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## TWO ASTONISHING PERSONALITIES ANNE SULLIVAN AND HELEN KELLER AND THEIR HEROIC COMPANIONSHIP

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### Abstract

Reviewing the history of the evolution of education, it is seen that with the change of time, unimaginable changes have taken place in the field of education. Various great educators have developed ideals in education and society by explaining and applying the meaning of education through their thoughts. Prominent personalities like them are Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller. Anne Sullivan, a great educator who worked tirelessly to build another great personality, Helen Keller. Sullivan introduced Helen, who was deaf, dumb, and blind, to the court of the world, through her patience and innovative teaching techniques, freeing her from the narrow confines. Helen Keller overcame all adversities by her determination and perseverance and established herself as a fighter. From women's rights to the development of society and the education of blind and deaf children, Anne Sullivan is still remembered for her wonderful contributions. To Helen Keller her teacher was a friend, mentor and guide. In Helen's view, Sullivan was a real hero who devoted her life to teaching and advising people with special disabilities on how to live a successful and meaningful life. The main purpose of this article is to shed light on the struggling lives of Sullivan and Helen and how these two incredibly talented great women have made wonderful contributions to each other's company in overcoming all adversities. Their contribution to the history of special education inspires us.

**Keywords-**Inspiration, adversity, contribution, mentor

### Introduction

Every child has the right to have a dedicated, responsible teacher who is well-versed in his / her subject, trained and knows how to teach students, how to change behaviour, and how to develop values in student life. As a teacher, it does not only mean teaching specific subjects; Emphasis is also placed on the ability to create a learning environment tailored to the needs of the students. [5] A great educator influences the student as well as the society. Many educators have contributed to society and influenced the field of education with their thoughtful doctrines. New ideologies have been introduced in the field of education by different perspectives of educators whose aim was to make education more life-oriented and meaningful.

A review of history reveals that two great educators, Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller, were two great women who redefined teaching and learning. The lives of the two women are so inspiring that it becomes hard to believe that it is not impossible to be free from any obstacle, and the person can overcome all his/her obstacles if he/she wants or tries.

### Objective of the study

The Objective of the present study is to-

1. Describe the struggling and inspiring life history of Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller.
2. Explain the contributions of Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller towards education and society.

## Anne Sullivan

Anne Sullivan was one of the most outstanding women of her time who made a significant contribution to the transformation of the world of education for the blind. To her, education was the only way to get rid of blindness and its pain. She faced many setbacks in her life. She became a successful teacher despite having a visual impairment. She was the first to teach a deaf and blind child at the same time. Helen Keller was a famous person in the history of child education.

### Anne Sullivan's Life History

Ann Sullivan was born on April 14, 1866, in Feeding Hill, Massachusetts, USA, to a poor family. Her full name was Johanna Mansfield Sullivan Messi. Her father Thomas and mother Alice were from Ireland. They moved to Massachusetts during the 1840 Irish famine. Her mother died of tuberculosis when she was eight years old. Her father was an alcoholic and an oppressor. At the age of five, Anne developed trachoma in her eye caused by a bacterium that caused her to lose her sight without treatment. Two years after her mother's death, her father abandoned her and her younger brother and sent them to a state-run orphanage in Tewksbury (now Tewksbury Hospital), where her brother died of tuberculosis within months.

At that time the environment of the Tewksbury orphanage was unhealthy, and overcrowded (on average there were about 940 men and women and children). Here Anne Sullivan spent four years with bitterness, illiteracy and two failed eye surgeries. The Massachusetts Board of State Charities 1875 conducted an investigation into allegations of abuse, sexual misconduct, etc. against Tewksbury residents. The investigation was led by then-board chairmen Franklin Benjamin Sanborn and Samuel Gridley Howe, who was the founder of Perkins School in Boston.

