1. Discuss the problems in the field of preschool education in India.

Ans: The pre-primary education owes its origin to the famous German educator, Froebel. He introduced this type of education by setting up a kindergarten school in Blakenberg in 1837. The people in India did not attach any importance to this system for a long time, although even in ancient Indian books it has been said that Abhimanyu learnt the art of smashing the Chakravyuh (a circular formation of an army in the battlefield) during his pre-school days. Even then no attention was paid in India towards the pre-primary education of the child. After Independence in 1947 some private efforts were made to develop pre-primary education and give it a definite pattern and shape. With the inspiration drawn from foreign countries, pre-primary education took root in the Indian soil. This system for the first time came into existence in Germany and it has come to India from there. As such, for its proper study it is necessary to have a glimpse of its progress in the Western countries.

There were 330 pre-primary schools in India in 1951-52 but in 1957 this number was almost doubled and now over four hundred schools or more are being opened every year since then. In these schools the Montessori or the Kindergarten system is adopted along with games and sports. But the government has always been apathetic in this sphere. The pre-primary schools lack equipments due to shortage of funds. The pace of progress being slow, there is a dearth of trained teachers and child literature in this field of education.

Development Efforts:
It is difficult to deny the importance and value of pre-primary education. Pre-primary education may be regarded as pre-requisite to primary education. So proper arrangement should be made for it. The efforts of Dr. Montessori and the recommendations of Sargent Scheme have attracted some persons in the field of pre-primary education in India.

New Experiments and Researches:
In view of the importance of pre-primary education, educationists in India have begun to pay some attention to this vital stage of education. So far the pre-primary age for children in India has been from three to six years. But now the educationists have divided it into four stages; (1) prenatal period, (2) upto the age of two and a half years from the day of birth, (3) from two and a half years to four years, and (4) from four to six years. The child remains solely in contact with his mother since conception to the age of two and a half years. As such, there is a need of maternity welfare centres attached with pre-primary schools. After this age, the child may receive education independent of his mother in schools. During this period the teacher is required to study minutely the child’s tendencies and attitudes and create accordingly an atmosphere for his education and all-round development.

Careful handling and regular medical examination is needed to ensure his proper physical development. He is taught language, art, arithmetic, science and music in a psychological manner through the medium of play.

Teaching:
So far we have had to adopt the foreign system in the sphere of pre-primary education such as Froebel, Montessori or play-way systems. But now efforts are being made and new researches are being conducted in order to evolve a pattern suit the Indian atmosphere. Now a mixed system comprising of Montessori and pre-basic system has been adopted by many schools in our country.

The Bhav Nagar Bal Shikshan Sangh is evolving a new system by incorporating the good qualities of both the above mentioned systems. There, therefore, appears to be a bright future for pre-primary education in India.

2. Discuss the contributions of Montessori towards preschool education.

Ans: Montessori is a method of education named after Dr. Maria Montessori. She was the first woman in Italy to obtain the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Because she was a doctor, Maria Montessori looked at education from a scientific level. She believed that education should prepare a person for all aspects of life. She designed materials and techniques that would promote a natural growth of learning in students. They are common to all Montessori classrooms. Working with these materials and techniques forms a pattern that children carry over naturally to reading, writing, and mathematics. Each skill is developed to interlock with another.

The Montessori Method of education, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori is a child-centred educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood. Dr. Montessori’s Method has been time tested, with over 100 years of success in diverse cultures throughout the world.

It is a view of the child as one who is naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared learning environment. It is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, cognitive.

Montessori education offers our children opportunities to develop their potential as they step out into the world as engaged, competent, responsible, and respectful citizens with an understanding and appreciation that learning is for life.

- Each child is valued as a unique individual. Montessori education recognizes that children learn in different ways, and accommodates all learning styles. Students are also free to learn at their own pace, each advancing through the curriculum as he is ready, guided by the teacher and an individualized learning plan.

- Beginning at an early age, Montessori students develop order, coordination, concentration, and independence. Classroom design, materials, and daily routines support the individual’s emerging “self-regulation” (ability to educate one’s self, and to think about what one is learning), toddlers through adolescents.

- Students are part of a close, caring community. The multi-age classroom—typically spanning 3 years—re-creates a family structure. Older students enjoy stature as mentors and role models; younger children feel supported and gain confidence about the challenges ahead. Teachers model respect, loving kindness, and a belief in peaceful conflict resolution.

- Montessori students enjoy freedom within limits. Working within parameters set by their teachers, students are active participants in deciding what their focus of learning will be. Montessorians understand that internal satisfaction drives the child’s curiosity and interest and results in joyous learning that is sustainable over a lifetime.