

## **Responsible Tourism in India: Special Reference to People with Disabilities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The annual growth rate of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India in 2014 was 10.6% which was higher than the median annual growth rate of 4.7% globally, indicating impressive growth (Ministry of Tourism, Annual Report, 2014-15). The Government of India has taken several initiatives to improve this growth rate through schemes like PRASAD, HRIDAY, Swadesh Darshan and Incredible India campaign. However the significant strata of tourists with disabilities has been heavily ignored in these initiatives. Globally, almost 1 billion persons with diverse disabilities are there-physical, mental and sensory. More than 2 billion persons are their family members (WHO, World Report on Disability 2011). The total number of disabled persons in India is 26,810,557 which are 2.21% of the total population of India (Census Report 2011). According to Lonely Planet, if disabled people are provided appropriate facilities wherever they travel, 50% more of them will travel. Another study shows that in United States alone, adults with disabilities annually spend 13.6 billion dollars on travel (UNWTO Recommendations on Accessible Tourism, 2013). Neither the National Tourism Policy 2002 nor the National Policy for Disabled Persons 2006 mentions anything about promoting tourism by persons with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 contains various legal loopholes that fail to remove discrimination against both domestic and foreign disabled tourists. Therefore, by ignoring these potential new foreign and domestic tourists, India is losing the economic opportunity to earn higher foreign exchange income and significant multiplier effect on the economy through strong forward and backward linkages. Moreover, India is missing the chance to present itself internationally as the face of inclusive and responsible tourism. The effort of this paper is to point out the shortcomings and suggest policymaking measures related to provision of accessibility to persons with disabilities in the legislation, policies, schemes and guidelines of the Government. In present study, secondary data is collected from various authentic published sources such as reports of Ministry of Tourism (GOI), Census of India, UNWTO, National Tourism Policy for persons with disabilities (GOI) etcetera.*

**Keywords:** Business potential, Disabled, Multiplier Effect, Responsible Tourism, Tourism Policy.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

India became one of the first countries to sign and ratify the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which marked a very significant moment for the disability movement worldwide. The Convention provides that States which ratify it should pass laws and undertake other measures to create an enabling environment for improving the rights of disabled people, and also abolish laws and customs that discriminate against them. Article 30(1)(c) of the Convention provides that State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities “Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments

and sites of national cultural importance.” Further Article 30(5)(c) provides that state parties must “ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues”.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

(Bowtell 2011) conducted a study “Assessing the value and market attractiveness of the accessible tourism industry in Europe: a focus on major travel and leisure companies” and he observed that accessible tourism is quite different from other forms of tourism. This sector is having much future potential if it is catered properly. He further recommended that 70 percent of the accessible population of Europe, is demanding accessible tourism and this strata is willing and capable to pay for this.

(Darcy 2002) in his study “Marginalised participation: physical disability, high support needs and tourism” brought to light that there are many barriers for people with physical disability when they plan for tourism. The author focused on the term “disability” more as these people need to be dealt with their disability first. The researcher also suggested to bring lot many changes in the policy making and special policy should be there for people with physical disability in tourism policy.

(Kumar et al. 2017) conducted a study on “Contribution of Public and Private Sector in Promoting State Tourism: A Case Study of Gujarat” and found that Gujarat has much potential for any kind of tourism like: spiritual, natural, cultural and historical. He further added that state government and its tourism department is doing well with the private partners. Even Gujarat government made policies to increase investment of private sector people. Both public and private sectors needs to work together to develop high class infrastructure to attract more tourists in Gujarat.

(Kumar et al. 2017) in a study entitled “Participation of Specially Abled People in Tourism: A Case of Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh” highlighted a different concept of accessible tourism i.e supply side. He found that in Dharamshala the specially abled tourists are considered from demand side only. It means they are just a source of income generation. Their own participation in employment generation and entrepreneurship is almost nil. The author suggested to work on the supply side also.

(Popiel 2016) in his study “Tourism Market, Disability and Inequality: Problems and Solutions” concluded that people with special disabilities, need to be handled carefully. These people have special requirements for tour and travels. Specific facilities should be created and given to them. They should also feel recognised. Moreover, some of the obstacles which are generally faced by them are: Lack of adequate and special transportation facilities, lack of proper respect and sensitivity during tour and problem of economic accommodation.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The Data used for analysis in present study is secondary in nature and collected from various reliable published sources of GOI such as World Report on Disability, World Tourism Organization, Census of GOI, Annual Reports of Ministry of Tourism, Annual Reports of various Tourism departments of GOI and papers published in proceedings of National and International Conferences and Seminars etc.

