

**Establishment and Development:  
Educational and Training Institutes for the Blind**

Paper presented by

*Jagdishbhai at the seminar organized by the Netra Hin Seva Sangh, Ajmer at Kota on 22nd June, 1980. In this paper, Jagdishbhai highlights the need for defining the objectives of an organization, evolving appropriate organizational structure, promoting local leadership, adopting a comprehensive approach with emphasis on economic rehabilitation and carrying out periodic performance evaluation in respect of pre-decided indicators. He expressed these progressive thoughts when the BMA was at the launching phase of professionalizing its services. All the expansion and diversification programmes launched subsequently under his leadership incorporated these thoughts - Authors.*

Rajasthan has the tradition of achieving unparalleled heights with its limited resources. It is astonishing that this desert land supplies milk and food grains to other prosperous states in India. This seminar, I feel, is being held at the most appropriate time in context of development of education, training and placement facilities at the national level. The organization of the seminar would now help to bridge, in a modest way, the communication gap that hinders planned development of blind welfare institutions, its deliberations would serve as guidelines for establishing such institutions in Rajasthan and elsewhere.

The report of 1944, "*Blindness in India*" reveals that the highest incidence of blindness in the country is in Rajasthan at 750 blind persons for 1,00,000 population. The services for the education and training of the blind are, however, meagre and scattered. There are only five blind welfare organizations for reaching out to the scattered blind population.

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**Objectives**

The foremost pre-requisite for establishing any organization is clearly defined objectives. The major objectives for a blind welfare

organization ideally should be promotion of education and vocational, social and economic rehabilitation of the blind; provision of support services; creation of public awareness; and advocacy on behalf of the target group. Whatsoever objectives are set by an organization should be well defined. The fulfillment of the short term objectives should lead to the realization of the long term goals. For example, imparting of vocational training which is a short term objective must result into economic rehabilitation, a long term goal.

The felt-needs and ideas expressed by the target group should be given due consideration to make the institutions need-based. Another important objective of any welfare institution should be enhancement of the functional, occupational and social status and restoring the human dignity and self confidence of the target group.

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### **Organizational Structure**

Another important aspect is a well-planned organizational structure. The fulfillment of the goals of any organization depends to a great extent on the norms and procedures that are established to guide and control behaviour, functioning and interpersonal relations of the people within it. A blind welfare agency like any other establishment should also have well planned and well defined organizational structure. The status, role expectation, authority and job content at all levels of the organization should be well defined. As informal conventions subsequently become an integral part of the agency, these should be carefully laid, accepted and internalized.

The organization should emphasize service to the target group and the community. It should act as a guiding force to render the value system and ideology of people in consonance with overall objectives of the organization. Subsequently, the internal belief and value structure will become an ingredient of overall organizational structure.

Considering the enormity of the task, environmental constraints and limited financial as well as human resources, a linear type of organizational structure would be appropriate for a blind welfare organization. There should, however, be clear demarcation between the functional and the advisory roles of various constituents of the organization. The functional role should be entrusted to the qualified and experienced professional people. The level of competence of the people should be congruent with the tasks to be performed by them.

*Systemic Linkages:* The Organization should establish and maintain systemic links with the local administration, government departments, other social welfare agencies, district development administration and other such agencies which constitute the environment in which the organization is expected to exist and grow. It is the responsibility of the functional head of the organization to develop these systemic links, harmonious relations and congenial

atmosphere so that all these agencies are willing to extend their cooperation and support to the organization.

*Local Leadership:* Involvement of philanthropists, local opinion leaders and service-minded people in the administration of the NGOs is essential for enhancing their image, increasing public participation and mobilizing local resources. Generally, people are invited on the Trust Board or the Managing Committees etc. on the basis of their financial strength or social standing. Organizations should make efforts to develop local leadership by inviting well meaning and devoted persons.

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### **Operational Aspects**

The prevailing societal attitude is that children can be educated only in residential schools. Whereas the established fact is that the existing residential school can not possibly cover blind children scattered across the country. The only viable alternative could be to promote integrated education of rural blind children. In fact, such an approach should not be considered competitive and in conflict with the existing residential education. In fact, this approach should be considered complementary and supportive to educational efforts of age-old residential educational institutions. However, for a large number of children, integrated education may not be the right option. Thus the existing residential schools would need to continue to impart education.

For Rajasthan, the most appropriate approach would be establishing at least one comprehensive centre for imparting education, training and other services at the district level to cater to the needs of selected blind persons. At the village level, integrated education should be promoted. It is desirable to involve parents and community while imparting integrated education with the help of a resource or itinerant teacher.

Another operational aspect of the organization is the necessity to build adequate infrastructure facilities. Most of the residential schools for the blind have been started in rented or donated buildings which even lacked basic amenities. It is essential to provide appropriate infrastructure facilities like proper class rooms, hostel, educational as well as mobility aids, trained teachers and braille books etc. At the same time, it is not advisable to provide very sophisticated and advanced equipment which may result into children not learning the use of basic equipment etc. For example, providing recorded cassettes to primary level students may discourage them from learning reading and writing of braille etc. Thus a judicious selection of appropriate equipment and facilities is essential.

Another significant aspect is the appointment of qualified and properly trained teaching staff. During the initial years, as grant etc. was not available and such schools were started merely as charitable organizations, low paid and unqualified teachers have generally been

appointed. This factor has resulted into the deterioration of standard of education of the blind. It is essential to train the existing teaching staff and to appoint only properly qualified and trained staff. It is also imperative that every staff member of a residential school knows braille. All the students must be trained in reading and writing of braille and the use of special educational equipment and devices etc.

*Integrated Approach:* It is socially desirable and economical that the blind welfare agencies should shed the sectorial approach and evolve comprehensive programmes. For example, if education and training services are not supported with placement services, it may not be possible to enhance economic resettlement of the individuals. Similarly, provision of education without the support of individual counselling, orientation and mobility and activities of daily living may not enhance self confidence and social integration of the individual. Thus blind welfare organizations should provide a whole gamut of rehabilitative services including individual counselling, family counselling, evaluation, orientation and mobility, education, training, pre-vocational, vocational and professional training, career counselling, placement services, provision of educational and mobility aids, concession and facilities, and public awareness etc.

*Emphasis on Economic Rehabilitation:* The existing system of vocational orientation and training does not equip the individual with the skills required for appropriate open placement. Similarly, the existing sheltered workshops and on-the-job training centres have not succeeded in promoting effective open employment. The antiquated pattern of training, existence of only traditional trades and charitable outlook of such centres is responsible for steady deterioration in their economic situation and complete failure in respect of enhancing economic rehabilitation of the inmates.

Such workshops and training centres should opt for modernization of their operations, select job-oriented trades, improve the training techniques and provide placement services on a regular basis. These centres should be managed professionally incorporating principles of scientific management to render these self supporting. Efforts should be made to seek patronage of the State in respect of purchasing products on a preferential basis, extending financial support and enacting laws for promoting employment etc.

*Specific Coverage:* Generally parents are reluctant in sending blind girls to the residential schools. The parents should be approached personally and convinced that blind girls have a right to education. Such centres should include teaching of home science, daily living skills, child care and personal grooming in the teaching curricula to enable the blind girls to learn life skills. Various crafts and trades suitable for girls should be introduced to expedite their economic rehabilitation.

*Performance Indicators:* It is essential that a system for periodic evaluation of the performance of the organization should be evolved, implemented and reviewed. The following

performance indicators are appropriate:

- Social cost of development
- Social returns on development
- Achievement of short term objectives and realization of long term objectives
- Extent of utilization of infrastructure facilities
- Relevance of existing facilities
- Extent of observance or violation of formal as well as informal norms and their tangible and intangible consequences
- Qualitative and quantitative availability and utilization of material and human resources

*Social Interaction:* In order to have a fruitful relationship with the public, blind welfare organizations should publish a newsletter highlighting their activities and achievements. Such a publication should focus on the extent of public participation, support of government departments and other such aspects of community participation etc. It should seek views of readers on its activities, ideology, functioning and such related aspects. Such an endeavour would prove the transparency of operations of the organization and seek public participation in its administration. Public opinion as feed back would help to bring in public accountability of the organization and establish bonafides of the agency.

*Societal Attitude:* Each organization not only has its own environment but it also provides an environment to a wider system to interact. It may result into dissonance among its members if its set objectives are not in consonance with social objectives. Many a times, such institutions have to perform the role of a pace-setter for inducing various social changes. So far, blind persons have been considered an object of pity, charity and compassion. The age-old tradition of considering such persons unemployable should be changed. The existing as well as envisaged blind welfare organizations must strive to change this societal attitude.

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## **Conclusion**

To expedite complete rehabilitation of blind people, it is essential to evolve and implement individual need based, scientific and practical approach to education, training and economic rehabilitation. Unless we develop a cadre of dedicated, devoted, hard working, appropriately qualified and experienced workers, it may not be possible to realize the objectives, of social integration and complete rehabilitation of blind persons. The spirit behind the theme “*Full Participation with Equality*” of the *International Year of Disabled Persons* to be observed next year must be understood, adopted and implemented in the right earnest.

## Paper II

### Training-cum-Transitory Employment: A Striking Success

**Abstract:** *For promoting training and placement of disabled persons, it desirable to impart them on the job training and then provide transitory employment in a simulated industrial setting. It would also demonstrate their production abilities and their open employment. It is essential to apply principles of management in personnel evaluation, inventory, production planning, financial management and costing, etc. Such a centre must be economically viable.*

The history of the disabled reflects their rejection and isolation from society. Their plight, generally unseen or too painful for most people to acknowledge is, therefore, easily ignored. Of late, this situation has changed for the better. With the development of welfare state, the disabled enjoy the right - may be on the paper only - to live a full life contributing to social progress. The *United Nations*, which represents the aspirations of the international community, has been drawing the attention of the world to the severe problems related to disability prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of disabled persons during the past two decades. Increasingly, governments are trying to develop, improve or restore, to the fullest extent the effectiveness of all their disabled citizens.

There is no denying the fact that the disabled are confronted with a formidable problem of open placement because of limited opportunity and age-old tradition of considering them unemployable.

The available vocational training facilities do not equip the disabled adequately for open placement. Realizing the need for on-the-job training for the disabled and their vocational orientation and training, the *Blind Men's Association* started a *Multicategory Workshop for the Handicapped* and *Adult Training Workshop for the Blind* (henceforth referred to as *Workshop*) to provide transitory employment to the disabled.

At the workshop, transitory employment is provided in the industrial setting. Well planned and concentrated efforts are made to improve production performance of the disabled. They are adequately trained and their production is made comparable to that of normal counterparts, after which they are provided open placement opportunities. So far, 176 disabled persons have availed themselves of employment facilities on the basis of merit after their transitory employment of 2 years at the workshop. Now they are members of society, contributing to its progress, and are productive assets for the nation.

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## **Professionalized Training Centre**

The workshop is professionally managed under the valued guidance of a dedicated team of leading entrepreneurs of Ahmedabad. All the production-cum-training activities are carried out under the supervision of experienced and qualified personnel. The workshop enjoys the unique distinction of having highly qualified managerial staff for its management.

At the workshop, well-planned efforts have been made to adopt modern approaches for the economic rehabilitation of the disabled. Attempts have been made to apply principles of management in personnel evaluation, inventory, production planning, financial management and costing, etc. This has resulted in the increased capacity utilization and better human resources management. Systematic monitoring of various operations and job enrichment has helped to achieve psychological growth of the disabled.

*The Student Organization for Managerial Assistance (SOMA)* of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad has taken keen and continued interest in various activities of the workshop. It has played a significant role in incorporating principles of scientific management.

*Modernization of Operations* : To increase efficiency and to extend facilities for transitory employment in machine operations, the workshop is planning semi-automation of the carpentry and printing shops. With the introduction of one semi-automatic printing machine, it will be possible to extend transitory employment facilities to 50 more disabled persons. Similarly, in the carpentry shop, at least 75 more such persons will be engaged after its mechanization.

*Increasing the Sales Turnover* : Over the years, continued efforts have been made to raise sales turnover per disabled person. This will help reduce overhead expenses. Consequently, more benefits may be passed to the disabled. The declining overhead will facilitate expansion of various activities, thus accommodating more disabled persons for transitory employment. During 1979-80, the sales turnover of the workshop was Rs. 4.45 millions. For the year 1980-81, it is expected to be Rs. 7 millions. Similarly, the transitory employment of the disabled may increase to 300.

To quote an article written by me, which appeared in a local newspaper, “*Apart from various other machine operations, plastic moulding provides ample scope for the successful employment of the blind and other handicapped. As the jobs are of a repetitive nature, visual discrimination is not of great significance*”.

To provide transitory employment to the disabled, ten moulding machines have been installed. At present 24 disabled persons are engaged in operating these machines have been installed. Encouraged by their production performance on such machines at the workshop, other plastic manufactures are voluntarily employing the disabled as machine operators.

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## **Expanding Employment Opportunities**

Over the years, the number of disabled persons availing on-the-job training and transitory employment facilities has increased manifold. As mentioned earlier, 176 disabled persons have been placed through the placement services, whereas many more found jobs on their own and some of them preferred self-employment. At the same time, the turnover of the trained disabled as well as the number of disabled persons availing transitory employment facilities have also increased. Various new projects have been developed to undertake new production activities for the horizontal expansion of the transitory employment facilities. Thus there has been a multi-dimensional growth in employment opportunities.

During the last five years, the number of disabled persons availing training-cum-placement facilities has increased gradually. At present, there are more than 200 disabled engaged in various production activities. The following is the number of disabled persons who have availed transitory employment facilities so far:

| <b>Year</b> | <b>No. of Disabled</b> |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1975-76     | 36                     |
| 1976-77     | 94                     |
| 1977-78     | 127                    |
| 1978-79     | 147                    |
| 1979-80     | 212                    |

*Economic Independence of the Disabled* : The disabled at the workshop are paid monthly on the basis of their production performance. This payment varies from Rs. 125 to 350. The performance evaluation is done quarterly to revise the monthly payment. It is done scientifically, considering daily production, regularity, interpersonal relations, interest in the job, nature of the job etc. At present, on an average, a disabled person earns Rs. 186 per month which is above the scheduled minimum wages.

