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Education of Blind in Colonial India

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Abstract:

Indian History witnessed many references of the blind people from the Rig Vedic time which reveals many aspects relating to the blind. The medieval India History gave references of many blind people with excellent talent. With the coming of the British some new developments were seen in the field of the upliftment of the blind people. Specially the educational institution of colonial India gave new prospective to the blind people. The missionaries play important role in this field. By this paper an attempt has made to analyze the importance and effects of the education of blind people during colonial period in India which has a significant impact in present blind education in India.

Keywords: *Blind, Education, empowerment, British, Colonial India*

1. Introduction

Colonial period witnessed many socio-economic developments along with the political changes. The concept of education was changed under the foreign government and many new educational developments took place in India. Among them the establishments of educational institution for the blind are noticeable. Blind people appeared in the literature of Indian antiquity. The central plot for the Indian epic Mahabharata was based on the blind King Dhitarashtra who was prohibited to become the king and this prohibition turned into the war of Mahabharata through many dramatical sequences. The decision of Queen Gandharito blindfold herself was itself an important aspect in this regard. The motive behind her decision was that she did not wanted to make her husband feel inferior which revealed the fact that blind people were considered inferior than the others. The ancient laws of Manu described various prohibitions on blind people who were considered to be afflicted as a result of misdeeds in the previous life. The character of Astavakra found in Ramayana of Valmiki and in the Vana Parba of Mahabharata was also differently able. In Ramayana, the story of sravan Kumar played an important role for the later consequences of the epic. Sravan Kumar's parents were also blind and the curse they gave to Dasharatha was recorded as an important event in the epic 'Ramayana'. The Medieval Indian History also witnessed the Excellency of the blind talent. The name of Surdas was mentioned in history of Medieval India as a perfect example of blind talent. With the establishment of British rule in India new educational policies were introduced in the field of the education of the blind people. This educational development has significance in the History of the blind people as these policies were the pioneer of the policies taken by the government of post independent India.

2. Objectives

The objective of the study is to discuss the history of education of blind people in Colonial India.

3. Methodology

Historical Research Methodology has been followed for the study. The study involves a critical use of both primary and secondary sources, based on internal and external criticism. The paper is basically written with the help of various secondary sources like books, journals, newspapers etc.

4. History of Education for the Blind

In 1832 a landmark was set in the history of Education for the blind people as in this year Thomas Lucas invented a script to teach the blind people. Lucas script was consisted of embossed characters in the sort of symbols used by stenographers. In 1847 blind Englishmen named William Moon developed the embossed typed devised based on modified characters of the Roman Alphabet, gave strong competition to Lucas's 'short hand'script. The system of embossed dots devised by Lucas Braille during the 1820s and perfected by 1834, spread more slowly and eventually overtook both Lucas and Moons systems throughout the world.¹ In 1920s and 1930s, a doctrine named 'surdotiflopedagogika' was issued for special education for the deaf and blind in Russia. Exploration and implementation of the most advanced ideas in the technology, communication, surdotiflopedagogika sought to compensate for the loss of speech, hearing and sight by supplying the child with mechanical and human prostheses, including other people (assistants), technical devices, technique of the body and multiple communication codes to be translated from one into

¹Smith, George, Henry Martyn saint and scholar, pp283-284,1892

another.² According to the census report of America, 1910 people of America were not willing to give details of the blind to the collector of census because of their ignorance to the blind people. Another difficulty was that the blind people would not acknowledge that they are blind. The parent of the blind people also often defined the child as not blind.³ The first American institution founded for the alienation and care of sense disabled people (blind, deaf, deaf-mute) were located on the east coast. The New England asylum for the blind in Boston, Massachusetts, which would some year later become the Perkins school for blind, the Pennsylvania institute for the Institute of the blind and New York institute for the Blind.⁴ An important development regarding the blind education is the introduction of music code in Spanish which was invented around 19th century by Spanish music teacher for the education of blind people. There were two, in Spanish sign graphic codes used for music teaching in the middle of the 19th century, the raised dot code of Gabriel Aberu Castano the blind music teacher of the national school for deaf and blind in Madrid and raised letters code of Pedro Lorensy latches sighted teacher of the municipal school of music for the blind in Barcelona.⁵ One of the important aspects for the upliftment of the Blind was the issues of earning which is still a burning issue all over the world. In this regard an article 'The Blind suffers from the war and their future employment' by C. Arthur Pearson is remarkable. He has mentioned various types of employment for the blind. He had mentioned about the type writing as an occupation for the blind. And stated that in many cases it was seen that many of the blind student passed the type writing test with great speed. But they did not enjoy employment in the offices because of the ignorance of the people towards the blind. Short hand writing was another occupational option for the blind. The author mentioned about a house for the defectives named St. Dusants in which blind were offered education of type writing, short hand writing, handicraft works, cobbling and poultry farming.⁶ But these types of occupational education were not proved effective for the blinds as the earning from these were very low. Besides the people were not willing to treat the blind people as much as competent like the normal people and were offered less money for their work. On May 1917, Mr. Herbert Samuel, then president of local government board of U.K. surveyed about the condition of the blind in U.K. and in his report, he criticized the types of education giving to the blinds as those were not sufficiently giving the livelihood to the blind. Besides he emphasized for improvement of the working environment for the blind.⁷