Globally, there are almost 1 billion persons with diverse disabilities are there-physical, mental and sensory. More than 2 billion persons are their family members such as spouses, children and caregivers. Thus almost a third of the world’s population is affected by disability directly (WHO, World Report on Disability 2011). The total number of disabled persons in India is 26,810,557 which are 2.21% of the total population of India (Census Report 2011). These figures signify a huge potential market for travel and tourism in India. However this segment of the population still remains hugely under-tapped in India because there is extreme dearth of disabled friendly travel and tourism infrastructure and services, along with discriminatory policies and practices.

This paper attempts to undertake a review of efforts of the central government of India in the recent past to promote tourism in the recent past and present, focusing specifically on the efforts to attract more tourists with disabilities from India and around the map. The main objective is to critically review in this regard, the government’s exercise of nation branding to the outside world in the form of Incredible India campaign. The paper also looks at the policies, Acts and schemes of the State in guiding the public and private sectors to make tourism accessible to the disabled, keeping in mind that disabilities are diverse. The paper argues that that government followed a disjointed and piecemeal approach with a skewed reliance on “incentives” to attract this segment. In particular it questions the various gaps that are visible in the segmented approach adopted by the State in dealing with the tourism by persons with disabilities.

This paper is divided into different sections. Section 1 takes a brief look at the contribution of tourism in India’s economic development and its multiplier effect. Section 2 looks at why the clientele of domestic and foreign

disabled tourists should not be ignored while planning initiatives to promote tourism in India. Section 3 points out the various shortcomings in the legislation, policies, schemes and guidelines of the government that fail to address the concerns of the tourist persons with disabilities. The concluding section aims to give suggestions to the government which must be incorporated in policy making which not only assert the role of the State in the provision of accessibility to disabled persons as a public good. Such measures by the State will eventually make the private tourism industry realize the high yields that can accrue to them by making investments to cater to this huge customer base including innovative start-ups and that too with a human touch.

**Contribution of Tourism in India’s Economic Development and its Multiplier Effect:**

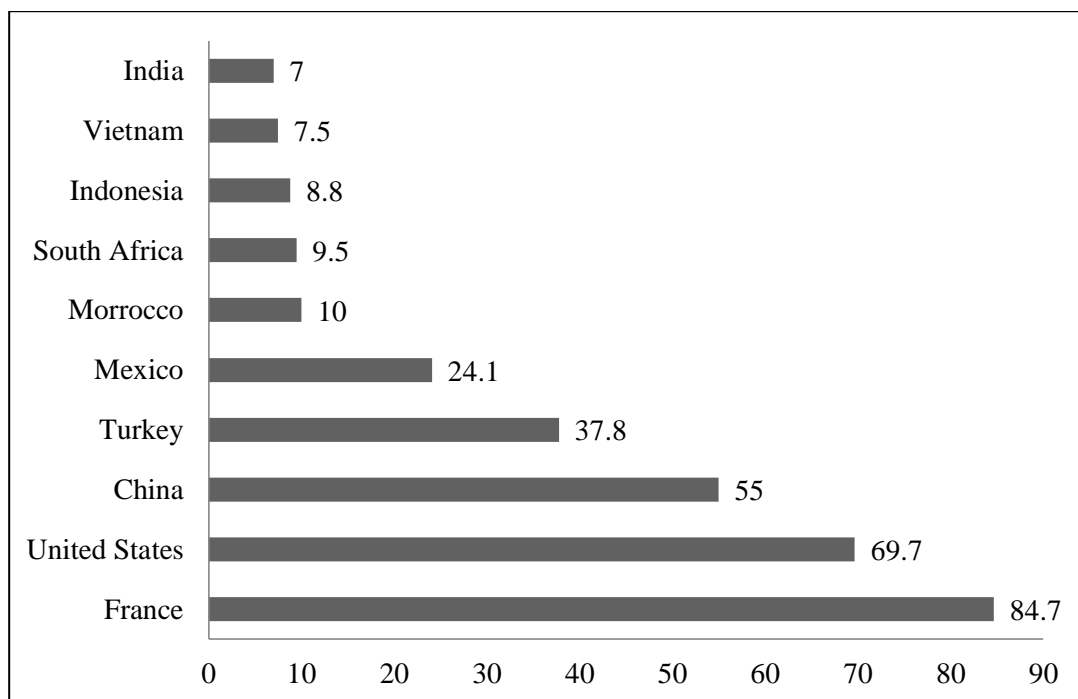
Tourism in India is a sunrise sector. The contribution of tourism to total GDP ranged between 6.6 percent and 6.8 percent from 2009-10 to 2011-12 (see Table 1). This increased to 6.9 percent during 2012-13 as revealed by the Second Tourism Satellite Account of India (Economic Survey 2014-15). Tourism is also an employment intensive industry. The contribution of tourism to total employment in 2012-13 was 12.4 per cent (Economic Survey 2014-15). The annual growth rate of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India in 2014 was 10.6% which was higher than the median annual growth rate of 4.7% globally, indicating impressive growth (Ministry of Tourism, Annual Report, 2014-15). India moved up 13 places to the 52nd position on a list of countries in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness (TTCI) report 2015 released by World Economic Forum. However, India attracts far less foreign tourists than countries much smaller in area such as Singapore and Thailand. In 2013, while Singapore attracted 11.90 million foreign tourists and Thailand 26.55 million foreign tourists while India accounted for only 6.97 million foreign tourists. Thus there is a huge potential for further growth. This is also abundantly clear when we see that China attracts a much larger number of 55 million (See Figure 1).