*Facilities for the Rural Disabled* : The workshop has arranged boarding and lodging facilities for the working blind at the Salvation Army Hostel. To extend similar facilities for the working disabled coming from other cities and villages, the workshop is planning to construct a hostel for them. It will enable it to provide transitory employment to the rural disabled also.

*Higher Turnover of Trained Disabled* : The trained disabled persons have been accepted for open placement in various industries in Gujarat. Over the years, the number of disabled persons finding suitable employment has increased. It is easier to provide placement opportunities for the disabled trained in treadle operations, composing, motor rewinding, book binding, machine operations, screen printing etc.

To enable the disabled to find jobs in various operations, the workshop has expanded its production activities considering their work potentials and the opportunities for open placement for the same. During the last year itself, the following production and other activities have been introduced:

- Packing product unit for training the disabled for manufacturing cartons, envelopes, paper bags, etc.
- Plastic moulding for providing transitory employment for operating injection and blow moulding machines.
- Screen printing on PVC sheet, fabric. etc.
- Salesmanship of consumer goods counter selling as well as door to door selling.
- Fabrication of steel furniture, etc.

The expansion of production activities will enable the workshop to explore new avenues for the employment of the disabled.

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### **Achievement Appreciated**

On 2nd April, 1980, two of the disabled of the workshop were given the “*Most Efficient Handicapped Workers*” award and citation by the President of India. The citation on Mr. Ghanshyam Kantilal Desai (Blind) reads, “*Adjudged a regular, punctual and well-disciplined worker, Desai has proved that deprivation of sight is not a handicap and given an opportunity, blind men do a variety of jobs even under competitive conditions*”.

Miss Aditi Bupatrai Vaidya, a mentally handicapped person and another award winner is working in the tailoring section. Her citation reads, “*Now she is performing the tailoring production tasks independently in the Multicategory Workshop and her productivity is reckoned as normal*”.

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### **Conclusion**

The Blind Men’s Association has achieved its objective of training and placement of disabled persons by evolving a new concept of imparting them on the job training and at the same time providing then transitory employment in a simulated industrial setting. This unique experiment of running a training-cum-transitory employment centre on the basis of economical viability has proved to be a striking success. At the workshop, the organization has not only extended training and employment facilities to the disabled, but it has also demonstrated their production abilities. Innovative and dedicated people at the organization are entrusted with the task of social integration and economic rehabilitation of the disabled through their on-the-job training, transitory employment and open placement. This concept is based upon the motto: ***the disabled need opportunity, not charity.***

## Paper III

### Education and Training not Enough

*This article published in the March, 1984 issue of Social Welfare, reflects the far-sightedness and vision of Jagdishbhai. He had predicted more than a decade ago that organizations of and for the blind should work in close cooperation. In fact, the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind and the International Federation of the Blind were merged to form the World Blind Union in 1988. He had also hinted that low cost programmes should be initiated - community based rehabilitation is a proof of this foresight. - Authors*

The existing programmes for the economic independence of the blind are woefully inadequate and need revolutionizing. A blind person is always regarded by the public as an expert only at weaving, caning or music. Can the blind do mechanical and repetitive jobs only? Most organizations still continue to provide them the training in traditional crafts only.

Though there are several new professions such as physiotherapy, stenotyping, bank jobs, telephone operating, motor rewinding, carpentry etc., where the blind could be employed after appropriate training, such jobs are not within the reach of many blind. Similarly, such occupations as poultry, dairying, fishing and piggery can be thrown open to the rural blind to ensure their economic independence.

Training programmes are inadequate and do not lead the blind anywhere. At the same time, many blind persons are unable to get employment although they possess the necessary qualification. This leads to frustration, withdrawal from society and manifestation of dissatisfaction in various ways. They have reached a juncture where they do not know where to go and what to do. The sense of insecurity about their future is one of the greatest problems the blind face today.

The second problem of the blind is their own attitude. It has been found that though they often talk of their own efficiency and ability, demand equal rights, they also ask for equal rights in respect of education and employment but in reality they exploit their blindness and whenever opportunity is available, they falsely play on the sentiments of the community and the government.

Blindness is a physical nuisance and, no doubt, causes trauma and maladjustment with society but it should be accepted by the blind person. This acceptance will lead him to conquer his handicap, making the best of his present situation. Blindness does not hamper the growth of personality or abilities. The blind persons have abilities which

are at par with those of any sighted individual; it is just that they have to be carefully nurtured and developed.

If blind persons develop a sense of self-respect and can prove their talents, all their problems will be solved. I feel it is the attitude of expecting sympathy and special concessions that should be avoided. To over-come their problems, the blind should have associations of their own where they can voice their opinions and prove their talents and skills from time to time. There should be solidarity among various organizations of and for the blind and they should work together for the creation of facilities for training the blind in employment-oriented occupations. These organizations should also have programmes for the socio-psychological adjustment and integration of the blind.

There should be cooperation between organizations for the blind, voluntary organizations and the community. Each should understand more about the other by a two way system of exchange. This way, the problems and limitations of each group could be solved the easier way. More realistic and low-cost programmes should be developed whereby a greater number of blind can be economically rehabilitated.

Teaching in schools for the blind needs to be completely upgraded so that the blind can be more equipped for handling jobs. The present system of education serves to encourage the blind to go in for higher education and take teaching as a career. More blind should be encouraged to go in for technical trades and employment-oriented training by providing for technical courses.

In many instances, whatsoever programmes on rehabilitation of the blind have been implemented have simply raised their expectations. Creating awareness among them about their needs has made them more dissatisfied. Thus more education and training may not lead them anywhere unless programmes on their economic rehabilitation viz. open employment, self employment, etc. are introduced. No rehabilitative measures will be adequate unless they help in developing self-confidence, making the blind socially integrated and economically independent.

## Paper IV

# Employment of the Blind - A New Perspective

**Abstract:** *“A nationwide, concentrated effort aimed at changing the attitudes of the people about the potential of the blind and bringing about awareness is the need of the day ...An environment has to be created that causes blind persons to naturally pass from the stages of schooling and training to that of employment.” Jagdishbhai in his article - “Employment of the Blind - A new perspective”, published in the Blind Welfare, Volume XXV, No. 1 (April, 1983) issue shows us the way of building a new system, conducive to placement rather than simply outlining jobs for the blind.*

Article 46 of the *Constitution of India*, on *Directive Principles*, enjoins on the State to promote with special care the education and economic interest of the weaker sections of people, including blind persons. The State has recognized the significance of providing each and every person, including the blind, with the opportunity to acquire education, technical and vocational knowledge and skills, and thus become ready for employment. There has, however, always been a wide gap between targets, expectations and reality.

*The International Year of Disabled Persons* succeeded in bringing into limelight this neglected segment of society and people became more aware of needs and aspirations of the disabled. The blind were suddenly focussed upon and much publicity was undertaken for convincing society about their latent talents and potentials.

Amidst the fanfare and publicity, actual good work has also emerged. There emerged, for example, legislations for employment of the disabled in a few states, concessions in various fields and the establishment of special employment exchanges. But the actual benefits generated and passed on to the blind through these schemes have been debated, derided and acclaimed at length. The article considers employment in its total perspective, i.e. not merely as an income-generating activity but as a spectrum of interaction of various socio-psychological pressures.

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### **Expansion of the Term “Employment”**

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Why do we stress employment as the ultimate step in the spectrum of rehabilitation? The importance of employment is derived not merely from the economic independence it bestows on the blind person but from various interacting economic and psycho-social pressures of society.

In the first place, most blind persons and their families come from the lower rungs of society. In fact studies in many countries disclose a high correlation between poverty and

disability. When there is a blind person in a poor family, the cost of maintaining that member adds to the burden of the family. Thus economic independence of a blind person does not remain an individual need, it becomes a question of survival for the family.

*“Work satisfies fundamental human needs of developing and enriching life,”* says an official Swedish report. Nearly every culture assigns a very important weightage to work as part of a complete life. When a blind person does not work, he is failing in one of the important standards laid down by society and he is not performing the traditional role of a bread winner. Thus employment becomes the most important part of any rehabilitation programme.

Employment also helps to integrate a blind person in the mainstream of society and gives a meaning to his existence. It gives structure and discipline to his thinking, helps to mould his thoughts and actions constructively and prevents him from developing introversions or complexes in his personality. In a country plagued by unemployment, disguised employment and the curious phenomenon called ‘*stagflation*’, where employment even for the able-bodied is difficult, generating employment for the blind is a herculean task. Also one can not suggest radical or new and unheard of ventures of employment for the blind because such measures would be abortive.

One has to make do with the existing conditions as uncontrollable variables and try to explore avenues of employment from ‘*within*’ the system, instead of imposing a set of new principles on the existing system. Employment is nevertheless a very potent problem when one considers that there are a large number of blind persons in India are in employable age. As this number is expected to increase every year, efforts must be made to evolve a system by which placement can be accelerated. It is proposed to build up a system which is conducive to placement rather than simply outlining jobs for the blind. Three factors viz. counselling, training and general services are some of the most important ingredients in the spectrum of placement.

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## **Counselling**

Man by nature is afraid to implement anything new; he is inherently resistant to change. One of the most important deterrents to employment of the blind is the lack of awareness among public regarding the potentials of the blind. A blind person is protected by his family, regarded as useless and pitiable by the general public and an unproductive element by the employers. Thus the most important stumbling block is the communication gap in terms of misconceptions regarding the abilities of the blind in the minds of the concerned reference groups.

**Reference Group I - Parents:** Since parents affect the decisions and life patterns of blind children the most, widespread and massive efforts should be made to educate them

about the abilities of their children, the possibilities of their employment and the agencies working for their rehabilitation, through the following measures:

- *Training* : Short-term courses on parent counselling should be organized at regional basis. The parents should be encouraged to visit various institutions, programmes and activities related to rehabilitation of the disabled.
- *Awareness* : The parents should be provided appropriate information related to programmes and concessions available to the blind. The regional level seminars, symposiums and workshops should be organized for the parents to discuss various problems related to the blind. Similarly, various services clubs should be encouraged to organize lectures by experts in the field of rehabilitation on prevention of blindness and on general care of the blind.

**Reference Group II - Fellow Workers:** A Blind employee has to work with other able-bodied workers as a part of a group. If the other workers do not understand his psychology or his typical attitude to life and work, he will not be able to find his work environment congenial and will be frustrated. The following measures should be taken for the counselling of workers so that a conducive work environment is developed.

- *Counselling* : Fellow workers should be given counselling about the characteristics of blind persons, their strength and weaknesses. This can be done through lectures, talks, activity profiles, demonstration etc.
- *Visits* : The trainees and instructors of Labour Training Institutions and trade union leaders may be invited to visit various institutes for the blind.
- *Acceptance on Co-workers* : All leading trade unions should be encouraged to employ relevant staff for the training of workers as regards acceptance of the blind as co-workers.

**Reference Group III - Employers:** Blind persons face problems of employment because employers are not aware of their skills. They do not know how a blind person comes to the place of work and performs necessary duties. Employers are justifiably concerned with the profit motive as they run industries for making profit and not for providing services. They will employ the blind only if they are convinced that the profitability of their unit will not decline. Thus what is needed is counselling the employers on the lines suggested below:

- *By Demonstration:* National level bodies entrusted with the work of blind welfare should have units or wings for demonstration and publicity. These units should demonstrate the abilities of the blind through live demonstrations, brochures and other pictorial publicity showing the blind working on machines and allied operations.

- *Forming a Forum of Satisfied Employers:* Those who have employed the blind and are satisfied with their progress should be invited to form a forum. These employers can act as catalysts in influencing other employers to consider the blind for employment.
- *Incentives for Employment of the Blind:* Provisions have been made under the Income-Tax Act to exempt wages paid to the disabled to the extent of Rs. 20,000 per year from the income tax. Similarly, some more incentives such as provision of direct monetary benefits for loss incurred during the training period etc. can be given to employers for employing the blind. Government can arrange for an Orientation and Mobility Cell to send officers to train the blind employed in such mills or factories. This will help more blind people to be quickly acquainted with the layout of the place of work and move about easily.
- *Formation of an Employment Cell:* There are many service minded employers who desire to employ the disabled but they do not know how to start. With the starting of employment exchanges for the physically handicapped in some cities, a unit of information has already been established. This unit can give information about places where the disabled are available. The concerned employers can contact these places for further information. Such employment exchanges should be established at other cities also.

## **Training:**

Much has been discussed about the need for training the blind and equipping them with appropriate skills. What is being proposed here is a training package that should be adopted, either in total or in part, by all organizations for the blind. The training should be imparted over a fixed period and at convenient intervals. The groups to be trained would be blind persons, the blind placement officers and labour welfare officers.

**Group I - Blind Persons:** To expedite employment of blind persons, it is essential to equip them with requisite skills, enhance their self confidence and to improve their personality. The following measures should be taken in this regard:

- *Self Care Training :* A blind person faces problems of integration in his job due to his dress, mannerisms, peculiar habits etc. Thus every school or rehabilitation institute should necessarily impart training in orientation and mobility, home economics, personal grooming etc. Such training will help to inculcate confidence in such a person.
- *Vocational Training :* More and more organizations should initiate vocational training in technical trades, physiotherapy, telephone operating etc. This will help the blind to be equipped with necessary employment-oriented skills.

