CHAPTER II

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION - AN OVERVIEW
THE GENESIS:

Early childhood educators view the young child within the contexts of the family and society. Group programmes are seen as tools to foster the child's total growth and development, physical, sensory-perceptual cognitive, intellectual, linguistic, social, emotional and academic.

The major figures whose writings and works have directly influenced the form and function of current-day early childhood education programmes are - John Amos Comenius in the seventeenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Pestalozzi in the eighteenth, Friedrich Froebel in the nineteenth and Montessori in the twentieth century.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT:

The history of early childhood education is intimately related to efforts to provide upward mobility in social status for children from poor families and to the desire to reform public schooling. Early childhood education has had to carry a host of high expectations ever since its beginning. 'Comenius' responded to the grimness of children's lives in his day by advocating "humour and lightness" in children's lessons.
Pestalozzi was an educational thinker and developer as well as a teacher who wanted to include poor children in the schools and liked to teach them. 'Montessori' began her educational programme specifically for children of the 'slums' with the goal of helping them become independent citizens.

The years following World War II (Mid 1940s to mid 1960s), were a period of accelerated 'Social Change'. More women joined the labour force. The shift from rural to urban centres of residence gained momentum. Extended families were separated. A normative-maturational view of child development prevailed in education and child rearing during this period.

THE KINDERGARTEN MOVEMENT:

Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries was a fruitful source of educational thought, stimulating the movement toward universal elementary education and reforming teaching practices. Rousseau, in France, urged that children be permitted to develop naturally as children, free from restricting adult standards. The ideas and practices of Robert Owen in Great Britain, J.H. Pestalozzi in Switzerland and Maria Montessori in Italy exerted tremendous influence on the Kindergarten movement of the 19th century. Robert
Owen, managing partner of cotton mills at New Lanark, established a school for the young children of his employees in 1816. His two ideals pleasant, healthful conditions and a life of interesting activity had a profound influence inspite of many setbacks. The circumstances of the Industrial Revolution in England tended to encourage the provision of schools for young children, known as infant schools because early legislation prevented their employment while the factories took their parents away from home for long hours. In 1837, however the home and colonial society was founded to train teachers in the methods advanced by 'Pestalozzi', who saw in education a means of elevating the masses. He and his pupil, 'Friedrich Froebel' believed in leading children to self-understanding and not imposing the ideas of adults.

In 1837, Froebel opened at Blankenburg, in Thuringia "a school for the psychological training of little children by means of play and occupations"; applying to it the name "Kindergarten" in 1840, he sought to convey the impression of an environment in which children grow freely like plants tended in a garden. The kindergarten plan to meet the educational needs of children through the agency of play gained
widespread acceptance. During the 25 years after Froebel's death in 1852 Kindergartens were established in leading cities of Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Japan, Switzerland and the United States.

OBJECTIVES OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION:

Pre-school education aims at the total development of the child in his physical, social, emotional and cognitive aspects so as to impart a 'creative outlook' about the society in him. The specific objectives of pre-school education are as follows:

1. To develop in the child a good physique, adequate muscular co-ordination and basic motor skills.
2. To develop in child good health habits and to buildup basic skills necessary for personal adjustment.
3. To develop desirable 'social attitudes' and manners, to encourage healthy group participation, by making the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of being a member of a social group.
4. To develop emotional maturity by guiding the
child to express, understand, accept and control his feelings and emotions.

5. To encourage aesthetic appreciation in the child.

6. To stimulate in the child the beginnings of intellectual curiosity, to help him understand the world in which he lives.

7. To encourage in the child independence and creativity by providing him with sufficient opportunities for self-expression.

8. To develop in the child the ability to express his thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct and clear speech.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Pre-school education came into existence about 50 years ago in India. Prior to 1947, provision of pre-school education was entirely in the private sector. Government's concern for pre-school education became apparent for the first time in 1944, with the publication of the Sargent Committee's Report on 'Post-war Educational Development in India'. The report pointed out that the "State should provide for pre-primary education and popularise it".

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) which was set up in 1953, placed considerable emphasis on
programmes for pre-school child. Since then the Board has been developing 'Balwadis' under various programmes directly through grants to voluntary organisations. The 'Central Advisory Board of Education' also recognised the significance of pre-primary education and recommended the proposal to develop a programme for pre-primary schools by mobilising the community resources.

In 1964, the 'Kothari Education Commission' stressed the need to undertake pre-school programmes for socio-emotional and cognitive development of the child through voluntary sector, in an effort to provide equal opportunities for all.

In 1972, a 'Study Group on the Pre-School Child' was setup which recommended setting up of a variety of models of pre-schools to suit local conditions.

The new National Policy on Education (1986) has given a great deal of importance to Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE). It views ECCE as an important input in the strategy of human resource development as feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education and a support service for working women of the disadvantaged sections of society. It has taken into account
the nature of ECCE and has pointed out the need for organising programmes for the all round development of the child including nutrition, health, social, mental, physical, moral and emotional development. With this in view, ECCE will receive high priority and will suitably be integrated with ICDS.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN PLANS:

i. In the First Five Year Plan (1951-56)
Balwadis formed an important feature in the Community Development Programme and the scheme of Welfare Extension Projects taken by the 'Central Social Welfare Board'. Besides, the Ministry of Education offered financial assistance to various State Governments for starting pre-primary schools. Nursery schools were provided under various legal enactments. In voluntary sector Kindergarten schools and nursery schools were also started by some organisations.

ii. In the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61),
Pre-Primary Education received considerable attention. The Ministry of Education extended further its programme of pre-primary schools and the CSMB the programme of Balwadis through their state branches.