While in Tewksbury, Anne learned from a resident that there were schools for the blind, and she realized that getting an education was the best thing she could do, and that attending school became main purpose of her life. During the interrogation at the Tewksbury almshouse in 1880, Anne mustered up all the courage and begged the investigating member (Franklin Benjamin Sanborn) to send her to school. He then granted Anne's request. Anne's formal education began on October 7, 1880, at Perkins School. She was able to come in contact with a few teachers even after years of hardship at school. While there, Anne came in contact with Laura Bridgeman. She was the first graduate of Perkins School and the first deaf and blind teacher at this school. From her, Anne learned the alphabet by hand. Here are some of the eye surgeries Anne performed and her vision gradually improved. She graduated in June 1886 at the age of twenty. In her school greetings, she said-"Fellow-graduates, Duty bids us go forth into active life. Let us go ourselves to find our especial part, when we have found it, willingly and faithfully perform it; for every obstacle we overcome, every success we achieve tends to bring man closer to God and make life more as he would have it." [8]

Sullivan was severely blind for most of her life. After a few operations her eyesight returned slightly. But by 1935 she was completely blind in both eyes. On October 15, 1936, she suffered a coronary thrombosis and went into a coma. She left this world at the age of seventy after being in a coma for five days. Her memorial is preserved in the National Cathedral in Washington D.C.

### Life History of Helen Keller

Helen Adams Keller (June 27, 1880 - June 1, 1968) was an American writer, political activist, and lecturer, and a preacher for the deaf and blind charitable agency. She was the first deaf and blind person to receive a bachelor's degree in the arts. The story of Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan was adapted into a stage drama called Keller's autobiography, "The Story of My Life," which became known as "The Miracle Worker." Her residence was in western Tusculum, Alabama which is now a museum. Her birthday, June 27, is commemorated in Pennsylvania as Helen Keller's Day, which was recognized by US President Jimmy Carter in his presidential proclamation on the centenary of her birth.

Helen was not born deaf and blind. Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880, in Tusculum, Alabama, as a healthy baby. Her mother was Kate Adams Keller and father was Colonel Arthur H. Keller. However, at the age of 19 months, Anne fell ill with an unknown disease. Doctors described her illness as "an acute congestion of the stomach and the brain" which is now believed to be scarlet fever or meningitis. [18] The illness did not last long, but it brought both deafness and blindness to her. She lived, as she recalled in her autobiography, "at sea in a dense fog".

For the first few years of her life she was only able to communicate with her family through primary signs. As a child, Helen could only communicate with Martha Washington, the daughter of Helen's family cook. Martha could understand Helen's signs a lot. Helen used 60 such home signs when communicating with family. Because of the inability to communicate properly, her behaviors were misinterpreted, such as picking up food with fingers from someone else's plate.

In 1886, to illuminate Helen's eye sight, her father went to Dr. Chisolm, an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist in Baltimore for help. The move was led by her mother, who was inspired by a report in Charles Dickens's "American Notes" which spoke about the success of Laura Bridgman, a deaf and blind woman, in education. Dr. J. Julian Chisolm asked to Helen and her father to contact Alexander Graham Bell (inventor of the telephone). Alexander Graham Bell was researching deafness and sound at the time. Bell's interview with Helen opened a new door for her from darkness to bright light, from loneliness to friendship, companionship, knowledge and love. Bell, inspired by Keller, wrote: "I feel that in this child I have seen more of the Divine than has been manifested in anyone I ever met before."

Graham Bell told Helen's family to contact Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, where Laura Bridgman received her formal education. Helen got Anne Sullivan, a former student of Perkins's, as her trainer. Director Michael Anagnos advised Anne Sullivan to join as Helen's educator. Anne was blind, but through surgery she regained little sight. Perhaps her unique experience showed her the way to help Helen. Anne was her teacher, friend, assistant and colleague for the next 49 years from March 3, 1887.

Anne started teaching six years old Helen with the word "doll" with a finger touch and Anne brought a doll with her as a gift to help Helen understand the matter of "doll". Other words were taught in the same way. Helen was curious at first, but some emotional turmoil began to be observed in her and refusing to cooperate with Sullivan's instructions. Helen was disappointed at first, because she didn't realize that each object could be identified individually. And when Sullivan tried to teach Keller the word "mug," Keller became so frustrated that she broke the mug. In fact, she could no longer connect things with the letters written on her hand. Sullivan continued to work on it. She helped Keller to get on the path of self-control. As Keller's frustration grows, so her mood problems also increase. Eventually Sullivan decided that she and Keller would be separated from the rest of the family for a while, so that Keller could only concentrate on Sullivan's instructions. They both moved to a cottage elsewhere.

