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Integrated education of the blind with the sighted in recognized schools in India

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INTEGRATED EDUCATION OF THE BLIND WITH THE SIGHTED IN RECOGNISED SCHOOLS IN INDIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India is an ancient land, with its present population, according to the 1961 Census Report, in the neighbourhood of 438 million people. There are fifteen states where different regional languages are spoken. According to a report of the Government of India issued in 1961, although no reliable statistics are available, it is believed that the blind population in India is about two million.[1] The story of the blind in India is as old as the Mahabharata and persists to the present. During this long period the country has had a chain of illustrious blind individuals who have contributed, in their own way to the political, social, and religious life of their fellowmen. Few as these individuals are, their impact on the social and religious life of their times is immense, though not yet fully appreciated.

With the possible exception of Egypt, India has the highest incidence of blindness in the world. The problems of the blind in India are of colossal magnitude, and an all-out

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1. Education and Welfare of the Handicapped, A Report for 1960-61, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1961, p. 1.

effort is necessary if it is to be tackled adequately and efficiently. As in all fields of social work the progress in the field of welfare work for the blind in India has been painfully slow. The first school for the blind was established in Amritsar, Punjab State, by a missionary, Annie Sharp, in 1887. During the 75 years that have followed, although a number of schools and institutions have been established, no great progress has been achieved. Most of these institutions continue to be asylums and orphanages where blind children and adults receive shelter and food, but very little education or training. In the past ten years, however, some definite progress has been achieved in welfare work for the blind. The Government is now taking an active interest in the planning of welfare services for the handicapped, including the blind. The public is also becoming aware of the various problems of blindness. Social welfare programmes, implemented by voluntary organisations with the assistance of the central and state governments have developed as an integral part of the Five Year Plans. The majority of the blind in India are children or adults of working age, as opposed to the conditions in the western countries where blindness is now beginning to be a problem mainly of old age.

The attitude of society toward the handicapped has passed through three main stages. Ancient society denied to

the disabled the same rights and privileges as those enjoyed by the able-bodied. The advent of religion led to the gradual recognition of their rights. The era of technological progress, a notable contribution of which to human thought has probably been the development of a rational and scientific approach to many human problems, has revolutionised the traditional concept of disability. Today, it is being increasingly appreciated that the loss of sight does not necessarily close for the victim the realm of knowledge, nor does it always deprive him of the ability to do productive work. In fact, it has been rightly said that emphasis should be placed not on what a person lacks, but on what he has. This, in essence, is the philosophy of modern educational services which aim at the complete integration of the blind individual into the community. Sighted society should abandon its age-old traditional attitude of viewing blindness with compassion, pity and charity, regarding the blind as helpless, useless, and losses to society. Society should afford adequate opportunity by providing education, training, and employment to enable the blind to be on their own feet. The ultimate goal should be the fullest possible development of the capacities of blind persons, and their fullest possible participation in and contribution to the community, so that they may 'realise their best selves,' as Harold Laski would put it. The blind only ask of the seeing just one

thing - an unemotional and unbiased approach.

Statement of Problem

The estimated present number of legally blind school-age children in India is 600,000,[2] whereas the existing 100 residential schools and institutions for the blind cater to the educational needs of less than one per cent of the blind youngsters, and these residential schools are located only in big cities. As such, blind children from small towns and rural areas are not able to take advantage of the limited educational opportunities being provided. The difficulties are poverty, 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 for purposes of receiving education at residential schools located at a considerable distance. The aim of the education of the blind, in a wider sense, should be guidance for life, socialisation, and economic independence, besides physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development.

Residential schools, however well equipped they may be for the educational and social development of a blind youngster, cannot provide through visits and limited contact

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2. Swaran Ahuja, Unpublished paper, "Care of Blind Children", read at Blind Welfare Conference held in Bombay in 1959, p. 1.

with the seeing public the real life experiences necessary to his entire development as a socially integrated person.

It is apparent that the present system of education imparted to the blind in India is devoid of life situations and does not meet the demands of the present generation. It is likely that the integrated programme of the education of the blind with the sighted now being followed and encouraged in the United States and other countries, if adopted in India, will not only educate a larger number of the blind but will also enable them to become socially secure and economically independent and teach the seeing about blind people.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe a suggested programme of integrated education of the blind with the sighted in recognised schools in India.

Residential schools serve their purpose well, but they are expensive, besides making it necessary to remove the child from his home and community. This removal of the child from his near and dear ones disrupts the family integrity. The integrated programme of education will offer immeasurable possibilities of education for the hundreds of thousands of educable blind youngsters. Such institutions in India do not make much effort to integrate their blind students with the

sighted in social or extra curricular activities. The younsters live a life of complete segregation. They are away from the true realities of life situations. Living among sightless peers, being taught mostly by visually handicapped teachers, does not allow the blind child to overcome his frequent inferiority complex, sensitivity, and the hostile attitude toward sighted society. Their outlook is limited.

During recent years, education has been made free and compulsory for every child up through the primary level. Blind children are, therefore, automatically included in every plan for education, but unfortunately very little has been done for them. Blindness should not be considered as a deterrent, for blindness does not connote ineducability. Compulsory education of the blind should not be obstructed by tradition, parental prerogative, fetish, opinion, or prejudice. Education without discrimination is the corner stone of the future. A programme of integrated education will give the blind youngster an even chance to prove his worth to sighted society, which will, in turn, recognise him as a capable member of the community and afford him suitable opportunities for economic stability.

It is probable that many problems of the blind can be solved through an integrated programme of education in India. This programme is psychologically, socially, and

educationally sound and economically feasible.

Scope of Study

1. This study will examine published and unpublished material, available at Perkins School for the Blind and Boston University, on the education of the blind in the United States and other countries, with special reference to the education of the blind with the sighted. The administrators of Perkins School claim with great pride that the Blindiana Library at Perkins is one of the best-equipped libraries of its kind in the world. There will also be included a review of available published and unpublished material and reports from schools for the blind and from the National Association for the Blind in India.

2. The Third Five Year Plan of the Government of India, which was inaugurated on April 1, 1961, will also be examined, along with the free compulsory educational system now being developed in India.

On the basis of these studies and information gained therefrom a system of integrated education of the blind with the sighted in public or private schools in India, and the advantages thereof, will be discussed in this thesis. It is not intended to include in this study the education of the preschool blind child, the education of the blind child with

multiple handicaps, or other welfare activities on a large scale. The programme to be described herein would be suitable and beneficial only to those blind youngsters who are otherwise physically fit, mentally sound, and socially adjusted.

Chapter I of this thesis covers the introduction, the problem, the purpose and the scope of this study. Chapter II will review the work being done in the field of education and welfare of the blind in the United States of America and some of the European countries. Chapter III will describe briefly the background and future plans of educational and welfare activities of the blind in India. Chapter IV will discuss the advantages of integrated education of the blind with the sighted. Chapter V will include the actual programme and how it may be implemented. Chapter VI, the last chapter, will give a summary of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND WELFARE ACTIVITIES FOR THE BLIND IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

In order to describe a programme of integrated education of the blind in India it would be most appropriate to consider here the work in the field of the education of the blind in other parts of the world, especially in the United States and some European countries, with special reference to the education of the blind with the sighted in regular schools.

When the first residential schools were founded in Europe and in the United States, no other way of educating blind children seemed feasible than segregating them from the seeing in special residential schools. At that time, the blind were, to a large extent, set apart from the rest of the people, not only for their education, but also for their subsequent life. In this scheme of things, the residential school was a self-sufficient and self-centred provision. In many parts of the world it has not yet moved far beyond this stage.

During the last few decades, however, there has been an increasing awareness in society that the blind should be integrated into the seeing world and educated accordingly

with the sighted. It seems reasonable to say that the blind child should have the love and affection of his family unit by residence at home with his brothers and sisters and his parents and friends around the home. Furthermore, the community to which the blind child belongs needs him; children are the richest resources of the community. It is now being felt that removing the child from the community is removing the responsibility of education, training, and job employment from the community where it belongs.

United States of America

Since the establishment of the first public school class for blind children in Chicago in 1900, the movement has not grown rapidly, but it has grown steadily. According to the 1947 report of the American Printing House for the Blind, there were enrolled in these classes throughout the United States 433 children in some 20 cities. [1]

The real significance of the movement lies in the evidence of the changing philosophy in the education of the

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1. George F. Meyer, "Education of Blind Children in the Public Schools," Blindness, edited by Paul A. Zahl (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 109.

blind and its impact upon accepted procedures in the education of blind children in residential schools. The day school plan was the first departure from the generally accepted method of bringing all the blind children of the state together in a centrally located institution where they were maintained and taught for nine to ten months of the year, returning home in most cases only for the summer vacation. The day school plan made the child an integral part of the public school system of his own community. He was one of a class of from five to ten pupils placed under the direction of a teacher trained to give specialised instruction in Braille, typewriting, craft work, and other special subjects necessary in the instructional curriculum of the child.[2]

A brief resume of the situation in the United States is available in the pamphlet entitled "Blindness - Some Facts and Figures" published by the American Foundation for the Blind, in 1960:

> In 1959 there was estimated to be in the United States at least 9,000 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

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2. Ibid.

