



YASHASVINI
RAJESHWAR

A ROAD TO ACCESSIBLE ROADS

When Vaishnavi Jayakumar, a member of the Disability Rights Alliance, filed a Public Interest Litigation at the Madras High Court to ensure that Chennai's buses were accessible, her demand was simple – that the government merely listen to a previous ruling from the court. Back in 2016, the Madras High Court had ruled in favour of having accessible buses plying on every route. In the five years since, this is yet to become reality.

This petition is one piece of a larger picture. In the long run, Vaishnavi is working to have accessibility become a part of government process. “We would want to have someone who signs off on all procurement after looking at accessibility,” she says. “It is difficult for us to rectify it after the tender is published. It would help have a sample tender that can be used for future procurement, so we know what an ‘accessible bus’ is, for example. We need to have specifics – how low are the floors, how much pressure does a switch need, what does ‘non-slip floor’ mean. We need to know the details for it to be truly accessible instead of just being dubbed ‘disabled-friendly.’”

While Vaishnavi joined this fight only earlier this year, it is a battle that has been ongoing since 2005. In the years since, Vaishnavi says



not much has changed. Apart from the lack of uniform guidelines and standards, she also notes a problem in mindset. “Conversation about accessibility is still focused on built environment. We are not talking about accessibility of transportation, for example. More than that, conversations about disability are always seen as a separate subject,” she says. The goal for Vaishnavi and others involved in disability rights activism is for this to change.

One step at a time though. As things stand now, Vaishnavi and the others fighting this battle are waiting to see this case through. Through their ‘Bus Karo’ campaign and their legal fight, they will push to make Chennai's streets accessible to all citizens. After all, as Vaishnavi says, “none of us have ever taken the easy way out.”

For more coverage on the issue, please refer reports by [The New Indian Express](#) and [The Hindu](#). Please also check out [a video from the Bus Karo campaign](#) of the Disability Rights Alliance.