



ROLE OF NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) IN EMPOWERMENT OF VISUALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN

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Abstract: The study attempts to understand the role of Non Government Organization (NGO) in empowerment of visually challenged students. Study was conducted on 153 visually challenged students attaining education in two NGOs Blind Relief Association and National Association for Blind of Delhi. Keeping in view the nature of study and limitation of the respondents' data was collected by using observation and interview schedule. It can be concluded that NGO is playing an important role in improving the conditions of visually challenged and making them empowered. It is noted that given the proper opportunities, support and encouragement, disability arising out of visual impairment can be surmounted. What makes it insurmountable is the absence of the right attitude and approach by the sighted towards the sightless.

Keywords: *Non Government Organization, Empowerment, Visually Challenged.*

INTRODUCTION:

The word empower is used to describe the act of enabling someone to gain more capacity and authority to do what s/he wishes to do. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, empowerment means the act or action of empowering someone or something; the granting of the power, right or authority to perform various acts or duties; the state of being empowered to do something and the power, right or authority to do something. Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger and more confident in controlling one's life and claiming one's right.

Adams (1990) described empowerment as "a process in which individuals, groups or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards maximizing the quality of their lives". Rappaport (1987) argues that empowerment involves both individual's determination over one's own life and democratic participation in the life of one's community often through mediating structure such as schools, neighborhood, churches and other voluntary organization.

Disabled people, who constitute large segment of India's population, have failed to get the benefit of the country's development. "There is no denying fact that the Disabled in India have experienced extensive marginalization and disempowerment. As a group they are starved of services and facilities available to the non-disabled and, consequently, are the least nourished, the least healthy, the least educated the least employed. They are subjected to a long history of neglect, isolation, segregation, poverty, deprivation, charity and pity" (Baquer, 1997).

Empowerment of weaker sections of society including disabled has become an area of concern for government institutions and civil society organization concrete effort towards empowerment involve sustained grassroots mobilization, social movements, intervention of civil societies (NGO's) and well articulated attractive policy formulations and their execution with a political commitment for the redressal of power imbalances at the grassroots.

Social movement and NGOs as agents of grassroots mobilization and collective action play a vital role in bringing about changes in the plight and living conditions of marginalized groups. These agencies sustain themselves on initiatives from below at the grassroots level through democratic way of seeking empowerment. Thus, it is important to study the role of these agencies in uplifting the weaker sections.

NGO activism has acquired momentum in the current development discourses. The role of Non Government Organizations (NGOs) in imparting education to children with special needs all over the world cannot be undermined. "In the last few decades of the nineteen century, the NGOs have played an active role in India to impart education to children with special needs (CWSN) (Lang, 2000). Many international funding agencies and governments have no hesitation to support NGOs in different parts of the globe. Together with the state, they act as the agents of social development and social change. They educate the community on many social evils and irrational practices. Moreover, as agents of mobilization at the grassroots level, they strengthen the political empowerment of weaker sections. The NGOs who are known to be the key drivers of the society play a proactive role in helping the nascent group to acquire growth so that the disabled can contribute to the development of the country. Though it is not possible to provide employment to the entire disabled population, it is possible to impart the necessary vocational training, motivating them to become independent and self-sufficient. In achieving that, the role of NGO in empowering the disabled in India holds immense significance. So, the NGO who acts as the vital organs of the civil society work towards creating a congenial climate and an environment free of barriers where the disabled can also lead a healthy life like its mainstream counterparts in the society (<https://medium.com/@ashabhavancentre/what-is-the-role-of-ngo-in-empowering-the-disabled-in-india-59e943e4e87>).

There are many NGOs working for the empowerment of visually challenged. To name a few, NGOs like Blind Welfare Society which make visually impaired self dependent by training them in to daily routines and make them employable. Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (Sightsavers) works with partners in developing countries to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. Blind Persons Association provides support to the visually impaired through education, employment, scholarships and accommodation to promote their independence, dignity and quality of life. National Blind Youth Association also provides support and advocacy services for visually impaired youth. 'Saksham' acts as a service provider in the field of rehabilitation, education, training and assistive technology for blind. In addition to a school for children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities, it runs a distribution center of assistive aids and appliances for education, mobility and independent living (<https://blindwelfaresociety.in>; <https://www.sightsaversindia.in>; <https://blindpersonsassociation.org>; <https://ngosindia.org>; <https://sakshamseva.org>).