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 special class teacher available during the entire day or with itinerant supervision by a resource teacher available at regular or needed intervals.
>
> In 1959 there were over 13,000 blind children attending school. It is estimated that 50 per cent of them were enrolled in one of the fifty residential schools for the blind distributed over forty-one states and Puerto Rico. The other 50 per cant were educated with seeing children as stated above. 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. 3

In an address, "The Role of the Residential School in the Education of Blind Children," delivered by Berthold Lowenfeld, he stated that early in the twentieth century when the first regular school classes were started both plans of educating the blind, that is, the residential schools and

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3. Blindness - Some Facts and Figures (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1960), pp. 5-6.

public school classes co-existed without any particular co-operation or relationship. He further stated that in California about 25 per cent of the blind children were educated in the residential schools, while about 75 per cent were attending public schools in their home communities.[4] In fact, the public school movement for the education of blind children has in the past few years gained impressive force to such an extent that in 1959, as stated above, there were more than 6,000 blind students in regular day school classes.

The residential schools in the United States have also realised the importance of integrating the blind with the sighted as members of the community. Many opportunities are provided for their students in the form of social and extra-curricular activities such as dancing, athletic competitions, scouting, and skating. Most of the staff members, including teachers in such schools, are sighted. They contribute toward socialisation of their blind pupils.

During the past years an increasing number of residential schools have either all or some of their high school

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4. Berthold Lowenfeld, "The Role of the Residential School in the Education of Blind Children," address delivered at the Northwest Conference on the Education of Children Who are Blind, at Portland, Oregon, October, 1957, reprinted from Concerning the Education of Blind Children, compiled by G.L. Abel (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1959), p. 24.

students attend regular local high schools. There they learn to adjust to work and friendly competition with their seeing peers while they are still assisted by the residential schools. This assistance extends to tutoring in subjects in which a blind student might find it difficult to follow regular classroom instruction, and to the reading of textbooks which are not available in Braille.

Blind students attending regular schools have the advantage of being able to select, from the great variety of courses usually offered, those in which they are especially interested. However, they must also take all the courses which are required in view of any future college education. It seems that most of the educators of the blind believe that such students from residential schools are successful in such courses as geometry, algebra, physics, and chemistry, which some schools for the blind do not include in their curriculum because they are considered to be too difficult. An important part of the public school programme is that the blind youngsters learn to use the means of public transportation to and from the public schools. They also take part in the social and extracurricular activities of the school according to their individual interests.

The need for socialisation of the blind was recognised

as early as 1871 by Samuel Gridley Howe, a pioneer in the education of the blind and the director of the first school for the blind in the United States, who believed:

> With the view of lessening all differences between blind and seeing children, I would have the blind attend the common schools in all cases where it is feasible. Depend upon it, one of the future reforms in the education of the blind will be to send blind children to the common schools to be taught with seeing children in all those branches not requiring visual illustrations, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, vocational music and the like. We shall avail ourselves of the special institution less, and the common schools more. [5]

It is generally felt in this country that the day school programme makes it possible for the blind youngster to become socially and emotionally well adjusted, as Meyer has expressed:

> The underlying philosophy of the day school class has been to adjust each blind child individually to the regular grade curriculum, to supplement instruction in such areas as might be required to accomplish well-rounded progress on the part of the child, and to keep in mind constantly the fundamentals of educational adjustment to the end that at the conclusion of his school career the child may not only have met the scholastic requirements but will as well have made satisfactory adjustment in his emotional and social life.

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5. S.G. Howe, Letter dated August 7, 1871, read at the Second Convention of the American Instructors of the Blind held at Indianapolis, Indiana, in August, 1871, Proceedings published by Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871, p. 17.

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> With his entry into the daily life of the community, going to and from school, with his daily contacts in the classroom with teachers and pupils, to a greater degree his problems became those of his associates.
>
> These new contacts, and the problems raised in the minds of educators inside and outside the field of the blind, bearing upon educational objectives and the best means for accomplishing them, gradually gave rise to changes in the practices of residential schools, where the bulk of blind children continued to receive instruction.
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> The emphasis placed by educators on the importance of such factors as the home environment, family ties, day-to-day contacts in normal social relationships with the sighted world, the realism of social and economic influences inherent in family and community life, stimulated progressive residential schools to change their time-honored procedures. A home visitor or field agent was employed to strengthen and maintain the contact between the school and the child's home. [6]

In the United States each blind child is educated according to his individual needs, and the whole educational programme is flexible, recognising that the changing needs of the child may require a move from one type of programme to the other.

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6. George F. Meyer, "Education of Blind Children in the Public Schools," Blindness, edited by Paul A. Zahl (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 110.

A survey made by Buell in 1953 to determine the trend in the direction of public high school education for blind pupils, from the point of view of the residential schools, found that 15 to 20 per cent of potential residential high school youth were being sent into the public school system for part or all of their education. They joined another 12 per cent of high school pupils who have received all of their education in the public school system. The residential schools cooperating in the study were divided into three groups, whose policy was, respectively, (a) to have boys and girls remain at residential schools, (b) to send some pupils to public high schools, and (c) to send all pupils above a certain grade to public high schools.[7]

There are three methods of educating the blind in public schools in the United States, and some variations are used in different schools. According to various writers and authorities in the field the following are the methods in progress in various parts of the country:

1. Cooperative Plan. The blind child is enrolled in a special home room where a teacher of blind children is available to him and assists him in his work. Except for

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7. Charles Buell, "Where should Blind Youth be Educated?" Exceptional Children, May, 1953, Vol. XIX, No. 8, pp. 304-308, and 327.

guidance in basic skills of reading and writing Braille and help in special subjects like arithmetic and geography the child attends regular classes and participates in day-to-day work with his seeing peers. The special teacher or the home room teacher cooperates closely with the regular classroom teachers and supplies the special material and equipment to enable the blind child to keep pace with his seeing classmates.

2. Integrated Plan. The blind child is enrolled in a regular classroom with a special teacher of blind children available to him in a resource room. The blind child is referred by the regular teacher to the resource teacher whenever the need for specialised instruction arises or when the child needs planning of his programme or special guidance.

The difference between these two plans is one of emphasis. In the first, the special resource teacher is responsible, whereas in the second, the regular classroom teacher carries the responsibility for the blind child's progress. In the integrated plan it is important that the school administrators be ready to accept the blind child. Above all, the regular classroom teacher has to want the blind child in his class, or the principle of integration will be lost.

3. Itinerant Teacher Plan. This plan provides for

the enrollment of the blind child in a regular class of the public school, where he and his teacher receive the special services of an itinerant teacher trained to teach the blind. In such a plan the blind child is required to be more independent and resourceful than in either of the other two plans. In most of the schools the services of an itinerant teacher are available at special intervals, usually once or twice a week. Although this programme is more useful for junior and senior high school students, some schools utilize itinerant services even for elementary school blind children. It is the primary duty of the itinerant teacher to see that his students receive the necessary Braille textbooks, recorded texts, teaching equipment, and, probably most important of all, the reader service which will enable them to learn the subject matter not available in Braille or recorded form. It is apparent that this programme is more economical than the other two. Blind children living in rural areas are especially benefitted by such itinerant services.

Beside the plans referred to above, there is another plan being followed in the United States in which the residential school for the blind and an itinerant teacher cooperate. This combination of services is called the Oregon Plan. Under this plan when a child is ready for public school placement the itinerant teacher takes the responsibility for

him, makes the necessary arrangements for his admission and follows up with further assistance. All ninth grade residential school students, and children of any other grade level who seem capable and adequately prepared, are sent to public schools for their further education. This programme emphasizes the need of flexibility of a system which will adjust to the individual's requirements, and not force the individual into some preconceived pattern of education. If, at one time or another, the blind child can be helped better at the residential school he may return to it for as long as it seems necessary. Partially seeing children are also included in such a programme.

The Oregon Plan is under the direction of a cooperative council, which considers each individual case for educational placement, and on the basis of this recommendation a final decision is made by the parents of the child and the school district. There is no doubt in the writer's mind as John W. Jones has said:

> More and more parents, through the efforts of preschool workers, are coming nearer to the goal of genuine acceptance and of understanding the needs of their handicapped children. It is assumed that such children when allowed to remain in the rich environment of home, community, and public school and provided with proper supervision will reap greater profits by living in - rather than preparing for - the sighted world.[8]

8. J.W.Jones, "Developments in Oregon's Program for Educating Blind Children," Exceptional Children, January, 1953, Vol. XIX, No. 4, p. 4 (reprint).

Another example of state-wide programme is that of New Jersey, a state which has never seen fit to establish a residential school for the blind. Oregon and New Jersey illustrate the diagnostic approach to educational needs of blind children. The educational plan for blind children in New Jersey is basically similar to that of Oregon, with emphasis on resource teachers and itinerant staffs.[9]

General Review of the Work Done in European Countries

The specific information about the work for the blind in Western European countries, including France, Scotland, and England, has been taken from "Special Education of Physically Handicapped Children in Western Europe," by Wallace W. Taylor and Isabelle W. Taylor, who have, in turn, collected their material from various other sources.

