INTRODUCTION
"We are guilty of many errors and faults,

But our worst crime is abandoning the children,

Neglecting the fountain of life.

Many of the things we need can wait.

The child cannot

Right now is the time his bones are being formed.

His blood is being developed;

To Him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow'

His name is 'TODAY'.

— Gabrila Mistral

— Nobel Laureate
The period of life that stretches from around three to six years is a period of momentous significance. It is during this time that children enter the social world beyond the family and establish themselves more or less easily and successfully as members of a community of their peers. It is during this time too, that they first encounter and deal with the challenges set to them by our system of education - challenges, for many children are unlike any they have ever met before. By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers and as language users, and be in a position to understand their own abilities and their own worth.

Childhood foundations play a great role in the way an individual would adjust to life later on. This idea has been expressed in sayings like "As the twig is bent, so the tree will grow." If childhood foundations are good, they lead to good personal and social adjustments and a greater chance of happiness. If, on the other hand, they are bad, they leave the individual poorly adjusted to the world and with less

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A child's early development has an enormous and a decisive influence on the whole of his future life. Modern sciences such as psychology, physiology, genetics and pedagogy provide concrete confirmation of this. The early years are considered to be the most impressionable and formative years of life. It is during these years that the foundation of habits are laid, behaviour patterns established and attitudes towards life developed. Recent researches in child development have led to a remarkable awareness of the crucial importance of early childhood years for the optimum development of the child. It has been held that the first few years of life are the critical years for personality development and the damages or impoverishment suffered at this stage are likely to be irreparable.

Today, great importance has been given to pre-school education. The term "pre-school education" usually refers to the arrangement of education before school - "School" being understood as compulsory schooling which begins in most countries at the age of six years. Broadly speaking, the concept of pre-school covers the period of the child's life from birth to formal entrance into the public school system.

Pre-school children are generally referred to children

who are between the ages of three to six years. These early years are very important because on them rests the entire span from childhood to old age. This is the time when children need to get correct guidance and assistance to help their growth, good opportunities to release their energies creatively and to express their talents and inclinations constructively. Children have their own peculiar needs, their own unique capacities and above all their own childhood life to live and enjoy.

Ruth Strang portrays the pre-school years as under:

"During their third, fourth and fifth years children grow rapidly - physically, mentally and socially. They gather information and put it together into patterns of knowledge that serve their purpose. They begin to work and play cooperatively with other children. In their play they show skill and ingenuity. These are the years of "the flowering of the self". By the end of the pre-school years children will have gained enough independence and skill to hold their own in the elementary school."

The rate of development at this stage is so rapid that the child is able to take in almost anything that is given to him in a form which he can understand. At no other stage is he able to benefit as much from an enriching environment as he can at the preschool stage. The more the experiences the

child acquires at this stage, the richer is the dividend. However, it should not be misinterpreted that preschool education provides immunity to the child against all failures. It only gives the child a good head start which helps him to face the later years with more confidence and ease.

Pre-school education has included children of both nursery school and kindergarten age, with the nursery school, theoretically serving younger children and the kindergartens, five year olds. Actually no such demarcations are valid since there is a lot of overlapping between the nursery school and the kindergarten.

Pre-school institutions can help a lot in enriching the experiences and supplementing the educational activities of the home. It can also help in the smooth transition of the child from the informal atmosphere of the home to the formal environment of the school. Pre-school education strengthens motivation for schooling and promotes school readiness. The fast changing sociological conditions have also necessitated that adequate provisions be made for pre-school education.

OBJECTIVES OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The objectives of pre-school education vary from one ecological and socio-cultural group to another. Some of the objectives relevant to urban, private nursery schools are not relevant to 'balwadis' in inaccessible rural areas, in tribal villages or in congested urban slums. One often finds differences in degree in the available pre-school facilities,
but what is universally acknowledged is that the pre-school age has important implications for later years.

The Kothari Commission’s (1966) main emphasis was on socio-emotional and cognitive development as objectives of pre-school education. The objectives may be spelt out as follows:

(1) To develop in the child a good physique, adequate muscular coordination and basic motor skills.
(2) 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, cleaning etc.
(3) To develop desirable social attitudes and manners and to encourage healthy group participation and making the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of others.
(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 intellectual curiosity and to help him understand the world in which he lives and to foster new interests through giving opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment.
(7) To encourage independence and creativity by providing the child with sufficient opportunities for self-expression.
(8) To develop the child’s ability to express his thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct and clear speech.
The importance of these objectives in a pre-school programme has been accepted and reiterated by professionals in the fields of education and child development, and has, in fact, been articulated by a number of well-run enlightened pre-school institutions.

Pre-school education, should therefore aim at promoting the total development of the child—physical, motor, emotional, social and cognitive. It should be planned in such a way that it fulfills the above objectives as laid down by the Kothari Commission.

