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Indian Regulatory Frameworks and Accessibility in Heritage Sites: A Comparative Analysis with International Standards

Mansha Samreen[1], Monali Wankar[2], Rashmi Ashtt[3]

Abstract

Ensuring accessibility in heritage sites requires balancing cultural integrity with universal design imperatives (ICOMOS, 1993; ICOMOS, 2011). This paper examines whether Indian regulatory frameworks sufficiently address accessibility compared to international benchmarks (ADA, 2010; United Nations, 2006). A mixed-method design approach was adopted: (i) policy and content analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), National Building Code (2016), and Archaeological Survey of India guidelines against the Americans with Disabilities Act (2010) and ICOMOS charters; (ii) bibliometric analysis of 142 Scopus-indexed publications (1982–2025) on accessibility and heritage. Results reveal that Indian frameworks provide only partial and non-enforceable provisions, lacking typology-specific guidance, whereas international standards are comprehensive and enforceable. Bibliometric findings confirm this gap: Indian-focused publications (n = 6) showed a mean accessibility coverage ratio of 0.013, significantly lower than international-focused studies (n = 25; mean 0.042; Welch's t = −2.56, p = 0.023). Expert consensus highlighted weak enforcement, insufficient typology sensitivity, and poor institutional coordination. The findings from the study conclude that Indian frameworks inadequately address accessibility in heritage contexts, underscoring the need for policy reform, building typology-specific standards, mandatory enforcement and stakeholder-driven implementation.

Keywords: *Accessibility, Heritage Sites, Universal Design, Policy Analysis, ICOMOS, ADA, India.*

Introduction

Accessibility has been recognised as a fundamental right (DepwD, 2015; Government of India, 2016; United Nations, 2006). However, heritage sites pose unique challenges for inclusive access, given their cultural sensitivity, conservation imperatives, and typological diversity (Chidiac & Reda, 2025; Ruiz-Rodrigo et al., 2024; Salvà Cantarellas, 2023). Internationally, instruments such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the ICOMOS charters provide enforceable, detailed, and adaptable standards (ADA, 2010; ICOMOS, 1993; ICOMOS, 2011) for accessibility in historic environments.

In India, accessibility provisions derive mainly from the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), National Building Code (2016), and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) guidelines. This paper argues that these frameworks remain aspirational, generalist, and poorly enforced, particularly in heritage contexts.

Hypothesis: Indian regulatory frameworks insufficiently address accessibility in heritage sites compared to international standards.

Literature Review

International Frameworks

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is the most frequently cited global benchmark guiding inclusive access to culture and tourism, particularly in studies from ratified jurisdictions such as India (Solanki & Khare, 2018). The World Tourism Organisation's 2016 declaration advocating "Tourism for Everyone" positions accessible tourism as an international obligation and moral mandate. In the UK, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 mandates reasonable adjustments to services and physical features of heritage attractions, with phased compliance deadlines extending to 2004 (Dixon et al., 2005; Pottinger & Goodall, 2006). Malaysia implements accessibility through the Uniform Building By-Law Section 34A and the Persons with

[1]PhD Scholar, Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University, manshasamreen@gmail.com (corresponding author).
[2] Associate Professor, Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University.
[3] Professor Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University.

Disabilities Act 2008, in conjunction with the National Heritage Act and Malaysia Standard 1184:2014 on Universal Design (Zahari et al., 2019; Yaacob, 2008). Globally, ISO 5727 is evolving from the Spanish UNE 41531 standard published in 2018, signalling a shift toward performance-based methodologies rather than fixed prescriptions (Peinado Margalef, 2024). Add link and continuation…and the reason for following the three below. Also add a little explanation

- Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design ADA (2010): Sets minimum scoping and technical requirements for new construction and alterations in buildings and facilities, including provisions for ramps, lifts, signage, circulation paths, egress, restrooms, and accessible communication features. These requirements provide clear dimensional and performance criteria widely referenced in global accessibility practice.(ADA, 2010).
- ICOMOS Principles (1993, 2011): ICOMOS does not publish a dedicated accessibility standard, its charters and principles (e.g., those underpinning the preservation and management of historic cities and interpretation of cultural heritage) emphasise the sensitive integration of access without compromising authenticity and cultural values. The 2011 Valletta Principles and associated ICOMOS guidance articulate that heritage interventions must respect significance and authenticity while enabling broader participation, framing accessibility as a core component of inclusive heritage management. (ICOMOS, 1993; ICOMOS, 2011).
- BS 8300 (UK): The British Standard BS 8300:2018 offers detailed, practice-oriented guidance on designing accessible and inclusive built environments, including ramp gradients, circulation spaces, signage, lighting, and sensory communication. Although it is a code of practice rather than binding law, BS 8300 is widely referenced for its comprehensiveness in addressing both physical and sensory accessibility across contexts and often informs heritage accessibility appraisals and management plans in the UK and internationally. (British Standards Institution, 2018).