AREA OF STUDY AND METHODS:

The study was conducted on 153 visually impaired students studying in National Association for Blind (NAB) and Blind Relief Association (BRA). The Blind Relief Association, established in 1944, in Delhi is a premier nongovernmental organization serving the visually challenged. The Association is providing quality school education and conducting training programmes to prepare teachers for the visually challenged; running a range of vocational skill training courses in light engineering and other industrial trades; multi-skill training programme covering bookbinding/paper craft, candle making, packaging, sewing, chair canning, relaxation massage, etc. Besides conducting computer training programmes for the visually challenged, it also provides counseling and direct help in placement of the visually challenged. The Association offers other services like production of study material in Braille and audio recorded books for the visually challenged, either free or at nominal cost. The campus has a hostel for children and adult students and trainees. The Association is constantly striving to ensure that persons with physical disability, especially the blind, are not marginalized due to physical impairment. Efforts are made to integrate them into the mainstream community as confident, equal and useful member of society. The Association is a recipient of “National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2012” as the best institution working for the cause of persons with disabilities”. The award instituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India was presented by the President of India Sri. Pranab Mukherjee at a ceremony held in New Delhi on 17 February 2013 (www.blindrelief.org/p/home.html).

The National Association for the Blind, Delhi is the largest chain of non-government voluntary organization in India. They have 23 state and 65 district level branches to reach the large number of visually challenged people. The Delhi State Branch was established in 1979, and since then, it has undertaken various projects, which have immensely benefited the visually challenged and helped them successfully integrate into the mainstream of life. In 2008 the Organization was awarded the prestigious National Award by the Government of India for its admirable endeavors. It has been working perseveringly to make maximum number of visually challenged persons both children and adults to become self-reliant and contributing members of the society. It highly advocates the concept of integrated education for social fulfillment. The core activities of NAB include education through preparatory school and integrated education unit. Today, a large number of government and private schools have opened their doors for children with special needs. NAB Delhi extends its prompt support to such mainstream schools where blind and low vision children study. It works to devise appropriate teaching techniques and learning environment for the success of visually challenged students. 280 blind students trained by NAB are studying in mainstream schools like DPS, St. Mary's, Mt. Carmel, Springdales, Kendriya Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Navyug and MCD Schools in Delhi. NAB provides highly trained resource teachers who work in tandem with the school teachers and other staff. Resource teachers provide useful guidance to mainstream school teachers in conducting educational and co-curricular activities while visiting regularly to the mainstream schools. NAB transcribes CBSE books in Braille and large print to make these books readable by blind students. It also records these books in audio format making them more portable and accessible. Special equipment or learning tools for writing Braille, studying mathematics and geometry are available for students studying in integrated education programme. Some other equipment like tape recorders, Braille watches, talking calculators, white canes, school bags, etc are also made available to such children. Transport facilities and scholarships are also provided to the deserving students (www.nabdelhi.in).

Keeping in view the nature of study and limitation of the respondents' data was collected by using observation and interview schedule.

OBJECTIVES:

The study attempts to understand the role of Non Government Organization (NGO) in empowerment of visually challenged students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Data shows that most of the respondents are young. 56% of them are aged between 15 to 20 years while 28% of them belong to the age-group of 21-25 years, followed by 8% belonging to 26-30 years age group and remaining 8% belong to the age-group of 31 years & above. It needs to be pointed out here that most of these respondents got opportunity for getting education at an age suitable for a particular level or stage of schooling. A few of them, however, could get such opportunity quite late.

