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Abstract

In recent years, the subject of the newborn disability rights movement in India has been attracting the attention of researchers, but there has been very little effort to document the movement of blind people in India for their rights, which preceded the broader disability rights movement. I therefore conducted a qualitative study of this movement of blind people in India by using the methods of oral history and document analysis. For this purpose, I conducted 93 interviews (by interviewing 45 informants) and analyzed relevant documents. Borrowing terminology from the self-advocacy movement of the blind in the United States, I describe this movement as a “movement of the Organized Blind,” which was launched when blind activists began to organize themselves at the national level in India during the early 1970s. I have attempted to explain that since the launching of this movement, blind activists have been constantly engaged in a struggle for their rights, which encompasses a wide range of issues from the right to employment to the enactment and implementation of the comprehensive disability rights law. I describe the historical evolution of this movement as a process of transformation of the status of blind people in India from being “passive recipients of services” offered to them through the service delivery organizations to “active advocates of their rights.”

I have classified the evolution of this movement into four stages from 1970 to 2005. I also reject the existing views about the time of origin of the disability rights movement in India and establish my argument that it began in late 1980s when blind activists began to focus on the demand for the enactment of a comprehensive disability rights law, which resulted in the enactment of such a law in 1995. Finally, I have analyzed the changing methods of advocacy as well as the shift in the approach of the service delivery organizations in the field of blindness in India from outright rejection of the advocacy approach to its acceptance in the post-1995 period.

MOVEMENT OF THE ORGANIZED BLIND IN INDIA: FROM PASSIVE RECIPIENTS OF
SERVICES TO ACTIVE ADVOCATES OF THEIR RIGHTS.

By

Jagdish Chander
Master of Philosophy, University of Delhi, 1995

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Cultural Foundations of Education in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

December 2011

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Acknowledgments

The accomplishment of the goal of completing my doctoral studies and, in particular, the writing of this dissertation involved a long process and it would not have been possible to attain this goal without the support of numerous people during the time span of almost a decade. An opportunity to interact with Syracuse University faculty and students in the fall of 2000 enabled me to learn about the doctoral program in Disability Studies at Syracuse University, and I began the pursuit of my doctoral studies in the Fall of 2001. Since then, my association with a number of people at SU has provided me with an enriching experience that has made an immense contribution to my intellectual growth and enabled me to be a more humane and confident person.

Pursuing studies at the doctoral level in the United States is not an easy task, perhaps for anyone, but it has been all the more challenging for me as an international student who also happens to be blind. It would have been very difficult for me to have successfully completed this task without the persistent support of several friends in India and the United States as well as faculty and colleagues at SU. I have deep gratitude for all these people who enabled me to complete the journey to my Ph.D. There are too many to be listed, but at the same time I do want to acknowledge the support of at least a few of them.

In retrospect, it would have been impossible to have completed my doctoral studies without the immense support of several faculty members at SU, particular Professor Steven J. Taylor, Professor Douglas P. Biklen, Professor Susan S. Wadley, and Professor Arlene S. Kanter. They have been not only mentors, but good friends who contributed significantly to my personal and intellectual growth since I arrived at SU. I cannot imagine completing my studies without financial support from the Center on Human Policy and the SU Graduate School

Fellowship. Similarly, it would not have been possible for me to spend a year in India collecting the data for my research without securing the American Institute of Indian Studies Fellowship. I am very grateful for the assistance and support from Steve and Sue in obtaining this financial assistance. I do not have words to express my gratitude for Doug and Arlene, without whose mentorship and constant support, it would have been impossible to complete my studies. Doug was very kind to have accepted me as his advisee and continuously extended his support in guiding me throughout my studies and has always been extremely prompt in dealing with the paper work whenever needed. At the same time, Arlene has always been very supportive in my studies and provided introductions to key people who enriched my professional growth. Support from all of these faculty members has had a transforming impact on my personality as a whole, and, if at all, I have grown as a better human being and an intellectually sound person, it is to be primarily attributed to this support and mentorship in my life during the time spent at SU.

Along with the faculty, I owe a great deal of gratitude toward several colleagues at SU, particularly those at the Center on Human Policy, the School of Education and the Office of Disability Services. The list of such people runs into double digits, but I must express my special thanks to at least Cyndy Colavita, Bonnie Shoultz, Pam Walker, Rachel Zubal, Debra Sims, Maryann Barker, Stephen Simon, Dana Williams, and Laura Derr, for whom I have a great sense of fondness and gratitude. Without the presence of these individuals, my time at SU would have been not easy and I cannot imagine completing my doctoral studies without this source of constant support.

Apart from faculty and SU staff, some of my graduate student colleagues deserve special thanks including Michael Schwartz, Cheryl Spear, Valerie Smith, Patricia English-Sand, Julia White, Rebecca Cory, Liat Ben-Moshe and Ester Kabuga. Their presence enriched my

intellectual growth; in addition, life at SU would have been very difficult without their constant support outside the classroom. Cheryl Spear and Michael Schwartz have been my two most supportive colleagues whom I also count among the best of friends I have ever had in my life. Michael often drove me to the classes we shared and Cheryl introduced me to people when I arrived at SU. Both Michael and Cheryl always stood by me as fellow disabled and personal friends whenever I needed their support in my personal and professional life.

Finally, it would have been impossible to have completed this journey of my doctoral studies without great support from numerous friends inside and outside SU. Some of them include Lisa Stubing, Sreeram Chaulia, Mike Ellis, Rohini Mutuswami, Ramesh Kumar Sarin, Om Prakash Mishra, Satish Kumar Mishra, Sarin Naredla, Radha Ganesan, and Ian Wilson. They all, along with Pam Walker, helped me in some way or other in arranging the data for my dissertation and refining it at various stages of its preparation. My friend and colleague at SU, Pam Walker deserves a special thanks in this context for her immense contribution in editing the draft of my dissertation. Because of my lack of good linguistics skills, the drafts I sent to her were very rough. She not only corrected the spelling and grammatical errors, but refined the expression of my thoughts and provided highly positive and creative feedback which helped significantly in giving final shape to this draft. If there is one person upon whom I depended the most outside the University life throughout my stay at Syracuse, it is Lisa Stubing, who has been my closest friend in Syracuse. She always stood by me through the best and the worst of times and helped me in taking care of routine house-keeping activities ranging from laundry to grocery shopping, enabling me to survive during my stay at Syracuse. Perhaps it would have been impossible without Lisa's support to survive in a foreign land for so long and she indeed made my life much more smooth and comfortable than I could imagine. Once again, I am truly

indebted to all of my friends, as it would not have been possible to complete my journey of doctoral studies without this immense and constant support.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Part I

The Struggle for Rights: An Age of Transitions

This dissertation is a qualitative study of the movement of the blind in India for their rights. I have attempted to document the history of this movement through the methods of oral history and document analysis. I have divided this history into 4 phases beginning with the first phase in 1970 to the 4th phase ending in 2005.

The 20th century has been historic in terms of social and political movements leading to significant changes in several parts of the world. The socialist revolution in Russia and the anti-colonial and democratic movements in Asia and Africa transformed the social and political environments in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The second half of the last century was also a time of social change in the United States as a result of the social movements of ethnic and racial minorities as well as feminist and gay rights movements. These movements raised social consciousness, leading to a social transformation in American society. One of the more recent social movements in the U.S. has been the disability rights movement, which began in the 1970s with the independent living movement (Barnartt & Scotch, 2001; Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Scotch, 2001; Shapiro, 1993). This movement led to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA) in 1990 and also, to some extent, influenced similar movements in various parts of the world including India (Bhambhani, 2004).

The disability rights movement in the United States has not only been well documented but also well theorized from a disability rights perspective. Some noted works which document this movement include Barnartt and Scotch (2001), Scotch (2001), and Shapiro (1993). However, as contested by some other authors (Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990), this literature documenting the American disability rights movement often underemphasizes the fact that the movement of the organized blind started at the national level much earlier, around the 1940s. Authors like Shapiro (1993) and even to some extent Barnartt and Scotch (2001) as well as Scotch (2001) have focused primarily on the disability rights movement in the context of efforts directed toward passage of the ADA, but they fail to fully acknowledge the accomplishments of the movement of the organized blind. While theorizing the Minority Model, in which disabled people are considered as a minority group in the United States, Scotch (2001) made a slight reference to the movement of the organized blind. But his focus was primarily on the independent living movement led by the physically disabled in the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, by and large, there has been lack of sufficient acknowledgement of the contribution of the movement of the organized blind dating back to the 1940s in the United States with the exception of a small body of published literature on disability rights movement (Fleischer & Zems, 2001) and the literature published by the National Federation of the Blind in the United States (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990; tenBroek & Matson, 1959). Since the disability rights movement is a relatively new phenomenon in India, not much academic work has been done yet in this

area, but the trend of the emerging research on this subject is similar to that in the United States (Bhambhani, 2004) as the contribution of the movement of the organized blind in India is also being under-emphasized in the initial research on disability rights movement.

As elaborated later in this chapter, I will be using the expression ‘movement of the organized blind’ to describe the advocacy movement of the blind in India. I have borrowed this expression from the literature of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990; Omvig, 2003). At the same time, I will also occasionally be drawing analogies from the movement of the organized blind in the United States in order to analyze certain developments of its counterpart in India. For example, as explained in Chapters 3 and 4, the adoption of the philosophy of self-advocacy by the early blind leaders in India was to some extent influenced by their counterparts in the United States. Also, as explained in Part II of this chapter, during the course of my doctoral studies in the United States I have been highly inspired by the self-advocacy philosophy adopted by the leaders of the organized blind in the U.S. I have, therefore, not only borrowed the expression ‘movement of the organized blind,’ but will also be using the self-advocacy perspective to analyze the movement of the organized blind in India. But before entering into a detailed discussion of the movement of the organized blind in India, I now briefly introduce the movement of the organized blind in the US in order to understand its basic perspective and philosophy and as a basis for comparative analysis.

Movement of the Organized Blind in the United States

The activists of the movement of the organized blind in the U.S. launched a strong struggle for their rights with the founding of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in 1940 (Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990). One major issue that evoked a strong response from blind people was that professionals were trying to speak on behalf of them. The blind activists argued that they no longer wanted to be under the control of the professionals. Therefore, they fought for their right to organize, to speak for themselves, and to be heard; additionally, they fought for higher quality services and to be full participants in the formulation of policies and programs affecting them (Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan 1999; Matson, 1990). As Kenneth Jernigan (1999), the prominent leader of the movement of the organized blind in the second half of the 20th century in the US argued, “Professionals do not have the right to speak for us ... At best they can speak with us” (p.5).

In his very last speech titled “A Day after Civil Rights,” which Jernigan delivered at the annual Convention of the National Federation of the Blind in 1997, he divided the history of the enlightened blind into four stages. The first stage began with the founding of the NFB in the United States in 1940. According to Jernigan (1999), the period prior to 1940 was the period of “dark age, a pre-enlightened era” (p. 211). Jernigan’s four stages include: The first stage, the stage of ‘starvation’ during the 1940s to mid 1950s, in which the focus was to satisfy hunger; the second stage, the stage of ‘rehabilitation’ from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, in which the focus was on seeking jobs; the third stage, the stage of ‘civil rights’ from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, in which the blind fought for their

rights by way of demonstrations, lobbying, picketing, and the like; and finally, the fourth stage, the ‘stage beyond civil rights‘ starting from the mid-1990s in which the blind move toward self-esteem” (pp. 212-215). Whether this classification of the history of the blind in the United States is accurate or not is a separate topic of research and is beyond the scope of this dissertation as it requires detailed, in-depth study. The important point, however, is that the movement of the organized blind began much earlier than the independent living movement, which, as has been previously noted, was launched in the 1960s and the 1970s.

A crucial factor which contributed to the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind in the United States was that there was a concentration of blind people in the special schools that had been created for them. The beginning of organized work in the field of services for the blind in America is usually set at 1828, the year in which the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill incorporating the New England Asylum for the Blind, which led to the establishment of the first special school for the blind in the U.S., now called the Perkins School for the Blind (Scott, 1969, p. 122). This school opened in 1832 (Scott, 1969). Around this same time, a few other schools for the blind were established along the East Coast of the United States. The New York Institute for the Blind began to accept students in 1831, and a school for the blind in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, first welcomed students in 1833 (Scott, 1969, p. 123). Similar schools were opened in various parts of United States in the 19th century. Many of the graduates of these schools got together and started advocating for their rights (Matson, 1990, pp. 10-11). However, it was following the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935 (which

was the first Federal law to accord benefits to the blind people in the United States) that blind people began to organize on a national level (Matson, 1990, pp.10-11)

Under the Social Security Act of 1935, the needs of blind people were defined as the bare minimum needs of human beings and they were put into the same category as paupers, the aged and the indigenous people (Matson, 1990, p. 14). While delivering the inaugural speech in the first Convention of the National Federation of the Blind in 1940, tenBroek, the founding father of the movement of the organized blind in the United States, denounced this categorization of blind people and argued that the needs of blind people were far greater than those of paupers, the aged, and the indigenous people. He called on blind people to organize at the national level and advocate for their rights: “Individually we are the victims of discrimination . . . Collectively we are the masters of our own future” (tenBroek cited in Matson, 1990, p. 14). So, while the concentration of blind people in special schools created a fertile ground for the beginning of a solid movement in different parts of the country, the immediate factor which triggered the founding of the NFB in the United States was the Social Security Act of 1935. Thus, with the founding of the NFB in 1940, blind activists began to wage a united struggle for their rights and a radical movement of the organized blind in the United States began at the national level.

In 1948, tenBroek declared a manifesto of the rights of blind people when he interpreted the terms ‘equality,’ ‘security,’ and ‘opportunity’ in the context of rights of blind people. He made this declaration in a forceful speech titled “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” delivered before an audience of the 1948 National Convention of the NFB

(tenBroek, 1948 cited in Matson, pp. 36-42). The use of the three terms, 'equality,' 'security,' and 'opportunity,' in 1948 in the context of blind people's right to employment was a very radical move and this speech, in my opinion, can therefore, be regarded as the Magna Carta of blind people; tenBroek forcefully argued that, first and foremost, blind people have a right to employment just like anybody else. Thus, by asking for the provision of jobs, the leadership of the National Federation of the Blind in the United States was shifting from an acceptance of 'relief' to a demand for 'rehabilitation'. While the philosophical arguments were articulated in speeches like his speech of 1948, the activists within the movement of the organized blind continued their lobbying at various levels.

Throughout the 1940s and the ensuing decades, the movement continued to grow. During 1950s, the NFB succeeded in approaching John F. Kennedy, the future president of United States, who was then a Senator from Massachusetts (the state that was home to the Perkins School of the Blind) to propose a bill in the Congress granting the right to blind workers engaged in the sheltered workshops (created specifically to employ the blind) to organize themselves (Matson, 1990, pp.92-93). The fact that the activists of this movement were able to lobby at the level of getting the Kennedy Bill prepared for introducing in Congress, reveals how effective the lobbying strategy was becoming by the 1950s. By the 1960s, the movement of the organized blind was able to attract the attention of the high-level government leaders. The fact that the 1965 annual Convention of the NFB was attended by the junior senator from New York, Robert F. Kennedy, and vice president Hubert Humphrey, explains how well the movement of the organized blind

through the NFB under the leadership of tenBroek and his successor Jernigan had matured by the mid-1960s (Matson, 1990, pp.187-188).

It is worth noting that the 1960s and the 1970s were the decades in which the independent living movement led by groups like the Center for Independent Living (founded by Ed Roberts in 1962) and Disabled In Action (founded by Judy Heumann in 1971) (Scotch, 2001, pp. 34-36) were just becoming established while the movement of the organized blind was reaching its peak. This accomplishment of the organized blind is generally underemphasized in the literature on the disability rights movement. This literature would be much more enriched if the contribution of the organized blind was taken into account. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in an in-depth discussion regarding the under representation of the struggle of the organized blind in the literature on the disability rights movement in the U.S. I would like to, however, conclude this section by emphasizing the point that blind activists were pioneers among the disabled in the U.S. to launch a struggle for their rights much before the other types of disabled activists. Similarly, blind activists were pioneers in launching a struggle on the basis of the philosophy of self-advocacy in India, much before other disability groups adopted this philosophy. In the next section, I present a brief outline of the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind in India based on the philosophy of self-advocacy.

Inception of the Rights-Based Approach and the Origin of the movement of the organized blind in India

India underwent many social and political changes in the post-independence period after gaining independence from British rule in 1947 (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, p. 66). The *dalit* movement (Omvedt, 2001), the socialist movement led by Jai Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia (Limaye, 1984; Mohan, 1984), and the Naxalite (radical communist) movement (Venaik, 1990, p. 182) all led to tremendous political upheavals and social changes. However, it is only recently, beginning in the 1990s, that India has witnessed the emergence out of the shadows of previously silent groups like women and the disabled. The passage of the Persons with Disabilities (Equalization of Opportunities, Equal Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 (Bhambhani, 2004; Baquer & Sharma, 1997), popularly known as the “disability law” or the ‘PWD Act’ is an example of the success of the disability rights movement.

Like their counterparts in the United States, the blind were among the first disability groups in India to wage a vigorous struggle for their rights, beginning in the early 1970s. The self-advocacy movement of the blind, which I call the ‘movement of the organized blind’ in India, formally began in 1970 with the founding of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), popularly called the ‘Federation.’ It was initially known as the National Federation of the Blind Graduates (NFBG). As explained further in Part I of Chapter 4, membership of the Federation was initially restricted to college graduates. In 1972 its membership was made open to all blind people and the word ‘Graduates’ was dropped from its name. This movement of the organized blind in India preceded the larger disability rights movement, which originated in the 1990s. However, as discussed

in Chapters 4 and 5, with the exception of some sporadic activities carried out by the NFB in the 1970s, it was not before 1980 that the Federation had established a strong base of support and started acting as a powerful lobby.

A landmark office memorandum was issued by the Central (federal) Government in 1977 (Mani, 1988, pp. 61-62; Pandey & Advani, 1995, pp. 100-102). According to this Memorandum, a quota was introduced in the lower-level government jobs (which are categorized as “C” and “D” positions) mandating that 3% of clerical and blue collar jobs be reserved for the disabled in the Central Government Services and Public Undertakings (industrial or service units having a substantial share of government in the management). However, after the memorandum was issued, it was challenging to get it implemented. Blind activists launched a vehement struggle, using strategies such as picketing, hunger strikes, and demonstrations. Thus, as a result of the effort to get the Office Memorandum of 1977 implemented the advocacy movement of the organized blind experienced constant growth during the 1980s. This sustained and vigorous movement created a pressure on the government to look into the issues concerning the rights of the blind. I offer a detailed analysis of the passage of this memorandum and its impact on the ensuing advocacy led by blind activists in Part II of Chapter 4. In Part I of Chapter 6, I also briefly discuss its importance as the first legislative measure introduced by the Indian State, marking a change in the attitude of the State toward the issue of employment of the disabled.

The movement led by the Federation and some other key advocacy organizations of the blind like the National Blind Youth Association was basically focused on

demanding the fulfillment of the rights of blind people, particularly the right to employment, though this demand was at times presented as a demand for comprehensive, cross-disability legislation. As a result, while the comprehensive disability legislation, the People with Disabilities Act (hereinafter “PWD Act”) was finally enacted in 1995 a number of developments took place in the 1980s that paved the way for the enactment of this legislation. Two such significant developments included the establishment of a committee in 1981 headed by Lal Advani to draft a policy on disability (L. Advani, personal interview, January 21, 2005; Mani, 1988, pp. 56-58) and formation of the Justice Baharul Islam Committee in 1986 to draft comprehensive legislation (Bhambhani, 2004, p. 17). As elaborated in Chapter 6, by the late 1980s, the advocacy led by the blind activists focused on the demand for enactment of a comprehensive disability law, which resulted in the passage of such a law. Hence, while the movement of the organized blind was basically confined to pressing for the fulfillment of demands for the promotion of the rights of the blind, its lobbying efforts at times yielded much greater results. Once the PWD Act of 1995 was enacted, the activists’ efforts began to address implementation of the provisions of this law.

During the post-Cold War period in the 1990s, when relations between India and the United States became relatively cordial, a greater interaction started taking place between the civil societies of these two countries. The struggle for the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the U.S. and its success had a worldwide impact (Kanter, 2003). Therefore, in the post-ADA period, some interaction started taking place between the disability rights activists of the U.S. and India. A landmark development in this area was a satellite discussion between two disability rights activists

in the U.S., Judy Heumann and Justin Dart, and a U.S. journalist, Joseph Shapiro, and the disability rights activists in India in March 1994 (Bhambhani, 2004, p. 28). This discussion proved to be a milestone in the formation of a broad disability rights movement and, as a follow up, a cross-disability alliance, the Disability Rights Group, was formed (Bhambhani, 2004). Thus, the disability rights movement shifted from an initiative of blind activists to a cross-disability effort.

Over a period of time, the methods of advocacy also began to change. During the early part of the movement led by the organized blind in the late 1970s and the 1980s, courts were not very active in India and the activists did not have the resources to approach the court of law. Therefore, the organized blind in India engaged in what Barnartt and Scotch (2001) describe as ‘contentious political activities’ or ‘contentious political action.’

Social movements are comprised of people who have no power to *affect* political decision making. This is why conventional political processes have not successfully satisfied their needs or demands. [(If they had power within the traditional political processes, presumably, they would already have used that power to satisfy their demands.)] Because they do not have power, they turn to contentious political activity in order to effect the changes they desire. This is one of the reasons why some of the ways in which they pressure policy makers differ from those used in conventional political processes. In the American context, this means that they do not depend solely on tactics such as lobbying or letter-writing campaigns, although they may also use those tactics. [(If those are the only tactics they use, they do not fit the conception of contentious

political action used here.))] Rather, they are likely to use tactics such as marches, sit-ins, or takeovers—tactics that are more disruptive than traditional tactics such as lobbying. They do this because disruption is one of the most successful of tactics available to people with fewer economic or political resources (pp. XIII, XIV).

Due to the limited economic and political resources, the most effective method of advocacy to get the office memorandum of 1977 regarding the quota of the disabled in certain categories of Central Government jobs implemented or the disability law enacted was through what Barnartt and Scotch (2001) called ‘contentious political action’ or ‘contentious political activity.’ This method of contentious political action or contentious political activity in the context of Indian situation included: *dharnas* (picketing), hunger strikes, rallies, disruption of rail and road traffic etc. However, as elaborated in Chapter 7, once the PWD Act was enacted, the activists altered their tactics and became focused on getting the provisions of this law implemented through lobbying, as well as litigation and appeals before the Chief Commissioner on Disability (a quasi-judicial body mandated under the provisions of the PWD Act). With this brief introduction of the origin and evolution of the movement of the organized blind, I now offer the classification of the stages of the growth of this movement in the next section.

Classification of the Phases of the History of the Movement of the Organized Blind in India

Based on the major turning points in the history of the movement of the organized blind in India, I have classified its history in four phases. The first turning point was the founding of the NFB, initially called the NFBG in 1970 that marked the beginning of the

movement at the national level. The second turning point was the first major split in the NFB in 1978 when a second generation of leaders introduced more radical methods of advocacy. The third turning point was the beginning of an overarching focus on passage of the comprehensive disability law since the late 1980s. This was followed by the fourth turning point, in the post-1995 period, when a new effort was launched by NFB as well as other disability rights organizations such as the Disability Rights Group for implementation of the PWD Act. These turning points led to significant changes in the methods and agenda of the movement. Therefore, I have decided to classify the history of this movement based on these turning points into four phases. They are: phase 1, (1970-1978), which I describe as ‘the phase of organization building and moderate advocacy’; phase 2, (1979-1988), which I consider to be a phase of ‘radicalization of the movement’ when the focus was primarily on right to employment; phase 3, (1988-1995), during which the struggle was focused on demanding the enactment of the disability law and finally, phase 4, (1995-2005), in which the methods of advocacy are changing and the focus is on implementation of the PWD Act. Based on the importance of each of these phases in the movement, I have devoted four out of five of my data chapters (e.g., Chapters 4-7) to discussion of each phase of the movement. I have divided the second, third, fourth, fifth and the sixth chapter along with this chapter into two parts. I now present a very brief outline of the chapters.

In the second chapter, I discuss the methodology, methods and the process of data collection. Since this is a qualitative study based primarily on the method of oral history and, to some extent, even the method of document analysis, I have devoted Part I of this chapter to the discussion of semi-structured interviews and oral history. At the same time,

I also discuss the application of the method of oral history to Disability Studies. In Part II, I discuss the methods of data collection and organization.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the analysis of developments that created the conditions for the origin of the movement of the organized blind in India. I begin Part I with a brief discussion of the traditional perspective on disability in India. Then, I describe the contribution of a few committed and sensitive bureaucrats and the first generation of politicians to the field of rehabilitation services for the blind. I discuss some crucial educational and rehabilitation measures that were set in India due to their initiative, and which contributed to the promotion of educational opportunities for the blind. I further explain how some of these developments created conditions for the emergence of a group of educated unemployed blind youth who initiated the movement for their rights in the early part of the 1970s. In Part II, I offer a detailed analysis of domestic and international factors that paved the way for the origin of the movement.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the activities and methods of advocacy during the formative years of the movement under the first generation of leadership led by the educated middle class blind, and certain developments which influenced the nature of subsequent struggle. In Part I, I discuss the origin and growth of the movement (with the founding of the NFBG in 1970) during its first phase from 1970-1978. In Part II, I discuss the impact of two significant developments that took place during this phase of the movement and which had a significant influence on the nature of the movement during subsequent phases. These are: 1, the first formal major split within the National Federation of the Blind, which I describe as the 'Kanpur Split,' which took place during

the general elections of the federation held in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, in 1978; and 2, the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1976 which was the first of such legal measures that marked a shift in the attitude of the Indian State regarding the right of the disabled to employment.

In the fifth chapter, I analyze the advocacy activities led by the organized blind during the second phase of the movement, which was focused on employment. I also discuss how this phase was characterized by intensification and radicalization of the movement. In Part I of this chapter, I analyze the growth of the movement during this stage with reference to an analysis of an incident of *lathi* charge (act of beating with sticks committed by police) in Delhi in March 1980. In Part II, I briefly describe the movement of the organized blind in a few selected states that experienced a strong state-level movement and, to some extent, provided support to the movement in Delhi from time to time.

Chapter 6 contains a detailed analysis of the struggle focused on the enactment of the comprehensive disability legislation from 1988-1995. In order to provide a brief socio-political and historical background, I begin Part I by discussing the relevant constitutional provisions relating to equal opportunities and social justice enshrined under the Constitution and the apathy of its creators to the rights of the disabled. I also briefly discuss the factors leading to the process of marginalization of the disabled in India and the role of 'socialistic State' in India with reference to the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977. I begin part II with a discussion of how the Federation shifted its

focus from right to employment to the enactment of comprehensive disability legislation. Then I engage into a detailed discussion of the movement carried out during this phase for the enactment of the disability law and conclude the chapter with a brief reference to certain factors which facilitated the accomplishment of the goal of the movement for the enactment of such a law.

I devote the last data chapter, i.e. Chapter 7 to an analysis of emergence of new methods of advocacy and trends in the movement of the organized blind. I provide this analysis with reference to the work undertaken by the NFB and other disability rights organizations for the implementation of the PWD Act in the post-1995 period and the changing attitude of the non-governmental organizations engaged in the field of disability toward advocacy. I end the chapter with a discussion of the debate related to the origin of disability rights movement in India and make an attempt to present an alternative explanation by rejecting the existing arguments in regard to this issue. Finally, I devote the last chapter (Chapter 8) to a summary of my findings from the data presentation and make some concluding observations.

Part II

Background

As described earlier in this chapter, a cross-disability rights group called Disability Rights Group was formed in India following a satellite discussion with Shapiro and the two leading U.S. disability rights activists in the spring of 1994. I joined the DRG at the time of its founding and had the special privilege to be one of the members of the committee consisting of its eight core group members (Chander & Baquer, 2005, p. 8). This gave me an opportunity to become part of the history of struggle for the enactment of the first comprehensive disability law in India (Chander, 2008). Being blind since early childhood and growing up witnessing the movement of the organized blind during 1980s, my interest in the disability rights movement grew over a period of time as my involvement in the movement increased. Appendix 2 contains a detailed discussion of my own struggle for advocating for accommodations at the higher education level as a result of the influence of the impact of the rights-based ideology which I witnessed during my high school days. Since 1992, I had also been teaching political science in Hindu College, affiliated with the University of Delhi.

Being a student of political science, I was highly inclined toward conducting research on rights issues. My background in political science provided me with knowledge of the literature on various kinds of social movements in India like the *dalit* (oppressed castes) movement, the communist movement led by different Marxist groups, the socialist movement led by followers of Gandhian ideology such as Jai Prakash

Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia, and also to some extent the emerging women's movement. My involvement in the disability rights movement significantly increased my interest in documenting and analyzing the disability rights movement in India as an academic endeavor.

At the same time that I was gaining interest in studying the disability rights movement, I had very little access to any literature on the disability rights movement. The idea of pursuing doctoral studies in the field of disability studies with the purpose of conducting research on the disability rights movement in India seemed a highly impractical proposition in the 1990s as I was not aware of any literature on the disability rights movement other than Shapiro's book (1993), *No Pity: The People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement in the United States*. This remarkable documentation of the disability rights movement would have given me some understanding of the American experience, but would have been of little use to me in documenting the movement in India except providing a perspective on disability rights. While struggling with the dilemma of pursuing doctoral study in the field of disability rights in India, I participated in an International Congress ON Asian and North African Studies held in the fall of 2000 in Montreal, Canada. Although I did not meet anyone engaged in academic pursuit of disability from a disability rights perspective at that Congress, during my extended stay in Canada, I had an opportunity to interact with some Canadian Disability Studies scholars from York University and Ryerson University. Through them, I learned about a Disability Studies conference scheduled to be held in Washington D.C. in the third week of October, sponsored by the National Institute on Disability, Rehabilitation and Research. It was at this conference that I learned about the

Disability Studies program at Syracuse University. Greatly excited, I visited Syracuse in the last week of October. It was during interactions with the students and faculty at SU that I realized that I found what I was looking for: a program that would enable me to conduct research on disability with a disability rights perspective. I was accepted into the program in fall 2001.

During my coursework, I conducted a few interviews with activists from the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind, the two leading advocacy organizations of the blind in the United States. I also spent about a month at the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness (PDRIB), affiliated with the Louisiana Tech University located in Ruston, Louisiana in the summer of 2003 to collect data on the movement of the organized blind led by the NFB in the United States which enabled me to familiarize myself with the literature of this organization (Chander, 2004). As noted earlier in this chapter and discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4, the NFB in the U.S. challenged the construction of blindness intellectually and vehemently. The Blind activists involved in this organization advocated for the right of blind people to control their own services and lives as a whole (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990).

Several years of academic pursuit in the field of Disability Studies, particularly the three years of coursework at Syracuse University, provided me with a theoretical understanding of a disability rights perspective. I was thus now ready to pursue my previous goal of documenting the disability rights movement in India. Due to my familiarity with the movement of the organized blind in India, my own experience, and witnessing this movement as a teenager and young adult, I felt that I was well-suited and

interested in documenting the history of this movement. Therefore, while other related research interests have a strong influence on my academic pursuit, the goal of this research has been on the documentation of the movement of the organized blind in India. Before ending this chapter with the discussion of the use of specific terms in this dissertation and the limitations of this research, I will now present a brief review of the existing literature that is relevant to this research.

Background Literature

Other than some exceptional books, which could be put in the category of books written from a Disability Studies perspective, most of the literature available on disability in India has basically been written with a traditional approach towards disability. In this section, I briefly review some important books written on disability that are relevant to my research.

I could not identify any published work documenting the movement of the organized blind in India. For that matter, other than one unpublished master's thesis at the University of Illinois at Chicago on the disability rights movement written by Meenu Bhambhani (2004) which documents the history of the disability rights movement since the early 1990s, there has hardly been any work which touches upon the theme of the disability rights movement. Even Bhambhani makes very little mention of the movement of the organized blind in India. I present a slightly more detailed review of this thesis at the end of this section.

The only publication that I could identify which touches upon the issue of the disability rights movement in India is the book by an American scholar, James Charlton, *Nothing about Us without Us* (1998). Charlton devotes part of a chapter to the disability rights movement in India, particularly to the movement of the organized blind. However, his portrayal of the disability rights movement, particularly, the movement of the organized blind, is completely erroneous. As Bhambhani (2004) notes, Charlton completely neglects to discuss the Disability Rights Group, a group that has been active since 1994 in Delhi (p. 35). Similarly, he fails to even mention the NFB, the largest advocacy organization of the blind in India. On the contrary, Charlton (1998) portrays the National Association for the Blind (NAB) as the largest and most powerful advocacy organization of the blind in India (pp. 145-146). He fails to acknowledge the fact that for most of its existence, NAB has been a service agency and until recently it vehemently opposed the advocacy approach adopted by organizations like NFB. I further discuss NAB's approach toward advocacy in Chapter 4.

A significant publication in the area of disability, which presents an in depth analysis of social attitudes toward disability, is a book by Usha Bhatt (1963). This book is a refined version of her Ph.D. dissertation in the Department of Sociology at Bombay University published in the early 1960s. It remains a highly cited reference on disability in India even now. Bhatt's analysis links the changing social attitudes toward disability to the scriptures in India and to western philosophy beginning with Aristotle's views on disability. She elaborates the *karma* model (actions of past lives making an influence on the present life) in the context of disability and explains the reasons for the lack of development of rehabilitation services for the disabled in India. She argues that the break-

up of the institution of extended family and two world wars have had a tremendous impact on social attitudes toward disability in the West but since India remained relatively unaffected by the world wars in the last century, the disabled segment of the society did not receive sufficient attention from policymakers and planners. As a result, social attitudes toward disability continue to be highly influenced by the moral or charitable approach arising out of the traditional Hindu notions of *karma* and *dharma* (religious duty). However, despite this significant contribution of Bhatt at a time when there was very little focus on disability as a subject of academic pursuit, her approach is primarily a sociological one based on moral considerations rather than a disability rights perspective.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of strong communist movements led by radical groups adhering to Marxist and Leninist philosophy (Venaik, 1990, P. 182) and a socialist movement based on the ideology of Gandhism led by Jai Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lal Lohia (Limaye, 1984; Mohan, 1984). While the radical communist movements based on the Marxist ideology did not acquire broad based legitimacy, the socialist movements of the 1970s did. One might expect that the scholars would have been influenced by the vibrant socio-political atmosphere of the country. But neither of the two important publications of the 1980s, Chaturvedi (N.D.) and Mani (1988), mentions a word about the movement of the organized blind, its accomplishments, and its approach. A similar line was adopted by T.N. Kitchlu (1991) in relation to welfare services for the blind in India in the second half of the 20th century. While Mani and Chaturvedi dealt with disability issues from a broad policy perspective, Kitchlu claimed to analyze the educational and employment measures

adopted for the blind by the welfare State of India. In these three books, the clear message sent to readers was that disabled people had received all the benefits accorded to them as a part of the welfare philosophy of the Indian State and not as a result of advocating for their rights. These intellectuals who wrote and edited these three leading books in the disability area completely ignored the accomplishments of the advocacy organizations such as the NFB. This omission reflects the fact that they strongly abided by the ideology of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the disability area, which at that time did not endorse the advocacy-based approach. I further discuss the political atmosphere of the country in the context of the socialist and communist movements in Chapter 4. In Chapter 7, I also discuss the changing attitudes of the NGOs in India working in the disability area, which were initially critical of the advocacy approach until it was endorsed by international level NGOs.

During the 1990s some progress was made in scholarly recognition of the importance of the advocacy approach adhered to by the disabled activists. The passage of the ADA and the movement preceding it in the United States, the origin of a broader disability rights movement in India in the mid 1990s, the passage of the PWD Act of 1995, and the growing literature in the West based on a disability studies approach gradually started to influence the intellectuals regarding disability in India, though initially in only a very limited way. Three major publications in the 1990s deserve special mention: the book by Ali Baquer (1994) and the book by R.S. Pandey and Lal Advani (1995), each published in the pre-disability law period and finally, the book by Ali Baquer and Anjali Sharma (1997), published in the immediate post-disability law period. While the book by Pandey and Advani and the book co-authored by Baquer and Sharma

primarily promote the traditional medical model of disability as they are focused on the description of rehabilitation services and legislative measures in India, they make some contribution to the newly emerging disability rights perspective in India. On the other hand, the earlier book written by Baquer in 1994 was to a greater extent based on analysis of disability issues from a disability studies perspective. The overarching emphasis of this work was that the government should respond to the demand of the disabled community for comprehensive disability legislation and the more the government delayed the passage of such legislation, the stronger the movement would become accompanied by the demand for more broad based legislation.

Lately, there has been an emergence of a disability studies approach by a few Indian scholars. For instance, Asha Hans and Annie Patri (2003) and Anita Ghai (2003) have incorporated the disability studies perspective into the literature on disability in India. However, these are the only two identifiable publications in India that can be placed in the category of disability studies to date. The first book compiled and co-edited by Hans and Patri (2003) and the second book authored by Ghai (2003) address issues of marginalization of disabled women and the feminist discourse in India.

The book edited by Hans and Patri is a significant work as it adopts a disability studies perspective in the discourse on identity of disabled women; the contributors are disabled themselves, the siblings or parents of the disabled, or women scholars working on theorizing the academic discourse on disabled women's identity in India and other countries. This book will, therefore, always be regarded as one of the pioneer works in initiating a new intellectual tradition in India that examines disabled women's identity in

the South Asian context. Drawing upon the marginalization of discussions on women with disabilities in Western feminist discourse, Ghai (2003) develops her argument regarding the marginalization of the discussion of women with disabilities in the Indian context by current feminist theorists in India and discusses the multiple forms of oppression of disabled women in Indian society. Ghai's work, in particular, should inspire young scholars interested in this new approach.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the only identifiable research conducted on the disability rights movement in India is the unpublished master's thesis written by Meenu Bhambhani (2004). Although just a master's thesis, it is the first research endeavor to theorize the disability rights movement in India. However, there are two major gaps in this research: First, the thesis clearly labels Javed Abidi as the undisputed leader of the disability rights movement. This finding is based on data collected from the office of the NGO headed by Abidi and the press coverage of the disability rights movement led by the Disability Rights Group (DRG). Second, the main theme of Bhambhani's thesis, that the disability rights movement began in 1994 with the founding of DRG, underemphasizes the role of the movement of the organized blind, which preceded the cross-disability rights movement. However, Bhambhani does acknowledge that some of the developments in the disability area, particularly in the area of blindness, have to be attributed to the existence of the movement of the organized blind (what she calls the "advocacy movement of the blind") prior to the origin of the broader disability rights movement. While reviewing Mani (1988), she points out that some of the benefits accorded to the blind like discounts in airfare and a 3% reservation in jobs for the blind, physically impaired, and the deaf would not have taken place in the absence of any kind

of advocacy. However, overall, Bhambhani fails to give adequate recognition to the influence of the movement of the organized blind that preceded the broader disability rights movement. She builds her argument about the origin of the disability rights movement in 1994 with the founding of the DRG, thus ignoring the fact that the NFB led a sustained movement for the enactment of the PWD Act beginning in the late 1980s. Under Chapter 7, I engage in a more detailed discussion about the timing of the origin of the disability rights movement and reject the arguments of Ghai (2003) and Bhambhani, (2004) regarding this issue.

Use of Language

Throughout this dissertation, I use the prevailing terminologies and expressions. However, I think it is important to explain why I have chosen to use certain terminologies that are central to my work. These are: 1) defining the status of the disabled in India as ‘marginalized’; 2) describing the advocacy movement of the blind as a movement of ‘the organized blind’; and finally, 3) my preference for the adjective ‘blind’ rather than any other word connoting blindness. In this section, I explain why I have chosen to use these three terminologies instead of using their alternatives.

Defining the Status of the Disabled in Indian Society as ‘Marginalized’

The Constitution of India used the term ‘weaker sections’ (Constitution of India, 2004, p. 18) or ‘educationally and socially backward classes of citizens’ (Constitution of India, 2004, p. 7). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage into a detailed discussion regarding the suitability and appropriateness of both of these expressions to define the marginalized status of the disabled and other underprivileged sections of society such as

women, *dalits* (oppressed caste groups) or low caste or tribal groups in India, generally referred as ‘scheduled castes’ (SCs) and ‘scheduled tribes’ (STs). However, I disagree with their usage to connote the underprivileged or marginalized status of these groups or classes and, therefore, have chosen to use the term ‘marginalized,’ which seems to me to be a more appropriate and suitable expression. Each of these expressions, namely ‘weaker sections’ and ‘educationally and socially backward classes of citizens,’ used in the Constitution do not signify the underlying fact that these people were subjected to a prolonged history of exploitation and oppression which resulted in their marginalization in society.

The term marginalized suggests that these sections were marginalized not due to their own fault or some sort of natural phenomenon. It also suggests that their state of being marginalized is not a permanent condition. However, marginalization of these sections is the result of a sustained pattern of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination at the hands of the powerful and privileged that resulted in deprivation of opportunities for their equal development and rightful place in society. Therefore, these sections have not acquired the so-called status of ‘weaker sections’ of society due to any natural phenomenon or due to some sort of individual or collective failure on their own part. The roots of their marginalization lie in the existing oppressive, exploitative, and discriminating social, political, and economic processes. Hence, I use the term ‘marginalized sections of society’ to describe the oppressive conditions and the deprived status of the disabled as well as other underprivileged groups within Indian society such as the *dalits* and women.

Of all the underprivileged sections of Indian society, the disabled experience is the most significant marginalization due to oppression and discrimination (Erb & Harris-White, 2002). In Chapter 6, I explain how the attitudinal and physical-environmental barriers along with political and economic factors result in extreme marginalization of the disabled. I argue that the disabled are much more marginalized and oppressed than any other underprivileged group in Indian society due to their exclusion from the mainstream life and deprivation of opportunities to participate in various spheres of life due to social, political, and physical-environmental factors.

Defining the Type of ‘Movement’

The most generic term used to connote an advocacy movement, including the movement of the blind for their rights, in the press coverage as well as the citation of the views of the activists and leaders of the movement is ‘agitation.’ However, I feel that the term connotes a specific advocacy activity, and is not suitable to convey the meaning of a sustained and radical movement, such as that of the organized blind. Because of its popular and prevalent usage, the term ‘agitation’ appears in this dissertation while quoting various statements from the press coverage as well as the citation of interviews of various activists, I have chosen to use the term ‘movement of the organized blind’ to connote a sustained advocacy movement led by blind people for their rights in India. In the following paragraphs, I briefly explain the rationale for this decision.

While my academic pursuit at the doctoral level has been in the United States, my research has been on the subject of the movement of the organized blind in India. Therefore, the use of a specific terminology to describe this ‘movement’ is most likely to be either borrowed from a movement in the United States or in India in the field of

disability. The disability rights movement in India, as it is understood today in a broader context as the movement of the disabled, is of recent origin and has consistently been borrowing the use of the terminology from the American disability rights movement. As is clearly established through the discussion in this dissertation, the movement of the organized blind in India dates far earlier than the broader disability rights movement. However, very little conscious and sustained efforts have been made to engage in intellectual discourse regarding this movement. Nor there has been any serious attempt by the leaders of the movement of the organized blind in India to question the traditional misconceptions relating to blindness and to challenge, explain, interpret, define, or redefine the vocabulary in the field of blindness. While the leaders of the movement of the organized blind have been successful in launching and sustaining a movement for their rights, the documentation of this movement and the growth of intellectual discourse on matters relating to the rights of the blind and presentation of an alternative perspective on blindness challenging the prevailing approach towards blindness has been largely absent. This results in a lack of vocabulary to denote the movement carried out by this group. Therefore, I was left with no other choice than to look elsewhere for appropriate terminology to describe the nature of this movement.

Based on my personal interaction with the leaders and activists of the movement of the organized blind in the United States during my stay of about 4 years there and the reading of the literature of the NFB in the U.S. I found the intellectual discourse on the perspective on blindness immensely rich. At the same time, because of my academic training in the United States, I happen to be more familiar with the developments in the field of disability rights in the U.S.

The leaders of the organized movement of the blind in the United States not only fought a legal battle for their rights, but also challenged the erroneous perception of blindness and offered an alternative perspective on this issue through in depth engagement in intellectual discourse (Ferguson, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990; tenBroek & Matson, 1959). Thus, I found the movement of the organized blind in the U.S. to be a logical place from which to borrow terminology to describe the advocacy movement of the blind for their rights in India. Hence, I decided to utilize terminology from the literature of the National Federation of the Blind in the U.S. I borrow the term ‘movement of the organized blind’ to connote the sustained struggle or movement of the blind for their rights in India.

Connoting Blindness

The expression ‘visually impaired’ is often used as a synonym for the term ‘blind.’ Recently, the term ‘visually challenged’ has also been used in the press or by those who are not directly related to the field of blindness. The term ‘visually challenged’ is a modified version of the commonly used expression, ‘physically challenged’ (Linton, 1998; Pandey & Advani, 1995). ‘Visually impaired’ is, however, the most common expression that is used interchangeably with the term ‘blind.’ In this dissertation, I have chosen to use the term ‘blind’ rather than visually impaired or visually challenged.

As noted in the preceding paragraphs, unlike the movement of the organized blind in the United States, leaders of the movement in India have made very little conscious effort to engage in intellectual discussion regarding issues related to blindness. Thus, I could not identify any literature discussing the use of language in the context of blindness. But based on the discussion during the interviews for this research and analysis

of the slogans used by the activists, it is clear that the use of terminology to connote blindness is different in English and Hindi (the dominant language of India). As mentioned in the next section dealing with limitations, my research was primarily confined to the Hindi speaking parts of India and so my knowledge of usage of terminologies relating to blindness has been limited to the Hindi speaking areas.

The most commonly used term to connote blindness in the English language in India is 'blind.' Interestingly, while the activists in India would raise no objection to the use of the term 'blind' when used in English, they would find it derogatory if its exact translation '*andha*' is used in Hindi. In the Hindi speaking areas, there are two terms used most commonly particularly by relatively less educated or uneducated people: '*andha*' and '*surdas*.' The term '*surdas*' is derived from the name of a blind Hindi poet, Surdas, who belonged to the medieval Hindi religious literary tradition of *bhakti* (religious devotion) (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 7). Both of these terms have been used by Hindi speaking people to identify one's blindness. But the activists consider it objectionable due to their prevalent use by uneducated and less educated people who form a major portion of India's population and the negative meaning that they associate with blindness.

Unlike their American counterparts, the blind activists in India did not create any slogan such as, 'We will change what it means to be blind' (Jernigan, 1999), but they rejected the most commonly used terminologies to connote blindness in Hindi and instead argued for the usage of less prevalent and what they considered to be refined terminologies in Hindi. Therefore, if a Hindi word is used to connote blindness, the activists would basically prefer to use the term '*netrahin*,' which would be translated in

English as ‘someone without eyes’ or ‘*drishtihin*,’ which is the Hindi translation of the word ‘sightless.’ I could not identify any published literature explaining the preference for usage of these terms in Hindi. But it is evident from the feedback that I got during my interaction with the blind activists that the usage of the Hindi word ‘*andha*’ is considered to be derogatory due to the traditional stigma attached to blindness. Similarly, while the term ‘*surdas*’ is supposed to connote a more positive association with blindness as it is derived from a literary figure whose name was Surdas and who is well-respected in Indian popular culture due to his devotion to Lord Krishna, it too became associated with the stigma attached to blindness due to its prolonged and pervasive usage by the common people in India. Therefore, due to the absence of any conscious trend to challenge the traditional meaning attached to blindness in Indian society, the activists chose to avoid the use of traditional terminologies like ‘*andha*’ or ‘*surdas*’ and instead preferred to use the relatively less prevalent and considerably more refined terms like ‘*netrihin*’ or ‘*drishtihin*’ in the Hindi speaking regions of India.

Other than the Progressive Society for the Sightless Persons (“*Progressive Society For The Sightless Persons At A Glance*,” 2005), a small Delhi-based organization that has used the term ‘sightless’ to adapt the popular term ‘*drishtihin*,’ almost every leading organization in India uses the term ‘blind’ as part of their name in English. Some of these leading organizations, which are frequently mentioned throughout this dissertation, include the National Association for the Blind (the largest national-level service delivery organization), the All India Confederation of Blind (a Delhi based service delivery organization), and the National Blind Youth Association (a Delhi-based advocacy organization). Blind Persons’ Association is yet another name which is common to four

different service delivery organizations based in four different states (Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra). Of course, even the National Federation of the Blind falls in this category. These organizations, which happen to have their original names in English, chose the term 'blind' because of its pervasive usage in English. Since my dissertation is written in English, I have also chosen to use the term 'blind' because of the acceptance of this term by the activists of the movement of the organized blind in India when used in English.

Limitations of the Research

I spent a little more than a year in the field in India to collect data for this research. However, no research is complete in itself and there is always potential for including additional data. Since the purpose of the study is to document the history of the advocacy movement of the blind in India by collecting data through interviews with the activists who were connected to the movement at the national level, the main focus was the states from where the major strength of the movement was derived. Therefore, most of the informants who were identified and interviewed were from five states: Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Haryana along with one informant from each of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and Kerala, respectively. Many parts of the country such as the northeastern and eastern regions are not represented at all. Although I made significant effort to collect as many documents as possible in order to validate the facts collected through interviews, not many documents could be procured due to the lack of systematic collection of documents by any organization. Therefore, I have to rely heavily on the method of oral history.

In addition to this limitation, my research is constrained in the following ways: First, all of the interviews were conducted in either Hindi or English. No interview was conducted in any regional language. Second, most of the people who were interviewed were people who had played some leadership role. It is quite possible that I would have obtained a slightly different picture based on the opinion of the common members of the advocacy organization in addition to the leaders. Many of these grassroots activists were often marginalized by the leadership and did not have much say in determining the agenda of the movement. Finally, all the people who were interviewed were either from the largest organization, NFB, or the National Blind Youth Organization, or were at some point connected with one of these organizations. Both of these organizations had their headquarters based in Delhi. The NFB and to some extent even NBYA had branches or affiliates in different parts of the country, but it was the leaders in Delhi who were basically determining the agenda of the movement. A few organizations that also adhere to an advocacy approach have been active in a few states at the local level, for example, the Blind Persons Association in West Bengal. However, I decided to confine my research to the Delhi-based large organizations to keep the scope of my research manageable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the subject of this research and the perspectives adopted to document and analyze the movement of the organized blind in India. I have also briefly described my academic background and my research interest along with the background literature, the rationale behind the use of certain terminologies in this

dissertation, as well as limitations of this research. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology adopted to conduct this research and the methods of collection and organization of data.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology, Methods and Data Collection

Part I

Methodology

This historical study of the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind in India is based on qualitative methodology. The two primary methods used for this qualitative inquiry are oral history and document analysis. Since the data collected through 93 interviews are the major source of my research, it is going to be highly descriptive and inductive. In Part I of the chapter, I discuss the methods of document analysis and oral history and in Part II I provide a detailed description of the methods and process of data collection.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) identify five characteristics of qualitative research: naturalistic, descriptive, data concerned with process, inductive, and meaning (pp. 3-7). This research incorporates all of the characteristics, except that it is not naturalistic. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) also mention three types of documents which are a good source for qualitative research: (1) personal documents, produced by individuals for private purposes and limited use, such as letters, diaries, autobiographies, family photo albums, and other visual recordings; (2) official documents, produced by organizational employees for record-keeping and dissemination purposes such as memos, newsletters, files, yearbooks, and the like; and (3) popular culture documents, produced for commercial purposes to entertain, persuade, and enlighten the public such as commercials, TV programs, news reports, or audio and visual recordings (p. 58).

My research relies heavily on two of the three types of documents referred to by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), that is, personal and official documents. In Part II of this chapter I present an explanation of the types of documents collected and used for this research. In the following pages of this part of the chapter, I provide a theoretical discussion of the types of interviews, use of the method of oral history for research, and the application of the method of oral history to the emerging field of Disability Studies.

Types of Interviews

“Interview is usually defined simply as conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information.” (Berg, 1995, p. 29).

Various scholars of qualitative studies have identified diverse types of interviews. Berg (1995) points out that many writers divide interviews into two broad categories: formal and informal. However, based on the various types of interviews, he identifies three broad categories used by qualitative researchers. These are: standardized, semi-standardized, and unstandardized interviews (pp. 30-33). These three categories are also described as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, pp. 93-95).

Standardized/structured interviews are structured, formal interviews with a well-defined set of questions. Berg (1995) concludes:

In sum, standardized interviews are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subjects' thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about study-related issues. Standardized

interviews thus operate from the perspective that one's thoughts are intricately related to one's actions (p. 32).

On the other hand, in unstandardized/unstructured interviews, the interviewer does not define and schedule the questions very explicitly and conducts the interview in a much more informal and flexible manner. Berg explains, “In an unstandardized interview, interviewers must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes appropriate to the given situation and the central purpose of the investigation” (1995, p. 33). In between the two types of standardized/structured and unstandardized/unstructured interviews are the semi-standardized/semi-structured interviews. In the following pages, I discuss different types of semi-standardized/semi-structured interviews and their extensive use in my research. Due to its more prevalent use, I use the term semi-structured interviews rather than semi-standard interviews in reference to the interviews conducted for this research.

Semi-standardized or semi-structured interviews fall in between the two extremes of standardized and unstandardized interviews. In these types of interviews, the interviewer starts with scheduled questions and then lets the interview flow naturally. The interviewer has certain broad questions that he might like to investigate and during the course of the interview he adapts the questions based upon the information desired and the responses of various interviewees. According to Berg (1995),

Located somewhere between the extremes of completely standardized and completely unstandardized interviewing structures is the semi-standardized interview. This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress, that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to

probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions (p. 33).

Klee and Taylor (2002) strongly emphasize the use of semi-structured interviews for conducting research on social movements. They identify four types of semi-structured interviews and their relevance for research on social movements: oral histories, life histories, key informant interviews, and focus group interviews (pp. 102-110). Some of these types of interviews overlap, for instance, there are similarities in the interviewing strategies for oral histories, life histories, and key informant interviews. All of these categories of semi-structured interviewing except focus group interviewing were used in the process of collecting data for my research. In addition to the three types of semi-structured interviews mentioned here, the interviewing method of oral history is very important and is central to my research. Since three out of four categories of interviewing described by Klee and Taylor have been used extensively for my research, I now present a brief overview of life history interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group interviews and engage in a discussion of oral history interviewing later in the next section of this chapter.

Life history interviews are meant to record the biography of a person with a specific purpose in the mind of the researcher. For researchers of social movements, such interviews are conducted with the objective of analyzing key events in the history of the selected person. An analysis of these events can then be used to dissect the history of a movement or phenomenon. Life history interviews can be highly unstructured because the interviewer can simply ask the interviewee to narrate his history. Klee and Taylor (2002) explain,

The researcher simply asks the interviewee to tell the story of his/her life, how he/she came to participate in the movement, the nature of her/his participation, and how it influences who she/he is today. Interviewers generally do not intervene in the interviewee's life story narration to suggest particular directions or questions, but make comments to encourage more complete expositions of events, to develop aids to respondents' memories by pegging recollections to historical events or life transitions, or to direct respondents to finish relevant stories that were incompletely narrated (p. 104)

Bogdan and Biklen (1998, p. 57) also point out that at the onset of a life history study, when the subject and the interviewer do not know each other well, discussion usually covers impersonal matters. Over time, the content becomes more revealing, the researcher probes more closely, and a focus emerges. According to them,

Life history interviews can involve over one hundred hours of tape recorded meetings and over a thousand pages of transcripts. While some life-history interviews are directed at capturing the subjects' rendering of their whole lives, from birth to present, others are more limited. They seek data on a particular period in the person's life, like adolescence or elementary school, or on a particular topic, like friendships or courting (p. 57).

In my research, I used two life histories as case studies. However, as explained later in this chapter, the focus of these two case studies was different from one another.

Key informant interviewing is another type of semi-structured interview described by Klee and Taylor (2002) as particularly useful in conducting research on social movements. They are of the opinion that

The most important requirement for selecting a key informant is the interviewee's position or role in the social movement being studied. The criteria for choosing key informants are the amount of knowledge he or she has about a topic and his or her willingness to communicate with the researcher (p. 106).

As I will explain further, I interviewed over 50 individuals, but decided to transcribe the interviews of only 45 of them. Many of the chosen 45 could be regarded as “key informants.” Most of the interviewees falling in this category were interviewed in depth and a detailed or, in most cases; complete transcription of their interviews was made. However, some of the interviewees among these 45 could also be called what Klee and Taylor (2002) describe as “respondents” (p 107). The interviews with these “respondents” were not transcribed completely, and only the key points were used.

Focus group interviewing is yet another category of semi-structured interviews. Under this category, a group interview, which is generally moderated by the researcher, is conducted. Klee and Taylor (2002) explain,

Focus groups are becoming a powerful tool among social movement scholars working from a tripartite model of cultural investigation in which data about texts, production, and reception are collected and the intersections between them analyzed. Focus group interviewing is particularly useful for studying the cultural outcomes of social movements, such as how people understand and incorporate the ideas, goals, practices, and identities of protest groups (pp. 107-108)

Klee and Taylor find semi-structured interviews to be useful in the following seven ways in the context of research on social movements: (1) through semi-structured interviews, scholars can gain access to the motivations and perspectives of a broader and more diverse group of social movement participants than would be represented in most documentary sources; (2) semi-structured interviewing strategies make it possible to scrutinize the semantic *context* of statements by social movement participants and leaders; (3) semi-structured interviewing allows scrutiny of meaning, both in terms of how activists regard their participation and how they understand their social world; (4)

semi-structured interviews are able to provide a longitudinal window on social movement activism; (5) these interviews allow social movement scholars access to such nuanced understandings of social movement outcomes as the construction of collective and individual identities rather than assuming such identities; (6) they bring human agency to the center of movement analysis; and (7) semi-structured interviewing allows scholars to scrutinize the ways in which messages of social movements are received by members, targeted recruits, intended audiences, and others (pp. 94-97).

As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) conclude,

In qualitative studies, researchers follow a flexible research design. We begin our studies with only vaguely formulated research questions. We do not know what to look for or what specific questions to ask until we have spent some time in a setting. As we learn about a setting and how participants view their experiences, we can make decisions regarding additional data to collect on the basis of what we have already learned (p. 8).

As mentioned earlier, the method of oral history is central to my research. I now, therefore, briefly discuss the meaning of the method of oral history and its application to the emerging discipline of Disability Studies.

Meaning and Growth of the Method of Oral History

In order to understand the meaning of the term ‘oral history’, it is helpful to first distinguish between ‘oral history’ and ‘oral tradition’. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, which can be confusing. ‘Oral tradition’ is generally referred to as the method used to pass stories in a verbal form from one generation to the next. It is a

method that is quite prevalent in many illiterate societies. However, as Hoopes (1979) points out,

It is commonly accepted that in literate societies like the United States, oral tradition is not as reliable as in illiterate societies, where people are well practiced in remembering stories, where story telling is highly ritualized, and where the teller may even be punished for changing the story's form or content. Yet in the United States, research in oral tradition may be useful in dealing with particular or local cultures, such as those of native and black Americans, who may not be literate or may have been denied a written history because of political oppression (p. 6).

In contrast to 'oral tradition', 'oral history' as it is understood in its present form and as it is used in this dissertation refers to the method of recorded interviews. To quote Hoopes (1979) again,

Rather than the collecting of stories handed down from generation to generation, 'oral history' will here refer to the collecting of any individual's spoken memories of his life, of people he has known, and events he has witnessed or participated in. Collecting even these personal, firsthand, fairly immediate memories and checking their accuracy require great care in a society that depends on written records and does not much exercise its memory (p. 8).

Different writers have offered various definitions of oral history. Valerie Yow (1994) refers to the following aspects of a definition of oral history: "Is it the taped memoir? Is it the typewritten transcript? Is it a research method that involves in-depth interviewing?" (p. 4). For her, "...the term refers to all three" (Yow, 1994, p. 4).

The British historian, Paul Thompson (1978), in his landmark contribution on defining “oral history,” which is perhaps the most cited work on this subject, emphasizes the importance of the method of oral history in giving voice to the marginalized sectors of society. In concluding the discussion in the first chapter of his book, *Voice of the Past*, Thompson states:

Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but also from the unknown majority of the people. It encourages teachers and students to become fellow-workers. It brings history into, and out of the community. It helps the less privileged, and especially the old, towards dignity and self-confidence. It makes for contact—and thence understanding—between social classes, and between generations. And to individual historians and others, with shared meanings, it can give a sense of belonging to a place or in time. In short, it makes for fuller human beings. Equally, oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgment inherent in its tradition. It provides a means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history (p. 18).

Although the method of oral history has been used for a long time, the means of recording oral history have changed over time. Most experts on oral history argue that the first oral historian was Thucydides, who sought out people to interview and used their information in writing the history of the Peloponnesian War (Yow, 1994). Since then, the use of personal testimony in the investigation of society has never ceased. Before the invention of sound recording devices, the preservation of spoken words depended mainly on memory, which might have been passed from one generation to another or later have been preserved in writing. This was sometimes true even of important public addresses, such as Abraham Lincoln's famous “Lost Speech,” supposedly so great that every reporter present forgot to take notes and instead listened raptly. One of Lincoln's

biographers, Ida Tarbell, recovered a sketchy account of the speech 40 years later from a member of Lincoln's audience who was still living (Hoopes, 1979, p. 7).

The tape-recorded interview was possible only after World War II when portable recording machines became available. Therefore, the use of oral history for qualitative research in its current form is barely half a century old. However, historians in North America, particularly in the United States, had exhibited a keen interest in the method since the 19th century. As Paul Thompson (1978) described,

H. H. Bancroft's interviewing of the 1860s was succeeded by other intermittent work on the frontier settlements and the American Folklore Society dates back to 1888. In the 1920s came the great break forward of American urban sociology from its English-influenced origins to the Chicago studies of the 1920s like Harvey Zorbaugh's *Gold Coast and Slum* (1929), vibrant with direct observation and interpretation of city life, and centrally concerned with documenting and explaining it. In these early years the Chicago sociologists were remarkably inventive in their methods, making use of direct interviewing, participant observation, documentary research, mapping, and statistics. They developed a special interest in the life history method (p. 52).

In 1948, Alan Nevins at Columbia University began to tape-record the spoken memories of white male elites. This was the first organized oral history project (Thompson, 1978; Yow, 1994). The "Columbia approach" (Thompson, 1978, p. 54), as it came to be known, proved immensely attractive to both national foundations and local funders, and especially to retiring politicians. At that time, heavy, cumbersome reel-to-reel recording machines were used. It was only in the 1960s that the hand held portable tape-recorders became widely available and came to be relied upon by researchers for interviewing. Also in the 1960s an interest in recording the memories of people other than elites became paramount among academics. Because of this interest and technical

improvements in recorders, by 1965 there were 89 oral history projects ongoing in the United States, and the number of projects has grown in each year since then (Yow, 1994, p. 3). For about 2 decades, the method of ‘oral history’ was predominantly used in North America. This method was vigorously revived for Indian history, black history, and folklore, and later on extended into new fields like women's history (Thompson, 1978, p. 54).

The use of tape recorders has drastically reduced dependence on memory. Therefore, the term ‘oral history’ generally refers to recorded interviews based on what is also described as “spoken memory” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 8). It does not mean that an interview that is not recorded in an electronic form would not be considered to be a part of the method of oral history. Since the availability of tape recorders has given a new dimension to the method of oral history, the term ‘oral history’ now basically refers to the method of recorded interviews. In this dissertation, therefore, the term oral history will refer to the recorded interviews conducted for the purpose of this research.

In addition to the qualitative researchers engaged in sociological and historical research, the method of ‘oral history’ came to be heavily used by military historians engaged in recording the history of the military, particularly the life histories of military personnel in the United States. As Everett (1992) notes:

During World War II, Army decided to play a more significant role in telling its own story. Under Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, the Army established a program to preserve and collect documentary sources that could be used to prepare the Army's official history of the war. The Army's program, which enjoyed the support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, brought together in each theater of operations, many professionally trained historians to collect sources and write

historical studies. Shortly after beginning their work, however, they realized they would need to conduct interviews to supplement official written records (p. 5).

Everett further explains:

Oral histories gave many participants the opportunity to relate their experiences in battle. Historians used the expanding collection of interview notes, terrain studies, maps, photographs, and after action reports as the basis for wartime historical monographs, many of which were later published as the *American Forces in Action series*. These popular pamphlets were produced at the request of Chief of Staff Marshall, who wanted histories available for explaining the war to wounded and convalescing soldiers and for training new soldiers. Each pamphlet was based on the best available records, which usually meant extensive use of interviews. For example, researchers for Small Unit Actions conducted group interviews with almost all surviving members of the units engaged in two of the four actions covered by the book. Some indication of the detail provided in these interviews is reflected by the fact that some of these group interviews lasted two or three days (p. 7).

Wars in Korea and Vietnam brought new challenges and opportunities for the Army historians to use oral history to record the experiences of the U.S. Army personnel and the army historians went to battlefields to record the day-to-day activities of the army to ensure the widest possible coverage of the Wars. Everett (1992) summarizes the growth of the use of oral history by U.S. military historians in the following words:

By the late 1970s the range of Army oral history activities began to expand. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers established an active biographical and subject interview program in 1977. During the early 1980s the establishment of fulltime historians at most of the U. S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's centers and schools provided greater opportunities to record new military developments using oral history (p. 10).

There has been extensive use of the method of oral history in qualitative research beyond North America. As Thompson (1978) explains, the second great concentration is

in northwest Europe. There has been considerable activity elsewhere too: in South America, mainly due to North American influence; in Australia, where it has brought local and labor historians together with anthropologists who study the aboriginal peoples; in Africa and Israel, where European and American influences have combined in different ways with resurgent nationalism. For Israel, after the systematic destruction of Jewish communities under Fascism, oral evidence became a vital part of a national and cultural struggle for survival (1978, p. 55).

The use of oral history was formalized by scholars of different social science disciplines like political science, sociology, anthropology, and even journalism. Oral history came to be crystallized as a formally recognized method of qualitative research in its present form in the 1970s in Northern Europe with the establishment of the Oral History Society in Britain in 1973, the membership of which grew by 400 within 4 years of its existence (Thompson, 1978, p. 57). Thus, oral history is a method of research that has been adopted by researchers of different disciplines rather than by historians alone. Anthropologists and sociologists use this method extensively. The same is true of journalists who rely on this method for reporting. They all, however, in some way, contribute to the documentation of history.

