CHAPTER 2

CHANGING SCENARIO OF THE
POLICY PERSPECTIVES FOR THE
VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN SOUTH AFRICA AND INDIA: A
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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2.0 A Historical Analysis of the Changing Policies for the Visually Impaired

This chapter presents a brief historical account to find out how far the policies for the visually impaired have been affected by the changes in the history which is not just some historical events but it is also a chronological understanding of the policies of the society which give birth to such events. Hence, there is a dialectical relationship between the policies of the society and the happenings in the given period. What comes first is a debatable question. As no serious attempt has been made to analyse the history of the policies for the visually impaired countrywise, the analysis given in this chapter will be of a generalistic nature and an attempt will be made to see how far these developments have some influence on South Africa and India. Moreover, in the latter part of the history, despite the specific needs of the visually impaired, the policies used to be framed for the physically challenged in general, one is forced to make an analysis of such policy and try to find how much space is given to the visually impaired in it. An attempt will also be made to find out how the interest of the particular segment suffers in the name of general policies.

2.1 Pre-Industrial Era and the Policies for the Visually Impaired

It was an era when people were dependent, in most of the cases, on manual labour and had a sense of involvement in whatever they used to produce. This period was also known for its community life in which there was not only an interdependence on each other but there was also a due regard to the skilled labour. The traditional understandings of the then society used to treat every member as the responsibility of the community in general. It had two effects on the growth of the individual: on the one hand, it made a person confident that irrespective of anything, his life was secured but, on the other hand, it made a person inactive due to such security of life.
Such inactive segment of the society used to live on the mercy of the community in general. This protectionistic trend reduced them to live in an asylum.

In most of the cases, the physically challenged fell in such segment of the society. As within the physically challenged people, the status of the visually impaired is treated critical due to the preconceived notions about their potence and due to a lot of prejudices against them, their dependence automatically enhanced on the community in general under the given circumstances. Though the detailed description about the attitude of the society towards the visually impaired be made in some other section, it is sufficient to mention that apart from the absence of the support base in terms of aids and appliances for the visually impaired, it is the attitude of the society towards them which becomes the hindrance in their acceptance as a useful segment of the society. The pre-industrial era was no exception to this situation. Moreover, it was the period when there was no development of the aids and appliances for the physically challenged in general and the visually challenged in particular, one can imagine their state of affairs. However, if an attempt is made to trace the history of any concern shown by the society to the visually impaired, some descriptions can be found about the education of the visually impaired even during the period of the Mesopotamian Civilisation. It was observed thus: "... there are records to show that letters were carved on clay to educate blind children in Mesopotamia almost 3,300 years ago."

This period can also be analysed from the viewpoint of the history of the political thought as there is a dialectical relationship between the political thought and the prevalent policies of the state. Hence, it is pertinent to have a look at the history of the political thought in juxtaposition with the policies of the state regarding the disability in general.

The history of the political thought is traced from the Platonic age. It is this age about which it was commented that "there was no difference between the state and

society.”

It was the period when the thinkers started differentiating between man and the animal by saying that man is a social animal and “he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or God.” Emphasising on the active role in the society, it is said that “We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character.” At the same time, it was the period in which ten percent of the society is treated as citizens and others are treated as slaves. It was the period which was known for its two major city-states known as Sparta and Athens which were known for its two exclusive philosophies about educating their citizens. The former was stressing on the physical education whereas the latter on the intellectual education.

In fact, this was a paradoxical period in which it was thought that the “sweat and intellect cannot go together”. This period was known as one of the brutal periods in which ten percent population was exploiting the 90% population. Obviously, during this period, the policies were framed by the ten percent of the society and it was called as a democratic system.

As was stated that in Sparta, one of the Greek city-state, there was a convention of leaving the child outside the home after his birth and if child survived, he was treated as brave. This convention implies that the weaker child was supposed to be either killed or left on the nature for its survival. So was the case with the physically challenged which included the visual impairment. It is thus described that “There was a time in Greek and Roman eras when children with disabilities were exposed to the elements and were permitted to die.” Plato supported the killing of the physically challenged children on the basis of this convention. Hence, obviously, the same

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4 A funeral speech by Periclese, cited in Thucydides, Chapter VI, *The History of Peloponnesian war*.
5 Jain, M.P., *op. cit*.
6 Advani, Lal and Chadda, Anupriya, *op. cit.*, p.3.
would have applied in the case of the visually challenged child. It was stated that the literary personality like Homer, Theresa and Phenox opposed this killing on the ground of humanity. In its practical sense, this age was supporting the maxim of ‘the survival of the fittest’.

The medieval period witnessed the emergence of Christianity, a religion which has been supporting moanism. This was the period when the king was treated as the representative of the god and this philosophy was supported by Cicero and Thomas Aquinas. It was the period when the king was treated as the messenger of the god and his functions were governed by the churches. If it is wished to find out the position of the physically challenged in general and the visually impaired in particular, one has to see the religious books and understand what is being said in it about them.

Miracle is the part of any religion and that is also supposed to be depended on the faith of the god. The usual adjective attached to such type of the faith was ‘blind’, the word which is originally being used for those who have no sight. In fact, this faith was nothing but to follow without any argument. Such faith was called ‘the blind faith’. It is said that “It is the religion which played a negative role in our development. Hence, it is against us.”

It is pertinent here to understand how religious people used to find the cause of anyone’s visual impairment or other physical challenges. The oldest scriptures, which are oft quoted, are the Vedas. In the case of Yajurveda, the treatment for the visual impairment is suggested by praying the Sun, the god of brightness and one can find even today, the visually impaired people uttering: “Om Hansaay Namah”. It was a typical personification of sun and it was hoped if it was pleased, it would give you some share of his brightness and you will get your sight. Ironically, it was stated that “In all countries where there is intense sunlight, great heat, and much dust, a high

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8 Ibid., p.9.
incidence of blindness will usually be found.”⁹ It can be saved if “the population is sufficiently advanced and intelligent to take the necessary precaution. ... Blindness is for the most part preventable when the people are sufficiently educated to adopt simple precautions and avail themselves of medical advice even then this involves some trouble and expense.”¹⁰

Not only this, all the religious scriptures are full of such stories which cure miraculously the visually impaired and give the direction of following one or the other faith. In this regard, one can find a lot of references in the Old Testament and the New Testament. As is stated:

“I was eyes to the blind, and feet were I to the lame.”¹¹

The god about which there is a concept of all creators and Almighty, one cannot make better expression than this. The same is depicted to be applied in the case of curing the visual impairment. It is stated thus:

“The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them That is bowed down: the LORDloveth the righteous:
The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless And widow.”¹²

Such writers were not satisfied by mere mentioning of such role of the God. They went to the extent of narrating such miraculous stories reference of which can be found, with slight changes here and there not less than half a dozen times in The New Testament. It is not suggested here to make the similar repetitive narrations, however, it is pertinent here to cite one example, maybe pious to any religious man but from any stretch of logic, the incidence seemed to be ridiculous. In a poetic form, it is stated thus:

¹⁰ ibid.
¹¹ The Old Testament, 29:15.
...And they bring a blind man unto him, and
Besought him to touch him.
And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the
Town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he
Asked him if he saw ought.
And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.
After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him
Look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.\textsuperscript{13}

The reference of this story has purposely been made as this is a unique story of its kind because in this, not only it is described that a visually impaired person is cured by the Christ but also the way he is cured needs an assessment. To cure him, it is stated that he spits on his eyes, thereby, it is tried to explain that the spit of the Christ is so powerful that it may set the process of curing and when Christ comes to know that the person is not fully cured, he touches him with his merciful hands. It is generally understood that even the religious stories are supposed to give some message. But the message of this story forces to raise questions answers of which may be debatable.

This does not mean that nothing has been stated in this book regarding the physically challenged in general and the visually challenged in particular which is not ethical. Ironically, in fact it is the religious books and their concept of Service which has initiated the welfare work in this field. This aspect will be touched in the separate section, however, it will be an injustice with the religion and the religious texts, if its ethical aspect left untouched despite the fact that this ethics is purely in the name of God and, for a believer in rebirth, it is done just to get some reward in the next birth.

On the behaviour with such people, it is stated thus:

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{The New Testament}, 8:23-25.
"Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD." 14

Some such similar attitude is found in an other religious book which says:

"Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see. Deaf, dumb and blind, they will not return (to the path)." 15

Such directions become pertinent in a society wherein it was taught that the impairment is nothing but the punishment of some superpower due to some misdeeds. Such teachings and preaching may lead anyone to think that if it is a punishment, why one should help them and, therefore, they should be left on their own faith. But such preaching and teachings, as they used to be the commands during that period, play a conspicuous role in initiating the welfare work. The writer of The Old Testament went to the extent of saying that there should be security and shelter of the physically challenged in general and the visually impaired in particular in the churches. Speaking over the over-protectionist and segregational approach of a Baptist church, it was stated that “There is a Sunday School class for the blind, the deaf, the crippled, and the mentally retarded. They also have a separate area in church for the blind, deaf, etc. For example, the blind have a special section where they sit which is clearly marked and no one else is allowed to sit there. Even in the eyes of religion we are second-class citizens. Does this mean that the blind will be placed in a special area before the judgment seat?" 16

Perhaps some such suggestions became the starting point of providing the shelter to the then disabled persons and that was the minutest symbol of the welfare work-may it is in the name of God. That is why, it is not suggested to discard the role of the religion outrightly but one can say that the then affirmative role, with the passage of the time, is viewed as a negative role by the rationalists as it put hindrance on one’s progress and make him fatalist.


During the 4th century, an asylum for the blind was opened by St. Basil in Capadocia in 369. This was perhaps the first written example of the beginning of some institution for the visually impaired. Of course, this was not a part of the state policy but it was due to the influence of the institutionalized work of the religion. Commenting upon this, it is said, “The earliest known institutions for the blind were due to the development of charitable work by the early Christian church and took the forms of refuge. Records exist of the foundation of such homes as far back as the fourth century, when St. Basil established one at Caesarea in Cappadocia.”

During the medieval period, the references are found of opening asylums for the war-blinded people such as Hospic des Quinz Vingt in Paris founded by Louis IX about 1260. Of course, this was an attempt by a king with the help of some religious bodies to make a start with opening some space to provide shelter to the war blinded. In fact, war has played the conspicuous role in opening different institutions not only for the visually challenged but also for other physically challenged. While dealing with the history of the institutions, one will find ample references of the institutions opened due to the war as, apart from the death toll, war causes physical injuries and any leader will feel pride in giving shelter to this segment of the society to show his allegiance for their patriotic sacrifice.

This commitment is not one-sided. The description is found in the Bohemian history of the 15th century when a blind patriotic military genius played a conspicuous role to save his country from the tyrants. His name was John de Turcznow and was popularly known as Zisca (meaning one-eyed person) who became totally blind during the war as his other eye was hit by the arrow of the opponent army but he continued to serve as general to save his country. After his blindness, he was dissuaded by his friends not to join the army, but he turned down their proposal by saying that “I have yet to shed my blood for the liberties of Bohemia. She is enslaved; her sons are deprived of

17 Report On the Blindness in India, op. cit., p.6.
18 Cited in Report on The Blindness in India, op. cit., p.6.
their natural rights, and are the victims of a system of spiritual tyranny as degrading
to the character of man as it is destructive of every more principle; therefore, Bohemia must and shall be free." 19 His bravery was expressed thus:

"On the 11th of January, 1422, the two armies met on a large plain. ... Zisca appeared in the centre of his front line [accompanied] by a horseman on each side, armed with a poleax. His troops, having sung a hymn, ... drew their swords and waited for the signal. Zisca stood not long in view of the enemy, and when his officers had informed him that the ranks were well closed, waved his sabre over his head, which was the signal of battle, and never was there an onset more mighty and irresistible. As dash a thousand waves against the rock-bound shore, so Zisca rolled his steel-fronted legions upon the foe. The imperial infantry hardly made a stand, and in the space of a few minutes they were disordered beyond the possibility of being rallied. The cavalry made a desperate effort to maintain the field, but finding themselves unsupported, wheeled round and fled ... toward ... Moravia ..." 20 He was offered the crown of the country but he refused it by saying that "While you find me of service to your designs, you may freely command both my counsels and my sword, but I will never accept any established authority; on the contrary, my most earnest advice to you is, when the perverseness of your enemies allows you peace, to trust yourselves no longer in the hands of kings, but to form yourselves into a republic, which species of government only can secure your liberties." 21

One can say that this is an extraordinary case. But the reality lays in this fact that even this historical fact, May it be extraordinary, was brought into light by two blind historians. More so, histories are written about the kings, brave soldiers so on and so forth and in most of the cases, they are specially being referred due to their extraordinary achievements. Not only this, his commitment becomes more

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20 Artman, William, Beauties and Achievements of the Blind, (Auburn: Published for the Author, 1890), P.267.
21 Wilson, James, op. cit., p.115.
revealing and progressive when he suggested developing a republic system for their country.