The table shows that 71% of the respondents are male and the rest are female. Data contained in the above table shows that out of 153 respondents, majority i.e. 56% respondents were found to be fully visually challenged and the remaining 44% were partially visually challenged. Data collected in this regard shows that the number of respondents who become visually challenged after birth is higher in comparison to those who were born with visual impairment. A reading of the above table shows that 48% of the respondents are visually challenged by birth while 52% of them lost vision after birth.

Data related to the age at onset of visual impairment of the respondents reveal that those respondents who lost their eyesight fully or partially after birth, 26% of them belong to age group of 1-5 years. 16% of them became blind at the age ranging from 6 to 15 years while others lost their sight after 15 years of age. Respondents who got blind at an early age could cope up easily in comparison to the person who got blind in later stage. In childhood, during the period of primary socialization, it is easy to learn the required skills to use Braille and other assistive technology. Adaptation at schools and with the society is, also, easier during this period. On the other hand, for the adult who lost their vision late it becomes difficult for them to learn ways and means a new to accomplish their task. It is difficult to re-socialize the socialized.

Data collected regarding respondents' place of residence shows that a large number of the respondents i.e. 49% live in urban areas, while 44% and 7% of them live in rural and semi-urban areas respectively.

Data shows that 20% of the respondents' fathers had never been to school. Majority of the respondents fathers were matriculate whose proportion is 25%. As against it, 18% of them had obtained education up to higher secondary level. While a total of 18% respondents' fathers were college and university educated. Only 1 respondent did not have any idea about the education of her father as she never met him. Her father left her mother a few months after her birth and her mother, being herself an illiterate person, did not have any idea about her husband's educational status.

A comparison of data collected on the educational status of respondents' mothers with that of their fathers' reveal that the number of illiterate mothers is quite high and it is more than double than that of their fathers. 25% mothers had primary level education, 11% mothers got an opportunity to complete their High School and 13% studied up to higher secondary level. The number of graduate and post graduate mothers is significantly low in comparison to respondents' fathers.

Although visual handicap is common to all classes, its incidence among lower socioeconomic strata is reported to be high. Various socio-economic reasons may lead to the loss of vision in disproportionately large number of cases in the lower income bracket. People belonging to these groups do not only suffer from malnutrition but

also from ill- health. Quite a sizeable proportion of cases are also found to be afflicted with ophthalmic ailments. Lack of resources and proper knowledge of preventive health care add to the problem. Visual impairment among children is also due to the fact that many people do not recognize the importance of counseling, family welfare planning, ante-natal, prenatal and post-natal care.

With the opportunities of education and training, a handicapped child moves towards successful rehabilitation. Re-integration of a blind person into society depends not only upon his own capabilities but also by opportunities available to them and his acceptance in society. The respondents of the present study do not appear to be evenly distributed according to their course of study. However, a careful observation of the data shows that number of respondents enrolled for Senior Secondary School Certificate (S.S.S.C) is larger i.e. 44% in comparison to the 24% respondents enrolled for Vocational courses. These vocational courses are chair canning, massage therapy, light engineering, stitching, paper product and candle making. A significant number of students i.e. 20% are pursuing computer courses. Very few students are pursuing B.Ed courses. If we combine the last three categories it turns out that most of the respondents are pursuing technical courses. These courses are preferred for its demand in the job market.

After the onset of blindness, one has to adjust himself to a new role. Several losses are suffered by an individual after losing his eyesight. Among these, a severe setback to his personal independence is most visible. This dependence presents his picture as a 'helpless blind man'. For his emotional adjustment, therefore, he needs constant attention and careful guidance not only from his parents but also from the members of the educational institution in which he happens to be placed. Therefore, present study made an attempt to understand the role and support of teachers in the life of visually challenge students. Data shows that 92% respondents firmly believe that their teachers are playing a great role in their lives. They solve their day to day academic problems and motivate them to get success. They make them realize that they are not less capable rather they have caliber and what they need is only hard work and high aspiration. A few respondents have a negative view towards teacher attitude and mainly for those, who are not trained in special education. These respondents shared that their teachers do not consider their presence in the class and they ignore the problems which are faced by visually challenged students while attending lecture. They lag behind and, therefore, why they need extra tuitions to cover up. It is to be noted that those students who are enrolled in integrated setting get the facility of resource persons, who are trained in special education. National Association for Blind provides the facility of extra coaching to those students who are studying in schools of Delhi based on integrated setting, to overcome the problems faced by them in class. While remaining 3% respondents have indifferent attitude that is to say that they neither acknowledge any support from teachers nor have problem with teachers.

