

Negotiating Indivisibility: A Critical Study On Visually Impaired Children In Baharampur Area, Nagaon District Of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Visual impairment is a term experts use to describe any kind of vision loss, whether it's someone who cannot see at or one at someone who has partial vision loss. Some people are completely blind, but few are partially blind. A person's experience of vision impairment varies depending upon many different factors. This includes for example, the availability of prevention and treatment interventions, access to vision rehabilitation i.e., including assistive products such as glasses or white canes and whether the person experiences problems with inaccessible buildings, transport and information. Visual impairment is a global concern that is likely to escalate with prolonged life expectancies, has gained increasing attention in the realm of eye care. The purpose of this research paper is to highlight the different aspects including its definition and characteristics, prevalence, causes and implications and also the life of few students in Baharampur Blind School.

Keywords: Blind Children, Health, Visual Impairment.

INTRODUCTION

Blindness and visual impairment are conditions that significantly limit an individual's ability to perceive visual information and perform everyday activities. Visual impairment includes reduced visual acuity, restricted visual fields, increased sensitivity to glare, and poor contrast sensitivity, which cannot be fully corrected by medical treatment, surgery, or refractive correction (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Blindness is defined as a visual impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance, even when corrective measures are provided. This definition includes individuals with partial sight as well as those who are totally blind (Rao, 2006). Anne L. Corn and Kelly E. Lusk (2010) explain that individuals with blindness or severe visual impairment may retain measurable vision but still experience significant difficulty in performing visual tasks. This demonstrates that blindness should be understood not only in terms of vision loss but also in terms of its impact on functional ability and learning. Blindness is defined as a condition of visual impairment that, even with refractive correction, adversely affects an individual's ability to perform

everyday tasks (World Health Organization, 2021). Corn and Lusk (1998) emphasized that individuals with visual impairments, while having measurable vision, still face difficulties in accomplishing tasks requiring vision. Blindness may result from congenital causes, diseases, or injuries and can range from partial vision loss to total blindness (American Foundation for the Blind, 2023). The American Foundation for the Blind (2023) defines blindness as a condition in which individuals rely primarily on non-visual senses such as touch and hearing for learning and interaction with their environment, and therefore require specialized educational methods, assistive technologies, and supportive environments to achieve independence and social inclusion. Blindness may result from congenital conditions, diseases, nutritional deficiencies, or injuries, and its severity ranges from partial vision loss to total absence of sight. Vision is a primary sensory channel through which children acquire information about their environment, particularly during early childhood. When vision is impaired or absent, children rely more heavily on other senses such as hearing, touch, and movement to learn and interact

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with the world. Corn and Lusk (2010) emphasize that individuals with visual impairment often have measurable vision but still experience significant difficulty performing visual tasks, even with corrective aids. As a result, blind children face distinct developmental, educational, and social challenges that require specialized educational interventions. To address these challenges, blind children benefit from specialized educational methods such as Braille literacy, tactile and auditory learning materials, and assistive technologies including screen readers, audio books, and magnification devices (American Foundation for the Blind, 2023). Orientation and mobility training is also essential, as it helps visually impaired children develop independence and confidence in navigating their surroundings and performing daily life activities such as reading, writing, and personal care (WHO, 2021). The World Health Organization classifies visual impairment based on visual acuity in the better eye with best possible correction. Vision between 20/30 and 20/60 is categorized as mild vision loss, 20/70 to 20/160 as moderate visual impairment, while more severe limitations fall under severe visual impairment or blindness (WHO, 2021). From an educational perspective, visual impairment refers to a condition that adversely affects a child's academic performance even after correction and includes both partial sight and complete blindness (Rao, 2006). Visual impairment is characterized not only by clinical measures but also by functional limitations that affect learning, mobility, and social participation. In many cases, functional vision does not directly correspond to clinical findings, as individuals may adapt and enhance their abilities through training, assistive devices, and supportive environments (Corn & Lusk, 2010). Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of blind students is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of educational provisions and social support systems. Creating inclusive and accessible educational environments is vital for the empowerment and social integration of blind students. With appropriate support, blind children can develop self-confidence, independence, and meaningful participation in society (American Foundation for the Blind, 2023). This study focuses on the educational experiences, daily lives, and socio-cultural conditions of blind students in Assam, with special reference to Barhampur Blind School in Nagaon district, in order

to understand the provisions, support systems, and challenges faced by visually impaired learners.

II. Objectives-

1. To understand the socio-economic condition and educational experiences of differently abled people within the Barhampur Blind School.
2. To understand everyday life of the differently abled people

III. History of Blindness in India

The history of blindness in India is closely linked with social beliefs, religious interpretations, and changing approaches to disability care and education. In ancient India, blindness and other disabilities were often understood through religious and philosophical frameworks. Texts from the Vedic and post-Vedic periods frequently associated disability with karma or actions from a previous life. While such beliefs sometimes encouraged charity and care, they also contributed to social exclusion and dependency rather than empowerment (Rao, 2006). During the medieval period, blind individuals largely depended on family support, alms, or religious institutions for survival. Formal education or vocational training for blind persons was almost non-existent, and blindness was widely viewed as a personal tragedy rather than a social responsibility. Opportunities for social participation were extremely limited, reinforcing marginalization (Bhadra P. P, 1999). A significant shift occurred during the colonial period, when the first organized efforts toward the education of blind individuals began. In 1887, the School for the Blind Boys was established in Amritsar by Christian missionaries. This marked the beginning of institutional education for blind students in India, with a focus on Braille literacy, basic academics, and vocational skills such as basket weaving and music (Krishna, 2011). Following this, several missionary-run and charitable institutions were set up across different regions of India. 11 significant number of early initiatives for the education of blind persons in India during the colonial period were led by Christian missionaries. The School for the Blind Boys established in Amritsar in 1887 was founded by Annie Sharp, an Australian Presbyterian missionary. She is widely recognized as a pioneer in the field of education for the blind in India (Krishna, 2011).