There is much evidence to show that pre-school attendance promotes social development because the child has many opportunities to accustom himself to social living with those of his own age and group. Today, pre-school education has become a dynamic part of education. The nursery school serves as a laboratory for the study of child development and provides opportunities to observe how each child reacts and behaves as a unique person. Modern researches have shown that pre-schools lay a solid foundation for the harmonious development of children, compensates for the short-comings in the upbringing of children who come from more disadvantaged families thereby ensuring that all children are given an equal start in life.

It is generally accepted that the earliest years of life have a great influence in determining the basic pattern of all social and emotional development. While children grow physically, perceptually and emotionally, they also learn
Social behaviour that make them similar to other people around them.

Social development means acquisition of the ability to behave in accordance with social expectations. According to Ralph McCaw (1965) "Social development is the learning of behaviour required by the social expectation of the culture. It involves learning to get along with other people. It involves proper performance behaviour, playing of approved roles and the development of social attitudes" Social development takes place in a social group which has a particular culture or a set of common and characteristic ways of behaving and believing. Socialization is the process of learning this culture. Although a human being is inherently social, he does not come into the world equipped with the necessary traits and techniques for social living. He has to learn how to be social and this learning is one of the most difficult things he has to master.

A look at children in their first few months in a preschool offers an interesting study in social development. They stay there for several hours and there is frequent opportunity for interaction with children as well as adults. In the nursery school, perhaps, for the first time, the child is in a group of peers. Ample opportunities for socializing are essential because children cannot learn to live socially

with others if they spend most of their time alone. To become socialized children must like people and social activities. If they do, they will make good social adjustments and be accepted as members of the social group with which they are identified.

The onset of the pre-school stage provides the child with greater opportunities to interact with people in the environment. During these years the child progresses in his social behaviour and there is a significant decrease in his autism.

Socialization Forces:

Important social forces affecting the child's social development include the family, the peer group and the school.

The Family

The family is the first and most important socializing agency. The emotional attachment it provides is crucial in the development of all relationships in life. In this setting the child first begins to understand how human beings relate to each other. The parents are the primary agents in the socialization of the child. It is the home that sets the pattern for the child's attitudes toward people, things and institutions.

A child who has a positive, trusting relationship with his parents is likely to be more secure in his interactions with others. Pampering and over-protection by the parents
prevent the normal social development of the child. Likewise, an autocratic atmosphere at home prevents the child from becoming spontaneous in his social behaviour. He is afraid to try new social relationships and is inhibited, unstable and quarrelsome.

It is the family that gives the child a sense of security or insecurity, that often determines his attitude to others and to himself. The family is the background against which he sees himself and is seen by others, until he has the power to make or remake life for himself. Within the family atmosphere and the family ranges the child learns what he is and what his parents and siblings expect of him.

The Peer Group

During the pre-school years the young child begins to disengage himself from the family circle and to interact with his peers, sometimes directly and sometimes in a parallel side by side relationship. Peer groups serve as an important socializing agent and actually provide for the child a workshop in human relationships. It is here that he first comes into contact with children of varied religions, social classes and ethnic backgrounds.

Peer groups assume an increasingly important role in the formation of social behaviour. Peers serve to keep the child conforming to the social expectations of the group.
the pre-school age, the child has attained adequate physical development and has mobility which facilitates his going out of home. He gradually initiates social interaction with other children.

Peers also have an important effect on the child's self-concept by giving him a feedback about the kind of person he is and the kinds of behaviour for which he will be accepted or rejected by his peers. This is the area in which he learns to accept, work with and cooperate with others. Peer groups satisfy various needs of the children like acceptance, achievement, affections, approval, belongingness, fame and recognition, expression of thought and opinion etc. They play an important role in the social development of the child because it is here that constructive relationships are formed. Peers provide powerful models of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. It is while interacting with other children that one has the opportunity to help, comfort, share, take care and give to others.

The School

The school, like the family is a potent institution in the development of the social behaviour of the child. It provides a complex of social situations or a miniature social world in which children live and perform their functions in interaction and under the guidance of the teachers.

The school is an outstanding instance of socialization.
In societies which are becoming highly rationalised and industrialised, the natural processes of education in the family are no longer adequate to prepare the child for his future adult role in the society. The responsibility is being increasingly thrust upon the formal school which is a social unit apart from the rest of society where the child spends several years.

The pre-school is an ideal situation for furthering social development. There the child finds a wealth of things to play with by himself while other children play nearby. Progress in playing with others is social progress, readily observed as a benefit of pre-school group experience.

The school serves as a laboratory for expanded experiences in social living. In the school setting, the child is for the first time intensively introduced to gaining recognition on his own merits outside the family circle. When children enter kindergarten, many attitudes and beliefs have already been formed, some of which may have to be unlearned. In the new setting, opportunities are present to shape the child's social attitudes. The child can benefit greatly from being in a social group.

While the effect of nursery school experience on academic development has not been thoroughly explored, progress in the social areas seems to be clearly indicated. Schools report that children who have nursery school
experience are at least at the start more socially active than children without this experience. Studies point to differences in social adjustment and social poise between children who attend pre schools and those who do not. Children who attend have been found to be more socialized, show more initiative and are more spontaneous.

