

Bright Shades of Blindness; 24 Carats Hard Trudge of NAB'S Prerna

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ABSTRACT

Blindness and blind characters are literally widespread in literary texts all over the world; nevertheless, they are generally represented through an optimistic or pessimistic formula. Although it seems to depend upon indisputable realities, the sensitivity of blindness is created to a great extent by metaphors. What is hidden by this fact is that there is a lack of information and adaptation regarding the real pain, sorrows and sufferings in this particular matter. Regardless of the fact that we can see or not, we belong to a visual culture and in the minds of especially the sighted, the importance of vision and consequently the idea of what its loss may bring are embedded. A brief glance at the representatives of blindness in society where life as we perceive it is reflected back at us, is enough to reveal how biased we are concerning particularly this disability. What this paper aims is not at all to compare Wells's story and Saramago's novel with the real life of blinds. Here the purpose of this paper is to throw the light and take a closer look at the perception of blinds about the quality of transformation brought in their life by the efforts of NAB- Prerna and what is yet to be done for them.

Keywords: *perception, blindness, disability, sorrows, sufferings.*

I.BACKGROUND

In 2014, after few days of deteriorating vision due to Retinal detachment, the author of this article lost the last traces of light sensation. For the next couple of days before surgery in Shankara Netralaya and the post operation period of recovery were the days which shook the soul from deep within. The wrecked heart and

trembling self-confidence was not chartering the optimism to set up its roots in the mind. It was also due to the post traumatic angst of death of the author's wife due to one of the deadliest cancer Angio-Sarcoma. This had before now devastated the entire life. It seemed that everything was vanished except two young infant daughters in his lap and elderly sick parents along with. The journey of his interior world of blindness killed him every fraction of seconds. The trepidation of qualms gave thousands of death every day. This horrific occurrence was a life time experience which gave learning about our existence in family and society which cannot be learnt even from the preaching of thousands of saints also.

When the author thinks about the blind experience of those days he trembles; along with this when he thinks about the people those who are still suffering from this never ending darkness, he gets filled with anxiety to know about them. This empathetic angle to peep deep in their lives brought him to an organization named Prerna under NAB.

II. INTRODUCTION

Upon starting our research, our main intention was to examine the positive representations of blindness through selected blind characters in society. We were and still we are of the opinion that we attach too much importance to visuality and the ability to see. Therefore, our plan was to prove that the opposite is thinkable as well, by bringing characters that are both blind and competent. Here we will briefly discuss the reasons that necessitate a change in the course of action and define the scope of this study. What is aimed at in this paper is to take a look at the perception of blindness through the world of blinds and address their necessity in front of the government and other non- government organizations so that they can address their needs in true sense.

III. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

India is the habitat to the highest number of visually impaired persons. According to World Health Organization out of the 37 million persons who are blind 15 million are from India. NAB is a non-profit organization which is working perseveringly since 1979 for visually impaired persons. It is registered under the Society Registration Act of Madhya Pradesh-Registration No. 1468.

In 2008 the organization was awarded the prestigious National Award by the Govt. of India for its admirable endeavors. Since inception its prime objective has been to make visually challenged persons both children and adults self-reliant and contributing members of the society. The organization lays special emphasis on education and skill development. It aims to send each and every visually challenged child into mainstream school. It highly advocates the concept of integrated education for social fulfillment. It also dreams to embed computer education and assistive technology into the lives of every visually impaired bringing them closer to the world. It ardently focuses on qualitative education and skill development.

IV. VISION

Empowered and well-informed visually challenged population of our country thus enabling them to lead a life of dignity and productivity.

MISSION

- Prevention of preventable and cure of curable visual impairment.
- Socio-economic rehabilitation of the visually challenged in mainstream, through education, training and employment.
- To take up advocacy against all types of individual and structural discrimination and ensure full legal capacity.
- Assure accessibility to the world of information.

ORGANISATION PRERNA - RAIPUR BRANCH OF NAB (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR BLIND)

The branch of NAB at Raipur was established on 5th March 1986 by socially active Shri M. N. Deshpande .The sole objective of the organization was to develop self sufficiency among visually impaired and to provide them proper place in a society.

The first body of Raipur chapter was formed under the Presidentship of Architect Shri T.M. Ghate in the year 1987. Since then every 3 years managing body is elected.

V. REHABILITATION CENTRE FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED GIRLS

Considering the need of visually impaired girls a rehabilitation centre was formed on 27th June 1986. The centre is running successfully. With the help of centre and public participation the students are provided free accommodation, food, clothes, free school and college level education. Other skill development programmes are also conducted for self sufficiency of the students. At present at least 114 girls are taking advantage of the centre. The minimum age for the admission in the centre is 6 years and for admission application form needs to be submitted.