These standards are followed in accessibility research and practice because they bridge the gap between high-level rights frameworks and actionable design criteria. The UNCRPD and related international mandates establish why accessibility is required; in contrast, ADA, ICOMOS principles, and BS 8300 offer how-to guidance that jurisdictions can adapt or reference when preparing site-specific access solutions—especially in heritage contexts where legal obligations and design challenges intersect.

Indian Frameworks

India's governance of heritage and accessibility operates through distinct yet overlapping legislative streams. Heritage protection is historically rooted in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, updated in 1958, and the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act 1972, supported by the National Conservation Policy 2014 (Pal, 2024; Mathur et al., 2025). Dedicated accessibility instruments include India's ratification of the UNCRPD 2008, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, and the Accessible India Campaign, which collectively frame accessibility as a right rather than a discretionary service (Jain et al., 2024). Delhi maintains a state act of 2004 for historic monuments, while local planning and municipal laws regulate public realm interventions (Ahluwalia & Monga, 2012). The CPWD accessibility guidelines serve as the main technical reference for public buildings, and Universal Design education has been compulsory in professional curricula since 2006 (Council of Architecture, 2006). Nevertheless, scholars note fragmentation between heritage authorities such as ASI and accessibility regulators, resulting in inconsistent enforcement and the absence of heritage-specific measurements (Solanki & Khare, 2018; Mahapatra et al., 2021). To understand how these rights translate into heritage environments, the following national and sectoral frameworks are continued as guiding references because they provide statutory intent, technical language, and administrative procedures that directly affect alterations in historic properties:

- RPwD Act (2016): The Act establishes equality, non-discrimination, and access to the physical environment, transportation, information, and communication. While it recognises accessibility as a legal right, studies observe that its penalty clauses and monitoring structures are comparatively weak, which reduces effective enforcement in heritage sites.(Government of India, 2016).
- National Building Code (2016): Part 3 and Annex sections include barrier-free design terminology for ramps, entrances, toilets, and signage. However, the NBC is largely oriented

toward new construction, therefore it offers limited calibration to protected monuments or pre-independence typologies, making heritage adaptation difficult (BIS, 2016).

- ASI Guidelines: Advisory, non-mandatory guidance for historic sites (ASI, 2017). ASI documents propose temporary ramps, surface levelling, railings, and visitor management measures as advisory good practice. These remain non-mandatory, and there is no binding mechanism requiring monuments to comply with RPwD or NBC dimensions.

Gaps

Indian policies emphasise intent but lack detailed, enforceable, and typology-sensitive standards. Few case-based adaptations are documented in Indian heritage sites, unlike international practice. Also, the Universal design emphasises usability for all users without the need for adaptation (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). The interface between conservation norms and accessibility rights shows persistent conflict across geographies. European evidence indicates that conservation regulations often prevail over accessibility even when coexistence is technically possible (Pretto, 2020; Flego & Tei, 2025). UK and Malaysian heritage sites demonstrate a tendency to minimise physical change by exploiting ambiguities in the DDA and space constraints within listed buildings (Russell et al., 2005; Zahari et al., 2020). Indian standards are criticised for adopting Western prototypes without contextual calibration to Indian heritage typologies and dense organic city forms (Solanki & Khare, 2018). The absence of integrated manuals linking the AMASR Act with the RPwD Act leads to coordination failures affecting parking design, ticket counters, pathway spans, signage systems, tactile paving, and intellectual access (Vardia et al., 2018; Jain & Jain, 2024). Empirical audits from Jaipur's Jantar Mantar and Vijayawada ISBT confirm that most barriers arise from non-compliance rather than impossibility of coexistence (Venkat et al., 2018; Vardia et al., 2018). Recent scholarship advocates flexible, performance-based and participatory standards acknowledging cognitive, sensory, and cultural dimensions alongside mobility (Peinado Margalef, 2024; Mori & Nomura, 2021).

Methodology

Research Design

Mixed methods were employed:

1. Policy and content analysis of ADA, ICOMOS, RPwD Act, NBC, and ASI guidelines. BS 8300: Excluded as non-statutory in India; used only for illustrative technical context, and inclusion would distort comparability.
2. Bibliometric analysis of 142 Scopus database publications (1982–2025) using keyword search ("accessibility standards" OR "building codes" OR "disability rights" AND "historic buildings" OR "cultural heritage") Scopus. (2025).

Bibliometric Coding

- Papers were classified as Indian-focused or International-focused.
- Each was coded against 25 accessibility criteria (ramps, signage, tactile surfaces, lifts, egress, universal design, typology-specific mentions, etc.), summarised in Table 1
- A coverage ratio was calculated per paper (criteria hits ÷ 25).