The problems of special education in Europe are basically the same as the problems of educating handicapped children in the United States. Progress has been slower in this field in European countries due to a variety of factors, such

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9. George F. Meyer, "Education of Blind Children in the Public Schools," Blindness, edited by Paul A. Zahl (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 110.

as the interruption of normal progress resulting from a depression, two world wars, and reconstruction. In Europe there was also the added burden of personnel shortage and damage to facilities and programmes during World War II.

In early days when the blind were educated in institutions, segregation of the blind necessitated clearer definition of blindness. At present these definitions vary to a considerable extent. Many countries have no medical, legal, or educational definitions that are used uniformly throughout the country. There is a tendency today to use more flexible functional definitions in terms of educability. This permits the best placement of the individual child.

In most of the European countries education of the blind is now compulsory. There is increasing recognition of the importance of identifying the blind child at as early an age as possible, and beginning some kind of special instruction, either in the home or in special nursery school or kindergarten. There is much stress placed on the integration of the blind into the normal seeing world by providing opportunities to blind children to share recreational and social activities with sighted children.

In most countries where the blind do continue their academic work, they are usually expected to attend a regular secondary school and university, sometimes with a reader and

guide provided.

Teachers of the blind, like other special teachers, enjoy a higher salary scale in most countries in Europe than do teachers in regular schools. Better teachers, better curricula, and better public understanding, with consequent greater financial support, are responsible for the advances that have been made in the field of the education of the blind.

In the following few pages a brief account will be given of the educational and welfare activities for the blind in France, Scotland, and England.

France

The first school for the blind in France, also the first of its kind anywhere, was the Royal Institution for the Blind Youth founded in Paris in 1784 by Valentin Hauy, inventor of a system of printing ordinary type in large relief.

The blind are usually defined as those with less than 1/10 of normal vision, but sometimes they are classified as those with less than 1/20 of normal vision. An estimate by the French Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 1955 shows that out of 40,000 blind, 10,000 are of working age,

and 1,800 are children upto 20 years of age. Besides this, school authorities estimate that between 7,000 and 8,000 children have difficulty in following a normal course of instruction because of defective sight. Some visually handicapped children attend regular schools. A few blind youngsters go to the secondary schools in the larger cities, and about 20 blind students each year take university courses leading to a doctoral degree. In general, a blind child is accepted in a regular school if he has normal intelligence and is not multiply handicapped. There are 24 residential schools for the blind, and generally the partially sighted may also attend them. Nine of these 24 institutions offer vocational instruction as well as elementary school instruction. Sixteen trade schools and schools for rehabilitation for the blind admit adolescents of 14 or 15 years of age, although most are for adults.[10]

Placement of the blind begins with the measurement of the degree of blindness by eye specialists. Geographic location and the wishes of their parents determine the special

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10. Wallace W. Taylor and Isabelle W. Taylor, Special Education of Physically Handicapped Children in Western Europe (New York: International Society for the Welfare of Cripples, 1960), pp. 199, 201, 203.

school to which the blind child is sent. He is treated by a staff consisting of teachers, supervisors, a physician, and an ophthalmologist in all institutions, by a psychologist in some, and by social workers in the National Institution in Paris and in the governmental institutions. Occasionally, a child may be kept in a typical class with a special regime, or placed in a special class, or sent to an institution for the blind.[11]

Recreational programmes are provided for all groups of handicapped youngsters. The blind enjoy various sports, such as swimming, and concerts, and special holiday festivities. Some special adjustment in the school programmes is usually made for physically handicapped children. As in other countries, classes for the blind average between 10 and 15 pupils, in contrast to an average class of 40 pupils in the public schools for normal children.[12]

Vocational guidance, training, and placement are provided to some extent for children with all categories of handicap. A varied vocational training is provided for blind boys and girls. In Paris there has been organised a specialised orientation and placement service for blind and partially sighted children.

11. Ibid., p. 209.
12. Ibid., p. 211.

In the vocational training programme of the National Institution for Blind Youth, 45 per cent of the instruction is devoted to musical studies, and 22 per cent to industrial activities. In 1956 the Ministry of Education opened a training school for industrial work on the premises of the American Foundation for Overseas Blind in Paris. There is decreasing emphasis today on the traditional crafts for the blind, such as brush making and chair caning. A broad general background training is now given to enable them to specialise later in a greater variety of vocational opportunities. A decree of July, 1959, permits legally blind persons, if they otherwise meet the qualifications specified, to take the competitive examinations for positions in secondary and technical schools in certain subjects: philosophy, letters, modern languages, and musical education. [13]

The preparation of teachers of the blind consists primarily of in-service training in institutions. Requirements vary according to whether the institution is national, departmental, or private. Special teachers in general receive a slightly higher salary than teachers of normal children.[14]

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13. Ibid., pp. 213-215.

14. Ibid., p. 218.

Scotland

The first school for the blind in Scotland was founded in Edinburgh in 1793. In 1835 the Edinburgh School for Blind Children was established. In 1890 the education of deaf-mute and blind children became compulsory, and the obligation of providing this education was placed upon the local education authority if the parents were unable to meet the cost themselves. It is now the official policy of the Scottish Education Department to educate handicapped children, wherever possible, in the regular schools, rather than to segregate them in institutions or special schools, and where the latter are necessary, to emphasize day schools rather than residential. [15]

Under the National Assistance Act of 1948, a home teaching service for the blind is provided, staffed with specially qualified teachers. These home teachers find out about blind people and their needs, visit them, give advice, teach them to read Braille, and give instruction in leisure-time occupations. They also look after the general welfare of the blind, organise social centres, etc. Voluntary organisations in some instances provide home instruction programmes.

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15. Ibid., pp. 397, 403.

The Scottish Education Department recommends that the programmes provided for the handicapped child should approximate the curriculum followed in the regular schools, with special stress on courses, such as art and music, because of their school and therapeutic value. Classes for the blind may not include more than 15 pupils.[16]

The Advisory Council on Education in 1950 discussed the relative advantages and disadvantages of employing blind teachers in a school for the blind, and stressed the general agreement on the point that the proportion of blind teachers to sighted teachers should not exceed 25 per cent.[17]

With the change in educational philosophy, individual needs and socialisation of a blind child, some educators of the blind began to think that blind children should be made free from what is known as 'institutionalism' and be educated with the sighted. Dr. Barnhill, of Glasgow, published as early as 1875 a treatise, "A New Era in the Education of the blind children," wherein he advocated such a system:

> It is a great matter that the education of blind children in the ordinary schools can be pleaded on the ground that thus all the blind may receive education.

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16. Ibid., pp. 410-411.

17. Ibid., p. 414.

> That every blind child should be taken in charge and provided with whatever is necessary to enable him to meet his trying circumstances in the most effective manner. Much difficulty or expense has usually stood in the way of the admission of blind children into institutions, and many have been entirely neglected. In these circumstances the plea for educating all the blind children in the ordinary schools must be acknowledged to be of the strongest character. [18]

Alexander Barnhill has not overlooked the importance and value of the residential schools for the blind where, besides learning various trades, blind children may also be trained in good habits of living. Orphans and children coming from poorly regulated homes can also benefit from such institutions. Teaching blind children with the sighted has not been advocated for the purpose of withdrawing children from special schools, but to provide education for those blind youngsters not being educated. Barnhill's experience was that children could and have been most successfully taught to read fluently without ever being in a residential school for the blind. The children who have never been in schools for the blind learn quite capably to know their way around their homes and to and from school through the assistance

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18. Alexander Barnhill, A New Era in the Education of the Blind Children, (Glasgow: Charles Glass and Company, 1875), p. 17.

rendered by their parents and schoolmates. It seems ridiculous to send a child to a school for the blind to be taught to eat and dress. He would be taught at home to act like his brothers and sisters in washing, dressing, and eating.[19]

In Scotland a start was made to educate blind children with the sighted in common schools in 1868. The following reports indicate this fact:

> Notice of Blind Children Attending Regular Schools - Greenock - October 28, 1868
>
> It is a great pleasure to be able to report the admission of a blind boy to an ordinary school. For some years there has been great anxiety in respect to blind children in such a place as Greenock where there was no special school for the blind. The boy has now been a short time at school, and is quite delighted with his new position. He was put under the care of the lady teacher, and she took a great interest in him when she found he could read a little in his raised book. He was put along with the youngest children, and being able to spell the words better than the others he got above them and went home at the top of the class, greatly overjoyed.
>
> November 24, 1869
>
> The number of blind children in Greenock having increased it has been necessary to make arrangements for their education. The teacher who did so well with the first boy was asked to receive them, but he did not see his way to undertake such a charge. The teacher and directors of the charity school were asked to receive them, and kindly agreed to do so, and application was made for the admission of five children,

19. Ibid., pp. 18, 20, 25.

> including the boy who had already been at school, as it was thought necessary that they should all be together. These children have been taught the raised letters at home in anticipation of this arrangement. They have now all gone to school, and Mr. Kay, the teacher, expresses himself as pleased with their progress. What a blessing to blind children throughout the country if they may be taught in the common schools in their several localities.[20]

Even now blind children are being educated with the sighted in regular schools in some places in Scotland.

