



The Too Dear Braille Finger and Tactile Queen of all Scripts for Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disability: An Empirical Discourse

Dr. Mahabir Prasad Yadav

Asst. Professor,
Department of English, Lakshmibai College
University of Delhi

Abstract : “*Of all the ills and imperfections of humankind, blindness is the most dreaded*”, Frances Koestler, The Unseen Minority. Although I am hence given an endless leeway to make a choice of my own whether to employ Braille or digital technology or both, and although I use both yet I prefer using Braille, “The Queen of all scripts” as it enlightens me and enables me to combat with all odds and the “barriers” in the battle field of life and society and to perceive the divinity, humanity, disability and universe in a better way than any other device could ever do.

Index Term: Leeway, Braille-Finger, Tactile-Queen, Rile Up, Sparsh-Sukh.

Isn't it the people love to discourse about the things of their choice? Any objects, thoughts and experiences of human behaviour, public attitude or any concept formulated and founded on individual or public perception. Yes indeed, they converse and even sometimes it so happens that once they embark upon it, they just go on conversing so endlessly that one finds it so tedious that he or she indispensably says, it is really too much, let us please switch over to something else as it is beating and biting brains.

That is what once happened in a coffee-house near Moolchand Metro Station in Delhi when two of my techy friends and me sipping coffee and eating profusely embarked upon the conversation which continued for so long that it seemed that it would never end comfortably that day.

One of those techy friends cursed the blindness in a fit of exasperations and said, “The blindness is really a damned curse of life and it is rightly stated in bibles that we are doomed and destined to suffer.” To which the other friend added vehemently, “Then call it the curse of doomed and damned blind life.”

One of them quoted Koestler saying loudly, “*Of all the ills and imperfections of humankind, blindness is the most dreaded.*”¹

¹ Koestler, F. A. (1976). The unseen minority: A social history of blindness in the United States. David R. Godine.

The aforesaid negative assertion ignited my thoughts and fuelled my rebellious reactions; and hence, I said, I wouldn't consent with all those flings and fooling and added that may be it is a problem of "identity crisis" of behavioural thinking and social attitude which was indeed argued by Erik Erikson in 1960's.

Those two visually impaired good techies continued debating and arguing about "blindness" as "the most dreaded of all the ills and imperfections of humankind in the universe" for too long till I intervened and said, Koestler's negative assertion as cited afore is rebutted and belied by the power of touch and ability of Braille Finger and invention and evolution of Braille which has been hailed by the academic scholars as "Queen of all scripts."

Which academic scholars hailed Braille as "Queen of all scripts?" The techies yelled at me horrendously as if they would swallow me up instead of gulping their coffee and gobbling victuals lying before them on the table of the restaurant.

"Well, N.K. Jahangira and A.K. Mittal" I simply replied.²

"Let them relax in the abode of God." One of them poured out his exasperation.

"Still very well, they are already doing that." I retorted.

Neither I ever dread my blindness nor anyone else is dreaded by my blindness. But they couldn't concede and rather fumed and fulminated saying, everyone is dreaded by your blindness and that is the reason that wheresoever you went in your social and professional life, you had to combat everywhere for your "reasonable accommodation" the vision and concept of which are though enshrined in The Constitution of India and The Rights of Persons With Disabilities, (RPWD.) Act 2016. To that I added, "well that concept of "reasonable accommodation" is also found in The United Nations Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities which is shortly known as "UNCRPD." and to which several other nations of the world, at least 164 till date including India are signatories to this Convention.

In the back and forth of that open and robust them versus me discourse, those techies reverted back to the inception point of the conversation, where it had begun: "Braille, blindness, dreaded, ills and imperfections" Etc. to which I added some more spices saying:

Dr. Henry Kissinger said, "The world is an imperfect place."³

And if "the world" itself is "an imperfect place," why is only blindness "most dreaded" "of all the ills and imperfections?"

Ultimately the whole world is imperfect.

What is perfect in the whole world?

Braille has enabled and empowered the persons with visual disability, (PWVDS.).

² Mittal, A. K., & Mittal, S. R. (2012). *Drishtibadha-Shikshan*. AICB.

