

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The Project Science and Technology under mission mode, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India Sanctioned "A Study of the Curriculum Development for the Vocational Instructors for the Visually Impaired" - to Dr. J.P.Singh Member Secretary, Rehabilitation Council of India in 1998. For the sake of feasibility, the study was confined to vocational instructors in LT.Is in Delhi.

(A) **Back Ground**

The establishment of Industrial Home and School for the blind by Ms. Annie Sharp, a British Christian Missionary in 1887 "at Amritsar, marked the beginning of organised efforts to provide education in India to blind children. Soon after another school Today's largest school for the blind in India was set up at Palamkottah by another Christian Missionary (RCI 2000). Lal Behari Shah was the first Indian who set up Calcutta school for the Blind in 1893. The first half of the 20th Century saw the establishment of several schools for the Blind in different parts of the country.

These schools imparted basic academic skills in addition to manual craft training. In the first half of the twentieth century, schools with similar goals and programmes were established. These schools were run largely by the Philanthropists and Non-Governmental organisations. At that time some of the State Govt. gave adhoc grants to some schools for the blinds. The Govt. of India began a scheme of assistance to voluntary organisation for the handicapped in 1961. In 1942, the Govt. of India appointed Sir Clutha Mackanji a blinded veteran of world war - I, as officer on special duty (Blindness in the D.G.H.S). The same year a committee was appointed to investigate into the causes of blindness and recommend measure for the welfare of the Blind. Sir Clutha Mackanji was the secretary of this committee, which submitted its report to the Govt. of India in 1944. Report on Blindness in India estimated the number of blind people in undivided India at 2 million. This works out to about 0.5% of the population at that time. One of the recommendations of the report was that Ministry of education should set up a unit on Blindness to deal with the problems of the Blind. As a result, a unit on blindness was set up by Ministry of Education in April 1947 headed by Mr. Lal Advani, himself blind, which was entrusted with the responsibility of developing and implementing educational and vocational training programme for visually handicapped. The emphasis of the work of this unit was on education. The first issue taken up by the unit was the development of a common Braille code for Indian language.

Subsequently the concept of setting up the National Center for the Blind at Dehradun (NIVH) came into being.

By this time Government began to consider the possibility of findings gainful employment for blind people. The first special employment exchange for the physically handicapped was established in Bombay in March 1959. Today there are 47 such exchanges and 17 vocational rehabilitation centers. All these organisations were set up with the aim of assisting blind employment seekers; but they have had limited success. The most important single reason for this was that the blind student at that time was not equipped with the skills to find employment in the open market.

The post independent period saw a rapid increase in the establishment of new schools but no significant change in the pattern of vocational training. About 400 schools are providing educational services to about 20,000 blind and Visually Impaired children.

Most of these schools are imparting academic education from primary to Secondary stage. The Govt. of India launched the scheme of scholarship in 1952 to promote the education of Blind students. The facilities to provide vocational education in all these schools are visibly non-existent. Whatever skills are taught have generally know economic value. Singh (2001), reported the results of the survey conducted by him in U.P, Haryana and Delhi, according to which the schools located in these states were providing training in Chair canning, Weaving & Candle making in the name of vocational education.

Information Technology offers special opportunities for blind persons. Limited beginnings have been made by certain NGG' s providing training in such occupations as Stenography and Computer operation.

Secondary education commission 1952-53, Kothari education commission 1964-66, National Policy on education 1986 and Acharya Ramamurthy committee 1990 strongly recommended the vocationalization of education at secondary and Sr. Secondary stages of education, purpose being to prepare the students for economic independence and instill in them the feeling of dignity of labour. In these reports the introduction of vocational education for the disabled students was also emphasize. Today when more than 400 special schools and a large network of integrated services in Governmental and voluntary sectors are providing education to blind students, very little attention is paid to meeting the need of vocational training of these students. The quality of education has no doubt improved to some extent but the quality of vocational training has somehow remained unchanged.

