

K. Raman Shankar

NAB

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EDUCATION - RAPID STRIDES

*K. Raman Shankar
Programme Coordinator
NAB Department of Education*

National Association for the Blind, India ever since its inception in the year 1952, has endeavoured to promote education of blind children in the country. In the past five decades much of our efforts were concentrated on achieving increased enrollment, support services and Human Resource Development. Starting with assistance to individual blind students, NAB(I) went on to play a pioneering role in the special teacher education, integrated education in rural areas and HRD activities for different target groups. We have travelled a long way and reached a stage whereby our programmes and services have created a far reaching impact transforming the lives of thousands of blind children, giving them a better future through education. Our prominent position as one of the largest NGOs in the field of blind welfare in India is well vindicated by the fact that more than 7000 visually impaired children have been brought under the fold of education through our efforts, and that every year, we assist around 1500 children by way of Braille kits, scholarships or sponsorships. This article highlights the significant contributions of NAB(I) towards education of blind children in India, over the last 50 years.

On the eve of independence, blind welfare services in India mainly consisted of a few residential special schools and vocational training centers. During the first decade of its existence, i.e. in the 50s NAB's involvement in education commenced with providing a variety of assistance to blind students pursuing higher education. These included financial assistance, intervention for securing admissions in schools and colleges, supply of basic educational aids, etc. Blind students who passed out of special schools and wanted to pursue their studies further, took benefit of these services.

Notwithstanding a number of special schools in the country, there was no training center for teachers of the blind until 1960. In this year, NAB set up the National Academy for Teachers of the

Blind in Palayamkottai (Tamil Nadu), to train special teachers and thereby improve the quality of education in special schools. This academy paved the way for four regional training centers for teachers of the blind initiated by Government of India in the next seven years.

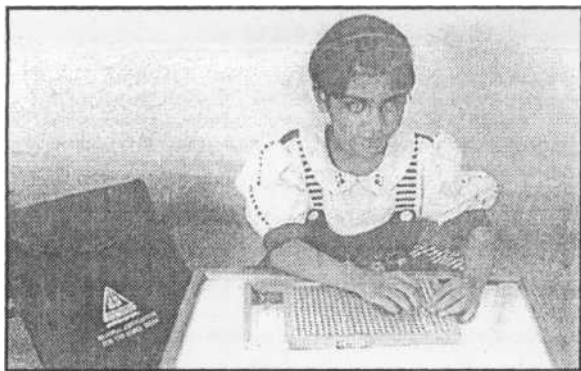
Perkins School for the Blind, USA was offering a special programme for teachers of the blind, which later came to be known as the Educational Leadership Programme. From 1960 onwards, Perkins decided to channelise all applications for this programme from India through NAB(I). During the last 40 years, 95 candidates from India have completed this training. NAB's role for this programme relates to circulating announcement, receiving and scrutinizing applications, conducting interviews of candidates and sending recommendations to Perkins and mobilising funds for travel and incidentals, in the case of needy candidates. Presently, this programme is restricted only to teachers working with multiply handicapped children. Candidates on their return from Perkins have provided leadership for generating and strengthening educational services in their respective areas.

Though, there were a number of special schools in the country, yet pre-school education of blind children, had not received much impetus. It was in the year 1969, when NAB established the first nursery for blind children viz., the NAB Male Lachmi Nursery for the Blind in Mumbai. This was the first decisive step towards early intervention in the country and served as a model for many other nurseries that were started later. An effort was made to prepare blind children for entry into special schools and lay the foundations of training in specialized skills.

The 60s were also marked by institution of scholarships for school and college going blind students and also those pursuing vocational and professional training. This has been a nationwide

programme, which was expanded considerably over the years. NAB(I) presently provides scholarships to about 700 blind students every year. NAB has also instituted several awards for meritorious and deserving blind students pursuing higher education.