³ The Sunday Times. (2023, December 10). *What is left of human rights*.

One of those techies vehemently opposed me and said, “Not (PWVDS.), better call it (PWBS.), or persons with blindness and just try to understand that actually the assistive technologies have enabled and empowered us not the Braille in which the Braille printed books are so cumbersome, so lengthy and bulky that the moment one looks at them, he or she is as dreaded and awed by them as one is dreaded with your blindness the moment he or she looks at your face with your eyes sunken in their sockets.”

“Well, that is just a matter of an individual perception to look at the things, places and persons as they are in their own ways of thinking and evaluations.

Well, so far as in my view, Braille, the tactile “queen of all scripts” and the assistive technologies are complementary to each other for the education, employment and social rehabilitation of persons with visual disability or blindness so that they are enabled to fully and effectively participate in the mainstream of the nation and society and eliminate the “barriers” on their pathways of success and “reasonable accommodation,” and live a “barrier-free” life of dignity, autonomy and self-esteem of their own.

Well, that’s the way I think my friends, I resumed ahead.

They vehemently disputed to farther that conversation saying, “You think and say and say and think, but say just in one word, Braille or technology?”

I said, “both.”

Although I am hence given an endless leeway to make a choice of my own whether to employ Braille or digital technology or both, and although I use both yet I prefer using Braille, “The Queen of all scripts” as it enlightens me and enables me to combat with all odds and the “barriers” in the battle field of life and society and to perceive the divinity, humanity, disability and universe in a better way than any other device could ever do. No disability is ever a curse. Not even the blindness. Blindness or any other disability for that matter is never inauspicious. Had it been inauspicious, Lord Shiva would not have invited the blind, the maimed, shrivelled, lame, footless, handless, frail, fragile and sightless in his wedding that we explore while reading *Shriramcharitmanas* of Shrimadgoswami Tulsidas which is the most revered and venerable of all Indian scriptures in North India. We clearly find them participating in the wedding procession and party of Lord Shiva and the divine Mother Mata Parwati.

Even we perceive that the divinity itself assumes the form of various forms of disabilities and operates through the universe footlessly, handlessly, sightlessly, without limbs and nostrils and even sometimes also assumes the various forms of invisible disabilities.

Disablization of divinity and divinization of disability are the most subtle and unique concept and ideas perceived in the readings and contemplations of *Shriramcharitmanas* of Shrimadgoswami Tulsidas in the tactile “Queen of all scripts” known as Braille with the incantative power of touch and unique ability endowed to the too dear Braille Finger⁴.

⁴ Tulsidas. (2011). *Ramcharitmanas* (H. Shastri, Trans.). Gita Press.

The onus of establishing the objective and justifying the significance of Braille is cast upon us all and hence, it depends on how far we strive ahead for its expansion and enhancement as far as the too dear Braille Finger is alive, safe and secured.

That is where we somehow restrained that conversation which had arrived at its pinnacle, so much so that it seemed it would never end, but, it was somehow with some difficulty summed up and we parted our ways by different metro trains.

As escorted by a Metro-Station attendant called the Housekeeper, I boarded the heavily crowded Metro-Train with passengers jolting and jostling against each other. As I occupied a seat vacated for me being constantly announced by the synthesized voice of the computer screen reader, “Please vacate the seats for Senior citizens, women and Divyang-Jans.”

The Expression “Divyang-Jan” reverberated in my brain. In fact, let me say that it almost started munching my mind, so much so that I started thinking as to which part of my body is divine?

While I am not treated as human being in the society because of my visual disability, How can I be divine being or divine-bodied?

Why has Hon’ble Supreme Court not taken care of “Divyang” while stating and directing not to use “loony,” “blind,” “lame” or “retarded” in the *Handbook Concerning Persons With Disabilities* which was compassionately released for protecting the honour and dignity of the disabled persons.

That profound thinking made me drowsy and slowly and gradually I waded and lapsed into contemplation of all the aforesaid, and in contemplation itself reverted back to thinking of Braille and my too dear Braille finger.