The period after sixteenth century tells the story of the physically challenged people from different countries who played, may be through their individual attempts, a conspicuous role in drawing the attention of the society in general and the political systems in particular to think in terms of developing some policies for this segment of the society. But, in Most of the cases, it seems that the initiative is made by the visually impaired by them. That is why, this period was known as the period of self-emancipation. Though the description of this period is just the description of the endeavours of some visually impaired individuals, but without making their reference, the judicious historical description of this era will remain unfinished.

During 17th century, a personality was found with the name of Nicholas Sanderson, a famous mathematician, who was born in 1682 and achieved the post of a professor in Cambridge University. He became visually impaired due to the small pox. He was a Britisher and developed a special equipment for the visually impaired to solve the geometrical questions. An honorary degree was given to him by the then queen of England. At that time he was just 30 years of age and he worked on this post till his death. He was made fellow in Royal Society in 1719. He was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by George II in 1728. He was the stimulator of the education for the visually impaired during the 18th century in Europe. He was died in 1739.

The 18th century witnessed the achievement of a visually challenged person with name of John Metcalf who was an also a Britisher and was born in 1717. He was a civil engineer and his expertise was related to the construction of roads and bridges. He was died in 1810.
This period also witnessed the role of the personalities like Thomas Black Lock, the Minister of Scotland (1712-1791), Fransova Huber (1750-1831), Maria Theressa Van Paradis (1759-1824) etc.

The period of ‘self-emancipation’ covers both the pre-industrial period and the industrial period. So the personalities mentioned above were the figures which were active during the dying era of the pre-industry.

If this period is analysed from the viewpoint of South Africa and India, there is no chronological analysis found in South Africa as even in their literature, one finds hardly any example of the visually impaired as a part of their story, whatever little description is found is relating to the 19th century onwards. It seems that till that period, the visually challenged people might be living on the mercy of the tribe as in their tribal practices the visual impairment or any other kind of physical impairment was treated as the result of the sin of their forefathers.

There are two exclusive views about India. One believes that it was a great civilization and had retained its greatness by keeping its ideals even for the physically challenged. That is why, it is said that “It has been a part of India's cultural heritage to help the poor and the needy even at a great personal sacrifice. The responsibility of assisting the individual in need was shared by the community and the rulers. Devotion and service towards one's fellowmen, love for charity and brotherhood existed even in the feudal times. In keeping with this tradition, every possible protection was given to the physically handicapped by the society.”

One can find examples in the scriptures and epics of India. According to Bhagwat Gita, “Charity is valid only if it takes into account Desha (place), Kala (time) and Patra (recipient). The forms of the charity were Artha (money), Vidya (education) and Abhaya (courage). Religious institutions like temples, dharmashalas and maths

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became the centres of social service. They provided shelter and free kitchens to the poor. Thus, religion emphasised the values of charity, philanthropy and mutual help.  

Commenting upon the behaviour with the physically challenged in India during the contemporary period of the Greek civilisation, it is stated that “In India we do not find any tangible instances of the inhuman practice of exposure and destruction, which characterized the primitive attitude towards the disabled.”

A foreign writer has stated that, "In ancient India the physically deformed children were cast into the Ganges." Refuting to this statement, it is said that “Nowhere in the recorded history of India do we find any evidence to prove that this was a general practice. On the contrary, a reference to Mahabharata (an Indian epic) shows that the physically challenged were then treated with sympathy.”

In a story of Mahabharata, Narada (a sage in Hindu mythology) interrogates Yudhishthira (a principal character in the epic), "Do you treat as father, your subjects who are afflicted with blindness, dumbness, lameness, deformity, friendlessness and those who have renounced the world?"

It is said that during that period, the king was supposed to be the protector and was expected to provide for the war disabled and their dependents, for Narada again puts a question to the eldest Of the five Pandavas (five brave brothers of the epic Mahabharata): "Do you maintain the women of those who died for you on the battle field? And do you also maintain those who are wounded on the battlefield while fighting for you?" Likewise the laws of Baudhayana (an author of Hindu scriptures) enjoined - "Granting food, clothing and shelter, they (kings) shall support those who

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24 Mani, Rama D., *OP. CIT.*, p.4


26 Mani, Rama D., *op. cit.*, p.4

27 *Mahabharata*, II, 5 p.125

28 Cited in Mani, Rama D., *op. cit.*
are incapable of transacting legal business viz., the blind, idiots, those immersed in vice, the incurably diseased, those who neglect their duties and occupations, and so on." Some references are made about the Vedic period and a glorious picture is depicted by uttering the names of some of the visually impaired Rishis or even about AshtaVakra whose eight organs were said to be impaired. On the basis of the respect which he got though his endeavours can make anyone to argue that if a physically challenged could get respect even in that age, there must be something positive in the attitude of the then people of India.

Contrary to this, the way physically challenged remained an object to be looked down upon also demands to find the bridge between these two extreme positions.

But sometimes, it becomes unbelievable when one finds that for so many centuries, no reference is made to the visually impaired except the reference of a poet known as Soordas. The epic example of Dhritrashtra can be a typical example of the ancient period. He, despite being shown so powerful, was shown as a poor fellow who fails to convince even his son to adopt a particular way and who has to depend on the mercy of others.

Hence, it can be said that in both the countries, there is no extraordinary trend which can be worth mentioning about the visually challenged people, whatever little is found was the result of some individuals may it be Dhritrashtra of Mahabharata, Soordas, the poet of the medieval period or Vrijanand of the 19th century in India. The concerted efforts which are witnessed in both the countries, it is only due to the influence of the development taking place mainly in Europe. It is due to the fact that majority of the developments in the field of the betterment for the visually challenged were made in the 18th or 19th century and most of the countries have been benefited by those developments.

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29 ibid.
30 For details, see, Mahamandleshwar Shri Swami Gangeshwar Nandji, *Vedopdesha Chandrika*, pp. 58-84
2.2 New Inventions and the Policies for the Visually Impaired

As industrial revolution is known for its new inventions in terms of artificial hands and artificial legs, this section will cover how these new inventions had opened new vistas for the visually impaired in particular and the physically impaired in general. During this period, some of the major revolutions, like Glorious revolution, French revolution, took place, hence, an attempt will be made to find out the impact of these revolutions on the new dimensions of the policies and programmes for the visually impaired. In the field of visual impairment, a revolution took place by the invention of Braille. An analysis will be made how this invention made a topsy turvey in the life of the visually impaired and which were the agencies which became active in the production of the literature for them and why were they interested in it. An analysis will be made about the kind of literature produced for this segment and some conclusions will be drawn therefrom about the intentions of these interested groups.

The 17th century is known for the invention of printing press and gun powder together. Perhaps, this is the starting point when, due to inability to use to read such material, intellect of the visually impaired came in the sphere of doubt. In fact, this doubt also started from the period when the script was invented. But, as during that period, the script, (manuscript), was the wealth of the people who could be counted on the fingers. But the invention of the press brought the written material in the common hands and, hence, the importance of remembering was reduced. Prior to the invention of the script, the base of the knowledge was listening and remembering because of which there was very little scope to question the intellect of a visually challenged.

18th century witnessed the French revolution which was famous for equality and democracy. Over the development in the field of the physically challenged, it is described thus:
“The ferment of the French Revolution gave a special stimulus to the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity for everyone. Great thinkers like Thoreau had a profound influence on initiating the process of special education though not directly. During the two decades preceding the French Revolution Father D’ Lepee developed a manual alphabet for the deaf. At about the same time, Germany was developing a system of lip-reading. In 1784, Valentine Hauy established the first school for the blind in Paris.” It was known as Institute for the Blind Youth. In fact, some such events like opening the schools or declaring the policies in favour of the visually challenged and the revolutions and movements occurring at the same time stimulates some people to think that there are some linkages between these two happenings. The protagonists in this field had developed some such theories to prove this. This can be argued both ways. One may call it an accidental and the other may call it a logical correlation in terms of ‘cause and effect relationship.’ However, if the equality and liberty were the major causes for such revolutions, it is quite obvious that the same should apply for the visually impaired which is, whether it is cared or not, a segment of the society which was supposed to be benefited. Obviously, the policy-makers were bound to speak, though not exclusively, about this group. If it is so, the claim of relationship between revolutions and the programmes for the physically challenged in general and visually challenged in particular, seems to be logical. 31

Francua Lesruva, the only student of the Abovementioned School, was of the opinion that the blind should be taught Music, some professions and Occupational therapy. They made some alphabets from wood. Perhaps, it was the first time when the importance of the touch—a sense which is at its peak in the knuckle of the fingers—was recognised. For such alphabets, one has to cut the wood in the form of the alphabets usually used for the accepted scripts for the sighted.

Knowing the alphabet was not the sole point of the satisfaction. Hence, embossed maps were also made. These maps could be felt by touch and through the two-dimensions, the attempt was made to impart knowledge to the visually impaired.

This was time when even the representatives of the visually impaired people had started realising that there would be a limit to remember something and there would be some other methods to keep records rather than cramming. Apart from knowing the names of the things, one of the essential parts of the education is the clarification of the concepts. For this clarification, description is needed. To avoid the repetitiveness of the description and to avoid the time and again beginning from a, b, c, it is necessary to keep the record of the past deeds. This necessitated developing a reading method convenient and suitable to the needs of the visually impaired. It is this for which inventions were needed.

As has already been mentioned that during the 17th century, there was a mathematician in Great Britain and a reference was also made about the development of some mathematical equipments, reformed mathematical strip was made by Sanderson. He also developed embossed alphabets through the help of the allpins on a coach. It was a placing of the allpins and the resultant shapes which helped the visually impaired to understand the alphabets.

Inspiring from this school, during the lifetime of Hauy, there were about 20 schools in Europe. In 1799, this school was closed by Napoleon by stating that these schools were imparting insufficient education. Later on, it was reopened.

This activity, the activity of opening schools was not remained confined to France. A school was opened in Liverpool in England by Edward Rusten. It was just a training centre providing training in handicraft and other vocational fields. As most of the students were adults, this school opened a new vista for those who became visually impaired at the later age including the visual impairment due to the accidents. A
school was also opened in Edinburough by Thomas Blacklock with the assistance of David Miller.

Valentine Hauy opened a school in Russia despite the claim by the then Tsar that there were no blind in his country. Another school was opened by this personality near Berlin in 1806. The opening of such a school in Russia showed the importance of the individual efforts in this field.

During the dying years of 18th century, a school for the visually impaired was opened history of which was described as “In 1791, the first institution of the kind in England was established in Liverpool by Edward Rushton, who had lost his own sight during a voyage tending a cargo of Negro slaves who were stricken with malignant ophthalmia.” Following this, Blind Asylum was established in Edinburough.

A school for the visually challenged was opened in Austria by John Wilhem Clean in 1804. It became famous for writing books for the teachers of the blind. This was treated the first book relating to the education for the blind students. Valentine Hauy is known as Father of the Education for the Blind because of the fact that during his lifetime numerous schools were opened in Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Italy etc. 

John D. Fisher got an asylum opened by getting a legislation of this effect passed due to the influence of his experiences of France. In real sense, HE opened a school in 1829. In 1839, a land was donated by Colonel Perkins for this school because of which this institute got the name of Perkins Institute Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind and even today it is known as Perkins school for the blind. It is this Perkins School for the Blind which grew into a research centre and produced a lot of equipments for the visually challenged peoples. In 1832, another school was opened by Dr. J.D. Russ with the name of New York Institute for the Blind.

32 ibid., p.8.
33 Ritchie, J.M., Concerning the Blind p.38.
In Asia, the opening of the schools for the visually impaired started very late. In this regard, the beginning was made by Japan. With the support of the Japan government in the decade of 1870 a school for them was opened. In Kyoto, in 1878, the visually challenged were also included in a school which was previously being run for the deaf and mute. With the support of the government, Model school for blind and mute was opened in 1877 in Osaka. A society had opened a school for the visually challenged in 1880 in Tokyo. This Society for the Blind came in to existence in 1875. In 1885, the school was brought under the government control. Now it is known as Tokyo Government School for the blind. In 1899, a section was opened for the deaf and this institute is still in working condition.

This process is continuing till date despite the fact that there is a change in the trend of the education which is favouring the trend of inclusive or integrated school for the visually impaired under the plea that they are also supposed to get the family atmosphere.

However, over this historical development, a picturesque comment is made thus, “The 160 years which has passed since Valentine Hauy started that small school in Paris with its solitary pupil, cover what has been a remarkable evolution, in the status of the blind people-the change from the day when they lived in beggary, ignorance and misery, to the point where in modern countries, every blind person is guaranteed a signified existence and where all of normal intelligence and health can take up remunerative and useful occupation, as well as having full range of literary, musical and other social interests to give them a full and happy life. They have become confident, self-respecting member of the community, of which they feel themselves a part and no longer useless encumbrances.”

