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Services for the pre-school blind child in India

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Thesis

SERVICES FOR THE PRE-SCHOOL BLIND CHILD IN INDIA.

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CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION.

India is a vast country with a rich historical background and heritage. She is a country with diversities of culture, religion and language. With her immense resources and potentialities she is, to-day, trying to emerge as one of the progressive countries of the world, a country in which all her citizens may get equal opportunities for their all round development and progress.

Until recently very little work for the blind has been done in India. The work for the blind began on a small scale during the last part of the nineteenth century, and it has grown gradually since then. Its progress has been hampered by political, social and economic factors. Nevertheless, since the attainment of independence in 1947, the welfare program for the blind, who form one of the handicapped groups in the country, has received added impetus.

The population of the blind in India, according to the estimation of Sir Clutha Mackenzie,^I is two millions. This forms nearly one fifth of the total population of the blind in the world. The society and the country cannot achieve any real

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Central Advisory Board of Health and Education, Government of India, Report on Blindness in India, New Delhi, 1944, p. II.

progress if they ignore this large number of the handicapped group. In order that this minority group may develop and progress, the country shall have to provide them with equal opportunities for their education and welfare as are available to the other citizens of the country.

There are about seventy five schools for the blind in India. But, on account of large population of the country, these schools are able to provide elementary education and vocational training only to about one percent of the large number of the blind population. Again, the educational facilities available to-day are primitive and unsatisfactory. If India is to meet the challenge of educating her blind children, she shall have to improve and expand her educational program tremendously. If she considers the efforts made by the advanced countries like America and England towards the cause of their blind children and the results they have achieved, she will find real encouragement. With her rich resources and potentialities, India can surely solve the problems of her visually handicapped children. She can successfully strive for their betterment.

The Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this thesis is to formulate a program of services for the pre-school blind child in India.

Justification.

The blind welfare program in countries like America and England are highly developed. On the whole they cater for the needs of all types of blind individuals from birth to death. The education of the blind has been placed practically on the same footing of the sighted. It is recognized that educational progress of an individual in his later life depends very largely on his development during his early formative years. It is also recognized that the ideal place for the blind child's development during these early years is his own home. But there are situations in which the home environment is not favourable for the child's development. The services for the pre-school blind children in America and England have tried to face this situation either by accepting the complete responsibility of such children or by offering assistance to them and their parents in their own homes.

The writer has associated herself with the welfare work and education of the visually handicapped children in her capacity as a head of some schools for the seeing as well as blind children in India. Besides this, she has served on many committees and organizations for the blind. She has had personal contact with the Headmasters and Headmistresses of nearly fifty schools for the blind in India who attended the Second All India Conference for the Blind, Bombay, 1959. She has discussed matters pertaining to the education of blind children not only in their own

states but in the country as a whole. She has realized that there has been no program of services for the pre-school blind child any where in India.

The first five years of any child's life form the most critical period. This is the period when the basic skills and social habits are formed. These are the years when the child learns most. These years have profound influence on the personality and character of the child during his later life. His mannerisms, ability to meet problems, to get along with others and to achieve satisfaction are all well fixed in these years and they remain with him for the rest of his life.

During these pre-school years the blind child lives with his parents. He undergoes different kinds of experiences. In one family a pre-school blind child may get good experiences, good physical care, association with other children and good material for constructive learning. Above all, he may have love from his parents and their understanding of him. This would make it possible for him to meet his new responsibilities later on. In another family, a blind child may have limited experiences due to limited capacities, lack of care, few opportunities to work with toys or restricted play activities with other children of his age group. Still, in another family, a child may have disturbed and unhappy family conditions.

All of these earlier experiences will have great influence on the life of the blind child. As a result of this he presents different kinds of problems when he is admitted into a regular school later on. For example, a blind child who has no associa-

tion with other children of his age group in his pre-school years may become mentally retarded. If a child with early mannerisms is not provided with suitable activities to counteract them, he may continue these mannerisms during his later years. A child, who is overprotected in his pre-school period, may not strike out for himself when he reaches his school age or when he becomes an adult. Such a child is always dependent upon others.

It is during the pre-school period that the blind child can acquire such necessary and varied experiences as reading readiness, auditory skills, tactual ability, sense of discrimination, language and speech.

The attitudes of the society and the parents of the pre-school blind child in India are detrimental to his normal development. The parents exhibit different attitudes. Some of them feel it too difficult to get over their feelings such as feelings of guilt, fear, sin, anxiety, shame and inadequacy at the advent of a blind baby in their home. Consequently they add additional hindrances to the blind child's handicap either by overprotecting or by rejecting him. As a result of this he becomes dependent on others and does not develop adequacy to cope up with the situations which he may have to face later on. Some of the parents find it extremely difficult to meet the special needs of the blind child. Many others generally suppose that it is impossible for a blind child to manipulate skills and materials as the seeing child. Consequently they deprive the blind child of many opportunities for gaining experiences, skills and habits. This causes a lack of necessary stimulation and desire for

activity. Parents, not only fail to give opportunities for tactual exploration and manipulation of skills but also they actually circumvent such explorations in a very surprising manner. Thus, for instance, the blind child is prevented from touching articles of furniture for fear of bumping himself; he is not allowed to touch the flower vase or the radio. Articles and objects of ordinary use at home are tabooed to him. Even in the case of the most indulgent and intelligent parents such a lack of providing the blind child with necessary stimulation from his early years is commonly found. It is said that most of the blind children who enter schools are deficient in muscular strength and development. This is due to lack of opportunities for muscular activities and development during their pre-school years.

As Thomas D. Cutsforth² has pointed out pre-school blind child should be suitably trained from his early years to behave in such a manner that he could be socially accepted. He should be taught to eat and dress by himself, to avoid soiling his clothes, to communicate with others, to go about freely and explore the environment. It is necessary to develop social insight and activity in the pre-school blind child. Again as pointed out by

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Thomas D. Cutsforth, The Blind in School and Society, The American Foundation for the Blind, New York, 1951, pp. 16-18.

Cutsforth³ such an insight and activity developed in the blind child in his home would be more real and natural than the one which he may acquire in the school later on. If the child is exposed only to limited experiences at home, then he behaves just like a foreigner who is very little adjusted to the world outside his own sphere. Opportunities for expanding activities should be provided for the blind child in his pre-school period. Imposing limitations on his mobility curtails his ability to explore many things and to have control over the environment. Lack of sensory experiences and mental activity retards his development.

In accordance with what Cutsforth has suggested⁴ the pre-school blind child should grow in a normal social atmosphere just as a seeing child grows in an average family. By birth and by nature the blind child is not unsocial. But his normal growth is not organized as it is done in case of the sighted child in the family. The attitudes of his parents and society may make his normal development impossible. The blind child becomes limited in acquiring broader social relations and he is ultimately left socially immature. Given suitable opportunities and encouragement the pre-school blind child, like the normal sighted child, can attain normal standards of life and grow to be an independent adult who can be useful not only to himself but to his society at large.

³

Thomas D. Cutsforth, op.cit., pp.19-20.

⁴

Ibid., pp.14-15.

Most of the conditions which may restrict normal growth and development of the pre-school blind child in India can be rectified by suitable program of services to him and to his parents.

The Scope of the Study.

This thesis will propose a program for the pre-school blind child in India, including necessary legislation, training of workers, parent education and public relations.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background to the problem of services for the
pre-school blind child in India.

Schools for the blind in India have been in existence for the last Seventy Five years and, of late, education for the blind has been receiving more and more attention. No serious thought, however, has been given to the care, training and education of the pre-school blind child.

Most of the existing schools admit children at the age of six and upwards. It is estimated that there are about 600,000⁵ blind children of school age in India. It is assumed, that out of this number, there are about 50,000 blind children of below the age of five. As against the West, where blindness is now chiefly a problem connected with old age, it is generally agreed that a large number of the blind in India are either born blind or have lost their eyesight during their early years of life. Neither the states nor the voluntary agencies working for the blind have made any provision for the proper care, training and education of the pre-school blind child. It is only very recently that some interest has been, evinced in this problem.

5

Swaran Ahuja, Care of the Pre-school Blind Child, paper read at the Second All India Conference for the Blind, Bombay, 1959, p.1.

The very belief in India that blindness is the result of some sin committed in the previous birth affects the parents in their reaction toward the blind child. An expectant mother expects a normal child, but when she comes to learn that her baby is born blind she naturally becomes emotionally upset and then shocked. To the parents, the loss of sight in their child means loss of every thing and this bewilders them. Their relatives, friends and neighbours give them undesirable advices. Besides, ignorance and illiteracy on the part of the parents render them helpless in dealing with their blind child.