England

The first school for the blind in England was established at Liverpool in 1791, and the first secondary school for the blind, Worcester College, was established in 1869. The 1944 Act made further provisions for residential and day schools for the partially sighted as a separate group. There are now special schools for the blind, 25 for partially sighted and three for the blind and partially sighted together.[21]

The British Ministry of Pensions and National Insur-

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20. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

21. Wallace W. Taylor and Isabelle W. Taylor, Special Education of Physically Handicapped Children in Western Europe (New York: International Society for the Welfare of Cripples, 1960), pp. 148-149.

ance indicated on March 31, 1955, a total of 110,000 blind and partially sighted persons of all ages. [22]

'Maintained' schools for the blind are provided, maintained, and operated by the Local Education Authority; 'Non-maintained' schools are supported and run by voluntary agencies, at times with the help of the Ministry of Education. Parents are not required to pay any fee in either case. The Ministry of Education also supports three hospital schools for bright or intellectually gifted blind youngsters. Another kind of instruction is given to blind children at home for those unable to attend special schools. This instruction is being given by a permanent itinerant staff, such as married women who have left school service, qualified retired teachers, etc. The duties of visiting home teachers include the teaching of Braille and occupational handicrafts. Increasing importance is being attached to the early training and education of blind children as soon as possible after the age of two. There are several residential schools for the blind known as the Sunshine Nursery Schools. Contact with the children's homes is maintained by parents' visits to the schools, and the children spend holidays at home.[23]

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22. Ibid., p. 151.

23. Ibid., pp. 155-160, 162-163.

The curriculum of the elementary school for the blind is much the same as in the regular school, with a little more emphasis on handwork and music. In the secondary school, boys receive instruction in woodwork and basket making, while girls are taught housecraft, knitting, simple sewing, and light basketry, but in neither case is there any thought of teaching such skills for vocational purposes. Typing is taught to children after the age of 12, if they have been reasonably proficient with Braille. More recently, shorthand, typing, and bookkeeping are normally taught only after the end of the compulsory period of schooling. After the necessary training blind youngsters are fitted to become stenotypists, clerks, piano tuners, musicians, basket and mattress makers, machine knitters, physical therapists, or teachers. Others go on to advanced education, while more than half succeed in the open labour market. The Royal Institute for the Blind, in cooperation with the Youth Employment Service, gives the youngsters advice and information concerning careers and employment opportunities, and watches their careers.[24]

In-service training of teachers of the blind was made a compulsory requirement, to be obtained within three

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24. Ibid., pp. 165-167.

years of appointment, by all those who intended to teach the blind. Teachers of the blind are paid a higher salary than teachers of the visually normal.[25]

Aneurin Bevan's recent statement that "... the nation which is most decent and worthy of respect is that in which the weak, the oppressed, and the sick have the first claim," is generally accepted by all Englishmen, regardless of party. It is this philosophy that provides the firm foundation on which special educational services are being built in England.[26]

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25. Ibid., pp. 167-169.

26. Ibid., p. 172.

CHAPTER III

A BACKGROUND OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND WELFARE ACTIVITIES FOR THE BLIND IN INDIA

Fortunately the times have passed when the blind were entirely rejected and were considered a drag and a heavy burden on society. The progress of the work of welfare and education of the blind depends on the economic advancement of the country as a whole. Seventy-five per cent of the population in India lives in villages and the countryside, and it has been noticed that the people living in isolated areas more often suffer from blindness. This can be attributed to the fact that they are usually deprived of medical facilities, and lack of education makes them superstitious.

Historical Survey

One of the first persons to be interested in the blind in India was a missionary, Annie Sharp. She became so interested in their problems that she opened the first school for the blind at Amritsar (Punjab) in 1887. The school still exists at Rajpur (Dehra Dun) as Sharp Memorial School for the Blind. Since then many other schools and institutions have been started by various religious, social, and governmental agencies.

In India the educational facilities are not only inadequate but they are also very primitive and unsatisfactory. There are at present about 100 schools and other establishments for the blind in the country. The majority of them are run by voluntary agencies with some state aid. Most of these institutions impart elementary education coupled with vocational training in crafts like weaving, chair-caning, candle making, toy making, etc. Music is taught in almost every school for the blind. [1]

After the attainment of independence in 1947, India's struggle for the creation of a 'welfare society' -- a society in which all its members will have equal opportunities for their development and progress -- was begun. The country has shown a greater awareness of the problems of the blind in the last decade, and perhaps more work for the blind has been done during this period than was done during the sixty years before independence.

Teachers of the Blind

The greatest handicap in developing a satisfactory educational programme for the blind in India is the extreme

1. Education and Welfare of the Handicapped (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1961), p. 1.

lack of trained teachers of the blind in the country. India, being a multi-lingual country, faces extra problems as far as the coordination of the education of the blind is concerned. For example, the teachers and administrators working in the South would find it difficult to share their experiences with their counterparts of the North, and vice versa. During recent years quite a few persons have been trained in the field of special education of the blind in the United States and Great Britain. The services of these trained teachers will be used to start regional teacher training programmes. The Government of India is, at present, planning to start such programmes in consultation with the American Foundation for Overseas Blind. The Government also intends to start a teacher training centre in the Model School for Blind Children at Dehra Dun in the near future. In the last few years teachers trained in the United States and England have started some work on psychological testing and evaluation of blind children. This is a valuable step in the field of the education of the blind.

It was realised that not many teachers could afford to go abroad for such training. If standards in the schools for the blind were to be improved it was felt necessary to provide facilities for the training of teachers of the blind in India. With this end in view, the National Association

for the Blind, in cooperation with the National Christian Council of India, established a teacher training course for teachers of the blind at the school in Palayamkottai in Madras, in June, 1960.

The annual report of the Executive Council of the National Association for the Blind for the year 1960-61 states that the National Academy of Teachers of the Blind was established in 1960. It is hoped that in the years to come the Academy will continue to serve the needs of the schools and institutions for the blind in India.[2]

Braille

A uniform Braille code for all major Indian languages came into existence in 1951. This uniform code is known as "Bharati Braille". The Government of India has started one Braille printing press in Dehra Dun to print educational books in Braille for use in schools for the blind. In January, 1954, a small workshop was added to the press for the manufacture of Braille appliances. Until then, almost all appliances needed for the education of the blind had to be imported from abroad. Recently, the United Nations pro-

2. Report of the Executive Council, for the year ending March 31, 1961 (Bombay: National Association for the Blind, 1961), p. 1.

vided the services of an expert to assist in the development of this workshop.[3] There is a proposal for starting regional Braille printing presses in different parts of the country to meet the demands for Braille textbooks in the fourteen major regional languages. Because of the inadequate Braille printing facilities available today, most schools have to transcribe most of their books by hand.

It is also proposed to start a National Braille Library in the near future in Dehra Dun. This library will have a small transcribing department which will undertake to put into Braille essential books for which there is limited demand. The state governments are also being advised to establish Braille sections in the central libraries of the states.[4] During 1960, the National Association for the Blind's Lions Blind Welfare Library was established. According to the annual report, the library, which at present consists of about 200 books and 300 pamphlets, will gradually include all available books on the subject of the education and welfare of the blind. Although, at present, the books in this library are all in the English language, it is hoped that when funds

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3. Education and Welfare of the Handicapped, 1960-61 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1961), p.3.

4. Ibid.

permit the library will sponsor the publication of books in Hindi and the regional languages.[5]

Associations and Agencies

During the present century, various relief associations and welfare societies came into existence. In 1952 the first All India Conference adopted a resolution forming a National Association for the Blind. It hopes to bring about a co-operative effort among the various organisations now working for the blind and to coordinate their activities. The Association pledges itself to work for the prevention of preventible blindness and the cure of curable blindness and its eradication on a mass scale. The formation of this national body is a significant milestone on the road of broadening opportunities for the blind in India. It receives grant-in-aid from the central Government.

National Centre for the Blind

One of the major projects undertaken by the Government of India in the field of education and training of the blind is the establishment of a National Centre for the Blind at Dehra Dun. The main object of this Centre is to provide an

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5. Report of the Executive Council, for the year ending March 31, 1961 (Bombay: National Association for the Blind, 1961), p. 2.

integrated service for the blind commencing from education in childhood to the provision of Braille literature and appliances for blind adults. The centre is ultimately to consist of several institutions, some of which have already been established, such as the Training Centre for the Adult Blind, the Sheltered Workshop, the Central Braille Press, and the Model School for Blind Children.[6]

Attitudes of Society

What is the position of the parents who are blessed with a blind baby? The writer has used the word 'blessed' because it is really a blessing when a baby is born in a family. The parents receive congratulations and there are celebrations, with gifts showered on the mother and the baby. However, if the baby is blind, there may be sorrow, depression, condemnation, and rejection from all sides. The parents cannot think what to do, and how to deal with the child. Out of parental affection they are unable to abandon the child. The darkness of its future life may make the parents sick because they have never heard or known blind children to receive education and become useful, contributing members of the community. They believe that the child will

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6. Education and Welfare of the Handicapped, 1960-61 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1961), p. 2.

be a burden on them, or wander in the streets begging from door to door.

