Tactile Triumphs

Braille, Rights and Inclusion in India

January 4, 2026

Key Takeaways

- **World Braille Day**, observed annually on **4th January**.
- India's policy ecosystem—anchored in the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** has steadily expanded access to Braille through education reforms, assistive schemes and digital platforms.
- Government-led initiatives such as **Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan**, **NEP 2020**, and **Sugamya Pustakalaya** align closely with the **United Nations' disability inclusion framework**, reinforcing India's commitment to "leaving no one behind".

World Braille Day

Observed every year on **4th January**, World Braille Day foregrounds Braille not merely as a reading system, but as a gateway to education, dignity and equal participation for persons with visual disabilities. This significance is mirrored in India's efforts to adopt and standardise Braille for inclusive learning. The Braille script was introduced in India in 1887. But, in 1951, a single national standard, **Bharati Braille**, was adopted with the common codes for Indian languages. According to the 2011 Census, there are **50,32,463 persons with visual impairment in India,** who face significant barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment**.** Recognising the needs of this population, Braille in India is embedded in a rights-based ecosystem anchored in initiatives, acts and polices like **the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, and the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and others. These efforts position Braille as both a literacy tool and a public accessibility norm.

What is Braille and How Does It Work?

Braille is a **tactile writing and reading system** used by people who are blind or have low vision. It is based on a **six-dot cell**, arranged in two columns of three dots each. Different combinations of raised dots represent letters, numerals, punctuation marks and symbols, enabling users to read through touch.

Braille (named after its inventor in 19th century France, **Louis Braille**) is not a language but a **code** that allows multiple languages to be read and written in tactile form.

Print Number Symbols	Braille Number Symbols
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
0.	

Braille English Alphabets

a		f		k		p		u		z	
b		g		l		q		v			
c		h		m		r		w			
d		i		n		s		x			
e		j		o		t		y			

Significance of Braille

Braille plays a vital role in ensuring literacy, independence, and empowerment for persons with visual impairment. It is central to inclusive education and equal participation in social and economic life.

India, as a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), is committed to ensuring access to information and education in accessible formats, including Braille.

Government of India: Policy and Programme Ecosystem Supporting Braille

The Government of India has established a comprehensive ecosystem to promote the development, dissemination, and use of Braille as a vital tool for inclusion and empowerment of persons with visual impairment. Rooted in constitutional commitments to equality, dignity, and social justice, these initiatives span education, social welfare, skill development, and digital accessibility.

1) Legal foundation: Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act)

India's Braille ecosystem is anchored in a rights-based legal framework through the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**. The Act mandates inclusive education for persons with disabilities, making Braille access and literacy a core requirement.

- **Inclusive education as a duty of educational institutions:** The Act requires educational institutions funded/recognised by government to ensure inclusive education and accessible infrastructure (buildings/campus/facilities), reasonable accommodation, and appropriate support.
- **Braille and communication modes in schooling:** For students who are blind (or deafblind), the Act stresses education in the *most appropriate languages and modes/means of communication* and explicitly supports **Braille** and related formats.
- **Free learning material and assistive devices (up to 18 years):** The Act includes measures such as providing books/learning materials and assistive devices free of cost for students with benchmark disabilities.

2) Bharati Braille: India's Standardised Braille Script

The Government of India recognises *Bharati Braille* as the unified script for multiple Indian languages. Under the aegis of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), a *Standard Bharati Braille Code (with Unicode mapping)* has been published on 04 January 2025 with official adoption of a consistent Braille system across Indian languages for education and accessibility. The same has been adopted after public consultation on the draft, which was published on 03 December 2024.

How Bharati Braille Works

1. Unified Braille System for Indian Languages

- **Bharati Braille** is the **standardised tactile writing system** used for most Indian languages.
- It was developed to **harmonise multiple disparate Braille scripts** that existed across languages into a **single, consistent code**.
- This ensures that visually impaired readers can learn and use a **common Braille system across multiple Indian languages**
- It **employs the standard six-dot Braille cell.**

2. Standardisation and Unicode Mapping

- The Government (through NIEPVD/DEPwD) has released **the Standard Bharati Braille Codes** that includes Unicode mappings, enabling digital compatibility.
- This means each Braille cell pattern is mapped to a specific **Unicode code point**, facilitating **digital reading-writing, screen reader support, Braille displays and software applications**.
- Unicode mapping is vital for accessible digital content in Bharati Braille.

3. Consistent Representation Across Languages

- The Standard Bharati Braille Codes provide rules to represent **vowels, consonants, numerals and punctuation** in different Indian scripts such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, etc., using a **common tactile framework**.
- This helps learners with visual impairment transition between languages while reading Braille without having to relearn different Braille codes.