**Table 1: Contribution of tourism in India’s GDP and Employment generation**

Year	Contribution of tourism in India’s GDP(%age)	Contribution of tourism in India’s Employment generation(%age)
2009-10	6.77	10.17
2010-11	6.68	10.78
2011-12	6.74	11.49

Source: Annual Report, 2014-15, Ministry of Tourism, GOI

**Figure 1: International tourist arrivals (millions) | 2014 or most recent available**



Source: The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015

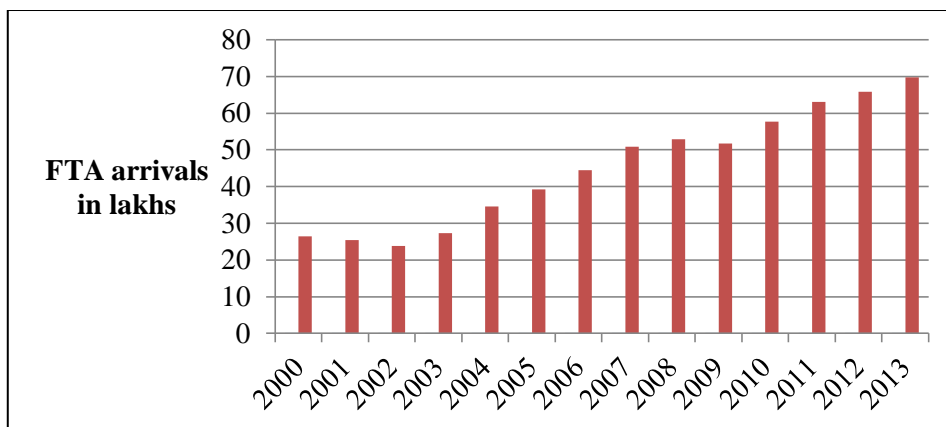
**Table 2: Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA's in India) and Foreign Exchange Earnings from year 2000-2013**

Year	FTA (in numbers)	%age change as compared to last year	Foreign Exchange earnings(Rs. crores)	%age change as compared to last year	Foreign Exchange earnings(Million US \$ )	%age change as compared to last year
2000	26,49,378	6.7	15,626	20.6	3,460	15.0
2001	25,37,282	(-) 4.2	15,083	(-) 3.5	3,198	(-) 7.6
2002	23,84,364	(-) 6.0	15,064	(-) 0.1	3,103	(-) 3.0
2003	27,26,214	14.3	20,729	37.6	4,463	43.8
2004	34,57,477	26.8	27,944	34.8	6,170	38.2
2005	39,18,610	13.3	33,123	18.5	7,493	21.4
2006	44,47,167	13.5	39,025	17.8	8,634	15.2
2007	50,81,504	14.3	44,360	13.7	10,729	24.3
2008	52,82,603	4.0	51,294	15.6	11,832	10.3
2009	51,67,699	(-) 2.2	53,700	4.7	11,136	(-) 5.9
2010	57,75,692	11.8	64,889	20.8	14,193	27.5
2011	63,09,222	9.2	77,591	19.6	16,564	16.7
2012	65,77,745	4.3	94,487	21.8	17,737	7.1
2013	69,67,601	5.9	1,07,671	14.0	18,445	4.0
CAGR	7.15 %		14.78%		12.70%	

