

# **MILESTONES OF AN EVENTFUL JOURNEY: TWO DECADES OF AICB**



**AICB HEADQUARTERS**

## **ALL INDIA CONFEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

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*The HRD Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi presenting the first set of Braille versions of NBT publications to the Vice-President of India, Shri Krishan Kant. These NBT publications were produced in Braille at AICB*



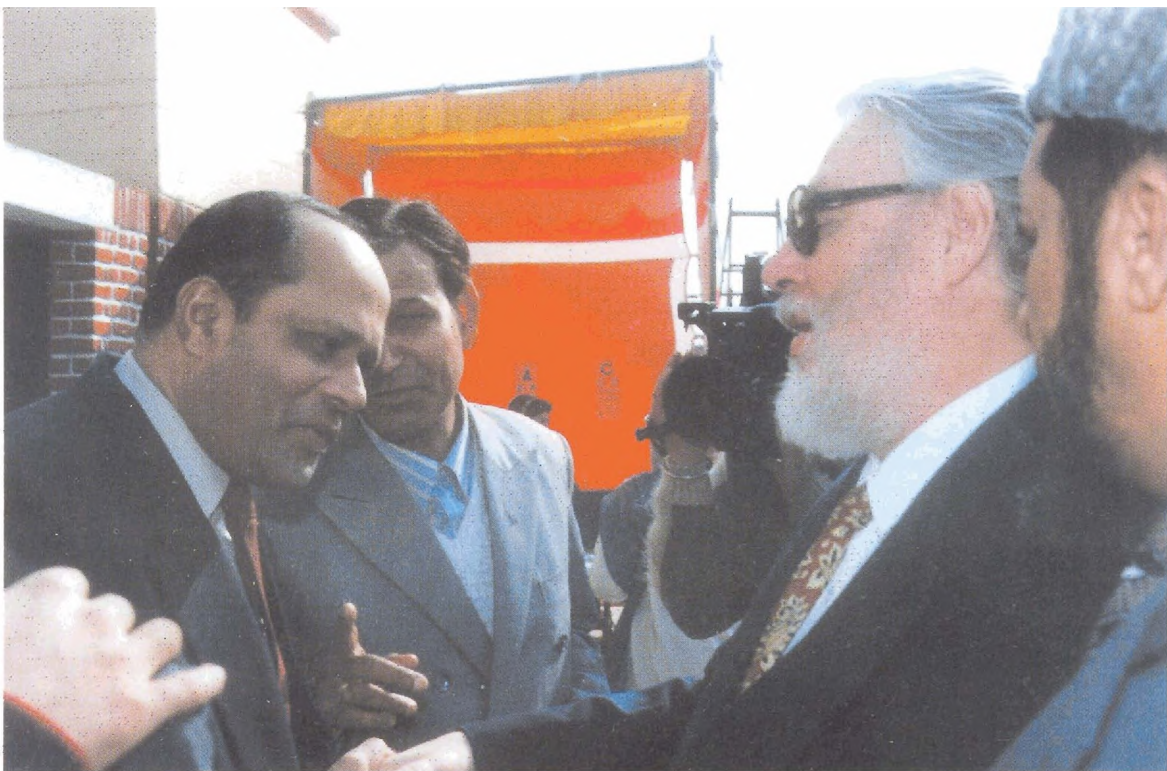
*A visually impaired lady working on Computer at AICB*

# A Challenging Vision

The All India Confederation of the Blind was established in 1980 as part of the world-wide **self-help movement of the blind**. In the two decades of its journey, the AICB has emerged as an **organization with a difference** — where the blind are not just passive recipients, but are active participants as workers, policy makers and significant contributors to society. What sets AICB apart from other organizations of its kind, is its focus on strengthening grass-root level bonds amongst the blind across the country and the development of innovative cost-effective and reapplicable model programmes.

AICB's **multifaceted activities** range from providing basic as well as alternative educational facilities to the blind; from initiating need-based services to the blind in the rural areas to challenging training programmes in Computer Applications; offering training and placement services, running schemes for the elderly blind and countering discrimination through judicial activism. Empowerment of women is a salient feature of AICB programmes.

Today the AICB has a network of 20 affiliates and branches countrywide. We are also a member of Asian Blind Union and World Blind Union. With two decades of **work for the blind** to its credit, the AICB is today acclaimed as an important self-help organization **of the blind** nationally as well as internationally.



*International Director of NABP, Norway, Arne Husveg at AICB, with the Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India.*

# Education: Key to Advancement

AICB has been striving to achieve all-round development of the visually impaired through its multidimensional educational programmes across the country. The AICB Captain Chandan Lal Special School for the Blind, located at Behrampur, Gurgaon is a co-educational Residential School. The school has been designed as a model centre of education, where overall development of the children is encouraged through their participation in various academic and extra-curricular activities. The joyful participation of the children in activities such as Judo and music, goes a long way in building up their self-confidence, enabling them to successfully compete with their visually normal counterparts.



