

Accessible India Campaign “A Silver Lining for the Persons with Disability”- An Analysis

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Abstract

As early as 1957, the then UN Rehabilitation Chief, Kurt Janson observed: “About 12 to 13 percent of the population of any given country suffers from a permanent or long term disability”. So there is an urgent need to provide the person with special facilities at different levels so that they can be made to survive easily with all other individuals. There is a lack of approach on the part of the Government as well as the other officials who are liable to create a harmonious environment for the person suffering from a disability. They must make an atmosphere where they don't feel being suppressed or humiliated. Although Accessible India Campaign has not attained the desired goal it was supposed to attain but yes it has helped in acting as a guide and ray of hope amongst the Person with Disability. The objectives of the present paper are to analyze the motive and objective of the Accessible India Campaign and to critically judge its achievement and shortcomings. The researcher has adopted the Doctrinal Research Methodology for the research undertaken.

Keywords- Accessible India Campaign, Persons with disability, Sugamya Bharat, Right to Accessibility, Fundamental Rights

Introduction

‘Accessible India Campaign’ which is also known as ‘Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan’ is an initiative taken up by the Indian Government. 3rd December is celebrated as International Day of Person with Disability. On the same day, this campaign was launched by the central government. This campaign aims mainly at the restructuring of the total environment of the differently-abled person in a manner that the environment becomes friendly for them. The measure was also to “design of disabled-friendly buildings and Human resource policies”. India has been a signatory to the UNCRPD from the year 2006 and keeping in mind Article 9 of the UNCRPD this campaign has been launched. Under this scheme, the provisions like Section 44, 45, and 46 of Person with Disability Act, 1995 has also been given

proper recognition. Section 44, 45 and 46 of the Act deals with protection of rights, equal opportunities, and non- discrimination in transport.¹

The main aim and objective of this campaign are to provide accessibility to disabled persons in areas like the equal opportunity of education, employment, health care, transport, recreation, sports, and various other areas. It is framed under the Principles of the “Right Model of disability”. The principles stated that the main reason for disability is the disorganized society rather than the person who bound by limitations or impairments. The barriers that have been created socially, physically, structural as well as attitudinal for the person with a disability has acted as a hindrance from participating them equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities.

To provide with Universal Accessibility to the Person with Disability, this campaign has been classified into three areas-

1. Built Environment;
2. Transport and

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3. Information & Communication Technology (ICT) Ecosystem.²

1. Built Environment

In Physical Environment, steps must be taken to remove the obstacles and hindrance from both the Indoor and Outdoor facilities, which include Medical facilities, Schools, and Workplaces, etc. A government building will be termed as an accessible government building only when it will be easy to get access to the building and also availing all the facilities that are present there. An accessible environment comprises of following things-

- a. Services provided;
- b. Ramps and Stairs;
- c. Corridors and Passages;
- d. Parking Areas;
- e. Entry and Exit gates;
- f. Emergency Exit areas.³

Apart from all these things, there are various others indoors and outdoors facilities that must also be made accessible. They are- Signals, Alarm System, Proper Lightening, Toilets. To determine whether a building is accessible or not and is meeting the required standards or not requires a proper and annual accessibility Audit after the building becomes fully accessible, the further annual audit is not needed. The audit will be again required to that building only when there are any proposed changes required to be done.

The Accessibility Standard is to conform to that of the standards that have been set at the international level like as set by ISO. The same standard must be complied with at the local level too. While talking about the Build Environment, the Construction of Building- Usability as well as Accessibility of the Built Environment, Delineates certain requirements as well as recommendations that are concerned with the Construction, Assembly, Fittings as well as Components. Certain targets have formed the Component Built Environment Accessibility under the Accessible India Campaign:

1. Carrying out accessibility assessment of minimum 25-50 “most important government building”

of 50 cities and building them so that they are accessible by the end of the year 2016;

2. The next target was to make 50% government building of NCT and the Capital cities of all the states in India to be fully accessible by the year 2018;

3. To Complete the Audit of 50% the government buildings and offices by making all the audited building fully accessible in the other 10 cities that are most important and are not covered under the target 1&2, by the year 2019.

The department has submitted the report of its work. The accessibility audit of 1653 buildings has been done that was identified by the State Government through the panel of Access Auditors. The Audit Committee has submitted the Access report for 1469 to the State Nodal Officers so that they can submit the financial requirements for retrofitting of all these buildings. Out of all these buildings, proposals of 575 buildings have been received by the Scheme. 45.42 Crores of funds have been allotted to the states for around 242 buildings. Besides, 148 lakhs have been released so that audit can be done by conducting access-audit.⁴

2. Transport

When it comes to Economic growth, an Accessible transportation system plays a very vital role. The Inaccessible Transport system has not only denied the freedom of movement but also has restricted mobility and active participation for the majority of the population who need accessible transportation.