Some of the Indian customs, superstitions and religious thoughts hang over the people to such an extent that many of their actions in their daily life are being guided by them. Blindness evokes misguided pity and sometimes ridicule or contempt in the people with whom the blind people come in contact. The result of this kind of pity is that many blind people try to earn their living by means of beggary. Some of the states in India have set up 'Beggar Homes' where the blind people are offered free shelter, food and clothing and where they are taught some handicrafts to enable them to earn an independent living. The majority of blind people do not remain in these homes as they prefer beggary as a convenient means of livelihood. Besides, they are also being encouraged by the general public, with its misguided pity and kindness. People in India, particularly the Hindus, believe that giving alms to the blind beggars is a means of winning the favour from God. This favour is called 'PUNNYA'.

Hindus also believe in the 'Law of Karma and the Transmigration of the Soul'. This is a religious belief strongly prevalent among this section of the community. In accordance with this theory of Karma, blindness in one's present life is the result of the sins committed in his previous life. This religious belief evokes stronger feelings of pity and kindness towards the blind.

It is learnt that even the Muslims who form another section of the population in India believe in the philosophy that blindness is sometimes destined upon the victim by God himself and as such they feel that to do anything to improve the conditions of the blind is to go against the will of God. In this connection Kalappurakal David Joseph has written as follows:

There is another philosophy current amongst some Oriental schools of thought, especially among the Muslims and Hindus, that fate has a place in the World Order which God has pre-destined. It is, therefore, natural that the stern hand of fate had already foreordained that a particular person or group of persons should be blind. This philosophy is dangerous in its application to those labouring under blindness. A question asked; 'Why do you Christians bother about the blind--their education, after care and social welfare?'. They add 'God has pre-destined them to be blind and anything which is done to improve the appalling condition of the blind is doing something against the will of God'. This philosophy is dangerous too. The strict adherence to this doctrine makes the blind object of natural contempt and no effort can be stimulated to ameliorate their condition.

On the whole the blind in India are often treated with such unscientific attitudes.

6

Kalappurakal David Joseph, Developing Public Understanding about the Social and Educational Problems of the Blind in India, Unpublished Master of Education Thesis, Boston University School of Education, 1956, p.39.

As stated by Mary Victoria and P.B.Krishnaswamy, the Second Five Year Plan made certain provisions for institutions for the education of the blind, and for kindergarten schools for blind children in India. Some of the relevant factors which have been considered under this scheme are :

1. A survey to be carried out with the help of medical and educational experts in order to determine the incidence of blind in the country and also to elicit such information as will be useful in formulating new plans for the education and welfare of the blind.
2. An adequate sum to be provided in the plan for giving assistance to state governments for establishing new educational and other welfare organizations for the blind and for developing the existing ones.
3. An adequate sum should also be provided in the plan for giving financial assistance to voluntary educational institutions and other welfare organizations working in the field of education and welfare of the blind.⁷

These considerations and recommendations by the government are not adequate considering the bulk of the country and the teeming population of the blind, in general, and blind children in particular and their varied problems. The problem of the pre-school blind child, with all its manifold aspects, has to be dealt with not by any one uniform program or plan but with varied types of programs suitable to their condition and nature of their blindness.

7

Jangam Mary Victoria and P.B.Krishnaswamy, Training of the Pre-school Blind Child in India, Unpublished Master of Education Thesis, Boston University School of Education, 1959, p.25.

Though India may not have experience in this field of work the examples that the advanced countries like America and England have set and the achievement and progress they have made are very encouraging to India to take similar steps that are suitable and adaptable to her background. The time has become ripe for this problem of vital importance to be treated on a top priority basis.

Services for the pre-school blind child in
America.

America has recognized the importance of educating and training the blind child before he is admitted to any regular school and different kinds of programs have been formulated for the purpose. The problem of the pre-school blind child has been such a big topic that it has not been possible for any one agency to deal with it in an adequate manner. The attention of many educators, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists has been focused on the pre-school blind child. The problem of these children has become acute with the incidence of blindness due to Retrolental Fibroplasia.

The services for the pre-school blind child in America has undergone an evolutionary period which runs into three significant Eras:

1. The Era of Pamphlets-----Early 1800's--1901.
2. The Era of Initial Nurseries. 1901--Mid.30's.
3. Home Visiting. Mid 30's--present day.

The importance of services for the pre-school blind child was recognized a century ago.

Before the start of the 20th Century, a few educators, who had gained an insight with respect to the inhibiting effects on the blind children of an emotionally charged home situation, provided partial remedy by means of supplying pamphlets of suggestions and lists of 'Do's and Don'ts' for the parents of blind

children and the public.⁸ These pamphlets are stated to have been very valuable sources of information to the parents of blind children regarding the care and training of blind babies.

As early as 1830 Dr.S.G.Howe, the first director of the Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts, recognized the importance of educating and training the pre-school blind child. In fact, he is the pioneer worker in the field of education of the blind in America. The name of Dr.Edward Allen is worthy of mention at this juncture. Some of the important suggestions which they made in these pamphlets are as follows:

1. Acquainting the child with everyday common experiences.
2. To give him scope for mobility and socialization.
3. Parents should play an important role in preparing the blind child for school.
4. The pre-school blind child should be taught every activity to become independent.
5. The pre-school blind child should be given sensory training.⁹

In 1887 a school for young blind children was opened in Jamaica Plain and by 1912--1913 this school was shifted to its present site at Watertown in Massachusetts.

A home for Blind Babies was opened at Connecticut in 1893. This home is not in existence to-day.

8

Paul A.Zahl, Blindness, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1950, p.71.

9

Perkins Institute and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, Forty Third Annual Report, 1875, pp. 38 & 46.

The famous Boston Nursery for Blind Babies was established in 1901 and is still in existence.

The first third of the 20th Century was the Golden Age of nurseries and nursery schools.

Dyker Heights Home for the Blind Children was started in Brooklyn in 1905 by the International Sunshine Society. This admitted blind children from their infancy to the age of sixteen. This was the first school which had a regular kindergarten program. By 1935 a number of nurseries were opened in New-Jersey, Yonkers, Los-Angeles, Michigan and many other places in America.

To begin with, most of these nursery schools were residential in character. By 1935 there was a swing from the nursery program to home visiting program. Most of the nurseries were discontinued with the exception of the Boston Nursery. This swing took place as the home came to be regarded the best place for training and educating the blind child in his pre-school period. Home services came to be regarded as the best type of services to be rendered.

In 1951, The American Foundation for the Blind in New-York undertook a detailed study of pre-school blind children and devoted much time in considering the following points:

1. Prevention of Blindness.
2. Help towards physical and mental development of the blind.
3. Need for further research in this field.
4. The disease of the eye such as congenital cataract.

5. Sensory Efficiency Studies:

Visual Efficiency--Investigation of methods to increase the recognition and interpretation of partially seeing children.

Other sensory efficiencies--Investigation of the methods of increasing the efficiency and utilization of auditory, kinaesthetic and other sensory skills.

6. Correlation of Medical and Psychological aspects:

Incidence of blindness with types of visual defects
Duration and environmental factors.

Correlation of mental retardation with environment and types of Ocular diseases.

Attempts to establish Ophthalmological diagnostic clues, activities of child and personality traits as an index of I.Q. during infancy.¹⁰

Referring to the services for the pre-school blind child the American Foundation for the Blind, New-York, has suggested the following:

Regard to the individual worth and respecting the feelings of the blind child.

Loving care and guidance from parents for the blind child.

A secured home which is free from want and dread of want and which provides satisfactory physical, aesthetic, social and spiritual environment to all its members.

Full access to health-educational, recreational, social and religious services and programs directed towards the well being of all they serve.¹¹

10

American Foundation for the Blind, Study of the Status of the Pre-school Blind Child in America, New-York, 1951, p.17.

11

John E Anderson, The White Conference on Child Health and Protection, The Century Company, New York, 1930, p.45.

Under the existing provisions in America, there is a wide array of services for the pre-school blind children and their **parents**, There are the pre-school counselors, day nursery schools, residential nurseries, nursery schools and summer institutions. There is also provision for the placement of the pre-school blind children in the nurseries, foster homes and also to the supply of literature both to the parents of blind children and the professional workers.

Pre-school workers:

The policy in America is to appoint pre-school workers. According to Kathryn E Maxfield,¹² these pre-school workers are appointed both by the Government and private agencies. They visit homes and advise the parents regarding the care of their blind baby. They do much towards lifting the morale of the entire family and help the visually handicapped child to establish himself as a worthy member of the group. They help the mothers in giving good training to their blind child, training which he needs in daily life routine such as eating, dressing, walking etc. They use a high degree of ability, tact and skill in guiding the parents on psychological, sociological and educational principles of care and training of their blind children.