They do not know how their blind child is different from, and to what extent he is similar to, his seeing brothers and sisters. This is not the attitude of one or two parents but the attitude of society as a whole, and unless it is changed it is a serious obstacle in bringing about the education of blind children. If the child is not handled properly in his early life, he will grow up as a maladjusted personality, a problem to himself, to his parents, and to the community.

A vast majority of Indians are uneducated and ask the question, "Is it humanly possible to educate the blind without the sense of vision?" Another question is asked, "What is the use of attempting to educate the poor, helpless, hopeless blind?"

India, at present, is approaching a stage of recognition, and as soon as she accomplishes this she will be in a better position to educate the visually handicapped. The present-day attitude of society is that the blind form a minority group, different in all respects from the seeing. Lack of financial resources is the greatest barrier in the advancement of general welfare of the blind in India. Since

the attainment of independence in 1947 there has been a general, gradual awakening among the people of India regarding the education, training, and rehabilitation of the sightless.

Education of the Blind

Education of the sighted has been recognised as State responsibility all over the world. One of the directive principles of the Constitution of India emphasizes:

> The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for the free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.[7]

Here, we have to note the words "all children." It does not say only the sighted children. The existing 100 residential schools and institutions for the blind are far from sufficient to satisfy the provisions of the Constitution. These schools can only cater to the needs of less than one per cent of the educable blind youngsters. Not all of them have modern apparatus and equipment, most of them do not teach beyond the primary stage, and few teach vocational subjects. Some schools do have secondary departments. The syllabus mainly corresponds to that adopted by regular schools for the sighted. No separate institutions of the type available in the West exist in India. Some of the schools send their

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7. Constitution of India, Article 45.

promising blind students to the nearest high schools for the sighted. Some rare blind individuals have, despite many difficulties, achieved great success and have graduated from high schools and universities in arts, law, etc. Though their achievements are praiseworthy, these examples come mostly from families who could afford such an expensive education, necessitating the employment of readers. So far no separate provisions exist for the education and training of partially sighted or the blind with additional handicaps, such as emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded blind children. Some of the existing schools for the blind admit such children, but no specialised arrangements are made for the education and training of this group.

Five Year Plans

To implement the directive principles of state policy, as also the recommendations in the First and Second Five Year Plans, the Government of India set up the Central Social Welfare Board with a view to providing assistance, guidance, and help to voluntary social welfare organisations in the country. This Board is an autonomous body with eminent social workers on its various panels. Recently similar Boards have also been established in various states.

In the Third Five Year Plan, inaugurated on April 1,

1961, the central and state governments place special emphasis on the field of social welfare:

> The working group on social welfare has recommended as priorities for the third plan in the field of social welfare, firstly the needs of children; secondly, the needs of women specially for educational and employment opportunities; and thirdly, the needs of those suffering from other handicaps, whether physical or mental, social or economic. The working group following the report of the study team, has further suggested that instead of concentrating on residential institutional services, voluntary agencies should try to develop community services for assisting various groups as far as possible in their family and social settings.[8]
>
> Among the handicapped groups, priority is recommended for the blind, the deaf, the mute, the orthopaedically handicapped, and the mentally deficient. It is also proposed that, although institutional services are essential for these groups, to the extent possible, non-institutional services should also be developed.[9]

It is unequivocally clear that the Government of India in its Third Five Year Plan is striving for the education of all Indian children, not just the physically normal.

Integrated Education of Blind Children

As already stated, no separate institutions of the type

8. Third Five Year Plan - A Draft Outline (New Delhi: Government of India, Planning Commission, 1960), Section 79 (4), p. 129.
9. Ibid., Section 79 (7), p. 130.

available in other countries, such as the United States and England, exist in India though some of the schools send their promising blind students to the nearest high schools for the sighted. The advantages of an integrated educational programme were presented by H.J.M. Desai in 1954:

> In view of the many advantages of this system, and especially in view of its comparative low cost the N.A.B. recommended the experiment to the Union and the Bombay Governments. The suggestion was to make provision for such co-education in at least one selected school in each district; a specially trained teacher with knowledge of Braille and psychology of the blind being attached to such schools. The suggestion was not accepted. This system has the added advantage of not segregating the blind from the sighted. It would be almost impossible for centuries to come to make adequate provision for training the majority of the two million blind in India and the cheapest and most practicable course seems to encourage the education of the blind with the sighted.[10]

Rajendra Vyas, Development Officer of the National Association for the Blind in Bombay, has also advocated this system on the basis of his personal experience:

> I myself was educated at a school for the sighted after losing sight and I did not find it difficult to learn along with sighted. In Bombay, my friend and colleague Miss Rehmut Fazalbhoy has begun teaching the blind in a school for the sighted and she is finding it both interesting and encouraging. Co-education of the blind with the sighted will

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10. H.J.M. Desai, The Blind in India (Bombay: National Association for the Blind, 1954), p. 16.

> pave a way for the social integration of the blind and what is more it would do away with the necessity of establishing more and more schools for the blind.[11]

For the past three years Miss Fazalbhoy has been teaching three blind youngsters in New Activity School in Bombay. In the annual report for 1960-61 of the National Association for the Blind it is mentioned that Noshir Guzdar, who is receiving a scholarship from the Association, is one of three blind boys who have been studying along with sighted children. In the final examination held in March, 1961, Noshir stood first in class, and he, along with the other boys, has been promoted to Standard VII. At the beginning of the academic year in April, 1961, these blind students joined a recognised secondary school in another locality in Bombay.

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11. Rajendra T. Vyas, The Blind in India, paper delivered at the inauguration of the Second All India Conference for the Blind in Bombay (Bombay: National Association for the Blind, 1959), p. 5.

CHAPTER IV

ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION OF THE BLIND WITH THE SIGHTED

Residential schools have served and are today serving a valuable purpose in calling attention to the importance and necessity of education of the blind and in doing something toward it. They inculcate and train to habits of order, cleanliness and diligence, and have provided good homes and better standards of life for many who might otherwise have been neglected. They can continue to be useful in providing education and training for those blind children who are not of average intelligence, or who have additional handicaps, or who are poorly adjusted in human relationships.

Residential schools have served their purpose well, but they are too expensive. At present, as already stated, the number of blind youngsters of school age in India is 600,000. Of this large number, less than one per cent are being taken care of by the existing 100 residential schools and institutions for the blind. If these children must be educated in residential schools, there would have to be at least one thousand such schools, which would be prohibitively expensive even for the Government and private agencies working together. It is thus evident that such a large number of

visually handicapped children can be provided education only in the common schools along with the sighted. Teaching blind children with the sighted is not suggested for the purpose of withdrawing children from the institutions, but to overtake those not being educated at all, and to give parents opportunity of having their blind children taught at home.

It is doubtful if India could build and equip enough separate schools for the blind to house adequately all blind children. Moreover, educating the blind child in a special school necessitates his leaving home, and one of the most highly commendable features of Indian culture is the sacredness of the family unit and its integrity. It seems reasonable to say that the blind child should have the love and affection of his family unit by residence at home with his brothers and sisters and parents and his friends. Furthermore, the community to which the blind child belongs needs him; children are the richest resources of the community. Removing the child from the community is removing the responsibility of education, training, and job employment from the community where it belongs.

One of the greatest blessings this plan gives the blind child is in his continuing to enjoy the society and happiness of home. With kind and loving parents, having a deep interest in his progress, and in satisfying his wants, he should not

be sent out of home for education in the special school. The ability of such a child to remain at home is bound up with the success of this effort to have him taught with the sighted.

For educating the blind child we have to start with the basic education in the government or private schools, in the village, town, or city. The blind child can go to school with his brothers and sisters and receive the same education as they do. The only difference is that the method of instruction for the blind must differ slightly as he has to use his fingers and ears for his eyes. He will of course, need the services of a special resource teacher to assist him in learning Braille, and to assist him with other aids necessitated by his blindness. This is by no means an insurmountable difficulty.

In the schoolyard, at recreation, going to and coming from the school, blind children can take their place with seeing children if given the opportunity. Such a programme is called "integrated" because it integrates the child into the society of the sighted children at the earliest possible age. It also integrates in that it helps the blind child to become himself an integrated personality. It is evident that such a programme does as much for the sighted as it does for the blind. It is not likely that parents would object, in spite of traditional and personal attitudes, to allowing their

blind child to participate in such a normal, happy, and worthwhile educational programme.

