Developing public understanding about the social and educational problems of the blind in India
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Thesis

DEVELOPING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING ABOUT
THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS
OF THE BLIND IN INDIA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country with an area of 1,221,880 sq. miles and a population of 377,000,000 people, speaking 14 main languages with more than 200 different variations in dialect. With the possible exception of Egypt, India has the highest incidence of blindness in the world. According to the recent report published by the National Association for the Blind in India, it is estimated that there are two million totally blind and three to four million partially blind. This constitutes one fifth of the total blind population of the globe. The problem of the blind in India is one of colossal magnitude, and an all-out effort is necessary if it is to be tackled adequately and efficiently. For a total blind population of two million there are only sixteen Special schools, four Industrial establishments, eleven Literary schools with Industrial establishments, and seven Homes for the Blind. Dr. Ras Mohan Halder says:

"In all these 38 institutions, facilities are available today for the education, occupation and employment of about 2,200 blind persons. But even


then full use is not made of them, for whereas they can accommodate about 2,200 persons, only about 1,265 (1,082 males and 183 females) are availing themselves of such facilities and educational opportunities as they are in a position to offer.3

This unsatisfactory condition is due to public apathy, professional begging by the blind or by their relatives, and the lack of knowledge on their part that the blind are educable and trainable, and can become self-respecting and contributive members of society.

The Purpose

The purpose of the writer is to create public understanding about the social, educational and economic needs of the blind in India; to build up a program for the quick amelioration of their sad condition and to provide for free and compulsory basic education and vocational training of blind children and young adults along with the sighted, in accordance with their individual talents and aptitude.

The Scope Of The Study

1. The author will examine as far as feasible:
   a. All published and unpublished materials on the education of the blind in the United States and the United Kingdom.
   b. All published and unpublished materials and reports from schools for the Blind in India and

other Asiatic countries that are available in the Blindiana Library at Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, Massachusetts.

c. All available literature dealing with the Indian social customs and religious performances.

2. The writer will examine very carefully the second five year plan of the Republic of India and the introduction of free compulsory basic education throughout the country, in order to build up a very useful but inexpensive basic educational program for the blind in India in accordance with the present philosophy of the education of the blind.

Specific Procedure

Because of the non-availability of accurate data; up to date information and statistics, the author will have to draw much from the Census Report of 1931; the Report on Blindness in India (Mackenzie Report) by the joint committee appointed by the Government of India Central Advisory Board of Health, and the Central Advisory Board of Education, 1945; the reports and findings of the First All India Conference for the Blind and the National Association for the Blind in India, 1952; books written by Dr. R. M. Halder, Educational Advisor on Handicapped Children to the Ministry of Education, New Delhi; and also, some of the writings of Sir Clutha Mackenzie, consultant on Braille to U.N.E.S.C.O. Again, the writer of this thesis will have to rely upon the observations made by
eminent Indian educators of the blind like Principal Amal Shah of the Calcutta Blind School; Principal Edward Jonathan of the Palamcottah Blind School; Professor S. C. Roy of the Light House for the Blind, Calcutta; Professor N. N. Sen Gupta of Calcutta University; Miss Manorama Hivale of the Ramabai Mukti Mission Blind School at Poona; and Mrs. Lily Sukhnandan of the Mungeli Blind Welfare Center in the Bilaspur District. In this thesis the author has also made use of some of his own observations and studies regarding the educational and social problems of the blind in India.

Limitations

The author does not intend to include in this program the education of the pre-school blind child, the education of the blind child with multiple handicaps, or other welfare activities on a large scale.

Justification For The Study

The writer has been directly connected with the education of the blind in India for several years in different capacities, and is now working as a teacher in the School for the Blind at Palamcottah, South India. This is the largest institution for the blind in Southeast Asia. The author has been thoroughly convinced that for want of publicity and propaganda, the cause of the blind has suffered a great deal, and the present educational institutions for the blind in India are struggling for their very existence, owing to a shortage of funds and
extremely limited facilities.\textsuperscript{4} It is needless to emphasize further that it is the paramount duty of the government and the public to help the cause of the blind. As a matter of fact, the author has taken the place of a Public Relations Officer and tried to bridge the gulf between the blind and the seeing public.

A vast majority of the seeing public, even those sympathetic, is quite ignorant concerning the blind and their problems. The blind are condemned and have been ostracized by the seeing. Through no fault of theirs, they have been misrepresented and looked down upon as "untouchables" because of the social stigma attached to blindness and the blind; they have been victims of prejudice and reproach because of certain religious and social misconceptions about blindness and the blind. Economically the blind are supposed to be useless and a "dead weight" to society. Hence, the seeing public is reluctant to accept the blind socially on the same footing as any other person. So, the matter of educating public opinion is of primary importance, so that erroneous ideas may be removed, confidence created, and universal practical sympathy and cooperation obtained.

Experience in Europe and America has shown that the position of the blind improves no faster than the speed at

which we can educate the normal seeing public and secure its practical interest. The consciousness of the public should be awakened to the social and educational needs of the blind in order to raise their standard and condition and also to recognize their rights in society.

Another reason for undertaking this study is to show that the traditional literary curriculum followed in the ordinary schools for sighted children as well as for the blind, no longer meets the demands of the present generation in India. "Even though some of the institutions for the blind in India have produced a few eminent graduates who are doing well in life, the percentage of successful graduates, when success is considered in the very ordinary sense, is not very high." 5

Another dark side of the present day education is, it has produced unemployment, even among the educated blind. Some of the author's own students, after graduating from the high school and college, are unemployed. Hence, there is a dire necessity for reorganization of our schools according to the needs of the community.

The "Wardha" scheme of education or better known nowadays as the "Basic Education," expounded by Mahatma Gandhi, has been introduced in many parts of India. The Central and State governments have accepted the principles of the Basic Education and will form the basis for providing compulsory primary

education to all Indian boys and girls. The object of these basic schools is to provide both theoretical training and training in crafts, so that after receiving primary training boys and girls may have avenues for earning their living. These basic schools are intended to form the base of the educational structure in India.

So, the author is exploring the ways and means of imparting a very useful education to India's hundreds of thousands of blind children who live in rural areas, in accordance with the present policy of the Central and State governments in introducing basic education throughout the country.

In developing public understanding about the social and educational problems of the blind in India, the author has tried to view the entire problem from different angles and to meet the urgent needs of the blind in India, a social and educational program has been recommended.

The introductory chapter of this thesis will state the problems, purpose, scope, limitations, and justification for making such a study. Chapter II will review the educational and welfare activities of the blind in Europe and the United States. Chapter III will give a brief historical survey of what has been done so far to uplift the blind in India. Chapter IV will make an analysis of the problem; showing the extent, causes and prevention of blindness in India. Chapter V will deal with the attitude of the public towards the blind. Chapter VI will depict the attitude of the blind toward the
seeing public. Chapter VII will give a general program for the social acceptance of the blind in India. Chapter VIII will discuss the significance, philosophy and goal of the Basic Education; and also the need for introducing Basic Education and Vocational training, for the blind in India. The last chapter will give the summary and conclusions derived from this study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND WELFARE ACTIVITIES
OF THE BLIND IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

In order to develop public understanding about the blind in India, it would be most appropriate to consider here very briefly the work for the blind (educational and welfare activities) in other parts of the world, especially in Europe and the United States.

The American Foundation for the Blind has quite recently published an excellent pamphlet, "The Blind," the content of which is mainly based upon the section "The Blind, Education, Employment and Care of" in the Encyclopedia Americana, 1955 edition. A few excerpts from this will be of immense help in understanding the changes that have revolutionized the entire concept of educational and welfare activities for the blind in the West:

Care of the Blind—General and Historical

The earliest efforts to care for the blind as a special class took the form of custodial institutions, such as a hospice at Caesarea in Cappadocia established by St. Basil in the fourth century, and the Quinze-Vigts, in Paris, France, which according to tradition was founded by St. Louis. Toward the end of the eighteenth century a Frenchman, Valentin Hauy discovered that blind people could learn to decipher with the fingers enlarged, embossed letters of the ordinary alphabet. This discovery led to the foundation of the first school for the education of
the young blind in Paris in 1784. Following this, schools were soon opened in other places, such as in Vienna in 1805, and in Berlin in 1806. In the United States three schools were established about the year 1832, in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

From the time that Valentin Hauy perfected his system of raised Roman letters, scores of tangible alphabets were devised, and books were printed in them. Of these types, the use of only two has survived to the present time—one, the Moon system, a series of raised lines slightly resembling the Roman alphabet and still used by many older persons; and the other, a system of dots invented by Louis Braille, a blind teacher in the school founded by Hauy in Paris. Braille's system is now in practically universal use throughout the civilized world. In addition to his original alphabet, sets of contractions have been devised for most languages, designed to reduce the bulk of embossed books and to cut down on their high cost of production.

Besides touch reading another medium of reading for the blind has been developed, the Talking Books. These are long-playing phonograph discs or magnetic tapes on which are recorded classic and current literature, books and periodicals. This form of reading has become extremely popular with the blind in those countries where it has been introduced.

A significant trend in recent years has been a growing awareness on the part of both medical and social agencies of the possibility of increasing the usefulness of residual sight through magnifying devices. These range from inexpensive hand magnifiers with varying properties for adaptation to different eye needs, to stronger eye glasses than have formerly been thought useful, to projection readers powerful enough to be used by some persons with little more sight than the ability to count fingers at the distance of a foot. With the establishment of clinics for the low-visioned, greater attention is being focused on the psychological problems in acceptance of both the limitations and the value of such aids.