34 Report On Blindness In India, op. cit., p.8.
Without touching upon the history of Braille, one cannot make justice with this section. Hence, an attempt is made here to make a brief sketch of the history of Braille.

There are 3 Parts of the history of Braille: Pre-Braille, Braille and the Recognition of the Braille.

Pre-Braille: Many scripts were prevalent during this period such as String Script which was Prevalent in Peru of South America. St. Mark of Scotland wrote through this medium a religious book. Dumas, a French musician uses to write by using the pieces of leather, cork or iron pieces in a twain. Dr. Andrick Diago, a citizen of Columbia in South America developed a script on the basis of Morse code. It was named as Cardilery. It had one knot for dot and two knots for dash.

Hauy started writing alphabets like roman script which was known as Hoy types alphabets. It brought some books. Two tactile scripts were developed. These were known as Line type and Arbitrary. Line type was a recognised script whereas the arbitrary was not recognised. Braille was one of its forms. There was another category of script which was known as Elliston type comprising only big letters by Edmond Fry. He got gold medal for this. James Gall developed in 1832 a tactile script based on the ordinary script. The angular form was given to the Roman script and he established a press in 1888 to spread it. There was another type of script which was known as Moon type. It came in 19th Century. It is still in practice in some of the areas. This script was developed by Dr. William Moon who took advantage from both line type and arbitrary scripts. It was helpful for the later aged blind. The first book in this script was published in 1847. He established Moon Society. The volunteers were sent to the residences of the blind clients for learning this script and, in a way, it was the beginning of the Home bound Programme. That is why, he was known as the Father of this programme. Later on, due to the recording services for the visually challenged, this script has lost its importance.
**Braille:** The first Braille type script was developed by Charles Barbarian. It was comprised of 14 Dots. Such script was being used by the military people during the night to send the secret messages. It was shown in the school of Louis Braille and he had introduced it to his students. Later on, due to the limitations of touch and knuckles, it was reduced into six dots. The Principal of the School, Mr. Pioneer permitted to use this script for the education in 1839. Due to the sudden demise of the Principal of the school, there was a gap. But 1843 was the year which produced a book with the name of A Brief History of France by Louis Braille. It was a first book of its own kind in this script. It paved the way for reading, writing and correspondence. Louis Braille died in 1852, but the Braille was not recognised during his lifetime because there were variety of scripts and presses.

First Braille press was established in 1868 by Thomas R. Armitage (a visually impaired Britisher) First International Conference for the teachers of the Blind was organised in Vienna in 1873. In 1882, he reported that except some of the institutions of the Northern America, almost all the institutions in the world have given recognition to this script.

**Post-Braille:** There were 2 types of Braille: English Braille and New York Point which was known in common parlance as American Braille. With some reforms, English Braille was introduced by them.

To solve the problem of the variety of Braille codes, the American Association Workers for the Blind tried to develop a uniform code in 1901. In 1931, World Conference on Workers for the Blind was organized wherein uniformed laws were applied. A uniformed Braille code was developed in 1932 in the meeting of the council and this was known as the Standard English Braille. Generally, all prevalent scripts were replaced by Standard English Braille in Europe and America.
As the process of universalisation of Braille was confined to the abovementioned countries, a letter was written to the UNESCO to develop an international Braille. A conference was organised by the UNESCO in Paris in 1950 known as World Braille Conference in which it was decided to develop this script on the basis of the pronunciation and, in 1952, the World Braille Council was established. Henceforth, the World Braille came into the existence. This was a script following the pattern of Louis Braille, i.e., of six dots. In the context of English, 3 grades of Braille are: Open, Contracted and Short form, commonly known as abbreviation.

Commenting upon the confusion of the common mass treating it either a script or language and to make a lively statement about its description, it is said that “...the Braille system ...is based upon the permutations and combinations of six dots arranged in two parallel rows of three dots. Braille is neither a language nor a script. It is just a way of writing and spelling. Spelling has to be the same as used by people with sight. In 1950, at an international conference, UNESCO recommended that the Braille page should be a precise transliteration of the printed page.”

The abovementioned developments reveal this fact that the history of the visually impaired and the history of the development of the various skills is nothing but a move from the individual endeavour or invention to the group involvement. In most of the cases, there is a negligible contribution of the governments of the respective states which are the focal point for the policy-making.

2.3 Religious Groups and the Policies for the Visually Impaired

This section has been initiated with a reflection on the relationship between religion and special challenge (commonly known as disability). “The relationship between religion and disability must be analysed on two levels. First, what kind of message do various religious doctrines convey about disability?

35 Advani, Lal and Chaddha, Anupriya, op. cit., pp.4-5.
That is, do they contribute to or help break down the myths and stereotypes about disability? Second, what is the social and political role of religion as an institution? That is, does the church foster or hinder the movement for social justice? Ultimately, though there are exceptions, religion, the most influential ideological influence on attitudes and ideas, fails on both counts.36

It is desired to make a critical evaluation of the consequences of the abovementioned role of the religion in the various walks of physical impairment in general and the visual impairment in particular. So far as the role of the religion in terms of breaking down the stereotype myths is concerned, indisputably, it failed to play any direct positive role in this direction because of which one finds a chain of negative attitude about the physically challenged people and worse is the case about the visual impairment. The detailed analysis of the attitude of the society and its cause and effect will be made in separate section.

So far as the role of the religion as an institution to support the cause of social justice is concerned, in its dogmatic form, it failed to support the social justice as, in most of the cases, it remained the heritage of the limited section of the society, the priests or so-called representatives of the God. For the common mass, religion reduced to a sanction—a sanction which one has to accept without any argument because, as generally is propagated, faith has no argument. Religion demands a group of faithful people, a flock of sheep. But, in the name of reformism, though just to glorify the religious faith with a rational touch, some positive role was played by them. It was this reformism which opposed the apology letters of the Roman Catholic Pope, it was this reformism which played a role in India by way of opposing Sati Pratha (convention of the burial of the widow with her husband) etc. But, unfortunately, in the name of justice, one faith was replaced by another faith, which, with the passage of time, is bound to become a dogma. However, so far as its impact on the

development of the institutions for the visually challenged is concerned, may be in the name of charity, its role cannot be sidetracked.

As has already been mentioned that the religion played a negative as well as a positive role in formulating policies for the visually impaired in general and the physically impaired in particular. If an analysis of the programmes for the visually impaired is made, it is found that the religion played a conspicuous role in opening and supporting the schools and the institutions for the visually challenged persons.

As charity becomes the part of any religion—maybe to get some reward from the God—it contributed a lot to the schools to meet out the cost of food, clothes and other essential materials. One may question the intention of such support but the fact remains as it is that in the absence of such support, as due to its political reasons, no governments is coming forward except giving partial grant, to meet the cost in toto, they will find virtually impossible to arrange the remaining expenditures. In most of the cases, it is the religious sanction which makes a positive contribution in realizing the cherished desire of getting education.

Despite all rational claims, it is the fact that in a society which is not able to provide due job venues or which is defunct in terms of providing minimum requirements to the visually impaired, they are bound to be left on the charity of the others and that charity is nothing but the by-product of the religion.

It does not mean that religion has played no negative role. In the name of creating taboo by saying that the impairment or disease or deformity of any nature is because of the sins either of oneself or of one’s forefathers, it had classified this segment of the society in a punished category which will have to develop negative opinion about them.
If the role of the religion is analysed in India and South Africa, there is a similarity in the sense that in both the countries, first school was established by the missionary. In the case of India, it was Amritsar which became the fortunate city to have first school of this kind whereas in the case of South Africa, it was Cape Town. The obvious reason for this is the fact that both were being ruled by the Britishers and missionary was playing its role in spreading the education. It can be a point of controversy for any person that they were spreading the education of its own kind. One cannot expect from a faith following group to provide rational education. But if an analysis is made of the personalities who left some indelible imprints on the socio-political development, it will be an astonishing reality that majority of these personalities were the by-product of the schools run by the religious bodies. The reason for such unknowing contribution is because of the fact that the recipients of the education were not a passive objects or dumb driven cattle. For them, education was a ground for further innovation and for innovation, the faculty of reasoning is needed and, whether it is desired or not by the religious groups, the sense of innovation stimulated them to make substantial contribution for the social justice. Hence, indirectly religion had also prepared a ground for the social justice.

2.4 State Support and the Policies for the Visually Impaired

A change is witnessed during the twentieth century in terms of the intervention of the state in the programmes of the visually impaired. It will be analysed how one fine day the state started taking interest in the programmes for the visually impaired and what kind of policies were developed for them and up to what extent these interests was witnessed. As the 20th century witnessed two world wars, an attempt will be made to see its aftermath in terms of change in the policies and programmes for the visually impaired by both the states.

Despite the fact that the state is termed as a tool in the hands of the oppressing class, the concept of welfare state, a mechanism of appeasement, has contributed to some
extent even in the development of the programmes and policies for the visually impaired in particular and the physically impaired in general. The moment, in the name of the welfare, the government had started opening the hospitals for the poor people and treating them as a service, the visually challenged of both the countries were benefited from this programme. The detailed analysis of the prevention in this field will be made in other section.

There was an opinion that it is necessary for a visually impaired child to get special education to meet his specific need. Though education was the basic need of any child yet, due to the adverse effect of the World War II, the first ever step taken by the then British government in India was to open a training centre for the war-blinded people. Of course, war is supposed to be condemned but in the field of the government initiatives for the welfare programmes for the visually impaired, war will be treated as a groundbreaking factor. It was the World War II during which first institute with the name of Dunston’s Hostel for the War-blinded was opened in Dehra Dun which, with the passage of time, was made opened for the civilians as well. Though initially most of the schools in both the countries were opened by some social groups may be under the name of some religious instincts, yet after some time, the governments of both the countries had started taking interest in either opening some special schools for them or providing maximum possible grant-in-aid to such schools. The detailed description on the educational facilities for the visually impaired will be discussed in some other section.

Not only this, at least in India, we find the opening of the government-sponsored Braille presses but in South Africa, there is no fully government-sponsored Braille press. 

So far as the job opportunities are concerned, despite all humanitarian claims, the attempt of making some reservation in their favour was made very late. In the case of South Africa, such exclusive reservation is not witnessed but they speak in terms of
employment equity which is, in real sense, is not fully favouring the visually impaired because if one is visually impaired, negro and woman, only then his case may become a strong case as he will be representing three categories for which preferential treatment has been proposed in the constitution.

In general, it can be said that there are some attempts being made by the government but they are of the welfare nature. No real attempt is made by treating this segment of the society as an ordinary member so that he can join the mainstream in real sense. Even in the case of the government, it is the charity which speaks much rather than the necessity. It raises the question of the use of human resource for the nation-building process.

2.5 Social Attitudes and its Impact on the Policies and Programmes of the Visually Impaired

There is no social policy which is neither being influenced by the social attitude for the beneficiaries nor the result of the reaction over such attitude towards the stakeholders. Hence, an attempt will be made to deal with the social attitude towards the visually challenged persons.

Social policies are generally the replica of the attitude or its reaction. The policies for the physically challenged in general and visually challenged in particular are no exception to it. Hence, it is pertinent to have a look at the social attitude towards this segment of the society. As the method adopted for this research work, an attempt will be made to make an analysis of the impairment in general and then, an attempt will be made to have a look at how the attitudes are developed about the visually impaired. Despite the fact that the research is confined to the visually impaired, this exclusive attention to this segment of the society becomes unavoidable as within the physical impairment, it is the visually challenged people whose integrity is always questioned or whose potence are always wrongly assessed due to the over-emphasis on the role
of vision not only common mass but even by the medical practitioners who use to say that the loss of vision reduces 84% of knowledge. Obviously, this statement has something to do with the capability of the person with visual disability. Before analysing this in detail, an attempt is made in the preceding paragraphs to analyse the social attitude about the persons with physical challenges.

Before making some such analysis, it is pertinent to have a look at two excerpts of two different books commonly used by the students in the United States of America which is supposed to be the trend setter and progressive in its attitude. These are as under:

Caring for the Handicapped

The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the crippled, and the insane and the feeble-minded are sometimes known collectively as the defective-people who are lacking some normal faculty or power. Such people often need to be placed in some special institution in order to receive proper attention.

Many blind, deaf, and crippled people can do a considerable amount of work. The blind have remarkable talent in piano tuning, weaving, wickerwork, and the like. The deaf and dumb are still less handicapped because they can engage in anything that does not require taking or giving orders by voice.37

The similar passage which had been used in the high school classes of the U.S.A. throughout the nation, says, thus:

The blind may receive aid from the states and the federal government, if their families are not able to keep them from want. There are over one hundred institutions for the blind in the United States, many of which are supported wholly or partly by taxes. Sometimes it seems as if blind people are partly compensated for their misfortune by having some of their other talents developed with exceptional keenness. Blind people can play musical instruments as well as most

of those who can see, and many activities where a keen touch of the fingers is needed can be done by blind people wonderfully well. Schools for the blind teach their pupils music and encourage them to take part in some of the outdoor sports that other pupils enjoy.\(^{38}\)

Attitudes can be expressed through the language—verbal or written. Writers may, sometimes, be over conscious in writing when they consider it not the part of sheer enjoyment but the role of contribution to the society. But this is not the case with the lingua franca.