In a dramatic struggle, Sullivan taught Keller the word "water"; she took Keller out one day to help make the connection between objects and characters. She placed Keller's hand under the edge of the pump's drain, and pours cold water into Keller's hand. She spelled the word w-a-t-e-r in Helen's other hand with the touch of a finger. Keller understood the word written on her hand and repeated it. This living word awakened Helen's inner soul, enlightened her, and freed her from captivity. Keller, along with Sullivan, gained ideas about other objects in this way. At the end of the day she gained ideas about 30 new words.

### Anne Sullivan, teacher of Helen Keller

Keller worked with her teacher Anne Sullivan, for 49 years from 1887 until Sullivan's death in 1936. In 1933 Sullivan suffered from health problems and lost her vision completely. A young woman named Polly Thomson, who began working as Keller and Sullivan's secretary in 1944, became Keller's constant ally after Sullivan's death. Through Sullivan's extraordinary instruction, the little girl learned to communicate with the world around her and to understand herself. She had achieved a great education that opened a new horizon in the education system for the blind and the deaf.

### Helen Keller's formal education-

Helen started studying at the **Perkins Institute for the Blind** in May 1888. In 1890, Keller started language education classes at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston. She had been trying to speak and learn for 25 years so that others can understand her. From 1894 to 1896, Keller attended the Wright-Humason School for Deaf Children in New York City. There she worked to improve her communication skills and began to study the subject regularly. During this time, Keller became determined to go to college. In 1896, she started studying at Cambridge School for Young Ladies, a preparatory school for women.

As soon as her story became known to the general public, Keller began to meet famous and influential people. One of them was the writer Mark Twain, who was fascinated by her. They became good friends. Twain introduced Helen to his friend Henry H. Rogers who was an executive of Standard Oil.

Rogers was so impressed by Keller's talent, perseverance, and determination that he agreed to help financially her studies at Radcliffe College. Sullivan was always there with her. She always sat next to her to explain speeches and texts. During this period, Keller had mastered a several communication techniques, including touch-lip reading, Braille, speech, typing and finger spelling. In 1904, Keller graduated from Radcliffe College at the age of 24 and was the first deaf and blind person to receive a degree in the arts.

Keller wrote 12 published books and several articles in total. One of her earliest writings at the age of 11 was "The Frost King" (1891). It is alleged that the story was taken from "The Frost Fairies" (Margaret Canby). Investigations revealed that Keller may have been suffered with cryptomnesia, then she might have forgotten that she had read Margaret Canby's story, the memory remained in her unconscious state.

With the help of Sullivan and Sullivan's husband John Albert Macy, Keller published her autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (1903), at the age of 22. That is still printed in more than fifty languages. It tells the story of her life until she was 21 and she wrote it while in college. Keller wrote "The World I Live In" in 1908, giving readers insights into what she felt about the world. Out of the Dark, a series of essays on socialism was published in 1913. When Keller was young, Anne Sullivan introduced her to Phillips Brooks, who introduced her to Christianity. Helen said: "I always knew he was there, but I didn't know His name!" Her spiritual autobiography, "My Religion", was published in 1927, and then in 1994, it was widely revised and republished under the title "Light in My Darkness". She supported the teachings of the Christian theologian and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg who advocated a particular spiritual interpretation of the Bible.[23] She wrote numerous articles in national newspapers on the prevention of blindness and the education and special problems of the blind.

## Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller:

The names of Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller are inextricably linked. One is the great teacher who by her tireless work made a great educator and struggling woman. Both are shining in the history of education as bright stars.

After graduation, Perkins School director Michael Anagnos, helped Anne to find a job. In March 1887, Sullivan traveled to Tusculum, Alabama to be employed as a tutor in the Keller family. Before leaving, Sullivan learned teaching techniques from Laura Bridgman. Then Helen was six years old and Anne was twenty years old.