VI. NAB GIRLS SCHOOL

In the year 2015-16 NAB was authorized to run special school for blinds by Education Department. At present the classes from 1st to 8th are running. The dice code of the school is 22110405517. Total 61 blind scholars are

taking advantage of the school. The staff includes 1 principal, 1 Music Teacher and 6 other teacher for teaching different subjects like Hindi, English, Science, Sanskrit, Social Science and Braille. Special attention is provided on teaching of Braille. For overall development of student other activities like Yoga, Games and Cultural activities are also included.

AOF-NAB COMPUTER TRAINING CENTER For The VISUALLY CHALLENGED

The computer training program of the school has been updated. Computer and Super Nova software was made available with the help of Amway Opportunity Foundation. AOF-NAB Computer training center for the visually challenged programme has been launched. Under this program computer science training is provided to the student of class 3rd onwards. There is also certificate course for class 9th and above from Dr. C.V. Raman University. Graduate student can also undergo a course from Dr. C.V. Raman University.

REHABILITATION CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Under this services after understanding the needs and resources of the candidates advisory services are provided for their future and rehabilitation.

PROVISION OF STUDY MATERIAL

As there is no easy availability of Braille study material so the organization provides and designs Braille and other audio related study materials. Digitization of books is also done.

VILINFORMATION

SCHOOL EDUCATION

Programme Name	Eligibility	School Type	Admission Time	Intake	Residential	Gender	Scholarship	Fee Structure
Primary Class 1 st -8 th	6-14 Years Blind	S	June to July	80	1	F	NULL	Free
Senior Secondary 9 th -10 th	8 th Pass Blind	S	June & July	20	1	F	NULL	Free

Higher Secondary 11 th -12 th	10 th Pass Blind	S	June - July	20	1	F	NULL	Free
Open School Learning	-	S	Any Time	10	1	F	NULL	Free

INFRASTRUCTURE

WELL MAINTAINED CLASSROOMS

All the classrooms are very well maintained as per the need of the students. IT Training is provided to the visually impaired children. The students according to their interest select a particular stream and are prepared for different diploma and degree courses.

MUSIC AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ROOM

Training for Dance and Music is provided. The students according to their interest select a particular stream and are prepared for different diploma and degree courses. They are also trained for admission in Khairagarh University. From time to time different competitions are organized to develop their music and dancing skills. Harmonium and other musical instrument are available in the organization

BRaille LIBRARY

NAB Raipur started brail library with the help of the public participation. The library is well equipped with different subject of books. Approx 700 books are present in the library. Annual, biannual and monthly magazines in Braille are also available in the library. Students are encouraged to read Braille books. Outsiders can also become members of the library. Computerized Braille printing is also done by NAB Raipur. Different books and customized matters are printed in house for the benefit of the students.

HOSTEL FACILITY FOR THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN

Rooms to stay in are neat and clean with separate bed and separate almirah for each and every student. Well maintained Garden and Washrooms facilities are also there.

ADEQUATE NUMBER OF WATER FILTERS

Water filter was donated to NAB, Raipur by the family of Late. Mrs. Pushpaben Jakhubhai. Another water filter was donated in remembrance of Late. Mr. Ganga Prasadji Sharma by Madhudhara. Van was donated to NAB, Raipur by the family of Mrs. Uma Sharma. Bus was donated to NAB, Raipur by LIC.

ACHIEVEMENTS

In the year 2002 the organization was honored by Mini Mata Puraskar from Chhattisgarh Government. Till now approximately 313 blind girl students have been enrolled for education. More than six decades have completed in service of the blind.

FINANCIAL AID

Maximum activities of NAB Raipur are managed by the Government and Public Funding. Funds are received from the following sources -

1. Aid from Chhattisgarh Government.
2. Donations from Social Workers and Citizens.
3. Donation from Social Service Organization.
4. Earnings from interest of savings in bank.

Interested person can also provide their personal services for the benefit of the organization. One can give donation in cash or kind for the welfare and betterment of the organization. The donation provided to the organization is exempted under 80G of Income Tax.

CURRICULUM FOLLOWED IN NAB, RAIPUR

Subjects taught to the student in the Blind School

- Hindi
- Mathematics
- Music
- Games
- Environmental studies
- Computer Science

IMPACT OF NAB'S EFFORTS

NAB school has helped all the students to become independent in their daily routine with the help of adequate trainings as mentioned below.