Most of the administrators of ordinary schools might hesitate to admit blind children in their schools for fear that the parents of sighted children do not like their children to be educated along with blind children. Sometimes the school authorities might consider that blind children are a great responsibility, but it is imperative that these administrators and supervisors should consider both the pros and cons of this programme. They have to be broadminded in their outlook and attitudes on this aspect. A segregated special class for the blind in the regular common school is not the answer as this would defeat the very purpose of the blind child's integration. A separate segregated class of blind children is not much different from educating them in a residential institution.

The most vital and important consideration is the human factor. Through education with his fellow sighted peers, the blind individual will no longer be an outcast, a third-class citizen, an object of charity to be pitied, tolerated or exploited. He can assume the status of a citizen, a fellow worker, and an active participant in his community and his country.

Educating all blind children in special schools makes them different from their seeing peers, as Samuel Gridley Howe expressed it:

> When we gather blind children from all parts of the State, to be educated together in a special institution, we make more salient their points of difference from their fellows, and unless we are very careful, we increase that difference. We must beware, ... lest we begin a process of social sequestration; lest we tend to sequestrate them socially.
>
> We must not form them into a class. We must not create a spirit of caste. We must not lessen the force of their relations with ordinary society, and encourage the growth of relations founded on community of physical condition.[1]

This idea was advocated almost a century ago by Howe, who was the first director of the first residential school for the blind in the United States. As such it holds good at present, even for an emergent nation like India.

Similarly, Cutsforth believes that for proper development of personality, blind children should be educated with the seeing, and he writes, "The education of blind children should by all means be among the seeing, and that

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1. S.G. Howe, Letter dated August 7, 1871, read at the Second Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind in August, 1871 - Proceedings published by Indianapolis Publishing House, Indianapolis, Indiana, p. 16.

does not mean among the seeing mental defective, spastic-paralytic, and epileptic, which too often passes as public school education for the blind."[2]

Socialisation

The greatest weakness in residential schools for the blind is that they do not present enough opportunities for their pupils to become socialised. Pupils in schools for the blind, especially in India, do not usually become acquainted with many seeing children and thus feel out of place in a public situation. It is also true that seeing children feel ill at ease when first thrown into contact with a blind peer. A majority of educators of the blind believe that attendance at public high school may lead to socialisation if the blind students are talented and enter into the activities of the school.

There is admittedly no greater socialising influence

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2. Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Personality and Social Adjustment Among the Blind," Blindness, edited by Paul A Zahl (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 187.

within the community than the public school. The blind child, being educated in the public school, is directly affected by all its influences. The daily routine and extracurricular activities of the school will have wide and far-reaching influence both on the blind child and those about him. All these factors make him feel that he is a normal member of the community and giving and receiving the benefits of his active participation in all phases of school and community life. While living with his parents at home and being educated in a regular day school along with his sighted peers the blind child maintains continuous social relationships with the sighted world in which he must live and work.

Education in the ordinary school gives the blind child common associations and cheerful influences and counteracts any feelings of isolation or despondency. This atmosphere has a happy and enlivening effect on him as he mingles with his schoolmates and their gossip, their fun, their lessons, in recreational and other extracurricular activities, and common incidents of the daily life. By mixing freely with those who have their sight the blind child comes to think, feel, and do as a normal child. Nothing can be more beneficial than this social influence, both to the blind and to the sighted. The public becomes more familiar with blind people and their problems. Furthermore, such daily contacts enable the blind

youngster to develop the concept that he is primarily a citizen of the ordinary school and of the community, and only secondarily blind. After several contacts, the seeing youngsters learn that their blind companions are 'just ordinary people with very bad sight'.

Competition with Sighted and Economic Self-sufficiency

As a result of the integrated programme of education the blind child will face competition with his sighted classmates, which will prompt and stimulate him, improve his mental faculties, and give him higher aims. If the blind child equals or excels the attainment of his seeing peers, his presence brings interest and zest to the classroom lessons. This superiority of the blind child will prove a stimulus and an incentive to the seeing children who would, in turn, share the honour of achievement with their blind schoolmate. The blind youngster learns more in the day school class from discussion and participation in the regular class of visually normal children where competition is real and keen. He gains self-confidence not only in his mental but also in his physical life.

Competition has a deep vocational significance. In his daily classwork the blind child learns the meaning of competition with sighted peers of his own age, grade, and

intellectual power. Academic education supplemented by vocational training in some field of his choice would enable the blind person to seek suitable work. Because of the regular contacts with his sighted friends at school and in the community, the blind youngster would be in a position to take a useful place in the economic life of the community. Sighted society, including agency workers and employers in industry, would be readily willing to afford him opportunity to become a self-supporting and contributing member of the community.

CHAPTER V

THE INTEGRATED PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Every parent of a blind child is faced with the problem of how and where his blind child can be educated, whether in an institution for the blind or in a regular ordinary school, public or private. In India, residential schools for the blind are located only in the larger towns and cities. Blind children from small towns and rural areas are not able to take advantage of the limited educational opportunities provided. Moreover, parents are unwilling to part with their blind children for purposes of receiving education at residential institutions located at a considerable distance. Therefore a programme of integration would be better than waiting for more residential schools to arise. It is not a question of 'what programme is the best'. It is the child who is important; the programme that fits his needs best is the best programme for him.

There are three possible methods of educating the blind child with the sighted child in India: the cooperative plan, the integrated plan, and the itinerant teacher plan. Another plan will also be proposed whereby the residential

schools for the blind in India would also be able to educate some of their pupils along with sighted children in local schools, thus integrating them into sighted society.

The Cooperative Plan

Under this plan the blind child would be enrolled in a special home room where a teacher, duly trained and qualified to teach the blind, is available to him and assists him in his work. Except for guidance in basic skills of reading and writing Braille, and help in subjects like arithmetic and geography, the child would attend regular classes and participate in daily work with his seeing peers. From this resource room the blind child would go to the regular classroom for as many hours of participation in regular classroom work as possible and individually advisable. The special resource teacher, or the home room teacher, would cooperate closely with the other classroom teachers and would supply the special material and equipment to enable the blind child to keep pace with his seeing classmates. The special teacher is responsible for the progress of the blind child, and the amount of time that the pupil would spend with the teacher would depend on his individual needs. The number of blind pupils should not exceed ten to a special teacher, who would then be able to give individual attention to students of various ages and grades. This type of cooperative plan would be particularly

beneficial to those blind children who are starting their educational career.

The Integrated Plan

In the integrated plan the blind child would be enrolled in a regular classroom with a special teacher of blind children available to him in a resource room. The blind child would be referred by the regular teacher, the home room teacher in this case, to the resource teacher whenever the need for specialised instruction arose, or when the child needed help in planning his schedule, or any other special guidance. The prime responsibility for the pupil's progress would be carried by the regular teacher.

The Itinerant Teacher Plan

In this third plan the blind child would be enrolled in a regular day school, where he and his teacher would receive the special services of an itinerant teacher trained to teach the blind. The itinerant teacher would be available at specified times, once or twice a week. This plan would require a greater amount of independence and resourcefulness on the part of the blind child than the other two plans. Although this programme would be more useful for junior and senior high school students, it would be possible for some schools, especially in small towns and villages, to utilize

the services of itinerant teachers even for elementary school children. It would be the primary duty of the itinerant teacher to see that blind students in his charge received the necessary Braille textbooks, recorded text, teaching equipment, and, probably most important of all, the reader service which would enable them to learn the subject matter not available in Braille or recorded form. It is apparent that this programme would be more economical than the other two, as one itinerant teacher would be able to serve a number of such schools in a given area. Such services could be more gainfully utilized in scattered rural areas where the number of blind children in one school would be very small, or in schools where it is not possible to engage a full-time special teacher for blind children.

Another plan of educating the blind with the sighted could also be followed in India in cities and towns where residential schools for the blind already exist. As soon as the blind child in a residential school seemed capable and adequately prepared, he could then be sent to a regular day school for further education. In this plan the residential schools and the itinerant teachers would cooperate and make necessary arrangements for the blind child's admission to the ordinary school. The itinerant teacher would follow the child's progress and aid him when necessary. If, at one time

or another, the child could be helped better at the residential school, he could return to it for as long as it seemed necessary. This plan would afford an opportunity for blind students from residential institutions to come in contact with the sighted members of their own age group.

Orientation; Location and Equipment of the Resource Room

The special resource room should be a large room centrally located within the school. Actually very few adjustments in the school setting would be necessary for meeting the needs of blind children. However, the blind child should be properly oriented in the beginning. He should be shown tactually the important points in the whole school building - the classrooms, the resource room, the location of water fountains, approaches to stairways, lavatories, entrances, exits, and other places where he might be required to go frequently. The blind child in his regular classrooms should be allowed and encouraged to sit in the front row where he can be within comfortable hearing distance of the teacher. He should be encouraged to explore the classroom independently. In a permissive atmosphere he will learn to come into careful contact with objects without hurting himself or damaging objects. Not undue sympathy, but proper understanding and due help, should be shown by all who come in contact with the blind students.