Application of the Method of Oral History to Disability Studies

One of the greatest contributions of the method of oral history has been recording the voices of the marginalized sectors of society, which were often silent in the official documents produced by dominant sectors of society. Through the use of oral history, researchers have not only been able to record the voices of the oppressed, but also to

document the interpretations of the narration of their past in their own words. As Perks and Thomson (1998), in their introduction to *Reader on Oral History*, explain very succinctly:

In the second half of the twentieth century, oral history – ‘the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction’ - has had a significant impact upon contemporary history as practiced in many countries. While interviews with members of social and political elites have complemented existing documentary sources, the most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been ‘hidden from history’, perhaps written about by social observers or in official documents, but only rarely preserved in personal papers or scraps of autobiographical writing. Through oral history interviews, working-class men and women, indigenous peoples or members of cultural minorities, amongst others, have inscribed their experiences on the historical record, and offered their own interpretations of history. More specifically, interviews have documented particular aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources, such as personal relations, domestic work or family life, and they have resonated with the subjective or personal meanings of lived experience (p. IX).

An analysis of the above statement made by Perks and Thomson highlights the fact that with the growth of the use of oral history, marginalized populations have found a new method of documenting their voices in an authentic manner. Perks and Thomson do not specifically mention disabled people; however, it is quite clear that among other categories of marginalized people within society, disabled people have also found a method of expressing their perspective, which was hitherto suppressed by the professionals who spoke on their behalf.

After reviewing some literature on “oral history” as a method of research, I was able to find one important academic contribution by Karen Hirsch (1998), who analyzed the importance of the use of oral history in the context of Disability Studies. Hirsch was

the Program Director at Paraquad Inc., an Independent Living Center in St Louis, Missouri at the time of publication of the article. This remarkable article was first published in *Oral History Review*. It was later reproduced in the *Oral History Reader*, edited by Perks and Thomson (1998). In this article, Hirsch analyzes two important issues: (1) the need to include disability issues as an analytic category in historical scholarship, in the “total history that social historians aspire to produce”; and (2) the role of oral history in the development of disability studies and disability history (Hirsch, 1998, pp. 214-215).

Disabled people form one of the most marginalized and powerless groups in society. Therefore, it is no surprise that disability related issues have often been neglected in the dominant historical discourses and most historians have not included the perspective and voices of disabled people in their writings. Historians often ignored the cultural and social aspects of disability before the origin of the disability rights perspective and the emerging discipline of Disability Studies. As Hirsch (1998) rightly emphasizes:

Scholars in fields like medicine, rehabilitation, public health, psychology, and special education, have long traditions of dealing with issues related to poor health, illness, birth defects, and traumas caused by accidents. But their accounts do not generally comprise disability history, though they may contribute relevant background information. This is because the 'medical model', with its emphasis on evaluation, diagnosis, prescription, isolation, treatment, cure and prognosis, has dominated both theory and practice in the 'helping professions' that deal with disabled people. The prevailing notion has been that a disability was like an illness that the medical and psychological professions needed to deal with. ... The disability rights movement was in part born out of the desire of disabled people to demedicalize their lives and take control over their own destinies. This impulse has had its parallel in scholarship. For while medical historians have occasionally conceived their studies to include the

relevant intellectual, political, and economic history, they have rarely given space to the voices of the patients, the clients, the recipients of services. While these areas of historical inquiry are beginning to benefit from adding the perspectives of disabled individuals in the roles of clients, students, patients, or consumers, their primary focus remains the history of medicine or of the professions - not a broader disability history focused on the everyday life experiences of people with disabilities. This disability history - the story of what life experiences with a disability have been like for different people in different places and at different times - is a field in its infancy: there is no established historical approach with a defined body of literature and a list of distinguished contributors (p. 216).

In recent years, however, there has been a growing body of literature dealing with the socio-political dimensions of disability. A number of publications have appeared, particularly in the last few decades, which incorporate the voices and the perspective of disabled people. Some of these leading publications, which also happen to be highly relevant to the subject of this research, include: Barnartt and Scotch (2001), Campbell and Oliver (1996), Charlton (1998), Davis (2002), Ferguson (2001), Fleischer and Zames (2001), Ghai (2003), Groce (1985), Hans and Patri (2003), Hockenberry (1995; 2005), Ingstad and Whyte (1995), Jernigan (1999), Longmore and Umansky (1998), Linton (1998; 2005), Matson (1990), Michalko (1998; 1999; 2002), Oliver (1990; 1996), Russell (1998), Shapiro (1993), Scotch (2001), Taylor and Blatt (1999), Thomson (1997), and others. These publications deal with disability related issues, particularly the struggle of disabled people for their rights, by incorporating the voices and perspective of disabled people.

One of the common trends, which can be observed broadly through analysis of the literature dealing with the disability rights movement in the United States and India, is the questioning of who has the right to speak for whom. In regard to marginalized populations such as the disabled in general, professionals have assumed the right and the

responsibility to speak for them; this has been the case particularly for individuals labelled as developmentally disabled and the blind. This trend of professionals speaking for their clients (who were regarded for the most part as patients) can be compared with the colonialist idea, based on the ‘white man’s burden theory’, that the white man had the responsibility and burden of civilizing the rest of the world (Easterly, 2006).

The trend of professionals taking responsibility to decide what is best for people with developmental disabilities has been challenged since the 1960s in the U.S. by proponents of the “self advocacy movement,” including Burton Blatt, Stanley Herr, and Gunnar Dybwad (Taylor & Blatt, 1999). These leaders strongly advocated for community inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities by closing down the institutions for them and enabling them to live in the community and speak for themselves. Similarly, the professional agencies working for the blind always tended to make decisions for them and denied blind people the right to speak for themselves and make their own decisions. Most of these professional agencies like the American Foundation for the Blind, which are also service agencies for the blind, were for the most part dominated by sighted social workers. However, activists within the movement of the organized blind in the United States did not accept this position as ‘second grade citizens’ and struggled to be a part of the decision-making process in regard to the issues that concerned them (Ferguson, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990). Just as the voices for civil rights within the African-American community and the women’s movement could not be silenced for long, the voice of the blind, too, had to be heard and the professionals working for them had to accept their demand to decide ‘what is best for them’.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kenneth Jernigan, a prominent leader of the movement of the organized blind in the United States in the second half of the 20th century, classified the history of the struggle of the enlightened and organized blind in the United States into four stages, beginning from 1940 (Jernigan, 1999, pp. 212-214). Whether this classification of the history of the struggle of the blind in the United States is accurate or not is a different matter and is perhaps beyond the scope of this dissertation. But it is important to emphasize in this context that disabled people, including the blind, have found a way of speaking for themselves and redefining history with their own perspective by expressing their voice, which is now increasingly heard and recorded.

In addition to arguing the case for inclusion of “disability issues as an analytic category in historical scholarship, in the total history,” Hirsch (1998) strongly emphasizes the importance of “the role of oral history in the development of disability studies and disability history” (p. 217). She emphasizes:

Oral history interviews with disabled people are adding a viewpoint that has been ignored partly because it has been assumed that disabled people do not have an articulate view of their circumstances that differs from other views. Scholars in the humanities are just beginning to discover that disabled people have a unique perspective on life informed by their disability experiences. And in the process, oral history projects can help shape our understanding of broader issues in American history and culture (Hirsch, 1998, p. 217).

Hirsch refers to a study by Paul Longmore highlighting the fact that despite the

claim of the Works Progress Administration to have made an attempt to define American culture and identity in 'pluralistic' and 'inclusive' terms in the 1930s, groups like disabled citizens were left out (Hirsch, 1998, p. 217). Furthermore, while making a critical analysis of the highly cited book of Erving Goffman (1963) defining the stigma attached to disability, Hirsch emphatically argues:

The changes that Goffman does not take into account are the changes in the political and social status of disabled people as a group, which allow individuals to start at different points and push further the rejection of disability as a stigma. While there is a need to acknowledge and understand the differences that exist among disabled individuals and sub-groups, there is a more basic need to recognize that disability activists are consciously building a positive sense of an inclusive disability community in which the idea of disability as stigmatizing is rejected, and in which people accept each other across disability categories thus affirming a shared sense of human value and dignity. In this context, disability oral history projects can be expected to document how competent disabled individuals experience being 'reassured' by their non-disabled friends or colleagues that they are not seen as 'disabled', 'handicapped', 'members of that group' (p. 29).

An immense volume of literature has been produced, primarily by disabled scholars, in the last few decades to reject the stigma attached to disability and produce an alternative perspective on disability identity (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Davis, 1997; Groce, 1985; Hockenberry, 1995; Ingstad & Whyte, 1995; Linton, 1998, 2005; Michalko, 1998, 1999, 2002; Oliver, 1990, 1997; Russel, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Similarly, an attempt has been made by various disabled and able bodied scholars who adhere to the disability rights perspective to challenge the historical representation of disability in the traditional manner and describe and analyze the history of disability from a disability rights perspective (Bhambani, 2004; Barnartt & Scotch, 2001; Baynton, 1996; Charlton, 1998; Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Longmore & Umansky, 1998; Matson,

1990; Shapiro, 1993; Scotch, 2001). With this brief discussion of the method of oral history and its application to the emerging discipline of Disability Studies, I now discuss the methods used in conducting my research.

There are two very important components of oral history that have been part of my research; first, the interviews conducted primarily with blind activists and second, the two life histories documented as part of the case studies for this research. Both of these methods are part of oral history. At the same time, one important aspect of oral history is that the information gathered through the oral history interviews needs to be supplemented with relevant documents as the method of oral history is not a replacement for the method of document analysis, but a supplement to it. Therefore, document analysis is another very important aspect of my research. The rest of this chapter is devoted to a description of the process of data collection and the nature of the data for this research, which primarily includes interviewing and review of pertinent documents.

Part II

Data Collection

After completing my course work and taking my comprehensive exams, I left for India in July 2004 and spent a little more than a year there collecting data on the movement of the organized blind. During this time, I visited several locales and conducted 93 interviews, most of which were semi-structured formal interviews either in person or on the phone. In this process, I had the opportunity for extensive interaction with numerous grassroots activists. Although there is little documentation of the activities carried out by the activists of the movement of the organized blind, I tried to collect as much data as possible from newspapers, brochures, articles, and editorials published in various Braille magazines, literature of the leading advocacy organization of the blind, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), memoranda submitted to state or national level governments, and the minutes of the meetings of the NFB held from time to time.

Recently, there has been an emergence of a strong exchange of ideas on electronic mailing lists. As elaborated under Chapter 7, one such mailing list includes an access India Yahoo Group that has been an important source of interaction among blind people in India since its inception on January 4th, 2001 (Access India, 2011). The participants in this electronic list have been engaged in constant discussion of various issues related to blindness and at times general issues relating to disability rights including legislative issues. I have been following the discussion regularly and also compiling relevant messages pertaining to advocacy from the archives of this electronic group list. Some of these discussions are very relevant for Chapter 7 of this dissertation

relating to the fourth phase of the movement of the organized blind in India. However, as described earlier, oral history is the major method used in my research in addition to document analysis. Therefore, the interviews of the grassroots activists and leaders of the movement of the organized blind are the major sources of this study.

Numerous activists who were involved in the movement for a long time and who played some sort of leading role were identified and interviewed. Two case studies were chosen for an extensive discussion. These studies examined the contribution of two leading figures that promoted the rights of the blind in India and led activities involving advocacy as well as service delivery in the field of blindness at the national and international level. The first examines the contribution of the late Lal Advani, an 83-year-old blind gentleman who lived from 1923-2005. Advani was the first and the only blind civil servant in the Central Government in India in the last century. He pioneered rehabilitation services for the disabled in India in his official capacity and, at times, encouraged and triggered the advocacy activities led by blind people while he was still holding the job of a civil servant. Later in his life during his post-retirement days in the 1990s, he participated in the broader disability rights movement when he joined his colleagues to form the Disability Rights Group, the first cross-disability rights group, founded in Delhi in 1994. The second case study examines the contributions of Georgekutty Kareparampil, the founder of the Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB), the first advocacy organization of the blind in India at the state level based on the philosophy of a 'self-advocacy movement' of the blind. Kareparampil remained the undisputed leader of the organization until recently and made the KFB a model organization of the blind in India. I will describe these case studies in greater detail later in this chapter.

Soon after basing myself in Delhi, I began traveling to conduct the initial research. Before returning to Delhi in September, I visited two places in Maharashtra, namely, Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) and Anand Van located in Chandrapur district. During my visit to Mumbai, I interviewed some blind activists and some disability rights activists who happen to use wheelchairs. At that point I was trying to devote a substantial part of my research to studying the linkage between the movement of the organized blind and its contribution to the broad based disability rights movement. It was only after returning to Delhi and interviewing some blind activists and going through some documents on the movement of the organized blind in India that I decided to limit my study to the movement of the organized blind. This decision came after the realization that, in order to complete a comprehensive study for my dissertation, I needed to confine it to the documentation of the movement of the organized blind in India.

After Mumbai, my second stop was Anand Van, which has been a well-known rehabilitation and training center for those who were cured of leprosy (Hansen's disease). It was established by Baba Amte, a noted social worker who had always impressed me because of his approach toward disability. One of his slogans indicating his approach to the issue of rehabilitation of the disabled was "work builds and charity destroys" (Gupta, 2001). Another similar slogan was, "let them lose their limbs and not their dignity" (Gupta, 2001). This was a very radical slogan for Indian society, which looked at disability based primarily on the charitable model. Therefore, I was very interested in visiting Anand Van myself and interacting with its staff and volunteers. Since this was a training and rehabilitation center, I was not expecting to interview anyone other than Baba Amte. But as Baba Amte was not available himself, and his son Vikas Amte, who is

currently the director of Anand Van, did not like to be interviewed, I could not find anyone to interview for the purpose of my research. However, I was able to collect some literature, which helped me in understanding Baba Amte's approach toward disability.

I returned to Delhi in September and started to interview Lal Advani and other blind activists. By the end of December, I decided to narrow the scope of my research to the documentation of the movement of the organized blind. Hence, the new focus was on interviewing the people who played an active role in this movement. Since I had grown up witnessing the movement of the organized blind during my school and college days, I was personally familiar with most of the activists based in Delhi. Once I started interviewing these activists in Delhi, I learned of other activists in different parts of the country and was able to connect with them by phone. Thus, I was able to network with different activists through one another. Most of the interviews that I conducted were highly useful for my research, while a few of the interviews did not provide extensive information. Therefore, as explained further, I focused on transcribing the more useful interviews and decided to limit the transcription of the less useful ones.

Interviews

I interviewed more than 50 individuals, in a total of 93 individual interviews. While data from all was taken into account, detailed transcriptions were made of the interviews of only 45 individuals as the others were redundant or contained minimal information that I could note without full transcriptions.

Transcribed interviews of 4 out of the 45 interviewees were unique in some ways. These interviewees were: Lal Advani, who is considered to be the father of rehabilitation services for the disabled in India in the post-independence period; Georgekutty Kareparampil, a prominent leader of the Kerala Federation of the Blind, the

first state-level advocacy organization founded in India which was based on the philosophy of self-advocacy; Madan Lal Khurana, then one of the high level leaders of the Bhartiya Janta Party; and Vishwanath Pratap Singh, a long-term national level politician and the former Prime Minister of India.

I decided to conduct an extensive case study of the contribution of Advani and Kareparampil and provide a detailed discussion of this in the next section. But it is worth mentioning here that I interviewed Madan Lal Khurana and Vishwanath Pratap Singh because they were well known for adhering to two extremely opposing approaches toward the rehabilitation of the blind and the disabled. I decided to interview Singh, as he was highly respected by most activists from Uttar Pradesh for his positive attitude in dealing with the issue of employing blind people in the highly caste-bound and, to some extent, feudal state of Uttar Pradesh when he was the chief minister of that state in the early 1980s. Hence, I was curious to discover his thinking about the issue of the rights of the blind. I selected Khurana as he then represented the leading Hindu Nationalist party, the Bhartiya Janta Party, and I had always known him as someone who publicly confessed a charity-oriented conservative approach toward disability-related issues and wanted to document this approach in contrast to the relatively progressive approach held by Singh.

In addition to the interviews of these 4, over 50 blind activists were interviewed. Out of these, the interviews of only 41 of them were transcribed based on the usefulness of the information. The interviews of the rest were not found at all useful due to the inability of the interviewee to share the information that I was looking for. Therefore, for subsequent discussion, I consider the number of the interviewees to be 45 in total, 4 of

which were unique in some way while the remaining 41 could be placed in one category of long time activists in the movement.

Most of the people who were interviewed among these 41 long-term activists were involved in the movement during the 1970s and 1980s. Some of them continue to be involved even now in some way or another. Therefore, most of the people who were interviewed were involved in the movement for 25 to 35 years. Most were in their 50s while a few of them were in their 60s, with the exception of Lal Advani, one of the two interviewees selected for case studies. As explained in Chapter 1 as well as appendix 1, Most also were based in the states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Haryana.

I had hoped to have a representation of women in my research. Unfortunately, not too many women could be identified, as there was very limited participation by women in the movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Even now, there is insufficient representation of women in the movement at the leadership level, with the exception of one person, Anuradha Mohit, who has been very well co-opted in the system as she now holds a very high level position in the Government of India as she is heading the National Institute of Visually Handicapped, the apex level Central Government body which deals with the issues concerning the service delivery projects run by the Central Government in the field of blindness. After a lot of effort, I was able to contact 5 women and interviewed them for this research. Thus, of the 43 activists (which exclude the two politicians) whose interviews were finally transcribed, 5 were blind women. These five women included Anuradha Mohit and Padma Jokhim who have been involved in some public activities in the field of rehabilitation of the blind and have been a part of the advocacy movement in

a limited way in the last 10 years. Anuradha Mohit is someone whose role was quite limited as far as grassroots advocacy is concerned, but I decided to interview her as she currently holds a very high profile in the field of disability in India. She is frequently consulted for her views on disability, particularly on women with disabilities, and has been representing the country at the international level. Other than Mohit and Jokhim, the other three women were part of the movement in the 1970s and 1980s, though not in any leadership positions at the state or national level. All of these three were in some way associated with the NFB at some point in time.

It is also worth pointing out that out of these 41 interviewees selected for transcription (excluding the 4 interviewees which were unique in some ways), not all of them were equally useful for this research. So, while most of the interviews were transcribed in totality, some were transcribed to a limited extent, depending upon their utility for the purpose of my research. Other than the two interviewees selected for the case studies (Advani and Kareparampil), most of them were interviewed only once with the exception of Vasudev Giri, a leading activist from the state of Uttar Pradesh. However, in some cases, clarification of several points was sought by phone or e-mail from some of these interviewees later. There was a wide range in the length of the interviews, from 15 minutes to several hours, and, particularly in the case of the two life history case studies, many hours over several days.

All the interviews conducted for this research other than the 30 interviews with Advani fall in the category of semi-structured interviews. The life history interviews with Advani were in the form of self-narration with occasional intervention by me to clarify certain points or to elaborate them. While interviewing the activists, I always began the

interview by reminding the interviewee about the focus and nature of the research. Then I would start by asking him/her a little bit about his/her personal background, such as when and where he/she was born and where he/she got his/her education and then how he/she got involved in the movement. This is how each interview was begun and then the rest of the interview was quite loose. I generally requested the interviewee to highlight an incident in which he/she was directly involved. With the exception of interviews with three people, namely Lal Advani, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, and Madan Lal Khurana, the focus of the interviews was to learn about their philosophical understanding of the self-advocacy movement as a result of their first-hand experience of participating in the movement of the organized blind. Most interviews conducted with leaders at the grassroots level in some states as well as at the national level, were very useful and form the primary basis of my study.

The 50 interviews for the two case studies of Advani and Kareparampil were conducted completely in English. In addition to this, 9 interviews of the other activists were conducted in English and the rest were conducted in Hindi. I was fortunate to have my almost full-time research assistant, Ramesh Kumar Sarin, help me transcribe some of the interviews. While I transcribed all the interviews of Lal Advani and others in English, the rest of the interviews were translated and transcribed by Sarin. As explained in the acknowledgement section earlier as well as later in this chapter, the contribution of Sarin has been very crucial in the process of data collection for my research.

Telephone Interviewing

A point that is often emphasized in the context of qualitative research is that for a qualitative researcher, it is advisable to conduct interviews in person rather than over the phone. However, my own experience during my coursework at Syracuse University was that it made more sense to conduct interviews by phone, particularly when I was interviewing blind people. My experience was that it was more comfortable for two blind people to speak over the phone rather than in person. One of the most common practices that I observed with my blind colleagues (which apply to me as well) is that they were often very comfortable talking on the phone. To some extent, this might be relative and depend upon individual personalities. My own perspective is that I could more easily speak to someone who is interviewing me over the phone rather than in person at my home or office. I anticipated the same preference with the other blind interviewees.

Being on the phone, I would not care how I looked and if someone was coming to my house I would be more conscious about presenting my house and myself and extending hospitality. Also, it is a part of Indian culture to be highly hospitable to anyone who visits someone's home and my visit to the homes of the interviewees would have caused an imposition of hosting me in addition to discussing the topic of my research. Moreover, I realized that I obtain a better recording over the phone with a good loudspeaker. All of these factors convinced me that I could conduct many interviews by phone, save myself the difficulty of traveling in the scorching heat in many parts of India, and make the best use of my time and resources.

As a result of my conviction that I could do a good job of interviewing by phone, only a few were conducted in person. With the exception of one interview (which was conducted in the house of one of the activists), all the interviews in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh were conducted in person at my hotel room during the two visits that I made in January and June 2005. Similarly, the interviews conducted in Mumbai, Maharashtra during my visit there in July 2005 were all conducted either in the houses or offices of the activists. While some of the interviews in Delhi were conducted in the houses or offices of the interviewees, most of them were conducted by phone. The remainder was conducted over the phone. However, despite my preference, not all the interviews could have been conducted over the phone.

It was not possible to interview Lal Advani over phone. Since he was a very senior person in terms of stature and age, it would have been rude to ask for interviews by phone. Also, it would have been quite difficult to conduct the interviews with him over the phone as his health was very frail at that time. Moreover, if the study had involved only one or two interviews, these might have been managed over the phone; however, this study involved multiple interviews with him. The fact that I traveled almost 3 hours back and forth in the highly polluted and smoky city of Delhi for the exclusive purpose of interviewing gave him a greater impetus to get out of bed and talk to me.

Case Studies

As mentioned previously, two case studies were chosen for this research, that is, case studies of Lal Advani and Georgekutty Kareparampil. The first life history case study of Lal Advani was meant to document the history of the social and political attitude toward

disability in the pre-rights era as well as to document the factors leading to rehabilitation in the area of blindness before the emergence of the movement of the organized blind. The other case study of the life history of Georgekutty Kareparampil was meant to acquire facts about the growth of the advocacy movement of the blind. I will now explain the nature and importance of these two case studies beginning with the case study of Advani.

Lal Advani was a civil servant by profession but ironically, he strongly encouraged the founding and growth of the movement of the organized blind in its initial stage and later co-founded the first cross-disability rights group (DRG) in 1994 in his post-retirement stage. I had the privilege of interviewing him at his residence in Delhi during the last 3 months of his life before he passed away on March 1st, 2005. Being a civil servant during the second half of the 20th century, Advani was used to giving dictation to his secretarial staff to type official letters or drafts of official documents. Unlike many, the first draft of a document would be the last draft for him. Upon my request, he agreed to share his life experience. I asked him what would be the best way for him to document the experiences, challenges, and accomplishments of his life. He suggested that since he spent his entire life giving dictations to his secretaries, this approach would work best for him. I initially thought of hiring a secretary for this purpose, but realized that this was not going to work because, due to a Parkinson's attack 2 years prior to these interviews, Advani had a severe slur in his voice and it was difficult to understand what he was saying.

Advani was known for intolerance of inefficiency and for curmudgeonly irony; he had become a bit short-tempered and impatient. So, it would not have been easy for any hired secretary to work with him. Thus, the option of hiring a secretary was ruled out. Therefore, I resolved that I would carry my laptop and take the dictations from him by acting as his secretary and at the same time tape the narration. I commuted for about 3 hours both ways, usually 3 days a week. During the days of the week when I would visit him at his residence for the purpose of collecting data, I would spend the whole day from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. taking down dictations from him with frequent short and at least two long breaks, depending upon his stamina. For the rest of the week, I made corrections in my notes, trying to capture whatever I could of Advani's difficult speech. Although his speech was very slow, I was not able to keep up with his speech and he would get irritated if I asked him to repeat. Therefore, I typed whatever I could understand and left some of the sentences incomplete or put dashes in the middle of the sentences in order to correct them later from the recorded interviews. At the same time, I made a lot of typographical errors as I was taking notes and so it was necessary to make corrections by listening to the tapes. Thus, it was a very slow and tedious process.

I spent 30 days with Advani during the 3 months from the beginning of December to the end of February. Each day we had two or three sittings, depending upon his stamina. During these 3 months of his life, he was in very frail health and had tremendous difficulty talking and therefore had to use his words very economically. Yet, I am fortunate in having over 100 pages of refined transcripts collected as a result of the time spent with Advani. The data in these transcripts provide an in-depth background to the origin and growth of rehabilitation services for the disabled in India much before the

disability rights movement or, for that matter, the movement of the organized blind. Had I not had the opportunity to collect this data on the contributions of Advani, I would have missed a great deal of information on the development of rehabilitation services for the disabled. I would not have known what triggered the development of these services in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s and created the conditions that laid the groundwork for the origin of the movement of the organized blind in the early 1970s. This data also helped me understand the involvement of people working in the field of disability as service providers in India at the national as well as international level. Being the leading figure in the disability field in India in the last century, Advani was the person who was representing India in most disability-related activities at the national and international level until very recently.

The 30 interviews with Advani were a self-narration from him regarding his life. While I did occasionally ask him to clarify some points if I missed anything, for the most part he narrated his life story in his own words in a chronological manner. These 30 interviews were basically meant to serve two purposes: first, to enable me to get data for my research, particularly for the period preceding the beginning of the movement of the organized blind; and second, to provide data on the biography of Advani, something that I plan to work on once I am finished with my doctorate. I use this data extensively for the third chapter on the historical background of the development of rehabilitation services for disabled people, particularly the blind, in India during the time preceding the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind. This data also is very useful in analyzing the response of the state to the growth of the advocacy movement of the blind,

as Advani often dealt with advocacy-related issues in a formal capacity as a state representative.

The data collected through the interviews with Georgekutty Kareparampil, the undisputed leader of Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB) for over 30 years, provide extensive information on the growth of an advocacy organization of the blind at the national level, but more importantly at the state level in the state of Kerala. The Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB) represents a model of an advocacy and service organization based on the philosophy of the self-help movement. As elaborated in Chapters 3 and 4, the unique feature of the KFB was that it was affiliated with the NFB of India and was highly influenced by the philosophy of the leaders of the National Federation of the Blind in the U.S. like Kenneth Jernigan who strongly emphasized the philosophy of “self-advocacy” instead of letting service agencies take charge of speaking on behalf of blind people (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990). The KFB relied on a combination of methods of “representation,” “persuasion,” and “agitation,” depending upon the circumstances. It was the only state-level organization of the blind that had a very wide base of membership among various sectors of society. On behalf of the KFB and the NFB, Kareparampil regularly participated in international organizations such as the International Federation of the Blind and the World Union of the Blind.

In short, while the focus of the case study of Advani was to understand the development of rehabilitation services for the blind in particular, and to some extent the disabled in general and his personal contribution to the growth of the movement of the organized blind, the focus of the case study of life history of Kareparampil was to collect

facts regarding the growth of the movement at the state and national level. In-depth data on the contribution of these two individuals provide background information of the developments in the area of blindness at the national and international level and their relationship with the advocacy-related activities of the largest advocacy organization of the blind in India, the NFB. Information acquired through the case studies of these two life histories is very useful for my research.

Recording the Interviews

I had selected a small pocket size tape-recorder for the purpose of recording interviews. It did not have a long reception range, but the short range of reception helped avoid capturing external noise, a certainty in a highly rambunctious city like Delhi. There would be hardly a house in Delhi where we could manage to avoid the external noise of the traffic or the grocery sellers on the streets outside the apartment buildings. Therefore, even if the recorder had to be kept within about 2-3 feet from the interviewee, it was better than a recorder with a sensitive microphone that would pick up the long distance noise outside the house in which the interview was conducted.

All the interviews were recorded on C- 60 tapes (compact cassettes). Although the tape-recorder that I used had an option of slow speed recording in which I could have a 2-hour recording on a 1-hour (C-60) tape, I decided to record on the normal speed so that the tapes could be played in any ordinary cassette player, in case my research assistant or anyone else had to transcribe the interviews. Once an interview was completed, I labeled the tapes in Braille with the name of the interviewee and the date and the location of the place where the interview took place. I also made duplicate copies of all the tapes containing the interviews. I kept most of the original tapes and left a copy with my

research assistant, Sarin, who helped me translate and transcribe many of the interviews. Once an interview was transcribed, I did not need to refer to the tape any longer, but the tapes are kept safely in case I need to refer to them and to preserve them for the future. I hope to convert these interviews into a digital format later and save them.

All the interviews were recorded through a built-in internal microphone with the exception of one interview of Vishwanath Pratap Singh, the former Prime Minister of India. The interview of Singh was conducted in a hospital room in Delhi and I had to use an external microphone as he was lying down on the bed and it would have been difficult to record his voice clearly from a distance. In the case of the recordings in person (with the exception of the interview of Singh), my sighted guide Bhupendar held the recorder in his hand close to the mouth of the interviewee and turned it toward me when I was asking a question. In the case of the phone interviews, I increased the volume of the phone loud speaker and kept the tape-recorder close to the phone.

Document Collection

Most challenging part of data collection was the collection of the relevant documents. Various advocacy organizations of the blind, including the NFB kept very few or poor records and whatever records they had with them, they were not well maintained. One of the greatest obstacles in the process of keeping records of the activities of the Federation was that after the split in 1978, the leadership did not have a smooth transfer of power and no official literature was handed over by the previous generation of leadership to the next. As a result, no official literature was available for the period of first phase of the movement of the organized blind during 1970s. Whatever record was available in the

national headquarters of the NFB was from the post-1978 period. Even in this period, only a few newspapers clippings were available and very little official literature of the organization in the form of minutes, correspondence with other organizations or with the government officials was kept in record.

I paid two visits to Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, one of the states of northern India where a great deal of energy has been devoted to the politics of India at the national level as well as the politics of the movement of the organized blind. The membership of NFB from the state of Uttar Pradesh forms the main base of the political strength of the NFB. Therefore, I arranged these two visits in order to interact with the state level leaders of Uttar Pradesh and collect any available documents from the Lucknow office of the NFB, in addition to interviewing some of the current and former leaders now based in the city of Lucknow. However, the primary source of document collection for this research was the main office of the NFB located in Delhi, which is its national headquarters, in addition to the Braille library of the Federation located on the outskirts of Delhi.

I paid several visits to the NFB headquarters to collect relevant literature. Over a period of time, I was able to develop a cordial relationship with the current leaders of the organization as well as the staff working in the office. I was able to photocopy hundreds of pages of documents from the NFB office in Delhi which included a few documents containing minutes of a few meetings of the NFB, its correspondence with the Central Government officials, some demand charters presented to the government, and some newspaper clippings containing coverage of the advocacy-related activities carried out by the Federation from time to time. I must again acknowledge here that the current NFB

staff and leadership were very supportive of my research and provided me immense assistance in collecting the relevant documents.

The other major source for collection of the literature was the Braille library of the NFB located on the outskirts of Delhi in a town called Bahadur Garh in the neighboring State of Haryana. I visited Bahadur Garh several times to collect both old and current literature. Most of the literature procured from the Braille Library in Bahadur Garh was from the two Braille magazines, *Sparsh Setu* and *The Touch*. The Touch is a relatively new magazine but *Sparsh Setu* has been in publication for a long time. One important feature of these two magazines is that there is a permanent column in each, titled “from the NFB Desk,” which contains information about the activities of the NFB. I have taken notes from the relevant text in some editions of both. However, even the NFB Braille library did not maintain a record of old issues of *Sparsh Setu* and only the last few editions starting from 2003 could be collected in a continued form and just a few volumes prior to that period were available. In addition, I also visited other libraries such as the library located in the building housing the Institute of Physically Handicapped and documentation centers such as the one managed by the Voluntary Health Association of India, but unfortunately, other than the NFB headquarters in Delhi, no other institution devoted any effort to the preservation of documents relating to the movement of the organized blind.

As noted earlier, even the maintenance of the record of press coverage of the NFB-led movement by the NFB headquarters in Delhi has been very poor and there is a very scant collection of the press coverage of the movement. It needs to be emphasized

that even this collection of press coverage is confined to the coverage of the advocacy-related activities of the NFB. Coverage of the advocacy-related activities of other Delhi-based organizations like the National Blind Youth Association (NBYA) and the criticisms of NFB by the NBYA and the All India Confederation of the Blind (which comprised the first generation of leadership of NFB and limited itself to the service delivery approach in the post-1978 period) was not included in this collection. All the relevant documents of NBYA were burned during an organizational conflict between two factions of leadership. I made significant efforts to locate documentation in different newspapers of a 184-day-long movement led by the NBYA in 1984, but little was found due to the poor coverage of the movement by the print media.

The task of collecting the press coverage of the advocacy activities of the NFB and the NBYA became all the more difficult as there has been no attempt to compile press coverage of advocacy related activities in the area of blindness. Most of the leading national newspapers published in Delhi lacked compilations of the disability sections from past editions. Most of these newspapers had a section on the social sector in which they placed everything together relating to marginalized people such as the *dalits* (oppressed castes), disabled people, women, and the like. This made it more difficult to scrutinize the literature on the movement of the organized blind as documented in the leading newspapers of India. The type of literature that was most easily accessible on blindness or any other category of disability was basically confined to the issues covered under the medical model such as the prevention of disability or various health care measures. Given the scantiness of documentation, I had to hire additional part-time research assistants to search through the newspapers for items related to advocacy.

My knowledge about some major incidents was based on the information that I received directly from various interviewees. Therefore, in most cases, it was difficult for me to get accurate information regarding the exact dates of the incidents. Most of the interviewees vaguely remembered the month in which an incident took place. In cases where the incident occurred a number of years earlier, for example in the 1970s or 1980s, some of the interviewees could only recall the season in which it happened. I often asked if they could relate the memory of a particular advocacy incident to some other memorable social or political incident. I asked them, “Do you think it was in summer or winter?” If the answer was “winter,” then I would ask them, “Do you think it was sometime before or after the New Year or sometime around the festivals of Diwali or Holi?” In this way, I was able to get some tentative idea of the month or part of the month in which a particular incident took place, and asked my research assistants to look for the newspaper coverage of that particular incident. I had asked them, initially, to look for coverage of particular incidents in two leading newspapers, *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express*. If some relevant news coverage could be found in these newspapers and if the coverage was satisfactory, then I would stop there, but if the coverage was not sufficient, then I would ask them to look in one or two more newspapers on those approximate dates. Unfortunately, I could not obtain a sufficient collection of documents containing press coverage of the advocacy related activities by the advocacy organizations of the blind and had to be contented with whatever coverage I could manage to procure.

Documents relating to newspaper coverage of the movement are very helpful in three ways. First, they provide a detailed description of incidents like demonstrations,

picketing, the handling of the protesters by the police, and reactions of the general public and state officials. The detailed description of some of these incidents is a very good source of information regarding various dramatic episodes of the movement. Second, since most of the interviewees were relying on their memory while talking to me, it is difficult for most of them to remember the exact dates of particular incidents. These documents help me present my data in a more authentic manner as the information provided by my interviewees was buttressed through the newspapers. Third, analysis of the newspaper coverage provided me with the perspective of the print media regarding advocacy-related activities of the blind activists.

Contribution of the Chief Research Assistant

Even after collecting documents, one of the challenges was to translate them into English and type notes from many of the newspaper clippings that were in Hindi. Many of the news items relating to the movement acquired from various newspapers and magazines were written in Hindi. I had to translate most of them while some were translated and typed by my Chief Research Assistant, Ramesh Kumar Sarin. Translating these news items from Hindi to English and then typing them was a daunting task. It was like transcribing a few more interviews conducted in Hindi.

The support from my Research Assistant Sarin was very helpful in enabling me to complete the task of data collection in a timely manner. Sarin was then a 54-year-old blind gentleman who was himself very active in the movement in the early 1980s. For the most part, he served as the press secretary for the NFB until 1979-1980 and then for the NBYA during its long drawn movement in 1984. Under Chapter 5, I engage in a detailed discussion of this movement led by NBYA in 1984. Sarin's career involved employment

at the clerical level in a domestic airlines company and he was engaged in writing his doctoral dissertation when he agreed to help me with my research. In the spring of 2008, he got his doctorate from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi when he completed his Ph.D. dissertation on a comparative study of policies and programs for the blind in India and South Africa. He is now employed as a faculty of Political Science in one of the colleges affiliated with Delhi University. Needless to say, I could not have found a more competent person than Sarin for this job. He continued locating literature that I needed until the completion of this dissertation. This literature included new data that was appearing in the form of new books, manuals, brochures, current law suits, cases being decided by the Chief Commissioner on Disability, current editions of magazines, and newspaper coverage of advocacy-related activities. I remained in regular contact with him throughout the writing of my dissertation and continued to receive updates from him with missing and new data that he had located. As explained earlier in this chapter, Sarin not only translated and transcribed the majority of the interviews for this research, but also provided clarifications in regard to information relating to my research as needed.

Organization and Analysis of the Data

As I transcribed the interviews and scanned the relevant literature, I organized them into well-defined folders within my computer files. I backed up all the data and the newly scanned literature on a memory stick as well as on an external hard drive. At the same time, once I completed a file containing the text written by me, I also e-mailed it to myself and preserved it online.

I initially thought of using some computer program intended for qualitative analysis, but decided against this for two reasons. First, at the time of beginning of my

writing, most of the qualitative analysis programs were not compatible with JAWS, the screen-reading program that I use. Some programs such as In Vivo 6 could be accessed reasonably well through JAWS, though not perfectly. Second, if I were to use a program like In Vivo 6, it would have meant that I had to learn to work on and how to use it by accessing it through JAWS. This would have entailed some training, which would have consumed a considerable amount of time. Even if I had devoted some time to learn to use a qualitative analysis program, it would have perhaps not been worth the time and effort spent on it if I could not make full use of it with the help of the screen reading program. Therefore, I decided to stick to the conventional use of the computer for my research.

It is worth emphasizing that my dependence on the computer has been perhaps much greater than it would be for an average sighted doctoral student. All of my books and the data that I am using for my research are in electronic text format. Even if I had something recorded on tapes, I had to convert it into e-text format for my final reference at the time of writing. The availability of the literature and data in an e-text format was very helpful in keeping everything organized in a useful form. Hence, despite not using any qualitative analysis program for coding my data, I depended upon the use of a computer for storing the data and the literature and putting down my ideas on paper. I always typed directly on my computer and did not use the help of a sighted amanuensis (the person who would write down the text for me in print).

Use of the computer was basically limited to selected word processors and the Internet. Although I took advantage of other basic functions of the computer like creating and organizing files into different folders, using Outlook Express as my e-mail client, and

surfing the internet through various search engines, basically I depended upon the use of MS Word and JAWS (the screen reading software). It would have been impossible for me to complete my research within this timeframe without an extensive dependence upon the use of these two computer programs. All of the text files created by me and the entire data and the literature available in e-text format were in MS Word format and I was able to access them through an effective use of Jaws.

In short, the knowledge of computers has given me a great sense of independence. Never before in my life have I been so independent in the process of reading and writing in the pursuit of my studies. It was the first time that I was able to write everything myself without any help at all, something that was entirely different from my undergraduate and Masters Studies. In other words, technology has drastically transformed my life in regard to the pursuit of my studies and made this research much easier than what it would have been in the absence of good access to the efficient use of a computer.

Conclusion

This study is a historical exegesis of the movement of the organized blind in India, based on the philosophy of self-advocacy. The two prominent qualitative methods used in this historical study are oral history and document analysis. Both of these methods are complementary to each other. The combination of these two methods for this qualitative inquiry was most appropriate for this study. With this brief discussion of the methodology, methods of data collection of this study under this chapter, I now analyze the findings of my research in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 3

Initiation of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind and the Factors Leading to the Founding of the Movement of the Organized Blind in India, 1947-1969.

August 15, 1947 proved to be a major turning point in the history of India as it was the day when the country gained independence from British colonial rule (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, p. 66). Prior to independence, the colonial State was only very minimally involved in any rehabilitation related activities in the field of disability. Therefore, this was something that was left primarily to charitable organizations and individuals. After the attainment of independence, charitable institutions continued to play a dominant role in promoting educational and employment opportunities for the disabled, but the State also gradually began to assume responsibility in this area. The newborn Indian State gradually initiated the process of creating educational and employment opportunities for the disabled with a welfare-oriented approach. Hence, the “charity model” arising out of a religious outlook toward disability coincided with the welfare approach in the immediate post independence period. However, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that India witnessed the emergence of a new approach toward disability based on a disability rights perspective.

In this chapter, I analyze the origin and background of the movement of the organized blind. I begin Part I of this chapter by considering traditional approach to disability in the Indian society during the colonial period, which was based upon religious

models. Further, I briefly discuss the crucial role played by some progressive leaders and bureaucrats who initiated the rehabilitation services for the blind in the post-independence period. By discussing their role, I attempt to explain, in particular, what triggered this initiation of rehabilitation services for the blind at a time when the movement of the organized blind had not yet begun. In Part II of this chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of the factors that, over a period of time, created the conditions for the origin of this movement. I begin Part II with an extensive discussion of domestic factors, which led to emergence of a group of educated blind by the late 1960s onward. I end the chapter with an analysis of the international influence on the movement of the organized blind in India, which triggered the adoption of a philosophy of self-advocacy and which proved to be a catalyst in inspiring the newborn group of educated blind in India to come together to form a national self-advocacy movement.

Part I

Approach toward Blindness during the pre-movement days:

The Colonial Era.

The Colonial State paid least attention to the issues relating to disability. So, during the most part of the period of the colonial rule, the approach toward disability was influenced by the ethics of Hinduism leading to the *karma* (actions of past lives) model and Christianity leading to the charity-oriented approach. With the exception of two measures taken up during the last 5 years of colonial rule, namely, preparation of the Report on Blindness by Committee on Blindness in 1944 and the establishment of the St. Dunstan's Hostel for war-blinded soldiers in 1943 (Kitchlu, 1991, p. 5), there was hardly any identifiable example to illustrate the interest of the Colonial State in regard to the development of rehabilitation services for the blind. This is not surprising as the main motivation of the Colonial State was basically collection of revenue in order to exploit the Indian colony (Narang, 1996, p. 9). Consequently, like many other neglected social issues, activities related to disability were not on the agenda of the Colonial State at all and it was basically the charitable institutions or individuals who handled work in the area of disability before the birth of the Indian State (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 167).

The religious reform movements of the 19th century had a positive impact on Indian society, changing the social views on various issues such as the practice of *Sati* (a heinous practice of burning of widows along with the body of the deceased husband),

widow remarriage, prohibition of child marriage, and the like. But the views on disability continued to be guided by the religious practices of ancient and medieval times. This was due to the fact that even during the period of the reformism of the 19th century, hardly anyone was questioning the *karma* theory (Bhatt, 1963, p. 96; Charlton, 1998, p. 110). Under the *karma* theory, the occurrence of disability was the result of sins committed by disabled people in their past lives (Charlton, 1998, p. 110). This led to their relegation to a pathetic life characterized by physical or mental impairments, with no religious mandate to look after them based on Hindu philosophy. It is a matter of further research to understand the treatment of the disabled during the ancient and medieval period in India before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. But it needs to be acknowledged that in addition to Hinduism, Christianity had some impact on the approach toward disability during the colonial period.

The Christian missionaries played the most crucial role in initiating services for promoting educational and employment opportunities for the disabled prior to independence (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 167) by starting and running institutions in the pre-independence period. The first school for the deaf as well as the first school for the blind (Kitchlu, 1991, p. IV; Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 70) was established by the Christian missionaries at the end of the 19th century. Thus, Christianity transplanted its charity-based approach toward disability in India during the colonial era. In short, prior to the initiatives undertaken by the Indian State in the post-independence period, the approach toward disability was highly dominated by religious thinking, whether based on *karma* theory or the charity model. Hence, work in the field of disability was left to

associations, trusts, and charities, which at that time were by-and-large guided by religious considerations leading to a charity model.

Immediate post-independence period and the initiation of Services for the Blind

The submission of the report of the Committee on Blindness in 1944 and the establishment of the St. Dunstan's Hostel for war-blinded soldiers during the Second World War (Kitchlu, 1991, p. 5) were the two major initiatives taken by the Colonial State which proved to be landmark developments with regard to the beginning of services in the area of blindness even prior to attainment of independence. The first initiative was an extension of the professionalization of services for the blind in Britain during the colonial period while the second initiative was stimulated due to the exigencies of World War II. The St. Dunstan's Hostel became the center of development of services for the blind while the Report on Blindness in India served as a great source of reference on various policy and legislative issues to the Government of India in the initial post-independence period. Therefore, these two developments during the pre-1947 era played a key role in laying the foundation for the development of professional services in the area of blindness in the immediate post-independence period of the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, the charity-based approach continued to dominate the rehabilitation work in the field of disability after independence too, but the State took some responsibility in this area with the beginning of professionalization of rehabilitation services in the field of disability through government initiatives.

The involvement of the Indian State in the broader field of disability and not just blindness can be traced to the initiation of a scholarship scheme in 1952 by the central

government to enable the deaf, blind and physically impaired students to pursue higher education (Bhatt, 1963, p. 31; Mani 1988, p. 74). This was followed by the beginning of establishment of Special Employment Exchanges in 1959 (Bhatt, 1963, pp. 31, 200, 230; Mani, 1988, p. 91). The State's involvement further increased with the establishment of four major national institutes in four categories of disabilities: blindness, deafness, intellectual disability, and physical impairment in the late 1960s and 1970s (Mani, 1988, p. 92). However, it needs to be acknowledged that the rehabilitation services were first initiated in the field of blindness among different categories of disabilities.

As I explain further in Chapters 4 and 6, the legacy of the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule and the constitutional philosophy relating to social justice in India did not draw the attention of policymakers toward issues concerning disability. There was no mandate for policymakers and leaders to devote attention to the rehabilitation of the disabled during the formative years of the newborn Indian State. So, the question arises, what was the impetus for the developments in rehabilitation services for the blind in the pre-1970 period before the origin of the movement of the organized blind? In the following paragraphs, I attempt to answer this question by briefly analyzing the contribution of at least three progressive thinkers who pioneered the work in the field of modern rehabilitation services for the blind as a part of the mandate of the "socialist State" in the immediate post-independence period. These three pioneers who deserve special mention for their positive contribution to the initiation of rehabilitation services for the blind are: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Lal Advani, in addition to Humayun Kabir, a senior level civil servant. They all were part of the government system and were

not expected to take any initiative in establishing rehabilitation services for the disabled including the blind without any external pressure of any kind of advocacy.

Maulana Azad, the first Education Minister of India, was a visionary in the true sense of the term and was a very progressive and innovative statesman. He had a long history of involvement in the effort to gain India's freedom (Azad, 1998). He was highly motivated and committed to the development of services for marginalized sections of the population. Being a highly progressive and innovative leader, Azad always welcomed Advani's initiatives despite having no prior experience of involvement in disability-related issues. So, Azad was strongly in favor of the development of rehabilitation services for the disabled. The following example is illustrative of the very positive and progressive attitude of Maulana Azad, based on his ideological commitment to marginalized sections of society such as the blind.

In the Report on Blindness in India (1944), submitted during the final years of British rule, a recommendation was made to create a position for an officer to be responsible for the execution of services in the field of blindness. The Union Public Service Commission (the Central Government body responsible for the recruitment of top-level civil servants) implemented this recommendation in 1947 by creating a position under the Ministry of Education (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004). Lal Advani, who happened to be blind, was recruited for this position. The initial response of the senior officers in the Ministry of Education was that there was no work for a blind person in the Ministry, and that this position should be abolished. In the context of a highly prejudiced social attitude toward blindness and the absence of any advocacy

organization to fight for the rights of blind people at that time, it would not have been a surprise if the position occupied by Advani had been abolished. But the position was saved because of the intervention of Maulana Azad. He refused to abolish this position and strongly encouraged the development of educational and rehabilitation services for the blind in India under the supervision of Advani (Advani, 2004). This reflects the level of Azad's sensitivity and social commitment.

Another example of the positive contribution made by Azad, reflective of his progressive thinking, was related to the expansion of a training facility, the Training Centre for the Adult Blind in Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh (now a part of Uttar Khand), to include women in 1959. In response to a question raised by a member of parliament, Azad mistakenly made an incorrect statement that the TCAB provided a training program for adult blind women. Advani suggested that a correction of this statement should be issued through the Minister. When this suggestion was brought to the attention of Azad, he responded by saying that there was no need to make a correction of this statement. Instead he issued an instruction to immediately set up a section for blind women within the TCAB (Advani, 2004,).

Lal Advani was another person who made a great contribution to the process of rehabilitation of the disabled in the second half of the 20th century beginning with the initiation of services for the blind beginning in the 1950s. He had training and experience in the field of blindness and was highly motivated to work in the broader field of rehabilitation. Being blind himself, Advani capitalized on his position as a senior level civil servant in the Ministry of Education. Creating various services and other initiatives

to promote the interests of the disabled, particularly the blind. As was rightly emphasized in a tribute to him at the first Lal Advani Memorial Lecture on April 26, 2005 on the occasion of his 84th birthday: “It is difficult to find one aspect of the services of the disabled in post-Independence India where Lal Advani did not make some direct or indirect contribution” (Chander & Baquer, 2005, p. 13). As a result of his contribution, Advani came to be recognized as “the father of modern rehabilitation services” for the disabled in India (Chander & Baquer, 2005, p. 13).

The motivation and hard work of Advani and the positive attitude of Azad resulted in a strong partnership of an innovative civil servant and a supportive political boss. This combination was very conducive to the development of services for the disabled, particularly the blind, in the first decade (1950s) of the implementation of the constitution of the new-formed Indian State.

The efforts made by Maulana Azad and Advani were also supplemented by Humayun Kabir, a high level bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education who was very supportive of Advani’s work to initiate educational services for the blind in India. His crucial role in the development of a uniform Braille code for the entire country deserves to be particularly acknowledged. He encouraged and supported Advani to take up this task at the national and international level. Kabir had a larger vision of developing a Braille script that would be common to all languages of the world. That is why he strongly encouraged Advani to collaborate with UNESCO to create a uniform Braille code at the international level (L. Advani, personal interview, December 30, 2004).

Advani made several trips outside India in the late 1940s and early 1950s and worked with a number of linguistic scholars on the development of a uniform Braille code. This experience provided him with international connections for work in the area of blindness in the years to come. This would have not been possible without the strong encouragement of Kabir (Advani, 2004). As narrated by Advani himself:

The English speaking countries already had an arrangement whereby after every ten years Standard English Braille was reviewed and revised. Kabir thought that the same principle could be applied to all the languages of the world. Therefore, on 24th April 1949, he wrote to the director general of UNESCO explaining his vision and asking UNESCO to take up this challenge (Advani, 2004).

UNESCO agreed and the first conference on Braille uniformity was held in Paris in March 1950 (Advani, 2004). Although the efforts did not succeed, one of the significant accomplishments of this initiative was that India became involved at the international level in the field of blindness.

There were a number of developments that can be directly or indirectly attributed to the persistence and passion of Advani, supported through strong encouragement by top level leaders like Azad and senior level bureaucrats like Kabir. Some of these developments include: establishment of the first Braille press in India in 1951 (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004); development of a uniform Braille code in 1951 (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 72); initiation of a scholarship scheme for disabled students in 1952 by the central government (Bhatt, 1963, p. 31; Mani 1988, p. 74); establishment of the first model school for the blind in 1959 (L. Advani, personal interview, December 30, 2004); designing and formulating of the plan for the establishment of Special Employment Exchanges in 1959 (Bhatt, 1963, pp. 31, 200, 230; Mani, 1988, p. 91); and

the creation of Vocational Rehabilitation Centres in 1961 (Mani, 1988, p. 77). These measures were followed by the establishment of four national institutes in four areas of disability (blindness, deafness, physical impairment and intellectual disabilities) in the late 1960s and 1970s (Mani: 1988, pp. 94-95). Apart from these significant developments in the field of disability, one of the highlights of the 1950s in India was a State visit of Helen Keller. Therefore, before concluding Part I of this chapter, it is worth describing the impact of Helen Keller's visit to India in the field of rehabilitation and Advani's role in making it successful.

Helen Keller's Visit to India

Helen Keller visited India for about 6 weeks in the spring of 1955 as a State guest. Lal Advani acted as a liaison officer for Keller during her trip to India (L. Advani, personal interview, January 12, 2005). Her visit was well received by high-level officials and leaders of the country at that time. Pandit Nehru, the first prime minister of India, held a special reception in her honor in the president's house in New Delhi. He was highly impressed with Keller's claim to understand the sound of the music of the national anthem by feeling the vibrations on the sofa (Advani, 2005).

Although Helen Keller's visit attracted the interest of high-level officials and leaders in the area of rehabilitation of the blind in India, there were not any changes instituted in this field after she left the country. Advani had to persistently pursue the Government to implement plans that had been made, at least in principle, during her trip. However, as Advani informed that Keller's visit provided an impetus to enable him to push for these changes:

The first seminar [conference] on the education of the blind was held in Mussoorie in April 1955. It was inaugurated by Dr. Helen Keller. One important recommendation of this seminar was that for rapid expansion of educational programs for the blind, integrated education should be tried out. It took me nearly two decades to get the idea accepted nationally (L. Advani, personal interview, January 20, 2005).

Helen Keller was highly impressed with Advani's efforts and commitment to initiate and promote services for the blind in India. She wrote a testimony for him in the form of a letter to his boss, K. Saidden, secretary, in the Ministry of Education. Advani considered it to be one of the greatest honors bestowed upon him and was very proud of it throughout his life (Chander & Baquer, 2005, p. 11).

Referring to the accomplishments of the above-mentioned conference she wrote:

Lal Advani, who has worked so faithfully to establish the seminar, may remain long in the service of the Ministry of Education. Only the blind know the big, black realities of sightlessness, and I am sure that Lal Advani has proved himself a skilful captain of the ship bearing untold lives over waters still partly uncharted. Judging from all I see and hear, he has the qualities of a real leader as well as the ability to plan beneficent programs of every department of the work for the blind. He brings to his many tasks not only true devotion but also the knowledge of all that is to be known about the blind of India. If a person with his energy, intelligence and willingness to accept suggestions from others is only given a chance, he will climb to the summit of his Mount Everest and show what man can do in the dark by the light of courage and perseverance (Keller 1956).

To summarize, one useful development that took place as a result of the initiation of some of the services for the blind by the government was that blind people were recognized as the potential target of measures aimed at attaining social justice. The Indian State thus came to play a proactive role in the development of rehabilitation services for the blind during the formative years of its existence. In this way, blind people began to be recognized as a marginalized section despite the fact that the services that were

established only led to very minor changes in the field as a whole. But this definitely marked a slight shift from a charity-oriented approach toward disability to a development-oriented approach as part of the mandate of the newborn Indian State, which claimed to be a “democratic socialist State.” However, while the efforts made by the pioneers in the field of rehabilitation of the disabled during the phase of the nascent State deserve to be acknowledged, it is an undeniable fact that these efforts remained quite haphazard. In the absence of lobbying by blind activists for their rights, there was no mandate to ensure that the interests of blind people were protected; the developments that took place in the field of disability were primarily the result of personal initiative of the progressive leaders and senior civil servants.

Despite a limited impact of some of these rehabilitation measures initiated by progressive state officials in the 1950s, a small group of educated blind emerged by the end of the 1960s. This very small, but very effective group comprised members who were highly conscious of their rights. It was the members of this group who became committed activists and organized themselves to fight for their rights and launch the movement in India over a period of time. With this background, I now discuss the developments in India, which led to the emergence of this new group of educated blind. This is followed by an analysis of the international influence that inspired the blind activists to launch a sustained and organized movement based on the philosophy of self-advocacy.

PART II

Factors/developments Leading to the Origin of the Movement of the Organized Blind

The above description of the contribution of some of the progressive State officials explains that a number of measures were introduced in the area of rehabilitation of the blind leading to the creation of educational opportunities, much before the organized blind began to lobby for the introduction of such measures. Some of these measures served as a catalyst in bringing blind people together to advocate for their rights. Three very important developments, which deserve a detailed explanation in this context, are: (1) launching of a scheme of awarding scholarship to enable disabled students to pursue higher education; (2) development of the uniform Braille code; and (3) establishment of residential schools for the blind in various parts of the country, particularly in and around Delhi. In this part of the chapter, I analyze the importance of these three developments in addition to the international influence, to explain their impact on creating a foundation for the movement of the organized blind.

Impact of the Scheme for awarding Scholarship to Disabled Students

As malnutrition is one of the primary causes of blindness, most blind people came from the poor section of society (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 42). Their lack of access to material resources proved to be a great obstacle in gaining access to higher education. The availability of financial support through the scholarship scheme enabled most blind students to pursue higher education.

A scholarship scheme was initiated in 1952 by the central government (Bhatt, 1963, p. 31; Mani 1988, p. 74). This scheme was intended to enable the deaf, blind and physically impaired students to pursue higher education. With financial support, they were able to hire assistants to read the printed literature and amanuensis to write their exams.

As noted by Akhil Kumar Mittal, one of the founding members of the National Federation of the Blind, this support for access to higher education led to the creation of a group of educated blind graduates

I am very sure that the scheme for scholarship grant for enabling blind students to pursue higher education was a significant contributory factor in creating a group of educated blind. Even I got the scholarship under that scheme from class 9th onwards, which was a great help (A.K. Mittal, personal interview, May 16, 2005).

Hence, one of the most important factors leading to the emergence of a group of college-educated blind graduates by the end of the 1960s was the provision of scholarships. The ability to pursue higher education with the required financial support, created a sizeable group of unemployed blind college graduates by the end of 1960s that were gradually becoming conscious of their rights.

Impact of the Development of a Uniform Braille Code for Indian Languages

Prior to the attainment of independence, there were eight Braille codes in various parts of India (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004). Having unique Braille codes in different parts of the country was like having different sign language in various places in the country. Due to the lack of a uniform Braille code, it was not possible for blind people from different parts of the country to communicate with each other in Braille. Nor was it possible for the Braille readers from one part of the country to access the reading matter produced in Braille in other places. Thus, the lack of a uniform Braille code not only obstructed the production of Braille books on a large scale for circulation at the national level, but also hampered communication through correspondence in Braille among the blind people living in different parts of the country.

A number of efforts were made to develop a uniform Braille code in India beginning in the last century. As early as 1902, three Christian missionaries developed oriental Braille (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 71). It claimed applicability all over Asia, but the code never became popular. From 1923 onward, demands were made at various conferences for the creation of a common Braille code for Indian languages. Finally, in 1941, the Union Ministry of Education appointed a committee to design a uniform Indian Braille code (Pandey & Advani, 1995). This committee submitted its report in 1943, but the code generated considerable controversy. Many blind persons wanted the code to have some phonetic correspondence with Standard English Braille. In response to this demand by Sir Clutha Mackenzie, the then Officer-on-Special Duty on blindness, significant progress was made in the formation of a uniform Braille code. As a result, Lal Advani, who was at that time a Braille instructor, designed standard Indian Braille

(Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 72). This code received a more favorable response but the controversy continued and no consensus could be reached regarding a uniform Braille code before the end of British colonial rule.

As a result of encouragement by Humayun Kabir, the then Joint Educational Adviser in the Ministry of Education, in April 1949 the Ministry of Education asked UNESCO to take up this issue on a worldwide basis and the first international conference on Braille uniformity was held in Paris in 1950 (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 72; Kitchlu, 1991, p. 2). Lal Advani, who had earlier developed the Indian uniform Braille code and was now a civil servant, and S. K. Chatterjee, a noted linguist, represented India at this conference. Certain general principles were agreed on at this conference, followed by a regional conference in Beirut in 1951 (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 72). A uniform Braille code, which was referred to as “Bharati Braille,” was developed after this conference by the two Indian representatives who had participated in the Paris Conference, namely, Lal Advani and S.K. Chatterjee. It was approved by an Indian expert committee in April 1951. Since then, Bharati (Indian) Braille has replaced all other codes (Pandey & Advani, 1995). The implementation of the uniform Braille code was facilitated by the establishment of the first centralized Braille press in India in 1951 (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004). It is called the Central Braille Press and is located at Dehra Dun, Uttar Khand that was then a part of Uttar Pradesh.

The development of Uniform Braille Code contributed to laying the groundwork for the origin of the movement of the organized blind in two significant ways.

First, a sizable group of educated blind people emerged as a result of availability of books in vernacular languages. With the development of the uniform Braille code, books produced in one location could be read everywhere in the country in Hindi and other regional languages. While such a code in English had been introduced by the British, most blind people did not have access to education in English as it has always been the language of the elite in India (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987, pp. 39-41; Venaik, 1990, p. 90). Consequently, a majority of them would have remained deprived of education through Braille literature in their vernacular languages in different parts of the country in the absence of a uniform Braille code. The circulation of the books produced by the Central Braille Press proved to be very helpful in promoting educational activities for the blind in different parts of the country, particularly, in the north (Advani, 2004). Over time, this helped to establish connections between a sizable group of the educated blind by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Members of this group were increasingly growing conscious of their rights and preparing to organize a unified movement to advocate for these rights.

Second, it would not have been possible for blind people from different parts of the country, even in the predominantly Hindi speaking Northern region, to communicate among themselves without a uniform Braille code for Indian languages. The uniform Braille code for Indian languages promoted interaction among blind people from different parts of the country who spoke different languages as it facilitated communication among them in distant locations through correspondence in Bharati Braille. It also provided a sense of affinity and unity among them. At the same time, the establishment of the Central Braille Press at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh had made it

possible to produce Braille magazines in Hindi. One of the Hindi Braille magazine printed by this Press, which has been widely circulated since 1960s, is *Nayan Rashmi* (R.K Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005). Through the circulation of *Nayan Rashmi* and a few other similar Braille magazines in various parts of the country, blind people could learn about what was going on in other places. Interaction as a result of correspondence made through letters written in Braille and information accessed through the reading of Braille magazines helped the educated blind in different parts of the country establish and maintain connections with each other. It helped them exchange ideas and learn about the conditions faced by others and facilitated their mobilization as a consolidated group over a period of time. Hence, the development of the uniform Braille code was a landmark development as the Braille literature produced on a large scale could now be used widely all over the country, which significantly contributed to the promotion of education of blind people and more importantly, it facilitated the interaction of blind people from different parts of the country through correspondence in Braille in their mother tongue.

Residential Schools as Seedbeds of Advocacy

The first school for the blind in India was established in Amritsar, Punjab in 1887 due to the pioneering efforts of Annie Sharp, a Christian missionary from Ireland (Kitchlu, 1991, p. IV; Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 70). Following this, a competition started within various religious bodies to open schools for the blind and that is why, within a span of two decades, almost a dozen schools were opened in various leading cities of the country including Mumbai, Kolkata, and Palayamkottai, Tamilnadu (Sanyal & Giri, et al., 1984, p. 22). It is worth noting that all of these schools were special schools for the blind that

also provided boarding and lodging. They are generally called ‘residential schools for the blind’ in India. I will therefore, be using the term, ‘residential schools’ throughout this dissertation to describe these schools.

As has been previously noted, blind people were the first group of disabled people to organize themselves in order to advocate for their rights. An important factor in facilitating this organization of blind people was that they were concentrated in the residential schools. These schools served as training grounds to produce a group of activists. At the same time, they were also used as the bases for carrying out the movement of the organized blind in different parts of the country, particularly, Delhi (Chander, 2008a). The establishment of residential schools for the blind in the early days of the newly formed Indian State played a very crucial role in producing a group of activists from late 1960s onward. In particular, the schools in Delhi and its neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh in north India proved to be the seedbeds of advocacy at the national level (Chander, 2008a).

Following a division within the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in 1978, the major strength of the second generation of blind activists came from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, and to a lesser degree from two other neighboring states of Haryana and Rajasthan. This division within the NFB, the first major split to occur, took place at Kanpur, an industrial city of Uttar Pradesh in 1978. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1 and elaborated in the next chapter, I refer to this split as the ‘Kanpur Split’ because it took place in the city of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. In the next chapter, I provide a detailed description of this split and its impact on the nature of the movement. However, it is important to mention here that this split brought tremendous changes in the methods and

agenda of the movement and the composition of the membership and leadership of NFB. It resulted in the takeover of power by the second generation of leadership of NFB. The Kanpur split and these resultant changes were instigated primarily by the graduates of the residential schools described in the following pages of this chapter.

As will be further explained through the analysis of various important events of the movement in subsequent chapters, the role of the residential schools was very crucial in the movement of the organized blind in India. Most of the residential schools in various parts of the country, especially the ones in northern India, often witnessed the resentment of the students against the management for the poor quality of some arrangements, particularly the quality of food. As Chander (2008a) argues “This resentment often took the form of a protest often leading to movements, which proved to be baptisms for future advocates of rights of the blind” (p. 205). In particular, three of the schools were very influential in determining the nature of this movement. Two of these schools are located in Delhi while one of them is located in Uttar Khand, which was formerly a part of the state of Uttar Pradesh. These schools are: (I) the Andh Maha Vidyalaya located at Punchkuian Road, about a mile away from downtown Delhi, as well as the national headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind; (II) the government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys located in Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar approximately 2 miles from the University of Delhi campus; and (III) the Model School for the Visually Handicapped in the Dehra Dun district in Uttar Khand. While there were a few more residential schools for the blind that played a significant role in influencing and strengthening the movement of the organized blind, these three schools played the most crucial role in this regard (Chander, 2008a). I provide a detailed analysis of the role

of these three schools in the following pages by discussing their role in preparing the second generation of leadership and serving as the bases for carrying out the movement over a period of time. But before entering into that discussion, it is important to briefly mention some of the smaller schools. The alumni of these smaller schools made a significant contribution to the movement as well. At least three such schools located at Kanpur, Varanasi, and Lucknow, the three leading cities respectively in the state of Uttar Pradesh, deserve special mention.

One of the important institutions that produced many of the second-generation leaders of the blind activists is the Kanpur School for the Blind. It is located in the industrial city of Kanpur, almost 70 miles from Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.). A number of alumni of the Kanpur School for the Blind became the second-generation leaders of the organized movement of the blind. As explained in the next chapter, the predecessor of the U.P. branch of NFB was the Netraheen Hitkari Sangthan (NHS). It was an organization that came into existence in the late 1960s (A.K. Sharma, personal interview, June 6, 2005). Most of the members of NHS were blind employees or students of the residential school for the blind in Kanpur (Sharma, 2005). During the 1970s, the management of the school was taken over by the NFB and the school still remains under control of the NFB.

