EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF BLIND AND DEAF-MUTE CHILDREN

BY RAMACHANDRA RAO KAVALGIKAR.

The problem of the blind and deaf-mute children in India is of great magnitude. In the following article, Mr. Ramachandra Rao traces the development of voluntary services in India for their education and employment in the past fifty years and makes some concrete suggestions for their effective organization to meet the present day increased needs.

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Education of the blind and deaf-mutes in India is of recent origin; and one of its objects is to make them useful members of the society.

The problem of the blind and deaf-mute in India is of a great magnitude. No accurate statistical survey has been made yet of the population of these handicapped persons. It is estimated that there are about four lacs deaf-mutes and twenty lacs blind in India. These are mostly dependents on their relatives or earn their living by begging. To keep them uneducated and unemployed is a danger to the stability of the civilized society. The uneducated handicapped are a liability while the educated handicapped will be an asset to the society.

There are at present fifty institutions in India for the blind and about 1,500 blind children and adults are receiving education and vocational training in them. Forty-five institutions are catering for the educational needs of the deaf-mutes wherein 1,200 of them are receiving education.

Difficulties of School Authorities.—Vast numbers of blind and deaf-mute children do not attend these schools because firstly, they are situated in big capital towns far from their homes, secondly, they have no adequate trained staff, apparatus and funds and lastly, the parents are ignorant about the importance of the education of handicapped children. Some poor parents have made their handicapped children the means of their livelihood. It is the common experience of the heads of institutions for the blind and the deaf-mute that it is a difficult task to convince the parents of the importance of such schools and the education they give to their handicapped children. The question is always asked: "With so many handicapped children in India, why are these schools not over-flowing with children and why is there no demand for more schools?"

I have varied experience in getting boys to my school. Poor parents ask: "What will you pay to my son if he is put into your school? He is earning Rs. 3/- to Rs. 6/- daily by standing near the cinema gate or a temple door and is supporting the whole family". Well-to-do parents don't come to me. When I approach them, they remark: "The boy is already handicapped and why do you want to throw a heavier burden on his shoulders? There is sufficient for him to live on. Let him be left to himself. Some parents desire that their blind children should be taught only music and deaf-mutes only tailoring. Muslim parents with blind children usually want their children to be expert reciters of the Holy Qoran. There are instances of the blind and the deaf-mute boys absconding from the school and travelling as far as Calcutta, Lucknow, Karachi and Lahore and maintaining themselves on the charity of railway passengers. A blind boy from a mofussil town came and lived with us for some time. One day he absconded. After a search in the city, he was found near a hotel. Enquiries revealed that he had been auctioned to the highest bidder
or was bought for a stipulated period and was now being used as an instrument of begging. At times caste people go to the extent of attacking the school authorities for keeping their blind and deaf-mute children within the four walls of the hostel. The school authorities cannot report to the police against these persons and, with great regret, they have but to watch such boys forcibly taken away from the educational institutions. I think often that we should open centres to educate the parents and guardians of these children. There are, of course, honourable exceptions; but they are few. What is urgently needed is that the public should open their eyes and realise that there is a mental blindness more pitiful and more far-reaching in its consequences than physical blindness. Let us now study the problems of the handicapped children free from age-old prejudices and see what should be done for their education and rehabilitation.

The sentiment instantly excited at the sight of the blind or deaf-mutes is one of overwhelming pity for their condition. Misdirected sympathy expressed in a few ill-chosen words is one of the hard things which these people have to bear. It is necessary while talking to them to keep our sympathy well disguised. Many of us think that the blind possess a peculiar spiritual temperament. There is a popular belief that the blind are naturally religious and the deaf-mutes have keen eye-sight and cunning in their behaviour. Blindness does not increase or decrease religious tendency and there is no evidence that the deaf-mutes are more cunning than their normal brothers and sisters.

