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Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Enhancing Universal Accessibility During Cultural Festivals

2025 Edition

Durga Puja in Kolkata

(inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021)

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Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

For Enhancing Universal Accessibility during Cultural Festivals

2025 Edition

Durga Puja in Kolkata

(inscribed in UNESCO' s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021)

United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office. India

Centre of Excellence in Urban Planning & Design, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

FOREWORD

Every autumn, Bengal bursts into colour, rhythm, and devotion as Durga Puja fills the streets with art, music, and community. For days, life itself seems to move in step with the beat of the *dhak* drums. Pandals rise like temporary palaces, crafted by thousands of hands, telling stories of both tradition and imagination. Families, friends, neighbours, and strangers pour into the celebration, embodying a joy that transcends barriers of faith, class, and geography.

It was in this spirit that Durga Puja was inscribed in 2021 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Yet, the festival can only truly reflect its inclusive spirit when every person including those with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women can take part with dignity and ease. The Operational Directives for the Implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) underscore the importance of ensuring communities and groups have equitable access to their living heritage.

These *SoPs for Making Durga Puja Accessible* represent a decisive step toward addressing this gap. Developed through extensive consultations with puja organizers, accessibility experts, organizations of persons with disabilities, and community leaders, these SOPs translate the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 into concrete, implementable actions that puja committees can adopt immediately.

The legal framework supporting this initiative is robust. India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, mandates equal access to cultural activities and public events. Article 30 of the CRPD specifically guarantees persons with disabilities the right to participate in cultural life on an equal basis with others. These are not aspirational goals but binding legal obligations that require systematic implementation across all levels of society.

The case for accessibility is also human and economic. Persons with disabilities represent about 16 per cent of the world's population, a vast community whose presence enriches every celebration. When festivals are accessible, they draw wider participation, spark stronger community spirit, and add to the cultural and economic vitality of society.

More fundamentally, accessibility is simply good design to ease out barriers and make the site friendly and safe for all. Spaces built for diverse needs serve everyone better: ramps help wheelchair users, parents with strollers, and the elderly; clear way-finding signage aids persons with visual or hearing impairments while guiding all visitors; seating areas support pregnant women, older participants, and anyone needing rest.

These SOPs identify practical steps across six critical dimensions:

- Physical infrastructure such as accessible pandals, ramps, and sanitary facilities.
- Accessible communication and information, including sign language, Braille, and audio formats.
- Inclusive programming that engages persons with disabilities as active participants.
- Emergency preparedness and safety protocols that protect all festival-goers.
- Volunteer training to build awareness, respect, and appropriate support skills.
- Attitudinal change to foster inclusion and dignity in every interaction.

Turning these principles into practice calls for a collective effort. Puja committees must weave accessibility into their earliest plans. Authorities must embed it in permissions and safety checks. Volunteers need awareness and skills to offer the right support. And above all, communities must embrace the spirit of inclusion that Durga Puja itself celebrates.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting this effort through technical cooperation, capacity building, and advocacy. As we advance toward the Sustainable Development Goals, the call to "leave no one behind" must also resonate in our cultural life. When persons with disabilities join fully in festivals like Durga Puja, the celebration becomes richer and meaningful for the entire community.

As the *dhak* beats echo through the streets each year, let them also echo a deeper promise: that no one is left at the margins of our shared joy. An accessible Durga Puja is more than a festival made better, it is a society made fairer, kinder, and stronger. May these guidelines help us turn that vision into reality, here in Bengal and far beyond.

Dugga, Dugga!

Shombi Sharp
United Nations Resident Coordinator in India

Tim Curtis
Director and Representative
UNESCO Regional Office for South Asia

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ACRONYMS

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DoP	Drop off Point
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
ISL	Indian Sign Language
NID	National Institute of Design
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organizations
OPD	Organizations for Persons with Disabilities
PuP	Pick up Point
(RPwD) Act	Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act
SOP(s)	Standard Operating Procedures
TGSI	Tactile Ground Surface Indicator
UDIP	Universal Design India Principles
UDID	Unique Disability ID
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Context and Introduction

a User Sensitive Approach

1

1.1. Context

Cultural festivals play a vital role in preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), fostering community participation, and celebrating traditions that bind societies togther. These festivals are not only a reflection of cultural identity but also an opportunity for people to participate in shared experiences. However, for many, these celebrations remain inaccessible. Persons with disabilities, older adults, pregnant women, and children face significant barriers in accessing public cultural spaces, making it difficult for them to engage fully in these celebrations. Despite global progress towards inclusion and accessibility, many festivals and public events still fail to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can participate equally in cultural activities.

In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, mandates accessibility across public spaces, including cultural events, ensuring that persons with disabilities can access the built environment, transportation systems, and communication channels. However, despite the presence of legal frameworks, cultural festivals continue to present challenges in providing equitable access, emphasizing the urgent need for action.

Additionally, recent Supreme Court of India judgments on accessibility and disability rights further reinforce the obligation to make public spaces, including cultural festivals, accessible for all. With the Court emphasizing all public spaces to be made inclusive, all barriers to participation should be removed.

A significant example of this challenge, and an opportunity to address it, is Durga Puja in Kolkata, a festival of immense cultural importance. Durga Puja was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2021. This recognition underscores the importance of Durga Puja not only as a major cultural event in Kolkata but also as an integral part of India's living heritage. The festival's vibrant community participation, traditional craftsmanship, and its role in preserving intangible cultural heritage are celebrated worldwide.

The scale of Durga Puja is massive, with millions of people participating in the festivities. For example, during Durga Puja in 2023, Kolkata Metro transported over 4.1 million passengers during the six-day festival period (from Mahapanchami to Vijayadashami),

demonstrating the large scale of movement of people and the immense pressure placed on public infrastructure during the festival 1.

Demographic statistics also underscore urgent need for inclusive arrangements: according to the 2011 Census, the prevalence of disability in India is approximately 2.21%2, and around 8.6% of the population is aged 60 years or older3.

These figures reflect the significant number of people who may encounter barriers to participating in cultural festivals like Durga Puja. Although estimates for West Bengal are similar, detailed state-level data is limited. Further, local surveys and observations indicate that many large, prominent Puja pandals (festival venues) remain physically inaccessible. For instance, over 70% of large pandals were found to be non-accessible, accordingly to an NGO survey 4. This shows that the barriers to full participation are not just potential but are already a significant issue.

These figures reflect the scale of the challenge. Persons with disabilities, older persons, pregnant women, and others with access needs constitute large absolute numbers whose full participation in public cultural events like Durga Puja is often impeded by crowding, inadequate infrastructural design, lack of accessible routes and facilities, and management issues.

Fig. 1.1 ***Photographs showing the crowd in Kolkata Puja Pandals***
(source: massArt)

In light of these realities, UN in India with UNESCO as technical lead, has collaborated with IIT Kharagpur to develop the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Enhancing Universal Accessibility during Cultural Festivals. The 2025 edition of the SOPs, while specifically developed for Durga Puja in West Bengal, is

1 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/kolkata-metro-records-over-4-million-passengers-during-durga-puja-festivities/articleshow/104703346.cms
2 https://depwd.gov.in/
3 https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/ElderlyinIndia_2016.pdf
4 https://newzhook.com/story/13636/

dedigned to be adaptable and scalable for **all Durga Puja pandals, regardless of scale, location, or organizing body** contextualized with the local-cultural-nuances without compromising on the non-negotiable accessibility standards**.** The aim is to embed accessibility, safety, dignity, and full participation for persons with disabilities, older persons, pregnant women, and others with access requirements into every stage of planning, management, and delivery of Durga Puja worldwide.

These SOPs will serve as a benchmark for festival organizers, Puja committees, and local authorities, offering practical and implementable measures for making cultural festivals universally accessible, and thus ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can partake in these celebrations.

1.2. Objectives of the SOPs

The SOPs aim to provide actionable guidance for festival organizers, government authorities, and stakeholders to ensure inclusive participation for all. Specifically, the objectives are:

i. Translate India's legal and policy commitments on accessibility and inclusion into practical, implementable measures for small and large cultural events.
ii. Operationalize CRPD Articles 9 (Accessibility), 11 (Situations of Risk), and 30 (Participation in cultural life) in the festival context.
iii. Align with the RPwD Act, 2016 (notably Section 8 on protection in situations of risk; Sections 40–46 on accessibility across the built environment, transport, and ICT; Sections 48–49 on statistics/data and the UDID system).
iv. Provide a replicable festival accessibility model with contextual adaptation to Indian states.

1.3. National Policy & Legal Perspectives

India's national Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 provides the legislative foundation for accessibility and inclusion in India, particularly during mass gatherings and cultural events:

i. Section 8: Duty to protect persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.
ii. Sections 40–46: Accessibility mandates for the physical environment, transportation, information & communication, and public services.
iii. Sections 48–49: National statistics and the Unique Disability ID (UDID) framework to enable evidence-based planning.

1.4. International Policy & Normative Perspectives

The SOPs are also informed by international standards and frameworks that promote inclusion, accessibility, and disaster resilience:

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):

i. Article 9 (Accessibility) obliges States to ensure access, on an equal basis, to the built environment, transport, information and communications, and services.
ii. Article 11 (Situations of Risk) mandates protection and safety in disaster and emergency contexts.
iii. Article 30 (Participation in Cultural Life) establishes the right to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport on an equal basis with others.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030):

i. Paragraph 19(g) calls for inclusive, risk-informed decision-making based on disaggregated data, including by disability; relevant priorities emphasize stakeholder participation and accessible early-warning systems.

UNESCO Operational Directives for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):

i. Access of communities, groups and individuals to the instruments, objects, artefacts, cultural and natural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing the intangible cultural heritage should be ensured.