Another school in the State of U.P. is the Varanasi School for the Blind located in the small religious city of Varanasi that is situated in close proximity to the school at Kanpur. It was a middle school, which imparted education from grade 1 to grade 8. Most of the alumni of this school went on to attend the schools located at Lucknow,

Dehra Dun, or Delhi and who made a significant contribution to the strength of the movement of the organized blind in the post-1978 phase (V.P. Yadav, personal interview, March 25, 2005; B.P. Yadav, personal interview, April 17, 2005).

The Lucknow School for the Blind, established in the later part of the 1960s, is yet another educational institution that played an important role in serving as a hub for meetings of NFB activists (Sharma, 2005). Most people who had been members of NHS moved to Lucknow in the 1970s and quite a few of them attended this school (Sharma, 2005). Hence, most of the blind staff members, teachers, and students of the Lucknow School for the Blind had some connection with the NFB in the 1970s. As explained further in the next chapter, the headquarters of U.P. Branch of NFB were located in Lucknow. Lucknow, therefore, became the preparing ground for the second generation of leaders of the NFB who took power in the post-1978 period. It continues to play a significant role in NFB politics at the national level even now.

Apart from these smaller schools in the State of U.P., the three schools mentioned previously, the Andh Maha Vidyalaya, the Government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys in Delhi, and the Model School for Visually Handicapped in Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh, remained the most influential institutions during the radical stage of the movement in the post-1978 period. Since there is frequent reference to the role of these three schools in the subsequent chapters, it is imperative to briefly explain the factors that made them the 'seedbeds' of the movement of the organized blind at the national level.

Andh Maha Vidyalaya

Andh Maha Vidyalaya is the oldest residential school for the blind in Delhi. It was originally established in Lahore, which is now part of Pakistan, and relocated to Delhi in 1947, when the country was partitioned (Chander, 2008a, p. 206). The NFB office was relocated within a mile from this school in the post-1978 period, when the leadership of the NFB was taken over by a radical group of activists. The proximity to the headquarters of NFB and important political institutions such as the parliament, president's house, and prime minister's house, made the location of this school very useful as a hub for the movement in Delhi (Chander, 2008a, pp.207-208).

Government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys

According to its first principal, Chandra Dia Tamboli, the Government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys was initially established in 1969 in the outskirts of Delhi called Maharani Bagh and was moved to a campus of the then Delhi Administration in 1971 (C.D. Tamboli, personal communication March 25, 2005). The school campus also included a Beggar Home for homeless beggars in Delhi who were arrested and kept in this home in order to provide them shelter (C.D. Tamboli, 2005). Some residents of the Home have been employed to clean this school. Though this school is a state government-run institute, this choice of its location along with the beggar home reveals the bankruptcy of the approach toward the educational support for blind children and college students. The campus was initially called 'The Poor House' and was later renamed 'The Louis Complex' on the anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille, January

4th, 1994, as a result of a demand presented to the Chief Minister of Delhi (Tamboli, 2005). On the same date, the school was extended from 10th grade to 12th grade (Tamboli, 2005).

Two important factors about the location of this school made it a unique institution to serve as a training center for future leaders of the movement of the organized blind: First, it was located only 2 miles from the main campus of the University of Delhi and second, a hostel for blind students studying at the University of Delhi is attached to this school. As I explain in the next chapter, the students from the University of Delhi who lived in this hostel often formed the core of the movement of the organized blind. Due to a close relationship of the university students living in the hostel with the high school students, the former often recruited the latter in the activities of the movement that were occurring in Delhi beginning in the 1980s.

These two schools in Delhi, the Andh Maha Vidyalaya and the Government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys, served as hubs of the movement in the capital city. They provided the primary numerical strength as well as moral and material support to the leadership of the movement. The activists from these schools also provided support to activists from other locations by providing them shelter and food in their hostels (living quarters) attached to their schools whenever needed.

Model School for Visually Handicapped

On January 4, 1959, a central government-run school was opened in Dehra Dun, Uttar Khand, which was then a part of Uttar Pradesh (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004). It was established as part of the National Institute of Visually Handicapped

(NIVH), the apex level body in the field of education and rehabilitation training for the blind in India, which was established in 1943 to rehabilitate the war blinded military men of World War (II) and was initially called the St. Dunstan's Hostel. The school is also popularly known as the 'Model School' and I will henceforth refer to it with this name. This school was the dream of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister of India, and as its name suggests, the idea that this school would serve as a model for future schools for blind children in India (Advani, 2005).

Initially, the Model School was under the Ministry of Education but it was later placed under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, previously called the 'Ministry of Social Welfare' (Advani, 2005). This change was requested based on the idea that full funding for the school and its hostel was possible only under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as disability related matters were covered directly under its domain. But even this Ministry could not do justice to the school claiming a scarcity of funds. With increasing costs, a proportionate increase in funds was not possible, which affected the standard of the school.

The first class of high school graduates of the Model School graduated in 1966 (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005). These graduates played a key role as leaders of the second generation of activists of the movement of the organized blind. This school did not develop as a hub of advocacy activities, but it did play a crucial role in preparing the second generation of activists and leaders. The key factors that played a role in making the Model School an important base for preparing the second generation of leadership of the movement of the organized blind include: first, having additional units relating to the training and rehabilitation of the blind located on its campus; second,

control of its administration under the Central Government; third, its location within an approachable distance of Delhi; and fourth, diverse composition of its students who came there to study from different parts of the country. A detailed explanation of the importance of these four factors will be useful in understanding the contribution of students and alumni of this school in the movement.

First, there has been a presence of additional units like the Central Braille Press, Braille and Talking Book Library, and most importantly, the rehabilitation-training center for the blind called the Training Center for the Adult Blind in the complex of NIVH. The location of these additional units, particularly the Training Center for the Adult Blind within the same campus, played a critical role in enabling this school to produce many second generation activists and leaders of the movement of the organized blind. It was a unique combination of an adult training center and high school in a government-run facility on the same campus. A number of adult blind people were involved in these units as trainees and employees and they were an ongoing source of support and inspiration for their young blind peers studying in the school. The presence of blind young adults in the complex of the Model School provided the high school students with the support of their adult peers whenever a conflict arose with the authorities. Sometimes the problems of the trainees of the Training Center for the Blind and the students of the Model School would be common ones. Even if their problems were not always shared, the high school students received significant support from the adult blind trainees of the Training Center for the Adult Blind. The adults not only provided guidance and encouragement to the younger students to be conscious of their rights and struggle against any kind of exploitation, but

they also provided moral and material support in the face of the oppressive attitudes of the administration.

With the support available from blind peers engaged in other units of NIVH, the numerical strength of the high school students would be multiplied. This would boost their confidence in advocating for their rights and protesting the mismanagement by the school authorities. At times, both the trainees of the Training Center for the Blind and the high school students would launch a joint struggle against the authorities and would go to the extent of meeting with the Prime Minister in her house to complain about maltreatment by the school authorities (“Blind Children Revolt,” 1967). Thus, with the support and encouragement from the adult blind people in units attached to the Model School, the students gained experience in approaching the high-level Central Government officials. This provided valuable training for these students, who later became the second generation of activists of the movement of the organized blind, and who contributed to a transformation of the nature of the movement during its second phase in the post-1978 period.

Second, unlike most of the other residential schools for the blind, which were run by charitable organizations at the time of their founding, the Model School was operated with government funding and was entirely under the jurisdiction of the Central Government. Therefore, whenever there was any discontentment among the students of the Model School or other blind people engaged in any one of the units of NIVH due to mismanagement by the administration, the discontented activists had an opportunity to directly approach the senior level Central Government officials in Delhi. Thus, even though this school was somewhat removed from the hub of advocacy in Delhi, the

students of this school had an opportunity to interact directly with administrators from the Central Government. This enabled the student leaders to acquire first hand knowledge of strategies in dealing with the Central Government authorities, such as placing demands, using pressure tactics, and entering into agreements. These activists included Santosh Kumar Rungta, Ramesh Kumar Sarin, and Ramesh Chandra Gupta, among others. Over time, these students of the Model School developed the understanding that it is the government of a democratic socialist state that should be responsible for granting their rights rather than having to rely on charity or philanthropy from generous individuals or institutions. Thus, a gradual process of training for leadership of the movement was taking place at the NIVH during the 1960s. This prepared the second generation of radical activists who took over leadership of the movement of the organized blind in the post-1978 period.

Third, the geographical proximity of the Model School to the capital city of Delhi contributed to making the school a fertile ground for the growth of the second generation of activists and leaders. Due to its location close to Delhi, it was possible for the young adults or the teenagers studying in the Model School to travel to Delhi (located at a distance of 200 miles) and meet the high-level Central Government administrators who dealt with the School. There were several instances in which a number of students, sometimes with the trainees of the Training Center for the Blind and sometimes on their own, came to Delhi to express their resentment to government officials regarding the mismanagement in NIVH in general and the Model School in particular (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005).

Fourth, finally, as the Model School was the only school run by the Central Government, it attracted blind people residing throughout the country and so a diverse composition of students gave this school a national character. When these students graduated, they usually returned to their respective states and shared their experiences with and had an influence on other blind people. This drew others into the movement, and helped give the movement a national character.

The prominent leader of the NFB in the post-1978 period was Santosh Kumar Rungta who was a graduate of this school. He and some of his other colleagues, who later on moved to either Lucknow or Delhi, formed the core of the leadership in the initial days of the second phase of the movement in the post-1978 period. So, the alumni of this school played a leading role in transforming the nature of this movement into a broad-based radical movement. With the exception of a brief period of 1980s that was marked by the absence of leadership of the National Federation of the Blind under the control of Rungta, he and his allies have continued to hold leadership positions up to the present day.

It must be acknowledged that all three schools discussed here played a vital role in preparing the second generation of leaders of the movement of the organized blind. Students from these schools were largely responsible for the drastic changes within the movement during the 1970s and 1980s. The leadership of the movement as well as much of the political strength of the movement was derived primarily from these three schools. Hence, the success of the movement can, to a great extent, be attributed to its membership from these three residential schools.

In addition to somewhat unique characteristics of these schools which enabled them to serve as the basis for initiating and sustaining the advocacy activities related to the movement of the organized blind, one important common characteristic of all of these schools was the presence of blind teachers. These teachers mentored the students and encouraged them to fight for their right to decent lodging, boarding, and clothing as well as accommodations for education. Some of them strongly supported the students to resist the oppressive and corrupt actions by the authorities. Another factor that proved to be helpful in influencing the thinking of these students regarding their rights was the presence of a political atmosphere characterized by socialist movements. As explained in detail in the next chapter, North India witnessed a strong wave of socialist movements in the late 1960s and 1970s. This political atmosphere had a profound impact on the political consciousness of the current as well as prospective students of these three schools during this period of time.

To summarize, the factors that enabled these three residential schools to play a critical role in the movement of the organized blind include (a) a concentration of a large population of blind students in these schools; (b) encouragement of political activities by some of the blind teachers; (c) their geographical location; and (d) influence of the strong political culture of socialist movements in North India during the late 1960s and 1970s. These factors enabled these schools to be fertile grounds for the movement of the organized blind in the 1980s and the 1990s.

In short, the three factors discussed above, including the creation of a scholarship scheme; development of a uniform Braille code; and the establishment of residential schools in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh led to a group of educated blind from the late 1960s

onward. It was a highly educated group of people who were gradually becoming conscious of their rights and who were able to connect with each other because of having been educated in the residential schools for the blind and later having access to college education. Once they were educated their expectations were raised, they understood that they had a well-deserved claim on the democratic-socialist state, and their frustration against social injustice increased. Thus, with the emergence of a group of unemployed and frustrated educated blind by the end of the 1960s, a basis was created for the beginning of a strong advocacy movement.

International Influence

While the internal factors discussed above were laying the foundation for the origin of the movement of the organized blind in India, diffusion of the ideology of self-advocacy propagated by the leaders of the organized blind in the United States served as an external stimulus. As described in detail in Chapter 1, a self-advocacy movement of the organized blind in the United States had begun by the 1940s. After consolidating their own organization in the United States, the early leaders of the National Federation of the Blind including Jacobus tenBroek and Kenneth Jernigan realized that every country had some type of service agency for the blind, but it was only in Europe, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand that there were organizations of the blind are committed to work based on the of philosophy of self-advocacy (Matson, 1990, p. 732). The leaders of these organizations spread this philosophy to other parts of the world by founding the International Federation of the Blind (IFB).

The IFB formally came into existence on July 30th 1964 when its charter was inaugurated in New York City (Matson, 1990, p. 732). It was established with the mission of getting blind activists in the world connected with each other to strengthen the self-advocacy movement. In a meeting of delegates and prospective members, Dr. Jacobus ten Broek was unanimously elected president while Rienzi Alagiyawanna of Sri Lanka was chosen first vice president. At the same time, Dr. Fatima Shah of Pakistan was named second vice president (Matson, 1990, p. 732). The goals and purposes of the IFB were set forth in the preamble to its constitution adopted by the delegates at the New York meeting:

The International Federation of the Blind is an organization of the blind of all nations, operated by the blind of all nations, for the blind of all nations. It is an educational and fraternal association, non-profit, and non-political in character, dedicated solely to serving the common needs and aspirations of blind men and women everywhere in the world (Matson, 1990, p. 732).

With the founding of the IFB, the NFB of United States encouraged the promotion of its philosophy around the world through free circulation of *The Braille Monitor*, a monthly magazine published by it. Isabelle Grant volunteered as an ambassador of NFB, USA, encouraging the self-advocacy movement of the blind in various countries in the 1960s and the 1970s. During her visit to Pakistan from September 1959 to February 1960, she helped Fatima Shah to establish the Pakistan Association of the Blind, the first organization of the blind in South Asia based on the philosophy of self-advocacy (Matson, 1990, p. 730). That organization grew in size and influence over a period of time. Grant also made use of *The Braille Monitor* to spread the

philosophy of self-advocacy of the blind initiated in the United States. This had a strong influence on the newly emerged group of educated blind in India.

Grant's contribution in spreading the philosophy of self-advocacy was very well recognized by the early leaders of the movement of the organized blind in India. Jawahar Lal Kaul, the founding member of the National Federation of the Blind in India and its prominent leader during the initial phase of its existence, described the impact of her work:

During that period, Ms. Grant had travelled 30 to 40 countries and this was her aim to spread the movement of 'self-help'. There were many countries where such movement was totally missing. She used to share with us her experiences in those countries and educate us about the activists in different parts of the world. We used to interact with each other often through correspondence. The process of learning through correspondence was such a good way, which enlightened us tremendously (J.L. Kaul, personal interview, February 14, 2005).

Some of the members of the newly emerging group of the educated blind could read and write English and could correspond with the activists of the movement of the organized blind in the United States. They were able to access writings of leaders of the movement in the U.S. such as tenBroek and Jernigan who challenged the social construction of blindness and called for a unification of blind people in order to advocate for their rights. As explained further in the next chapter, the writings of these leaders from the U.S. were very inspiring and many of the early leaders of NFB in India were highly motivated by them. Akhil Kumar Mittal, and Jawahar Lal Kaul were among those early leaders of the Federation based in Delhi, who regularly read *The Braille Monitor*.

Apart from the early leaders of NFB in India who were based in Delhi, other leaders from different parts of the country were equally inspired by reading *The Braille Monitor*. This was supplemented with Isabelle Grant's encouragement to initiate a movement of the blind in India based on the philosophy of self-advocacy. The founder of the Kerala Federation of the Blind, Georgekutty Kareparampil, acknowledged the influence of Grant and her colleagues, who were the source of inspiration for starting the KFB:

In the Kerala Federation of the Blind, we used to get support from V.E. Joseph. Another gentleman was also there. His name is Subrahmaniam. Now he is about 85 years old. He was working in the Government School for the Blind in Trivandrum. He was keeping *Braille Monitor* from NFB. Both, Joseph and Subrahmaniam, had contacts with NFB of USA, through *Braille Monitor* and through that they came in contact with Isabelle Grant...The blind persons of Kerala were inspired to start their own organization (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005).

Impact of the Conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind

A conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB), an umbrella organization at the international level comprising service agencies working in the field of blindness was held from October 8-18, 1969 and 51 delegates registered to participate ("Conference on Blind Welfare", 1969). It was hosted by the Government of India and was attended by a number of representatives from different parts of the world. The plan to organize this conference was announced in February in that year. News coverage indicated that "various aspects relating to the blind like communication skill, adjustment problems, job placement and reservation needs will be discussed at the 11 day assembly" ("Conference on Blind Welfare", 1969).

This Conference of the WCWB was significant in two ways in triggering the founding of the NFB in India: First, since the conference was attended by a number of international representatives from different parts of the world, it provided an opportunity for the young educated and frustrated blind activists to establish connections with people working in the field of blindness from different parts of the world and learn about what was going on in other countries; second, the emerging blind leaders of the movement of the organized blind in India organized a protest in front of Vigyan Bhawan (venue of the conference) in Delhi during its proceedings, demanding jobs for the educated blind (J.Kaul, 2005). The elaboration of the significance of these two factors will be helpful in understanding the importance of this conference in triggering the founding of the movement of the organized blind in India.

The most important characteristic of this conference was the fact that it was the first international level event in India in the area of blindness and it was attended by the representatives of both the WCWB and the IFB. While the WCWB and the IFB were two international bodies working in the area of blindness, their approach to the issues concerning blindness were quite different. The WCWB was an umbrella organization of service agencies working in the field of blindness whereas the IFB was based on the philosophy of self-advocacy (Matson, 1990, pp. 719-730). However, despite the contrasting approaches of the two organizations, there was an overlapping membership of both of these bodies and they did participate in the meetings organized by each other during the initial years of the formation of the IFB. Therefore, as a recently blind person herself, Isabelle Grant was one of the international delegates who participated in this conference as a representative of the IFB. As a result, she was able to meet and become

acquainted with the emerging leaders of the organized blind in India, who happened to be the young, educated, and frustrated unemployed blind activists. She continuously remained in communication with them and acted as a bridge between them and the activists of the NFB in the U.S.

The other significance of this conference was that, for the first time, a protest was organized which coincided with this conference which proved to be the most important international event organized in India in the area of blindness. There were a handful of activists who picketed in front of the venue of the conference in Delhi. Most of these activists were recent college graduates who were demanding jobs. Two of these activists were offered jobs immediately on the basis of their qualifications: Jawahar Lal Kaul was appointed as a typist in the Delhi Administration and Sant Lal Thareja was appointed as an assistant professor in Shradhdhanand College of Delhi University (J.Kaul, 2005). As elaborated in the next chapter, both, Kaul and Thareja played a key role in founding the movement of the organized blind in India.

Conclusion

Analysis of the history of educational and employment opportunities for the disabled in the pre-independence period reveals that it was basically the result of charitable work performed by the Christian missionaries. It was only after the emergence of the nascent Indian State that the responsibility for rehabilitation of the blind was undertaken by the “democratic-socialist” government. However, in the absence of any advocacy organization of the blind during 1950s and 1960s, development of services in

the area of blindness was completely dependent upon initiatives that were undertaken by a small number of sensitive state officials based on a paternalistic approach.

The developments discussed in this chapter, including the creation of the scholarship scheme, the development of a uniform Braille Code, and the establishment of residential schools for the blind in various parts of the country, particularly Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, played a significant role in the origin of the movement of the organized blind based on the philosophy of self-advocacy. Additionally, as described, international influences also contributed to the initiative and growth of the movement. By the end of the 1960s, these factors helped the emergence of a newly born group of educated blind. It was this group of educated blind who laid down the foundation for the formation of a strong self-advocacy organization by the beginning of the decade of 1970s and then led a sustained movement during the subsequent decades. In Chapters 4-7, I will analyze the origin and evolution of the movement of the organized blind starting from 1970 onward.

CHAPTER 4

Origin of the Movement of the Organized Blind: Organization Building and moderate advocacy.

Phase I: 1970-1978.

Introduction

The first self-advocacy organization of the blind in India, which was officially registered, was established in 1967 in the State of Kerala and it was called the Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB). However, as discussed at length in this chapter, the movement of the organized blind in India formally began at the national level with the founding of the National Federation of the Blind Graduates in 1970, the first and largest advocacy organization of the blind in the capital city of Delhi. In 1972 it was renamed the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB is also popularly known as the 'Federation' and I refer to it by this term.

As explained in the first chapter, I have divided the history of the movement of the organized blind into four phases, based on the major turning points in its evolution. The following three chapters, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, cover an analysis of the growth of the movement during the second, third, and fourth phases, respectively. In this chapter, I analyze the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind during the first phase (1970-1978) of its growth and certain developments, which had a significant influence on the politics of struggle in the subsequent period.

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed the circumstances leading to the creation of educational opportunities for the blind prior to the origin of the movement of the organized blind. In order to further understand the context of the initiation of this movement, I introduce this chapter with an analysis of the approach toward advocacy adopted by the service delivery organizations working in the area of blindness and the political atmosphere of the country at that time. As in the preceding chapters, I have divided this chapter into two parts. I begin Part I of this chapter with an analysis of the context in which the movement originated by briefly discussing the sporadic advocacy activities during late 1960s in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Then I engage in a discussion of the origin of the movement of the organized blind in India based on the philosophy of self-advocacy. As part of this, I discuss the founding of self-advocacy organizations at the local and national levels. I begin this discussion with a description of the founding of the Kerala Federation of the Blind in 1967 and the National Federation of the Blind Graduates in 1970. I further engage in the debate regarding the membership of the National Federation of the Blind Graduates and its transformation into the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). This section is followed by a discussion of the advocacy activities during this phase of the movement by the NFB and other smaller advocacy organizations based in Delhi. I begin Part II with an analysis of the class background of the leadership of NFB during this phase of the movement and the struggle for power between the first generation of leadership and the newly emerging leadership comprising young blind activists which resulted in what I describe as the ‘Kanpur Split’ of 1978, the first major split in NFB since the inception of the movement of the organized blind. I engage in a detailed discussion of the impact of this split on various aspects of the

movement. Finally, I end the chapter with a brief discussion of the impact of the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977 mandating 3% jobs for the disabled in Central Government Offices and Public Undertakings, the first quota system for employment of the disabled in India, which drastically influenced the politics of struggle in the subsequent period.

Establishment of Service Delivery Organizations and their Approach toward Advocacy

In the pre-1970 era, a number of service delivery organizations were established in the field of blindness at the regional level. These organizations primarily adhered to a traditional charity-based approach versus an advocacy-based approach. Notable among such organizations were the Blind Persons' Association (BPA), earlier called the Blind Men's Association, which is now based in Pune, Maharashtra and the Blind People's Association (BPA) of Gujarat that also was previously known as the Blind Men's Association. The BPA of Maharashtra was established in Mumbai, Maharashtra in December 1947 (G.P.S. Gupta, personal interview, March 16, 2005) while the BPA of Gujarat was established in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in 1954 (Blind People's Association, 2010). In addition to these two regional organizations, the National Association for the Blind (NAB) was established in Mumbai in 1952 (National Association for the Blind, India, 2010).

NAB is the only service delivery organization for the blind that has expanded beyond the regional level and has established branches outside of Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), the financial capital of India. It was founded by local philanthropists,

most of who were generous sighted industrialists or high-level public personalities (G.P.S. Gupta, personal interview, March 16, 2005). It continues today to carry out its service delivery activities through its headquarters in Mumbai and its branches located in various parts of India.

The service delivery organizations like NAB have been dominated by sighted philanthropists who came from the elitist strata of Indian society. They have often been engaged in convincing the class of industrialists based in Mumbai and elsewhere to provide opportunities for blind people to participate in the economy. But for the most part, the approach of these organizations has been based on charity and professional paternalism (D.P. Yadav, personal interview, July 30, 2004). Similar to service agencies for the blind in the United States such as the American Foundation for the Blind, they have claimed to speak for the blind, (Matson, 1990, pp. 15-16). Additionally, there had been very little focus on advocacy as a part of the agenda of these organizations.

As an example, one of the most notable persons at a high-level leadership position in NAB was Vijay Merchant, a distinguished cricket player in the 1950s and early 1960s. After his retirement from sports, Merchant continued his new career as a famous cricket commentator in addition to being an industrialist who owned Hindustan Mills, a mid-level industrial firm (K. Karan, personal interview, February 17, 2005). He was also an intellectually oriented person and claimed to speak for blind people through his writings in a magazine known as *Deepawali*, published by the NAB. However, he was not a person who only took an intellectual approach to blindness; he was also a practitioner who was trying to work as a professional volunteer (G.P.S. Gupta, personal interview,

March 16, 2005). He derived immense personal satisfaction through the rehabilitation of the blind by encouraging them to sell the products manufactured in his industry in order to be financially independent (G.P.S. Gupta, personal interview, March 16, 2005). Despite his noble intentions, though, his approach was also based on charity and professional paternalism. This was evident from his stand against the demonstration carried out by the National Federation of the Blind demanding jobs for the educated blind in 1973 (K. Karan, personal interview, February 17, 2005). He criticized members of the NFB for engaging in contentious political action by adopting radical methods of advocacy such as burning their degrees, picketing, hunger strikes, and the like. He urged the administration to deal with the activists sternly and punish them for what he considered to be an act of crime to engage in such activities of contentious political action (K. Karan, personal interview, February 17, 2005). Further description of this advocacy activity carried out by the members of the NFB in the spring of 1973 is provided later in this chapter, but it is worth noting here that such a reaction of Merchant illustrates how wealthy, sighted philanthropists who were championing the cause of the blind through service delivery organizations like NAB were not ready to accept the fact that blind people could speak for themselves and fight for their rights.

In some ways, the founding of the NFB was in reaction to these service delivery organizations like NAB, but there were no major differences between these service delivery organizations and advocacy organizations like NFB in the initial stages. NFB did not adopt a radical advocacy approach until the late 1970s. Most of the leading service delivery organizations in the country like the NAB, BPA of Maharashtra, and BPA of Gujarat worked in collaboration with NFB in the initial stage of its first phase of

development before the first major split within the NFB (D.S. Mehta, personal interview, August 6, 2005). However, this collaboration did not last for very long and was almost completely severed by the late 1970s, particularly in the aftermath of the split in the NFB in 1978. In Chapter 7, I provide further discussion about the changing relationship between the advocacy and service delivery organizations in the area of blindness.

While it is true that the disabled have rarely been included in the mainstream political discourse in Indian politics, the emphasis of political culture based on socialist philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s did influence the thinking and ideology of the educated blind at that point in time. The socialist philosophy of many political leaders within the ruling Congress party and the Leftist parties inspired the class of newly educated blind to organize themselves into a consolidated political group to launch a struggle for their rights. Therefore, in order to understand the impact of the existing socio-political atmosphere on their thinking, I now provide a brief overview of the existing socialist and radical communist movements around the time of the beginning of the movement of the organized blind.

The Socialist and Communist Movements in India in the 1960s and 1970s

The later part of the 1960s witnessed the growth of the Naxalite movement, a radical communist movement based on the Leninist and Maoist ideology. This movement originated in a village called Naksalbadi in the state of West Bengal in 1967 and then spread to other states such as Andhra Pradesh and Bihar (Venaik, 1990, p. 182). As Venaik (1990) explains,

The Naxalite movement (1967-72) was a product of many things — the domestic economic downturn of the mid-sixties, rising social turbulence, growing rank-and-file discontent within the CPM [Communist Party of India Marxist, the dominant leftist party of India] at its increasingly reformist orientation, the worldwide radicalization of youth, the Sino-Soviet split and the image of China as a radical centre of world revolution, enhanced by a general misreading of the Cultural Revolution (p. 182).

Along with the Naxalite movement, there was also an emergence of a strong socialist movement led by Jai Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia in certain parts of North India during the 1960s and early 1970s (Limaye, 1984; Mohan, 1984). This created an atmosphere in which movements for advocacy became a legitimate activity in India at that juncture of history. While the Naxalite movement was never accepted by the Indian state and had a limited social and political base across the country in its initial stage of growth, the socialist movement led by Narayan and Lohia acquired a broad social and political base. The university students in various parts of North India were actively involved in this socialist movement during the late 1970s. Therefore, the vibrant atmosphere of the universities in North India served as a training ground for prospective activists of advocacy movements.

In June 1975, the then ruling political party, Congress I, led by Indira Gandhi, imposed an emergency rule and suspended democracy until March 1977 (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987, pp. 7-8). This generated strong resistance by active political forces outside of this political party. Hence, in the late 1970s, during the period of emergency rule, the anti-establishment forces came together to challenge the long-lasting domination of the political party in power since the attainment of independence. The primary issue in Indian politics, therefore, became one of revival of democracy (Rudolph & Rudolph,

1987, p. 62; Venaik, 1990, p. 69). Consequently, the socialist movement was subsumed in the process of a political movement for the restoration of democracy.

In contrast to the anti-caste movement of the 1930s and 1940s, led primarily by Bhim Rao Ambedkar (the champion of the rights of the oppressed castes and founding father of the constitution of India), the socialist movements led by the political figures such as Narayan and Lohia addressed the issues of class and caste as interchangeable categories (Limaye, 1984, pp. 42-45; Mohan, 1984, pp. 55-57). Hence, the exploitation based on class as well as caste as the multiple forms of oppressions came to be challenged through these socialist movements, but they failed to address other forms of oppression such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, or disability, despite the passage of 2 decades since the attainment of independence from colonial rule. However, the existence of these movements during that period of time created a political atmosphere that legitimized and inspired the struggle for rights by any marginalized group in society. This vibrant political atmosphere arising out of the existence of the socialist movements inspired the blind activists to actively advocate for their rights.

PART I

Origin of the movement of the organized blind

As noted earlier, I shall devote Part I of this Chapter to the discussion of origin of the movement of the organized blind in India. Considering the fact that Uttar Pradesh has always been a very important state in shaping the nature of the movement of the organized blind in Delhi, I begin this discussion with a brief mention of beginning of certain sporadic activities in that state. Then I will make a brief mention of the origin of self-advocacy movement in the state of Kerala before engaging in a detailed discussion of the origin of the movement of the organized blind at the national level.

Sporadic Advocacy Activities by Blind Activists in Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s

The State of Uttar Pradesh has often played a very crucial role in the national politics of India (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, p. 99). The State becomes particularly important in the context of the movement of the organized blind in India because of the location of the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped (NIVH) in Dehra Dun district, which was then a part of Uttar Pradesh. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, NIVH is the apex level body in the field of rehabilitation of the blind; it consists of various units including the Model School. Also, as discussed at length in the previous chapter, a few other schools and institutions based in Uttar Pradesh also were pivotal locations for the emergence of the second generation of activists. In this section, I briefly discuss some of the advocacy activities that took place at NIVH as well as certain activities at Lucknow, the state capital, during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Sporadic advocacy activities used to take place at NIVH in the 1960s. Santosh Kumar Rungta, the prominent leader of the movement of the organized blind in the post-1978 period, described an episode that took place at the Model School in 1964:

I think that was when I was in the third class. There were lots of problems as one usually faces in residential school. This incident took place in 1964. I was nine years old. There were problems of food and hygiene. One evening, there was a sudden cause for our reacting sharply, and it finally resulted in the first ever strike in the history of school. I was mainly instrumental for the strike. What exactly happened was that I had caught a cook red-handed when he was taking away prepared food as well as uncooked material. When students went to report to the principal and he refused to take any action, I locked the cook in the kitchen itself. We maintained that unless a district administration's officer comes and registers a case, he would not be set free. Ultimately, this incident led to the constitution of a committee which would look into the entire affairs of the school. We had a hot discussion on the matter because somehow the committee wanted to protect the employees and was favoring the administration. We did not allow it to happen. Ultimately, it was decided that the mess committee (dining management committee) of students would be constituted to decide the menu, control and regulate the functioning of the kitchen. That was the first change that we could bring in (S.K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005).

This was not the first or an isolated episode of this sort and food was not the only major issue. Resentment was shown also, for example, against corporal punishment. Rungta described another advocacy action that he led also in 1966:

As you know that one of the methods of Braille teaching involved raised platform of dots on a tin plate with steel nails to enable a child to feel the dots easily. If any child used to commit mistake while learning Braille then some teachers used to press his fingers hard on the nails. That used to be very painful because many times small children's fingers used to start bleeding. In 1966 this incident took place with a student of first standard.

It was a regular practice so we did not individualize the case. The main issue was that the teacher cannot inflict upon us corporal punishment. The seven days strike took place as a consequence of that incident. I was leading that strike. That strike was also very successful in the sense that finally a written agreement was made that no teacher would give such corporal punishment. Thereafter, that practice was stopped forever (S.K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005).

While such advocacy activities used to take place from time to time at the Model School, the first major strike that took place at NIVH began on March 23rd, 1966. The school was closed for about two weeks during that strike. Like many other actions at the residential schools for the blind, the protest started due to the lack of proper functioning of mess. It may not be a coincidence that this activity began on the occasion of death anniversary of the date that Shahid-e-Azad Bhagat Singh, one of the great revolutionaries of India who sacrificed his life in the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule, was hanged along with two companions on this day in 1931 (Deol, 1969, p.87). One of the activists who was then a student in that school vividly recalled this activity:

It was March 23, 1966 when we staged a *dharna* [picketing] in front of the house of the principal of the School and later on *gheraoed* (circled) his house for three days and compelled him to accept certain demands. After a day, the principal called the police and the school was reduced into a campus of the police (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005).

Almost every student took part in that movement. As reported in the press even children as young as seven years were ready to get arrested when the police threatened the demonstrators with arrest (“Blind Children Revolt,” 1966). It is however, important to mention that the advocacy activities in the state of Uttar Pradesh during 1960s and early 1970s were not confined to the NIVH only. Other residential schools in that Uttar Pradesh had witnessed several similar activities too.

One of the major organizations founded in Uttar Pradesh based on the philosophy of self-advocacy was the Netrahin Hitkari Sangha (NHS). It was established by some blind teachers and students in 1966 in a residential school located in the town of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, and it played a conspicuous role in sustaining the initial advocacy activities in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi (A.K. Sharma, personal interview, June 6, 2005). It remained a major advocacy organization in this region until 1972, when it merged into the Uttar Pradesh branch of NFB (A.K. Sharma, personal interview, June 6, 2005). One of the active members of NHS, Mahendra Kumar Rastogi, who also led the major radical advocacy activity of the National Federation of the Blind in the 1970s narrated the story of the establishment of the NHS:

There were some visually impaired persons who were senior to me, like Anmol Krishna Sharma and his friends namely, Shrawan Kumar Katiyar, and Raj Narayan Katiyar, and so on, at Kanpur and Lucknow. Anmol Krishan Sharma was instrumental in forming the Netrahin Hitkari Sangha sometime in the year 1966. Under the banner of this organization we started the movement against the U.P. [Uttar Pradesh] Government...I joined this movement in 1970. During those days people were very insensitive, particularly the U.P. government. Charan Singh was the Chief Minister of U.P. when we had started the movement. When we went to meet him along with our demand charter, he said, '*is main aap kee galti nahin hai, aap log zara sa padh likh gaye ho to netagiri aa gayi hai*', [It is not your mistake, it is just that you guys gained little bit of education, and you people have started playing the role of leaders]. We replied saying that sir, by playing the role of leaders, we don't intend to take over your seat [position], but we have come to you to talk about our rights, which the government and society must give us (M.K. Rastogi, personal interview, May 18, 2005).

Rastogi described another incident involving the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1972 before the NHS merged with the Uttar Pradesh branch of NFB:

... In 1972 when Kamalapati Tripathi was the chief minister of the state, we started another big movement basically demanding the right to

employment. He constituted a high power advisory board, which included persons like Begam Hamida, state social welfare minister as chairperson, one member of legislative assembly and two blind members, i.e. Mr. Anmol Krishan Sharma and myself from Netrahin Hitkari Sangha. We gave our suggestions to the government pertaining to the introduction of reservation in the educational institutions and identification of suitable jobs for the visually impaired persons (M.K. Rastogi, personal interview, May 18, 2005).

Soon after the founding of the NFB in Delhi in 1970, the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB was set up in Aligarh, a small city almost 100 miles from Delhi (J.L. Kaul, personal interview, 14 February, 2005). However, in 1972 the branch headquarters were shifted to Lucknow, the capital city of U.P, and most people who were active in NHS moved to Lucknow in the early 1970s and joined the NFB (A.K. Sharma, personal interview, June 6, 2005). It was these members of NFB, previously with NHS, who formed the core of the second generation of leadership of the blind activists. As described in detail later in this chapter, an important development that transformed the nature of the movement in the late 1970s was the Kanpur Split, which took place in 1978 in the city of Kanpur. This happened to be the city of origin of the NHS and most of the people who voted for the change of leadership were from the state of U.P. and were in some way connected with the Lucknow branch of NFB.

As explained in the previous chapter, the momentum to launch a self-advocacy movement was created when a demonstration was carried out in Delhi in November 1969 during an international conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind. The success of this demonstration revealed the potential for establishing an organization like NFB. These activities, though parochial and sporadic in nature, influenced and even set the stage for a movement at the national level. But before discussing the origin of the

movement at the national level with the founding of the NFB, it is imperative to briefly discuss the formation of the first self-advocacy organization of the blind in India, the Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB). The establishment of the KFB in the state of Kerala with the clear philosophy of self-advocacy even preceded the formation of the NFB.

Establishment of the Kerala Federation of the Blind: The Beginning of the Self-Advocacy Movement of the Blind in India

The state of Kerala is located on the southern coast of India. It is one of the most progressive states of India. It also is unique in that it has a very diverse religious population. By the beginning of the 1980s, 47% of its population comprised Christians and Muslims together (Venaik, 1990, p. 191). It was also the home to a large Jewish Population (Fernandes, 2008). This distinguishes the state of Kerala from every other state in India.

By the late 1960s, a small group of English educated blind with college degrees was emerging in Kerala. This group of blind graduates was in a somewhat more advantageous position than the educated blind of North India, partly because of a relatively greater command over English. While English was always a preferred language of the educated elite section of Indian society since the time of British colonial rule (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987, pp. 39-41; Venaik, 1990, p. 90), the educated elite in North India could still manage to interact with their counterparts in different parts of the region as Hindi was adopted as the official language in the post-independence period. Even before Hindi was adopted as the official language of India, the Hindi-speaking population was spread throughout most of North India. Hence, in North India, people could still

communicate with each other through the use of Hindi, particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. However, there was no single language which could be used across the states of Southern India.

With the exception of Tamil and Malayalam to some extent, there is little commonality among the southern languages. There are great differences among the languages of Kannada, Malayalam, and Telegu, in the states of Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh respectively. Hence, English was the only medium through which the educated elite in South India could communicate among themselves as well as with the elite of North India. Therefore, in South India, there has been relatively greater emphasis on the knowledge of English, though English still remained an elitist language there too, confined to use by a small educated segment of the population.

Due to the absence of a common language outside their home state, the only choice that the blind college graduates in Kerala had was to rely on the use of English in order to communicate with people outside the area of their mother tongue even if it meant that communication was difficult. But this knowledge of English proved advantageous for them, in comparison to their blind counterparts in North India, as it enabled them to be informed of the developments in the area of self-advocacy by the blind activists in Western countries, particularly the United States. As discussed in the previous chapter, *The Braille Monitor* is a monthly magazine published by the NFB, USA. Spread through free circulation of *The Braille Monitor*, the philosophy of self-advocacy had a great influence over the thinking of the founding members of the KFB.

The knowledge that was acquired regarding self-advocacy movements through *The Braille Monitor* inspired the pioneers of the movement of the organized blind in Kerala to establish an organization based on this philosophy. Coincidentally, this was also the time when NFB, USA, was entering into conflict with the service agencies for the blind there (Matson, 1990, p. 445). These early activists in Kerala were familiar with the resistance of the NFB, USA to the dominance of the professional agencies in the field of blindness, which were largely controlled by sighted professionals (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005). The knowledge of this resistance acquired through *The Braille Monitor* proved to be a great morale booster for the founding leaders of the KFB. It gave them the strength to have an ideological debate with the service delivery organizations for the blind in Kerala.

Many of the activists who played a crucial role in establishing the KFB had serious differences of opinion with the sighted philanthropists leading the branch of the National Association for the Blind in Kerala (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, NAB was and still is basically a national level service delivery organization, which initially began in Mumbai and then expanded to various other parts of the country. It was dominated by sighted professionals and the locally-based elite business families. According to Georgekutty Kareparampil, the founding member and a long-term leader of KFB, a resistance was also evolving against the NAB in Kerala by the emerging group of educated blind who refused to accept the unchallenged supremacy of the sighted philanthropists who claimed to speak on behalf of the blind:

The state branch of NAB Kerala was established in 1959. There were sharp differences between the sighted people who set up NAB and the blind activists like Dr. Abdul Salam, Joseph Verghese .etc. ... There was not much say of the blind people in NAB and the same nature of NAB existed in its state branch in Kerala (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005).

Finally, in 1967 a concrete effort was made to establish the first organization of the blind based on the philosophy of self-advocacy in India with the founding of the KFB in the state of Kerala. Kareparampil vividly described the day that the KFB was founded:

In August, 1967, I saw a press notification by Mr. Joseph Verghese who was also blind and who had organized the first convention for the blind. In fact, my sister who is also blind wrote to him about me and he invited me for the convention for the blind. It was held on the 10th and 11th September 1967 in the government school for the blind at Punnamkulam in Trichur. It was 250 kilometres away from my native place and I was going to such a distance for the first time. There I met people like Mr. Joseph Verghese, Mr. Abdul Salam, Mr. P.A. Josh, and there was a gentleman there by the name of Unnikrishnan. I also met Mr. Basu, Mr. Subramaniam and some other people and they were all blind. For the first time, I came in contact with other visually impaired people. We were about 70 persons in the convention and the Kerala Federation of the Blind was established. I was elected as Joint Secretary on that day. In fact, Kerala Federation of the Blind is a forerunner of the National Federation of the Blind (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005).

As a result of this first convention of blind activists in Kerala in the fall of 1967, the first organization of the blind in the country based on the self-advocacy philosophy was born. The founding of the KFB thus marked a watershed development in the beginning of the self-advocacy movement of the blind in India. This does not mean that no organizations of the blind existed in India at the time of the establishment of KFB. As explained above, the Netrahin Hitkari Sangha was also established almost at the same time in Uttar Pradesh and later merged into the National Federation of the Blind. Similarly, the Training and Rehabilitation Center for the Blind established in Delhi

during late 1960s (which later merged into the NFB) was founded and run by the blind people themselves and it too engaged in some advocacy activities (J.L. Kaul, personal interview, February 14, 2005). The most important of the advocacy activities carried out by the Training and Rehabilitation Center for the Blind was the demonstration in front of Vigyan Bhawan, a Central Government building, during the international conference on blindness in November 1969.

The founding members of the KFB were very clear that the service delivery organizations like NAB would serve only a limited purpose and that blind people needed to speak for themselves. Also, unlike other organizations such as the Netrahin Hitkari Sangathan and the Training Center for the Rehabilitation of the Blind, the KFB did not merge into NFB India. It has maintained its separate identity while working as a part of NFB India by being its affiliate and has grown in size and shape over a period of time. It was the first self-advocacy organization of the blind that was formally registered and interacted with Isabelle Grant, the international representative of NFB, USA, and the head of the International Federation of the Blind.

As shared by Kareparampil, the highly enthusiastic and passionate activists of the newly founded organization in Kerala launched a struggle in the summer of 1969 to demand a number of things including a quota system for teaching positions in the training college for teachers of blind children in Kerala:

In the first week of June, 1969, there was a hunger strike before the Secretariat. That was our first agitation [movement] for justice ... There was a training centre for the teachers of blind children attached to the residential school for the blind. And Mr. Verghese who passed the post-graduation and maintained some high-level rank in the university was not

given admission in that training center. In fact, they did not consider the request of the blind teacher for training though it was of a primary level. That was one of the immediate reasons for the agitation. There was a provision that the blind cannot become a teacher of the blind. Mr. Basu, Mr. Ramachandran, Mr. Raje, and Mr. Unnikrishnan fasted for ten days. Consequently, there was a discussion with the minister and our demands were approved. Authorities agreed that there would be a reservation [quota] of minimum 25% for the blind in the Teachers' Training College for Blind Children. This was our first achievement for the rights of the blind people. One of our demands was also for the enhancement of the boarding grant for the blind students in the College and it was also upheld. That was historic strike and I came to Trivandrum and myself and Mr. Verghese was leading the strike (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005).

Someone like Isabelle Grant, a representative of NFB, USA, cited the KFB as an example of the initiation of a self-advocacy movement of the blind in India:

Whatever we were doing at the state or national level, we used to write her and seek her advice. She was the editor of *The Braille International*. She was also writing to many people in Malaysia, Africa and to many countries. She was always publishing the reports whatever Mr. Kaul or myself wrote. That way, we got very good introduction in the international field. Whatever we were doing in Kerala or India or in any developing countries, we used to get very good coverage through her (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2005).

Just like KFB, the newly founded National Federation of the Blind Graduates in Delhi was used by international leaders like Grant to promote the literature of NFB, USA, and to spread the philosophy of NFB, USA, in India. A discussion of this interaction with NFB, USA, and the leaders of the movement of the organized blind in India at the national level follow in the next section of the chapter. With these examples of the emergence of local and state level advocacy organizations, I now discuss the origin of the movement of the organized blind at the national level in India.

Role of the Graduates of the Perkins School for the Blind

As described above and in the previous chapter, some of these newly educated blind college graduates had exposure to the ideology of self-advocacy propagated by NFB, USA. Reading the literature published in the Braille Monitor or interaction with an activist like Isabelle Grant from the International Federation of the Blind had made a profound impact on their ideology and thinking. So, while the foundation was being laid in India for the emergence of a movement of the organized blind by the late 1960s as a result of the presence of a newly emerged group of the educated blind, the philosophy of self-advocacy championed by the NFB of the USA also inspired this group to launch a movement of the organized blind at the national level. A few members of this group of educated blind in India included the graduates of the Perkins School for the Blind in the United States. It will, therefore, be useful to briefly describe the role played by the graduates of this school in the establishment of the NFB in India before discussing the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind at the national level.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Perkins School for the Blind located in Watertown, Massachusetts has been one of the leading schools in the United States imparting education and training for blind students and their teachers since the early 1800s. It was the school where the famous deaf-blind scholar and writer, Helen Keller, received her education (Davidson, 1969, pp. 62-72; Thompson, 2003, pp. 67-73). Her teacher, Annie Sullivan, was also a product of this school. Over a period of time, the Perkins School also became a champion in training teachers of blind children at the international level.

In the academic calendar year of 1969-70, there were four blind trainees from India at the Perkins School for the Blind: Akhil Kumar Mittal, Daljeet Gulati, V.B. Reddi

and Gopinath Das (A.K. Mittal, personal interview, May 16, 2005; V.B. Reddi, personal interview, July 31, 2005). Mittal found a job in a leading residential school for blind children in Delhi upon his return. He was particularly inspired by the philosophy of self-advocacy propagated by the leaders of the NFB, USA. The idea of setting up a national level self-advocacy organization in India occurred to him after he read some of the writings of Kenneth Jernigan, the prominent leader of the movement of the organized blind in the USA. In particular, he recalled a landmark paper written by Jernigan in 1963 called “Blindness: Handicap or Characteristic” (Mittal, 2005). This article challenging the social construction of blindness is still one of the most cited of Jernigan’s works (Jernigan, 1999, p. 71; Matson, 1990, P. 176).

The radical philosophy of self-advocacy propagated by NFB, USA, under the leadership of Jacobus tenBroek and Kenneth Jernigan greatly inspired Mittal. While at Perkins, he and his peers from India at the Perkins School contemplated the idea of establishing a self-advocacy organization of the blind, based on the ideology of NFB, USA:

We said to each other, that, after going to India we must form an organization in order to implement the philosophy of Kenneth Jernigan. There is nothing like this in India. National Association for the Blind has just established its monopoly in the blindness field and younger group of blind people like us hardly get any participation in its running and decision-making process (Mittal, 2005).

Formation of the National Federation of the Blind Graduates and the Origin of the Movement of the Organized Blind at the National Level

As explained in the previous chapter, the initial two decades of the post-independence period marked the initiation of various educational services for the blind. These services included: a uniform Braille code, scholarships for disabled students for higher education, a Central Braille Press, and residential schools for the blind in various parts of the country, including the Model School for the Visually Handicapped located in Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh. As a result of these developments, the first generation of high school and college graduates was emerging by the late 1960s. Most of these graduates were the products of different residential schools for the blind and a good number of them were also from North India.

This emerging group of educated unemployed blind college graduates was increasingly frustrated with the obstacles that they faced in pursuing their education and employment. There was a growing realization among members of this group that their voices were not heard and they felt the need to create an organization to address their concerns and interests. They were intent on forming an organization in which the members could have a say in contrast to well established organizations like the National Association for the Blind dedicated to the goal of service delivery.

Upon his return to Delhi from the Perkins School for the Blind in the United States in the summer of 1970, Akhil Kumar Mittal explored the idea of setting up an organization in India similar to the NFB, USA. He discussed this idea with one of his acquaintances, Jawahar Lal Kaul, who is also blind. As described in the previous chapter,

Kaul was one of the leaders who organized the demonstration in 1969 in Delhi at the time of the conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind. During that demonstration he had also interacted with Elizabeth Grant, an international leader committed to propagating the philosophy of self-advocacy through the International Federation of the Blind. After the successful demonstration and an inspiring interaction with Grant, Kaul was also thinking along the lines of launching a self-advocacy movement of the organized blind in India.

During his first personal interaction with Kaul, Mittal enthusiastically shared his thoughts about the philosophy of self-advocacy, based on his familiarity with the literature of NFB, USA. Mittal and Kaul met in the summer of 1970 and contemplated the idea of taking some action (Mittal, 2005; J.L. Kaul, personal interview, February 14, 2005). During that meeting, Mittal discussed his conversation at the Perkins School with his Indian classmates about establishing an organization similar to the NFB, USA after reading Jernigan's article on the social construction of blindness (Mittal, 2005). He expressed his concern that the service agencies working in the area of blindness in India, led by sighted philanthropists and a few well-established blind people, were not really addressing the needs and interests of the young educated blind. Kaul and Mittal, therefore, agreed that they should work to establish an organization to promote self-advocacy in order to address the needs of the young educated blind instead of depending upon the service agencies like NAB or BPA of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Issue of Membership

While consensus was reached immediately regarding the formation of a national organization of the blind based on the philosophy of self-advocacy, Kaul and Mittal did not agree about the composition of the organization. Kaul was of the opinion that the organization should be broad based and represent the interest of blind people from all class backgrounds (Kaul, 2005; Mittal, 2005). Expressing his disagreement regarding the composition of the organization, Mittal suggested to Kaul that: “United States has NFB and its membership is open to all, but we should not blindly follow the example of USA. On the contrary, in India educated blind should take the lead” (Mittal, 2005). Mittal received greater support from other people who took a lead in founding the organization to restrict the membership to college graduates. Hence, ultimately the view of the elitist group consisting of people like Mittal and Professor Ved Prakash Varma (who was the first blind professor in the University of Delhi) prevailed as far as eligibility for membership in the organization at the time of its formation (V.P. Varma, personal interview, May 29, 2005; Kaul, 2005; Mittal, 2005).

Despite the fact that it was resolved that the membership of the newly established organization was to be limited to college graduates, there was lot of controversy over the issue of defining who should be covered under this definition of being a ‘graduate.’ Even people who had studied music and received a diploma or certificate from independent music schools (which were not affiliated with any recognized university) claimed to be college graduates in order to attain membership in the proposed organization. But their

claim was rejected by the elitist group of leaders, who were opposed to broad-based membership in the organization. Mittal forcefully argued:

I was insisting that let us take only those people who had a formal degree from a recognized University, basically liberal arts education. So the purpose was to avoid people who have done their degree from independent music schools like Gandharva Maha Vidayaalaya [an independent music school which imparts education of Hindustani classical music] as they would also call themselves equivalent to the holders of degrees from universities. My view was being supported by Professor V. P. Varma too and you would be surprised that even at that time, we were able to get about two hundred people from across the country who had formal university degrees, either bachelor or above (Mittal, 2005).

Consequently, blind people who held degrees from independent music schools and who formed the majority of educated blind in India at that time were ultimately excluded. Thus, in this controversy regarding the issue of covering the holders of music degrees within the definition of “graduates,” the elitist group led by people like Mittal and Varma finally prevailed over the democratic opinion of others who wanted to have a wide base of the organization.

It is worth emphasizing that traditionally, music instruction was an accessible career for blind people. Even someone like Lal Advani, the first and only blind civil servant in the last century, initially considered choosing music as a career if nothing else better could be achieved. As described by Lal Advani himself, he considered music teaching as one of his most viable careers options:

I had to do this (join as a music teacher), because I was clearly told that a blind person at that time had only three options of earning a living, firstly, to become a music teacher; secondly, to become a Vedic scholar and work as a preacher or finally, to become a chair caner. (L. Advani, personal interview, December 22, 2004).

Thus, there were a significant number of blind people who graduated from various independent music schools in India and depriving them of the opportunity to join the planned organization meant exclusion of a sizable population of blind people. But ultimately, it was the blind college graduates led by the elitist middle class members who succeeded in excluding this sizable population of holders of music degrees who had been deprived of having access to education through colleges affiliated with a university.

According to these early leaders who succeeded in keeping the membership of the proposed organization restricted for the initial two years of its existence, the idea behind confining the Federation to college graduates was to keep leadership in the hands of the educated blind, who claimed to be capable of representing the interests of all blind people (Mittal, 2005; Varma, 2005). At the same time, this elitist group of early leaders tried to justify restricted membership on the ground that it was necessary in order to keep the organization manageable at that initial stage:

We included only graduates with a view to involve the educated people who could be manageable and the organization may run in a smooth way So, in the first formal meeting regarding the founding of self-advocacy organization held in the fall of 1970, we decided that we would establish an organization. And its membership would be confined to blind college graduates only. So, we decided to name it as National Federation of Blind Graduates (Mittal, 2005).

Hence, because of its restricted membership at that initial stage, the founding fathers of the self-advocacy movement of the blind decided to name the newly formed organization the “National Federation of Blind Graduates” (NFBG) instead of the “National Federation of the Blind” as in the National Federation of the Blind in the

United States. Hence, the self-advocacy movement of the organized blind was launched in India with the founding of the NFBG in 1970.

The early leaders who founded the NFBG took a lot of pride in the fact that despite its restricted membership, it was the first and largest pressure group of the blind in India, spreading its branches in different parts of the country:

It was an organization that was represented by members from different states. Initially, we were interested to work as a pressure group. It was a totally new idea and we were of the view that we should do something on our own (Kaul, 2005).

However, despite the fact that these leaders decided to limit the membership to college graduates in order to keep it manageable, it was not an easy task to maintain an organization without any infrastructure. It was very difficult to initiate an organization based on the philosophy of self-advocacy without the availability of any material resources.

As Kaul remarked,

It was an uphill task as we did not have any means or membership and more so, it was very difficult to make people convinced about this philosophy. It was the time when the blind were themselves finding difficult to believe that they could run their own organization. People used to laugh at us. However, we started this organization with 13 members and kept growing since then. (Kaul, 2005).

It is remarkable that the early members were able to connect with each other only through correspondence. One of the factors that facilitated this communication is that most of these blind graduates were the high school graduates of one of the existing residential schools for the blind. These schools or institutions for the blind became good

starting points to initiate the process of communication through correspondence. Since most of these blind college graduates were frustrated by unsuccessful attempts to secure jobs, they responded promptly and enthusiastically to such an initiative of a call by the founding leaders to get organized in order to fight for their rights. Hence, even at that time (the early 1970s), it was possible to mobilize around 200 blind graduates to come together in order to launch the self-advocacy movement of the organized blind in India (Kaul, 2005; Mittal, 2005; Varma, 2005). Kaul used to communicate by himself, typing the letters and sending them to schools and organizations for the blind across the country in order to reach the blind college graduates (Kaul, 2005). Once connected with the leadership, these college graduates joined the movement and started interacting with their blind colleagues through correspondence in Braille.

Broadening of the Organization and the Birth of the National Federation of the Blind

The elitist group that succeeded in restricting the membership of the organization to college graduates could not justify its stand for too long and soon pressure was placed on them to include all blind people. It is interesting to note that this pressure to open the organization to all blind people irrespective of their class background came from within its existing and aspiring members as well as from abroad. As Kaul, the founder and undisputed leader of the organization during the first phase of the movement, remarked:

We continued for two years and seeing its success and the rising pressure, it was thought to be important to make it open to all. It was a pressure from Isabelle Grant and also the popular demand to include the non-graduates in the organization (Kaul, 2005).

A rigorous debate took place during the 1972 convention of NFBG held at Ahmedabad, Gujarat, regarding the nature and scope of membership of the organization. A majority of the members were strongly in favor of widening the member base and opening it to all blind activists who expressed a desire to join. While there was some resistance within the elitist leadership, ultimately the popular demand to open up the organization to all blind people had to be accepted. Thus, finally, membership in the organization was open to everyone; the word “graduates” was dropped from its name and the organization was renamed the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) (Kaul, 2005; Mittal, 2005; H. Shah, personal interview, March 24, 2005). The 1972 Ahmedabad Convention of the NFBG, thus, proved to be a watershed development in the history of the first and largest national-level self-advocacy organization of the blind in India in terms of expanding the member-base of the organization. However, despite the fact that its membership was opened to all blind people, the educated middle-class blind elite always strove to maintain control of the organization. They were convinced that opening the membership would give the appearance that the NFB was an all-inclusive organization and at the same time would not pose a threat to their monopoly over leadership.

In order to avoid controversy, the leaders refrained from engaging in electoral politics and treated the electoral process as a mere routine activity. Elections were basically held to confirm the decision of the leadership regarding the high-ranking office holders until the next convention. But it was evident that resistance against the leadership was gradually growing. Commenting on the election of 1972, Hasmukh Shah, one of the radical leaders from Mumbai who was himself offered a position on the board during the

Ahmedabad Convention, expressed his resentment about the way elections were conducted:

That gathering had happened because they had promised open elections. But ultimately, the elections did not take place. Since the Ahmedabad Convention was hosted by Jagdish Patel who was a type of a person who did not believe in democracy ... Ultimately, he invited applications for elections. But at the last moment, he cancelled all that and they just decided the holders of different positions to be on the NEC [National Executive Committee] without conducting the elections. ... I was taken in the NEC from Maharashtra. Its first meeting was held on the evening of the second day of the Convention. I went there and told them that they had announced elections but did not conduct them. They had just appointed me in the Executive Committee without seeking the popular vote. This was not agreeable to me. I told them that I did not like the way things had gone about and I would not be much interested in the Executive Committee of the organization (Shah, 2005).

Since 1975, NFB had also offered leadership training workshops similar to those conducted by NFB, USA. But these were discontinued due to the change of leadership in the post-1978 period (Kaul, 2005). According to the early leadership of NFB, the ultimate objective of these workshops was to pave the way for the emergence of new leadership (Kaul, 2005). However, this intention of the first generation of leadership dominated by the educated blind elite did not seem to be genuine. As I will explain later in this chapter, when this newly trained leadership tried to initiate its experiment of demanding the functioning of the Federation in a democratic way, it was not taken seriously by the existing leadership. This situation is what ultimately led to the Kanpur split of 1978 that had far reaching implications for the nature of the organization and subsequent politics of struggle. In the following two sections, I discuss selected advocacy activities during the first phase of the movement of the organized blind and then, in Part II of this chapter, I present a detailed description of the Kanpur split of 1978.

Beginning of Advocacy for Employment by the NFB: Adoption of Strategies of Shoe Polishing, Rally, and Relay Hunger Strike

The right to employment has been an overarching focus of the movement of the organized blind. Once the membership of the Federation was opened to all blind people, the leadership began to address the demand for employment of the qualified unemployed blind. The most radical step that the first generation of leadership undertook was the tactic of shoe polishing by educated blind youth in March 1973. It was immediately followed by a rally and a relay hunger strike (continuous group fasting). Most of the youth who participated in this series of activities were unemployed, but a few who were employed joined them.

Mahendra Kumar Rastogi, who was the Public Relations Officer of the Federation at that time and who held a Master's degree, led this first major series of advocacy activities. He had been a leader of advocacy activities of the Uttar Pradesh-based organization Netrahin Hitkari Sangha in the 1960s and early 1970s (M. K. Rastogi, personal interview, May 18, 2005). As recounted by him, the activists chose the occasion of International Disabled Day (which then used to be celebrated in the month of March) to organize the shoe-polishing campaign in order to register their protest:

It was in the month of March of 1973 when the function [event] of World day for the disabled was being held in the office of the Prime Minister at Teen Murti Bhawan. The Prime Minister herself used to inaugurate the function. I think it used to be held on third Sunday of March every year and series of events would last for about a week. In fact no constructive or purposeful activities used to take place except some dance or cultural programs [events] etc. So on this occasion, we organized a shoe polishing campaign at Teen Murti Bhawan [venue of the event] on behalf of NFB. ... I led that campaign along with my other post graduate [holders of master's degrees] friends like Shiv Prakash Gupta who was a teacher at the Government School for Blind Children Delhi and some other people

for whom I had facilitated the procurement of job in my capacity as a Public Relation Officer of the Federation at that point of time. We hung our degrees on our chest just like you put a garland in your neck when we performed the task of shoe polishing. We said to each other that we would do the shoe polishing of all the VIP's [very important persons] Rastogi, 2005).

Thus, the activists who were involved in leading this shoe polishing campaign included not only educated unemployed youth, but also a handful of employed blind youth as well. They joined the shoe polishing campaign to express their solidarity with the struggle of the unemployed blind youth and also to demonstrate that there are some blind people who are successfully employed and, given the opportunity, others too could perform equally well.

Shoe polishing was adopted as a strategy to embarrass the authorities in power as it was considered to be a menial job for educated youth. This, along with the display of college degrees of the demonstrating blind activists, was considered to be a very appealing symbol to draw the attention of the government officials. It was meant to convey to the high-level government officials that these educated blind youth deserved to be employed in what were considered to be "dignified" white-collar jobs. But they were forced to resort to menial job such as shoe polishing due to discrimination. As recalled by Rastogi, this incident of shoe polishing annoyed the government authorities and evoked strong resistance and anger on their part:

We kept our table at entrance gate of Teen Murti Bhawan and decided that we would stop every VIP and request him to get his shoes polished by us. When the Prime Minister saw us doing that, she immediately ordered the police to remove us from the place. Then the DSP [Deputy Superintendent of Police] came and asked us not to do this. We said that Sir, we are not doing any crime at all. We are unemployed poor people. Since we have not got any job despite getting good education and so we would make our

living by doing this. Then he replied, ["no you are dishonoring us, you people are educated, and have good behavior and mannerism of talking"]. I replied him saying: Sir, to talk well and having good education does not do any good when we are still empty stomach. He said, ["no we will not allow you to do this at all"]. But we insisted that we could not stop ourselves and only we could request him to kindly allow us to do what we were doing because by doing that, we would earn some money and thereby live our livelihood (Rastogi, 2005).

The movement continued after the successful completion of the shoe polishing action. The activists then organized a rally and burned copies of their college degrees to symbolize the futility of those degrees since they were not being hired for related positions (Rastogi, 2005). This rally was followed by a relay hunger strike for the next two weeks until the activists got engaged in organizing a conference on employment for the blind in April. Again, as recalled by Rastogi,

In this relay hunger strike, many people gathered from different parts of the country and took part in it. We also met the Prime Minister and submitted our demands. The most important demand was the employment of the qualified blind and the provision for quota in jobs for the blind, but no instant and concrete response came from the government (Rastogi, 2005).

There was a strong reaction by the government authorities to the shoe polishing action on World Disabled Day, as this campaign was intended to embarrass government officials for not employing qualified blind youth. Typically, on World Disabled Day, the government organizes various ceremonial events to commemorate its accomplishments in the area of disability; thus, government officials were annoyed at this disruption of events. As Rastogi emphatically pointed out, it was not acceptable to the authorities and it therefore evoked a strong reaction on the part of the senior level bureaucrats who were engaged in organizing the official event on this day:

It always takes long time for positive outcome, but negative thing take place immediately. Luthra sahib was the secretary in social welfare department and he was very angry with NFB and its activities... Even before this incident too, he never used to respond to our representation and avoided giving any appointment to us for meeting him. We had applied for the grants from the Social Welfare Ministry [now called the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment], which was headed by him, but he used to ignore the matter. Lal Advani sahib was there in the social welfare department and he said that Luthra sahib is very annoyed with us because we had ruined his function and lost any chance of getting any grant from the government because of annoying the government officials (Rastogi, 2005).

In addition to Advani, who was then indirectly supporting NFB with the exception of this incident, there was an elitist group holding high-powered positions within the NFB leadership. This group was totally opposed to any kind of contentious political action through the adoption of a radical approach of advocacy and that is partially the reason why these radical activities were called off and the movement could not be sustained for any significant length of time. It was difficult for some of these office bearers to accept such a radical approach taken up by the young activists at that initial juncture of the movement. For example, Professor Ved Prakash Varma, who was the first blind person to be hired as faculty in the University of Delhi, was strongly opposed to this radical move of the young activists (V.P. Varma, personal interview, May 29, 2005). The only exception to the well established executive members of NFB at that time who was in favor of a radical advocacy approach was the late Dr. Sant Lal Thireja, the second blind person who was appointed as a faculty member at the University of Delhi after the demonstration in front of Vigyan Bhawan during the international conference on blindness in 1969. According to Rastogi, Thereja's opinion remained a lone minority opinion in the leadership circle:

Dr. Thireja used to be in our favor and extend his support both morally as well as materially. He always encouraged us to adopt radical methods of advocacy like shoe polishing, rallies etc. but unfortunately, he passed away soon after these activities of 1973. Many other people of NFB like Professor Varma were opposed to us for this kind of rigorous methods of advocacy and Dr. Thareja could not fight much with such people (Rastogi, 2005).

As a result of strong resistance by the government authorities and some of the board members like Ved Prakash Varma, these radical activities such as the relay hunger strike and rallies did not last for more than two weeks and the Federation then turned its attention toward organizing the national conference on employment. However, despite the fact that the movement had to be called off after a relatively short period of time and without any concrete accomplishment in terms of getting the demands met, these radical activities had a far-reaching impact on the thinking and ideology of the second generation of members and leadership. At least an example of radical methods of advocacy was provided for the future. Also, organization of these activities raised the expectations of the members. This, in the long run, created an atmosphere in which the first generation of leadership was challenged and had to give up power for not adopting a radical approach to advocacy.

National Conference on Employment of the Blind

It is in this context of the first-ever major advocacy activity carried out by the Federation that an initiative was undertaken by the NFB to host a national conference. This was the first national conference organized by any self-advocacy organization of the blind in India. It was held on April 8, 1973 (Rastogi, 2005). The primary goal of this conference was to put forward a demand for the quota system for jobs for the blind in the government sector (Rastogi, 2005). At this stage, the activists were not particular about a

specific percentage for the quota, but they felt there was a strong need for some specific quota in Central Government jobs for the blind as was the case for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Federation also invited some Members of the Parliament in this Conference (Rastogi, 2005). Inviting the members of parliament to the Conference was intended to serve as a beginning of lobbying for issues such as the quota for the blind in jobs in government services.

