

# To boldly go where most have gone before

In a rapidly-changing metropolis like Chennai, some believe that nostalgia is a game for old fools. But 26-year-old Chandrachoodan Gopalakrishnan, or CCG as he is known in the blogosphere, makes you question this assumption. This adman is the founder of the concept of Chennai photowalks – camera expeditions through interesting parts of the city. “Because I’m this guy who is obsessed with the city’s history, my routes are always through old Madras,” says this blogger.

Once a month, CCG leads devoted Chennaiites on a fun outing to shoot people and places in the city. The idea is to walk through a neighbourhood and capture in pictures – the buildings, the people on the streets, and the very ethos of the place. Photowalkers also chat with long-time residents to learn the lore of the locality. At the end of the self-guided heritage walk, they post their digital snapshots on flickr.com.



Above: The photowalkers find children smiling subjects. Right top: Crossing a road in a rush; Right middle, A view of the Adyar River and Estuary from the broken walkaway; and Right bottom: A boat in city waters. All photographs from the Chennai photowalkers’ collection.

group, they are also curious. They ask members of this Tamil-speaking bunch if they are from Malaysia or Singapore. “In their

your enthusiasm for anything is not easy at the end of a six-day workweek, says G.V. Balasubramanian, a 54-year-old banker. But once on the walking trail, we find we are learning photographic techniques and more

nary walk has a history angle to it. “There is a rumour that an Arya Bhavan chef invented the Masala Dosa – I want to dig into the origins of this dish,” he says.

The photowalkers have covered a lot of ground by picking places that offer promises historically and photographically. “I have never had to sit down with a map to plan a walk yet,” says CCG. Eventually, he hopes that these expeditions will be documented not just digitally, but in a coffee table book. Someday, we may also go beyond the city and into other historically significant places in Tamil Nadu, says CCG. “And which place isn’t historical in this state?” he asks.

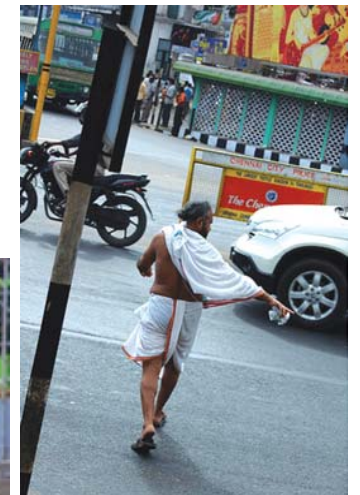
Chandrachoodan is one of those rare people whose eyes, ears and heart remain attuned to his surroundings, no matter how familiar they become, says Manivannan. Plus, of course, he

has this unique ability to inspire other Chennai-buffs to join him on intimate explorations of the city. Some of the digital snapshots taken by this growing band of photowalkers make people – especially the ones who have moved away – fall in love with their old city all over again.

### FOOTNOTE

For information on the next photowalk, check out the Chennai Metblog for updates: The URL: <http://chennai.metblogs.com> You can also visit CCG’s blog for the same: <http://www.selectiveamnesia.org> To find pictures from the photowalks, go to [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) and type **Chennai Photowalk** in the search box.

P.Orr & Sons, Anna Salai, composed from 4 images.



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about the city’s history from one another, he adds.

The walkers don’t always go looking for photogenic old buildings. One trip in the offing is an evening stroll down Mint Street. “This is to sample Seenabhai’s oothappam, Kakada Ramprasad’s badam milk, coffee at Arya Bhavan, and beeda from the corner shop,” says CCG. This culi-

books, only foreign tourists will photograph places like the LIC building.”

Till the end of March, the group had been on five walks. CCG mentions the Royapuram railway station with awe. “It’s a fantastic little place – rotting away, weeds overwhelming the tracks, and was the first ever station in South India.” Today, only suburban lines pass through. But here too, the police shooed the group away just as they got ready to click pictures. Ultimately, the very sights compensate for all the needless hostility – as do the auto drivers and strangers who give us helpful directions when we are lost, says CCG.

There is a certain strength in numbers. The social aspect of the photowalk makes it easier for the amateurs to indulge in their hobby. Otherwise, mustering



Photowalkers take a break at Tidel Park

“The photowalks are a wonderful idea, and it’s not surprising how quickly they’ve drawn attention,” says Sharanya Manivannan, a critically acclaimed Chennai-born poet who joined the February walk. The walks are egalitarian: it doesn’t matter if you’re carrying a cameraphone or something with a zoom the length of your forearm; even those with no cameras are welcome. “All that matters is a willingness to wake up at an ungodly hour and take your time to appreciate familiar places.”

But Chennai photowalkers do run into surreal problems. “Photography is prevented in most places in the city because the authorities think we will sell our valuable secrets to foreign powers,” says CCG. While guards of monuments and public buildings are wary of this camera-toting