1.5. Methodology of SOP Development

These SOPs were co-developed through a user-sensitive, participatory process and included:

ii. Consultation with persons with disabilities, OPDs and domain experts on enhancing accessibility during Durga Puja Celebrations in Kolkata
iii. Field assessments and accessibility walk-throughs in select pandals
iv. Key informant consultations with Puja organizers
v. Core Group engagement with OPDs and allied institutions
vi. Multi-stage technical review against CRPD, RPwD Act, NBC.

Fig. 1.2 ***Visit of Puja pandals and on-field Stakeholders' Consultations***
(photo source massArt)

Fig. 1.3 ***Online Core Group Consultation***

Fig. 1.4 *Orientation Workshop with Puja Committee organized by Core Group - members*

1.6. Applications and Stakeholders

Primary Users

i. Puja Committees and Organizers: The principal users of these SOPs, responsible for ensuring that pandals, associated events, and facilities are accessible, safe, and inclusive.

ii. Festival Operations Teams: Including designers, decorators, contractors, and service providers engaged in pandal construction, lighting, sound, crowd control.

Government Authorities (Secondary)

i. Nodal Departments under Union and State Governments for issuing these SOPs.
ii. Police – including both traffic management and law-and-order divisions, responsible for crowd regulation, accessible movement corridors, and safety oversight.
iii. Fire and Emergency Services – ensuring accessible fire exits, evacuation routes, and emergency drills.
iv. Urban Local Bodies and Civic Agencies – including Municipal Corporation and allied authorities, tasked with ensuring accessible sanitation, mobility chains, drinking water facilities, and public infrastructure.
v. State and District Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs/DDMAs) – mandated under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and Section 8(3) of the RPwD Act, 2016 to maintain disability-disaggregated records and ensure timely information to persons with disabilities in risk situations.

On-ground Service Providers

i. Volunteers – the first line of support for visitors; trained in accessibility awareness, respectful interaction, and basic Indian Sign Language (ISL).
ii. Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) – including those representing persons with visual, hearing, locomotor, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities, to guide inclusive planning and monitor implementation.
iii. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Groups – offering outreach, awareness, and advocacy support.
iv. Academic and Technical Partners – contributing technical expertise, audits, and design solutions.

1.7. Who Are the Beneficiaries?

The recommendations in these SOPs are designed to ensure safe and dignified participation for:

i. Persons with Disabilities – as defined by the RPwD Act, 2016, which recognizes 21 disabilities.
ii. Older Persons – approximately 8.6% of the population is aged 60 years and above (2011 Census), many of whom experience mobility, sensory, or cognitive challenges.
iii. Pregnant Women – often excluded in high-density environments due to lack of seating, rest zones, or accessible facilities.
iv. Children and Families – who also benefit from universally designed, safer, and more inclusive festival environments.

1.8. Intended Use of the SOPs

The SOPs are designed to provide comprehensive guidelines for ensuring that all aspects of festivals, from physical infrastructure to communication and emergency preparedness, are accessible to everyone, regardless of ability.

i. **Planning and Auditing Physical Accessibility:** Ensuring step-free routes, ramps, tactile surfaces, accessible entrances and exits, inclusive viewing areas, universally designed toilets, accessible signage, and resting zones.
ii. **Inclusive Information and Communication**: Implementing multilingual announcements, visual and auditory alerts, ISL interpretation, QR-coded information, and accessible formats (Braille, large print, audio).
iii. **Emergency Preparedness and Crowd Management**: Integrating inclusive evacuation drills, crowd flow design, refuge areas, and deployment of trained volunteers to support persons with disabilities, older persons, and pregnant women in emergency contexts.
iv. **Monitoring and Compliance:** Using accessibility checklists anchored in the National Building Code of India,Standards for Universal Accessibility in India (2021) and the RPwD Act, 2016, with independent validation involving OPDs and technical experts.

1.9. Guiding Philosophy

The SOPs adopt a universal accessibility and universal design approach: designing spaces, services, and information so they are usable by all, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation. This aligns with CRPD Article 9 and National Building Code of India as the national benchmark for the built environment, mobility chains, and information systems.

The approach centers on dignity, autonomy, and safety, recognizing that what benefits persons with disabilities (e.g., step-free access, clear signage, visual/auditory alerts, resting zones) also benefits older persons, pregnant women, children, and the broader public.

The guidelines draw inspirations from the Universal Design India Principles (UDIP), © NID, 2011, where the thrust has been given on usability and simplicity, considering the cultural context and the aesthetic since Durga Puja is one of the greatest festival of Art. Also, the recommendations are easy to implement, cost effective and grounded.

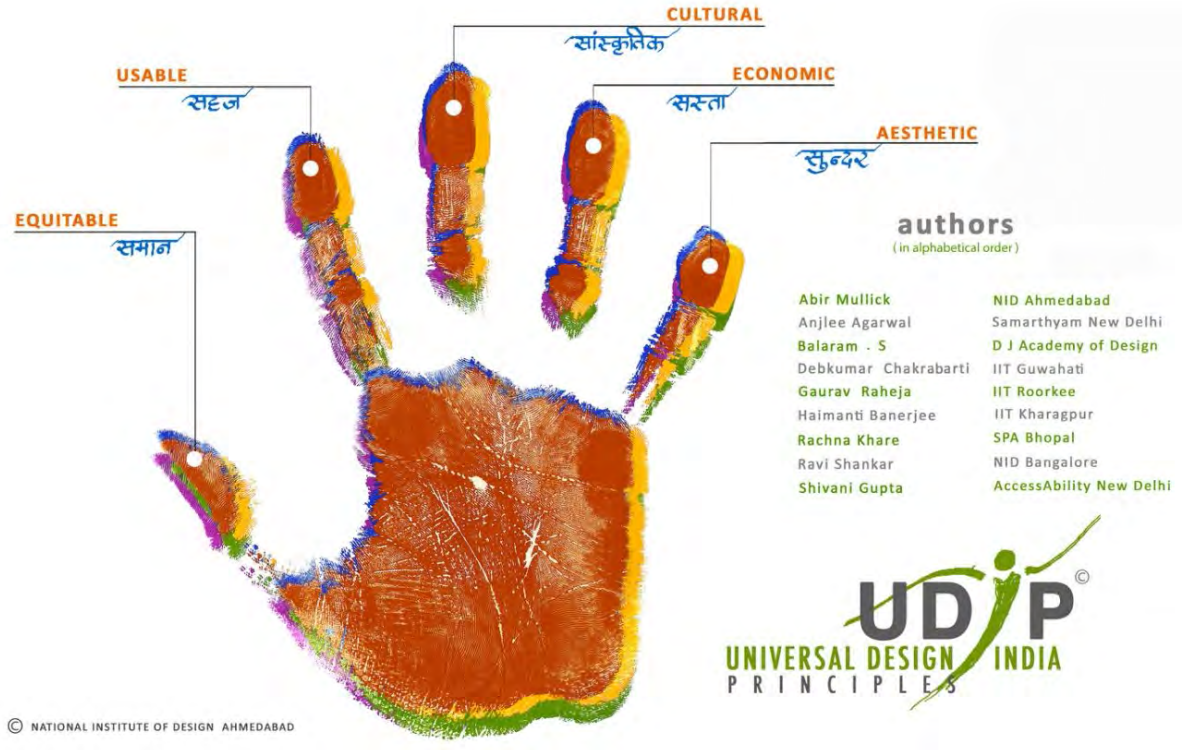


Fig. 1.5 *Universal Design India Principles (NID, 2011)*

1.10. Why SOPs?

Durga Puja has long symbolized inclusion, creativity, and shared cultural identity. Yet, for persons with disabilities, older persons, and pregnant women, participation is often restricted by barriers in access, mobility, information, and safety. At a time when the festival has been internationally recognized by UNESCO as a global heritage of humanity, it is imperative that its accessibility and inclusivity match its cultural prominence as has also been emphasized in its directives.

The urgency of these SOPs stems from three interlinked realities:

i. **Scale and Density:** With tens of millions participating in Durga Puja worldwide each year, even minor accessibility gaps can exclude huge numbers of people. The density of movement across metros, airports, and pandals demands anticipatory and inclusive planning.

ii. **Bridging Policy and Practice:** India has a robust legal and policy framework - the RPwD Act, 2016, the National Building Code of India, the UNCRPD, and the Sendai Framework but these remain meaningful only when operationalized on the ground. These SOPs translate obligations into clear, practical steps for organizers, committees, civic authorities, and volunteers.

iii. **Judicial Mandate:** The Supreme Court of India has made it clear that accessibility is a constitutional and statutory right, not an option. In Rajive Raturi v. Union of India (2017), the Court directed governments to ensure barrier-free access in all public buildings and services. More recently, through its Handbook on Persons with Disabilities (2024) and continuing directions, the Court has reinforced that all government bodies and public authorities are under a binding obligation to make infrastructure, information, and services accessible. These SOPs therefore provide a tool for compliance at the state and local levels, ensuring that festival arrangements uphold this judicial mandate.

The convergence of unprecedented scale, binding legal and policy commitments, and Supreme Court directions makes the adoption of SOPs for accessibility not just timely, but indispensable. By acting now, we can ensure that Durga Puja becomes not only the world's largest public art festival but also a global model of accessibility, safety, and dignity for all.

1.11. Structure of the SOPs

The SOPs are organized in two parts to aid implementation:

i. **Physical Design Standards** (routes, surfaces, gradients, entrances/exits, viewing and resting zones, toilets, signage/wayfinding, lighting, assistive features);

ii. **Management & Administrative Protocols** (volunteer training incl. ISL basics, inclusive information/alerts, ticketing/queueing, assistive services, emergency/evacuation planning, complaints redressal, and monitoring & audit tools).

These components are designed to be used together, enabling progressive realization with non-negotiables (mandatory minima) and enhancements (recommended good practices), consistent with National Building Code of India and RPwD norms.

1.12. Note on Applicability

Although the 2025 edition of the SOPs have been developed in the context of Durga Puja in Kolkata, their principles and recommendations are broadly applicable to:

i. All Durga Puja pandals, regardless of scale, location, or organizing body.
ii. Similar high-footfall cultural, religious, or public events elsewhere in India, with appropriate site-specific modifications to reflect local geography, infrastructure, and administrative systems.

