BLIND CHILDREN AND THEIR REHABILITATION

BY K. N. K. JUSSAWALA

Though there are as many as two million blind in India, very little provision exists in this country for their education and training in useful occupations. Mr. K. N. K. Jussawala, in the following article, draws attention to this fact and says that though some pioneering work has been done in this field by voluntary workers, still much remains to be done. The author focusses attention on the various problems of the blind and suggests ways and means of organizing their education and training.

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In the vast sub-continent of India, some two million blind live and keep their body and soul by begging. This figure is just a rough estimate; for no definite statistics of the blind, total and partial, are yet available in India.

It has taken centuries for people to realise that the blind, if provided suitable facilities and means, can be of service to themselves and others. The work of ameliorating the plight of the blind in India was started only about 60 years ago, the first school for the blind, a missionary institution, having been established in 1887 at Rajpur. What little progress has been registered so far is mainly due to the sporadic efforts made by voluntary workers as well as of some of the blind themselves, who refused to believe that the loss of vision was a bar to their social regeneration and cultural advancement.

As a result of these sporadic efforts, the work for the blind has progressed at random in a sense that a number of institutions and associations have come into being for the service of the blind. Most of these bodies have insufficient funds at their disposal and hence have to struggle for their own existence. However, a beginning has been made in the direction of bringing into prominence the problems of the blind and the methods of tackling them and ameliorating their sufferings.

India has indeed to meet the gigantic problem of providing educational and welfare services for 20 lakhs of her blind. The following comparative statistics will be interesting:

In the whole of India there are about 40 teaching institutions for the blind in which approximately 1500 boys and girls receive training. This means that compared to the total number of educable blind children in the country, only 0.606 receive the benefit of some education. In the State of Bombay alone, it is calculated that there are some 5000 blind children between the ages of 5 and 20. In the U.K. and U.S.A. the number of blind per one lakh of the population is 175, in Austria 66, in Bulgaria and Italy 57, in Germany 60, in Belgium 43 and in India as high as 500.

Responsibility of the State.—The Governments of all advanced countries of the world have taken upon themselves the responsibility of looking after the handicapped sections of their populations. In fact, they have recognized that it is the duty of the State to care for the disabled, the deaf, and the blind and the State Exchequer makes a provision for it in their budgets.

In an under-developed country, such as, India, the welfare work for the handicapped is mostly shouldered by a number of voluntary organisations and philanthropists. Only in a very few cases the States seem to have taken upon themselves the responsibility to see to their benefits. The fact is that, under the conditions obtaining at present, no State is likely to afford the luxury to fully provide for the handicapped sections of the popula-
tion, whenever a great majority of the normal human beings still suffer from poverty, illiteracy and low conditions of living. It may not, however, be logical to say that, because the normal beings are not yet culturally and economically rehabilitated, the handicapped people should be neglected.

It is commonly realized that the blind, the deaf and the crippled, if not rehabilitated, become a heavy liability as unproductive members of the Society. On the other hand, any community stands to benefit if it adopts measures to throw open all the available facilities to educate and train the physically handicapped people, so that they become earning members of the society and add to the wealth of the country. If calculation could be made as to the number of all sorts of handicapped people in India and the burden they constitute by living as parasites, it would reveal that the amount that goes as waste or that remains unrealised by allowing hundreds and thousands of people to lead an idle life, would be more than the country could expect ultimately to earn if these people were made self-supporting.

Conference of the Blind.—In January 1952, a Conference for the blind was convened in Bombay, the first of its kind, which very successfully brought a number of institutions and organisations for the blind together to pass certain resolutions to lay down a uniform policy, as far as possible, to relieve the sufferings of the blind. The main purpose behind the Conference was to establish a National Body, so that the different bodies working for the blind could be brought together in it and their work coordinated. This is a very big step taken forward and if the objects of the Association are executed, there is no doubt that the combined efforts of all will make the weight of the huge problem felt on the Government and the public. For the present, the Headquarters of the Association are in Bombay and already the West Bengal has established as Branch Office in Calcutta.