It is true that nothing concrete could be accomplished immediately as a result of the advocacy activities carried out on the occasion of World Disabled Day in March 1973 and the subsequent conference in April. But the importance of these activities cannot be underestimated. It was or THEY WERE particularly significant, in part, because the first generation of activists had no prior experience of pressing for their demands through such radical methods as a shoe polishing campaign, a relay hunger strike, and rallying. In addition, organization of the national conference was a mammoth task in the absence of the required infrastructure and the lack of prior experience in undertaking such a large-scale activity. Although these advocacy activities could not be sustained over the long term, the fact that a national-level effort regarding employment was initiated within the first 3 years of the existence of the organization itself marks an accomplishment of the early generation of activists. However, with the emergence of a new group of students pursuing or aspiring to pursue higher education, there was an increasing resistance to the mild methods of advocacy adopted by the first generation of leadership over the years. These students who were still in high school or college gradually developed opposition to the mild approach of the leadership toward the issues of right to employment and accommodations in the pursuit of their studies at the college level. This, in the long run,

created a background for the first major split in the Federation in 1978, which had far reaching implications for the politics of the Federation. As mentioned earlier, a detailed analysis of this split follows in Part II of this chapter. But before that, it is worth briefly discussing the role of smaller level advocacy organizations led by students in Delhi. These organizations did not pose any threat to the existing leadership of the Federation. Rather, they functioned independently to voice the concerns of college students as well as those who were aspiring to be college students.

Students' Movement and Role of the Small Self-Advocacy Organizations in Delhi in the 1970s

From the time of its founding, NFB has remained the largest advocacy organization of the organized blind in India. It has undoubtedly played the most crucial role in the process of advocacy for the rights of the blind over the last 3 and on half decades. However, despite that, it needs to be acknowledged that there has always been an alternative voice of the blind manifested through smaller level organizations. As the purpose of this study is to analyze the history of the movement at the national level, no serious attempts were made to collect data regarding the role of the small local level advocacy organizations of the blind in India outside Delhi. But since most national-level activities took place in Delhi by virtue of being the capital city of India, I feel that it is useful to analyze the alternative voice of the blind activists manifested through these smaller level organizations.

Soon after NFB started functioning in Delhi, discontentment arose as the college students became frustrated with the mild methods of advocacy adopted by the first generation of leadership at a time when socialist movements were gaining momentum in

various parts of North India. They blamed the leadership for its inability to help them obtain the required support in the pursuit of their education. This highly conscious and active group of college students realized that the leadership of NFB was in the hands of well-settled middle-class blind individuals who did not give adequate attention to the interests of high school and college students. So, the mild forms of advocacy adopted by the first generation of leadership of the movement and an indifferent attitude toward the interests of college students triggered this group of students to form small independent organizations to address their interests. As a result, beginning in the early 1970s, a few small organizations were founded in Delhi to represent the interests of college students or those who were aspiring to be admitted to certain college programs; these students or future students would later become part of the second generation of the educated blind activists. Hence, based on their dissatisfaction with the first generation of leadership, the students in Delhi started advocating for their rights through these newly founded organizations.

There were several small advocacy organizations that existed from time to time or continue to exist in Delhi in addition to NFB. Two of these organizations, both formed in the 1970s, were the Akhil Bhartiya Netrahin Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVNP) and the Blind Persons Association (BPA). The BPA was established in 1975. On the other hand, the ABNVP had been in existence since April 1972, but it could not be registered, and, as explained further in this section, it was later disbanded and most of its members founded a new organization called the National Students Organization of the Blind (NSOB). A third organization, the National Blind Youth Association (NBYA) was established in 1974. It became the second largest self-advocacy organization of the blind in Delhi and

parts of North India and, at times, challenged the hegemony of NFB as the leading advocacy organization of the organized blind in Delhi. NBYA thus became an alternative forum representing the voice of blind people in the capital city of India.

For the most part, these organizations led by students maintained a distance from NFB and functioned independently, but they did collaborate with it occasionally. In order to understand the alternative voice in the advocacy movement of the blind led by the students in the capital city during this phase of the movement, I now briefly discuss the role of these four organizations based in Delhi: ABNVP, NSOB, BPA and NBYA.

The Akhil Bhartiya Netrahin Vidyarthi Parishad

The ABNVP was the first advocacy organization formed by blind students in Delhi. The organization was established to promote the interests of the group of prospective high-school graduates of Andh Maha Vidyalaya, the oldest special residential school in Delhi located downtown in the Connaught Place vicinity. In the previous chapter, I provided a brief description of the role of Andh Maha Vidyalaya in the advocacy movement of the blind in Delhi.

It was quite common during early 1970s that blind students were denied admission in colleges even if they had the required qualifications (R.M. Vyas, personal interview, February 3, 2006). Based on past experience, the students of Andh Maha Vidyalay who took high school exams in the spring of 1972 feared that even if they performed well in the exams, they would be denied admission to college. They therefore realized that they needed to raise their issue of admission to colleges before the high-level

government authorities. For this purpose, they decided to establish an organization and that is how the ABNVP was formed in April 1972 (R.M. Vyas, personal interview, February 3, 2005).

As described in the beginning of this chapter, there was a strong culture of socialist movements and political activism in North India during the early 1970s. It was, therefore, quite usual for the activists of any movement in Delhi to approach the Prime Minister's office directly. Hence, the activists could easily go to the highest authority of the government to register their protest in relation to any issue. So, as informed by Dr. Bharat Prasad Yadav who was then also a student in Andh Maha Vidyalaya and subsequently played a significant role as a youth leader:

On 21st May in 1972, Joginder Singh Gosain, Baldev Kishan Sharma, and Girdhari Lal went on hunger strike in front of the residence of Indira Gandhi [the then Prime Minister of India]. We demanded that we should get admission in colleges and decent amount of scholarship to pursue our education... It was all done under the banner of the ABNVP (B. P. Yadav, personal interview, April 17, 2005).

Thus, soon after the establishment of ABNVP, these students launched a movement demanding admissions for qualified blind students in the colleges and an increase in the amount of scholarships.

While the movement was successful in its mission despite the fact that it was led by high school graduates who had no experience and infrastructure, there was a strong resistance from the school authorities of Andh Maha Vidyalaya as well as the high-level leadership of NFB. Jawahar Lal Kaul, the General Secretary of NFB and Lal Advani, the first and the only blind civil servant in India, both, were very critical of this student

movement. As narrated by Yadav Kaul and Advani pressured the headmaster of Andh Maha Vidyalaya, Purshottam Das, to curb this movement and deal harshly with the students who were involved in it:

Advani sahib contacted Kaul to find out who were these students who were causing nuisance to the government by organizing a strike and picketing in front of the Prime Minister's house. Kaul informed him that these were the students of Andh Maha Vidyalaya. Advani sahib called Purushottam Das ji and told him to deal with these students sternly as they were annoying the high-level bureaucracy. For this, Baldev Krishna was beaten up by Purushottam Das ji who announced that whoever would participate in that strike would be sent out of the school (Yadav, 2005).

Despite the opposition by the then leadership of NFB and an attempt by the school administration to curtail the movement in an authoritarian manner, the students did succeed in sustaining the movement until they were able to schedule an appointment with the Prime Minister. According to Yadav, within a week of the launching of the movement, the Prime Minister agreed to meet with the activists to discuss their demands:

Mrs. Indira Gandhi met us in the last week of May and she too said that 40 rupees of annual scholarship for college students was very less. So, addressing to our request, she immediately ordered to increase this amount to 150 rupees a year. Dr. Shanti Narayan was the dean of the colleges in Delhi University those days. Indira Gandhi called him as well as the vice-chancellor of Delhi University for a meeting at her residence. She told them that it is very unfortunate that blind people want to study and you don't give them admission in colleges. She warned them that if we were not given admission in the colleges, then the grant to the University of Delhi through the University Grant's Commission [the Central Government body which disperses the grants to the higher educational government institutions in India] may be withdrawn. So, upon her instruction, all of us were granted admissions in the colleges in that year and were provided accommodation free of charge (Yadav, 2005).

The success of this movement provided a great experience and morale booster for the students who organized it, and many of them became the leaders of the movement of

the organized blind in Delhi outside the NFB, which always remained a dominant voice within the struggle for the rights of the blind in India at the national level. As mentioned in the previous quotation from Yadav, one of the outcomes of this meeting with the Prime Minister was that blind students who were going to attend colleges would be given campus accommodation free of charge. This was opposed by Kaul as he considered it to be too great an achievement of the movement by the students that affected the image of NFB as the sole champion of the rights of the blind. Representing the voice of the student activists Yadav argued that Kaul opposed the provision of free accommodations on campus based on jealousy:

Kaul was then General Secretary of NFB. He opposed our facilities [accommodations]. We asked him, why did he want to stop our fund which was being paid by the government. He said that [“you are asking for undue concessions”] [discounts]. Here onwards, our opposition with NFB continued and most of us from Andh Maha Vidyaylaya always stayed in opposition to Kaul’s leadership (Yadav, 2005).

So, because of this opposition by Kaul, most of these younger activists of this movement could never reconcile with NFB particularly during the time he remained its undisputed leader.

As explained by Yadav again, another significant achievement of ABNVP was that the activists used it as a forum to oppose a paragraph in a high school textbook in which the author argued that blind people should not get married because they are likely to have blind children:

There was a book written by V. D. Ramchandran in which it was clearly written that blind people should not marry because if they get married, then their children will be born blind too. We started raising our voice

under the banner of ABNVP. Finally a meeting was scheduled with social welfare minister, Sri Arvind Kumar. We explained our objection to him. We said that organize at least one marriage for one of us and if our child is born blind, then we will accept the statement of Sri V. D. Ramachandaran and if in case his statement proves wrong then please remove this book from the school curriculum. He finally called meeting of the secretary of the Department of Education and asked him to look into our complaint. After that, author's widow came and started crying and pleading not to remove the book from the curriculum as the royalty from that book was the only means of her living. The Minister once again called us for the meeting. He explained the gravity of the situation and asked for our suggestions. We suggested that keeping in mind the problem of both [the objection raised by blind activists and the concern of the widow of the author], what best can be done is that this particular paragraph should be removed from the chapter. Finally, formal letter was given to us explaining that such and such paragraph from the book has been removed ... It was our opposition that she gave us an apology letter and such statement was removed from the book. It was a time when such achievements were not easy as it was very difficult to get such a response from the authorities (Yadav, 2005).

Due to some internal disputes and in the absence of proper infrastructure, which would have helped any organization to get institutionalized, ABNVP could not last long. One of its founding members, Ram Millan Vyas, described the end of ABNVP with a great sense of nostalgia:

Some differences started taking place among its members by the beginning of the year 1974. A group within the organization led by Ram Bhajan Soni was given the responsibility of framing its constitution. But this group led by Soni tried to establish its monopoly over the organization by being dominant in the decision making process and there was a strong resistance to the non-democratic tendencies of this group by the other members who wanted to ensure a democratic character of the organization. The members of this dominant group led by Soni were accused of misusing the funds of the organization for their personal interest. They refused to adopt a policy of transparency in financial and other matters of organization and sadly burnt all the official documents of ABNVP. In fact, with that act, all records of the ABNVP were put to ashes and that marked the death of this organization (R.M Vyas, personal interview, February 3, 2005).

Undoubtedly, the attempts of this organization were almost at the nascent level and whatever little it achieved at that point of time was a significant achievement of any small organization, which functioned without any infrastructure and prior experience of engaging in any kind of advocacy activities.

National Students' Organization of the Blind

The dissolution of ABNVP gave rise to NSOB in the fall of 1974 (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005). Many people who were members of ABNVP joined the NSOB. So, as described by Ramesh Kumar Sarin, who was then a college student and played the role of a leading activist during early 1980s, its focus was on the same issues relating to the problems of blind students studying in colleges:

Its constitution was developed in Delhi College now known as Zakir Hussain College. We all were students and it was the wisdom of the students, which gave birth to an organization that could fill the vacuum of ABNVP (Sarin, 2006).

Once a group of qualified educated blind individuals who were eligible to be university professors emerged by the 1990s, NSOB also engaged in a number of activities to demand the appointment of the qualified blind to teaching positions in the university. It was basically as a result of the efforts of NSOB that the Academic Council of Delhi University passed a resolution in 1994 to reserve 3 % of college teaching positions for the disabled (P.S. Kushwaha, personal communication, February 6, 2006). This was a year before the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) was enacted to mandate reservation of 3% of jobs in all the central government services.

As elaborated in Chapter 7, even if the PWD Act of 1995 was enacted, it was not implemented unless the administration was pressured to implement it. One most important method of advocacy to get the law implemented has been to approach the courts and demand that they issue directives to the administration for implementing the provisions of a particular law. Therefore, blind students, most of whom happen to be doctoral students, had to file a suit in the High Court of Delhi to get the provisions for the 3% reservation in teaching positions implemented at the University of Delhi. The suit was filed in 1996 and the high court gave its judgment in 2001 asking the university administration to implement the provisions of the PWD Act by filling the teaching positions with eligible disabled candidates (Pushkar Singh Kushwaha and others Vs. University of Delhi, 2001). It is notable that though this suit was not technically filed by the NSOB, the chief petitioner, Pushkar Singh Kushwaha, happened to be the unchallenged leader of this organization. However, with the exception of occasional advocacy activities recently relating to issues concerning accommodations for blind students and the appointment of blind candidates in teaching positions in the University of Delhi, NSOB has basically been silent and dormant.

The Blind Persons' Association

Some of the members of NFB who constituted a group of college students during the mid-1970s were growing increasingly dissatisfied with its leadership in Delhi. They felt that the leadership of the Federation was not adequately addressing their interests. As a result, they decided to form an organization solely intended to address the interests of college students. That is how BPA was formed by some of the members of the Delhi branch of NFB in 1974 (R. A. Sharma, personal interview, June 27, 2005). Hence, unlike

the ABNVP and NSOB, which were formed by students, who were not involved in NFB and who faced a lot of opposition from the leadership of NFB, the BPA was formed by a group of students who were still members of the Federation. The formation of a new organization did not affect their relationship with the leadership of the Federation. So, as recounted by Ram Avtar Sharma, a leading figure and founding member of BPA, it was an organization which came into existence as a result of dissatisfaction among a group within the Delhi branch of NFB, particularly over the issues of accommodations for blind students at the college level to facilitate the pursuit of their education:

There were some differences with the NFB over the issues of arranging typewriters, tape recorders etc. for those of us who were pursuing higher education. So, five of us, as the founder members, started BPA. We also needed to find a sighted person to make him work as a treasurer. So we included Harish Tandon who was a friend of Krishna Kumar. We took in confidence some of the shopkeepers of Model Town [area where the NFB office was located those days in Delhi] for donation to meet out the minimum postal, conveyance and other expenditures of the Association in the beginning. Initially, it was an informal organization. Later on, it was duly registered and Mahendra Rastogi became its President. I [Ram Avtar Sharma] became the General Secretary and Krishna Kumar became the Secretary (Sharma, 2005).

It is worth repeating that Mahendra Rastogi, who became the president of BPA, was highly active in the Federation as well. He was the Public Relations officer of the Federation and also one of the leaders of the demonstration of 1973 in Delhi, which involved the incident of shoe polishing of high-level government dignitaries. So, even if those who formed BPA had some differences with the leadership of NFB under Kaul, they were long time comrades of the then leadership in power. Their loyalty to the first generation of leadership was revived when this leadership was replaced with a new group led by Santosh Kumar Rungta in the aftermath of the 1978 Split within the Federation (Sharma, 2005).

Most of the activists of BPA either became employed or shifted their loyalty to the All India Confederation of the Blind, a newly formed organization headed by Kaul. BPA then remained inactive for a long time following the post-1978 split. It was again revived as an advocacy organization in the early 1990s for a short while by some young educated blind activists (N.R. Nishad, personal interview, July 3, 2005). It then took up the issue of accommodations for blind students for high status government jobs such as civil service positions (Nishad, 2005).

It is notable that blind people were not even allowed to take certain exams for civil service jobs. There was a provision in the eligibility tests for the Indian Civil Services conducted by the Union Public Services Commission (the recruitment agency for Central Government civil services) that the exams needed to be written in the handwriting of the same person who was taking the exams (Nishad, 2005). This meant that no one was allowed to use amanuensis for writing these exams. As a result, the prospective blind examinees could not take those exams, as they had to depend on the amanuensis to write for them. BPA mobilized the educated blind and got a handful of them to push the leadership of NFB to file a suit in Delhi High Court to challenge the Union Public Service Commission (Nishad, 2005). Finally the Delhi High Court instructed the Union Public Service Commission to allow qualified blind job seekers to take these exams that are held annually and to ensure the necessary accommodations, such as extra time to complete the exams and the permission to seek the help of an amanuensis to write for them (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 104).

BPA is still in existence but it has changed from being an advocacy organization to a service delivery organization as it is running a hostel for blind female college students in Delhi. The closeness of its leadership with the leadership of the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) is partly the reason why it has reduced itself to this status of a mere service delivery organization. As explained further in Part II of this chapter, AICB is a breakaway organization from the NFB following the split in 1978.

In addition to these small organizations primarily representing the interests of blind students in Delhi, the National Blind Youth Association (NBYA) also emerged in opposition to the NFB as a discontented group of young blind people, most of who were still college students. Unlike ABNVP (which did not last long), BPA, and NSOB that were active from time to time and often kept the scope of their activities quite limited, NBYA grew in size and shape and continues to be an alternative forum for representing the voice of blind people in the capital city. Most of the members of NBYA from the time of its founding were students of Andh Maha Vidyalaya and were involved with the ABNVP and even NSOB to some extent. As explained above, the early leadership of NFB did not approve of the activities carried out by ABNVP. This led to strong differences and even bitterness between the members of ABNVP and the leadership of NFB. These differences and bitterness continued and even sharpened when many of the members of ABNVP later became members of NBYA. Therefore, as explained further in the next chapter, for the most part, NBYA functioned independently of NFB with the exception of a small period of a little less than three years from the middle of 1978 to the beginning of 1981. In order to better explain the contribution of NBYA during the 1970s

and 1980s, I now discuss the developments in the process of its establishment and evolution during the initial stage.

National Blind Youth Association

The NBYA was established in 1974 after the dissolution of ABNVP. Dr. Bharat Prasad Yadav, who was the founding and long-term prominent leader of NBYA, was himself a college student at the time of its formation. He explained the background of how its name was chosen:

We all wanted to form an association that could fight for the rights of blind people rather than siding with the government. I proposed National Blind Youth Association as the name of the new association to the members. I proposed this name due to certain reasons -- firstly, there was no other federation or association by this name in India; secondly, I had discussed with the members of the Congress Party and I myself was the member of the Youth Congress [student wing of the Congress Party then in power at the Central Government level]. The plan was that we would get affiliated to Youth Congress later. Unfortunately, Sanjay Gandhi [the son of the Prime Minister and a very influential figure in Indian politics at that time] who was known to me could not live longer, and you can say that my planning to develop NBYA to make it a part of Youth Congress failed (B.P. Yadav, personal interview, April 17, 2005).

The activists who formed NBYA initially intended to launch a struggle for the rights of blind students pursuing higher education in the University of Delhi. Therefore, to start with, they focused on ensuring a support system and accommodations for them. These included equipment such as tape recorders and tapes for taping books, provisions for human readers to read books out loud, transcribing of books in Braille, and amanuensis to write their exams (Yadav, 2005).

By late 1970s, members of NBYA began negotiating with the authorities with respect to a range of issues including discounts in the college hostel fee; establishing a Braille and Recorded Books Library at the University of Delhi; admission in the Bachelor's of Education program; and organizing sports weeks for blind youth. Attempt was made to address almost all issues relating to the student community (Yadav, 2005).

Despite the lack of sufficient infrastructure, NBYA started engaging in contentious political action in Delhi outside the University of Delhi. It organized the first major rally of blind people in front of the Parliament on August 11, 1978 demanding implementation of the 3% reservation order, Braille presses in each state, declaring The birth day of Louis Braille on January 4 as a special holiday (Yadav, 2005).

NBYA was, thus, the first organization that could organize a rally of blind students based in Delhi with a big demand charter covering all of these issues concerning accommodations for pursuit of their education.

It was an integrated rally of its own kind with equal participation by sighted and blind activists. It was one of the rare occasions in the history of the movement of the organized blind in India when blind activists received tremendous support from a mainstream political force in the country. As informed by Yadav, with a great sense of accomplishment and pride, it was not only supported by sighted people but their participation was disciplined in the sense that the leader of the supporting group presented herself as an integral part of the movement of the organized blind:

It was attended by almost two hundred blind people and [a] similar number of sighted people. We all demonstrated before the Parliament... Amarjeet Kaur who was then General Secretary of the All-India Students Federation [the student wing of the Communist Party of India] had supported us with her two hundred comrades. When Amarjit Kaur volunteered her arrest along with us then Sri Avinash Chandra, the S.H.O. [in-charge of a local police office] Parliament Street Police Station, Delhi asked her, ["I think, madam, your role would be different"]? She replied that ["no, now I am standing under the banner of National Blind Youth Association and whatever the President of this Association says, I will do so"] (Yadav, 2005).

NBYA had also organized a number of advocacy activities independently or in collaboration with the NFB during the 1980s. I provide a detailed description of these activities in the next chapter. However, it is worth mentioning here that it is still primarily an advocacy organization despite its recent involvement in a few service delivery activities that includes running a hostel for blind men.

While resentment toward the first generation of leadership of the Federation was in part manifested in the formation of these smaller level advocacy organizations in Delhi, there was a rising discontentment among the younger generation of its members as a whole. In other words, the absence of sustained advocacy activities and the leadership's moderate approach toward advocacy soon led to discontentment among its newer members. These members comprised the rising group of students and unemployed blind youth who gradually started to express their disagreement with the first generation of leadership under the control of the middle class educated blind. Therefore, over a period of time, this rising group of young members of the Federation came to challenge the hegemony of the elitist leadership. This led to the first major split within the Federation, which had far reaching implications for the politics of the movement. It is therefore worth

examining the background of the first major split within the organization that was spearheading the movement at the national level.

PART II

The Kanpur split and the introduction of a quota system: Their impact on the nature of the movement.

It is true that some of the Delhi-based small level organizations such as the NBYA, BPA, and NSOB came into existence as a result of frustration with the approach of the first generation of leaders within NFB toward advocacy and their apathy to the interests of college students. But they did not pose any threat to the then leadership in command and at times worked in harmony with it in some ways. The real threat to this first generation of leadership, however came from the newer membership of NFB itself and it was out of this newer membership of NFB that the new leadership of a second generation of NFB emerged. At the same time, an Office Memorandum was issued in 1977 through which a quota system for the disabled was introduced. These two landmark developments, namely, the challenging of the authority of the leadership of first generation by the emerging leadership of second generation leading to a split in the Federation; and the introduction of the quota system in jobs for the disabled, had far reaching implications for the politics of struggle in the subsequent years. In this Part of the chapter, I therefore, analyze these two landmark developments and their impact on the working of the Federation.

Challenging the Authority of the First Generation of Leadership and the Kanpur

Split of 1978

By the mid-1970s, the second generation of activists had started to emerge. They were growing increasingly frustrated with the mild methods of advocacy adopted by the first generation of leadership. However, since the first generation of the leadership did not come into power through a democratic process and its primary base resided in the support from the educated blind elite, they were reluctant to share power. Therefore, they were reluctant to hand over power to the second generation of activists through the democratic process. This was bound to result in a struggle for power within the organization and a situation of confrontation between the forces contending to acquire or retain power.

A number of factors contributed to the widening of the base of the membership of NFB and the emergence of a second generation of leadership by the late 1970s. These primarily included: First, the role of the high school graduates of residential schools for the blind, particularly the Model School for the Visually Handicapped located at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh and second, the dissatisfaction of the younger generation of unemployed high school and college graduates with the mild methods of advocacy adopted by the first generation of the well-established educated blind. The importance of the first factor has been discussed in the previous chapter. So, I briefly discuss here the importance of the second factor, that is, the rising discontentment among the newly emerging group of educated and semi-educated youth.

In 1976, the NFB convention was held at Jaipur, the capital city of the northern state of Rajasthan, which is located adjacent to Delhi on its western side (H. Shah,

personal interview, March 24, 2005). During this convention, Shiv Jatan Thakur, a high school graduate of the Model School, Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal, was nominated to be the representative of the new generation of activists led by Santosh Rungta to challenge the group in power under the leadership of Kaul (S.J. Thakur, personal interview, June 16, 2005). Thakur contested the election for the position of General Secretary, the most powerful position under the constitution of the NFB, which had been occupied by Kaul since 1970 without challenge. However, while the opposing faction led by Rungta could not mobilize sufficient support to challenge Kaul's leadership during this 1976 election, it did succeed in acquiring a majority of the positions on the National Executive Committee (NEC), the highest decision making body of the organization (Shah, 2005). Thus, Thakur was defeated easily, as Kaul had a stronghold over the organization and most of the members of NFB were either recruited by him or under his control in some fashion (Shah, 2005). So, the uniqueness of that election lay in the fact that although the top leadership remained the same, a majority of the office holders and the members of the NEC who won the election were from the opposition camp led by Rungta.

As observed by one of the activists, analysis of the discussions held in the NEC highlighted the fact that Kaul faced strong opposition during those 2 years (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005). But he failed to read the nerve of its members and was not prepared to face the consequences in the next bi-annual elections held in 1978. The young generation of the Federation, who were in a majority by now, were basically in favor of Rungta, and the older generation of the Federation, some of whom happened to be from a highly educated middle class background, were now reduced to the status of a minority.

In the 1978 election held at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, the long established and unchallenged authority of Kaul was contested in a forceful manner and he lost the election through a majority vote (J.N. Bhargav, personal interview, May 17, 2005; V. Giri, personal interview, June 7, 2005). But since the opinion and expectations of the common members of the Federation hardly mattered to the first generation of leadership, it was not easy for Kaul and his close comrades to accept defeat through a majority vote. Kaul and the other members of the inner circle of leadership had not anticipated that the democratic character of the Federation, which was created and theoretically agreed upon by them, could be used as a tool to oust Kaul from power.

Kaul refused to accept the verdict of the majority vote and declared the elections invalid and announced himself to be the acting General Secretary until the next elections. But the winning faction led by Rungta also refused to give up their rightful claim to power. This resulted in a dispute over leadership between Kaul and Rungta, each of who declared himself as the real leader of the Federation (Bhargav, 2005; Giri, 2005).

The conflict over leadership of NFB lasted for little over a year and Kaul had to finally step down (Bhargav, 2005). Thus, while, the conditions for a split in NFB were emerging from the time of the 1976 bi-annual membership meeting of NFB and election of the top-level leadership held in Jaipur, Rajasthan, it finally crystallized only in the next elections of 1978 when Kaul was defeated through the electoral process. I describe this incident as the 'Kanpur Split' because the elections held in the city of Kanpur (located in the state of Uttar Pradesh) resulted in a pronounced split within the Federation and led to the creation of two rival factions of those who supported Kaul and those who supported

Rungta. This was an irreconcilable split between these two groups. As I will explain in the following few pages, this change of leadership as a result of this split had far-reaching implications for the nature of the movement of the organized blind in India.

After the issue of Kaul's defeat was settled, he decided to form a new organization called All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB), in which he could have an unchallenged dominance for the rest of his life (Bhargav, 2005; D. S. Mehta, personal interview, August 6, 2005). He established it primarily as a service delivery organization rather than an advocacy organization by initially using the resources and contacts from his previous position as General Secretary of NFB to build up the newly formed organization. While the name of AICB in itself conveys the philosophy of a self-advocacy umbrella organization at the national level, it has primarily been a Delhi-based service delivery organization for most of its existence. I provide a somewhat detailed analysis of the nature of AICB and the change in the attitude of Kaul toward advocacy after the Kanpur Split later in this chapter. However, before analyzing the impact of the Kanpur Split, I first briefly analyze the social background of the leadership and its attitude toward advocacy during the first phase of the movement, as the class character of the leadership plays an important role in shaping the nature of any organization.

Class Character of the First Generation of Leadership and its Attitude Toward Advocacy

It is primarily the social base of the wider membership of any organization that has the most influential role in shaping its nature, but the socio-economic background of the leadership also can play an important role in influencing the agenda and nature of the

movement, particularly if an organization is in its formative stage. So, in order to understand the nature of the movement of the organized blind in its first phase of growth, it is important to analyze the attitude of the members of the caucus of NFB toward advocacy with reference to their class background. In this section, I therefore briefly discuss the class background of some of the key leadership position holders during this phase of the movement and their attitude toward advocacy.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, malnutrition is one of the primary causes of blindness (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 42), and thus, most blind people happen to be from the poorer stratum of the society. This simply means that the membership of a large organization of the blind like NFB would predominantly comprise blind people from a low socio-economic background. But despite having a preponderance of members from a low socio-economic background, the top-level leadership of the Federation during this phase of the movement was largely in the hands of the educated middle class blind college graduates who were primarily based in Delhi.

At the time of its establishment, NFB was led by Kaul and was strongly supported by some well-established middle class blind professionals. The notable ones among them who strongly supported the initiative of Kaul included Akhil Kumar Mittal, a Perkins School graduate and the principal of a leading school for the blind in Delhi affiliated with the Blind Relief Association; Professor Ved Prakash Varma, the first blind faculty member appointed at the University of Delhi in 1966; Sant Lal Thareja, the second blind person to be appointed as a faculty member in the University of Delhi; and Lal Advani, the first and the only blind civil servant in India and the most influential figure in the disability sector in the second half of the last century. All of these individuals, who were

among the highly educated middle class, gave tremendous support to Kaul in organizing the various activities of NFB in the initial stage of organization building. Thareja who died in 1974, always stood for the democratization of the organization and was strongly in favor of adoption of radical methods of advocacy. Other than him, they all were opposed to adoption of such an approach and were ardent supporters of Kaul; together they formed the caucus of NFB for the most part of this phase of the movement.

As noted earlier in this chapter in the section on membership of the Federation at the time of its establishment, Akhil Kumar Mittal was always of the opinion that the leadership of the Federation should have remained in the hands of the highly educated blind and that membership should also have been confined to the blind college graduates. Despite the fact that a long time has now passed since the Kanpur Split and a lot has been achieved through the advocacy activities carried out under the second generation of leadership, Mittal still feels that it was a mistake to open up the Federation to the general population of blind people:

I am afraid you might regard me to be an elitist, but I have always told Kaul also that if we had stuck to the National Federation of the Blind Graduates, may be our base would have been narrower and the membership would have been smaller. But the kind of problem that we subsequently encountered in NFB, we probably, would have perhaps been spared because education of those days made a great deal of difference in the perception and thinking of the individuals. That is why I had suggested to keep the membership confined to blind graduates only (A.K. Mittal, personal interview, May 16, 2005).

Hence, according to the kind of politics that took place over the period of time, which led to the split of 1978, would not have taken place if the membership of the Federation was confined to the blind college graduates and if the NFB had remained the

NFBG instead of converting into the NFB in 1972. Mittal, therefore, started to distance himself from NFB when the organization opened its membership to all blind people.

Ved Prakash Varma, one of the members of the National Executive Committee, was completely in disagreement with the rest of the leaders who decided to utilize radical methods of advocacy in March 1973. To him, it was much below the dignity of the educated blind to engage in activities such as shoe polishing and rallies, as he felt this would adversely affect the image of the members of the Federation in the opinion of the government as well as the general public (V.P. Varma, personal interview, May 29, 2005; M. K. Rastogi, personal interview, May 18, 2005). He, therefore, never approved of the radical advocacy activities and remained opposed to any kind of contentious political action.

Although Lal Advani was a civil servant and was not supposed to engage in the activities of non-governmental organization or an advocacy organization as per the protocol of his job, he had always supported the activities of NFB in its first phase until the leadership was in the hands of Kaul before the Kanpur Split. A number of the landmark meetings in the process of the founding of NFB in 1970 were held in his house and he was the one who drafted the constitution in 1972 after the NFB was opened to general membership (Mittal, 2005). He regularly participated in the activities of NFB in the pre-1978 period. Advani, however, had to distance himself from NFB when the leadership fell into the hands of the second generation in the post-1978 period and it became a real troublemaker in the opinion of the Indian government. His relationship with the Federation changed drastically after the Kanpur Split; he was no longer an ally,

and in fact he was completely anti-NFB until he formally retired from his government position in 1982 (L. Advani, personal interview, February 6, 2005; H. H. Khan, personal interview, August 2, 2005). At times, he even resorted to authoritarian measures to curb the disruptive advocacy activities led by NFB (Khan, 2005). The change in the relationship of Advani with the Federation demonstrates that even a highly progressive person like Advani who was very sensitive and committed to the promotion of the interests of blind people could not support the activists when they started engaging in contentious political actions. It reflects the fact that a high-class civil servant like him could afford to identify himself with NFB only as long as it was not regarded unfavorably by the government. But he had to change his relationship with the Federation when it adopted a radical advocacy approach. He even had to resort to authoritarian measures to suppress radical advocacy activities during 1980-1981 when he was holding the position of director of the National Institute of the Visually Handicapped, the highest government body in the field of education and rehabilitation of the blind in India which also included the Model School for the Visually Handicapped among its various units (Advani, 2005; Khan, 2005).

Apart from these members who formed the caucus of the Federation during the first phase of the movement, some other middle class blind professionals who tacitly or directly supported the activities of the Federation during this period also disassociated themselves from the organization as a result of the change in leadership. For example, Jagdish Patel was one such person who was heading the Blind Persons Association, a large state-level organization in Gujarat, and he had even accepted the position of President of NFB in 1972 (H. Shah, personal interview, March 24, 2005). Being a person

engaged in a service delivery organization in the field of blindness, he basically adhered to the then prevalent charity-based approach and who could not have afforded to displease government officials, he could not have approved of the radical methods of advocacy adopted by the second generation of leadership. So, it was natural for someone like him to distance himself from an organization such as NFB when it became so radical with the change of leadership. Similarly, most of the middle class members who were direct or indirect participants in the movement in its first phase could not continue in the second phase with the change of the approach of the leadership toward advocacy.

To summarize, during the first phase of the movement, the most influential members of the leadership caucus came from the middle class and a good number of the common members also comprised the blind college graduates. Thus, the Federation was able to draw the support of the well-established middle class blind people as well as the government authorities during this phase. This was possible because, for the most part, during this time the activists were engaged in mild forms of advocacy that did not significantly concern the government in the absence of any kind of radical advocacy through contentious political actions led by NFB. But most of these high level leaders coming from the class of educated blind elite who had a major influence on the working of the Federation formally or informally distanced themselves from it when the leadership was taken over by the second generation of the blind activists in the post-Kanpur split.

As explained further in the next few pages, the horizon of the membership of the Federation was expanded in the second phase of the movement. At the same time, while

the top-level leader, Rungta, happened to be a middle class person, the major difference was that Federation now became a much more democratic organization. Unlike the first phase of the movement, the semi-educated or uneducated unemployed blind youth began to have a say in the working and decision-making of the organization and thus, the opinion of the common members of the Federation began to be taken into consideration in the post-Kanpur Split era. Since the Kanpur Split had far-reaching implications for the nature of the social bases of the Federation and the consequent change in the methods and agenda of the movement under the leadership of NFB, I now engage in a detailed discussion of its impact on the post-1978 period politics of advocacy.

Impact of the Kanpur Split on the Nature of the Movement

The Kanpur split resulted in a change in the leadership from the first generation to the second generation and drastically influenced the nature of the movement in the subsequent period. The social bases of the organization; methods of advocacy; the agenda of the movement; and the attitude of the first generation of leadership toward advocacy under the control of Kaul after the formation of AICB underwent a drastic change. An analysis of the influence of the split and the resultant change in each of these spheres is beneficial in order to understand the nature of the movement in the post-1978 period.

Change in the Social Bases of the Federation

The social base of an organization lies in its members, and the leadership of any democratic organization has to serve the interests of its members. In other words, the leadership generally responds to the issues of the members of the organization and it is these issues that often play a determinant role in shaping the nature of the movement at a

given time. The social bases of the NFB have been changing over a period of time. In its initial stage in the 1970s, the majority of its members basically comprised college graduates. As explained earlier in this chapter, NFB, for that matter, began as the “National Federation of the Blind Graduates,” which meant that its membership in the initial stage was confined to college graduates, and it was not until 2 years later that its membership was opened to all blind people in the country. Although its membership was opened to everyone in 1972, it was the class of educated blind who continued to have a predominant share of membership of the Federation until the new leadership assumed power in 1978 following the Kanpur Split. Hence, even as the word “graduates” was dropped in 1972 in order to make the organization open to all blind people irrespective of their academic background, the majority of the membership of the Federation comprised the educated blind elite of India, particularly those from Northern India.

In the post-1978 period, the top-level leadership of the Federation still remained primarily in the hands of the educated middle class blind, but there was a drastic change in its social base. A portion of the supporters of the leadership in the post-1978 period still came from the group of educated blind. Some of them were college graduates, while quite a few of them were still students either in college or in one of the residential schools in Delhi, or Uttar Pradesh. At the same time, a good number of the members were also drawn from the workers employed in the sheltered workshops meant to generate employment for the uneducated or semi-educated blind in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Quite a few of these members from the working class were from the Training Center for the Adult Blind, which was part of the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh.

In contrast to this diverse composition of the membership of NFB in the post-1978 period, the earlier leadership had relied heavily on college graduates and, to some extent, the well-established middle class blind to maintain its power. Hence, if we analyze the composition of the National Executive Committee, the highest decision making body of the Federation, during the first phase of the movement in the pre-1978 period, it consisted of the highly educated well-established middle class blind elite such as Mittal, Varma, and Thareja.. Even someone like Lal Advani, who could not be a formal member of the Committee, played an informal but very decisive and effective role in the functioning of the Federation. There was hardly any participation by the general membership of the Federation in the decision making process. Kaul and some other elitist members of the inner circle of the organization like Varma, Advani, and Mittal were not concerned about the opinion and expectations of the common members of the Federation even after it was made open to general membership. It was partly due to this apathy of the first generation of leadership toward the opinion of the general membership that the second generation of leadership was able to gain their support.

The newer leadership relied on the common members for support and drew its strength from them. It was as a result of the numerical strength of the supporters of the second generation of leadership cutting across class lines that they captured power through an electoral process in 1978. Hence, while the first generation of leadership depended primarily on the group of educated blind, a significant number of whom were college graduates, the second generation relied primarily on the semi-educated as well as uneducated blind in addition to blind college graduates. Thus, in the post-1978 period, the social base of the organization underwent a dramatic change. The common members

made their presence felt by participating in the electoral process and the subsequent leadership had to take into consideration the expectations of the wider membership of the Federation.

Change in Methods of Advocacy

Since the leadership during the first phase of the movement was primarily in the hands of the well-educated activists and most of them were also well employed, they were not in favor of taking the struggle for the rights of blind people to the streets. Therefore, this leadership confined itself to mild and sophisticated methods of advocacy. An exception was the use of method of contentious political action during the short-term movement of spring of 1973 that included burning college degrees, shoe polishing, picketing, relay hunger strike etc. However, the predominant methods of advocacy practiced during this phase of the movement were those of persuasion through correspondence and making representation to the government authorities.

The emerging leadership comprising the second generation of activists had launched a campaign to replace the earlier leadership by arguing that it was too mild in its approach to advocacy and was not utilizing radical methods of advocacy through contentious political actions. According to this newly emerging group of leadership, adoption of radical methods of advocacy was necessary in order to achieve substantive results (R.K. Sarin, personal communication, February 15, 2006). Once this new leadership of the Federation acquired power in the post-1978 period, it brought a drastic change in the methods of the movement. Strategies such as picketing, rallies, hunger strikes, and blocking traffic became the most commonly used methods of advocacy

adopted by the second generation of leadership in the post-Kanpur split era. Occasionally the activists even attempted to enter government offices forcefully when the concerned officers refused to meet with them. These radical and, at times, even violent methods of advocacy were by and large missing in the first phase of the movement.

Change in Agenda of the Movement

While the right to employment for the qualified blind in government jobs became the primary agenda of the struggle led by the Federation in its subsequent phases, the development of service delivery projects and organization building dominated the agenda of the movement during its first phase. Therefore, in that initial stage, recruitment of new members from different parts of the country and network building had to be a priority, as a numerous blind activists had to be brought together to launch a united struggle. Likewise, the leadership devoted a lot of time to organizing various activities like conferences and training programs in order to develop the skills and leadership of the high school and college students. At the same time, it also spent a lot of time and energy developing service delivery projects, and the NFB started becoming more of a service delivery organization because of an increasing emphasis on this aspect. The service delivery activities predominantly included the establishment of the Braille transcription unit and the Braille library, as well as an effort to place unemployed and uneducated or semi-educated blind youth into sheltered employment workshops through service delivery organizations such as the National Association for the Blind (J.L. Kaul, personal interview, February 14, 2005). So, unlike the later phases of the movement, all this diverted the focus of the leadership from the main agenda of ensuring government jobs for the unemployed educated and semi-educated blind and other than the movement of

1973, there is no instance when the struggle for the employment in the government sector became the prime agenda of the advocacy activities carried out during the first phase of the movement.

The new leadership in the post-1978 period had to broaden the scope of the agenda of advocacy because of its allegiance or base of power. Hence, there was a complete shift in priority of the leadership from piecemeal efforts for placement of uneducated and semi-educated unemployed blind people into low level private sector jobs or sheltered workshops to sustained and radical advocacy for employment of the educated as well as uneducated and semi-educated blind in government jobs in addition to promoting the interests of the high school and college graduates. Hence, during the 1980s and the subsequent decades, the primary agenda of advocacy has been the demand for absorbing blind graduates as well as the less educated blind in different types of jobs in the Central and State level government services.

Change in the Attitude of the Earlier Leadership Toward Advocacy

After the establishment of the All India Confederation of the Blind in 1979, Kaul was able to convince most of the local and international funding organizations to support the service delivery projects headed by him (R.K. Sarin, personal communication, February 15, 2006). Consequently, he was able to shift the funding sources from NFB to AICB and portrayed himself as the chief representative of blind people in India. Using the resources and contacts from his previous position as the head of NFB in the pre-1978 era, Kaul maintained contact with international organizations and agencies working in the field of blindness like the Christofel Blinden Mission, a Germany-based funding organization

(Advani, 2005; Kaul, 2005). He portrayed AICB as an organization that was based on the philosophy of self-advocacy practiced by him during his previous position as the head of NFB.

The major repercussion of the formation of a service delivery organization and monopolization of the funding sources at the international level by Kaul and a change in his approach toward advocacy was that he then also started discrediting the philosophy and activities of the new leadership of NFB in the post-Kanpur split era. It would have been acceptable for Kaul to found the AICB as a new organization and confine its scope primarily to service delivery; however in order to justify the mission of AICB, he not only discredited the leadership which succeeded him at NFB but also launched a campaign to discredit the advocacy approach adhered to by NFB. His primary aim was to discredit the leadership of Rungta. But in order to do that, he resorted to discrediting the philosophy and methods of advocacy adopted by NFB in the post-1978 period. This was an interesting irony and contradiction in Kaul's approach. He was a person who spearheaded the founding of the NFB, which was based on the philosophy of self-advocacy from its beginning. He had also strongly promoted advocacy related activities even if he preferred mild methods of advocacy rather than radical methods. Ironically, with the founding of AICB in the post-1978 period, Kaul joined the coalition of the well-established NGOs functioning in the field of blindness in India and endorsed their view about advocacy as an undesirable method of promoting the interests of blind people. This contradiction in the approach of the founding leader of the self-advocacy movement of the blind illustrates how the leaders of a movement can make dramatic shifts in their

beliefs and approaches depending upon the existing conditions and the harsh political realities.

Many of the middle class members who were also close comrades of Kaul like Advani, Varma, and Mittal and were part of the Federation during the time of Kaul's leadership completely renounced their relationship with NFB in the post-1978 phase. Undoubtedly, they were quite opposed to the radical approach adopted in the second phase of the movement following the Kanpur split. Most of these middle class members later extended their support to the AICB directly or indirectly. Further discussion of the changing attitude of the middle class blind elite toward the advocacy-based approach is provided in the Chapter Seven in the context of the changing attitude of the NGOs toward the advocacy approach.

In short, the Kanpur Split had far-reaching implications for the nature of the movement as it underwent a drastic change in terms of methods, agenda, and the attitude of the first generation of leadership toward advocacy as well as the composition of membership and leadership of the Federation leading to a transformation of the role of the general membership in the decision making process. In addition to the Kanpur Split, another landmark development that highly influenced the nature of the movement in the subsequent period was the issuance of the first major legislative measure mandating 3 % reservation in Central Government jobs. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the impact of this legal provision on the nature of the movement before I end this chapter, as it is necessary to understand the impact of the issuance of this Order in order to understand the politics of advocacy in the subsequent years.

Introduction of the quota system in the employment for the disabled

After the initiation of the movement of the organized blind in India in the 1970s, there was a growing consciousness in the minds of activists regarding their rights. As a result, they came to adhere to a rights-based approach by challenging the traditional charity-based approach. The development of this consciousness in the approach of the blind activists inspired them to press their claim for affirmative action, referred to as “positive discrimination,” and enshrined in the constitution under the fundamental right to equality (Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 7-9). This recognition of the need to press for their claim for equal rights was also buttressed to some extent by the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977, which recognized the rightful claim of the disabled to be covered under the concept of affirmative action on the basis of positive discrimination.

Through this Office Memorandum of 1977, a quota for 3% of jobs in the third and fourth categories of positions, described as “C” and “D” categories of jobs respectively, was introduced for the disabled in Central Government Services and Public Undertakings (Mani, 1988, pp. 60-62; Pandey & Advani, 1995, pp. 100-102). This included 1% each for the blind, physically impaired, and the deaf (Mani, 1988, pp. 60-62; Pandey & Advani, 1995, pp. 100-102). These lower level white-collar jobs categorized as class “C” jobs include the jobs performed by clerks, schoolteachers, support staff members, and the like. The “D” class jobs are the working class positions in the organized government sector; these include jobs of office peons, security guards, chair-recaners, and the like.

This Office Memorandum of 1977, was the first landmark development recognizing the right to employment of the blind and the disabled through a legal provision. Under the Indian legal system, an Office Memorandum holds the same weight

as a law passed by the legislature unless it is surpassed by another Office Memorandum or overruled through a law passed by the legislature (Mani, 1988, p. 60). The issuance of this Office Memorandum was thus a very positive development in the process of ensuring equal opportunities for the disabled in the matter of public employment in Central Government Services and Public Undertakings. In Chapter 6, I will return to a discussion of the history of the issuance of this Office Memorandum in the context of the response of the Indian State to ensure rights of the disabled through legislative measures. I also devote substantial text under Part I of Chapter 6 to a detailed discussion of the relevant constitutional provisions relating to the philosophy of social justice and the marginalization of the disabled under it. In the following section, I now briefly explain the importance of the impact of this Memorandum on the movement of the organized blind.

Impact of the Office Memorandum of 1977 on the Movement

The issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977 was notable in that it represented for the first time a concrete action to ensure the right of the disabled to employment. It had far-reaching implications for triggering the struggle for the right of the disabled, particularly the right to employment for blind people, as it was instrumental in raising the expectations of the activists. This was the first time that the Indian State recognized the rightful claim of the disabled to employment by way of legally protecting this right through the quota system. It strongly influenced the launching of the struggle for employment and provided momentum for the movement. As a result of this provision, the educated unemployed blind youth gained confidence to continue the movement, as they

believed that they had the required qualification for the jobs and at the same time their right to employment was protected through this Memorandum.

As is the case with most of the legal provisions in India, this provision was only enforced when pressure was exerted for its implementation. Courts were not highly active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Also as noted in the beginning of this chapter, the 1970s had witnessed a wave of movements, such as the anti-emergency rule movement as well as socialist movements in various parts of north India. So, there was also a strong culture of democratic and socialist movements in North India at that time. Therefore, the most effective method of getting a law implemented was through contentious political action by going to the streets and adopts the ground level methods of advocacy, which included rail and road blocks, picketing, hunger strikes, rallies, and the like. These were the methods of advocacy in addition to representation and persuasion that were adopted by the activists of any kind of advocacy movement. Therefore, the activists of the movement of the organized blind too adopted these methods as a means of demanding the implementation of the provisions of this Memorandum.

Blind activists became conscious of the fact that the legal provision was in their favor and they could now approach the government to ask for their right to employment. If the government did not implement this Memorandum, they had a strong basis upon which to launch a struggle for its implementation. They realized that if they could sustain their struggle, they could use this legal provision to pressure the government. Thus, the expectations of the educated blind were bolstered by the existence of this legal provision.

By the late 1970s, there was increasing discontentment among the educated blind regarding their opportunities for employment. At the same time, there was a growing consciousness of the fact that employment was no longer regarded as a matter of charity, but a legal right. If the government was not going to keep its promise of providing employment to blind people, the activists were not going to wait. They were now ready to launch a struggle to make the government take concrete action to deal with the lack of employment. Hence, the availability of this provision for employment and the unwillingness of the government to implement it raised the need for a radical movement by the blind activists in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The introduction of the quota system in government jobs through the issuance of this Office Memorandum not only became an inspiring factor for that generation of educated unemployed blind youth but also for the future generations to continue the same struggle. The movement of the 1980s and 1990s was, therefore, able to draw great strength not only from the group of job seekers at that time but also from the emerging generations of job seekers who, at that point in time, happened to be high school or college level students. This was one of the major factors that made schools like Ansh Maha Vidyalaya and the Hostel for College Going Blind Students major sources of numerical strength in Delhi.

As explained in the previous chapter, The Ansh Maha Vidyalaya is a residential school located in downtown Delhi and it had a sizable number of college students as well who lived on the premises of the school while the Hostel for College Going Blind Students provided accommodation to college students and it was located in near the

campus of Delhi University. Thus, both of these educational institutions were in prime locations for usage as housing centers for the activists. Part of the reason why these places became the hubs of the movement over a period of time and why the current generation of students was involved in the movement for the right to employment was that most of the educated unemployed blind youth lived in these two institutions in Delhi and had close contact with the younger group of people studying in them. As a result of this close interaction and friendship of the educated unemployed blind with the high school and college students, the older peers were able to convey the importance of the involvement of students in the movement and motivate them to be a part of it.

As informed by one of the leading activists engaged in the movement in the 1980s, the activists could sell the point to their younger peers that

today it is struggle for our employment and tomorrow it is going to be struggle for your employment. If our attempts to get employed through the implementation of this Order [Office Memorandum] succeed, it opens doors for future employment under provisions of this Order. If the government does not start implementing this Order now, even you will also never be employed (V. K. Mishra, personal interview, April 27, 2005).

Thus, the introduction of a quota system in jobs through the Office Memorandum of 1977 significantly raised hopes not only for the unemployed and discontented educated blind people in late 1970s and early 1980s, but also for the students who were still in the residential schools for the blind as well as those in college. Hence, the students enrolled in colleges and residential high schools for the blind, particularly those in Delhi, were drawn to the movement with the hope of acquiring employment in the future through the implementation of this Memorandum.

Soon after Santosh Kumar Rungta took over the leadership of the Federation following the Kanpur split of 1978, he launched a struggle for the implementation of this Memorandum. His main call was that the government had promised jobs to the unemployed blind youth by way of the issuance of this Memorandum and they had a rightful claim to be employed, but it was not going to happen unless the educated blind youth come out on the streets and launch a sustained struggle for it. His appeal was “support me in my struggle and we all will have jobs as a matter of right as promised in the Office Memorandum of 1976” (S.K. Rungta, personal interview, March 18, 2005). The next chapter is devoted to a detailed description of this movement.

Conclusion

The early years of the 1970s witnessed the initiation of the self-advocacy movement of the blind led by the organized blind themselves with the founding of the National Federation of the Blind Graduates, which was later expanded and renamed as the National Federation of the Blind. Through this radical advocacy movement, the organized blind in India began to challenge the hegemony of the service agencies for the blind like the National Association for the Blind that were predominantly led by sighted philanthropists who primarily adhered to a charity-based approach. This marked the beginning of a shift from the charity-based approach to self-advocacy. While the attention of the leadership during this first phase of the movement from 1970 to 1978 was basically devoted to organization building and the initiation of some service delivery projects, it was through the use of the forum of the Federation that blind people came to the streets for the first time to demand jobs as a matter of their right to be employed as

qualified candidates. At the same time, there was also the beginning of the emergence of an alternative voice within the movement of the organized blind through forums like NBYA, the other Delhi-based advocacy organization of the blind.

By the late 1970s, the time was ripe for the beginning of a radical struggle as a quantitatively large and qualitatively enthusiastic group consisting of the educated unemployed blind youth had emerged by this time. The issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977 raised the expectation of this group of educated blind youth. This stimulated them to launch a radical struggle under the leadership of Santosh Kumar Rungta, the newly designated leader of the NFB. The following chapter provides a detailed analysis of the struggle for right to employment based on demand for implementation of the 1977 Office Memorandum through a radical and sustained movement spearheaded by the second generation of leaders and members of the National Federation of the Blind.

CHAPTER 5

Radicalization of the Movement and the struggle for Right to Employment: Phase II of the movement of the organized blind (1979-1987).

The second phase of the movement of the organized blind until the late 1980s was a very crucial time which marked the growth of radical advocacy through a sustained movement. This phase witnessed the launching and continuation of the struggle for employment at the national level as well as at the state and local levels in a few states. Some of the highlights of this timeframe of the second phase of the movement included: the incident of *lathi* charge (beating with sticks) by the police on the peaceful procession of the blind on the International Day of Disabled Persons in 1980; launching of certain schemes for the disabled during International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP); and the observation of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons during the period of 1983-1992. The incident of *lathi* charge drew tremendous media attention and proved to be a blessing in disguise, as it accorded tremendous publicity to the rally that was held on that day. At the same time, the 1980s also witnessed the establishment of two committees to recommend enactment of comprehensive disability rights legislation. The first committee was set up during the IYDP under the chairpersonship of Lal Advani, while the second was set up in 1986 under the chairpersonship of Justice Baharul Islam.

In this chapter, I explain how the beginning of the 1980s marked the radicalization of the movement led by the NFB and the alternative organization of the blind in Delhi, the National Blind Youth Association. After a passing reference to the commemoration of IYDP in the beginning of Part I of the chapter, I engage in an in-depth analysis of the incident of *lathi* charge, followed by an analysis of the incident by the national and local print media based in Delhi. I end Part I with a discussion of an almost 5-month long movement led by the NBYA. Finally, in Part II of the chapter, I provide further analysis of the shift from mild methods to radical methods of advocacy and the spread of the movement to other states beyond the capital city of Delhi.

Part I

Intensification of the Movement in Delhi and the Struggle for Employment

As explained in the last few pages of the previous chapter and discussed further in Chapter 6, the Office Memorandum of 1977 reserved a quota in jobs for the disabled. This Memorandum made it mandatory for the government to hire 3% of the work force from among the disabled in “C” and “D” categories of jobs in the Central Government and the Public Undertaking Services. But government officials used to routinely disregard such memorandums related to the interests of any marginalized section unless a vigorous and sustained movement was launched through radical methods of advocacy. Therefore, a sustained and vigorous struggle had to be carried out by blind activists to get this quota in specified government jobs filled. The highest priority of the activists during this phase of the movement, from 1979-1987, was therefore the demand for implementation of the Office Memorandum of 1977 introducing a quota for the disabled in specified government jobs.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Santosh Kumar Rungta occupied the most powerful position of General Secretary of the NFB after the Kanpur Split of 1978. This marked a shift of leadership from the first generation to the second. At the same time, there was an emergence of the new generation of activists, which I regard to be the second generation of activists. Rungta received massive support from this generation of activists who constituted the majority of the membership of the Federation in the post-1978 period. This group of activists led by Rungta was very

clear that it is only by way of a sustained struggle carried out through radical methods that blind people could succeed in getting jobs as a matter of their right.

As soon as the conflict for leadership was settled in the aftermath of the Kanpur split of 1978, the second generation of leadership began planning to launch a struggle to demand the employment for blind people as mandated under the Office Memorandum of 1977. Despite the fact that this was altogether a new group of activists under the new leadership, who were not experienced in leading a large-scale nation-wide movement, the young and dynamic Santosh Kumar Rungta was very intelligent and passionate, and was committed to planning the first major radical advocacy activity in the spring of 1980. So, under the esteemed leadership of Rungta, the Federation organized a massive rally on the occasion of International Day of Disabled Persons that used to be then commemorated on the third Sunday of March. It was during this first major rally organized by the Federation under the leadership of Rungta that the incident of *lathi* charge took place; it received immense, and in some ways, exaggerated coverage by the press. I engage in a detailed discussion of this incident and its coverage by the press, but before that, I briefly discuss the commemoration of IYDP by India in order to further understand its correlation with the movement of the organized blind.

Commemoration of International Year of Disabled Persons in India

Following the international years of women and children during the 1970s, the year 1981 was declared as the “International Year of Disabled Persons” by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1977 (“United Nations General Assembly,” 1977).

Some of the identifiable objectives of the IYDP which were spelled out by the UN included:

- Helping disabled persons in their physical and psychological adjustment to society;
- Promoting all national and international efforts to provide disabled persons with proper assistance, training, care and guidance to make available opportunities for suitable work and to ensure their full integration in society;
- Encouraging study and research projects designed to facilitate the practical participation of disabled persons in daily life by improving, for example, their access to public buildings and transportation systems;
- Educating and informing the public of the rights of disabled persons to participate in and contribute to various aspects of economic, social and political life;
- Promoting effective measures for prevention of disability and for rehabilitation of disabled persons (“United Nations General Assembly,” 1977).

These objectives covered a wide range of issues relating to disability, but the extent to which they made a real difference in the lives of disabled persons across the world is a debatable issue. However, if one sees these objectives in terms of their implied meaning, it becomes clear that the international community had begun to accept the disabled as productive members of the society. It therefore needs to be acknowledged that the commemoration of IYDP made some positive contribution at the international level and signified a shift from charity to rights of the disabled in some ways, at least. Inaugurating the IYDP in Delhi on January 5th, 1981, the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi highlighted the importance of the commemoration by stressing that: “It is

high time that attention was drawn to the multi-faceted problems of the handicapped through the International Year of Disabled Persons” (Indira Gandhi, 1981).

Based on the commitment of the country to the international mandate for the observation of IYDP, the government was expected to pay some attention to the disabled and it cannot be denied that some of its attention was drawn toward them. But whatever was done during that year was all done in a cosmetic manner that hardly scratched the surface of the real issues in regard to promotion of the interests of the disabled in India. Even the discussions undertaken by the government on disability issues and some token measures that were instituted were quite superficial and short-lived. The extent to which the observation of the IYDP by India proved to be basically a showpiece for its disabled citizens can be judged by the apathy of the Government of India to consider the introduction of a comprehensive national level policy on disability. A draft of such a policy was submitted by a committee headed by Lal Advani, the only blind senior level bureaucrat in independent India in the last century. As explained by Lal Advani, his attempt to introduce such a bill was sidetracked:

Another important thing I did was to draft a comprehensive law for the education and rehabilitation of the disabled. In that draft, I recommended setting up national and state councils for the disabled with financial and administrative powers to implement programmes, but the secretary Mrs. Sarla Agrawal did not agree with this suggestion (L. Advani, personal interview, January 21, 2005).

It is true that nothing substantial was accomplished in India as a result of observation of the IYDP in 1981, but it needs to be acknowledged that this was the first time in the post-independence period that the disabled had the attention of the government. Being a leader of the third world movement, India at that time could not be

completely oblivious to its international commitment to pay some heed to issues concerning disability. As a result, some programs and schemes were launched in the field of rehabilitation of the disabled during this year (Mani, 1988, pp. 135-152). Thus, 1981 was at least a turning point in the history of rehabilitation of the disabled. This attention paid to the disabled as a result of the initiative of some programs and schemes in the field of disability was misinterpreted in some ways as the starting point for the beginning of the disability rights movement in India (Ghai, 2003). I devote the last section of Chapter 7 to a discussion of the origin of the disability rights movement in India and will be making an attempt to prove the point that there was no connection between the commemoration of IYDP and the origin of the disability rights movement.

As I will explain in the next few pages, while the movement of the organized blind had already intensified in 1980, the observation of 1981 as the IYDP was helpful in sustaining the movement in some ways. The discussion that took place regarding disability issues in the media as well as various conferences and official meetings organized by the government enabled the activists to sustain the momentum of the movement.

It was in 1980 that a turning point took place in the history of the movement of the organized blind in India. The first major rally organized by the NFB in Delhi with participants from different parts of the country on World Disabled Day in 1980 and the eventual incident of *lathi* charge on that occasion proved to be a watershed development. Extensive coverage of this incident by the print media drew a lot of attention of the general public and the government. This was the first time that any advocacy activity of

the blind became a headline of many leading national newspapers in India and even received limited coverage by the international media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation. Therefore, based on its importance, I provide an in-depth analysis of this incident in the following section.

Rally of March 16, 1980: the Beginning of Radicalization of the Movement of the Organized Blind

March 16, 1980, was observed as World Disabled Day. On this occasion, a large-scale rally was organized by the NFB, which was a very typical activity for any advocacy organization in those days. However, what made this rally a notable in the history of the movement of the organized blind is the publicity accorded to it by the print media due to the incident of a mild *lathi* charge by the Delhi Police on the demonstrating blind activists. The activists were attempting to violate Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code by crossing the “prohibited area.” Section 144 is a section of the criminal law under which police are authorized to guard a specified area by cordoning it off with rope and declaring it as a “prohibited area.” Entering into that area by crossing the rope is considered to be a violation of this section and authorizes the administration to take penal action against those violating it (Section 144 - Indian Penal Code, 2011.). The police resorted to a *lathi* charge to prevent the demonstrating activists from entering the “prohibited area” and violating Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. Somehow, news regarding the response of police involving a minor *lathi*-charge was picked up by the print media and it snowballed into a major issue. Before analyzing the impact of this incident on the movement of the organized blind in India, it is pertinent to mention that this rally of March 16, 1980 was not the first incident of its kind in the history of this

movement. In fact, there is a background to this rally, which had a series of events preceding it.

As explained in the previous chapter, the NFB had organized its first major rally in 1973, which also included the use of tactics of shoe polishing and a relay hunger strike. However, the most important and radical advocacy of the 1970s was the rally organized by the National Blind Youth Association (NBYA) on August 11, 1978, a short time before the Kanpur split. I have provided a limited discussion of this rally in the previous chapter, but it is worth repeating that it was a large-scale rally organized in the capital city of Delhi. Almost 400 youth in Delhi participated in this rally and its uniqueness lies in the fact that it drew almost equal participation of sighted and blind activists, something that was not repeated at any stage in the history of movement of the organized blind in India.

The timing of the rally of August 1978 was also crucial because it was organized almost two months prior to the bi-annual Convention of NFB scheduled to be held at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, which eventually led to the Kanpur split. This occasion was used by the second generation of emerging leadership of NFB to mobilize the young and new activists to join the Federation. So, the rally became a platform for Santosh Kumar Rungta to mobilize the support of the new members along with some of the older radical members of the Federation to elect him as leader of the organization in the next elections. The successful organization of the rally, which was attended by the emerging active members of the Federation, significantly contributed to strengthening the support for the newly emerging leadership of NFB and set a pace for radicalization of the movement. The greater importance of this rally, therefore, lies in the fact that it was attended by

those blind participants who later became the activists of the NFB after the Kanpur Split. At the same time, it was also used as a means to mobilize support from the members of the NBYA to participate in the NFB election, which was scheduled to take place during its Kanpur Convention. Many of these young activists, therefore, for the time being held a dual membership in NBYA as well as NFB. These new, young, and enthusiastic activists played a crucial role in replacing the first generation of leadership with the new and dynamic leadership of Rungta.

Once the dispute regarding leadership following the Kanpur Split was settled in favor of the new leadership, the new group of activists led by Santosh Kumar Rungta, the young, dynamic, and highly popular leader, began to work on its agenda of launching a vigorous struggle for the right to employment for blind people. Describing the agenda of the rally of March 16, 1980, Rungta stated:

During that time, the third Sunday of March of every year used to be celebrated as the World Day for the Disabled. We had decided that on that day, we would organize practical demonstration of various skills by blind people on a vehicle. Of course, we planned to hand over a charter of demands also. We thought that by both, written demand charter and practical demonstration, we might influence the government. The main purpose of the demonstration was to ask the government to do more in the employment sector for visually impaired persons. Another major demand was also to ask for a bill or law passed on the rights of blind persons (S.K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005).

As explained in the next few pages, the press exaggerated the incident of *lathi* charge, shifting the attention away from the real focus of the struggle on this occasion. However, smaller items in the newspapers revealed some information about the agenda of this rally:

The demonstrators started from Paharganj in the form of a rally. They had planned to hand over a draft bill to the Prime Minister through which it was proposed to develop the means for education, employment and social integration (“*Lathi Charge on the Blind Going to Handover a Memorandum to India,*” 1980).

The Federation has been asking the Centre to declare the blind as backward class and grant them the same rights as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Their other demands include, reservation of jobs, treating education compulsory for the blind and giving financial assistance to their educational institutions (“*Procession of Blind Lathi Charged,*” 1980).

If a critical analysis of the demand charter is made, one finds that it was basically restricted to rights for blind people only. This approach may be regarded as parochial and sectarian, but it needs to be acknowledged that this demand was raised by the National Federation of the Blind, so participants of the movement focused on their own interests rather than representing the interests of different categories of the disabled. However, as explained in the next chapter, based on analysis of the agenda of the movement of the organized blind since the late 1980s, it is clear that the Federationists acknowledged that, in the long run, they needed to broaden the agenda of their struggle. Therefore, by the late 1980s, they accepted the fact that they could not have separated the demand for comprehensive legislation regarding the rights of the blind people unless they combined it with the demand for broader legislation ensuring the rights of cross-disability groups. As mentioned earlier, even this agenda of blind activists for the rally of March 16 1980, was obscured due to the exaggerated presentation of the incident of *lathi charge* by the press. I now analyze the coverage of this incident by the press

Exaggerated Presentation of the Lathi Charge Incidence by the Press

Before elaborating the role of the press in exaggerating the incident of *lathi* charge on the demonstrating blind, it is important to make clear that at that point in time in early 1980s, the electronic media was completely under government control. So, no incident would have been covered in any way that would have a bad reflection on any act of the State machinery. The only branch of media that was then independent was the print media and an incident like the *lathi* charge could be covered only by it. Therefore, it is important to clarify that the term “media” in this context refers to the “print media.”