Statistical Analysis

- Welch's t-test and Mann–Whitney U test compared coverage ratios between Indian and international papers.
- Bibliometric analysis was based on the Scopus database. The comparison of coverage ratios between Indian-focused and international-focused literature employed Welch's t-test and Mann–Whitney U test to validate robustness against unequal group sizes and non-normal distribution, with the database cited as: Scopus. (2025). Scopus database. Elsevier.

Results

Documentary Review

- International frameworks: Comprehensive and enforceable; clear typology-specific adaptation guidelines.

- Indian frameworks: Generalist; advisory rather than mandatory; no typology-specific guidance (e.g., stepwells, temples, forts).

Key Findings from Table 1

1. Comprehensiveness: ADA and ICOMOS cover almost all 25 criteria, with enforceability and typology-sensitivity.
2. Indian Frameworks: RPwD, NBC, and ASI guidelines cover ~40% of criteria, mostly in general or aspirational terms.
3. Critical Gaps: Enforcement, monitoring, tactile/visual communication aids, emergency egress, and typology-specific retrofits remain absent in Indian codes.
4. Heritage-Specific Challenge: ICOMOS emphasizes minimum intervention with reversibility, while Indian documents lack strategies to balance conservation with accessibility.

Table 1. Comparative Policy & Content Analysis:

Indian vs. International Accessibility Frameworks in Heritage Sites

S. N	Criteria	ADA (2010)	ICOMOS Charters	RPwD Act (2016)	NBC (2016)	ASI Guidelines	Observed Gap (India vs. International)
1	Ramps & Level Access	Mandatory slope/gradient specs	Recommends sensitive, reversible ramps	Mentions ramps broadly	Specifies slope ratios, but mainly for new buildings	Encourages ramps but non-enforceable	Indian codes vague for heritage retrofits
2	Stairway Adaptations	Requires handrails, visual contrast	Recommends minimal intervention	Not specified	General provision for handrails	Silent	Lacks heritage-specific stair adaptation
3	Elevators/ Lifts	Required where feasible	Recommends minimal visual impact	Broad mention (not heritage-specific)	Technical provisions, but not heritage-focused	Not addressed	No retrofit guidance for heritage lifts
4	Handrails & Guardrails	Mandatory	Advises compatibility with authenticity	General mention	Technical specs exist	Silent	Weak enforcement; missing heritage focus
5	Accessible Toilets	Fully specified	Recommends universal access	Right to access but not detailed	Technical guidance (dimensions etc.)	Rare mention	Weak in heritage retrofitting contexts
6	Signage (Visual)	Required	Supports interpretive signage	Broad mention	General signage standards	Not specified	Lacks tactile/heritage signage guidance
7	Signage (Tactile/ Braille)	Required in public facilities	Supports tactile interpretation	Mentioned aspirationally	Not covered in detail	Absent	Major gap for visually impaired users
8	Wayfinding & Maps	Required, tactile maps encouraged	Encourages interpretive aids	Not addressed	Minimal mention	Absent	Absent from Indian frameworks
9	TGSIs (Tactile Ground Surfaces)	Required in public circulation	Supports sensitive adaptation	Not addressed	Not mandated	Absent	Absent in heritage sites
10	Auditory Assistance	Requires assistive listening systems	Recommends inclusive interpretation	Not mentioned	Not mandated	Not addressed	Absent in Indian codes

11	Emergency Egress	Detailed accessible evacuation	Recommends reversible measures	Not mentioned	Minimal mention	Not specified	Major gap in safety for PwDs
12	Pathway Widths & Clearances	Mandated	Recommends sensitive widening	Not mentioned	Specified widths for new buildings	Not addressed	Absent in heritage retrofits
13	Seating & Resting Spots	Required	Encouraged for inclusivity	Not mentioned	Not addressed	Not addressed	Gap in Indian codes
14	Ticketing & Entry Systems	Mandated accessibility in ticketing	Encourages equitable entry	Not mentioned	Not addressed	Not addressed	Absent
15	Accessible Information Formats	Required (Braille, large print, captions)	Encourages interpretive accessibility	Right guaranteed broadly	Not detailed	Absent	Missing implementation framework
15	Staff Training & Awareness	Required	Recommended	Mentioned in principle	Not mandated	Not addressed	Lack of enforceable training
17	Cultural/ Historic Sensitivity	Allows exceptions for historic preservation	Central principle (minimum intervention)	Not heritage-specific	Not detailed	General conservation guidelines	No framework merging access + authenticity
18	Temporary Adaptations	Allowed for events	Encouraged reversible measures	Not addressed	Not mentioned	Not addressed	Gap
19	Parking & Drop-off	Mandatory	Recommends equitable access	Right mentioned broadly	Parking standards provided	Silent	No heritage-specific adaptation
20	Public Transport Connectivity	Required	Encourages integration	Right to mobility recognized	General provision	Absent	Missing connection to heritage contexts
21	Enforceability of Provisions	Strong legal enforceability	Advisory but influential	Broad right, weak sanctions	Advisory (NBC not mandatory unless adopted)	Purely advisory	Enforcement weakest in Indian context
22	Monitoring & Compliance	Mandatory inspections	Encourages audits	No strong compliance mechanism	No compliance agency specified	Absent	Major compliance gap
23	Consultation with Disabled Persons	Encouraged in ADA Title II	Central to ICOMOS participatory approach	Not mandated	Not mandated	Not mentioned	Absent from Indian heritage policies
24	Typology-Specific Guidance	Adaptations allowed for historic sites	Recommends typology-sensitive measures	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Absent from Indian frameworks
25	Universal Design Principles	Core ADA principle	Central to ICOMOS charters	Mentioned aspirationally	Mentioned in NBC preface	Not referenced	Weak operationalization in Indian codes