- *On-the-Job Training* : ‘On-the-job’ training centres for imparting transitory employment should be encouraged. Such centres should be economically viable and self-supporting. On-the-job training in such workshops should be matched with employment opportunities. The ultimate objective of such centres should be to provide on-the-job training to the blind so that they can be placed in open industry without any competitive disadvantage.
- *Training in Rural Crafts* : Centres for training the rural blind in rural crafts and agriculture should be encouraged. Efforts should also be made to rehabilitate the rural blind in their home situation itself, through non-institutionalized home bound programmes.

**Group II - Placement Officers:** Many agencies have appointed Placement Officers who are neither adequately trained nor understand the blind well enough. The Placement Officers must necessarily know work-evaluation techniques of testing the skills and residual abilities of the blind. This knowledge will help them to scan the environment for possible jobs and place the blind person properly, finding the right job for the right man.

The National Association for the Blind has started a training programme for Placement Officers in Bombay. Other national-level welfare organizations should also introduce such training programmes. Various voluntary organizations and government bodies should take advantage of this training and sponsor their Placement Officers to such training programmes.

**Group III - Labour Welfare Officers:** The Labour Welfare Officer in the units which have employed blind persons should also be trained in dealing with the blind employees. This does not mean that the blind workers should get any privileges; it is just to help them to be a part and parcel of the system. The *Labour Welfare Departments* and the *Labour Welfare Boards* should be approached for this purpose. Various Universities running courses on labour welfare should be approached to include welfare of blind employees in the course curriculum.

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## **General Services**

*Job Identification:* Continuous efforts should be made by all parties concerned to identify more and more jobs which the blind can perform. The lists which include only certain jobs for the blind should not be encouraged because this means a compartmentalization of jobs. New jobs which have not been traditionally performed by the blind should be encouraged. Whatever jobs have been identified for the blind, the public should be made aware of them. As mentioned earlier, efforts should be made to convince people as regard potentials of the blind, at least for the jobs identified for them.

*Public Awareness:* The main thrust of any programme for the employment of the blind should be the creation of public awareness. A number of programmes have been launched

for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the blind. But very few persons have availed themselves of such programmes, due to lack of awareness. The government, with the help of voluntary agencies in the field, should implement programmes on creating public awareness.

*Quality of Jobs:* Certain jobs have been traditionally associated with the blind, such as caning, music, weaving, etc. Such stereo-typing of jobs should be avoided by regarding all jobs which require mechanical dexterity and where visual discrimination is not important as open to the blind, provided they can prove their worth.

*Legislation on Employment of the Handicapped:* Mr. S. Loveraj, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour has pointed out at a meeting of the *Central Advisory Committee on the Physically Handicapped* that the *Ministry of Social Welfare* was considering a proposal for bringing out a comprehensive legislation covering all aspects of the welfare of the physically handicapped.

Although no legislation has been enacted on employment of the blind, some executive orders have been issued by various Ministries requesting concerned State as well as Central Government Departments to employ the disabled on priority basis. While such executive orders are not obligatory on the concerned departments, some noticeable results have been achieved whenever there has been a follow-up of such orders. During the *International Year of the Disabled*, Mr. C. M. Stephen, the then Minister for Communications issued such orders and showed personal interest in the self-employment of the disabled on public telephone booths. The results were encouraging, and during 1981, some 634 disabled persons were employed on public telephone booths, with Andhra Pradesh topping the list with 171, followed by Tamilnadu with 120.

Recently the Government of Gujarat has enacted a law reserving one half to one percent of the jobs for the disabled, in existing factories having 200 or more workers. This has resulted in better employment exchanges for the handicapped in Gujarat. When one makes a comparison over the last three years i.e. from 1979 to 1982, one notices that the employment due to reservation has increased from less than 100 persons in 1979 to 1672 persons in 1982.

I hope, encouraged by the performance of employment exchanges for the physically handicapped in Gujarat, the Central Government will enact a comprehensive and comparable legislation including reservation of jobs for the disabled. (*This has been enacted in January 1996 - Authors*).

*National Placement Grid:* Till today, there has been a significant void in the placement scene. There has been no nation-wide planned effort made in co-operation with voluntary agencies to evolve a scheme for employment. A *National Placement Grid* should be established to facilitate employment. It should have representatives of the

Central Government, State Governments, employers, trade unions, voluntary organizations and other concerned institutions.

*Building of Infrastructural Facilities:* Most of the blind in our country come from the rural areas where rehabilitation services are difficult to obtain. The rural blind desire to migrate to the cities for employment but due to lack of lodging and boarding facilities, they cannot avail themselves of rehabilitation services. The government, having a strong base, should work at establishing an infrastructure to enable the blind to obtain temporary shelter. The work of the *Salvation Army* in providing such facilities is commendable. All voluntary organizations working for the economic rehabilitation of the blind should endeavour to provide such facilities to serve as temporary shelters for the blind.

*Compulsory Registration:* The country, inspite of having an efficient public administration system, does not have reliable statistics on the exact number of employable blind. Thus lack of statistics makes it very difficult to formulate any realistic plan of employment. The government, through its machinery, should see that every blind person is compulsorily registered. This will enable employers and institutions for the blind to arrange for rehabilitation of the blind.

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## **Conclusion**

A nationwide and concentrated efforts aimed at changing the attitudes of the people about the potentials of the blind and bringing about awareness is the need of the day. Sporadic efforts at placement will neither alleviate nor reduce the problem of unemployment of the blind. What is needed is a coordinated systems approach that will bring together the concerned reference groups and evolve a system that will be conducive to enlarged employment opportunities.

What has been advocated so far is a path of establishing a new environment for bringing about necessary changes, so that placement of the blind becomes part of a natural sequence of events and does not remain a problem that has to have contrived and imposed solutions. An environment has to be created that enables blind persons to naturally pass from the stages of schooling and training to that of employment. At present, employment has to be forced upon the employers; they have to be cajoled and coaxed. In years to come, with the several reference groups being properly trained and motivated, employment of the blind will become a smooth and continuous process.

## Paper V

### Employment of the Visually Impaired

*A paper presented by Jagdishbhai during the Seminar on NAB State and District Branches held on 2-3 March, 1996 at Jamnagar, Gujarat. His most recent paper advocates exploring all avenues of employment, promoting appropriate skill development and professional training and evolving a co-ordinated approach to training, and employmen. -Authors*

Employment is the single largest factor in enhancing the earning capacity, social status, social esteem and social integration of an individual, hence every organization devoted to the welfare or rehabilitation of the visually impaired must aim at expediting their employment. All the educational, training and rehabilitation programmes should be geared to making employment the ultimate objective.

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#### **Disability Act**

The newly enacted *The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995* makes provision for reservation of 3 percent of vacancies for the persons with disability in the posts identified for each disability. In other words, one percent of vacancies in the posts identified for the disabled at large, would be exclusively reserved for the visually impaired for them in every establishment. The key words in this respect are: every establishment, identified posts and reservation of vacancies. Thus reservation is only in the identified posts, 1 percent of vacancies only but in every establishment.

Firstly, the NAB State and District Branches must prevail upon the Appropriate Government, mostly State Governments, to appoint State Coordination Committees, *State Executive Committees* and *Commissioners for the Handicapped*. The Appropriate Governments must also be prevailed upon to identify appropriate authority and appoint committees for the identification of posts suitable for the persons with disability in every establishment and notify the same.

Secondly, the NAB Branches should form advocacy groups with the involvement of other leading disability organizations to ensure that the concerned authorities expedite the process of posts identification; convince and encourage employers to employ visually impaired at least in the posts so identified. It may also be desirable to knock at the doors of appropriate legal authorities to seek directions against the concerned authorities regarding effective implementation of various provisions of the Act in respect to job reservation.

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## **Exploring All Avenues**

It is not possible to seek formal, institutional, industrial and government employment, often termed as open employment, for every individual. According to available estimates, hardly 10 percent sighted individuals are able to avail such employment. Thus depending exclusively on open or formal employment may not extend adequate employment opportunities to the visually impaired. It is desirable to explore avenues of self employment, employment in informal sector, community based gainful occupation and other options which enhance the earning capacity of the individual.

*Appropriate Training* : The existing training facilities are not appropriate and are grossly inadequate. It would be essential to match the training facilities with the nature of posts identified and number of vacancies likely to accrue in those posts in the near future. The NAB Branches must encourage development of appropriate training facilities at the regional and local levels.

This would require a multi-pronged approach:

- of developing appropriate recognized vocational and employment-oriented courses;
- extending facilities for need and individual based appropriate skill development;
- imparting training in orientation & mobility, self care and related aspects;
- providing counselling to the individual, family members and employers and also by actual demonstration of abilities of the blind;
- systematic and scientific follow up of the placed persons at regular intervals;
- and creating public awareness about successful employment etc.

*Professional Training* : Encouraging employment of the visually impaired in various professional jobs would not only create suitable employment opportunities for them, it would enhance their self-esteem and would change stereo-typing attitudes of considering them suitable only for repetitive, semi-skilled and traditional crafts. The placement of the visually impaired as physiotherapists, stenographers, computer programmers, telephone operators, management professionals, public relation officers and counsellors has created a new awakening and hope among the visually impaired persons as well as amongst the public by and large.

Promotion of professional employment would require the development of suitable infrastructure, recognition of courses, provision of special equipment, adaptation of curricula and suitable trainers. Each NAB Branch must aim at developing at least one professional training course in their area of operation. NAB Gujarat Branch would be pleased to extend the fullest cooperation and guidance in this regard.

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## **Coordinated Approach**

Extending open employment to the visually impaired requires the active involvement and participation of State Departments of Employment & Training, Education, Labour, Social Welfare; Vocational Rehabilitation Centres, Industrial Training Institutes, Polytechnics, disability organizations, employers federations, industries federations, employment exchanges, educational institutes, state administration and such other authorities. Similarly extending self employment would require coordination with banks, financial institutions, local municipal authorities, telephone department, local transport authorities, suppliers of consumer products, disability organizations, service clubs, parent associations and such other bodies.

Thus NAB Branches must involve these authorities, organizations and individuals actively in the process of promoting open as well as self employment services. Formation of regional and local level Placement Committees, organizing various employment promotion programmes, creating public awareness about successful placements, use of print and electronic media are the steps in the right direction.

The other areas which need adequate consideration in respect of promotion of open and self employment include:

- Special efforts for promotion of employment of blind women.
- Efforts for job reservation on the basis of number of posts and not the vacancies.
- Efforts of seeking job reservation as a percentage of total number of posts and not only one percent of vacancies in the identified posts.
- Development and distribution of suitable manual on promotion of employment of the visually impaired.
- Reintroducing the system of appointing Employment and Placement Officers under the auspices of NAB Branches with the financial support from NAB(I).
- Seeking recognition of the Employment and Placement Services run by the NGOs at par with the Government Employment Exchanges.
- Creating nation-wide awareness about the most successful initiatives on employment.
- Initiation and promotion of employment related research aimed at task analysis, job identification, ergonomics, product development.
- Development of centres of excellence for the training of human resources, use of special equipment, adoption of technology and promotion of innovations.
- Reactivating the NAB Employment and Placement Committee, making it more functional, result-oriented and national in character.

## Paper VI

### Self Employment of the Visually Impaired

*While Jagdishbhai is known for developing a variety of professional as well as vocational training programmes for the blind, he has always advocated promotion of their self employment. He had realized during the beginning of his career that this avenue has vast potential for expediting economic independence. As a self employed person himself - a physiotherapist by profession - Jagdishbhai has been an ardent supporter of self employment. Establishing of a Vending Stall Project, Temple of Hope Committee for promoting public telephone booths, School of Physiotherapy etc. are the milestones in the development of lucrative self employment services under his patronage.*

*During the early 1980s, he chose to present this paper, at a National Seminar organized by the National Association for the Blind in Bombay, to echo his thoughts on the subject. - Authors.*

**Abstract:** *Self employment is the only alternative for reaching out to a large number of blind persons. Such ventures are generally low investment oriented, cost effective, socially desirable, economically viable and help to generate sound financial returns. For promoting self employment, a variety of individual, local, national as well as global efforts need to be initiated at the earliest. The individual, however, must remain the focal point and all methods must be client oriented and centred around his needs, his potentials, his strengths and his environment.*

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#### **Need for Promoting Self Employment**

The world over there is a general consensus among the workers of the blind that employment is the most essential but the toughest aspect of rehabilitation. The approach, method, nature, and level of employment may vary from country to country. Employment is a more potent problem for the countries where incidence of visual handicap is higher, social security benefits are non-existent, onslaught of blindness is generally in the working age group and employment of the sighted is a major problem. These are the characteristics of developing countries which account for more than 80 percent of the population of the blind of the world.

The education and training facilities in the developing countries are so meagre that only a negligible proportion of the blind can get access to the same. Due to resource constraint, ignorance and general apathy towards the blind, majority of them are illiterate, confined to their homes, totally at the mercy of their families or community, generally considered as a burden on society and have no hope for the future. To talk of formal employment is highly utopian when even self employment is a far cry.

In developing countries, gainful employment of the blind gains prominence as there are too many persons dependent on too little land in the face of mounting economic pressures. Contributing to the family income would facilitate the adjustment of the blind in his family and pave the way for his acceptance in society. In these countries, the unorganized or the informal sector accounts for 90 percent of employment. With increasing mechanization and lopsided development, formal jobs are becoming more scarce while on the other hand the population of the blind is steadily increasing. To add to this, the existing training programmes for the blind are not employment oriented and self employment of the blind seems to be the only viable alternative.

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### **Explanation of the Term Self Employment**

The term “*self employment*” generally implies “*self-initiated, self-developed and self-regulated income generating opportunities where the individual plays the role of the investor, employer and employee.*” This understanding of the term, however, ignores the community which offers a wide spectrum of opportunities where the blind may be absorbed in gainful occupations.