Most of the activists interviewed for the purpose of this dissertation who happened to be involved in the movement at the time of this incident were of the opinion that the issue received far more publicity by the press than it deserved (R.K. Sarin, personal interview, January 30, 2005; S.K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005; B.P. Yadav, personal interview, April 17, 2005). According to these activists, it was a minor issue as hardly anyone received major injuries. It was not unusual for the police to resort to such treatment of the activists of any advocacy movement while engaged in an activity such as a mass rally, but this incident became such a major issue because of the way it was presented by the press in an exaggerated manner.

As mentioned several times in this chapter, it was quite usual for the police to resort to *lathi* charge on the demonstrating activists in those days, but that such an incident would typically not become a major headline in the newspapers. In this case, the press focused on the brutality rather than on the demand for employment, which was the basis for this rally. Hence, as is evident through coverage of this incident cited in the following pages, due to the exaggerated coverage, the *lathi* charge was such significant

news that the resignation of the home minister was demanded and the very legitimacy of the actions of the Delhi Police was questioned. The Delhi Police was presented as having committed a “heinous crime of *lathi* charge” on the peacefully demonstrating “helpless” blind activists. An example of the coverage by a leading English newspaper from Delhi reflects how this incident was exaggerated by the print media:

About 300 blind persons who intended to take out a procession from Paharganj [Delhi] to the Prime Minister’s House this morning were stopped, *lathi* charged and a number of them arrested at Jantar Mantar on Parliament Street for defying the prohibitory order. Mr. Santosh Rungta, General Secretary of the National Federation of the Blind said, the police had been informed of the rally and the route was specified more than ten days ago. No objection was however raised. A fight brought out and the blind were beaten up mercilessly. Laxman, a Delhi University M.A. student said, he was cornered, taken to the police lock up and beaten up. They bullied a student of Dehra Dun, taken his stone eye and spectacles broken. Another Dehra Dun student Ramesh Chandra Soni who was bleeding from the back said that Rs.300 had been stolen from his pocket. Mr. Rungta said Vijay Kumar of Kingsway Camp blind school was missing. He said, except 20 or 30, most of them were *lathi* charged. The blind persons could not understand why they were arrested. They protested strongly against the ruthless treatment by the protectors of law. The S.H.O. [in-charge of the police station], Mr. Bahal refused to allow this reporter to meet the arrested. He says that there are no serious injuries and nobody was taken to hospital. The ACP [Assistant commissioner of Police], Mr. Narendra Singh, however, said one man was taken to Lohiya Hospital. According to the Police, 118 blind men were arrested (“Procession of Blind *Lathi* Charged,” 1980).

Similar coverage appeared in most other dailies in English as well as in vernacular languages (“All Round Condemnation of *Lathi* Charge,” 1980; “An Order for Judicial Inquiry to Probe the *Lathi* Charge on the Blind: The S.H.O. Suspended,” 1980;

Lathi Charge on the Blind Going to Handover a Memorandum to Indira,” 1980; “Walk-out over *Lathi* Charge on the Blind: Judicial Inquiry Ordered,” 1980). The

exaggeration that occurred can be understood by the fact that the British Broadcasting Corporation exclaimed that “there was flood of blood on the road (Sarin, 2005).

The incident was widely criticized by political leaders across party lines and there was a strong reaction by the parliamentarians and the then home minister was asked to provide an explanation on behalf of the Delhi police. The exaggerated impact of the coverage of this news evoked a strong reaction by the Parliamentarians through raising slogans, waving press clippings, walkouts, and the like. Following selected excerpts from some of the leading national dailies reflect the kind of reaction that this incident evoked from the political leaders and parliamentarians:

Characterizing the police *lathi* charge on the peaceful procession of the blind as absolutely inhuman, the CPI [Communist Party of India] Secretary C. Rajeswara Rao has called for immediate punishment for the offending police officials.... Delhi Pradesh Janta Party President Vijay Kumar Malhotra, condemning the *lathi* charge, said that the heaven would not have fallen if the processionists had been allowed to proceed (“All Round Condemnation of *Lathi* Charge,” 1980).

The *lathi* charge on the blind is today vehemently criticized in both the Houses of Parliament. All the opposition members of both the houses made a walk out while criticizing this inhuman act. The speaker Balram Jhakkar did not allow the discussion by saying that the Union Home minister is going to make a statement on this event and attention motion has already been given by a CPI member Geeta Mukherji and two others. Waving the newspapers covered with the photographs of *lathi* charge, they said that this event is a shameful matter. The Home Minister is failed to maintain the law and Memorandum situation and he should resign from his post. In Rajya Sabha [the upper house of the parliament], the walk out was made when the Home Minister of State used the word [‘alleged *lathi* charge’] in his statement time and again. The opposition raised their strong objection on this word and they walked out of the House in protest (“An Order for Judicial Inquiry to Probe the *Lathi* Charge on the Blind: The S.H.O. Suspended.” 1980).

The Prime Minister's prompt statement came at the end of nearly 90 minutes of intermittent excitement in the House over the issue, which was raised by members of the opposition immediately after question hour. Most of them waved the morning newspaper-carrying picture of the *lathi* charge. The uproar all that could be heard was the repeated expression ["worse than Jallianwala Bagh"] [an incident of British military killing thousands of activists of the struggle for freedom in 1919]. The Speaker Mr. Bal Ram Jhakar who seemed upset over the rising noise told the opposition that the Home Minister was to make a statement and sought to end the uproar ("Walk-out over *Lathi* Charge on the Blind: Judicial Inquiry Ordered," 1980).

It is clear from these excerpts that politicians sitting in Parliament, aside from a few progressive leaders, preferred to oppose or express their resentment only with regard to the *lathi* charge. Most of the parliamentarians who condemned the act of the police by waving the newspaper during a session of Parliament were much less interested in the news about the demand charter. They would have found it hard to imagine that blind people are capable of speaking for themselves and of giving guidance to the government about steps for their betterment. They, the supposedly helpless and poor blind people who happen to suffer due to their bad *karma* of past lives, did not need legislation ensuring their rights. Rather they just needed charity.

The exaggerated presentation of the incident of *lathi*-charge, however, had its positive outcome too. It helped the activists to maintain the momentum of the movement in the next few months. I continue the discussion of the progress of the movement for the remainder of 1980 and the subsequent years later in the chapter. First, however, I analyze the response of the media and the parliamentarians to this incident in comparison to the meeting of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the demonstrating blind activists in 1985.

Perpetuation of the Pity for the Blind Based by the Press: A Comparison Between the Lathi Charge of 1980 and the Meeting with the Prime Minister in the Road in 1985

As informed by one of the activists,

In 1985, an agitation was launched by the NFB and it was during this agitation that Rajiv Gandhi, who was then the prime minister, was confronted by the demonstrating blind activists as planned by them. It was a joint venture of NFB and the NBYA..... It was a part of the strategy of that day's demonstration as some of us were aware of the fact that there were two ways which were used by the Prime Minister to go to the Parliament and the agitators could manage to block both the ways, one after the other. And the Prime Minister was stuck in between and he had no option but to meet the blind. (Sarin, 2005).

It reflects sensitivity by a person of the stature of the Prime Minister to do what Gandhi did in this situation. It is very unusual for someone of that stature to come out of their car to meet the blind activists on the road and find out what was going on. Even a leader like Sat Kumar Singh who was then holding the position of General Secretary of NFB, the highest position in the organization, acknowledged this sensitivity of Gandhi:

It was November 18 [1985] when we blocked all the routes of Rajiv Gandhi who was supposed to attend a meeting with some foreign delegation. Incidentally, he saw that we were lying on the road and police was forcefully trying to vacate the way. I feel the greatness of the Prime Minister who reacted over this situation and came out of his car. I know that the leaders of the present age would have avoided this situation. He came out and told the agitators that I am Rajiv Gandhi and no one was accepting it because all of us were in fury and some of us were wounded. We were called then and there for a meeting with him. He was supposed to go to Japan on the same day but still, we were called by him for a meeting and the decision was taken about the identification of the jobs (S.K. Singh, personal interview, June 6, 2005).

One can argue that he could have used force to remove the demonstrating activists. But there was no better opportunity for a populist and relatively young and

sensitive leader like Rajiv Gandhi to listen to his conscience and express his generosity than a situation like this. He availed it not only by meeting the activists on the road, but further by asking them to come on the table and discuss the issue of employment with government officials. The leadership of the Federation acknowledged that this was a good gesture on the part of Prime Minister Gandhi, but an analysis of the coverage of this incident by the print media reveals that it was completely focused on presenting a favorable portrayal of the Prime Minister. The news reporters made very little attempt to draw the attention of the readers to the agenda of the activists. For these reporters, it was a great gesture on the part of someone of the stature of the Prime Minister to step out of his car and meet with the demonstrating activists. So, instead of covering this event within the context of the movement of the organized blind, it was presented as a kind-hearted action on the part of Rajiv Gandhi. A brief overview of selected excerpts from the newspapers illustrates this point well:

The blind tried to stop the Members of Parliament to protest against the non-fulfillment of their demands. However, they could not succeed to break the security of the police but Prime-minister Rajiv Gandhi himself broke its security and met the blind. The Prime Minister came out of the car while seeing the blind raising slogans against him. He talked with them for a while. Rajiv Gandhi promised them to discuss the matter in a week and to take necessary steps for the solution of their problems. The demonstration was organized by the National Federation of the Blind. During this course, two blind were injured who were sent for the treatment on the direction of the Prime Minister. As per the spokesman of the Federation, the Federation has called off its agitation on the assurance of the Prime Minister (“Kind-Hearted Rajiv.” 1985).

The Prime Minister left the imprints of his gentleness when he came out of the car and met the blind persons proceeding to the Parliament annexe. He came out and discussed the matter with the blind demonstrators while he saw them being stopped by the police. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi assured the representatives that he would himself take interest in solving their problems (“Kind Heartedness of Rajiv,” 1985).

The Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, did not turn a blind eye to the plight of the small group of blind demonstrators some of whom were beaten up in the process of seeking to force their entry into Parliament House today (“P.M. to the Rescue of Blind,” 1985).

These excerpts of the press clippings reveal the fact that this coverage was limited to praising the Prime Minister and the agenda of the blind activists was completely marginalized. Thus, while this incident did lead to coverage by the print media in India, the focus of that coverage was entirely tilted toward presenting the image of Rajiv Gandhi as a person who was very kind hearted and generous to the blind activists, who were considered to be poor and helpless.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, Indian society is predominantly a religious and traditionally conservative society in which the blind or any other category of disabled people are to be treated with compassion and pity (Bhatt, 1963). So, according to the popular perception based on the prevalent notion of *karma* in a Hindu-dominated Indian society, blind people deserved pity and compassion and not justice and no one should think of committing any kind of violent act against them. With this prevalent social attitude, it was expected that a minor act of violence by the police on the demonstrating blind activists would evoke a strong reaction from various sections of people and even politicians based in Delhi. Therefore, an analysis of the response of the media and the parliamentarians to the incident of *lathi*-charge in the context of the prevalent attitude based on pity reflects a very pitiable image of blind people who were considered to be already sufferers of the sins of their past lives. Hence, both the press and the Parliament failed to respond rationally to the incident of *lathi*-charge. It was a great shock to them and the general public to learn that the police could deal with the demonstrating blind

activists in a somewhat violent manner even if this was a legitimate and typical thing to do in this kind of situation. They could not digest the idea that the police could resort to a *lathi* charge on blind people irrespective of their crime, as it would be considered to be truly cruel for the police to resort to any kind of coercive act on them.

The wide and exaggerated coverage of this incident by the press in an exaggerated and the reaction of the parliamentarians thus aroused the sentiment of pity and reinforced the stereotyped attitude toward the blind. On the other hand, the later incident in which Rajiv Gandhi left his car to meet the demonstrating blind activists on the road in 1985 made him a heroic figure. Although this incident did not attract a similar headline in the media, the orientation of the coverage was similar to that of the *lathi* charge incident of 1980, in that it perpetuated the traditional approach toward the blind based on pity. In both of these incidents, the press basically portrayed blind people of as a helpless section of society who deserved pity and charity instead of equal rights and justice. The exaggerated presentation of the incident of *lathi* charge, however, helped energize the advocacy movement during the next few months of the 1980. I now discuss the progress of the movement during the rest of the year.

Desperation of the Leaders and the Growth of the Movement During 1980

Following the massive press coverage of the rally of March 16, 1980 due to the incident of *lathi* charge, the Federation organized another rally on March 19th while negotiations with the Prime Minister were already underway to hold a high level meeting (Rungta, 2005). This rally received very little coverage by the press despite the fact that the then top leaders of the opposition political parties also participated in it. So, as Rungta

explained, the success of the rally can be viewed in terms of receiving wide political support:

Many distinguished personalities addressed [delivered speeches] the rally of March 19th. Quite a few of them were the leaders from opposition political parties. Some of these great political leaders included Ram Vilas Pasvan, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpaye [who also later became the Prime Minister] etc. (Rungta, 2005).

The mounting pressure as a result of the massive coverage of the *lathi* charge incident forced the government to immediately look into the demands of the NFB. Therefore, a meeting between representatives of the Federation and the Prime Minister was scheduled on March 25th to discuss the demands of the Federation (Rungta, 2005). In this meeting, all the demands of the NFB were discussed and the Prime Minister assured the activists that their demands would be taken into consideration. For the purpose of inquiry, a one-man commission was set up to look into the incident of the *lathi* charge. However, despite the passage of about a month after these assurances, no concrete action was taken. As covered in the press, the activists were therefore compelled to plan the organization of another rally in the month of May:

Disgusted with the government's response to their demands, the blind marchers who had faced police batons last month, have once again threatened to organize rallies in Delhi and elsewhere on May 19th. Mr. S.K. Rungta, acting General Secretary, National Federation of the Blind, told newsmen today that even after the passage of one month, the Central Government was yet to take any decision regarding the major demands contained the Federation's memorandum to the Prime Minister ("Countrywide Rallies by Blind on May 19th," 1980).

Due to assurances from the Government to look into the problems of the blind, once again the proposed rally scheduled on May 19th was cancelled. But following a wait

of more than four months after the incident of the *lathi* charge, no progress had been made and the activists lost their patience. As a result, out of the frustration or desperation, the leaders of the movement took some actions that are generally taken at a time when one wishes to end a movement due to fatigue from intense activities which fail to yield any results. Therefore, in the press conference organized by NFB on July 26th, an announcement was made that based on disappointment with the Government's inaction over their grievances, the National Federation of the Blind decided to stage a *dharna* (sit-in) outside the Prime Minister's House from August 1st onward. Covering the news of the proposed plan of Rungta for a fast until death, the next day the newspapers also spelled out the agenda of the movement:

Mr. S.K. Rungta, the Acting General Secretary of the Federation will commence a fast unto death outside Mrs. Indira Gandhi's residence at 9 a.m. on August 1st. He will be joined in the fast by one person daily from various states. Their main demand concerns employment: ["even educated and qualified blind persons are not given jobs by government agencies"], they say. The blind persons wanted that those registered with the special employment exchanges for the physically handicapped for one year or more should be given employment immediately. So far cases exist of those being registered for over 19 years still not getting jobs. It was also told that according to the Prime Minister's letter to all Union Ministers on June 14 this year, only 120 blind people have got employment from these special exchanges in thirty years. Mrs. Gandhi had written to all the cabinet and state ministers asking them to appoint a senior officer to find suitable jobs for the blind, ["but so far very few ministries have done so"], they allege ("Blind Decide to Go on Fast." 1980).

Similarly, quoting Rungta, another newspaper reported:

He said that in spite of the letter written by the Prime Minister to various state Chief ministers to look into the blind's employment problems, nothing has been done so far. ["Only 120 blind persons had been given employment since independence"], Mr. Rungta said. Among their other demands a special mention was made for a commission for blind on the lines of S.C. and S.T., reduction of excise duty on Braille

paper and putting the report of the judicial probe ordered into the *lathi* charge in March before the Parliament (“*Dharna* Threatened By Blind.” 1980).

As announced in this press coverage, launching of the movement once again began with picketing on August 1st, which was followed by the indefinite hunger strike from August 2nd onward. This series of activities concluded on August 5th after an agreement was reached with the Union Government. It is true that this movement was covered by the press, although not to the extent of the incident of *lathi* charge of March, as the hunger strike was much less sensational. The following excerpts from two leading national dailies provide a glimpse of the nature of the coverage of these activities and summarize the outcome of the rigorous 5-day advocacy campaign:

Acting General Secretary of the National Federation of the Blind Mr. S.K. Rungta today called off his fast unto death following an agreement worked out with the Government. Mr. Rungta has been on fast before the Prime Minister’s residence since August 2nd. According to the agreement worked out with the Union Labour Minister T. Anjaya the government is reported to have assured Mr. Rungta that both the centre and state governments would do their best to absorb over 2000 unemployed blind registered with the employment exchanges. No guarantee was however being given in this direction. The government is reported to have assured the Federation that the unemployed blind would be absorbed as soon as possible. It is also learnt that committee would be formed at the centre and in states for reviewing job opportunities for the blind in the government and private sector. This committee would have as its members the representatives of the Federation as well as officials from government and private sector (“Movement of the Blind Called off,” 1980).

Statutory guarantee of job opportunity for the blind has been assured under an agreement between the government and the National Federation of the Blind here today. The agreement was signed by the senior Labour Ministry officials and Mr. S.K. Rungta, acting General Secretary of the Federation in the presence of the Labour Minister Mr. T. Anjaya. The agreement said, the Social Welfare Ministry has been asked to expedite the legislation that might make the provision for an unemployment allowance for Rs. 60 per month. As time was short, it

might not be possible to bring in the legislation in this session, it would, in all probabilities be brought in the next session. The agreement stipulates that a meeting of the major employing ministries and the private employers be convened within a month to impress upon them the need to employ at least one blind person immediately with the ultimate objective of absorbing all those registered in the special employment exchanges. UNI [United News of India, a news agency] adds Mr. Santosh Rungta, acting General Secretary of the National Federation of the Blind has called off his fast unto death outside the Prime Minister's residence after the agreement was worked out. After working out the agreement in his office, Mr. Anjayya went to the Prime Minister's residence where the operative portion of the agreement was read out to Mr. Rungta who later gives his assent to it. He handed over a letter to Mr. Anjayya announcing his decision to end of his fast. Mr. Anjayya assured him that an agreement will be implemented as speedily as possible ("Agitation Called Off," 1980).

The adoption of the hunger strike for its use as a weapon of pressure for this movement of August, 1980 was largely hailed by the wider membership of NFB, but some leading activists disagreed with the idea of resorting to this strategy. They questioned whether it was an appropriate step in terms of strategy or if it was used out of frustration. Additionally, some of the activists were of the opinion that the indefinite hunger strike was not unanimously approved (Yadav, 2005; Sarin, 2005). For them, basically, it was an imposed decision of the acting General Secretary. They raised the question as to why General Secretary Rungta, who was the chief decision-maker, was in a hurry to declare an end to the movement without significant achievement. They argued that one could not avoid the fact that the elections of the NFB were going to be held soon (Yadav, 2005; Sarin, 2005). So, for them, Rungta's decision to call off the movement was actually due to his impatience to prove his dedication and commitment to the cause of the blind. They questioned this decision and regarded it as a ploy to attract the attention of the members. For them, the movement was called off based on Rungta's worry that if

such opportunity was not utilized, he might not have a better chance to acquire popularity before the upcoming elections. As summarized by one of the discontented activists:

As a student of political science, I understand that the hunger strike is the last resort of any agitation. Unfortunately, it became the first step during this agitation of August. They sat for the hunger strike and they could manage to tolerate for few days. On the last day, one of the gentlemen felt uneasy. I feel that if you take some steps, you should know its consequence. The strike was called off. In fact, this seemingly agreement reached with the Labor minister leading to the withdrawal of the movement was nothing but a compulsion (Sarin, 2005).

This criticism may, however, be valid to the extent that if there was no urgency due to upcoming elections, Rungta would not have rushed to use an intense method like the indefinite hunger strike to attract broad-based support by the membership of the Federation. But it needs to be acknowledged that nothing could have been a more significant outcome of any movement than the agreement reached with the Labor Minister of the Government of India, who is the highest authority regarding employment matters. So, the adoption of the method of an indefinite hunger strike might have been a decision that was made hastily in a situation arising out of desperation, but the contribution of the leadership has to be acknowledged as far as the outcome of this movement is concerned in such a short time. Responding to the criticism of the discontented leading activists, Rungta defended his decision regarding the indefinite hunger strike at that time:

Since the reservation for the blind in jobs was there in existence since 1977, but why was it not being implemented. It was mainly because the posts were not identified and therefore, everybody was arbitrary in his approach. By arbitrariness I mean that one department expressed its opinion that blind people cannot do the respective job and on the other hand other department would say that, blind people can do that job. If you know the government structure, in group 'C' we have clerical level jobs,

but in group D it is peons and chair-recaners [those who designed the seats and backs of the chairs through plastic wires] etc. If you look at the identified list or general instructions and the selection criteria, you might have noticed that at that point of time, the blind people were not considered to be fit for these posts [positions] whether they were posts for clerical or peon's jobs. Therefore, nothing remains in group 'C'. We had basically taken up this issue, and we succeeded in group 'D' but in group 'C' we got the success later on. In group 'D' we succeeded in the sense that, I could get a government Memorandum to be issued under the agreement itself. According to that Memorandum each department was asked to give at least one post in group 'D' against the vacant post of peon and provide the job of a chair-recaner. Secondly, we got it accepted by the government that no work of chair-recaning should be got it done by any person other than blind, even on the contract basis. Thirdly, if there is a substantial volume of work then, a post should be created. So, this was the major break through. This entire thing happened in 1980 (Rungta, 2005).

Thus, one significant accomplishment of the movement of the organized blind in 1980 that brought immediate results was that as part of the implementation of the Office Memorandum of 1977, the position of chair re-caner was identified as suitable for blind job seekers. This meant that blind people needed to be employed as chair re-caners up to the required quota under the Office Memorandum of 1977.

Before completing this section, it is worth mentioning that while it took almost half a century for blind people to be officially recognized as being suitable for the job of chair re-caner, this was something for which blind people had been considered suitable from much earlier times dating back to the 1940s. Even a highly accomplished blind person such as Lal Advani was raised during 1940s with the expectations of having a career in very selected fields including chair re-caning:

I had to do this (join as a music teacher), because I was clearly told that a blind person at that time had only three options of earning a living, firstly, to become a music teacher; secondly, to become a Vedic scholar and work as a preacher or finally, to become a chair re-caner (L. Advani, personal interview, December 22, 2004).

This is a statement regarding the job opportunities available for blind people in the 1930s and 1940s. But it took almost 40 years to get an official recognition of the job of chair-recaner through a letter from a Minister despite the fact that some blind people had been engaged in this work on a daily wage basis even from the pre-independence time. However, it needs to be acknowledged that at least the stage was set by the blind activists in 1980 for the identification of jobs for the blind, which in a way marked the beginning of the identification of jobs suitable for blind people and official recognition of their capabilities to perform certain jobs; at the same time, though, this was done in a very narrow way as it was basically the job of chair re-caner which was officially accepted as the a job that was suitable for blind people under the agreement reached with the Labor Minister as part of the conclusion of the movement of August 1980.

On the basis of the above discussion, it needs to be acknowledged that 1980 marks a watershed year in the history of the movement of the organized blind in India. This was the year in which the movement acquired an extremely radical nature and received widespread coverage by the print media at least due to the incident of *lathi* charge. This drew significant attention of the parliamentarians and media to issues concerning blind people for the first time in India. Therefore, 1980 was a very significant year in the history of the movement of the organized blind as the movement began to acquire a radical character, which created pressure on the government. This pressure forced the government begin the identification of jobs suitable for the blind in the “D” categories of jobs in Central Government Services and Public Undertakings. Thus, despite the fact that the leadership and most of the activists were inexperienced with a large-scale, national movement, the accomplishments of the advocacy carried during this

year need to be acknowledged. Following the radicalization of the movement of the organized blind in 1980 and the accomplishments during this year, the activists were now ready to launch another movement to press for their demands. I next present a brief analysis of this movement during the IYDP (1981).

IYDP and the Movement of the Organized Blind

As mentioned earlier in this chapter and elaborated further in the next chapter, the commemoration of the IYDP by India had hardly any relationship to the origin of the movement of the organized blind. It, however, needs to be acknowledged that observation of the IYDP did make a difference at least in enabling the NFB to maintain the momentum of the movement first in Delhi, and then in certain other states of India. As also mentioned earlier in this chapter, in order to prove to the international community that it was sincerely committed to the observation of IYDP, the government engaged in certain activities to promote the interests of the disabled. However, this made little if any real difference in the lives of disabled people. The blind activists were therefore able to expose the ineffectiveness of the government and continue the movement.

The Federation used this occasion of commemoration of IYDP to sustain the momentum of the movement launched in Delhi during 1980. In addition to Delhi, this year also witnessed the launching of a wave of struggles at the state level in certain states of the country. As discussed later in this chapter, these struggles served as the launching pads for a series of movements in different parts of the country by exposing the ineffectiveness of the government in promoting the interests of the blind. The significance of this year in terms of the growth of the movement of the organized blind in Delhi, therefore, lies in the fact that the inability of the government to introduce effective

measures in the field of disability, particularly in the area of providing jobs for the unemployed blind, enabled the Federation to highlight the inefficiency of the government. This, in turn, provided the blind activists with an opportunity to revive the movement. Hence, the Federation launched a series of vigorous advocacy activities in Delhi right from the beginning of the year even if the movement that took place as a result of these activities proved to be a relatively short-term exercise.

In the absence of an attempt on the part of the authorities to appropriately respond to the demands raised by the Federation, the frustration of the activists increased to the extent that the leadership of the Federation chose to use the occasion of the beginning of the IYDP as a launching pad for another movement, starting from the first day of the year itself. It was launched with the support of the National Blind Youth Association when the government began portraying itself as being an outstanding provider of services for the disabled and a champion of the interests put forth in the Memorandum in order to gain a favorable impression in the opinion of the international community. By that time, the activists had been learning from their previous mistakes. So, they were not going to make a mistake such as hastily calling for a fast-unto-death in order to bring a sudden end to the movement. Hence, a 25-day-long movement was launched from the day of the inauguration of the IYDP on January 1st to pressure the government to look into their demands. They used different methods of advocacy including rallies, daily courting of arrest in groups of eleven activists, chain fasts, and blocking roads and trains during the course of this movement. A demonstration was carried out on the first day of the IYDP and was well-covered in the newspapers:

The National Federation of the Blind which had led yesterday's demonstration today demanded an independent inquiry into the alleged police excesses. Addressing a Press Conference, Mr. S.K. Rungta, General Secretary of the Federation, alleged that except five, no injured blind person was sent for medical examination and the police did not give copies of the medical certificates of those who were examined in spite of repeated requests.... Mr. Rungta and Dr. F. S. Abdul Salam, President of the Federation, announced a series of agitations to press for their demands, including full employment for all blind registered with employment exchanges. While the *dharna* by a batch of five volunteers would go on indefinitely, the Federation proposes to take out a procession to Teen Murti House [center of official activities] on fourth January when the Prime Minister is scheduled to address a function [event] of the blind on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Louis Braille. Mr. Rungta said, ["the processionists would seek a commitment from the Prime Minister regarding their demands. From January 8, the blind would picket long-distance trains going from New Delhi and Delhi main station. ... simultaneously, a batch of five blind would court arrest outside the Prime Minister's residence from that day".] The Federation's demands include unemployment allowance of Rs. 60 per month to the unemployed blind, setting up of a commission for the blind on the pattern of the commission for Scheduled Castes and Tribes and implementation of the agreement with the Labour Ministry. Meanwhile, the Federation has sent a cable to Dr. Franz Sonntag, President, International Federation of the Blind informing about yesterday's incident and an identical message has been wired to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The message released to the press read, ["We deeply regret for beginning the International Year of Disabled Persons on 1-1-1981 by India with the reaction of police by arresting the blind demanding job in front of the Prime Minister's residence at New Delhi."] ("Blind for Clash Probe," 1981).

Based on the press coverage of the movement in the previous year and being a participant in the commemoration of the IYDP, the authorities could no longer be oblivious to the movement of the organized blind. As reported in the press, the activists received a positive response from the government as far as a dialogue was concerned as a high level Union Minister met them the day after the rally of January 4th:

The Union Home Minister, Mr. Zail Singh, today met the blind persons who have been sitting on *dharna* outside the Prime Minister's

residence. A memorandum was presented to him. He assured them that their demands would be looked into (“Zail Singh Meets Blind,” 1981).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the activists haphazardly adopted a variety of tactics of pressuring the government during the course of the movement. These included picketing, rallies, blocking road and railway traffic, courting arrests, and chain fasting; all of these contributed to making the movement effective. But while it was gaining momentum, the movement was suddenly called off on the eve of Republic Day, January 25, 1981, with one more agreement. This time, as expected, the deadline for implementation of the agreement between the government and the activists was the end of the year, that is, December 31, 1981 without working out the plan for meeting the demands in specific steps or phases. This meant again a waiting time of a year, reflecting the tendency of the bureaucracy to postpone the task of working out a solution to a problem. In contrast to this, the government did not delay in organizing other initiatives related to IYDP because it felt that this would harm the prestige of the country at the international level.

The government spent a significant amount of time and energy organizing ceremonial events rather than doing anything concrete to promote the interests of the disabled. It made promises to introduce comprehensive disability legislation enshrining the right to employment, but the actual accomplishments were merely cosmetic in nature. The government basically wanted to get through the IYDP without giving an impression to the international community that it was lacking in seriousness regarding the interests of the disabled. The agreement reached between the leaders of NFB, Rungta and the government representative Narayan Dutt Tiwari, the Industry and Labor Minister,

was a facade within the larger government trend of postponing fulfillment of the demands of the blind activists.

The fact that the end of the year was set as the deadline to implement it in totality without working out a plan to do it in a phased manner illustrates the strategy of the authorities to get through the IYDP. The government had no political will to implement the agreement reached with the Federation, and its hidden agenda was to basically pacify the agitating activists and get through the year. At the same time, it was able to show to the international community that it was in the process of working out concrete measures to promote the interests of the disabled without doing anything substantial. This was well understood by some leading activists, but their opinion remained a minority opinion. The leadership disregarded their opinion in the process of final decision making at the time of reaching an agreement with the concerned officials leading to the abrupt cessation of the movement on the eve of Republic Day.

The sudden cancellation of the movement by the leadership of the Federation had long-term implications for the politics of movement of the organized blind in Delhi. It annoyed some of the leading activists of the Federation and the National Blind Youth Association, which happened to be the closest ally and partner (Sarin, 2005; Yadav, 2005). They did not consider it to be a prudent decision by the leadership to call off the movement without a promise on the part of the government to meet the demands of the activists in specific phases. The greatest setback to the leadership of the Federation was, therefore, the withdrawal of support from NBYA, which proved to be an irreparable loss to the Federation in the long term.

It is worth repeating that the advocacy activities carried out by NFB in the post-Kanpur split period were strongly and continuously supported by NBYA until January 1981. The leadership of NBYA was strongly opposed to the decision of the leadership of NFB to call off the movement when it was in the process of gaining momentum. Dr. Bharat Prasad Yadav, the founder and a long-term leader of NBYA, decided to withdraw its support for any future activity carried out by the NFB. According to him, the sudden calling off of the movement by the leadership of the Federation failed to leave any indelible imprint on the mind of the participants and even any pressure on the government (Yadav, 2005). Due to the sudden cessation of the movement by the NFB and the consequent disagreement between the leadership of both of these organizations, Yadav announced the end of the alliance between NFB and NBYA and decided to carry out advocacy activities independent of NFB in future. Expressing his displeasure with the haste with which this movement was called off, he commented:

On 25th January 1981 Rungta made an agreement with the Labor Minister, N. D. Tiwari. I opposed the agreement but he said this is the only way of resolving things. From here onwards differences started taking place between Rungta and me. Thus, the long protest came to an end and we could never work together in future (Yadav, 2005).

This difference of opinion between the Federation and the NBYA was crystallized during 1981. This was explicitly demonstrated when the NBYA decided to carry out advocacy activities independent of NFB. One such activity was the organization of a *dharna* on December 31, 1981, as it was strongly felt that the Government of India did nothing during the IYDP despite having made promises to do so at the national and international levels. The leadership of NBYA took great pride in its accomplishments after severing their relationship with the Federation:

It was the NBYA which could get a chance in real sense to expose the inactivity of the government during the period of IYDP and could manage to make government accept to enhance the scholarship for the blind students. The struggle was launched by the Federation during this year, but it failed to maintain the tempo till the last day of the year. It was important to carry out this struggle in a sustained manner in order to expose the inactivity of the government officials on all fronts of their promises for the welfare of the disabled (Yadav, 2005).

Aside from the Federation, the NBYA was the second largest and leading advocacy organization of the organized blind based in Delhi. It had a wide base of support among the blind youth of Delhi due to its committed membership from two leading educational institutions for the blind in the capital city of India. Both of these institutions, namely Andh Maha Vidyalaya located at Punchkuan Road and the Hostel for College Going Blind Students located at Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar, played a crucial role in the movement of the organized blind in Delhi by providing the major participants of the movement during the 1980s and 1990s (Chander, 2008a). As discussed in detail in the following section, deriving its major strength from these two institutions, the NBYA led a sustained movement of almost 5 months in Delhi during 1984.

The major strength of Federation under the leadership of Rungta until the movement of January 1981 had been derived from the larger membership of NBYA since the time immediately following the Kanpur Split. The break up of the alliance between the leadership of the Federation and the NBYA, therefore, led to a weakening of the movement for the time being. Thus, this was definitely a setback to the unity of the organized blind engaged in the movement in Delhi. This was also, in part, the reason why there was a conspicuous absence of any sustained movement carried out by the Federation until the later part of the 1980s in addition to the withdrawal of Rungta from

active politics due to certain developments in his personal life. Therefore, for the time being, the Federation focused its work at the state level rather than a national level. A brief discussion of the movement carried out by the Federation in some of the states for the right to employment follows later in this chapter.

It is also worth mentioning that the sudden cancellation of the movement not only upset the Federation's allies but also bothered some of the Federation's own leading members. For instance, Ramesh Kumar Sarin, the then administrative officer and press secretary of NFB, withdrew from the organization in the early part of 1981 and later joined the NBYA. Analyzing the conclusion of the movement that took place in the beginning of August 1980 involving the indefinite hunger strike as well as the movement of January 1981, Sarin expressed his disappointment with the decision of the leadership of NFB on both occasions:

In both the agitations, looking at the issue of calling it off on two occasions, the leadership lacked prudence. During the August agitation, they could not extend it till the Independence Day on August 15th. And during the January agitation, they could not extend it to continue it till the Republic Day [observed on 26th of January]. One does not find ample reasoning of calling this agitation off just before these important days of national importance (Sarin, 2005).

The large demand charter and agreement reached with the government to implement it without working out a plan to do so become a major weakness of the movement and affected its success during the IYDP. The government used the size of the charter as a rationale to take a full year to look into the demands. Presentation of a smaller demand charter and asking for implementation in specified phases could have been a more workable solution. It would have resulted in meeting the demands in a

practical manner. However, it is understandable that the activists of any movement may present a large demand charter in the hopes that the government will agree to fulfill even a few of the demands (V Giri, personal interview, June 7, 2005; Yadav, 2005). At the same time, the large size of the demand charter may also be attributed to the fact that the leadership has to consider the interests of a variety of groups of activists within the movement as a whole (Rungta, 2005; Yadav, 2005).

After the movement of January 1981 was called off, the rest of the year passed without any major advocacy by the blind activists. As the rival leader of NFB who challenged the leadership of Rungta, Sat Kumar Singh criticized lack of action by arguing that NFB failed to show its protest on December 31st which was given as the last date of the implementation of the agreement. In fact, had the then leadership of NFB been really serious about the achievements and the movement, it should have continued and the pressure should have been sustained in a cumulative manner (Singh, 2005).

However, despite this criticism by the discontented activists and opponents of the leadership of that time, the achievements of the movement during 1980 and 1981 cannot be underemphasized. The fact that the process of employment of the blind began during 1980 through the implementation of the provisions of the Office Memorandum of 1977 was not a small achievement. It at least needs to be acknowledged that in both August 1980 and January 1981 the activists succeeded in pressuring the government to the extent that the Labor Ministers, who held the highest government positions in the area of employment opportunities within the government sector, were forced to come to the table to sign the agreement with the protesting activists. At the same time, the press coverage

during these two years highlighting issues relating to the blind in India was in itself a great success.

Before summing up the discussion on the achievement of the Federation during 1980-1981, it is pertinent to briefly mention the reaction of some former Federationists from the first generation of leadership to the new methods of radical advocacy adopted since Rungta assumed leadership of the organization. It is particularly important to analyze the reaction of Jawahar Lal Kaul, who founded the Federation in 1970 and who also established the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) following his defeat for the leadership position of the Federation during the elections held at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh in 1978. It is also worth noting that most of Kaul's close comrades, who were well-educated middle class blind people, had directly or indirectly joined the newly founded AICB. They vehemently criticized the radical methods of advocacy adhered to by the new leadership of the Federation and dismissed its role as a trivial activity carried out by semi-educated troublemakers. For the most part, this bitterness and rivalry between the leadership of NFB and Kaul and his allies in the post-1978 period remained confined to the blind people themselves. But by the beginning of the IYDP, it was exposed in public when Kaul took an open stand against the radical advocacy approach of NFB under the leadership of Rungta during the January movement and this was covered in the press, as exemplified by the following excerpt from a leading Indian national daily paper:

Like many political parties, the blind in the country too appear to be split. The agitation led by the National Federation of the Blind, which was called off after 25 days on Republic Day eve, was wrought with political bickering and factionalism between the police and the supporters

of the NFB. It had the support of some associations of the blind as well as political parties. Among those who were understood to have openly supported the agitation were the National Blind Youth Association, The Delhi Wing of the All-India Students Federation and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. The Delhi Units of the Janta Party, The Bharatiya Janta Party and the Lok Dal too, by and large, expressed their sympathy for the agitation. The All-India Confederation of the Blind, NFB's rival however, opposed the agitations. Not that the AICB did not seek a fair deal for the blind so far as job opportunities and other problems were concerned, but it was formally opposed to the NFB's agitation approach. The Confederation, in fact, came out with a scathing attack against the NFB-led agitation on January 2nd, condemning the agitation. The AICB dubbed it as an agitation launched by certain sections of the blind. The Confederation also described the agitation as an attempt to enhance personal leadership and create a melodramatic effect—Mr. J. L. Kaul, Secretary-General of the AICB even alleged that because of his statement opposing the agitation, he was assaulted on January 24th. He said that although a report was lodged with the Nizamuddin Police Station, no action was taken on his report... (“Politics Plagues the Blind Stir,” 1981).

While these differences among the blind people were in existence since the founding of the NFB, it took almost a decade to expose them through press coverage. This coverage not only highlighted the rift within the organizations of the blind, but also presented it as a very unusual and unexpected occurrence. It is a generally accepted fact that a debate or differences of opinion involving different methods to accomplish a desired goal is inevitable in any movement. So, the coverage of this politics of differences among the blind people gives an impression that blind people have no right to have differences of opinion. The portrayal of this kind of politics taking as unusual reflected the existing public perception based on the traditional religious notion that blind people were supposed to be saintly and at the same time naive. According to that prevalent notion, they were supposed to engage in simple spiritual activities rather than radical political advocacy.

Based on the analysis of the activities in 1980 and 1981, one finds that within a span of less than a year, the NFB was able to attract maximum coverage in the national press. Its ordinary activities such as sending a cable to the International Federation of the Blind and the General Secretary of the United Nations were covered by the press. At the same time, by 1981, the sensitivity of the press increased to the extent that it mentioned the demand charter and devoted ample space to cover the course of action taken by the NFB. As will be clear from the discussion regarding advocacy in certain states of the country later in this chapter, a significant amount of activity was going on in these states during the IYDP. The momentum gained by the movement in the year 1980 was maintained during 1981. This was primarily because of the commemoration of that year as IYDP which placed the government under pressure to demonstrate to the international community that something action was being taken in the field of disability in India. Since disability issues were in the forefront that year, this helped in some way to enable the activists to maintain the momentum of the movement in various parts of the country. Therefore, 1980 and 1981 were significant years from the point of view of the movement of the organized blind in India as it was during those two years that there was a beginning of contentious political actions through the adoption of radical methods of advocacy. This was the time when India witnessed the growth of a sustained movement.

Thus, I would conclude that these two years, 1980 and 1981, constituted a watershed period in terms of the momentum of the movement during its initial phase of radicalization. However, despite the noticeable accomplishments of the leaders of the Federation during these two years, the fact cannot be underemphasized that the withdrawal of support from NBYA to the Federation after the calling off of the

movement of January 1981 proved to be a great setback to the Federation. At the same time, Rungta too withdrew his involvement in the Federation temporarily. These two developments, namely, break up of alliance between the Federation and the NBYA and the withdrawal of Rungta from his involvement in the leadership of the Federation, resulted in a vacuum for the movement of the blind in Delhi until the later part of the 1980s. In order to understand the impact of Rungta's withdrawal from the leadership of the Federation on the politics of the organized blind in India, I now briefly discuss the background in which this situation occurred before engaging in a detailed discussion of the movement carried out by the NBYA in the year 1984.

Temporary Withdrawal of Santosh Kumar Rungta from Active Politics of Advocacy and its Impact on the Movement

The weakening of the Federation in Delhi enabled the state-level leaders to focus their attention on the issue of employment of the blind in their respective states. As I discuss in Part II of this chapter, there was a spurt of advocacy activities in some of the states of the country. I also explain that the state of Uttar Pradesh, which was the hub of the membership of the Federation, witnessed an emergence of a sustained struggle for employment by the middle of 1981. This struggle yielded immediate results as 213 qualified blind were engaged in gainful employment by the end of the spring of 1982 (Giri, 2005; Singh, 2005; S.N Shrivastava, personal interview, June 7, 2005). It was all done under the banner of the Federation and this was a great accomplishment for the leadership of Uttar Pradesh within a time span of less than a year from the launching of a sustained movement for attaining that goal beginning in the later part of the summer of 1981.

The struggle in Uttar Pradesh and its instant success provided a fertile ground for the emergence of an Uttar Pradesh-based state level leader, Sat Kumar Singh, who emerged as a rival leader to Rungta. He became ambitious and powerful enough to challenge the position of Rungta as the most popular and powerful leader of the Federation by the time of its next general elections in the fall of 1982 (R.C. Gupta, personal interview, March 24, 2005). However, Rungta was too powerful and charismatic to be marginalized and ousted from power completely in such a short span of time. Therefore, during the elections of 1982, a compromise was reached between Rungta and Singh for power sharing and Rungta was offered the position of President, which was a more respectable position than the political position of General Secretary of the organization (Gupta, 2005). Hence, while Rungta had not been embarrassed or humiliated, he was no longer in a position to make decisions regarding the activities of the Federation. Following the change in Rungta's political career after the change in his position in the Federation, certain important developments took place in his personal life which led to his withdrawal from the leadership position in the organization for about 4 years starting from late 1982 until the elections of the Federation during the bi-annual Convention of 1986.

Rungta has been the most powerful and undefeated leader of the Federation in the post 1978 era, with the exception of a brief interlude during the later part of the first half of 1980s. Similar to many small organizations in India, NFB had not established an organizational structure. So, withdrawal of Rungta from the leadership drastically weakened the movement in the 1982- 1986 time period. In 1986 Rungta again contested for the position of General Secretary and came back to power and revived the movement.

However, the withdrawal of Rungta from the leadership position for approximately 4 years and the consequent vacuum of leadership of the Federation led to a setback for the movement of the organized blind.

The absence of an effective leader like Rungta to lead the Federation provided an opportunity for the National Blind Youth Association, the second most important and powerful advocacy organization of the blind in India, to emerge as an alternative activist group during this 4-year interval. The NBYA initiated an almost 5-month-long movement in Delhi during 1984. I next discuss this movement.

The Movement of 1984 and the Role of National Blind Youth Association

With the exception of the rally of August 1978, which was organized under the banner of NBYA, most other advocacy activities that took place for the next 3 years or so were organized under the banner of NFB. This gave an impression that it was only the NFB that led the movement while other advocacy organizations played a subsidiary role. It was not adequately acknowledged by the leadership of the Federation that a good amount of its strength was derived from the larger membership of NBYA during those days. An analysis of the effectiveness of the Federation after the leadership was taken over by Rungta in the post-Kanpur split period clearly reflects the fact that while the movement was carried out under the banner of the Federation until January 1981, its major strength was derived from the membership of the NBYA. However, following the break up of the alliance between these two organizations due to the withdrawal of the movement of January 1981 by the leadership of the Federation, NBYA began independently organizing the struggle for rights of the blind through numerous advocacy activities. The most

important of these activities was a 158-day movement (approximately 5 months in duration) starting from the third Sunday of March to August 25, 1984 (R.K. Sarin, personal communication, April, 27, 2006). In this section, I analyze the developments during this lengthy movement.

After the crystallization of some differences between the NFB and the NBYA by the beginning of the IYDP, the organization of picketing on December 31st 1981 marked the beginning of independent advocacy activities coordinated by NBYA, and it continued to pressure the government for the next 2 years or more through occasional pickets and rallies. But nothing substantial could be achieved. Therefore, out of frustration, a longer movement was planned involving a variety of methods of advocacy in March of 1984 (Yadav, 2005). This decision was made despite the fact that NBYA had neither any established infrastructure nor any regular financial resources to engage in such an intense and prolonged activity. What it had, however, was the manpower, zeal and committed leadership. So, with the limited material resources, but tremendously committed and passionate human resources, the NBYA made an announcement regarding the launching of this movement on the occasion of World Disabled Day in 1984, (the third Sunday of March 1984) (Yadav, 2005). Like many other prolonged movements of the 1980s, its focus was on employment, but being sponsored by a youth organization, its agenda and 50-point charter of demands covered almost all the major areas of the life of blind people, from education to jobs, and more.

On its first day, the movement began with a simple rally and pitching of a tent for picketing in front of Shastri Bhawan, Delhi, which houses important ministries like Social Justice and Empowerment and Human Resource Development. In order to draw

the attention of the relevant authorities, the activists adopted various tactics like courting arrests, blocking roads, and blocking the way of foreign dignitaries during their visit to Rajghat in Delhi (where Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Nation was cremated). During the course of 158 days, a number of advocacy activities were organized in addition to a token 24-hour picket with a new group replacing the previous group on a regular basis (Yadav, 2005). A discussion regarding the problems of the blind was held with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (lower house of the parliament) and pamphlets were distributed to several members of the Parliament (Sarin, 2006). At least two major activities of July 2nd and August 15th, respectively, deserve special mention.

A large-scale rally was organized on July 2nd (1984), which involved participation of almost 400 activists from different parts of the country (Yadav, 2005). As informed by Bharat Prasad Yadav, the long-term leader of NBYA, the activists worked hard to mobilize such large-scale participation: “For this purpose, we sent our representatives to most of the schools of Northern and Eastern India and the appeal was not only made to the students but also the teachers and other working class members” (Yadav, 2005).

This rally would have attracted massive coverage by the media if the participants had been arrested, but due to the intervention of Jawahar Lal Kaul, the General Secretary of All India Confederation of the Blind (a breakaway group of NFB), arrests were avoided (V.K. Misra, personal interview, April 27, 2005). Kaul requested of the magistrate that the rally participants not be sent to jail as some of them were in government jobs and if they were arrested, they might be terminated. His concern was very genuine, but the enthusiastic, passionate and young leadership of NBYA was

disappointed with Kaul's request and the resulting lack of arrests of the demonstrating activists. They were of the opinion that had the participants been arrested, the movement would have received a lot of coverage (Mishra, 2005; Sarin, 2006; Yadav, 2005). The leaders of the movement felt they had, therefore, lost an opportunity for publicity about the movement and its wide-ranging demand charter.

Further reflections on the movement are provided by Yadav:

Another noticeable event of this movement was the attempt to enter in the President House on Independence Day (August 15, 1984). Obviously, we were arrested for defying the prohibitory orders issued under section 144 and later on released (Yadav, 2005).

This rally of August 15th and the consequent arrest of the activists were meant to draw the attention of the government to this lengthy movement on the occasion of the Independence Day. But it had very little impact as the government was too busy justifying its crackdown on the terrorists in the golden temple at Amritsar in Punjab, which had been carried out almost 2 months previously (Singh, 1993, pp. 217-221).

The movement took its last turn when its leaders made the decision to stage an indefinite hunger strike in the end of August. Misra commented: "No doubt, this decision was taken out of frustration and, perhaps after almost putting on test all the possible tactics and even going to the extent of stopping the trains" (Misra, 2005). There was a division of opinion about this tactic, because such steps are typically utilized as a final act, whether it be out of frustration or as a finishing touch to the agitation. Yadav reflected:

Due to the scarcity of funds, we had no option but to find a way so that this agitation could be put to an end without exposing our weakness. So, we adopted the tactics of hunger strike unto death (Yadav, 2005). Hence, unfortunately, the movement had to be finally called off on August 27 without yielding any concrete results (Mishra, 2005; Sarin, 2006; Yadav, 2005).

This movement of almost 5-months duration was unique in the following two ways: First, this was a movement led by a group that had some differences with the NFB that had led the agitations during the 1980-1981. Of course, the demands of this group were not significantly different from that of the NFB, but their demands contained more detail and covered the wide range of problems relating to blind people of different age groups cutting across class lines. Second, the movement was organized by blind youth through an organization that was not duly institutionalized. However, despite these unique aspects of this movement, it must be emphasized that howsoever young, enthusiastic, dynamic, committed, and passionate these activists might have been, they were overly ambitious and lacking in practicality.

Long lasting movements may leave their indelible impressions, but from the viewpoint of materialistic achievement, it failed to achieve any concrete accomplishments as the leadership was forced to prematurely curtail this movement. Apart from the lack of sufficient material resources and required infrastructure to sustain such movement, two important factors were primarily responsible for the failure of this movement: first, A cumbersome and ambitious agenda; and second, the timing in which it was carried out. These factors need a brief explanation.

No organization could have succeeded in convincing the authorities to accept their 50-point demand charter. The agenda of the movement was too broad to be achieved

by a small organization with very limited means. In reference to this sizable agenda, the NBYA leader pointed out: “It was passed in our Executive Council to launch an unending movement with a view to force the government to implement the reservation orders, bring legislation, arrange Braille presses in each state, provide better facilities in the school etc.” (Yadav, 2005). It would not have been possible even for a very well established organization with the required infrastructure to accomplish such an ambitious agenda unless a plan was established to pursue it in phases.

In addition to an overambitious and impractical agenda, the timing of this movement was another very important factor leading to its failure. One must keep in mind that the early years of the 1980s were marked by a lot of turbulence and tension in the country due to the secessionist movement in the state of Punjab. The struggle for Khalistan, a separate nation on the basis of Sikh identity, had been going on in the state of Punjab for a long time and it had taken a violent turn by the 1980s. The Indian State officials regarded the leaders of the Khalistan movement as ‘terrorists.’ The crisis reached its peak in 1984 and the Indian State was forced to conduct an army operation in the Golden Temple located at Amritsar, Punjab in the summer of 1984 (Singh, 1993, PP. 217-221). The army crackdown on the leaders of the Khalistan movement had a lot of influence on the law and order situation in Delhi and the Central Government was preoccupied with justifying its actions in the Golden Temple for the rest of the year. This resulted in the imposition of a ban on all types of *gheraos* (encircling of State officials by protesting activists to force them to listen), picketing, rallies and the like. Advocacy movements such as the movement of the organized blind or any other marginalized section of society were not routine activities during that year. That is why the steps that

were taken occurred in an undertone, which prevented them from attracting the desired coverage by the media. Hence, the failure of this movement to achieve significant results can also be viewed from the angle of the choice of its timing.

Apart from these weaknesses, the failure to accomplish any goals was also due to the fact that the leadership neglected to do any follow-up to the movement. Such movements are usually not taken seriously by the government in the absence of follow-up action. It is a tendency of the government machinery to keep the agreements reached with the activists in the minute books of the department unless the leaders of the movement maintain a sustained pressure on it through constant follow-up. However, despite these drawbacks, the contribution of the efforts of the activists during the course of this movement cannot be completely denied.

With the lack of leadership in the Federation, the NBYA at least succeeded in maintaining the presence of an advocacy organization in Delhi in the mid 1980s. It therefore needs to be acknowledged that despite the lack of required infrastructure, NBYA was at least able to build and maintain the tempo of the movement for almost 5 months. During the course of this movement, the NBYA activists had developed a heightened sense of awareness. Hence, despite the lack of any immediate outcome, the accomplishment of this 158 days long movement cannot be completely discounted.

As noted earlier in the previous section, temporary withdrawal of Rungta from his involvement in the movement in 1982 led to the weakening of the movement by the Federation. Rungta however, was re-elected as the General Secretary of the Federation during its bi-annual Convention held in 1986 and resumed the leadership of the

movement of the organized blind India. This revived the Federation and the movement leading to the culmination of the struggle for employment in Delhi. I next discuss the successful completion of this struggle.

Climax of the Struggle for Employment in Delhi

The re-elected group of people under the leadership of Rungta began to make attempts to reviving the movement in less than a year's time after the 1986 elections. The first of these attempts was to organize a weeklong display of job skills of the blind in the last week of April in 1987 ("Blind Agitate for Jobs," 1987). This was organized by the Federation under the leadership of Rungta in front of the prime minister's residence and the purpose of this demonstration was to sensitize the ministers and bureaucrats regarding the potential of blind people to perform skilled jobs. The activists succeeded in getting the attention of the prime minister to demonstrate their skills before him ("Blind Agitate for Jobs," 1987). However, this kind of activity had a very limited influence. It might have convinced government officials regarding the skill level of the qualified educated blind, but these officials were not about to launch a recruitment drive to employ them. Therefore, as usual, the blind activists planned to return to the streets to demand employment.

As announced in a press conference on July 3rd (1987), the Federation decided to organize a sustained movement from July 6 onward ("Blind Youth Stir from July 6," 1987). The rally organized on this day marked the beginning of the movement focused primarily on the twin demands of absorption of unemployed youth and the enactment of the disability law ("Demonstration of the Blind on P.M.'s Residence," 1987; "Blind Present Demands to P.M.," 1987; "Blind to Justice," 1987). This movement continued

with various methods of advocacy including a march to the parliament on July 28th (“Blind March to Parliament,” 1987) along with picketing and negotiations with government officials. But it was not until the 27th of August that the activists reached a historic agreement with the Welfare Ministry (“Employment to the Blind,” 1987; “Accord on Blind’s Demands Claimed,” 1987; “National Federation of the Blind Calls off Stir,” 1987). According to this agreement, the government promised to introduce the disability law in the next parliamentary session and absorb all the 4,000 blind candidates registered with the special employment exchanges by October 1987.

This was not the first time that such a promise was made to the blind activists and the promise of introducing the disability law in the next session of parliament proved to be a false promise to pacify the agitating blind activists. However, what made this agreement a historic one was the creation of the committee under the Staff Selection Commission, to carry out a special recruitment drive to fill the lower level government positions. The Staff Selection Commission is a statutory body assigned to recruit lower level staff in Central Government. The special recruitment drive was carried out in the later part of 1987 by the committee set up with this purpose. As a result of the recruitment drive, 239 blind candidates were selected for appointment in various Central Government Services, though the Federation had to schedule a massive rally in January 1988 in order to get them actually placed in jobs (“Blind to Take Out Morcha on January 21,” 1988; “The Blind Decide to Organise a Rally in Protest of Non-implementation of the Appointment of the Selected Blind Candidates,” 1988). The rally was cancelled as the minister responsible for supervising the recruitment process responded promptly, ordering the immediate placement of selected candidates in the government departments

(“Delay in Appointment of Blind Shocks Minister,” 1988; “Blind Call off Rally Following Agreement,” 1988).

This marked the climax of the movement for employment of the blind carried out during the 1980s. Once this massive recruitment drive was completed in early 1988, the Federation shifted its focus from employment of the blind to the larger issue of enactment of the disability law. In Chapter 6, I analyze this effort during the third phase of the movement from 1988 to 1995, but I first engage in a discussion of the struggle for employment in certain states under Part II of this chapter.

PART II

Origin of Philosophy of Self-Advocacy at the State Level and the Struggle for the Right to Employment: A Case of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra and Kerala

India is a large country and keeping in mind that my focus is the study of the movement at the national level, it is beyond the scope of this research to conduct an in-depth analysis of advocacy carried out by blind activists at the local and state levels. However, at the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that while it is true that large-scale changes at the national level were triggered as a result of vigorous advocacy carried out in the political center of the country located in the capital city of Delhi, it would not have been possible to mobilize such broad based support if the movement was not mobilized at the local level in various states of the country.

The role of the groups of activists who led the movements at the local and state levels was very crucial for the success of the movement at the national level. These activists from the local and state levels in different parts of the country contributed significantly to the strength of the activists who led the sporadic advocacy activities in Delhi. They often gathered to show the strength of the number of blind people in Delhi whenever a major advocacy activity was organized. This also expanded the support base of the movement and gave it a national character rather than just a Delhi-based parochial movement. So, even if these local and state level movements were highly parochial in nature, they were of immense significance for the movement at the national level. It would not have been possible to organize a mass movement at the national level if these

local and state level leaders had not joined the leaders in Delhi whenever a show of strength was required. Hence, even though the purpose of this study is confined to the documentation of the history of the movement of the organized blind in India at the national level, the study of the struggle for the right to employment would be incomplete without some attention focused on the movements carried out beyond Delhi. This section provides a brief overview of these local and state level movements, the kinds of advocacy activities that were utilized, and the response of the states in different parts of the country.

While most of the demand charters prepared by blind activists in various parts of the country dealt with a range of issues, the focal point of these movements was in some way related to the issue of employment. In light of the constraints of this research, I have confined this discussion to an analysis of the advocacy activities in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Kerala. These were the states that were among the pioneers to launch a state level movement and witnessed a strong state level struggle for employment during the 1980s. In this part of the chapter, I therefore present a brief discussion of the movement of the organized blind and the struggle for right to employment in these states.

Struggle for Employment in Uttar Pradesh

As noted in the previous two chapters, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) is a state has been a hub for the political activities of the blind. This state has thus, had a key role in determining the leadership position of NFB. Therefore, it is important to analyze major advocacy

activities in this state during this phase of the movement related to the right to employment.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Federation called off the 25-day-long movement following an agreement with the Labor Minister on January 25 1981, according to which the Government promised to address the demands raised by the activists by the end of the IYDP. After that, the Federation had no major activity planned in Delhi for the rest of the year. This provided an opportunity for the leadership and the general membership of NFB in U.P. to launch a vigorous movement during the later half of the year. Hence, as informed by one of the activists, Vasudeve Dev Giri (who was actively engaged in that movement), in August the U.P. branch of the Federation launched a sustained struggle for employment: “On August 14, we reached Lucknow [state capital] and it was decided that we would court arrest in the groups of elevens. For five days, we were sent to jail and there was an arrest of 85 blind youngsters in total” (Giri, 2005). The courting of arrest was a common phenomenon of the movement, which continued for two weeks.

This movement of August 1981 yielded immediate results and it thus encouraged future advocacy activities by the NFB, U.P. branch. As recounted by Shrivastava, an activist engaged in that movement of August 1981:

On September 4 of IYDP, it was decided to provide jobs with an immediate effect by employing 31 blind persons. Amongst them, there were seven Lecturers [assistant professors], 14 chair re-caners, and rest of them were clerks. Initially, it was the feeling among blind people themselves that a blind person can only be suitable in the special schools for the blind at the post of peon [office attendant to perform the manual labor] or teacher. But when these jobs were provided, we became optimistic and the agitation continued to pressurize the authorities. Rungta was our leader and we used to meet Mr. V.P. Singh, who was then the

Chief Minister of U.P. (S.N. Shrivastava, personal interview, June 7, 2005).

In that era of the early 1980s, it was very hard even for a progressive politician like Vishwanath Pratap Singh to be convinced that blind people were capable of performing any productive jobs. He expressed his curiosity in this regard to the activists. He told them that he was ready to consider employing the blind youth according to their qualifications, but he was not sure what kind of jobs they were capable of handling. As one of the committed and active members of the Federation Giri (also quoted above) shared his memories of that time:

The Chief Minister also asked us about the nature of jobs where the blind could be fit in. It was said by Mr. Rungta that [“provide us jobs which are suitable to our qualifications and we will prove ourselves better than your normal staff.”] The example of the blind factory workers was given who were performing hundred times better than others.... In the then 57 districts of this state, 57 posts of the chair re-caners were identified. Also, in every directorate, a job of the chair re-caner was identified. The job of dispatcher was also identified in the seven departments. The job of receptionist was also found in 10 different departments. Similarly, jobs of enquiry clerks were also found in various departments. 28 jobs were found of the lecturer in the intermediate colleges. Ultimately, 213 posts were identified and I am one of them who are currently working as a clerk in the state legislative assembly (Giri, 2005).

This decision to employ 31 blind people, to start with, proved to be a landmark development in the history of success of the movement in U.P. It encouraged the activists to continue their struggle for employment. Therefore, as described further by Giri, a large-scale movement was again launched in March 1982 that evoked a prompt response from Chief Minister Singh:

After the movement of March [1982], Chief Minister, V.P. Singh advised to bring a list of all the unemployed blind people and he assured a Cabinet decision for their employment. On April 19, 1982, a list of 213

unemployed blind was given to V.P. Singh by the Federation. He promised to employ all the candidates whose names were recommended by the Federation. Ram Kishan ji used to be the Secretary of Welfare Ministry those days. He also supported us fully. It was the plan of V.P. Singh to distribute the appointment letters himself on June 29 [1982]. But unfortunately, he resigned from the post of C.M. [chief Ministership] due to the murder of his brother. But still, since this decision was approved by the cabinet, there was a great importance of the cabinet decision. Now it was a matter of pursuance and NFB got the power to make recommendations and whosoever was recommended, got the job irrespective of the age factor (Giri, 2005).

What is unique about this process of special recruitment is that the U.P. branch of NFB was completely involved in it. This entire process of reaching out to those 213 blind people aspiring for government jobs and the submission of the list of these unemployed blind youth in April 1982 was handled by the U.P. branch of the Federation. At least in the field of employment of the disabled, this was the first time that such a development took place. Hence, it was the first instance in the Indian history in the field of disability that an advocacy organization like NFB was given the full authority to provide the names of the people to be employed. Also, following the special recruitment of blind people in Haryana in 1972 (which is explained further later in the chapter), this was the second time in the history of recruitment for government jobs that special positions were created through a special Memorandum of the cabinet rather than filling the existing vacancies in a routine manner.

Sat Kumar Singh, the second most powerful leader of NFB and the most powerful leader of its U.P. branch, took a lot of pride in the fact that the power of recruitment of blind people was given to the U.P. branch of the Federation and the State Government basically complied with its recommendations in this regard:

This was the first time when the Federation got the right of being the expert for the jobs for the blind. I am just talking about the U.P. and till date we have the power to work as an employment exchange. We register people who are applying for government jobs and the list of those people is forwarded by us and the government honours that list by providing jobs to the qualified people, depending upon the availability of vacancies. We have about 2100 blind persons who are unemployed and registered with us currently. We are trying to seek employment for them (Singh, 2005).

These 213 jobs were made available as specially created positions through a cabinet decision and were made possible as a result of the personal interest of Chief Minister Singh in response to the pressure exerted by the Federation. The interest shown by Singh can be understood because of the fact that an important aspect of the creation of these jobs also included a provision that in case of a long leave by a blind employee, that position should only be filled by another blind person even if filled on a contractual basis (Giri, 2005; Singh, 2005; Srivastava, 2005).

Most of the informants from U.P. who were interviewed for this research were of the opinion that Chief Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh faced strong resistance from his elected colleagues (politicians) as well as bureaucrats regarding the implementation of this Memorandum of special recruitment (Giri, 2005; Singh, 2005; Shrivastava, , 2005; A. Tiwari, personal interview, June 6, 2005). They agreed that Singh responded in an assertive manner to the negative approach of his colleagues, who asserted that blind people were not capable of performing any tasks assigned to them. Based on the prevalent work ethics of the government sector in the era of lack of any kind of accountability of the employees in regard to the performance of their work, Singh's response was that it would not make a difference if seven hundred blind persons would not work out of the seven hundred thousand employees (Giri, 2005). This suggests that

even Singh's approach toward the issue of employment for the blind was primarily based on charity and sympathy. This is ironic because Singh was otherwise considered to be a progressive politician who was committed to the cause of social justice. As elaborated further in the next chapter that incidentally, it was basically Singh's decision to expand the quota system for jobs to include members of what are considered to be "other backward classes of citizens" in August 1990 when he was the Prime Minister of India (Narang, 1996, pp. 650-655). However, when interviewed for this research, Singh's approach toward the issue of employability seemed to be very different than at the time of the special recruitment in the early 1980s. During this interview, I asked what influenced him to adopt such a supportive attitude toward the issue of employability of the blind people at that time. At a very old age and having held the highest position in the government of the country, his answer to this question was now based on a relatively progressive sounding approach with a slightly patronizing tone:

This is my thinking that there can be one handicap but basically, man works from his mind, eyes only watch and mind sees. Eyes are just the lens of a camera. The task of interpretation and understanding lies with the mind. Full personality of anybody is from his mind and heart. There is a lot of talent in the handicapped people. Even in this sense too we have to tap this talent for the country. Apart from this, even from the humanitarian views, one should do something for them. It should be done in both government and non-government sectors. Surdas was a great poet. Basically, it is the mind and heart which always play the most important role in shaping anyone's personality. We should provide the facilities to the handicapped so that their mind and heart may be used for their development and for the development of the country. Such means need to be developed so that they may read. They may use computers and there are audible books. At the same time, modern technology is also pooling its resources to minimize the limitations of the blind. This technology has proved successful in some areas. A blind person can read any book through Braille or even use computer. He is nowhere less than anybody in intellectual capacity. I feel that under such conditions, a handicap which was considered to be a handicap fifty years ago is not that much a handicap in the present age.

Blind people may be handicapped in certain areas, but they are not handicapped as a person in totality. They have a full personality and full

capability what a mind and heart can give. They should be given due place and whatever prejudices are there, they should be removed. These prejudices can be removed by giving opportunities. For instance, you [the researcher] are a professor and I know there is a professor in Lucknow and if you can teach then you can become guru [teacher]. You know guru is treated as god in our culture. So, in any sense, they are no less than anybody and they should be respected like others (V.P. Singh, June 24, personal interview, 2005).

