



Ditch the *dis* in *disabled*

How disabled-friendly (and inclusive) is the modern-day infrastructure of Mumbai? Does our diversity agenda go beyond the gesture of assisting a blind person to cross the road and instead, focus on generating effective (and unbiased) results? A few disabled *Mumbaikars* don't think so. Read on...

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Picture returning from work on a Monday evening to Versova from Colaba. The sheer thought of the same can churn a lot of emotions - agony, frustration, impatience and finally, relief. You dodge nasty potholes, slippery pavements, broken stairs, puddles with much finesse, in a quest to catch the next train, bus or cab! However, during those rare occasions when these very 'lifelines' become non-functional, the city comes to a standstill. And we are reminded of our dependence on this extensive, reliable

for the Handicapped) employee has quit taking the bus altogether. "Who is going to help me board the bus? For a mobility-challenged individual, the bus serves hardly any purpose," says Ganeshan. However, he isn't complaining, "The monorail has been quite an enabler as it is disability-compliant. But making the monorail disabled-friendly is one thing - how do I reach the station from home? That is an accessibility issue."

32-year-old Savitri Gupta recalls the many times she had almost tripped while taking the escalator at railway stations. "Escalators aren't always conducive to people like me since I am better-

PhD at IIT-Bombay.

Ganeshan and Gupta are not alone. About 15 per cent of the world's population lives with some form of disability, according to WHO. 'International Day of Persons with Disabilities' on December 3, as its 2016 theme, highlighted the need for achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were initiated by the UN. Let's lay emphasis on 'Goal 11' (build sustainable cities). Are the needs of the disabled considered during city planning?

Yogendra Shetty, director general, NASEOH says, "Most of our



LEGALLY SPEAKING

Amba Salelkar elaborates: 'The rights of persons with

Disabilities' Bill (a replacement of PWD act) concerns rights of persons with disabilities in India. The entitlements largely follow those under the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995; however, the 1995 Act only recognised seven impairments as 'certifiable' for the purpose of entitlements and the Bill proposes 19 categories of impairments. With respect to infrastructure, the Bill in its last public domain avatar reiterates the PWD Act's commitment to 'establishments' becoming accessible. It also constitutes a National Commission to set standards for accessibility, and mandates that all new government establishments be accessible. With regards to transport, it mandates retrofitting of vehicles for accessibility, however it is conditional upon the retrofitting and adaptation being 'economically viable and without entailing major structural changes in design'. Establishments do not include private establishments, which may be open to the public.

are slightly forgiving towards the deaf community. Hearing-impaired Harish Bhatia, general skills instructor, Deaf Enabled Foundation does not think so. "Most of the time, information gets distorted because sign language interpreters or boards are not available. How can a deaf person understand a key announcement?" Unfortunately, for 35-year-old mobility-impaired Manohar Suradkar and a NASEOH employee, accessing a public toilet is embarrassing when he must drag his body with the help of his hands. "Also access to any form of transport is an issue and people like me, are compelled to take a taxi and that is not economical," he says.

A city's infrastructure is not restricted to transport only. Easy access to ATMs, malls, restaurants, cinema halls, banks, police stations, parks, hospitals, are equally important. Dr Ashok Kumar Sinha, director, Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Speech and Hearing Disabilities, says that the usage of signage at public buildings and public places such as auditoriums should be facilitated. Salelkar points out, "It has been said, time and again, that anything made accessible for a person with disability makes it easier to use for everyone." Accommodating the needs of the disabled is the need of the hour. The monorail and metro are cases in point. "Provisions in the form of special platforms, even levelling and priority entrance and seating have been achieved at certain locations. The future of city planning will include incorporating the needs of the disabled at the urban planning stage itself and perhaps, even a dis-



DIFFERENTLY ENABLED?

How compatible are today's housing establishments with the needs of people with disabilities? We seek some answers...