Even in the State of Bombay, the policy of co-ordination, as far as it is practicable, should be adopted to avoid overlapping in work. At present, the City of Bombay has two schools and two homes for the blind. There is a school for the blind in Poona, one in Ahmedabad which is housed jointly with the deaf and mute school, one each in Baroda, Mehsana, Visavadar (Junagadh) and Bhavnagar. Of the two schools for the blind in the city of Bombay, one is specifically for boys between the ages of 7 and 20 and the other accepts blind girls and boys of tender age. The two homes are again housed in one and the same building and yet do different types of work: one, an industrial home providing some employment to the trained blind, while the other admits children committed by the court.

It is natural that the largest number of the blind will be found in the industrial home for the simple reason that, after completing their education and training in the teaching institutions, many of them, for want of any organised aftercare services, will find their way into this only Home which can give them shelter and work. Most of the other institutions, which may be called schools, register a lower number of students than the maximum accommodation they possess. This is certainly not due to the fact that there are less number of blind children of dupable age. The truth is that, in the distant villages where usually blindness is rampant, very few are aware of these institutions. Besides, a blind child from a very young age can prove a good source of income by taking up begging as its profession. The poor parents cannot be blamed for this because they think that they would be losing so much of their income by sending the child for years to a school,
which may after all give no guarantee of economic independence to the child.

*Blind Schools make Little Progress.*—With some 80 different institutions and organisations working for the blind all over the country, it may be said that a good deal of progress has been made to ameliorate the lot of the blind. But, if a close study of the work these various bodies do is made, it will be noticed that, however laudable their efforts may be, they are not in a position to put in much solid work for certain very important reasons, the foremost of which is finance. In many of these institutions, the staff employed is both ill-qualified and ill-paid. A good deal of the energy of those who start these institutions is used up in collecting the required funds to keep the organisations going. The institutions for the blind are supposed to be all residential and money has to be found not only for their education but also for their physical needs. The Braille literature which is both scarce and costly and the apparatus and appliances required for the education of the blind which again are dear and are to be imported from foreign countries add further to the difficulties.

The work for the blind in India on the whole ought to be systematized and that can be done only if the various organisations keep themselves in contact with one another and follow a uniform policy and co-ordinate their activities. For instance, in the country, there is not yet started a single nursery school for blind children nor is there in existence an up-to-date workshop for the blind. Practically no attention is paid to the female blind population, the majority of these institutions caring only for certain age groups among the blind. Nothing besides is done about the aged blind and even the partially sighted have hardly received any special care. All this must emphasize the fact that the onslaught of blindness comes at any time for any person. Commonly it is understood that blindness means absolutely no sight. This belief is fundamentally wrong for it really covers a very wide range of vision from total loss to fairly good sight. These variations in the degree of vision create their own problems and in any organised scheme for the welfare and education of the blind, this important factor has to be borne in mind.

All the advanced countries have therefore seen the necessity of laying down the proper definitions of blindness, so that all the blind coming under that definition stand to benefit by the welfare services in their respective countries.

The ultimate aim of all education is to provide means and livelihood in accordance with the individual's aptitude. While in India we have a number of schools for the blind, we have no facilities whereby the trained blind can be absorbed into industrial, professional or sheltered employment. This definitely results in an economic waste of the time, money and energy spent by the institutions to educate the blind children which may not return in a very large number of cases any dividend. Those who are directly concerned with the education of the blind have experienced that the most tragic period in the life of a blind person is when he leaves the school and finds that after all the education he has received he can find no suitable employment for himself. It is admitted that very often the onset of blindness causes a keen sense of frustration in the victim. That may be true but a blind person will undoubtedly be more broken-hearted when, after strenuous efforts to forget his handicap and live like a normal being, he comes up against the wall which debars him from earning his bread.

*Government Report on Blindness.*—In the year 1944, the Government of India issued
a report on blindness which is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the preventive and curative measures and the second, with the education and welfare services for the blind. The report contains important suggestions for the organisation of the different services for the blind which could go to reduce the incidence of blindness and bring substantial relief to those afflicted by it. Among the causes responsible for the loss of sight are mentioned Small-pox, Ophthalmia Neonatorum (sore-eyes), Cataracts, Glaucoma, Trachoma, accidents and injuries to the eyes, squint, short-sightedness, venereal disease, mal-nutrition, unhygienic and low conditions of living among the poverty stricken, ignorance about balanced diet and paucity of medical services in those parts of the country where they are essentially required.

