

## **Museums in India- towards universal access**

### **Topic Code: K (Others)**

India has witnessed a significant increase in tourism activity in the last decade- a three-fold increase in domestic tourist visits at 650 million and over a two-fold increase in foreign tourist arrivals at 5.6 million (Kapoor, 2011). Cultural tourism has been identified as a growing sector of the tourism industry (Lord, 2002) and museums in particular play a significant role. Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), recognises the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life.

Our paper shall seek to locate inclusive tourism in India at the interface of systems of transport and infrastructure, with a specific focus on universal access within Indian museums. We shall attempt to address issues of creating universal access in Indian museums at physical, sociocultural, economic and intellectual levels. Pramod Nayyar (2006) opines that while many public, collection- based museums in India function as spaces showcasing the finest specimens of Indian art, they also serve as 'utilitarian instruments of democracy'. It is our view that Indian museums have the potential to function as largely democratic spaces which enable universal access for visitors. However, the key challenges which threaten this possibility, as highlighted in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2011, by the World Economic Forum, include lack of:

- a. Quality infrastructure
- b. Skills development
- c. Conducive policy framework
- d. Coordination among various authorities

Hall and Page, in their work on the geography of recreation and tourism (1999), identify the need to study 'mobility provision and access within an area with a relevant tourist attraction'. We intend to explore questions of universal access to museums in India, in relation to particular museum projects which our organisation, the Disability Research and Design Foundation, has been associated with during the last few years. Our paper shall be structured around our views and findings collated during the course of working on the museum projects. These views will pertain to the physical design of museum spaces and the need to facilitate more inclusive visitor experiences within the museum exhibition and non-exhibition spaces.

### **References:**

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