CHAPTER II

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Down from the time of Plato, thinkers had explicitly expressed the idea of education and educational methods as constructive processes of guidance aimed to help each child attain the fullest possible development of his personality and the fullest realisation of his potentialities.* The ancient system of Indian education, despite its manifold drawbacks, was individualistic.**

Even in the pattern of odd system, that prevailed in the Vedic period, there was in addition to instruction some (+) sort of guidance.++

Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries stand out as a glorious period; because it was then that children's rights as individuals were recognised Cominius published a picture book for children. Rousseau's thought provoking work 'Emile' was rather a declaration of children's right. Pestalozzi was a systematic observer of the behaviour of children.*** Froebel and Herbart held that education must be based on principles of child psychology. The


** Keay, F.E. (1938) Indian Education in Ancient and later times: Oxford University Press P.191.


theory of evolution markedly influenced the study of child development; Darwin himself took systematic notes on the day-by-day development of a child. Similar studies were undertaken by Perez (1878) and Campayre (1879) in France and Preyer (1882) in Germany. At the Leipzig laboratory children were included among the experimental subjects of Preyer. Stanley Hall in America made child study a field for scientific investigation and in 1891 he founded the 'Pedagogical Seminary' a magazine devoted for the study of children. In 1895, Sully the founder of 'British Association for child study' published his 'Studies of Childhood', which soon became widely popular.

Francis Galton laid the foundations of the mental testing movement. He opened his anthropometric laboratory in 1884. Galton emphasised the study of the individual child. He showed how research findings could be used for practical purposes like the appropriate treatment of child at home and school and for vocational guidance. He studied the genetic and environmental differences between individuals in his laboratory, which must be considered, as one of the earliest child guidance centres.

Binet, in 1904, devised his 'intelligence tests' for young children from which stemmed a vast quantity of research in the psychology of children and adults.

In 1905, Binet established a pedagogical laboratory in conjunction with a collaborator. He formulated a scheme for the examination of subnormal children. At the same time in Germany, Muemann was conducting serious studies in child psychology and child guidance. His three volumes in 'experimental pedagogy' mark an important event in the history of experimental education.

The last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century witnessed rapid developments. Maladjustments of children in terms of discrepancies between their potential abilities and their levels of achievement were subjected to intensive study. Witmer, in 1896, established at the University of Pennsylvania the first 'psychological clinic'. William Healy did commendable service in the development of new performance tests and in indicating the ways in which a testing programme should be integrated with a biographical and medical studies of the child. J.B. Watson, the exponent of the 'behaviourism' published useful data on experiments conducted with children as subjects. The methodology advocated by him infiltrated into child psychology as to render it more objective or 'behavioural'.

Claparede, in Switzerland, established in 1912 the 'Ecole des Sciences de l' Education' at Geneva which later came to be known as the 'Institut des sciences de l' Education'. Claparede and his collaborators took child study in all its aspects. He published numerous
articles on educational Psychology, Psysiology, Pathology of childhood and subnormality.  

1. Jean Piaget was during those years conducting investigations in child development in the University of Geneva. Credit goes to him for systematising the method of observing children, devising experiments and developing the clinical interview for testing children between the ages of two and fourteen. His main books, 'The language and thought of the Child', 'The Child's conception of the World', and 'The moral judgment of the child', are good source books of valuable data.

2. Stanley Hall's initiative in America aroused keen interest in child study all over the world. J.M. Cattell, E.L. Thorndike and William James were in the fore-front at that time in psychologising education. Study of the problems of adolescent delinquency was taken up by Healy in 1909, a year after Burt had commenced his studies of adolescent delinquents.

Theories of Freud, Morton Prince, Janet and Adler in the field of abnormal behaviour permeated educational thoughts too, with the result that childhood problems began to be viewed in a new light. Dynamic theories of personality and behaviour were propounded.
which really helped the teachers to handle problems effectively.

In the foregoing paragraphs an attempt was made to trace the history of child study as a scientific discipline. The account is only sketchy and it mentions only important landmarks. The problem of subnormality was an offshoot of the scientific movement in child psychology. First it mainly dealt with only intellectual subnormality. Itard, Decroly, Binet, Segiun and Monessori were during the early years of this century conducting intensive studies on the problem of diagnosing mental subnormality. They formulated suitable instructional methods suitable for children of low I.Q. and the practical issues involved in institutionalising such children. Educational backwardness was considered identical with intellectual subnormality.

The problem of educational backwardness was separately studied on a scientific basis by Sir Cyril Burt. Surveys conducted in Liverpool, Birmingham and London consequent on his appointment as psychologist to the London Education authority, mark the opening era of the experimental investigation of educational subnormality. He left practically no problem in the field untouched. The causes of backwardness were analysed by him incidence was determined for each age and each type of environment, types of backwardness were described and remedial measures were suggested. His inferences were drawn from data enmassed from extensive sources. It is his
broad methodological contribution that is most valuable. He introduced the parallel group method, the experimental design and statistical methods, in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The importance of case study method and observation were stressed by him, but he was always firm to use those qualitative data in a rigid experimental framework. Burts' services are difficult to overestimate; his monumental works, "The Backward child", "The Subnormal mind", "The Young delinquent" and "Mental and Scholastic tests" are masterly demonstrations of the techniques we have to adopt when investigating psychological and educational characteristics of children. 1 The causes and treatment of Backwardness published recently is a resume of his previous works, in the light of the developments taken place since. Burt's articles on the topic published mainly in the *Journal of Experimental Pedagogy* and the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* during the past four decades throw light on all sides of the problem.

Encouraged by Burt's work in Liverpool and London, similar investigations were undertaken in many other areas in England and in Scotland. The subject attracted educational psychologists and the different aspects of the problem were studied. Schonell undertook

systematic study of specific backwardness and he elaborated testing procedures for diagnosing specific backwardness in separate factors of each subject. Language was split up into different components like spelling, vocabulary, comprehension etc. and he standardised attainment tests and diagnostic tests, expanding the scheme devised by Burt and Ballard.

Schonell's tests were very carefully prepared and they are widely popular as efficient diagnostic instruments. His methods, like Burt's, apart from their theoretical importance are also of much practical utility. Schonell's "Backwardness in the Basic Subjects" is a volume of considerable value for those interested in the progress of the child.

The major studies mentioned above, were followed by similar surveys. The results obtained in all those studies corroborated most of the findings of Burt. Surveys were conducted in different School districts in America to find out the general trends by George Peabody, Fulmner, M.C. Millian and others.

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