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Under India's Disability Act (1995), a person with disability is anyone who suffers at least 40 per cent impairment from a medical issue such as blindness, low vision, leprosy, deafness, locomotor disability, mental retardation or mental illness. This gives rise to a pertinent question - are we as a city, well-equipped to provide the basic housing needs to the people with disabilities? Let's find out. According to advocate, Rajan Hiranandani, "There is an act titled 'The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995'. Under the said Act of 1995, the appropriate governments and local authorities shall by notification, frame schemes in favour of persons with disabilities, for the preferential allotment of land at a concessional rate for a house. Further, there is a Bill as well - The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014, which was to replace the Act of 1995, but this Bill of 2014 has not yet become an Act so far."

FACT CHECK:

The office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, had released some data on the disabled population by the type of disability, type of households and sex in the 2011 census. The data released showed that a whopping 207.8 lakh households have disabled people living, which means that in India alone, such houses constitute 8.3 per cent of the total households. The data further goes on to show that among the total households that have disabled persons, there has been an increase of 20.5 lakh, from 187.3 lakh in 2001 to 207.8 lakh in 2011.

Thus, with this as the backdrop, are we, as a society and a city, prepared to provide housing needs to this section of our population? Piyush Gandhi, national director - project and development services, JLL India, says, "The number of disabled people is expected to rise in our country further due to the improved survival rates after congenital disabilities, diseases or accidents. However, many human settlements are not designed or managed to meet the special needs of these groups. It is important, therefore, to develop worldwide strategies for the improvement of the living conditions for the disabled people in human settlements. Local governments play a leading role in shaping this reformation and are also major beneficiaries of this change."

To this Hiranandani adds, "On glancing through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014, there is a provision for mandatory observation of accessibility norms. It is provided that no establishment shall be granted permissions to build any structure if the building plan does not adhere to the regulations formulated by the National Commission. The National Commission is required to formulate regulations for the persons with disabilities laying down the standards of accessibility. It is further provided that no establishment shall be issued a certificate of completion or allowed to take occupation of a building unless it has adhered to the regulations formulated by the National Commission."

WHAT THE REALTY FRATERNITY CAN DO?

In line with the need of hour, The Model Building Byelaws, released in 2016, by the Ministry of Urban Development for adoption in the entire country, addresses the needs for differently-abled citizens. The Model Building Bye Laws 2016 (Chapter 8), IS Code 4963, CPWD guidelines for barrier-free environment gives very detailed design and planning guidelines to provide a barrier-free environment for differently-abled citizens.

Along with applicable local statutes, it is worth referring to them to understand these norms and design principles before building any new real estate project. In order to understand some of the typical focus areas, see box.

"Great care should be taken to include a range of special facilities, which are commissioned during the design phase itself. Facilities such as special parking zones, toilets, ramps, etc. ought to be made available in projects that are being built by developers today. Similar other facilities that should be included are accessible routes, signboards, footpaths and walkways, landings and handrails that are designed in a manner to make them live in total comfort."

KISHORE BHATTIA,
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K RAHEJA CORP

KEY FOCUS AREAS:

- ▼ **Easy path / Walkway** for access from plot entry to the building entrance;
- ▼ **Selection of floor material** to guide the visually-impaired through colour and brightness assistance, which is conspicuously different from that of the surrounding floor or has a different sound;
- ▼ **Parking** - Surface parking space for minimum two cars near the entrance for the differently-abled;
- ▼ **Approach to plinth level** - Every building should have at least one entrance accessible to differently-abled and should be indicated by proper signage;
- ▼ **Lifts** - Provision of at least one lift should be made for the wheelchair user with adequate cage dimensions and entrance door width with hand rail provision adjacent to the control panel. Provision to audibly indicate the floor, the door position (open or closed), graphic/braille signage should be made as well;
- ▼ **Toilets** - One special WC in common toilets for the use of differently-abled with the provision of washbasin near the entrance. The toilet should be provided on the ground floor; the provision of drinking water should be made for the differently-abled near the special toilet provided;
- ▼ **Proper signage** - Visually-impaired persons make use of other senses such as hearing and touch to compensate for the lack of vision, whereas visual signals benefit those with hearing disabilities. Signs should be designed and located so that they are easily legible. For the visually impaired, the information board in braille should be installed on the wall. International symbol mark for wheelchair should be installed in the lift, toilet, staircase, parking areas, etc.



