

## **EMPOWERING ADULT LEARNERS THROUGH THE UNIQUE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH OF PRERAKS IN KERALA**

**Pranali B. Gedam**

Asst Professor, Department of Political Science, St.Xaviers College for Women, Aluva, Kerala, India

**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores the role of continuing education teachers, known as Preraks, in the process of adult education in Kerala, India. Drawing on Jack Mezirow's theory of transformational learning, the study aims to describe Preraks as adult facilitators, empathetic provocateurs, and critical thinking coaches. 35 nodal continuing education teachers were interviewed semi-structuredly on their teaching behavior, curriculum planning and assessment, and beliefs and values guiding their practice, revealing their key role in measuring the effectiveness of adult education programs. The findings emphasize that Preraks' quality, ability, and performance play a crucial role in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of adult education programs. The paper highlights the responsibilities and duties of Preraks, their training, convergence with other programs, and income-generating programs. The study also reveals that the Preraks act as a link between the community and the authorities, becoming a focal point of village life in Kerala.

**Keywords:** Continuing education, adult education, Preraks, transformative learning, critical thinking coaching.

### **Introduction**

Adult education is an important means of empowering communities and advancing social and economic development in India, particularly in rural areas where illiteracy is still prevalent. The success of adult education programs depends largely on the quality and effectiveness of continuing education teachers, known as Preraks, who facilitate the process of learning and help learners explore new ideas and challenge their assumptions.

This qualitative study is aimed at exploring the Preraks' role in adult education programs in Kerala, India, by examining the extent to which Preraks perform as empathetic provocateurs and critical thinking coaches as posited by Mezirow's theory of transformational learning. The study used semi-structured interviews with 35 nodal continuing education teachers to gain insights into their teaching behavior, curriculum planning and assessment, and beliefs and values guiding their practice.

The findings of the study highlight the key role played by Preraks' quality, ability, and performance in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of adult education programs. The study provides insights into the duties and responsibilities of Preraks, their training, convergence with other programs, and income-generating programs. The study recognizes Preraks as a crucial link between the community and the authorities, becoming a focal point of village life in Kerala. The study further underscores the need to develop the Preraks' capacity in facilitating adult education programs to empower and uplift the communities they serve.

### **2. DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY**

The present research was a qualitative study that explored 35nodal continuing education teachers or preraks conceptions of teaching behavior in adult literacy classrooms. In the present study, two hour semi structured

interviews with each nodal preraks was conducted. The questions centered on their understanding of the process of teaching and learning, their approach to curriculum planning and assessment, and the beliefs and values that guide their practice. The roles include: the facilitator, mentor, provocateur, instructor, and counselor. The present study is conducted through several phases. Firstly a focus group discussion was organized with the Officials of the Kerala State literacy Mission and district project coordinator and two assistant project coordinators of the district literacy mission. At the second phase the same was organized with the 35 preraks who are the adult facilitator of the adult literacy programme in Kerala, from the nodal continuing centers. They are the block coordinators of the CEC. Along with the discussion an interview schedule was also conducted. Questionnaire was prepared and distributed to the preraks of the nodal centers. In the third phase of study the target group was the beneficiaries. Questionnaire were prepared and distributed to the beneficiaries by visiting the centres. A face to face interview was also organized with the beneficiaries. Explanatory research strategy and interpretative research strategy is used. In this explanatory study the CEP programme is identified with social, political, gender and economics variables.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the Research Studies in the realms of literacy focuses its attention on the performance of neoliterate or continuing literates rather than the preraks or literacy educators. A few research studies conducted on the effective role performance of adult literacy educators as adult facilitators.

Vasumathi (1992) studied the functioning of CECs in Kannur district. In this study it is found that the preraks were experienced up to 5 years and majority of them were men and did not undergo any training processes during their performance as adult facilitators. The study also revealed that they were not satisfied with the allotted fund for the maintenance of CEC works, attitudes of the neo literate towards the classes and the physical facilities of the CECs.

Nair, Omana and Rehim (1992) studied the CEC programmes and revealed that majority of preraks had adequate experience in total literacy campaign.