Another rigorous movement in U.P. took place in 1985 in which Narayan Dutt Tiwari, the then Chief Minister of the State, was approached for the creation of 251 posts for the blind. This movement is further described by Giri:

Despite the issuance of the orders, due to the lethargic attitude of the bureaucracy, it could not be implemented and the movements for its implementation continued for several years. Chief Minister, N.D. Tiwari gave the instructions to employ the qualified blind people. So, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Minister of State Social Welfare. That committee comprised the Principal Secretary Finance, Principal Secretary Planning, and Secretary Social Welfare. They [Committee members] issued a Memorandum on June 28, 1989 to appoint the blind people on 251 posts. But that Memorandum could not be implemented fully. Mr. Satish Chandra Misra filed a case in the High Court with the name of Satish Chandra Misra vs. State of U.P. and others and it was revealed that the cabinet had issued a Memorandum to reserve 251 posts for the blind that needed to be implemented. Even in 1989, such promises were made but when the question of the contempt of court was taken up, partial implementation was made and still there are about 61 posts yet to be filled up. It is not legally binding to implement the cabinet decision. And because of frequent change of governments in the state, the issue of employability of the blind hardly figures in the priority list of things to be done when a new government comes to power for a short time (Giri, 2005).

An analysis of the case of U.P. reveals that about 464 positions were created on which the blind people were qualified during the decade of 1980s. This can be considered to be a very important development in the history of the movement of the organized blind in that state, but it is a matter of further investigation whether this

achievement was the result of pressure tactics or due to the interest of the Chief Ministers. Such achievements seem to be possible when there is a positive response from the highest-level authority of a state, despite the fact that blind people do not constitute a block of voters for any politician, as they are not concentrated in a particular place. However, there is no doubt that the positive and sympathetic attitude of the Chief Ministers made it much easier and faster to ensure employment for such a large number of blind youth, but it also would not have occurred if the activists had not launched an advocacy movement. This was an unprecedented event in Indian history and it was impossible to accomplish without the voice of the blind activists. In the 1990s as well as the current decade, both of the conditions of the 1980s, that is, a sustained and vigorous movement and highly progressive Chief Ministers such as Singh and Tiwari are missing, and that places the issue of employability of the blind at a lower priority in terms of the government officials in the state of Uttar Pradesh. So, in summary, it was the pressure of the movement of the organized blind and the positive support of the then Chief Ministers Singh and Tiwari which made it possible to ensure employment for such a large number of educated blind youth in U.P.

Similar pressure tactics were adopted as part of the movement in certain other states, but the response of the Chief Ministers varied from state to state. The following brief analysis of the response of the Chief Minister of Haryana presents a somewhat similar but also dissimilar picture. On the other hand, as explained later in this chapter, the situation of Maharashtra and Kerala present a relatively different picture.

Origin of the Movement of the Organized Blind and Struggle for Employment in Haryana

Haryana is one of the smallest states of India, located at a geographically crucial place in the vicinity of Delhi. The relatively smaller size and location of the state made it easier for the activists to gain access to the powerful government officials and avail the support from the national level leaders and activists of the movement of the organized blind based in Delhi. This relative ease of access to the authorities and the support from national level leadership proved to be a boon for the activists in Haryana to get their demands met from time to time. However, at the initial stage of the process of employment of the blind people, the response of the Chief Minister of the state, who holds the topmost position in power in the state, was the determinant factor.

Haryana was the first state to launch a special recruitment drive for blind job seekers. This occurred as early as 1972. This drive has an interesting background and is to be largely attributed to the generosity of a progressive Chief Minister in power at that time and, to some extent, to the initiative of the blind activists to advocate for their rights.

In the fall of 1971, a group of students in a government run residential school for blind children located in Panipat, a small town of Haryana went to meet the Chief Minister, Bansilal, to discuss some problems of mismanagement at the school regarding some basic amenities such as food, clothing, and housing. Bansilal took a keen interest in those problems and made a personal visit to the school in the month of December (M.L. Goyal, personal interview, July 30, 2005). During that visit, he not only promised to address the issues that were raised by students but also took a keen interest in the issue of employability of the qualified blind job seekers.

In his interaction with the students and teachers, Bansilal tried to educate himself about what kind of jobs blind people could perform. He learned that many of them were capable of performing the jobs of chair re-caning and playing *tabla* (an Indian classical drum). He asked for a list of the qualified candidates and a list of thirty *tabla* players was submitted. He instantly ordered that they be employed by the Department of Education. By the time actual recruitment started in the following year, six more qualified members submitted their application for this job and they too were hired. So, a total of 36 blind people were recruited in 1972 through the special Memorandum issued by Chief Minister Bansilal (Goyal, 2005).

Madan Lal Goyal, who was a high school student during the early 1970s, described another example of the positive attitude of Bansilal:

There was another episode when Mr. Bansilal became the Union Defence Minister during 1976-77. There was a student Mr. Saangvan who did his post-graduation in English and came to me. I took him to Mr. Bansilal who was impressed with him and wrote a personal letter to Mr. Banarsi Das who was then the Chief Minister of Haryana. Saangvan was then provided a job of lecturer [assistant professor] of English literature at Rohtak College. He has got that letter even today in which Bansilal wrote that it would be a misfortune to the state if such a qualified person is not provided job (Goyal, 2005).

In contrast to the progressive attitude of Bansilal, the two Chief Ministers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Choudhary Devilal and Bhajan Lal, were highly negative with regard to employability of the qualified unemployed blind. As a result, the struggling blind activists initially faced strong resistance in their quest for jobs. Goyal recalled Devilal's response in meetings with the blind activists:

We used to meet Mr. Devilal through our delegations. He used to have negative approach about us. I first met him in 1977 along with Ram Pal

and Dharm Pal Kalra who were well-educated blind job seekers ... He used to say that there was no need of jobs for us. According to him at that time, our job was just supposed to be praying to the God and we would be better off singing bhajan [hymns] and playing harmonium in the temples (Goyal, 2005).

However, Devilal's attitude did change over a period of time as a result of his association with a progressive leader, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, whose contribution has already been mentioned in the context of the special recruitment drive in the State of Uttar Pradesh in the early 1980s.

Once a sizable group of educated blind emerged in Haryana and a few of them were employed, they felt a need to organize. At the same time, the regime had changed and a new Chief Minister, Choudhary Devilal, who as described above initially held a very negative opinion regarding the potential of blind people, took power after the elections of 1977. So, the blind activists at first obtained only a negative response from him. This combination of factors prompted the blind activists to organize themselves to struggle for their rights. As a result, the first advocacy organization of the blind in Haryana was founded in 1977 to take up their issues with the government (Goyal, 2005; J. Ram, personal interview, July 29, 2005). It was called the Haryana Association for the Blind (HAB) (Goyal, 2005; Ram, 2005).

The activists from Haryana had played a crucial role during the movement led by NFB in Delhi in 1980 and the early part of 1981. Because of the geographical closeness of Haryana, it was one of the few Northern States that contributed as a major force for the NFB during this movement. Once these activists from Haryana got a break from some of the advocacy activities in Delhi, they were able to focus their attention on the issue of employment of qualified blind in their own state. So, the first major advocacy activity led

by HAB was a 52-day-long demonstration of the fall of 1981. The HAB members picketed the house of the Chief Minister, Bhajan Lal, with support from the leadership of NFB in Delhi. The main demand of this movement was the provision of employment of the qualified blind by filling up the 3% quota for the disabled in Haryana. No written agreement was reached between the demonstrating blind activists and the government at the conclusion of the picketing on December 17th except a verbal assurance to provide employment for the qualified blind. However, this demonstration did create a backdrop for a major development in the state of Haryana, that is, the founding of a high-powered committee to look into the issues of employability of the qualified unemployed blind.

As a result of prolonged demonstration and its follow up through meetings with state level officials, this committee was formed in the spring of 1982. The committee continues to exist at the present time and has sporadically addressed the issue of employability of qualified blind job seekers. The committee is headed by the commissioner of the Social Welfare Ministry of the State and comprises the directors of related departments such as the Department of Education and Labor and representatives of blind people. It acts as an agency of the State Service Commission, which is the recruitment body for “C” and “D” categories of jobs in Haryana. It also makes a special recruitment drive for blind job seekers and employs them in positions suitable to their qualifications. This is a diversion from the normal course of recruitment in which an applicant for the job has to apply to a recruitment body such as the State Service Board. The blind applicants for jobs in Haryana are therefore waived a prolonged bureaucratic procedure of applying for a job and do not have to compete in an open competition. The Committee receives the list of blind applicants for jobs registered in the Special

Employment Exchange and creates positions to employ them in various departments according to their qualifications.

It is important to note that this procedure of employing qualified blind people does not follow any specific legal provision such as the 3% provision for jobs under the Office Memorandum of 1977 or the PWD Act of 1995. On the contrary, the recruitment is carried out in an arbitrary manner by the Committee. The recruitment initiative by the Committee is dependent upon pressure exerted by the activists from time to time. When a sizable number of qualified unemployed blind get together and launch a struggle to pressure the authorities to employ them, the Committee responds accordingly. Thus, the possibility of ensuring employment for the blind in Haryana is still not based on the existing legal provisions. Rather it is dependent upon the pressure exerted by the activists on the Committee.

After the major advocacy activity carried out by the HAB in the fall of 1981 and the creation of the committee in the spring of the following year, this sole organization of the organized blind in the State of Haryana remained silent for a while. Later on, with the increasing influence of the National Blind Youth Association in Haryana, a split took place within the HAB in 1983 and a splinter group called the Blind Welfare Association was founded. This new association developed an alliance with the NFB leadership in Delhi and in 1985 merged with the Haryana branch of the NFB (Ram, 2005). So, on November 10th 1985, the Haryana state branch of the National Federation of the Blind was created and major advocacy activities were henceforth carried out under its banner (Goyal, 2005; Ram, 2005). On the other hand, HAB sided with the National Blind Youth

Association, which had developed sharp differences with the NFB leadership in Delhi after cessation of the movement of January 1981.

In 1986, there were general elections for the executive of the NFB at the national level and Rungta was restored to power in the position of General Secretary. This led to a revival of the movement in Delhi. As mentioned under the last section of Part I of this chapter that soon after Rungta resumed power, he launched a vigorous struggle against the Union Government to fill the backlog of positions for blind people in C and D categories of jobs to implement the provision for 3% reservation under the Office Memorandum of 1977, which led to the employment of 239 blind people.

The success of the Federation in securing employment for qualified blind job seekers in Delhi inspired the activists in Haryana and they organized a one-day-long rally in September 1987 to demand employment. As one of the leaders of the Haryana branch of NFB described:

There was a change in the Government in the state in 1987. Choudhary Devlal became the Chief Minister again. Initially, he was of the view that the blind persons cannot work. They look better if they confine themselves to the religious activities. But later on, he did a lot to ensure employment for the blind in comparison with others. We had a one-day movement in 1987 in the month of September. Kripa Ram Punni then happened to be the Minister of Social Welfare who gave us some assurances. But it did not yield any substantial result (Ram, 2005).

Within a span of two months, the activists understood the shallowness of the promises made to them. Due to the lack of fulfillment of the promise made by the Minister of Social Welfare, a decision was made to launch a large-scale movement. This movement began in the fourth week of December with approximately 20 people courting arrest, massive rallies and picketing for six days in a row:

In the month of December, we decided to take up a long fight. We gave notices to the government in that month and mobilized people from Delhi, Faridabad, Hisar [leading towns of Haryana] and other places. On December 21, we had started a rally. It was Monday. About fifteen to twenty people's courted arrest every day and at least 200 to 250 persons participated in the rally almost every day until the movement was called off on 25th.... On 23rd, we were beaten with the *lathis* [sticks] and deserted in the forest across the river. We were carried there in different vans and left in different villages when we tried to break prohibitory orders. On 25th, our comrades in Delhi got together and Rungta organized a *gherao* [surrounding] of the Chief Minister, Devi Lal, who was then visiting Delhi in protest of the misbehavior of the police. He gave a written assurance that he would make sure that our demands are met and asked his staff to set up a high level meeting as soon as possible. According to this assurance, he agreed to meet with us on the 31st of December to look into our demands. So, we called off our movement.... On 31st, Rungta came to Haryana to meet the Chief Minister and led a delegation of five persons. At the end of this meeting, Devi Lal wrote one clear sentence saying provide jobs to all the eligible job seekers. The implementation of this instruction by the Chief Minister was unique, as it never happened in the same way prior to this and after this. About 100 persons were appointed as chair re-caners and about 175 to 200 were enlisted for different departments for variety of posts. At that time, there were 269 unemployed people registered with the employment exchange and within the period of a year, everyone got a job (Ram, 2005).

This brief movement carried out by the Haryana branch of NFB was crucial as it led to a massive recruitment drive in the subsequent year.

The Haryana movement reveals the change in the attitude of two Chief Ministers, Bhajan Lal and Devlal. In the beginning, both of them were negative in their outlook, thoroughly adhering to the traditional approach of treating blind people as completely unproductive and incapable of work. But the moment they were convinced regarding the competence of blind people, they did not believe in holding formal or informal discussions, but like the traditional kings, they issued orders. It is this tendency of the Chief Ministers of Haryana that ultimately brought a substantial change in the area of

ensuring jobs for the blind youth. But with the exception of the instance of generosity of Chief Minister Bansilal in the early 1970s, employment for the qualified blind necessitated ongoing advocacy.

Overall, the committee has had variable successful in employing blind people, depending upon the strength of the struggle and the monarchical type order from the Chief Minister. But there is no guarantee that a sympathetic attitude at the top of hierarchy of power will prevail forever. When there is no acknowledgement of a right to employment,, success remains doubtful despite all positive attitudes. We can take the example of U.P., where despite the humanitarian attitude of V.P. Singh, opportunities for employment were not readily available in the long run. Rather, continuous pressure tactics were required in order to achieve any substantial results. As it is clear from the discussion in the next section that the struggle of the blind activists for their employment and the response of the authorities in the state of Maharashtra present a similar picture.

Beginning of the Self-Advocacy Movement and the Struggle for Employment in Maharashtra

Maharashtra has relatively been one of the affluent states of the country with Mumbai (formerly called Bombay) as its capital. Mumbai has also been the financial capital of the country since the days of British colonial rule. Partly because of having Mumbai as its major city, Maharashtra was one of the early states to move on the capitalistic path of development. It was therefore also the first state to witness the growth of the large-scale service delivery organizations in the field of blindness in the country.

As explained in the previous chapter, the two major service delivery organizations, the National Association for the Blind and the Blind Persons' Association that was earlier

known as the Blind Men's Association, were established in Mumbai by the mid-1950s. The BPA confined itself to the goal of service delivery at the regional level and moved its headquarters to the neighboring city of Pune, one of the leading cities in the state and also the hub of educational institutions in the western part of India. But NAB maintained its headquarters in Mumbai and started billing itself as a national organization. As elaborated in the previous chapter, NAB was basically dominated by sighted philanthropists with few middle-classed educated blind people. Due to the typical charity approach adhered to by NAB for most of its existence, similar to a typical NGO working in the field of blindness; NAB was resistant to any organization that embraced an advocacy approach. As a result, the people managing NAB at the top level always discouraged the presence of NFB in Maharashtra. Therefore, despite being the pioneer city in the field of rehabilitation of the blind in India, Mumbai had no presence of NFB until the mid-1970s. However, the NAB could not prevent the presence of NFB in Mumbai for too long.

Similar to the situation in some other parts of the country, a group of educated blind emerged in Mumbai by the 1970s. The members of this group were cognizant of the self-advocacy philosophy propagated by the NFB, USA and NFB, India. Many of them were highly discontented and frustrated with the patronizing attitude of the top management group of NAB. So, they became involved in NFB and established its branch in Mumbai in the second half of the 1970s. The views of two early activists, Ms. Madhuri Desai and Hasmukh Shah, are reflective of discontentment of the educated blind with the NAB. Shah was one of the pioneers of the advocacy movement of the organized blind in Mumbai who was attracted by the philosophy of the Federation:

I liked the Federation for two reasons—one is that there were some organizations that were now coming up and speaking up against the agencies, which were not treating the blind well. Another thing was that it gave importance to blind people because the important office-bearers needed to be blind only. And all this was missing in the ideology and practice of NAB (H. Shah, personal interview, March 24, 2005).

Similarly, Madhuri Desai, one of the few exceptional female blind activists and a founding member of the NFB branch in Mumbai, was also frustrated with the patronizing attitude of the management of NAB. Just like Shah, she too felt the need to promote the self-advocacy philosophy of the Federation:

In fact, the philosophy of the Federation influenced me a lot as I am a strong believer of justice, equality, fraternity and opportunity, which is the preamble of the Federation. It appealed to me very much. It is the wearer who can tell where the shoe pinches. The policy of some of the institutions is that beggars are not choosers, but our policy is that if we are independent, then we can choose and demand something.... When I was a student in the mid-1970s, I did not have a good experience with the NAB management in Mumbai. I wanted a job and so, I registered my name with the employment committee of NAB. But I was not given a job. They hardly used to employ educated blind people in NAB. They were prejudiced against those who did not work in accordance to what they say. Practically, the NAB was against the existence of NFB.... Personally I did not have anything against anyone, but they deliberately tried to keep me aside. I mean they did not want intelligent people or the people who questioned them. When I took an open stand on certain issues and spoke the truth, they did not like it and they sidelined me. So I had to depend on the Federation and therefore I joined its ad hoc committee in the later part of 1976. The interesting thing was that at that time, all members were supposed to contribute some amount whether they were doing some job or not. As I was a student and my father became blind and unemployed, I used to contribute eleven rupees per month (M. Desai, personal interview, July 23, 2005).

Shah was involved in the Federation from the early 1970s onward. He was inspired to establish the branch of NFB in Mumbai after the Jaipur convention of NFB in 1976. He summarized the founding of NFB Maharashtra in the following words:

In 1976, the general convention of Federation was held at Jaipur in Rajasthan. In that convention, seven of us participated from Maharashtra. Upon our return, we started working on establishing a branch of NFB in Mumbai, but we have no funds. So, we decided to raise funds by making a small contribution ourselves without taking any money from outside. We did not want the NAB kind of funding in which the sighted people would end up being influential by way of their financial control.... Therefore, in the first meeting, I had proposed, [“charity begins at home”] and so those of us who can contribute something to the Federation towards the creation of this branch should come forward. We should contribute something every month. That is how the members of the committee, who were unemployed, started contributing two or three rupees. Those who were employed contributed five rupees. Some people contributed ten rupees. Like that, every month we used to collect about sixty to seventy rupees.... gradually of course, the momentum gathered. Then some people, who had other sighted friends, also came forward. On 5th June, 1977, the branch was officially inaugurated by Mr. Rupavate, the Social Welfare Minister of Maharashtra. It proved to be a very well attended event. The president of NFB, Mr. Sadhan Chand Sengupta and some senior level representatives of NFB from Delhi like Lal Advani who was a senior blind civil servant had also come (Shah, 2005).

One of the long time state level activists spoke about the relationship between the Maharashtra branch of NFB and the NFB head office in Delhi. He recalled the strong association of the Maharashtra branch of NFB and the NFB India beginning from the days of the *lathi* charge incident of 1980. He summarized the growth of the Maharashtra branch of NFB in the following words:

During the incident of *lathi* charge on the blind activists by the Delhi Police in 1980, there were 16 of us from Maharashtra who went to attend the demonstration of March 16th. So far as I recollect, leave aside some couple of incidents, the relations of Maharashtra Federation and the NFBI [NFB of India] remained cordial. Wherever the NFBI took up any movement, Maharashtra also participated in it. Currently, we have about 3,000 members. We have got six regional branches and we have district branches at about 10-12 places. There was a time when we could not find a handful of blind comrades to get together in order to oppose any atrocity on us. But today, we can easily find fifty or hundred blind activists to protest against any wrong act. This is certain that we have got a strong organization (S.R. Pokhley, personal interview, June 15, 2005).

The state level leaders of Maharashtra participated not only in the national rally organized in Delhi on World Disabled Day on March 16, 1980 but also in the hunger strike organized by the national-level leadership in the beginning of August that year. Once they had completed these activities in Delhi, they were able to focus on state level issues upon their return to their home state. They initiated the first major advocacy activity of NFB in Mumbai to demand employment of the qualified blind. As Madhuri Desai, a highly committed and active female member of NFB branch of Maharashtra described, they started an effective movement in August 1980:

In the month of August, 1980, we started a movement to implement 3 per cent quota in jobs. Mr. Shankar Rao Chauhan was then the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. I sat on a fast unto death. I was then joined by others who included Professor Raghunath Rikvai. Most of them fasted for three days. The agitation lasted for a couple of days and then some eminent public personalities intervened and the Chief Minister Chauhan agreed to look into our demand of providing 3 per cent quota in 'C' and 'D' categories of jobs. Mrs. Mrinal Gore, Mrs. Ahilya Rangnekar, both of them was social workers and leaders of opposition. They used to agitate [carry out advocacy activities] for issues concerning the oppressed groups in Mumbai. Mrinal Gore fought for water. She is known as *pani wali bai* [the water woman] in Goregaon [slums of Mumbai]. Both of these social workers came and intervened. With their intervention, the Chief Minister was forced to agree to look into the issue of employability of blind people. The Chief Minister came with his secretary in the presence of these social workers and I called off my fast unto death after an assurance from him to set up a high-powered committee to look into this matter. We were also promised a piece of land for the use of our office, though we did not get it till 1995 despite our sustained follow up of this issue. One of our activists, Ganesh Sabre, was immediately offered the job of a peon in the Chief Minister's office and several other people were offered jobs in banks and other offices later on (Desai, 2005).

The struggle for employment had to be sustained throughout the 1980s. The activists organized a large-scale demonstration during the IYDP (1981), and the then Chief Minister Mr. Antulay agreed to identify the positions that were suitable for blind

job seekers (Desai, 2005). However, this did not ensure employment for the job seekers, and the struggle had to be continued.

In 1985, a demonstration was carried out demanding implementation of the 3% quota for the disabled in jobs (R. Rikvai, personal interview, June 24, 2005). The government promised to employ at least five blind people in each district (Rikvai, 2005). However, this was not implemented, so the activists had to launch a struggle to get it implemented. Thus, in 1987, a 3-day long fast unto death was carried out from July 15-17, under the leadership of Professor Raghunath Rikvai, as a culmination of the long drawn demonstration (Rikvai, 2005). The fast was called off after an assurance from the government. The Maharashtra government committed to fulfill the promise of employing at least five blind people in each district (a zone roughly equivalent to a county in the United States) of the state and almost 150 people were employed soon after that (Rikvai, 2005). With this overview of the struggle for employment in the state of Maharashtra, I now discuss the movement for employment in Kerala in the next section before concluding this chapter.

Origin of the Movement of the Organized Blind and the Struggle for Employment in Kerala

Kerala has been one of the most advanced states in terms of the movement of the organized blind in India. As noted in the previous two chapters, this movement began in the state of Kerala with the founding of the first advocacy organization of the blind, namely the Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB), in the fall of 1967. KFB is the first organization of the blind in India that was based on the philosophy of self-advocacy with a clear theoretical understanding of self-advocacy. In addition to being a self-advocacy

organization, KFB is also an organization that is committed to service delivery with a clearly articulated rights-based philosophy. Thus, Kerala is unique as a state in having a self-advocacy organization of the blind that is also committed to service delivery. Hence, Kerala was not just the first state to have the advantage of a formally founded organization of the blind based on the philosophy of self-advocacy, but is also a state that has developed a well-established state level advocacy organization combined with the element of a service delivery organization. In this section, I will be elaborating the attempts made by the KFB to seek employment through a sustained struggle during the 1980s. But in order to understand the evolution of the self-advocacy movement in Kerala, which created the basis for the subsequent struggle for right to employment, I will first briefly discuss the nature of KFB and the developments in the field of advocacy during the 1970s.

As informed by its long-term undisputed leader, Georgekutty Kareparampil, from the beginning, KFB followed a strict policy that blind people would have significant input into organizational matters:

As is the case with the NFB of USA and NFB in our country, only one-third strength of the total membership is allotted to the sighted in the KFB but they have no right to vote. They can only play the advisory role. They are just like our supporters. I am of the opinion that once we have sighted people in the organization at the executive level or at the level of the office bearers, we weaken our organization. Such situation divides the blind and the interest of the blind persons is distorted. Of course, at times, there have been tight competitions among various candidates for high-level executive positions, but that is among the blind themselves. Sometimes, in order to implement the programmes, we need the cooperation of the sighted people. During my tenure as General Secretary, I tried to develop the modus operandi to take the cooperation of the sighted people. We take the assistance of various social workers and that is well established in our programme (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 25, 2007).

Taking pride in the accomplishments of the large size and well-developed structure of the organization, Kareparampil further highlighted:

Kerala Federation was a state federation and as soon as I became the General Secretary in 1971, I visited various schools for the blind. We started various units in the blind schools and later on these units were reorganized as regional units of KFB. Then, as time went on, we started district wise units. By 1977, we had our units in all the districts and the membership grew to about six hundred. In all the 14 districts, we had the district units. This helped us to get in touch with the various districts of Kerala and also the involvement of the social workers from all the districts. Another structure was also established and that was state level forum for women, teachers and students. The student forum was established in 1979. Women's forum was established in 1980. The teacher's forum was established in 1982. We had an employee's forum as well, because at that time, there were about 25 blind employees working in different sectors. But that could not continue for long. It could continue only for a period of four to five years because they were settled in life and could not get much time to participate in it. Now, the structure is that we have the district units in every district, then students' forum, teachers' forum, and women's forum. All of them have their separate activities and the district units have their own activities, but the membership is given from the center, which is from Trivandrum [the capital city of the state where the headquarters of the KFB is located]. The people who want to join the Federation have to apply through the units and that application is scrutinized in Trivandrum by the General Secretary or President or Secretary on the recommendation of the district unit and then the membership is granted. Now, there are about 4,000 members (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 26, 2005).

In addition to being the largest state affiliate of the NFB in terms of the size of the organization in proportion to its population, KFB was also an organization that utilized a combination of methods of advocacy. It has now grown primarily into a service delivery organization and has been confining itself primarily to mild methods of advocacy through representation and persuasion. But when absolutely necessary, the leaders of KFB have never hesitated to adopt the methods of picketing, rallies, and token and indefinite hunger

strikes. To once again quote the long-term undisputed leader of the state who spelled out the methods of advocacy adopted by KFB depending upon the specific circumstance:

We have relations with all the political parties because we do not have any political affiliation. To get the political support, we have to adopt the method of representation. We have to meet people and we have to present our things in a very acceptable manner, logically and systematically. We have to argue our case, but that is not sufficient. We have to pursue our case through representation and develop a positive attitude among the people. So, we have been following the methods of representation, persuasion and then agitation if the earlier two methods of advocacy don't bring fruitful results. This has been the strategy of KFB and that is how we have been getting our things done (Kareparampil, 2005).

Kerala was the first state to introduce the quota system for the disabled in employment. From the early 1970s, KFB made its presence felt in the state of Kerala and succeeded in convincing state leaders to introduce the quota system for the disabled in jobs. As early as 1973, 1% of jobs were reserved for the disabled in State government Services in Kerala (Kareparampil, 2005). This made Kerala the first state to introduce the quota system in jobs for the disabled much before it was introduced in the Central Government and Public Undertakings' Services.

In 1978, the State Government appointed a one person-led commission for the handicapped known as the Omena Kunjamma Commission for the disabled that was headed by Ms. Omena Kunjamma. This Commission worked in close collaboration with the KFB. Once the Commission gave its recommendations in 1979, the government also worked in close collaboration with KFB to implement them in the state (Kareparampil, 2005). However, despite the introduction of these positive measures in the 1970s, the situation of the employment of the blind remained quite grim.

Kareparampil shared the frustration of KFB regarding the non-implementation of the quota for the blind as part of the quota for the disabled in State Government Services:

The state government had agreed for 1% reservation for the handicapped in Kerala. But it was not being implemented very strictly. In fact, it was 1% for all the handicapped, not the blind alone. The Government regularized or absorbed the blind for the first time in 1976. They [The Kerala State Government] did the same in 1980. The same demand was made in 1981 in the state (Kareparampil, personal interview, July 27, 2005).

Hence, despite the fact that Kerala was the first state to introduce the provision for a quota for the disabled in state services, not much headway was made in this regard until the early 1980s. So, as in most other states, Kerala too had a pretty grim situation regarding the implementation of the quota in jobs. The KFB therefore had to launch a sustained struggle for the absorption of blind people in jobs to get this provision for employment of the disabled implemented.

Taking advantage of the momentum created as a result of the movement for right to employment in Delhi in 1980 and the commemoration of the IYDP, the KFB launched a vigorous movement from the beginning of 1981:

On January 1, 1981, we had a big rally in Trivandrum. We reached to the Secretariat and we had a *dharna* there. We sat the whole day with fasting in front of the Secretariat. Then, the Chief Minister invited us. So, we met the Chief Minister and submitted a memorandum of rights as we call it. He was considerate. We gave the copies of our demands to all the ministers. Our most important demand was 3 per cent reservation in jobs especially for the blind. Enhancement of the stipend, primary level education to all the students, 60% jobs to be reserved for the visually impaired in the educational institutions for the blind etc. were other important demands. Now they have agreed about 50% job reservation in the institution for the blind.... Actually, in 1981 during the International Year of the Disabled, all those who were employed through employment exchanges at least for a day were regularized on their respective jobs. We also demanded implementation of the pension scheme for the disabled. As a result, we got

a special scheme for the pension of the disabled, which was introduced in 1982. That was also the result of the *dharna* [sit-in] (Kareparampil, 2005).

This description of some of the accomplishments in the first 2 years of the 1980s reflects that the first major series of advocacy activities carried out during the IYDP and the subsequent year did yield some results in meeting the demands of the activists in Kerala. However, similar to other parts of the country, the activists had to continuously maintain pressure on the state authorities. A sustained movement was therefore always needed to continuously press for the fulfillment of the demands of the employment of the blind as the number of unemployed qualified blind kept increasing. Therefore, another series of advocacy activities had to be launched first in 1984 and then in 1987 (Kareparampil, 2005). During both of these times, the demand for the absorption of the unemployed blind in suitable jobs remained a major focus of the movement.

The movement in 1984 began with a token *dharna* and was followed by an indefinite hunger strike:

There was an agitation from 1st August to 14th August. It was a hunger strike. We had a discussion with the Chief Minister on the eve of Independence Day [14th of August, 1984]. He agreed to most of our demands. Therefore, the reservation orders were issued for ensuring 3% reservations in 'C' and 'D' categories of posts [jobs] in the State Government Services in September of 1984. The only thing was that there was no special provision for the visually handicapped. However, there was a direction [instruction] that while implementing the job reservation; all the categories of handicapped should be taken into consideration to get equal representation. But this was just a recommendation and was not binding on the implementing officials to follow it. So, even though there was a direction that while implementing the reservation for 3 per cent in jobs, all the three categories of the orthopedically handicapped, the deaf and mute and the visually impaired should be considered, it was left to the discretion of the appointing authority to choose the candidate for the respective jobs. This went against the interests of the blind job seekers as the other handicapped received greater favors by the government while implementing this Memorandum for job reservation. So, we had another

agitation in 1987 demanding the special provision clearly specifying one per cent of the seats for the blind out of 3 per cent. Then, again we had an agitation in 1990-1991 (Kareparampil, 2005).

One big issue from 1981 onward for several years was the appointment of a blind person to the position of head master in the special school for the blind in Kerala:

In 1981, we had a qualified blind person who could become the headmaster of the blind school. There was no public instruction in our favor. We made this demand in all of our representations. All through 1981 onwards every time whenever there was a change in the government, we used to persuade this demand. This demand was also included in the agitation of 1984. At that time, Mr. K. Karunakaran was the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister and the Education Minister agreed to appoint a blind person on this post, but the Director of Public Instruction was not willing. As the administration was not willing, it could not be achieved till 1991. Finally, they agreed that the blind person can be appointed as a headmaster in an aided school and if he proved to be successful, then the General Memorandum of this effect can be issued. By that time, the Kerala Federation of the Blind had an aided school [which receives major government grants]. So we decided to promote Mr. N. Chandrashekhar Nayar, a senior assistant teacher, as the headmaster and this was approved by the State Government (G. Kareparampil, personal interview, July 29, 2005).

To summarize, Part II of this chapter dealing with the advocacy movement carried out in these states of the country, the discussion highlights the fact that, at times, it was much easier for the demonstrating blind activists to get their demands met if the highest authority in the state (i.e. the Chief Minister) was a sensitive and supportive person, but nothing was ever given to the blind people without a struggle. Just like the society at large, the state governments were ready to patronize the blind members of society through an approach based on charity, but were not ready to accept the fact that they deserved employment as a matter of right. The example of the response of the Chief Minister of Haryana in the late 1970s asking the qualified blind to go to temple and sing

bhajans instead of asking for a job is reflective of this approach. Even a progressive Chief Minister like Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who was considered to be a champion of social justice and rights of the *dalits* (oppressed castes groups) in India took the issue of employability of blind people as a humanitarian issue rather than as a matter of right.

The case of Haryana is still reflective of the patronizing attitude of the state officials. Despite a statutory enactment mandating 3% job reservation for the disabled under the PWD Act of 1995, the issue of employability of the disabled job seekers is still handled by a Committee created for the special recruitment of the blind under the chairmanship of the secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare. This is in violation of the spirit of the PWD Act of 1995. As elaborated in Chapter 7, according to this Act, 3% of the vacancies in Central and State Government jobs have to be granted to the disabled. Unless the philosophy of social justice based on the concept of rights for all is accepted, blind people will not get what they deserve as a matter of rights.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the second phase of the movement of the organized blind from 1980-1987. By the early 1980s, the Federation had grown in size and shape and the movement acquired a radical form during this phase. Hence, the government could not afford to be oblivious to the demands raised by the struggling activists. While occasionally a demand like the enactment of the legislation figured as an important demand under the demand charter, the predominant agenda of the struggle at the national and state levels throughout this phase of the movement was the demand for the right to employment. Providing jobs to the unemployed blind people by way of implementation of the provision of the Office Memorandum of 1976 addressed a major demand of

employment of the educated blind in urban India to some extent. After the IYDP, the Federation became slightly inactive in the capital city for sometime and during this dormant stage of the Federation, the National Blind Youth Association tried to fill this vacuum in the mid 1980s, but could not make much headway in this direction. Once a sizable number of qualified blind job seekers were absorbed in central and state government jobs, the Federation started broadening its agenda of struggle. Therefore, since the late 1980s, the agenda of the struggle began to be focused primarily on the demand for disability law addressing multiple issues including education, housing, and employment. In the next chapter I engage in an extensive discussion of the struggle for the enactment of disability law during the third phase of the movement.

CHAPTER 6

Claim of the Disabled for Social Justice and the Struggle for the Enactment of Disability Law: Phase III of the Movement of the Organized Blind (1988 -1995).

As explained in the first chapter and in the previous two chapters, I have divided the history of the movement of the organized blind into four phases on the basis of major turning points in its growth. Having engaged in an in-depth analysis of the initial two phases (1970-1978 and 1979-1987) in the previous two chapters, in this chapter I provide a detailed analysis of the movement during its third phase (1988-1995). I characterize the third phase as the period of struggle for the enactment of comprehensive disability rights legislation, popularly referred to in Hindi as '*viklang vidhayak*,' which in English means 'disability law.' I begin the chapter with a brief analysis of relevant constitutional provisions and the factors leading to the marginalization of the disabled in Indian society, as well as discussion of other developments, which were crucial in the process of creating the demand for the enactment of such a law.

The demand for enactment of disability law was an issue that arose sporadically during the early part of the 1980s. However, by the end of that decade, it became the an important focus of the agenda of the movement of the organized blind. This focus resulted in legislative protection of the rights of the disabled through the enactment of the Persons With Disabilities (equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation)

Act of 1995 (Government of India, 1996), popularly known as the “PWD Act.” The disabled citizens of India, thus, for the first time succeeded in acquiring protection of their rights through the enactment of comprehensive legislation. In addition to the PWD Act, there were three other laws enacted in India during the 1980s and 1990s that are directly related to the field of disability. These are: The Mental Health Act (1987); Rehabilitation Council Act of India Act (1992); and The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999) (Disability Manual, 2005, pp. 27-39). Along with these laws, India also ratified the United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1993), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1969), Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and most importantly, the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (“India ratifies U.N.C.R.P.D. and then Just forgets!” 2009). As the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) considered to be a turning point in ensuring the rights of the disabled in the United States (Shapiro, 1993), the enactment of the PWD Act, or ‘disability law’, has proved to be the most important development in providing protection to the rights of the disabled in India.

The process of enactment of the disability law needs to be traced historically in the post-independence period. I therefore begin this chapter with a discussion of the provisions related to disability in the Constitution of India, the exclusion of the disabled under the constitutional philosophy of positive discrimination, and the factors leading to the marginalization of the disabled in Indian society. I further provide a brief analysis of the

“socialistic character” of the Indian State in the context of disability and the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977 reserving 3% of positions for the disabled in government employment, a measure that had far reaching implications for the enactment of the disability law. Finally, in Part II, as the primary focus of this chapter, there is a detailed discussion of the struggle for the enactment of the disability law carried out during this phase of the movement of the organized blind in India. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2007).

PART I

Marginalization of the Disabled and their Claim for Social Justice

The Constitution of India and the issue of disability

As described in Part I of Chapter 3, most schools for the deaf, the blind, and the physically impaired in the pre-independence days were started and run by religious individuals or organizations. Most of these individuals and organizations were Christian missionaries from the West and the schools were run as charitable institutions. At the time of attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1947, it was therefore legitimized that matters relating to the disabled were the domain of religious and charitable organizations, but not the State. Thus, it was not considered necessary to incorporate provisions in the Indian Constitution relating to positive discrimination in favor of the disabled. The term “positive discrimination” is a concept that is similar to affirmative action under the Constitution of India (Basu, 2001; Kanter, 2003).

It is interesting to note that the vocabulary used in the Constitution of India at the time of its framing was quite comprehensive in addressing a variety of forms of oppression. Examination of the provisions relating to equality provides a view of the comprehensive character of the coverage of these forms of oppression acknowledged under the Constitution. These provisions related to the right to equality are contained in articles 14-18 (The Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 6-8). Article 14 deals with legal equality by ensuring equality before law and “equal protection of the laws.” On the other

hand, articles 15-16 prohibit discrimination based on various grounds. Article 17 abolishes the practice of 'untouchability' prevalent in India under which the low caste people were considered to be dirty and untouchable. Finally, Article 18 aims at preventing inequality in society on the basis of status arising out of State conferred titles. Conferment of titles by the Colonial State was a practice to patronize selected members of the elitist section of Indian society in order to distinguish them from common people (Basu, 2001). A further discussion of the grounds on which discrimination is prohibited according to the provisions of Articles 15 and 16 is useful in understanding the comprehensive character of the coverage of a variety of forms of oppression under the Constitution.

While Article 15 prohibits discrimination in general, Article 16 prohibits discrimination specifically in the context of public employment. Clause 1 of Article 15 stipulates that: "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them" (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 6). Similarly clause 2 of Article 16 states that "(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State" (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 7). However, under these two Articles (Article 15 and 16), an exception is made to the equality provisions to ensure positive discrimination in favor of marginalized sections. For example, clause 3 of Article 15 makes an exception in favor of women and children by directing that "(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children" (The Constitution

of India, 2004, p. 7). On the other hand, clause 4 makes an exception in favor of the ‘socially and educationally backward classes of citizens’ by mandating that

“Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes” (The Constitution of India, 2004, p.7). Similarly, clause 3 of Article 16 makes exception to ensure positive discrimination for the residents of specific places while clause 4 makes an exception in favor of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens in matters relating to public employment (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 7).

Thus, in the provisions relating to right to equality enshrined in the chapter on fundamental rights, discrimination was prohibited on a number of grounds such as caste, gender, religion, and race in order to create an equal society. But the framers of the Constitution did not regard disability as a form of oppression and so did not find it to be a marginalizing category. This was not unusual. Not until the 1990’s did countries begin to include disability as a category in anti-discrimination laws (Kanter, 2003).

There are only two places that contain a reference to disability in the original Constitution enacted in 1950, that is, Article 41 in the chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy and the 7th Schedule of the Constitution spelling out the subjects to be covered by the State Governments. Article 41 uses the term “disablement” in the context of old age, undeserved want or sickness as it says:

The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 18).

The only other reference to disability in the original Constitution occurred under entry 9 of the list of subjects to be covered under the jurisdiction of State Government within the 7th Schedule. It is stipulated that the matter pertaining to “Relief of the disabled and unemployable” is the responsibility of the State Governments (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 224).

While analyzing any provision contained in the original Constitution of India, it is important to keep in mind that this Constitution was framed during the second half of the 1940s (Basu 2001). Therefore, with this in mind, it is clear that the term ‘disablement’ is not synonymous with the current usage of the term “disability” connoting the social construction of disability. The fact that the Constitution’s authors included ‘disablement’ as a target of welfare, along with old age, sickness, unemployability, or any other undeserved want, reflects that they understood disability purely as a medical condition and not as a form of oppression or marginalization. At best, what they had in mind is the functional incapacity of an individual arising out of physical or mental impairment. They clearly did not consider disabled people as productive citizens who deserve equal opportunities for growth and participation in the society. It is quite clear that the reference to disability in these two places in the Constitution also reflects the fact that the constitution makers accorded a very low priority to this issue.

Article 41 of the Constitution falls under Part IV. Provisions in this part of the Constitution contain Directive Principles of State Policy, which have been borrowed from

the Irish constitution (Basu 2001). These Principles basically serve as guidelines for policy and legislation makers and the State is not required to implement them (Basu 2001). In other words, the Articles contained under this part are non-justiciable, which means that a citizen cannot approach the court if the provisions of this part are violated (Basu 2001). Considering the fact that disability was placed along with old age, sickness or what was considered to be any other 'undeserved want' under the constitutional provisions, which are non-justifiable, reflects the apathetic approach of the constitution makers toward the disabled. Hence, it is clear that the Constitution-makers considered the disabled members of the society as the targets of welfare depending upon the availability of resources (Erb & Harriss-White, 2002).

As mentioned above, in addition to Article 41, the other reference to disability is in the context of listing of subjects to be covered by the State Governments. The Constitution of India has divided the subjects falling in the jurisdiction of Central (federal) and the State Governments respectively into three categories (The Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 106-111). Subjects of high importance fall under the jurisdiction of the Central Government within the Central List while less important subjects fall under the joint jurisdiction of the Central and the State Governments within the Concurrent List and the State List (The Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 106-111). The fact that subject relating to disability was kept under the State List demonstrates the low level of priority accorded to disability by the makers of the Indian Constitution.

Having briefly discussed the marginalization of the disabled under the

Constitution, I would like to argue that the disabled deserve a greater amount of positive discrimination by the Indian State than other categories of marginalized groups in society. This is not to say that other groups such as the *dalits* (oppressed castes), which have been recognized by the Indian State as rightful claimants based on the concept of positive discrimination, had no legitimate claim. But it needs to be emphasized that given the level of marginalization, the disabled constitute a highly deserving section of Indian society for the positive discrimination enshrined in the constitutional philosophy. In order to analyze the marginalization of the disabled in the Indian society and present their claim for social justice within the Indian State, I now discuss the factors leading to their marginalization.

Factors Leading to the Marginalization of the Disabled in Indian Society

A prolonged process of constant discrimination and deprivation of opportunities has rendered and continues to place disabled people in a state of extreme marginalization, much more so than other marginalized sections in the society. I argue that the disabled experience a much greater degree of marginalization and oppression than any other underprivileged group in Indian society due to their exclusion from the mainstream of community life and deprivation of opportunities to participate fully in society. I begin with a discussion of socio-economic factors leading to marginalization of the disabled. This is followed by a discussion of physical-environmental and political factors.

Socio-Economic Factors

Over a period of time, caste came to be associated with birth under the traditional interpretation of Hindu philosophy. Hence, people who were born in a particular caste

were deprived of various opportunities of intellectual and economic growth due to the caste affiliation that was imposed on them (Thorat & Deshpande, 2001). According to the *karma* theory, *dalits* were considered to be responsible for their plight due to the bad *karma* in the past lives (Thorat & Deshpande, 2001). In the same way, the disabled were considered to deserve their bad fate due to sins committed in their past lives (Bhatt, 1963). Hence, their marginalization was justified on the basis of their past sins and was not to be attributed to a lack of opportunities in their current life.

There is a similarity between the deprivation of opportunities for the disabled and the *dalits*. While the *dalits* were denied opportunities for empowerment because of their ascriptive identities of being born *dalits*, the disabled were deprived of similar opportunities as a result of perceivably having committed sins in their past lives. Thus, the disabled, under the traditional *karma* theory, remained victimized for their past lives' sins and were not granted equal opportunities for their empowerment. Instead their survival depended upon religious institutions like temples where they were fed and provided with opportunities to improve their next life by devoting themselves to the cause of *Bhakti* (religious devotion) (Bhatt, 1963). Hence, there is significant similarity in the social construction of disability and caste and the consequent stigma attached to both of them in the context of Indian society. Both are associated with the *karma* theory according to which, those who committed sins in their past lives were either born in *dalit* families or were the victims of mental or physical impairments as punishment for their past deeds. However, the economic implications of the social construction of caste and disability were different for the disabled and the *dalits*.

The *dalits* had limited opportunity to participate in the economic process. They

were allowed to participate in the economy only to the extent that they were serving the interests of the dominant caste and not empowering themselves by exploiting the economic opportunities. Therefore, their participation in the economy was merely a source of survival for them and not anything beyond that (Thorat & Deshpande, 2001). The disabled, on the other hand, were expected to devote themselves solely to religious duty in order to improve their next life, and were, thus, completely deprived of any participation in the economy. This rendered them completely unproductive and they were left to the mercy of the society for their survival (Bhatt, 1963; Erb & Hariss-White, 2002). Therefore, under the traditional Hindu philosophy based on *karma* theory, the disabled were relegated to a low socio-economic and unproductive status that led to their exclusion from society.

Physical - Environmental Factors

The real challenge that disabled people have to deal with is not their own physical impairments, but the inaccessible environment. While mobility-impaired people have to deal with all kinds of physical barriers, blind people also find it hard to commute or walk independently in large cities as well as in the small towns and countryside. The cities and the countryside are full of stray animals and there are very few sidewalks in the countryside and small cities and towns.

As I (the author, see appendix 2 for a detailed auto-biographical note) have observed myself through travelling in various parts of the country, most places in almost all parts of the country are completely inaccessible for mobility impaired people with the exception of rarely accessible buildings in relatively modern cities such as Delhi or

Bangalore. Wherever there are sidewalks in the cities, they are full of potholes, poles, trees, as well as standing water or manure, and these prove to be great obstacles even for blind people. In addition to this, the undisciplined traffic makes it very difficult and hazardous for a blind person to negotiate his or her way around most of the large cities. Thus, the obstacles within the physical infrastructure and environment create significant challenges for blind or physically impaired people. Hence, the physical-environment impedes participation in day-to-day life and is, in fact, a strong marginalizing factor.

The situation is far worse in the villages as the existing infrastructure is not at all geared to the mobility needs of physically impaired and blind people. In a country where large chunks of the population still live in villages, blind and physically impaired people are deprived of participation in the village economy. They, therefore, become dependent on other family members for their survival and well being, which makes them vulnerable to oppression and discrimination, sometimes even within their own family. The disabled therefore, not only suffer oppression and discrimination from the society at large, but in many cases, by their family members as well.

Political Factors

As noted later in this chapter as well as the next chapter, one of the major criticisms by the blind activists earlier and now the disabled activists is that the issue of disability is rarely discussed by politicians during their election campaigns. Even the leftist parties, some of which have been theoretically supportive of the interests of the disabled, hardly keep disability on their political agenda. This apathy toward disability as a social issue can be traced to the days of freedom struggle against the Colonial State.

Caste was the only form of oppression that caught the attention of the freedom fighters and the early leaders during the formative years of the Indian Republic. Therefore, while gender was at least theoretically recognized in the Indian Constitution as a marginalizing factor, caste was the main target of social reform under the philosophy of social justice contained in the Constitution of India. This is reflected in various provisions, particularly the provisions relating to Right to Equality from Articles 14 to 18 (The Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 6-8). Therefore, the *dalits* were recognized as influential actors in Indian politics from the early years of the independent Indian State. A quota of 22.5% was reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government jobs, educational institutions as well as the state and the central legislatures under the original Constitution as it was implemented in 1950 itself (The Constitution of India, 2004, p. 143).

It is now a well-established theory that disability is the product of social construction (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Davis, 2002; Linton, 1998; Oliver, 1990, 1996). But disability was not even theoretically acknowledged as a form of discrimination at the time the Constitution was framed. Thus, due to the lack of the representation of the voice of the disabled in the anti-colonial struggle, the construction of disability was not addressed in the original Constitution in an effective way nor were there any perceivable examples of initiatives to address disability issues through policies and legislation during the formative years of the Indian republic.

It would be very naive to think of any possibility of considering any quota for the disabled in Parliament, but the disabled have hardly been recognized in the political process and continue to be neglected. Therefore, as Erb and Harriss-White (2002) rightly

conclude: “In India, positive discrimination for disabled people lags far behind that for scheduled castes and tribes” (p. [(I)]). Hence, the disabled remain highly excluded from the political process.

Thus, a combination of social, physical-environmental, and political factors contribute to tremendous marginalization of disabled people, in many ways a marginalization far greater than that that is experienced by other groups such as the *dalits*. The disabled not only have to deal with a social construction of disability that is similar to the social construction of caste, but in addition they are subjected to further marginalization due to the factors discussed in the preceding paragraphs. This marginalization of the disabled is often neglected in the literature on social justice and marginalization of various groups in India. In the next section, I engage in a brief discussion of the lack of recognition of disability as a marginalizing category under the social philosophy practiced by the Indian State during its formative stage.

The Socialist State and the Disabled

After the attainment of independence, India adopted the mixed economy model and the Indian State claimed itself as a liberal socialist state based on the ideology of positive liberalism. Based on this philosophy, the public sector was expected to play a preeminent role and the private sector was to play a secondary role (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). In January 1955, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and also the leader of the Congress Party (which was then in power), personally moved a resolution at the Avadi session of the Party committing the Indian State as a whole to the principle that "planning should take place with a view to the establishment of a socialistic pattern of

society where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control" (Narang, 1996, p. 543). Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) summarized this well in their leading work on the political economy of the Indian State,

India's ideological consensus and Constitution featured socialism along with secularism and democracy. For Nehru, socialism meant using the planned development of an industrial society to eliminate poverty, provide social justice, create a self-reliant economy, and assure national independence and security in world politics. In a mixed economy, the state would occupy the commanding heights. The socialist state would serve society by providing collective and public goods from which everyone would benefit. Equally important, concentrations of private economic power were to be eliminated or controlled so that they could not appropriate state authority or resources or unduly influence the choice and implementation of state policy (p. 62).

This emphasis on the philosophy leading to the establishment of the socialistic pattern of society was reflected in various Industrial Policy Resolutions (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987, p. 255) and the socialistic purposes, as defined under this philosophy included investment in the social sectors like education; health care; and infrastructural development such as roads, transportation, and railways (Narang, 1996, pp. 543-544). The underlying emphasis of this model was that the State was expected to play an active role in promoting the interests of the marginalized sections of society through the ownership and control of resources. Thus, there was a consensus, at least theoretically, that as a socialist State India was officially committed to the interests of what was described under the Constitution as the "weaker sections" of society (Constitution of India, 2004, p. 18).

As explained in Chapter 3, the first major development in the field of disability during the early years of the newborn Indian State was the creation of a position under the Ministry of Education through the Union Public Service Commission (the recruiting body for civil servants in Central Government jobs) in 1947. It is worth repeating here

that Lal Advani, the first and only blind civil servant in the last century, was appointed to this position in order to implement the recommendations of the Committee on Blindness that were introduced in the declining years of British rule (Kitchlu, 1991, p. 5). It was since then that the Indian State undertook the task of working in the field of disability. However, as also noted in Chapter 3, if a progressive leader like Maulana Azad had not been in power, this position would have been abolished within a short time period. Beyond the creation of this position, there was no clear policy in the field of disability (L. Advani, personal interview, December 27, 2004). This illustrates the low priority accorded to work in the field of disability in the formative years of the Indian State.

The indifferent approach of the State toward disability related issues, particularly in regard to public employment, continued for almost 3 decades until an office memorandum was issued by the Government in 1977 mandating 3% quota in selected government service jobs for the disabled. This was the first landmark development recognizing the legal rights of the disabled to be employed in public employment and as explained in the previous two chapters that following the issuance of this office memorandum, the blind activists launched a sustained struggle to get it implemented. The history of comprehensive legislation regarding the rights of the disabled in India has to be traced back to the issuance of this Order. I therefore, now discuss the historical background of this Memorandum before proceeding to the analysis of the struggle for the enactment of the disability law.

Issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977

According to Lal Advani, who formulated the Office Memorandum of 1977, the history

of its issuance dates back to the time of the India-Pakistan war of 1971:

On 17th December 1971, when India won the war against Pakistan, Mrs. Indira Gandhi [Prime Minister] announced in Lok Sabha that she would bring forward a bill reserving 2% vacancies in government jobs for the war disabled. On the 18th morning, I was summoned by the Home Secretary and asked to prepare a draft of the bill in two days. I told him that it would be impossible to do so, but I would try. I prepared a bill and sent it to the Law Ministry for vetting (L. Advani, personal interview, January 31, 2005).

However, Advani further explained that it was not easy to introduce a quota system in employment even for the war disabled:

The Attorney General expressed the opinion that the bill was ultra vires of the constitution because its Article 16 (1) guaranteed equality of opportunity to all citizens. And so no discrimination in favor of the disabled could, therefore, be made. I argued back that 'making unequal citizens, equal, was part of the concept of equality'. Therefore, the bill was not ultra vires of the Constitution. After a lot of argument, the Attorney General agreed and said that the Government could go ahead with the bill, but he felt that Supreme Court would strike it down. The bill was finally prepared, vetted by the law ministry and sent to P.M.'s office for final approval. Unfortunately, the file never came back from the P.M.'s office. Therefore, the effort to reserve vacancies for the war disabled was aborted (Advani, 2005).

Thus, in the absence of vigorous advocacy needed to pursue such an important matter, the issue was forgotten and the file containing this announcement was buried in the archives of the Parliament. But Advani's perseverance in pushing this matter through his contacts in the government circle as well as the demand by the organized blind for jobs reservation enabled Advani to modify the draft to introduce a quota for three categories of disability instead of only the war disabled.

The Congress Government, which had committed to enact such legislation, lost power in the elections of 1977 (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987, pp. 240-245), but the issue did not die. Lal Advani, who was quietly pursuing this matter, once again took it up with

the newly formed government after the elections of March 1977. In the absence of effective advocacy by any organization for the introduction of such a drastic measure, it was not an easy task to move the file through a big hierarchy of bureaucracy. But it is clear that such a remarkable development was possible primarily because of the intense perseverance of Advani in pursuing this matter with the high-level power circles of the Central Government:

I made inquiries from the Department and Law Ministry which informed that this could be done by an executive order [Office Memorandum]. Accordingly, a note proposing a reservation in all classes of posts was made, but the general feeling was that it would be better to start in the group 'C' and 'D' categories of jobs. All the States were consulted. Most of them favored the idea. The Attorney General was again opposed to this plan on the ground that it would be ultra vires of the constitution. ... I spoke to the minister, Mr. Prakash Chandra in the Janta Government. I told him that Supreme Court was unlikely to strike it down. Both the minister and I went to Mr. Morarji Bhai Desai, the then P.M. [Prime-Minister] and requested him to take the risk in the hope that no one would challenge the Order nor would the Supreme Court strike it down. Therefore, on 15th July 1977, the minister made a sue motto statement in the Lok Sabha [lower house of Indian parliament] about reserving 3% vacancies, one per cent each for the blind, and the deaf and orthopedically handicapped in the group 'C' and 'D' post in the Central Government and public sector undertakings. Thus, 15 July 1977 would be regarded as a watershed in the history of employment of the disabled in the Central Government Services and Public Undertakings. Similar order was issued by a number of State Governments (Advani, 2005).

It is true that this quota system was introduced in a very limited way as it was confined to selected categories of jobs, which reflects the prejudice of the government officials and the lack of recognition of the capability of the disabled. But despite the tremendous limitations of this Memorandum, its issuance definitely marked a great beginning toward recognition of the disabled by the Indian State as the legitimate and deserving targets of social justice due to a prolonged history of deprivation and discrimination leading to their marginalization. It, therefore, needs to be acknowledged

that given the time framework of its issuance in the late 1970s, it was an immensely important development in the field of employability of the disabled. For the first time, there was recognition of the right of the disabled to be employed in the Central Government Services through legal protection.

The issuance of this Memorandum reflected the rightful claim of the disabled to be covered under the concept of affirmative action in accordance with the philosophy of positive discrimination enshrined in the Constitution of India, as outlined in the provisions for right to equality. It was, thus, a very positive development representing a shift from a charity based approach to a right-based approach. It provided an impetus to launch a struggle for the right to employment and laid the groundwork for the longer struggle for disability legislation. With this background of the history of the formulation of this Memorandum and its significance, I now turn to a discussion of the movement carried out by the blind activists for the enactment of a broad disability law.

PART II

The Struggle for the Enactment of the Disability Law

While the PWD Act was finally enacted in 1995, it was the result of a long drawn out process. A number of developments took place in the 1980s which contributed to its enactment. The most important of these developments included the formation of a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Baharul Islam called the Bahrul Islam Committee in 1986 (Bhambhani, 2004, p. 17). The Committee submitted its report in 1988 (Bhambhani, 2004, p. 17). Similarly, following the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977, a draft disability law was prepared in 1981, the International Year of the Disabled Persons (Mani, 1988, pp. 56-58). In the following pages, I give a brief description of these developments. But, I first mention some examples of a few advocacy activities carried out as a part of struggle for the enactment of the disability law during the early 1980s in order to provide a chronological description of this struggle prior to the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind.

Demand for Enactment of the Disability Law during the Early 1980s

While I have argued that the timeframe of activity by the Federation that was focused on demand for enactment of the disability law was the period from 1988-1995, it needs to be acknowledged that there has always been an overlap of issues occupying the agenda of the blind activists. For instance, the issue of employment was also part of the agenda

from 1988-1995, and the demand for legislation had been part of the agenda even prior to 1988. The chronological phases that I have identified represent the focus of the struggle during that time period. In fact, the demand for enactment of disability law was very much on the agenda of the movement from the early 1980s. I now briefly describe some of the instances in which this demand was raised during the earlier phase of the movement prior to 1988.

There were several occasions when the activists of the movement of the organized blind, particularly the Federationists demanded enactment of legislation in the early 1980s. One such demand was made in 1980 itself. As a result, a private bill was proposed in Lok Sabha in 1980 by the then sitting Member of Parliament from the opposition party, Professor Madhu Dandvate (S. K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005). But the focus of the movement at that time was on the demand for employment of the blind and the Member of Parliament who proposed this bill had little support in Parliament from other members whether from the ruling party or any other opposition party. Thus, the bill never passed and was buried in the archives of the Parliament's files (Rungta, 2005).

One instance in which the demand for the enactment of disability law figured prominently was the demonstration at the end of 1982. Addressing a press conference on December 24, 1982, the Federation leader Santosh Kumar Rungta announced that his organization would hold a rally on January 6, 1983 to press for the fulfillment of two demands, that is, opposing the government's plan to convert the National Institute of Visually Handicapped located at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh into an autonomous body and demanding the enactment of a disability law. The following press coverage from two

selected newspapers cited below illustrates the tone of advocacy in which this announcement was made:

The National Federation of the Blind today announced that it would take out a rally to the Prime Minister's house on January 6 if the Government did not take steps to introduce legislation for the welfare of the disabled in the coming Parliament session. Addressing a press conference today, the President of the Federation Mr. S.K. Rungta said that the Prime Minister had in the beginning of 1981, the International Year of the Disabled, given an assurance to enact legislation for the welfare of the handicapped. But the government had done nothing in this regard he said. He added that the Department of the Social Welfare had not acted on its promise to convert the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, the one institute for the blind run by the government of India into a registered society. He says, ["the authorities had started a move to convert the institute into a registered society under the Society's Registration Act. But the inmates as well as the Federation wanted that autonomy to the Institute should be given by statute in line with the UGC"]. The inmates had been on strike for the last 18 days and the authorities had converted the Institute into a police camp and they are not prepared for a dialogue ("Blind to Hold Rally if Demands Go Unheeded," 1982).

Mr. S.K. Rungta, President of the National Federation of the Blind said here today that the Federation might be forced to organize a rally before Prime Minister's residence on January 6 to stress that the promised legislation for the disabled be brought in the coming session of the Parliament. Addressing a Press Conference here today he said that another demand of the Federation was to stop the move to convert the Institute of the Visually Handicapped, Dehradun, the only Institute for the blind run by the government into a registered society. He said that the Federation is not against the autonomy but wanted that it should be done by a statute in line with the University Grants Commission. 110 inmates of the Institute have started a struggle against this move and the Institute has become a camping ground of the police, he said ("Blind's Rally Threatened," 1982).

This tone of the demand by the Federation for the enactment of a disability law sounds quite aggressive, but it is clear that this demand was combined with the demand for the prevention of conversion of the National Institute of Visually Handicapped (NIVH) into an autonomous institute. As mentioned in Chapter 3, NIVH is an apex level

government run institute in the field of blindness. Therefore, making it a completely autonomous institute would have meant that the activists would not have been in a position to influence any kind of decision making by the authorities if those decisions went against the interests of the blind community. Hence, the issue regarding the autonomy of NIVH was the most pressing demand of the time. It, therefore, required the urgent and complete attention of the activists. Thus, even if demand for the enactment of the disability law was on the agenda of the proposed demonstration, the activists were primarily focused on preventing the conversion of NIVH into an autonomous institute.

As mentioned in another newspaper article, enactment of the disability law was to be one of the demands during the proposed rally of June 11th, 1984 organized by the Federation under the leadership of its General Secretary, Sat Kumar Singh:

In a letter written to the Prime Minister, Mr. Singh said that on January 5, 1981 it was announced that a legislation for the disabled would be brought during the International Year for the Disabled to give legal protection to the blind welfare programmes. Draft legislation was submitted by the committee set up for the purpose to the Government in November 1981. Similarly, the Prime Minister had written in 1980 for identification of jobs for blind in all the departments. But no progress had been made on both the fronts despite directions by the Labour Minister in 1981 to launch a special drive to find jobs for the blind.... Mr. Singh also complained that there was a move to convert the Government of India run National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, Dehra Dun, into a registered society. This was being done on the pretext of giving more autonomy and make it more effective ("Blind Federation to Hold Rally on June 11," 1984).

However, this rally was cancelled due to public unrest in Delhi because of the military operation at Golden Temple in Punjab against the Sikh leaders demanding

secession of the State of Punjab from India (“Call for Rally near P.M.’s House Withdrawn,” 1984; “Blind Men Called off Rally,” 1984).

Call for the enactment of disability law was made several times from 1985-1987 (“Blind Men Seek Law for Disabled,” 1985; “Demonstration of the Blind for Their Demands,” 1985; “Rally by Blind outside P.M. House,” 1985; “Blind to Justice,” 1987). However, a sustained focus on the demand for enactment of the disability law effectively gained momentum only from late 1988 onward. In the following section, I discuss the shift of focus in the agenda of the movement from employment of the blind to enactment of disability law. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the progress of the movement during its third phase, including a chronological description of the series of advocacy activities led by the blind activists. I begin this discussion with a brief description of the factors that contributed to this shift in focus of the organized blind.

Factors Leading to the Demand for the Disability Law

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed certain developments in India which were supported by an international atmosphere that legitimized the advocacy approach in the field of disability. These developments provided an impetus to the movement led by the NFB for demanding enactment of the disability law. I will return to the discussion of these developments at the end of this chapter as well as in the next chapter, but it is imperative to mention that there were broadly two identifiable developments that took place during the late 1980s leading to a change in the focus from employment of blind people in the government sector to the demand for enactment of the disability law by the

NFB. These were: (1) a special recruitment drive to employ a sizable number of eligible unemployed blind people in 1987 and (2) submission of the Justice Baharul Islam Committee Report in 1988 strongly recommending the enactment of a disability law.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the lost leadership of Santosh Kumar Rungta was restored in 1986 and he revived the vigor of the Federation. Also as elaborated further in the previous chapter, after his return to power, Rungta focused on pressuring the government to launch a special recruitment drive to fill a long-standing backlog of jobs in the C and D categories of Public Undertakings and Central Government Services. This led to the employment of 239 blind people by early 1988. The success of the recruitment drive also boosted the morale of the leadership and revitalized its strength. Also, once that recruitment drive was completed and a good number of qualified blind were absorbed in different jobs, the Federation was relatively free to focus its attention on the struggle for the enactment of disability rights legislation.

As noted earlier in this chapter, a draft disability law was prepared during the International Year of the Disabled Persons in 1981 (Mani, 1988, pp. 56-58). But it was rejected by a senior bureaucrat of the Ministry of Social Welfare, now called the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the ministry that deals with disability related issues (L. Advani, personal interview, January 21, 2005). However, the most important development in relation to the introduction of disability law was the formation of a committee under the chairmanship of a former judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Baharul Islam, in 1986 (Bhambhani, 2004, p. 17). This step was taken by the regime of

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Justice Baharul Islam Committee submitted its report in early 1988 (Abidi, 2000). The Committee was headed by a senior legal expert who was highly respected by those in power within the government. The Committee's strong recommendations for the introduction of disability legislation proved to be a watershed development leading toward the introduction of such legislation. Similar to the recruitment drive discussed above, the Committee's recommendations were a great morale booster for the leadership of NFB to make this issue a priority. Hence, following these two major developments—the special recruitment drive of 1987 and the submission of the report by the Bahrul Islam Committee recommending the need for the introduction of a disability law-- it was an ideal time to launch a movement for the enactment of such a law starting from 1988 onward.

Santosh Kumar Rungta was re-elected as the General Secretary of the Federation during its bi-annual Convention in September 1988. The team of leaders who were elected or re-elected made it clear that the demand for enactment of the disability law would be their highest priority and raised this demand through a press statement after they resumed their office (“The Bill for the Disabled is in Flux,” 1988; “Anguish on Delay in Making Law for the Disabled,” 1988). This group of board members, led by Rungta, organized a rally in early December 1988. During that rally, they vehemently criticized the government for not making sincere efforts to enact the law by implementing the recommendations of the Justice Baharul Islam Committee, which had submitted its report during the early part of the year (“Blind Protest against Govt's Apathy,” 1988). As elaborated further in the following press coverage, the primary focus of that rally was on

the demand for enactment of the disability law in addition to the quota in government jobs:

The blind marched from Paharganj to place their long pending demands. Among their major demands are the reservation in the government jobs and a comprehensive legislation to protect the interest of the disabled persons. The blind men also staged demonstrations outside various government offices on Thursday (“Members of National Federation of the Blind Marching towards Boat Club,” 1988).