The psychological strategy suggests that we may empower the people first with awareness and confidence and the rest will follow in due course. The transformation in their psyche will prove a move towards a life with greater dignity and self assurance which, in turn, will pave the way for claiming their, social, economic and other entitlements. Empowerment can, thus, take place even without concomitant economic increments. According to this approach, to be informed is to be empowered and to be ignorant is to be impoverished. 92% of the respondents are aware about governmental programmes and facilities available for the disabled particularly for visually challenged. While 8% of the respondents are not aware about these available facilities. This lack of information is primarily for two reasons. Firstly, they lost their vision quite recently and secondly, some of them hail from rural areas where flow of information is slow and they joined the institution recently. Out of 92% respondents who are aware about the governmental programmes and facilities, they are availing these facilities in form of scholarships, free gadgets like smart cane, recorder, laptop, tab, etc distributed by government from time to time. They are, also, making use of concession in railways and buses, guide facility at metro station, state pension etc. A few of them got to know about these schemes recently and are expected to

utilize the facilities in near future. The respondents who come from well off families do not want to make use of these such as scholarships as their families can easily afford their educational expenses.

Extra-curricular activities help in socializing, cultivate personality and maintain a healthy body. It also promotes social networking skills and help to integrate with the society. From the data it is obvious that majority of the respondents invest and utilize their time and energy in extra-curricular activities. 31% of the respondents reported sports as their extra-curricular activities. In sports they usually play cricket with the help of sound ball, chess with tactile feature and sound. This was followed by music and debate. Only a few of them (4%) reported reading and writing as their extracurricular activities. They read and write in Braille. Some have interest in writing poems. In 30 percent of the cases, however, it was not applicable as they do not participate in any extra-curricular activities for some personal reasons they did not want to disclose.

It is worth noting that almost all the respondents i.e. 99% manage their daily activities themselves. They are not dependent on others for their daily life routine activities like washing the clothes, ironing, getting ready for classes and to go to different places, etc. Some respondents can cook also and it is very surprising that they use electric heater also which is considered as very unsafe even for the sighted person. They are so perfect that they know how to do all the procedure as they do all the things themselves very systematically. They keep the things at their proper places which makes their work easy and systematic. They keep their dresses in a systematic way and maintain that order. They go to market and do shopping also, even they go alone also. They have identified some shops and usually they go to these known shops only. Well only 1% of respondents stated that they are unable to do their work themselves. One of them resides at his home and his mother does all the works for him and another one requires the services of a servant for his work.

A position of responsibility in any organization carries with it power, honor and esteem. Its diligent performance requires the post holders to have certain level of confidence, caliber, trust, initiative, communication skills and organizational capacities. He is expected to set example for others and works as role model. People believe in his caliber. Keeping these facts in mind, the present study attempted to examine the nature of responsibilities assigned to the respondents in the hostel or the institution.

The data revealed that 39% respondents have been assigned different kind of responsibilities whether in school or in hostel such as class monitoring which shows the confidence, leadership quality and controlling power of the holding person. Another responsibility that some respondents have been assigned is organizing institutional functions which develop their administrative intellectual and creative ability. Other kind of responsibilities assign to the students are helping new comers in settling down in the environment of institution and also helping them learn daily living skills, keeping the keys safe which promote their positive attitude towards life, motivation level and communication skills.