Muthuchamy( 1992) Studied The Role of Performance of the Preraks and found that there is discrepancy between the ideal performance and actual performance. Furthermore the study revealed that women preraks, who are better qualified, were found to be the best role performer in the continuing education process. Operation research group in their study found that there was no separate budget allocation for the training of Preraks in most states in India. Delays in the payment of honorarium have reduced the commitment level and the major reason for the nonperformance of preraks.

In the perspectives of those studies conducted by different researchers, it is necessary to analyze the role performance of the preraks as adult facilitator is essential in the accomplishment of the continuing education programme in Kerala which has touch its new sky of different projects such as 7<sup>th</sup> equivalency ( Athylam project ), the 10<sup>th</sup> equivalence and 12<sup>th</sup> equivalence . So the purpose of the present study 1) to identify whether the adult educators' conceptualize the teaching-learning process described in the transformative learning theories 2) to know do teachers see themselves as "transformative" educators.

The hypothesis of the study is that the quality of preaks as empathetic provocateur towards adult literacy determines the success of the programme and the hypothesis is tested by analyzing the data of the neo literate and continuing literate in different centers qualitatively. **Table1. Showing Selected Centres**

Sl. no.	Taluks	Block	Cec/ncec
1	Paravur	Paravur	1.Kottuvally
		Paravur Municipality	2.Nauthyattukunna
2.	Aluva	1.Alangad	3.Chirkkam
		2.Angamali	4. Kanjoor
			5.Thavalappara 6.Thuravoor

			7.Manjikkad
		3.Angamali Urban	8. Kunnu
		4.Parakadav	9. Nedumbassery
3.	Kunnathunadu	1.Koovappady	10.Okkal 11.Vaikkara 12. Mudakkuzha 13.Muttathumagal NCEC
		2.Vadavucode	14. Mattakkuzlu 15.Peechinzachiva NCEC 16.Kadomttom
		3.Vazhakkulam	17. Arakkappady
4	Kanayanoor	1.Edappally	18.Cheranellloor 19. Kadamammudy
		2.Mulanthuruthy	20. Perumpilly NCEC 21.Parpakode
5	Kochi	1. Vypin	22.Chera
6	Kothamangalam	1. Kothamangalam	23. Vettampara 24.Chelad NCEC
		2. Municipality	25. MathirappillyNCEC 26.Valiyapara
7	Moovattupuzha	1..Pampakkuda	27. Thirumarady 28. Mamalassery
		2.Moovattupuzha	29. Arakkuzha 30. Avoly

The quality and effectiveness of the programme depend up on the quality and ability of the preraks who are really involved in the programme and they are in close touch with the community and the learners and act as a link between the authorities and community.

All the programmes formulated by the KSLMA and DLM were done through the preraks and their role for the conduct of the programme is significant. The information regarding different programmes organized by the CEP centres were collected through a focus group discussion with these preraks.

**Table2.** Profile of the Prerak

Category	number	Percentage
Male	5	14.29
Female	30	85.71
Total	35	100

**Source;** Primary

Majority of the nodal preraks are females. Preraks of almost all the CEC centres were also females. This feature of employing female preraks was an encouraging aspect since the main beneficiaries were females and this has also reflected in the final results of the beneficiaries.

**Table3.** Age wise distribution

Age Wise Distribution	Number	Percentage
50 and above	9	25.7
40 and above	15	42.9

Below 40	11	31.4
total	35	100

**Source:** Primary

It is evident that more number of preraks are from the age group of 40 to 50. It means that most of them were matured persons and the preraks who were in the age group of 40 to 50 and above 50 were involved in the beginning of the total literacy campaign of the district. They are dedicated and service oriented persons. They were able to organize and conduct various programmes at the centre. They had taken several innovative steps in creating awareness about the CEP as well as in conducting the programmes. All the beneficiaries had positive opinion about the performance of the preraks. **Table4. Educational Qualifications**

Sslc		Pdc		Graduate		Post Graduate		Total		Computer		Other Diploma	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
8	22.9%	5	14.3%	18	51.4%	4	11.4%	35	100%	10	28%	8	23%