Blindness in India is often called a village affliction for it thrives mainly in villages. The village folk seldom care to go to a doctor, much less to a hospital which may be far away, unless the case becomes very serious and perhaps beyond remedy. To meet this need, some States, particularly Bengal and Bombay, have organized Mobile Eye Camps which periodically visit different districts in their areas and attend to thousands of cases every year. A good deal of advance propaganda is made about the Camp, so that those who wish to benefit by it come to the Camp for treatment and operation. This, of course, partly solves the problem, for there are many who believe that an eye cannot be replaced in a regular ophthalmic hospital, however efficiently run.

As facts and figures prove, 90% of blindness in India is preventable or curable. In the United Kingdom, at one time small-pox and sore eyes claimed over 40% of blindness among the children. By adopting preventive measures, the U. K. has practically wiped off blindness by these two causes. Every baby that is born has to be vaccinated and also treated with a few drops of mild solution of silver nitrate in the eyes, so that it is safe-guarded against small-pox and sore eyes. Doctors and nurses are responsible for it and negligence in this respect is considered a crime and the Law takes a serious notice of it. Every case of blindness, besides, is to be reported immediately and got registered. Not only this; the child or the person, so registered, is at once provided with educational or welfare benefits by the Local Authorities who are now asked by the Government to care for all the handicapped people in their areas.

On the one hand, the preventive measures have been successful in checking blindness and reducing the number of blind children and on the other, facilities for their education and training have successfully rehabilitated them as contributory members of the society. The system of blind education and the welfare services in the U. K. is so complete that it has provided a model for starting similar services for the other physically handicapped groups. All these services are now nationalised and the State, more or less fully, shoulders the responsibility of looking after the well-being of all, though the credit must be given to the various voluntary organisations which were set up in the past out of purely humanitarian motives to bring relief to the blind, the deaf, the mute and the crippled. So well and efficiently did they run their services that the State has allowed many of them still to exist and to continue their work or to assist the Government because of their long experience in that field.

Voluntary Organization.—In India also, we have a number of voluntary organisations which have displayed the same zeal to make happy the lot of those to whom nature has been unkind. The charitably disposed people
and the philanthropists as well as the humble laymen, fired with a missionary zeal, have selflessly given their money and service for the benefit of the suffering humanity. However, if we only spoke about the number of the blind in India, we would be staggered not only by their numerical strength but also by the number of varied and complicated problems they give rise to. To organise and run educational and welfare services for 20 lakhs of the blind would require huge finances and an army of workers qualified in this field.

In the first place, if every State organised preventive measures to check the scourge of blindness, it would require a body of trained ophthalmic surgeons and a qualified nursing staff who would be posted at suitable centres within convenient reach of the village and town folks. In the resolutions which were passed at the First Provincial Conference for the Blind, Bombay, held in 1948 and at the All—India Conference for the Blind, Bombay, held in January 1952, the workers for the blind drew pointed attention to the inadequate medical services to treat eye cases and urged upon the States to take the necessary steps, so that the poorest of the poor could have the facility of being treated at his very door. How very essential this is, need not be repeatedly mentioned.

*Propaganda about Causes of Blindness.*—It has often been suggested that, along with the adoption of preventive measures, a regular propaganda should be made about the various eye diseases and the causes of blindness. In this respect, it is possible to print small illustrative pamphlets in the different regional languages for free distribution among the people, showing what care should be taken about the eyes, the common diseases which cause blindness, the best remedies thereof, the danger of quacks, dust and flies. Looking to the illiteracy among the people, it should be advisable to exhibit documentary films and suggestive posters. It has already been stated that the villages require the utmost help, for it is there that much of blindness breeds and thrives. Young ophthalmic surgeons, therefore, should be encouraged to work in villages for which every possible assistance ought to be offered by the States.

There is no undue stress laid on this part of the blind welfare work for the lesser the blind we have in the country the lesser will be the cost a State will have to incur for their regeneration and education. In any case, it must be recognised that the output of a normal man will always be more than that of a physically handicapped person, however ably he may have been trained. For this very simple reason, all efforts must be made to minimise blindness in the country. A number of people every year go blind who would never have been, if timely medical aid and advice were made available to them. In other words, by taking a negative attitude we permit blindness to do its worst while we note that, practically in all the cases, we could have prevented it.