Rehabilitating Manjula, a 50 year old blind women, residing in a remote village in India does not need any specialized training but helping her to take care of her household activities as she used to perform prior to her visual impairment. Women in rural areas are generally engaged in cleaning their homes, cooking meals and taking care of household activities thus enabling men to undertake income generating activities. Enabling Manjula to perform all these activities and helping her to become economically independent by starting a rural occupation is rehabilitating her in the true sense of the word.

Similarly, training Shankerji, who used to work as a casual agricultural labourer before his blindness, in orientation and mobility and various farm operations, and then enabling him to get a bank loan for purchasing a buffalo is definitely meaningful self employment. Shankerji is economically resettled and contributes very substantially to the family income.

Similarly, Kanti Patel at the age of 20, on completion of his schooling and after gaining a certificate course in telephone operating found that it was nearly impossible to seek open employment as a telephone operator in the organized sector due to a variety of reasons. With appropriate counselling and launching grant, he was helped to set up a public telephone booth near a theatre. He got the telephone connection under the scheme of Public Call Office for the Handicapped on a call sharing basis. With the active patronage of the department, support of local administrative bodies and involvement of blind welfare organizations, hundreds of blind persons like Kanti have turned to manning public call offices as a source of livelihood.

Thus self employment, in the urban as well as rural settings, is the only alternative for reaching out to a large number of blind persons who have remained bereft of any rehabilitative services ever since.

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### **Pre-requisites for Self Employment**

It has been observed that the successful operation of a small business or self employment venture will depend upon the following factors:

- Initiative and active involvement of the individual.
- Business acumen, foresight and knowledge of the particular occupation.
- Capacity and desire to work and to take up the venture as a challenge.
- Understanding of the environment and the individual needs.
- Conducive environment and consonance of the venture with the family background.
- Counselling and guidance of family and its level of support.
- Involvement, support and active participation of community.
- Convincing of the concerned officials and level of support of local bodies, state administration and organized sector.
- Availability of education and training facilities and existence of support net work.
- Compatibility between training facilities and specific requirements of the venture.
- Availability of funds, market competitiveness, prevalence of ventures in the area and economic viability.

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### **Examples of Self Employment Ventures**

The various factors described above are exemplified by the occupations in which the blind persons have been successfully self employed in various countries namely telephone operating, physiotherapy, salesmanship, music, courier services, insurance agency, teaching, touch typing, stenography, plastic moulding, motor rewinding, cycle repairing, weaving, block printing and recaning of chairs etc.

It may be useful to list rural crafts or trades in which the blind have been gainfully occupied in various pilot community based projects in the developing countries viz., duck keeping, fishery, sharpening of agricultural implements and tools, making and selling of pickles,

making of leaf plates, growing vegetables, poultry, rice puffing, rope making, selling incense sticks, pottery, making bricks, skinning of dead animals, petty shop keeping and sericulture etc.

These ventures involve low investment, are cost effective, socially desirable, economically viable and help to generate sound financial returns. As these ventures are group oriented, the entire family of the blind person can take up the same as a joint venture and play a complimentary role to each other.

It is not advisable to approach a blind person with a list of trades or occupations. On the contrary, our approach should be client centered and individual need based. As every blind person has his own values, expectations and potentials, the individual should be the focal point of the employment process. The residual potentials, expectations, family background, past experience, and other such factors should be the pivotal point of our approach to his employment.

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### **Efforts for Promoting Self Employment**

The following individual, local, national as well as global efforts need to be initiated at the earliest for promoting self employment of the blind.

**Individual Efforts:** In a process of change, the individual must himself be geared towards making the necessary overtures for enabling the change to become a reality. No extraneous or external factors can work unless the blind person himself understands the necessity of self-employment and makes concrete efforts towards achieving the same. Thus the process should be initiated at the level of the individual himself and then expand from this micro level to the macro level.

As pointed out earlier, the blind person must be considered as the most vital component of the rehabilitation process. It is for him that planning has to be done, hence his views, potentials, likes and dislikes would be of paramount importance. It is equally necessary for him to put in efforts for his own rehabilitation, so that it is a process that evolves from within rather than being imposed by an outside agency.

The following steps should be taken at the individual level for expediting self employment of blind persons:

- *Counselling* : The individual should be counselled and convinced to direct his potentials for initiating, developing and regulating gainful occupations.
- *Training* : The education and training of the individual should be occupation oriented and there should be compatibility between training facilities and self employment opportunities. The individual should be equipped with appropriate skills to compete for employment.

- *Family Trade* : The family members and community should be approached to absorb the blind person in the family trade, craft or occupation.
- *Social Reinforcement* : The successful self employed blind individuals should encourage other blind persons to take up such ventures. This sort of social reinforcement may be instrumental in expediting self employment.
- *Group Approved* : Individuals should form their associations at the local as well as the national level for the purpose of collective bargaining; economies of scale and unity of operations; assertion of their rights; and for preservation and enhancement of the physical efficiency and resourcefulness as a group.

*Institutional Efforts*: In developing countries, institutions have always remained at the foray of rehabilitation work. They have evolved policies, programmes and have regulated the rehabilitation of the blind. They have been instrumental in focussing attention on the needs and talents of the blind. It is thus essential that blind welfare and other such institutions should be taken into confidence and convinced of the benefits of this innovative approach to enable a shift from employment to self-employment.

They should shoulder the mantle of popularizing the concept and prove its worth by resettling blind persons in a variety of self employment ventures and should take the following measures in this regard:

- *Support Services* : The blind welfare organizations should develop, along with their existing education, training and such other services, a net work of support services in terms of counselling, job-oriented training, finance and marketing.
- *Vocational Guidance* : Vocational guidance and counselling programmes should be arranged for motivating the blind to initiate self employment ventures for social integration and economic rehabilitation. Existing placement services should be upgraded to incorporate self-employment immediately.
- *New Initiatives* : Community based rehabilitation programmes should be initiated, implemented and financed with the ultimate objectives of economic rehabilitation. Systematic linkages should be developed with other financial, marketing and administrative bodies for facilitating self-employment. Extensive survey and research should be undertaken to identify new avenues of self-employment. Public awareness should be created regarding potentials of the blind, social desirability and propriety of self employment ventures.
- *Institutional Support* : Trade unions, employers' federations, funding organizations and state administration should be encouraged and counselled to extend suitable employment opportunities. Monitoring, control and evaluation of self employment programmes should be carried out regularly.

**National Efforts:** Rehabilitation services the world over have been initiated, implemented and controlled mainly by voluntary or non-governmental organizations. In recent years, there has been an increasing degree of governmental involvement in terms of extending financial assistance to voluntary organizations, providing administrative, legislative and constitutional support and adopting a variety of other measures for extending employment opportunities to the blind. The government should take the following measures in respect of encouraging self employment:

- *Training* : Intervention should be undertaken for augmenting and upgrading employment oriented educational and training facilities and for encouraging placement services.
- *New Initiatives* : Community based rehabilitation programmes should be initiated, encouraged and funded with the ultimate objective of promoting economic resettlement. Seed money should be provided for launching the ventures on self employment.
- *Adaptations* : Research and development on adaptation of equipment and techniques of promoting work effectiveness of the blind should be encouraged with the involvement of the research, industrial training and higher educational institutes.
- *Special Cell* : Self employment bureau should be set-up on a priority basis with the active participation of the non-governmental voluntary organizations, local bodies and development administration. Self employment cells should be set-up under appropriate Ministries and employment committees for inter-ministerial co-ordination.
- *Lagslative Measures* : A comprehensive legislation for providing equal opportunities to the disabled or suitable laws on employment or job reservation should be enacted and enforced. Various resolutions or conventions on employment adopted by the *United Nations* bodies or other international organizations should be ratified and implemented in the right earnest.

**Global Efforts:** With the increasing awakening in the field of blind welfare, organizations working for the blind at the global level have emerged to assume the roles of policy makers, advocacy, coordination and resource mobilization. These bodies enjoy a great deal of prestige, status and influence which can be used in accelerating the self employment of the blind. International funding agencies have contributed immensely to the prevention of blindness and development of education and training facilities by providing financial assistance and consultative inputs. These agencies should be motivated to change this antiquated pattern to incorporate newer vistas which are low cost and reality oriented such as self-employment and community based rehabilitation. At the global level, the following measures need to be undertaken:

- *Pilot Project* : Time bound self employment programmes should be launched around the world on a pilot basis with the active involvement and participation of international organizations entrusted to employment as well as the welfare of the blind. Member countries as well as other categories of members should be encouraged to initiate and implement suitable programmes on self employment. These organizations should be motivated to allocate funds for this purpose on a top priority basis. Concerned national as well as international labour as well as employment organizations should be convinced to establish self employment bureaux.
- *Publicity* : Concept of self-employment should be popularized through publicity in mass media, publication of periodicals, production of suitable audio-visual material and documentation of human interest stories etc. Effectiveness of self employment as well as community based rehabilitation programmes should be demonstrated by highlighting the achievements of successful experiments at appropriate international forums.
- *Appropriate Resolutions* : Policy guidelines for self-employment should be set through resolutions in international meetings and implementation of the same should be governed.

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## **Conclusion**

I have striven to point out the vast possibility of self employment, its appropriateness and contemporary relevance. I have also emphasized the various tiers and echelons involved such as individual, the institution, the country and the world. If we adopt this multipronged strategy, I am sure our efforts would bear fruit. To ensure success, I stress once again that the individual must remain the focal point of our work, all our methods must be client oriented and centered around his needs, his potentials, his strengths and his environment.

I am sure by this time, all of you must be convinced of the immediate need as well as the merits of encouraging self employment of blind persons. Let us make a firm resolve to all work together to make this dream a reality. Let not our discussion become a paper tiger, let us not make dreams our masters and thoughts our aim.

Let us make a determined and concentrated effort to identify newer avenues of self employment and impart adequate training to enable resettlement of the blind persons in these occupations to achieve our long cherished goal of imparting economic independence and hence self respect to blind persons who have remained bereft of these ever since.

## Paper VII

### Community Based Rehabilitation

*Jagdishbhai is known the world over for promoting community based rehabilitation services for the visually impaired in India. The National Association for the Blind constituted a Rural Activities Committee during 1982 to promote services for the rural blind under the Chairmanship of Capt. H.J.M. Desai with Jagdishbhai as the Secretary. Subsequently Jagdishbhai became Chairman of the Committee.*

*This paper is based on the thoughts of Jagdishbhai pertaining to the concept of community based rehabilitation. The paper was formulated and presented by (Late) Mr. Madhukar R. Suryavanshi, Project Coordinator of the NAB Rural Activities Committee during the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment Asian conference held at Ahmedabad during 9-11 January, 1995 with Jagdishbhai as Chairman of the Host Committee. - Authors*

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#### **Existing Scenario**

From the analysis of the existing statistics about the demographic details of the visually impaired in the developing countries, the following significant features emerge:

- In majority of cases, visual handicap is adventitious and after forty five years.
- The rehabilitation centres are few, confined to urban areas and cover a few hundred people in the working age group of 16-35 years.
- The distribution of the population of the visually impaired persons follows the general distribution pattern, i.e. 84 percent live in rural areas.

#### **Analysis of Existing Rehabilitation Services**

*Limited Coverage: Education:* The existing special schools in India, at present cover only 15,000 visually impaired children. Even if special education is extended to all blind children of the school going age (*which is never going to be possible*), the coverage would be only 3.2 percent of the total population of the visually impaired.

*Training:* The existing vocational as well as on-the-job training centres at present cover merely 3,000 blind persons. The trades are urban-oriented and do not necessarily result into employment.

*Category of Disability:* Most multi-category rehabilitation programmes mainly cover the locomotor handicapped only. The glaring examples in India are the Vocational *Rehabilitation Centres* under the *Ministry of Labour* and *District Rehabilitation Centres* under the

*Ministry of Welfare.* These programs were launched for all categories of disabled but at present major coverage is the locomotor handicapped.

*Lack of Social Security:* Most developing countries have not yet introduced social security measures for assuring a minimum standard of living for the disabled. Some State Governments have introduced disability as well as old age pension schemes. Due to limited budget allocation, cumbersome procedures, lack of public awareness, and lack of an effective delivery system, the coverage has been limited. A visually impaired person is left at the mercy of family members and the community.

Thus the only way of reaching out to the unreached persons in rural areas is to initiate and implement CBR programmes for the visually impaired.

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### **Components of CBR**

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Thus due to cost constraint, commonality of services, scattered target group and state policy, it is essential that the CBR should:

- be exclusively for the visually impaired
- cover persons of all age groups
- include all aspects of:
  - prevention and cure of curable blindness
  - certification of incurable blindness
  - social integration including orientation & mobility, activities of daily living, psychological reinforcement
  - integrated education
  - economic rehabilitation
  - support services and concessions, and
  - public awareness

#### **Concept of CBR :**

Here it is pertinent to mention the definition of CBR provided by the *World Health Organization* - “*CBR involves measures taken at the community level to use and build on the resources of the community, including the impaired, disabled and the handicapped persons themselves, their families and their community as a whole*”.

In context of developing countries, the definition of CBR can be modified. It should be cost effective, individual need based and result oriented. It should result into complete

integration of the individual into the community. Once rehabilitated, the visually impaired person should lead a more productive life, thus helping the community economically. It should enable the individual to stay within the fold of the family and contribute towards the family income. Rehabilitation should aim at helping people to function and to perform as they used to function and perform prior to blindness, that is restoring the fullest use of the senses to compensate the loss of vision.

From the experience of implementing CBR projects exclusively for the visually impaired persons at 97 locations in India, it has been established that a group of 8 Field Workers and 1 Supervisor can easily cover 200 visually impaired persons within a period of two years. The per capita cost of such services is less than Rs. 1000 (about 34 \$), which is one-tenth as compared to institutional programmes.

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### **Implementation Plan**

Based on the foregoing discussion, the process charts for the CBR, medical rehabilitation and integrated education have been evolved. The process charts reflect the envisaged sequence of activities, responsibility areas and the aspects of rehabilitation.

