



**Research Unit**  
Press Information Bureau  
Government of India

## **From Awareness to Action: India's Commitment to Disability Rights**

(Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment)

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Disability rights in India are undergoing a transformative shift, propelled by the government's commitment to inclusivity and empowerment for persons with disabilities (PwDs). This movement is supported by various policies and initiatives aimed at ensuring that every individual, regardless of ability, can access opportunities and participate fully in society. Central to this effort is the Accessible India Campaign, launched by the government to create a barrier-free environment across education, transportation, and public spaces, thereby enhancing accessibility for all.

The Indian government has also implemented a range of schemes focused on empowerment, including financial assistance programs, skill development initiatives, and support for education. Among these efforts is the Divya Kala Mela, an event that celebrates the craftsmanship of differently-abled artisans, showcasing their talents and fostering economic self-reliance within the community.

Moreover, the government recognizes the importance of cultural and artistic expressions as vital components of this movement. By highlighting the talents of individuals with disabilities, society can challenge stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of their capabilities. As India progresses on this journey, the emphasis on disability rights underscores the government's dedication to recognizing the diverse contributions of all individuals, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

### **Accessible India Campaign**

The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), launched on December 3, 2015, by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), aims to achieve universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) across India.

Key focus areas include:

- Built Environment Accessibility:** Enhancing physical spaces like schools, medical facilities, and workplaces to ensure barrier-free navigation for all.
- Transportation Accessibility:** Improving access to various modes of transport, such as air travel, buses, taxis, and trains, to facilitate independent mobility for PwDs.
- Information and Communication:** Creating an accessible information ecosystem by improving website accessibility, providing audio-visual media content, and ensuring critical information is understandable for daily life.

4. **Sign Language Access:** Increasing the availability and training of sign language interpreters, along with enhancing captioning and interpretation in public television news to support the deaf and hard of hearing communities.

## Divya Kala Mela

The Divya Kala Mela, inaugurated on December 2, 2022, by the ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, represents a significant milestone in India's journey toward inclusivity and empowerment of the Divyangjan, or differently-abled individuals. This event stands as a testament to the evolving narrative around disability and craftsmanship in the country, highlighting both historical and cultural dimensions.

Historically, artisanship in India has been a source of identity and livelihood for many communities. For centuries, crafts have been passed down through generations, weaving together local traditions and skills. However, the participation of Divyang artisans in this rich tapestry has often been overlooked. The establishment of the Divya Kala Mela marks a pivotal shift in recognizing and celebrating the contributions of these artisans.

Since its inception, the Divya Kala Mela has expanded rapidly, with over 20 such melas being held in different states across India, the latest is organised in Pune, Maharashtra where 100 participants showcased a diverse range of products, including home décor, clothing, eco-friendly stationery, toys, and personal accessories, along with organic foods and handlooms. The mela aligns with the government's "vocal for local"<sup>1</sup> initiative, aiming to empower artisans and encourage visitors to support their work.



This growth reflects not only a recognition of the talents of Divyang artisans but also a commitment to fostering self-reliance and economic empowerment within these communities.

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<sup>1</sup> This initiative aims to encourage a spirit of self-reliance among the populace of Aspirational Blocks, propelling them towards sustainable growth and prosperity.

Each mela serves as a vital platform, allowing artisans to showcase their work, engage with local markets, and connect with potential buyers and business partners.

The fair, showcase a rich array of products, including handicrafts, handlooms, and organic goods. It illustrated not just the diversity of Indian craftsmanship but also the unique stories behind each creation. Each artisan's work reflected their cultural heritage, yet, more importantly, it symbolized resilience and the desire for recognition in a society.

Central to the festivities is the cultural program “**Divya Kala Shakti**,” which features performances by Divyangjan artists. This program not only highlights the immense talent within the differently-abled community but also serves as a powerful statement about their capabilities and contributions to the arts. These performances, filled with passion and creativity, challenge societal perceptions and inspire change, demonstrating that art knows no boundaries.

Furthermore, the event was supported by financial institutions like NHFDC<sup>2</sup>, NBCFDC<sup>3</sup>, NSFDC<sup>4</sup>, and NSKDFC<sup>5</sup>, which have long aimed to provide economic assistance to artisans. This partnership reflects a growing recognition of the need for targeted support to uplift Divyang artisans, ensuring their economic sustainability and integration into the broader market.

As the Divya Kala Mela continues to be held across the country, it signifies a broader movement towards inclusivity and recognition of the abilities of all individuals. It is a celebration of heritage, skill, and empowerment, challenging historical narratives that have often sidelined the contributions of the differently-abled. In this way, the Divya Kala Mela not only showcases the present talents of Divyang artisans but also sets the stage for a more inclusive future, where every individual's potential is acknowledged and celebrated.

## **Initiatives Taken by Government of India for Persons with Disability**

### **Initiatives**

- ❖ **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:** [The Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(RPwD\) Act](#) was enacted in 2016 and came into effect on April 19, 2017, replacing the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995. Its objective is to ensure that individuals with disabilities can live with dignity, free from discrimination and with equal opportunities. The Act includes specific provisions to uphold these rights and aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), of which India is a signatory.
  