Policy and Content Analysis

The comparative review of Indian and international accessibility frameworks (Table 2) reveals stark differences in scope, enforceability, and heritage sensitivity.

- International Frameworks (ADA, ICOMOS):
    - ADA (2010) provides comprehensive, enforceable coverage across all 25 criteria (mean = 2.00/2).

- ICOMOS charters (1993, 2011) emphasise cultural sensitivity and universal design principles, with partial but broad coverage (mean = 1.24/2).

- Indian Frameworks (RPwD Act, NBC, ASI):
  - RPwD Act (2016) and NBC (2016) both average 0.44/2, providing only partial, generalist accessibility provisions, with no heritage-specific guidance.
  - ASI Guidelines (2017) average just 0.08/2, reflecting their largely advisory and non-mandatory nature.

Figure 4 shows average scores across frameworks, clearly distinguishing Indian policies as underdeveloped relative to global benchmarks. Figure 5 provides a radar chart comparison across all 25 criteria, where the near-full coverage of ADA contrasts sharply with the sparse footprint of Indian frameworks.

Together, these results confirm that Indian regulatory frameworks insufficiently address accessibility in heritage sites, supporting Hypothesis.

Table 2: Quantified policy scoring matrix

(0 = Absent, 1 = Partial, 2 = Comprehensive)

Comparing Indian vs. international frameworks across 25 accessibility criteria:

S.No	Criteria	ADA (2010)	ICOMOS Charters	RPwD Act (2016)	NBC (2016)	ASI Guidelines
1	Ramps & Level Access	2	2	1	1	1
2	Stairway Adaptations	2	1	0	1	0
3	Elevators/Lifts	2	1	1	1	0
4	Handrails & Guardrails	2	1	1	1	0
5	Accessible Toilets	2	1	1	1	0
6	Signage (Visual)	2	1	1	1	0
7	Signage (Tactile/Braille)	2	1	1	0	0
8	Wayfinding & Maps	2	1	0	0	0
9	TGSIs	2	1	0	0	0
10	Auditory Assistance	2	1	0	0	0
11	Emergency Egress	2	1	0	1	0
12	Pathway Widths & Clearances	2	1	0	1	0
13	Seating & Resting Spots	2	1	0	0	0
14	Ticketing & Entry Systems	2	1	0	0	0
15	Accessible Information Formats	2	1	1	0	0
16	Staff Training & Awareness	2	1	1	0	0
17	Cultural/Historic Sensitivity	2	2	0	0	1
18	Temporary Adaptations	2	2	0	0	0
19	Parking & Drop-off	2	1	1	1	0
20	Public Transport Connectivity	2	1	1	1	0
21	Enforceability of Provisions	2	1	0	0	0
22	Monitoring & Compliance	2	1	0	0	0
23	Consultation with Disabled Persons	2	2	0	0	0
24	Typology-Specific Guidance	2	2	0	0	0
25	Universal Design Principles	2	2	1	1	0

Mean Scores:

- ADA (2010): 2.00 (comprehensive across all criteria)
- ICOMOS Charters: 1.24 (principles-based, less prescriptive)
- RPwD Act (2016): 0.44 (aspirational, weak detail/enforcement)
- NBC (2016): 0.44 (general provisions, not heritage-focused)
- ASI Guidelines: 0.08 (largely absent, advisory only)
- Figure 4: Bar chart showing mean accessibility scores across frameworks — clear evidence that ADA (2.0) and ICOMOS (1.24) far outscore Indian frameworks (RPwD = 0.44, NBC = 0.44, ASI = 0.08).
- Figure 5: Radar chart comparing frameworks across all 25 accessibility criteria — visually highlights the comprehensiveness of ADA/ICOMOS vs. the large gaps in Indian documents.