In the case of medical rehabilitation and integrated education, the Project *Implementing Agency* should confine its role to referral to the respective specialist agencies. Integrated education is handled by the itinerant teachers by admitting children to accredited educational institutes preferably in the same village. Similarly, prevention and cure activities are exclusively handled by the ophthalmic surgeons or eye hospitals or such other institutions.

*(Process Chart included as Annexure - I)*

### **Identification of the Incurable Visually Impaired Persons**

The first stage of classification is during the eye check-up to divide the visually impaired persons into:

- Curable
- Incurable

It is essential that every person with eye defects or having no light perception should be examined by a qualified Ophthalmic Surgeon (not by the Field Worker by any chance). The curable blind persons should be taken up for further treatment, whereas the incurably blind persons should be certified as a blind person.

### **Cure of Blindness Process**

The role of field staff for the purpose of prevention and cure of blindness, should be limited to:

- Identification (*not even initial screening*) of persons with eye-ailments or vision defects
- Referral of such cases to a qualified Ophthalmologist
- Acting as link between the individuals and the Ophthalmologist or such specialists
- Acting as a motivator and guide.

Our experience of implementing CBR at 90 locations in India reveals that involvement of eye hospitals or eye specialists is essential for effective project implementation. In fact, wherever the *Project Implementing Agency* is a rural eye hospital, the results have been very encouraging. As eye hospitals enjoy better social acceptance than a rehabilitation organization, the whole concept is easily accepted by the beneficiaries.

In the process chart for medical rehabilitation, Field Workers are assigned the role of identification only. The eye check-up, eye care, certification and cure of blindness is carried out by the eye hospital or a specialist agency. In this case also there is clear demarcation between the roles of the Field Workers and the ophthalmic staff. (*Cure Of Blindness Process Chart included as Annexure-II*)

**Social Rehabilitation:** Every incurable visually impaired person should be provided individual need based services of social integration as listed earlier. The nature of services would depend upon:

- Age of the individual
- Sex
- Age of on-set of visual handicap
- Level of any earlier training and potential of the individual.

Almost all the visually impaired persons need training in activities of daily living, orientation and mobility and personal grooming to be independent. The following services should be provided according to individual felt needs of the person:

- Psychological reinforcement
- Individual counselling
- Parent counselling
- Daily living skills training
- Occupational training
- Communication skills
- Orientation & mobility training
- Provision of statutory benefits

- Training in social graces and etiquette.

The Field Workers need to be adequately trained for imparting such training to the individuals. Many a times, it is essential to avail services of experts, particularly in case of counselling and communication skills. It is, absolutely essential that the family members be involved at all stages of such training.

### **Integrated Education**

On completion of social integration in terms of training in orientation & mobility, activities of daily living, and counselling, the incurable persons are divided into:

- School going age, and
- Higher age groups

At this stage, blind children are referred to agencies implementing integrated or semi-integrated education. Whereas other cases are taken up for further rehabilitation.

In the process chart for education, the identification and social rehabilitation is handled by the Field Workers. Eye check-up and certification is done by the Eye specialists. With the admission of children into the village school, the role of the Itinerant Teacher begins. There is clear demarcation between the roles of the Field Workers and the Itinerant Teachers.

*Role of Field Staff:* As Integrated education needs specific inputs, the field workers should perform only following roles.

- Identification of visually impaired children
- Their referral to the eye hospitals
- Imparting them training in various aspects of social rehabilitation, and
- Parent counselling

With the admission of the child into the village school, the role of the Itinerant Teacher begins.

*Role of Itinerant Teachers:* The role of itinerant teacher is not only to support the child in educational activities, but to perform the following roles:

- Pre-braille tactual activities
- Teach braille
- Counsel family members
- Establish a rapport with fellow students and teachers of the child, and

- Encourage the child to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Hence it is essential to appoint only qualified and specially trained Itinerant Teachers.  
(*Integrated Education Process included as Annexure - III*)

**Economic Rehabilitation** : The third classification is done for cases for:

- Only social rehabilitation, and
- Social as well as economic rehabilitation

The age, physical capacity, family background and interest of the individual should be considered. Most persons who are above the age of 60 and who have multiple handicaps fall into the first category i.e. provision of adjustment training for independence.

The persons falling into the category of economic rehabilitation are young, physically fit and need the utmost attention and intensive coverage. Involvement of local administration, banks, craft training centres and family members is essential in this case. Many a times, the local crafts-men are also needed to be involved.

*Ultimate Goal:* The economic rehabilitation should be the ultimate goal of a CBR programme. Every person who is otherwise eligible and capable should be provided such a service. The main avenues for economic rehabilitation include :

- Traditional rural crafts and activities
- Small business and petty shops
- Small co-operatives
- Agriculture and horticulture
- Technical and professional activities
- Dairy and animal husbandry.

*Use of Community Resources:* While imparting vocational training, every effort must be made to utilize existing community services. It is recognized that the community resources by themselves will most likely not have the ability to effectively assist the visually impaired persons. The Field Workers should impart appropriate training to the individuals.

*Local Resources:* A blind person and his family members must be encouraged to utilize the local resources as listed below to the optimum level:

- Agriculture extension services
- Local craftsmen such as weavers, basket makers, potters etc.

- Existing co-operatives
- Co-operative banks, nationalized banks, rural development banks and other loan giving agencies
- Technical and craft training institutes
- Labour and employment agencies
- Community development, health and agriculture workers
- Various rural and community development and subsidy schemes

*Rural Crafts:* Examples of various traditional rural crafts or activities currently being pursued by visually impaired persons around the country are :

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| - carpentry         | - broom & basket making |
| - poultry keeping   | - knitting / sewing     |
| - farming           | - dairy farming         |
| - bread making      | - brick making          |
| - forestry          | - leaf plate making     |
| - pottery           | - food processing       |
| - bone setting      | - weaving               |
| - rope making       | - goat/sheep keeping    |
| - preaching         | - pump repairing        |
| - bicycle repairing | - fishnet making        |
| - duck keeping      | - petty shop keeping    |
| - foot wear making  | - inland fishing        |

*Role of Field Worker:* He is expected to perform the following functions for expediting economic rehabilitation:

*Selection of Activity:* Most visually impaired persons would find the above mentioned activities appropriate. It is essential that the Field Worker makes a thorough assessment of the potentials, interest and capacity of the individual before deciding suitability of the trade or the activity. It is also essential to consider family background of the individual as many rural crafts are caste-oriented.

*Training of the Individuals:* The Field Worker should organize training of the individual in the selected activity. The family should, however, be actively involved in such training. Also, the market must be researched to ensure that the activity is viable and income generating.

*Organizing Inputs:* The Field Worker should also assist the individual in availing:

- bank loan

- subsidy, and
- other financial inputs for the activity.

It is essential that the Field Worker does not create any dependence upon himself or undertake the responsibility for purchase of raw materials and sale of finished products. These areas should be assigned to the individual or the family members. The Field Worker may, however, assist:

- in compilation of relevant market information, and
- liaison with any appropriate agency to enable the individuals to get
  - launching grant
  - other monetary incentives, and
  - relevant inputs and market information.

*Non-income Generative Activities:* It is not always possible to find suitable formal or paid employment in the rural areas. The visually impaired should be taught the income generating tasks or gainful occupations undertaken by the household and save hiring a daily wager. The opportunity income should thus be considered a step towards economic rehabilitation.

In many instances, ability of a visually impaired women to manage and maintain the household is equally important to the survival of the family as is paid employment. Therefore, the Field Workers should make all the efforts to encourage informal, unpaid and gainful employment of the individuals.

## **Integrated Approach**

The envisaged CBR process charts reflect that the field staff, Itinerant Teachers and the ophthalmic staff have to work as a team in the beginning of the project. As the project advances, there is complete decentralization of their roles. However, the *Project Implementing Agency* continues to coordinate the functioning of these functionaries.

## **Manpower Requirement**

*Field Workers:* A key element in providing a rehabilitation service would be to ensure that such service is appropriate to the individual felt needs of a visually impaired person. For providing these services, a team of Field Workers is required. Our experience has proved that a team of 8 Field Workers, who have completed their schooling, is a viable and appropriate unit. A qualified, preferably a graduate, and trained Field Supervisor is also required to monitor the functioning of the Field Workers.

*Itinerant Teachers:* As integrated education requires specialist inputs, two Itinerant Teachers

are also required. As we require one itinerant teacher for every eight children, the number of such teachers would, however, depend upon the number of children identified and enrolled in the regular schools in the project area.

## **Conclusion**

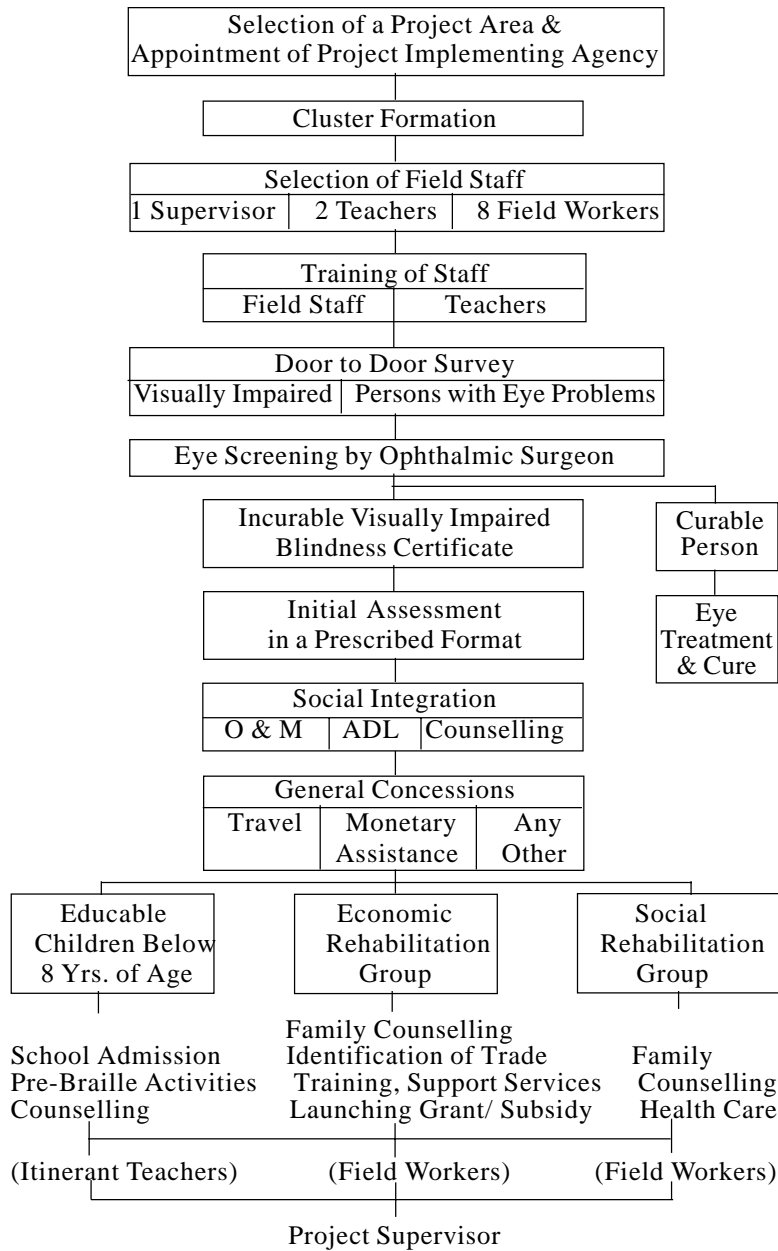
The only way of reaching out to the millions of the unreached visually impaired persons in rural areas is by initiating CBR programmes. The theme of this conference is “*Reaching the Unreached*” and I think it is appropriate. If we are to liberate visually impaired persons, we must go to them in their villages, convince the community and enlist the support of the family. This will be the only lasting method of rehabilitation which can be replicated in all the countries of Asia. It is also necessary that we rope in prevention organization as well as other welfare organizations, village and district administrative bodies to enable fruits of comprehensive rehabilitation to reach visually impaired persons in rural areas.