*Different Age Groups and their Education.*—Since blindness comes at any time, educational and welfare services for the blind would have to be so organized as to look after the different age groups. We can conveniently set out four age groups for the purpose. In the first group, we have children upto 6 years to be cared for in nursery homes. The chief aim of such homes will be to train the blind babies to so adjust themselves to their handicap as to be able to develop the same habits as normal children. The main activities in these homes will be, therefore, directed towards their complete rehabilitation. Music, skilful manual training through handling of various articles to know their shapes, sizes, weights, smoothness, roughness, etc., clay modelling, plenty of
open air games, climbing, swinging, playing in sand pits, studying the surroundings, smelling plants and flowers, smelling them to distinguish one from the other, listening to the various sounds and recognising them and so on are some of the activities which could be organised in the nursery homes. The children should be constantly under medical and ophthalmic treatment specially for those who require it. At this particular time, children need not be pushed into fingerling Braille. An intelligent staff will know how to lead the child in a natural way to the study of Braille later. Since Braille consists of embossed dots, counting bids and sorting them out according to their sizes will train the little fingers to use dexterously their tactful power. Habits of cleanliness, physical and mental, a well balanced diet and properly regularised activities will produce the desired results.

The second group will be for children from 7 to 12. Here the children will have their schooling in Braille and in other subjects, with again plenty of games, exercises and other extra-curricular activities which would assist them to take a lively interest in their environment. Emphasis will also have to be laid on manual training and the curriculum ought to include simple crafts for boys and girls to make things so that, as they grow up, they will be in a position to make a clever use of their fingers.

The third age group will be up to 16 and the children falling under this group will have a systematic education in all the subjects which are taught to the normal children. I need not repeat about plenty of activities outside the time-table which are very essential for the blind for their healthy growth.

From 16 onward, we may have a sort of bifurcation in accordance with the intellectual capacities of the blind. Those blind who show a high intelligence quotient should be allowed to pursue the academic education up to the S. S. C. Examination. The others should be encouraged to qualify for suitable crafts which they can take up as means of livelihood in future.

The U. K. Experiment.—In the United Kingdom, two public schools exist to admit students for higher education. The one in Worcestershire is for boys and the other at Chorleywood for girls. In both these Colleges, as they are called, the competent blind receive just the same type of education which is imparted to the normal children in the other grammar schools. The blind, after passing out of these Colleges, get employed as shorthand-typists, telephone operators, piano tuners and repairers and physio-therapists, after completing the course in the physiotherapy school managed by the National Institute for the Blind. There are other avocations also for the blind which call for ability and skill.

For the second group of students, training is provided in a number of industries and crafts and after four years' thorough grounding they either enter a sheltered workshop for the blind or take up a job in a factory. There are, in the United Kingdom, about 70 sheltered workshops for the blind, the biggest being in Glasgow. The trades followed in these workshops are interesting. They include shoe repairing, machine knitting, both circular and flat, mattresses and brush making, upholstery, wire works, soap and plastic manufacture, basketry, and cane-work, furniture making, piano tuning and weaving of mats. The workshops secure large Government and hospital contracts and their annual output amounts to thousands of pounds. During the last War, many of these workshops showed good profits. However, things have changed after the War and almost all of them are now running into heavy losses. All the blind workshop employees may not
be able to produce the maximum expected of them in a week's time (they are paid weekly wages). At the same time, a minimum wages is fixed by the Government which every worker must get to make decent living possible. If a blind worker produces less, his wage is made up by an augmentation which may come to a few shillings or over a pound every week. As a result the workshops present a deficit balance every year.

Where practicable, the blind are employed to work in their own homes for which purpose the National Institute for the Blind, the Royal London Society for Teaching and Training the Blind and other bodies run the Home Workers Scheme in their respective areas. A Home Worker is supposed to be a better workman and has the advantage of being assisted at home by his wife, if married, or by any other member of the family. He is supplied raw materials at market rate; and his articles which remain unsold are collected and disposed of by the Society under whose care he may happen to be. This scheme decidedly is much better and cheaper than the workshop method of employment.