Education of the blind does not differ in essence from that of the sighted; only the method of instruction differs. It is necessary, therefore, for the schools to make specific provisions for tools and apparatus to facilitate this special method of instructing the blind. The resource room must be equipped with Braille slates, Braille writers, typewriters, Braille books, talking book machines, radio, tape recorders, models, and relief maps, and also large type books, proper illumination, and magnifying devices for those children who are partially seeing but legally blind. Some of these appliances, such as Braille slates and Braille or large type books, can be taken by visually handicapped students from the resource room to the regular classes whenever needed. Pupils with some residual vision should be encouraged to make the best use of their vision, unless otherwise advised by the eye specialist. It would be a great asset if the resource room could have a small adjoining room to which children could go when they wanted to do quiet work, or when the teacher or a reader had to do individual work, away from the noise and disturbance of other children. Both rooms should have sufficient electric outlets for radio, talking book machines, and other recording equipment.

The resource room should not be considered to be the

blind child's only place of education; it is essentially a service room.

Role of School Administration

The school administration must make known its policy that their school welcomes the opportunity to serve the blind child as a bona fide student. Such an announcement by the school authorities will do much to break down any bias which might exist on the part of the staff concerning the child's admission and acceptance.

The heads of ordinary public or private schools who provide for the education of the blind in their schools must treat the blind child as a normal child with a visual handicap. The blind child must be wanted by all personnel of the school, including the principal, the regular classroom teachers, and the special teacher, and he must be afforded the same opportunities, experiences, love and respect as shown to visually normal children.

Careful attention must be given to the relationships between the special teacher and other staff members to ensure that disagreements do not develop regarding specific responsibilities toward the child. Effective teamwork and cooperation should be fostered under the leadership of the school principal.

The school administration can help to a great extent in procuring the services of volunteer or paid readers for the blind child. The child must also be helped by school authorities in making necessary arrangements for his transportation to and from school.

Role of the Classroom Teacher

The regular classroom teacher holds the key to the child's satisfactory adjustment and successful integration into the sighted group. His resourcefulness will determine the extent to which he can effectively enrich the child's daily programme. The degree to which he is able to enlist the support and assistance of the other members of the school staff will be important in determining the school's contribution to the child's education.

After a decision has been made regarding the child's acceptance, recognition must be given to his needs as a child. Most of his problems are similar to those of visually normal children. The teacher must look upon blindness as a condition in life, rather than a handicap to learning. Thus, with the understanding of a few differences that do exist, the regular classroom teacher gradually becomes more confident in his ability to handle such a child in a manner which will best contribute to the child's total growth and development.

A blind child cannot see the teacher's facial expressions. To interpret the true feelings toward the child the teacher should convey his feelings of warmth and acceptance to the child by an occasional pat or a word of encouragement. The teacher's attitude toward the blind child will mould the attitude of his classmates.

The teacher should also help the blind child to function in a natural and relaxed way in the classroom. It may be necessary for the teacher to keep the blind child informed of what is going on in the classroom so that the child can have a preference for any particular activity in which he would like to participate, so that he may not feel that he is being ignored.

The satisfaction of helping a child grow should be sufficient motivation for the teacher to make the sacrifice in time and effort which the blind child may need. Helping to ensure his acceptance in the group is an ample reward for the teacher who loves children, handicapped or otherwise.

Role of the Special Teacher

The special teacher or the resource teacher acts as a consultant to the regular classroom teachers in all aspects of the educational activities of the blind children under his care. He advises the classroom teachers about the problems,

limitations, and capabilities of each individual blind child, and the availability of the various educational aids, appliances, services, etc., for his help. The special teacher should also try his best to minimize the extra attention that the blind child may need from the regular classroom teacher.

This teacher serves as a special teacher to the blind child in all areas where specific help is needed, such as in the learning of skills like Braille reading and writing, typewriting, use of mathematical and scientific devices, learning to move around freely, and learning to know his school. The major contribution of the special teacher lies not so much in actual participation with the child in developing skills as with preparation of materials which enhance the task of the regular classroom teacher as he fulfills his responsibility in educating the visually handicapped child. The blind child will need less and less assistance from the special teacher as he advances in his school life.

The special teacher should also act as a connecting link between the school and the parents of the blind child. He should interpret the child and his needs to his parents in a helpful manner, thus making it possible for them to accept their child and his handicap.

The resource teacher is, in short, the special feature of the whole programme of integrated education of blind children.

Qualifications of Special Teachers

It would be good if basic teacher education curricula were restructured so that all prospective teachers of the blind would be given at least minimum preparation in the principles of child growth and development, case finding techniques, use of records, follow-up procedures, and hygienic classroom environment. They should be trained particularly in the special education of blind children, including knowledge of skills such as Braille and typewriting, and the psychology of exceptional children, over and above the requirements for a general elementary or secondary certification.

Curriculum for the Blind Child

The general educational activities for the blind child do not differ from those of sighted children. For academic work the blind child will attend the same courses of study as for visually normal children, but for physical activity, manual training, games and gardening work some adaptation and individual attention will be necessary. Provision should be made for the same educational, social, and vocational

opportunities for the visually impaired child as are enjoyed by the visually normal child.

The daily schedule of the blind child should be planned by the special teacher and the regular classroom teacher in consultation, in such a way as to enable the child to have at least two periods a day with the special teacher. This would help him in getting the extra attention and help he needs in subjects like arithmetic, geography, and reading.

It must be remembered that the majority of blind youngsters will have to depend, for their future living, on occupations requiring thorough training in manual and/or musical skills. Therefore, the daily timetable should also make provision for crafts and other vocational training. The school should arrange small handicraft classes for blind children where they can receive individual attention. The same practice can be useful in the instruction of music and musical instruments. A blind music teacher in the community might well be asked to serve in the capacity of a full-time or part-time instructor. This would give blind children an opportunity to meet a blind person, who, it is presumed, has himself made a successful adjustment to the sighted world.

Physical and recreational activities must also be arranged for such children. A blind child, particularly an

older one, can participate in the physical education programme of seeing children only to a very limited extent. In order to give him much needed exercise, it is necessary to arrange special physical activities for him, such as wrestling and gymnastic exercises. The special teacher can assist in planning such activities. The blind child can also take part in recreational and extracurricular events, like folk dances, rhythmic activities, picnics, sound films, scouting, camping, and dramatisation. During recess time and leisure hours the blind children often find themselves on the side lines. Special indoor games such as lotto, dominos, jig-saw puzzles, etc., can be gainfully introduced as a form of recreation and friendly contacts with other youngsters.

Additional Services

In order to develop diagnostic services the schools in India should also start guidance departments wherein the specialised services of a psychologist, social worker, and a guidance counsellor could be made available to all children, whether blind or otherwise. This would require additional funds, which should be provided to all government and private schools by the central, state, or local governments. The guidance personnel should make special efforts to help the blind youngsters in finding suitable employment after they complete their education and training.

Schools must not only give them information on vocations, but also help them to find out along which lines their own interests and aptitudes could be developed with best chances of success.

Blind pupils cannot learn at the speed of normally sighted pupils, because of the limitations imposed by their blindness. A programme of educating the blind child at a public or private school should be geared to the slow speed and individual needs of the blind child. The programme calls for a high degree of compatibility and teamwork among all those personnel who are responsible for it. The integrated programme for the education of blind children must be a total school programme, to be implemented, interpreted, and discussed with frequency. All concerned must recognise that blind children have a right to an education fitting their needs. The organisation of a programme, the selection of good trained teaching personnel, adequate supply of books and equipment, the curriculum, and the methods used for instruction - all contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the programme.

Implementation of the Programme

In order to enforce a proper implementation of the suggested programme of integrated education of the blind in ordinary schools in India, it is imperative to change the attitudes of both the sighted and the blind; to provide for enough trained and qualified teachers and necessary equipment; and to enact needed legislation.

Attitudes

As Helen Keller has said, "Not blindness but the attitude of the seeing to the blind is the hardest burden to bear." The attitude of the public, and this includes school personnel, toward blindness is still traditional, medieval, and stereotyped. Because of his handicap, the blind person is neglected and his rights are overlooked. The predominant attitude of sighted society vacillates far too often between stifling sympathy and avoidance. These attitudes obviously react upon the individual who is blind.

Parents are the main figures who determine in large measure the ultimate psychological fate of their children. Genuine love and acceptance by the parents for their child will carry the child far toward developing a healthy personality. Parents should convey to the child in behaviour and words that he is loved, respected, and wanted in the family.

While this is true for all children, it is especially true for the blind child.

The problems of parents of visually handicapped children are not unique but apply to all parents. All parents must learn to accept the limitations of their children. Any course other than acceptance will definitely add to the child's handicap and increase their own difficulties. Home visitors and social workers for the blind can help parents to realise that frequently it is not the handicap that hinders a child's adjustment, but how the child and those about him feel about blindness. The feelings of guilt among parents of blind children have to be handled properly by workers and agencies in the field.

Much encouragement, as well as untold patience, on the part of the parents is of utmost importance in order to effect a normal progress in the child. The child should not be led to believe that he is a burden on the family or community. Parents, community, and society as a whole should try to know the potentialities of such a child - what he can do, rather than what he lacks. He should be accepted and not over-protected or rejected, either overtly or disguisedly.