*Jagdishbhai Presenting a Paper with Ishtiaq Haider on left and Dr. Rajendra Vyas on his right*

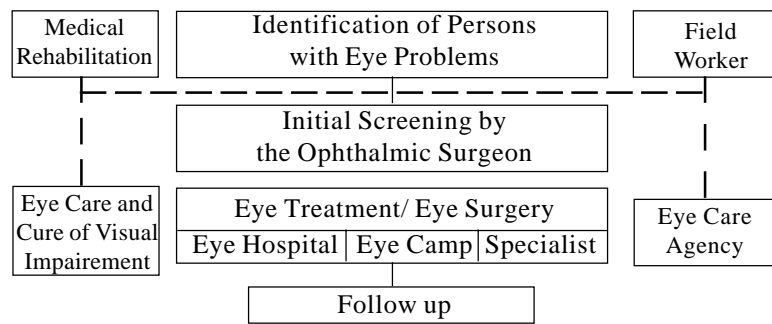
Annexure I

**CBR PROCESS**



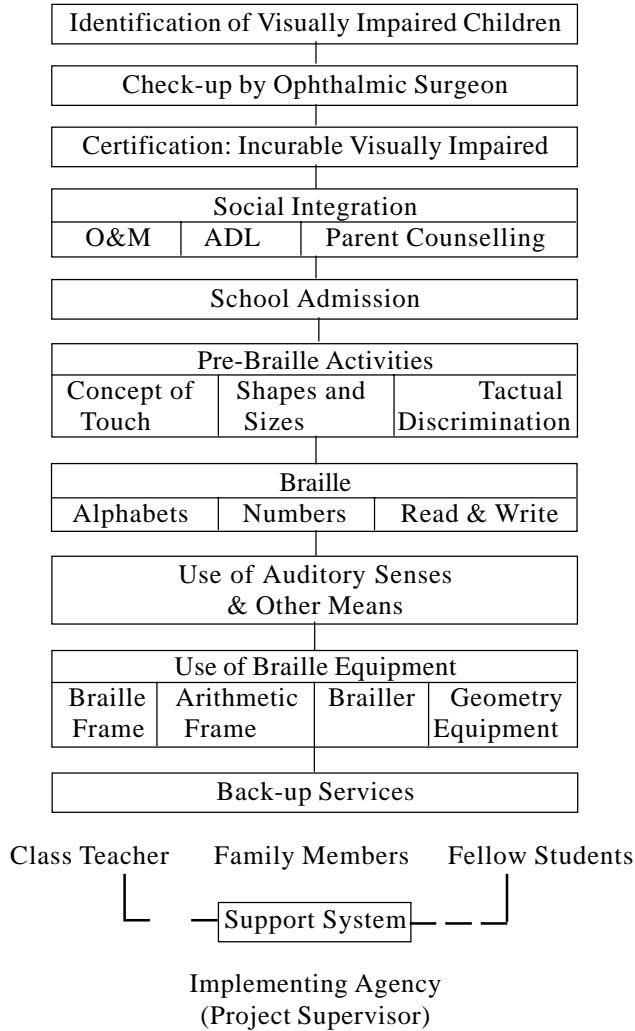
Annexure II

**CURE OF BLINDNESS PROCESS**



Annexure III

**INTEGRATED EDUCATION PROCESS**



## Paper VIII

### Community Based Rehabilitation: Management Perspective

*A paper presented by Jagdishbhai in the National Conference organized by the All India Confederation of the Blind, Patna. This paper with modifications was also presented in the Asian Conference of the World Blind Union, Karachi, Pakistan, 1989. This paper was published in the World Blind, a publication of the World Blind Union during 1990. Jagdishbhai updated the content during 1995 and sent it for publication in a book to be published by the Christoffel Blindenmission, South Asia Regional Office. - Authors.*

The agricultural population accounts for 68 percent of the total population in the developing countries. Though this proportion is decreasing in almost all the developing countries, this population is increasing in absolute numbers. Over the years, a shift from farm production to allied agricultural pursuits, rural crafts and agro-technical programmes has been observed, in spite of which the dependence upon agriculture, allied pursuits and agro-based small industry continues. This sector, termed as the agriculture and the rural economy sector, along with other self employment ventures, has been collectively termed as the unorganized sector which accounts for 90 percent of employment in the developing countries.

The unorganized sector is thus also the most important avenue of economic rehabilitation of blind persons. This is more so because only a negligible proportion of the blind population can gain access to educational and training facilities. Due to limited financial resources, ignorance and apathy of family members and lack of rehabilitation programmes, majority of them are illiterate, confined to their homes and survive only at the mercy of their families and community. To talk of their formal education, training or employment in the organized sector is highly impractical.

In India, the incidence as well as prevalence of visual handicap in the rural areas is reported to be higher as compared to urban areas. Similarly the on-set of visual handicap takes place predominantly after the age of 45. It has also been reported that the prevalence of visual handicap rises steadily with increasing age. It is reported to be 84 percent in the age group above 45. Similarly 83 percent of the blind persons reside in rural areas only. Thus the majority of them are above the age of 45 and reside in the rural areas. While planning rehabilitation programmes for the blind, it is essential to consider this group - the rural aged blind persons - also and their socio-economic conditions. As majority of sighted persons in the rural areas depend upon the unorganized sector, it also emerges the most ideal avenue for the rehabilitation of the rural blind as well.

The most significant aspect is that these ventures are generally low investment oriented and help to generate sound economic returns. These ventures are family oriented as all the members are actively involved in the economic activity. Thus the resettlement of blind persons in these ventures would ensure active family as well as community involvement. As only preliminary training is adequate, induction of blind persons would be speedier and at very little cost. Most of the times, all that is required is motivation and counselling of the family members and mobility training to the individual.

As majority of blind persons have acquired visual handicap at a later age and were pursuing agriculture or allied occupations before on-set of visual handicap, they have knowledge about these occupations, their socio-economic feasibility and economic viability. They only need to be re-inducted into these occupations once again. As there is multiplicity of operations in agriculture, their acceptance in this sector would be much easier. The familiarity of the environment and the rural set up would also facilitate their resettlement in the rural economy which would generate a new urge and an inspiration for better living among the family members, a desire to improve their material conditions and to have a more constructive outlook towards their future. It will thus make a meaningful beginning of true rehabilitation.

Thus the only viable approach to comprehensive rehabilitation of the rural blind is evolving an individual need based, community based, result oriented rehabilitation programme. Such a programme should involve the community actively at all stages like base-line survey, identification, eye screening, counselling, social integration, economic rehabilitation, provision of various concessions and other such facilities. Thus the management of community based rehabilitation programmes would require active involvement of the community, use of local resources and planning according to the individual felt needs of the blind person himself.

The extent and nature of services depends upon the socio-economic conditions, individual felt needs, work potentials, past experience, family background, local customs and such other factors. As far as possible, such services should suit the individual felt needs of the blind person and it should be in consonance with the environment.

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### **Experience in India**

The Rural Activities Committee of the National Association for the Blind has successfully implemented a nation-wide project on community based rehabilitation of the rural blind. Through a net-work of local blind welfare, rural development organizations and eye care agencies, the Committee has successfully implemented the project at 97 locations in India covering 14762 villages and 25742 blind persons. Similar projects have already been initiated in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Srilanka.

A large number of international funding agencies including Christoffel Blindenmission, Danish International Development Agency, Helen Keller International, Helpage International, Hilton Perkins International, Misericordia, OXFAM, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Sight Savers International, Swedish International Development Agency, South Asia Partnership, and World Blind Union have already extended financial assistance for promoting this approach.

The approach aims at the active involvement of local organizations and their officials in the management of the project and community for the provision of services. The system of holding weekly review meetings of the field functionaries and submission of monthly reports of physical as well as financial performance by the project implementing agencies has enabled the Committee to monitor the performance of the project regularly, systematically and effectively.

Based on the experience of implementing community based rehabilitation programmes at 97 locations in India, it has been realized that while initiating such programmes, the following aspects must be given due consideration:

*Rehabilitation to the Extent Possible* : A good programme should enable the blind person to stay within the fold of the family and contribute towards the family income. Rehabilitating a blind farmer in a community simply means helping him to function and perform as he used to function and perform prior to blindness.

*Rehabilitation from Within* : Most of agro-technical operations are family as well as community oriented, it is, therefore, essential to involve family members, community, opinion leaders and local administrators at all stages of rehabilitation. This will enable the community to act as rehabilitation agents and accelerate the process of meaningful economic resettlement. As far as possible, only the local resources should be utilized for the purpose, trades or activities which are alien to the community should not be imposed.

*Multipronged Approach* : Agriculture is seasonal in nature and remunerative work does not continue round the year, small farmers and landless labourers have thus to rely upon income from other sources as well. This seasonality would also have a bearing on the rehabilitation programme for the blind persons. They should be given training in two or more trades to enable them to earn a livelihood throughout the year. A suitable combination of such trades should be adopted depending upon the individual felt needs and the environment.

*Individual Centred Rehabilitation* : The blind person must be rehabilitated according to his dexterity, potentials, social customs, desires and aspirations. The rehabilitation strategy should centre around the individual himself. A blanket approach of providing the same rehabilitation services to every individual should not be followed. Every blind person should be considered an individual in his own right and rehabilitation

should be planned accordingly.

*Coordinated Approach* : Most blind welfare organizations generally operate in isolation. As the task of reaching blind persons in the far-flung rural areas is gigantic, it is desirable that all governmental as well as non-governmental agencies entrusted to social welfare, rural development as well as disabled welfare in the area should be approached, convinced and motivated to extend their services to them also. This will enable them to avail multifarious benefits. In turn, they should be encouraged to avail of concessions, loans, grants and subsidies given by these agencies.

*Support Services* : While economic rehabilitation should be the ultimate objective, the programme should also aim at comprehensive rehabilitation. It must have a provision for integrated education, appropriate training, social and economic rehabilitation and follow up services. It is also essential to provide training in orientation and mobility and activities of daily living. However, the extent and nature of such training would depend upon the type of services to be extended for economic rehabilitation.

*Adaptation of Equipment and Production Techniques* : Efforts must be made to modify farm equipment, stationary machinery and implements to enable blind persons to perform various farm operations and carry out agro-based pursuits effectively. Suitable research through product development, ergonomics and task analysis should be carried out for this purpose. Bio-medical engineering institutes, scientific research organizations, agricultural universities, science & technology missions and blind welfare organizations should be actively involved in the process.

*Broadening the Production Base* : It is true that the absence of appropriate technology and lack of supportive services impose constraints on the blind farmers and they can not adopt farming or allied pursuits as means of livelihood. But none of these constraints are insurmountable. These can be relaxed through suitable means in terms of appropriate training, allocation of cultivable land, provision of farm inputs and handling of output on a priority basis.

A variety of poverty alleviation programmes have been initiated in the country. Measures have also been taken under these programmes to benefit the blind persons. In some countries, the landless labourers who acquire blindness are allocated land on a preferential basis. The small farmers who acquire blindness are provided financial assistance and subsidy etc. for initiating self employment ventures.

It is generally contended that blind persons are eligible for all the benefits available to sighted persons under poverty alleviation and rural development programmes. However, due to lack of proper system of delivery of services, they are generally not able to avail the benefits. It is essential to make special provisions for enabling them to avail benefits under these schemes and also evolve special schemes for them in view

of their specific needs.

*Evolving Appropriate Training Facilities* : All the persons who were pursuing agriculture or allied pursuits before acquiring blindness or visual loss are generally aware about farm operations and related activities. As loss of vision results into lack of confidence, it is essential to provide appropriate training and counselling inputs along with scientific training for compensating for the vision loss.

In this respect, a centralized training centre in agriculture may be established or a rural based training programme may be evolved. Both these approaches have their own merits and demerits. However, in view of cost effectiveness, consideration of individual felt needs and diverse training needs of blind persons in different areas due to vast regional differences in crop patterns and farm operations, the second approach of extending training services at the door step is more desirable. In the countries where the population is scattered, it may not be possible to evolve rural based training services, the possibility of establishing regional rural training centres may also be explored.

The rural based training services should be evolved considering local geographical, demographic, social and economical conditions. The individual should always be the focal point of the programme. The community and the family should be actively involved at all stages of rehabilitation.

*Follow up* : While the short term training course would be sufficient for induction of the blind persons into the farm operations and allied pursuits, it is desirable to provide consistent follow-up for sustaining the interest of the individual and supporting him further in this respect. The follow up should be in-built into the comprehensive approach to rehabilitation.

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## **Conclusion**

The unorganized sector is definitely the most ideal avenue for the economic rehabilitation of blind persons. The strategy of their resettlement into these occupations should be well planned, individual need based, client centred and should involve family, community and local administration at all stages of rehabilitation. These efforts should be supported with appropriate research and development.

The community based rehabilitation programme should encompass all aspects of rehabilitation including prevention of blindness, integrated education of blind children, social integration through orientation & mobility training, training in activities of daily living, counselling and economic rehabilitation. As far as possible, the economic rehabilitation should be in the family occupation or trade and it should be within the community.

## **Paper IX**

### **The Situation of Deaf-Blind in Developing Countries - An Overview**

*A paper presented by Jagdishbhai in the 5th Helen Keller World Conference on The Quality of Life on Deaf-Blind People: Realities and Opportunities at Osimo, Italy during 25-30 September, 1993. While he participated in a number of world conferences, he presented only this paper in any world conference.*

**Abstract:** *Services for screening, assessment and early intervention of the deaf-blind in the developing countries are almost non-existent. Lack of programmes, paucity of funds, limited human resources, and lack of inter-agency coordination have resulted into this situation. New strategies should aim at promoting skills of total communication as well as independent living. These should expedite their social integration through result-oriented, community-based, client centered and cost effective programmes.*

The organizers should be complimented for including this topic in the World Conference. Hopefully, it will stimulate meaningful and thought provoking discussion regarding needs of a large number of deaf-blind persons in the developing countries. While encouraging efforts have been made and a variety of innovative programmes have been developed for such persons in the developing countries, such countries have yet remained bereft of such services due to a variety of reasons as listed below:

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#### **Lack of Early Intervention Services**

At present, even the services of early intervention for the blind and other disabled persons are almost negligible, the services for screening, assessment and early intervention of deaf-blind in case of developing countries are almost non-existent.

One report has pointed out that one-third of the total population of the visually handicapped in the U. K. is multi-handicapped. Another report establishes that in the Netherlands in the age group of 0-6 years, about 60 percent of the visually handicapped children are multi-handicapped. However, no reliable estimates for the deaf-blind, particularly in case of developing countries, are available.

Hence, it is not possible to establish the magnitude of the problem and develop the services commensurate to the extent of the problem. Thus our first and foremost focus should be conducting surveys for establishing magnitude of the problem, developing assessment tools and promoting services for early screening and early intervention.

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## **Lack of Programmes**

The only prevalent approach to rehabilitation of the deaf-blind in developing countries is establishing residential training institutions for them. Such institutions are urban-based, meagre in number, have a negligible coverage and these services normally exclude the family and the community completely from the programme. The services of such institutions are generally available to a very small proportion of the population of deaf-blind persons. For example, for a country like India with a total population of 932 million, the institutional coverage of deaf-blind is so scarce i.e. less than 100 at any point of time.

Thus it is essential to develop individual need based rehabilitation and training services which should involve the family and community in the programme. Such involvement and participation may be achieved through counselling and guidance of the family members of such persons.