Referring to the pre-school counselors Zahl writes:

Visiting counselors who give all or most of their time to this work are employed by states such as New-Jersey, New-York, Connecticut, Illinois and Wisconsin. In some states home teachers for the adult blind take the pre-school children into their already overfull schedules.

¹²

P.A.Zahl, Blindness, op.cit. pp.78.

Counselors are also sent into the homes by private organizations like the Light House (New-York Association for the Blind) or the Boston Nursery for the Blind Babies. A social worker and a visiting teacher work with the mothers of the retrolental fibroplasia children being studied by the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary.¹³

The Massachusetts Division for the Blind offers valuable services to the blind children and their parents. Thus

Jean M. Ellis indicates that:

We have two such counselors. Our agency is tax supported. Hence our services are free.

Upon the request of the parents, we visit any pre-school child who is blind.

We encourage parents to bring up their visually handicapped child as they do their others, giving them acceptance, love, direction, without overprotection. We explain in what ways these children must have a little more encouragement, such as in investigating for themselves, how they must be stimulated more than a sighted child who learns so much through his eyes, and that this takes patience and time.¹⁴

Referring to some of the important pre-school services that are being offered by the Massachusetts Division for the Blind

Jean M. Ellis mentions the following:

1. Interpret child development to the parents.
2. Advise on the need of a child who is blind.
3. Demonstrate techniques helpful in training in order to promote independence in the child.
4. Provide knowledge of educational material, such as toys.
5. Evaluate the child's readiness for group experience.
6. Arrange for education in nursery schools, kindergartens and schools for the blind.
7. Interpret the child to the school and follow his adjustment in school.¹⁵

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Paul A. Zahl, op.cit., p.77.

I⁴

Jean M. Ellis, The Role of the Pre-school Counselor, The New Out Look for the Blind, Vol.51, No.1, January 1957, p.25

I⁵

Jean M. Ellis, Ibid.

Ellis also states that:

The pre-school counselor goes to the public kindergarten schools and help these children enrolled--we meet the principals, discuss the possibilities of these children entering their schools, how the child can be integrated in the class and in what ways the counselors can help the teacher.¹⁶

While discussing different types of blindness among children and services for them and their parents, Emma H. Minturn says:

In early years of retrolental fibroplasia, the impact of so many premature babies on mothers, not prepared for this, became almost a catastrophe. Mothers who had planned for and looked to a warm, cuddly little creature, were presented with puny pitiful little things, who were taken from them and placed under oxygen for 2-3 months, depriving these mothers and babies of giving and receiving the love so very important to the first parent child contact. The final crushing blow came when they were told these children were blind. With the heart break and emotional distress of this, a great cry went up for help for these people. Agencies, organizations, hospitals, professional people from all over the country came forward. Parent groups were formed; institutes of mothers with their babies were held; lectures were planned for them from pediatricians, ophthalmologists and educators; lectures dealing with their problems were made available.¹⁷

Summer Schools:

Summer schools and conferences are another source of help to the pre-school blind child and his parents in America. These schools are generally attended by the parents. The importance of these services is greatly emphasises by Francis E Marshal in the following words:

Summer School programs help the parents of the pre-school

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Jean M. Ellis, op.cit., p.29.

I7

Emma H. Minturn, The Pre-school blind child and his mother, The International Journal for the Education of Blind, Vol. X, No. 2, December 1960, p.82.

blind children to meet together in their own community or state and receive the assistance which comes from group participation. They create an opportunity for emotional release through group identification and the supportive guidance of the leaders; an opportunity for congenial friendships to develop among individuals having similar interests and problems.¹⁸

There are summer schools in states like Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin where parents of pre-school blind children receive training in dealing with special problems of blind children. During the summers of 1945-46, summer sessions were held at the Perkins Institute, Massachusetts. These sessions were a part of an experimental and demonstrational project. The purpose of these sessions was to offer guidance to the mothers of blind children who were retrolental fibroplasia cases. This project brought to light, retrolental fibroplasia as a new cause for blindness in the United States.¹⁹

It is also learnt that Perkins Institute, Massachusetts used to hold 'Baby Weeks'. These weeks were organized under a pre-school work scheme. At present, however, very little work is being done in this direction. This indicates that blindness among infants has decreased. However, these agencies have played an important part in the field of service to the pre-school blind children and their parents in the United States.

18

Francis E Marshal, Desirable and Comprahensive Plan for Aid to the Pre-school Blind Child and His Parents, Proceedings of the Thirty Ninth Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, June 1948, pp.44-45.

19

Paul A.Zahl, op.cit., p.79.

Day Nursery Schools:

These are another source of pre-school services for the blind child. In these institutes teachers give attention to the development of special skills which are needed by the blind child. According to P.A.Zahl,²⁰ there are three such schools in the United States of America. The oldest of them is 'The Light House' at New-York. Another one has been established at Buffalo. The one at Minneapolis is of unique type. This school accepts both blind and seeing children from four out of five buroughs of New-York. It also provides transportation facilities to these children. Besides, services of Pediatricians, psychologists and nurses are also offered to them.

There are similar schools at Brooklyn and Los Angeles for the benefit of employed mothers having many children. Blind infants are cared for while their mothers are at work.

Parents' Meetings:

These are considered to be valuable adjuncts to the nursery schools.²¹ The purpose of these meetings is to build morale and understanding in the parents of blind children(pre-school). These meetings are usually held at intervals during the school year.

Integration of pre-school blind children in sighted nursery schools:

This has become one of the educational goals in America. While writing about pre-school blind children Kathryn E Maxfield²² stresses the importance of such integration by stating that

²⁰ Paul A Zahl, op.cit., p.78.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

if the schools for seeing children recognize blind children as children and meet their special needs, then such school placement is wise for many blind children. This gives them valuable experience in getting along on equal terms with sighted children. According to Zahl,²³ there are a few such institutions which have recently been developed. The one at Illinois has been developed on a genuine scale. This school has made a co-operative arrangement with the philanthropic and private nursery schools in Chicago to admit blind children of pre-school age. The staff of these schools are given guidance in dealing with the special problems of pre-school blind children.

Residential Nursery Schools:

The best known of the residential schools is the Boston Nursery for Blind Babies which was started in 1901. It admits only twenty blind babies at a time. This nursery has, to-day, been very well established and organized.²⁴ A thorough psychological appraisal of the abilities of these babies is made before and during residence. At the age of five or by the sixth birthday, at the latest, these babies are sent to Kindergarten or first grade class at the Perkins Institute for the Blind, Massachusetts.

There are three more such nurseries which are worthy of mention.²⁵ The one at Los Angeles is the only residential nursery in the West. Since the one at New-York is a private residential

²³ Paul A. Zahl, op.cit., p.79.

²⁴ Paul A. Zahl, op.cit., p.80.

²⁵ Ibid., p.80.

nursery it charges fees which is paid either by the state or the family of the blind baby. The last one is located on a farm in Paoli, Pennsylvania. This is the only one of its kind in the country which is designed for the care and training of mentally retarded blind children.

Foster Homes:

Sometimes blind children are placed in these homes. They are specially meant for young blind children whose home conditions are very inadequate and unsatisfactory. The children in these homes are under the supervision of social workers or teachers.

Literature:

This is an important supplement to the existing services. Literature pertaining to the care, training and education of pre-school blind children are placed in the hands of parents and professional workers. Some of the very useful pieces of such literature are:

Guide for parents of pre-school blind child, by
Miss. Gertrude Van Den Broek.

A Manual for parents of pre-school blind children, by
Mrs. Edith L. Speer.

What shall we do with our Blind Babies?, by
Miss. Harriet E. Totman. 26

The American Foundation for the Blind, New-York, possesses practically everything in print which has been written about the pre-school blind child.

Program and facilities for the
pre-school blind child in England.

The educational system in England was reinforced in 1893 and this made education of blind children compulsory between the ages of five and sixteen.²⁷ Most of the blind children in this country go to what are called 'Sunshine Homes'. These are modern residential nursery schools which admit blind children who are trained and educated there up to their age of seven if they are normal and nine if they are retarded blind children.

There are about eight Sunshine Homes under the auspicious of the National Institute for the Blind in England. They are all well supported by the Government.²⁸

Each Sunshine Home consists of three groups. One of them is called the 'Out of School Group' as it consists of blind babies who are not ready for regular class room work. Each of the other two groups consists of blind children between the age of three and five, and five and seventeen respectively. The number of blind children in each group is not more than ten. There are trained teachers and nurses in these groups in whose care the blind babies are placed.

