1. Introduction
An adult learner passes through various stages in the course of adult education programme. During basic literacy stage, it passes through following three stages:

i) Pre-literacy Stage - emphasis is on oral and visual Communication and participation in order to create ‘reading readiness’ in the adult.

ii) Literacy Stage (I) - When the adult learner begins to read and which lasts till he has broken the illiteracy barrier, largely with the help of teacher.

iii) Literacy Stage (II) - When the adult learner has newly acquired the literacy skills, it is consolidated. His dependence on the teacher is gradually reduced with initiation into learning by her/himself under the guidance of the teacher and she/he comes up to the standards laid down in the National Adult Education Programme.

For pre-literacy stage, only a handbook for the teacher is needed. In addition to this carefully planned visual materials with short captions are also helpful.

For the Literacy stage (I), we need primer, work book, teachers guide and co-literate material. For Literacy Stage (II), we need a set of supplementary materials, teacher’s guide and large amount of co-literacy materials.

The Literacy Stage (I) is the most crucial. The success or failure of this stage mostly determines whether the learner will become literate or not. A good primer along with relevant supplementary material makes the most significant contribution to the success of Literacy Stage (I). It shows the significance of the primer in the total set of adult education material.

2. General Consideration for preparation of primer
The following general consideration should be kept in view while preparing the primers:

- The first few lessons are very crucial. It should be very attractive, motivational and related to the life of learners. The greatest care must therefore be taken in designing these lessons.

- Every lesson should be short and manageable that the learner would have a definite sense of achievement every day when she/he leaves the class. It is better not to introduce more than four new teaching units in one lesson. Too many new units may discourage the learner and repeating the same lesson for several days may prove boring.

- The total time needed for learning the primer thoroughly should be about 150 to 200 hours.

- Devices or props’ for learning the units of teaching help in recall. These may be pictures of known objects, verses, proverbs etc.

- There are several methods of teaching reading. Common ones are alphabetic, picture-association, phonic syllabic, keywords, story method, etc. These may be classified under the categories of synthetic, analytic and eclectic method.

(a) Analytic Method
- The story method
- The sentence method
- The word method

(b) Synthetic Method
- The phonic method
- The syllabic method

(c) Eclectic Method
- Combination of Analytic and Synthetic method

It has been experienced that no method is good or bad in itself. All have certain advantages and limitations. While selecting a method, a holistic view of the learning situation should be taken. Following points may be considered while selecting the method of primer construction.

(a) The types of teachers available and their capacity to change, innovate and adopt after training.

(b) Learners’ cultural background, their likes, dislikes, and preferences.

(c) A easier system to teach the skill of reading and writing in the language.
(1) Content
Content should be selected very carefully. It should be need-based and relevant to the learner.

- If content is of a technical nature (e.g. related to agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, forestry etc.), the information should be checked by the subject specialist and the writer of the primer should become temporary expert herself/himself.
- If the content is non-technical, the writer should not advice, sermonise or preach. Avoid confusing messages.
- Be very cautious and careful while giving advice and message meant to result in economic gains. Consult not only specialist but also a person of the status of the learner who has actually gained from such project.

(2) Language

- Proceed from known to unknown.
- Lesson load to be light.
- Repeat the words several times so that it becomes a sight word. The place of word, its configuration or general shape and the kind of grammatical structure also helps in word recognition.
- In the beginning of lessons, use simple and familiar words. Simple means words that do not require difficult pattern of writing. However in the sentence method, the reverse may be helpful because of their distinct configuration. Familiar words mean the words which are easily understood and spoken by the learners.
- In several areas, learners use colloquial form of language. In such cases, colloquial words in the beginning for the sake of communication. Use of standard form of language should come only after the initial literacy is achieved and not in a very restricted way.
- Use words having the power of generating new words and sentences.
- Gradual development - In the initial three to four lessons, there is possibility of building only phrases in most cases. Care should be taken onto that these phrases should be connected with the topic of the lesson.
- There should be gradual development of the text from lesson to lesson which alone will give confidence to the learners. Big jumps in the text may discourage them. Last lesson of the primer should be within 250 words.
- Each new symbol taught in the lesson must be exposed to learners 3-4 times in the text. Many more exposures should be in the drills and exercises. Old symbols must be repeated 2-3 times upto at least the next 3-4 lessons: the longer the exposure, the longer the retention. Use frequency chart to count upto to count the exposure of the words/letter.
- If it is necessary to use a technical word and the learner does not know it, explain it in the text and repeat it about ten times.
- When selecting letters for writing practice, take into account as far as possible the number and the order of strokes.