By grounding the SOPs in universal design principles, RPwD Act, 2016 mandates, the National Building Code of India, and India's obligations under the UNCRPD and Sendai

Framework, these measures are adaptable to diverse environments while retaining a set of core, non-negotiable accessibility standards.

1.13. Implementation Protocol

It is understood that due to the huge diversity in size, scale, site context, location, approach, traffic-movement pattern across the puja pandals spread over the city, some recommendations made in this guideline may be difficult to implement. However, there are some non-negotiable aspect. To address this issue and to make the guidelines more pragmatic, the following distinctions are made:

Non-Negotiable Standards (Mandatory Minimums): Measures that must be implemented in all pandals, regardless of size or resource constraints.

Aspirational (Recommended Good Practices): Measures that enrich accessibility, participation, and user experience, to be implemented wherever feasible. These will include those recommendations which either

i. Do not target to solve an immediate hazardous and unsafe situation but if implemented will enhance the usability.
ii. Are not urgent and can come up if resource and time permits.
iii. Implementation involves logistic difficulties
iv. High cost to benefit ratio

Non- negotiable / mandatory provision

Desirable / Aspirational provision

This two-tiered approach makes the SOPs both pragmatic and progressive ensuring that minimum accessibility is guaranteed across all pandals, while also encouraging innovation and leadership in inclusive festival management.

Physical Design Standards

Zone-wise guidelines

2

2.1. Vehicle Drop off Point (DoP)/ Pick up Point (PuP)

Purpose: To provide safe, convenient, and accessible arrival and departure for persons with disabilities, elderly persons, and pregnant women.

a) **Drop-off Point (DoP) / Pick-up Point (PuP)**

- Each bay should dimension of minimum 5400 mm x 3900 mm.
- Bay(s) should be clearly demarcated with the International Symbol of Accessibility.
- DoP/PuP may be sheltered to protect users from sun and rain.

b) **Accessible Route Connection**

- The route from the DoP/PuP to the main pandal entrance should be smooth and step-free.
- The entire route may be marked with a continuous Tactile Ground Surface Indicator (TGSI) for persons with visual impairment.

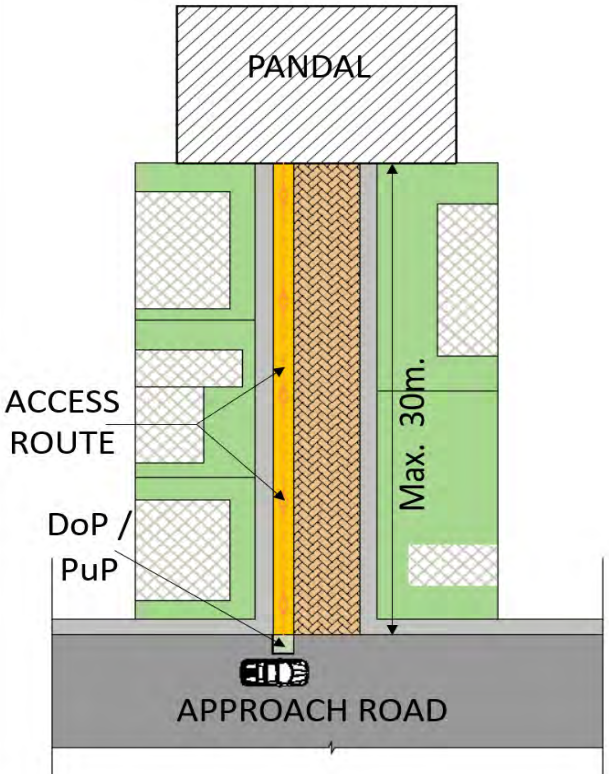


Fig. 2.1 ***Drop off Point / Pick up Point***

- The distance between the DoP/PuP and the main pandal entry/exit should be no more than 30 metres.
- Where the distance is more than 30 metres, alternative arrangements such as wheelchairs or battery-operated vehicles are recommended.

c) **Signage and Information**

- The accessible route should be marked with international signage of disability.
- To mark the accessible pandal entry, there should be vertical signage of minimum 600 mm x 600 mm, at a height of at least 2100 mm for visibility.
- Signage should be bi-lingual (Bengali and English); tri-lingual preferred.
- Information in Braille may be used additionally.
- Signage and entry maps may incorporate a QR code providing digital access to the same information.

d) **Volunteers**

- At least one volunteer should be present at the DoP/PuP at all times.
- Volunteers should be easily identifiable (through uniform, ID badge, or vest).

e) **Parking**

- Barrier-free parking bays should be provided near the DoP/PuP.
- Parking bays should be clearly demarcated with accessibility signage.
- They should be located nearest to the accessible route leading to the pandal.

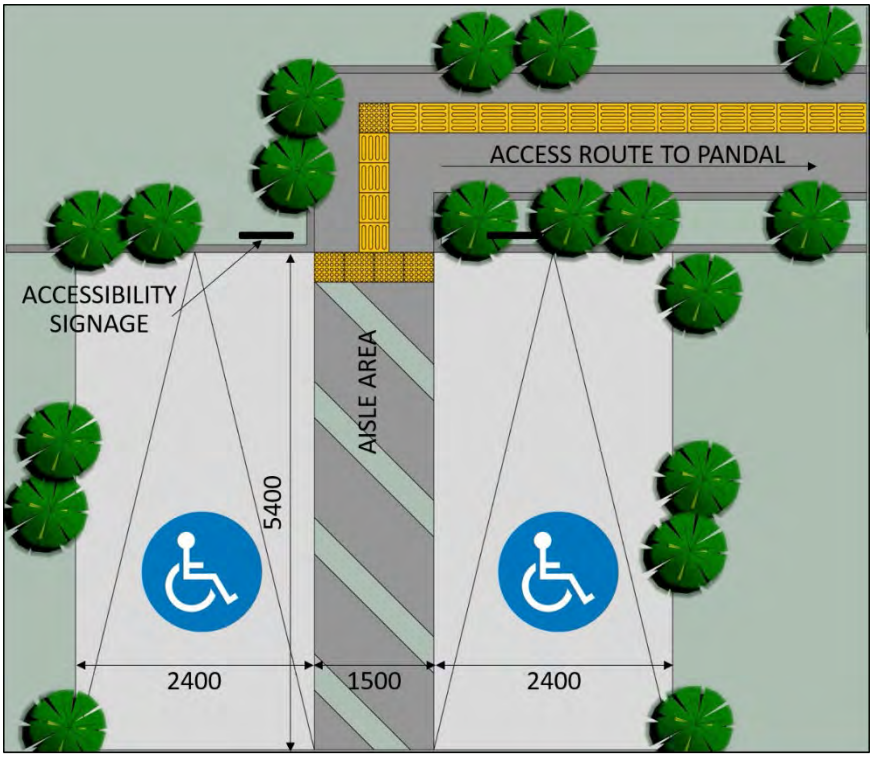


Fig. 2.2 ***Barrier Free Parking leading to accessible route to the pandal***

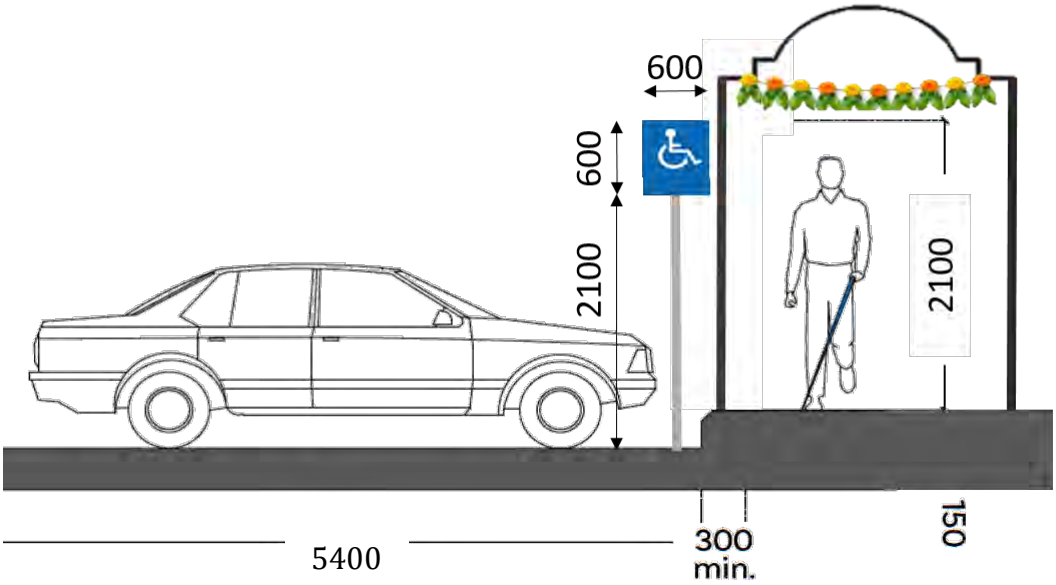


Fig. 2.3 ***Barrier Free Parking leading to accessible route to the pandal***

2.2. Accessible Route from drop off / pick up point to Pandal

Purpose: To ensure a safe, step-free, and obstruction-free movement path between the designated drop-off/pick-up points (DoP/PuP) and the main pandal entry/exit, suitable for wheelchair users, persons with visual impairments, elderly persons, and pregnant women.

a) **Width of Walkways**

- There should be separate entry and exit routes of minimum width 1.2 m.
- For two-way movement:
  i. Preferred width: 1.8 m.
  ii. Minimum width: 1.5 m (in case of contextual restrictions or low footfall).
- High-traffic pandals should have a minimum width 1.8 m.

b) **Gradient**

- Walkways should not exceed a gradient of 1:20.

c) **Surface Conditions**

- Walkways should be step-free, levelled, and anti-skid.
- Path of movement should be free from waterlogging, loose materials, or uneven surfaces.
- The finished level should be hard, well-maintained suitable for both walking and wheelchair movement.

d) **Handrails**

- Handrails should be provided on both sides of walkways.
  i. Height: at two levels between 700 mm and 900 mm.
  ii. Diameter: 38–45 mm for a comfortable and secure grip.
  iii. Colour: contrasting to the background for visibility.
  iv. Material: smooth, durable, free of sharp or abrasive edges.