Education is imparted to these children through experience and natural means. Learning is related to life situations and

27

Paul A Zahl, op.cit., p.30.

28 College of Teachers of the Blind and the National Institute for the Blind, Report on The Education of the Blind, Edward Arnold Company, London, 1936, p.87.

every day life problems. Reading and writing of braille are taught only after the children have acquired readiness for the same. Every child is provided with opportunities to develop at his own speed and according to his own capacity.

Home visiting is also made and parents of blind babies are advised how to bring them up providing opportunities for the wholesome development of their personality.

Parents are encouraged to visit these Sunshine Homes. Sometimes they are also permitted to stay with their blind babies for a few days. Separate units called Parents' Units are set up for this purpose in these homes. These units help the parents to understand their blind babies' needs and problems. Regular meetings of parents, nurses, home teachers and welfare workers for blind are also conducted in these Sunshine Homes.

Facilities for the pre-school blind child
in Europe.

France:

The Paris Conference for the blind, 1953, which devoted one session for the discussion of the problems of pre-school blind children has expressed some of the French views on the subject as follows:

It was recommended that the pre-school years should be extended to the age of ten.

Considerable importance was placed on the effort to educate the public to the realization of the fact that the blind child is a 'Person'.

Parents should be instructed on the importance of teaching independence to the young blind child.

The day is confidently looked forward to when the blind child shall have full quality educationally with the sighted.

The importance of frequent contact of blind children with other children of his own age was emphasised for both physical and intellectual reasons.

It was also stressed that developing a sense of touch and hearing in the home as a training in observation was considered important.

The conference unanimously agreed that before the blind child goes to school he should have acquired a great deal of education at home and especially through memory work. It was thought that reciting pieces at family gatherings would encourage in the child social development and self-expression.

The attention of the conference was directed to a manual of directions for the training of the pre-school blind child written by Monsieur de la Sizeranne. It was suggested that this manual be sent to every public and

private school, together with a Braille alphabet as an educational advertisement.

The need was also proposed for a book to be written on the subject of advice to parents to provide the proper background for bringing up the children and to enable the parents to stimulate their children to learn before they go to school.²⁹

Greece:

Comparatively very little work has been done for blind children in this country. A school for blind children was established in Athens in 1907 which now, accommodates about one hundred and twenty children. 'The Light House' is a publication which is being distributed among the parents.³⁰

Austria:

It is learnt that parents of pre-school blind children are invited to attend lectures at schools for the blind.³¹

29

American Association of Instructors of the Blind, International Journal for the Education of the Blind, Vol. X, No. 2, 1953, P. 178.

30

Paul A Zahl, op.cit., p. 54.

31

Jangam Mary Victoria and P. B. Krishnaswamy, op.cit., p. 22.

Norway.

It is stated that under the auspicious of the National Association for the Blind, a school for pre-school blind children has been established at Oslo.³² Home Teaching is also prevalent. The 'Treatment of Blind Children in the Homes' is a publication by the Norwegian Association for the Blind.

Facilities for the pre-school blind child
in Japan.

It has been reported by Shigeharu Matsura³³ that according to the Ministry of Education of Japan, 1956, there were seventy four schools for the blind in Japan, out of which twelve were kindergarten schools. The School Education Act of 1947 enforced compulsory education for blind children as a result of which education for these children rapidly developed since then. The number of pupils, including the kindergarten, was 4,457 in 1948, and this rose to 9,460 by 1956. The number of teachers correspondingly increased from 783 to 2,269.

An act was passed in 1954 to encourage parents to send their blind children to special schools. According to the extent

32

Jangam Mary Vistoria and P.B.Krishnaswamy, op.cit., p.22.

33

Shigeharu Matsura, Proposed Program for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind in Japan, Unpublished Master of Education Thesis, Boston University School of Education, 1960, pp.5-9.

of home economy the local government has to pay, either partially or totally, for their text books, transportation, school meals and board. Half the amount is to be charged to the National Treasury.

According to the report of the Ministry of Education regarding the local expenditure the cost per capita relating to special schools is stated to have been 95,437 Yen(\$265:II). The per capita cost for the blind children is stated to have been 7.03 times as much as that for normal children.

At present Japan has a residential school system for blind children after the practices in the United States and England.

CHAPTER III
PROPOSAL FOR THE PROGRAM OF
SERVICES FOR THE PRE-SCHOOL BLIND CHILD IN INDIA.

A review of literature about the pre-school blind child has revealed that a tremendous amount of work is being done in this field in America and England. There has been no such program for the pre-school blind child any where in India.

To begin with, it is necessary to obtain a reliable census of pre-school blind children. Certain legislative measures should be taken to ensure their registration. It is of equal importance that steps should be taken for the prevention of blindness during pre-school years.

A real foundation for the training and education of the pre-school blind child is to be laid in his home. His parents should be helped and educated to shoulder this responsibility in an intelligent and understanding manner. The education of the parents necessitates the services of trained pre-school workers. It is, therefore, necessary to start training programs to train social workers for helping pre-school blind children and their parents.

After sufficient training is received at home, the pre-school blind child should be able to enter nursery and kindergarten classes in order to get fuller development of his personality. Nursery and kindergarten schools for blind children should, therefore, be opened in the country. Provision should also be made to

integrate blind children with sighted ones.

Other facilities such as summer schools, foster homes and seminars should be provided.

Above all it is very necessary that the general public be educated regarding their attitudes towards the pre-school blind child and his handicap.

It is on these lines that a program of services for the pre-school blind child in India has been formulated in this thesis.

Census and Registration of
pre-school blind children in India.

In order to give early training to the pre-school blind child, it is necessary that there should be early referrals of such cases. Early referrals, early diagnosis and early therapy are necessary if the pre-school blind child is to have his potential development.

A National Health Survey is very essential to establish any welfare program in a country. This survey will include the blind also. Such a survey is worthy of consideration in a country like India where the population of the blind children is large. This would facilitate the acquisition of reliable statistics of pre-school blind children.

Registration of all persons in the country should be maintained both by the National and the State Governments. The

registration should be followed by the establishment of National and State Bureau of services for the blind. The Governments can implement the registration program by entrusting this responsibility to the village headmen who should eventually communicate the information, through the District Agencies, to their respective state Bureau of services for the blind. These Bureaus should, ultimately, submit their reports to the Central Registry under the National Government.

The registration should be very accurate and complete.

During registration period, information regarding the causes of blindness of the children and the age of onset of their blindness should be noted.

It should be mandatory that the heads of hospitals, ophthalmologists and medical practitioners should report all cases of blind babies that may come to their notice.

Even the private registered medical practitioners and surgeons should report such cases to the registration office in the area to which they belong.

Any breach of this law should be subject to disciplinary action.

The heads of nursery and kindergarten schools should also report all cases of blindness among their school children. They should take particular notice of the eye defects of those children, either at the time of their admission or when they leave the school due to defective eye sight.

Registration of blind babies would be a basic necessity to:

1. Determine whether surgical or other treatment may restore useful vision.
2. Determine service needs and to plan service programs.
3. Analyse the causes for blindness and to plan for conservation of vision and prevention of blindness.³⁴

Prevention of blindness among
pre-school blind children in
India.

It is not enough that statistics of pre-school blind children are obtained and measures are passed for their registration. Efforts should be made for the prevention of blindness among these children. National Health Schemes, which are highly successful in the western countries like America and England, should be started in India. Such health schemes may be operated either by the Government or by voluntary organizations. Mandatory laws should be passed through out the country that maternity cases should be handled only by registered medical practitioners.

³⁴ Paul A Zahl, op.cit., p.39.

The use of silver nitrate drops for new born babies should be enforced. This would minimize the spread of infectious eye diseases and blindness among infants.

With regard to cases which are not treated at hospitals, the Health Departments of respective areas should provide for eye examination and medical aid.

It should also be the responsibility of the respective Health Departments of different States and local areas to watch the trend of epidemics such as small-pox, infectious eye diseases like trachoma, sore eyes and conjunctivitis. Preventive measures should be taken to check the spread of these diseases.

Periodical checking of children at nursery and kindergarten schools should be made and remedial treatment given free of charge, wherever it is possible for the same.

'Eye Camps' are a valuable solution for the prevention of blindness. This is particularly so for the rural areas, because medical help in these areas is very unsatisfactory. Transportation facilities are still wanting. Poverty makes it hard for the villagers to travel long distances to seek modern medical help available in big cities. Eye camps are of special benefit to the rural folks. These camps should be organized by the Governmental bodies. They should be staffed by well qualified surgeons. Members of the local medical associations should also volunteer their services for this purpose. The work of these camps should be scrutinised and properly assessed by registered supervisors. Laymen should not be encouraged to hold such camps. The aim of

these camps should be to give the best possible medical help to blind children.