In addition, organizations such as the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society played important roles in promoting welfare and educational services for persons with disabilities, including the blind, in different parts of colonial India (Bhadra, 1999). These missionary efforts introduced Braille literacy, basic academic instruction, and vocational training such as weaving, craft work, and music, laying the foundation for institutional education for blind individuals in India.

Thus, the early development of formal education for the blind in India was closely associated with Christian missionary initiatives, particularly the pioneering work of Annie Sharp and missionary societies operating during the late nineteenth century.

After Independence in 1947, the Indian government gradually recognized blindness as a social and developmental issue rather than merely a charitable concern. The National Policy on Education (1968) emphasized the integration of children with disabilities, including blindness, into mainstream education wherever possible. This period also saw the expansion of special schools and teacher-training programs for visual impairment (Rao, 2006). A major legal milestone was the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which mandated access to education, employment, and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, including the blind. This law strengthened institutional support systems and promoted inclusive practices across the country. In recent decades, India has adopted a rights-based approach toward blindness. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 expanded the definition of visual impairment and reinforced the right to inclusive education, accessibility, and assistive technology. National initiatives such as the Accessible India Campaign (2015) aim to remove physical, digital, and communication barriers faced by visually impaired individuals (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2019). Today, the history of blindness in India reflects a gradual transition from charity and stigma to rights, inclusion, and empowerment. Although significant progress has been made, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and social attitudes continue to affect the lives of blind individuals. Nevertheless, ongoing

policy reforms and technological advancements offer hope for greater inclusion and equality in the future.

IV. History of Blindness in Assam

The history of blindness in Assam reflects broader patterns of social attitudes toward disability in India, shaped by cultural beliefs, colonial influence, and post-independence welfare policies. Traditionally, blindness in Assam, as in many parts of the country, was viewed through religious and cultural lenses. Blindness was often associated with fate or karma, which resulted in sympathy but also social marginalization. Blind individuals largely depended on family members, community charity, and religious institutions for survival, with little access to formal education or employment (Rao, 2006). Before the colonial period, there is limited documentation of structured support systems for blind persons in Assam. Care was primarily informal and family-based. Religious institutions such as temples, monasteries, and community shelters occasionally provided food and shelter to blind individuals, but these efforts were charitable rather than educational or rehabilitative in nature (Bhadra, 1999). The colonial period marked the beginning of organized efforts toward the education and rehabilitation of blind persons in Assam. Christian missionaries and voluntary organizations played a key role in introducing special education for the blind. These initiatives focused on basic literacy, Braille education, and vocational skills. Although such institutions were limited in number and reach, they laid the foundation for formal blind education in the region (Krishna, 2011). Education of Children and Disabilities in India. After India's independence in 1947, the Government of Assam gradually began to address the educational and social needs of blind individuals. Special schools for the blind were established in different parts of the state, including Guwahati, Jorhat, Nagaon, and other districts. These schools emphasized Braille literacy, orientation and mobility training, vocational education, and life skills development. Government support, along with contributions from non-governmental organizations, played an important role in expanding these services (Government of Assam, 2015). A major policy shift occurred with the introduction of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which ensured equal

educational opportunities, reservations, and social security for blind persons. This was further strengthened by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which promoted inclusive education, accessibility, and assistive technology for persons with visual impairment in Assam (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2019).

In recent years, Assam has adopted a more rights-based and inclusive approach toward blindness. Government initiatives such as disability pensions, scholarships for blind students, free distribution of assistive devices, and the implementation of the Accessible India Campaign have improved the quality of life for blind individuals. Despite these advancements, challenges such as lack of infrastructure, shortage of trained teachers, limited access to technology, and persistent social stigma continue to affect the full inclusion of blind persons in Assam. In conclusion, the history of blindness in Assam shows a gradual transition from charity-based care to institutional education and rights-based inclusion. While significant progress has been made, sustained efforts are necessary to ensure equality, dignity, and meaningful participation of blind individuals in society.

IV. a. Educational System of Blind Children

Blind children require specialized educational strategies, including Braille literacy, tactile learning, and the use of assistive technologies such as screen readers and magnifiers (WHO, 2021). Orientation and mobility training is essential to equip children with the skills to navigate their environment independently (Corn & Lusk, 1998). Research by Obiakor, Bakken, and Rotatori (2010) highlighted those qualitative studies focusing directly on the perspectives of blind students are limited, with most studies focusing on parents or educators.