iii. During the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66),
stress was laid on providing the Balwadis in existence,
with trained Child Welfare Workers (Bal Sevikas) and to meet their demand of Bal Sevikas, training centres were setup.

iv. In the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74), efforts were confined mainly to certain strategic areas such as training of teachers, evolving suitable teaching techniques, production of teaching materials.

v. In the Fifth Five Year Plan (1975-79) it was envisaged to attach children's play centres to selected primary schools and encourage private agencies to run pre-primary schools.

vi. The pre-school programme in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) envisaged to have at least one early childhood education centre in every community development block and develop these centres as adjuncts to village primary schools, wherever possible. Stress in these centres was laid on the inculcation of sense perceptions among the children, through innovative use of locally available resources, in the community and the environment.

vii. In the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), early childhood education is proposed to be dovetailed with nutrition, healthcare and social welfare as a package within the broad framework of programme of
'Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS), so as to inculcate in the children "a healthy attitude to school-going to help increase their retention rate in schools.

DIFFERENT MODELS OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION:

Institutions imparting pre-school education go by several names in India. Some of them using the English language call them 'Kindergartens' or 'Montessori schools' while others include Balmandir, Balwadi etc. All institutions that deal with children between 3-5 years of age are pre-schools by whatever name they may be called.

BALWADIS:

The Balwadi programme was sponsored first time by the Government of India in 1958 in selected Community Development Blocks, as part of Welfare Extension Projects. These projects are of multipurpose nature and external services for women and children. In 1986-87, 11 WEPs were working with nearly 249 Balwadis aided by CSWB (Central Social Welfare Board).
ANGANWADIS:

Anganwadi is a grassroot level institution, acting as a focal point for child care services in a village. It is essentially a part of ICDS scheme which aims at providing a package of services, consisting of supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health and nutrition education for women and non-formal, pre-school education for children in the age of 3-5 years. The scheme initiated in 1975 with only 33 experimental projects has expanded within 12 years to 1641 projects.

FROEBEL'S AND MONTESSORI'S METHODS:

It is pertinent here to discuss about the Froebel's and Maria Montessori's methods of early childhood education, which revolutionised the pre-school education all over the world.

FROEBEL'S SYSTEM:

Friedrich Froebel was the greatest pioneer in the education of the child in the 19th century. Froebel was a devout German educationist. In 1840 at Blankensburg he coined the term 'Kindergarten' to his school. He named it 'Kindergarten' as he sought to convey the impression of an environment in which children
grow freely like plants tended in a garden. To develop the child's constructive and aesthetic powers play was the dominant spirit in the kindergarten system. Froebel believed that, it is through play that the child first represents the world to himself. It is through play that the education can give the child the interpretation of the life he seeks to impart. Froebel has laid down the following kinds of play in his scheme of kindergarten.

1. Play leading to recreation and constructive activities.
2. Play for imaginative and intellectual development.
3. Play for developing co-operation like group games.
4. Play for the development of character.
5. Play for learning the 3R's.

In the Kindergarten system, along with play, the other means are songs, gesture and construction. Various activities like paperfolding, drawing, clay modelling, painting, singing, dancing and story telling are to provide for spontaneous activity of the child. Froebel laid stress on natural study.

Thus Froebel revolutionised the education of the child at primary school stage. He was the first
man to stress the ideas of 'Teacher Education'. Froebel's Kindergarten system, influenced the system of primary education all over the world.

MADAME MARIA MONTESSORI'S SYSTEM OF EDUCATION:

'Montessori Method' is a great contribution to Pedagogics. It is a distinct step forward in the history of educational methods. Madame Montessori was an Italian medical practitioner. As a doctor, she evinced more interest in the treatment of the feeble minded. She came to the conclusion that mental retardation is caused by lack of sensory training. In 1907, she prepared a scheme for the education of the children in Italy. She began her educational programme specifically for children of the slums with the goal of helping them become independent citizens. Her main publications were "The Discovery of the Child", "The Montessori Method", "Advanced Montessori Method", "Secrets of Childhood".

The main principles of Montessori can be stated as follows:

1. Education is a process of development. 'If any educational act is to be efficacious it will be only that which tends to help towards the complete, unfolding of the child's individuality.'
2. Doctrine of Liberty: Discipline must come through free-activity.

3. Principle of growth of individuality: The child manifests his individualism in his natural and spontaneous manner, when he is free.

4. Self-education: For the normal child, it is auto-education given through self corrective exercises like the didactic apparatus.

5. Motor-training: Education in movement is one of the cardinal features of the Montessori school. Movements like walking, jumping, running and skipping are provided for.

6. Education of the senses: This is a special feature. She has stressed the education of the senses through appropriate didactic materials.

7. Environment is the basis of education: Montessori believed that a rich educational environment will help in the proper growth of children.

8. Language teaching and teaching numbers; writing should precede teaching. In teaching writing a) tracing letters of the alphabet, b) learning sound c) using a writing instrument like pencil, lead chains are used for counting.
THE ROLE OF TEACHER IN MONTESSORI SCHEME:

In Montessori scheme, the teacher is called as Directress who should be a trained observer, deeply interested in child's behaviour. She is expected to keep a detailed record of every activity of the child. The morphological growth of the child in terms of height, weight capacity etc., are to be studied. No rewards and punishments are to be given by the teacher. She has to recognise individual differences among children. The Montessori approach has influenced educators, progressive schools and even national systems of education all over the world. The Montessori approach offers the present system of education a framework which aims at helping a child achieve excellence through his/her personal potential and encourages the teacher to be a catalyst at the various stages of a student's growth. It is fine-tuned to the needs of a child to develop creatively rather than turning into a one-dimensional citizen who learns and lives by 'rote'. 