It is said that it is the language which gives a shape to the ideas and expression. It gives birth to an image. A famous Russian linguist termed it as 'experience is organized.'\(^{39}\) When a word is used time and again, it starts establishing a meaning, an image and a reality. If an analysis of the words used for the physically challenge is made, it will reflect the backwardness of variety of cultures. Linda Nicholson, treating language as a social product, remarks, “Thus, many terms in our language, such as ‘production,’ ‘mothering’ and ‘sex’ are ambiguous between possessing a strictly limited physical meaning and possessing a more culturally loaded meaning.”\(^{40}\)

Language is a process and its liveliness rests in the fact that it should adapt itself with the new developments. For this, the interaction between the language and the culture and society is inevitable. The terms like ‘cripple’, ‘invalid’, ‘retard’, ‘confined to a wheelchair’, ‘blind as a bat’, ‘single eyed as crow’ and ‘deaf and dumb’ generate the meaning which have an ideological understanding. Therefore, it has social and cultural impact. Obviously, the words used for the physical impairment are carried with the social meanings. As language is not meant for oneself and is a way of


expression with others, for many, the language is known as “the most social of all social facts.”

Here are some of the words of different languages used for the disability. The word ‘chirema’ is used for specially challenged (disability) in Shona and it means totally useless or a failure. In Ndebele, the word ‘isigoga’ is used for impairment and that means helplessness. For deafness, the word ‘matsi’ is used in Shona and in Ndebele, it is called ‘isacuthe’ and both the words carry the meaning as one who needs help. Bernhard Helander writes that all the words used by the Hubeer in southern Somalia to describe particular disabilities connote illness. Similar expressions are found in the languages of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Not only this, there are some proverbs in these languages which represent its culture in an explicit way. Not all proverbs are giving negative messages. Some of them carry, in its own way, the message of behaving properly the physically challenged. These are reproduced thus:

“In Shona, chirema chinemazano chinotamba chakazendama kumadziro translates as “a disabled person can be clever and dance if he is leaning against a wall.” It means all people have abilities as long as they try and seek help. It is similar to “God helps those who help themselves.” Another common adage is seka urema wafe, or “laugh at disability when you are dead.” It means do not tempt fate. In Ndebele, ubulima kabuhla/eli translates, as “disability does not wait for anybody.” A somewhat similar saying has a more pejorative effect: okwehlela inja lemuntwini kuyafika, “what may happen to a dog may happen to you tomorrow.” This means do not think the disabled are stupid or despise them because the same may happen to you.”

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42 Cited from Charlton, James I., op. cit., p.66.
If the use of language is analysed in terms of the words and phrases used by different people about the visually impaired, the depiction made hereunder will draw a precarious scene about them.

To begin with English which claims itself to be one of the progressive languages, one of its famous dictionary known as Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language defines blind, in its edition of 1912, as "without the power of sight; sightless; eyeless; lacking insight or understanding: done without adequate directions or knowledge; as, bind search. Reckless; unreasonable; not controlled by intelligence; as, blind destiny; Insensible; drunk; illegible; indistinct. In architecture, false, walled up, as, a blind window." How slowly these meanings change can be understood by making a reference of the fifty-year’s later edition of the same dictionary which defines blind as "blind. Sightless. Lacking discernment; unable or unwilling to understand or judge; as, a blind choice. Apart from intelligent direction or control; as, blind chance. Insensible; as, a blind stupor; hence, drunk. For sightless persons; as, a blind asylum. Unintelligible; illegible; as, blind writing."44

Even if one has a casual look at the meaning given by these two editions, one can easily understand how slowly this so-called language is moving in terms of giving the proper meaning to this word and that is too, in a country which is known as the father of the Disability Right Movement (DRM). Commenting upon the description made in both the edition, it is said that “The primitive conditions of Jungle and cave are gone, but the primitive attitudes about blindness remain. The blind are thought to live in a world of “darkness,” and darkness is equated with evil, stupidity, sin and inferiority.”45

45 ibid.
In Hindi and some other North Indian languages, the words like ‘Netraheen’ (eyeless), ‘Pragya Chakshu’ (eye of wisdom), ‘Nhera’ (darkness) etc. give negative meanings. In Shona, the word for the visual impaired is ‘bofu’ which means ‘someone without freedom’ and in Ndbele, it is called ‘isiphofu’ which means ‘helpless’. A typical style of addressing the blind is found in Northern India where any blind is called as ‘soordas’. Its typicality becomes more heinous when one finds the style in which he is being called. Here, it is needless to say that Soordas was the greatest poet of his time who was known for the illustrious description of the childhood of Lord Krishna because of which a controversy took place whether he was born blind or became blind later on. Obviously, the word ‘Soordas’ should denote a respectable word but generally the users are unaware of its belonging and that is why they are using this word in a derogatory sense.

Not only this, there are some proverbs in Hindi which depict an appalling picture of the visually challenged persons. A famous proverb in Hindi goes like ‘andha bante revari, phir phir apanon ko de’. It means that if a blind is distributing some sweets, he gives time and again to his nears and dears’. In turn, it means that the blind favours his nears and dears and it implies that the blind is spreading the nepotism. If one analyses the sphere where such practice exists, one will rarely find a blind. There is another proverb which says, ‘Andha kya Jane basant bahar’ the literal translation of which is ‘how a blind can know the weather of spring.’ It can be understood in two ways: one, that the spring season carries the visual beauty only and the visually challenged person due to his visual limitation cannot enjoy the beauty of spring or two, the visually impaired has nothing to do with the aesthetic sense. Another proverb draws a more precarious picture about the visually impaired person. It is ‘Andhe ke aage rona, apne naina khona’ which literally means, ‘weeping in front of blind amounts to doing harm to your own eyes’. In turn it means as if a visually challenged cannot understand the feelings of other. Last but not the least, the proverb like ‘aankha gayi to jahaan gayaa’ which
means 'if eyes are lost, the world is lost'. This proverb reduces the whole world into an entity which can only be enjoyed by seeing.

Perhaps, it will be an injustice to simply put forth these examples without developing an insight to find the then rationale about them. Of course, as had already been stated in the beginning of this chapter that the development of the script and further development of the press made the importance of sight so great as people forgot the importance of the use of other sensory organs despite the fact that the pronunciation of the word to a child is taught only by speaking and learnt by hearing. There is no script in this world which can teach a six-month-old baby in the universe. However, the fact cannot be denied that such usages played a negative role in the development of the image about the visually impaired.

For last two decades, a struggle is made by the disability related organizations at academic, philosophical, legal and policy level about the use of the words for the specially challenged in different languages so that its use may become more neutral and more responsive to the changing political and cultural world. But it is not an easy task. As it is said that "Think of how profound it has been in our world to say the word 'Black' in a new way. In order to say 'Black' in a new way, we have to fight off everything else that Black has meant. ... The entire metaphorical structure of Christian thought, for example." 46

Some gradual differences are witnessed due to this endeavour in terms of the change of verbal expression like the use of "person with disability", "person with handicap", "person with physical challenge" so on and so forth. 47 But the alternative words suggested by the DRM are not yet become the part of the dictionary and if those words are told to the students and if by chance, the try to find in the dictionary, they will find nothing about it and may ask the obvious

47 For details, see, Charlton, James I., op. cit., pp.67-68.
question about its credibility. One can give them the answer that “we will not accept the oppressors just because some book perpetuates stereotypes and myths we are fighting to breakdown. The DRM has targeted language as an important issue for just this reason.” The similar change is witnessed in China where the word ‘canfei’ was used for the disability and now it has been replaced by ‘canji’ which means ‘disabled’. This change has taken place after the foundation of the China Disabled Persons Federation. Commenting upon this change, it is further stated that “The experience is similar in Asia, Africa, and Latin America since disability-related organizations have come under the control of people with disabilities. Ultimately, the language used to describe people with disabilities will change because it is now being actively contested by those it describes.

It is not only the language which has left its imprints on the attitude of the society, the culture has also played a negative role in this direction. The importance of the explicit look of the body and the related question of the beauty poses a question pertaining to the attitude towards the physical challenge. As it is put, “Our traditional account of disability casts it as a problem located in bodies rather than a problem located in the interaction between bodies and the environment in which they are situated.”

The outlook of the beauty varies from country to country. One can take the example of a scar on the face. In America, it is considered as a deformation but for the Dahomey of Africa, it is considered as a sign of honour. In most of the cultures, fat is considered unattractive but in Polynesia, it is treated as beautiful. If a scar or fatness can become a point of deformity, one can think how one feels if an organ is missing or defected. As deformity is also equated with the lack of potence, the potence of the disabled is also challenged because of this.

48 Charlton, James L., op. cit., p.67.
49 ibid., p.68.
This outlook affects the attitude towards the female disabled or physically challenged in graver manner. Rosangela Berman Bieler rightly puts it, “In spite of the similar discrimination disabled men and women face, there is a point where they differ: in sexuality and affection. Latin countries like Brazil have machoist aesthetic values that make a woman with a perfect body the ‘ideal’ type. This notion, which is exhaustively exploited by the media, generates an enormous gap between women and men, disabled or not.”

The negative attitude towards them starts from the fact that they are not being allowed to use full mirror under the plea that it is not desirable to see the deformed organ of the body. Not only this, they are not being treated to be fit for marriage and since their childhood, they are being instructed to help their brothers or other family members. In a way, their natural instinct of sex is being crushed in the name of their physical challenge. Their everyday body issues like their appearance, expressions and body language are neglected.

This disability and the consequent attitude of the deformity and ugliness lead to the thinking that they are asexual. Even their paternality comes in the scope of doubt. It can be understood by a life experience made by Maria Paula Teperino, “When I was married many people asked our maid if she could hear whether we had sex. Everyone on the street would ask me. For example, if we could have a baby. That was the first question many people thought about.”

There is well spread doubt about getting a child with physical impairment from the parent with physical challenge. A vivid remark was made by Cornelio Nunez Ordaz thus, “I got married in 1978 when I was twenty-five. I met my wife on the way to the Rehab Centre. First we were friends and then we got married. It was very difficult for her to be with me because her friends thought she shouldn’t date a disabled man, they

51 Cited in Charlton, James I., op. cit., p.58.
52 Ibid.
assumed we wouldn't or couldn't have sex, I'm not sure. During my wife's first pregnancy a lot of family and friends told us they were afraid that the child would be born with a disability."

There are typical understandings about the sex and beauty. It can be understood from the remark made by Maria Paula Teperino which says, "There is a cult of the body in Brazil. We call it culto ao corpo. You really need beautiful legs and bottoms in our culture. Machismo is very strong, and it affects the way many men think of women. Because of its prevalence, machismo leads many men to believe that a disabled woman can't satisfy him many even believe that disabled women cannot have children. Sons are considered necessary by Brazilians.... Even though my mother always encouraged me to dress well and look pretty [as I grew up], I believe she never thought I would get married, It's strange because I know she believed I would lead an intellectual and independent life, but the issue of dating and sexuality never was discussed. This was a double message and confusing, but looking back on it, I shouldn't be surprised. The myths and stereotypes about disability and sexuality based in our macho culture taught her these ideas." 54

The similar backward attitude towards the physically challenged women can be seen in Zimbabwe, a depiction of which is made by Lizzie Mamvur, "In Zimbabwe, the attitudes toward disabled women are very backward For example, in my village, but also in Bulawayo, I was told many times that no man would want me as a woman because I had a disability. In fact, there was a strange man who always said I was his wife and this was very annoying. Finally, after a lot of effort, I built up my nerve and told him to stop this practice. He said no one would want me so he was doing me a favour. I stood up to him, and from then on I felt a lot stronger. I felt the power of talking for myself. The women's project I coordinate has this issue as a major goal. That is, to hold meetings and workshops that trains leaders and others to be assertive. To speak up, to articulate our rights—the right to work, to get married, have kids.

53 ibid.
54 ibid.
Unfortunately, we are a small minority. The biggest problem is that it's very difficult for disabled women to get married and to find a job. Even if a man were interested in marriage, his parents wouldn't allow it. They believe that having their son marry a disabled woman would bring misfortune or bad luck to the family. Also, there is widespread unemployment and Zimbabwean culture expects women to stay in their village. It is doubly bad for a disabled woman because she is shut off by people in the village and even her family.”

The Western cultures are no exception to it. Commenting upon the conditions of the physically challenged daughters, it is said that “There is a myth in our society that disabled people are asexual. ... Because so much of female sexuality has focused on physical appearance, disabled women are particularly likely to be misperceived as asexual.”