Fig. 2.4 ***Separate routte wih hand-rails for elderly and Person with Disabilities to access pandal***

e) **Level Changes**

- Changes within the walkway should be highlighted with contrasting colours or distinct material change.
- Vertical rise and gradient requirements should be as per the table below.
- Vertical level changes up to 6 mm may not require edge treatment.

Changes in vertical rise (mm)	Gradient < than
0 to 15	1:2
More than 15 to 50	1:5
More than 50 to 200	1:10
Exceeding 200	1:12

- Level of access route should not be more than 150 mm above the road surface/DoP/PuP, and be connected with appropriate slopes.
- Temporary slopes should be used where permanent ramps are not feasible.

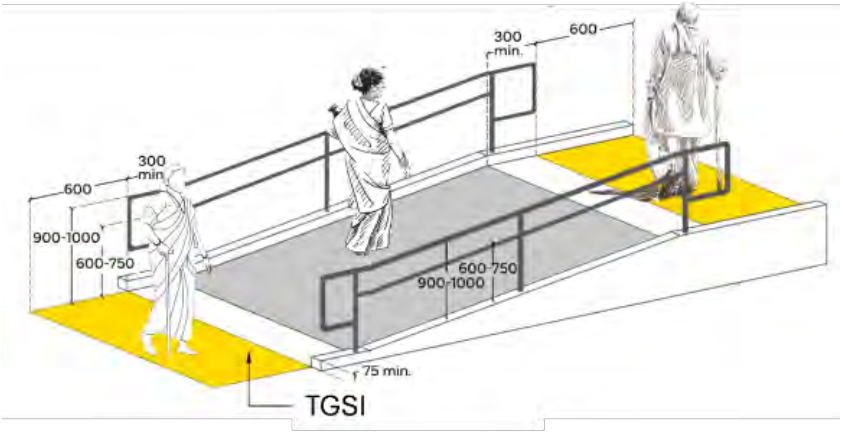


Fig. 2.5 ***Ramp design for negotiating level differences within the premises***

f) **Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs)**

- A continuous TGSI strip (min 300mm from edge) may be placed along the route.
- Warning blocks are recommended 300 mm before and after the end of the walkway.
- Directional TGSI are recommended to indicate the movement direction.
- Hazardous TGSI should be provided at turns or where the path changes direction.

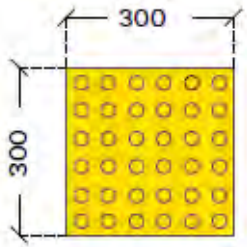


Fig. 2.6(a) ***Hazardous TGSI for change of direction & warning***

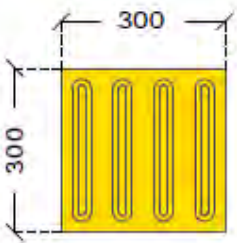


Fig. 2.6(b) ***Directional tiles to indicate movement direction***

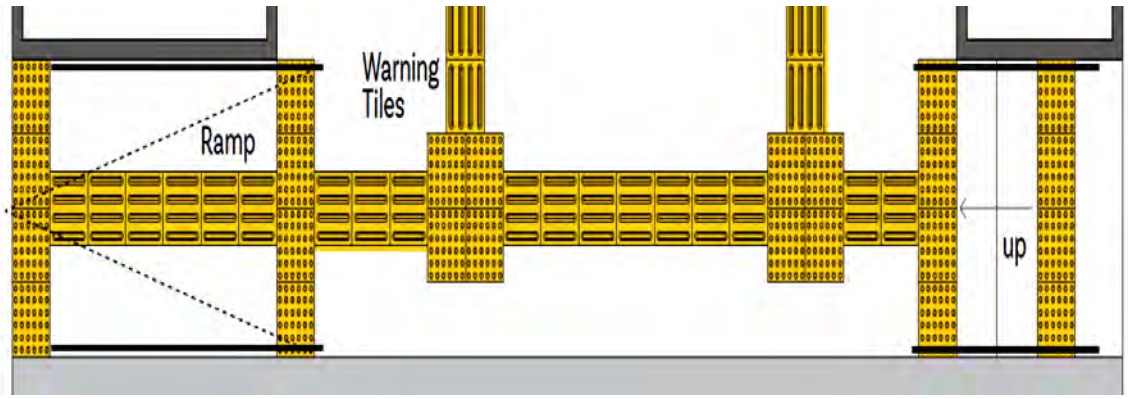


Fig. 2.7 ***General guidelines for laying of Hazardous and Directional tiles***

g) **Obstruction-Free Path**

- Walkways should be free of protruding objects such as vegetation, poles, signboards, or furniture.
- Routes should remain unobstructed throughout the festival period.

2.3. Entry and Exit to and from Pandal

Purpose: To ensure that all visitors including persons with disabilities, elderly persons, pregnant women, and children can enter and exit the pandal safely, comfortably, and with dignity.

a) **Step-Free Access**

- Entrances should be step-free wherever possible.
- Where the entrance is raised, a ramp should be provided, following the gradient requirements outlined in Section 2.2 (e).

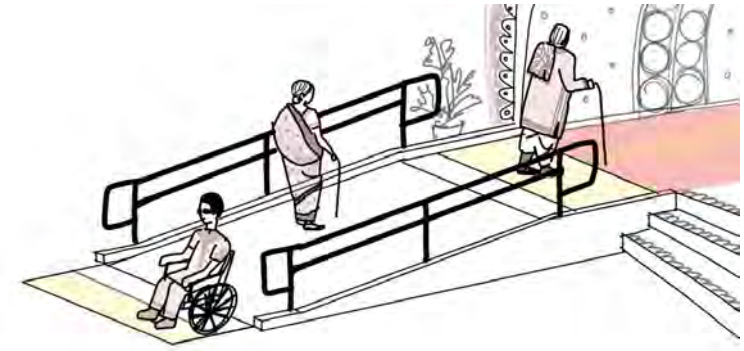


Fig. 2.8 ***Entry to the pandal through a ramp with hand-rail***

b) **Alighting and Boarding Point**

- A clear, firm, and well-defined alighting/boarding area should be provided at each entry/exit.
- Dimensions of the landing should preferably be 1800 mm x 1800 mm; minimum 1200 mm x 1200 mm.
- This space must connect directly to the accessible ingress/egress route and the Sugamya path (see Section 2.4).

c) **Accessible Entrance Location**

- At least one accessible entrance must be located adjacent to the main entrance.
- The accessible entrance should be physically separated or cordoned off to prevent overcrowding.
- It must display the International Symbol of Accessibility clearly.

d) **Width of Entrance**

- The clear width of the accessible entrance should be not less than 1000 mm and preferably 1500 mm.

2.4. Movement within the pandal (Sugamya Path)

Purpose: To provide safe, step-free, and continuous circulation routes inside the pandal for persons with disabilities, elderly persons, pregnant women, and children, ensuring convenience, comfort, and dignity.

a) **Sugamya Path**

- A separate aisle of minimum 1.5 m width should be provided for movement inside the pandal.
- The path should be demarcated by chains, bollards, or barriers to avoid encroachment.
- Travel distance along the path should be kept as short as possible, depending on pandal layout.
- At no point the clear width of the aisle should be less than 900 mm, free from all protrusions or free-standing elements.
- TGSI may lead to main entry / exit points and functional zones.

