CHAPTER V

Methods and Activities:

To look closely into the activities of the child in the different categories of preschool institutions of the state and the factors which have a determinative effect on his activities has been a necessary part of the present study.

Underlying the specific activities of a preschool institution are the methods based on the philosophies of the early childhood education as propounded by different educationalists and internationally renowned innovators to link such activities towards realisation of the specific objectives already defined. It is necessary, therefore, to get an overview of the objectives of preschool education of our country (or of the state) while looking for the linkage of the activities through methods employed in the light of different philosophies of preschool education.

It has been found that methods do vary to a great extent depending on the various philosophies of early childhood education as propounded by great thinkers and innovators in education. These methods, again depend closely on the goals or objectives of preschool education as accepted by the community or the state.
The general objectives of preschool education can be broadly classified into three categories as social, educational and developmental. The social goal is said to be the oldest goal of preschool education. Starting from the 'écoles maternelles' (Nursery school) in France to 'Casa Dei Bombini' (children's home) of Rome established by Dr. Maria Montessori, it is found that providing better environment for growth to the children of deprived families and communities (a social goal) is common to all these institutions.

There is no doubt that the preschool institutions today serve as effective agencies for developing various forms of sociability by providing enriched environment for -

i) harmonious development of all the social components of personality;

ii) developing a genuine interest in an attitude to democratisation;

iii) developing skill in language for self expression and communication; and

iv) helping children to adjust better with the constantly changing world by making them well aware of and adept in biological, motor, psychological and social mechanisms.

The social goals of preschool education therefore, go beyond mere child-minding. They form a complete whole to which all preschool teachers must give thought if they really want to educate and not just mind small children in their institutions.
Educational goals:

Education, in a broader sense, is not mere instruction; but is part of development of psycho-biological factors of the life of the growing child. The early childhood education today consists of everything the adult does with a view to the child's optimum development, social integration and general welfare in the light of the present state of social development.

Broadly speaking, the educational goals of preschool education centres round the development of skill in language and control over the bodily activities and emotions of the growing child. The cognitive aspect or knowledge leading to intellectual development and reasoning which ultimately will prepare the child for formal schooling also form a vital part. All such education is provided to the children through experiences in different physical and social activities.

Development goals:

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth and development of the body and so of the mind. It is, therefore, the ideal period for observing the child both in his individual as well as social activities with a view to provide better facilities scope for
proper development. It is important that the need for detecting handicaps and giving simple compensatory and remedial education should be recognised by all connected with the activities of preschool children.

All such programmes relating to health care, nutrition and medical check up are provided with preventive and curative aims. Of course, the teacher alone cannot provide such care but needs a well organised team of workers to analyse and deal with such cases. The need for educating the parents in this field is also essential.

In an international survey on preschool education as reported in 'World Survey of Preschool Education', most of the countries responding indicated their preferences on the objectives of preschool education in the following order:

1) Intellectual development and socialisation.
2) Preparation for Primary School.
3) Physical development.
4) Child minding

1. Mialaret, G. - World Survey of Preschool Education: (UNESCO) P 34
v) Emotional aspects.
vi) Moral and religious aspects.

Most of the countries have set goals for preschool education. In India, there is no such goal set as yet legally or officially except recognition of the need for preschool education in government documents. In this respect the Kothari Commission has given a long and elaborate consideration towards pre-primary education in modern India. The Commission held out the following objectives:

- to develop in the child good health habits and to build up basic skills necessary for personal adjustment, such as dressing, toilet habits, eating, washing and cleaning;

- to develop desirable social attitudes and manners and to encourage healthy group participation, making the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of others;

- to develop emotional maturity by giving the child to express, understand, accept and control his feelings and emotions;

- to encourage aesthetic appreciation

- to stimulate the beginning of intellectual curiosity concerning the environment and to help him understand the world in which he lives, and to foster new interest through opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment;
- to encourage independence and creativity by providing the child with sufficient opportunities for self expression;

- to develop the child's ability to express his thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct and clear speech, and

- to develop in the child a good physique, adequate muscular co-ordination and basic motor skills.2

The committee on child-care, in its Report, has also spelled out the objectives of preschool education in India, which concern mostly the physical aspect of the child's life, health care and nourishment besides social and emotional developments.3

The National Council for Educational Research and Training, New Delhi organised a seminar in 1971 to deliberate on materialising the suggestions by the National Commission on Education (1964-66) relating to pre-primary education and subsequent adaptation by the Central Advisory Board on Education (1970) and

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opined that the Pre-primary education in India, in the present context, should have the following objectives:

1) To develop healthy habits in the child and thereby to help him in better social adjustment.

2) To develop sensory and motor activities.

3) To develop emotionally and socially.