5. Educational Institution for the Blind in India

In India, formal European charitable work began in the 16th Century when some Portuguese hospitals were established for the European distress with amodest poor fund at Madras.⁸ By 1802 William Carey, Joshua Marshman William Word and others at Serampore were giving weekly alms to blind people and lepers but they also began to campaign more formal service provision. In this field an important contribution was done by Raja Kali Sunkar by giving land to open a leprosy hospital in 1818. Raja Kali Saran opened blind asylums at Benaras in 1826.⁹ At Allahabad in 1826, Mr. Mackintosh read the Bible regularly to 250 lame, blind and indigent persons and distributed alms to them from a regular collection among the local Europeans. In 1839 at Benaras, William Smith preached weekly in a chapel crowded with poor blind and lame people.¹⁰

Till 1902 there were no government schools for blinds in India. The few schools which do exist were under private management and several of them were missionary institutions. In 1889-99 an association was started in Madras under the name of the "Christ Association for the Education of the South Indian Blind". The Government of India suggested various improvements such as agencies for providing industrial work for defectives that have left school, greater uniformity, a proper combination of general and industrial education and attention to physical training.¹¹

In Tinnevalley district of Madras there were three church missionary schools in which both Girls and Boys were admitted. There were in all 30 and 8 girls in those schools in the year 1902.¹² According to the education progress report of India 1927-32 the Institutions for blind in Madras were increased to four but the "Victory memorial School" at Ponnammalle was closed due to the lack of fund.¹³ It showed the problems of gathering funds for these institutions. Though government provided some aid to these institutions, but the aid was not enough to run the institution properly. In many cases the funds were collected from the local people and by selling the handicrafts products made by the students. In Pannaivilai School, eleven boys and seven girls were native Christians and rest were Hindus and Panchama.¹⁴ The most noticeable aspect was that all the students studied together in a same school despite of caste issues between them.

² Sandomirskaja, Irina, skin to skin: language in the Soviet education of deaf-blind children, the 1920s and 1930s, *springerscience*, pp122, 2008

³ Hyman, Herbert, Occupational Aspirations among the totally blind, *Social forces*, Vol 51, no 4, pp 403-416, 1973.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Pearson, Arthur, the blind suffers from the war, *Journal of the royal society of arts*, vol 65, no 3315, pp475-482, 1917.

⁷ Price, E.C. Welfare of the blind, *Charity organization review*, new series, vol 43, pp61-71, 1918

⁸ Sen Gupta, K.P., *The Christian Missionaries in Bengal 1793-1883*, pp136-137, 1971.

⁹ E.A. Reade, *the asylum for the blind and destitute*, pp4-11

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Report on Progress of education in India 1897-98-1901-02

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Report on Progress of education in India 1927-32, pp210

¹⁴ Report on Progress of education in India 1911-1917

In Bengal, there was a blind school at Ranchi which was aided by the Anglican mission. They learned reading by means of raised type and writing by using figures in the form of letters made by perforating holes in thick paper.¹⁵ Along with the handicrafts works, teaching of typing and script writing gave new perspectives to the blind students. Another important institution was the teacher training centre situated in Calcutta where teachers were trained to inspire the blind students to come schools.¹⁶ It was not easy to bring the Blind people to schools because of the lack of interest paid by the parents of blinds.

In 1886 'North India industrial home for the blind' was founded in united provinces which played an important role for the education of blind in north India. The pupils of this school were Mohammad an women and girls who came daily to be taught. At a much later phase a department was opened for resident Christian pupils and the day school was discontinued owing to lack of funds. At first the school was established at Amritsar and later on transferred to Deharadun.¹⁷ In this institution, mainly handicrafts works were taught to earn the livelihood.

