

**BLINDNESS AS A FORM OF DISABILITY IN PRE-COLONIAL
SOUTH ASIA**

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The cultures of pre-colonial South Asia agree with the rest of the ancient world in considering blindness as a disability and therefore as part of the suffering inherent in our imperfect universe. What is unique is the attempt to explain it as the result of one's actions in a previous existence. Although this explanation cannot be held to have universally discouraged an attitude of charity and benevolence towards blind persons on the part of society, it has led to the imposition of a number of restrictions, which must have prevented blind persons from participating fully in the religious and social life of their communities. However, the traditions about famous blind seers and prophets, poets and teachers are an indication that, in most periods of history, there were visually impaired persons who were endowed with sufficient determination to challenge negative social attitudes and prove themselves capable of making an enduring contribution to the upliftment of their fellow beings.