Dogs have long been used as guides by individual blind people. During World War I the German government established schools for the
systematic training of guide dogs for blinded veterans. These specially trained dogs proved so successful that through the years a number of such training facilities have been organized in the United States and in other countries, and in this way many blind persons have gained new independence and found new opportunities for work. It is estimated, however, that less than 5 per cent of the blind population can make proper use of a dog guide. The blind person must be of at least average intelligence and of good health, for obviously, any handicap, in addition to blindness, which impairs him so that he cannot walk rapidly, or any health disorder obviously affecting his vitality would prevent him from using a dog.

From early times blind men have used a cane. A special technique for its use was developed by the United States Army for its blinded service personnel. This technique, with certain modifications, is now taught in a number of centers throughout the country. In America forty-seven states have enacted legislation giving the blind person using a white cane the right of way in traffic. Of later years, men of science have attempted to develop guidance devices to enable a blind person to go about alone. Unfortunately, none of them so far has proved of real practical value.

The United States of America

EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG BLIND

In 1955, there was estimated to be in the United States at least 6000 blind children under the age of seven. It is generally acknowledged in this country that the blind child's optimum development is usually secured in his own home with his own family. Many state legislatures, therefore, have appropriated funds for parent education in the form of counseling services conducted by field workers. There are also a few residential institutions which care solely for the small blind child.

Blind children of school age are educated
in residential schools for the blind or with the
sighted in schools for the seeing, with either a
resource teacher or braille class teacher available
during the entire day or with itinerant supervision
by a resource teacher available at regular or
needed intervals.

In 1955 there were fifty-three residential
schools for the blind in the United States with an
approximate enrollment of 6000 pupils, distributed
over forty states, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. The re­
main­ing states send their children to similar schools
in neighboring states, or the children are educated
with seeing children as stated above. In 1954 a
total of fifty-three cities in seventeen states and
the District of Columbia conducted such classes with
an approximate enrollment of 1000 pupils. Since
1879 federal funds have been made available to the
American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville,
Kentucky to provide books and tangible apparatus to
be used in schools and classes for the blind.

Many blind students go on to college where they
follow the regular curriculum in competition with the
sighted. The textbooks needed may be transcribed in
braille or they may be recorded on various recording
devices by volunteer workers. Eighteen states have
special legislation providing funds for payment of
readers.

The education of the blind is much more diffi­
cult when other handicaps besides blindness are pre­
­sent. For instance, it is estimated that about 3000
persons in the United States suffer from serious
loss of hearing in addition to defective sight.
Seven schools for the blind or for the deaf through­
out the country have established special departments
for the education of deaf-blind children, and many
workshops and other agencies for the blind give em­
ployment and other services to deaf-blind adults.

REHABILITATION OF THE ADULT BLIND

Work for the adult blind in the United States
is based on a system of cooperation between public
agencies, federal and state, and private agencies
both national and local. The trend may be said to
be toward increased government participation in
this area of social welfare. Thus, the federal
government has enacted a considerable number of
legislative measures beneficial to the blind. The
services established through such legislation may be administered through special agencies in the various state governments, and are subject to standards and requirements set by the federal government. The private or voluntary agencies supplement these services, and may act where public agencies are unable to function. Home teaching of the adult blind, a service designed primarily as an aid in the adjustment of the newly blind, is a function of both public and private agencies. Similarly, adjustment centers for the vocational diagnosis and adjustment of the newly blind have been established by both kinds of agency.

The most significant federal legislative action during recent years was the passage of the amendments in 1943 and 1954 to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1920. According to this act the federal government through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare assumes the necessary state administration cost and the cost of vocational counseling and placement, while certain other expenses including vocational training are shared by the state and federal governments. An average of 3500-4000 blind persons each year are being rehabilitated into employment as a result of this law.

The Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and amended in 1954 also administered by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation authorizes the operation of vending stands in federal and other buildings by blind persons, and has provided employment for close to 2000 blind men and women. The Business Enterprises Program for the blind, authorized by the Labor-Federal Security Appropriation Act of 1946, and by subsequent appropriations makes federal funds available for one-half of the necessary expenditures for the acquisition of vending stands and other equipment to be controlled by the state agency for the blind.

These various legal measures have opened up many new opportunities for the blind in the professions, in business, industry, agriculture, and other fields. In addition, many blind persons, who cannot compete successfully in the open market find employment in special workshops or in industrial homework programs. The federal government provides
a market for blind-made products under the Wagner-O'Day Act of 1938, which requires that the federal departments under certain conditions purchase brooms, mops, and some forty other approved articles from workshops for the blind at a fair market price, determined by a special committee appointed by the President of the United States. In 1955, over 3000 blind persons were employed in these special workshops and earning a fair wage.

FINANCIAL AID

One half of all the blind in the United States are receiving direct financial aid. The federal government cooperated with the forty-eight states in providing such aid partly as aid to the blind and partly as old age assistance. The special aid to the blind program is administered in accordance with state plans subject to approval by the Social Security Administration. Early in 1955, the average monthly payment per client for the entire country was slightly over $55.00, although the actual grant varied considerably from state to state. The federal government pays four-fifths of the first $25.00 of the monthly grant, and one-half of the balance. Thus the federal government may contribute up to eighty per cent of the cost of assistance, depending upon the amount of the individual payment, and in addition pays fifty per cent of the administrative cost.

LIBRARIES FOR THE BLIND

Books and reading have always played an important part in the life of the blind. Libraries for the blind, however, for years were unable to acquire an adequate collection of books for the blind because of their relative high cost of production. In recognition of this deficiency Congress in 1931 passed a law which authorized an annual appropriation of $100,000 to the Library of Congress for this purpose. Through later amendments, especially since the advent of the Talking Book, this amount has been increased, the last amendment (1946) authorizing an amount of $1,125,000, although the actual appropriation is usually somewhat lower. Not more than $200,000 of this amount may be spent for books in raised print, and the remainder for Talking Book records and for the maintenance and replacement of Talking Book machines. The Library of Congress has selected twenty-eight
libraries throughout the country to serve as distributing libraries and the braille and Talking Books go from these libraries to the blind readers and back to the libraries postage free under a special amendment to the United States Postal Laws. In addition, a considerable number of periodicals are printed in braille or recorded as Talking Books. For instance, The Readers Digest is available both in braille and Talking Book editions. These may be had either on a subscription basis or may be borrowed from the libraries.

THE WAR BLINDED

In December 1954 the Veterans Administration reported the number of veterans with service-connected blindness as approximately 2000. The federal government assumes full responsibility for their rehabilitation and provides a disability compensation according to degree of disability. Thus, a totally blind veteran with enucleation of both eyes and with no other disability and with no dependents receives $353.00 a month. Additional compensation for dependents is provided when disability is rated as not less than 50 per cent.

SPECIAL PRIVILEGES

The Revenue Act of 1943 included a provision permitting a blind taxpayer in reporting his income to take a personal deduction of $500 in addition to any other deductions authorized by law. In 1948 this deduction was changed to an exemption and the amount exempted was increased to $600, to be allowable also for the blind spouse of a taxpayer. An amendment to the Interstate Commerce Act of 1927 permits the railroads at their discretion to carry a blind person and his guide for one full fare. This privilege has been extended to a number of interstate bus lines.

NATIONAL AGENCIES

There are two national associations of professional workers for the blind, The American Association of Instructors of the Blind and the American Association of Workers for the Blind. They hold biennial and annual conventions, respectively, to discuss problems of national interest, and the printed proceedings of these
conventions constitute valuable additions to the literature on the blind.

The American Foundation for the Blind was established in 1921 by action of these associations for the blind and other friends of the blind to fill a need for a national organization to serve the interests of the blind and to coordinate the work done by local agencies throughout the country. Among its activities are research, consultation and field service, special services to blind individuals, publications of professional literature, and a special library on work with the blind.

**Other Countries**

In certain countries outside of the United States there has been evident a progressive tendency toward the development of private philanthropy in the expansion and operation of programs for the blind, though usually on a partnership basis with governmental agencies. This is particularly true in the United Kingdom, Canada and the British dominions, as well as in certain countries of Western Europe. In Canada, for example a single voluntary agency, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, functions on a nationwide scale in providing all major services to the adult blind, the needy and the elderly blind. In the United Kingdom where major responsibility for service program rests with county councils and county borough authorities responsible to the Ministries of Education, of Health and of Labour, many of these statutory groups appoint voluntary societies to serve as their agents in administering such services. The Royal National Institute for the Blind in London maintains certain programs for the rehabilitation of the civilian blind, including training for employment in professional and semi-professional fields. The Institute is also a center for the production of braille books and periodicals. The famous St. Dunstan's organization, another private agency, cooperates with RNIB in the manufacture of Talking Book recordings for the blind and provides rehabilitation, training and life-long after-care for men and women blinded in war service.
In some countries private efforts in behalf of the blind are based on action by groups or federations of blind people. In the Scandinavian countries, Italy, Yugoslavia and Spain, considerable responsibility for the operation of national programs now rests upon such groups, while in France, Germany, and the Benelux countries their influence is also of substantial significance. Similar groups have been founded and continue to emerge in the underdeveloped areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where governmental and private authorities, while usually providing some services for the education of blind children, have been less active in their efforts to provide adequately for the needs of the adult blind in the fields of rehabilitation, training, employment and general welfare facilities.

At least two countries, England and Germany, have enacted legislation of a preferential nature in regard to the employment of the physically handicapped, including the blind. Such legislation establishes regulations which provide that for each group of employees hired by an employer, a certain percentage must be physically handicapped. In addition, these laws specify that certain safety precautions including installation of safety devices must be observed.

Britain and its dominions, most Western European countries and some other areas have legislation providing financial aid for the economic needs of blind persons. In most instances the extent of such assistance is determined on the basis of individual need. Some governments make provision for additional living costs imposed by blindness through payment of higher rates than would be granted to sighted persons with apparent equal needs. This principle is especially recognized in Australia, Denmark, Sweden and certain states of Western Germany where a handicap allowance is granted to all blind persons regardless of financial need of the recipient. Increasing acceptance of this theory has been evidenced in later years by powerful groups of international stature.