- ❖ **The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999<sup>6</sup>:** The act establish a national body dedicated to the welfare of individuals with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental

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<sup>2</sup> National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation

<sup>3</sup> National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation

<sup>4</sup> National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation

<sup>5</sup> National Safai Karamcharis Finance & Development Corporation

<sup>6</sup> <https://thenationaltrust.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/National%20Trust%20Act%20-%20Englsih.pdf>

Retardation, and Multiple Disabilities, along with related matters and incidental provisions.

- ❖ **Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992:** [The Rehabilitation Council of India](#) (RCI) was established as a registered society in 1986. In September 1992, the RCI Act was enacted by Parliament, making it a statutory body on June 22, 1993. The Act was amended in 2000 to broaden its scope. RCI's mandate includes regulating and monitoring services for persons with disabilities, standardizing syllabi, and maintaining a Central Rehabilitation Register of qualified professionals and personnel in the fields of Rehabilitation and Special Education.
- ❖ **Scheme for Implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (SIPDA):** Launched in March 2015, **National Action Plan (NAP) for Skill Development**, focuses on skill training for PwDs aged 15 to 59, including those with hearing and speech impairments. The plan is implemented under the umbrella scheme SIPDA.

### **Schemes for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities by DEPwD**

- ❖ **Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances (ADIP):** The Department implements the ADIP scheme operation since 1981, releasing funds to various agencies for distributing aids and assistive devices to eligible persons with disabilities, including deaf and dumb individuals. This scheme includes provisions for cochlear implant surgery for children with hearing impairments.
- ❖ **[SAMARTH Respite Care](#):** A program offering temporary housing for orphans, families in crisis, and Persons with Disabilities (PwD) from BPL and LIG families with disabilities recognized under the [National Trust Act](#).
- ❖ **Financial Assistance to Deaf Colleges:** Financial support is provided to existing colleges for the deaf across five regions of India. This initiative ensures access to education for deaf and dumb students affiliated with UGC-approved institutions.
- ❖ **Deendayal Divyangjan Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS):** This Central Sector Scheme provides grant-in-aid to NGOs running projects like preschools, early intervention, special schools, and community-based rehabilitation for the welfare of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), including deaf and dumb students.
- ❖ **National Divyangjan Finance and Development Corporation (NDFDC):** NDFDC channels concessional loans for the socio-economic empowerment of PwDs. It



operates two flagship schemes: **Divyangjan Swavalamban Yojana (DSY)**<sup>7</sup> and **Vishesh Microfinance Yojana (VMY)**<sup>8</sup>

- ❖ **Scholarships for Students with Disabilities:** The Department implements an umbrella scheme for scholarships, which includes six components<sup>9</sup>
- ❖ **Diploma in Teaching Indian Sign Language:** Conducted by the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), this program waives tuition fees for deaf students registered with the [Unique Disability ID \(UDID\)](#)<sup>10</sup>. ISLRTC has also published a sign language dictionary of 10,500 words, facilitating the teaching and communication process for deaf students.
- ❖ **PM-DAKSH-DEPwD Portal:** This portal includes two modules:
  - **Skill Training:** Provides skill training for PwDs across the country.
  - **[Divyangjan Rozgar Setu](#):** Acts as a bridge between PwDs and employers, offering geo-tagged information on employment opportunities.
- ❖ **National Institutes and Composite Regional Centres (CRCs):** Two national institutes, namely Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for Speech & Hearing Disabilities (AYJNISHD) and Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLRTC), focus on hearing and speech disabilities. Additionally, 25 Composite Regional Centres (CRCs) have been approved as outreach centers providing rehabilitation services, training professionals, and creating awareness about the needs and rights of PwDs.

## Conclusion: A Vision for an Inclusive Future

The evolution of disability affairs in India reflects a growing recognition of the rights and potential of persons with disabilities. The establishment of dedicated departments and initiatives exemplify a commitment to fostering inclusivity, creativity, and resilience within the community. By providing platforms for showcasing talent and facilitating economic opportunities, these efforts not only empower individuals but also contribute to a more inclusive society where everyone can thrive.

## References

- <https://socialjustice.gov.in/common/1508>
- <https://depwd.gov.in/video/divya-kala-mela-celebrating-divyang-artistry/>

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<sup>7</sup> Loans up to ₹50 lakh at concessional interest rates for income-generating activities, higher education, vocational training, and purchase of assistive devices.

<sup>8</sup> Provides loans up to ₹60,000 at reasonable rates for small/micro businesses and developmental activities.

<sup>9</sup> Pre-matric (Classes IX & X); Post-matric (Classes XI to Post Graduate Degree/Diploma); Top-Class Education (Graduate and Post Graduate Degree/Diploma in notified institutes of excellence); National Fellowship (M. Phil/Ph.D. in Indian universities); National Overseas Scholarship (Master's Degree and Ph.D. in foreign universities); Free Coaching (for competitive exams in the government sector and entrance examinations for technical and professional courses)

<sup>10</sup> UDID sub scheme is being implemented with a view of creating a National Database for Persons with Disabilities across the country. Under the UDID project, certificates of disability and Unique Disability Identity cards are issued to Persons with Disabilities through competent medical authorities notified by respective State Governments/Union Territories.

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**Santosh Kumar/ Sheetal Angral/Ishita Biswas**