This rally marked the beginning of a series of advocacy activities leading to a strong movement by the Federation in 1989 primarily to lobby for enactment of the disability law. I next analyze this movement during that year.

The Movement for Disability Law in 1989

While the advocacy activities involving demonstration aimed at demanding enactment of the disability law happened to be organized by the Federation at the end of 1988, it was during the ensuing year that a sustained struggle was focused on the fulfillment of this demand. Starting in the end of December 1988, a number of rallies were held with the agenda of demanding enactment of the law and finally a 43-day long sustained movement was launched beginning on July 17th, 1989 to pursue this agenda. For the most part of 1989 the Federation persistently pressured the government to fulfill this demand.

The first of the series of activities carried out by the Federation in 1989 was a 24-hour picket in Delhi on January 25, the eve of Republic Day. The activists chose Raj Ghat, Delhi, the cremation site of Mahatma Gandhi, for picketing, as this site always receives a lot of attention from the media and visitors from India and abroad on Republic

Day. As described in the newspaper, this daylong action also included picketing of government offices in various state capitals where the Federation had some sort of base:

The blind staged *dharna* in the capitals of all states. It was organized by the National Federation of the Blind. It was started today and will continue for 24 hours. About hundred blind persons have been picketing here while sitting in Raj Ghat since morning...The delegates of the Federation had met the Prime Minister and the Minister of Welfare in the past and submitted a demand charter. The Prime Minister had assured to fulfill their demands in the coming Budget Session. According to Mr. Rungta, such promises had been made several times even in the past but if this time, the promise is not fulfilled they will launch a nationwide protest. The Federation plans to launch *dharna* from the very first day of the Budget Session of the Parliament (“Blind Staged *Dharna*,” 1989).

This event was symbolic of future action by the Federation. Through this, the activists meant to warn the government that they would launch a sustained movement if no initiative was taken in the next few weeks to address the issue of the disability law before the beginning of the Budget Session of Parliament.

It is worth pointing out that the Parliament of India usually meets three times per year. These three sessions of Parliament are called the “Budget Session,” “Monsoon Session,” and “Winter Session” (Narang, 1996, pp. 222-245). The Budget Session is held in the spring of every year while the Monsoon and Winter Sessions are held during the monsoon and winter seasons of the year respectively. The Budget Session of Parliament usually begins in the later part of February and lasts until the middle of May. The government budget for the next financial year is discussed and approved during this Session (Narang, 1996, pp. 222-245).

While the activists organized a large-scale rally during the Budget Session of Parliament, they engaged in a milder form of advocacy prior to that. First, they organized a meeting in the middle of February with the members of Parliament belonging to the constituents of the coalition government. The focus of this meeting was on the need for enactment of the legislation and, as reported in the press, the Federationists were able to convince the members of Parliament who attended this meeting that it was possible to reach consensus on this issue: “Mr. S. Satyanath Reddi MP [Member of Parliament], TDP [Telugu Desam Party] said, “their problems hardly permitted any difference of opinion... With participation of all, it is possible to persuade the government” (“Political Parties Jointly Focused on the Genuine Difficulties of the Disabled,” 1989). This was followed by a 2-day discussion regarding enactment of the disability law in the end of February. It was inaugurated by Jagdish Tytler, a Central Government Minister, and was attended by about 400 participants from different parts of the country (“Legislation for the Disabled Urged,” 1989; “The Demand for Passing the Legislation for the Disabled,” 1989).

This lobbying before the beginning of the Budget Session of Parliament did not yield any effective results and the government once again proved to be apathetic to the interests of blind and other disabled people as the issue of introducing the bill for the disability law was not placed on the agenda of the Budget Session. Nor did the issue concerning the blind receive any government attention in the budgetary allocation for the next financial year. This prompted the Federation to organize a large-scale rally on March

6th. As reported in the press coverage, the one unique feature of this rally was that it was also attended by members of other disability groups:

More than 500 blind and disabled persons demonstrated at Boats Club here today to press their demand for legislation for the disabled. The rally which was organized by the National Federation of the Blind and the Welfare Society for the Disabled started from the office of the NFB at Paharganj at 9 a.m. ("The Disabled Demand Legislation," 1989).

In addition to the entry of other disability groups into the advocacy process during this rally organized by the Federation, another unique development that took place simultaneously was the adoption of the advocacy approach by the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB). As reported in the coverage by another leading national daily, AICB organized a parallel rally on this day:

The blind held two separate rallies under different banners in the city on Monday to press implementation of the common demand — legislation for the disabled, which would ensure employment for them. The demand has been raised time and again by both, the National Federation of the Blind and the All-India Confederation of the Blind. Despite the assurances by the government, the demands remained unfulfilled. On Monday, both the organizations converged on Boat Club separately. Although the rallies were separate yet the leaders of the rallies were making similar remarks about the government's apathy and disinterest in helping the visually handicapped ("Blind Hold Rallies," 1989).

As discussed in detail in the fourth chapter, the AICB was formed after the major split in the Federation in 1978 and had confined itself basically to the execution of service delivery projects. The organization of this parallel rally by AICB was an exceptional event that marked a shift in its approach from being completely opposed to the advocacy-based approach to an acceptance of this approach. A brief analysis of this

new trend of involvement in the politics of advocacy by service delivery organizations such as AICB follows in the next chapter.

Following the two simultaneous rallies, both the NFB and AICB met the Minister of Social Welfare for the state, Rajendra Kumari Vajpayee, and delivered the memorandum to her. She assured them that the government would try to enact the disability legislation in that session of the parliament (“Blind People Demand Law for Job Reservation,” 1989). As in the past, this promise was not fulfilled, but this time the Federation was persistent in pursuing this demand.

Once it became clear that the government was not willing to introduce the bill for the disability law in the Budget Session of Parliament, the Federationists organized a large-scale rally on the 4th of May just before the Session was about to come to a close. They insisted on meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss their demands and the meeting took place on May 8th (“P.M. Grants Audience to Blind,” 1989). During this meeting, the Prime Minister assured the Federationists that he would address their demands effective immediately, including demands such as the promotion of blind people who were employed during the specific period of time from (D) categories of jobs to (C) categories of jobs and fill the backlog of reserved jobs for them in the Central Government Departments and Public Undertakings (“P.M. Grants Audience to Blind,” 1989). Also, as reported in the press coverage, there was a commitment from the government to introduce the legislation:

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on Monday assured a delegation of the National Federation of the Blind that legislation for the disabled would be introduced in the Parliament in the Monsoon session. A delegation which discussed its long pending demand with Mr. Gandhi decided to postpone their proposed agitation following the assurances (Blind Assured of Legislation," 1989).

Based on this assurance from the highest authority of the country, the Federation decided to suspend its movement until the next session of Parliament with the hope that the words of the highest authority would be honored this time.

After witnessing the momentum created by the NFB, the AICB also decided to initiate a debate on this issue. It soon organized a 2-day conference to discuss the need for immediate enactment of the disability law. In this conference, the Confederation invited the major policy makers of the country including Jagdish Tytler, a leading member of the ruling Congress Party along with Rama Devi, the Secretary in the Law Ministry who happened to be one of the topmost bureaucrats dealing with the process of legislative enactment ("Issues Relating to the Facilities for the Blind Will be Taken to Rajiv Gandhi," 1989). The following press coverage from leading English daily describes the response of the government during this conference:

Two-day seminar was inaugurated today by Mr. Jagdish Tytler, the Minister of Food and Supply. The conference organized by the All India Confederation for the Blind will continue for two days and it has been attended by about 200 representatives of 12 states of India. The subject of the conference is the need for legislation for the disabled including the blind and the need for the reservation in all the categories of the posts for the blind. The Minister appreciated the programmes run by the Confederation for the blind, especially for the women and the aged, during his inaugural speech. He said that he would make all possible support to the Confederation. He assured that he would try to take the problems of

the blind to the Prime Minister. Mrs. Rama Devi, the Central Law Secretary rejected the notion that the Parliament will lose power to enact the legislation for the disabled if the Panchayati Raj [grass-root democratic] Institutions are entitled to look after the welfare of the disabled. She told, that by empowering the Panchayats, the allocated budget for the disabled may reach from the centre to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and this will help to run some services for them at the local level ("Issues Relating to the Facilities for the Blind Will be Taken to Rajiv Gandhi," 1989).

Thus, once an organization like AICB, which had primarily been a service delivery organization until then, embraced the advocacy approach, it conducted advocacy activities parallel to those of the Federation in order to demand enactment of the disability law and it also began to contribute to the process of lobbying for enactment of the legislation.

It is clear from the above discussion that the movement for enactment of the disability law had gained momentum by the middle of 1989 and the blind activists were being persistent in pursuing this demand. After the assurance received from the Prime Minister in May to introduce the bill during the ensuing Monsoon Session of Parliament, the activists were prepared to launch a sustained and vigorous movement under the banner of the NFB if the commitment by the Prime Minister was not honored. This time they were not ready to be satisfied with lip service from the top-level leadership of the country and decided to carry on a prolonged movement until something concrete was offered by the government in regard to enactment of the legislation. The Federation therefore, persisted in organizing a 43-day sustained movement to press for its demands from July 17th onward soon after the beginning of the Monsoon Session of the Parliament. During this time the Federationists resorted to various types of contentious

politics. These methods ranged from uninterrupted picketing throughout the duration of the movement, to stopping trains, massive rallies, token and indefinite hunger strikes, and even threats of self-immolation.

It is true that the overarching demand of this movement was the enactment of the legislation, but the leadership could not have been successful in garnering the massive support of its membership if the current issues were completely overlooked. Therefore, in addition to the legislation, a number of more specific and urgent demands were made. These included: a reservation in higher categories of jobs (e.g., those categorized as Group A and B services), filling the backlog in the existing quota for jobs for the disabled in the (C) and (D) categories of jobs in Central Services and Public Undertakings, and introduction of a quota system in the on-going poverty elevation and rural employment schemes (“Handicapped Demonstrated at P.M.’s House 1989).

Within 5 days of picketing since the beginning of the movement, the Minister of Social Welfare for State, Rajendra Vajpayee, met the delegation of the Federation. She promised to consider their demands, but did not commit to any immediate, concrete action. She informed the delegation that it would not be possible to introduce the disability law before the new government was formed after the mid term polls scheduled for the fall of that year. The activists felt betrayed once again, as the Prime Minister had not upheld her promise to introduce the legislation in the Monsoon Session. Therefore, after the disappointing meeting with the Minister of Social Welfare for State on July 21st, the fifth day of this movement, the Federation announced that the movement would be

intensified and radical measures would be adopted, including the stopping of trains (“Disabled Will Stop Trains,” 1989; “Blind Threatened Stir,” 1989; “The Blind will Stop Trains on 24,” 1989). Consequently, the movement was intensified during the last week in July and a number of arrests were made in front of the Central Government offices in addition to making attempts to stop trains and at times even threatening to commit self-immolations. In addition to the previous methods of contentious political action, this time the activists staged a continuous picket in front of the houses and offices of many government dignitaries ranging from the Social Welfare Minister to Home Minister and even the Prime Minister. This was a unique strategy, as during the earlier advocacy activities the picketing was organized either in front of the office of the Social Welfare Ministry or at times in front of the Prime Minister’s official residence. But this time, the strategy was to create pressure by picketing the offices or residences of other high-ranking Ministers as well.

About 50 people who were picketing the residence of the Home Minister were arrested on July 27th, 1989 (“50 More Blind Arrested,” 1989; “Blind Planned *Dharna*,” 1989). The activists continued to picket and court arrests (compelling the police to arrest themselves symbolically) with about 30 people courting arrest on July 31st (“Agitation to Continue: Asserts Blind Union,” 1989; “30 Blind Arrested,” 1989). In order to intensify the movement, the Federation decided to organize a rally at the Prime Minister’s residence on August 3rd (“Rally of the Blind at P.M.’s Residence tomorrow,” 1989). It is difficult to determine the exact number of participants in the August 3rd rally as different newspapers quoted different numbers ranging from 300-500. But whatever may have

been the exact number of activists who participated in this rally, it was a well-attended event and the activists submitted a memorandum at the Prime Minister's office. This Memorandum (demand charter) contained the demands enumerated above, most importantly, the demand for enactment of the disability law ("Blind Demand Law for the Disabled," 1989; ("The Blind gave Memorandum," 1989; "Memorandum to the Prime Minister by the Blind," 1989). This rally was followed by a series of events including picketing, courting of arrests and hunger strikes.

It is worth repeating that the main reason for launching this massive movement beginning in the middle of July was the need to press for fulfillment of the promise made by the Prime Minister in the meeting on May 8th to introduce the disability law in the Monsoon Session. That session of Parliament begins in the middle of July. The Federation, therefore, thought it to be an appropriate time to launch a movement to build momentum so that the government was pressured to keep the promise made by the Prime Minister during his meeting with the Federationists to bring the disability law in that Session. However, at the same time, the Monsoon Session lasts beyond Independence Day, which is observed on August 15th every year. This is a day when the attention of the entire country is drawn to the activities going on in the capital city and so whatever goes on in New Delhi gets noticed widely.

The Government did not show any signs of introducing the disability law by the beginning of August. Consequently, in conjunction with Independence Day, the Federation further intensified the movement in order to attract the attention of the general

public as well as government officials. Hence, two major additions were made to the ongoing advocacy activities in early August: (1) sustained picketing was organized on a daily basis from the 5th of August, which often resulted into courting of arrest; and (2) an indefinite hunger strike was launched on August 10th beginning with one person who was committed to fasting to death followed by one additional person each day. This hunger strike also included a widespread hunger strike on August 14th and 15th. Both of these activities received wide coverage by the print media, but they had almost no impact due to the existing political situation in New Delhi. An explanation of the impact of the political situation on the effectiveness of the movement is provided later in this section after further discussion of the chronological development of advocacy activities, which lasted until the end of August.

Following the rally on August 4th, which was the 19th day of the movement, the Federation decided to stage an ongoing picket in front of the Prime Minister's residence; 30 activists participated on the first day, August 5th ("Demonstration on Gol Methi Chowk," 1989; "Blind Men's *Dharna* Near P.M.'s House," 1989; "Blind *Dharna*," 1989). This picketing prompted a series of arrests in the next few days, with an average of 20- 30 arrests per day ("Blind Detained," 1989; "Blind Court Arrest," 1989; "20 Blind Detained," 1989; "Blind Arrested," 1989; "25 Blind Arrested while Breaking Prohibitory Orders and Released," 1989).

The strategy of picketing did not evoke any notable response from the government. As a result, the activists resorted to the strategy of an indefinite hunger

strike starting on August 10th (“The Blind Began an Indefinite Fast,” 1989; “The Federation of the Blind Started Hunger Strike,” 1989). The hunger strike was supposed to be the last resort of the movement and there could not have been a better time to use this tactic than the second week of August which was politically the most important time for any Government in power due to the appraisal of its programs and policies on the occasion of the anniversary of Independence Day. At the same time, the movement was already more than 20 days long by that time and had included such activities as blocking the railroad tracks, massive rallies, and ongoing picketing and courting of arrests. The prolonged duration of the movement as well as the approach of Independence Day compelled the leadership to adopt the strategy of an indefinite hunger strike, which was considered to be the most effective and desperate step to conclude the movement. The hunger strike continued until it was forcibly prevented by the police in the fourth week of the month.

From the beginning of the hunger strike, the Federation maintained its publically announced plan of one additional volunteer joining every day. Given the importance of the 15th of August (Independence Day), a 24-hour massive hunger strike was also organized. This large-scale hunger strike began at 2 pm on the eve of Independence Day and was joined by 300 activists. It received wide coverage despite the fact that the press had a lot to cover on this national holiday (“Blind Men Begin Indefinite Hunger Strike,” 1989; “Blind Go on Fast,” 1989; “Fifth Day Fast by Blind,” 1989; “The Hunger Strike of the Blind Continued on 7th Day,” 1989; “Condition Deteriorates,” 1989).

The Federationists were very optimistic regarding the outcome of this movement. But long before anything concrete was accomplished in terms of introducing the disability law, the Monsoon Session of Parliament came to an end on August 18th soon after the observation of Independence Day. Almost 50 activists made forceful but unsuccessful attempts to enter Parliament on the last day of the session (“50 Blind Arrested While Entering in the Parliament,” 1989; “Blind Marchers Arrested,” 1989). However, due to the prevailing political turmoil in the capital, the hope of introduction of the bill for the disability law was gradually fading. The Government authorities had anticipated that the activists would discontinue the movement once the session of Parliament came to an end. But this was an underestimation of the patience and perseverance of the activists, who decided to continue the movement. The Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, M. J. K. Mannan, the senior most bureaucrat in the Central Government who handled matters relating to disability, tried to pacify the activists by promising on behalf of the Prime Minister that their demands would be considered. But because the activists had often been misled or lied to in the past, they did not want to end the movement with a simple assurance from a senior level bureaucrat who had no authority to reach a written agreement with them (“Dialogue between the Government and the Blind Failed: Agitation will Continue,” 1989).

The Federation had invested so much time and energy into this prolonged movement that, it was not so easy for the leadership to call it off without showing any concrete proof to its membership of some perceivable outcome. Therefore, even though the observation of Independence Day and the Monsoon Session of Parliament had come

to an end, the leadership decided to continue the movement until it was in a position to negotiate an agreement with the government. Hence, the Federation continued its regular strategy of picketing the residences and offices of the high level authorities of the central government. In the meantime, the police attempted to disperse the movement through various methods which included the forceful eviction of the hunger strikers, arresting those who were picketing, and uprooting the tents where the activists took shelter. Despite these attempts of the police to discourage them, the activists were able to continue the movement for 43 days and draw the attention of senior level government authorities (“Blind to *Gherao* Police Station,” 1989; “23 Blind Taken to an Unknown Place by the Police,” 1989).

A press release revealed that the movement was finally called off on August 29th after a written agreement was reached with the Minister of Social Welfare for State, Rajendra Kumari Vajpayee:

The National Federation of the Blind has temporarily suspended its agitation for the legislation for the disabled following a reassurance by the Government that the legislation will be brought in the next session of Parliament. Mr. Rungta, General Secretary of the Federation said in a press statement that the Union Minister of Social Welfare for State, Mrs. Rajendra Kumari Vajpayee had appealed to the Federation to withdraw its 43 days old agitation. He was assured that reservation for the blind in groups (A) and (B) posts as well as in promotion was under active consideration of the government. The government has, in a written commitment, agreed to fill up a backlog in the vacancies in groups C and D by November 30 in central government and subordinate offices (“Federation of Blind Suspends Agitation,” 1989).

When assessing the accomplishments of this movement at the time that it was called off, it needs to be kept in mind that both the government and the activists were reaching a saturation point and the government had started to resort to atypical strategies such as uprooting tents and forcefully evicting the hunger strikers. Forty-three days is a long time for any sustained movement, and as a result, even the Federation was losing the energy to sustain the momentum of this movement. In addition, the existing political conditions were not conducive to a movement led by any marginalized section like the disabled.

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the timing of the movement of 1984 led by the National Blind Youth Association was not favorable due to the prevailing condition of terrorism in Punjab. The problem of terrorism in Punjab at that time had captured the attention of the government in Delhi and the media and legitimized the discouragement of any kind of advocacy movements involving methods of contentious political action on the pretext of maintenance of law and order in the country. Similarly, the timing of the movement of 1989 was also not very opportune, as it was a period when the country was going through massive political uncertainty. The Congress Party, which had come to power with overwhelming majority in 1984, was now struggling for survival due to a split in the party. Therefore, the Congress leadership was preoccupied with the worry of losing power during the next general elections that were scheduled to be held by the end of the year (Narang, 1996, pp. 414-430). Despite the fact that the movement was very intense and rigorous, there was little possibility of any outcome particularly with

regard to enactment of landmark legislation such as the disability law due to the prevailing political uncertainty.

It is true that the activists failed to achieve the primary goal of the movement immediately. It however, needs to be acknowledged that this movement of July-August 1989 was the longest sustained movement carried out by the Federation in its history. At the same time, it also needs to be acknowledged that it was focused on the agenda of enactment of a landmark disability law, which was not a very simple goal to be achieved. Accomplishment of this type of goal is never an easy thing as it necessitates a long drawn out process. Hence, much of the delay in getting the legislation enacted can be attributed to the existing political situation rather than a lack of vigor and perseverance on the part of the blind activists.

On October 9th, a month after the movement was called off, the Federation organized a press conference. While briefing the news reporters during this press conference, the leadership of the Federation criticized the government in power for being apathetic to the interests of the disabled and announced a relaunching of the movement during the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament (“Nationwide Stir Threatened by the Blind,” 1989; “Blind Warned Government to Act on Report,” 1989; “Agitation Threatened by the Blind,” 1989). As reported in one of the newspapers:

The Leader of the Federation, S.K. Rungta, informed the press reporters that the ruling Congress Party has been assuring them since 1980 that the legislation for the disabled would be introduced. Detailing the recommendations of the report submitted by the Committee led by Justice

Baharul Islam which broadly covers education, training, employment and rehabilitation of the disabled, Mr. Rungta said that it was unfortunate that the government thereafter had done nothing in the matter (“Blind Warned Government to Act on Report,” 1989).

However, the Winter Session of Parliament was delayed due to the call for the next general elections of the lower house of Parliament. The activists had no choice but to postpone relaunching the movement. They however, did register their protest with the political parties for being apathetic to their interests and criticized them for not including issues concerning the interests of the disabled in their political manifestos (“Disabled Threaten to Boycott Polls,” 1989; “The Disabled Will Boycott Elections,” 1989; “The Disabled May Boycott Polls,” 1989).

After the elections of 1989, Vishwanath Pratap Singh became the Prime Minister. As described in the previous chapter, he was highly respected by the blind activists because of his contribution in employing a sizable number of blind people in Uttar Pradesh. The Federationists in Delhi, therefore, became quite optimistic regarding the possibility of enactment of the disability law when the National Front Government took charge with Singh as Prime Minister. Therefore, despite the fact that the NFB had issued a call for a boycott of the elections in order to protest the apathy of the political parties toward the interests of the disabled, a delegation of the Federation went to meet Singh in December 1989, soon after he had taken over as Prime Minister of the newly formed government. (“The Blind Met the Prime Minister” 1989). The delegation had requested this meeting to congratulate him on his position and to begin to establish a relationship

with him. However, the larger purpose was to create a foundation for initiating a dialogue regarding the legislation.

The blind activists waited patiently for the newly formed government to settle down. During this period, the Federationists engaged in very little public advocacy activity and they employed a strategy of quiet lobbying with the government to introduce the disability law by July 1990. They were able to obtain a commitment from the then Social Welfare Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, to get the law introduced in the budget session of Parliament in March 1990 (“Blind to Agitate for Law on Disabled,” 1990). This little-publicized meeting with Paswan to raise the demand for introduction of the disability law is an example of a milder form of advocacy that was utilized from time to time. However, since no concrete steps were taken in the direction of enactment of a law by the summer, the Federation announced the launching of a rigorous movement by the middle of July (“The Blind Will Agitate for their Demands,” 1990; “A Demand for a Solid Policy,” 1990; “Blind to Agitate for Law on Disabled,” 1990). The Federation had plans to intensify the movement around the time of Independence Day in the middle of August (S. K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005), but one very significant development in Indian politics, that is, the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, changed the political atmosphere of the country altogether. Therefore, in the following section I briefly describe the impact of implementation of this Report and the political scenario at that time.

Implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and a Period of Political Instability

In the first week of August 1990, the National Front Government led by Prime Minister Singh announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, which had recommended a 27 % quota in employment within government services for what is considered to be the “Other Backward Classes of Citizens” (Narang, 1996, pp. 643-661). This meant that 27 % of the seats in central and state government jobs were now going to be reserved for this group of people. This was bound to be controversial, as the high caste members of society who were going to lose employment in all categories of government jobs were not going to accept it easily. They launched a strong protest in the form of demonstrations, rallies, picketing, destruction of public property, and even incidents of self-immolation (Narang, 1996, pp. 643-661). This brought many parts of the country, particularly Northern India, to a standstill during the later half of 1990.

The unrest due to the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report was accompanied by a counter campaign for the construction of Rama temple at what was claimed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, the most popular Hindu deity. This political campaign for the construction of Rama temple was launched through a *Rath Yatra* (ride on a chariot) through parts of north India (Narang, 1996, pp. 431-443). The *Rath Yatra* was organized in September and October by Lal Krishna Advani, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in support of this campaign. The BJP is a right wing Hindu nationalist political party and the *Rath Yatra* marked the rise of neo right politics. The party advocated the construction of the temple at the alleged “birthplace” of Lord Rama

at Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh by demolishing the existing mosque, which was allegedly built at that site at the beginning of the Muslim rule in medieval India (Narang, 1996, pp. 431-443).

These two landmark developments in Indian politics, namely, the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and the campaign for the construction of Rama temple at Ayodhya, caused considerable upheaval in the Indian socio-political environment. The remaining months of the second half of 1990 witnessed a series of caste and communal riots. Thus, the issues of implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and construction of Ram temple, with Advani launching the *Rath Yatra*, dominated Indian politics and the media coverage during the second half of the year.

The 1989 General Elections of Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament) marked the beginning of a new phase of a hung parliament and coalition governments in the federal politics of India as no political party has since been able to form a government independently due to the lack of a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. This, on the one hand, introduced a greater democratization and representative form of government, but on the other hand, it also introduced an element of political instability at the Center.

The National Front Government, formed after the 1989 elections under the leadership of Prime Minister Singh, was in power with the political support from two opposite ideological camps, namely, the leading leftist parties as well as the right wing

Hindu nationalist party, the BJP. But the BJP withdrew its support for the government when Advani was arrested before he reached Ayodhya, the destination of his *rath yatra*. This led to the collapse of the National Front Government in November 1990 and the government that came into power subsequently was also a very unstable government that did not last even for a year. Thus, the collapse of the National Front Government led by Prime Minister Singh resulted in a period of great political uncertainty. In such a situation of political instability and turmoil, a movement of a marginalized group like the blind would not have carried any meaning and weight as the government was pre-occupied with the issue of survival. However, after the establishment of a new government led by Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar in October 1990, which replaced the National Front Government led by Prime Minister Singh, the Federation began making sporadic attempts to revive the struggle for the enactment of the disability law.

In November 1990 and again in December 1990, the leaders of the Federation organized rallies in front of the Prime Minister's residence ("Members of the National Federation of the Blind on their way to present a memorandum to Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar to highlight their various demands on Monday," 1990; "Blind Protesters Court Arrest," 1990). They succeeded in obtaining a meeting with the Prime Minister in the later part of December and, once again, the activists were assured that the desired law would be introduced shortly ("Demand of Introducing the Legislation for the Disabled: Assurance by the Prime Minister," 1990; "Assurance by the Prime Minister to the Blind," 1990; "P.M.'s Assurance to the Blind," 1990). But there was, in fact, no further progress made toward introduction of legislation as this period too was marked by

tremendous political uncertainty. Just as the National Front Government led by Prime Minister Singh had been dependent upon political support from other political parties to remain in power, the Chandra Shekhar Government too depended upon the Congress Party to hold power. It also collapsed due to withdrawal of support from its political ally, the Congress Party. As a result, once again there were mid-term elections in the middle of 1991 (Narang, 1996, p. 405). Thus, due to the prevailing political uncertainty and the fact that the Chandra Shekhar government was very busy struggling to remain in power during its short-term governance, an issue like the enactment of legislation for the disabled was hardly a priority.

An analysis of the political situation between 1989-1991 makes it clear that this time period was marked by tremendous political uncertainty coupled with caste and communal riots following the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and campaign for the construction of Rama temple. Hence, the Federationists did not find it useful to carry out any advocacy activities until the middle of 1992 when the newly elected Congress government was settled. In the following section, I discuss some of the advocacy activities carried out by the Federation from 1992-1995 to give a last push to the struggle for the implementation of the disability law.

Advocacy Activities from Mid-1992 Onward and the Enactment of the Disability Law

The new Congress Government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was formed in the summer of 1991 (Narang, 1996, p. 405). No major advocacy activity was initiated by the

blind activists for about a year in order to allow the newly formed government to get established. However, in the meantime, the Federation did engage in sporadic advocacy activities when a specific issue arose. For example, the issue of denial of the right of blind candidates to appear in the exams for civil services in June 1991 was protested with the concerned authorities (“Blind Youth Who will be Appearing for the IAS Examination on Sunday being Denied Access to the UPSC Secretary,” 1991). It was further taken to the court and the Federation succeeded in getting a directive issued from the court in favor of the blind candidates in February 1992 (“Supreme Court’s Directives to Centre,” 1992). Likewise, the fear of a reduction in the quota for the disabled in employment due to the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report was also expressed through a demonstration in September 1991 (“Rally against the Cut in Reservation,” 1991).

The first noticeable advocacy activity organized by the Federation in 1992 to press for enactment of the disability law and employment in government jobs was a symbolic rally in the middle of March (“Blind March for Job Reservation,” 1992; “A Rally by the Sightless,” 1992). The Federation also organized another rally and picketing in August after the Congress Government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had completed a year in power. The leaders met the Minister for Personnel, Margret Alva, who was responsible for recruitment along with the Special Officer of the Prime Minister who assured them that an appointment with the Prime Minister would be arranged (“Blind *Dharna* for Law and Job Quota,” 1992; “Blind for Legislation,” 1992). Another big rally took place in December and a memorandum was presented to a representative of the Prime Minister (“Visually Handicapped Marched for their Rights.” 1992; “The Blind

Demonstrated and Arrested,” 1992). In spite of these efforts, nothing substantial was achieved that year. It, however, needs to be acknowledged that enactment of landmark legislation is always a result of a long drawn out process and any step taken in that direction becomes a crucial part of that process. Hence, though the rallies held during 1992 did not yield any immediate results, they were very crucial in building upon the pressure created in the past and contributed to the accomplishment of the goal of enactment of the disability law. Similar advocacy activities were carried out in the ensuing years along with the adoption of quiet methods of advocacy until the legislation was finally passed by Parliament in December 1995.

In addition to the quiet lobbying with the government officials, an example of a noticeable radical advocacy activity carried out by the Federation to pursue the demand for enactment of the disability law during 1993 was the rally organized in the middle of May (“Demonstration of the Blind,” 1993; “Blind Hold Rally,” 1993). Similarly, the Federation again organized a massive rally in the later part of August 1994. During that rally, it threatened to launch a vigorous movement if government officials did not respond positively. But following that rally, it withdrew that plan after receiving a favorable response from the concerned authorities. During their meeting with the representatives of the Ministry of Personnel and Grievances as well as the Ministry of Social Welfare, the activists were promised that the government would look into their demands and introduce the proposed legislation in the next session of parliament (“Blind Put off Stir Plan,” 1994; “The Blind took out a Rally,” 1994; “Demonstration of Hundreds of Blind in Support of their Demands,” 1994).

The elected representatives had changed since late 1988 and early 1989 when the Federation had made the demand for the enactment of the law its core focus. But there was little change in the bureaucrats who play a very important role in drafting the legislation and policies. They were becoming increasingly familiar with the role of an activist organization like the NFB and the need for enactment of such a law. At the same time, the Minister of Social Welfare, Sita Ram Kesari, and his political colleagues were well aware of the promises that had been made to the agitating blind activists for so many years. By the middle of 1995, the Congress Government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had already been in power for about 4 years and the next General Elections were due in 1996. There was a limit to the extent that the government could continue to get by on false promises. Hence, the demonstrations carried out during 1995 proved to be the catalyst that prompted government officials to introduce the law in December during the Winter Session of Parliament.

As early as May 24, 1995, the Federation got a convincing response from Sita Ram Kesari regarding the introduction of the disability law in the session of Parliament that was going on at that time (“Kesari’s Assurance to the Blind and Disabled,” 1995; “Blind’s Rally to Draw Government’s Attention,” 1995; “The Blind Pressed for their Demands,” 1995). As mentioned in a press statement, the leadership of the Federation threatened to launch a vigorous movement if the promise was not kept:

Union Minister Mr. Sitaram Kesari assured a delegation of the Federation of the Blind that all efforts will be made to bring the legislation in the

current session. This assurance was given to a delegation following a demonstration of NFB to draw the attention of the government towards its pending demands. The General Secretary told the journalists that it warned the government to accept its demands failing which a nationwide agitation will be launched (“Kesari’s Assurance to the Blind and Disabled,” 1995).

Soon after the beginning of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, the Federation again organized a massive rally on July 24th to press for this demand. Despite the usual promise of the concerned Ministry, the bill for the disability law was not introduced in Parliament (“The Blind took out a Rally for the Fulfillment of their Demands,” 1995; “NFB Activists Seeking Legislation for Disabled,” 1995).

As in the past, the promises made by the authorities after the demonstrations in May and July to introduce the bill for the disability law in the ongoing Budget and Monsoon Sessions of Parliament were not kept. But the activists now knew that it was not going to be long before the law was enacted. The concerned officials were already doing the groundwork for the introduction of a bill for the disability law. While the sporadic demonstrations led by the organized blind during 1995 finally triggered the enactment of the PWD Act (1995), the foundation for its introduction had already been laid as a result of a long drawn out process of lobbying which included various methods of advocacy. At the same time, as explained further in the next section that the disabled were now forming a united front to fight for it and there were additional conditions which created a conducive atmosphere for the enactment of such a law in addition to the pressure built by the organized blind. As a result, the government could no longer afford to be oblivious to the demand for the enactment of this law raised by the disabled community and as Bhambhani (2004) concludes

After a prolonged campaign, several rounds of talks, lobbying, sit-ins, protest marches, press-conferences, media mobilization and agitations, the Persons with Disabilities Act was finally passed by the Indian Parliament on 31st December, 1995 and became a law on 7th February, 1996 with the President, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, giving his assent (p.28).”

Additional Factors contributing to the passage of the Disability Law

It is true that the enactment of the PWD Act was primarily the result of a prolonged and sustained struggle carried out by blind activists predominantly under the leadership of the Federation. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the early years of the 1990s witnessed a number of internal and external developments which contributed to the creation of an atmosphere that was conducive to the enactment of the PWD Act). These factors included: the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990; signing of the 1993 ESCAP Declaration by India and emergence of a private television network through the introduction of satellite TV channels in India during the early 1990s.

As mentioned under Chapter 1, the ADA was passed in 1990. The passage of this Act in the United States played a significant role in creating a conducive atmosphere legitimizing the need for comprehensive disability legislation in other countries. (Kanter, 2003). It became an important topic of conversation in various international forums and it inspired disability rights activists to advocate for similar legislation in their respective countries. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a satellite discussion was held between a group of disability rights activists in Delhi and the American journalist, Joseph Shapiro, along with two American disability rights activists, Judy Heumann and Justin Dart, in March 1994

(Bhambhani, 2004, p.28). This led to the formation of the Disability Rights Group (DRG) in the spring of 1994, the first cross-disability rights group in the capital city 1994 (Bhambhani, 2004, p.28). Inspired by this satellite discussion regarding the ADA and the disability rights movement, the members of the newly formed DRG decided to actively advocate for the enactment of disability law in India. Hence, along with the NFB, the DRG also engaged in quiet lobbying for the passage of the proposed law until it was finally enacted by Parliament in December 1995.

One declaration, which is also quoted in the PWD Act, is the declaration that came out as a result of the ESCAP conference (Disability Manual, date, p. 31). Under this Declaration there was an emphasis on comprehensive disability legislation in the countries of Asia and the Pacific region. Conferences like the ESCAP Conference, which were attended by representatives from different Asian countries including India, created an atmosphere conducive to the passing of the legislation. Additionally, the ESCAP Declaration of 1993 contributed in creating an atmosphere that was conducive to the enactment of the PWD Act.

The early part of the 1990s also witnessed a boom in telecommunication services in India leading to a rapid and pervasive growth of private satellite television channels (History of Private Television in India, 2011). These channels covered much more than the government controlled radio and TV channels. Hence, proliferation of private satellite TV channels resulted in an expansion of the range of issues covered in contrast to the traditional narrow focus of the government controlled electronic media. Thus, issues that

were previously neglected by the mainstream political process, like the issue of disability rights, attracted the attention of the private satellite TV channels.

Coverage of advocacy activities and disability rights issues gave voice to hitherto marginalized sections of society such as the disabled. As I had an opportunity to observe through my involvement in the disability rights movement since early 1990s that while the leadership continued to use traditional methods like indefinite hunger strikes, *dharnas*, and political rallies, it also began to rely heavily on the use of satellite TV channels to hold discussions on disability related issues. This helped in giving recognition to disability rights as an issue that demanded the attention of the policy makers. Thus, prior to the early 1990s, disability rights issues were presented primarily by the print media in response to a major event such as a political rally or large-scale demonstration. But with the emergence of various private satellite TV channels since the early 1990s, issues pertaining to disability attracted greater coverage. This, in turn, helped to persuade the government to enact the PWD Act by the mid-1990s.

Conclusion

With a brief discussion of the relevant constitutional provisions and the claim of the disabled for social justice as well as the historical context of the disability law, this chapter has documented the struggle carried out by the Federation for the enactment of the disability law during the third phase of the movement of the organized blind from 1988- 1995. Prior to this, the movement was led primarily by blind activists and remained an impairment specific movement because of its narrow focus. I have attempted to

establish that the enactment of the PWD Act of 1995, ensuring the rights of a broader group of disabled and not just the blind, was the result of the struggle carried out primarily by the Federation, particularly since the late 1980s. Although there was little participation in the advocacy movement by cross-disability groups until the early 1990s, the fact cannot be denied that the movement of the organized blind encompassed cross-disability advocacy in the fight for and enactment of the disability law. Based on this description of the contribution of the organized blind in succeeding to get the PWD Act enacted, I will be making an attempt in the next chapter to establish my argument that the disability rights movement in India began with the beginning of this phase of the movement of the organized blind discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

The Struggle for Implementation of the PWD Act in the Courts and Streets: Phase Four of the Movement of the Organized Blind (1996-2005).

Having discussed the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind in its earlier three phases, in this chapter I engage in an analysis of the fourth and final phase of this movement. This phase began in 1996 with the enactment of Persons with Disabilities (equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation) Act, 1995” which, as noted in the previous chapter, was enacted in 1996 after being passed by the Parliament of India in December 1995. This law is popularly known as the “PWD Act” (Disability Manual, 2005, p. 245) or the “disability law” (Baquer & Sharma, 1997, p. V). In this chapter, I analyze the emergence of new methods of advocacy as well as the new trends in the movement of the organized blind during this phase. I discuss these developments in light of the role of the Disability Rights Group, a cross-disability advocacy organization based in Delhi, as well as changing attitudes of the non-governmental organizations engaged in the field of blindness toward advocacy. I end this chapter with a discussion of the debate on the time of origin of the disability rights movement in India and present my argument that this movement began with the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind in the late 1980s.

The existence of the PWD Act enabled the blind activists to have a strong basis for engaging in a struggle to press for the realization of their rights in various spheres of life through implementation of its provisions. As mandated in chapter XII of this law (PWD Act, section 57, chapter XII) the Chief Commissioner on Disability (CCD), a quasi-judicial body, was established in 1998 to look into complaints regarding violations of the provisions contained in this law (Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, 2008, p. 1). Subsequently, comparable counterparts were also established in various states (Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, the PWD Act was also used by advocates to approach the courts in India to seek the realization of the rights of the disabled in accordance with its provisions (Disability Manual, 2005). At the same time, access to the Internet enabled the English educated blind activists to connect with each other and lobby for implementation of the law in a unified manner. Thus, the post-1995 period witnessed the continuation of struggle through new means of court cases, filing complaints in the offices of the State Commissioners and Chief Commissioner on Disability, and use of the internet.

Advocacy for the rights of the disabled through these new means proved to be a very effective approach in the post-1995 period leading to a reduction in the use of contentious political action. This does not mean that the strategy of contentious political action was no longer relevant or useful; rather, it was used in conjunction with these new methods of advocacy. I will devote a substantial part of this chapter to a discussion of advocacy through these new methods, but I first begin with a brief overview of some of

the examples of advocacy by the organized blind through contentious political action specifically for the right to employment.

Sporadic Incidents of Advocacy through Contentious Political Action for the Implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act

As elaborated later in this chapter, the agenda of the struggle carried out by the organized blind during this phase of the movement was much broader as compared to the earlier phases of the movement. However, it needs to be emphasized that the overarching focus of the struggle carried out through contentious political action as well as through other methods of advocacy has been on the demand for employment of the blind through the implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act. This section mandated:

Every appropriate government shall appoint in every establishment such percentage of vacancies not less than 3% for persons or class of persons with disability of which one percent each shall be reserved for persons suffering from:

- i. blindness or low vision
 - ii. hearing impairment;
- locomotor disability or cerebral palsy in the post identified for each disability provided that the appropriate government may, having regard to the type of work carried on in any department or establishment, by notification subject to such conditions, if any, as may be specified in such notification, exempt any establishment from the provisions of this section (PWD Act, section 33, Chapter VI).

There were a few instances of contentious political action carried out by blind activists at the local level during this phase of the movement. One of the notable examples was a short lasting movement at Delhi University led by the Progressive Welfare Forum of the Blind during the early part of 2003 (Namami, Vijaya, And Manasi, 2003). The Progressive Welfare Forum of the Blind was a very small organization that

remained in existence for a short period of time, but it did succeed in carrying out a sustained struggle for almost 2 months by bringing like-minded forces together on the university campus. This movement was crushed in an authoritarian manner by the administration (“Delhi University Students Protest Police Brutality,” 2003). It thus failed to achieve any immediate results. However, it did mark the beginning of the struggle for implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act at Delhi University, which ultimately resulted in the hiring of a number of disabled persons as faculty members over a period of time (“Panel on teachers for disabled set up,” 2009).

There were also some instances of local level struggles organized by different advocacy groups of the blind in various state capitals. For instance, the organized blind in the State of Himachal Pradesh held a demonstration on the occasion of International Day of Disabled Persons on December 3, 2003 (“Visually Disabled Hold *Dharna*,” 2003). This marked the climax of a 122-day long movement led by a state-level organization called State Blind Persons Association demanding implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act to promote employment of the qualified blind (“Visually Disabled Hold *Dharna*,” 2003). Similarly, the Uttar Pradesh branch of NFB engaged in prolonged picketing in Lucknow, the capital city of that state, for about 8 months starting from August 16th, 2004 (“Blind organized a rally and discussed with the Governor,” 2005). Apart from various other demands, the main focus of this prolonged movement, primarily utilizing the methods of sustained picketing and occasional rallies, was on seeking employment for the 2,500 qualified blind through implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act (“The Blind Staged *Dharna*,” 2005).

As explained later in this chapter, the NFB filed a number of lawsuits in various courts and complaints in the office of CCD to seek implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act. But the leadership of NFB became frustrated due to the lack of proper implementation of this provision in the decade since it was passed by the Parliament of India (S. K. Rungta, personal interview, April 4, 2005). Therefore, the NFB organized a massive rally in collaboration with the All India Confederation of the Blind in August 2005 (“Visually Impaired Take out Rally,” 2005). The press reported on the outcome of this rally:

An NFB-AICB delegation later met Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Mira Kumar and submitted a memorandum. The Minister assured that their demands would be [“looked into seriously”], a release issued by NFB and AICB said. It also said the delegation was later called by officials from the Prime Minister’s Office to discuss their demands (“Visually Impaired Take out Rally,” 2005).

The Federation held another massive rally on World Disabled Day demanding implementation of Section 33 of the PWD Act, particularly in the Ministry of Railways. They also asked for an extension of the quota for the blind in employment in the private sector (“Visually Challenged Demand Quota,” 2005). Speaking on behalf of the Federation, its leader, Santosh Kumar Rungta emphasized: “We have been asking for strict implementation of Section 33 of Persons With Disabilities Act, 1995 in the Railways in the matter of 1% reservation in all type of jobs” (“Visually Challenged Demand Quota,” 2005). As a follow up to this rally, another rally took place 10 days later on December 14th (“Demand to Fill up Vacancies for the Blind,” 2005).

This description of contentious political action reflects the fact that there were a limited number of such incidents that took place during this phase of the movement. But

as mentioned above, there was a considerable decrease in such activities as compared to the previous two phases of the movement of the organized blind. This, however, does not mean that there was no effective advocacy organized in the post-1995 period. Rather, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, this period witnessed a change in the methods of advocacy. Based on the significance of advocacy in the post-1995 period carried out through these new methods, I now briefly discuss the emergence of these methods.

Struggle from the Streets to Courts, Quasi-Judicial Bodies and the Use of Internet

The passage of the PWD Act created a strong platform to enable disabled activists and their allies to approach the courts and quasi-judicial bodies. This law began to be used as an instrument to approach these institutions to address the issue of rights of the blind and other disabled people. Blind as well as other disabled activists along with their allies started to make frequent use of this law both on an individual basis as well as through advocacy organizations. Thus, in the post-1995 period, law has become an instrument that can be used by any disabled person covered under it to seek the realization of his or her rights. While contentious political action such as rallies and picketing took place sporadically, filing of lawsuits in the Courts of India and complaints in the offices of various quasi-judicial bodies, namely the State Commissioners on Disability, the CCD, and the National Human Rights Commission, was adopted as an important means of advocacy. Therefore, as a result of the use of the PWD Act as a tool to advocate for their rights, the fourth phase of the movement of the organized blind was characterized by the

use of a combination of methods of advocacy ranging from traditional contentious political action to legal approaches.

As elaborated in the next section, a number of lawsuits were filed by disability rights organizations including the organization of the blind as well as individual disabled people in various High Courts and the Supreme Court of India in the post-1995 period. This is not to say that the disabled did not approach the courts in the past for their rights. There were a few lawsuits relating to the issue of disabled people's right to employment filed under the general principle of right to equality enshrined in the Constitution of India (the Constitution of India, 2004, pp. 7-8) before the PWD Act was passed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the NFB had sued the Union Public Service Commission (the institution which recruits civil servants) to ensure the right of blind people to appear in civil service exams. A few other similar law suits filed before the PWD Act came into force included: *Daya Ram Tripathi vs. State of U.P. & Ors* (1986), *Narendra Kumar Chandla vs. State of Haryana & Ors* (1994), *Lance Dafadar Joginder Singh vs. Union of India & Ors* (1995) and *Nandkumar Narayanrao Ghodmare vs. State of Maharashtra & Ors* (1995). However, it should be emphasized that, prior to passage of the PWD Act, it was only in rare situations that the activists approached the courts to deal with the issue of discrimination and they primarily relied on contentious political action to advocate for their rights. In addition to the use of law as an instrument for the realization of the rights of the blind in the post-1995 period, it is worth noting that another important development which took place during this period in India, particularly since the first decade of the 21st century, is the proliferation of Internet services and their usage by blind people.

The advent of Internet services brought great change around the world; in particular, in India, it has helped the English-educated blind to be informed of developments at the international level and promoted interaction among the blind activists and their allies. Access to the World Wide Web and use of e-mail has been immensely influential in promoting the mobilization of the disabled in the United States in the process of the struggle for their rights (Barnatt & Scotch, 2001, p. 214). Additionally, use of the Internet has enabled blind activists in India to exchange their ideas through e-mails, and to gain access to a wealth of information in electronic format through the use of screen reading software.

Several e-mail groups have been established by blind people in India to exchange ideas with each other related to specific areas of interest. One such group is the access India Yahoo Group; it was originally created on January 4 2001, for blind computer users to discuss computer-related issues (Access India, 2011). But over a period of time, the scope of discussion has expanded significantly. The Group has a very wide membership which has connected a big group of blind people as well as their allies as it has now been joined by a large number of subscribers who regularly exchange their ideas and share relevant information among themselves. It has now become a forum for blind people as well as sighted allies working in the field of blindness from different parts of the country to exchange ideas on numerous issues including the issues of employment discrimination, obstacles to education, and the like. It has helped blind people join forces in order to deal with discrimination on the basis of blindness and implementation of the provisions of

PWD Act, as well as initiating discussion of issues relating to the rights of the disabled not covered in this Act (Access India, 2011).

The availability of e-mail groups like the Access India Yahoo Group as well as other Yahoo Groups and Google Groups has enabled blind people to exchange legal documents and to work collaboratively on the filing of law suits in various High Courts and the Supreme Court as well as on complaints to be registered in the offices of the Chief Commissioner and the State Commissioners on Disability. The access to e-mail has also facilitated their correspondence with government authorities. Hence, access to the Internet has in a number of ways enhanced the advocacy efforts of the blind in India.

In addition to the beginning of new methods of advocacy, the post-1995 period also witnessed a change in the nature of the movement of the organized blind. There are discernable trends that are distinguishable from trends in its previous phases. The most important identifiable trend that distinguishes this phase of the movement of the organized blind from its previous phases is the broadening of the agenda of struggle. Since the PWD Act ensured a wide range of rights of the disabled in India, blind as well as other disability groups have now been getting a wide range of rights realized through implementation of the Act. This period has also witnessed an emergence of other disability groups that have adopted an advocacy approach and significantly contributed in providing a cross-disability character to this movement. At the same time, there has been a shift in the approach of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the field of disability toward an acceptance of advocacy. This has created the possibility of collaboration with advocacy organizations like the NFB. This reflects a marked shift in

the nature of the movement from the earlier phases. I discuss this shift in the approach of the NGOs toward advocacy later in this chapter. But I now first analyze the change in the nature of the movement of the organized blind due to the broadening of the agenda of struggle and the increasing participation of cross-disability rights groups.

Broadening the Agenda of the Struggle for Rights and Emergence of a Cross-Disability Character of the Movement

As is clear from the discussion in the last three chapters, while there was always some sort of overlapping of issues for which struggle was carried out during the earlier phases of the movement of the organized blind, the focus was basically on a specific demand. Thus, while the founders of the movement were primarily focused on organization building and engaged in mild forms of advocacy during the first phase of the growth of the movement, the struggle for right to employment and the enactment of a disability law became the focal points of the advocacy agenda during the second and third phases of the movement. Although in this chapter I have described the focus of the movement of the organized blind during its fourth phase as “implementation of the PWD Act,” this has entailed a much broader agenda than the earlier phases of the movement.

While the predominant agenda of the struggle carried out by the Federation, particularly through contentious political action, was the implementation of section 33 of the PWD Act, the struggle carried out by the Federation as well as the other disabled people in their individual capacity and through advocacy organizations in the post-1995 period was very wide in scope. It also involved several lawsuits filed in courts and

complaints registered in the offices of various state commissioners on disability as well as the CCD. These lawsuits and complaints have been related to a very wide range of issues including the right to housing, access to social security, and the right to education, among others (Disability and the Law, 2005; Disability Manual; Office Of The Chief Commissioner For Persons With Disabilities, 2008). However, it needs to be acknowledged that the majority of the lawsuits were still related to the issue of right to employment. Some of these include: Ashok M. Shrimali & Ors. vs. State Bank of India & Ors., (2001); Baljeet Singh vs. Delhi Transport Corporation, (2000); Delhi Transport Corporation vs. Sh. Harpal Singh & Anr., (2003); Government of NCT of Delhi vs. Bharat Lal Meena and Surinder Singh, (2002); Jaswant Singh & Anr. vs. State of Punjab, (1996); Kunal Singh vs. Union of India, (2003); LIC of India vs. Chief Commissioner for Disabilities & Anr., (2003); Pushkar Singh & Ors. vs. University of Delhi & Ors., (2001); Ravi Kumar Arora vs. Union of India & Anr., (2004); Shall Kumar vs. Bharat Petroleum Corporation, (2004); Smt. Shruti Kalra vs. University of Delhi & Ors., (2001); University of Rajasthan vs. Surendra Kumar Goyal, (2003); and I. S. Uppala Venkat vs. South Central Railway & Ors., (2003).

It is true that the struggle led by the organized blind during the third phase of their movement aimed at accomplishing an agenda that is considered to be common to the interests of different categories of disability groups, namely, the passage of a comprehensive disability rights law. However, the major limitation of the movement led by the organized blind prior to the passage of the PWD Act was that it lacked cross-disability participation. In contrast to this, the post-1995 period witnessed the beginning

of participation of diverse disability groups in the struggle for their rights; this has contributed significantly to the enrichment of the disability rights movement.

As mentioned in chapters 1 and 6, the Disability Rights Group (DRG) was established in Delhi in 1994. This marked the beginning of a cross-disability rights alliance. Since the DRG came to play a very effective role in advocacy for a broader group of the disabled including the blind, the issues of promotion and protection of rights of blind people also were included in that process. While the NFB continues as a leading advocacy organization addressing issues regarding the rights of blind people, increased participation of diverse disability groups, particularly the DRG, has made a significant contribution in strengthening this movement.

The contribution of the DRG is particularly crucial in two ways: First, the DRG succeeded in widening the scope of issues concerning various categories of disabled as it actively advocated for the rights of cross-disability groups instead of focusing on the rights of any disability specific group. Second, over time, DRG began to be essentially a one-person organization, dominated by Javed Abidi who claimed to speak on behalf of all disabled people and who made unilateral decisions. But it must be acknowledged that this was for the first time that disabled activists with different types of disabilities had come together to advocate for their rights (Ray, 2001). Some of the common issues addressed by DRG through contentious political action included:

- appointment of the Chief Commissioner on Disability in 1997 Bhambhani, 2004, p. 45);

- inclusion of the disabled in the 2001 census (“Disability Rights Group to Strike Over Census Issue,” 2000);
- raising the limit of the income tax exemption for disabled people and parents of disabled children (“Disabled Rights Activists Rally to Awaken Centre,” 2002);
- exemption of customs/excise duties on aids and appliances used by the disabled (“Rally to Make Govt. See Reason,” 2003);
- right to accessible voting (“Abidi to Fast Unto Death Over EC’s Attitude,” 2004; “Dharna Moves Election Commission to Action,” 2004; “Protest Outside EC Office: Several Activists Detained,” 2004);
- Opposition to appointment of able bodied professionals as the head of the apex level institutions in the field of disability like CCD, the Rehabilitation Council of India, and the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities (Bhambhani, 2004, pp. 50-52).

Similarly, the issues taken up by the DRG through court cases included: right to vote (Disabled Rights Group vs. Chief Election Commissioner & Anr, 2004) and expansion of the definition of disability under the PWD Act to include dyslexia as one of the types of learning disabilities for the purpose of granting admission under the quota for disabled students at the college level (Disabled Rights Group vs. Delhi University & Ors, 2004). Earlier Javed Abidi, the leader of DRG, had also filed a lawsuit against Indian Airlines to provide discounts for wheelchair users and ensure accessible airports (Javed Abidi vs. Union of India, 1999). The verdict in this trial was the first victory by and for disabled persons in India under the PWD Act of 1995. (Pandey, Chirimar, & D'souza, 2005, p. 22).

This section has provided an overview of the beginning of cross-disability advocacy in the post-1995 period. In the following section I discuss another trend that emerged during this phase of the movement of the organized blind, that is, the acceptance of the rights-based approach by the NGOs engaged in the disability sector, particularly the field of blindness.

Acceptance of a Rights-Based Approach by the Non-Governmental Organizations in the Field of Blindness

As discussed in earlier chapters, the movement of the organized blind had gained momentum in India by the beginning of the 1980s, but it was not until the early 1990s that the advocacy-oriented approach was accepted by the service delivery organizations engaged in the field of disability. These organizations were highly dependent on the state and charitable or philanthropic institutions or individuals for funding during the second half of the last century (Mohanty & Singh, 2001). Neither the State nor the generous private funders endorsed the advocacy approach adopted by the disabled. These NGOs therefore had no choice but to avoid association with organizations practicing an advocacy-oriented approach based on a radical disability rights perspective and involving methods of contentious political action as they were not in a position to displease their funders. However, in recent years, this situation has been changing because of various international developments. One of the most crucial of these is the emergence of the philosophy of self-advocacy within the field of disability. This has led to an acceptance of the advocacy approach by NGOs working in the field of disability including those involved in the field of blindness in India. As a result, there has been a marked shift in

their approach from significant opposition to any kind of advocacy to its acceptance. In this section, I briefly discuss this change in the attitude of the NGOs engaged in service delivery in the field of blindness, namely, the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) and the National Association for the Blind (NAB). I also briefly address the change in attitude of the middle-class professionals through the example of composition of the DRG at the time of its formation.

It is a well established fact that most of the NGOs in the field of disability in India have been run by able-bodied individuals and have had very limited participation of the disabled in their decision making processes. As noted in 2005 by the National Human Rights Commission in its manual on disability:

Majority of the voluntary organizations working in the area of disability in India are dominated by able-bodied, philanthropic individuals and professionals. They view people with disabilities as unfit to carry out day-to-day affairs of their lives. Such an approach is characteristic of the biocentric model, which presupposes the inability of people with disability to take charge of their own situation (Disability Manual, 2005, p.35).

There were over 3,000 such service-delivery NGOs engaged in the field of disability in India in the year 2005 (Disability Manual, 2005, p.35). However, despite such a preponderance of NGOs dominated by able-bodied philanthropists and professionals which continue to adhere to a traditional, paternalistic approach toward the disabled, there is a beginning of acceptance of a rights-based approach at least by the leading NGOs in the field of blindness.

In recent years, the disabled have not been allowing able-bodied professionals to speak on behalf of them and, instead, have themselves been leading the movement for their rights. Thus, there has been an emergence and acceptance of the philosophy of self-advocacy symbolized by the slogan ‘Nothing about us, without us’ (Charlton, 1998). Activism in the field of disability leading to a disability rights movement in various parts of the world provided a greater legitimacy to advocacy in the field of disability at the international level. This, in turn, influenced the civil societies as well as the states internationally. The movement for enactment of the ADA in the United States and similar movements led by disabled people in different parts of the world led to an increased participation of disabled people in the process of advocacy for their rights. For example, the Disabled People’s International (DPI) which is a leading international organization of disabled people was founded on the bases of philosophy of self-advocacy. DPI soon acquired widespread support from international organizations working in the field of disability (Disabled Peoples’ International, 2011). Even international organizations that are not focused solely on disability have begun to support a disability-rights perspective. For example, World Bank hired Judy Heumann who has been a pioneer of the Independent Living Movement and leader of the disability rights movement in the United States (“World Bank Appoints Judy Heumann to New Disability Adviser Post,” 2002) and now in the year 2011 she has been working in the Obama administration as special advisor for international disability rights, under the US state department (Heumann, Judith E. Biography, 2011). This illustrates a change in the attitude toward advocacy leading to a rights based approach at the international level.

In an era of globalization and the Internet, India has been an active participant in international affairs and so it is logical that its civil society organizations as well as the government authorities would be considerably influenced by international developments. Emergence of the approach based on the philosophy of self-advocacy was thus bound to influence the ideology of the service delivery organizations in the field of disability. These organizations could no longer be oblivious to this newly emerging advocacy-oriented approach after it acquired legitimacy at the international level. At the same time, the change in the approach toward advocacy at the international level also influenced the government, private funding bodies, and individual donors in India. Hence, the fear of alienating funders through adoption of an advocacy-oriented approach has also been decreasing, which is proving to be a very important factor in prompting the NGOs engaged in the disability field to change their attitude toward advocacy.

As explained in detail in the fourth and the fifth chapters, from the time of the formation of AICB in 1978, its prominent leader, Jawahar Lal Kaul, and his close associates actively opposed the advocacy-based approach adopted by NFB for about a decade. However, as mentioned in Chapter 6, by the late 1980s the leadership of AICB gradually began to accept this approach. Similarly, as also noted earlier in this chapter, its involvement in contentious political action as well as advocacy through the use of legal forums to get the provisions of the PWD Act implemented was clearly noticed in the post-1995 period. For instance, it is worth repeating here that AICB was the co-organizer with the NFB of a joint rally in August 2005 demanding the implementation of some of the provisions of the PWD Act, particularly its Section 33, seeking amendments to the

law and replacement of a sighted director of NIVH with a blind individual (“Visually Impaired Take out Rally,” 2005).

In addition to involvement in certain advocacy activities involving contentious political action, the AICB has regularly engaged in advocacy through registering complaints before the CCD. For example, the AICB filed a complaint with the CCD in 1999 relating to the issue of denial of promotion of blind employees selected under the reserved quota system for the blind in a leading government run bank (*All India Confederation of the Blind and Ors. V. Punjab National Bank*, (1999). Similarly, citing section 33 of the PWD Act, the chief functionary of AICB took the matter of promotion of blind employees in higher levels of jobs through the forum of the Central Administrative Tribunal, which deals with issues of the rights of Central Government employees (*J. L. Kaul v. Services III, Department of NCT of Delhi*, 1999). At the same time, the AICB has also been knocking on the doors of the court from time to time to get the provisions of the PWD Act implemented.

The prominent lawsuits filed by the AICB in the Supreme Court of India included one under which it demanded that it is the responsibility of the government to provide school level text books in Braille (*All India Confederation of Blind and Anr vs. Union of India and Anr*, 1998). Similarly, another very crucial issue related to the relaxation of qualifying grades for the test conducted by the University Grants Commission (the apex level body which sets standards for higher level education) for eligibility for teaching positions at the higher education level (*All India Confederation of the Blind vs. Union of India*, 2002). Hence, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the approach of AICB toward

advocacy started changing slightly by the late 1980s, but its leadership began to clearly adhere to the advocacy-oriented approach in the post-1995 period.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the National Association for the Blind (NAB), the largest NGO working in the area of blindness, was strongly influenced by the sighted donors and fundraisers and professionals who dominated its ideology. These professionals or donors who controlled NGOs like NAB had a highly paternalistic attitude toward the blind and they could not imagine blind people speaking for themselves. Also as mentioned in Chapter 4, the NAB completely disassociated itself from the NFB after the 1973 strike led by the Federation. This attitude of the NAB toward the advocacy-based approach began to change beginning in the early 1990s and similar to the AICB, there was a marked shift in NAB's approach in the post-1995 period even though there was hardly any identifiable instance of its direct involvement in any kind of contentious political action. The fact that it stopped opposing advocacy activities carried out by blind activists and began encouraging the occasional involvement of its high-ranked position-holders within advocacy organizations is reflective of a significant change in its approach toward advocacy. The involvement of Anuradha Mohit in the DRG at the time of its formation is a glaring example of the beginning of an acceptance of the advocacy approach by the NAB, as she was then heading the Delhi branch of NAB (A. Mohit, personal interview, June 19, 2005).

Based on my own involvement in the DRG at the time of its founding, I observed that the composition of DRG also reflected the change in the approach of the middle-class disabled members as well as the NGOs engaged in promoting rehabilitation

measures in the field of disability. (See Chapter 1 and appendix 2 for a detailed description of my involvement in the struggle for rights of the disabled in India). In addition to Mohit, another leading member of DRG at the time of its founding was Javed Abidi, who happened to be a wheelchair user. Abidi was then heading the Disability Division of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, a foundation established by the family of the former Prime Minister of India in 1991 to carry out philanthropic work (Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, 2011). Yet another leading member at the time of its founding was Lal Advani who had spearheaded the process of rehabilitation in the field of disability in India as a civil servant (Chander & Baquer, 2005, p. 4). I have provided a detailed description of Advani's professional background and his contribution to the field of rehabilitation of the blind in India in Chapters 2 and 3. The other core group members of DRG at the time of its founding included Sarvjit Singh, a wheelchair user, who was then serving as a high level civil servant in the Ministry of Railways, Ali Baquer who was heading an NGO engaged in the field of intellectual disabilities, and myself when I had already started working as an Assistant Professor in the University of Delhi (Chander & Baquer, 2005, pp. 4-5). This composition of the core group of DRG at the time of its founding in 1994 reflects the fact that there was beginning to be a degree of acceptance of the advocacy-based approach by middle-class disabled members of the society as well as professionals working in the field of disability. It is symbolic of a significant change in the approach of middle-class professionals engaged in the NGOs working in the field of disability, in contrast to their traditional approach of disregard for the contentious political action adopted by radical advocacy organizations like the NFB. Having provided this overview of the change in approach of the NGOs toward advocacy, I now devote the

last but very important section of this chapter to a discussion regarding the time of origin of the disability rights movement in India based on the findings of this research.

Contentious Political Action and the Origin of the Disability Rights Movement in India

The discussion throughout this dissertation, and particularly within the last two chapters, makes it clear that the organized blind launched a sustained movement for their rights by engaging themselves in contentious political action from 1980 onward. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this movement was an impairment specific as it was led by the organized blind and its focus, until the late 1980s, was primarily on the rights of the blind. This leads to a logical conclusion that it was a ‘impairment specific’ movement and cannot be regarded as a “disability rights movement.” This aspect of the movement led by the organized blind, however, changed at the beginning of the third phase of its growth, from 1988 onward. In this section, I reject the existing views regarding the period of origin of the disability rights movement and make an attempt to establish my argument that the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind, since the late 1980s and particularly since 1988, marked the beginning of the disability rights movement in India.

There are two identifiable views regarding the origin of the disability rights movement in India. Anita Ghai (2003), one of the very few scholars of Disability Studies in India, is of the opinion that “the disability rights movement in India got initiated with the declaration of year 1981 as the International Year of Disabled People. Till then, only sporadic attempts were being made to rehabilitate the disabled” (p. 17). On the other

hand, in her master's thesis at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Meenu Bhambhani (2004, p. 17) rejects Ghai's argument and argues that intensification of rehabilitation measures and programs and policies in the field of disability during the International Year of the Disabled Persons (IYDP) is not associated with the beginning of the disability rights movement. She further argues, until and unless cross-disability is taken into consideration, it cannot be called a disability rights movement. Hence, according to her, the disability rights movement in India began with the formation of DRG in 1994. I would agree with Bhambhani in that the launching of certain programs and schemes for the disabled by the government as a part of the commemoration of the IYDP in 1981 in no way led to the mobilization of the disabled to engage in the struggle for their rights. However, I would like to challenge Bhambhani's argument that there was a lack of any movement for the rights of the disabled before the formation of DRG in Delhi in 1994, but before doing that, I would like to present a brief argument dismissing Ghai's views regarding the time of origin of the disability rights movement in India.

Ghai's view is misleading because she regards the commemoration of the IYDP by the Indian government as the symbol of the beginning of the disability rights movement. It is true that this was the first time since Independence that the disabled caught the attention of state officials in such a significant and sustained way, leading to a minor shift in attitude and policy (Mani, 1988, pp. 132-152). However, this shift was in no way related to the origin of the disability rights movement. It was primarily a move on the part of the Indian government to attract the attention of the International community. Therefore, 1981 cannot be regarded as the starting point for the origin of the disability rights movement in India.