V. History of Blind Education in India

The formal education of blind students in India began during the colonial period. In 1887, the School for the Blind Boys was established in Amritsar by Christian missionaries, emphasizing Braille literacy and vocational training (Krishna, 2011). Post-independence, the National Policy on Education (1968) promoted the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools. The Persons with

Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act, 1995, reinforced educational rights and opportunities for persons with visual impairment (Rao, 2006). Recent initiatives, such as the Accessible India Campaign (2015), focus on improving access to assistive technologies and inclusive education (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2019). The history of blind education in India reflects a gradual shift from religious interpretations and charity-based support to institutional education and finally to a rights-based inclusive framework. In ancient India, blindness was largely understood through religious and philosophical concepts, particularly the doctrine of karma found in Vedic and post-Vedic traditions. Disability was often interpreted as the consequence of actions in a previous life, which encouraged charitable attitudes but also reinforced dependency and social exclusion rather than empowerment (Rao, 2006). During the medieval period, blind individuals generally relied on family support, alms, or religious institutions for survival. Formal education and vocational training for blind persons were virtually absent, and blindness was viewed primarily as a personal tragedy rather than a matter of social responsibility (Bhadra, 1999).

A significant transformation began during the colonial period with the arrival of Christian missionaries who introduced organized education for blind children. In 1887, Annie Sharp established the first School for the Blind Boys in Amritsar, marking the beginning of institutional education for blind students in India (Krishna, 2011). This school introduced Braille literacy, elementary academics, and vocational skills such as weaving and music. Missionary organizations including the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society also supported similar initiatives in different regions of the country (Bhadra, 1999). These early institutions followed a charitable and custodial model but laid the foundation for structured educational services for the visually impaired.

After India's independence in 1947, the responsibility for blind education increasingly shifted to the state. The establishment of the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped in 1950 marked a major milestone in professional training, Braille production, research, and rehabilitation services (Krishna, 2011).

In subsequent decades, disability policy evolved from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based framework. The enactment of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act formally recognized the educational rights of persons with disabilities, while the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act strengthened provisions for inclusive education and accessibility. Government initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan further promoted the integration of children with visual impairments into mainstream schools with appropriate support services. Thus, the history of blind education in India demonstrates a progressive movement from religious charity to institutional care and ultimately toward inclusion, equality, and empowerment within the broader educational system.

VI. History of Blind Education in Assam

Assam established its first school for visually impaired students in Guwahati in 1976—the Guwahati Blind High School. The school provides education from Grades I to X and includes vocational training in music, crafts, and computers. Government schools in Nagaon, Jorhat, and other districts also follow inclusive education practices as outlined by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Assam Social Welfare Department, 2020). The history of blind education in Assam evolved gradually within the broader framework of disability welfare and special education in India. In the pre-independence period, there were no formal institutions exclusively dedicated to blind education in Assam. Visually impaired individuals largely depended on family support, community charity, and religious institutions for survival. Disability was commonly viewed through traditional and religious lenses, and structured educational or vocational training opportunities were almost non-existent (Bhadra, 1999). The absence of institutional support reflected the wider marginalization of persons with disabilities in colonial Assam.

A significant turning point came in the post-independence period, when the growing national focus on rehabilitation and special education began to influence developments in the state. Inspired by early institutional models established elsewhere in India, voluntary organizations and social reformers in

Assam initiated efforts to provide structured education to blind children. One of the earliest milestones was the establishment of the Assam Blind School in 1955. Initially founded as a voluntary initiative, the school later received government recognition and support. It introduced Braille literacy, formal academic instruction aligned with the state curriculum, music education, mobility training, and vocational skills such as weaving and handicrafts. Hostel facilities were also provided to accommodate students from rural and remote areas, which was crucial in a geographically dispersed state like Assam.

Subsequently, additional institutions were established to expand access to blind education in different districts. Among them, the Barhampur Blind School emerged as an important center for visually impaired students in central Assam. Such institutions not only provided academic education but also emphasized rehabilitation, daily living skills, and co-curricular activities to promote independence and social participation. These schools played a pioneering role at a time when inclusive education in mainstream schools was still limited and special schools were the primary mode of educational delivery for blind children.

Developments in Assam were also shaped by national-level initiatives. The establishment of the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped in 1950 strengthened teacher training, Braille textbook production, and rehabilitation services across India, including Assam (Krishna, 2011). Teachers from Assam received training in special education methodologies, and Braille materials were gradually made available through national networks. Furthermore, legislative measures such as the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act mandated free education and reservation in educational institutions for children with disabilities. This was further reinforced by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, which emphasized inclusive education, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility.

With the launch of inclusive education schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) and later Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Assam began promoting the integration of visually impaired students into mainstream schools with the support of resource

teachers, Braille textbooks, assistive devices, and scholarships. The approach gradually shifted from segregated special schooling toward inclusive and community-based education, although special schools continue to play a significant role in the state.

Despite these advances, blind education in Assam still faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained special educators, limited assistive technology, and rural-urban disparities. Nevertheless, the historical trajectory demonstrates a clear movement from informal charity-based support to institutional special education and progressively toward inclusive, rights-based educational practices within the state.