Every civil hospital in each district should have an Eye Department. This department should be well staffed and equipped. There should be an Eye Ward, both for indoor and out door patients, in each such hospital. This should be fully in charge of expert ophthalmologists and ophthalmic surgeons. There should also be a Mobile Squad in the base hospital and the duty of this squad should be to tour about in village parts of the district to preach the gospel of prevention of blindness, treatment of eye diseases and to attend to minor types of surgery. But all cases requiring major treatment should be referred to the district base hospital.

A far more effective and efficient service to prevent blindness among children is to educate the rural masses on problems of blindness among children. Thousands of people in India are rendered blind through ignorance. The worst victims are the children. Some parents do not attend to the eye problems till it is too late. Some use home made and unscientific medications. Many a times they use different medications on the advice of equally ignorant well wishers and friends and make matters worse. Unqualified 'physicians' are also very much active in the rural areas and the uneducated, ignorant parents fall easy victims to these quacks.

Intensive propaganda should be carried out on local and state wide bases to educate the rural masses.

Social workers, Community Development Centers, National Extension Blocks and health units should offer their co-operation in this kind of campaign.

Health Visitors, nurses and midwives can also make an important contribution towards prevention of blindness among children by warning prospective mothers against the use of harmful drugs, teaching them the use of simple remedies and urging them to seek the constant help of available medical facilities.

It would be of great benefit if a few lessons related to ophthalmology are included in the regular training program for nurses.

It would be of equal importance if school teachers also receive some instruction, during their training period, about a few simple eye diseases and care of the eyes.

Training of Social Workers

and

Parents of Pre-school Blind Children.

The incidence of blindness in India is greater in rural areas than in citizen towns. Many factors, such as illiteracy, poverty, superstition, lack of medical help, etc., are responsible for this high incidence of blindness. Thus, the parents who are of less than average ability and means are required to face the responsibility of bringing up a blind child. These parents cannot face this heavy responsibility without some external special assistance. In order to provide such assistance, it is necessary that special training centers to train social workers in the field of care of pre-school blind children should be started in every State by State Governments. In order to meet the local needs such centers should be administered by the local authorities and voluntary agencies. The social workers may receive training as Medical Social Workers, Pre-school Counselors, Home Teachers etc.

Social welfare programs in India, to-day, are fairly extensive. They are being operated mainly by the State Social Welfare Boards (which are working in cooperation with one another under the control and supervision of the National Central Social Welfare Boards) and a network of National Extension Blocks. These organizations provide a wide range of services pertaining to the problems of health, medical care, literacy, handicrafts, recreation and many such welfare measures for the general uplift and welfare

of the society. These services should be extended to the pre-school blind children and their parents.

Training program for social workers.

During the training period the social workers should be provided with the fundamental knowledge about growth and development of the pre-school blind child in relation to the growth and development of children in general; psychology of blindness; attitudes of his parents and the society and their reactions towards him and his handicap; limitations which blindness imposes upon him; special needs of the blind child and the way to meet these needs; some common eye diseases and care of the eye. In short, these workers should be trained to guide the parents in the training and care of their blind children.

If all the basic knowledge in the above mentioned areas is supplied to these workers, they will be better equipped to help the pre-school blind child and his parents on sound lines.

Social workers who are to be trained should preferably be ladies. In addition to their training which qualifies them to their profession they should possess the good qualities of patience and tolerance. Their success would be possible only through deep understanding of human nature.

Trained workers are a great asset in the field of services to the pre-school blind child and his parents.

General Guidance by the social workers to
parents of pre-school blind children

Trained workers should guide the parents on the following lines:

The pre-school blind child is basically a child. His visual handicap does not alter the fact that he is still a child. His basic needs are the same as that of any seeing child. Love and security, sense of belonging to a group and being wanted, sense of his own worth and the right to be himself, sense of adequacy and ability in meeting situations, sense of achievement and direction are some of the very important needs of the blind child. These needs must be well considered by the parents. The blind child does not always express his needs in the same way as his seeing brother does. However, he too wants to take an active part in all activities with other children. His needs must be satisfactorily met.

Very early in life the blind child becomes conscious of the fact that he is different from other children in his family and in the neighbourhood. It is at this stage that a sensible attitude on the part of the parents will help him in his proper adjustment to blindness and the world around him.

Parents should exhibit healthy attitudes towards the blind child. They should accept him as he is. Attitude of self confidence and adequacy are the pre requisites towards their acceptance of him. By their acceptance they will be developing, in him, a healthy attitude towards the sighted world. Lack of acceptance,

on the other hand, can be a greater handicap in his development, than his blindness itself. An attitude of denial gives the child a feeling of inadequacy. He will act adversely with regard to his relation between his parents and himself. This seriously interferes with his physical and mental growth. Feelings of overprotectiveness deprive him of the much needed normal experiences of every day life. This, again, retards his physical, mental and emotional growth and development. Feeling of rejection and neglect render him very aggressive or withdrawn in his later years.

The first instinct of any parent is to love their child. It is from the parents and their love that the blind child can come to learn what love and hatred are and how they should be expressed and controlled. It is, again, from the parents that he can learn that love, independence, courage, competition and many such qualities are good. Love and affection from his parents and the other members of the family are very essential to the blind child.

Excessive love and affection will result in his retardation, lack of self confidence and overdependence.

The pre-school blind child should be given full place in the family. He should have all the privileges and obligations as his seeing brother. But care should be taken that he is not given any special privileges. He should be given the feeling of security and stabilization which will back him up and enable him to face all his difficulties with courage and confidence.

Blindness imposes certain basic limitations on the growth and development of the blind child. The field of his experiences becomes

restricted. Again, these experiences are, many times, incomplete and distorted. These limitations also make him a withdrawn person. They cause his detachment from the physical, and to some extent, from the social world. He fails to acquire certain behavior patterns which seeing children acquire by visual imitations. The parents should have some understanding of these limitations so that they can modify their behavior in a suitable manner.

Parents of the pre-school blind child should teach him regular habits of eating, dressing, sleeping, taking exercises and toilet habits. All these habits should be cultivated in him from his very early years of life. In addition to meeting these physical needs the parents should also train him towards his social and emotional development. Sensory and mobility training, training in correct habits of speech and expression etc, are of equal importance and basic to his normal growth and development.

Parents should realise that the blind child, in spite of his handicap, is capable of becoming a useful member of his family and society provided suitable opportunities are given to him. Every situation that might help the child towards optimum growth and development should be understood and efforts be made to help him towards such development. They should provide a congenial home atmosphere towards the same.

Bringing up of a blind child is not a mechanical process. Parents cannot expect their blind child to grow into a normal adult over night. It demands a great deal of understanding, tolerance

rance, patience, sympathy and kindness on the part of the parents to care, train and educate him during the pre-school age.

Specific instructions by the social workers to
the parents of pre-school blind children.

In addition to the general considerations described in the previous pages the parents should also receive definite instructions and guidance from the social workers in developing the following specific skills and habits in the blind child:

Meeting the physical needs of the blind child:

Eating Habits: The development of good eating habits is very necessary in order to make the child a socially acceptable individual. The development of such habits is not very difficult, but it takes patience, persistent effort and constant repetition. The teaching of eating habits should begin when the child is six months old. The process should be a slow and a gradual one.

A seeing child can see his mother approaching him with the food, but a blind child cannot do this. He has to depend upon his other senses in order to associate his mother and his food. Therefore, his mother should make him aware of her approach by her loving talk or any other auditory means. The child should also be stimulated to use his sense of smell and touch (whenever possible) to identify different dishes.

It is very necessary that the child be made to feel the way the mother holds the cup or the bowl with which she feeds him. This will prepare him to hold his feeding cup or bowl in the proper manner later on. This will also develop his finger muscle

co-ordination in holding things.

As the child gets more confidence in eating with his fingers independently, he should be taught the use of spoon(it is not a common practice in India to use fork and knife).

Bowls,cups,spoons and other necessary things to be used for his feeding should be suitable to his age so that he can hold them easily and conveniently.

Since eating should be an enjoyable experience it is necessary that sudden changes in feeding should be avoided as this would frighten him.

When food is served to the child he should be informed about it so that he may know what is in his plate or bowl and can decide how he is going to eat it. He should be taught to explore the contents of the plate by moving his hands gently.

Before introducing any change in the type of food the child should be prepared for this change. When he is not ready to accept food, he should not be forced. It is better to leave it at that point and to introduce the same at a later date when he is ready for the same.