The presumption that specially challenged people is asexual means that they are not socially and emotionally prepared to experience their own sexuality. Analysing this, Rousso points out that “Parental difficulty in recognizing and affirming the social and sexual potential of disabled daughters can be understood in terms of the individual dynamics of the parents and family, and in terms of broader societal values. For mothers in particular, affirmation of sexual potential and womanhood may require the mother’s ability to see herself in her daughter and to be able to identify with her. As a result of their own dynamics and history, for some mothers the daughter’s disability may loom too large and make the daughter seem too disparate; the mother may then have difficulty identifying and seek to keep her distance. For example, the disability may remind the mother of her own feelings of imperfection, and she may be reluctant to acknowledge that part of herself. Or, having a disabled child may seem like punishment for wrongdoing, a source of guilt safer dealt with from afar. Fathers also play an important role in the confirmation of a female child’s heterosexuality. For

55 Ibid., pp.59-60.
fathers to affirm their daughter’s heterosexuality, they must be able to see in their daughters the potential to become the kind of woman they could choose as a mate. Again, as a result of feelings of inadequacy, guilt, or other dynamics, the father may have difficulty seeing his daughter in this light.\textsuperscript{57}

Apart from the print media, the visual media is also playing a negative role in developing the image of the physically challenged. Leave aside some exceptional films, most of the Indian movies used to depict the specially challenged either as a beggar or a person miraculously awarded power by the Unseen. A film centring on a mentally retarded child revealed that he got some miraculous power from some heavenly creature and suddenly he becomes as powerful as to learn everything in no time or he can defeat anybody in any game. Very recently, a film was produced to depict the problem of the deaf and is widely appreciated. Of course, the efforts like Black or Sparsha are some of the exceptional attempt by the Indian films. But in most of the cases, one has to accept the view of Longnore, one of the best North American writers on disability imaging, that “The most prevalent image in films and especially in television during the past several decades has been the maladjusted disabled person. These stories involve characters with physical or sensory, rather than mental handicaps. The plots follow a consistent pattern: The disabled central characters are bitter and self-pitying because, however long they are disabled, they have never adjusted to their handicaps, and never accepted themselves as they are.”\textsuperscript{58} Similar comment is made by Maria Paula Teperino that “Our culture is shaped so much in Brazil by the media. The media forces the picture that disabled people is not able to do certain things like have sex and be happy. An example was the polio and virus vaccination campaigns in the past. Brazil eliminated these about ten to twelve years ago. But in the television propaganda that was used to encourage people to get the vaccine, the message always was, until about four years ago, you had better get these shots or you will get the disease, become disabled, and your life will be ruined

\textsuperscript{57} ibid, p.152-53.

because you will be sick for the rest of it.... Many of the angry characters in our soap operas use wheelchairs. When they stop being meant, they're cured of their disability. Disability, then, is in your head. A lot of the disabled on the TV soaps turn out not to have a disability, it was only in their heads. So when they are feeling better and are happy, then they become cured of their disability.”

Religion is one of the parts of culture. Hence, it plays a major role in building the attitude of an average person. Chronologically speaking, Hinduism is one of the oldest religions. Its all claims that there is a difference between religion and Dharma and the claims that Dharma means the characteristic, the fact remains as it is that it has created such a fabric of the philosophy in which either one can think in terms of self-emancipation by so-called activities of the Yoga or one can enjoy the result of the deeds/misdeeds of his past life by way of happy or sorrowful life. As is happening in most of the cases, in the absence of any proper causes of certain effects, most of the people create one or the other supernatural entity, so was the case with the Hinduism. It started treating all the natural entities as the gods and was trying to find the remedy of their problems from them. In the case of no remedy, there was a need of another philosophy. It is understood that it was this which would have led to the philosophy of Karma (literally means as action). But, in fact, Karma means more than that. Through this theory, on the one hand, an attempt was made to develop an endless cause and effect chain and on the other hand, an attempt was made to convince the common mass to do rightful things by showing the terror of its consequence in the next life. Like other religions, there are many questions pertaining to Hinduism answers of which cannot be found and that is why the preachers talk about the faith. But those creators of the religion were unaware of its impact on specially challenged people in terms of their way of thinking as well as in terms of how others think about them.

Almost similar is the case with Buddhism. Buddhists also have the understanding that a person takes birth time and again as they fail to live the balanced life in their previous life. In one way or the other, they are supposed to maintain some standards to do away with this cycle of life and birth. One can find a dichotomy between the attempts of the social workers and the religious sufferings. It is well explained, thus:

In 1993 I sat in the conference room of the largest social service agency in Thailand. In the room were leaders of all the disability groups in the country that are consumer controlled. All disabilities were well represented. The main topic was the relationship between attitudes toward disability and the barriers to social progress. After an hour or so everyone had clearly articulated the need to change attitudes that defined disability as pitiful, sad, sick, a burden, something bad. After a break I changed directions a bit and asked people to talk about their religious beliefs. Of the eleven people present, all but one was Buddhists. This was to be expected, as 97 percent of Thais are Buddhists. Many described the Buddhist notion of reincarnation. They affirmed the reason that people tried to live a good spiritual life was to avoid having a difficult existence in their next life. I asked the ten Buddhists if they believed they had a disability because of something bad they had done in a previous life. All but one raised their hands. I then asked if they did not see a contradiction between this belief and their collective interest in changing society's attitudes about disability. They looked at each other in dismay. The room became quiet. They realized their religious beliefs conflicted with their political and social beliefs.60

Apart from the theory relating to the reincarnation of the mankind, there are some understandings that a disability is coming from the spirit of the ancestors or God's spirit or witches. It is felt that it is because of some sin or lack of the ancestral homage. Commenting upon this belief, Alexander Phiri remarked that "In our culture, disability is looked at as shameful not just for the disabled person but for the family. This is connected to witchcraft, to some notions that somehow the ancestors are upset because the family is not acting in the traditional way or honouring them enough. The

60 ibid., p.62.
traditional religious churches do not even attempt to change these ideas because they are afraid of losing members.\textsuperscript{61}

As the persons with physically challenge belong, in most of the cases, to the villages, the representatives of the God play a vital role by way of suggesting one or the other remedy for the cure of the disability. These remedies may range from witchcraft, to observing fast or praying a particular god. If the person is not cured, it is treated as the curse of the ancestor or his Karma or his luck or the order of the god. Whatever the case maybe, in all probabilities, as the religion is supposed to maintain the status quo and, thereby against the change, its negative role also affects the attitude of the disabled as such and, in most of the cases, generally the attitude of the specially challenged is also status quo oriented. Their sense of satisfaction proves to be a hindrance in their progress.

In sum, it can be said that it is a strong belief that “the question of what caused a disability is of primary importance—not the medical cause, but the spiritual cause. All disabilities are believed to be caused by some failure on the part of someone to follow a tradition, fulfil a responsibility, appease an ancestor.”\textsuperscript{62}

Most of the religions preach passivity as they deny the role of human being in the name of the destiny. The concept like ‘unfolded future’ can make think that when everything is decided by the destiny, why should he/she make some contribution. Examples of such passive creatures are seen in both Afro-Asian countries. Over-emphasis on spiritualism has also to do something with the passivity.

Over the issue of an interesting socialization formula is given thus: “disability = sickness/deformation; sickness = helpless and deformation = abomination; helpless =

\textsuperscript{61} ibid.

protection and abomination asexuality; asexuality = childlike; childlike = helpless/protection; helpless/protection = pity; pity = disability. The message can be simplified: disability = invalid; invalid = inferior; inferior = disability. The logic is circular, but it works.  

The sum total of the impact of the language and culture leads to the development of not only some negative attitude but also the extremist attitude. The visually challenged is either understood as over intelligent under the argument that if God takes one thing, it gives another or under the concept like ‘sixth sense’ or treated as stupid, a cut adrift creature of the society or insensible. Such attitudes are summed up by Kenneth Jernigan as “Nevertheless, it is widely felt that loss of sight involves a total personality transformation which leaves its victims mentally incompetent, psychologically abnormal, socially inept, and physically helpless. That is one side of the stereotype: a thoroughly pessimistic and defeatist picture of the physical effects of loss of sight. On the other side, no less significant and no less wrong is an attitude of casual optimism if not unconcern toward the social limitations imposed by the sighted community upon the blind. These social limitations include discrimination in employment; segregation in and from ordinary social relations; exclusion from living accommodations, public and private; rejection from many of the normal activities of the community; and relations with government in which they are viewed as wards rather than citizens, or as patients rather than clients. They have not yet been fully emancipated and are very far from being accepted on a basis of social equality and individual capacity. Their inferior and deprived status is thought to be their normal, natural, and inevitable lot.”  

The relationship of attitude and the specially challenged in general and the visually challenged in particular can be summed up by saying that the things remain as it is but it is its relativity or the human thinking which is the by product of the language.

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63 Charlton, James I., op. cit., p.65.
and culture which shapes or reshapes in the desirable or undesirable way. Marx has aptly stated, "A Negro is a Negro. Only in certain conditions does he become a slave. A cotton-spinning machine is a machine for spinning cotton. Only under certain conditions does it become capital. Torn away from these conditions, it is as little capital as gold by itself is money, or sugar is the price of sugar." So is true with the physically challenged in general and the visually impaired in particular which are nothing but a characteristic. Hence, it is said that "No one is likely to disagree with me if I say that blindness, first of all, is a characteristic. But a great many people will disagree when I go on to say that blindness is only a characteristic. It is nothing more or less than that. It is nothing more special, or more peculiar, or more terrible than that suggests. When we understand the nature of blindness as a characteristic-a normal characteristic like hundreds of others with which each of us must live-we shall better understand the real need to be met by services to the blind, as well as the false needs which should not be met. By definition a characteristic-any characteristic-is a limitation. A white house, for example, is a limited house; it cannot be green or blue or red; it is limited to being white. Likewise every characteristic-those we regard as strengths as well as those we regard as weaknesses-is a limitation. Each one freezes us to some extent into a mould; each restricts to some degree the range of possibility, of flexibility, and very often of opportunity as well.

2.6 Awakening and Self-Dependence and its Impact on the Policies for the Visually Impaired

The civil rights movements in the United States of America and its impact on the Disability Right Movement there proved to be stimuli for the awakening of both the classes and groups respectively. Hence, an analysis will be made in this section how these movements have direct or indirect impact on the physically challenged in

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66 Jernigan, Kenneth, "Blindness—Handicap or Characteristics", Floyd Matson, op. cit., p.177.
general and visually impaired in particular in the countries under discussion. The extent of awakening may differ, but both the countries witnessed a kind of awakening in the visually impaired and, hence, an analysis will be made to find its causes and its aftermath for the development of the society in both the states. Before making such an analysis, it is pertinent to have a look at the historical background of this awakening.

For more than four decades, a change has been witnessed in the field of the visually impaired in the United States of America when, through the National Federation of the Blind (America), the visually challenged persons started putting their demands to the government. This movement was, in its history, was known as the self-help movement. Of course, this was an ideological stand by an organisation against the agency outlook of the voluntary organisations for them. It was not a casual approach for a particular point of time or for a demand specific. Irrespective of the broader movement in the name of Disability Rights Movement, it is still felt that the visually impaired should have its own voice. However, a trend has been witnessed for around three decades to have an integrated approach in terms of including all the disabilities for putting forth their demands as it is learnt from the time tested fact that "... when others speak for you, you lose."67 This idea is generated from the common say that wearer knows where the shoe pinches are. That is why, the emphasis is laid on the use of the organisations which are led by the specially challenged themselves. Though derived from the liberal philosophy of Lasses Faire, its tone was no less than an interest group which is supposed to be explicit and assertive to put forth his interest in the exclusive manner rather than depending upon others. It is quite understandable that it was learnt from the experience that there is no political party or any agency which can speak on behalf of the physically challenged. Hence, it is pertinent for them to come forward and put their demands in the emphatic manner.

This awakening made them to speak about their oppression—a gamut of oppression which is not just due to their physical impairment but also due to the outlook of the society and the consequent limitations posed by it. This awakening made them political activist and humanist to change its outlook of treating itself as a mere medical entity. They have started realising that there is a need to give a humanitarian mould to their demands and make a claim that like others, they should also be treated as human beings.

It is a raised consciousness which can be described by Sandra Bartky, Thus:

“This experience, the acquiring of a “raised” consciousness, in spite of its disturbing aspects, is an immeasurable advance over that false consciousness which it replaces. The scales fall from our eyes. We are no longer required to struggle against unreal enemies, to put others’ interests ahead of our own, or to hate ourselves. We begin to understand why we have such depreciated images of ourselves and why so many of us are lacking any genuine conviction of personal worth. Understanding, even beginning to understand this, makes it possible to change. Coming to see things differently, we are able to make out possibilities for liberating collective action and for unprecedented personal growth, possibilities which a deceptive sexist social reality had heretofore concealed. No longer do we have to practice upon ourselves that mutilation of intellect and personality required of individuals who, caught up in an irrational and destructive system, are nevertheless not allowed to regard it as anything but sane, progressive, and normal. Moreover, that feeling of alienation from established society which is so prominent a feature of feminist experience may be counterbalanced by a new identification with women of all conditions and a growing sense of solidarity with other feminist consciousness, in spite of its ambiguities, confusions, and trials, is apprehended by those in whom it develops as an experience of liberation.”