"The development of a properly planned system of education and welfare on the one hand and of vocational training and employment on the other is of recent date. In the olden days, the blind were generally regarded as incapable of participating in the ordinary activities of life and were left to depend on begging for their existence. The main exception to this was the blind minstrel who is found in the earliest epic of European literature."

"The 150 years which have passed since Valentin Hauy started that small school in Paris with its solitary pupil, cover what has been a remarkable evolution in the status of blind people—the change from the days when they lived in beggary, ignorance and misery, to the point where in modern countries every blind person is guaranteed a dignified existence and where all normal, intelligent and healthy can take up remunerative and useful occupations, as well as having full range of literary, musical and other social interests to give them a full and happy life. They have become confident, self-respecting members of the community, of which they feel themselves a part and no longer useless encumbrances."

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CHAPTER III

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO UPLIFT THE BLIND IN INDIA

"In earlier times the picture of a blind person in India is in no way different from that of a person similarly affected in any other country of the world and is that of one who, staff in hand, tries to feel his way, stretching out his hands for help, probably carrying a bag or a bowl, the symbol of beggary. The situation in India was even more complicated, since a vast section of her people still believed that blindness in the present life might be the natural result of one's past sins in a previous life. Buddhism, which came into being about 525 B.C., reached its culmination before the Christian era and struggled for supremacy with Hinduism during the next six centuries. Thereafter, though it declined in the land of its origin, Buddhistic principles influenced the treatment of the blind as did Hinduism. The days of Hindu and Mohammedan rule in India did not see any effective change in the role and life of the blind. They still continued to be objects of sentimental sympathy."

Sometimes "blind fakirs" and "mendicants" were attached to the mosques and temples. They could recite verse after verse

from their religious books. Many were found begging in the neighborhood or at the gates of the mosques and temples.

Before the advent of Christian missionaries, no organized effort was taken to ameliorate the sad plight of the blind in India. The year, 1757, found British supremacy gradually asserting itself in India. It was not until 1793, a decade later than the foundation of the first school for the blind in Paris by Valentin Hauy, that we see the advent of the first missionary in the person of William Carey, who established his mission at Serampore in 1800. The good work started by him was followed up by Duff in Bengal and by Wilson in Bombay. These and others like them carried a message of education and enlightenment throughout the length and breadth of India. These missionaries not only opened schools and colleges, but also tried to put into practice the message of the Christian gospel by taking care of the orphans, widows, aged and underprivileged including the blind. And it was that a missionary, Miss Annie Sharp, a torch-bearer of the same faith and convictions, came in contact with some blind folks. She was so touched with their pitiable plight and became so interested in their problems and opened the first school for the blind in India, in 1887 at Amritsar. In 1905 it was transferred to Rajpur, Dhra Dun, U. P. and has since then been renamed Sharp Memorial Blind School in recognition of her services. Three years after Miss Sharp, in 1890, Miss A. J. Askwith, a missionary sent out by the Church Missionary Society, founded
the second school for the blind at Palamcottah in South India. This institution is supposed to be the largest in Southeast Asia. In 1897 Reverend Lal Bihari Shah, an old student of Carey's famous Serampore College, founded the Calcutta Blind School. A year later the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel opened a school at Ranchi and in 1901 the first school was founded in Mysore, one of the leading native states in India. Out of the many other institutions inaugurated by the missionaries, the American Mission School for the Blind, founded by Miss Anna Millard in 1900 at Bombay, should be mentioned and it was renamed the Dadar School for the Blind. 

Thus we see that most of the schools are established and being operated by the Christian missionaries. The purpose of missionary institutions for the blind is not only to teach them the three "R's" and a few handicrafts, but also intended to impart religious and moral instruction based upon the Bible. The outcome of this was that a good many of the blind accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and they were welcomed into the Christian fold and homes for the blind. The orthodox Hindus and Moslems who did not like the idea of proselytizing the blind by the Christian missionaries raised their voices against such activities. Aversion of the Indian mind to the missionary institutions has led Indian philanthropists and social workers to establish a few of their own sectarian institutions for the care and education of the blind.

The history of the modern movement of the education and
welfare of the blind will remain incomplete, if the pioneering and the generous work of a Hindu, Dr. Nilkanthrai Chhatrapati, is not mentioned. When he became blind he left the medical profession and devoted the rest of his life to the service of his fellow blind. As the founder of the Ahmedabad School for the Blind in 1901, as the first principal of the Victoria Memorial School for the Blind at Bombay in 1902, as an active life member of the Defective Inquiry Committee of Bombay government, and as the founder of several hospitals, eye clinics, and homes for the blind in Bombay Presidency, Dr. Nilkanthrai helped and served the cause of the blind for about twenty-seven years.

He also did yeoman service in the cause of the prevention of blindness and in helping the incurable blind. With the help and cooperation of the leading citizens of Bombay, an association called "The Blind Relief Association" was started on January 27, 1919. This Association succeeded in starting institutions and homes for the blind, hospitals and eye clinics for the blind in different parts of Bombay state. The blind of India in general, and the blind of Bombay Presidency in particular, will cherish the memory of this pioneer worker in the field of education and welfare activities for the blind, with gratitude and love for all that he has done for their amelioration.

In 1952 there were eleven government institutions for the blind, three of which are managed by the government of India. The adult blind training center at Dhera Dun, formerly St.
Dunstan's Hostel for war-blind Indians, requires special mention. The whole project is being operated by the central government for the training of the adult blind in suitable industries and crafts. The government of Madras is also thinking of starting a similar project at Poonamallee for giving vocational training to the adult blind. The first sheltered workshop was started in 1952 at Bombay by the Blind Relief Association. These are all epoch making events in the annals of the welfare work of the blind in India for two reasons. Firstly, the national government has come to realize the acuteness of this national social problem of the blind and so, steps are being taken to raise the standard of the blind by recognizing their needs and by giving them proper education, vocational training, employment and after care. Secondly, these welfare activities will surely raise the appalling conditions of the blind and they will no longer be considered an economic drawback in society. Even though the modern social welfare activities have not touched the fringes of this problem, there is yet hope that there will be better days to come.

Considerable stimulus has been given by the founding of voluntary associations like the Blind Relief Association of Bombay (1919); Henderson Blind Relief Associates of Sind (1925); Madras Blind Relief Association (1929); and another relief association has come into existence in the Punjab. Two associations have been formed in Calcutta with objectives which all India has accepted. They are called "All India Light House
for the Blind" under the presidency of the most Rev. The Metropolitan of India.

In 1952, on January 19th, the first All India Conference adopted a resolution forming a National Association for the Blind. It aims at working in the whole of India for the welfare of the blind. It hopes to bring about a cooperative effort among the various organizations working for the blind and to coordinate their activities. It pledges itself to work for the prevention of preventable blindness and the cure of curable blindness and its eradication on a mass scale. It also provides for doing all such other things as may be necessary for the promotion of the interests of the blind. The formation of N. A. B. is a significant milestone on the road of broadening opportunity for the blind of India.
CHAPTER IV
THE EXTENT, CAUSES, AND PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS IN INDIA

The Extent of Blindness:

The extent of blindness in India is not accurately known, partly because no enumeration has been done since 1931 and also chiefly due to difficulty in defining who is to be classified as blind. So, the figures of the Census of India Report of 1931 (Volume I, Part II) remain the latest statistical survey. According to this survey, there were in India at that time, 601,370 blind persons. The following table will show the blind population according to sex and age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-20-------- 108,688</td>
<td>72,793</td>
<td>181,461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-40-------- 42,503</td>
<td>57,695</td>
<td>100,198</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40------ 132,630</td>
<td>185,448</td>
<td>318,078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Unspecified-- 940</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total------------------------------- 601,370</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reliability of census figures has been questioned on

1 Hutton, J. H., Census Report of India, 1931; Volume I, Part II, pp. 189-204.
many grounds. The Joint Committee\(^2\) reports that the value of the figures for blindness may be only comparative because the term "blind" was liable to a diversity of interpretation, although instructions given to enumerators were to record only those who were blind in both eyes. In view of the lack of precise definition, blindness was defined in Bengal "as unable to count the fingers of a hand held at a distance of one yard." The Joint Committee further states that the figures of blindness have generally been, in the opinion of census officers in India, the most accurate of "the infirmities returns" on the ground that there is no particular motive for concealment, as this particular affliction excites neither contempt nor disgust. Even so, the returns are in some cases open to doubt, and in many cases concealment is likely in cases of girls of marriageable age.

From the limited evidence at the disposal of the Joint Committee, they were able to arrive at the following moderately conservative estimate of the blind population.

1. "The census gives a ratio of 172 blind persons per 100,000 of the population.

2. Census returns in other countries have seldom shown more than half the true number of the blind, and in India an even lower proportion has probably been


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 12.
revealed to the census enumerators.

3. Specific counts in districts in Bengal have shown 233.42 per 100,000; in Bombay 260; and in the United Provinces 900.

4. These figures have been arrived at on a general definition amounting to total blindness; and we can assume that for every totally blind person there is at least one partially blind individual, whose sight is so damaged that he cannot earn his living without the special assistance of blind welfare services." Therefore, the Joint Committee in its report, feels justified in believing that 250 per 100,000 represents the probable ratio of totally blind, with a similar ratio of partially blind, giving a total figure of 500 per 100,000; and this proportion applied to a gross population of 400,000,000 people, gives a blind population of 2,000,000.

The following figures (Table II) would seem to indicate that blindness is on the increase.