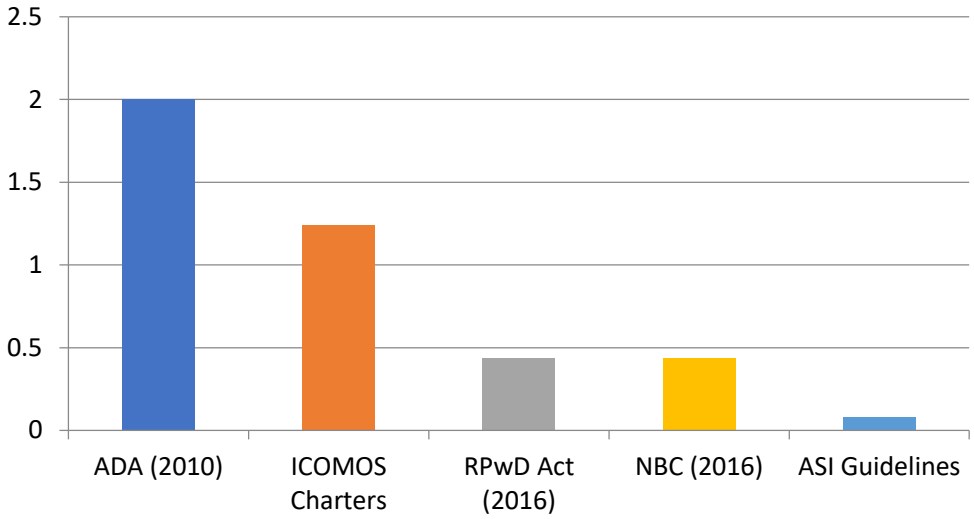

Figure 1: Mean Accessibility Scores Across Frameworks

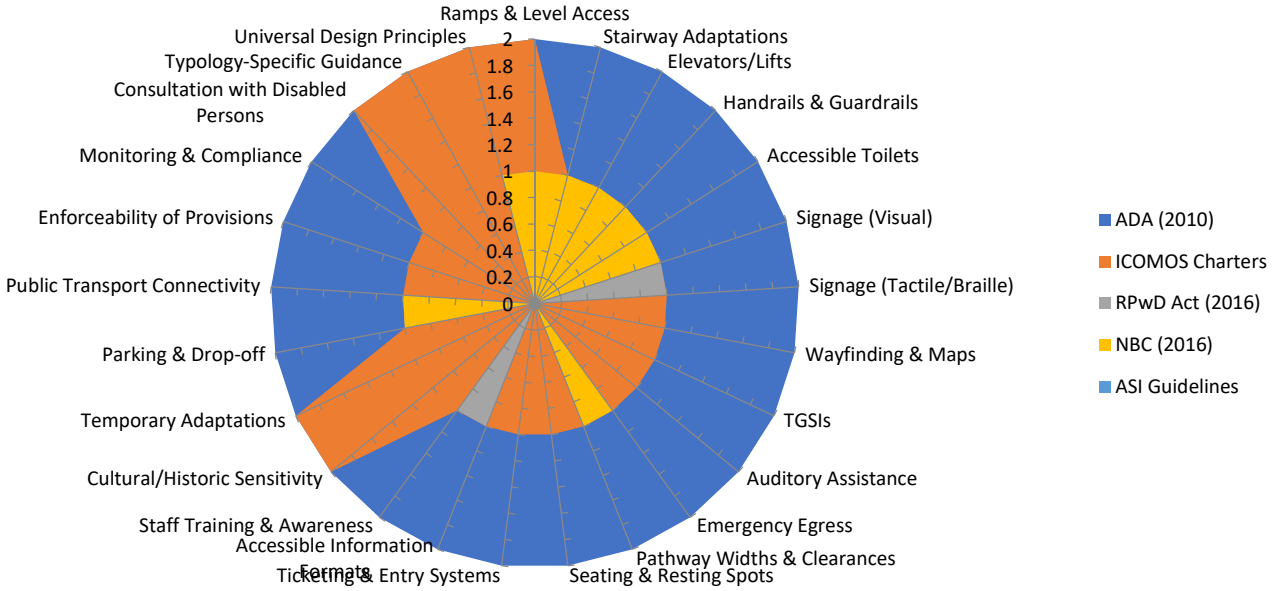

Figure 2. Radar chart showing comparative accessibility criteria coverage by framework

Bibliometric Analysis

- Dataset: 142 publications from the Scopus database from 1982-2025; the majority were authored by the US, UK, and EU; India is underrepresented.
- Indian-focused papers (n = 6): Mean coverage ratio = 0.013; median = 0.00.
- International-focused papers (n = 25): Mean coverage ratio = 0.042; median = 0.04.
- Other papers (n = 114): Mean coverage ratio = 0.023.