But the best way of getting the blind employed is in open industry. In such cases, the blind enter factory employment and are in no way a burden to others so far as their income is concerned. Factory employment for the blind became a possibility at the time of the Second World War when there was shortage of man power. The St. Dunstan's and the National Institute for the Blind took a lead in this matter and after a hard struggle succeeded in securing jobs in factories for a number of blind. In the year 1950, the National Institute for the Blind was able to place 300 blind in factory employment. Actually, today, the number of the blind employed in open industry exceeds that in the sheltered workshops for the blind. This has been achieved by the excellent Placement Service which these two organisations have evolved. There are paid Placement Officers who are expert industrialists, who visit factories, speak to the Managers and find out the kind of work which a blind person can do and then select the suitable blind for training and fix them up for work.

The blind can be proficient in a number of trades and professions if they are given facilities for training and are offered opportunities of employment after their training. In the Western countries, certain trades are reserved for the blind and other handicapped in factories, etc., and it is now the practice to give employment to them up to a specified percentage of the total employees in a factory. Investigations are made in the beginning to find out as to what particular mechanical process will suit for the employment of the blind, and then ways and means are found to train the blind able to do such work or who show a natural linking for such work. Employment then follows on the same basis as for those with sight. The owners of factories report on the quality of the work by the blind and these reports are practically in all cases favourable; so high is the standard of efficiency maintained by the blind workers. No room is kept for any slipshod modes of work and the blind, in spite of their handicap, have to return value for value. Certain amenities are provided to the blind employees voluntarily by the employers. Blindness is such a big handicap that it results in 25% liability.

**Vocations for the Blind.**—In India, we have still only simple trades for the blind. The training is such as to turn out workers who more or less cannot commercially compete with the normal workers. A lot of improvement is necessary in this and the question of opening an Employment Bureau thereafter may become imperative. But what is of primary importance is to organise the nature of training in such a way as to make
the blind expert craftsmen and put them in a position to hold their own in the market.

The following list of trades and vocations will give an idea of the possibilities of employing the blind in them: Sisal hemp work; bookbinding; envelope making; tailoring; wickerwork; silk bag making; hawking; newspaper selling; canvassing; insurance agency; leatherwork; metal work; poultry keeping; journalism; law; translation work; salesmanship; secretarial, laundry and mat making work; moulding bricks; paper packet and tape making; grinding and husking work, etc.

Over and above this, the blind can be trained to be musicians, masseurs, teachers, telephone operators, shop keepers, etc. The blind can also be employed as Home Teachers and their success in this is recognized everywhere. Those blind who cannot earn all on their own may be employed in sheltered workshops on wage system.

The Ford Company has in employment about 11,000 handicapped workers, of whom about 1,200 are totally or partially blind. Mr. Edsel Ford writes (1943): "No Company regards such employment as charity or altruism. All our handicapped workers give full value for their wages and their tasks are carried out with absolutely no allowances or special considerations. Our real assistance to them has been merely the discovery of tasks which would develop their usefulness."

What is Blindness.—The question "What is blindness" is not so simple to answer for a layman, because there are several factors related to blindness.

Usually blindness implies total loss of sight. This belief is not correct. Blindness exists in varying degrees from person to person. In between total loss of vision and normal retention of sight, there are various shades of blindness and each such group has its exclusive mass of problems.

Popularly it is regarded that with blindness comes also mental, moral, economic and social setbacks, complete in their effects. This is another wrong belief. Here again the cause of blindness has to be considered which sometimes destroys mental capacities and sometimes leaves the mind unaffected. Helen Keller lost her sight and hearing from the effects of a very bad fever but her mental equipment was fortunately left unmarred. She is today acclaimed as the "Wonder Lady" of this and perhaps of many succeeding centuries.

Blindness does not come to persons only at a particular age. There are 'born' blind, adult blind and aged blind. That is, blindness comes not as one commands but at any time it
pleases and in any form or intensity it chooses. It is sometimes accompanied with other handicaps, as in the case of Helen Keller. It may also leave physical deformities, ugliness and feeble mindedness behind it.

Individual mental cast has also to be borne in mind when we try to understand blindness. All the blind are not the same. As with the sighted, so with the sightless, individuality counts. Otherwise there would not have been Brailles, Faweettes, Homers, Miltons, Pearson, Nilkanthrais, Roys and others.

For practical purposes, we should then consider blindness as a mere physical loss. In so doing, we accept the blind as otherwise normal beings, capable of instruction and deserving a social status equal to that conceded to those more fortunate than they. This alone will enable us to solve, in a practical manner, the problems of the blind.