The position of a handicapped child in a family is peculiar. He is regarded as a misfortune to the family. His parents believe that blindness or dumbness in the present life is the result of his sins in the previous life. The child is spoiled either by being over fondled or by being neglected.

Many times the blind and the deaf-mutes are classed in one institution as defectives. Sometimes people bring their children who are lame, consumptive and insane to be admitted in the schools for the blind and the deaf. Even the blind and the deaf-mutes cannot live together and make satisfactory progress in education. The Royal Education Commission in England and the World Conference of the Blind are definitely against this kind of harmful grouping. A wide gulf really separates the blind from the deaf-mutes. To those immediately concerned with both, the contrast is very marked. The methods of education of the blind have no relation at all to those of the deaf. There is only one point of resemblance between them and that is that they are deprived of one or other of the most important physical senses. The deaf-mutes are better able to take care of themselves while the blind respond readily to intellectual stimuli. The blind are taught reading and writing in Braille script while the deaf-mutes are instructed by the oral system. The teaching of language is most important to them. They begin to hear by "sight" and speak by "imitation". These and other psychological and methodological differences in education of the blind and deaf-mutes show that combined schools are mis-fits and therefore these combinations should be discouraged.

Work for Welfare of the Blind.—Organised work for the welfare of the blind is still in an infant stage in India. The first school for the blind was established at Amritsar in 1887. By the end of the last century, two more schools—Palamcotta School for the Blind in Madras and Calcutta Blind School in Bengal—were established. In the last fifty years, more schools for the Blind have been established and run either by the State or by private bodies. At present, there are about
eleven institutions for the Blind run by the State, three of which are managed by the Government of India. Most of these schools admit children and impart primary education and training in a few simple handicrafts. The Goverment School for the Blind in Hyderabad conducts High School classes for the blind and coaches them for Graduate and Post-Graduate Courses. In many blind schools, there is free tuition and free board and lodging; in some, nominal fees are charged. The Training Centre for the Adult Blind, Dehra Dun, is run by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. It caters to the needs of the blind adults. This is the only blind institution in India training the blind adults in highly specialised industries. Some of them are:—Weaving of blankets, towels, shirtings, manufacture of newar tape, cotton durries, caning of chairs, poultry keeping, bookbinding manufacture of articles in plastic, etc.

The Braille system for the blind is founded upon six embossed dots. Embossed print is essential to any work of an intellectual nature for the blind. Standard English Braille Grade II is a highly developed system having many contractions (single signs representing more than one letter) and abbreviations, which are internationally recognised by the English speaking blind world. Indian Schools for the blind had to draw up a Braille Code suitable to their provincial languages. There were as many as ten different Braille Codes in India. Thus the diversity of Braille Codes made the education of the blind extremely difficult. The Government UNESCO to investigate the possibility of evolving a single Braille script to be known as "World Braille". Bharati Braille is the outcome of many experiments and of a number of discussions between experts in this country and abroad. This code for Indian languages is now in operation throughout the country.

Central Braille Printing Press is the first press of its kind in this country. It has recently brought out a Basic Hindi Primer in Braille Script. Gradually this press will cater to the needs of blind persons by printing Braille books in major Indian languages.

In addition to the educational institutions for the blind, there are also a few associations working for the welfare of the blind, such as, the Blind Relief Association of Bombay, Blind Persons Association of Calcutta, etc.

The Government of India have recommended to all the State Governments to consider the possibility of forming State Councils on Blindness. Accordingly three States, namely, Bombay, Hyderabad and PEPSU have formed such councils. These councils will not merely function as advisory bodies, but will also take effective measures for the prevention of blindness and for providing better welfare services for the blind. They will have to marshal all available resources for the social, educational and economic advancement of the blind.