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4 Ibid., p. 10-11
Table II  The Increase of Blind Population from 1901-1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As per Census of</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Total Blind Population</th>
<th>Percentage of blind to total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901--------------</td>
<td>294.36 millions</td>
<td>354,104</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911--------------</td>
<td>315.15 millions</td>
<td>443,653</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921--------------</td>
<td>318.94 millions</td>
<td>479,837</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931--------------</td>
<td>352.83 millions</td>
<td>601,370</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During a period of 30 years (1901-1931) blindness has increased 12 to 17 ten thousand. According to the census returns of 1941, the population has increased by a little more than 14 per cent over 1931 figures. Leaving Burma and Pakistan, the recent 1951 Census Report of the Republic of India shows there is an increase by 13.4 per cent over the 1941 population. So, there is ample reason to believe that blindness must be definitely on the increase in accordance with the rate of increase of the population, since not very much work on the preventive side has been attempted in the rural areas. It has been calculated that 30 per cent of the blind in India have lost their sight under the age of 21, and most of it is lost in the first five years of life. Women are more affected than men.

5 Halder, R. M., op. cit., p. 88.

Causes of Blindness: 7

Incidence of blindness is very high in India. Chief among the causes stand complications of inflammatory diseases of the conjunctiva and cornea, including Trachoma. Other prominent causes include smallpox, venereal diseases, nutritional deficiency, Glaucoma and Cataracts. Specific causes vary from state to state, influenced by several factors, such as climate, diet, living conditions and the great lack of medical facilities.

Climatic, Economic and General:

Blindness reaches its peak in northern and northwestern plains where relentless sun, frequent dust storms and the intensity of the dry, hot weather has put the greatest strain on the eye. In such a climate one also finds that there are innumerable flies to spread infection. Lt. Colonel Kirwan from Bengal reports that where there is intense sunlight, great heat, and much dust, a high incidence of blindness will be usually found, unless the people are sufficiently advanced and intelligent enough to take necessary precautions. So, in India the main cause of the large amount of blindness may be said to be due to the physical conditions of the country itself, general backwardness, apathy of the public and the great

lack of medical facilities.

Sardhar Bahadur Dr. Sohan Singh from Uttar Pradesh reports that ignorance plays the most dangerous part in the causation of blindness. It is an established fact that incurable blindness is mostly a result of serious complications of sore eyes. Ignorance is also responsible for the second commonest cause of incurable blindness, namely chronic Trachoma progressing to absolute Glaucoma. Wrong notions about the preventions and improvement of sight are also responsible for producing sore eyes which may result in blindness. Irritant powders like antimony and many other "Magic Cures" are liable to produce burns and scratches on the surface of the cornea and will give rise to ulcers and opacities, perforations and even total loss of the eye. The unhygienic practices such as using the same rod from the common cosmetic pot for the eyes of all children in the household, is a factor in the spread of eye diseases. "Social customs such as the Purdah System (remaining behind the veil), very many taboos regarding certain kinds of food, and the restrictions on women for free access to light and air, have been found as the major cause for the high degree of prevalence of Trachoma among the "Gosha"* and "Purdah women."

*"Gosha is a kind of taboo imposed upon women of Caste Hindus, by which the movements are restricted.

Economic Condition:

Blindness usually affects the poor, especially in villages, which are symbolic of poverty and illiteracy. It is said that blindness is a close associate of poverty, unsanitary conditions and malnutrition. So, the incidence of blindness will steadily diminish as the living standards of the people advance. Principal Edward Jonathan has remarked that the problem of the welfare of the blind in India will rise and fall according to the food situation in India. India's health problem is rather appalling. Very few villages receive any kind of medical aid, and even if there is a dispensary or hospital nearby, these poor villagers hesitate to go over there for treatment because they do not have enough money to spare for medicines. Further, they have to work all day and have no time to spare. If they go at all, therefore, they go at a later stage, when the disease has passed beyond the stage of cure.

After carefully studying the causes of blindness from the records of the blind boys and girls admitted in the Schools for the Blind at Plamcottah, Principal Edward Jonathan has arranged in a tabular form:
Causes Of Blindness In India

1. Specific Causes:
   1. Gonorrhoea
   2. Leprosy
   3. Syphilis
   4. Tuberculosis

2. Infectious Diseases:
   1. Smallpox of eye
   2. Chicken pox of eye

3. Vitamin Deficiency:
   Keratomalacia

4. Local Causes:
   1. Virus—Trachoma
   2. Injuries through accidents
   3. Corneal ulcers

5. Changes lens:
   Cataract

6. Changes in tension of eye
   Glaucoma

7. Industrial Causes
   Due to want of protection during work

8. Criminal Practices
   1. Couching by Muslim quacks in pushing the lens into the vitreous by unsterilized instruments
   2. Applying irritant juices of leaves and sandal wood oil in eyes by native physicians for eye diseases

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Percentage of Sight Loss in the Order of Severity

1. Trachoma
2. Smallpox
3. Cataract
4. Keratomalacia
5. Leprosy
6. Corneal Ulcer
7. Gonorrhoea
8. Couching

Colonel Sir Jamshedji Duggan, D. O. (Oxon), and outstanding Ophthalmologist of Bombay, describes the causes of blindness in a slightly different order:

1. Ophthalmia Neonatorum, or sore eyes in newly born babies
2. Smallpox
3. Venereal Disease
4. Trachoma or granular lids—Khul or Khupri
5. Eye afflictions due to defective dietetic conditions such as Xerosis or Keratomalacia
6. Irritant remedies
7. Accident and war injuries
8. Short-sight
9. Squint
10. Cataract or Motio
11. Glaucoma

The Treatment of Eye Diseases:

India is fortunate in having good Ophthalmologists, but most of them are crowded in big cities like Calcutta, Bombay, New Delhi and Madras. A good many of the Eye-Specialists serve the country through government hospitals, private dispensaries, and Christian Mission Hospitals. It has been reported that annually an average of 10 million eye cases are treated through all these eye clinics. But, this number is only a drop in the bucket when compared to the millions of people who

All India Conference, op. cit., p. 56.
go untreated for the simple reason that no medical aid is available to the poor who live in remote villages. The condition of the Indian villager is still at the stage where treatment has to be brought to him. "Among factors that act against his going to the hospital of his district (if there is any), are those of ignorance and his acceptance of old fashioned and harmful village remedies, coupled with a fear of cities and lack of money to pay for travel and food." In different parts of India, new schemes are being tried to carry treatment to the villager in his own community. The Eye Relief Scheme in Utter Pradesh, Eye Fairs and Mobile Hospitals in Sind, Traveling Eye Units in Bengal and Eye Camps in the South deserve special mention for their attempt to reach out to eye patients in rural areas. Excellent work has been done and is being done in this direction by missionary societies, The Red Cross, Departments of Health and Sanitation, and many other voluntary associations. The typical picture of the existing stage of eye work in many parts of India is this:—excellent work in limited areas, though far from adequate; expansion in progress and an earnest desire to do more. Some states are more advanced than others, but everywhere the urgent need and cry is the same—more hospitals, more trained men, more facilities for work in rural areas.

11 Hivale, Manorama, op. cit., p. 10.
Prevention of Eye Diseases:

The Report of the First All India Conference for the Blind states that "nearly ninety per cent of the blindness in India is preventable and another five per cent is curable." This statement would reveal the urgency of taking immediate steps for the prevention of blindness and reducing its high incidence in the country by a systematic and scientific approach to this important problem and to make the people aware through the radio, poster and films in their regional languages, so that they can guard themselves against the malpractices of quacks and value and practice the hygienic principles of living; to be careful of the flies which carry infectious germs which many times lead to blindness, and the contagious diseases which do great harm to the delicate eyes. All evidence shows that blindness is closely associated with poverty, ignorance, unsanitary living conditions, poor and unbalanced diet. Therefore, incidence of blindness would diminish as the standard of the people advances, that is, most of the causes would be eliminated with the general uplift of the people. All efforts by government, by special organizations and private individuals to better social conditions by every kind of action, are valuable contributions toward the reduction of blindness.

The tragedy is that the four major diseases causing the

12 All India Conference, op. cit., p. 69.
whole of the loss of sight among children--smallpox, keratomalacia, ophthalmia neonatorum, and conjunctivitis—are easily preventable by well known measures if people can be reached, and if they will accept precautionary treatment. Total vaccination will banish smallpox; adequate animal fat in children's diet make keratomalacia impossible; a few drops of 1% concentrated silver nitrate solution in the eyes of the newborn at birth will wipe out ophthalmia neonatorum; and simple lotions instead of damaging irritants will quickly cure conjunctivitis. Venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea have been responsible for destroying the sight of a large portion of the young population. These two diseases are the greatest scourges of society and have ruined many a beautiful home. Venereal diseases can be eliminated from society if proper treatments and preventive measures are taken, as done in Japan and other modern countries in the world. Trachoma is almost universal in India. A Trachoma patient is a source of infection to others—use of zinc boric drops on eyes twice a week will reduce the intensity of the disease. The affected persons should take great care not to infect others by unhygienic practices.

Prevention of blindness is not one man's job. Every social organization should cooperate with the State governments in a campaign against blindness. In order to educate the public and to make them interested in the prevention of blindness, a National Society for the Prevention of Blindness
in India must be formed as early as possible, similar to the ones in the United States and England.
CHAPTER V

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PUBLIC TOWARD THE BLIND

Amongst the early historical records of India, descriptions of human sympathy for the blind are not lacking. "Asoka the Great, who ruled from 264-228 B.C., after being converted from Brahminism to Buddhism, conducted a missionary campaign and built hospitals at public cost. Those without sight found a heaven in the new institutions, and Asoka announced that he wished to save suffering creatures, and to be a light and a healer to those who lived in blindness."