(B) Need and Importance

For a long time, the Charist goal of every blind person has been to achieve economic independence. This can in part be reached by teaching blind students salable skills so that he or she can work in a competitive environment.

The project envisaged studying trades in Junior Technical Schools, Polytechnics etc. It was discovered that although 1 % seats in LT.Is have been reserved for visually impaired people in LT.Is, these seats had never been filled because the instructors did not know how to teach visually impaired people. The trades taught in LT.Is were similar to those taught in Junior Technical Schools. Therefore, in view of the fact that the county has about 2300 LT.Is spread across all states in India. The LT.Is were chosen as the base of the Study. This was done because it was felt that training in LT.Is could afford an opportunity to many blind persons with limited education to achieve economic independence.

The purpose of the project was to identify trades taught in different LT.Is, which could be successfully learnt by Visually Impaired students with or without some modifications. Another purpose of the project was to pinpoint the modification in machines/methods and techniques of teaching various trades that could be learnt by the Visually Impaired students in order to practice them.

The project also envisaged designing curriculum for the training of Vocational Instructors. So that they could teach identified trades to Visually Impaired students.

Adequate facilities for the vocational training have been a missing link in the services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped in this country. This has resulted in the entry of these students in higher education indiscriminately moreover; the training in a few traditional craft imparted to these students has proved to be insufficient to help them gain suitable and remunerative employment. The blind students have been denied access to this type of training for want of adequate special equipment and appropriate technical training of vocational instructors in the field of blindness working in these institutes. Due to non-availability of technological know how, unawareness of special needs of Visually Impaired students and skills in meeting these needs, the LT.Is have been refusing to admit blind and Visually Impaired students to various technical courses. Even after more than 100 years of organized efforts of initiating educational services for Visually Impaired students, no significant efforts were directed by the Government as well as Non-governmental Organisations towards Vocational technical training of the Visually Impaired students. Over a period of time certain manual skills were taught. This is evident from the fact that many of the schools still provide vocational training to these persons in traditional crafts like Chair re-caning, Weaving, Candle making etc. These were the simple skills and had little economic back up. Even today, although there have been substantial improvement in imparting academic education to the Visually Impaired people, the quality of vocational training has remained almost unchanged for the last 50 years.

As the time went by, the importance of these skills in terms of making a blind person economically independent diminished because of introduction of new machines and the advent of electronics. Even after more than half a century of our independence, no systemic programme of providing vocational education to blind people exists in India. Only sporadic efforts were made towards providing training in technical occupations to these students. One such effort is a training course in Light Engineering which was designed and developed in 1961 with the assistance of an expert deputed by ILO. These are inadequate in terms of making a blind person an economically productive member of the society, as they do not impart the marketable skills. The training in Light engineering is imparted by a few institutions. Besides this, no opportunity was afforded to these students for technical training.

Non-availability of need based courses for the training of Vocational Instructors as pointed out in the report of Manpower Development published by Rehabilitation Council of India in 1996 is one of the major reasons for this situation. Another important reason is the lack of empirically carried out study to find out as to which trades could be learnt and practiced by the blind people. There was, therefore, imperative need for an in depth study to determine what trades can be taught to the persons with visual impairment and what curriculum should be designed for their Instructors.

It is difficult to imagine Visually Impaired people being able to undertake self-employment without vocational training. Vocational training cannot be organized unless trained Instructors are available. Therefore, designing and developing need based technical training courses for Visually Impaired students is crucial in order to make them competent to become economically self reliant and productive citizens of the country. It is with this broad aim, the project has been implemented.

(C) Objectives:

It is in this background, this project had the following objectives: -.

1. To study about 50 different trades in Polytechnic, Women Polytechnic, Vocational Rehabilitation Center and Junior Technical Institutions.
2. To consider which of these trades can be performed without use of sight.
3. To devise assistive devices or pieces of equipment that would help persons with visual impairment to perform the various trades.
4. To work on the development of specimen curriculum for training of vocational instructors in the trades considered suitable for the visually impaired.