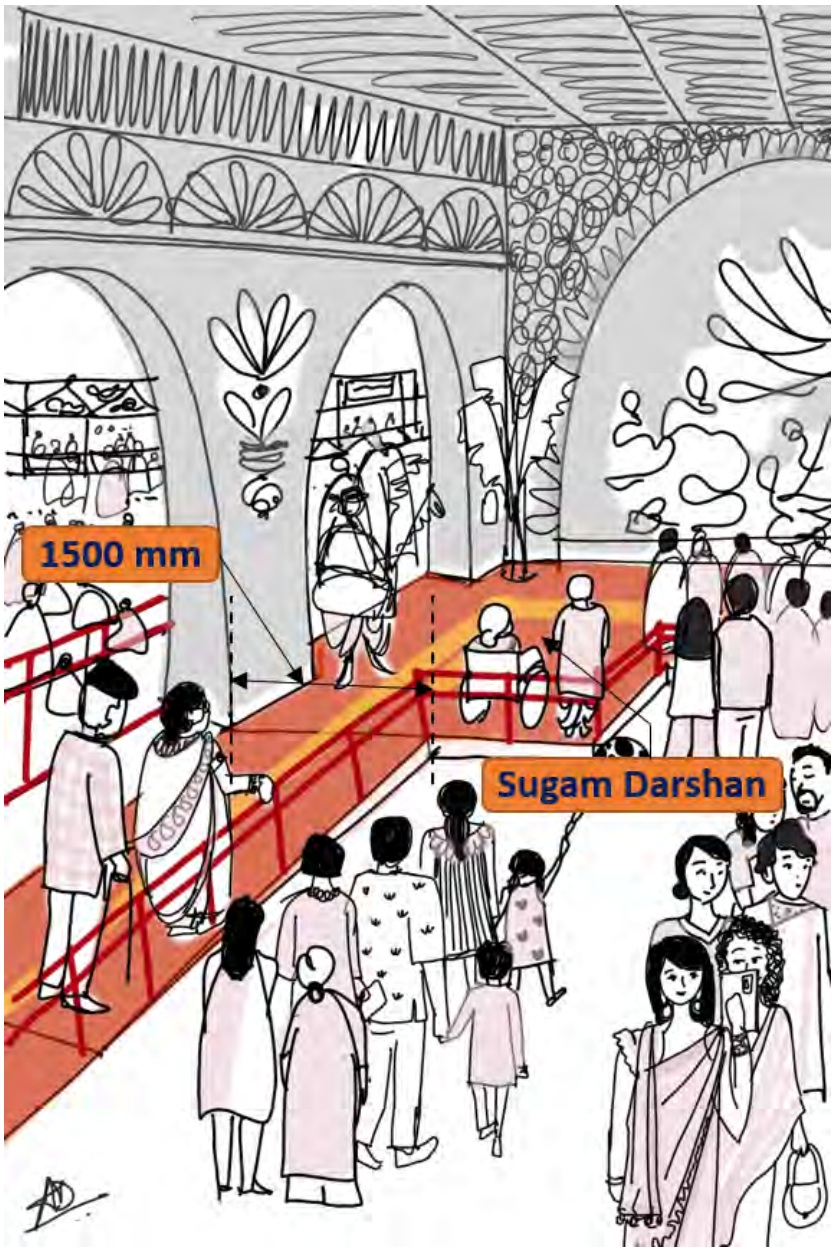


Fig. 2.9 ***Free-movement route wihin the pandal (Sugamya path)***

b) **Maneuvering Space**

- At doorways and turning points, a minimum of 1200 mm maneuvering space should be provided.
- All level differences along the path should be resolved using ramps of compliant slopes (see Section 2.2 (e)).
- Where intermediate ramps exist:
  i. Adequate landing spaces must be provided for wheelchair turning.
  ii. Handrails must be installed on both sides.

c) **Surface Materials**

- Internal flooring must be anti-skid, non-slip, and allow smooth movement of wheelchairs and mobility aids.
- Carpets may be avoided; if unavoidable, thickness must not exceed 12 mm.
- Carpets should be fixed, flush, and smooth (especially at transition points).
- High-contrast patterned carpets (e.g., stripes, checks, zebra patterns) that can cause disorientation for older persons or persons with low vision/cognitive disabilities should be avoided.

d) **Handrails and TGSIs**

- The sugamya path should include handrails for support.
- Pathways should be free from planters, advertisements, or decorative obstructions.
- Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs) should be used in accordance with accessibility standards to guide visually impaired visitors.

e) **Protruding Objects**

- Objects fixed to walls must not reduce the required clear width.
- in presence of protruding objects from the wall, the clear width of the pathway should be 1500 mm
- Protruding objects in the access route shall contrast visually with the background environment.

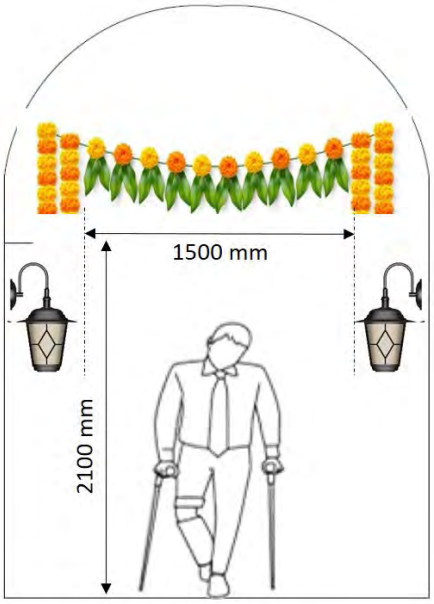
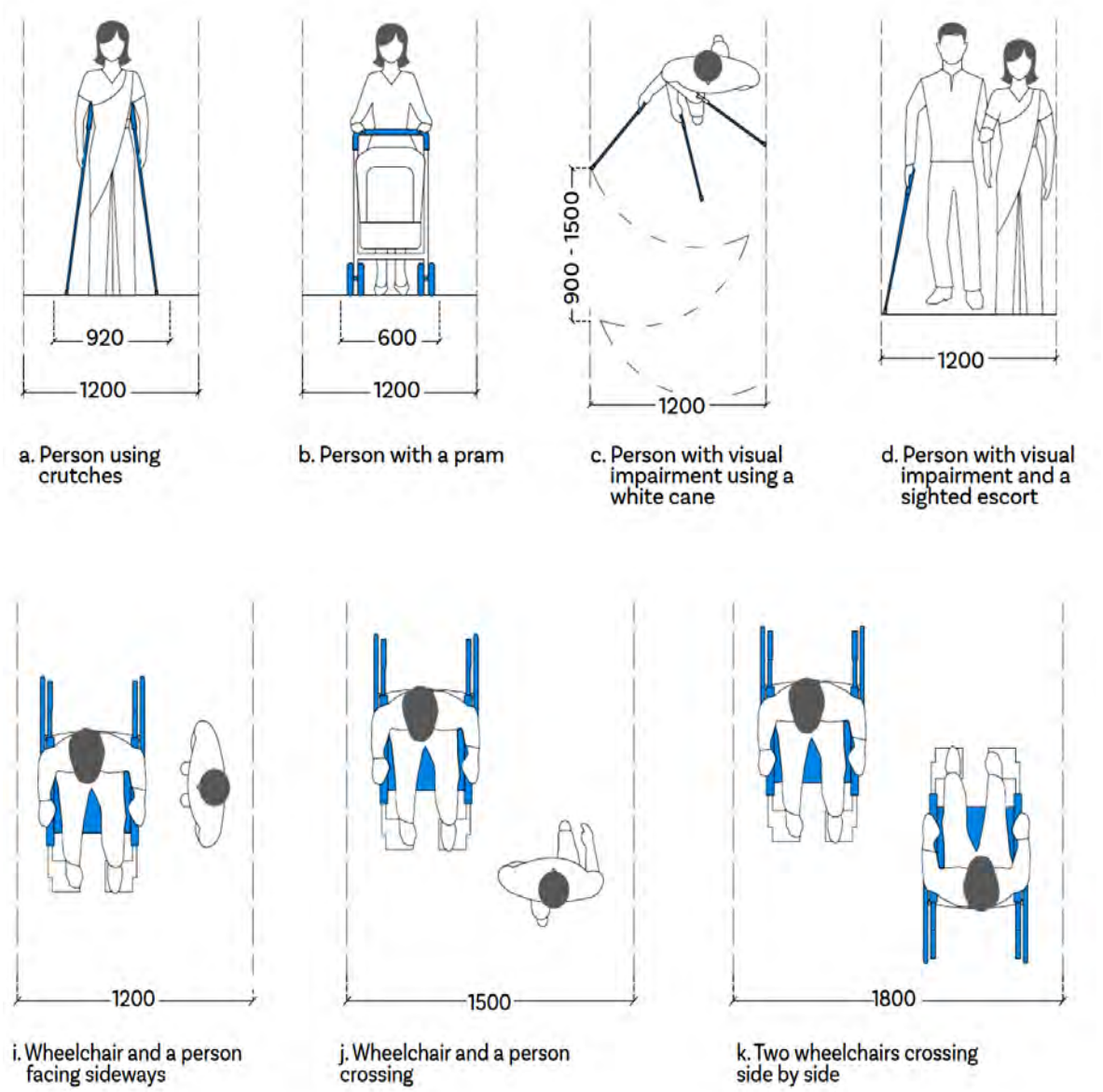


Fig. 2.10 Minimum walkway for a clear pathway for diverse users



a. Person using crutches

b. Person with a pram

c. Person with visual impairment using a white cane

d. Person with visual impairment and a sighted escort

i. Wheelchair and a person facing sideways

j. Wheelchair and a person crossing

k. Two wheelchairs crossing side by side

f) **Special Zones**

- The Pushpanjali platform should be directly connected to the sugamya path.
- There should be clear and un-obstructed sightline connecting the idol and the platform for offering 'pushpanjali'.
- Volunteers must be stationed at this location to assist elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

g) **Resting Areas**

- Required where travel distances inside the pandal exceed 50 m.
- Preferred spacing: resting areas should be provided every 30 m along the sugamya path.
- Seating specifications: Refer Section 2.6 (f)
- Number of seats should depend upon footfall.
- Resting within the pandal for not more than 10 minutes should be encoraged.

Fig. 2.11 ***Seating zone for elderly and Person with Disabilities adjacent to the Free-movement route wihin the pandal (Sugamya path)***

2.5. View of the Idol

Purpose: To ensure that all visitors including persons with disabilities, elderly persons, and pregnant women have an unobstructed and dignified view of the idol, whether standing or seated (e.g., wheelchair users).

Fig. 2.12 ***Viewing Platforms zone for elderly and Person with Disabilities within pandal***

a) **Visibility from Sugamya Path**

- The idol should be clearly visible from the Sugamya path.
- Sightlines should accommodate both standing visitors and seated users in wheelchairs.

b) **Viewing Platforms (Sugam Darshan)**

- Dedicated viewing platforms should be provided at strategic locations inside the pandal, based on its layout and circulation patterns.
- Dimensions of platforms should be minimum 1800 mm width.
- Length of the platform should be determined contextually, ensuring adequate capacity without congestion.

c) **Accessibility Features**

- All viewing platforms should be directly connected to the Sugamya path.
- Platforms must include adequate maneuvering space for wheelchair users.
- Surfaces should be firm, level, and non-slip to ensure safety during peak crowds.