The National Association for the Blind was formed by the All-India Conference for the Blind, held in Bombay from 19th to 21st January 1952. Its objectives are:—(a) to work in the whole of India for the prevention of preventable and cure of curable blindness and the welfare of the blind, (b) to bring about a co-operation among the various organisations of the blind and to co-ordinate their activities, (c) to organise and start new organisations and institutions for various activities for the welfare of the blind and (d) to do all such other things as may be necessary for the promotion of the interest of the blind.

Branches of this National Association have now been opened in some States. The National Association for the Blind has been recognised by the World Council on Blindness on which six members of this association have been taken as its representatives.
On the invitation of the Government of India, a conference of experts on physically handicapped children for countries and territories in South East Asia was organised by the United Nations and held at Jamshedpur from 19th to 21st December 1950. This Conference briefly made the following points to make a complete service for both the blind and the deaf.

(a) Systematic research into the extent and distribution of each form of disability, its predisposing and exciting causes and the most effective methods of prevention.

(b) The adoption of preventive measures through campaigns of health education, immunization, the combating of infectious disease and the installation of safety devices in industry.

(c) Early diagnosis of potential or actual disability;

(d) Efficient medical and surgical treatment, combined with physical rehabilitation and psychological readjustment;

(e) Appropriate methods of education under specially trained teachers;

(f) The provision of mechanical aids including prostheses, surgical appliances, spectacles, hearing aids and methods of transports;

(g) Expert vocational guidance, followed by training for a suitable and satisfying form of employment;

(h) The establishment of some form of Employment Bureau to facilitate securing suitable posts on the completion of education and vocational training.

Sight Saving Classes.—There is no adequate educational arrangement anywhere in India for the partially sighted child who is not partially blind. This child in the sight saving class has enough vision to follow the same methods of work as the normally seeing children provided proper eye-habits and working conditions are maintained. Hygiene dealing with lighting, natural illumination control, class room colours, adjustable desks, writing equipments, printed books in 18 or 24 points types, etc. are some of the essential factors for sight conservation programmes.

Remission of Custom Duty.—The Government of India have—allowed remission of customs duty on educational apparatus and appliances, imported by institutions for the blind. This step has been taken in order to bring apparatus and appliances within the reach of the maximum number of blind children and adults.

Railway Concession.—This concession enables blind children and adults studying in recognised institutions for the blind to travel with a sighted escort on payment of a single fare.

Welfare Work for the Deaf-Mute.—In India, the first school for the deaf-mutes was established in Bombay in 1883, called the Bombay Institution for the Deaf-Mutes. Its founder was His Lordship the Late Rt. Rev. Dr. Leo Meurin, Bishop of Bombay. He met a deaf and dumb boy whom he endeavoured to teach on the oral system of instruction. His Lordship started a school at his own residence and maintained it out of his scanty resources. He then brought an Irishman Mr. T. A. Wash who had acquired the art in Belgium. He had many difficulties to face. There were sceptical persons who refused to believe that the dumb could ever be taught to speak. Some held that to teach the dumb to speak was to work in defiance of the decree of Providence who condemned them to eternal silence. The Bombay Gazette of the 8th March 1886 writes:—"It was most interesting exhibition of the training which the pupils of the Institution had received under Mr. Wash. Their powers were tested in various ways, and the success with which they went through the ordeal showed what
marvellous results could be achieved. The
infirmities of the unfortunate children were
so far conquered as to enable them to speak
and to understand and to answer questions.
Simple problems of multiplication were
worked orally and the pupils displayed a
good knowledge of the elementary geography
of India."

This school was then housed in a one-
storeyed building in Grant Road, Bombay.

The Calcutta Deaf and Dumb School was
founded by the late Shri Jaimininath Banerji.
He opened a new page in the history of
education of the deaf-mutes in our country.
After his death, Shri. Atal Chand Chatterji
served this institution for forty years. He
made the Calcutta Deaf and Dumb School
the leading institution in India by providing
scientific methods of educating the deaf-
mutes and by starting the Teachers’ Training
Department in the School.