The new “National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP), 2014” has included within its policy universal accessibility in all the planning and also implementation inventions. The Indian Roads Congress Code 103:2012 Guidelines for the Pedestrian Facilities has provided inclusive street design standards and roads. Some important features that are linked with the Transport Infrastructure Accessibility are as follows:-

Ø Properly lit, bus shelters and streets.

Ø To move barrier-free the pedestrian crossings must be raised. They must be textured with different paving materials to make the crossing more perceivable.

Ø The footpaths must be made flat for all the

mobility aid users and the tactile pavers must also be continuous for the entire stretch for the person who is visually impaired.

Ø There must be the use of white light on footpaths that will be able to maintain a color contrast from the roads and which will also ensure that the tactile pavers are easily visible during the night.

Ø There must be an installation of Audible light signals that will make a beep sound when the light is green.

Ø Bus stops must also have barrier-free access and must have broad gates with warning tiles.

Ø The low floor buses must contain folding ramps that will help the mobility aid users.

Ø There must be a proper installation of safety belt that will secure the journey inside the buses.

Ø There must proper parking space for the wheelchairs to get parked.

Ø The Signage Panel must have audible messages and also the provision for Braille Signage.

Ø All the metro stations and the coaches of the metro must possess accessible features.⁵

The target that has been set by the Accessible India Campaign is to make 10% of the public transport that is government-owned to get fully accessible by March 2018. To fulfill the achieved target the Ministry has taken the Undertaking to ensure that 10% of the above-stated vehicles become fully accessible by March 2018.

3. Information and Communication System

Information Access has been of vital importance in society as it helps in creating opportunities for everyone. Access to information refers to all sorts of Information. The range of actions covers areas like the ability to read price tags, enter any hall physically, to take part in any sort of event, to read a brochure dealing with the vital information regarding Health-care, understanding of the train time table, or also to view a particular website or webpage.⁶

There is a need to bring all the websites that are very important to be converted to accessible friendly

and it must ensure that all the public documents that have been publishing in the past and the current years get converted. The conversion must be done in the manner as set by the “International Organization for Standardization (ISO)” criteria which are found in “ISO/IEC 40500:2012, IT- W3C WEB CONTENT ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES (WCAG) 2.0”.

‘Public document’ has been defined as the entire document that has been issued by the National Government and by all the State Governments and other government official documents. When it comes to this branch of accessibility, the target that has been initiated is to make at least 50% of the State as well as Central Government websites accessible by 2017 March.⁷

Till the mid-2017, already 917 State Government websites have been made accessible. Apart from this 100 Government websites of 56 Departments/ Ministries have been made accessible by the Ministry of Electronics & Information technology. On 19th January 2018, to empower Persons with Disabilities, 100 accessible websites were launched under the Accessible India Campaign. These websites deal with the working of various State governments and Union Territories. The Department has taken the help of Social media to create a footprint in the digital space. Live updates, blogs, reports, and pictures are being circulated and are updated at social networking sites to bring awareness among the people⁸.

There is also a website created by the department in the name of www.accessibleindia.gov.in. The department has dedicated this website for this purpose⁹. A mobile application has also been launched by the department by which the recent happenings and updates can be brought into the notice of the general people¹⁰.

An E-Library has also been launched by the Union Government by the name “Sugamya Pustakalaya”.

‘SUGAMYA PUSTAKALAYA’

An online library has been launched by the Department in the name of “Sugamya Pustakalaya” for persons with print disabilities¹¹. It is centered on achieving “Universal Accessibility”. Their department has taken initiative by organizing workshops at various places throughout India like Mumbai, Ahmadabad,

Jaipur, Raipur, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, and Ranchi to provide information to the people regarding various contours of the Accessible India Campaign.

· It consisted of publications across various subjects that are present in the Country and also in various languages.

· It has been incorporated by the collaboration of Bookshare and the National Institute of Visually Handicapped (NIVH). The whole initiative is also powered with TCS Access. NIVH is a member organization of the daisy forum of India.

· This online library has been designed in such a manner that books that are there are also available in various accessible and desired formats for the person who is suffering from visual impairment as well as another form of print disability¹².

Udid- Unique Disability Id

The UDID project initiated by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities aims at building a holistic end-to-end integrated system for Issuance of Universal ID & Disability Certificates for Person with Disabilities with their identification and disability details. It includes -

1. Online availability of data of Person with Disabilities across the country through a centralized web application.

2. Online filing and submission of registration application form for disability certificate/ Universal ID card;

3. The quick Assessment process for calculating the percentage of disability.

4. Non-duplication of PwDs data.

5. Online renewal and update of the information.

6. MIS reporting framework.

7. Effective management including interoperability of the benefits/schemes launched by the Government for PwD.

8. To take care of additional disabilities in the future.

9. As of 9th May 2020, 10 states have already started generating the UDID Cards. They are Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan¹³.