**Source:** Primary

About the educational qualification of the preraks more than 66% of the preraks are highly qualified and capable of conducting the equivalency classes. 51% of them had specialized training like computer, tailoring, fabric painting, lab technician, etc.. So they are capable of giving training programmes to the learners. The selection of the preraks was uniform throughout the state. The ZSS followed the prescribed guideline of KSLMA. To select the prerak a selection committee consisting of Block panchayath level president and secretary, welfare standing committee chairman, and representative from KSLMA. The main eligibility criteria for NCEC must be a graduate in the age group of 18-40 years and must belong to same panchayath, for CEC must be minimum of 10th passed. Preference will be given to higher qualification and experience in the literacy programme and a rank list were prepared on the basis of performance. However ZSS officials mentioned that there was some political interference in the selection of preraks but this was resolved by discussing with political parties.

### 3.1. The Duties and Responsibilities of the Prerak

The timing of CEC was 10 am-5pm and both prerak and Asst. prerak will work full time 6 days in a week. The duties are, to conduct literacy and equivalency classes, target specific programmes, vocational training programmes, conduct social and health awareness classes, to work at information window etc. The documentation of the CEP was maintained by the preraks. All the documents are verified by the officials of ZSS.

### 3.2. Training to Preraks

There were regular training programmes to the Preraksin Kerala for the efficient conduct of the equivalency programme. These training programmes were given at a regular interval of 6 months to the new preraks and orientation to the old preraks. All the 35 preraks from the nodal centres attended the training programmes in different areas such as Personality development / leadership quality, Skill training convergent with other programmes, Project Planning of equivalency programmes, Communication English and Hindi and Health and hygiene. The training classes were organized by the DIET, JSS, DLM, BRC, and Election Commission, Suchithwa Mission, Polytechnics, etc.

The preraks were given various suggestions for improving the training classes. The duration of the training should be increased and more emphasis should be on vocational training. The training should be more practical than theoretical. KSLMA should directly involve in training programme for equality in quality of training.

### 3.3. Convergence With Other Programme

Ernakulam district has the best example of convergence with other department with the CECs. Instead of people approaching the government officers, the literacy programme created a condition where by officers

were approaching the people. All SHG group held meeting at the centres and the village extension officer also attended the meetings Thus the CEC had become a focal point of the village life in Kerala. The preraks act as a link between the community and the panchayaths. It is essential to recognize the efforts of the prerak to serve CEC as information window holding 'CharchaMandal and also support the role of SHG in CEP activities.

**Table5.** Details regarding the help from different department for different programmes of CECs

Department/ Organisation	Programme
JSS	Vocational training to beneficiaries
Local self government	CEP in Annual plan
Social Welfare Department	Organising festival at CEP
SC/ST Department	Activities in colonies for health and education
Public relations department	Celebration of important days field publicity on various aspects
Health department	Health, Sanitation, AIDS awareness classes
Torture Preventive centre	Legal literacy/ child rights
World Malayalee Association	Providing sewing machines for IGP beneficiaries
Community Polytechnic	For training in different trades
Agricultural department	Training programme for the preraks and learners in cash crops
Animal Husbandry department	Training programme on live stock development
Khadi and village Industries	Vocational training programme for various handicraft
Nehru YuvaKendra	Training programme for women empowerment
SarvaSikshaabhiyan	Family life education
Water resource management	Awareness programme for preraks related to management of water resources and rain harvesting
Akshaya Mission	Computer literacy programme for CEP beneficiaries

**Source:** Primary

The centres have conducted these programmes both for the preraks and the beneficiaries. Preaks from different nodal centres informed that in addition to all these programmes the centre conducted medical camps with the help of government hospital, redcross, and SSP. Aluva and Kunnathunadu block has been conducting personality development classes for the learners with the help of Rajagiry College of social sciences. CDS organized an awareness class for the beneficiaries on social justice and equality. Eloorcentre organized a class on interpersonal relationship between citizens and police with the help of Janamaithry police station. About 40 to 200 people were attended various programmes in each centres. From the above data it is evident that the CE centres act as a kingpin point of the community life of the people, especially the neo literate and the role of prerak in the success of all this ventures were significant.