2.6. Seating zone

Purpose: To provide safe, comfortable, and universally accessible resting areas and basic facilities (seating, toilets, and drinking water) for vulnerable groups, including elderly persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and children.

d) **Location and Access**

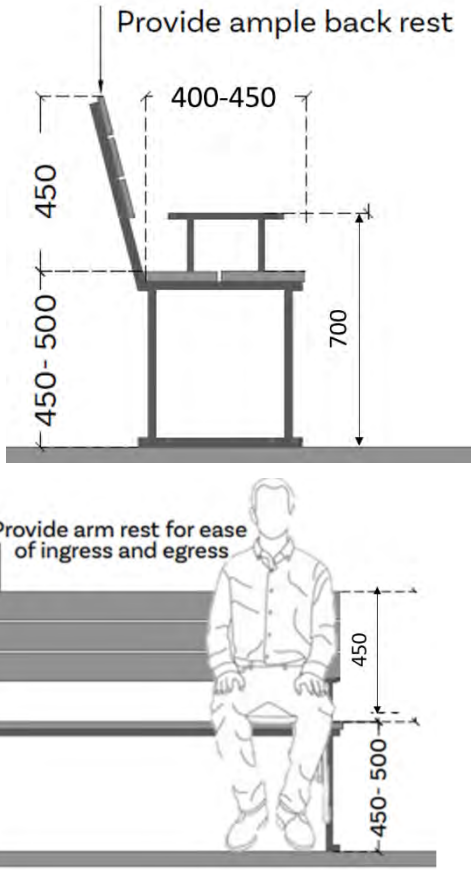
- Resting zones should be provided outside the pandal but directly accessible from the ingress/egress pathways.
- All access routes to resting areas should be:
  i. Well-defined, hygienic, and well-maintained.
  ii. Safe and illuminated with minimum 100 lux lighting.
  iii. Equipped with anti-skid floor finishes.
  iv. Provided with wayfinding signage and marked along with the International Symbol of Accessibility.
  v. Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs) wherever feasible.

e) **Environmental Comfort**

- Resting zones should have adequate natural or mechanical ventilation.
- Lighting should be uniform and glare-free.

f) **Seating Design**

- Seating can be provided as independent furniture or built-in features depending on site context.
- Minimum clear aisle width around seating: 900 mm.
- Seat dimensions:
  i. Seat height: 450–500 mm.
  ii. Seat depth: 400–450 mm.
- Backrest: angled at 100°–105°.
- Armrests: height 700 mm above floor level, and 220–300 mm above seat height.
- Forward approach (wheelchair access): clear knee space of at least 900 mm wide, 480 mm deep, 680 mm high.



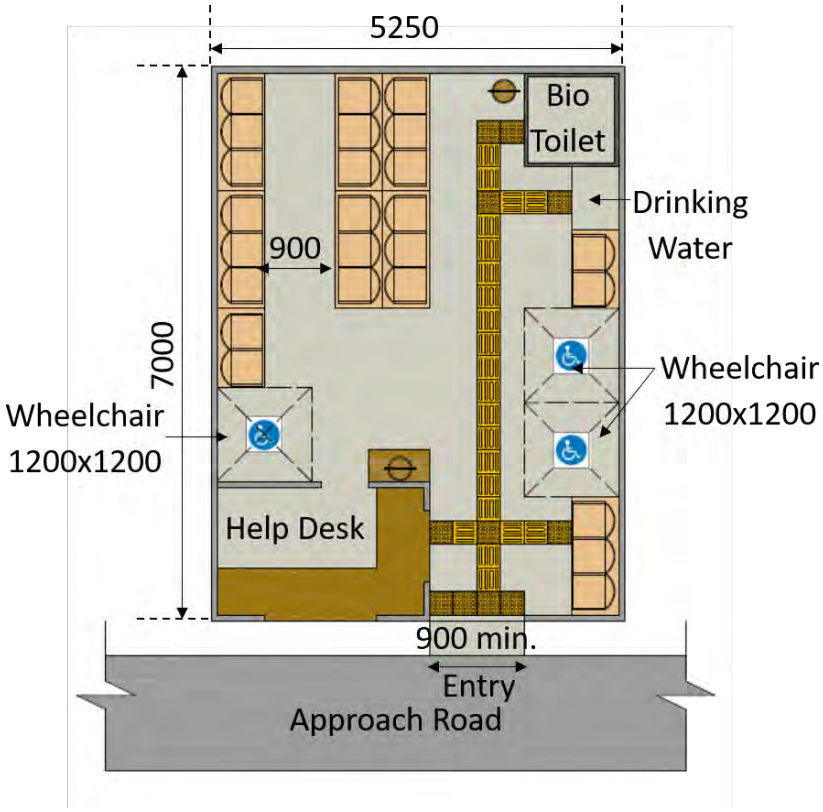


Fig. 2.13 ***A modular seating zone for 25 with basic facilites***

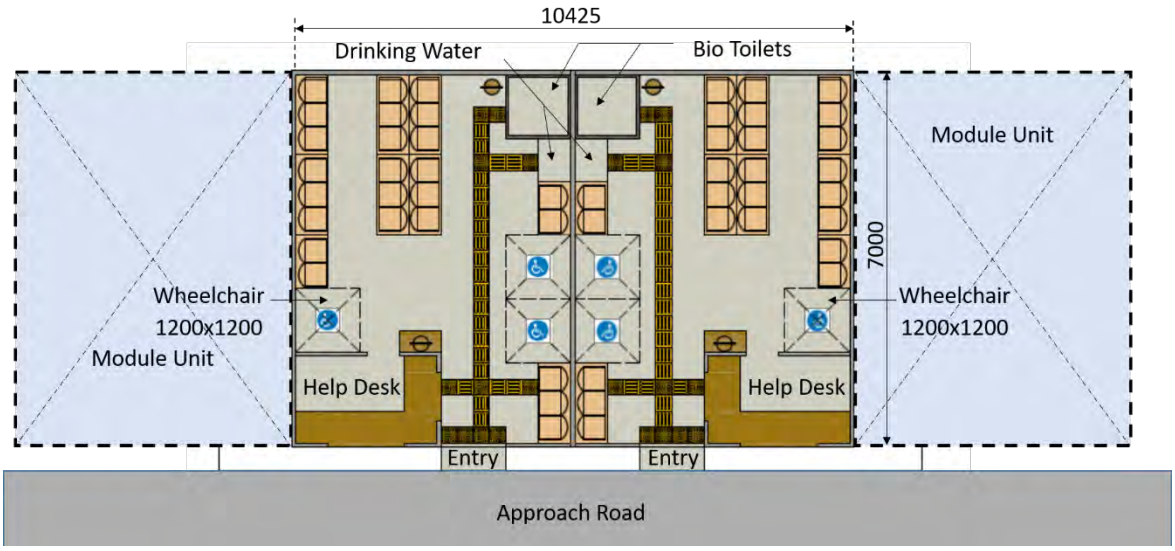


Fig. 2.14 ***Linear arrangement by repeating the basic module for puja pandals catering to large crowd***

2.7. Public Utilities and Ancillary facilities

Toilets

a) **Mandatory Provision**

- Every puja pandal premises should have at least one universally accessible toilet.
- There should be one additional bio toilet near seating zone (if the existing toilet is more than 30 m from the seating zone)

b) **Retrofitting Existing Toilets**

- Where permanent toilets exist, they should be retrofitted with:
  i. Grab bars.
  ii. Lever-type faucets/taps.
  iii. Accessible door latching.
  iv. Emergency alarms.
  v. A feedback mechanism for reporting maintenance needs.

c) **New Accessible Toilets**

- If space permits, a wheelchair-accessible toilet may be constructed (fig. 2.15(b).
- Where bio-toilets are used:
  i. If supplementary to an accessible permanent toilet → dimension 4’ x 4’.
  ii. If sole toilet in the premises → dimension 6’ x 7’

d) **Accessibility features toilets**

i. Marked by International Sign of Disability
ii. For layout and features refer fig 2.15 (a) and 2.15 (b), for particular cases.

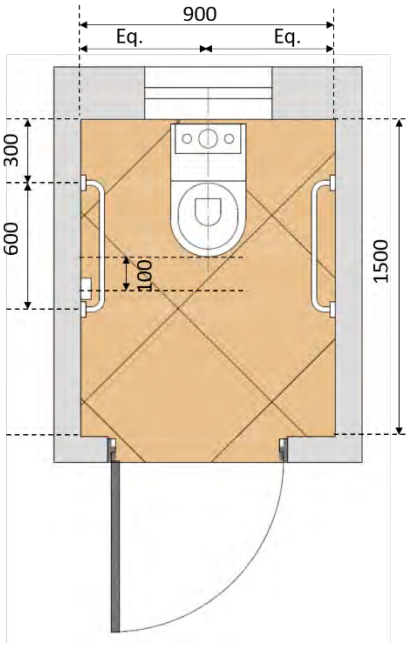


Fig. 2.15 (a) Typical layout of a retrofitted toilet for elderly

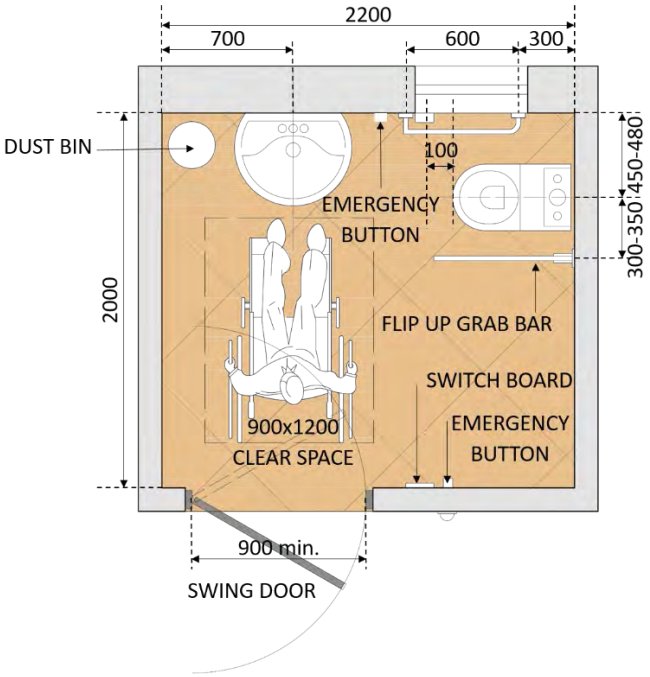


Fig. 2.15 (b) Typical layout of a Universally Accessible Toilet

Drinking Water

e) **Design Requirements**

- Accessible water outlets should be provided at multiple heights, with at least one tap/fountain at 750 mm height.
- A clear floor space of 900 mm x 1200 mm should be provided in front of water outlets.
- For units without knee space (e.g., freestanding coolers), a clear floor space of 1200 mm x 1200 mm should be ensured in front.