VI. a. Challenges Faced by Blind Students

Blind students face challenges related to accessibility, social stigma, and limited career opportunities. Studies have shown that while assistive technologies and Braille resources are available in schools, access is often limited due to lack of funding or infrastructure (Praat & Keil, 2003). Social stigma and discrimination continue to affect students' confidence and social participation (Shakespeare, 2006).

VI. b. Importance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education enables blind students to participate in mainstream learning while also receiving specialized support. Duckett and Pratt (2007) emphasized that including persons with visual impairment in research and educational planning is vital for ensuring that interventions meet their actual needs. Curtin and Clarke (2005) highlighted the importance of listening to the perspectives of students with disabilities to develop effective educational strategies.

VI. c. Technological and Vocational Support

Assistive technologies, such as screen readers, Braille displays, and audio books, have been shown to enhance learning outcomes for visually impaired students (WHO, 2021). Vocational training, including music, sewing, and computer literacy, fosters independence and employability (Obiakor et al., 2010).

VI. d. Socio-Economic Context

Most visually impaired individuals, especially in developing countries, face socio-economic disadvantages. Studies show that women are at higher risk due to limited access to healthcare and education (WHO, 2021). In Assam, financial support through scholarships is available for students, though gaps remain in funding for assistive devices and technology (Assam Social Welfare Department, 2020).

VII. Statement of the Problem

Blind students face multiple challenges in accessing quality education, social inclusion, and equal opportunities despite the existence of national and state-level policies aimed at supporting persons with disabilities. Although various provisions and support systems such as special schools, scholarships, assistive devices, and inclusive education policies have been introduced, the actual effectiveness and adequacy of these measures remain uneven, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas like Nagaon district of Assam.

In Assam, educational institutions for blind students play a crucial role in promoting literacy, independence, and vocational skills. However, there is limited empirical research focusing on the everyday life experiences, socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and personal perspectives of blind students themselves. Most existing studies emphasize policy frameworks or institutional viewpoints, while the voices of blind students are often underrepresented.

Barhampur Blind School in Nagaon serves as an important educational institution for visually impaired children in the region. Despite its contributions, blind students enrolled in the school continue to face challenges related to accessibility, availability of assistive technology, social stigma, limited career opportunities, and transition to higher education and employment. Understanding how blind students experience these challenges and the type of support they receive is essential for improving educational practices and welfare policies.

Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the socio-economic conditions, daily life experiences, and cultural norms of blind students at Barhampur

Blind School, Nagaon, Assam. It also aims to assess the existing provisions and support systems from the perspectives of blind students, with the objective of identifying gaps and suggesting measures for enhancing their educational and social inclusion

VIII. Significance of the Study

The present study holds significant academic, social, and policy-related importance as it focuses on the educational experiences and everyday lives of blind students in a special school setting in Assam. Understanding the realities faced by blind students is essential for developing inclusive educational practices and effective support systems. Firstly, the study is significant because it examines the nature of provisions and support services available to blind students and evaluates whether these supports are adequate to meet their educational and daily life needs. By identifying existing strengths and gaps in facilities such as Braille materials, assistive technology, mobility training, and financial assistance, the study can help policymakers, educators, and administrators improve the quality of services provided to blind students. Secondly, this study gives importance to the voices and lived experiences of blind students themselves. Most previous research on disability and education has largely relied on the perspectives of teachers, parents, or institutions, while the personal experiences of persons with disabilities remain underrepresented. By focusing on students' narratives, this study contributes to qualitative disability research and helps in understanding how blind students perceive and experience education, support, and social inclusion. Thirdly, the study is socially significant as it highlights the everyday challenges faced by blind students, including accessibility barriers, social stigma, and limited career opportunities. By bringing attention to these issues, the research can help raise awareness in society and encourage more positive attitudes toward persons with visual impairment. Finally, the findings of this study can be useful for future researchers, educators, and social workers by providing localized data from Nagaon district of Assam. The study can serve as a reference for further research on disability, inclusive education, and social welfare policies, and it can also contribute to improving educational planning and intervention strategies for blind students in Assam. In conclusion,

this study is significant as it not only contributes to academic knowledge but also supports the broader goal of promoting equality, inclusion, and empowerment of blind students in education and society.

IX. Case Study

To further substantiate the thematic findings, individual case narratives of blind students from Barhampur Blind School and other institutions in Assam are presented below. These cases reflect variations in socio-economic background, educational structure, daily routine, and future aspirations.

Case 1: Raju (14 years, Rural Agricultural Family)

Raju belongs to a low-income agrarian household where farming is the primary source of livelihood. Prior to enrollment, he had no exposure to structured education due to the absence of accessible schooling facilities in his village. His visual impairment confined him largely to domestic spaces. After admission to the residential blind school, Raju acquired foundational Braille literacy and basic numeracy skills. Orientation and mobility training significantly enhanced his independence, enabling him to navigate the campus confidently. He actively participates in music classes, which serve as both a recreational and therapeutic outlet. Despite his academic progress, Raju lacks personal assistive devices such as a Braille slate or digital recorder and depends on shared institutional resources. His case illustrates how institutional support can transform educational access, though economic deprivation continues to limit individualized learning opportunities.