The Training College for Teachers of the
Deaf at Lucknow is another institution
preparing graduate trained teachers required
for the schools of the deaf-mutes in India.

The Convention of the Teachers of the
Deaf in India publishes "The Deaf in
India", which is a quarterly periodical
dealing with the problems of the deaf. It is
subsidised by the Ministry of Education,
Government of India and is circulated free
to the members of the Convention, educa­
tional institutions and libraries, Government
officials and the public. The aims and objects
of this Convention are:—

(a) To urge for compulsory education for
the deaf-mute;
(b) To stimulate public interest in order
to establish more schools;
(c) Removal of legal disabilities of the
deaf-mute regarding inheritance, etc;
(d) Research organisation for better
teaching;
(e) After-care organisation to find
employment to the deaf after they leave the
school; and
(f) To establish Homes for the unem­
ployed deaf-mutes.

Conventions are annually held at different
places in India and teachers and Principals
of the Deaf and Dumb Schools discuss
methods of organizing welfare activities for
the children under their charge.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Govern­
ment of India, have removed the ban against
the employment of the deaf-mutes in
Government services in Class III and IV
Artisan posts.

The All-India Education Conference has
recently opened a section of the physically
handicapped and has made it a permanent
feature along with other sections of their
future conventions. In this section, discussions
take place and resolutions of general nature
for ameliorating the lot of the handicapped
are usually passed.

In comparison with the work in the
United States for the welfare of the blind
and deaf-mutes, India's contribution in this
field is still in an infant stage. The following
figures speak for themselves.—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Deaf-Mutes</th>
<th>Blind</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. S. A.</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. No. of schools</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No. of students attending</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Population of the handicapped</td>
<td>78,000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Annual average cost per</td>
<td>Rs. 3,000</td>
<td>Negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capital in educating</td>
<td>to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a child.</td>
<td>Rs. 4,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No. of teachers</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
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</table>
These are round and approximate figures. The average cost of educating the deaf or the blind in the U. S. A. is ten times as much as that for educating a normal child. In such an advanced democratic State as the United States of America, education is compulsory and this is just in the fitness of things. India too should follow suit. Indeed democracy and compulsion go well together in this respect.

Rehabilitation Services.—The United States provide the following services to the adult blind or the deaf: —

1. Medical, surgical, Psychiatric and hospital aids,
2. Training for jobs,
3. Maintenance and transportation during training,
4. Individual counselling and guidance
5. Necessary tools, equipment and licenses,
6. Placement in the right job and
7. Follow up to make sure that the rehabilitated workers and the jobs are properly matched.

No such services are known to exist in India. After rehabilitation, the average annual earning of the blind or the deaf in the U. S. A. is $ 800 to $1000, i.e., from about Rs. 3800/- to about Rs. 4750/-. No figures regarding the earnings of the deaf and the blind in India are available. There are about one hundred industrial establishments in the U. S. A. wherein about 6000 blind persons are employed.

Here are a few instances of how the American blind and the deaf-mute help to increase the national out-put: —

A blind farmer in Missouri has a grinding mill, 10 cows, 80 hogs and 4 horses. His wife is blind and both are graduates of Perkins. Their monthly income is about $400.

Blind persons in Florida are being trained as fishermen. Average weekly income of each is $60.

A deaf-mute man in Michigan, after training, established a concern to prepare automobile parts with a capital of $ 250. After 12 years, his capital has swelled to a million dollars with 1000 workers of whom 90% are deaf.

Blind women operate electric shuttle and sewing machines and Braille printing presses, each earning $ 200 per month.

Many blind persons are employed in broom factories throughout the U. S. A.

Deaf persons are employed as safe motor drivers, each earning $ 100 a week.

All Post-offices and some Government offices have candy, coca cola and sight-seeing pictures shops entirely conducted by the blind. Average monthly income is $ 600.

A blind Radio Engineer is conducting a class of radio-engineering in New York where the blind and sighted persons take instructions from him.