4. Basis for Teaching, Publishing and Digital Accessibility

- Bharati Braille serves as the foundation for Braille education, transcription, publishing and accessible material production in India.
- The standards are used by publishers, Braille presses, and accessibility implementers to produce textbooks, learning materials and digital Braille content that are consistent and reliable.
- The standard supports national initiatives for inclusive education and literacy.

Recent Initiatives:

- The National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD) has conducted a Project on Validation of the revised Bharati Braille for technological integration and prepared the **Draft Bharati Braille** 2.1 after validating Liblouis tables. This draft has been developed through validation workshops and consultations through focal group discussions conducted across different regions of the country. The draft is being uploaded on the NIEPVD website on **04 January 2026 (World Braille Day)** for a period of **15 days**, inviting comments and feedback from all stakeholders, including educators, Braille experts, persons with visual disabilities, publishers, researchers, and technology developers.
- NIEPVD is also conducting training on Bharati Braille in the regional language. Recently, the Institute has organised training on Tamil, Malayalam and Odia Braille.

3) Accessible India Campaign: Strengthening Inclusive Access in Infrastructure, Mobility, and Information and Communication Technologies

The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) is India's national initiative, launched in 2015, by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), to create a barrier-free, inclusive environment for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), including persons with visual impairment. The campaign adopts a holistic approach to accessibility by addressing the built environments (buildings, transport), the information & communication ecosystem (websites, media), and transportation systems universally accessible. It focuses on retrofitting buildings and public spaces with Braille signage (covering 2,000+ railway stations), improving infrastructure at railways, metro stations and airports, and implementing national website accessibility guidelines.
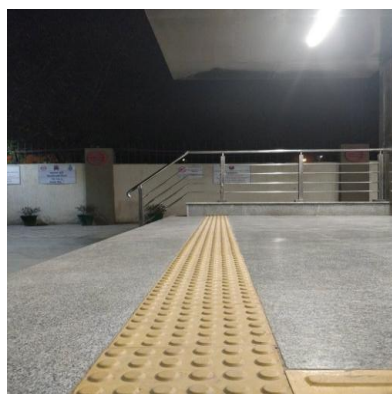
4) NEP 2020's Braille integration

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly recognises that inclusion needs practical learning supports—assistive devices and accessible teaching-learning materials, including Braille.

- NEP prioritises participation of children with disabilities, and states that language-appropriate teaching and learning materials—including textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille—should be made available to support integration into classrooms.
- The NCERT develops school curricula and textbooks aligned with **NEP 2020,** and is responsible for producing and enabling **Braille and accessible-format textbooks** for school education.

5) Higher education and institutional accessibility to Braille

As students with visual disabilities move into higher education, Braille and other accessible formats need to be integrated into mainstream academic systems. Government-supported digital libraries and institutional mandates are enabling universities to shift from ad-hoc accommodations to structured, campus-wide accessibility practices. The DALM Project supports the students with visual impairment pursuing higher education through provision of free Braille Books through its implementing agencies.

Sugamya Pustakalaya

It is a comprehensive digital library for persons with visual and other print disabilities, with accessible books in multiple languages and links to global sources. It was initiated as a collaborative effort of NIEPVD (National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities), along with Tata Consultancy Services and a non-profit organisation called the Daisy Forum of India. The portal offers availability of books and learning materials in digital Braille format. Institutions involved are required to:

- Search for accessible-format books
- Convert if not available
- Upload to Sugamya Pustakalaya to avoid duplication
- Provide memberships to students/faculty with print disabilities.

This is significant because it embeds "Braille/accessible formats" into institutional workflows, not just disability offices.

INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE LIBRARY FOR BLIND & PRINT DISABLED

6) Programmes that fund and operationalise Braille learning materials

The Government of India has created dedicated funding mechanisms to translate Braille access into real, scalable learning materials. These programmes focus on mass production, free distribution and institutional capacity-building to ensure that students with visual disabilities are not excluded due to lack of accessible content.

DALM (Project on Financial Support for Development of Accessible Learning Materials)