A raised or empowered consciousness can only bring changes. Changes cannot be brought just per chance or by waiting for the appropriate time. Has it been the case, there would be no necessity for the organizations and the organizers. This can be more revealing if experiences of some of the personalities relating to this awakening are reproduced.

“I called the independent living centre in Chicago and they put me in touch with a number of disabled suburban women who were organizing a meeting around transportation. The first meeting I went to I was totally intimidated. I kept thinking throughout the meeting that I am not like these people and they are not like me. I’m a businesswoman. But there quickly began an amazing shift in my consciousness. We decided to start going to the public transit board meetings and organizing protests. Once we started meeting with the professionals at that agency, I felt in my element, except immediately I was categorized as “you people.” What do “you people” want? We were asked. So that radicalised me. That was, you might say, the greening of Judy Panko Reis. My businesswoman view was collapsing. I started realizing the people I was with were more like me than anybody else... Unless I had become pissed off at my condition and gotten into transportation advocacy when I had, I may have never recognized my own self.”

Another fellow expressed thus, “In 1981, I was invited to go to Singapore to the Disabled Peoples’ international conference, representing the Philippine National Commission of the Disabled. That one event changed my life. I went there to have some fun and get a free trip but as soon as I got there I became involved in all these controversies about how disabled people could take control of their lives. I remember seeing Ed Roberts and thinking that if a man with the disability he had could do so

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much, I could do something, too. This was the first time I had met activists from anywhere outside the Philippines. When I returned, I was committed to organizing.  

Because I was having problems with mobility, I started using a wheelchair in 1975. I saw the wheelchair as a wonderful mobility aid that would allow me to continue my work. I was immediately struck by peoples’ reactions. I can say my consciousness was raised almost overnight. I was teaching dance and drama at the time. It was so strange because I felt the same the day before I started using the wheelchair as the day I started using the wheelchair, but I was immediately labelled incapable. I decided to do something. I quickly realized that a single person never gets anywhere so I tried to figure out how I could do something collectively. (Rachel Hurst, project director, Disability Awareness in Action, London, England)

The idea behind this change in the consciousness was to empower others in education, to fight for their rights and facilities, adopting various tactics to achieve the goal of finding economic dependence for oneself and for the segment of the society. This empowered consciousness is the result of the experiences of the individuals which they were having in their families, groups or institutions in terms of oppression (psychological or biological) and the resentment against it develops their feeling in terms of spreading this consciousness to others. This culture is being spread in the society which is described as “Disability culture which Says, what? Aren’t disabled people just isolated victims of nature or circumstance? Yes and no. True, we are far too often isolated. Locked away in the pits, closets, and institutions of enlightened societies everywhere. But there is a growing consciousness among us… Because there is always an underground. Notes get passed among survivors. And the notes we are passing these days say, “There’s power in difference. Power. Pass the word.” Culture. It’s about passing the word. And disability culture is passing the word

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that there's a new definition of disability and it includes power.”\textsuperscript{71} Such similar development can be perceived in the development of the culture in the labour class. It developed in the coffee houses, bookshops and churches. It went to the extent of reading aloud the newspapers to those who were illiterate. This development is summed up by Thompson, “Thus working people formed a picture of the organization of society, out of their own experience and with the help of their hard won and erratic education, which was above all a political picture. They learned to see their lives as part of a general history of conflict.”\textsuperscript{72}

This consciousness developed a coherent culture in the disability. But this was not a development in the sense of other groups who were having their own history. It is said that "... I believe disability is a marginalized status that society assigns to people who are different enough from majority cultural standards to be judged abnormal or defective in mind or body ... But in the ideal world, my differences, though noted, would not be devalued. Nor would I. Society would accept my experience as "disability culture," which would, in turn, be accepted as part of "human diversity." There would be respectful curiosity about what [have learned from my differences that I could teach society. In such a world, no one would mind being called Disabled.”\textsuperscript{73}

Though inspired from the European countries and the U.S.A., the experience of the DRM in the Afro-Asian countries is different as it is not being drawn from the group which is affluent or from those parents of the disabled who have some political or social influence. The movement in Africa and Asia is mainly joined by those activists who are not even politically conscious or awakened. Their consciousness is the consciousness of the problems of the society. The issue of the awakening in the

\textsuperscript{71} Wade, Cheryl Marie, "Disability Culture Rap", Barrett Shaw (Ed.) The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience from the Pages of First Fifteen Years of the Disability Rag, (Louisville: Avacado Press, 1994) p.15.
\textsuperscript{73} Gill, Carol, "Questioning Continuum" in Barrett Shaw, OP. CIT., pp.44-45.
disabilities is also linked up, as was stated, with the issue of the human rights. This linking has a meaningful potential because it raises three crucial and interrelated issues: (1) democracy—are people included in decision making? (2) Equality—is the distribution of wealth fair? And (3) sovereignty—is the international distribution of power uneven? Local and national elites do not want to consider the issue of democracy. They want to control who is included in all decision making. Transnational firms do not want to address the issue of equality. They are making super-profits and do not want anybody raising questions about the increasing poverty and pauperization of the world’s people. U.S. political elites who control the world’s dominant military power do not want to address the issue of sovereignty. They want everybody to believe that the “age of imperialism” vanished with Vietnam. Each of these issues raises questions about the systemic relation of power to oppression. Each heralds the need for resistance to the status quo. But the influence of liberal orthodoxy on the DRM and its ideological embrace of that status quo (the capitalist world order) is a real harness on its ability to take up human rights as a primary demand. It would call into question activists’ own privileges, patriotism, and prejudices.  

The issue of the human rights is also concerned with the independence and integration and since 1983, the DRM is propagating these issues. The issue of independence is related with the empowerment and the issue of integration is related with the civil rights. The influence of the civil rights has been seen on the DRM for the last three decades.

Another wave in this movement is seen in terms of supporting power and feeling that it will automatically bring the integration. It is not even supporting independence as it is but it supports the idea of interdependence. As Gill states that “The struggle shouldn’t be for integration, but for power. Once we have power, we can integrate whenever we want.” Crescendo, another supporter of this wave quotes: “We’re

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74 Charlton, James I., op. cit., p.124.  
75 For Details, see Charlton, James I., op. cit., pp.125-126.
looking for interdependence, not independence. We’re looking for power, not integration. If we have power, we can integrate with who we want.”

There is another understanding that much has been achieved through the DRM and there are some differences based on the disabilities. Commenting over this understanding, Young says, “Today in our society a few vestiges of prejudice and discrimination remain, but we are working on them, and have nearly realized the dream those Enlightenment fathers dared to propound.”

Self-help and self-determination are the ideas which are supposed to be cornerstones of the DRM. It is these ideas which shows the uniqueness of the idea of the DRM and separates it from the other new ideas. These two ideas are not only categorical but also non-ambiguous. Self-help is purely referred to do away with the charity and it exclusive be a means to achieve the self-determination process. Self-determination opposes the paternal approach of deciding the way of development as per their whims and fancies. Both these terms have been interpreted in the easiest possible ways, as “Self-help and self-determination, in contrast, are simple and clear-cut they require people with disabilities to control all aspects of their collective experience. They simply mean: we are able to take responsibility for our own lives, and we do not need or want you to manage our affairs; we best understand what is best for us; we demand control of our own organizations and programs and influence over the government funding, public policy, and economic enterprises that directly affect us. The demand for self-determination provocatively and intuitively attacks the ideology of paternalism; the existing political elite and power structure; social institutions like family, school, the medical establishment, social agencies, and charities; and the political, economic, and social dependency people have been forced into.”

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78 Charlton, James I., *op. cit.*, p.128.
After having a look at this theoretical aspect of the DRM, it is pertinent to have a look at the history of this movement. The history of the DRM goes back to the period of 1970s. Perhaps, it is because of the fact that it was first time in the history when thinking was developed to take cognisance of the problems of the disability at the generalistic level. Of course, it has, despite the broader spectrum, its own limitations which will be discussed at the later stage.

In the history of the DRM, it is said, that the two years, i.e., 1973 and 1981 proved to be the milestones. It was during the early seventies that people with disabilities in the United States and Europe, influenced by and directly involved in antiwar, student, and civil rights movements, began to organize on disability-related issues. Many activists, especially in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, were also influenced by leftist politics. Throughout southern Africa, where the DRM began on that continent, the influence of national liberation movements was important. Many of these people began to make political connections between their own lives and other social conditions and events. Commenting over such development, Rachel Hurst said, "Vic Finklestein is a really interesting man from South Africa who had joined the Communist party there. After he sustained a spinal cord injury, and after he had been in prison for some time, he escaped and moved to England. He was one of the founders of the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation in 1975. He was one of the first people to understand our segregation because he had seen segregation so starkly in South Africa. We owe him a great debt."\(^{79}\) Influenced by the social movements of his time, similar comments were made by Ed Robert, "So much of the good that has happened to me and the good I've done have to do with being in Berkeley in the sixties. There was such energy, so much optimism. We were the generation that could and would change the world. There were all sorts of alternative living experiments and new ideas. Like everybody else, I just got caught up in them.

\(^{79}\) Cited in Charlton, James I., *op. cit.*, p.131.
Fortunately, there were other people with disabilities who were also affected. We were together at the right time at the right place."^80

The period of 1972-73 was associated with the founding of the Berkeley Centre for Independent living (CIL). Boston Self-help Centre also became interested to toe the same line. Independent living movement was the focal point or the source of inspiration for the DRM in the United States. Through this, its leaders had an influence on the leaders and activists elsewhere. The first rights-oriented group in Europe was established in England when Vic Finklestein, Paul Hunt, and others initiated the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation in 1975.

During this period, some of the major Issues taken by this movement were: "inaccessibility of public transportation; the lack of accessible, affordable housing; the institutionalising of poor, young people with severe disabilities in nursing homes because of the prohibitive cost of personal assistance; the struggle for inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms; and efforts to change the way in which the public relates to, perceives, and understands disability. The last area is pivotal because it calls into question the dominant mythology about disability."^81

Most CILs started in the USA in 1980s. Now, they are enumerating more than 300. For the Americans, these centres were conspicuous because of two factors: one, most of the important early leaders of the DRM was identified by these Centres and the Independent Living became the main base of their philosophy. Secondly, These Centres remained the cornerstone of the DRM because of the big number of paid staff and, thereby, became the big resources of infrastructure. Around the same period, Rehabilitation Act of North America was declared in 1973.

As 1981 was declared as the International Year for the Disabled Persons (IYDP), variety of activities was seen around this year. Sharing his experience, Narong

80 ibid.
81 ibid.
Patibatsarakich said, “In 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, Thailand had its first workshops about disability that people with disabilities actually participated in. At the end of that year, I was selected to go to Singapore for the Disabled Peoples’ International Congress. Before this meeting, I had no ideas about philosophy, politics, and so on.... When I heard Ed Roberts speak, he had a big impact on my ideas. When I came back to Thailand I was committed to starting DPI-Thailand. First, we meet with alumni of the deaf schools to get them organized. Next, we met with the Parents Association of the Mentally Retarded. Then I started the Association of the Physically Handicapped. One year later, we met and formed DPI-Thailand. We had our first Congress in Chiang Mai in 1983.”

It looked that the proposal of the celebration of the IYDP yielded some positive results and it is found that the organisations relating to the disability became active. The events in Brazil around this year were summarised by Eugene Williams thus, “As a consequence, in 1980 Brazil hosted the first National Meeting of Entities of the Disabled with nearly one thousand participants representing the blind, deaf; [physically] disabled and Hansen diseased. Guidelines for action were established and also the foundation of a national coalition in an attempt to encompass the areas of disability. Moreover, a new policy was defined for the following year, the IYDP. The policy consisted of representation by disabled people and not by the ‘specialists”

It was not the case that everything which was taking place, was positive for all the organisations as it was this declaration which had suddenly charged the specially challenged in terms of realising their identity. Consequently, in June, 1980, a split took place in the Rehabilitation International over the issue of the composition of the delegate assembly by the 50% of the disability members. The Resolution moved of this effect was defeated by 61 votes against 37 votes. It was a point of annoyance for the disabled who were especially called for this occasion. It resulted in the formation of Disabled peoples’ international having international headquarters in Winnipeg,

82 ibid. p.132.
83 ibid.
Canada. In fact the creation of the Disabled Peoples International was a reaction against the Rehabilitation International which was mainly comprised of the professionals of the field of disabilities. Expressing his experiences, Joshua Malinga said, “When I went to Singapore I was conservative, but when I returned I was very radical.”