CEC centres established an information window which provides all necessary information to the public and distribute all necessary forms as well and organized various meetings, talks and discussions on topic such as agriculture, health and hygiene, animal husbandry, first aid, seasonal diseases, environmental education, natural calamities etc with many officers like health inspectors, bank managers, agricultural officers, doctors, district education officers, teachers and lawyers. All CEC's and Preraks convey all information to the beneficiaries about the financial assistance for poor families for marriage of their daughter, the students to

avail scholarship (snehapoorvam of social security mission), file the petition under RTI, getting medical treatment for BPL families etc. **Table6.** Information provided by the CEP to the comity in last 6 months

Name of Programme	Information Provided	Forms Filled
Bank loan	600	324
Handicapped certificate	320	132
Ration card	280	190
Caste certificate	650	444
Income certificate	652	312
Residence certificate	478	346
Under BPL list	220	213
Birth certificate	523	236
Death certificate	40	18
Financial help for marriage	356	180
Medical treatment	250	124

**Source:** primary

Income generating programmes for the beneficiaries of CEC had been designed by the ZSS and coordinated by the nodal preraks. The programmes included training in various vocational skill, self employment courses computer usage and village product manufacturing which help the neo literate to earn an income which will up bring their self esteem and purchase capability

**Table7.** IGP programme under CEC

Name Of Programme	Duration	Average No of Participants from All the 30 Centres	Income Per Month
Tailoring	6	25	500
Candle making	1month	23	500
carpentry	3 months	18	1000
Screen printing	1 month	30	1500
Fashion designing	6 month	23	1500
Ornamental jewelry	6month	23	800
Catering training	1 month	20	1000
Fabric painting	6months	18	1800
Beautician	3 months	20	1000
paper bag	2 weeks	20	850
Detergent making	2 or3weeks	18	900
Mushroom cultivation	2 weeks	40	500
Embroidery	3 months	24	900
Computer course	6 months	35	2500
Rosary making	1 month	32	1000

Agarbati making	2/3 weeks	20	500
Jam/Jelly/ pickle making	2 weeks	34	1500

**Source;** *primary*

The preraks furnished necessary information about the IGP and it was found that their additional income range from Rs 500-2500 per month. The income from different vocational skills is not substantial for the beneficiaries.

The quality of life improvement programme were conducted in all the centres in areas such as family life education, communal harmony, health, family welfare, food and nutrition, drinking water, sanitation environment and social service. These are considered as the indicator of quality of life. **Table8.** *Programme organized during last six months*

Programme	No. Of Programme	Average No. Participants
Health camp	43	150
Eye camp	5	368
Talk on health and hygiene	120	50
Talk on food and nutrition	100	50
Child care	105	35
Seasonal diseases	232	65
Safe drinking water	200	50
Free tuition classes	All centres	20
Coaching classes for SC/ST for competitive exam	10centres	20
Family life education	200	40
Social service	continuous	
Right to information	220	45
Cultural programmes	All centres	44
special day celebration- reading day/literacy day/ aids day/Environment day	All centres	57

**Source:** *primary*

These programmes were organized not only for the beneficiaries but for all citizens of the general community. The eye camps were organized by the hospitals, NGOs and one camp was organized by senior citizen club. In addition to these programmes centre has been conducting other classes such as rain water harvesting, energy conservation, crisis management classes and awareness on poverty alleviation and social security programmes of the government.

### 3.4. Honorarium of the Nodal Preraks

The honorarium paid to the prerak was revised in 2017 as Rs. 10500 to 15000 which is not enough for their sincere effort to educate and uplift the society. The honorarium was paid by the Panchayath out of their plan fund. The payment was regular and preraks were not satisfied with their present honorarium. They said that they were working for the whole day from 10am to 5 pm and could not engage in any other work to meet their needs. The effort of the prerak should be rewarded by enhancing their honorarium. Since they are the volunteer

of the literacy programme from its inception and are very much involved in this community service, they are continuing their services to the community without considering the monetary benefits.