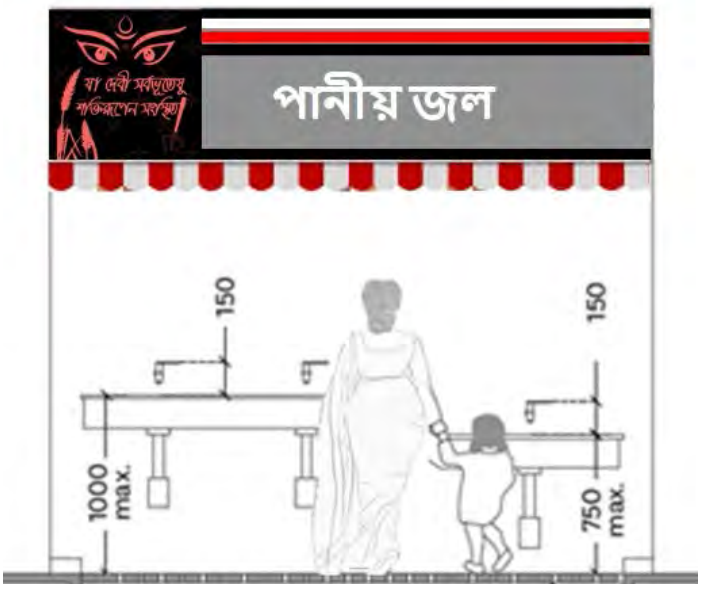


Fig. 2.16 ***Accessible Water Fountain***

f) **Drainage and Maintenance**

- Proper drainage covers, gratings, and slopes must be provided to prevent waterlogging or muddy surfaces.

g) **Tap/Faucet Design**

- Lever-type taps or faucets should be installed for ease of use by persons with grip-related disabilities, arthritis, or limited hand function.

2.8. Signage and Information

Purpose: To provide clear, consistent, and accessible information for all visitors including persons with disabilities, elderly persons, pregnant women, and children ensuring safe navigation, access to facilities, and effective emergency response.

a) **Language and Format**

- Bi-lingual (mandatory): Bengali + English.
- Tri-lingual (preferred): Bengali + English + Hindi
- All information and directional signs must include arrowheads to guide movement.
- International Symbol of Accessibility must be used for all facilities meant for persons with disabilities.
- Universally recognized pictograms should be used alongside text wherever possible.

b) **Location of Signs**

- Signs must be placed at key points including:
  i. Accessible parking.
  ii. Drop-off and pick-up points.
  iii. Accessible ingress/egress routes.
  iv. Seating zones.
  v. Drinking water points.
  vi. Toilets.
  vii. Information/help booths.
  viii. Emergency evacuation routes and refuge areas.

c) **Design and Colour**

- Signs must use contrasting colours to differentiate figures and text from the background.
- Materials should be sturdy, weather-resistant, non-reflective (matt finish).
- Suggested materials: wood, acrylic, Aluminium Composite Panel (ACP)
- Signs must be uniformly illuminated at 100–300 lux.

d) **Placement Heights**

- Wall-mounted detailed signs (maps, timetables, diagrams): centre at 1500 mm from ground.
  i. Bottom edge: not less than 900 mm.
  ii. Top edge: up to 1800 mm.
- Braille/tactile signage: between 900–1500 mm above floor (ideal: 1050 mm).
- Safety notices: at both high and low levels:
  i. High: 1600–1700 mm.
  ii. Low: 1000–1100 mm.

Fig. 2.17 Dimensions for placing an accessible sign-board

e) **Font and Size**

- Sans Serif Recommended
- Viewing distance sizes:

Distance	Size of Signage
Upto 7m	60mm x 60mm
7m – 8m	100mm x 100mm
More than 8m	200 mm x 200 mm to 450 mm x 450 mm

- The letter height depends on the reading distance. A letter height between 20 mm and 30 mm for each metre of viewing distance is preferred.
- The letter height should not be less than 15 mm.

- Height of letters vs viewing distance

Distance	Size of Signage
2-3 m	15 mm
6 m	20 mm
8 m	25 mm
12 m	40 mm
15 m	50 mm
25 m	80 mm
35 m	100 mm
40 m	130 mm
50 m	150 mm

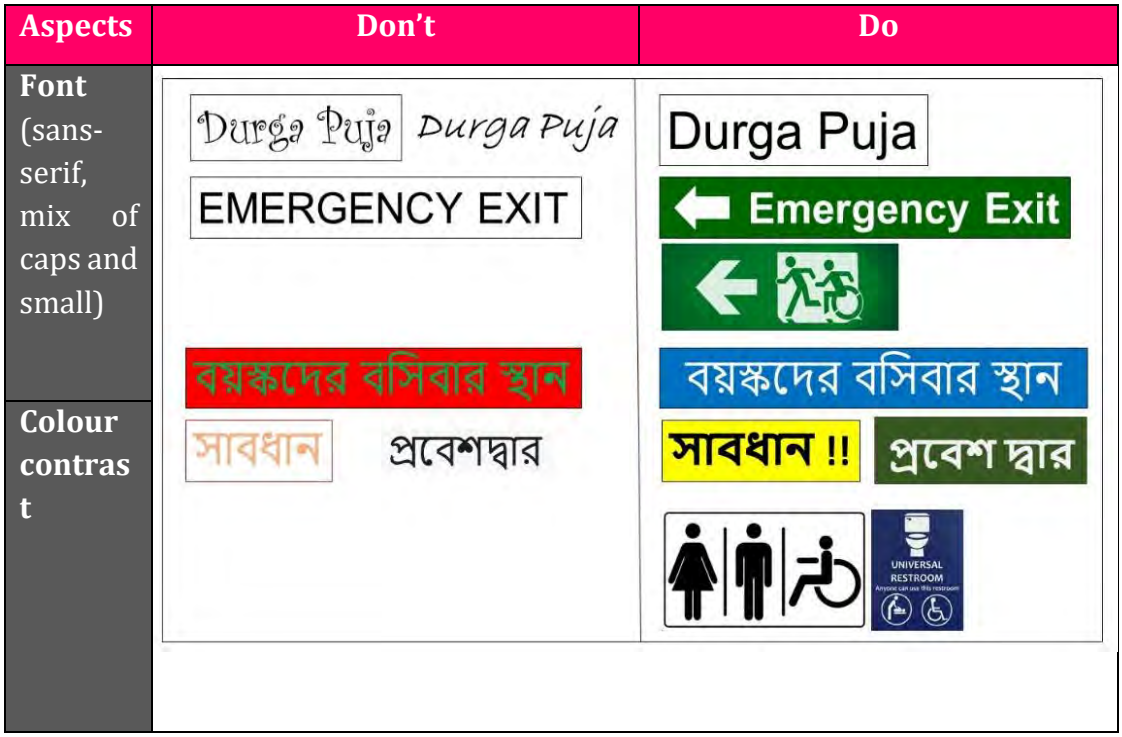
Fig. 2.18 Important Signs

f) Tactile and Accessible Features

- Embossed letters, raised pictograms, raised arrows, and Braille signage are recommended to be used for persons with visual impairment.
- A tactile map or model (maximum 800 mm x 450 mm) may be provided at the entry point of the accessible route.
- Map should cover only essential information:
  i. Drop-off/pick-up point.
  ii. Ingress/egress routes.
  iii. Pandal entry and exit.
  iv. Accessible circulation path inside the pandal.
  v. Resting zones and ancillary facilities.

g) Do's and Don'ts (for Committees and Designers)

Aspect	Do	Don't
Font	Use Sans Serif, mix of upper & lower case	Avoid decorative or all-caps fonts
Colour Contrast	Ensure strong contrast (e.g., white on blue, yellow on black)	Avoid low contrast (e.g., red on green, grey on white)
Finish	Use non-reflective, matt finish	Avoid glossy or reflective surfaces



. **Fig. 2.19** ***Some Dos and Don't s of Signage***

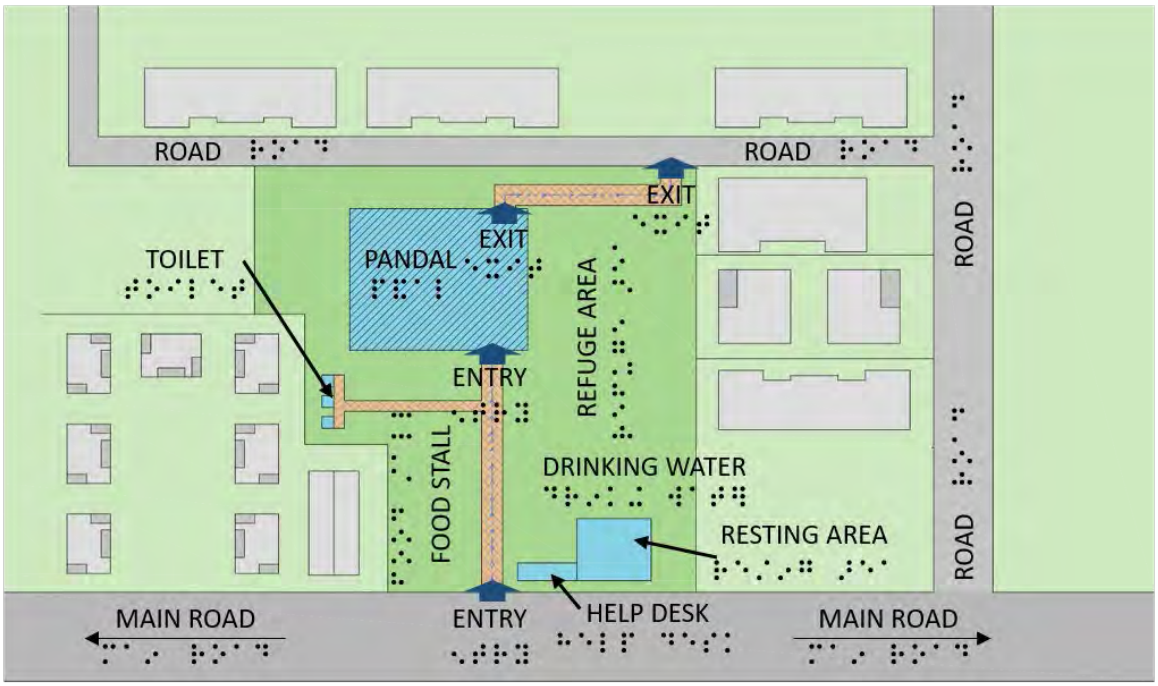


Fig. 2.20 Example of a typical tactile map

2.9. A Glossary of Braille terms

entry

exit

emergency exit

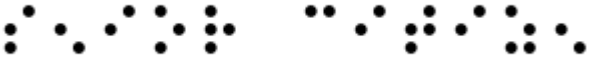
toilet

drinking water

help desk

male

female 

senior citizen 

Person with Disability 

2.10. Miscellaneous

To ensure that all vulnerable groups including elderly persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and children can participate fully and safely in Durga Puja celebrations, the following measures shall be implemented:

