



26 February 2013

To

General Manager
Southern Railways Head Quarters
Park town post office
Chennai

Dear Sir/Madam,

Sub: Request for restoration of the Rights to equal opportunity and access to modern facilities, of visually impaired railway passengers.

Nethrodaya is a self help organization dedicated to the welfare of the visually impaired community in Tamil Nadu, which is been recognized by Government of TamilNadu award for the “Best Institution 2012” in recognition of its outstanding services towards the differently abled persons. Our interventions are designed to elevate the standard of living of the visually challenged in all walks of life and to assist them with the latest technology and assistive devices to enable them to lead a trouble free life.

As you may be well aware, The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 has been enacted by our Parliament to ensure full protection, equal opportunities and full participation of persons with disability. Section 44 of the Act makes a specific reference to non discrimination in transport, which reads as under44:

“Establishments in the transport sector shall, within the limits of their economic capacity and development for the benefit of persons with disabilities, take special measures to-

(a) Adapt rail compartments, buses. Vessels and aircrafts in such a way as to permit easy access to such persons;

(b) Adapt toilets in rail compartments, vessels, aircrafts and waiting rooms in such a way as to permit the wheel chair users to use them conveniently.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” signed by many countries including Government of India, stipulates that comprehensive and concerted efforts should be taken by the member countries to provide inter-alia a equal opportunity, accessibility and full effective participation to persons with disabilities. In this connection we wish to bring to your kind attention the various hardships

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being faced by the visually impaired persons and the discrimination being meted out to them as users of the various laudable facilities being provided by the Indian Railways which are as under;

1) E –Ticketing

While normal persons enjoy the facility of booking railway tickets online sitting at home, visually impaired persons have to book tickets in person at the special counters to avail the concession in ticket fare allowed for the visually impaired, At present online reservation in respect of visually impaired, is not available, even though online reservation for senior citizens, with the concessional ticket fares, is made available. Necessary changes must be made in the reservation software to enable the visually challenged persons to book their reservation online. Moreover with the advent of assistive devices, screen readers and other technological developments, the visually impaired persons can operate the computer independently almost on par with the normal persons. Ways and means must be found by Indian Railways to enable and empower the visually impaired to book tickets on line independently with the assistance of technology adapted to their special needs which will remove the discrimination felt by the visually impaired.

2) Passenger safety in special coaches for persons with disability

We appreciate the efforts made by the Indian Railways in allocating separate coaches exclusively for persons with disability. However the purpose of these coaches is defeated by lack of passenger safety in these coaches in many instances as there is no railway staff posted in the coach to prevent others including anti social elements with various kind of vices to occupy these seats The offenders often go scot free .Offenders and other antisocial elements who enter these coaches and commit crimes against the visually challenged must be penalized with severe punishments including imprisonment and heavy fine to deter such occurrences. Many a time the disabled persons are unable to enter the coaches which are invariably fully occupied by other persons. There is an urgent need to post a special guard for the purpose as being provided in respect of AC, Ladies coaches.

3) Inconvenient placement of the special coaches

It is observed that these coaches are attached at the far end of the train and these coaches halt at the end of the platform which makes it difficult and inconvenient for the visually impaired to board the coaches without hurting themselves. These coaches may be kept in the middle of the train or in the beginning of the train, for the convenience of the visually impaired persons.

4) Inadequate quotas in allotment of seats for the disabled in the coaches

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3 percent of the total berths/seats in a train are required to be allotted for persons with disability as per the existing norms which work out to 24 berths per train of 800 passengers. But it is observed that in practice, these percentages are not followed and only few berths are allotted to the disabled persons. This norm must be followed in letter and spirit and necessary steps should be made to carry out in the software for reservation to make it fool proof.

5) Absence of speakers /audio alerts in coaches

Except in metro trains, there is no system of giving automated audio alert system in each coach regarding the next station, warning before leaving the current station, information regarding change over etc. As the halting time of trains in suburban trains and other express trains is very short, the visually impaired find it extremely difficult to disembark or board the trains without injuring themselves. Necessary arrangements are required to be made to install the automated audio alert system in all coaches being used by visually impaired.

6) Recognition of visually impaired self employed salespersons selling goods on the trains

While we agree that begging by the visually impaired persons on trains must not be encouraged, we strongly feel that visually impaired persons who want to undertake selling of products on the trains to eke out a decent living, must be permitted as being permitted by Indian Railways in case of porters who are not the staff of Railways. The visually impaired salesmen must be permitted to carry out their business under license from railways. An Indian railway has now permitted visually impaired to travel alone under the concessional tickets recognizing their ability to be self reliant. It has come to our notice that many visually impaired salespersons are harassed by the Railway Staff,

We, therefore appeal to you to bestow your personal attention on the above mentioned issues and take appropriate and immediate steps to rectify so as to restore their right to equal opportunity, equal access to all modern facilities and full participation as users of the laudable existing facilities and facilities that may be introduced in future from time to time.

Thanking you,

For Nethrodaya

C. Govindakrishnan

Founder

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