"In the Kings of Kassamira, Kathana Pandita points out that in 1028, during the reign of Anantedeva, Utpala built a town named Utpalapura in which was a 'house for the blind.' The king had five brothers and their charity made everyone desire and pray for their riches, by whatever means acquired, whether by plunder or by honest means."1

Blindness has evoked pity, ridicule or contempt commensurate with the mental depth and attitude of the individual with whom the handicapped come in contact. Compassion kindled in the hearts of their fellow human beings is a great acknowledgment of human love and the goodness of God.

"Customs, superstitions and religious thoughts helped,

and in some instances, hindered genuine work for the blind. Accounts of barbarisms inflicted on the blind by the sighted for fun or amusement are also found in history." Such misguided sympathy and pity have tolerated the blind to earn their livelihood by begging. A section of the people, especially the Hindus, believe that they can win favor from God (punnya) if they give alms to the poor, the blind, the crippled and the sick. Begging, therefore, has become one of the easiest and most profitable professions of the blind.

The theory of Transmigration of Souls and the Law of Karma are prevalent in the religious beliefs of the Hindus; and they believe that blindness in the present life might be a punishment because of sins committed in a previous life. The blind were, therefore, objects of pity, ridicule and reproach.

There is another philosophy current amongst some Oriental schools of thought, especially among the Moslems and the Hindus, that fate has a place in the world order which God has predestined. It is, therefore, natural that the stern hand of fate had already foreordained that a particular person or group of persons should be blind. This philosophy is dangerous in its application to those laboring under blindness. A question is generally asked; "Why do you Christians bother about the blind—their education, after care and social

2 Halder, R. M., Society and the Visually Handicapped, op. cit., p. 15.
They add, "God has destined them to be blind, and anything which is done to improve the appalling conditions of the blind is doing something against the will of God." This philosophy is dangerous, too. The strict adherence to this doctrine makes the blind objects of natural contempt and no effort can be stimulated to ameliorate their condition.

Another popular view is that blindness is caused by the curse of God on disapproved conduct or licentious character. There are several mythological and Puranic stories which deal with persons who became blinded after visitations from "yakshis" or Gods. Even though these stories are unbelievable and un-scientific, yet they serve a useful purpose in warning the people to live a godly life.

Another segment of the people regards as a bad omen the sight of a blind person early in the day or while performing religious or social functions, either in the family or in the community. The natural outcome of this superstitious belief is that the blind are ostracized from social and religious activities.

Some still believe that blindness is contagious, and that their religious scruples do not permit them to touch the blind when occasion arises to lend a helping hand. If a blind person belongs to the "untouchables," his situation is usually a very pathetic one. It is good to believe that certain types of blindness are contagious (for example, Trachoma) and therefore, proper care should be taken for its
treatment and prevention. However, society cannot escape from its moral and social responsibilities toward the blind by these biased religious and unscientific attitudes.

Social customs and sanctions did not approve blind persons holding important positions in society. When King Dhritarashtra became blind, he was forced to abdicate his throne and install his nephew as heir apparent, being unfit to wield the sceptre of authority on account of his blindness.

In the code of Kautilya, it is found that blindness was considered to be a terrible calamity, and serious social, political or religious offenses were punishable by inflicting blindness on the offender. For example, "When Sudra calls himself a Brahmin, or when any person steals the property of gods, conspires against a king, or destroys both the eyes of another, he shall either have his eyes destroyed by the application of poisonous ointment or pay a fine of 800 panas."

In India according to the prescriptive law, generally, a blind person is not entitled to possess the right of holding his share in his parental property. Because of his handicap, he is neglected; his rights are overlooked, and he is not considered equal to any other sighted person in his family or the community.

The position of a blind child in a family is peculiar.

His arrival is generally regarded as a misfortune in a poor family, and a cause of distress in a rich one. In both cases he develops abnormally, and he is considered as an economic liability. As he grows, he manipulates situations to bring about social pressures upon the sighted which are sometimes wrongly generalized as the behavior patterns of the unfortunate few as typical of "the class." The common man, without trying to understand the causes of the physical and mental disturbances of the blind, often penalizes him as unsocial and selfish.

There has been a popular belief in all countries, including India, that the blind are compensated with superior intelligence, good memory power, and the possession of the "sixth sense" or "facial perception." It is true that a few Indian blind persons possess superior intelligence and good memory power, and some of them being considered as "walking encyclopedias." Others have been able to recite page after page from the Sacred Religious Books of India. These extraordinary powers are not actually compensations, but they are the reward of unusual and persevering industry. Dr. Samuel Hayes and other psychologists have repeatedly found that compensation is not a free gift, but the hard won reward of special effort.

A vast majority of Indians are illiterate and still ask the question, "Is it humanly possible to educate the blind without the organ of vision?" Another question is asked;
What is the use of giving education to the poor, helpless, hopeless blind?

It should be pointed out that our people are ignorant concerning the importance of the education of the blind. Herein lies the responsibility of the propagandists and the social workers to educate the parents of the blind and the public through demonstrations, radio talks, newspapers, and films that, after all, most of the blind are educable, employable, and can become useful citizens if they are given proper opportunities for education and training.

"The outlook of the sighted toward the blind must be changed. There must be a realization of the handicaps under which they work, and a recognition and a true estimate of their abilities and capacities. There must be sympathetic understanding of their psychology, of their weaknesses and defects, arising from the wrong treatment they receive, and a genuine desire on the part of the sighted to work for, and create an environment for a harmonious and healthy development of the sensitive nature of the blind, so prone to be distorted and twisted by neglect, wrong treatment, or indifference to their needs. Sympathy need not be made cheap; but sterling action for the benefit of the blind must follow." 4

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4 Report, All India Conference, op. cit. p. 77.
CHAPTER VI

THE ATTITUDE OF THE BLIND TOWARD THE PUBLIC

The attitude of the blind toward the sighted depends upon very many factors. Some are congenitally blind and some are adventitiously blind. Among these two groups there is a vast difference in their conceptual understanding and attitude toward the seeing simply because the former cannot have visual images and the latter builds upon what they have already had in their minds. The handicap of blindness affects the reactions of a blind man to his environment and these sometimes produce a change in his disposition and temperament, his habits, his outlook, in fact, in his whole life.

The world of light is denied to the blind. They live in darkness. The condition favors dullness and depression. Every movement in darkness is in the unknown and is associated with hesitancy and fear. The result is frequently inaction. Inaction brings about sloth and something far worse. According to Mme. Montessori, "Movement has more and more importance for the normal and the intellectual building up of man."

Sloth often ends in beggary; where self-respect gradually disappears and the incentive to movements are of a lowly sensual type. With the loss of vision at an advanced age, the shock of sudden blindness brings about a despondence and despair and lack of exertion, resulting in a state of physical and
mental incapacity. Because of the impairment of vision, a blind person is less mobile and depends too much upon the sighted and also, he expects too much from the seeing community which is detrimental for the advancement of any real social uplift and emancipation of the blind.

In social contacts the blind person is often awkward, slow and inferior in social competence. There is always in him a feeling of anxiety and as Dr. Gutsforth has said; "The blind lives in a world of anxiety and he has no confidence in his own abilities nor in others." He has awkward mannerisms; and he is generally treated by the sighted with irritability and impatience, condescension or pity. These social contacts become a strain, fatigue and discouragement. As Helen Keller has said; "It is not blindness, but the attitude of the sighted toward the blind, is unbearable." In these and many other situations, the blind feel themselves inadequate and inferior to others, and if allowed to live in them, gradually develops an inferiority complex, leading them to undesirable introspection, day-dreaming, and self-centeredness.

A different type of influence produces a superiority complex in the blind person. His handicap leads him to be over-indulged, to be over-esteemed and to be unduly praised and these give him an idea of superiority. It makes him dominating, aggressive and sometimes careless.

The undesirable social habits, the ego-centric nature, the social verbalism, physical and mental maladjustments, are
generally found in certain types of blind people. They are caused by the environmental factors such as unwholesome homes, and unfavorable situations. For personal and social development of the maladjusted blind, the home, the institutions and the enlightened society must be prepared to provide them ample opportunities for social acceptance.

A large group of blind persons have been able to adjust themselves to the seeing world by readily accepting their own handicaps and limitations, and also, relying on the other four senses. Some of them have overcome their impediment by graciously surrendering themselves to the will of God and find happiness and pleasure by honest work and sincere service to society. As John Milton has said in his sonnet, On Blindness, "They also serve who only stand and wait." A normal blind person craves to lead a healthy, normal, useful life by becoming a part and parcel of society. He has the talents, aspirations, ambitions and hopes, just as any seeing person. He loves and wants to be loved. It is up to society to accept him by extending a warm welcome.

As has already been pointed out, the attitude of the blind toward the sighted very largely depends upon the individual himself. Some are very friendly and sociable, others are not; some are too much dependent upon the sighted; and others do not like the idea of receiving help from the sighted; some have pleasant feelings toward the seeing, and others have
unpleasant feelings toward them; some are grateful, others ungrateful; some are skeptical, and others are not; some are frustrated and disillusioned, others have accepted their limitations and have a realistic and self-reliant attitude; some are pessimistic and fatalistic, others are optimistic and believe that they can mold their own lives; some are curious and inquisitive, others are not; some are highly emotional and irritable, others have a well-balanced and charming personality; some have inferiority complexes, others have superiority complexes; some are cooperative and contributive members of society while others are not.

"In general, the social environment of the blind determines their attitude toward others and, still more important, their attitude toward themselves."  

1 Halder, R. M., op. cit., p. 40.
CHAPTER VII

A GENERAL PROGRAM FOR THE SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE
OF THE BLIND IN INDIA

The new independent India has unequivocally declared itself to be a welfare state. Every such state has for its main objectives, the social acceptance and rehabilitation of downtrodden and suffering humanity. The blind are a community who have all through the ages suffered and are still suffering, though in some countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, their condition has much improved through governmental effort and the untiring services of disinterested and philanthropic institutions and individuals, and as a result, their social standards have been raised by making them self-supporting and contributive members of the community. The problem of the blind in India cannot be tackled successfully unless the state governments and the Central Government render their help; people realize their task and the widest possible publicity is given to the cause.