A deaf, dumb and blind farmer who is a high school graduate of Perkins cultivates land and breeds chickens. His monthly income is $ 200.

The Chief Officer of Rehabilitation of the Federal Government is blind. After graduating in law, he undertook to do social welfare work for the blind. For some time, he travelled without a guide 40,000 miles a year, telling the public and the Government that the blind are educable and employable. He got employed the trained blind in industries and more than $ 1,000,000 of income was produced by the blind during a short period. The present acceptance of blind persons in war industries is largely the result of his activities.

What we need in India today are the following: —
STATISTICS.—Every State and city should prepare and maintain a list of the blind and the deaf in the area. Unless we have accurate statistics, it will be difficult to formulate schemes.

EDUCATION.—Summer classes for training the trained teachers in the special methods of teaching the blind and the deaf may be started in every State. Every University in India should incorporate the education of the handicapped as one of the optional subjects in the Teachers’ Training Colleges.

When there is a sufficient number of trained teachers, special schools for the blind and deaf-mute children should be started by the State.

Gradually education of the deaf and the blind should be made compulsory.

A Committee of experts under the auspices of the Central Government should examine the working of the existing schools for the blind and the deaf in India and make suggestions for their improvement and efficient management. These schools for the present should work under the supervision of one Central Body until every State has experts in this field to guide them.

ACTS.—A Blind Persons Act and a Deaf Persons Act to suit Indian conditions should be passed. The unemployed blind and deaf should receive minimum assistance. This can be given by the community or the State.

REHABILITATION.—Every State should have centres to rehabilitate the adult deaf and blind.

Training in rural occupations and various phases of farming can be profitably given to the blind and the deaf. Dairy, poultry, vegetation and cultivation of food products can absorb a major portion of the blind and the deaf in rural India. Handspinning and handloom on an organized basis is an easy and remunerative occupation. After suitable training, the blind can also be employed in specialized sections of textile mills, factories and workshops.

Preventive Work.—Ninety per cent of blindness in India is preventable. Ignorance in the treatment of eye diseases, malnutrition, under-feeding and low vitality of many school-going children lead to blindness. Therefore, prevention of blindness requires measures to remedy defects.

Preventive work falls under two heads:—
(a) prevention of diseases which lead to blindness and (b) the treatment of the persons who are already suffering from eye diseases. The first part can be undertaken by health inspectors, health visitors, social welfare workers and teachers. The second, i.e., the treatment, is the work of eye doctors.

The Blind and Deaf-Mute Beggars.—There should be legislation against begging. The public should co-operate with the State in enforcing the law against begging. Trainable blind and deaf beggars should compulsorily be housed in industrial homes meant for them.

We need an Act of Parliament to enforce education and rehabilitation of the physically handicapped.

Need for Propaganda.—It is necessary to organise nation-wide campaigns both by the States and voluntary agencies on an agreed basis. The press and the radio should be utilised for propaganda to enlighten the general public. Eye Doctors can co-operate by sending their incurable children to the schools of the handicapped because our work begins where theirs ends. The City and Railway police can help by picking up such children and directing them to us.
Many in India think that the blind and the deaf-mutes are not educable and therefore beyond the reach of education. Again the State requires extraordinary funds in establishing and running these special schools. The famous Sargent Report also deals with the problems of education of these handicapped children. It says "The time has come when State action can no longer be delayed. While in a period of financial stringency there can be no excuse for neglecting the needs of the handicapped children in a scheme of education on really comprehensive lines, in a national system intended to satisfy the needs of all, it is difficult to ignore the claims of those who are unfortunate through no fault of their own. Moreover the money spent in educating them may prove a profitable investment in view of the fact that many of the handicapped at the end of their training may be saved from becoming a burden either on private charity or on the State." It is therefore high time that the Government and the people turned their attention to this vital problem of the blind and deaf-mute children in India.

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