The child should not be given any snacks in between the meals as this will spoil his appetite.

Meal time should be very regular and relaxing.

Sleep and rest: The social workers should instruct the parents of the pre-school blind child about his hours of sleep at different stages of his growth. This schedule should be adhered to with consistency and understanding by the parents.

Blindness limits the activities of the child. He tends to sleep more than what he should. In this circumstance the mother should provide him with stimulating activities which do not involve the use of vision, such as, bouncing a ball, playing with toys that make noise etc.

As the blind child grows older, he should be gradually made aware that there are set times for all activities in his daily life. Before the child is actually put to bed a daily routine should be followed. Such a routine should consist of changing his clothes, taking him to the bath room, etc., so that he may know that the day has come to a close and it is time to go to bed.

A wise and loving mother should put her child to bed by telling interesting stories or singing cradle songs, etc., as she would do to her sighted child. This will enable him to sleep very comfortably in a happy and relaxed manner.

Toilet Training: The child gets bowel control at about the age of two years. This may vary from child to child due to different rates of maturation.

Toilet training should be started only when the child is ready for it. The mother who is in constant touch with the child can understand when the child is ready for this training. If a child can remain dry continuously for two hours, that is an indication that he has gained bowel control and that he is ready

It would ^{be} very useful to keep in mind some of the very important and practical suggestions for toilet training made

by Pauline M. Moore:

Establish suitable habits of toileting at regular and convenient time (before or after breakfast or preferably later)

There must be consistency in toilet routine in regard to time and manner of toileting as consistency helps the blind child to be free from doubt and builds association for his learning.

Use two simple words that would always mean toileting to the child. The words must be familiar to the child or they may be originated by the child.

Give the child something to play, preferably a toy.

Provide comfortable toilet arrangement.

Guard against leaving the child on the toilet too long a time. Ten minutes is usually considered sufficient. If he stays longer he may forget the association and purpose of going to the bath room.

Always change wet clothing. In this way the parent helps to build up in the child a distaste for discomfort.

Take the child to the bath room even though he has just wet his clothing so that the act may become associated with the appropriate place.

Provide the child with clothing which he can manage easily.

Accept accident calmly.

Always expect the best from the child and give him your genuine approval when it is legitimate. At the same time withhold undue praise.³⁵

These suggestions are very helpful to the parents of the pre-school blind child as much as they are to any other parents.

Parents should be made to realise that toilet training is a gradual process because bowel and bladder control take their natural course in the child.

35

Pauline M. Moore, Toilet Habits, American Foundation for the Blind, New-York, 1952, p.5.

Walking habits and body control: The mothers should be made aware of the gradual process by which a child gets body control so that she can help him during all these stages.

During the early months, the child should be surrounded by suitable toys. This will help to keep him active, provided him with the stimulation, and help him in developing control over his body. The toys should provide auditory stimulation so that they may serve the same purpose to the blind child as coloured objects serve to the seeing child.

Like the seeing child the blind child also begins to crawl when he is about six months old; but his crawling or creeping process is not very active. It is not motivated by any definite purpose. When a seeing child crawls he tries to reach some objects around him. In the case of the blind child this desire has to be artificially aroused by holding dangling objects.

When the child reaches the stage of sitting up he needs more help. After he has gained enough physical strength to sit up, he gradually makes an attempt to stand on his legs. When he shows signs of walking, after he has gained enough strength in his muscles, he should be encouraged to walk with the help of his mother or a chair or any other article of furniture.

This kind of support should be gradually reduced and the child should be encouraged to get up and stand up by himself without any support.

From the very beginning it is necessary that the child should be encouraged to place his feet in correct position. Some

activities such as pushing a baby carriage or a doll cart or any other object of that type is very helpful in developing correct walking habits.

The parents should allow the blind child to explore as many objects around him as possible. This helps him to get more and more practice with regard to walking and gaining body control.

The process of gaining body control and walking is a long and a slow process. Hence at every stage of his success and improvement in this process of learning he should be encouraged and praised as this would give the child a feeling of confidence. If the parents express feeling of worry or unpleasantness, he feels frustrated. It should be remembered that failure is a stepping stone to success.

Dressing habits: The blind child should be taught to dress up in an orderly manner. He should be encouraged to feel his mother's hands as she dresses him so that he can gradually acquire independence in dressing. His clothes should be rather loose and of simple pattern. Some identification marks should be put on his garments so that he can distinguish the front side from the back.

The blind child should be allowed to handle different pieces of his dress independently and he should be acquainted with their names.

It is necessary that a specific place should be provided to put his clothes from where he can pick them up independently. There should be separate places to put his clean and soiled

clothes.

If the blind child is taught an orderly procedure to be followed with regard to his dressing he will learn the value of orderliness. The ability to dress neatly is one of the prerequisites for an individual's social acceptance.

Speech and language development:

Speech defects and disorders are more common among blind children than among the seeing. Speech defects and disorders affect the personality of the child. Lack of opportunities for the development of good and correct speech is one of the main causes for speech disorders in blind children.

One of the best means of cultivating good and correct speech habits is through "Parallel talk". A wise mother will find many opportunities for such talk during the course of the day. It can be done while dressing the blind child; while he is playing; while putting him to bed. Many other opportunities can be made use of for this purpose.

In order to compensate the limitations which blindness imposes, the blind child should be given many experiences of every day life. He should be encouraged to know more about things and to know about them as complete wholes. The child's curiosities (such as asking many questions) should be satisfied. The objects with which he comes in contact should be associated with their names. Every member of the family should contribute to this aspect of the child's development.

Music, story telling and nursery rhymes are very good means for developing correct speech habits. The mother who accepts and loves the blind child can find many opportunities during the day for such purposes (while bathing, dressing and feeding the blind child etc.). Music should be simple and rhythmic.

The child should be encouraged to retell the stories and sing the songs. This will facilitate the development of correct speech and language from his early years.

Development of social skills:

The blind child should be taught to play in a meaningful manner. Correct play habits will increase his muscle co-ordination and help him to play with other children of his own age.

The social workers should advise parents in the supply and selection of toys and other play equipment to suit the needs of the blind child.

The child should be allowed to mix with the children of his neighbourhood and to play with them. This gives him a feeling of security and of belonging to a group. To the seeing children the blind child appears to be a little strange at first. But once they are told that he cannot see, they will realise and be ready to help him in many ways. Children of the same age are very friendly and sympathetic towards each other. Opportunities for the blind child to mix with the children in the neighbourhood will help him to learn to associate with others and become a part of the group.

Blind people are considered to be socially maladjusted. Blindness, in itself, is not the direct cause of such maladjustment. The sources of maladjustment lie in the unfavourable situations within the family and the larger social group. As a child he may live in such restricted situations. But as he grows he has to live in a world dominated by the sighted people where he is an unprivileged minority group member. He has to be taught to live up to the standards of the society. Opportunities should, therefore, be provided to the blind child from his early age.

Sensory training:

The blind child is entirely dependent upon his remaining senses in order to get perceptions. These senses should be suitably trained from his early years. Vision enables a person to see things objectively. But when vision is lost, touch or tactual perception renders help for getting concepts of objects and persons. Objective activities should be provided to the blind child in order to give objective motivation.

He should be provided with an abundant supply of materials to handle and explore. These materials should also be of different varieties in order to develop his sense of touch and enable him to differentiate the qualities, such as, roughness, hardness, softness and smoothness etc., of these objects.

Stimulation through sound:

The parents should be instructed how to teach the blind child to distinguish objects by their sounds, wherever possible,

because audition is an important and objective avenue for stimulating him.

It is difficult for the blind child to associate sound with its object. He should, therefore, be provided with opportunity to come in contact with the object that produces sound. It is only then that sound becomes meaningful to him. (for example, the word 'bell' or 'Jingle' will not be meaningful to the blind child unless he is given an opportunity to come in contact with a bell or a jingle). Verbal unrealities in early years will present problems in his later years. Hence he should be offered opportunities for acquiring auditory perceptions and their development.

Ability to listen and hear enables the child to identify different sounds, pitch, loudness and direction. All training in the area of listening and hearing should be given during his pre-school period. He should be encouraged to listen to the barking of the dog, howling of the wind, tickling of the clock, the sound of a motor car horn and many such common experiences in every day life. These are various ways of stimulating him to listen. Again, listening to the songs of birds, to the animals in the zoo, and to the people passing on a busy road etc., offer good facilities to learn to listen.

He should be encouraged to reproduce, compare and discriminate sounds.