It is very encouraging to know that the government of India has recently set up a Social Welfare Board under the chairmanship of Mrs. Durgabai Deshmukh, and steps are being taken to ameliorate the sad lot of the blind. Also, by the formation of the National Association for the Blind in 1952, set up by educators, workers for the blind, and sympathizers
of the blind, a new era has dawned in the history of the eman-
cipation of the blind in India. The N.A.B. has laudable aims
and objectives to solve the problems of the blind and it is
working on similar lines with that of the Royal National In-
stitute in England and the American Foundation for the Blind
in the United States.

The cause of the blind in India has so far suffered con-
siderably for want of publicity and well-planned propaganda
through the radio, moving pictures or slides, photos, articles,
handbills, illustrative leaflets and hand posters. Publicity
should also be given to the social needs of the blind and at
the same time the public should be educated to remove from
their minds some of the fallacies and misconceptions regarding
blindness and the blind. Funds are also required for tackling
this huge problem. So, adequate funds may be procured from
the generous public if the Indian people are made aware of the
acuteness of the problem.

In order to carry out this program, we also require a
large number of selfless volunteers, social workers and trained
men. An organization called "Andha Seva Sangham" meaning "The
Society for the Help of the Blind," may be established through-
out the country, and members of youth movements, women's
associations, Scouts, the village social service squads and
the sympathizers of the blind may be mobilized for this purpose.
These groups will work as liaison officers between the sighted
and the blind, bringing about better relations and mutual
understanding.

In this connection, it should be added that the observance of a "Blind Week" will be of utmost importance in helping the activities of the blind. On all such occasions, if possible, eminent blind persons may be invited to speak. This will serve as an ideal demonstration to educate the public regarding the abilities of the blind.

In the United States there are more than eight hundred voluntary associations working for the educational, religious, social, cultural, and all-round development of the blind whereas in India, similar associations and clubs have to be started for the benefit of the blind. At the same time, care should be taken to prevent the blind from becoming isolated.

For want of a proper definition; registration and enumeration of the blind according to age groups, the cause of the blind is suffering a great deal. Another dire need is that there must be a compulsory law prohibiting the blind from begging, but at the same time, financial aid should be given to those who are needy. The charity given to the individual blind may be diverted for aiding new homes and educational institutions for the blind. In order to form a definition of blindness, registration and enumeration of the blind, the government is requested to take immediate steps.

Sociologically, India is just beginning to come out of the second period, namely, the period of humanism in the social treatment of the blind. The record-making achievements of the
visually handicapped persons like Nagendra Nath Sen Gupta,¹ Bankim Chandra Roy Chowdhury, Dhirendra Nath Chattopadhyaya,² Subodh Chandra Roy, Sadhan Chandra Gupta, K. C. Dey, and others have shown to society that the adaptation to a normal life by the blind is possible. These prominent persons have overcome their handicaps and they are working as professors, lawyers, teachers, pastors, and members of legislative assemblies. They have paved the way for the blind for their social acceptance and are ushering in the third period of integration of the visually handicapped into society in India.

"According to the principles of sociology, social heritage is handed down through institutions of society such as the family, the local community, the state, the industries, the religious bodies, the school, the press, the customary recreation, the health-preserving institutions, and the institutions of a miscellaneous nature. The evolution of the treatment of the blind by and through these institutions have shown, amongst many things, that the good will of the sighted is the social heritage of the blind. 'Good will' is a fellowship, effective, hopeful and productive of joy and mutual understanding between the parties. The success of the blind has proved that they are capable of adjusting themselves to the industrial, economic and social order of the present day. In the integration process and program of society, the institutions or the organizations for the blind should therefore be considered as an intricate part of the society. Prevention of many maladjustments of the blind may be made effective by

¹ Gupta, Sen Nath Nagendra, M.A. in Philosophy and M.A. in Economics.
² Chowdhury, Roy Chandra Bankim, M.A. in History.
³ Chattopadhyaya, Nath Dhirendra, Cane work business, teacher, musician.
⁴ Roy, Chandra Subodh, M.A., B.L., M.A. in Education (Columbia University).
⁵ Gupta, Chandra Sadhan, M.A., B.L., (Sitting member of the Parliament).
⁶ Dey, K. C., Violinist and Singer.
affording them ample opportunities for education and training, and especially by creating a favorable public opinion and public attitude toward them. As knowledge and belief change, attitude also changes."

"The process in the integration and socialization of the blind can therefore be subdivided into four heads: 1. accommodation, 2. assimilation, 3. diffusion, and 4. amalgamation. Accommodation means organization of relationship between the classes or groups on a mutually satisfactory understanding. Under this category will be included the activities, clubs, agencies, associations, and the institutions that will have a socializing effect. These will assist the sighted to realize more and more, the fact that the visually handicapped can no longer be regarded as an appendage, but that they are definitely an integral part of modern society. On the other hand, the blind will also understand that they are being accepted on equal terms with the sighted.

Assimilation is the next step in the integrating process. Free and intelligent mingling of the two groups, namely the sighted and the visually handicapped, aid this process of socialization.

Diffusion means distribution of the capable blind on equal terms with the sighted in business, industries, and vocations in which they will be gainfully engaged and employed on their merit. This process aids in creating an opinion in favor of the rest of the handicapped group.

Amalgamation means inbreeding of peoples. Friendship and intermarriages between the capable blind and the desirable sighted is a sign of realizing this end."

The purpose of educating the blind should be a process of guidance for life. During the period of training and education, pupils will grow in social activities not only preparing for future life, but actually enjoying living and

7 Halder, R. M., op. cit., p. 84.
8 Ibid., p. 85
learning how to live—inculcating in themselves the right attitude toward life. In other words, pupils will be guided to help themselves. Teaching by socialization should be the principal method. Ample opportunities must be given to allow blind people to take part in recreational, cultural and social activities with the seeing. Since most of India's blind people come from rural areas, the system of education should be based upon the "Wardha system of education" as expounded by Mahatma Gandhi. The object of this system of education is to provide both theoretical training and practical training in crafts, so that after receiving this kind of education for six or seven years, boys and girls have avenues for earning their living. These basic schools are intended as the base of the educational structure in India. If the blind boys and girls living in rural areas are to be provided with useful education, these basic schools might play an important part in imparting education to blind children along with the sighted. There should be at least one teacher who is trained to teach the braille system to the blind. This teacher will be in a position to help both the sighted and the blind students, but specially engaged in looking after the interests of the blind boys and girls.

The blind as social beings have a right to normal life, education and employment. Trained and educated under conducive environments, they are capable of making valuable
contributions to society. In the integrating process of society the blind and the institutions for their education, amelioration and rehabilitation must be regarded as an integral part of society. This will be the basis of mutual understanding and good will.

The school life activity should be more systematized, more constructive and more comprehensive. Socialization must be one of the chief objectives of the education of the blind, in order that they may be accepted by the community.
CHAPTER VIII

AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM--BASIC EDUCATION AND
VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR THE BLIND IN INDIA

What is Basic Education?

"85 per cent of India's people live in 700,000 rural villages and the percentage of literacy is very low, not even 15 per cent."

Mahatma Gandhi--the Father of the Indian Nation--was intensely conscious of the crying need to improve the village life by making the people literate and developing cottage industries. It was also his deep concern for the creation of a non-violent, self-sufficient and cooperative society, he gave us a definite scheme of education known as the "Wardha System of Education," or better known nowadays as the "Basic Education." With the advent of Independence, the Basic Education scheme has been accepted by the Central government and the State governments, as the basis for providing compulsory primary education to all Indian boys and girls and it is now under way. The object of these basic schools is to provide both theoretical training and training in crafts, so that after receiving primary training, boys and girls may have avenues for

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1 Reid, W. W., Methodism and India, Editorial Department, Joint Division of Education and Cultivation, Board of Missions and Church Extension, The Methodist Church, New York 11, New York.
earning their living. These basic schools are intended to
form the base of the educational structure in India.

The Philosophy of Basic Education:

Basic Education is part of "Nai Talim"—New Education—a
plan of productive and cooperative activity covering the whole
of life and designed to shape and conserve a new social order
based upon non-violence and truth.

"Gandhi's city of truth was not a great and diverse
center of commerce and government. It was a simple com-
munity in which neighbors could seek unity. He did not
want a strong government but strong communities. In
fact, he wanted no government at all, for he wanted men
to govern themselves—spinners, weavers, farmers, artisans,
and traders, and not simply capitalists, lawyers, pro-
fessors, politicians and princes. He did not want such
machinery and factories as would break the oneness of
simple community life. He wanted to adopt machinery to
that life and not change the life for the sake of the
machinery. He said, "The machine should not be allowed
to cripple the limbs of man"....He said, "Do not believe
that multiplication of wants and machinery contributed to
supply them, is taking the world a single step near its
goal...."

The educational system which has developed in India during
the last century, is intended to supply the manpower needed for
a vast and complex administrative machinery. The governments
both Central and Provincial, demanded an army of bureaucrats
and clerks and the schools supplied the demands. This system
of English Education is in no sense national and it never de-
signed to meet the needs of the vast majority of the nation who

2 Maurer, Herrymon, Great Soul, Doubleday and Company, Inc.,
Garden City, New York, 1948, pp. 81-82.
live in villages. The tragedy of this system of education lies in the creation of a special "educated class" and has also confronted us with the wretched spectacle of the "educated unemployed," unable to get the kind of job which they know how to do, and unfitted by their education to turn their hands to anything else.