The importance of sports and games encompasses more than just the benefit of physical activity. The benefits of playing sports are multiple. It leads to balanced mental and physical growth. It teaches life skills like teamwork, leadership and patience and help in learning the importance of hard work, preservice, learning from failure and importance of grasping opportunities. Sports and games can be chosen as a career. It may be a source of gainful employment leading to independence, autonomy and improvement in self-esteem. It also, helps in socializing and forging new social networks which results in assimilation, inclusion and empowerment. However, being a blind often comes with an assumption of being incapable to participate in sports activities. Rather than integrate visually challenged with their sighted peers for sports, they are pulled out and asked to sit on the side line. Society as a whole has a low expectation for people with visual impairment with regard to sports. In view of the above facts, respondents were asked to state whether they participate in sports and games.

It is interesting to find that 75% of the respondents play both outdoor and indoor games. They participated from school level to international level sports events and won prizes. Among 25% respondents, who do not participate in sports activities, most of them are those who got blind recently and, therefore, they find it difficult to adapt themselves to their new environment. As they, from the very beginning, participated in sports as students with normal vision, sudden loss of vision has proved as major impediment to their participation in sports.

Most of the respondents were found to participate in social functions. Some of them like to attend the functions with their families and some with their friends. A family where supportive and encouraging social environment exists, family members usually take their sightless children to different social occasions. In a close conversation with the respondents, it emerged that a few of them love to participate in social functions. But, in a significant number of cases (27%), they did not take part in such gatherings. Their dislike stems largely from four factors: (1) condescending attitude of sighted persons (2) They are made to sit aside (3) They are treated as 'others' or abnormal – someone who need to look after (4) they are treated as burden on hosts as well as their family members. Consequently a sense of negativity overwhelms them - a sense which makes them realise that they are helpless and burden on others. They do not enjoy there and feel that "Oh! If I can only see." In some cases their family members ask them not to attend the social functions as in the case of one respondent (Juli), where her brother asked her not to attend his wedding ceremony due to his firm belief that wedding is an auspicious occasion where disabled people are not supposed to be present. Such observations point towards the need for educating family members of the visually challenged for bringing about attitudinal changes towards visually challenged.

The loss of vision limits participation in outdoor activities because of difficulty in access to way finding information, especially in unfamiliar areas. It may also become difficult for the visually challenged to use public transportation. The inability to travel independently and adjusting themselves with the wider world is one of the most significant handicaps that persons with visual impairments experience. Thus, travelling or merely walking down a crowded street is quite challenging for them. Persons with vision loss have to memorise the exact locations, obstacles and signage to navigate outside. In the present study, therefore, respondents were asked to state whether they visit market places, picnic spots or other public spaces on their own. The responses shows that 93% of the respondents visit market places, picnic spots and other public spaces as and when required with friends or alone. They emphasised that in public spaces they sought to be independent. They desist from becoming burden on others. A few of them stated that there is no need for them to visit outside as all the sundry items and daily requirements are easily available within precincts of the hostels.

While probing about the decision making power of the respondents, the researcher came to know that 76% respondents have decision making power regarding their personal matters. They take their own decisions whether it is of personal matter or academic. They themselves decide where and which course they have to pursue, what kind of job they have to go for, have freedom to select spouse. It is decided by them whether they want to attend any social gatherings and with whom they want to attend such gathering. Some respondents like to attend social gathering with friends, some with family and some do not want to attend the function as they do not feel comfortable over there. Nobody force them to change or modify their decision which shows a remarkable shift in their lives. It shows the journey of dependence to independence. They feel that the changes coming in their life is due to the exposure of educational institution in which they are studying. Some respondents still do not enjoy decision making power, but the numbers of those respondents are less than those who have this kind of power. While 18% sometimes enjoy decision making power independently and sometimes they have to consider the decision of parents or have to convince the parents for their decision. Decision making power, shows their ability, knowledge, awareness, power to influence others and their

empowerment. It became possible because of their education and institutional exposure. They are aware about their rights and duties. They know the pros and cons of any issue and consider it carefully so that they can make a sensible decision. One reason for their decision making power is lack of awareness among their family members with regard to different courses and different social issues.