*Captain Chandan Lal School & Students Hostel*



*Opening of the Resource Centre at Gurgaon*

The innovative Resource Centre, set up at the School premises, contains highly specialized devices to facilitate the education of the visually impaired. The model Science Laboratory consists (among other modified science equipment for the blind) of a talking thermometer, a tactile spring-balance, a talking weighing machine, tactile picture embossing machine, etc. This unique Resource Centre in India also has equipments which enable blind children to better understand subjects like Maths, Geometry and Geography.

The Braille Equipment Banks of AICB, located at its head office as well as affiliate centres across the country, support the education of the blind by providing them basic educational aids and recreational articles at subsidized cost. Under its project for the Low Vision, the Confederation has been helping the Low Vision children studying in special as well as normal schools by providing them specifically designed equipments for reading. Besides these, the AICB supports educational programmes of various other institutions in many states by providing them braille books at a heavily subsidized price.

# Facilitating Access to Print Media Through Braille and Tapes

The ABU/AICB Braille Press (set up with assistance from NABP, Norway and Swedish Umbrella Association of the Blind), has been playing a significant role in providing educational and general reading materials to the visually impaired all over the country. Equipped with the latest computerized braille



*Braille Books being printed at the AICB Braille Press*

printing technology, this Braille Press has two high speed embossers, each capable of producing Braille materials at the speed of 400 characters per second. This project has opened up new channels of information for the visually impaired as hundreds of educational titles and books of general interest are made available in braille every year.

With assistance from AMWAY Enterprises, the confederation has been providing schools texts books at the cost of ordinary print books in states such as

Rajasthan, Punjab, UP, Haryana and Delhi. A similar project has been taken up in collaboration with National Book Trust, India, to make accessible to the visually impaired NBT publications in various languages in braille at the same cost at which these are accessible to their sighted counterparts. Endeavours towards making the society realize that the blind have a right to access print materials at no extra cost have yielded significant results.

The AICB Recording Studio and Tape Library are specially designed to meet the requirements of blind students pursuing higher education. The Studio has till date produced more than 300 titles in Audio format. Under the interlibrary loan scheme, recorded books from other libraries in India and abroad are made available to students on request.

To promote general awareness and reading habits among the blind, the Confederation brings out three journals every month—two in braille and one in audio format.

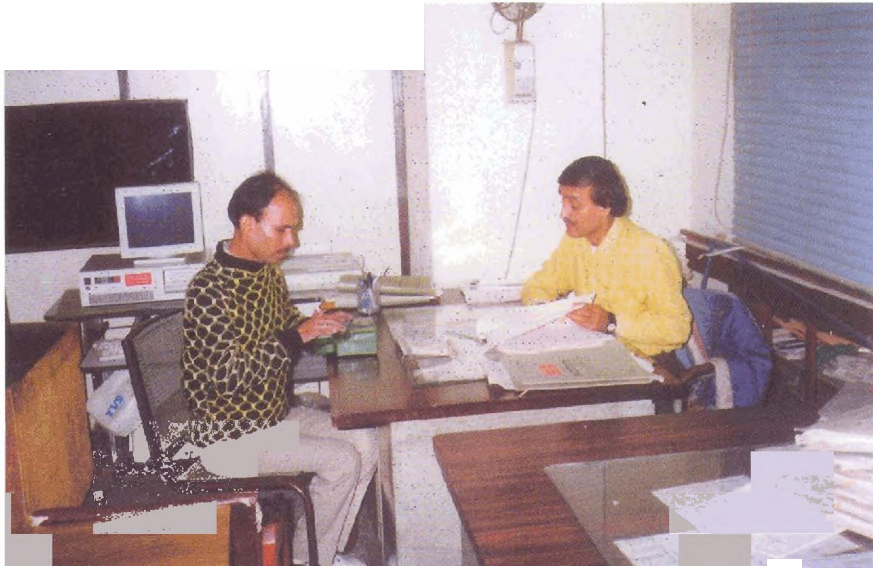


*President WBU Euclid Herie visiting the Recording Studio,*

# Towards Economic Self-Reliance: Vocational Training, Rehabilitation and CBR

The AICB conducts various kinds of **Training Programmes**, with the view of opening up avenues of employment and self-sufficiency of its trainees. The **Stenography and Typing. Training** is one of the most sought-after programmes, and numerous blind persons have secured useful employment in Government Departments, Public Sector and Banks after undergoing this training.

