

The women behind Metro tunnels

Engineers recall the host of challenges and the thrill when the breakthrough was achieved



The women engineers who worked to create the tunnels for Chennai Metro Rail. (From left) K. Yogambal, Bharathi P.M., Shrinidhi Vijayakumar and E. Brigita. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SUNITHA SEKAR
CHENNAI

A bunch of vibrant young women engineers tirelessly worked underground to create the tunnels for Chennai Metro Rail.

The youngest, 24-year-old Shrinidhi Vijayakumar, says she was charmed at first sight, looking at the giant tunnels of the Delhi Metro Rail when she interned there as a student. Soon, she was drawn to working for the Chennai Metro Rail project and was thoroughly fascinated.

"For an engineer, one of the most emotional moments is witnessing a breakthrough of a tunnel boring machine (TBM), wherein the machine bores the earth and reaches a station. You work with several challenging geological conditions and mostly these are unpredictable. So, when you overcome all that and witness a tunnel being created, you feel so proud," she says.

After years of work, when we finally saw the train zip through tunnels, we felt it was all worth it

E. BRIGITA
Engineer, CMRL

Carrying out every task underneath means dealing with a host of challenges, from checking soil conditions to ensuring that the cables and wires are not snapped, the women say.

Chilling experience

Her colleague, Bharathi P.M., 27, an expert in laying tracks in tunnels, was recruited after a special course sponsored by Chennai Metro Rail at IIT Madras.

She recollects a chilling experience when she walked in the tunnels alone during the floods of December 2015.

It was the time when Chennai Metro Rail tunnels contributed to carrying water to several areas and exa-

cerbated the floods.

"I had to go on an inspection. There was quite a lot of water in the tunnel. After a point, I was petrified," she adds.

Not just tunnels, constructing a station structure below the ground was tough too.

K. Yogambal, 33, says she began her career in constructing buildings on the ground.

"Then when I started going underground for station construction, I was thrilled beyond words," she says.

E. Brigita, a 29-year-old engineer who has been with Chennai Metro Rail for seven years now, scrutinises contracts and goes underground to check the progress of the work.

"After years of work, when we finally saw the train zip through the underground tunnels for the first time and heard the public cheer, we felt it was all worth it," she says.