In a study by Walsh the social and personality growth of twenty two children who attended nursery school for six months was compared with the growth of a comparable group of children who did not attend nursery school. It was found that the children who attended nursery school became less inhibited, more spontaneous and more social. They developed more initiative, self reliance, curiosity and self-assertiveness than the children of the control group.

In a much more comprehensive investigation, Hattwick compared the social and personality growth of a group of 106 children who attended nursery school for nine months with the growth of 106 children who attended nursery school for only six weeks. Although there was a general increase in the social adjustment of both groups of children, the boys and girls who attended nursery school for longer period showed greater gains in social skills.

5. Walsh, M.E. 'The relation of nursery school training to the development of certain personality traits'. Child Development; 1931, 12, pp.72 - 73.
There seems to be little doubt that a well conducted nursery school has a positive influence on the social growth of pre-school aged children. It offers children ample opportunities for expanded social relationships. Today, it is a fact that the child's most difficult adjustments involve the behaviour of other people. In view of the complexity of social adjustments, it is little wonder that the majority of children's problems and maladjustments lie in the social area.

Keeping this in mind, the investigator in this study has made an attempt to find out the impact of pre-school education on the social development of children between the age of 3 and 6 years. Two comparable groups of children initially matched on chronological age, sex and socio-economic status of parents have been considered in this study. One group comprising of 120 children attended pre-school institutions whereas the other group of 120 children did not attend any nursery or kindergarten school.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It may well be asked "why the need for a study of this kind?" The study of social development of children has been an important area of research interest in recent years. The importance of pre-school education is universally recognised.

as catering to the most impressionable and educationally potent period of a child's life.

The pre-school institutions play an important role in the socialization of the child. Early educational experiences have been found to be particularly important for children growing up in an atmosphere of poverty. Enrollment in pre-school institutions assists these children by introducing them to the modes of social behaviour.

Keeping in view the importance of pre-school education on the social development of children, the present investigation was designed with the following major objectives:

(i) To find out whether pre-school attendance helps in fostering social development of children.

(ii) To find out whether there exists a significant difference in the social behaviour of school going children as compared to the non-school going children.

(iii) To find out differences, if any, in the behaviour of boys and girls so far as their social development is concerned.

(iv) To find out whether there is any relationship between socio-economic status of parents and the social development of children.
To find out the role of play in the socialization of the pre-school child.

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses formulated for the study were:

(i) Pre-school attendance promotes social development

(ii) There is significant sex difference in the social behaviour of boys and girls.

(iii) Children belonging to different socio-economic status groups differ in their social behaviour.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A survey of the related studies revealed that very few studies were conducted on the social development of pre-schoolers between 3 and 6 years on a comparative basis, to determine whether attending pre-school has any effect on the social behaviour of children. Hence, the investigator who is interested in early childhood education wanted to find out whether attending pre-school helps in fostering the social development of children between 3 to 6 years of age. The present study was undertaken with this in view.

The scope of the study was both restricted and broad. Restricted because it was limited to the urban areas of Greater Guwahati alone. It took into consideration only the children of the lower SES groups. Broad, because it sought to study the impact of pre-school education on the social
development of children within the overall context of the selected schools and areas. In view of the growing importance of early childhood education and child care, such a study seemed to have some special significance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has taken into consideration numerous aspects relating to social development of pre-school children. It is, therefore, an extensive study. But this investigation suffers from certain limitations for a variety of causes. These are briefly discussed as under:

(i) The first limitation relates to the area under study. Greater Guwahati has been taken as the field of study in this research project. The city of Guwahati was selected because of its expanding educational facilities. Different categories of pre-school institutions can be found under different types of management. Moreover, the number of English and Assamese medium schools are also sufficiently more here.

(ii) The second limitation arises from the age group studied here. Since the investigator wanted to study the social development of pre-school children, the age group of 3 to 6 years was considered in this study. This age group was chosen because children normally attend a pre-school when they are about three years old. The age group below 3 was not included for various reasons, the chief being that contact with the
outside world is not sufficiently established at this stage.

(iii) The third limitation is with respect to the selection of the sample. This study has been confined to the lower socio-economic groups only. Two income groups have been considered in this study. The lowest income group and the lower middle income group. In practice it meant that the investigator restricted her search for households earning an income of Rs. 3000/- per month or less. The upper socio-economic status groups were not considered in this study because it was not possible for the investigator to get the required number of non-school going children between the age group of 3 and 6 years from the higher income groups. Most of the families belonging to the middle income groups, not to speak of the higher income groups having pre-school-aged children send them to some type of pre-school institutions — either preparatory, nursery or kindergarten.

(iv) The fourth limitation flows from the selection of the schools. Only the Government schools were selected and the required number of children were drawn from these schools. It was found that children belonging to the lower strata of society who were unable to pay their fees normally attended Government schools which imparted education free of cost or charged a very nominal fee.