Keeping in view that all work places are becoming rapidly computerized, the AICB has started **Computer Training** Programme for the visually challenged. Employment-oriented training is imparted through this programme with the help of **Speech synthesizers** and screen-reading softwares. With the help of such devices, visually challenged people are successfully able to compete with their sighted colleagues at their place of work.



*A visually impaired stenographer working at Punjab National Bank Zonal Office, after undergoing training at AICB*

As efficient mobility is integral to progress in any walk of life, every blind person attending AICB's Training Programme is provided training in **Orientation and Mobility** by skilled Mobility Instructors. The objective is to boost the individual trainee's morale and confidence, and enable him/her to move about independently with the help of a white cane. To impart similar training in other parts of the country, the Confederation has placed the services of qualified O&M instructors with its affiliates.

To specifically address the problems of those who lose their sight at a later age, the AICB has set-up a **Crisis Management Unit**. Therapeutic counselling and skill-training are provided to such persons, along with free board and lodging, and a monthly stipend. The objective of this programme is to restore the self-confidence of the newly blind and enable them to resume their normal employment/social duties by teaching them specialized skills.

Our Training Programmes are supplemented by effective **Placement Services**.

# Rehabilitation of the Rural Blind

While in the urban areas the Confederation has achieved considerable success in rehabilitating the visually challenged in the organized sectors, in the rural context the emphasis has been in helping



*A visually impaired person engaged in dairy farming*

the rural blind overcome their disability within the community itself. **Community Based Rehabilitation Programmes** conducted by trained field staff have helped the **rural blind** in various parts of the country, such as Gurgaon in Haryana, Patna and Muzaffarpur in Bihar, and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. The CBR has imparted training to nearly 1500 blind persons in villages, in skills such as **rural crafts, animal husbandry and agricultural work.** This has resulted in enhanced self-employment, social

rehabilitation, and more significantly, in greater **self esteem** of the rural blind. **Interest-free loans** to launch shops and small family businesses are also offered.



*A visually impaired lady farmer working in the fields*

**Day-care centres** and **pensions** for the **Elderly Blind** and **Prevention of Blindness** Programmes form some of the other features of our CBR projects.

# Empowering Women

In order to ensure true **gender equality** in all spheres of activity, a determined effort is made at AICB to include women in all its educational, training and rehabilitation services. In addition, the Confederation also runs several schemes and support services exclusively with a view to empower visually challenged women.

To **facilitate** their **higher education**, the AICB has set up a special **hostel** within its premises for college-going girl students, where free boarding and lodging is provided. The academic needs of these students are also taken care of. The Confederation also offers **merit scholarships** to blind women for higher education. The career advancement of blind women is further supported by us by awarding high value scholarships of Rs. 1000/- each per month to talented women wishing to pursue professional and career-oriented courses of study.

Various **leadership and training programmes** conducted by the Confederation from time to time have gone a long way in instilling self-confidence and initiative amongst blind women. In this context, the Confederation's **National Forum of Blind Women** has been playing an active role.



*Ms. Kicki Nordstrom, Sr. Vice President, WBU, delivering the Keynote Address at the 2nd Women's Conference of AICB National Forum of Blind Women.*



*A. Selvi, Ex Trainee of AICB working in P.N.B. Zonal Office, Madras, receiving National Award from the President of India*

Among its other activities the Forum organized the **Second National Conference of Blind Women** in New Delhi in November 1998 with participation of more than 200 women from India and abroad.

Suitable employment of visually impaired women has been a major concern of **AICB**, and a special **Placement Officer** has been appointed in Bangalore to ensure optimum employment opportunities for them.

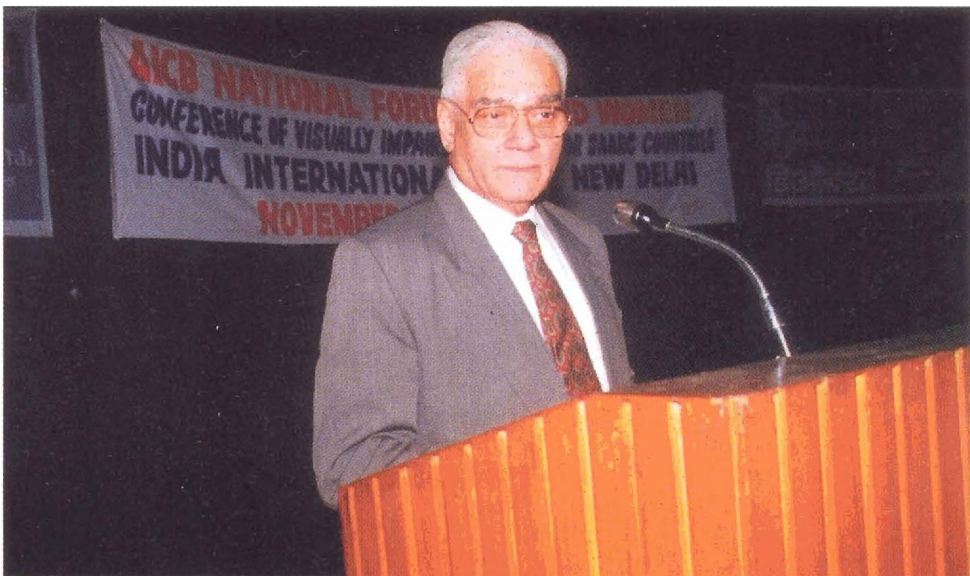
# Social Activism : Combating Discrimination