Case 2: Salma (16 years, Small Business Family)

Salma resides in the school hostel and demonstrates strong academic performance in mainstream subjects. With access to screen reader software provided by the institution, she actively engages in computer-based learning. She is a recipient of a government scholarship, which partially supports her educational expenses. However, Salma expresses concern about transitioning to higher education due to anticipated infrastructural barriers and uncertainty about continued financial assistance. Her case reflects both the success of inclusive digital interventions and the

anxiety surrounding post-school educational pathways.

Case 3: Dipak (13 years, Daily Wage Labor Family)

Dipak initially exhibited signs of social withdrawal and dependency. Coming from a daily wage labor family, he had limited early stimulation and educational exposure. Through structured daily routines, peer mentoring, and classroom participation, he gradually developed independence in personal and academic tasks. Storytelling sessions significantly improved his communication skills and self-confidence. Dipak's transformation underscores the importance of psychosocial support and peer-based inclusion within residential educational settings.

Case 4: Monalisa (17 years, Economically Constrained Rural Family)

Monalisa excels in Braille literacy and vocational sewing training. She has emerged as a disciplined and goal-oriented student with aspirations for college education. However, she reports apprehension about accessibility in higher education institutions, particularly regarding availability of Braille materials and assistive technology. Her case highlights gendered and infrastructural concerns in educational transition for visually impaired girls from rural backgrounds.

Case 5: Harun (15 years, Marginal Rural Background)

Harun experienced stigma and social isolation in his village due to misconceptions about blindness. Within the institutional environment, he reports a sense of belonging and social acceptance. Participation in drama and cultural programs enhanced his social integration and confidence. Harun's case demonstrates the role of inclusive peer environments in countering community-level discrimination.

Case 6: Babul (12 years, Fisherman's Family)

Babul shows strong mobility skills and enthusiasm for vocational weaving classes. His practical orientation reflects his family's livelihood background. While academically engaged, his family faces seasonal income fluctuations, making travel during school holidays financially challenging. This case illustrates

how economic precarity intersects with educational continuity.

Case 7: Rina (14 years, Single-Parent Household)

Rina depends significantly on hostel facilities due to limited family support. She displays strong interest in computer literacy but has restricted access to personal assistive devices. Her educational aspirations are shaped by institutional support structures, highlighting the importance of residential schooling for children from single-parent and economically vulnerable households.

Case 8: Ajmal (16 years, Low-Income Rural Background)

Ajmal studies mathematics and social science diligently and actively participates in assemblies and group activities. Despite academic engagement, he expresses concern regarding employment prospects for visually impaired youth in rural economies. His narrative reflects broader structural anxieties about labor market inclusion.

Case 9: Pinky (13 years, Tea Garden Labor Family)

Pinky acquired Braille literacy after enrollment and actively participates in music training. Financial hardship prevents her from owning personal study materials. Her case exemplifies how first-generation learners from plantation labor communities' benefit from institutional access but remain economically constrained.

Case 10: Suman (15 years, Small Trader Family)

Suman uses shared Braille textbooks and attends computer classes. He demonstrates leadership qualities, often assisting peers in academic tasks. His confidence and collaborative skills reflect positive peer engagement within the institutional setting.

Case 11: Anjali (14 years, agricultural labor family)

Anjali comes from a seasonal agricultural labor household with irregular income. Prior to enrollment, she remained at home due to lack of nearby inclusive schooling facilities. After admission, she developed Braille reading proficiency and actively participates

in group study sessions. She shows particular interest in singing and cultural programs. However, her family's unstable income affects her access to personal learning materials during vacations.

Case 12: Rahim (15 years, rickshaw puller's family)

Rahim is the eldest child in his family and feels responsible for supporting his parents in the future. Since joining the institution, he has gained independence in mobility and daily living skills. He performs well in mathematics and uses shared screen-reading devices in the computer lab. Despite his progress, he expresses anxiety regarding employment prospects after completing schooling.

Case 13: Liza (13 years, tea garden worker family)

Liza initially struggled with homesickness after joining the hostel. Over time, peer support and counseling helped her adjust. She has developed strong Braille writing skills and actively participates in storytelling and debate activities. Financial limitations restrict her access to supplementary educational materials, but she remains academically motivated.

Case 14: Imran (17 years, small farmer family)

Imran is preparing for board examinations and aspires to pursue higher secondary education. He is proficient in using screen reader software and demonstrates leadership in group discussions. However, he is concerned about accessibility barriers in mainstream colleges and limited availability of assistive technology outside the institution.

Case 15: Kabita (12 years, daily wage earner family)

Kabita entered school with limited exposure to structured learning. Through orientation and mobility training, she gained confidence in navigating the campus independently. She shows interest in handicraft training and music classes. Her family's low income makes it difficult to purchase personal assistive devices.

Case 16: Nayan (16 years, marginal farming household)

Nayan actively participates in sports adapted for visually impaired students and demonstrates strong teamwork skills. He has acquired Braille literacy and basic computer knowledge. Although he benefits

from government support schemes, delays in scholarship disbursement occasionally create financial stress for his family.

Case 17: Farida (15 years, single-income household)

Farida is academically consistent and particularly interested in social science subjects. She resides in the hostel and depends on institutional support for daily needs. She aspires to become a teacher but is uncertain about inclusive teacher training opportunities for visually impaired students.