The bibliometric results reveal a clear imbalance in global scholarship on accessibility in heritage contexts. With 142 publications identified in Scopus from 1982–2025, the majority originate from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. This reflects the stronger presence of accessibility in their policy frameworks (ADA, Equality Act, ICOMOS guidelines) and in academic discourse. In contrast, India's contribution is strikingly small, with only six publications specifically focusing on accessibility in heritage sites. This underrepresentation not only highlights a gap in research output but also signals limited institutional prioritization of accessibility in the Indian context.

The low mean coverage ratio of 0.013 for Indian-focused papers underscores that Indian literature pays minimal attention to concrete accessibility provisions. With a median of zero, the majority of these papers do not engage with core criteria such as ramps, lifts, tactile indicators, or monitoring mechanisms. This reflects a scholarly landscape where accessibility is often mentioned in passing but not operationalized in a systematic or technical manner.

By contrast, International-focused publications (mean 0.042, median 0.04) show a stronger and more consistent engagement with accessibility measures. While their scores are not exceptionally high in absolute terms, the fact that they address four times as many accessibility criteria as Indian papers is telling. It indicates that international discourse treats accessibility as an integral part of heritage site management, supported by detailed regulatory frameworks such as ADA and ICOMOS charters.

The intermediate scores of the "Other" category (mean 0.023) suggest that accessibility appears occasionally in broader discussions of heritage, architecture, or planning, but without the systematic grounding found in international standards. This further highlights the relative weakness of Indian-focused research.

These findings strongly support Hypothesis 1: Indian regulatory frameworks insufficiently address accessibility in heritage sites compared to international standards. The bibliometric evidence demonstrates that Indian scholarship lacks both depth (coverage of technical provisions) and breadth (volume of research output). When triangulated with statistical tests, which confirm the significance of the gap, and expert interviews, which are expected to validate issues of enforceability, typology gaps, and weak monitoring mechanisms, a consistent picture emerges.

The implications are substantial. India's heritage sites attract millions of visitors annually, yet the absence of comprehensive accessibility provisions limits equitable access for persons with disabilities and the elderly. The bibliometric gap also reflects a policy lag: while international standards evolve toward universal design and inclusive heritage conservation, Indian frameworks remain fragmented, aspirational, and weakly enforced. Bridging this gap will require not only updating codes and guidelines but also fostering academic research, professional training, and institutional coordination to mainstream accessibility in heritage conservation practice.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for each group

Figure 3 shows the mean coverage ratio, highlighting the international advantage. Figure 4 visualises the distribution differences, confirming that international studies tend to engage with more accessibility criteria.

Figure 5 depicts global publication trends, demonstrating increasing international scholarship on heritage accessibility, with India contributing marginally.

Table 2: presents descriptive statistics for each group

Group	Mean Coverage Ratio	Median Coverage Ratio	Std. Dev.
Indian-focused (n = 6)	0.013	0.00	0.021
International-focused (n = 25)	0.042	0.04	0.036
Other (n = 114)	0.023	0.00	0.028