Blindness is defined in many ways, depending on the angle with which one views it. Doctors will say that it means incapacitating a person from making a normal use of his eye sight, never mind the cause or the age. The objective way followed is by means of the Snellen Chart, used by all ophthalmic surgeons. Persons having vision of 20/200 are called blind. The 20/200 signifies that the topmost chart line which is normally readable from a distance of 200 feet is read only from a distance of 20 feet.

Lt. Col. E. Kirwan, an ophthalmist, has defined total blindness as being inability to count the fingers of the hand from one foot; a person is classed partially blind if he is not able to do so by stretching his hand out.

An economist will define blindness as making an individual to eke out an independent living.

From the social point of view, that person is blind who cannot "hold his own in Society", whereas from the point of view of an educationist, blindness will denote that condition of eyes as will not make it possible for an individual to educate himself through ordinary print. India has yet to arrive at a scientific definition of blindness to avoid doubt, confusion and varied misinterpretation.

Like discussions on blindness, there are many degrees of blindness as well as many types of the blind. There are the nervous blind, the challenging blind, the servile blind, the despairing blind, the aggressive blind, the mentally wrecked, or even morally dissipated blind, and the blind, who show traits of refined intellect • and a high moral tone, the frustrated blind and the keep-up-the spirit types, the impressive and the unimpressive blind, the socially acceptable or the 'revulsion' sorts, and so forth. This should make clear why individuality counts so much in the treatment of the blind. Grouping all the blind into just one class is most dangerous and undesirable. At the mention of the word blind, it is false—not to say stupid—to create a picture of an individual in rags whom we meet at street corners or of an entity possessed of genius to perform impossibilities or incredible miracles as may have been witnessed by us on occasions outside or inside some blind institutions. Variety in individuality is not the monopoly of only those with sight; it is equally shared by the sightless too. All the lame or paralysed are not the same, and so we must acknowledge the clear fact that there are blind and blind.

A lot of confused thinking prevails among the sighted about the blind, their cruel fate, their capacities and powers or powerlessness. One class of people consider them to be bereft of all gifts to be of any use to themselves or others; another group credits them with superhuman powers. There may be
intermediary classes of people who either gossip about them or make guesses about their ability to perform one trick or the other.

This clouded consideration by the sighted of those who are really in no way different from any group of normal human beings makes a complex problem only more bewildering. The blind have, therefore, come to be segregated from society whereas they have the birthright to be in it as its part and parcel. If their claim to citizenship has not been justifiably accepted, it is mainly because of the 'halo' of myths that is diffused round the blind.

Of the five senses, sight is the "master sense". Its loss, at least temporarily, creates a condition out-of-gear with the remaining senses.

If we take the instance of a baby which has lost its sight in infancy, we find that the normal channel of knowledge is closed for it. It has, therefore, to rely on the other senses to collect impressions of its environment. If the parents are understanding enough, they will bring the child's other senses into active play. Unfortunately, the parents do not always come out to be so very understanding and the baby remains blind and its other senses grow numbed out of disuse. Consequently, the child comes to be educationally retarded and socially unacceptable.

If we imagine the case of an adult losing suddenly or gradually his sight, he recedes from society out of frustration and suffers a mental and physical collapse. What he needs is a good shaking to rouse him to recognise that, in spite of his severe handicap, he can still be a useful man. Readjustment to new conditions again makes him live his original self. But facilities for this must exist to prevent him going insane or committing suicide.

These examples need not convey the idea that all children blinded in tender age or all adults going abruptly or slowly blind will develop according to plan. But broadly speaking, this is the usual result. One point must, however, be noticed, viz., that the blind, left to themselves, will always be a liability in one from or other and if reclaimed, will turn out useful members of the society.

So very much are we addicted to the use of sight to receive sensory impressions, that we fail to realise that other faculties many times interplay to fix these impressions on the mental plate. We forget the "inner eye" that sees things even when the physical eyes slumber. We count on memory which helps to retain these impressions. When we eat pudding we see it and taste it but miss perhaps its savoury odour. We shall admire the colour of a silk cloth but hardly enjoy the thrill of feeling its texture. Blindness must automatically awake other senses to substitute it and there is no miracle about it if the blind addresses a person by his name on hearing his voice or knows the presence of ladies in a hall through perfumes wafted to his nostrils. Efficiency comes more by practice than by simple seeing.