It is very heartening to note that large majority (94%) of the respondents feel the importance of education in their lives. They have a firm belief that education equips one to meet the challenges of life. As in the case of one respondent namely Raju who belonged to a joint family of landlords. A large number of servants were available to take care of him and to do all his work. The members of his joint family were also there to rely upon but Raju wanted to continue his educational pursuit in order to lead an independent life. To lead a life dependent on others was never acceptable to him as he deeply feels that blind should not get education just for the sake of being recognized as educated people but must make use of education for some practical and productive purposes. Educated person must be aware about their rights and duties, about the facilities available for them and what is more important that they must know how to avail these facilities. One can overcome the hurdles of his or her life with the help of education. Similarly Batra (1981) conducted study on social integration of the blind who were students of colleges, factory workers, self-employed, unemployed and blind employed in various offices. The study observed that with the increase in the educational status, the attitude of both blind and sighted towards blindness became more positive, i.e., it underwent a change from the belief in the Karma theory to an incidence of natural calamity. Awareness among the sighted about the potentialities of the blind increase with their education. Only 1% of the respondents do not feel and accept that education can change their destiny. They believe that no matter how talented they are they will always be identified and treated as disabled. 5% of them have indifferent attitude regarding this issue.

In the present study an attempt was made to understand the perception of the respondents about their relative position as educated visually challenged in comparison to their uneducated counterparts. For this, the respondents were asked to share whether they perceive themselves to be in a better position than their illiterate or uneducated counterparts. 93% of the respondents consider themselves lucky as they have got the opportunities to get educated. They feel that they are in a much better position than uneducated persons, be sighted or blind. They consider themselves privileged people who can read and write, can do many activities themselves and are not dependent on others like their uneducated counterparts. They proudly declare that “the time has gone when disabled were considered as burden on others”. Most of the respondents believe that education plays an important role in reducing many obstacles and barriers for everyone particularly the visually challenged. A very small percentage of these respondents i.e. 3% of the respondents feel that they are not better than an uneducated blind person in any way. They believe that a blind always remains a blind no matter whether he is educated or uneducated. Blind need to take the help of sighted person on occasion such as crossing a road, knowing a bus number, marketing, etc. Remaining 4% respondents have indifferent attitude regarding this issue

Respondents were asked to state the type of change that they observed in their personality after becoming a part of current NGO. In response to that, 93% of the respondents stated that they have observed a positive change in their personality. The new social and cultural milieu have enhanced their level of confidence and obliterated their inferiority complex. They have come to realise that they are not alone who are suffering from visual impairment, but, there are many like them. They now feel it necessary to equip and skill them better to tide over the difficulties that they face. They emphasised the need for getting independent and empowered. Condition of some respondents who suffered from anxiety and aggression, has started to improve. Negative feelings regarding their life and disability have mellowed down. Now, their life is filled with enthusiasm and courage. They feel that they can now live with dignity. Kunal (respondent) goes to his home on his own. With the help of technology he gained confidence in doing his day to day work on his own. He feels that all these changes have

taken place in his personality due to his exposure in an educational institution. He emphasizes the importance of education and family support to make his life bright. The smile on his face is clearly visible when he shares that “Mujhe sirf andhere k bare mai pata tha. Education ne meri zindagi roshni se bhar di” (I know about darkness only. Education has filled my life with brightness”). Remaining 7% respondents do not feel much change in their personality after reaching at present level of education as some of them feel that they were already had a positive outlook towards life and were confident while some of them do not have any hope for their bright future.

94% of the respondents stated that learning of various skills such as mobility, ironing, dining manners, home management skills, etc which are taught to them at institution are really helpful for them in leading a better life. Now they are not dependent on others. They can move freely here and there, can cook food for themselves as well as for others also unlike earlier they were dependent on others. With the exposure of institutional positive environment they have become self dependent which gives them sense of empowerment. They are managing and controlling their lives themselves. Only 6% of them have indifferent attitude towards the issue. In other words, some of the respondents were not quite sure of the benefits of the skills learned or they had not paid any attention to this aspect of their lives.

