

# ART TAKES THE GREEN LINE

- The Chennai metro rail and station have become a hot spot for conducting several art-based events
- From poetry reading to *kutcheris*, it has hosted them all and is all set to entertain you with more

## ● Roshne Balasubramanian

It's 6 pm on a Sunday evening and as we reach the Vadapalani CMRL station, the music compositions of Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar, rendered by the famous sister duo Ranjani-Gayathri flows through the entire station. As we proceed to level 1 of the venue, there are over 800 people seated in chairs, tapping their fingers and animatedly listening to the concert. Not a Sabha, not a hall but in our very own metro!

Art-based events are slowly making its way to the metro rail stations in the city. We find about the shift in the image of metro stations — from a commuting point to a community center.

"I travel from the Airport to Pachayappas College everyday by metro. So, when we were looking for a venue to celebrate 20 years of Mohan Foundation and 50th year of the first heart transplant in the world, I suggested the metro!" shares Lalitha Raguram, country director, Mohan Foundation.

While the music took commuters by surprise, the organ donation registration stall on the other side made people

smile. "Several commuters read the pamphlet which highlighted how organ donation can save several lives and immediately registered themselves as donors!" she smiles and adds that next, a food festival in the metro, promoting a healthy living, is on the cards.

R Balasubramanian, a music enthusiast who was in the metro for the concert, shares, "I have travelled in metros in the country before. But, this is the first time

I am attending a concert. The music quality for me is as good as the ones in sabhas. The only difference here is that commuters from the metro keep walking up and down. This is such a unique experience!" he exclaims.

But, this is not the only event to have been conducted in the metro. From poetry reading, photo biennale, 'Madras on Metro' tour to even food festivals, the metro has hosted it all.

Poetry with Prakriti, in association with Bonjour India, organised a ride full of poetry and art in the Chennai metro train. Ranvir Shah, founder, Prakriti Foundation, emphasises that public spaces are important to promote art, provided that it's done in a controlled and sensible manner. "It was a mid-week afternoon and about 70 regular poetry en-



**The commuters have loved the events happening in the metro so far and want more. So we are planning events for next year**

— CMRL official

thusiasts, schools and college students boarded the train from the Ashok Nagar metro station. Holding on to the bars there, we began reading poetry and there were two illustrators who sketched what they saw along the trail. Some curious passengers joined too," recalls Ranvir.

Sharing the experience of conducting an event in the train, he avers that there's an appetite for art and performance-based events in public spaces. "It was a fun event. We are also going to ask the metro to permit us to print poems in different languages and put it up for the commuters. Imagine having a bad day and then reading poetry while you commute? This will be a way to engage and bridge the gap between art and commuters," he shares.

Srini of Keyterns, a tour agency curated 'Madras on Metro' a trail focusing on iconic places along the route. "Transportation is for many things. But, it

should also feed the passengers in different ways and metro is ideal for that," he shares. "When I had senior citizens come on board for the tour, the metro workers immediately helped them with their canes and wheelchairs," he shares.

The metro has also helped Sirini in conducting city induction tours for newbies in the city. "I recently took a bunch of youngsters from Northeast on the metro to different parts of the city, via the metro. This is a very viable place for people to learn about anything from art, culture to the different shades of the city," he explains.

For Sunil Shroff, managing trustee, Mohan Foundation, attending a concert in the metro for the first time was a memorable experience. "The footfall on a Sunday in the Vadapalani metro is more. I think more such events should be conducted here so that even people who don't get an opportunity to attend such events otherwise get a chance," he shares.

In spite of beginning its operations two years back in the city, the metro still remains new but the CMRL officials want to give the best experience to commuters. "More or less, people see the metro as a place only to travel but, we want to make them feel at home when they come here and ensure that it's more of a community based place," says a CMRL official.

The next event will be a community wall painting event in the metro. "A lot of NGOs have shown interest and it will happen in another two to three weeks. Art, social causes, food, music and everything that will bring people together will be curated once in every three to six months. The metro is not just a commuting point anymore," adds the official.



(Top and inset) Scenes from the poetry reading session; (below) a music concert