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## **Lack of Human Resources**

Another major problem in the developing countries is the non availability of trained manpower. There is hardly any programme for imparting training to the instructors, trainers, rehabilitation workers and interpreters of the deaf-blind. One very welcome change is the promotion of training services for the multi-handicapped blind by the *Hilton Perkins International Programme, U.S.A.* Under this programme, a few selected Master Trainers from developing countries have just been trained. In a recently concluded training programme, 3 persons from India have also availed such training. These trainers are in turn imparting training to rehabilitation workers of the multi-handicapped blind at the regional level.

It is, however, pertinent to mention that such Master Trainers must further lay emphasis on the need for developing appropriate training programmes for instructors, trainers, and rehabilitation workers and interpreters of the deaf-blind. Such programmes should be area specific and in consonance with the socio-economic environment of the target group.

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## **Paucity of Funds**

It is a well established fact that the training of deaf-blind persons is very intensive, prolonged and needs a one to one coverage. Thus a large expenditure on staff, training material, boarding and lodging and other incidental items is required. The training programmes for such persons thus work out to be very expensive for obvious reasons.

In developing countries, the allocation of funds for welfare services and particularly disabled welfare services is very low and comparatively declining. The system of special allocation of funds for developing services for deaf-blind persons is not prevalent. Due to lack of

funds, it is not possible to promote institutional or non-institutional programmes for them.

It is essential to prevail upon international funding agencies, developmental agencies and national governments to make special allocation for this purpose. Similarly, leading blind welfare organizations should also earmark special funds for promoting such services. It is also desirable to evolve and implement low cost as well as cost effective result-oriented programmes.

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### **Lack of Total Communication**

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The complete lack of functional communication is the plight of most of the deaf-blind in the developing countries. It completely isolates such persons and they develop feelings of rejection. Persons with this type of condition have difficulty in developing even rudimentary communication skills on their own without a well designed and effectively administered curriculum.

The first and foremost objective of any rehabilitation programme for the deaf-blind should be promoting social and communication skills. It should also focus on improving their functional skills of orientation & mobility, self-help and independent living.

For enhancing social integration and effecting socio-psychological adjustment of a deaf-blind person, it is essential to promote the concept of total communication. The sign language book titled “*The Talking Hands*” developed by *Helen Keller Institute for the Deaf and Deaf-Blind, Bombay* is a step in the right direction. It is essential to develop such area-specific sign languages for enhancing functional communication of such persons.

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### **Lack of Inter-agency Coordination**

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In developing countries, most programmes are disability specific. Generally a school for the blind would cover only blind persons. Similarly a school for the deaf would cover only deaf persons. Both these schools would generally function in isolation. There is hardly any scope for coordination among these two parallel streams of special education. By developing coordination among disability specific institutions, it may be possible to promote individual need based programmes for persons with multiple disabilities. It is essential that the specific needs of deaf-blind persons be understood by the disability specific institutions.

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### **A Note of Optimism**

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As mentioned earlier the *Hilton Perkins International Programmes* has initiated training of Master Trainers in the area of multi-handicapped blind including the deaf-blind. Already a group of motivated young persons from the developing countries have undergone such training. The *Hilton Perkins International Programme* is also planning to extend financial

assistance for establishing such programmes on a pilot basis. It is heartening to know that a few community based rehabilitation programmes for multi-handicapped blind may also be developed and supported on a pilot basis.

## **Conclusion**

The prevailing situation regarding services of the deaf-blind in the developing countries is dismal and needs immediate attention of rehabilitation planners, funding agencies and national governments. Let us not be content by showing a few high cost institutional programmes for the deaf-blind on the map of our countries. We should instead develop cost effective programmes for their screening, identification, appropriate training and complete rehabilitation. Such programmes should aim at promoting skills of total communication as well as independent living.

Let us now shift our focus from merely creating institutions to understanding needs of the individuals. Let us not remove them from their homes and familiar environment, for the sake of confining them to the four walls of the institutions. We should expedite their integration into mainstream of society through result-oriented, community-based, client centered and cost effective programmes. Our theme should be - **from home to community, from solitary life to complete integration.**



*Bhadraben leads the way*

## Paper X

# Problems Faced by Handicapped Consumers

*A paper presented by Jagdishbhai during the National Workshop on the Handicapped as Consumers organized by the Consumer Education and Research Centre, Ahmedabad and funded by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Koenigswinter, Germany at the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry at Ahmedabad during 28-30 October, 1994. (Late) Madhukar Suryavanshi, Project Coordinator NAB RAC assisted Jagdishbhai in preparing this paper.*

The fundamental rights enshrined in our constitution, particularly the right to equal protection of the law under Article 14, appear to lose their meaning when we deal with persons suffering from natural handicaps. These persons face an unequal fight, against heavy odds, which are not faced by normal persons. Therefore, even though a law may be good enough to protect the interests of a normal human being, it may, however, fall short of safeguarding the interests of the handicapped.

Since I belong to the field of welfare of the blind and have been dealing with the visually handicapped and I am a blind person myself, I would speak with particular emphasis on the requirements of the blind consumer.

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### **Contract of Sale**

The transactions of sale and purchase of goods in our country are regulated by the *Sales of Goods Act, 1930*. The contract of sale between the buyer and the seller relies heavily on the celebrated dictum of Roman Law - '*Caveat Emptor*' - which means '*let buyer beware*'. This Act envisages that the buyer, upon examining the goods and feeling satisfied with their fitness for use, cannot subsequently hold the seller responsible for an apparent defect.

However, if the buyer has not examined the goods and has made the seller aware of the particular purpose for which the goods are required, the seller becomes liable under Section 16 of this Act. In other words, the buyer in this case does not examine the goods and relies solely on the seller's skill and judgement for the soundness of the goods. In that event there would be an implied condition that the goods should be reasonably fit for such a purpose.

The provision of Section 16 of the Act has implications on the needs of the visually handicapped. It is well known that a large majority of visually handicapped persons come from the poor strata of society. Their purchasing power is restricted. They purchase simple articles of common use such as food grains, vegetables, inexpensive fruits, linen, lanterns, kerosene,

cots, tables, chairs etc. The blind purchaser is wholly incapable of conducting any examination of these articles. Therefore, he has to rely on the good sense and judgment of the seller regarding their fitness for use. It is our unfortunate experience that unscrupulous elements among the sellers fully exploit this handicap of the blind. There are numerous instances of defective material being sold off to the blind consumer. The plea always taken by the seller in such cases is that he had offered the goods for examination to the blind purchaser.

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## **Legal Consequences**

It is, therefore, necessary that this Section is amended in favour of the blind consumer. The implied condition as to the fitness of goods should be made obligatory on the part of the seller when the buyer is blind. The seller in such cases should be deemed to act on behalf of the blind purchaser, and should be solely liable for obvious defects in the goods sold. He, therefore, should be bound to replace the defective article or face legal consequences.

The other important piece of legislation protecting the interests of the consumer is the *Consumer Protection Act, 1986*. This Act also does not seem to adequately account for the fact that a blind consumer has no means of adjudging the soundness, quality or fitness of the article purchased or even ascertaining the correct price printed on the wrapper. Repeated references have been made in the Act to the term '*article displayed for sale*'. That the blind purchaser cannot see this display has been lost sight of. The Act, therefore, purports to protect the interests of a normal consumer who has been deceived despite being sighted. Imagine the plight of the consumer who can be deceived far more easily!

It is, therefore, necessary to insert an overriding clause in this enactment that, in the case of a blind purchaser, there shall be an implied warranty as to the fitness, quantity, quality and correctness of the price charged. If a blind person is a complainant before the District Forums or the State or National Commissions, the burden of proving that no breach of this implied warranty occurred should rest on the seller.

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## **Complaint by Post**

*Procedure:* Section 12 of the *Consumer Protection Act* lays down the procedure for filing a complaint with the District Forum. The same procedure applies when a complaint is made to the State Commission or the National Commission depending upon the valuation of the goods purchased. It is heartening to note that a complaint can be made not only by a consumer but even by a recognized consumer association on his behalf. I have gathered from the Ahmedabad District Forum that complaints received even by post are recognized, but verification has to be done through an affidavit filed before a Notary. All this involve documentation and legal formalities for which a blind

consumer has to be provided legal assistance.

Majority of blind consumers are from the economically deprived sections of society. Inexpensive legal aid extended by public spirited advocates prepared to work for the blind at a nominal fee would be a welcome measure. The name of such advocates may be circulated among *Voluntary Consumer Associations, Blind Men's Organizations* and such other bodies. It is also expedient to seriously consider having a blind representative on all Advisory and Consultative Committees engaged in consumer protection activities.

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### **Role of Media**

The media has an important role to play in mobilizing public opinion with regard to the attitude of sellers to blind consumers. The blind consumers should also be enlightened through radio and television as to their legal rights and the protection accorded them as consumers. It is left to the legal luminaries to give shape to the above mentioned proposed amendments in law. The age old dictum of '*let buyer beware*' needs a reversal towards '*let seller beware*' when the buyer happens to be a blind person.

There should be detailed discussions and a meaningful exchange of ideas aimed at achieving this new principle, which also would greatly strengthen the hands of consumer associations, including the Consumer Education and Research Centre. The time has come when the moral obligation of the society to deal with the blind in an honest manner becomes legally enforceable duty.



*Jagdishbhai during a Meeting*

## Spotlight on Visionary - Breaking Barriers

*Article on Jagdishbhai published as cover story in BLIND WELFARE Volume XXXIII No. 3 December, 1992, a publication of the National Association for the Blind (India). Mr. Subba Rao, author of this lead story paid a visit to Ahmedabad, met officials of BMA, conducted a few interviews of Jagdishbhai and his wife Bhadraben. The article is a brief biographical sketch of Jagdishbhai and it enlists his various achievements etc. - Authors*

**Jagdish Patel** is a man in a hurry. Last August (1991), he suffered a paralytic stroke and was hospitalized. He was out of the hospital in less than 10 days. And the very next morning, defying doctor's orders, he was in his seat in Vastrapur office of Blind Men's Association at 9 sharp. "Yes, I'm impatient - I want to get results," admits Jagdishbhai, now 64. And no one disputes that Jagdishbhai gets results.

What is the secret of his success? Recognizing a need, formulating a concrete plan of action, and putting the right man on the job. That is Jagdish Patel's formula for success. "All our programmes are need based. In fact our very first project was a Recreation Centre for the Blind," recalls Jagdishbhai. Jagdish was twenty-six years old at that time.

After early education in Calcutta and Bombay, he had shifted to his native city of Ahmedabad and had started his practice as a Physiotherapist. One of his patients was Ambalal Sarabhai, a leading industrialist. "For 14 years, Monday to Saturday, every morning at 4.30, I used to visit Mr. Sarabhai for his daily massage. I charged him Rs. 7 per visit - in those days doctors used to charge about Rs. 10 per home visit. More than money, what I valued most was hearing Mr. Sarabhai speak on a variety of subjects", Jagdishbhai recalls.

Ambalal Sarabhai was a voracious reader. He had a collection of select books. As young Jagdish massaged him, the old man would speak about the books he had read, men he had met, the deals he had struck, and discuss various political and social issues. He would advise the young Physiotherapist how to deal with people, the importance of grooming and social etiquette.

In the early fifties, Jagdish had passed Matriculation. He started interacting with other bright young men. He read in the Times of India about a young blind fellow who could repair radio and telephone and drive a motor car. He sought out the young man, who turned out to be Rajendra Vyas.

In 1954, Jagdish and his friends founded Blind Men's Association. The friends used to meet in the evening to play cards and to listen to books and magazines read by a reader.

There was no fixed meeting place, as the Association did not have a building of its own. Then, in 1956, Ambalal Sarabhai offered his ancestral house to BMA. Rajendra Vyas negotiated the deal and the house was handed over to BMA, Ahmedabad.

*“He gave us a start,”* Jagdish Patel says gratefully.

In 1954, M.N. Chhatrapati (*whose father had founded Victoria Memorial School for the Blind in Bombay*) offered Rs. 2500 to start a school for blind girls in Ahmedabad. Jagdish Patel, as General Secretary, started looking for the right persons to teach at the school. One of the candidates whom he interviewed was Bhadraben.

Bhadra belonged to a family of freedom fighters. Her father, a cloth merchant, heeding Gandhiji’s call to practice *Swadesi*, stopped selling foreign cloth and plunged into the freedom movement. When freedom came, he was no longer rich and he found it difficult to send Bhadra to college. But Bhadra was determined to resume her education which was interrupted during the days of the freedom struggle. *“I told my father that by giving tuition, I would earn enough to pay my college fees and he agreed.”*

After taking her M. A. in Psychology, Bhadra secured a B. Ed. and here she was, facing a young man in dark glasses who wanted her to join the Light House for the Blind Girls as a teacher.

Bhadra was willing to shoulder the responsibility but was in no position to work on a low salary, as she had to educate her younger sister. *“I had no other alternative but to turn down Mr. Patel’s offer, as the salary he offered then was very low and I had to support my family, particularly my younger sisters,”* Bhadra says.

A few months later she ran into Jagdish Patel again. This time it was Bhadra who sought the young Physiotherapist’s help. Bhadra’s younger sister was hurt in a freak accident when a stray cow gave her a push. After initial medication, she was advised to undergo physiotherapy and the Physiotherapist turned out to be Jagdish Patel.

*“He recognized me by my voice,”* recalls Bhadraben.

During the physiotherapy sessions, Jagdish learnt that Bhadra was now a lecturer in a college. Now that she was earning enough she did not mind doing social work. She started dictation and typing letters for the young General Secretary of BMA.

Around this time Kanubhai Thaker, a young science graduate who had lost his eyesight while working for M. Sc., came to meet Jagdish Patel. For six long years, Kanubhai had been brooding about his *‘lost paradise’* and wallowing in self-pity.