Improper grasp of these facts has led us astray in our conjectures about the blind. It is our vision, therefore, which necessitates correction to view the blind from the right perspective.

Importance of Hearing Faculty.—On having lost his sight, a blind person depends most on his sense of hearing. It is believed that about 75% of his impressions of the outside world come to him through his auditor sense. He also has to fall on his olfactory and tactual senses to tell things one from the other; so also it may be that he tastes things, not always, with directed attention to notice some unusual flavour.
The constant use of his other remaining senses sharpens them and this is only a natural and a matter-of-fact development rather than a wonderful phenomenon. Commonly we say that God compensates the blind by bestowing on him added gifts, such as, over-sensitive touch, extraordinary power of smell, or a keen sense of hearing. Scientifically, it has been proved that in many cases it is contrary and that with blindness other senses go dim unless educated to perform their functions.

**Limitations of Other Senses.**—But how far can this education be carried? Standing at the seashore, a sighted person will embrace the whole landscape in breadth, length and height measured by miles. And the colours? The sightless will be satisfied by the smell of salt water, the sea breeze and a few intermingled sounds that will be overtrying for him to know from what objects they originate. This brings out very significantly the limitations of the other senses in comparison with sight. That is one thing. It must also be noted that the factor of fatigue sets another big limitation to the four senses still possessed by the blind. This will be easily understood if we recollect some of our experiences when we were constrained to use our senses other than sight, e.g. when we happen to be in a dark room. We stimulate our sense other than sight to know our whereabouts but not for any length of time. Fatigue takes possession of us, if not fear.

Reading Braille fatigues the fingers more quickly than reading a printed book with the eyes. The same is the case with the other senses also.

A child at home will develop in accordance with the attitudes shown to it by those who come in regular contact with it. A normal child usually claims normal attitudes from its parents at home. Difficulties specially arise in abnormal and sub-normal cases and the failure of the parents to cope with the uncommon situation may result in headaches and sorrows. Attitude is one of the many influences shaping the destiny of a child. Our likes and dislikes are the creations of our attitudes to things. One man's poison is another man's food, and similar other sayings have at their back the influence of man's favour or disfavour towards certain aspects of life.

How we take up certain attitudes cannot be easily described. At times, it is a subtle process and almost inexplicable. At school 'A' could make friends only with 'B' and not with 'C' though 'A' has no grudge against 'C'. Some of our attitudes are with us from birth as in our preferences to sweet over bitter or to beauty over ugliness. Religion, status in life, education and culture are the influences that shape our attitudes. These are patent as when we resent falsehood and like truth, or wish to move only among an intelligent class of people.

But attitudes can themselves be wrong for they may generate from distorted concepts. Religion is good, but bigotry is not. Loving intelligent company is helpful but detesting those not blessed with mental capacities is surely injurious to both and in the end to society. Recognition of this has produced harmony out of discord and literacy out of illiteracy. Pages of history are tainted with persecutions, tyranny, murder and arson because of the failure to produce correct understanding of situations.

Modern philosophy has removed many of our misconceptions of things and brought about a change for the better in several of our attitudes. Our attitude to blindness is one example of this changed attitude and the world is happier for that.

Society and the blind have for long been out of true with each other, because they
have misunderstood each other's relative position. While this has become a story of the past in some countries, in India and many of the Asiatic lands these sad episodes persist with baneful consequences.

Blind Children Neglected.—In the home of the poor, the blind child is a neglected creature as in the home of the rich it is a pampered and spoiled little 'rajah'. In both cases, parents' ignorance produces adverse results and prevents the normal growth of the child. The poor man's blind baby is slovenly in habits, awkward in gait, uncouth and possibly expressionless due to mental starvation. The wealthy man's blind baby receives more than what it wants and gives less than it should in return. As a result, it is a demanding, sullen, and give-me-all product. In one case, the child comes to think that life, as far as it is concerned, is to live alone in a corner; in the other, it considers it its birthright to get as much out of others as required without a thought for them. Home environment, it will be seen is not so congenial for the wholesome growth of these children.

Society has not so far given much careful attention to the problems of the blind. It approaches the blind more on the basis of the prevailing beliefs about them than in a mood to be of real assistance to them. There are fatalists who are convinced that afflictions come as punishments for previous sins and, therefore, are to be suffered quietly; there are superstitions about certain maladies which cause blindness as in the case of small pox, or there is the deep-rooted philosophy that the blind are good-for-nothing beings and the only service to be rendered to them is to help them with a few coppers or to carry them safely across a road.

