

A library that chugs along with you

Meet Samyuktha Nair, the author of Read On Rails, an initiative to promote reading on Metro trains in Chennai

SHIBA KURIAN

While waiting for a train at the Metro station, if you see a book on a vacant seat, don't look for its owner. It's yours – to take home and read and bring it back to the Metro for another commuter.

A regular on the Metro, Samyuktha Nair hit upon an idea to make the time Metro commuters spend on trains productive.

She made a list of friends who would help her in this initiative and called them one by one.

"I need your old books," she would tell them.

A few weeks later, when this resident of Vadapalani amassed a sufficient number of books, she started planting them in the nooks and crannies of the Metro railway station in Vadapalani. This initial step signalled the birth of what is now called 'Read on Rails'.

"Read on Rails is a free, not-for-profit initiative. As part of this, books are placed in and around Metro stations in Chennai," says 21-year-old Samyuktha, who

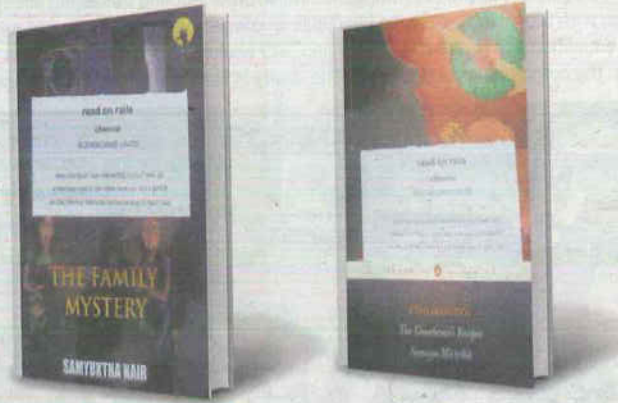


drew inspiration from similar initiatives – 'Our Shared Shelf' by Hollywood actress Emma and the "Books on the Delhi Metro" initiative.

"The basic idea behind Read on Rails is to give the commuters books to read, and, of course, to make them read it," says Samyuktha, who is currently pursu-

ing a master's degree at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Each book has a "Read On Rail" label and a slip carrying a message for the one who has picked it up: "If you find this book, take it home and read it. Bring it back and keep it for someone else



Samyuktha (left) places the books with a message.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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to read it."

"As I wanted the books to look new, I used an instruction slip and also applied

whitener on the donor's name if it is found in any of the pages," she says.

Though she is away in Hyderabad, she will keep the initiative alive by promoting it whenever she comes to Chennai on a break.

"I placed the first set of books when I was in Chennai for my holidays. When I come back to Chennai in February, I will place more books. This time, I plan to take it to other metro stations in the city," says Samyuktha, who graduated from Madras Christian College.

Be a book donor

"If anybody happens to find one of our books, share a selfie with it using the hashtag #readonrails, and he/she will be featured on our Facebook page," says Samyuktha, who has authored two novels – *Warriors of Javida* (2012) and *The Family Mystery* (2017).

Those interested in donating books can drop a message on www.facebook.com/readonrailsindia/. Instructions on how and where to leave the books will be provided.

After planting the books, Samyuktha would get her friends to check if the books have found takers.

"Most of the time, they would not find a book where it was placed. So, I am assuming the book has been taken," she says.