Realizing the need for a formal set-up to monitor and coordinate the multifarious educational services for the blind, NAB(I) set up a separate Department of Education in June 1980. Hereafter, NAB's educational services and programmes in the country grew manifold. The year 1982 marks a significant landmark in education of blind children. It was in this year, that NAB pioneered integrated education programmes for blind children in rural areas, adopting the itinerant model. After its modest beginning in Gujarat, Integrated Education Programmes have spread far and wide into the country, thanks to our State and District Branches and a host of partner agencies. The last two decades have witnessed considerable increase in enrollment as a result of involvement of a large number of generic NGO's in this collaborative venture. The generous support of our international partners such as the Sight Savers International, Danida, NORAD, Share and Care Foundation, etc. have helped us to continuously keep expanding the IE Programmes and create a significant impact on the national scenario. As an offshoot of IE, support services were also simultaneously developed. Distribution of Braille kits, containing basic educational aids, and the sponsorship programme covering personal needs came up in a big way.



A blind girl working on the Arithmetic Frame



A blind girl playing with her sighted classmates

NAB Department of Education, realizing that the success of the itinerant type of IE Programme pre-supposes a favourable social environment, has led considerable emphasis on community awareness and training. Whereas, the 1980s witnessed growth and expansion of IE, the 90s can be termed as the age of Social Engineering for the Department. The Department designed a variety of training programmes for different target groups, such as the itinerant teachers, parents, regular teachers and headmasters, peer groups and community volunteers. We experimented these programmes at various locations and they have now evolved into a regular feature. In addition to the orientation and refresher courses for itinerant teachers, the three main programmes aimed at community participation are :



Social Animator Trainees preparing Tactile Maps and Diagrams

- a) Para-professional Training Course in Mumbai for parents of blind children and volunteers.
- b) The Social Animators Training Course for parents of blind children, volunteers and local social workers in rural areas.

- c) Integrated Camp for blind children and their sighted peers.

Whereas, the first two programmes are aimed at generating positive attitudes and developing competency skills, the last one aims at fostering a healthy interaction and understanding amongst the blind children in IE and their sighted friends. We have so far trained around 500 Para-professionals/Animators and covered 750 children in the Integrated Camps.

It was noticed that blind children with additional disabilities are least cared for in any of the existing systems of education - the special schools or IE. Services to these children were virtually non-existent in the country. NAB(I) thus commenced a Home-based Service Programme for Blind Children with Additional Disabilities in Mumbai City and its adjoining areas in the year 1995. This programme having its pattern more or less similar to the itinerant type of IE, endeavours to provide child centered and need-based education to the children in their home environment. The emphasis is not so much on formal education but on skills for communication, independent living, etc. There are presently 40 such children in our programme. NAB has also replicated this programme for deafblind children at as



many as 9 different locations in the country under the National Project supported by Sense International India covering 45 children.

We have come a long way towards achieving our goal. We have pledged ourselves to the task of bringing each and every visually impaired child of school going age under formal

education. Similarly, it is also our dream to provide each and every multi-handicapped blind child with the education best suited to his/her needs and abilities. The task is gigantic and yet we are equally determined to struggle towards fulfillment of this mission. As in the past, we greatly rely upon the Government, our international donors, partner agencies and most of all the Indian people in successfully pursuing our future plans and dreams.



RAJ BHAVAN
GUWAHATI

November 23, 2001



MESSAGE

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the National Association for the Blind, I send my greetings and good wishes to all those connected with this noble organisation. It is our bounded duty to do our best to improve the quality of life of our people afflicted by blindness. I earnestly hope that the National Association for the Blind will continue its laudable work in the coming years with continued determination and dedication.

(Lt Gen (Retd) S. K. Sinha, PVSM)

Telegrams "WELFARE"
Fax: 3384918



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शान्ति भवन/Shanti Bhawan,
नई दिल्ली-New Delhi-110 001

दि/Date: 24.11.2001

MESSAGE

The National Association for the Blind has played a notable role in advocacy for the blind, educating children suffering from blindness or low vision, development of Braille material and in the prevention of blindness.

Empathy for the disabled and efforts for their empowerment through qualitative rehabilitation programs characterizes the endeavours of all those who have worked with N.A.B. in their different programs. I wish the N.A.B. all success in their noble efforts to restore dignity to those with impairment of vision.

(Mrs. Rajwant Sandhu)
Joint Secretary (DD)