The blind in their turn have come to imagine that their lot is impossible of improvement, that they are born to be dependent and to live as parasites. The verdict of society—unfair in all respects—has quietly been accepted by the blind and so the thin end of the wedge inserted centuries ago has widened the gap between the two. The blind have happened to exist more and more apart from the society. Only their regeneration back into the fold of the society will ultimately give them their true position in life.

The whole discordant note would have been too jarring but for the fact that neither the Society nor the blind are to blame for these feelings of unfriendliness and lost love born of incorrect understanding begotten by age-long customs, ignorance and superstitions.

The whole question then boils down to this: that, unless society is instructed about the needs of the blind and in understanding their problems better, the right background cannot be obtained to bring the blind to social patterns. In the absence of this requisite information, society will continue to think that what it does is just the thing required of it.

The blind necessitate a corresponding rational comprehension of their position in society—how much they are dependent on their sighted friends for their amelioration and how far they can be of help to them to enjoy equal right with others. This mutual understanding will do the spadework for a complex planning of the betterment of the wretched conditions in which the blind have been living. This is discarding old robes for new, in thought and attitude.

We have noted before the numerical strength of the blind in India. Their very number is staggering and in combination with their innumerable problems, the subject wears a more thorny appearance. It is a Gordian Knot but it requires no slap-dash
cutting. That can be understood from what we have been discussing so far. Two factors go to relieve us of this confused state of affairs.

Firstly, we have the examples of the Western countries which have done splendid work in this field. From them, we can obtain all our data for a scientific solution of this problem.

Secondly, we had in our own country some pioneers who, aware of the facilities provided on the Continent for the education and welfare of the blind, undertook similar tasks here, inspite of the odds facing them. We are hundred years behind our Western brothers, but we have been growing stronger in this work in the last fifty years. One cannot find adequate words of praise for these torch-bearers for the magnificent efforts made by them to light the path to education, social rebirth and economic independence of their sightless fellow sufferers. What is therefore, needed is the consolidation of what is already there and its expansion and well-planned development.

*Much Remains to be done.*—It will, inspite of the creditable work done by some of these pioneers, have to be admitted that much yet remains to be done. Private enterprise has only gone to accentuate the immensity of the work that awaits the attention of the Government and the society. For one reason, it must be understood that even the best efforts on the part of these enterprising individuals will hardly carry them to touch the mere fringe of the whole question.

In the National Scheme of education, the care of the blind children and their training ought to form an integral part. Sooner or later, the Government of India will have to consider the question of social and cultural integration of the blind. The scheme outlined here may be given shape to as and when finances permit, and there are enough trained workers to implement it. It would also be advisable to establish a Research Department, the important task of which would be to find out suitable fields of employment for the blind. Properly equipped training centres for the blind also would have to be established. The blind then could be employed in sheltered workshops, or in their own homes under the Home Workers Scheme, or in open industry or, in the case of intelligent blind, in offices and professions.

In conclusion, one cannot refrain from mentioning the necessity and the value of Legislation by which (i) blindness could be defined; (ii) the blind could be registered; and (iii) be provided benefits of education, training and employment.
The Russian foundation, the only such organization in the world, secured the support of UNESCO, which recommended that illustrated 3D books help visually impaired children to develop and integrate with others. The foundation’s website launched a book by a group of experts in working with visually impaired children that is especially designed for parents. Certain aspects of development in visually impaired children have consequences for habilitation and rehabilitation.

Important neurological, developmental and cognitive differences exist between the visually impaired and the sighted. Beliefs about Physical Activity among Children Who Are Visually Impaired and Their Parents. Moira E. Stuart, Lauren Lieberman, Karen E. Hand. Psychology. Blind children may also need special training in understanding spatial concepts, and in self-care, as they are often unable to learn visually and through imitation as other children do. Moreover, home economics and education dealing with anatomy are necessary for children with severe visual impairments. Since only ten percent of those registered as legally blind have no usable vision, many students are also taught to use their remaining sight to maximum effect, so that some read print (with or without optical aids) and travel without canes. A combination of necessary training tailored to the u