Similar Comment was made by Danilo Delfin: “The Singapore conference had a big impact on me. I realized I wasn’t so disabled, that it was possible to have a family and work. After that conference I started working on disability issues full time.”

How far such a movement can reach within a span of more than one and a half decade can be understood by the fact that "self-help groups have formed in leprosy communities in southern Africa, in refugee camps in Kampuchea and Mexico, and on remote islands in the Philippines, Palau, and Fiji. A village in the mountains of Mexico is controlled by people disabled from drug-related violence, and has attracted hundreds of people with disabilities from throughout the country. Economic development projects like supermarkets and agricultural collectives have been set up in Africa by these organizations. The first centres for independent living have appeared in a number of cities in South America. Most of these groups are relatively new, small, and fragile. Their roots are in the 1980s. Most exist without funding or developed programs. Others, like the National Council of Disabled Persons Zimbabwe and Disabled People South Africa, are quite sophisticated organizationally and politically.”

Most of the organizations of the DRM were founded between 1979 and 1986. The National Council of Disabled Persons Zimbabwe, initially registered as a welfare organization, became a national disability rights group in 1981; the Organization of the Revolutionary Disabled was set up in the wake of the Sandinista victory in 1979;

84 ibid. p.133.
85 ibid.
86 ibid., p.133-34.
the Self-Help Association of Paraplegics (Soweto) (SHAP) was started in 1981 as an economic development project; the Program of Rehabilitation Organized by Disabled Youth of Western Mexico (PROJIMO) also began in 1981 as a rural community-based rehabilitation program; Disabled Peoples International-Thailand was established in 1983; the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled was formed in 1986 as a federation of non-governmental organizations of disabled persons; and so on. It was during this time that most CIL as well as many other disability rights groups, including ADAPT, were established in the United States.

This declaration also paved the way for the enhancement of the paraphernalia of some of the organisations. Initially in Brazil, the organizations were found for the athletic and social clubs but later on by 1980s, these organizations crossed the boundary of the country.

1984 was the crucial year for structuring the organizations. There are national coalitions in South Africa, Zimbabwe, India, Thailand, and numerous other countries. But the experiences of the Philippine were not as desired by the organisers.

Despite the fact that the common denominator of all these organizations, with some exceptions, was self-determination and human right, it is not the case that all the organisations adopted one type of programmes to exhibit their concerns. Different organisations had different approaches on the basis of their priorities. However, these priorities can broadly be categorised as under:

1. Local Self-help Groups,
2. Local Advocacy and Programme Centres,
3. Local Single Issue Advocacy Groups,
4. Public Policy Groups,
5. Single Issue National Advocacy Groups,
6. National Membership Organisations,
7. National Coalitions/Federations of Groups,
8. National Single Disability Organisations,
9. Regional Organisations and
10. International Organisations.  

As the Disabled Peoples International is one of the biggest organisations representing the DRM, it is pertinent here to give its brief description. It is an organisation which was founded in Singapore in 1981. Its programme emphasizes on leadership development, Community organizing and self-help. It was involved in UN World’s Programme of Action concerning disabled persons in 1982. At present, it has more than 70 countries as its chapters. Its membership is consisted of national assemblies for which it is necessary that the organization concern should be controlled by the disabled. This organisation is divided into 5 regions. These are: Asia/ Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America/Caribbean.

Of course, the emergence of such a movement rise not only the expectations in the minds of the stakeholders but also poses the question concerning to the end of the oppression. This situation is depicted in a picturesque manner with an analysis by William Rowland as under:

"What makes the DRM subversive is paradoxically the extraordinary worldwide oppression of people with disabilities. The oppression is systematic. The principles, demands, and goals of the DRM cannot be accommodated by the present world system. These aspirations, when fully considered, lay bare the concealed horror of that world system and dominant culture. Although the DRM cannot subvert that domination in its totality, it can and does chip away at it, in the immediate institutions of everyday life. Time will tell if the powerful principles and convictions of the DRM will help to produce a long-term transformation of that domination." 

87 ibid., pp.136-49.
88 Charlton, James L., op. cit., p.149.
There is a dialectical relationship between the oppression and the empowerment. Hence, it is not an easy way to comment upon or thinking in terms of the vanishing of the oppression because its causes are multifarious. Even if one is self-sufficient, one is supposed to move in the variety of people and those people, knowingly or unknowingly, suppress you by their gesture or otherwise. Basically, this is a subject matter of human nature coming from the ages and cannot be resolved in one shot. Moreover, the extent of suppression also varies from disability to disability due to the over-emphasis on the importance of one or the other organ. At the same time, some disabilities are non-revealing. Such disabilities which cannot be seen with the naked eye are falling in such categories. As the person concerned is unaware of the disability, his reaction can also be unpresumable.

Commenting upon this situation, it is said that "in most of the researches, the notion of the difference between the disabilities is missing. This is the case in Erving Goffinan’s influential book Stigma. Goffman not only de-politicised the oppression of people with disabilities, he treated disability as uniform. Goffman’s deviance theory failed to comprehend the divergent forms and experiences of oppression because it did not recognize differences among people with disabilities. One only has to ask simple questions to raise serious doubts about its explanatory power. For example, what about those with hidden disabilities (is cancer “stigmatised” only if people gossip?), or the “stigma” status of a destitute, black, gay man with AIDS? Does deviance theory help us to understand why a non-verbal Mexican immigrant with cerebral palsy dies mysteriously in a Chicago hospital after an alleged experimental treatment? Why do Maoris with renal failure find no access to dialysis? What about the class, race, or gender differences within disability? Does anyone imagine that a black sixteen-year-old boy with a spinal cord injury received from a gunshot, who lives in a housing project in Brooklyn, experiences the same stigma or stereotype “problems” of a sixteen-year old spinal cord-injured white girl who was hurt in a diving accident and lives on Martha’s Vineyard?"89

89 ibid., pp.156-57.
In sum, it can be said that all the organisations joining the DRM have a common agenda of self-help and self-determination and these are the organisations which are generally being managed by the persons with special challenge themselves. In their individual capacity and in the capacity of a group as such, all these organisations are facing, by and large, the social oppression and pooling their resources to develop the zeal of empowerment to develop a feeling of self-sufficiency. Hence, it is not wrong to say that this movement is bound up in the dialectics of oppression and enforcement. Through their own experiences of the oppression and the experiences of the other oppressed groups, these organisations have paved the way of tearing the ideology of paternalism and charity.

Of course, this disability movement has its impact on both the countries in question. Though two different events may become a source of inspiration in terms of making a joint venture for realising the cherished desire of the well being of the specially challenged by the organisations of and for them. In South Africa, the declaration that "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth"90 in India the enactment of THE Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) ACT, 1995 opened a venue for forcing the government to take up positive actions in favour of the specially challenged. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa came into force in February, 1997 whereas the Persons With Disability Act came into its actual force in the month of February, 1996. For a country like South Africa, this constitution itself was an epoch-making document and the mention of Disability in the 'non-discriminatory' clause seems to be a big achievement. But if the time frame of both the constitutions are analysed, the Constitution of India which was developed in 1950, did not have the advantage of some set examples in terms of giving some

space to the disabilities under the fundamental rights as any document which is developed in any particular span of time is supposed to be made by taking into consideration of the best available trends of its time. However, the Constitution-makers gave some space to the disabilities in Article 43.

This is true that both the countries had different types of problems while developing their constitution details of which will be discussed at the later stage, but the fact remains that so far as the disability is concerned, a path-breaking step was taken by both the countries in the second half of the tenth decade of the 20th century. But the difference lies in this fact that in the Republic of South Africa, it was an initiative of the Government itself whereas in the case of India, it was the result of untiring pressure of the voluntary organizations of and for the disabled. This difference itself reveals this fact that the amount of concern of the implementation of the policies differs in both the countries and this difference has its own impact on the development of the Disability Rights Movement in the country concern.

It is pertinent here to describe about the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa by Quoting Joshua Malinga, “I believe in South Africa they have as strong a movement as we have in Zimbabwe. Probably because of the struggle against apartheid the disabled community is more politicized, so it has progressed well.”91

Logically, this expression should be acceptable. But there is a difference between fighting against a so-called alien group92 and fighting against the government which is, in its document, promising no discrimination for the disabled are two different things. Hence, after the beginning of the non-apartheid rule, there is no substantial pressure from the voluntary organizations of and for the disabled. Moreover, South Africa had an advantage of making claim in terms of favouring disability by showing their representation in their Parliament in whatsoever number. More so, if one takes

91 Cited from Charlton, James I., op. cit. p.15.
92 The term ‘so-called alien group’ is used to express the emotions of the Black South Africans as practically they were fighting against a racialist tendency which was borrowed from abroad but institutionalised in South Africa.
the example of one of its peak organization of the specially challenged, the South African National Council of the Blind, the majority of its high post holders is visually impaired. However, by this, it is not suggested that nothing has happened in South Africa.

To awaken the people at large, there is an organization with the name of People with Awareness on Disability Issues (PADI). This is one of such organizations which can be categorised under an anomic group. Stating over the development of some such organizations, Fadila Lagadien, a founder of PADI, says

"I met Kathy Jagoe who was a high-level quad who had moved to Cape Town and had lectured about disabilities in different parts of the world. Kathy suggested that I start a disability awareness group and, with her help, we started People with Awareness on Disability Issues. This experiential workshop lasted for a couple of years, and many issues came up, like transportation and accessibility, but mostly we talked about disability awareness. We started to use computers to communicate our issues. Then we decided to start a newsletter because attitudes about disability are so bad. I got a volunteer who was from Texas whose husband was working in Cape Town to help with computerizing the newsletter. ... So after a lot of work, we now produce a 24-page newsletter that we mail to three thousand people throughout South Africa. We have been invited to places like Zimbabwe and Canada to talk about our experiences. We have the idea to set up an independent living centre now. PADI is a small organization that is an affiliate of DPSA." 93

Over the issue of the data shown by the Census of South Africa in their census 2001, different organisations raised their objection but that is nothing but they remained confined to the correspondence with the government.

Despite this fact that South Africa is one of the countries where the slogan of ‘nothing about us without us’ is being echoed by some of its leaders, yet they are reluctant

93 Charlton, James I., op. cit., pp.139-40.
enough to persuade its government to absorb or to give due representation to the disability in different types of jobs. Unfortunately, the mouthpiece of most of the disabilities is coming from the economically sound families and, more or less, with an ideology of openness or free competition whether in the name of it, one is asking all unequals to compete with each other at par. This issue will be dealt with in details in some other sections while dealing with the policies for the employment.

In contrast with South Africa, the DRM seems to be more vocal. This trend becomes more surprising if we realise this fact that “There is no single cross-disability movement in India, which unites all disabled people. Blind people, deaf people, and those with orthopaedic impairments have their own single-disability federations, but there is very little linkage between them. The logistical problems of organizing a single cross-disability movement, with so many languages, such vast numbers, and distances so great, are formidable. With over 14,000 indigenous rural development NGOs working in India, the task of co-ordination and information sharing about any aspect of development becomes daunting.”

If the 1996 are treated as one of the sources of stimulations, the experiences of ten years are the glaring example of the series of activities through which not only the Government of India was pressurised but its autonomous bodies were also forced to face Public Interest Litigations. Some of the events during this period include organisation of the “World Disabled Day on India Gate to encourage the solidarity of the people with disability and to focus some of the issues concerning them; campaign for the inclusion of he disability in the Census 2001; opposing non-disabled Chief Commissioner for People with Disability; accessibility of the disability in the general elections of the 2004 for their free access to enfranchisement etc. It may be a point of controversy that how far such issues useful to the en masse. It all depends what type of the section within the disability one is talking about.

Conceptual framework of the DRM has been discussed by G.M. Kama in his book “United Nations and Rights of Disabled Persons: a Study in Indian Perspective” from the perspective of various school of thoughts which are being supported by the writers which include Mike Oliver (New Social Movement), Jenny Morris (the last civil rights movement), Harlan Hahn (Disability Rights Movement), and M. Mason (an organization). On the basis of these schools of thought, he develops a workable definition of the disability movement as “a social or civil rights movement directed towards the integration of disabled people into the mainstream of society.”\footnote{Kama, G.M., \textit{United Nations and Rights of Disabled Persons: A Study in Indian Perspective}, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 1999), p.145.}

For such a movement, He gives four major characteristics of new social movements, which are:

Existence on the margins of political systems;
Providing a critical evaluation of society;
Concerned with an equitable distribution of resources as a matter of right
International in nature and scope.\footnote{For details, see, \textit{ibid.}, p.146.}

Kama holds this view that “There is no doubt that the DRM in India has all these characteristics. However, the movement is not based on any tradition and is reactionary in nature.”\footnote{Kama, G.M., \textit{op. cit.}, p.147.}

But if an analysis of the awakening in the visually impaired in particular is made and if an attempt is made to trace the history of the organisations or some sort of union of them, one will find some facts scattered over the world in the span of a millennium. The history of the organisations of the visually challenged can be seen during the medieval period of china when an “a guild comprised of blind persons who made a career of singing, entertaining, and storytelling. Parents would seek to place a young blind son into this guild so that he might learn a trade for his future lifelong employment. As he succeeded in the required skills, he would rise in status in the

\footnotesize{\textit{ibid.}, p.146.}
guild to the level of master." 98 It is said that it was a group leadership of which was used to be comprised of the visually challenged and only for the post of the Secretary; they used to select a sighted person.

