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## A book by Chennai's non-authors



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**A collection of short stories, being written by Chennaiites from different walks of life, shows the city through myriad lenses**

They say Chennai is a city but Madras is an emotion. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you mention the city? Some would say an early morning filter coffee. Others would instantly talk of Chennai Super Kings or the city's two beaches. Some would feel Mylapore, Bharatanatayam and Carnatic music are more apt descriptions of the city. Each of these are how different people interact differently with the city.

“The general perception is that we drink filter coffee and we have Carnatic music and dance and stuff like that. But we are much more than just that as a city. We've got drama, theatre, Western classical music. We have got different types of occupations, the whole lot of urban changes that

we're going through.," says historian Shalini Ravikumar, who heads operations at Madras Inherited. Madras Inherited is curating stories for their book *People Called Chennai*, to be published by Penguin Random House and People Place Project. The latter has initiated similar book projects in other Indian cities. They recently held a two-hour workshop in the city by Nisha Nair-Gupta, founder of the People Place Project.

"The book focusses on getting the stories of people, and integrating them with a larger historical and architectural framework of the city," says Shalini.

Nisha adds, "We have a range of writers. Sometimes they are from other disciplines, but are good at writing. For example, in the Delhi project, we have filmmaker Anand L Rai writing. We have a historian writing for the Chennai project."

The workshop was attended by 25 people from different walks of life, ranging from journalism students in their 20s to published children's writers in their 40s. The aim was to curate a potpourri of stories, no two the same.

"People came up with stories related to cinema, to the concept of '*ra pitchakaran*'. Others suggested the concept of women who work in crematoriums," says Shalini.

The book is for a pan-Indian audience, and will be launched in the first half of 2020. It will carry around 50 stories: some sourced by Madras Inherited from invited writers, others written by attendees of the workshop and online submissions by Chennai residents .

Shalini who is also a conservation architect, says, "One of my favourite stories, that I am writing, is about the heart transplant scene. Chennai, as we know, is a medical hub. A lot of transplants are happening here: they have been portrayed in a good way, and also in a bad way."

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