Anne Sullivan showed maturity and ingenuity in teaching Helen Keller. Anne helped the stubborn and disobedient student to make connections between different objects and words through hard work. Anne also continued to strive for how to communicate with the outside world. One thing after another, Helen's heart was pounding, and she felt remorse and regret for what she had done because of her disobedience. Gradually Helen continued to learn the names of various subjects through touch. Within a few months, she had also learned to read about 600 words and Braille in Anne's collaboration. In her autobiography, 'The Story of My Life', Helen reveals how Sullivan became an inspiration of her life's progress. Anne herself was partially blind, but she played a major role in bringing about an unprecedented change in her life. Helen saw her teacher as a friend, guide, and role model. Helen wrote in her autobiography that Anne was lovingly and discreet, and her life became joyful and honeyed for her. Anne unveiled and developed all her possibilities from a small lump. Her great teacher did not waste time to know the beauty of all things. Sullivan was unique as a mentor. She instilled confidence in Helen. The long relationship between the student and the teacher was full of experiences. Anne Sullivan played the role of anchor in various storms and successes. Her patience, affection, determination and perseverance helped Helen to reach the pinnacle of success.

Both Keller and Sullivan were revered at Perkins's School. Helen's vision consistently served as inspiration for what is possible for young people with vision disabilities. Anne Sullivan has served as an inspiration to teachers who help these students achieve their potential. The Perkins School is proud and grateful for the contribution of humane Helen Keller and her brilliant teacher Anne Sullivan to education. In fact, both were highly dependent on each other. Many people saw them as one person. Sullivan's biographer Bella Bradley wrote that "as long as Annie Sullivan lived, a question remained as to how much of what was called Helen Keller was in reality Annie Sullivan". The answer is not easy, when Helen Keller graduated from Radcliffe in 1904, she and others were disappointed that why Sullivan was not awarded a degree. "

In 1933, clinical psychologist Dr. Thomas D. Cutsforth raised a question in a book 'The Blind in School and Society'. He said that whether Anne's goal to make Helen as equivalent to a sighted person as possible, or to develop her own potential. In response, Helen said, "Was this the result of Anne's emphasis on language and book?" Helen and Anne never responded to Cutsforth's publication publicly, but Helen declined her nomination for the N.C. Model Award in the late 1950s. Anne Sullivan's contribution to Helen Keller's life is immense and indomitable. In her autobiography, 'The Story of My Life' Helen reveals how Miss Sullivan was the inspiration behind her dull and motionless life.

Anne Sullivan played the role of an angel. As a twenty-year-old teacher, she showed an outstanding talent. Helen's dark life was transformed into a world full of light and helped to realize the true meaning of life. Helen regarded her teacher as an integral part of her life. From Helen's autobiography we can see how valuable Anne Sullivan's accomplishments were in her life.

### Anne Sullivan's contribution

Anne was a firm believer in her actions and words and she was remembered for her accomplishments. Each time you fail, start all over again, and you will grow stronger until you have accomplished a purpose not the one you began with perhaps, but one you will be glad to remember. -Anne Sullivan. According to her - "Education in the light of present day knowledge and need calls for some spirited and creative innovation both in the substance and the purpose of current pedagogy." Miss Sullivan was unique as a mentor. No one else has been able to teach blind, deaf and dumb children so successfully before Anne. Sullivan's own past gave her the infinite strength and morale to endure trials, struggles and errors. Her philosophy was to survive through extreme adversity, despite all obstacles. Her words and actions were a source of positive, motivational encouragement.

She instilled confidence in Helen and inspired her to love and express herself. The 49-year-long relationship that teacher and student shared was replete with significant experiences that helped Ms. Sullivan become a lifelong colleague and companion from a teacher and mentor. Sullivan played a role as the anchor of Helen's life in various problems and disasters. Her endurance and perseverance made Helen an enthusiastic and confident in achieving great success in life. The best reference made by Helen was when she imagined herself coming out of Egypt and standing before Sinai when "a power divine" touched her spirit and "gave it sight" so that she could see many wonders and as if she could hear a voice crying out of the sacred mountains - "Knowledge is Love and life and Vision". [10]

Anne Sullivan's contribution to Helen Keller's life is immense and indomitable. In Helen's autobiography 'The Story of My Life' she reveals how Miss Sullivan became the inspiration behind her dull and motionless life. Miss Sullivan herself was partially blind and had undergone surgery to regain her sight at a very young age. She was educated at the Perkins Institute for the Blind which later played a key role in transforming Helen Keller's life. [10]