But in Europe, some such guilds developed in the medieval period. One of the famous groups was the Congregation and House of the Three Hundreds. 99 During the eighth decade of the 19th century, a development of the voluntary organisations was witnessed. First organisation of this nature came into existence in 1871 with the name of Friedlander Union of Philadelphia. Just after six years, an organisation emerged with the name of New York Blind Aid Association. By the end of the century, the number of such organisations started increasing.

In the year 1921, an agency-oriented organisation emerged with the name of American Foundation for the Blind to work primarily as a research and coordinating organ of the agencies for the blind.

Newel Perry summed up the nature and trend of the evolving national movement in a 1940 editorial. During the last forty years, he wrote, a growing group consciousness has been noticeable among the blind of our country. Practically every state and large city now has an active organization with a membership composed exclusively of blind persons. These clubs seek to improve the economic conditions of the blind through the enactment of legislation and through other means. The dream of a national organization is now to be realized against the ideology of the agency outlook. 100 In mid-November of 1940, the National Federation of the Blind came into existence in America. During the first year of his mobilisation, Tenbroek said to his visually challenged fellow, "In dealing with the public, especially in its many governmental forms, we, as handicapped persons, have long known the advantage and even the necessity of collective action. Individually, we are scattered, ineffective

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98 Matson, Floyd, op. cit., p.2.
99 For details on the blind guilds in the medieval age of Europe, See, Matson, Floyd, op. cit., pp.1-3.
100 Cited from Matson, Floyd, op. cit., p.10.
and inarticulate, subject alike to the oppression of the social worker and the arrogance of the governmental administrator. Collectively, we are the masters of our own future and the successful guardian of our own common interests. Let one speak in the name of many who are prepared to act in his support, let the democratically elected blind representatives of the blind act as spokesmen for all, let the machinery be created to unify the action and concentrate the energies of the blind of the nation. The inherent justice of our cause and the good will of the public will do the rest."\textsuperscript{101} He further says, "The time has come to join our state and local blind organizations in a national federation. Only by this method can the blind hope to cope with the nationwide difficulties at present besetting us.... But the mere listing of them shows the imperative need for organization upon a national basis, for creating the machinery which will unify the action and concentrate the energies of the blind, for an instrument through which the blind of the nation can speak to Congress and the public in a voice that will be heard and command attention. Until the blind become group-conscious and support such an organization, they will continue to live out their lives in material poverty, in social isolation, and in the atrophy of their productive powers."\textsuperscript{102}

This new developed group was emphasising on the socio-economic rehabilitation of the visually challenged. Commenting upon keeping the visually impaired at par with the pauperised people, Tenbroek said, "This definition must be rejected by anyone having even the slightest acquaintance with the needs of the blind. A needy blind person has a greater need than paupers, indigents, and the aged, because there are additional elements comprising it. Besides the physical necessities of life, his need consists in some fair utilization of his productive capacity. This can only be obtained by restoring him to economic competence in a competitive world. Without it his need will never have been terminated. With it he is a normal, useful, self-respecting citizen. Hence his need is as broad as the effects of his blindness. It can only be met by a rehabilitation that is social, economic, and psychological, and these are the

\textsuperscript{101} ibid., pp13-14.  
\textsuperscript{102} ibid., p.14.
objectives within the intentions of the legislatures of many of our states in their statutory schemes providing aid to the blind." 103

As has already been stated that the war, which is condemned by most of the people around the world, proved a boon to the disabled because it forces any nation to develop at least some policies for their veterans who became disabled due to it, maybe, just to show its allegiance. With the passage of time, such policies are generalised and the civilian disabled also get its benefit. In juxtaposition with the development of the National Federation of the Blind in America, there was a development of the organisation of the war-blinded veterans who became blind during the course of the Second World War. This organisation was known as Blind Veterans Association. The contribution of this organisation can be understood from the viewpoint of its emphasis on equal treatment for all. In fact, this was an organisation which laid emphasis on non-racialism. Commenting upon this view, Russell Williams, one of the founding members of the Blind Veterans Association said, "blindness imposed "maturity" of judgment on the veterans and thus forced them to see that racial prejudice was as unreasonable as the prejudice against the blind.... what possible difference does skin colour, of all things, make when you are blind?" 104

The uniqueness of this organisation lies, as its name suggests, that it was the organisation of the war-blinded and for them the blindness was "a rebirth due to the psycho-social and biological change." 105

It was the period when the use of white cane was treated as a stigma to the visually impaired and the emphasis was laid on the use of the facial vision. With the passage of time, they realised that it was the white cane which could make them independent.

103 ibid., p.20.
105 ibid. p.324.
They were staunchly against the charity to the extent that they preferred to find their work by themselves in lieu of finding the support of any sheltered mercy.\textsuperscript{106}

It was this development which stimulated the Afro-Asian countries to develop the organisations of and for the blind. But so far as the awakening of the blind in South Africa is concerned, one will have to go back to the third decade of the 20th century when the South African National Council for the Blind came into existence which, with the passage of time, became an umbrella organisation for majority of the organisations in the country irrespective of the fact whether they are agency-oriented or the organisations propounding the philosophy of the self-help.

In contrast to this, in India, irrespective of the development of the body like National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, an autonomous body with a view to take up innovative researches, could not become a point of attraction to develop as an umbrella organisation due to its specific structure. Hence, despite the claim of the 'no difference in the 'of the' and 'for the' ideologue, the existence of such organisations is found and on certain issues, they still maintain their differences.

On the pattern of agency-based organisations, one of the biggest organisations is known with the name of the National Association for the Blind which was initially Mumbai-based but now has branches in many Indian states. In practice, it is a project-oriented organisation. Commenting upon the nature of this organisation, it is said, "NAB has always opposed activism and contentious politics believing that it is wrong to antagonize government and public 'on whom we depend.'"\textsuperscript{107}

Almost after two decades of the existence of the national Association for the Blind, an organisation was developed by a handful graduates in 1971 with the name of the National Federation of the blind. Of course, before its existence, there was a federation in existence on the tune of 'of he blind' with the name of the Kerala

\textsuperscript{106} For details, see, Longnore, Paul K. and Umansky, Lauri, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.324-27.

\textsuperscript{107} Culshaw, Murray, \textit{It Will Soon Be Dark ...}, (Delhi: Lite House Publications, 1983), p.76.
Federation of the Blind which, with the passage of time, became the affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind. This was an organisation which was influenced by the ideology of self-help propounded by the Americans. It was this organisation which had spearheaded the role of the awakening in the visually challenged. Apart from spreading the ideology in the eighth decade of the last century, during the dying years of the decade and in the first half of the ninth decade, this organisation led the pressure groups of the visually challenged for their jobs relating to the education and the employment. It was this organisation which, through its varying tactics, could manage to force the Indian government to come on the table and discuss and find the solution (May it be temporary) of the problems of the employment at least in the Government sector where Government has all say. It was the first organisation in India which, for the first time through its memorandum, asked the Government to bring an Act for the visually challenged. One may call this a parochial approach but as the organisation was solely concerned with the interest of the visually impaired, it would be too much if it is expected it to become the spokesman of the disability in general. But the fact remained as it is that whenever some laws, job identifications or other rules and regulations were made, they were always made for the specially challenged in general irrespective of the fact that till that time no such demand was put forth.

Commenting upon the effects of the National Federation of the Blind, Culshaw holds that NGOs such as the NFB helped raise consciousness within government circles and certain sections of the public. This in turn prompted a shift in perception of persons with disabilities: from passive receivers of services to self-advocates. But his argument that it is due to the support of the missionaries is totally baseless as the projects run by this organisation had nothing to do with the agitational approach of the Federation. If one makes a critical view of the activities of the Federation, one will find that during the period of maximum activisation, less attention was paid on the projects. It was opined that it was a matter of choice.

On the basis of this analysis, it can be said that irrespective of all claims by some organisations to develop a solid forum for the physically challenged, one cannot deny the role of the organisations of the visually impaired for preparing a solid ground to launch a movement with an integrated approach.

2.7 South Africa and India: A Comparison

Unfortunately, there is a dismal effort to write the history of the physically challenged in general and the history of the visually impaired in particular. More so, in the case of the history of the South Africa, no strenuous effort is made to write a history of this country. Whatever written sources are available, they are harping on the tune of one or the other extreme. In the case of the visually impaired in South Africa, it becomes very difficult to trace any history of this segment of the society even during the 19th century as even the literary figures also failed to choose a visually impaired as a part of their writing. Thereby, it is not suggested to say that prior to the 20th century, there was no visually impaired in this country and, it is also not proper to say that the pre-colonial stage of the South Africa was inhuman to kill or embarrass the visually impaired. But before reaching to any conclusion, one is bound to say that even the supporters of the high time of the pre-colonial age failed to make any reference of the physically challenged in general and the visually impaired in particular. It seems that for them, as happened with most of the historians, it was not the subject matter to bank upon.

So far as India is concerned, the reference of Ashtavakra (which means eight kinds of deformities) in its epics reveals, even if it is treated as a story, that those writers had a flight of imagination through which they could create a roll model who became impatient when he came to know that his father was imprisoned and had not only did save his father but also got an honour of the wisest courtsman of the King Janak. The references are found about a helpless but mighty visually impaired known as
Dhritrashtra and a physically challenged Shakuni. In the Buddhist literature, references are found about some rules laid down by the then kings in favour of the physically challenged. Medieval history of India made a reference of a visually challenged poet with the name of Surdas, which was generally treated as the synonym of the visually challenged man. As his poetry is still the inseparable part of the Hindi literature, its integrity cannot be doubted. During the 19th century, a reference is seen about Swami Dayanand's teacher who was known as Swami Vrijanand. His contribution can be understood by the fact that he prepared a student who not only revived the Hindu religion but gave it a new name as Arya Samaj role of which has even today been the point of controversy.

If a comparison of the history of both the countries is made, one can say that in the absence of any written proof or otherwise, one is forced to point out that there is nothing to talk about the history of the visually impaired in South Africa before the 20th century. It becomes more shocking for any scholar if he makes a cursory look at the documents provided by the Government, the description made about the situation of the visually impaired is pathetic.

So far as the institutionalised work for the visually impaired in both the countries is concerned, it started with the initiatives of the missionary. In the ninth decade of the 19th century, first school for the visually impaired was opened in India and in the beginning of the 20th century, similar opening was made in South Africa.

So far as the attitude of the society is concerned, despite some differences of the historical figures, both the countries are falling in the group of having, in most of the cases, a negative attitude towards the visually challenged persons. Despite all big claims of the urbanisation and treating at par, there is something which makes a visually challenged in both the countries either extraordinary or Rousseau’s innocent man. As has already been mentioned that these attitudes are the part of one’s culture which is the by-product of the language and the religion and unfortunately, due to
whatever reason, the dominant religions in both the countries treat visual impairment as the curse of the god.

In sum, it can be stated that both South Africa and India, as being ruled by the British, were influenced by the developments not only in the ruling country but also by the European and the Americans to develop their programmes, policies and the voluntary organisations. The people of South Africa had to see the period of apartheid effect of which was visualised on the development of separate community-based schools and organisations which was, in the exact sense, not the case of India though the similar stereotype development is being witnessed in the schools run by some religious groups in terms of giving priority to a particular group or over-emphasising a particular way of living. This over-emphasis in both the countries develops a sectarian mental make-up in the visually impaired and this puts a hindrance on their proper development. In such cases, despite all claims of rainbow culture, the political system of South Africa is bound to produce ‘black blind’, ‘White blind’, ‘Coloured blind’ or ‘Indian blind’ which was sensed strongly during interviewing the visually impaired citizens of the country. So is the case with India which is, even after the freedom of more than half a century and even after the big claims of secularism, is producing ‘Hindu blind’, ‘Christian blind’ or ‘Muslim blind’. By saying this, no attempt is made to undermine or snatch the freedom of religion or sect but this analysis and emphasis is made to clarify the difference between the claims and its results and the consequent effect for the development of this segment of the society which is already a scattered minority.

Obviously, it is a challenge for both the countries while drafting the policies for them. In the following chapter, a vivid description will be made on the policies for the visually impaired in both the countries which will cover the aspects like source of policies for the specially challenged in general and visually challenged in particular, directions of the United Nations, various models for policy-making, some relevant documents etc. It will also touch various aspects of the policies which will range from
prevention to total rehabilitation so that their best use can be made for the development of the society.