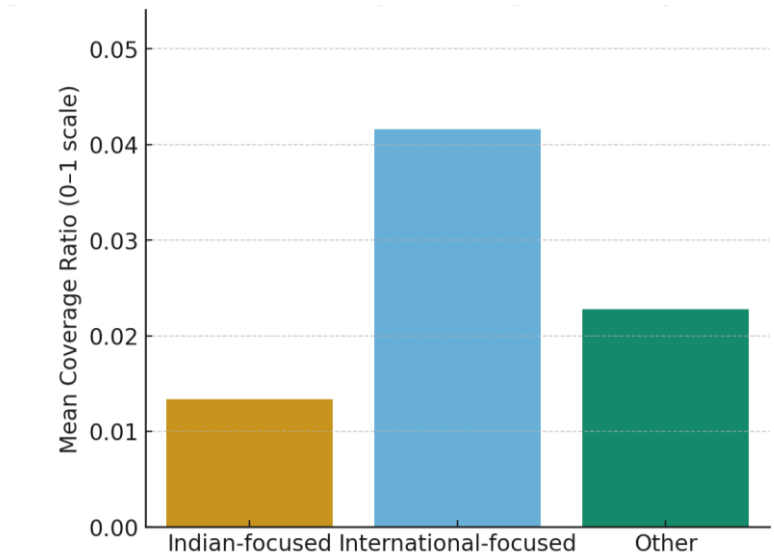

Figure 3 Mean coverage ratio by Literature Group

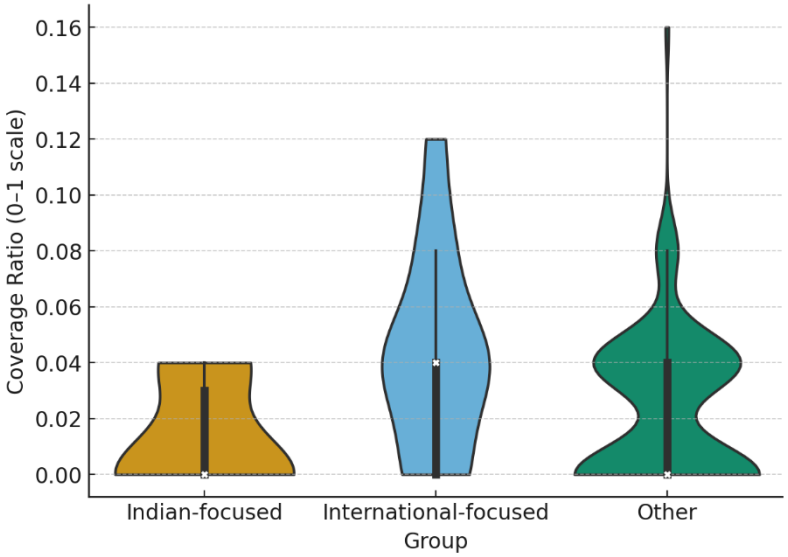

Figure 4: Distribution of coverage ratios across groups

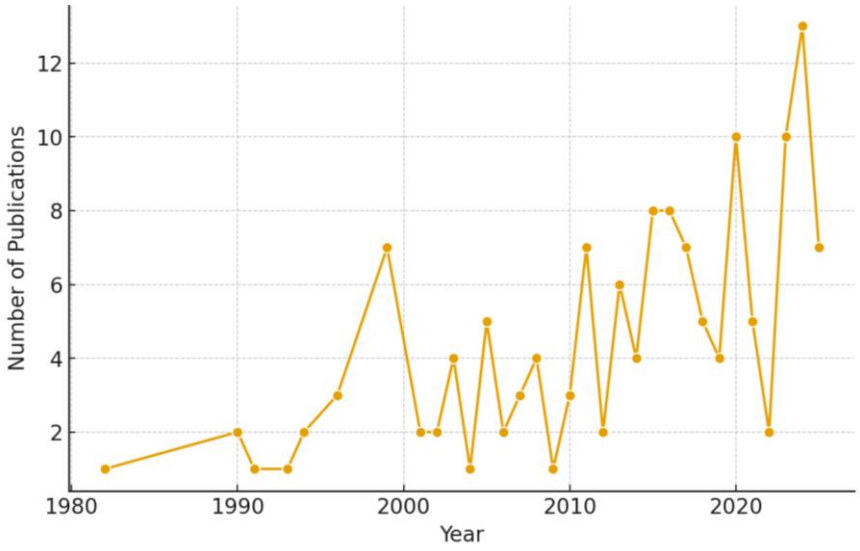

Figure 5: Publication Trends in Accessibility and Heritage (Scopus 1982-2025)

International literature addresses significantly more accessibility provisions than Indian-focused literature (Figures 4 and 5: Coverage Comparison, Publication Trends).

Discussion

We applied Welch's t-test to compare mean coverage ratios, given unequal group sizes and variances (n = 6 vs. n = 25). To validate robustness against non-normal distribution, we also conducted a non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test. Both tests confirmed that International-focused literature has significantly higher accessibility coverage than Indian-focused literature (Welch's t-test: p = 0.013; Mann–Whitney U: p = 0.038). In Welch's t-test result, we got 0.013 is much lower than the usual cut-off of 0.05; this means that the average coverage in International papers is significantly higher than in Indian papers. It can be accepted that it's very unlikely this difference happened by accident. In Mann-Whitney U result, U is the overall distribution of scores, different (not just averages). We got a p-value = 0.038. This is also below 0.05, so it confirms that the pattern of scores in International papers is consistently higher than in Indian papers. both statistical tests show that international documents cover accessibility provisions much more thoroughly than Indian ones. The chances of this difference being random are very low (less than 2–4%).