### 3.5. The Contribution of Preraks in the Quality of Life of the Neo Literate

The beneficiaries are the neo-literate who have completed their literacy classes, school dropouts, pass out of primary education and interested in availing opportunities for lifelong learning. The continuing Education Programme tries to attend the multifarious development of the learner and organized different programmes. The most important programme of the CEP under the supervision of the Preraks were the equivalency programme in which more number of people participate. The following data reveals the impact of the programme and the role of the Preraks in the quality of life of beneficiaries. **Table 9. Social Empowerment of the Respondents**

	Variables		Pre-CEP (%)	Post CEP (%)
1	Communication skills	Hesitate to talk	85	86
		Talk freely	3	81
2	Self confidence	Exude self confidence and self esteem	28	90
		Helping neighbours	40	90
		Respectful treatment from family members	45	95
		Involve the social issues actively	43	88
3	Health and hygiene	Family health and hygiene	45	100
		Cleanliness of the surrounding	32	95
		Epidemic and contagious diseases	30	98
4	Decision making	Household assets and investments	34	86
		Selection of jobs	38	81
		Education and marriage	28	83
5	Behavioural changes	Protest against social evils	36	80
		Domestic violence	29	81
		Wage differentials	40	86
		Adultery and black marketing	38	78

The above table shows that communication skill of the respondents increased significantly. They agreed that the cultural activities and training classes, personality development classes helped them a lot and their hesitation disappeared. This social empowerment reveals that the preraks played a crucial role in uplifting their social status of the participants which reflects in the social scenario of Kerala. **Table 10. Political Empowerment of the respondents**

Sl no	Variables		Pre-CEP (%)	Post CEP (%)
1	Exercising Right to vote	No	40	84
		Yes	60	96
2	Understanding the Political policies of parties	No	81	15
		Yes	19	85



3	Knowledge about the Constitution of India	No	87	23
		Yes	13	77
4	Knowledge about the rights and duties of citizens	No	74	12
		Yes	23	88
5	Knowledge about the political system	No	86	22
		Yes	14	78
6	Participation in Grama sabha	No	76	26
		Yes	24	74
7	Political participation	No	82	13
		Yes	18	87

Source: *primary*

The table shows that the literacy programme is helped to develop the citizenship and autonomous attitude of the adult learners. After joining the programme they could acquire the information about the political policies and programmes of the parties as well as the government. They are exposed of the knowledge about the constitution, the rights and duties of a citizen which led to the higher level of participation in the panchayati raj system especially in Grama sabhas. From this data it is evident that the Preraks has succeeded to build the spirit of being questioning the existing obstacles to one's life and acquire a higher level of political participation among the beneficiaries. The political emancipation of the adults has also been much better. Even though most of the educators in this study did not see their role as a "transformative educator," the study reveals that the learning process were very significant and went beyond the acquisition of practical skills into the realm of personal development and social awareness. The learners emphasized the fact that there were a considerable change in the level of understanding which is visible in their self-perceptions and social awareness. Many of the Preraks in this study emphasized that deeper level learning more depends upon the willingness of the learner than of something specific that the educator may do. The present study reveals that the adult learners have been showed a self perception in understanding and socializing the current social and political realm. The adult facilitator becomes a part of the socializing process of the community which would develop a greater interest in national and community activities. **Table11. Output of the Programme**

Sl No	Benefits	Very Useful		Useful		Not useful	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1.	Identify the strength and weakness of the personality	46	77	14	23	-	-
2	Social interaction	22	37	33	55	5	8
3	Skill development	30	50	26	43	4	7
4	Impart knowledge	55	91	5	8	-	-
5	Political awareness	12	20	38	63	10	17
6	Social justice and equality	11	18	38	64	11	18
7	Self confidence	56	93	4	7	-	-
8	Self reliance	42	70	18	30	-	-