4) To help the child in its proper development of intellectual, linguistic and aesthetic abilities.

Information collected from different preschool institutions, teachers, parents and some persons connected with the management of such institutions and concerned government and statutory bodies, it appears that there does not exist a definite set of objectives of preschool education in the state of Assam. Neither the activities nor the methods underlying such activities carried on in these institutions have been selected and structured consciously enough to realise fully any or all of the

objectives defined at the national level. Activities do vary from institution to institution, but whatever is being carried on in any particular institution appears to be stereotyped carried on mechanically in a routined manner only to prepare the child for entering into the primary school.

The following table gives an idea of the objectives of preschool education as the teachers and workers in the preschool institutions are conscious of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of responses</th>
<th>Preprimary class in a primary school</th>
<th>Balwadi</th>
<th>Anganwadi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical (sensory motor development)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
<td>20% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for primary education</td>
<td>87.5% (35)</td>
<td>40% (3)</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better development of abilities</td>
<td>20% (9)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relieving mothers</td>
<td>12.5% (5)</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
<td>60% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of habits</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
<td>20% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting other children</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20% (1)</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (i) The privately managed infant schools have been included along with the primary schools with preprimary classes attached to them.

(ii) The figures in parentheses indicate the responses (number of) received.
The material and human conditions obtaining in these institutions also do not appear to be conducive to introduce varied programmes as suited to the needs of the children to allow them to grow at optimum pace under natural (informal) atmosphere. As regards tools and equipments, the less said the better. This does not mean that the tools and equipments are not available at all in any of the preschool institutions, but it does mean that whatever tools and equipments are available in some of these institutions are sparingly used and that too improperly. This has been observed to be due mainly to the following reasons –

1) Inadequate physical facilities (to be described in a separate chapter later).

ii) Untrained or inadequately trained teachers.

iii) Inadequate supervision and inspection.

iv) Very high child – teacher ratio.

v) Outside pressures.

Most of the teachers engaged in these institutions are matriculates or under matric with or without training in preschool education or in any
other related fields excepting those in urban institutions. The graduate teachers working in urban institutions are mostly without any training in preschool education who work in these institutions at a very low monthly salary to run away with better prospects elsewhere. It is, however, no exaggeration to say that none of these adequately equipped though all of them have some sort of tools and equipments and teaching aids to move along.

It was stated in the chapter on Supervision and Inspection that the supervisory staff wherever they are available are professionally not competent to provide adequate guidance to the preschool teachers. In the case of teachers in the preprimary classes attached to primary schools the head pundits are neither in a position to provide the necessary guidance nor they are willing to create the necessary atmosphere for the preprimary teachers to use these equipments, with very few exceptions. On the contrary, the head pundits think that the preprimary teachers should also share some amount of work-load in primary schools.

Tools and equipments in a preprimary school can be effectively used only when the number of children per teacher is considerably low to allow scope
for individual attention. But in most of the preschool institutions the number of children placed in the charge of a teacher is high enough to be taken proper care of with little scope for using tools and equipments, if there be any. The number of children in a preprimary class attached to a primary school is well above 50, the average for all type of preschool institutions being around 30.

Most parents, even in the enlightened urban areas, insist on their children in a preschool institution being taught of reading, writing and arithmetic right from the beginning. Pressures exerted by parents in rural areas are strong enough to compel the preprimary teachers to start teaching the children how to read and write in a traditional way giving up all other activities.

Mother tongue is the medium of instruction in all categories of preschool institutions other than those under private management with a few exceptions. In the privately managed preschool institutions, the interpersonal communications between the teacher and the children and that among the children themselves including instructions by the teacher to children in the conduct
of various activities in and around the institution are carried on in mother tongue. But reading and writing, is done in English. Singing of English rhymes, teaching of English alphabets and numerals (Arabic) and aping English manners and customs get prominence in the privately managed (English Medium) primary schools with pre-primary classes attached to them. Thus these institution prepare children not only for English medium primary schools but also inculcate in them a sense of superiority to isolate them from the mainstream of national life. Children in these institutions generally come from the elite upper class and the upper middle class families of the society.

It should also be mentioned here in this connection that children's books, teachers' manuals for preprimary and primary education and other teaching aids being almost non-existent in Assamese and other modern Indian Languages of this region, teachers and organisers find it easier to go in for all these in English medium which are readily available. Instead of attempting to develop a fair ground for and the proper aptitude to learning a language (mother tongue), the children in the so-called English medium infants' schools appear to be racing hard to acquire a flair for affected English because of the encouragement with which these children are being constantly goaded by
their parents. Little care is taken, on the other hand, by the parents, teachers and organisers in preschool institutions with mother tongue as the medium of instruction to develop in children a capacity for effective and expression and communication in mother tongue and to derive the aesthetic and rhythmic pleasure the mother tongues are capable of providing.