Courtesy: JLL

In a nutshell... In most of the first-world countries, there are strict rules and guidelines that are essential when it comes to providing homes to people with disabilities. In Mumbai however, it may not be the norm and hence, the need of the hour is to ensure just that and pay heed to the needs of the disabled.

"The current norms have no provisions for the differently-abled section of our population. Given that an estimated 15 per cent of our population would fit into this demographic, it is appropriate that the planning authorities amend the building permission norms to make suitable provisions for this demographic. Such homes need a different type of planning that is appropriate - the entire building has to be designed to be differently-abled-friendly."

ROHIT Poddar,
MD, Poddar Housing and
Development Ltd



There have been strides made and initiatives by the government and a case in point is the Accessible India Campaign (AIC). How well do you know the AIC (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), post a year since its inception? Dr Sinha, director, Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Speech and Hearing Disabilities gives you a lowdown:

- ✓ AIC is a nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.
- ✓ The first workshop of AIC was held last year at Mumbai organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of

Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Government of India;

- ✓ 50 cities across the country have been selected for making its buildings accessible including Mumbai.
- ✓ An 'access audit framework' has been created. 18 access auditors have been empanelled.
- ✓ Synergy with other national campaigns, namely, Digital India for accessible public infrastructure, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is also being done.
- ✓ The creation of a portal is in process along with a mobile app for crowdsourcing information on inaccessible places, key public buildings in each of the major 50 cities to be converted into fully accessible infrastructure.



ACCESSIBILITY
It's often thought of in terms of ramps for wheelchair users. There's no real point in accessible infrastructure if there is no way to get there from your home. It's quite frustrating when able-bodied citizens get to pop in and out of cabs at six rupees a kilometer when a disabled must pay a premium for a wheelchair-accessible vehicle.

AFFORDABILITY
It needs to be factored into policy-making. For instance, if we talk about accessing a cinema hall, a person with disability may need to pay additional costs for accessible transport. Metro services in cities are quite costly compared to other modes of transport and it is the only mode of public transport accessible for many persons with disabilities.

cities have planned and developed haphazardly. The problems get more aggravated for the disabled who are using mobility aids like tri-wheeled wheelchairs, crutches to move around and access their living quarters." 32-year-old, visually-impaired, Kailash Tandel who is currently studying at TISS, is reminded that he isn't empowered enough when he has to rely on a fellow commuter's judgement in a bus to alight (an announcement mech-

anism could work). Railways pose serious threats for friends Tandel and Gupta. "The special compartment is too small and there have been times when the non-disabled passengers board to avoid the rush," Tandel adds. Gupta says, "I avoid the compartment for the same reason. I have heard of a few cases of harassment too towards female disabled passengers. And we don't have security personnel either." Many assume that the issues

skilled at taking stairs. Most blind individuals are. Firstly, there aren't any tactile floor markings that lead me to the escalator. Are there audio alerts to figure out whether the end is approaching while on an escalator? No! So you are only stuck with your intuition." The visually-impaired Gupta's struggles don't end there. "The pavements are dominated with hawkers, illegal parking and of course, notorious potholes. Therefore, accidents are a common occurrence. A uniform levelling of the pavement and a separate walking path are crucial for the blind to navigate safely," adds Gupta who is pursuing her



ACCEPTABILITY
The practice of 'reserving' seats often inconveniences families and friends of persons with disabilities. Theatres often seat wheelchair users separately from their friends and families, for instance.

AMBA SALELKAAR, a lawyer specialising in disability law and policy and currently working with Equals, Centre for Promotion of Social Justice (Chennai) discusses key issues faced by disabled citizens w.r.t the city's infrastructure and transportation, thus reiterating the need for inclusivity:



T Ganeshan,
mobility-impaired



Manohar Suradkar,
mobility-impaired



Kailash Tandel,
visually-impaired



Savitri Gupta,
visually-impaired



Harish Bhatia,
deaf

and sometimes-flawed system of the city, called 'transport'.

However, we as commuters, generalise our struggles. 53-year-old, T Ganeshan, encounters a different struggle of sorts. His primary modes of transportation are a tricycle and wheelchair since the day he was diagnosed with polio. But they are not enough for him to move around in the city. The NASEOH (National Society for Equal Opportunities