Equality and full participation in the socio-economic and political life of the country is the right of every blind person. With this perspective, the AICB has been engaged in social activism in order to counter discrimination against the blind.

A special cell has been set up to look into the specific grievances of the visually impaired, relating to denial of opportunities. The issue of discrimination against the blind has also been effectively taken up by AICB on various platforms. A number of public interest petitions filed by the Confederation have led to significant decisions in favour of the visually impaired. For instance, in response to a petition filed in the Supreme Court by AICB, the UGC has agreed to provide 3% reservation in teaching jobs to the blind and physically handicapped at College and University levels. Due to our efforts, the blind are now allowed 30 to 45 minutes extra time while appearing for Civil Services and UGC NET examinations. 5% relaxation in the eligibility requirement for NET is also admissible to them now.

The issue of denial of internal promotions to the visually challenged in public sector and Government departments has been of serious concern to the Confederation. As a result of our appeal on this issue, two favourable orders relating to the promotion of the visually impaired have been issued by the Chief Commissioner (Disabilities).

We at AICB are determined to build up a discrimination free environment for the visually challenged in society, not only through judicial activism, but also by enhancing general awareness in the country in day to day life.



*Mr. M. C. Bhandare, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, presenting a paper on legal literacy for the visually handicapped at an AICB Conference.*

# Adaptive Technology: The Stepping Stone to Future

The rapid integration of technology into one's professional and personal life has made it imperative that the visually impaired are equipped with appropriate technologies to meet future competency requirements. With this as a salient focus, the Confederation has been working towards ensuring the development of adaptive technology for the blind.

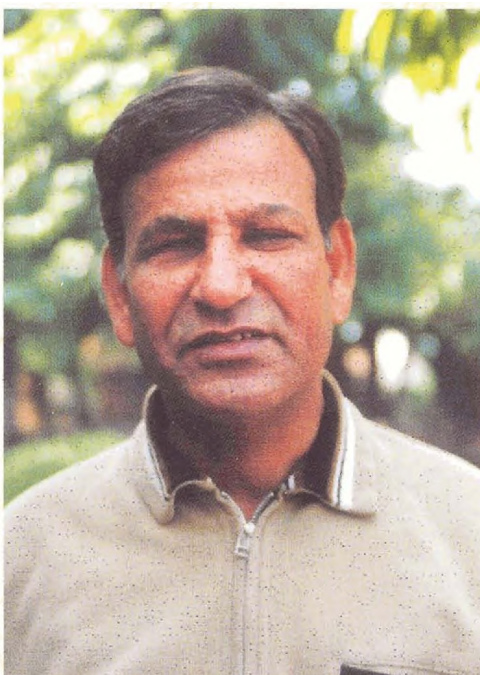
Besides conducting Computer Training programmes, we closely work with leading scientists and institutes—such as I.I.T., LSI, Bangalore and Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India—to facilitate the development of need-based equipments. The Hindi Braille-Embossing software was developed by Braille America at the initiative of AICB.

The Technology Committee of the Confederation which monitors the development of appropriate technology for the visually impaired has conducted an exhibition and two national conferences on this theme. These have provided a meaningful forum of interaction between the visually impaired users of technology and various leading scientists and international agencies from India and abroad.

We are committed to opening new vistas in future for the visually challenged, by making appropriate technologies accessible to them.



*A panel discussion at the 2nd National Conference on Adaptive Technology, 1998.*



J.L. Kaul, Gen. Secretary, AICB, has been working for the cause of the visually challenged for the last thirty years. In recognition of his contribution to the disability sector, he has received two prestigious international awards : The International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England has conferred on Mr. Kaul the **International Man of the Year Award** for the Year 2000 - 2001. The American Biographical Institute, U.S.A. has designated Mr. Kaul as the **Man of the Year** 2000.



*Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment, Mrs. Menaka Gandhi  
distributing prizes to the Winners of the 1st National Braille Reading  
Competition at AICB, January\_2000.  
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