Case 18: Rakesh (14 years, construction worker family)

Rakesh initially faced social exclusion in his village before enrollment. Within the school, he developed self-confidence through participation in drama and cultural events. He performs well in Braille reading but requires additional support in mathematics. His family struggles with irregular income and transportation expenses.

Case 19: Mitali (13 years, rural below-poverty-line family)

Mitali demonstrates strong interest in sewing and vocational training. She has improved her daily living skills and maintains close friendships with peers. Despite institutional support, she lacks personal digital devices for independent practice of computer skills during holidays.

Case 20: Arman (17 years, small shopkeeper family)

Arman is preparing for transition to higher education. He effectively uses assistive software and participates in school assemblies and leadership activities. While academically capable, he expresses concern about societal attitudes and workplace discrimination against persons with visual impairment.

Case 21: Juri (12 years, marginal agricultural family)

Juri comes from a remote rural village where access to educational facilities is limited. Before admission, she depended entirely on family members for mobility. After joining the institution, she developed basic Braille literacy and improved orientation skills. She actively participates in morning assemblies and music classes. However, her parents' limited

awareness about higher education options restricts long-term academic planning.

Case 22: Karim (16 years, daily wage labor family)

Karim is academically average but highly motivated to learn computer skills. He uses shared assistive technology in the school computer lab and participates in group discussions. He has shown remarkable progress in independent living skills. Despite receiving government financial assistance, irregular family income creates uncertainty about his continuation in higher education.

Case 23: Rupa (15 years, tea garden labor family)

Rupa initially had low self-confidence due to community stigma associated with visual impairment. Through peer mentoring and participation in debate competitions, she developed strong communication abilities. She excels in Braille writing and social science subjects. Nevertheless, financial hardship prevents her from owning personal Braille books and digital devices.

Case 24: Tapan (14 years, fisherman's family)

Tapan demonstrates strong mobility skills and actively participates in sports activities designed for visually impaired students. He has developed competence in basic mathematics and Braille reading. His family struggles with seasonal income, making it difficult to afford travel expenses during school vacations. Despite these constraints, he remains enthusiastic about continuing his studies.

Case 25: Nasima (17 years, rural low-income household)

Nasima is preparing for her final examinations and aspires to pursue college education. She is proficient in using screen reader software and frequently assists younger students in academic tasks. However, she expresses concern about infrastructural barriers and limited accessible learning materials in mainstream higher education institutions.

Case 26: Bikash (13 years, construction labor family)

Bikash entered the institution with limited exposure to formal education. Over time, structured classroom routines and peer support improved his academic engagement. He shows interest in storytelling and

drama activities, which have enhanced his confidence. His family's unstable income limits his access to personal educational resources.

Case 27: Saloni (14 years, single-parent farming family)

Saloni resides in the hostel and depends on institutional support for daily necessities. She performs well in language subjects and actively participates in cultural programs. Although she receives a scholarship, delays in financial assistance sometimes create challenges in purchasing supplementary learning materials.

Case 28: Manash (16 years, small business family)

Manash demonstrates leadership qualities and often guides younger students in mobility training. He is interested in vocational training, particularly in weaving and handicrafts. Despite acquiring computer literacy skills, he is uncertain about employment opportunities suitable for visually impaired youth in rural areas.

Case 29: Purnima (13 years, economically constrained rural family)

Purnima struggled initially with adapting to hostel life but gradually developed independence in daily living skills. She actively participates in music and prayer sessions and shows steady improvement in Braille reading. Financial limitations restrict her ability to access additional assistive learning tools outside the school environment.

Case 30: Jahid (17 years, marginal labor household)

Jahid is academically capable and aspires to secure stable employment after completing his education. He uses shared screen reader facilities and participates in school leadership activities. However, he expresses apprehension about discrimination and limited vocational placement opportunities for visually impaired individuals in the open labor market.

X. Major Findings from the 30 Case Studies

Based on the detailed case profiles of 30 visually impaired students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the following major findings emerge:

X. a. Strong Educational Transformation after Institutional Enrollment

Most students (e.g., Raju, Pinky, Bikash) had limited or no access to formal schooling prior to admission. After enrollment, they acquired:

- Braille literacy
- Basic numeracy skills
- Computer literacy using screen reader software
- Improved communication and social skills

This indicates the institution plays a critical role in bridging educational exclusion in rural and low-income settings.

2. Economic Vulnerability as a Dominant Factor

The majority of students come from:

- Agricultural labor families
- Daily wage earners
- Tea garden labor households
- Fishermen and marginal farming families

Irregular income affects:

- Access to personal assistive devices
- Purchase of Braille books
- Transportation during holidays
- Continuation to higher education

Economic insecurity is directly linked to educational continuity and access to technology.

3. Dependence on Shared Assistive Technology

Many students (Salma, Rahim, Suman, Arman, Nasima, Jahid) rely on:

- Shared screen reader devices
- Shared Braille books
- Institutional computer labs

Personal ownership of assistive devices is rare, limiting independent practice outside school.

4. Improvement in Mobility and Daily Living Skills

Students such as Babul, Tapan, Kabita, and Juri demonstrated:

- Increased independence in navigation
- Orientation and mobility training outcomes
- Reduced dependence on family members

This reflects the importance of structured institutional routines in building autonomy.