The **DALM Project (earlier known as the "Braille Press Project")**, implemented under the SIPDA (Scheme for Implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act), provides free Braille textbooks and course materials to persons with visual impairment across India, covering both school and higher education. Since its inception in 2014, the project has distributed accessible-format school textbooks and other learning materials to 1,69,782 students.
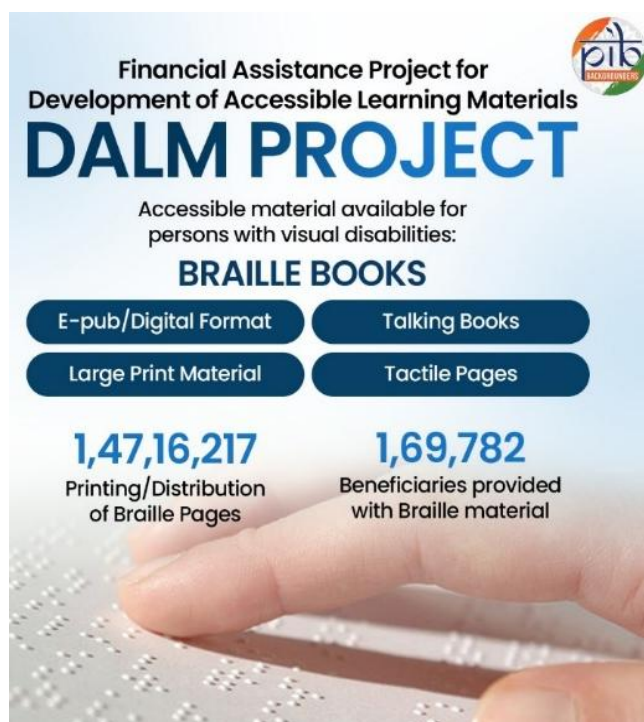
7) Capacity building that sustains Braille (training, special education)

Government bodies and statutory regulators play a critical role in standardising training, accrediting institutions and maintaining professional quality across the country. NIEPVD, Dehradun, is conducting various training programmes for the promotion of Braille literacy and Braille development activities.

Rehabilitation Council of India

The **Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)** is a **statutory body of the Government of India** established under the *Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992*. It came into existence on **22 June 1993** when the Act was enacted by Parliament. An amendment in 2000 broadened its scope. Its objectives are:

- **Regulate and standardise rehabilitation education and training** for professionals working with persons with disabilities across India.
- **Prescribe and enforce minimum educational and training standards** to ensure quality and uniformity in rehabilitation services.
- **Recognise and monitor institutions and courses**, including domestic and foreign qualifications, in the field of rehabilitation and special education.
- **Maintain the Central Rehabilitation Register (CRR)** for registration and regulation of qualified rehabilitation professionals and personnel.

- **Promote research, data collection, and continuing professional development** in rehabilitation and special education.
- **Strengthen manpower development** by recognising and registering vocational, national and apex disability institutions and their personnel under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Core Institutions and Delivery Ecosystems

- **Braille Library Service, Delhi Public Library** – Provides Braille books and periodicals.

  - Operates under the **Delhi Public Library (DPL)**, an autonomous organisation of the **Ministry of Culture, Government of India**.
  - Provides **Braille books, magazines and periodicals** for persons with visual disabilities.
  - Functions as a **national-level public Braille library service**, supporting reading, education and lifelong learning.

- **Braille Resource Centre, Bangalore University** – Academic Braille resource support.

  - Functions as an **academic support centre** offering:

    o Braille transcription support
    o Accessible study materials
    o Academic assistance for visually impaired students
    o Supports inclusive higher education in line with **UGC accessibility guidelines**.

  - Braille presses and resource centres

Conclusion: Toward a Barrier-Free Future

World Braille Day underscores a simple but powerful truth: **access to information determines access to opportunity**. India's evolving Braille ecosystem is rooted in law, strengthened by institutional mechanisms and aligned with the United Nations' rights-based vision. By standardising Braille and investing in accessible learning materials, India is further strengthening the foundations of inclusive education. Integrating tactile information across public services and building professional capacity are further helping transform constitutional principles into meaningful, lived accessibility. As these efforts further expand, Braille is increasingly recognised not just as a niche accommodation, but as a vital bridge to equality, participation and dignity for persons with visual disabilities.

References:

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment:
- https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/15939/1/the_rights_of_persons_with_disabilities_act%2C_2016.pdf
- Homepage | Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) -Home | DEPwD | भारत

- https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s36ee69d3769e832ec77c9584e0b7ba112/uploads/2024/12/20241213710399415.pdf
- Microsoft Word - Project Guidelines - DALM Project.docx
- https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s36ee69d3769e832ec77c9584e0b7ba112/uploads/2024/12/20241213710399415.pdf
- https://rehabcouncil.nic.in/objectives/
- https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s36ee69d3769e832ec77c9584e0b7ba112/uploads/2025/01/20250104954295710.pdf
- https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s36ee69d3769e832ec77c9584e0b7ba112/uploads/2024/12/202412131431869544.pdf

Ministry of Education
- https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/8572354_Final-Accessibility-Guidelines.pdf
- https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

United Nations:
- https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/news/shaping-a-future-where-everyone-is-included
- https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-braille-day
- https://www.un.org/en/observances/braille-day/background

Government of India (Central Govt) and the Government of NCT of Delhi
- https://x.com/OfficialDMRC/status/1182246500283244545

PIB Research