Generally, the children who have attained the age of 4 years and admitted into the preprimary classes attached to primary schools. In most of the cases, the preprimary classes start along with the primary classes with variation in working hours. The working hours for preprimary classes range from 3 to 4 hours starting either from 7 a.m. or 10 a.m. in the morning. The activities begin with a general prayer after which children are led to their specified area of the school-building to be left for few minutes for free discussion among themselves. The children may take note of the absentees, enquire about the causes of their friends' absence. The children also get an opportunity to respond to the nature's call mostly in the open of the back yard of the school-building. Exercises on verbal identification of matters and objects subsequently to be expressed in writing is one of the major activities in the preprimary classes. Equal importance is attached to 'number games'. Institutions where the children of preprimary classes are required to stay for not more than three hours, there is no break of the activities or recess and
in others where duration of stay is of 4 hours, the children have a short break in between their activities. This is because in almost all the institutions there is no arrangement for the children to take a mid-day meal and a nap thereafter or the preprimary teacher is also required to attend to primary classes either simultaneously or as soon as she has been able to finish her job with the preprimary children. Drawing, singing of rhymes both individually and in a chorus, telling or listening to stories interspersed with simple physical exercises (whether permitting) or games and free play constitute the activities of the preprimary children. There is, of course, variation in timing and sequences of these activities depending on circumstances and also on the importance attached to a particular activity.

The school day of a privately managed preschool institution starts almost in the same manner as in the case of a preprimary class attached to a primary school. Most of these institutions start working from 10 a.m. for three or four hours a day. The minimum age of admission of a child into the preschool class of these institutions is 3+. Two to three classes are there in these institutions for the preschool children. The lowest class is termed the nursery class and the next higher class is termed the kindergarten, if there is only one class, and kindergarten I and kindergarten II, if there are two classes.
The children and the teachers exchange greetings as the children enter the school-building. Activities begin with a common prayer. The teachers supervise the dresses, nails, teeth, hair and shoes of the children to see if these are in order and clean as advised. The nursery children take some time to get adjusted to the atmosphere of the school and no formal work or routine activity is given to them till they get settled. The activities carried on with this group generally are free handling of wooden blocks, cubes, cylinders, etc.; observation of pictures, singing of rhymes, using toilet, etc. are the other kind of activities these children introduced to. In between these activities, the children are taken to some specified area of the school-building at a prefixed hour where the children take their snacks brought from their respective homes under the supervision of the teachers.

Schools with four hours working programmes allow the children to lie down for about half an hour for rest and play for about 20 minutes in the open before they are taken home by their parents.

The older group (in kindergarten classes) has more or less, similar programmes of activities; but activities on language and number, reading and writing occupy a major portion of their time in the school. Sometimes, the children are taken out to the yard to observe trees, plants, flowers, etc. for study. This group, generally, has 4 hours programmes. Drawing
painting, listening to or telling stories, paper cutting, and folding, recitation of short poems or rhymes also are included in their programmes. Games and physical exercises in the open are also organised sometimes for this group.

The day in a balwadi begins either at 7 a.m. or 10 a.m. to last for two and a half hours or for three hours with 'safai work' i.e. the children along with the Balsevika and the helper co-operate to sweep and clean the hall where the activities are organised. After cleaning, the children wash their hands and legs under the supervision of the Balsevika with the helper helping them when necessary. The children are asked to bring towels or handkerchiefs with them for wiping their wet limbs. Supervision of nails, hair, teeth, dresses, etc. to see if these are in order and are properly cleansed is a regular feature of a balwadi. A common prayer then follows after which the children are taken to the hall. All the children in a balwadi even though their age varies from 4 to 6 are seated together in the hall, but are grouped for different activities on the basis of their age and experiences. The new entrants generally take a month or two to get adjusted to the Balwadi atmosphere and during this period these children are engaged in activities like singing, doll-play, identifying objects through pictures and models, using building blocks, etc. Gradually they are introduced to certain activities relating to development of language
and number. Various concepts relating to size, shape, colour, texture, etc. are given through materials which are of common use. Sufficient time is allotted in a balwadi for outdoor activities like games and sports, physical exercises and tending gardens, etc.

The children in a balwadi are served with light refreshments in the form of cooked food or fruits. The food is supplied by the institution. The helper prepares the food and the older children take part in serving the food to the children. The balsevika insists the children on washing their hands and mouth properly to take food in a clean and decent manner and also on washing their dishes and glasses supplied by the institution. The parents collect the children from the balwadi after the programmes is over. In case the parents fail to turn up in time, the helper escorts the children home.