91% of the respondents feel that remarkable change has come in the attitude of their family members towards them. Although the families of most of them were good to them even earlier but now their family members pose greater faith in their potentials. Now, they believe in their calibre and feel confident and assured that one day they will get success through education and their impairment will not become hurdle in their path. Remaining 9% of the respondents feel no change in their parents’ attitude towards them for different reasons. They support them but not sure about their future as they believe that in this competitive world it is difficult for the able bodied persons to survive their how come differently able will survive with dignity. The parents of these respondents feel that though they are getting education but it is difficult for them to get success in future due to functional limitations as visually challenged people. Some of these respondents feel that their families do not play an important role in their lives and not concerned so much about them. Some of them left their children on the mercy of others and keep very less contact with them.

82% of the total respondents feel that with change in their educational status the attitude of their relatives towards them also changed. These respondents observe positive change in their relatives. Relatives who nurse positive thinking about the visually challenged are now posing greater faith in their talent, calibre and potential. Seeing their progress and achievement they now realise that these visually challenged students will be able to have a secured future. Rather than being burden on others, they would turn out to be productive member of society, who would contribute positively for the betterment of society. Remaining 12% respondents did not witness any change in the attitudes of their relative towards them. They remain more or less the same. These relatives, although assured of their future, are not satisfied with their potentialities. They are assured of their future for the simple reason that both national and state governments have earmarked/reserved 5% seats in educational institutions as well as services for the persons who suffer with disability including visually challenged. Visually challenged persons will, thus, be able to manage gainful employment from the reserved category. They treat it as a dole, a handout not a fruit of hard work. But proportion of these type of people increasingly on the wane. More and more relatives have, now, come to accept the potentialities and talent of the visually challenged. 6% do not witness any change in the attitude of their relatives because they keep very less contact with them, relatives do not play any major role in their life.

Having analysed the changes in the attitude of relatives, we will now turn our attention to an examination of attitude of neighbours towards visually challenged. Out of a total of 153 respondents, 85% feel that with change in the educational status of the respondents, attitude of the neighbours has also witnessed noticeable change. Their support and trust for respondents have grown significantly over a period of time. They now believe in their abilities and lend moral strength to them. In case no. 2, Shimpi told that the neighbours who used to criticize her with humiliating comments like “ Bechari Andhi ladki kaise zindagi guzaregi”? (“Poor blind girl! What will happen to her future life?”) have now started to appreciate her. Her achievements have gradually changed the mindset of neighbours towards her and some of them have started appreciating her by saying that “ye tou kamyab hokar rahegi” (“She will definitely succeed”). Sunil (respondent), shares with a confident smile that “the same neighbours, who used to criticize me during my childhood days, send their children to discuss their problems related to computers and to take help from me”. 7% of the respondents believe that their neighbour still harbour a negative attitude towards them. Their negative attitude can easily be understood from an event as shared by a respondent won a prize in a singing competition. Instead of appreciating and applauding the commendable feat, his neighbour remarked derisively that “Andha gayega nahi tou kya karega”? (what else a blind can do, if not sing a song?). In this way he wanted to slight his personality. This remark, also, shows the deep rooted stereotype in some persons with regards to blindness. Remaining 8% of the respondents stated that their neighbours did not show any significant change either positive or negative because they get very little chance to interact with their neighbours. For them, therefore, neighbours do not play any significant role in their lives. From the above discussion, it is obvious that in majority of the cases attitude of family members, relatives and neighbours with regards to the visually challenged is increasingly changing for the better. People have started to pose more and more faith in their ability, talent, calibre, capability and potentialities. With advancement in their knowledge, skill and capabilities due to their exposure and training in educational institutions, the hitherto closed frontiers are opening up, the barriers that shackled them are gradually losing its grip. They are visible in various arena of life – such as sports, academics, administration, technology, politics, etc.