**CAGR:** Beginning value-last value÷Number of years

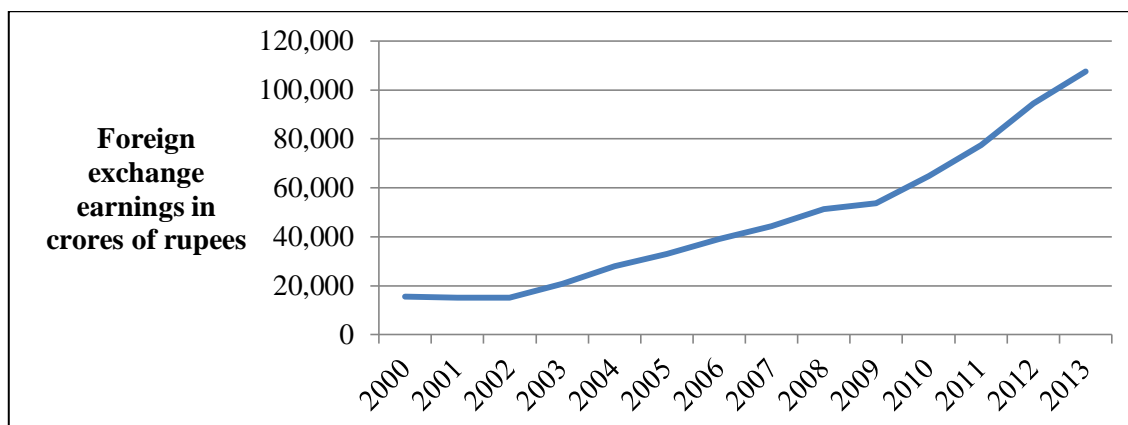
**Source:** Annual Report, 2013-14, Ministry of Tourism, GOI

**Figure 2: Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India between 2000 and 2013**



**Source:** Annual Report, 2013-14, Ministry of Tourism, GOI

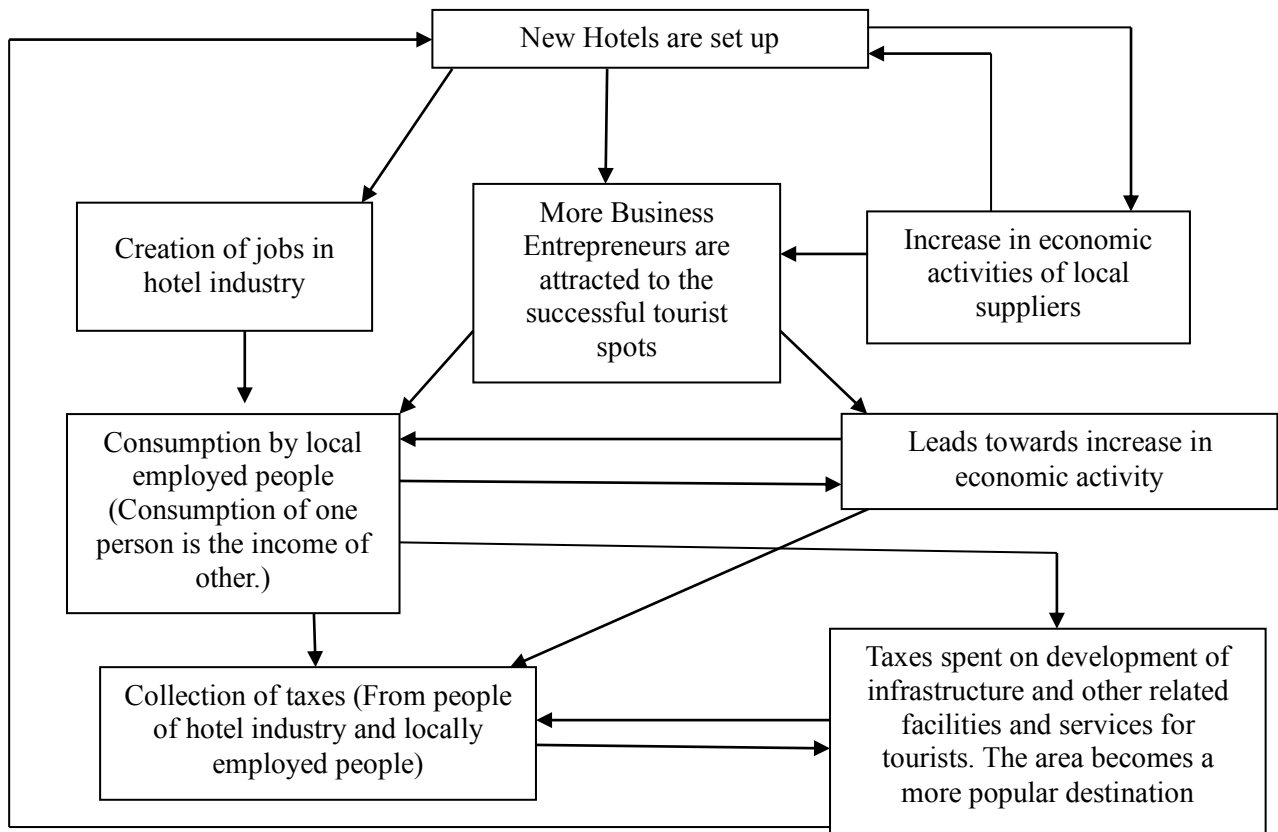
**Figure 3: Trend of foreign exchange earnings from Tourism in India between 2000 and 2013**