h) **Reserved Areas**

- Clearly marked reserved spaces must be designated within:
  i. Food stalls and dining areas.
  ii. Gaming and recreational zones.
  iii. Cultural programme arenas and performance spaces.
- Reserved areas should be clearly sign posted with accessibility symbols and maintained free from crowding or encroachment.

i) **Accessible Counters**

- Ticketing and serving counters must be designed at dual heights to accommodate:
  i. Seated users (wheelchair users, children).
  ii. Standing users (general visitors, elderly, pregnant women).

j) **Cultural Programme Zones**

- Reserved seating must be provided for elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women.
- Designated seating must ensure clear, unobstructed sightlines to the stage for wheelchair users.
- A portion of reserved seating should also be child-friendly, located near exits for easy movement.

k) **Manoeuvring and Comfort**

- Adequate manoeuvring space must be ensured in all reserved zones for wheelchair users.
- Seating layouts must include resting spaces for pregnant women and elderly visitors who may need frequent breaks.
- Pathways in reserved areas must be kept step-free and obstruction-free.

Management & Emergency protocols

Crowd Management, Public Awareness, Emergency Handling

3

3.1. Emergency Evacuation

Purpose: To ensure safe, orderly, and inclusive evacuation of all visitors in the event of fire, earthquake, medical emergency, or other natural/man-made hazards.

a) Evacuation Plan

- Every pandal should have a well laid-out, rehearsed evacuation plan.
- Routes for senior citizens and persons with disabilities should be demarcated.
- Emergency evacuation routes should be clearly displayed with accessibility signage.
- Signage should be mounted at a maximum height of 1200 mm for visibility.
- Evacuation routes should lead to open-to-sky areas of adequate capacity, in proportional to pandal size and expected peak footfall.

Fig. 3.1 ***Sample Emergency Evacuation Plan clearly demarcating route for Person with Disabilites***

b) Refuge Areas

- Refugee areas should be accessible from both the Sugamya path inside the pandal and the main ingress/egress routes.
- Where exits are not accessible, refuge areas should be provided on each level equal to the number of inaccessible exits.
- Each refuge area should have minimum two accessible spaces (750 mm x 1200 mm each).
- Refuge areas should not reduce minimum required exit width.

c) Communication

- Refuge areas may have two-way communication systems (visible + audible signals) with the primary entry point.
- Each refuge area should be identified with illuminated signage, marked "REFUGE AREA" along with the International Symbol of Accessibility.
- Signage should be placed at all inaccessible exits to direct people towards refuge areas.

a) Design Specifications

- Signage should have font of minimum 14-point in San Serif
- Raised letters and Braille may be used where possible.
- High-contrast against background should be maintained
- Emergency routes should be illuminated with independent power supply separate from the main source.

3.2. Help desk and Information Booths

Fig. 3.2(a) ***Help Booth for Elderly and Person with Disabilites***

a) Every pandal should have an adequately staffed helpdesk which will be:

- Located near drop-off zones or resting areas.
- Clearly marked with high-contrast signage visible from a distance.
- Connected with TGSI.
- Equipped with induction loops at enquiry desks for persons with hearing impairments.
- Staffed with easily identifiable volunteers (uniforms/vests recommended).
- Volunteers trained to handle high-stress situations calmly and talk respectfully.

b) A separate **'Prasad distribution'** arrangement should be made. This can be combined with the help-booth located in the sitting zone. As an alternative, volunteers may be assigned for distributing sealed packets containing Prasad and flowers to interested visitors moving through the accessible route.

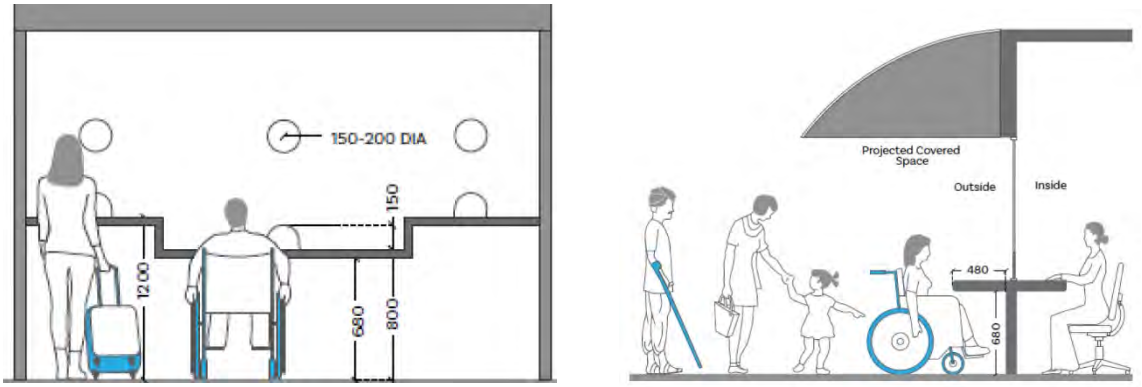


Fig. 3.2(b) ***Help Booth for elderly and Person with Disabilites***

c) A **first – aid room** should be provided near the help-desk to handle medical emergencies including psychological conditions like panic attack. This may double up as a **calm-zone** for those who may need a break from sensory overload.

3.3. Public Address System

a) Announcements

- Essential announcements should be repeated at least twice, in multiple languages (Bengali, Hindi, English).
- Announcements should provide clear information on accessible facilities (routes, toilets, seating, help desks).
- Announcements on the availability of volunteers should be made regularly.

b) Audible Systems

- Announcement systems should have minimum +5 dB S/N ratio.
- Alarm systems should have min 15 dB above sound level, max 120 dB.
- Alarms should provide voice instructions with directions to exits.

c) Non-Auditory Systems (for persons with hearing impairments)

- Flashing visual alarms should be installed in all spaces (including toilets and storerooms).
- Visual alarms should be:
  - Installed at visible locations in all areas that the building users may visit (including toilet areas, storerooms etc.).
  - Mounted at 2100 mm above floor level or 150 mm below ceiling.
  - Spaced at a maximum of 15 metres apart in common areas.
  - Bright but safe for direct viewing.
  - Intensity: 75 candela minimum.
  - Flash rate: 1–3 Hertz.
  - Adequately contrasted in colour and tone from the background wall
  - Labelled with raised letters and in braille

d) Special emergency measures

- Audible alarms with "Voice Instructions" sould be provided to guide people to the nearest emergency exit.
- These alarms may be connected to central control room for on-the- spot broadcasts as an alternative to the pre-recorded messages,
- Visual alarm signals may be intergrated with required audible fire alarm system where feasible.
- Signal from at least one device should be visible throughout the floor area or a portion of it in which they are installed.
- The visual alarm signal may raise the overall light level sharply, but it should not be so intense to be unsafe for direct viewing.
- Visual alarms that are in same proximity may be synchronized to flash at same time.

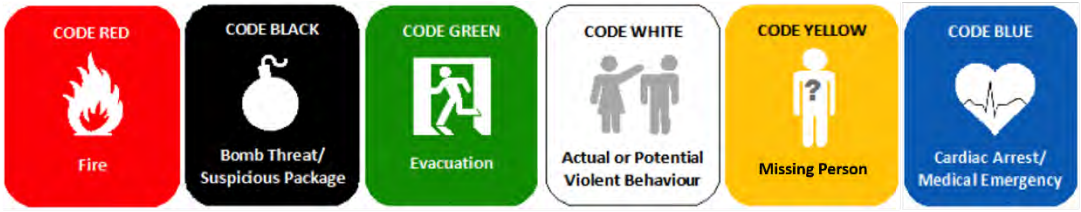
3.4. Volunteers Training Protocol

a) Orientation

- Volunteers should be trained in guiding persons with disabilities and elderly persons respectfully.
- Training should include disability etiquette: empathy, not pity.

b) Emergency Preparedness

- Volunteers should be trained to handle emergency situation with a special focus on the elderly and Persons with Disabilities.
- Volunteers should have a list of essential phone numbers (ambulance, police, fire).
- Pre-Puja emergency drills should be mandatory.
- Use of hospital-style codes (e.g., Code Blue, Code Red) is recommended to alert volunteers without causing public panic.



c) Special Skills

- At least one volunteer at each help desk should have basic Indian Sign Language (ISL) orientation.
- Narration services should be available for visually impaired visitors to explain the idol and decorations.
- ISL interpreters should be engaged for key rituals (e.g., Sandhi Puja, Pushpanjali).

d) Simulation Exercises

- Pre-Puja simulations should be conducted to identify barriers and prepare volunteers for real-life scenarios.