5. Psychosocial Development and Confidence Building

Several students (Dipak, Harun, Rupa, Rakesh, Bikash) initially experienced:

- Social stigma
- Low self-confidence
- Community exclusion

Participation in:

- Drama
- Storytelling
- Debate
- Music
- Peer mentoring

helped improve self-esteem, communication skills, and social integration.

6. Gender Dimensions

Female students (Monalisa, Farida, Nasima, Anjali, Rupa, Saloni) often:

- Excel academically
- Show strong motivation toward higher education

- Express concern about accessibility and safety in mainstream institutions

Economic and social barriers appear slightly more restrictive for girls from rural low-income households.

7. Concerns about Higher Education Accessibility

Senior students (Imran, Monalisa, Arman, Nasima, Jahid) expressed:

- Anxiety about accessibility in mainstream colleges
- Limited assistive infrastructure
- Fear of discrimination
- Uncertainty regarding inclusive teacher training and employment

Transition from specialized schooling to higher education remains a major challenge.

8. Employment Uncertainty

Many students (Ajmal, Rahim, Manash, Jahid, Arman) reported concerns regarding:

- Limited rural employment opportunities

- Workplace discrimination
- Lack of vocational placement support

This indicates a gap between educational training and labor market integration.

9. Importance of Hostel and Institutional Support

Students from single-parent or economically unstable families (Rina, Saloni, Farida) depend heavily on:

- Hostel facilities
- Institutional food and accommodation
- Government scholarships

The institution functions not only as an educational center but also as a social protection mechanism.

Chart: Differentiation of Disability and Key Characteristics

All 30 cases represent visual impairment, but differentiation can be categorized based on functional capacity, assistive use, and support needs.

Category of Functional Level	Characteristics	Representative Cases
Category A: High Functional Independence	Proficient in Braille, uses screen reader software, leadership qualities, preparing for higher education	Salma, Imran, Arman, Nasima, Jahid
Category B: Moderate Independence with Institutional Support	Braille literate, uses shared assistive devices, active in academics and extracurricular activities	Suman, Rahim, Farida, Manash, Rupa, Nayan
Category C: Developing Independence	Improved mobility and communication skills, still dependent on shared materials	Raju, Dipak, Pinky, Kabita, Juri, Bikash
Category D: Economically High Vulnerability Group	Severe financial constraints affecting access to devices, transport, and study materials	Babul, Mitali, Tapan, Anjali, Karim
Category E: Psychosocial Vulnerability (Stigma Background)	Experienced social exclusion, improved confidence through school activities	Harun, Rakesh, Rupa, Dipak

XI. Methodology of the Study

XI.a. Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the lived experiences, educational conditions, and socio-economic realities of visually impaired students enrolled in Barhampur Blind School and selected institutions in Assam. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because it allows in-depth understanding of subjective experiences, institutional practices, and structural barriers that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, focusing on how institutional support systems shape educational transformation among blind students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

XI.b. Study Area

The primary site of the study is Barhampur Blind School, located in the district of Nagaon. The school serves visually impaired students from rural and economically marginalized communities across Assam.

The institution provides:

- Residential hostel facilities
- Braille-based education
- Orientation and mobility training
- Computer education using screen reader software
- Vocational training (weaving, sewing, handicrafts)
- Cultural and extracurricular activities

XI.c. Research Approach

The study follows a multiple case study method, documenting detailed narratives of 30 visually impaired students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Each case reflects variations in:

- Family income and occupation
- Rural or semi-rural residence

- Gender
- Academic performance
- Access to assistive technology
- Educational aspirations
- Perceived challenges

This approach enabled cross-case comparison and thematic analysis.

XI.d. Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 students representing diverse backgrounds. Selection criteria included:

- Enrollment in upper primary or secondary level
- Variation in socio-economic background
- Representation of both boys and girls
- Inclusion of hostel residents and day scholars
- Students preparing for board examinations

The sample size of 30 allowed detailed qualitative exploration while ensuring diversity of experiences.

XI.e. Sources of Data

XI.e.i. Primary Data

1. In-depth Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students.
- Questions focused on educational experiences, daily routines, access to assistive devices, psychosocial challenges, and future aspirations.

2. Participant Observation

- Observation of classroom activities, mobility training sessions, vocational classes, hostel routines, and cultural programs.

- Focus on interaction patterns, independence levels, and institutional environment.

3. Informal Discussions

- Conversations with teachers, hostel wardens, and staff regarding academic progress and institutional support mechanisms.

XI.e.ii. Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from:

- School records and admission registers
- Government scholarship documentation
- Policy documents related to disability rights and inclusive education
- Academic literature on disability studies

Relevant legal and policy frameworks include:

- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which mandates inclusive education and accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- National education and welfare schemes for persons with visual impairment.

XI.e.iii. Tools of Data Collection

- Semi-structured interview schedule
- Observation checklist
- Field notes
- Case documentation format

Interviews were conducted in a language comfortable for the participants and later translated into English for analysis where necessary.