It is interesting to note that 73% of the respondents consider themselves empowered. To prove themselves as empowered they have their own explanations like in case of Sanju who spent his childhood in a dark room, feels that his exposure to a totally different and positive environment increased his level of confidence remarkably. Now, he has become confident in talking to people, go to market with friends and sometimes alone also, do all his daily work himself, make use of laptop and other electronic gadgets. He plays cricket with the help of sound ball and chess (the large raised black squares make it easy to feel way across the board and each black chess piece has a tactile pin in the top) in his leisure time. Sanju wants to open an NGO for the welfare of visually challenged people so that the precious time of his life which he wasted in the dark room must not be wasted by other people like him. Shimpi one of the respondent who faced lots of criticism from her relatives but her achievements have gradually changed the mindset of neighbours towards her and some of them have started appreciating her. Shimpi moves with the help of sensor stick (smart cane) to sense and avoid hurdles in the pathway, uses talking watch to do work on time, downloads study material in her laptop with the help of talking software, can sense different colours of her dresses with the help of software applications, uses mobile to get updated on social networking sites and talks to people and records the class lecture with the help of angel (gadget used for recording purpose). Shimpi strongly feels the need for education and skill development for everyone especially for visually challenged persons as the main source of their empowerment. Krishna, who faced pitiable comments and attitude of society is now a confident and aware member of society. Now he is aware of all the governmental facilities available for him as a visually challenged person and how to avail them. He wants to create awareness that a blind is not a disabled person rather a differently able person who can lead a normal life but there is a need of proper positive environment to be provided by family members, government

and voluntary associations for the welfare of the blind. Sameerullah, shared that the same people who earlier looked at him with sympathy now appreciate him. Such appreciation gives Sameerullah a reason to feel confident and act as a role model for other visually challenged children. Maya, who faced lots of difficulty in her childhood, now, feels herself empowered as now she is graduate and getting trained to work in call centre by the Blind Relief Association. She is earning 2500 per month as a call centre trainee and expects a higher salary after her training is over and she gets a permanent job. "A good job which I will get through my educational qualification and training at BRA will make me financially independent. I will, then, ask my mother to come and stay with me so that I could take care of her in her old age". Maya shared with great confidence and enthusiasm. Kashish, feels that "sight is not everything. If a person has desire and determination to get success then nothing is impossible". She aspires to go for civil services and wants to run an NGO for educational development of visually challenged in order to make them feel empowered and self dependent. Bheem, feels that exposure, training, knowledge of social skills he is getting at BRA has played a great role in making him feel as a normal and confident person. Now, he considers himself a productive member of society who will definitely do something for the blind in future. 26% respondents, however, have indifferent attitude towards this issue. It can be said that with the joint efforts of families, government, NGOs and visually challenged themselves, they are getting education to lead an independent, empowered and dignified life but the large section of visually challenged person has to go a long way to join the mainstream of society which requires concrete efforts and attitudinal changes at all levels

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that NGO is playing an important role in improving the conditions of visually impaired and making them empowered. It is noted that given the proper opportunities, support and encouragement, disability arising out of visual impairment can be surmounted. What makes it insurmountable is the absence of the right attitude and approach by the sighted towards the sightless. Similarly Bhan (2005) indicated that misconceptions and prejudices regarding the capabilities of the blind in society lower down their self esteem and make the problem more acute. The sighted society should abandon its age-old traditional attitude of viewing visual impairment with compassion, pity and charity and must stop considering visually challenged people as helpless and useless member of society. Khan (1999) in her study on misconceptions about the visually impaired children observed that the misconceptions about visually impaired play a prominent and significant role in placing the child away from the society. Society's reaction to the visually impaired determines his/her adjustment level. In other words, they do not have a different type of personality produced by the lack of vision sense; rather the rejection or pity helps them learning no other skills as they are taught to play a dependent role. Society must make concrete efforts to provide opportunities for education, training and employment to enable the visually challenged to be on their feet. Fullest possible development of the capacities of visually challenged persons and their fullest possible participation and contribution to their families and society will help them to identify and recognize their best selves. It will also promote sense of self worth and empowerment among them. Empowerment of people with disabilities would not only benefit them but would also strengthen society by making use of their talents and would make democracy stronger and more vibrant. Thus, understanding regarding disability issues should move from a biological perspective to collective efforts towards accessibility, inclusion and empowerment.

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