*“It was Jagdishbhai who, in a way, opened my eyes,”* says Kanubhai, now 64. *“He was radiating confidence despite loss of sight and some of it rubbed on to me, I think. Slowly but surely I came out of the shell.”*

Jagdish asked Kanubhai to team up with Bhadraben and start a coaching class which turned out to be a success. It brought money. And it helped Kanubhai to regain his confidence. *“Yes, it gave me tremendous satisfaction. When I lost my sight, I thought it was the end of the world. And the coaching class experience proved that I could do things...I was not a hapless vegetable..”*

However, Kanubhai had to close his coaching class when Jagdishbhai involved him in education of the adult blind, and later asked him to head the *Technical School for the Blind*. (Kanubhai subsequently became Principal of the *Secondary School for the Blind*, after his retirement took over as Director, *Education and Support Services* of the BMA)

Jagdishbhai had other plans for Bhadraben too. *“He wanted to marry me,”* says Bhadraben.

What was Bhadra’s feelings when Jagdish proposed to her ?. *“I was flattered,”* she says.

Didn’t she have any hesitation in marrying a blind man ?

*“I was no doubt conscious of his blindness when I met him for the first time and perhaps for a few more months. But as I got involved with blind welfare work it (blindness) ceased to bother me. I was no longer conscious of Jagdish’s blindness.”*

But it did bother her parents who asked her to reconsider, and to wait for some time. And Jagdish’s parents were not willing either, as the bride, (a Jain), was from a different religion and was not bringing a dowry.

*“One morning we quietly got married on our own and sought the blessings of the elders”* says Bhadraben.

Meanwhile Jagdish was doing very well as a leading Physiotherapist. He had equipped his clinic (*Medico Massage*) with all kinds of gadgets - infra-red, short-wave diathermy, ultra-violet and so on. He had bought a car. His father, a doctor, had retired from practice. It fell on the young couple to educate his younger brothers and sisters, who all lived together as a joint family.

In spite of a busy practice, Jagdish used to find time for BMA. Ambalal Sarabhai had introduced him to many businessmen. Around this time, he got to know Arvind Lalbhai, another leading industrialist, and the two had become very close friends. With friends like Arvind Lalbhai to back him up and colleagues like Kanubhai Thaker to support him, he had started building up BMA. He launched a periodical, ‘*Usha.*’ in Braille in 1963, started a *Secondary School for the Blind* in 1967, *Employment and Placement Services* in 1968 and *Talking Book Library* in 1973. And in the midst of all the activities he took B.A. degree in Sociology and Psychology from the *Gujarat University*.

Meanwhile the State of Gujarat had come into being and Dr. Jeevraj Mehta had assumed office as the Chief Minister. Jagdish Patel, along with Rajendra Vyas, called on the Chief Minister and requested for allotment of land for building the BMA complex to house its various activities. Impressed by the activities of the BMA, the Gujarat Govt. allotted a substantially large site at Vastrapur on the outskirts of Ahmedabad and soon the construction began.

BMA was growing at an astounding pace. As one batch of blind trainees moved out after successful training, others were taking their place. New projects like integrated education scheme (*helping the blind to study in a normal school*) were being launched. New buildings were coming up. Jagdish Patel thought it was time to streamline administration, set targets and work to a plan. It was time to involve the right kind of professionals in blind welfare activities.

The first of the professionals Jagdish Patel brought to BMA was Harish Panchal, an engineer, Bhushan Punani, an MBA, an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad joined BMA in 1979, and Nandini Rawal, another MBA arrived in 1981.

The young professionals came with their own ideas. While transfusion of young blood was in the interest of BMA as a whole, would the old guard, those who had built BMA with personal involvement and with a missionary zeal, accept the new generation?

Fortunately, the young professionals were not hot heads and the old war-horses came forward more than half way to accommodate the young. And Jagdishbhai was very much there as a shock absorber whenever sparks flew. Gently but firmly Jagdish Patel ensured that the young and the old accept each other, for he was convinced that the outcome would be synergic. And events that followed proved him right. Today, as an organization, BMA is very sound. It is one organization where a second line has been carefully groomed and nurtured. *"I do not have to worry about BMA's future,"* says Jagdishbhai in a relaxed manner.

With the induction of young professionals, BMA expanded its activities rapidly. *Adult Training Centre Workshop for the Blind* began functioning in 1975, *Higher Secondary School for the Blind* was started in 1976 and a *Multicategory Workshop for the Handicapped* was started in 1976.

In the midst of hectic day-to-day activities, Jagdishbhai would make efforts to find time to evaluate various projects. While he was convinced that every project BMA has undertaken was need-based, he was unhappy that for the effort BMA was putting in, its reach was very low. He was concerned about the rural blind who appeared to be beyond the reach of BMA which was situated in Ahmedabad city.

The plight of the rural blind became a recurring topic for discussion during the tea-time

meeting. (At BMA, the senior executives take tea with Jagdishbhai at 3 in the noon, every day. Tea time is used for a quick review and times snap decision).

Then one day in 1981 Jagdishbhai, Bhadraben, Bhushan Punani and Nandini Rawal were driving back to Ahmedabad after attending a function to inaugurate a school for the Blind. In the car, while they were talking about various things, someone posed a question:

“What’s this school doing? What’s its future? How many will really benefit?”

It was on this day that the BMA team decided to give a serious thought to the rural blind.

In the early eighties, in various fora, the plight of the rural blind was being discussed and solutions were being offered. Yet a concrete plan was yet to take shape, although efforts were being made on a small scale.

At that time, the *National Association for the Blind* (NAB) had set up a *Rural Activities Committee* with Captain H. J. M. Desai as its Chairman. The *Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind* (now known as *Sight Savers International*) had agreed to fund the rural project and Dr. Rajendra Vyas, the Asia Director of RCSB was looking for a suitable organization to implement the project.

“Here was an opportunity I was looking for and I grabbed it,” says Jagdishbhai referring to the launching of the CBR project for the rural blind in 1983 in Dholka.

The CBR programme provides for education and training on rehabilitation of a blind in his own environment without uprooting him from his immediate surroundings. The CBR programme involves community as a whole - family members, neighbours and local people in rehabilitating the blind and in the process creates greater awareness among people and helps to generate their active participation instead of passive acceptance. In the last 10 years, over 20,000 rural blind spread over 11,300 villages in different parts of the country have benefitted by the CBR programme.

In 1981, BMA took another significant step - opening of a division for marketing produce of various organizations. BMA’s Handika showrooms at three places in Ahmedabad attract customers from all parts of the city.

In 1989, the CBR programme was extended to cities to reach out for the urban poor resulting in UCBR - *Urban Community Based Rehabilitation of Aged and Disabled*. This programme was sponsored by ‘*Helpage International through Helpage India*’.

The philosophy of UCBR was the same as the CBR for the rural blind, only its scope was larger to include the aged in general. Eventually, the service Jagdishbhai rendered to the aged won him the coveted *Golden Award for Community Development Services* from the *Help the Aged*, an international non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom. Jagdishbhai received the award from Princess Diana on November 4, 1991.

Only a few months earlier, the President of India had conferred on him the *Padmashri* Award for his meritorious services in the field of disabled welfare.

Jagdishbhai has now developed a hearing problem. Blood pressure and diabetes are the other two companions he has to live with. To top it all, he suffered a paralytic stroke last year (1991). None of this has kept him down. *"I have been a fighter all through my life."* says he with justifiable pride. While he continues to work tirelessly for Community Based Rehabilitation, he wanted to go a step further.

*"The CBR programme should eventually pave way for COR - Community Oriented Rehabilitation Programme,"* says Jagdishbhai. When the initiative for rehabilitation comes from the community itself, Jagdishbhai feels, the rehabilitation process becomes more meaningful and hundred percent effective.

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## **Second Line**

*The article "Jagdish Patel: Breaking Barriers" published in the Blind Welfare, December, 1992 issue by Mr. Subba Rao also carried an item in the box "Second Line" highlighting tenacity and far-sightedness of Jagdishbhai in respect of inducting professionals for developing a functional and effective second line. - Authors*

**Bhushan Punani** is perhaps the first ever MBA to take up a full time job with a voluntary organization in the field of rehabilitation of the disabled. After taking the B.Sc. degree in Dairy Science, he worked for a couple of years for Milkfoods Ltd. Patiala in Punjab. His job as a Dairy Development Officer brought him into contact with villagers in Punjab and Haryana. Bhushan took on break from service to do his MBA in the prestigious *Indian Institute of Management* in Ahmedabad. Incidentally IIM and BMA are located on either side of the main road in Vastrapur. After his MBA one day in 1979, Bhushan just walked across the road to take up a job with BMA as a Project Manager.

Dr. V. S. Vyas, the then Director of IIMA, was surprised to hear that one of his students was joining a voluntary organization when MBAs were in such high demand. Dr. Vyas sent for Bhushan to make sure that he was not making a mistake.

But Bhushan knew what he wanted. *"I was looking for a career opportunity in virgin territory. Social work was far from my thoughts. As a management man what fascinated me was the challenge a professional manager faces in a voluntary organization active in rehabilitation work,"* says Bhushan.

After 11 years with BMA, Bhushan has no regrets. And Dr. Pradeep Khandwala, the present Director of IIM proudly mentions that some of the alumni of IIM like Bhushan have brought glory to it by their distinguished service in the field of rehabilitation!

Bhushan was promoted as a Project Director in 1981 and two years later was made the Executive Director.

Bhushan points out that by the time he joined BMA *“the process of professionalizing the BMA had begun and Jagdishbhai had already set the pace.”*

*“In those early days,”* Bhushan recalls, *“Jagdishbhai fought to establish me at BMA. He was a sheet-anchor for me.”*

Jagdish Patel used to take his young colleagues to places he visited, introduced them to people he knew and sent them abroad repeatedly to attend conferences, to read papers and to participate in workshops.

The strength of BMA, according to Bhushan, lies in the fact that while individuals have set up a system, the system itself does not depend on individuals. *“I am leaving for Madras tomorrow. No work will be held up on account of my absence. No work was halted or staggered when Jagdishbhai was in hospital. The system we have developed makes allowance for absence of key office-bearers and ensures that the work does not grind to a halt.”*

This at BMA has been made possible by giving the staff freedom in operation. *“And we had to train our people to use the freedom given to them,”* points out Bhushan.



**Nandini Rawal**, unlike Bhushan, had exposure to the blind before she joined BMA. She used to read to the blind college students.

Nandini was looking for something exciting. She wanted to take up a job which would give an opportunity for personal growth. And this prompted her to take up the job with BMA. She spent the first year in office to study her organization and to understand how it worked. *“There was no laid out system. We did not even have leave records!”* recalls Nandini.

While introducing the many new systems Nandini had to strive hard to gain acceptance. *“It took quite some time for others to accept a woman executive,”* says Nandini without rancour.

In the early eighties, Nandini noticed a paradox. While the number of institutions were going up, the capacity - utilization of these institutions was going down! Add to this, the demographic profile of the blind available for the first time as a result of the 1981 survey showed that no help was available where it was required most i.e. in the villages where 83 percent of the blind live.

*“It was obvious that we had to reach out to the blind in villages.”*

With Jagdishbhai and Bhushan, Nandini worked hard to set up a CBR programme for the rural blind. Referring to Dholka, Nandini proudly mentions, “*We withdrew in 1985, but the local people have been continuing the work*”.

While CBR Programme is admittedly cost-effective and meaningful to the blind who are trained to lead an independent life in their own environment, the greatest challenge, according to Nandini, lies in human resource development training.

Nandini looks upon the first four years of her work for CBR as experimentation and the six years that followed as a period of consolidation. “*Now is the time*” says Nandini, “*for evaluation. And we are in the process of initiating it.*”



**Harish Panchal**, the Director (Training) in charge of Engineering, used to deal with BMA from the other side of the table when he used to give job work to BMA in 1974-75, in his capacity as an engineer working for a die casting factory. When Jagdishbhai requested him to join BMA, Harish hesitated, “*I did not quite know how I could be useful to the blind.*”

And it was a difficult decision for the young engineer to give up a job in industry. Harish finally made up his mind to plunge into the unknown territory and joined BMA in 1975 as a Workshop Superintendent.

Harish decided on a simple approach, “*While all opportunities had to be given to the blind, we would not compromise on productivity and quality.*” At BMA the apprentices are trained to work in an atmosphere as close to the factory floor as possible. While no pressure is brought on an apprentice he knows that his take home pay is in proportion to his output. This enables him to understand the basic law of industry. “*Nothing comes free. One has to earn his salary.*”

Jagdishbhai encouraged Harish to take people with all types of disability. Deaf and physically handicapped of Ahmedabad found their way to BMA. So did the able-bodied.

“*Ours is an integrated approach, helping the blind and the other kinds of disabled to rub shoulders with the able-bodied,*” explains Harish.

“*There was a time when the only job the blind were trained to do was weaving and recaning chairs. As the expectations of the blind rose, we had to provide other alternatives. We now have an Electronics Centre and a Computer Division*” Harish points out.

Carpentry, Light Engineering, Printing, Book Binding, Electric Motor Winding, Plastic Moulding, Toy making, Tailoring, Painting and Greeting Cards are the other activities which fetch revenue for BMA.

When Harish Panchal joined BMA, the annual turnover of its workshop was Rs. 30,000. Today it exceeds 20 millions. About 60 percent of its income is through sale to various government departments and public sector industry and 40 percent is generated by counter sale at Handika, the BMA showroom.

The work ethic at the BMA workshop is very high. *“We are not covered by government grants. We are not protected. We are on our own”* says Harish. *“I work because otherwise I won’t get my salary.”*

Bhushan, Nandini and Harish all emphasize that working for BMA is a matter of commitment for them. And their own career growth at BMA could inspire other professionals to enter the field of rehabilitation. As Nandini points out, **all three had other job offers and continue to receive similar offers.** But they have chosen to work at BMA because here they have found job satisfaction.



*Jagdishbhai Explains the Braille Production Facilities*