Guidance and counseling to the parents of the pre-school blind children are the most effective means of educating them. Through these means it is possible to promote wholesome rela-

relationship between the parents and the child. Counseling and guidance release them from their emotional tension and feelings (feelings of fear, guilt etc.) about the handicap of their child. If these feelings are not corrected, the parents will not be able to face the condition of their blind children nor will they be able to build a wholesome attitude in their child and help him to face his handicap and adjust to it.

Contact with the parents of the pre-school blind child should be made as early as possible.

On the whole, counseling and guidance to the parents should be very supportive and instructive. It is of primary importance that parents are helped to accept their blind child and train him on sound lines.

Other opportunities to
the pre-school blind child and his parents.

Summer Schools, conferences and seminars:

Parents should be provided with opportunities to attend these programs as they help them to obtain first hand information regarding the care and training of their blind children. They can come together; meet other parents like themselves; give and receive information and assistance which come through group participation. Group participation enables them to get congenial friendship among individuals having similar interests and problems as themselves.

These programs should be directed to furnish information to the parents about the growth and development of blind children, to determine whether group teaching will give them specific help to reduce their anxieties, to determine whether there is any value in interchange of ideas between these parents and to acquaint the parents with many available resources for the blind with regard to their education and many other areas.

Such programs can be arranged in schools for the blind as well as in schools for normal children. They should be conducted during school year. Parents should be encouraged to bring their blind children so that a thorough evaluation of their emotional, psychological and physical needs may be made.

Public buildings and theaters can also be acquired for the purpose of conducting these programs.

Lectures and discussions on various problems related to the pre-school blind child can be arranged and they can be conducted in sessions (one day session for the parents; one day for school teachers and one day for the public etc.,).

Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, educators of the blind and counselors should participate in these programs.

Literature, Exhibition, Clubs, Posters, Movies and Broadcasting

Knowledge and guidance about bringing up of the pre-school blind child, training and educating him, can also be brought home to the parents through these medias. It is very necessary that such campaigns should be held in rural areas.

Foster Homes:

These homes would be of much service especially in cases where the parents may have to go out for work or where the family is broken through death and when there are no relatives to look after the blind child or when the child's family is not able to give him suitable training. In order to protect the blind child under such circumstances foster homes similar to those in America and England should be provided in India.

Today, in India, there are many similar agencies which cater to the care of sighted children. Most of them are being run by private agencies and social welfare boards. These should be thrown open to pre-school blind children. Foster homes should be developed largely through the use of private agencies.

Home Visiting and Counseling Services.

These programs are as beneficial to the pre-school blind

child as they are to his parents. They can help the child to acquire readiness for entering nursery and kindergarten classes. The child can be given training in areas related to his mobility, reading, use of toys, toilet habits, etc. Activities leading to sensory training finger co-ordination and muscular skills can also be arranged. The social workers who visit the blind child's home can conduct such activities and they can counsel the parents.

The services of these workers should be made available to the pre-school blind child and his parents in rural areas.

Training of the pre-school blind child
at school

Nursery and kindergarten classes:

The presence of the pre-school blind child in the family places heavy responsibilities on the parents. A majority of the parents in India are not capable of meeting his special needs. Hence, for a fuller development, the blind child should be placed in an institution after he has received some training at home. He should be given opportunities to get experiences of doing and achieving things outside his home. Such experiences can be obtained in nursery and kindergarten schools.

There are a number of nursery and kindergarten schools for sighted children in India. There are no such schools for the pre-school blind children. On account of the large population of blind children it may not be immediately possible to provide for these types of schools all over the country. However, this problem needs to be considered seriously. Some pilot schools can be started in the states and rural areas.

This question can be considered by the National and State Governments. The co-operation of the Central and State Departments of Education should also be secured.

Nursery and kindergarten schools can be affiliated with the existing schools for the blind and counseling visitors for the pre-school blind child can be appointed to provide itinerant services. Such services can be administered by local authori-

ties, voluntary agencies, social welfare boards, service clubs, such as, the Rotary and Lions Clubs. There are several such organizations doing welfare services for seeing children all over the country. They can be encouraged to take up the work for pre-school blind children too.

Mutual understanding and co-operation of parents of these children, teachers and the general public at large, should be secured.

With regard to the finances required for these services, trust funds can be approached. Central, State and local funds can be set apart for the purpose. Laymen interested in the problem of the blind child can also help. Private funds from various clubs and boards can be acquired.

It would appear that the cost of providing services for the pre-school blind child would be very high (through these schools). But it must be remembered that the care bestowed upon him in his pre-school years will shape his future destiny. It is also very necessary that if welfare services for the blind are to be successful they should commence with the pre-school blind child.

A nursery school is a play center where the pre-school blind child can come in contact with children of his own age and also with the adult teachers. A nursery school may be a day nursery, or a residential nursery, or an integrated nursery. Whatever may be the type of nursery school, it should resemble a home, as far as possible. For this purpose it is necessary that

the number in the nursery should be very limited. The atmosphere should be more like that of a large family rather than that of an institution. It would be a good idea to divide the children in the nursery into groups such that each group can consist of 4-6 blind children, with one nursery school teacher and a nurse in charge of each group. This will facilitate the nursery to work on a family system. This is a suitable way to create a home atmosphere in the school.

These groups of blind children can have a room each, where all of those belonging to that particular group may live as if in a family. Even in the dining room they can all sit in one group and the nurse can pay particular attention to them and as they grow up, they can be taught how to eat by themselves. At play time and social functions like birthday parties, for instance, all these families can get together to play and enjoy themselves in a big group. Under this kind of family system the blind child gets the love and affection and individual attention which he needs. It will also create a feeling of belonging and a feeling of being wanted.

Formal education should not form an important part in the life of the nursery. It is the formation of good habits that is more essential. There should be stress on toilet training, personal grooming, dressing and eating habits. There should be plenty of opportunities for play, creative activities and development of skills and abilities. The program should be very flexible and informal so that the child can fit into any program according to

his capacities.

At the end of the nursery school program, the blind child can be prepared for life in a school for the blind. Here, the aim should be to prepare him for formal school education. This can be done by having informal elementary education or kindergarten in the nursery itself. Simple beginnings in reading, writing and arithmetic may be made. Simple elementary education can be introduced for the older children in the nursery. By the time the child is ready to go to a regular school, he should have received instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing and counting.

Thus, kindergarten is only an extension of the nursery school program and in addition to this the kindergarten school program includes preparation of the blind child for a regular school. This could be done by the provision of reading readiness, simple arithmetic, music, story telling, play activities and sensory training. Some simple handicrafts like clay modeling, stringing beads etc., should be included in the kindergarten program in order to facilitate finger co-ordination and manipulation of skills.

Thus, the blind child should be taught certain standards at the nursery and kindergarten level and prepared to go to a regular school. The kindergarten program will be very suitable at the age of four to six years of the child's life.

The staff of the nursery and kindergarten schools should be adequate in number and they should be duly qualified. In

addition to their educational qualification they should possess qualities, such as, patience, sympathy and understanding of the child, his problems, needs, capacities and aspirations. They should help him towards emotional adjustment and personality development.

The schools should also be staffed with trained nurses.

For diagnostic purposes it is necessary to have specialists like psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, individual and group therapists.

Integration of the pre-school blind child in
school for sighted children.

It is very beneficial to the blind child to have contact with sighted children. He has the same basic needs as the seeing child and these needs should be met in order to enable him to reach maximum development. A comprehensive program for the pre-school blind child should include opportunities for his participation in many activities with the seeing children. These opportunities should be given wherever and whenever possible and practical.

There is a large network of nursery schools for sighted children throughout India. Such schools are being organized, even in rural areas, by their respective State Governments, local authorities, private agencies, and social welfare boards. Most of them are largely staffed with experienced teachers.

These schools may be supplemented by pre-school workers.

A few experiments can be conducted at selected areas as a part of a pilot project in the field of integration of the pre-school blind child in the sighted nursery. The National and State Governments, private and voluntary agencies should take the necessary initiative in this respect. The interest of the educators and those interested in the welfare of the blind and their education should also be evinced.

It is true that the parents have to decide whether their blind child should go to a private or a public school, day nursery or a residential nursery school, etc. Whatever their decision may be, the integration of the blind with the sighted should be one of the educational goals. Hence, parents should be helped to understand that their blind child is entitled to as many rights and privileges as are made available to the seeing child in the community and that the blind child is capable of receiving education and leading a normal life just as the seeing child.

At the nursery school the blind child will get many opportunities to learn to live away from his home and to be in contact with the nursery school staff. There will be plenty of toys to play with together with the other sighted children. He can listen to the radio, stories and songs. He can learn many new skills. On the whole, he can learn to share joy and satisfaction with others. Thus, he can get many experiences and feel that he stands on an equal footing with the seeing children.