9	Self esteem	50	83	10	17	-	-
10	Health and family welfare	51	85	9	15	-	-

**Source:** *primary*

Capacity building refers to the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive and adapt. It considers the abilities in undertaking socio cultural and political activities and enhancing self esteem. The above table shows that the participants of the continuing education programmes had an opportunity to develop their skills. It is reported that more than 90 percent of the respondents have acquired knowledge about social and political facts, that help them to improve their self confidence and self esteem. There was a significant increase in the awareness with respect to family welfare, health and hygiene. They realized the need for social justice and equality in all spheres of life which will help them to intervene in community matters more democratically. Their interaction with community has also increased which were exposed of them how to control the social and political institutions effectively and to develop their goals and identify the obstacles in their lifewhich is visible in the voting behavior pattern of Kerala .

#### 4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The present study reveals the preraks were highly qualified and capable of conducting the equivalency classes. So they can perform as a facilitator to improve the quality of life of the no literate. There were regular training programmes organized by several governmental agencies to the Preraks which was systematic and effective which equipped them with imparting knowledge and experience to the beneficiaries. By conducting surveys for identifying the illiterate, Preraks perform the role of a constructivist of the society.

CEP fulfilled the realization of the people by inculcating necessary knowledge, creating awareness which help the neo literate to cope with issues like conservation of gender equality, good governance, nutritional issues, basic health care and sanitation. Preraks identified themselves in this regard as a facilitator who could guide people to help them look at themselves and their own discoveries. They may be considered as a reformer only in the sense that they helped the people for finding out where or what they want to reform. They also supported the learners to articulate their experiences. In this regard we can understand that most of the Preraks perform their role as a facilitator, resource person, researcher, and “diagnostician” of learning needs.

Preraks organized Street plays, processions and home visits for developing awareness among people which creates a sense of critical thinking in social and political affairs .The discussion with the learners during the present study, they revealed that this informal education system is similar to that of formal schooling. They made it clear that the teacher or preraks see themselves as a manager of the classroom. Learning should not be controlled by them. In this parameter the adult facilitator would not be considered as empathic provocateur The study revealed that the literacy programmes benefitted the individual to build the spirit of being questioning the existing obstacles to one’s life and acquire a higher level of political participation .There was a positive relationship between literacy programme and change in attitudes towards community participation. Even though the self-confidence and self-reliance of the participants were increased but the Preraks in the present study revealed that it was difficult to perform the role of the counselor or the mentor. Mezirow (1981) emphasizes that educators should have “sufficient psychological knowledge” to help learners deal with anxieties and emotional barriers that may interfere with learning, but the preraks in this study were are not trained mentors and not capable to deal with the problems of many adult literacy learners. The Preraks ability to empathize and be sensitive to the learners’ problems is critical and they could not perform the role of a mentor in this adult literacy programme.

The concept of literacy has been analyzed in two perspective -Literacy as learning and literacy as development – when the analysis is done in the context of literacy as development it is noted that each CEC and Preraks took devoted effort to make literacy as a tool that supplement the individual to develop themselves socially,

politically and economically. The innovative approach towards sustainable literacy enables the beneficiaries to improve the quality of life.

In this study the teachers organized specific classroom activities but had no share of responsibility in the setting of course objectives .Evaluation of the programme is done through the normal schooling pattern of examination system conducted by the Literacy mission which cannot be taken as a parameter . But during the study period most of the beneficiaries claimed that they can interact with the society more confidently due to the training given by the preraks.

There have been positive behavioral changes in their lives as well as their awareness about family health and hygiene. The study revealed that self-esteem is the strongest outcome of the literacy programmes and it facilitates the social interventions that enhance self-esteem through the effective participation of literacy classes. For the beneficiaries these programmes create a public space for collective discussion.

This review of teacher role performance as adult facilitator shows that the success rate highly depends upon the quality and ability of the teacher who is performed the role of adult facilitator. The triumph of the programme in Kerala is considered as a model of success all over India and many states are following the model. The Preraks of the centres are channeled into improving the quality of life by enriching their sense of critical thinking by encouraging critical thinking, enable them to face challenges and help the participants to think differently and engage in self-reflection.

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