**Source:** Annual Report, 2013-14, Ministry of Tourism, GOI

Thus tourism sector is a potential game-changer for India in terms of multiplier effects. This is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

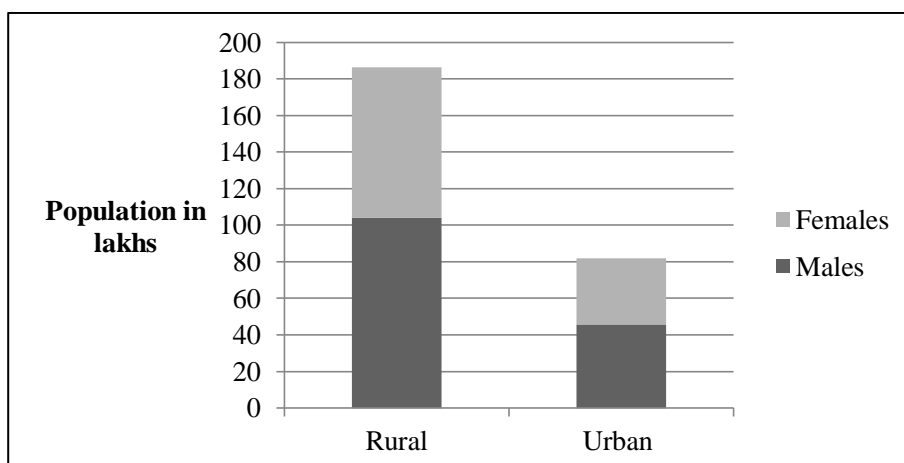
**Figure 4: Forward Multiplier effect of Tourism Sector**