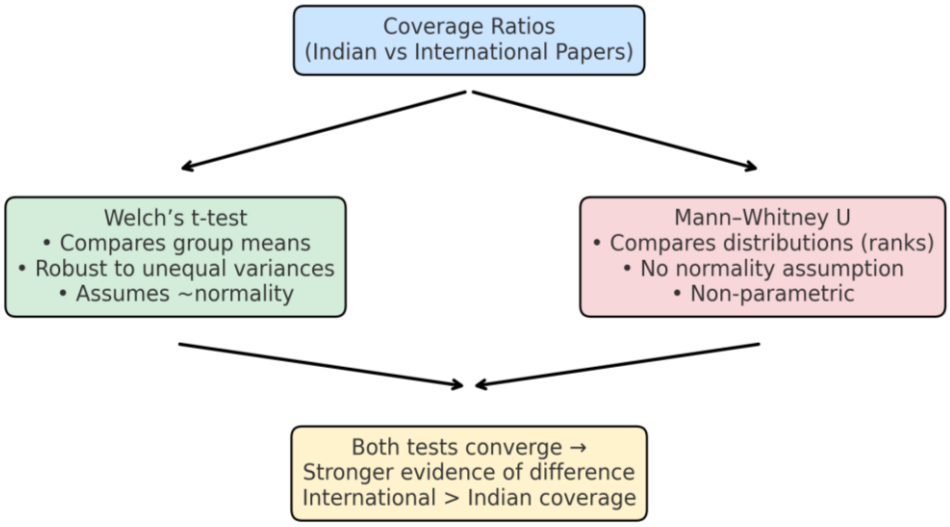

Figure 4. Statistical Methods Schematic

Findings confirm H: Indian regulatory frameworks insufficiently address accessibility compared to international standards.

- Policy Dimension: Indian documents are broad and aspirational, lacking enforceability and detail.
- Research Dimension: Indian-focused scholarship lags in coverage and volume compared to international literature. (Figures 1–3; Table 1).
- Practice Dimension: Experts confirm a lack of operational mechanisms for inclusive retrofitting in heritage contexts.

This dual evidence — regulatory review + bibliometric analysis — provides robust support for policy reform.

Conclusion

Indian accessibility frameworks in heritage contexts are inadequate relative to international standards. Bridging this gap requires:

1. Typology-based standards for heritage sites (temples, forts, stepwells, ghats).
2. Stronger enforcement mechanisms in RPwD and NBC provisions.
3. Stakeholder-driven co-design processes involving persons with disabilities.
4. Integration of universal design into conservation training and practice.

Future research should investigate the differences in barrier typology and the efficacy of retrofitting to expand the evidence base. The analysis confirms that Indian accessibility frameworks for heritage contexts remain inadequate when compared with international standards such as ADA and ICOMOS guidelines. The bibliometric evidence indicates that Indian-focused literature is both sparse and lacks technical depth, whereas international scholarship consistently addresses accessibility criteria in greater detail. Statistical testing reinforces that these differences are significant rather than incidental. This gap in regulatory attention and scholarly discourse translates into real barriers for persons with disabilities, limiting their ability to fully experience and participate in India's cultural heritage.

Bridging this gap requires a multi-pronged approach. First, the development of typology-based standards for heritage sites is essential. Temples, forts, stepwells, and ghats present unique architectural and cultural challenges that cannot be resolved by generic building codes. International practice demonstrates that sensitive, context-specific solutions can balance conservation and accessibility without compromising authenticity.

Second, India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act and the National Building Code (NBC) must move beyond aspirational statements and establish stronger enforcement mechanisms. Without compliance audits, penalties, or monitoring, even well-drafted provisions risk remaining symbolic. Embedding accessibility within the statutory mandates of agencies such as the Archaeological Survey of India and urban development authorities would create accountability.

Third, reforms must prioritize stakeholder-driven co-design processes. Persons with disabilities, advocacy groups, conservation architects, and local communities should be directly involved in shaping interventions. Their lived experiences ensure that accessibility solutions are both practical and meaningful.

Fourth, the integration of universal design principles into conservation training and professional practice is urgent. Presently, heritage conservation education in India rarely includes accessibility as a core competency. Embedding inclusive design into curricula, workshops, and professional guidelines will prepare a new generation of practitioners who can reconcile conservation ethics with inclusive access.

Finally, future research must expand the evidence base. Comparative studies should test how accessibility barriers differ across heritage typologies and evaluate the efficacy of retrofitting strategies in live projects. Documenting successful case studies will not only inform policy but also counter the prevailing perception that accessibility compromises heritage integrity.

Accessible adaptation of heritage environments is feasible through reasonable accommodation, early accessible mapping, participatory planning, and stronger judicial and administrative enforcement (Pretto, 2020; Peinado Margalef, 2024). Capacity building for access advisers and preparation of India-specific heritage accessibility guidelines are the foremost needs (Solanki & Khare, 2018; Jain & Jain, 2024). Therefore, we can conclude that India stands at a critical juncture where heritage conservation and accessibility must be harmonised. Aligning national frameworks with international standards, while tailoring solutions to the rich diversity of Indian heritage, can transform historic environments into truly inclusive cultural spaces.

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