Some of the Works Done by Various States in India

At first, for instance, when accessibility audit started taking place in India and the Buildings, as well as public places, were being accessed, there was not even one public place or building that can be stated as completely disability-friendly¹⁴. After the first phase of audit that has been launched in 31 cities as a part of the initiative of the Accessible India Campaign brought shocking results and it was seen that the state of toilets was appalling and various other facilities for the differently-abled person in hospitals, public buildings, railway stations, and educational institutions was not worth mentioning. It was also seen that if certain attempts were made to make the place accessible it was half-hearted. It was stated that 95% of the buildings that were audited do not have accessible toilets for the person with a disability. The rest 5% which have the toilets for the person with disability 75% out of them were in sorry states. Universal Design Centre had only found 3 out of a total of 29 buildings in Goa that possess basic facilities like ramps and all but still, none of them can be classified as fully accessible. Even the Chennai Metro Rail System was found to be good still certain areas needed improvement. Jammu and Kashmir have taken up the access audit work for around 18 cities whereas West Bengal has no taken up even a single Access Audit. Access is not done by West Bengal does not mean that they do not possess many shares of Person with Disabilities. 7.52% of the people of West Bengal are suffering from a disability. The total Indian figure is 2.21%(11).

In New Delhi, around 23 buildings have been audited out of which most were hospitals. Out of these 23 buildings, one was the Supreme Court and this audit has taken place in the year 2016. The areas that were made accessible cover the main gates, parking areas, building entrances, reception areas, ramps, lifts, the stairs, cafeteria areas, washrooms, facility of drinking water as well as disaster preparedness. However, the Supreme Court has not been made fully accessible and the areas

like toilets, cafeteria, and disastrous preparedness were missing. The Supreme Court was made accessible to the rest of the areas but these neglected areas are also of considerable importance. The Audit report has however suggested that these improvements must be done and are not too expensive.

The Access Audit Report 2016 also accessed Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), in different segments for the terminals 1-C, 1-D, and 3. It was found that this airport is friendly for the person with a disability. The audit reports that were conducted at New Delhi Railway Station has been resulted in negative as the station was not found to be accessible for the person with a disability. However, various measures are being undertaken to make the station disabled-friendly. The ministry has taken efforts to install lifts and escalators so that it will be easy to travel from one platform to another¹⁵.

The government to make the campaign successful is taking all effort even IRCTC has also made provision for booking of wheelchairs. Even to help the differently-abled person, the East Coast Railways has also introduced 'MOBILE WHEELCHAIR FOLDABLE RAMP' at the Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur as well as Visakhapatnam Railway Stations. To avail of the facility, the passenger has to inform the Wheelchair section near the Chief Ticket Inspector's office. This facility is free of cost¹⁶.

Suggestions and Discussions

This campaign is indeed an appreciable initiative that has been taken up by the Government of India to provide a barrier-free environment for the person with disabilities. But the Campaign has restricted its scope by covering only government buildings. The ambit that has been reduced not only restricts the scope as well as the benefits that can be drawn from the Campaign. The campaign must also incorporate within its ambit the private Hospitals, schools, and all the educational institutions. Among all the problems that are faced by the differently-abled person, the most pertinent one is that of transportation. Whether it is rural areas or urban areas the problem is very much the same. Another area that needs a great concern is the accessibility of the differently-abled person to the public toilets. This has to be considered as one of the major priorities as the public toilets are in abysmal nature when it comes to

accessibility. Also, the safety issue must be kept in mind and hence KIOSKS which is Disabled friendly must be installed in big shopping malls. All the signboards that are used to show various indications must be designed in such a manner that they are disabled friendly. In the future, it is considered that the Public Work Department, Land Army, and Nirmiti Kendra will be included in the implementation committee by the Government. All these departments will be taking up the civil works of the infrastructure that are to be initiated by the Government. The Disabled community and the Government must encourage the Private sector to make products as well as services that are disabled friendly. Like the news bulletin in sign language can be run by the private news channels for the person who is suffering from hearing impairment. This type of news bulletin is only shown on Doordarshan Channel. All the private taxis/cabs must introduce wheelchair accessible vehicles that will possess ramps which will ease the traveling. Even the hotels and restaurants should install a separate menu for the differently-abled person which must be written in Braille. If it is on any electronic gadgets then it must be supported by any software that will be easy for them to readout. Even the steps should be taken to make the baking facilities easier for them and it must be designed in such a manner that they do not have to be dependent while making access to the banking system. Although there is a lot more to be done by the government for the upliftment of living conditions of the persons with disability. But still, we can state that the start is good and has the potential to reach the milestone.

Ethical Clearance - Not required as the researcher has just referred to some published works. The research is doctrinally undertaken, completely by the researcher himself.

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