1. Orientation and Mobility Training

The students are trained to become mobile and independent. They are also taught self-defense techniques to enable them to move about freely anywhere, even by public transport. Children with visual impairments are encouraged to explore their surroundings. Orientation and mobility training (O & M) has helped blind or visually impaired children to know where they are in space and where they want to go. This has helped the individuals to learn skills that allows navigating the world efficiently, effectively, and safely. Also they have been taught to walk with the help of simple Cane sticks and Smart Cane sticks. It helps visually impaired persons to move confidently.

2. Communication Sovereignty

NAB has helped all the students for Braille reading and writing; social etiquette-using whatsapp on phone, booking Ola Cabs, Uber with the help of talking software in the mobile, etc. This way they have helped in Confidence building to lead a normal and productive life.

3. Social and Cultural Constructiveness

Students are engaged in activities like physical training, participation in sports and cultural activities, visits to public spaces, familiarization with public transport, etc. Trainees are also provided vocational guidance, exposure to work avenues open to them and assistance in identifying occupation that suits them most. They are given a small monthly stipend also.

4. Home Management and Daily Grooming Activities

The students are trained for carrying out themselves with self reliance. They are taught combing, washing, sweeping, making bed, simple mending, cooking, ironing, sewing, identifying currency and so on. Training in housekeeping, shopping, cooking etc has helped the girls to live with an independent existence and thereby manage their homes successfully. These enhance their chances of getting married and make a life for them.

5. Literacy – This has helped to assist the visually impaired girls to access information and move a step ahead towards literacy. Braille, Software called Super Nova, NVDA, and JAWS has made the students techno friendly and they can progress with the same speed as the normal people do. (NVDA - Non Visual Desktop Access, JAWS - Job Access with Speech and other software are the computer screen reader program that allows visually impaired people to read the screen with the help of text-to-speech output).They are also trained in -

Mobile Phone Assertive Technology and Vlingo – A free download that is designed to recognize the user's voice, Vlingo can be commanded to perform various functions on the phone. The user needs to hold down the voice key on the phone or other mobile device and wait for the tone before speaking their command or tap it once to start and once to stop. From there the app can place a call, send a text or connect with other applications on the phone.

Ray – Ray is a cellular phone that was designed specifically to aid users who are visually impaired or blind. With the same functions as a Smartphone, Ray uses an Android Operating System that has been modified to meet the needs of low vision individuals. Not only are voice commands recognized but a voice output reads the display back to the user.

Sprint PCS Voice Phone – A number of Sprint cell phones such as the PCS Vision have features added to assist the blind and visually impaired with making calls from the cell. In addition to voice activated dialing they can work in speaker phone function, allowing for hands free operation while in use.

Samsung HAVEN – Designed specifically for the aging market, the Samsung Haven cell phone provide features that the visually impaired will find helpful such as voice activated dialing, large buttons and a large screen with big fonts.

JOURNEY OF SELF RELIANCE FOR THE FINANCIAL GROWTH

There are no. of professional courses NAB students have opted according to their choice .These professional courses are DCA, PGDCA, BA , B.Ed. , D. Ed, Certificate Course in Acupressure and Massage, etc. They play a vital role in helping visually challenged job-seekers to find suitable employment by working closely with the candidates and liaising with companies both in public and private sector to give the blind an opportunity to get into the work force. They get Open Employment, Self-Employment and Sheltered Employment.

☐Open Employment

Through Open Employment 35 students became government teachers, 10 in railway and others got job in bank, public and private sectors.

☐Self-Employment

Unemployed blind persons interested in self-employment are referred to funding agencies like the State Handicapped Finance Development Corporation for financial assistance by way of loans, to start their own small business. Doing self employed business like selling stationary items in shop, etc

☐Sheltered Employment

Candidates who could not be assisted under the two above stated categories are trained to make articles like paper bags, candles, incense sticks, chalks, etc.

Training and Counseling

With conventional sources of employment drying out, they had initiated many new training programs such as: training in making novel items, marketing consumer products, Call Centre Operation, Medical Transcription, etc. Many of the trained candidates work in Call Centers and have also been employed as Medical Transcriptionists by some reputed names in the field.

They have partnered with some agencies that help to prepare the candidates to face interviews and entrance tests for various competitive exams thus helping them to compete for jobs on an equal footing with sighted applicants. With a view to enhance their employability job aspirants are provided communication and computer skills training. Blind individuals are also offered pre and post-employment counseling.

Long-Term Training Programs

A. Basic and Advanced Computer Training

Visually challenged girls who take up this NIIT affiliated course facilitated by ERNET, Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India, receive DOEACC certification. This qualification not only helps them in higher studies but also to get job- ready.