With the rapid increase in education and literacy in India there is bound to be a change in the attitudes toward

blindness from the old beliefs to a more rational outlook. Sympathy and shelter are no solution to the various problems of the visually handicapped, as Clunk believes:

> ..... the best friend of a blind person is that individual who does tell him when he is out of step with the rest of the world; and the person who shelters the blind person from a frank evaluation and comparison with the performance of sighted persons cannot be called 'best friend'.
> .....
>
> If the blind child is trained to look for and to accept without bitterness objective evaluation of his performance in comparison with that of the sighted world, that child is well on his way to a successful career in any field that is compatible with his skill and ability. The door of opportunity, both in employment and social living, will open with surprising ease.[1]

It should be the responsibility of the workers, educators, and publicists to educate the parents and the public through full use of all media such as radio, newspapers, and films, that most of the blind are educable, trainable, employable, and can become useful citizens.

The blind person must also learn to adjust to the seeing world. Sometimes the conditions of life are kind to

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1. Joseph F. Clunk, "Adequacy of Secondary Schools in the Preparation of Blind Youngsters for Adult Life", The New Outlook for the Blind (New York: American Foundation for the Blind), November, 1950, Vol. XLIV, No. 9, p. 250.

the blind and sometimes harsh. This is characteristic and illustrative of life itself. The blind child learns as much from his failures as he does from his achievements. Referring to the potentialities of a blind person, and his own attitude, Grant says:

> The most potent lever at the moment to break down prejudice and to replace it by normal integration into society lies with the young blind themselves, in their sincerity of purpose, in their determination to make good, in the full utilization of their composite abilities, in their fervent desire for equality of opportunity in a society of which they are members, and finally, in their awareness of the need for collective action ....[2]

The handicap of blindness affects the reactions of a blind person to his environment, and these sometimes produce a change in his disposition and temperament, his daily habits, and his outlook on his whole life. "In general, the social environment of the blind determines their attitude toward others and, still more important, their attitude toward themselves."[3]

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2. Isabelle L.D. Grant, "Education of Blind Children in the Public Schools: A Teacher's Viewpoint". Unpublished paper read at the Semiannual Convention of the California Council of the Blind, held in San Francisco, October 1956, pp. 17-18.

3. R.M. Halder, Society and the Visually Handicapped (Bombay: Thacker and Company Ltd., 1948), p. 40.

Teachers of the Blind

One of first and most urgent prerequisites for such an educational programme for the blind is trained and qualified teachers. These can be secured only if there are provisions made for the training of all those sighted and blind persons who are interested in teaching the blind. Summer and short-term courses should be introduced for teachers of visually normal children and in-service teachers of the blind. Arrangements for the training of home teachers, social case workers, and rehabilitation counsellors should also be made. It is, therefore, necessary that the Government of India, the state governments, and private agencies should start training courses for such personnel in various parts of India, using the regional language, as well as the national language, as medium of unstruction. UNESCO and other international organisations like the American Foundation for Overseas Blind, should be approached and urged to cooperate in setting up teacher training courses, both full-term and short-term in different parts of the vast country. Such cooperation in initiating and carrying on these courses, at least for a reasonable period, would surely be a worthwhile investment in human resources.

Braille Books and Equipment

Provisions for the supply of more Braille books should

be made by installing Braille printing presses in different linguistic regions of India. Manufacture of related equipment for the blind such as Braille slates, Braille writers, relief maps, talking book machines, etc., should be supported by the Government, and individual blind persons desirous of importing such equipment from abroad should be exempted from levy of import custom duty.

Legislation

"Comprehensive enabling legislation, implemented by appropriate regulations and supported by the necessary funds, constitutes the legal framework by which a state can assist local school districts in establishing programs for educating the blind with the sighted in the public schools." [4]

As there is at present no legislation protecting the blind or providing for services for the blind in India, it is essential that some legislation be passed by the central and state governments to enable all blind individuals to be educated, trained, and self supporting. In order to plan properly there must be a collection of accurate and reliable statistical data as to the number of all legally blind persons. The

4. The Pine Brook Report, National Work Session on the Education of the Blind with the Sighted (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, Group Reports No. 2, 1954), p. 19.

registration of the blind should be made compulsory through legislation. The existing revenue machinery could undertake this work without much additional expense.

Legal provision should also be made to ensure that all blind children desirous of being educated with the sighted in government or private schools are admitted to such schools, and arrangements must be made for the extra teachers trained to teach the blind. The Government must underwrite the cost of the extra teachers, and equipment, if need be.

Education and training of the visually handicapped will be of no avail if proper arrangements are not made for their job placement. Appropriate legislation should be effected to ensure that a certain percentage of all handicapped groups must be employed by all industrial employers who employ more than 20 workers in their establishments. Special units for assisting the handicapped to find suitable employment should be added to the existing Employment Exchanges throughout India. Some provisions need to be made for award of scholarships and monetary help to blind students and those wishing to be trained as teachers of the blind to pursue their studies.

Publicity and Propaganda

The cooperation of local and state education boards, as well as central Ministry of Education and other agencies in the field should be effectively utilized to distribute

pamphlets, handbooks, and other materials to parents of blind children and to the general public to help them understand the needs and educational problems of blind children. Lectures, demonstrations, and exhibitions could be held to acquaint the public with the potentialities of blind youngsters and the different services available for the education and training of this uncared-for segment of the population. Social workers, educators, and counsellors of the blind should participate in such programmes.

In the United States and England there is an abundant supply of books, pamphlets, and magazines related to the various services available to the blind right from the cradle to the grave. A large amount of money is spent on research in the field of education and welfare of the blind. Research workers in India need much incentive and encouragement for carrying on research.

A few experiments of this proposed programme of integrated coeducation of the blind with the sighted in India should be conducted in selected places throughout the country as a part of a pilot project. The national and state governments and private educational agencies should take the necessary initiative in this respect.

It is true that parents have to decide as to whether

their blind child, on the basis of his individual needs, should be sent to a residential school for the blind or to a regular day school. Whatever their decision may be, the integration of the blind into seeing society should be one of the major goals of present-day education.

> It is recognized that good systems of education of the blind may be expensive. However, ... whatever the cost, it should be an investment by society that will bring returns to society in the form of an adult blind individual who has been educated according to his individual needs and who can make his maximum contribution to society on that basis.[5]

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5. The Pine Brook Report, National Work Session on the Education of the Blind with the Sighted (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, Group Reports No. 2, 1954), p. 55.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

The problems of the blind in India are of colossal magnitude, and an all-out effort is necessary if they are to be tackled adequately and efficiently. As in other fields of social welfare work the progress in the field of welfare work for the blind in India has been very slow. The existing schools for the blind in this vast country are far from adequate to educate the huge number of school-age blind children. Blind youngsters from rural areas and small towns are unable to take advantage of the limited educational opportunities as the residential institutions are located in urban areas only. Almost nothing has so far been done to socialise the blind as an integral part of society.

Advanced countries, like the United States of America and some European countries, have set up very successful programmes in the field of special education. There has been a remarkable progress in the field of education and welfare of the blind. Almost 50 per cent of school-age blind children in the United States are being educated with the sighted in public or private schools. It is likely

that the integrated programme of the education of the blind with the sighted now being followed and encouraged in these countries, if adopted in India, will not only educate a larger number of the blind, but will also enable them to become socially secure, and economically independent, and teach the seeing about blind people. It is felt that such a programme of integrated education will help the majority of blind youngsters to become self supporting and contributing members of society.

An attempt has been made in this thesis to formulate an educational programme of the blind with the sighted in regular day schools. In this system the blind child will receive education while living at home and enjoying the love and comforts of family life. This programme will give the blind youngster an even chance to prove his worth to sighted society, who will, in turn, recognise him as a capable member of the community and afford him suitable opportunity for economic stability.

In order to effect a proper implementation of such a programme the writer has discussed the need of enacting certain legislative measures and active participation of government agencies in carrying out this plan on a large scale. For proper planning there must be a collection of

accurate and reliable statistical data as to the number of all legally blind persons in the country. Proposal has also been made for legal provisions to ensure that all blind children desirous of being educated with the sighted in government or private schools are admitted to such schools, and arrangements must be made for the extra teachers trained to teach the blind.

At present in India even trained blind adults find no openings for employment in order to become self-supporting. It is further suggested in this thesis that appropriate legislation should be effected to ensure that a certain percentage of all handicapped groups must be employed by all industrial employers who employ more than 20 workers in their establishments.

If India is to meet the challenge of providing a well-rounded educational and welfare programme for her large number of blind children, she must introduce the scheme of educating the blind with the sighted in regular common schools. However, residential schools for the blind, which are serving a useful purpose, must also continue to exist for thousands of those blind children who have multiple handicaps, or those who are not properly adjusted to home and community life. It is hoped that the sugges-

tions outlined in this thesis will be of considerable help in the development of a satisfactory programme in this direction. Time will tell to what extent India succeeds in meeting the challenge.

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