The IYDP happened to be commemorated in 1981. There was no disability rights movement and the only impairment specific movement that existed at that point in time was the movement of the organized blind. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5, the movement led by NFB had already gained momentum during 1980. This was the year that happened to be the most important year in the history of the movement of the organized blind in terms of its vigor and publicity during the initial phase of its growth. It was during 1980 that the issue of *lathi-charge* (beating with sticks) by the police on the peaceful demonstrators on World Disabled Day drew tremendous attention from the general public as well as the Parliamentarians and the press. Blind activists from various parts of India had gathered at the time of this incident and they were engaged in some sort of advocacy for their rights throughout the year. The events of 1980 and the intensification of the movement of the organized blind can, therefore, not be said to have been influenced by India's involvement in the commemoration of 1981 as the IYDP. In fact, by the end of 1980, the NFB had already become a troublemaker in the opinion of the authorities and the administration was forced to be vigilant on the occasion of the official event organized by the government to inaugurate the beginning of the IYDP.

Lal Advani, who was in charge of the organization of inaugural events commemorating the beginning of the IYDP, emphasized that the administration was asked to disallow the activists of the NFB to participate in that event:

1981, was declared by United Nations as International Year of the Disabled Persons (IYDP). Every country was to appoint a national committee and I became the secretary of national committee for India. The year was inaugurated by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 1st January 1981. Santosh Rungta was at that time engaged in contentious political actions. He had threatened to disturb the inaugural function [event]. The secretary [the top

level official of the Ministry of Social Welfare] told me that he would leave all the arrangements to me and I would personally supervise security arrangements and refuse admission to all those whom I suspected could disturb the function even if they had an invitation. Accordingly, I stood at the gate and checked every person who entered and fortunately for me, no disturbance took place. The function passed out peacefully and smoothly (L. Advani, personal interview, January 21, 2005).

Hence, based on the strength of advocacy by the blind activists as well as its radical nature, it is clear that the movement of the organized blind, which happened to be the only movement carried out by any disability specific group at that time, had been gaining momentum even prior to the commemoration of IYDP. It is, therefore, wrong to consider IYDP as a watershed or even a stimulator for launching the disability rights movement as was portrayed in Ghai's analysis and thus her argument regarding the co-relationship between the IYDP and the origin of the disability rights is not convincing.

Rejecting Ghai's theorization of the commemoration of the IYDP as the year of origin of the disability rights movement in India, Bhambhani (2004) opines,

There is no doubt that, with international pressure, advances were made in the government response and some consciousness also developed among disabled people in India. However, this definition of a ["movement"] is a matter of contestation and thorough academic research. Sporadic or desultory attempts at demonstrations by single or impairment-specific groups cannot necessarily be termed a movement ... I believe that the real movement of contentious disability political action in India started in the early 1990s with the formation of the cross-disability advocacy group, Disabled Rights Group (p.17).

Bhambhani's argument is right to the extent that the movement led by the organized blind lacked participation of different groups having varying types of disabilities until the formation of the DRG in 1994, but it does not mean that there was no advocacy for the rights of the disabled as a broader category of disability. I now explain why I disagree

with Bhambhani regarding the issue of the period of origin of the disability rights movement.

Based on the statement by Bhambhani quoted in the preceding paragraph, two points emerge: first, there is no history of sustained movement even by any impairment specific group during the 1980s and early 1990s as whatever advocacy activities that took place during this period were basically ‘sporadic’ or ‘desultory’ attempts at demonstrations by ‘single’ or ‘impairment-specific groups’ (p.17) and second, no history of contentious political action by any impairment specific group can be regarded as a part of the history of the disability rights movement due to the lack of cross-disability participation prior to the formation of the DRG in 1994. As discussed in detail in the preceding chapters, particularly chapters 5 and 6, the advocacy activities carried out by the blind activists did not remain sporadic and desultory. On the contrary, there is a well-documented history of contentious political action resulting into a sustained movement led by the blind activists particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s prior to the formation of DRG. This argument of mine is self-explanatory through the discussion of the movement of the organized blind that I have provided throughout this dissertation, particularly within chapters 5 and 6. I would, therefore, now reject the second point emerging out of Bhambhani’s statement quoted above, namely, no history of contentious political action can be regarded as a part of the history of the disability rights movement due to the lack of participation by cross-disability groups prior to the formation of DRG in 1994.

The dominant academic discourse regarding the origin of the disability rights movement in the United States is that it began with the independent living movement spearheaded by wheelchair users under the leadership of stalwarts like Judy Heumann and Ed Roberts. (Barnatt, & Scotch, 2001; Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Scotch, 2001; Shapiro, 1993). It was again predominantly this group of wheelchair users who led the struggle for the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and then the regulations to implement section 504 of this Act and later for the ADA. This means that what is regarded as the “disability rights movement” in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s was predominantly led by wheelchair users. But it came to be regarded as the ‘disability rights movement’ as it was focused on the issue of rights of a broader community of disabled people rather than a impairment specific group like the blind or the wheelchair users only. This group of the disabled engaged in the struggle for the rights of the disabled community came to be known as a newly recognized “minority group” in the United States (Barnatt, & Scotch, 2001; Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Scotch, 2001; Shapiro, 1993). Hence, despite limited participation by different disability groups and the predominance of wheelchair users in the contentious political action during the 1970s and 1980s, it came to be known as the disability rights movement since it was primarily focused on the issue of rights of broader groups of the disabled community rather than issues concerning any impairment specific group.

Drawing an analogy of the origin of the disability rights movement in the United States, I take a stand that the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind should be regarded as the time of origin of the disability rights movement in India. I argue that even if the movement for the disability law aimed at ensuring rights

of different disability groups was predominantly led by the organized blind, it should be regarded as the beginning of the disability rights movement because of the focus of its agenda. There is sufficient evidence provided in the discussion in Part II of chapter 6, to demonstrate that the movement led by the NFB since late 1980s onward until the passage of the disability law in 1995 by Parliament was basically focused on enactment of a comprehensive disability law dealing with the rights of a broader group of the disabled and not just the blind. Thus, the scope of the agenda of the struggle by the blind was expanded to advocate for the rights of other categories of the disabled as well, in addition to the rights of the blind through the enactment of comprehensive disability rights legislation. Therefore, in short, the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind since 1988 in my opinion also marks the beginning of the disability rights movement in India. As discussed in detail in this chapter, I readily acknowledge the fact that this movement however was significantly enhanced by the increasing participation of various disability groups and there is a co-existence of a cross-disability rights movement as well as impairment specific movement in the post-1995 period.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that following the passage of the PWD Act, the movement of the organized blind underwent a noticeable change in the post-1995 period. This phase of the movement was marked by a beginning of participation of different disability groups as well as advocacy for an expanding horizon of issues relating to the rights of the disabled through the traditional as well as new methods of advocacy through an increase in use of courts to litigate rights in India. This period also witnessed a drastic change in

the attitude of the NGOs operating in the field of blindness toward the advocacy oriented approach. At the end, I have attempted to establish my argument that based on the findings of my research, the disability rights movement in India originated with the beginning of the third phase of the movement of the organized blind. In the next and final chapter, I summarize the discussion made throughout this dissertation and offer some concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The Organized Blind in India:

From Passive Recipients of Services to Active Advocates of their Rights

Through this research, I have made an attempt to document the origin and development of the movement of the organized blind in India, which marked the beginning of the adoption of a philosophy of self-advocacy. The findings of this research should serve as a foundation for future researchers to explain the history of the struggle for the passage of the PWD Act starting from the late 1980s as it provides evidence to support the fact that this effort was a decades-long endeavor, and not a new phenomenon of the 1990s. Additional research is needed regarding the role of the courts in advancing disability rights in India, which was beyond the scope of this dissertation.

There is hardly any identifiable documentation to analyze the impact of the PWD Act on the lives of disabled people at the time of completion of this dissertation in the Fall of 2011. But the impact of the PWD Act for empowering disabled people, particularly the blind, can be judged from the developments at the University of Delhi in the field of their education and employment. According to the documents filed by the authorities of University of Delhi in response to a lawsuit filed by a disabled teachers' advocacy organization in the University of Delhi called Sambhavana, 130 disabled people were

appointed as faculty at the University of Delhi between the Spring of 2007 and the Fall 2011 (*Sambhavana vs. University of Delhi*). Of these, sixty were blind (*Sambhavana vs. University of Delhi*). Likewise, there is a sustained increase in the enrollment of blind students in the University of Delhi in the last 3 years, e.g. there were 170 blind students who were enrolled in various programs in 2009 while 205 students were admitted in the year 2010 (C.N. Singh, personal communication, September 5, 2011). On the other hand, almost 250 blind students have been admitted in 2011 (C.N. Singh, personal communication, September 5, 2011). In this chapter, I summarize the findings of this research and make some concluding remarks.

There was hardly any disability rights movement at the national and international level and even the movement of the organized blind in the United States was at a very nascent stage at the time when India attained independence from the British colonial rule in 1947. Therefore, disabled people lacked the attention of the leaders of the anti-colonial struggle. Hence, the disabled had little if any place under the philosophy of positive discrimination enshrined in the Constitution of India. The newly formed Indian state, thus, did not have any mandate to consider the disabled when adopting measures to promote social justice for the marginalized sections of the society.

The lack of a political and constitutional mandate to launch services for the disabled through State intervention basically resulted in the continuation of the type of conditions prevalent during the colonial rule irrespective of independence. Hence any kind of work in the field of disability was still primarily considered to be the domain of the charitable institutions in the immediate post-independence period. The Indian State,

however, gradually started taking some initiative to establish services for the disabled in the 1950s and 1960s. But these were based on a paternalistic attitude of State officials as they were the result of the discretion of some sensitive State officials and they were created in the absence of any effective advocacy by blind activists to lobby for their rights. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that some of these initiatives, particularly the ones related to the creation of educational opportunities for the blind, led to the emergence of a group of educated blind. The members of this group were also inspired by the movement of the organized blind in the United States. As a result, they organized and launched a movement for their rights in India during the early years of the 1970s.

During the first phase of the movement of the organized blind which I described as the phase of 'organization building and moderate advocacy', the emphasis was primarily on organization building and service delivery rather than advocacy (Chapter 4). The founders of the movement did not believe in engaging in contentious political action at its nascent stage. Hence, there was very little noticeable advocacy activity involving contentious political action during that phase of the movement with the exception of the rally led by the Federation in March 1973. This does not mean that the contribution of the early Federationists to the initiation of the self-advocacy movement and organization building was not crucial. Despite the elitist character of the Federation during those initial days of the movement, its founders succeeded in building the Federation by bringing blind people together from different parts of the country. The movement would not have gained as much strength during its subsequent phases without this solid foundation.

With the beginning of the movement of the organized blind in the 1970s, there was a growing consciousness in the minds of the blind activists regarding their rights and they increasingly adopted a rights-based approach by challenging the traditional charity-based approach toward blindness. Their growing understanding was that they deserve their rights as a matter of claim on the socialist State of India rather than charity. They, therefore, needed to launch a struggle for their rights. They increasingly realized that if India was claiming to be a socialist state then it had the same kind of obligation toward disabled citizens as it had toward other marginalized sections like the *dalits* (Chapter 6). This consciousness, reflected in the approach of the blind activists to press their claim for social justice, was further boosted with the issuance of the Office Memorandum of 1977. Despite its limitations, this Memorandum proved to be a turning point leading to a marked shift in the attitude of the Indian State toward the disabled. It symbolized the recognition of the disabled as the potential targets of social justice because of the prolonged history of deprivation of opportunities for their empowerment.

The existence of this Memorandum provided a strong base to enable the blind activists to advocate for their right to employment. They developed an understanding that the Indian State was now legally obliged to ensure their right to employment by filling the required quota in accordance with this Memorandum, and if it was not implemented they could go to the streets to demand its implementation. They now knew that they no longer had to beg for employment as a matter of charity, but deserved employment as a legal right. Therefore, the main focus of the advocacy movement led by the organized blind during the 1980s was the demand for implementation of the provisions for right to employment of the blind as spelled out within this Memorandum. The issuance of this

Memorandum thus had far reaching implications for ensuring the rights of the disabled, particularly for employment for the blind. However, the blind activists also recognized that there was further need for a comprehensive disability rights law due to significant limitations of this Memorandum and their rising expectations from the Indian State.

As explained in Chapter 6, one major concern of the activists engaged in the movement of the organized blind was that the Office Memorandum of 1977 did not address the issue of employment of the blind in an adequate manner. Its implementation was not considered to be as effective as the implementation of a duly enacted law would have been as the government always lacked the political will to actually implement the Memorandum and employ the blind. At the same time, the organized blind were quite conscious of the fact that this Memorandum merely covered the issue of employment in highly restricted categories of jobs and did not cover rights in other areas such as education, housing, and social security. They therefore felt that if a comprehensive disability rights law was passed by the Parliament, it would be easier to address the issue of employment as well as other issues concerning the rights of the disabled. Hence, during the third phase of their movement (1988-1995), the organized blind advocated for a comprehensive disability rights law. But the struggle did not end with the passage of such a law in 1995: rather it now continues in courts and streets for its implementation.

To sum up, the rights-based approach guided the activists of the movement of the organized blind during the 1970s and 1980s and the ensuing years. The 1990s, however, witnessed a broadening of the movement for the rights of the disabled through incorporation of other groups having different types of disabilities as well as non-

governmental organizations engaged in the field of disability. Thus, the rights based perspective is now widely embraced by the current generation of disability rights activists from cross-sections of disability and the non-governmental organizations. This perspective has evolved as a well-established and internalized approach that dominates the thinking of the disabled activists. It is likely to strengthen over time as it crystallizes at the national and international levels. Disabled people are, therefore, no longer going to be passive recipients of services. Rather, they are active advocates for their rights and will emerge as the masters of their destiny.

Appendix 1

Brief introduction of the interviewees

L. Advani: Lal Advani was born in western India which later became a part of Pakistan after the division of the country in 1947. He attended an inclusive school where his father was the head-master. He began his career in 1943 as a Braille instructor at St. Dunson's Hostel established for the war blinded at Dehradun, located in the state of Uttar Pradesh which is now called Uttar Khand. St. Dunstan's was later renamed the National Institute of Visually Handicapped. He devoted his entire life to formulating programs and policies for the disabled. In 1947 he joined the Ministry of Education in the Central Government as a civil servant, but for most of his career he worked for the Ministry of Welfare which is now called the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This is the primary Ministry which deals with disability related issues. Despite being a civil servant, he actively but quietly encouraged the founding of the NFB and supported its activities until the Kanpur Split. He retired as the director of the National Institute of the Visually Handicapped. He also played a crucial role in founding the Disability Rights Group, the first cross-disability advocacy organization, established in Delhi in 1994.

J.N. Bhargav: Jitendra Nath Bhargav was born to middle class parents in the state of Madhya Pradesh. He received his education from the Model School for the Visually

Handicapped (hereafter referred to as the Model School) located at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh and then completed his higher education up to the level of M. Phil (Masters in Philosophy) in Political Science from Sagar University in Madhya Pradesh. He was active in the NFB during the late 1970s before he began work as a schoolteacher in Jaipur, the capital city of the state of Rajasthan, located near Delhi.

D.S. Bisht: Divan Singh Bisht was born in Lucknow, the capital city of the state of Uttar Pradesh. He was educated in a residential school for the blind located at Lucknow and became an active member of the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB during the 1970s. In the early 1980s he moved to Delhi, where he remained an active member of the NFB until he took a clerical job in the state of Punjab. He was one of the rare young activists who participated in the the first ever identifiable demonstration in Delhi in 1969.

M. Desai: Madhuri Desai was born in the state of Gujarat and received her early education in a residential school in Mumbai. She obtained her Undergraduate and Masters degrees in English literature from Bombay University along with a diploma in journalism and she is currently a practicing astrologer. She was among those who founded the Maharashtra branch of the NFB in Bombay (the city which is now called Mumbai) after she developed serious differences with the administration of the National Association for the Blind in Bombay. She has been one of the rare blind women who continue to be active in the Maharashtra branch of the NFB since its founding.

L. Deshpandey: Professor Deshpandey was born in Maharashtra and received his education in a residential school for the blind located at Nagpur, Maharashtra. He began his career as an Assistant Professor in a law school at Nagpur, Maharashtra, where he continues to work as a professor. He joined the Maharashtra branch of the NFB in 1981. He has been serving as president of the NFB after being consecutively elected to this position since 1999.

V. Giri: Vasudev Giri was born in the state of Bihar and enrolled in the Model School after completing elementary school in Bihar. He got involved in advocacy activities during high school and has since been an active member of the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB. He took a clerical position at Lucknow (the capital city of Uttar Pradesh) and continues to be actively involved in NFB's activities there.

M.L. Goyal: Madan Lal Goyal was born in the state of Haryana and received his education in two residential schools in that state. His involvement in advocacy began in 1971 when he joined his peers in the fight with the school authorities for their rights. He was hired as a school teacher and has been quite active in the movement of the organized blind in Haryana and was among the founders of the Haryana Association for the Blind, which later merged with the NFB.

G.P.S. Gupta: Gupta was born in the state of Madhya Pradesh and obtained his early school education from the Victoria School for the Blind located in Bombay,

Maharashtra, and then began to work in a factory. He was one of the rare blind activists who continued his studies, going on to earn a Master's degree from Bombay University. He was then promoted to a clerical job. Since 1986 he has been working as a receptionist for a leading national bank. He played an active role in the movements carried out in Mumbai during the late 1970s and 1980s and continues to be an active member of NFB Maharashtra.

R.C. Gupta: Ramesh Chandra Gupta was born in the state of Uttar Pradesh and received his education in an inclusive school setting. He learned Braille through private tutoring. Coming from a reasonably wealthy family engaged in a business which was also politically active, he decided to make a living through this business and not to take a job as he wanted to be actively involved in advocacy through the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB. He has dedicated a substantial part of his life to advocating for employment of blind people. Currently he also maintains the Braille Library of the NFB located at Bhadurgarh, Haryana, in addition to continuing his family business.

S. Gurnani: Saraswati Gurnani was born in the western part of India which became part of Pakistan after the partition of the country in 1947. Her family later moved to Ahmadabad, the capital city of the state of Gujarat. She got her early education in a residential school in Ahmadabad and pursued a career as a school teacher in that city. In 1973, she became the first blind woman to receive a law degree. She was among the early activists of the Gujarat branch of the NFB, beginning in the early 1970s. She

has also been active in the blind women's rights struggle and founded a self-advocacy organization of blind women in Ahmadabad called *Rashtriya Andha Mahila Utkarsha* (Blind Women's National Association).

K. Karan: Khem Karan was born in the state of Uttar Pradesh and attended the Model School. He was trained to work as a telephone operator and receptionist through a program run by the National Association for the Blind in Bombay. While undertaking his training, he developed some differences with the authorities of the NAB and he was well known for speaking out in opposition to them. He was among the early activists who strongly advocated for the founding of the Maharashtra branch of the NFB with its headquarters in Bombay.

G. Kareparampil: Georgekutty Kareparampil was born in the state of Kerala and lost his sight after completing his education. He co-founded the Kerala Federation of the Blind (KFB) the first self-advocacy organization of the blind in India. The KFB was founded in 1967 and later became affiliated with the NFB. Kareparampil remained its undisputed leader until his retirement in 2003. As a prominent leader of the KFB for more than 3 decades, Kareparampil was highly respected by the NFB leadership and was nominated to represent India in several international forums.

J.L. Kaul: Jawahar Lal Kaul was born in the state of Kashmir and was educated in the residential school for the blind located at Amritsar in the state of Punjab. In 1967, he moved to Delhi and joined the staff of the Training Center for the Blind which was a

service established by Madan Lal Khandelval, who was one of Kaul's former school teachers. Khandelval left for Britain in 1968 and Kaul took over the Training Center for the Blind. In 1970, Kaul then founded the NFB, which was then known as the National Federation of the Blind Graduates. He then founded the All India Confederation of the Blind in 1978 after the Kanpur Split. He has been its undisputed leader since that time.

H. H. Khan: Born to wealthy parents in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Hamid Hasan Khan joined the Communist Party of India. Due to his involvement in the Communist Party and the mistreatment that he received from his family after his father's death, Khan developed a radical approach toward issues concerning blindness. Once he came in contact with blind people when he started working at the Training Center for the Blind in Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh, he became an active member of the Dehradun chapter of the NFB and continues to hold a leadership position in that Chapter. He played an important role in mobilizing the activists from Dehra Dun and led them in the movement carried out by the NFB during the late 1970s and 1980s.

M.L. Khurana: Madan Lal Khurana was born to Punjabi speaking parents in western India during the colonial period and his family moved to Delhi after the partition of the country in 1947. He joined the Bhartiya Janta Party, a right wing Hindu nationalist political party, and was one of the conservative leaders of this party until he was expelled in 2006 due to internal politics of the Party. He also held the position of the chief minister ship of Delhi during the early 1990s.

P. Jokim: Padma Jokim was born in the state of Maharashtra. She was educated in Mumbai in an inclusive school setting and then took, a clerical job in a bank in Mumbai. She has been involved in organizing sports activities for the blind and a strong advocate for the rights of blind women and their inclusion in organizations of the blind.

J. Luthra: Jagdish Luthra was born in Uttar Pradesh and attended the Model School. He began his career as an assistant professor in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, but gave up his job and started an educational institute to teach students studying for civil service examinations. He was active in the advocacy movement in Delhi during the early 1970s, but later withdrew from this involvement in order to focus on work at his educational institute.

D.S. Mehta: Daryav Singh Mehta was born in Rajasthan and completed his education at a residential school for the blind in Ajmer, Rajasthan. He began his career as a teacher in a residential school for the blind in Udaipur, Rajasthan and retired as the headmaster of that school. He was an active member of the Rajasthan branch of the NFB during the 1970s and 1980s. He encouraged the young adults studying in the school where he was teaching to participate in the demonstrations for employment of the blind in Rajasthan. He also held various leadership positions in the National Association for Instructors of the Blind, an association engaged in advocacy for the rights of teachers working in schools for the blind in India.

V. Mehta: Vishakha Mehta was born in the state of Maharashtra and educated in schools for the blind in Mumbai. She worked in a clerical job for a private company in Mumbai and became involved in the Maharashtra branch of the NFB. She actively advocated for involvement of blind women in the NFB. She also introduced a Braille ballot for the NFB elections and organized several conferences relating to women's empowerment.

V. K. Mishra: Vinay Kumar Mishra was born in Uttar Pradesh. He received his education from the Government Senior Secondary School in Delhi. After completing his higher education at the University of Delhi, he obtained a clerical job in the Central Government. He was very active in the NBYA beginning from his school days and played a leadership role in its activities during the 1980s.

A.K. Mittal: Akhil Kumar Mittal was born to upper middle class parents in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He obtained his education in an inclusive setting and learned Braille through private tutors. He came in contact with Lal Advani during his high school days and was highly inspired by him. After attending Agra University, he went to Perkins School for the Blind located in Watertown, Massachusetts, and received a diploma in inclusive education of the blind. He was one of four blind trainees from India in 1969 who conceived of the idea of formation of the NFB in India after reading an article by Kenneth Jernigan, the prominent leader of the NFB of the USA.

He was among the founding members of the National Federation of the Blind Graduates in 1970 and then the All India Confederation of the Blind in 1978.

A. Mohit: Anuradha Mohit was one of the few activists who played a vital role in advocacy and who gained significant recognition for this. Born in the prosperous state of Punjab located in the vicinity of New Delhi to middle class parents, Mohit gradually lost her vision during her early adulthood. She was educated in an inclusive setting and has a very good command of English. She began her career as a university faculty in her home town and then joined the National Association for the Blind. She was active in the formation of the Disability Rights Group, the first cross-disability rights organization, which was established in Delhi in March 1994. She was the first disabled and female Deputy Commissioner, a position next to the Chief Commissioner on Disability (an apex level quasi-judicial body set up in the field of disability under the PWD Act of 1995). After serving as a reporter on disability issues for the National Human Rights Commission she is currently serving as the director of the National Institute of Visually Handicapped, Dehradun, Uttar Khand.

N. Nishad: Nathuram Nishad was born in Uttar Pradesh and got his school education from Government Secondary School for Blind Boys in Delhi and then his higher education from the University of Delhi. he is now working as a teacher in a high school in Delhi. he revived the Blind Persons' Association (BPA) during early 1990s. BPA was founded in 1970s (see chapter 4), but the organization did

not remain active after the initial years of its existence. However, after reviving BPA in 1980s, Nishad organized certain advocacy activities in order to launch struggle for employment of educated blind in civil services in the Central government Services as well as State Government Services.

R.R.B.R Pokhale: Ram Rao Bitthal Rao Pokhale was born in Maharashtra and attended two residential schools for the blind in that state, one located at Nagpur and the other one at Amravati. He has been teaching in the residential school for the blind at Amravati. He was inspired by Hasmuckh Shah who was one of the founding members of the Maharashtra branch of the NFB. Pokhale has been an active member of the Maharashtra branch of the NFB since the late 1970s. He has also held a leadership position in the *Maharashtra Rajya Apanga Sanstha Shikshaka va Karmachari* (union of Maharashtra disabled government employees and teachers).

S. Pokhale: Sudhakar Pokhale was born in Maharashtra and attended a residential school for the blind in Amravati, Maharashtra. He took a position there as a teacher after completing his higher education and special teachers' training for blind children. He has been actively involved in the Maharashtra branch of the NFB and also founded an advocacy organization of the disabled called the National Association for the Welfare of the Physically Handicapped.

A. Prasad: Akhlesh Prasad was born in Bihar and went to the Model School. He started working as a teacher after completing his higher education and remained

active in the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB. His involvement in the advocacy movement began in his high school days when he became active in the Dehradun chapter of the NFB. He played a leading role in the movement led by the NFB in Uttar Pradesh during the 1980s.

J. Ram: Jaggay Ram was born in Haryana and attended a residential school in that state. During his school years, he was very active in the struggle against the school authorities. He pursued a career as a school teacher and has been active in the movement in Haryana and Delhi. In particular, he played a leading role in the movement in Haryana during the 1980s.

R. Rakibe: Professor Raghunath Rakibe was born in Maharashtra. He attended a residential school for the blind in Maharashtra and began his career as a university faculty after completing his higher education. He joined the Blind Men's Association of Maharashtra (now called Blind Persons' Association), a service delivery organization in Maharashtra, but because of his increasing political awareness and belief in the philosophy of self-advocacy, he joined the Maharashtra branch of the NFB in 1977 and became its leading activist. He was elected president of the NFB in 1983 and played a leading role in the movement for employment in Maharashtra in the 1980s.

M. K. Rastogi: Mahendra Kumar Rastogi was born in Uttar Pradesh and completed his education at the Model School and the residential school at Lucknow, Uttar

Pradesh. He was among the founding members of Netrahin Hitkari Sangh, which was established at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh which happens to be the location of his parents' house. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Netrihin Hitkari Sangh later merged with the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB. In the early 1970s, Rastogi became a leader of the NFB first in Uttar Pradesh and later in Delhi. He played a leading role in the first major demonstration carried out by the NFB in 1973. He was head of the Vocational Rehabilitation Center, a service agency operated by the Central Government which provided vocational training to the uneducated and semi-educated disabled. He was also active in the advocacy cell of the All India Confederation of the Blind before moving to London, where he has lived with his son since his retirement from his job in Delhi.

B.V. Reddi: He was born in Andhra Pradesh and went to a residential school for the blind in that state. He was one of the Indian students at Perkins School, located in Watertown, Massachusetts who contemplated the idea of establishing a self-advocacy organization of the blind in India similar to the NFB of the USA and worked on this goal upon his return to India in 1970. He was among the few very close comrades of Jawahar Lal Kaul who left the NFB and joined the All India Confederation of the Blind in 1978 after the Kanpur Slit. He also founded the Andhra Pradesh branch of the NFB and played a leading role in the movement of the organized blind in that state.

S.K. Rungta: Santosh Kumar Rungta was born in Uttar Pradesh. He attended the Model School and made his career as a lawyer in Delhi. He has been the prominent leader of the NFB since his election in 1978 at the time of the Kanpur Split. With the exception of a brief period of absence from his leadership position (from 1982-1985), he has been the undisputed leader of the NFB. He was born into an affluent business family, had a good support system, was able to achieve a good command of English, and had an in-depth knowledge of legal matters. These factors, along with his aptitude for leadership and rhetoric, helped him become a powerful leader.

R. K. Sarin: Ramesh Kumar Sarin was born in Delhi and obtained his education from the Model School. He became active in the movement of the organized blind in the mid-1970s when he was studying at the University of Delhi. He drafted the constitution of the National Students' Organization of the Blind when it was formed. He has been very active in the National Blind Youth Association since the time of its formation. He also played a leading role in the NFB for about 3 years, from 1978-1981, when there was an alliance between the NFB and the NBYA. During that time he acted as a spokesperson for the NFB and was responsible for coverage of the movement by the media. He left the NFB after the differences arose between its leader, Santosh Kumar Rungta, and Bharat Prasad Yadav, the leader of the NBYA. Since then he has played a leadership role in the NBYA. He spent a major part of his early adulthood as a freelance Braille transcriptionist before joining a government airline company as a clerk. He then went on to earn his Ph.D. in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, one of the leading universities in Delhi, when he

was in his mid 50s and then was hired as an Assistant Professor at the University of Delhi. He had also been active in the student division of the Communist Party of India. In the early 1990s, he founded an advocacy organization called Progressive Society for Sightless Persons. Because of his background as a student of Political Science and his constant involvement in the movement of the organized blind, he is very articulate and well informed about issues concerning the movement of the organized blind in Delhi. This made him the most cited person in my research and, as noted in Chapter 2, I was very fortunate to have him as my chief research assistant.

H. Shah: Hasmukh Shah was born in Gujarat and attended the Victoria School for the Blind in Bombay, Maharashtra. He initially joined the Blind Men's Association in Maharashtra, but was so impressed with the self-advocacy philosophy of the NFB when he participated in the 1972 NFB Convention that he then co-founded the Maharashtra branch of the NFB. He is a strong believer in the philosophy of self-advocacy and still active in the Maharashtra branch of the NFB while running a jewelry business in Mumbai.

A.K. Sharma: Anmol Kumar Sharma was born in the state of Uttar Pradesh and completed his school education from the residential schools in Kanpur and Lucknow in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He was among the pioneers of self-advocacy movement of blind in Uttar Pradesh during late 1960s and early 1970s and was among the founding members of NFB Branch of Uttar Pradesh. He joined his career as a school teacher in the

residential school at Lucknow and was the principal of that school at the time of interview.

R. A. Sharma: Ram Avtar Sharma was born in Uttar Pradesh and was educated at Andh Maha Vidyalaya, a residential school for the blind in Delhi. He was among the founding members of the Blind Persons' Association, a student organization, when he was studying at the University of Delhi. After the Kanpur Split, he joined the All India Confederation of the Blind due to his loyalty to Jawahar Lal Kaul. He was the first blind person to complete a doctorate at the University of Delhi. the completion of his doctorate in the late 1980s he, he joined the faculty at the same university.

S. N. Shrivastva: Shree Nath Shrivastava was born in Uttar Pradesh and received his education at the residential school for the blind at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. He obtained a job as a telephone operator in Ludhiana, Punjab, but returned to Lucknow to actively participate in the movement taking place there in the early 1980s. He now works for the Uttar Pradesh government.

S. K. Singh: Sat Kumar Singh was born in Uttar Pradesh and received his education from two residential schools in Uttar Pradesh, one located at Lucknow and the other located at Varanasi. He attained a leadership position in the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB after the Kanpur Split. Due to strong support by blind activists in Uttar Pradesh who constituted the majority of the membership of NFB and easy access to the headquarters in Delhi, he was able to challenge the monopoly of Santosh Kumar Rungta as leader of the

NFB. Hence, Singh served as the General Secretary of the NFB from the later part of 1982 to the early part of 1986, the only time in the history of NFB when Rungta was not the General Secretary after the Kanpur Split. It was during this time (1984-1985) that Singh organized a movement when the NFB lobbied with Prime-Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Singh continues to be a rival of Rungta and the most powerful leader of the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB.

V. P. Singh: Vishwanath Pratap Singh was born in Uttar Pradesh into a high caste family. He entered politics during the time that he was pursuing his higher education and then joined the Congress Party and became the chief Minister (a position comparable to the governor of a state in the U.S.) of Uttar Pradesh in 1980. He later became the Finance Minister in the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1984. He then exposed some corruption scandals in the Rajiv Gandhi Government and formed a new political party through which he came to power in the next general elections in 1989 and became the Prime-Minister of the country. Though he was only in this position for 2 years, those years are considered historic in Indian politics because he introduced a quota system for what is described as Other Backward Classes of Citizens (lower-middle castes), which has had far reaching implications for change in the Indian political scenario. Singh has been highly respected by blind activists because of his exceptional initiative to employ 213 blind people in Uttar Pradesh State Government in 1981.

S.J. Thakur: Shiv Jatan Takhur was born in Bihar and was educated at the Model School. He became an active member of the Dehradun chapter of the NFB in Uttar Pradesh

during his school years. He was among those who opposed the monopoly by the first generation of leadership and contested elections for the position of General Secretary of the NFB in 1976 as a representative of the alliance within NFB against the leadership of Jawahar Lal Kaul. This alliance was led by Santosh Kumar Rungta who himself ran against Kaul in 1978, which led to the Kanpur Split. Thakur then after returned to his home town in Bihar where he took a position as an assistant Professor of English literature and withdrew from the politics of the NFB.

A. Tiwari: Arun Tiwari was born in Uttar Pradesh and attended a residential school for the blind in Madhya Pradesh. After his schooling, he moved to Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and joined the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB. He attained a leadership position in the late 1970s, and since that time he has remained a very active member of this group. He has also played a very active role in the movement of the organized blind in Delhi as well as Uttar Pradesh.

V.P. Varma: Professor Ved Prakash Varma was born in Uttar Pradesh and attended a residential school in Punjab. He became the first blind faculty member at the University of Delhi after he was hired as an assistant professor in 1966. He was among the founding members of the NFB in 1970, when it was called the National Federation of Blind Graduates. He remained quite active in the NFB until the Kanpur Split and later joined the All India Confederation of the Blind. He is known as a leading scholar of philosophy, who has written extensively on philosophical issues and to some extent issues relating to

blindness. He also edited a Braille Magazine titled Braille Bharti, which was published by the All India Confederation of the Blind.

R. M. Vyas: Ram Milan Vayas was born in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He was one of the early graduates of Andha Maha Vidyalaya who had to struggle to get accepted in the University of Delhi. He therefore, had to join his other peers to launch a movement for the rights of blind students in the University of Delhi through the students' movement during 1970s. After completing his higher education from the University of Delhi, he joined his job as a language officer in the Hindi Department of Central Government in Delhi.

B. P. Yadav: Bharat Prasad Yadav was born in Bihar and got his elementary education from a residential school at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh and then attended the Andh Maha Vidyalaya in Delhi. He became a leader of the students' movement while studying in Andh Maha Vidyalaya . Later, he founded the National Blind Youth Association when he was pursuing his higher education at Delhi University. As noted in Chapter 5, NBYA was the only powerful organization based in Delhi which was a competitor of the NFB. Just as Santosh Kumar Rungta has been the most powerful leader of the NFB in the post-Kanpur Split period, Yadav has been the most powerful leader of the NBYA. Yadav also earned his doctoral degree from the University of Delhi and took a position as a school teacher in Delhi. He is no longer formally the General Secretary of NBYA but he still enjoys a strong influence in NBYA. He led the NBYA movements of 1981 and 1984.

D. P. Yadav: He was born in Maharashtra and obtained his early education in a residential school for the blind in a remote district of Maharashtra. He moved to Mumbai and joined the NFB in the early 1980s. He was the General Secretary of the Maharashtra branch of the NFB at the time of the interview in July 2005.

V. P. Yadav: Vijay Pal Yadav was born in Uttar Pradesh and attended the Model School. He became an active member of the NFB beginning in his school years and joined the executive committee of the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB when he moved to Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. He works as a high school teacher and continues to play an active role in the Uttar Pradesh branch of the NFB.

Appendix 2
My Personal Struggle for Education and My
Interactions with the Indian Support System for
the Blind

Born to uneducated poor parents in a remote village in the state of Rajasthan, India, there is no record of my date of birth. But based on his memory, my father put February 27, 1968 as my birth date on school records. My grandfather was a landlord and acted as a tax collector for the British colonial government. However, he sold or donated a major portion of his land to other villagers due to conflicts over the joint ownership of the estate with his older brother. So my grandfather was left with a relatively small piece of land, in a semi-desert area of Rajasthan. Moreover, he had four daughters and two sons, none of whom were educated. His youngest son, Jabhar Singh Yadav, was adopted by his brother, who had daughters but no son. Hence, my grandparents were left with only one son, Balu Singh Yadav (my father) and his four sisters.

My father Balu began his career as a military soldier, a common profession for village boys from that part of the state of Rajasthan. But having grown up as the son of a wealthy land-owner, he could not tolerate the strict discipline and rigorous training of the military and was quickly discharged. With almost no income from the relatively small amount of land left and the need to support a big family, he was then sent to the city to look for a new job. (It was and is common for village families to define a son's

occupation and opportunities, with little free choice offered.). He found employment as a security guard in a leading Government bank and spent most of the remaining years of his life in Delhi, leaving his family (including his parents, wife and children along with his siblings) behind in the village, about 150 miles away from Delhi. But my father's young brother, (who had been adopted by their uncle), Jabhar, died at a rather young age, leaving five children and his widow whose maintenance became my father's responsibility, despite his brother's having been adopted into another family. As a result my father was left with the responsibility of looking after his late brother's family along with his own five children.

I was the youngest of five. This also put me in a relatively advantageous position over my other siblings and cousins. All of them, who were dependent on my father, were grown and had acquired financial independence by the time I began my higher education. My sister and female cousins were married rather early (-during their late teens), having had very little education. Only one of my brothers was able to go to university; he works as a school teacher in my native village. The rest of my brothers and cousins were not able to study beyond the high school level and obtain lower level jobs in the government sector (except one cousin who remained engaged in agriculture).

I lost my sight when I was 6 years old due to what is described as “optical-atrophy,” probably caused by a tumor on my optic nerve. This seemed to be the greatest tragedy for the family after the death of my father's younger brother. My family was devastated, but they hoped for a cure, although my male and female kin had different approaches to

finding one. While my mother, grandmother, and aunts hoped that my sight might be restored through religious or spiritual methods, my male kin sought a cure through modern medical science. Yet despite placing their main hopes in religious and spiritual measures, the women did not rule out the possibility of utilizing modern medical means and were ready to support the decisions of the male members to consult the doctors. (They in fact had little choice given that they were bound by the decisions of the male members of the family in a highly male-dominated society.)

Against the decision of the male kin and perhaps without their knowledge, my mother continued trying various religious or spiritual means, including seeking out various gurus for their supernatural abilities. My female kin also attended various religious rituals with the purpose of curing my blindness. Eventually the decision of the men prevailed and my father and grandfather focused on treatment first in the local hospital near my village and then a prolonged treatment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the largest and then the best government hospital in India, located in the capital city of Delhi.

Since my father was working Delhi, he brought me there for diagnosis of the cause of my blindness. The diagnosis took more than a year. At that time the doctors informed my family that there was almost no possibility of a cure. If my parents were willing take a great risk, the doctors could try a surgical remedy, but they were warned that this involved the possibility of my losing my life or becoming paralyzed.

It was a very difficult situation for my parents; they had to put my life in danger with surgery or accept my blindness. Finally, my parents refused to take any risk and decided to accept and bring me up as a blind child.

School Education and Familial Support

After overcoming the shock of learning that there was no hope of restoration of my vision, my father began to worry about my bleak future. Like any parent of most disabled children in poor households from rural India during the 1970s, he worried about who was going to feed me once both of my parents passed away. In such a moment of despair, there appeared a light at the end of the dark tunnel. While discussing his concern with his colleagues in his office, he learned from a high-level official that there was a school that educated blind children. My family and kin had never imagined that blind children could be educated. Greatly excited, he visited the Government Senior Secondary School for Blind Boys, located at Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar in the vicinity of the campus of Delhi University (see Chapter 3 for more on this school).

As advised by the school authorities, my father enrolled me in this residential school at the beginning of the next academic session in 1976. I was 8 years old. It was the first time that I had stayed away from home without either parent: The next day my father found me crying, insisting that I wanted to go back to my mother. Every day for a week my father visited with the same result. Finally, both the school authorities and my father

decided that I was not ready to stay away from home and so he took me back to the village.

Upon my return to our village, my mother was relieved and we hugged each other and cried profusely, both extremely happy to be back together. But within a few months, my mother and I both realized that my father had placed me in the school for blind children to empower me and that this would be very beneficial. My family, and especially my mother, had to take me to the fields (which served as a latrine). I could do very little on my own, and certainly would have no education. Probably this would continue for all my life. And who would care for me when my parents passed away? I was soon convinced of the importance of going to school and so I prepared to return to the school for the blind and begin a new chapter in my life.

I went back to the government school for the blind and started learning Braille and other basics. I learned mathematics with the help of what is described as “Nemeth Code,” a method designed by a blind American mathematics professor. Since it was a residential school that imparted education through 8th grade and housed students studying through high school, I was taught not only by my teachers but by older students who tutored me after school officially ended. These other students also oriented me to the campus and played with me in the evenings, and I was soon comfortable there. But after only 2 years, I transferred to a different school.

The monsoon rains of 1977 and then 1978 were very heavy, causing floods in many parts of north India. Delhi too was heavily flooded, especially near the Yamuna River. For parts of 1977 and 1978, my school had to close as the first floor of the building was submerged.

I and my fellow students were fortunate that we were moved to the second floor before it became worse. When my father came to take me home, the water came over his knees. He carried me on his back and kept walking until he found a dry area where he could catch a bus back to the room that he shared with three other security guards who worked at the same bank. With my original school closed, my father decided to look for another school and enrolled me in Andha Maha Vidyalaya located at Punchkuian Road, about a mile away from downtown Delhi. Andha Maha Vidyalaya provided education through the 8th grade, and lodging to those who studied further. In contrast to my previous school, Andha Maha Vidyalaya was a charitable institution run purely through donations. (A detailed description of the significance of this school for the movement of the organized blind in Delhi is provided in Chapter 3.)

I really loved this school as studying was not important: Food was the focus. Any time that the members of a donor family came to donate food or fruit and insisted on distributing these to the students with their own hands, classes were interrupted and the bell assigned to food distribution was rung. This was a routine and not an exception. I told my father during his initial visits that I was very happy because the students played football with apples, a fruit that was far beyond the affordability of the lower-middle

class in India. Even my siblings and relatives were jealous when they heard of the abundance of all kinds of food and fruit in my new school.

Andha Maha Vidyalaya was the oldest school in Delhi. By the time I enrolled, there were some success stories. A few alumni were already enrolled in graduate programs and three were pursuing their doctoral studies. One of its alumni had been named an Assistant Professor. But these successes were exceptions, partly because it was the oldest school in Delhi and there had to be exceptions after more than 30 years. Most critical, though, was that the atmosphere of the school was not conducive a smooth pursuit of studies. And the quality of the academic environment further deteriorated during the late 1970s.

In 1978, a revolt of students was instigated by a faction of the administration and the old administration, including the founding members, was ousted. By the time I graduated from Andha Maha Vidyalaya in 1987, it was in a state of total chaos and the administration had almost collapsed. The school was mostly run by a gang of students: Violence involving fighting; sexual exploitation of younger boys by older boys; cheating in exam; boys sleeping or playing cricket when classes were in session loud playing of radios, cassette players, or harmoniums and singing in the dormitories leading to a unbearable noise level which prevented students from studying beyond class hours—all these became routine activities. Over a period of time the school was partly converted into an ashram type of institution where education became secondary and food and giving shelter to the unemployed blind was primary. The plight of the school can be judged by the fact that some of my peers who studied with me are still living there without engaging

in any productive activities. I was one of the few fortunate students who survived this unhealthy atmosphere.

After the completion of my schooling in the 8th grade at Andha Maha Vidyalaya, I continued to reside there, but attended inclusive schools for the rest of my school education. I initially went to the Government Boys Secondary School, located in the vicinity of Andha Maha Vidyalaya in a poor neighborhood inhabited by low caste families less than a mile from the Birla temple where Mahatma Gandhi was killed. I used to walk to the school along with my blind peers and attend a few periods as classes and be finished by 11.00 A.M. instead of 1: P.M., which was the scheduled time for the school day to end. Because they were from very marginalized and low-socio-economic backgrounds, most of the students in that school were least interested in studying. In addition, the administration was very poor. As a result, hardly anyone remained at the school after 11 A.M. However, due to the inspiration and support from volunteers studying at the Springdales School (whose contribution to my empowerment is explained further later), I was able to do well in 10th grade exams and could aspire to transfer to better school for 11th and 12th grades. So, I enrolled in the President Estate School which was located on the campus of Rashtripati Bhawan (the president's house); it was a co-educational school that was known as one of the best government-run schools in Delhi. (best of the education at the elementary, middle and high school level in India is provided by private schools where most middleclass and upper middle class parents send their children and it is very uncommon to find a good government school even in the capital city of India). The location of President Estate School on the campus of the president's

house which is in the vicinity of North Avenue, where the official houses of Members of the Parliament are located, enabled it to be among the best public schools in Delhi. Its prestige was enhanced by the fact that the children of a few of the Members of Parliament were admitted in that school which enhanced its prestige.

I had wished to enroll in the President Estate School for 9th grade but I did not have the confidence to attend a co-ed school due to very weak command of English. (Fluency in written and spoken English was a still is a very important criteria to measure the success of a student in India.) Hard work leading to an improvement in English during the 9th and 10th grades and support and inspiration from my friends from Springdales Pusa Gate School, (hereafter referred to as Springdales), enabled me to gain confidence and I then had the courage to attend the President Estate School for the rest of my school education. Unlike good private schools, which imparted education in English, the medium of instruction at the President Estate School was Hindi because of it was a state-run school. However, the support from the volunteers at Springdales helped me acquire proficiency in English and I was able to study and take exams in English at the undergraduate level, which in some ways put me on an equal footing with my peers at the university.

In the absence of other opportunities for a career, becoming a university faculty member was the dream job for the blind students based in Delhi between the 1960s and 1990s. Aspiring to such a position during those decades required a lot of courage and perseverance as only a handful accomplished this goal before the quota system was introduced in Delhi University in the post-disability rights legislation period. A few of

my contemporaries succeeded in making their careers as school teachers. I was the fourth person from Andha Maha Vidyalaya to get a job as Assistant Professor in Delhi University (and no one in the past 2 decades has repeated this achievement). In addition to Ved Prakash Sharma and Rajendra Rathore -who were already Assistant Professors when I joined the School (they were hired in the late 1970s and early 1980s), Ram Avatar Sharma was the only other person appointed to the faculty of Delhi University from the school in the late 1980s). Even Ram Avatar Sharma had to wait for 15 years after completing his masters (which was the basic qualification for this job) before he could realize his dream of becoming an Assistant Professor. I attribute my success to the support that I received primarily from student volunteers and the state's initiative through the university, in addition to my family. Before describing the importance of the support from the student volunteers and the university system that enabled me to accomplish my goal, I must mention the support from my family.

Family always plays a very important role in raising any child and the role of parents becomes all the more important in the case of a disabled child. For example, the numerous auto-biographical writings of Ved Mehta (1957; 1972; 1979; 2004), the Indian American blind author, describe the role that his family, particularly his father, played in enabling him to pursue his education. Likewise, my father was very committed to empowering me through education. My family had few expenses for me through primary and secondary school. But when I began to study in college, my father had to decide whether I should stay: Andha Maha Vidyalaya (where I could stay for free) or could he or would he pay for my expenses to stay in a university dormitory?

There would have been no expenses incurred by my father for food, clothing, and accommodation if I remained at Andha Maha Vidyalaya. But to stay on campus meant that these expenses would be incurred primarily by my father. While food and accommodation on the campus were heavily subsidized through state funding, the remaining expenses for them along with other expenses were still very high in relation to my father's income. Although my siblings and cousins were all adults and educated, my father was now retired and earned only a meager amount as a pension.

I asked my father to help me to stay on campus as the atmosphere at Andha Maha Vidyalaya was not at all conducive to pursuing higher education. My father readily agreed to spare half of his pension and sacrifice his other pleasures. So, finally, I was able to obtain the best possible conditions for my higher education through the financial support available partly from my father's pension and partly through the scholarship that I received from the Central Government.

Struggle for Support from the State for Higher Education

It would not have been possible for me to obtain equality in the pursuit of my education at the university level without the provision of a scholarship for disabled students from the Central Government and the financial support received from my father. But apart from the scholarship, two other schemes for blind students were available at Delhi University. First, tapes and tape-recorders were made available so that texts could be

audio-recorded. Second, readers (to read printed text aloud) were employed for the purpose of recording books in audio format in a section designated specifically for blind students in the Central Reference Library of Delhi University, which was the largest library at the University. This section of the Central Library was popularly called the Braille Library where five employees were assigned the task of reading for blind students. The services of these five employees were very useful for those who could make use of them. At the same time, there was a Braille transcriptionist to transcribe books into Braille, and a few Braille books and magazines were kept there purchased from various places in India and abroad. However, I must emphasize that these two schemes, namely, the availability of tapes and tape-recorders and the establishment of the Braille Library, were not introduced by the university authorities voluntarily. Rather, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the blind students of the University of Delhi had to advocate for the establishment of these services.

One of the most important lessons that I learned from my peers in school was to fight for our rights. The students of Andha Maha Vidyalaya were a major force in the movement of the 1980s led by the National Federation of the Blind and the National Blind Youth Association. They also comprised the major force of the students' movement in Delhi during the 1970s. Witnessing the movement of the organized blind during the 1980s had taught me to fight for my rights. It was not easy to get the Braille Library at Delhi University established, nor was it easy to access services for blind students without a rigorous struggle. Since the library was the only place in the entire university where I could exercise my right to read, I quickly began to pursue the matter of getting proper

service from the readers. This required that I be persistent and vigorous with my advocacy beginning as soon as I joined my class at the university (in 1987).

Most of the readers employed to read for blind students in the Braille Library were not competent to do their job. Most important was that the single reader assigned to read English texts was not competent to do so. The readers had all been reassigned from their original jobs as clerical employees and were assigned this job in the Braille Library. I was the first blind student who studied in the English medium track since the Braille Library had been established. The individual assigned the job of reader in English could not perform this job, but his incompetence of reading text in English fluently was not questioned.

While there was an increasing awareness among blind students regarding their rights because of the existence of the movement of the organized blind in Delhi during the late 1980s, sufficient motivation to pursue higher education was still largely missing.

Two factors contributed to this: first, the lack of an atmosphere conducive to studies in the schools that they attended and second, the students' backgrounds within families without any tradition of education. The school administration and teachers of residential schools for blind students in Delhi, in which most of them studied, hardly succeeded in motivating them to have high expectations. Therefore, very few students made sufficient use of the support system available through the Braille Library. But I was determined to

make full use of the opportunity given to me, even the very meager resources of the University library.

Recognizing the incompetence of the reader assigned to English, I eventually complained to his boss, asking that he be replaced. This definitely offended the English reader in the Braille Library and the authorities were also resistant to taking such an action against their colleague. Finally, the authorities assigned another reader to read for me until they found a replacement for the inefficient English reader. But the struggle was not yet over. I also had to convince the authorities to require that the readers work during the summer break.

The employees of the Braille Library were officially assigned to work throughout the year, but before I joined as an undergraduate, they had established the practice of not reading or recording books for blind students during the summer break. Except for the Braille Library, no employees of the University enjoyed a summer break comparable to that of faculty. This practice of the readers not doing their job during the summer break continued for about a decade until I questioned it during my first and second years at the University. I insisted that I needed to get books recorded in advance during the summer break for my courses for the following year, as learning through recordings was much slower than reading as my peers did. I explained that I first needed to get the books recorded on tapes and then make notes in Braille by listening to different books on tape. This involved a long process, much longer than that used by my sighted counter-parts. If I was to study well, I could not afford to take a summer break and indeed I never had a

summer break while doing my B.A. and M.A. degrees. But the employees of the Braille Library strongly resisted any move to make them work during the summer break, arguing that it had never been done before.

This resistance required that I mobilize my blind peers. (There were about 100 blind students at Delhi University at that time.) During the first year, the senior-most librarian intervened and an exception was made so that I was given 1 hour a day to get my reading matter recorded. But the struggle had to be continued during the second year. This time I had to seek support from the National Students Organization for the Blind (see Chapter 4). This struggle finally ended with intervention from the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor was not aware that the employees of the Braille Library were not working during the summer break and not performing the responsibilities assigned to them. Once this issue was brought to his notice, he demanded that they fulfill their job obligation by providing their services during the summer break. Since then, it has been routine for the employees of the Braille Library to work during the summer.

Please note that I had a similar experience during the first year of my doctoral studies at Syracuse University. But while the Office of Disability Services at SU never denied me the services I deserved, it was not able to keep up with the pace of readings to be converted to an accessible format. Also, being a doctoral student in the United States in the post-ADA period, the requirements and expectations placed on me were much greater than in India. It was not possible for me to keep up with the readings required for graduate courses at SU without reading them in electronic text format through screen

reading software on the computer. Hence, I refused to accept readings in any format other than electronic text.

The major difference between the struggle at SU and Delhi University was that while I had support from my blind peers at Delhi, but none from other colleagues or faculty, at SU my faculty and colleagues were enormously supportive. Unlike the struggle which I had to lead in Delhi, the struggle at SU was led by my allies. Most of the students studying with me in the School of Education helped me confront the authorities at the Office of Disability Services and we had strong moral support from the faculty engaged in teaching courses on Disability Studies.

My SU colleagues argued that the nature of graduate studies was such that everyone had to participate in the class discussion. Hence, in the absence of my contribution to the classroom discussion due to my inability to get readings done on time, not only did I lose out, but so did the class as a whole. I found this argument based on an egalitarian philosophy very valuable and deeply appreciated the support of my colleagues. The struggle finally ended with a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Deborah Freund, whom I met with me, some peers, and my faculty advisor near the end of the spring semester of 2002. In less than a year's time, Stephen Simon, a sensitive man committed to ensuring accommodations for disabled students, was hired as the Director of the Office of Disability Services. He transformed the Office of Disability Services and made it highly disabled-student friendly.

Support from Volunteers

Support through the family and the state would not have been sufficient for me to reach my educational goals. Also essential was the support of volunteers, most of who came from middle-class or upper middle class families and who spent a lot of time in reading out the text as well as writing my exams. Prior to the advent of computers (though they are expensive for impoverished families), the 1980s and early 1990s was a time when there was almost no concerted effort to provide reading material for blind students.

Two projects which encouraged students to volunteer are relevant to my achieving an education. The first is the Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) which encouraged high school students to volunteer their services for the under-privileged sections of society. The second was a similar project at the university level which was called National Social Services. One high school which implemented the SUPW project in its true spirit was Springdales School (mentioned earlier), one of Delhi's most prestigious schools, providing education primarily to middle-class or upper middle-class children, its volunteers who joined the SUPW to read for blind students played a vital role in my life.

Mrs. Uma Agrawal, the social work teacher at Springdales who coordinated the SUPW project, was a very sensitive person who was committed to empowering children from marginalized sections of society. She encouraged the students of her school to help the blind students of Andha Maha Vidyalaya obtain an education and become better integrated into society. Some students then truly helped those at Andha Maha Vidyalaya,

and also developed strong friendships with a few students, one of whom was me. Several of these students continued to read and write for me after I enrolled in the university.

The support from the volunteers from Springdales transformed my life. Almost all of my examinations starting from 9th grade (when I joined the inclusive education set up through my masters were written by the eminences provided by Springdales. Not only this, the fact that I can speak fluent English and was able to study in _ English for my higher education, first in India and then in the United States, has to be attributed primarily to the volunteers of Springdales. I could not have learned English without the constant interaction and support from my friends and volunteers from Springdales. I was often excluded from social participation and felt quite isolated during the pursuit of undergraduate studies. As mentioned earlier, most of my sighted_ counter-parts came from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds. It was basically proficiency in English which put me at an even playing field with my sighted peers, but developed few friendships with them. Most of my close friends during my undergraduate days came from Springdales; the volunteers not only provided support in the pursuit of my education, but also helped me feel included in social activities.

There is a major difference between the physical support (food, housing, clothing) that I received from Andha Maha Vidyalaya, itself a charitable organization with state funding only for a few teacher and administrative salaries, and the volunteers of Spring-dales. Andha Maha Vidyalaya received food, clothing, money, and other donations from those seeking merit through performing their dharma, or religious duty. They gave to

“helpless” blind people who needed pity and compassion. But the volunteers from Springdales came with the goal of enabling the blind students at Andha Maha Vidyalaya to have successes in the world of education. Hence, it is to Springdales that I owe the most gratitude and thanks: they truly helped me succeed. (I dreamed that one day my own children would study there, a dream that came true when my daughter, Namita was accepted at Springdales in the 8th grade.)

Unlike most of my blind peers, I was very fortunate to get a job once I was qualified (which was on the basis of an examination called the National Eligibility Test, which is a -basic qualification for the position of Assistant Professor). This was possible partly because of my good grades and performance in the interview and also because of my exceptional good luck and the supportive attitudes of the committee members who hired me. The committee that hired me was primarily comprised of professors who had taught me at the undergraduate and master’s levels and I had already impressed them. Becoming a member of the university faculty with just an MA, let alone being blind, was not a usual occurrence. Most of my blind peers did not dare to aspire to this type of job and were happy to work as school teachers no matter how brilliant they were. There were even cases of some blind people committing suicide out of frustration due to unemployment after earning doctorates from Delhi University or Jawaharlal Nehru University, another leading university in Delhi. A few of my blind peers began working as school teachers and later moved to faculty positions at Delhi University, once the quota system was introduced in the post-PWD period during the latter half of the last decade.

When I did well as an undergraduate, my friends began to suggest that I should earn my doctorate from an American university instead of planning to get this degree from Delhi University. (At this time, a degree from the U.S or the U.K. was sought by all the best students.) To me, this was a joke: I did not dare to aspire for something which then seemed so impracticable. I had not even imagined getting a job at Hindu College so soon and so easily. But as my confidence grew, I began to dream of the impossible. My own students were going to the United States and Britain after receiving recommendations from me! So I began this dream of applying. But I was not aware of any program having some component that would enable me to do research on the disability rights movement, something that I wanted to do and something for which I was registered in Delhi University for my doctorate. It was only when I participated in a conference on disability studies in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 2000 that I learned about Disability Studies at SU. As a result I was able to pursue my dream of undertaking doctoral studies in the United States.

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50 blind arrested while entering in the Parliament. (1989, August 19). *Jansatta*. Delhi.

50 more blind arrested. (1989, July 28). *Punjab Kesari*. Punjab, India.

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Place of birth: Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

Date of birth: February 27, 1968.

EDUCATION

- Doctoral candidate in Cultural Foundations of Education (disability studies concentration), Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York (expected graduation, summer 2012).
- Master in Philosophy in Political Science, the University of Delhi, Delhi, 1995.
- Master in Political Science, the University of Delhi, Delhi, 1992.
- Bachelor in Political Science, the University of Delhi, Delhi, 1990.

PUBLICATIONS

- Chander J. (in press). Disability rights and the emergence of disability studies. In Adalakha, R. (ed.). *Disability studies in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, India.
- Chander, J. (work in progress, anticipated year of publication, 2013). Disability rights movement in India. In Rao, S. & Kalayanpur, M. (eds.). *South Asia and Disability Studies: Redefining boundaries and extending horizons*. Peter Lang: New York.
- Chander, J. (2008, spring). History and disability in India. *The Disability History Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4(1).
- Chander, J. (2008). The Role of Residential Schools in Shaping the Nature of the Advocacy Movement of the Blind in India. Danforth (S. & Gabel S.L. (eds.) *Disability and politics of education: An international reader*. Peter Lang: New York.
- Gabel S. L. & Chander J. (2008). Inclusion in Indian Education. Danforth (S. & Gabel S.L. (eds.) *Disability and politics of education: An international reader*. Peter Lang: New York.
- Chander, J., & Baquer, A. (2005) *Lal Advani: The torch bearer*. New Delhi: Indian Association for Special Education and Rehabilitation.
- Chander, J. (2004, October). Reflection on a visit to LCB and Louisiana Tech University's PDRIB. *The Braille Monitor*, Vol. 47(9). Baltimore, MD: The National Federation of the Blind.
- Chander, J., and Spears, J., (2003). Accommodations for blind and visually impaired students at the Postsecondary level: A Dialogue between Jagdish Chander and Cheryl Spear. In Cory, R., Taylor, S.J., Walker, P., and White, J. (eds.). *Beyond Compliance: An Information Package on the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in*

Postsecondary Education. Syracuse, New York: National Resource Center on Supported Living and Choice, Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University.

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- Awarded the Syracuse University Dissertation Writing Fellowship for the year 2005-06.
- Awarded Junior Research Fellowship by the American Institute of Indian Studies to conduct field research for Ph.D. dissertation for the year 2004-05.
- Awarded the Redley Foundation scholarship at Syracuse University, in the Spring Semester of 2004.
- Awarded a Junior Research Fellowship by the University Grant Commission of India in 1992 to conduct research at the Masters in Philosophy.
- Offered meritorious scholarships at the undergraduate and masters level at the University of Delhi for being among the top three rank holders majoring in political science (1990-92).

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

- The developing countries Research center, University of Delhi, Delhi.
- Society for Disability Studies, USA.
- Equal Opportunity Cell, University of Delhi, Delhi.

PRESENTATIONS

- Presented on “implementation of UNCRPD and disability rights movement in India” at the Regional Consultation on Realizing UNCRPD: Learning from inclusive Practices, organized by Unnati in partnership with Blind People’s Association, held in July 2011 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.
- Presented on “Disability Studies: Methodological challenges potentials in the context of Indian scenario,” in the National Conference on “Exploring Disability Experience in Social Science Research” organized by Centre for Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawahar Lal Nehru University held from March 25-26, 2011 in New Delhi.
- Presented on “disability rights movement in the Indian context” in National Annual Conference on Disability organized by, equal opportunity Cell, University of Delhi held from March 3-5, 2011 at University of Delhi, Delhi.
- Submitted abstract on “Disability rights movement in India: Factors determining the period of origin” for presentation at the 22nd national annual conference of Society for Disability Studies held from June 17-19, 2009 in Tucson, Arizona.
- Presented on “Disability rights and Disability Studies” in the Conference on Disability, Gender and Society: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges organized by The Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi in partnership with the Women’s Studies and Development Centre of University of Delhi held from 21-22 August 2008 at the University of Delhi, Delhi.
- Presented on “status of disabled women in India” at the XI National Conference on Women's Studies held from May 5-9, 2005 at Goa, India.

- Presented on “ disabled students’ activism on the campus of Syracuse University” at The Barrier Free conference organized by the Canadian Disabled Students Organization, University of Toronto held on November 1, 2003 at Toronto, Ontario.
- Presented on “A comparative analysis of The Constitutional basis of the philosophy of Social justice under the constitution of India and USA and the definition of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Persons With Disabilities (1995) Act of India” in the 16th Annual Society for Disability Studies held from June 11-15, 2003 in Bethesda, Maryland.
- Presented on “status of the disabled in India and role of NGOs” at the ASHA 12th International Conference Held on May 24-26, 2003 in New York City.
- Presented on “disabled students’ experience of advocacy on campus” in The Second City Conference hosted by the National Louis University and the Louisiana Tech. University held in June 2002 in Chicago.
- Presented as a member of students Panel on “Disabled students’ advocacy experience at Syracuse University” in The fifteenth annual meeting of the Society for Disability Studies Held in June 2002 in Oakland, California.
- Presented on “The emergence of self advocacy movement of the disabled in India” in the 13th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies held in August 2000 in Montreal, Canada.

LEADERSHIP ROLE

- Currently serving as the General Secretary of Indian Association for Special Education and Rehabilitation (An NGO working in the field of disability in Delhi) and vice-president of Concerned Action Now since 2007 onwards.
- Serving as the coordinator, Equal Opportunity Cell (Office of Disability Services) at Hindu College, University of Delhi since Fall 2006.
- In the Spring, 2005, Instituted the Lal Advani Memorial Lecture Series and organized the lectures on disability since then as a part of this series in the memory of Lal Advani, who is considered to be the father of rehabilitation services for the disabled in India.
- Represented in the university Senate, Syracuse University as a member of the LGBT senate sub-committee for the year 2003-04.
- Acted as the Stuart for five projects aiming at the promotion of educational opportunities for the disabled children in India undertaken by ASHA for Education (a US based fund raising organization to support the education of under-privileged children in India during the year 2003).
- Served as a board member of ASHA-Syracuse and Beyond Compliance Coordination Committee, two leading campus organizations at Syracuse University during 2002-2004.
- Co-founded the Beyond Compliance Coordination Committee (a disabled students' advocacy organization at Syracuse University), in fall 2001.
- Organized the annual grass root colloquium of developing countries research center, University of Delhi on "Rights of the Disabled" in March 2001.

- Worked as a Member of advisory committee that worked with the Associate Vice President of student support and retention, the 504 Compliance Officer, and the Director of the Office of Disability Services to develop an Office of Disability Services Policy Manual and foster collaboration and communication in the university community on issues of disability and diversity.
- Served as the chair, Department of Political Science, Hindu College, University of Delhi during the academic year of 1998-1999.
- Served as an executive board member of Concerned Action Now (CAN), a Delhi based NGO engaged in promoting social awareness on disability related issues from 1995 to 2007.
- Co-founded the first cross disability rights group in Delhi, India called the Disability Rights Group along with 7 other people in March 1994.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH

- Teaching in the Department of Political Science, Hindu College, University of Delhi since 1992 onwards.
- Written the doctoral dissertation at Syracuse University on *movement of the organized blind in India: from passive recipients to active advocates of their rights*, 2011.
- Wrote thesis at the University of Delhi for Master in Political Science, *State Policy towards the blind in India*, 1992.
- Wrote the Master of Philosophy thesis at the University of Delhi on *State Policy towards the disabled in India*”, 1995.

- Worked as a Research Assistant at Syracuse University from Fall 2001 to Summer 2004.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Served on the University Judicial Board and the University Appeal Board (quasi-judicial bodies of the university consisting of students and faculty) at Syracuse University for the year 2003-2004.
- Worked as a note-taker for the United Nations' Ad hoc Committee meeting on disability (June 16-27, 2003) to prepare for the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Served on the National Constitution Review Committee set up by the Chief Commissioner on Disability (Delhi, India) to recommend amendments in the constitution of India related to the provisions for the disabled, 2001.
- Represented numerous disabled students and employees in hearings before the Chief Commissioner on Disability to deal with issues of discrimination by respective authorities.
- Consulted as an expert on disability matters in various documentaries and television news programs in India on leading satellite channels like Zee TV, Star News etc.
- Secured rank 2 at the undergraduate level (1990) and rank three at the master's level (1992) at the University of Delhi (grade A under the numerical based grading system).
- Participated in various extra-curricular activities, such as chess competitions,

debate/speech competitions and paper presentation contexts, in high school and college.