It is true that a blind child is unable to see things. But the sighted nursery school teacher can explain to him many things in a meaningful manner. Besides, the sighted colleagues, at the pre-school age will not be able to understand physical differences so much as the adult and they do not make differences between themselves and the blind child. On the other hand, the parents of the blind child can also learn that their blind child, though limited by his lack of vision, still, can participate with the sighted and do many things in common with the sighted. This will help them to view their blind child's physical, mental, social and emotional developments as compared with the seeing children of his own age. This will further enable them to love their blind child as a child with some handicap rather than as an handicapped child.

Many of the heads of the sighted nursery schools hesitate to admit blind children in their schools for fear that the parents of sighted children do not like their children to be educated with the blind. Sometimes it may be that the heads of these schools think that the blind children are a great responsibility. But it is very necessary that these supervisors or heads of sighted nurseries should think of both the pros and cons but not just the cons. The authorities of these nurseries should be very broadminded regarding their attitudes towards integrating the blind child with their sighted children. Some times the school authorities may think of having a separate section for the blind child but this defeats the very purpose of

his integration.

As suggested by Eileen Scott,³⁶ the heads of sighted nursery schools should lay down a good plan for the integration as follows:

The blind child should be enrolled in the sighted nursery school one or two weeks after the school has been reopened after the summer vacation, for by then the school staff, the children and the school administrators will have been settled down to carry on their routine work in their school. They shall be better prepared to receive the blind child in their midst. If this child is admitted too late he will miss many opportunities and experiences which the sighted children in the class will have already had by that time. If possible the pre-school worker can arrange for the class supervisor to visit the blind child at his home as this arrangement would render it possible to get an idea as to how the blind child will function in his home which offers a familiar atmosphere.

After the blind child has been admitted to the sighted nursery school, he should be carefully instructed. The pre-school worker can take him to the school when other children are not there but when only the class teacher is present. He should be introduced to all the equipment there, the play ground, the bath room and many other things that stimulate him.

³⁶

Eileen Scott, The Blind Child in the Sighted Nursery School,
The New Outlook for the Blind, Vol. 51, No. 9, Nov. 1957,
pp. 406--410.

She should then take him into the class room. It is very necessary that the pre-school worker should stay with him for some time during the school routine and encourage him to participate in activities with the sighted colleagues.

The pre-school worker should gradually reduce the number of visits and the length of her stay with the blind child. By this time the sighted class teacher and the children will have become familiar with the blind child and his needs and problems. They will be ready to help him. The child will also learn to get over his fear and nervousness and he will participate well with them. If these sighted children are explained that a blind child can see through his fingers they will soon learn it and they will be ready to co-operate with him and to help him. For example, if they have to show any object to him they will put it in his hands and make him feel it instead of asking him to see the object.

Education of the general public concerning
the pre-school blind child and blindness

No programs, schemes and proposals can be successful and practically effective without the real understanding and active co-operation of the general public. The social and cultural attitudes in India are very deep rooted and are not very easily changeable. The change in this background should come about only through gradual process; some effective means should be devised for the purpose. Public relation activities are very necessary to bring about public understanding of the problems of the pre-school blind child and about blindness. Publicity and propaganda are very effective means of educating the public. These consist of agencies like film shows, radio broadcasting, news papers, public lectures, conferences, and meetings.

Films and music:

The use of films and music to bring about public understanding of the blind children and the schools for the blind and the problems of the blind should be adopted to meet the local conditions. Films about eye diseases, accidents causing damage to the eyes, care of the eyes, personal care, evil effects of living in unhygienic places, evils of unscientific treatment of the eyes, direct infections from gonorrhoeal diseases, and infections through trachoma, glachoma etc. will appeal to the general masses of the public. Damages causing to the eyes in industry could be made known to the public through films. It is also possible to introduce the schools for the blind and services to the blind as

they exist in foreign countries like the United States and England. Organizations, such as the American Foundations for the Blind, New-York, may be approached in order to obtain such films.

Posters:

All the above subjects could be utilized for campaign work through posters. Posters should be exhibited in such places as the railway stations, bus stands, public offices, restaurants, movie theaters, market places and schools where they can be freely and easily accessible to the public. If these posters are supplemented by explanatory talks by local speakers they would be very effective and meaningful.

Conferences, public lectures and meetings:

These should be conducted on the educational and medical problems of blind children and the general public given opportunities to discuss these problems and arrive at conclusions as how best to tackle and solve these problems. State associations for the blind and the National Association for the blind can organize such programs. The same could be done by private people interested in the welfare of blind children and blind people in general, with the co-operation of local bodies. The state social welfare boards can also take initiative in this respect. Such activities are very useful in determining public reactions to the problems of the blind and the blind children. Services of professionals and educational institutions for the blind and their co-operation and good will is very essential for holding public meetings and conferences. These should be integrated with the

national organization for the study of education of the blind children.

Publication and distribution of hand-books and pamphlets.

Publication and distribution of hand-books and pamphlets to the parents of the pre-school blind child and also to the public is another very effective means of educating the public. The Local Boards of education and the Departments of Education in the Districts and States and the Ministry of Education, India, can exercise initiative in this respect and these hand-books and pamphlets could be distributed through the agencies of public offices, book stores, libraries and community centers. These pamphlets and handbooks will enable the parents and the public to know about the educational problems of the blind children. The co-operation of educationalists, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, professionalists and educational administrators is very necessary with regard to the publication and distribution of pamphlets and hand-books.

Similar initiative and co-operation is required with regard to publication of books on the education of the blind children. In the United States and England, there is an abundant supply of books related to the services for the pre-school blind child and the blind adult. A large amount of money is being spent for their printing and publication, and also towards research work in the field of education of the blind in general.

The supply of books and other publications is very limited in India. It is very necessary that the services of the availa-

ble experts and qualified people in this field of education of the blind and the blind children should be utilized. Such research workers should be encouraged by providing them scholarships for carrying on research work. Books related to the field of special education should be published. Encouragement and facilities are also necessary for the transportation of books published in the western countries. These are very worthwhile for the purpose of helping public realization of these subjects.

Schools and public relation programs

Schools for the blind can also organize public relation programs. It would be very effective if professional officers are appointed, for this purpose, in these schools. The purpose of appointing these professional officers is to make friendly and co-operative relations with the news agencies and broadcasting agencies for collecting information about the blind, schools for the blind and the problems of the blind children. It is not only that they should collect information but they should be able to furnish such information to those agencies. It should also be the purpose of the professional public relation officers to organize meetings and conferences, plan for meeting outsiders and also to attend to the editorial task of the school publications. Every opportunity available for public relation activities should be taken advantage of.

Dramatizing:

Dramatizing school life and arranging Radio programs (the life of such schools for the blind children) are also very

effective means of stimulating the public interest and working out the problems of the blind children.

Public relation programs should be systematically organized. There should be a country wide program. To carry on such a program on a national basis, co-operation of local bodies and voluntary agencies should necessarily be secured. The Ministry of Education, education departments and local boards of education should exercise a large share of responsibility in furthering the cause of blind children. Public relation activities should promote genuine spirit of co-operation between the community and schools for the blind. The public should cultivate desirable attitudes towards the cause of blind children and their future. Children of the present are the citizens of the future. Blind children, by virtue of their birth in the community, have a share in their country's progress. They should be suitably trained, educated and cared for to take their rightful place as contributing members of their society. Public relation activities and program should create this understanding in the minds of the public.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

There has been no program of services in existence for the pre-school blind child in India. Advanced countries like the United States of America and England, have set up very successful schemes in this field of special education and have made great progress. It is felt that such a program should be adopted in India as far as it suits her needs and conditions. An attempt has been made in this thesis to formulate a program of services for the pre-school blind child in India.

The writer has discussed the need for enacting several legislative measures for the census and registration of pre-school blind children in the country as well as for prevention of blindness among children of pre-school age.

The writer has also suggested a comprehensive scheme for the development of services for these children. This includes a discussion of the broad areas in which workers for the pre-school blind children should be trained in order to help the parents regarding the care and training of their blind children.

Some suggestions for the education of the pre-school blind children in nursery and kindergarten classes and their integration with children in sighted nursery schools are also included in this discussion.

Suggestions towards educating the general public are also

made.

If India is to meet the challenge of providing an all-round educational and welfare program for her large population of the blind, she should have to start her program with the training and care of her pre-school blind children. The writer hopes that the suggestions outlined in this thesis will be of some help for the development of a satisfactory program in this direction. Time will tell to what extent India succeeds in her attempt to make up for the lost time in this field of social welfare.

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