In Burma the beginning has been made by a teacher in Moulmain, Maung, Pe Gui, who had lost sight. In this institution, also handicrafts making were taught along with the reading. A blind alphabet for the province based on Mr. Garth Waite's adopted of the Barllie system to Burmese had been adopted, and a good beginning has been made. Mr. Sherratt was acknowledged by the Government of India for rendering valuable help in preparing the alphabet.¹⁸

Like the other parts of the world, in India also the blind was provided mainly two types of education-type writing and industrial work. As discussed by Herbert Samuel these types of education were not sufficient because of less money were generated through this type of education. Besides the condition of the girl blind student was also an important aspect as at that time the physically sound women were allowed for the British educational institution, in that condition the girl blind student were also deprived from the education. The working environment for the blind was also not satisfactory in India like discussed above relating to the other country.

6. Blind Education in Assam

In Assam 1921-1926 there were no schools for education of defectives in Assam.¹⁹ The financial situation and the backwardness of the province were the causes behind the lack of progress of the education of blind in Assam. This progress report also mentioned that an endeavor was made to ascertain the scope of the problem and to outline requirements. The hill district had to be omitted on account of languages difficulties and the enquiry proceeded with reference to males alone. It was estimated that for Blind and Deaf annual cost in direct charges would amount to at least Rs 1,20,000-2,00,000 and a propose was also made to establish a school at Guwahati at a cost of Rs 30,000 initial and Rs 10,000 annually expenditure Rs 40,000-50,000.²⁰ In Dibrugarh a training school was established for the education of defectives in Assam. There was a private institution at Dibrugarh in the District of Lakhimpur for the training of the deaf, dumb and the blind which was assisted by the Government with contribution for the construction of its buildings.²¹

The number of deaf, dumb and blind persons was 2,578 in number. The total and relative number in other provinces in India was shown below in the table shown below.²²

States	No of deaf, dumb and blind	No of persons to each defective
Assam	2578	1822
Central provinces	6712	1720
Burma	2270	1116
North-western provinces	27469	1606
Bombay	11857	1386
Berar	2486	1075

Table 1

The distributions of blind people in India by ages are shown below in the table.²³

Age	Number of blinds	Ratio per 10,000 people
0-4	53	0.65
5-9	129	1.9
10-14	125	2.7
15-19	164	4.6
20-29	324	3.9
30-39	387	5.8
40-49	409	9.9
50-59	526	20.7
60 upwards	1029	48.2

Table 2

¹⁵Report on Progress of education in India ,1897-1901-02

¹⁶ Report on progress of education in India 1927-32

¹⁷ibid

¹⁸Report on Progress of education in India,1927-32

¹⁹Report on progress of education in India 1921-26

²⁰ibid

²¹Education of the deaf and dumb in India, nos 16.16,1929

²²Census Report of India 1881.

²³Ibid

The distribution of the blind people by districts of Assam are shown in the table below .²⁴

Districts	Number of blind			Proportion for per 10,000 of population		
		male	female		Both sexes	male
	Both sexes					
Cachar	225	140	95	7.7	9.0	6.3
Sylhet	366	609	297	4.9	6.7	2.0
Total S.V	1119	809	252	5.2	0.7	3.4
Goalpara	325	194	131	7.2	8.4	6.0
Kamrup	318	177	141	4.9	5.3	4.4
Darrang	104	78	56	4.9	5.4	4.3
Nowgong	193	118	76	6.2	7.3	4.9
Sibasagar	216	150	65	5.7	7.7	2.7
Lakhimpur	70	43	27	2.8	4.4	2.2
Total B.V	1900	700	405	5.5	6.5	4.5
K.J. Hills	132	70	62	7.7	8.6	6.9
Province	2576	1639	930	04	6.8	9.1

Table 3

In 1942-43 there was only one school for the defectives in which only boys were admitted. The total numbers of students were 22 and average daily attendance was 16.²⁵

7. Conclusion

With the coming of the British new system of education was introduced. Initially the missionaries took steps for the promotion of education in India but at a much later phase the colonial government started providing them aids for the spread of education among the people in India. The Colonial Government also showed interest for the education of the defectives. The government generated few income providing courses for the defectives in the employment sector. The blind people who completed their studies were provided with teaching as a profession and some of them chose to become priest. The schools for the defectives were relatively small in number and were confined mainly to the urban areas. Moreover, the parents and the siblings of the defectives were somewhat orthodox and were against of the idea of sending their children to the special schools.

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²⁴ Census report of 1881.

²⁵ General education report relating to Assam 1942-43.