**Promoting Tourism by Foreign and Domestic Disabled Persons:**

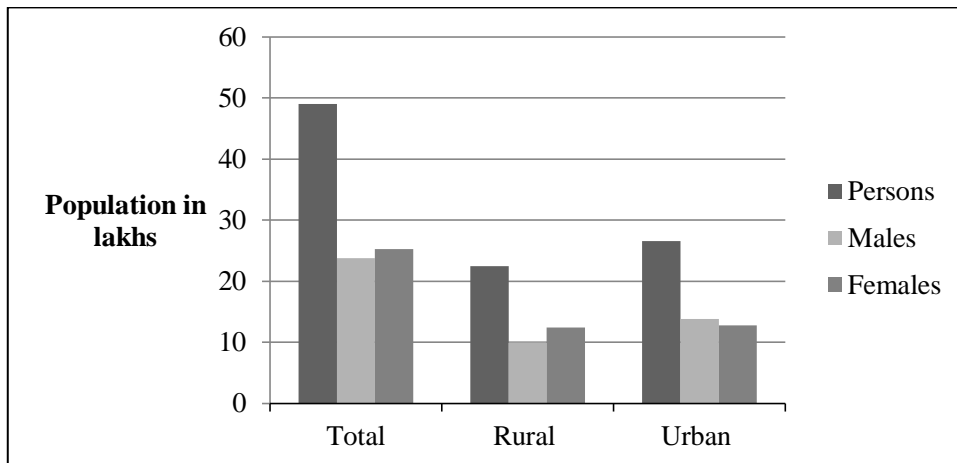
There is huge scope for making efforts to attract all segments of population from around the globe to avail tourism services in India. The Government of India has taken several initiatives in the recent past to improve the growth rate of tourism through schemes like PRASAD, HRIDAY, Swadesh Darshan and Incredible India campaign. However the significant strata of tourists with disabilities has been heavily ignored in these initiatives. As already stated above, approximately 15% of the world population has a disability which need not only be physical but can also be mental or sensory in nature. Moreover, the disabled population in India has also seen a high growth rate of 22.4% between 2001 and 2011 (Census 2011). The urban areas saw a significant decadal increase in growth rate of 48.4% in the same period.

**Figure 5: Disabled Population by Gender and Residence in India, 2011**



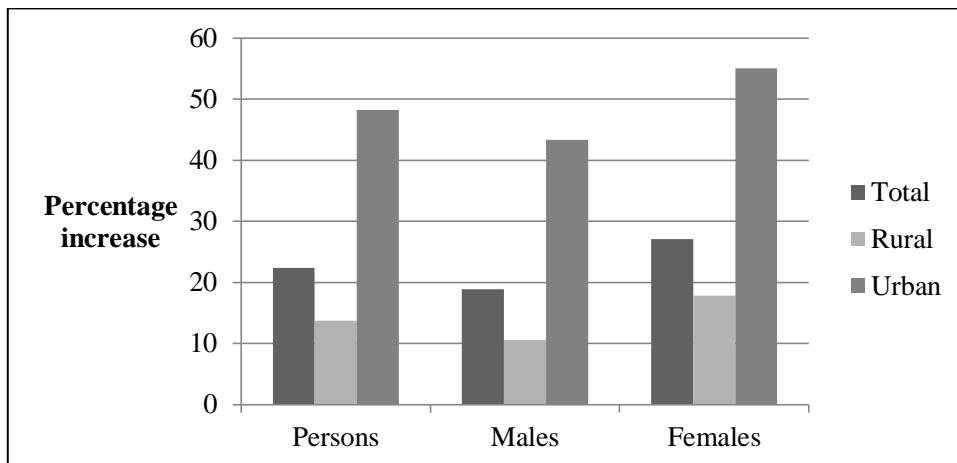
Source: Census, 2011, GOI

**Figure 6: Decadal Change in Disabled Population by Gender and Residence, India, 2001-11 (Absolute change)**



Source: Census, 2011,GOI

**Figure 7: Decadal Change in Disabled Population by Gender and Residence, India, 2001-11 (Percentage Decadal Growth)**



Source: Census, 2011Decadal

**Table 3: Percentage of Disabled to total population India, 2011**

Residence	Persons	Males	Females
Rural	2.24	2.43	2.03
Urban	2.17	2.34	1.98

Source: Census, 2011,GOI

According to Lonely Planet, if disabled people are provided appropriate facilities wherever they travel, 50% more of them will travel. Another study shows that in United States alone, adults with disabilities annually spend 13.6 billion dollars on travel (UNWTO Recommendations on Accessible Tourism, 2013).

Studies like these dismiss the common notion that all persons with disabilities are poor and if they are not poor, they do not like to travel. The population of persons with disabilities searching for an adventurous life is increasing. This can translate into an altogether new and sustainable clientele with new incomes for the tourism industry. Thus there is immense untapped business potential and socio-economic multiplier effect that tourism by people with disabilities promises.

**The Current Legislation, Policy and Schemes Instituted by Government of India and Shortcomings Therein:** India signed the Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region in 1993. In lieu of this, the government of India enacted Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The objective of the act is to strengthen

disability rights through affirmative action in the fields of education and employment, social security and by creating a barrier free environment, et cetera. The implementation of the Act requires that all the appropriate governments, including various Central Ministries/Departments, States/Union Territories and local bodies coordinate together. India also signed to the Biwako Millennium Framework for action towards a barrier free and rights based society.