Romain Rolland says: "Gandhi hopes to organize gradually higher schools that will spread education broadcast throughout the towns and filter it down to the masses, so that--ere long the suicidal cleavage between educated and the uneducated will be bridged. And as an effect of giving an industrial education to the genteel folks and a literary education to the industrial classes, the unequal distribution of wealth and social discontent will be considerably checked. In opposition to European educational methods, which neglect manual work to be part of the curriculum of all the schools from the lowest grades up. He believes it would be excellent for children to pay for their tuition by a certain amount of spinning. In this way, they would learn to earn their living and become independent. As for the education of the heart, which Europe neglects absolutely, Gandhi would have stress laid upon it from the very first."3

The time has come to replace it by a truly national system of education which will reflect and conserve the social ideals as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi to establish a just, peaceful, non-acquisitive social order on the unshakeable rock of non-violence and truth.

The Significance of Basic Education:

K.G. Saiyidain, Educational Advisor to Bombay government, in introducing the Basic curriculum has stated

thus:

"It attempts to adjust the growing child to his environment and to exploit the resources of the environment for educative purposes. It makes the child's early undifferentiated but active, rich and practical experiences its starting point, links them up with one another, gradually introduces order, system and meaning into them and bridges the gulf between concrete experiences and book knowledge. It is an activity curriculum, not confining its outlook to the imparting of information about certain subjects but seeking to encourage various kinds of activities through which the child acquires knowledge and also develops certain significant social, intellectual and moral attitudes. It stresses the principles of coordination and correlation and instead of introducing a large number of isolated "subjects," it seeks to combine those which naturally "belong together," e.g. social studies and general sciences. Moreover, in drawing up the syllabus in each subject, it seeks to organize the essential subject matter into a number of significant and comprehensive units which are not remote from life but closely related to it, e.g. in science, it prefers to study such concrete every day topics as water, fire, air, food, the human body, which bring the various sciences into intelligible relationship, rather than abstract scientific laws logically arranged according to the needs of the adult mind. It gives to craft its overdue but essential place in the curriculum and attempts to provide co-ordinated training of the hand and mind. Thus, by basing itself on the psychology of the child mind on one hand and the sociological requirements of the community on the other, it aims at bringing about a far-reaching and desirable revolution in the education imparted to children in our schools."4

The Pedagogic Method of Basic Education:

The pedagogic method of Basic Education is "learning by doing" which may seem to be identical with Dewey's philosophy of "learning by doing" and to a Westerner it may sound like a "Project method" or a "Unit Method;" but it is more than these.

From one point of view, it is not new at all, but as old as the wisdom of mankind. The children of the Stone Age learned their hunting, swimming and woodcraft as the children of remote forest tribes learn them today. Marjorie Sykes, a member of "Mai Talim" and an expert interpreter of Basic Education to the West, remarks, "that no one has ever yet found a method of teaching any skill, whether swimming or 'the three R's,' by any other method than practical experience." Reading, writing and counting cannot be learned at second hand, but only by actually reading, writing and counting for oneself. Every sensible person knows this and yet a lot of time is wasted in our schools by ignoring this elementary principle of learning. The emphasis on "learning by doing," obvious as it may seem, leads to a revolution in practice when it is properly carried out.

Basic Education: The Goal in View:

"Basic Education covers the eight years of childhood from six to fourteen, and constitutes the first stage of formal school training. It lays the foundation of successful living both physically and mentally; physically, by the stress it lays on bodily health and cleanly personal and social habits, and also by the muscular exercise, control and precision which are learned through manual labor and handicraft; mentally, by following out the principle of relating knowledge to life needs, which enables the "three R's" to be mastered with less delay and more efficiency than in many purely literary schools, and also by instilling into the pupils throughout the whole of school life the mental attitudes of cooperation and social responsibility."

In summing up the goal of Basic Education, Marjorie Sykes says:

"A boy or girl of fourteen years, healthy and vigorous in body, alert in mind, able to grow food and to make cloth, to cook and sew and keep the surroundings clean, able to perform the calculations needed for practical life and to speak and write clearly on many topics, to enjoy music and to appreciate beauty, has an excellent foundation on which to build any career one cares to name. Many of the so-called "higher" careers will call for several years of specialized further education, whether linguistic, scientific, technical or commercial. The child who has completed the Basic school course is likely to be better equipped to make an intelligent use of this further specialized knowledge, whatever it may be, than the average product of the passive parrot-learning which so often goes by the name of education. And whatever form our future society may take, there can be no doubt that India will need more than anything else reliable, cooperative, public spirited citizens in every walk of life. Basic Education is designed to produce them."

**Basic Education and the Blind:**

In the light of the above discussion, let us evaluate the present system of education of the blind in India. India is nearly 100 years behind in the education of the visually handicapped than some of the well-advanced countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Although the first school for the blind in India was started in 1887, the education of the blind is still in its infancy and has not been very effective or deep-rooted, for several reasons. From a questionnaire sent out by the Joint Committee to various schools for the blind in India, in an effort to discover the difficulties encountered in the enrollment of pupils, the

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The following facts have been revealed:

"The difficulties are poverty, the illiteracy of the parents, the ignorance of the public as well as of the parents regarding the education of the blind; and the parents' unwillingness to part with their children and want of employment after training."?  

The best recruiting propaganda is the demonstration of real successful candidates who have gone out from schools for the blind, after undergoing a prescribed course of studies. In this respect, few schools can boast of "the real success" of their past students, in the true sense of the word "success."

Dr. R. W. Halder conducted an extensive survey to find out the number of successful blind persons. Taking into account the 3,465 persons who have so far passed through the registers of all the existing schools for the blind in India during the last fifty-six years, it has been found that not even 10 percent have been successful, or fairly successful.

The report of the Joint Committee makes a rather important observation:

"In seeking the causes for poor success, in the field of employment, we might observe that to some extent, the school methods appear to have been copied in too wholesale a manner from Britain and America with too great a bias toward academic learning and too much emphasis on Braille....what we would urge is, a simple curriculum aimed at a practical objective--a simple elementary education to fit them to be skilled craftsmen in a workshop for the adult blind, which present circumstances in India

7 Mackenzie Report, op. cit., p. 46.

8 Halder, R. W., op. cit., p. 30.
indicate, will be of necessity the main outlet for employment at least for this generation."

Sir Mackenzie, the chairman of the Joint Committee, advises that,

"It is better to be marching in step with the social advances of the people, rather than attempting undue short cuts straight to the point which the Western blind welfare has reached."  

At present, in most of the schools for the blind in India, besides the "three Rs," a few handicrafts and music are taught. The growing importance and usefulness of teaching arts, crafts and industries have been greatly recognized by the educators of the blind and nowadays more emphasis is being given to include these subjects in the school curriculum. However, one can hardly say that the present educational system is craft centered but the truth is far from it. The aim of the education of the blind, in a wider sense, should be guidance for life, socialization and economic independence besides physical, mental, moral and spiritual developments. The writer of this thesis has been thoroughly convinced that the present system of literary education imparted to the blind in India is devoid of life situation and does not meet the demands of the present generation. So, the introduction of basic curriculum in all the existing schools for the blind in India, will rectify the major defects of the present system of education. From the point of utility, psychology and

9 Mackenzie Report, op. cit., p. 46.
10 Ibid., p. 46.
methodology of Basic Education, the blind boys and girls will be better benefited than the present stereotyped literary education and the result will be the total assimilation and integration of the blind into their home and community.

Basic Education and the Rural Blind:

Most of the blind children in India live in rural areas and to educate them, "Residential schools" are most desirable; but they are too expensive to have special schools entirely for the blind in each village or district. The second best will be to consider a scheme similar to the plan that is being tried and found quite successful in Oregon, and California, to impart education to the blind along with the sighted in day schools.

In the Second Five Year Plan, which the Republic of India has inaugurated on April 1, 1956, there are definite proposals to push forward the Basic Educational Scheme in rural areas under the jurisdiction of the local self-governing bodies of Village Panchayats, Municipalities and District Boards. So, in every Union, there is likely to be one or more Basic schools set up in the near future. Since most of the blind children live in villages, the writer is exploring the ways and means of imparting Basic Education to blind


children along with the sighted, with some special arrangements and modifications.

In every Basic school in a village or district, provision must be made for the admittance of blind boys and girls along with the sighted in day classes. For those blind children who are not within walking distance from the Basic school, noon meals must be provided and, if funds are available, boarding houses for the blind attached to the Basic school will be most welcome. And it should be under the direct supervision of a resident Warden, preferably a woman teacher who is well-trained to look after the interests of the blind children. Care must be taken that the boarding house should not be converted into a permanent home for the destitute blind. The blind children may be encouraged to go home during weekends, vacations, and festive occasions.

The success of blind children attending day classes very largely depends upon well-trained teachers, Braille materials and other special appliances to teach the blind. Every Basic school must be provided with at least one qualified Basic-trained teacher with an additional training to teach the blind. For this purpose, the following proposals may be taken into consideration:

(1) Short term courses to train teachers for the blind may be instituted throughout the country and such training centers may be affiliated with the existing schools for the blind.
(2) In the teacher training program for normal children and also at Basic Education training centers, a general course dealing with the education, psychology and methods of teaching the blind with special emphasis on Braille and special appliances, may be instituted as an optional course.

(3) To overcome the acute teacher shortage for the blind in rural areas, the services of itinerant Braille teachers can be made available for each Union.

In India, especially in rural areas, a good many of the teachers are working as village postmasters, cooperative inspectors, agricultural inspectors and special officers in community projects. So, a special allowance or an increment in salary would be an incentive for the prospective teachers of the blind. Above all, a spirit of service must be inculcated among the teachers to serve the blind in rural areas. A professional magazine dealing with the problems of the teachers of the blind in day schools, will be of much help in imparting education to the blind children in Basic schools. So, to obtain capable young teachers for the blind, the author's proposals are worth trying for far reaching effects.