Helen recognizes her teacher Miss Sullivan as her friend, philosopher and guide. In her autobiography, she recalls the day she first met him, which will be considered "the most memorable day of my life." [10] It is remarkable and interesting how Anne used every opportunity to inspire Helen and enrich herself with both knowledge and experience. She learned to appreciate nature through Sullivan. As she happily records that Anne made her feel that "Birds and Flowers and I were happy

Peers". [10] She began to enjoy small things in her daily life, such as "every blade of grass" or "the curves and dimples of my baby sister's hand." Helen acknowledges Sullivan as a separate part of her and claims that "the footsteps of my life are in hers". [10]

Sullivan's determination probably determines the ultimate value of teachers. Even with Keller's disability, Sullivan refused to give up and continued to set high goals for her student. She was not only a pioneer in teaching the deaf and blind, but she is an ideal example for all teachers who are trying to reach hard and challenging students.

### Contribution of Helen Keller

In the first half of the twentieth century, Keller was speaking out on various political and social issues, including women's suffrage, birth control, and socialism. After completing her college studies, Helen embarked on a journey to learn how to help improve the world and the others' lives. Her accomplishments spread to Massachusetts and New England. She became an accomplished person and speaker by sharing her experiences with the audience and working on behalf of people with special abilities. She declared before the Congress that she was determined to improve the welfare of the blind.

In 1915, with the famous city planner George Kessler, she founded 'Helen Keller International' to deal with the causes and consequences of blindness and malnutrition. She assisted in the establishment of the 'American Civil Liberties Union' in 1920. Helen's tireless efforts to establish the 'American Federation for the Blind' in 1921 made her a national icon. In 1924 she became a member of the organization and participated in many campaigns to raise awareness, financial support and cooperation towards the blind. She joined various organizations for helpless people and the Permanent Blind War Relief Fund (later known as the American Braille Press).

After graduation, Keller became a member of the Socialist Party. Between 1909 and 1921, she wrote several articles on socialism and supported Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party's presidential candidate. Among her essays on socialism, she described her views on socialism and the world in "Out of the Dark". During this time Helen experienced the public's superstitious attitude about her disability. For most of her life, the press praised her courage and intelligence and strongly supported Helen. But even after expressed her socialist views, some criticized her to pointing her disabilities. An article published in 'Brooklyn Eagle' newspaper stated that "mistakes sprung out of the manifest limitations of her development." In 1946, Helen was appointed as counselor by the 'American Foundation of Overseas Blind' as an international relations consultant. Between 1946 and 1957, she traveled to 35 countries on five continents. In 1955, at the age of 75, Keller embarked on the longest and most terrifying journey of her life. It was a journey of 40,000 mile and 5 months trek across Asia. Through her many speeches and appearances, she brought inspiration and encouragement to millions of people. [15] Helen rose to fame from the age of four until her death in 1968. Her wide range of political, cultural, intellectual passions and activities confirms that she knows people in all aspects of life.

### Source of data

Data have been collected from various secondary sources for the present study. Information is taken from various eBooks, articles and websites.

### Conclusion

If we look at the lives of Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller, it is hard to believe that two great personalities, both blind and deaf, can ever be considered incapable? They have proved that education is wealth and how to communicate with the world. Their influence in the field of current education has created a new dimension. First, they helped establish educational institutions for the blind and deaf. They protested the society's restrictions on disability. Second, they showed if the limitation between teaching and learning can be opened to students and if there is a way to communicate and understand, the education methods are will be limitless and learning methods will be undetermined. No one was able to successfully teach a deaf-dumb child before Sullivan. It was probably Sullivan's own difficult childhood that provided the necessary speed and patience for her endeavors. Sullivan's determination set a standard for future teachers. She was not only a pioneer in teaching visually and hearing impaired students, but also being an inspiration and guide to all the teachers who are currently trying to reach out to problematic and challenging students. Sullivan and Keller are a paradigm for those teachers who have questions about their own teaching skills and students who have doubts about their learning skills.

Maria Montessori gives inspirational accounts of Helen Keller and her revolutionary teacher in her own handbook. She says: "Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy, by their example, both teachers to myself- and, before the world, living adornments of the miracle in education. In fact Helen Keller is a unique example of the phenomenon common to all human beings: the possibility of the liberation of the imprisoned spirit of man by the education of the senses." [14]

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