The working hours in an anganwadi ranges from two to three hours starting from 7 a.m. These institutions are not, in the real sense, preschool institutions but are child care centres only. In principle these centres provide preschool experiences in an informal setting to the children of age ranging from 3 to 6 though, due to various reasons, material
and human, the activities cannot be carried on properly. The daily activities in an anganwadi start with a prayer. The anganwadi worker supervises the personal cleanliness of the children. The helper assists the children in having a good wash or a bath. Singing rhymes in groups, group games and sports in the open, physical exercises, etc. are organised in these centres. Special care is taken in developing proper toilet habits; but there being no sanitary arrangement in these centres, the back yard of the hut of the centre is used as the toilet. The health visitors visit the centres at regular intervals and the children are taken to the nearest primary health centre for physical health check up once in three months.

The children in an anganwadi are also provided with light refreshments. Care is taken to see that children develop proper habit of eating in a clean manner. The food is supplied by the centres. Older children who are going to complete the age of six years are prepared for entering into primary schools by way of teaching them the rudiments of language and number.

On an analysis of the various programmes and activities of the different types of preschool institutions under the study, it is found that these programmes and activities lead to the realisation of certain
objectives, however remotely, and help creating the awareness in the community of the needs of the preschool children.

The activities like standing in a queue for washing, forming a line for prayer, sitting in an order, greeting teachers and friends, keeping things tidy — are some of the activities common in all the preschool institutions.

In most of the preschool institutions these activities are practised in a mechanical way. The teachers insist on maintaining the order of sequence of different activities in a rigid manner. But whether these activities are imposed or done spontaneously by the children, these tend to develop habits which are and would be helpful both for social and personal life of the child. These habits and attitudes developed therefrom have an aim of preparing the child socially.

Activities like free conversation, directed conversation, listening to and telling stories, memorisation and recitation of rhymes which are common to most of the institutions help developing the language capacity of the child.

Observation of Nature — tree, plants and weather, would raise the natural curiosity of the child
and the scientific explanations provided to his queries about the natural phenomena are likely to form the basis of scientific enquiry in the mind of the child by way of providing immediate satisfaction.

Activities like handling and manipulation of blocks, cubes, hollow sticks, rods and tablets of different colour, shape and size, listening to sound box, ringing of bells of different pitches, touching and feeling of varied surfaces of different objects give the children an opportunity to have sensorial and perceptual experiences leading to the development of intellectual capacities.

Activities concerning distinguishing objects in terms of shape, size, weight and length help the child developing the rudiments of mathematical concepts. Experiences of all or some of these activities properly structured and sequenced with reference to ages of children would surely help them becoming good learners by creating in them the strong intellectual basis besides helping them to grow normally.

The growing child in a preschool institution requires facilities for his optimum growth, both physical and mental. Some of the common activities
like games and play in the open, physical exercises, working in the garden which allow the child to have sufficient physical movements; lying down or taking rest after exhaustive play are some of the activities which foster physical development. Insistence on cleanliness is a common feature. Health check up and nutrition programme though not common, are very important aspect of preschool educational programmes in all the countries of the world.

Motor activities like pulling and pushing objects, certain outdoor activities like swinging, riding the slides, etc. help development of motor abilities though not common in all these institutions. Activities like drawing, painting, singing, paper cutting and folding, colouring and recitation and observing pictures help developing aesthetic appreciation and artistic abilities besides helping finer adjustments and control over motor abilities of the preschool children.

From the preceding discussion of activities of the child in the preschool institutions of our state one is likely to get an impression that the needs of preschool children in these institutions are being properly attended to within the limitation of resources, both material and human, and that it is neither necessary nor there is scope enough for
further improvement under the existing circumstances. Far from the truth. It has been observed that no method based on philosophical, psychological and pedagogical conceptions as innovated by any of the great educationists like Froebel, Decroly or Dr. Maria Montessori, for instance, is precisely used in any of the preschool institutions of the state. While observing a particular set of principles of education, the corresponding methods need not be followed literally. The experienced and well trained teachers always bring the methods up to date to accommodate new conceptions and to facilitate attaining the various objectives set, and this certainly deserves all the praise in consideration of the rapidly changing world of today. But to use various methods without proper co-ordination being unaware of either the objectives or the principles underlying the methods used is not likely to produce the desired results. The coherence and harmony necessary for normal evolution of the personality of the child must be always borne in mind and all efforts must be directed toward achieving this end. The entire sphere treded in is delicate enough and everything within this sphere needs very delicate handling under the guidance of dedicated experts in the field of education with thorough knowledge of the psycho-biological processes included. It
is not so in our preschool institutions. A casual peep into any of the preschool institutions of Assam will substantiate the point. The children in these institutions do not appear to have been enjoying the vigour of natural growth under the possible extension of their home environments conjured up by the protective and creative influences of the teacher.