However thirty years have passed since the Act came into operation. In these thirty years, the outlook toward disability rights has undergone significant changes. Various legal loopholes have been observed in the implementation of the Act. These shortcomings have served to discriminate heavily against the disabled persons and the tourism by disabled persons in particular. As a result certain amendments to the Act have become inevitable. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2006 echoes this concern. For example while Chapter VIII of the Act requires the appropriate governments, local authorities and establishments to make provisions for a barrier-free environment in the public buildings, transportation systems and on the roads, there is no explicit direction to extend this accessibility to tourism, cultural activities, leisure and sports. Moreover, various sections of the Act have explicitly stated that the provisions to improve the disability rights would be made by the appropriate governments "...within the limits of their economic capacity & development...". For example, Chapter VIII of the Act which deals with non-discrimination makes the provisions such as adaptation of railway stations, compartments, buses, vessels and aircrafts, installation of auditory signals at the red lights, curb cuts and slopes in the pavements, engravings on the zebra crossings and railway platforms for the benefit of visually impaired, appropriate symbols and warning signs related to disability, ramps in public buildings, Braille symbols and auditory signals in elevators and lifts, conditional on the economic capacity of the provider. This means that right to accessibility is still not a matter of right but instead dependent on the patronage and discretion of the provider.

The Act is discriminatory also because it is not applicable to theatres, restaurants, et cetera which also are buildings for public use. The Act also fails to cover all aspects of disability while providing for non-discrimination in disability such as visual signals and sign language interpreters for persons with impaired hearing, and avoidance of very bright lights or loud noises near an intellectually challenged person.

This makes the act fail to address the concerns of both domestic and foreign disabled tourists because they not only tour the country to visit national monuments but also to know more about the country by visiting the marketplaces and therefore various public buildings like restaurants and theatres. The act also fails to give prime importance to access to services and information that the disabled tourists require at the time of planning their tours.

The National policy of 2006 calls for measures to make accessible all the public and private recreational, sporting and cultural facilities to ensure that the services offered to persons with disabilities are accessible. Part IX of the policy says that there needs to be regular collection, compilation and analysis of data relating to socio-economic conditions of persons with disabilities. However, it is disappointing that no official data is available about the number of disabled foreign tourists visiting India.

The National Tourism Policy, 2002 also does not include the concerns of persons with disabilities even after it was approved after the passing of the disability act of 1995. This is disagreeable because if India wants to project itself as a friendly and responsible tourist destination, promoting accessible tourist facilities for persons with disabilities is an indispensable part of any policy.

The State Governments and Union Territory administrations have detailed instructions from the Ministry of Tourism to make barrier free all the tourist facilities created with central financial assistance. There are guidelines to classify and reclassify hotels, including all star hotels to ensure customized rooms and facilities for the disabled guests (Annual Report, 2014-15, Ministry of Tourism, GOI).

The Ministry of Tourism presents National Tourism Awards every year. Two of these awards are given out on the basis of criterion of providing facilities to the physically challenged persons. They include awards for the Best maintained and Disabled Friendly Monument and Best Hotel for having Facilities for Differently Abled Guest.

None of the ministries in the government currently have guidelines to provide incentives to private businesses related to travel and tourism to provide employment to disabled people. Also at present, there is none of the Ministries or Departments concerned with accessibility has separate budget for disability.

In the recent past the Government of India launched three initiatives- Swadesh Darshan(to create tourist circuits around specific themes), PRASAD (to promote pilgrimage tourism) and HRIDAY (to promote sustainable development of heritage sites along with the local populace). However the guidelines released for each of these schemes do not include any mention about promoting accessible tourism for disabled persons.