B. Handicraft Course

This course equips visually challenged girls uninterested in higher education, with skills in making a variety of articles like designer envelopes, candles, decorative festival products, silk pouches and jute bags, baskets for chocolates and dry fruits, corporate gifts/stationery, chocolates, etc. The training duration is six months – initial three-month are devoted to learning the trades followed by undertaking outsourced jobs, supplemented with a stipend.

C. On-Job Employability Training

Intended for self-growth and improving/increasing employability as well as sustaining employment, This course imparts general employability skills that prepares visually challenged girls to cope with the ever increasing profession related pressures, tackle safety concerns and adjust to the present day competitive atmosphere. Depending on their capacities and interests, during these three-months course the trainees also go through employment oriented ancillary training in real work conditions, where they are familiarized with various aspects of front desk reception activities, administration and coordination, supervision and providing teaching assistance.

D. Therapeutic Massage Training

This six month training course for literate/semi literate visually challenged girls was started in Collaboration with the beauty salon. They have set up in its premises a Therapeutic Massage Unit to train 50-100 visually challenged girls annually.

Short-Term Training Programs

A. Training for Computer Educators

This training lasts for 10-15 days and equips teachers with skills to teach visually, hearing and physically challenged to operate the computer.

B. Front Desk/Reception Handling

Involves training in real work situations at the reception counter. Telephone etiquette while dealing with clients, inter-departmental call transfer, maintaining database of contact details; noting messages on the talking computer; coordinating visits of volunteers; coordinating and networking with partner agencies, etc are the course components. This is three-month course which accommodates ten students.

C. Life-skill Training

Started with a view to help visually challenged women become self-reliant. This training involves three months course in Braille, six months course in Home Management and teaching orientation & mobility. The Braille Course covers Braille Reading and Writing (English and Hindi) – Grade I and II, usage of mathematical aids like Abacus and Taylor Frame. The Home Management Course is all about essentials of good housekeeping. The training has significantly increased self esteem level of the girls who besides earning respect in their families have ably shouldered responsibilities of a home maker after marriage. These girls have also been able to better manage their life as working women who stay in hostels.

D. Training in Orientation & Mobility

Students of all the courses are imparted three months Indoor and Outdoor Mobility Training.

E. Personality Development Program

This three months course for all round development of visually challenged girls include basic and advanced communication in English, grooming, dining etiquette, personal hygiene, confidence building through theatre activities, Yoga and fitness, sex education, etc backed by practical experience through workshops, excursions, exposure visits and so on.

Data of Success

After completion of the education around 80% of the students have got married. Around 50-55% of the students have got employed in government sectors, private sectors and became an entrepreneur leading their own business for earning their livelihood.

VIII.CONCLUSION

India has misfortune of having the largest number of blind persons in the world. Blindness is a disability, which one can overcome with proper training and guidance. Persons affected by blindness need opportunities for quality education, skills, training, rehabilitation, employment and a full social and family life. National Association for Blind is spread throughout India in different states.

NAB, Raipur is an NGO which provides education, skill training, etc to the visually disabled children. Their main aim is to empower the blind with education and training, towards self sufficiency through employment or self employment and thereby integrate them with dignity into the mainstream of society. Their vision is to work towards an environment where each and every blind person of this country will be able to lead a life up to his optimum potential and be so empowered as to be able to work towards his/her own growth and development.

IX.RECOMMENDATION

NAB's contributions to social welfare are laudable and remarkable .The contribution of every volunteer contributing monetary and through services is highly appreciable. Its vision is to work towards an environment where each and every blind person of this country will be able to lead a life up to his optimum potential and be so empowered as to be able to work towards his own growth and development. NAB is exemplary emblem proving its motto.

Every socially working organization needs monetary and voluntary upliftment for sustaining a particular social work being practiced. With increasing population, unemployment and growing social bewilderment society requires more such organization to stem up and existing organizations to be empowered with capabilities to serve extensive. NAB as an NGO is working in improvising one of the main aspects of social cause should sustain with more volunteers joining and more physical & financial resources to be pooled in. Forecasting its long and sustainable journey without cease requires some measures to bring well off volunteer's with same vision to connect and undertake it forward.

Primarily every social work being practiced in our country for uplifting and changing people's life must be portrayed through social media with regular updates. Weekly posts subjective to connect people to volunteer and contribute are to be made through free access of Face Book ,Twitter, etc. These social

handlers will generate more eyeballs to view good work happening in their particular township following exemplary to follow. Moreover this will help the needy to approach them easily.

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