I wouldn’t let the shark of that conversation with those techies with visual disability chew or munch the brains of the esteemed readers as I would very briefly discourse about a little but very precious thing of my choice, Ah! How precious! I must say from the very core or the bottom of my heart and soul that it is too dear to me and hence, I call it my too dear braille finger, both in the sense of it being precious as well as ardently loving to me. The blind or the visually impaired techies who do not require or like reading braille are supplicated not to go in a huff and not at any cost feel riled up.

Anyway, while I was lost in profound contemplation, and as I felt, it all goes herein as under:

Whatever yours is significant, mine is too.

Whatever you need, I may need too.

You may have something which I can’t see, I too may have something which you can’t see. It is just a question of seeing and not seeing. Several times it also happens that even you have something and yet you can’t see, you do have that thing but still you can’t see it, yes you can’t see your very own thing that you do have! Just think of it and you will find it yourself, I am not bothered; after all why should I?

You see and then you touch, I touch and then I see; that's the difference, and that is we are differently abled. The trouble is that only I am called differently abled, not you, though you are differently abled too. In fact and indeed, each one is different in his or her own ways and the ways of each one's being abled are also very different, then why am I only called differently abled and not you? Well that question always agitates my mind; but, here I leave it aside for latter discourse sometimes in future.

Our fingers are very important, though many of us conduct and manage our life without fingers.

Little Finger, Ring Finger, Middle Finger, Forefinger and the Thumb, but aah, I shouldn't talk of Thumb lest some Dronacharya chops it off and takes away from some Eklavya who has to manage in the battle of life without it.

Well enough, you have heard and seen of all the above fingers. But, what about the Braille Finger? It is just one of the above fingers. Well, you may substitute it with the Forefinger.

I acquired and evolved it in Lucknow in 1976 when I learned to read Braille. Its acquisition and evolution was so sudden that I was struck with wonders. As I was able to read and write within a week or two; and that is why, I love it so dearly.

Ever-since then, my Braille Finger has helped me tremendously in countless ways and indeed, brought me a very unique happiness of life.

But, while working in kitchen, I mean washing, mopping, cooking or making tea or coffee, telling the beads of rosary in prayers, or for that matter lighting incense sticks while in my prayers, I am very often struck with awe lest my Braille Finger be burnt depriving me of my tactile perception.

Many times, my friends and companions in life, I mean short and lifelong, have repeatedly said, "hey, your tactual ability is so pleasant, your tactile powers are so unique that were never felt elsewhere!"

To which I simply laughed away and replied, "it is just because of my reading Braille with my Braille Finger which is really very dear to me."

Very often, I have felt as if I am nothing without Braille, nor I am anything without my Braille Finger.

Many times, I have felt that whatever God and my divine Muse Mother Sharda fetch and render to me, fetch and render through Braille and Braille Finger only.

Yes indeed, our Braille Finger has unique power of touch.

Our Braille Finger ought to remain safe, sound and secure.

Not only that it enables us to perceive the world through Braille, but it brings an immense and unique delight too!

If anyone desires to test, permit me to touch and you will feel the blissful pleasure of being touched, and I am sure and certain that you would give it the name or title Sparshsukh Of The Too Dear Braille Finger!

REFERENCES:

1. Koestler, F. A. (1976). *The unseen minority: A social history of blindness in the United States*. AFB Press.
2. Correspondent. (2023, December 10). What is left of human rights. *The Sunday Times*.
3. All India Confederation of the Blind. (2004). *Shikshak-prashikshan lekh-mala*. AICB.
4. Mittal, A. K., & Mittal, S. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Drishtibadha-shikshan*. AICB.
5. Tulsidas, G. (2067 Samvat). *Shriramcharitmanas*. Gita Press.
6. Government of India. (2016). *The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016*. Government of India.
7. United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*. United Nations.
8. Sharan Giriraj, *Vikalang vibhootiyon kee jeewan gathayen*: Prabhat Prakashan Delhi, 2010.
9. Discipleship Centre. (n.d.). *Saint Jerome*. New Delhi: Discipleship Centre.
10. Farrell, R. (1956). *The Pamphlet*. NIVH.
11. Supreme Court of India. (n.d.). *Handbook concerning persons with disabilities*. Supreme Court of India.