As a result of these omissions on part of the government, the issue of making all the tourist places in India disabled friendly have been taken up in a segmented manner. The private tourism sector has also largely been

indifferent to this. Most of the private firms are still ignorant of the huge customer base and have failed to open up to them. Also there has hardly been any enthusiasm on the part of the private sector to employ people with disabilities. Employing people with varied disabilities in the hotels helps to sensitize the staff to the needs of guests with disabilities. As a result several problems are faced by the domestic and foreign tourists during the booking of tours. These include lack of understanding about disability among the booking staff, inhospitable staff, inaccessible booking centres, unreliable travel agency services. At places of stay such as the hotels, rooms meant for the physically disabled do not have all the necessary facilities, are priced higher and situated at inappropriate locations. There is insensitivity and unpreparedness to handle disabled tourists among the staff, lack of hurdle free moving environment in the hotels, absence of lifts, lack of facilities for persons with hearing and vision impairments such as tactile blocks, audio guides, sign language interpreter and so on. Even where facilities have been provided in the hotels, pedestrians, theatres and tourist venues, too many variables are observed. For example, the ramps are too steep for easy manoeuvring of the wheel chairs.

### **Incredible India Campaign (IIC):**

Incredible India is a nation branding marketing exercise which was conceptualized in 2002. The mission of this exercise was to create a special place for the country among the target audience which includes high-income tourists. The IIC is considered as an important factor for the rise in foreign exchange earnings and increase in tourist arrivals to India (Kant 2009).

Given that almost one third of the world population is directly or indirectly affected by disability, India is missing the chance to project itself internationally as the face of responsible tourism by not leveraging IIC to attract these potential visitors. The advertisements of IIC so far have not contained even a single visual of a disabled tourist manoeuvring the tourist sites in India. As a consequence, we are unable to create a favourable image in the minds of the global citizens who can now have access to the nation branding campaign through a wide variety of media sources like television and internet. This applies equally to the State Governments which are also walking an extra mile to attract the maximum share of tourists from abroad and domestically.

The Ministry of Tourism has recently updated and revamped its promotional website [www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org) (E-book of Ministry of Tourism accessed from [www.tourism.nic.in](http://www.tourism.nic.in)). However a look through the website reveals that it does not cater specifically to the information providing needs of the disabled tourists-both domestic and foreign to design a disabled-friendly holiday.

### **Suggestions for Policy Making by Government of India to Promote Responsible Tourism in India in Context of Disabled Persons:**

- Currently a lot of debate is going on regarding the framework of the new bill on disability rights. The new bill must incorporate the following points:
  - The Act must include explicit direction to the appropriate governments to extend the accessibility to disabled persons to tourist sites. This must also include emphasis on access to services and information to disabled tourists
  - Amendment must be made to make accessibility in all spheres of life a fundamental right and not a matter tied to the economic capacity of the provider.
  - Adherence to accessibility should be made compulsory in all the buildings of public use owned by the private sector and not just the government buildings
  - The new act must recognize that tourists can have diverse disabilities including intellectual impairment. Such aspects must also be covered.
- There must be official collection and compilation of data on a regular basis to enable its analysis related to disabled tourists, especially the foreign disabled tourists.
- All appropriate governments must include separate chapter on disabled friendly responsible tourism in the guidelines for all schemes meant to promote tourism.
- All Ministries and Departments at all levels of appropriate governments as well as institutions concerned with accessibility such as Road, Railways, Tourism, et cetera should undertake exercise on Disability Budgeting much like gender budgeting which ensures that the commitments to improve accessibility to persons with disabilities are translated into budgetary commitments. This will also build capacity and encourage research, so that a perspective on disability is retained at all levels of the planning, formulation of budget and implementation on the ground.



- Schemes must be framed which give financial incentives to tourist and travel firms to provide employment to persons with disabilities. A new National Tourism award with financial rewards must also be instituted to recognize the private businesses which perform excellently in this criterion.
- The schemes must include initiatives to make alternative forms of tourism like adventure tourism, medical tourism, and rural tourism also accessible and not only the hotels.
- A new National Tourism Policy must be framed which must contain a separate chapter on disabled friendly responsible tourism.
- The Incredible India Campaign must be rebranded to give more visibility to disabled tourists enjoying barrier free access to disabled friendly tourist sites. The website must include clearly visible and dedicated links that provide more information about hotels that are disabled friendly. This will induce hotels to adhere strictly to all accessibility norms to attract customers from this strata since Incredible India website is usually the first website used by most prospective tourists to know more about the country.
- Tourism offices must keep information in formats that are accessible.
- The 'Atithi Devo Bhava' campaign must also put emphasis on sensitising the general public as well as all the direct and indirect stakeholders in tourism sector on disability issues.

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