Resource Room, Braille Literature and Special Appliances for the Blind:

In a Basic school where blind children are admitted, a special room known as the "Resource Room" or "Home Room" must be set apart to teach Braille writing, reading and arithmetic.
to blind children. A small collection of Braille literature, including textbooks, special apparatus, models, embossed maps, Braille writers, Taylor frames, and many other modern special devices for the blind must be procured in the resource room.

As to theoretical education, there may be joint classes in some subjects both for seeing and blind children. But, it will be necessary to hold special classes for blind children in such subjects as arithmetic and geography and for correcting their daily exercises in Braille, and so, the blind children are expected to go to the resource room at certain periods, to get the necessary coaching from the specialist teacher.

As regards outdoor activities such as gardening, games, sports, and participation in social programs, the blind children will join with the seeing. Since the Basic Education is centered around crafts, the blind boys and girls will receive the practical training in crafts along with the seeing.

Music is considered an important subject in the Basic Educational curriculum. So, training in music is very useful and profitable for the blind student in rural areas.

This educational system is so devised that all who receive this training may become efficient workers with the possibility of being able to earn their living after they have gone through their course.
The Vocational Training and the Adult Blind in India:

The recent Far East Conference on work for the blind held at Tokyo in October, 1955, deserves special mention. One of the important topics discussed at the meeting was "Vocational Training for the Blind." Miss Genevieve Caulfield, Vocational Director, Foundation for the Welfare and Education of the Blind in Thailand, emphasized at great length the need for vocational training for the blind in the Far East countries, so that the blind need not necessarily be a burden to society and they can be reclaimed by the community as useful and contributing members. The same viewpoint was expressed by the Indian delegation. The purpose of imparting vocational training to the adult blind is twofold. It aims at economic independence of the blind by following a craft or industry as a vocation for life and secondly, it is intended to make use of the long hours of inactivity of the blind in a more profitable way. "An idle mind is the workshop of the devil," is applicable to the blind also and hence they are to be engaged in some activity. "Work" is the birthright of every able bodied person and the blind, too, have a right to claim it.

Experts on blind welfare are agreed that the real and ultimate test of all blind welfare service is the number of blind employed in congenial and profitable occupations and earning their living as independent and self-respecting

members of the community. The Adult Blind Training Center at Dehra Dun (formerly of St. Dusun's in India) is doing a marvelous job in this direction of vocational training and rehabilitative work.

In India, it is believed that the advance to the sheltered workshop stage is the immediate practical step for the following reasons. The vast majority of the blind belong to the poorer and less intelligent section of the community; and this step offers the most immediate good to the greatest number. It is the speediest way to create an outlet for the blind which is sufficiently attractive and remunerative to compete with the old system of begging. Finally, it is the least costly way of meeting the situation.

In order to impart vocational training to the adult blind, the author has some definite proposals to make. According to the present educational policy of the Central and State governments, very soon there will be at least one Post-Basic Educational Center in every district. Productive and creative work is fundamental to post-basic education, for it tackles the fear of want at the very root. Post-basic students are given thorough training in village crafts such as oil press, poultry, agriculture, bee-keeping, weaving, the manufacture of palm jaggery, etc. Blind adults up to the age of thirty, may be encouraged to attend these post-basic centers, in order to learn the crafts and trades they are interested in. Selection of a particular trade for a particular trainee will have to
be made with a full knowledge of the individual's home background and interests.

Some of the crafts and cottage industries which the adult blind can be profitably engaged in are basketry, cotton handloom weaving, mat weaving, cane work, leather work, coir making, dairy farming, poultry raising, agriculture, etc. The one definite advantage in offering these vocations to the blind, is that they can easily be absorbed into the community after their training and there will be fewer problems of rehabilitation.

The author cannot close this chapter without stressing the thought that has become more and more recognized as a guiding principle in training the adult blind for indigenous occupations. John E. Jarvis, in an article, "World Review of Work for the Blind," makes an important observation in this direction. He says:

"If they succeed, schemes such as this may well be relevant to underdeveloped territories throughout the world as our Western system, based on schools, training centers and employment services, is appropriate to our own economy. This estimate of their value was endorsed last year by the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, when it expressed the conviction that the fundamental training and resettlement of indigenous rural populations should be affected with due regard to their family and community background, and in the case of newly blinded adults, to their past employment—usually as small holders and village craftsmen. Specialized training centers of this type were envisaged instead of the concentration of such people in cities and towns in new sheltered workshops. Public and private agencies in such areas were recommended to give serious consideration to the pilot scheme known as the Shamba Training..."
Scheme, which is now being conducted by the Uganda Foundation for the Blind with the help of the British Empire Society for the Blind.15

The author hopes that similar programs will be more beneficial to the adult blind in India. It is worth trying.


CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to develop public understanding about the magnitude of the social and educational problems of the blind in India.

Chapter I, the introduction, deals with the purpose, the scope, the limitations, the specific procedures, and the justification for writing this thesis.

Chapter II gives a brief review of early voluntary efforts, the beginnings of schools, the entry of government and public bodies into the education and welfare activities of the blind in Europe and the United States.

Chapter III gives a brief historical survey of what has been done to uplift the blind in India in the way of educational and welfare activities.

Chapter IV deals with the extent, causes, and prevention of blindness in India.

Chapter V discusses the attitudes of the public toward the blind, and Chapter VI deals with the attitude of the blind toward the seeing public.

Chapter VII discusses a general program for the social acceptance of the blind in India.

Chapter VIII deals with an educational program for basic education and vocational training of the blind in rural areas.
Conclusion:

For want of a precise definition and adequate data regarding the number of blind persons according to age groups, the cause of the blind has suffered greatly. So, for compulsory registration and enumeration of the blind, it is imperative that a standard definition of blindness be formulated.

Much of the blindness in India is preventable and curable if adequate medical aid and general knowledge of preventive measures are imparted to the people who live in villages. Propaganda through the modern mediums such as films, newspapers, posters, etc., should be made through the length and breadth of India to dispel the colossal ignorance of the masses. Compulsory vaccination against smallpox and other contagious diseases; protection against and treatment of venereal diseases; the application of Crede's prophylactic in the eyes of newborn babies; and above all a well-balanced diet and timely and proper treatment of eye diseases by ophthalmologists, will save many a person who otherwise would become blind. For a vigorous campaign against blindness, a national organization for the prevention of blindness must be formed as early as possible.

The present attitude of the sighted toward the blind is not congenial but discouraging because of some religious misconceptions and superstitious beliefs regarding blindness and blind people. In order to remove such biased feelings, the public should be told the truth, and thus their attitude
must be changed. So, also, the attitude of the blind toward the seeing public needs correction. To create a better understanding between the sighted and the blind, and also to bridge these two groups, a program has been worked out for the social integration and acceptance of the blind in India. Integration and socialization of the blind can be carried on through the processes of accommodation, assimilation, diffusion and amalgamation. As has already been pointed out, under favorable environments the blind can become productive and contributive members of society. The sentimental sympathy and pity alone will not be able to do much good in raising the standards of the blind, but rational kindliness should be extended to them. Blindness is in itself a great handicap. The load should be lightened by offering opportunities for enduring social contact with the sighted. The darkness under which they are laboring should be dispelled by an assuring message of faith, hope and good will.

In India the blind have always been considered as a drag upon society, but they can be made independent, self-supporting and useful citizens if the public and the government are prepared to give them useful education, proper training and employment. The need of the hour is that begging by the blind should be stopped by the enforcement of law. People should be discouraged from giving alms to the blind, and instead encouraged to help the existing schools, homes and institutions for the blind. They need money and support from the public
for the very effective services they are rendering to ameliorate the pitiable condition of the blind. At the same time, financial help should be given to the needy blind through governmental and social agencies working for the welfare of the blind.

The education of the blind children must be made compulsory. Toward this goal, the enlightened public, with the help of governmental agencies, should provide every facility by starting special schools for the blind or by admitting blind children in ordinary day classes with the sighted, provided there are special teachers to teach Braille and guard the interests of the blind pupils. The blind children of rural areas must be encouraged to attend basic schools along with the normal children if a special school for the blind is not within the reach of their home. The aim of education of the blind should be social integration by making them economically independent and cooperative members of the community. It is for this purpose that the author is advocating basic education for all blind children in India, and it is a sound system of education in every aspect, based on the cultural, social and economic background of India. For the reasons mentioned above, the existing schools for the blind in India should change their curricula to the Basic Education scheme of our national government as early as possible. Rehabilitation centers, sheltered workshops, and after care homes for the blind may be a timely help or relief for those
who are struggling under the handicap of blindness. But, for all the capable adult blind, vocational training should be provided through the post-basic schools, so that after being trained in some craft or industry, they can be very easily absorbed in some remunerative occupation in their own communities. The public can help the blind by employing capable blind persons in remunerative jobs, patronizing goods made by the blind, and also by patronizing blind musicians and orchestras on festive occasions.

The religious and social clubs, the Scout movement, and the Red Cross must reach out to include the blind in their activities. With the help of selfless volunteers and untiring workers for the blind, "Blind Week" may be arranged in big cities as well as in small village areas for wide publicity and propaganda, to foster better public understanding about the problems of the blind and the speedy amelioration of their grievances.

Thus, with patience and perseverance, by developing public understanding about the problems of the blind in India, and trusting in God for guidance and strength, the author looks forward to brighter days when the enlightened public and the welfare state of India will come forward to serve the blind in order that they may become happy, contented and independent citizens making useful contributions to society.
"Emancipation of the blind throughout the globe has begun. When I consider what is done for the blind by people who see, I have a bright vision of life upon earth, when hearts and brains shall work for the good of all. I look forward to a new era when America shall join hands with all other countries, when there shall exist one family, the human race; one law, peace; one need, wisdom; one means, work—and God as Love Supreme."

Helen Keller

1 First All India Conference, op. cit., p. 14.
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