XII. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps included:

1. Transcription of interviews
2. Coding of recurring patterns

3. Identification of major themes
4. Cross-case comparison
5. Interpretation in relation to socio-economic and institutional context

Major themes that emerged include:

- Educational transformation
- Economic vulnerability
- Dependence on shared assistive technology
- Psychosocial development
- Gender dimensions
- Higher education barriers
- Employment uncertainty
- Institutional support as social protection

XII.a. Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from students and school authorities.
- Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms.
- Participants were assured that the study would be used strictly for academic purposes.
- Care was taken to avoid emotional discomfort during interviews.

XII.b. Limitations of the Study

- The study is limited to one primary institution and selected cases.
- Findings may not be generalizable to all visually impaired students in India.
- Economic data are based on self-reported information.
- Time constraints limited long-term follow-up.

XII.c. Rationale for Methodological Choice

The qualitative case study approach was chosen because disability is not merely a medical condition but a socially structured experience shaped by environment, economy, and institutional support. Understanding the lived realities of visually impaired students requires narrative depth, contextual sensitivity, and interpretive analysis.

XII.d. Research Design

This study follows a descriptive research design, which is suitable for exploring the status, history, and challenges of blind students in Assam. Descriptive research is used to systematically describe a phenomenon, population, or situation, providing detailed insights without manipulating variables (Kothari, 2004). This design helps in understanding the educational facilities, social support, and policies related to blindness in Assam.

IX.2. Population and Participants

The population of this study includes students with visual impairment, teachers, and administrators working in schools for the blind in Assam. The study focuses on both government and private institutions that provide education and support services to blind students.

Sample

The study uses a purposive sampling method, selecting participants who are directly involved with or affected by blindness education. This ensures that the data collected is relevant and insightful for the research objectives.

XII.e. Data Collection Methods

The study employs secondary data collection, primarily through document analysis. This includes:

Government reports and policies on disability and education in Assam (e.g., Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; Assam Social Welfare Department reports).

School records, historical documents, and annual reports of institutions for blind students.

Previous research studies, articles, and publications on blindness and inclusive education.

XII.f. Rationale for Document Analysis:

Document analysis allows researchers to systematically review existing data and historical records to understand trends, policies, and practices related to blindness in Assam. It provides insights into educational approaches, accessibility, and social support systems without requiring direct experimental interventions (Bowen, 2009).

XII.g. Data Analysis

The collected documents are analyzed using a qualitative approach, focusing on:

Content Analysis: Identifying themes, patterns, and significant information related to blindness and education.

Comparative Analysis: Comparing policies and practices across different schools and regions in Assam.

Historical Analysis: Understanding the development of educational services for blind students over time.

The analysis aims to present a comprehensive overview of the situation of blind students in Assam, highlighting achievements, challenges, and gaps in services and policies.

XII.h. Ethical Considerations

Since the study uses secondary data and publicly available documents, ethical issues are minimal. However, proper citations and references are maintained to ensure academic integrity.

CONCLUSION

The present study offers a comprehensive understanding of the educational, social, and cultural experiences of blind students in Assam, with a specific focus on Barhampur Blind School in Nagaon. The research highlights the multifaceted nature of blindness and visual impairment, demonstrating that while these students face significant challenges, they also possess considerable potential that can be realized with proper support and interventions.

Through detailed interviews, case studies, and thematic analysis, it was observed that blind students develop essential skills for independence, including Braille literacy, mobility training, vocational skills,

and participation in cultural and extracurricular activities. These skills not only enhance their academic performance but also contribute to building self-confidence, social integration, and personal growth. Students actively engage in music, drama, storytelling, and adapted sports, demonstrating that disability does not limit creativity, talent, or social participation.

The study also underscores the challenges that blind students encounter. Limited access to assistive technologies such as screen readers, Braille displays, and computer software remains a significant barrier. Infrastructural limitations, including inadequate tactile pathways, signage, and classroom adaptations, restrict the students' ability to navigate their environment independently. Additionally, social stigma and discriminatory attitudes from society pose emotional and psychological challenges, affecting the confidence and self-esteem of blind individuals. Access to higher education and meaningful employment continues to be limited, reflecting systemic gaps in the educational and professional ecosystem for persons with disabilities.

The research emphasizes the importance of government policies, school provisions, and social initiatives in supporting the holistic development of blind students. Programs such as scholarships, financial aid, and vocational training are crucial, yet the study indicates that additional measures are needed to bridge gaps in resources, infrastructure, and accessibility. Furthermore, the study reveals the value of listening directly to the voices of blind students, as their perspectives provide critical insights into the effectiveness of educational strategies, support systems, and social inclusion efforts.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study have implications for society at large. Inclusive education is not only a matter of policy compliance but a moral imperative that ensures every individual has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Blind students, when provided with adequate support, demonstrate resilience, talent, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The study highlights that the integration of blind students into mainstream education, coupled with specialized support, can help overcome barriers and create a more equitable and just society.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while Assam has made significant strides in providing education and support to blind students, there remain critical areas that require attention. Investments in assistive technologies, teacher training, accessible infrastructure, and social awareness programs are essential to enhance the quality of life and future prospects for these students. By continuing to build inclusive educational environments and addressing systemic challenges, society can empower blind individuals to lead independent, productive, and fulfilling lives, thereby fostering an inclusive society where disability does not equate to limitation.

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