(3) Presentation and Style
Presentation means the manner in which a topic is dealt with and style means the formats in which the matter is presented. It is expected that the presentation should be as follows:

- It should be create Scientific temper.
- It should be sensitive to the feelings of illiterate poor people. They are illiterate but not fools. There should be empathy and not sympathy.
- It should be gender sensitive.
- Simplistic solutions and prescriptive statements should be avoided.
- Messages and solutions should be based on relevant information rather than bookish.
- If possible, introduce different forms of writing like narration, dialogue, poems, songs, etc.

(4) Exercises

- Good and well developed exercises help in developing reading speed, comprehension and writing skill.
- Exercises should be developed with certain objective (e.g. developing reading speed, developing comprehension, reacting to the ideas given in the text, changing ideas and behaviors, teaching writing, etc). There should be variety of exercises.
- Exercises provided must expose learners creativity. It should help them in developing the ability to take up challenges and provide them an opportunity to express their views and caliber.

(5) Illustrations

- Illustrations help in explaining the content and increase the attractiveness of the book. It should be simple and clear, and avoiding unnecessary details.
- The purpose of illustration should be clear to the artist only then she/he can illustrate properly.
(6) Pre-testing

• Before printing, the manuscript should be reviewed by as many experienced persons as possible.
• Make a few copies and put it to actual use at least in two classes.
• Illustrations and vocabulary should be checked with the learners.

By doing pre-testing, shortcomings of the primers may be detected and could be removed before actual printing.

3. Indian Scenario

An analysis of the adult education programme in the country as well as in other developing countries in the past has revealed that the success of adult education programme largely depends on the following factors:

• High personal motivation of learners and instructors
• Systematic teaching and learning
• High quality of content
• Visibility of success in learning
• Optimum programme duration

In addition to this, an evaluation of adult education programmes in a few educated as well as backward states of country showed that longer duration does not necessarily increase the achievement; i.e. there is no additional gain in learning after a certain duration. Moreover, short learning period results in higher output at lesser costs.

After serious thinking, holding various workshops the National Literacy Mission adopted a new approach of primer preparation. This approach is known as Improved Pace and Content of Learning (IPCL).

Rationale underlying IPCL technique are as follows:

• Duration should not be unduly long. It should be sufficient for proper learning and assimilation of prescribed levels.
• There is variation in pace of individual learning. To overcome this aspect, there are well defined units and instructors enabled to assist learners to proceed at own pace.
• Pace and progress will improve if learners perceive their achievement.

(1) Approach to Development of IPCL primers

Key aspects of the approach to development of IPCL Package are to:

• Sustain learners’ motivation
• Instill confidence among learners by enabling them to see the pace and progress of learning
• Ensure achievements of prescribed levels
• Cost effectiveness

In order to strengthen these approaches the primer should have following characteristics:

• Learning package in three primers.
• Each part corresponds to a level.
• Each level defined for 3Rs.
• Contents reflect learners interest and national values.
• Each primer to have 50 per cent learning units and 50 per cent test exercises, evaluation, etc.
• Reduced duration of teaching: 200 hours.
• In-built mechanism for learning assessment.

(2) Textual Contents

• Reflect national concerns/local needs.
• Priority to women’s issues.
• Reflect messages of population education.
• Presentation of issues to be capable of evoking dialogue.
• Element of fun/entertainment.
• Numeracy is interspersed throughout the primers and it relate to practical home and work situations.
• Exercises and drills follow each lesson. The aim of exercises is at mastery over learning units.
• Exercises are aimed at full coverage of all teaching points introduced and adequate revision of teaching points covered in earlier lessons.
• Extensive use of games to assess the learners achievement.

(3) Evaluation

After every 3rd/4th lesson, there is a test which is natural extension of exercises. It covers reading, writing, numeracy and comprehension. Frequency of test eliminates fear. Moreover, the tests are not external but participatory and back referencing is possible.

(4) Book Format

There will be three primers corresponding to three levels of learning.
Each primer will have 9 lessons and composition of lesson will be as shown here.

However, IPLC approach will be successful if following prerequisites will be fulfilled.

- Conductive environment for literacy
- Proper training of volunteer instructors
- Timely supply of materials
- Emphasis on proper administration of tests and exercises
- Proper monitoring of field programmes and evaluation of learning outcomes