

PRINT CULTURE AND THE MODERN WORLD

CHAPTER COVERAGE

- The First Printed Books
- Gutenberg and the Printing Press
- The Reading Mania
- India and the world of Print
- New forms of Publications
- Print comes to Europe
- The Printing Revolution & Its Impact
- The 19th Century
- Religious Reforms and Public Debates
- Print and Censorship



The First Printed Books

- (i) Print technology was developed in China, Japan and Korea. From 594 AD onwards, books in China were printed by rubbing paper – also inverted there – against the inked surface of woodblocks. Chinese 'accordion book' was folded and stitched at the side, superbly skilled craftsmen could duplicate, with remarkable accuracy, the beauty of calligraphy.
- (ii) The imperial state in China possessed a huge bureaucratic system which recruited its personnel through civil service examinations. Textbooks for this examination were printed in vast numbers under the sponsorship of the imperial state. From the sixteenth century, the number of examination candidates went up and that increased the volume of print.
- (iii) By the seventeenth century print was no longer used just by scholar-officials, merchants used print in their everyday life. Reading increasingly became a leisure activity. The new readership preferred fictional narratives, poetry, autobiographies, anthologies of literary masterpieces, and romantic plays.

(a) Print Culture of Japan :

- (i) Buddhist missionaries from China introduced hand printing technology into Japan around AD 768-770.
- (ii) The oldest Japanese book, printed in AD 868, is the Buddhist Diamond Sutra, containing six sheets of text and woodcut illustrations.
- (iii) Pictures were printed on playing cards, paper money and textile products.
- (iv) In medieval Japan, the works of poets and prose writers were 'regularly published and books were cheap and abundant.
- (v) In the late 18th century, in the flourishing urban circles at Edo (later to be known as Tokyo), illustrated collections of paintings depicted an elegant urban culture, involving artists, courtesans and teahouse gatherings.

➤ **Print Comes To Europe**

- (i) Marco Polo, a great explorer reached Italy after several years of exploration in China in the year 1295. Marco Polo brought back with him the technology of woodblock printing. Now Italians started publishing books with woodblocks and soon the technology spread to other parts of Europe. Merchants and students in the university towns bought the cheaper printed copies.
- (ii) As the demand for books increased, Scribes or skilled handwriters were no longer solely employed by wealthy or influential patrons but increasingly by booksellers as well. More than 50 scribes often worked for one bookseller.

Limitations of handwritten manuscripts :

It could not satisfy the ever-increasing demand for books. Copying was an expensive, laborious and time-consuming business. Manuscripts were fragile, awkward to handle, and could not be carried around or read easily. Their circulation therefore remained limited.

Hence woodblock printing gradually became more and more popular.

➤ **Gutenberg and the Printing Press**

The breakthrough in print technology occurred at Strasbourg, Germany, where Johann Gutenberg developed the first-known printing press in the 1430s. Gutenberg had learnt the art of polishing stones, became a master goldsmith, and also acquired the expertise to create lead moulds used for making trinkets. Drawing on this knowledge, Gutenberg adapted existing technology to design his innovation. The olive press provided the model for printing press and moulds were used for casting the metal types for the letters of the alphabet. By 1448, Gutenberg perfected the system. The first book he printed was the Bible.

The new technology didn't entirely displace the existing art of producing books by hands. Printed books at first closely resemble the written manuscripts in appearance and layout. The metal letters imitated the ornamental handwritten styles. Borders were illuminated by hand with foilage and other patterns and illustrations were painted.

Between 1450 and 1550, printing presses were set up in most countries of Europe. As the number of printing press grew, book production boomed. The second half of the fifteenth century saw 20 million copies of printed books flooding the markets in Europe. The number went up in the sixteenth century to about 200 million copies. This shift from hand printing to mechanical printing led to the print revolution.

➤ **The Printing Revolution and Its Impact**

The shift from hand printing to mechanical printing was not just a development, but led to the print revolution.

- (i) It transformed the lives of the people.
- (ii) It changed their relationship to information and knowledge.
- (iii) It affected relationship with institution and authorities.
- (iv) It opened up new ways of looking at things, influenced popular perceptions

(a) A New Reading Public :

Access to books created a new culture of reading Earlier, reading was restricted to the elites. Common people lived in a world of oral culture. They heard sacred texts read out, ballads recited, and folk tales narrated. Now books could reach out to wider sections of people. If earlier there was a hearing public, now a reading public came into being.

The rates of literacy in most European countries were very low till the twentieth century. So the publishers had to keep in mind the wider reach of the printed work. So printers began publishing popular ballads and folk tales, and such books would be profusely illustrated with pictures. These were then sung and recited at gatherings in villages and in taverns in towns. Oral culture thus entered print and printed material was orally transmitted, and the hearing public and reading public became intermingled.

(b) Religious Debates and Fear of Print :

Not everyone welcomed the printed book, and those who did also had fears about it. Many were apprehensive of the effects that the easier access to the printed word and the wider circulation of books, could have on people's minds. It was feared that if there was no control over what was printed and read then rebellious and irreligious thoughts might spread. If that happened the authority of 'valuable' literature would be destroyed.

In 1517, the religious reformer Martin Luther wrote; Ninety Five Theses; criticizing many of the practices and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's writings were immediately reproduced in vast numbers and read widely. This led to a division within the church and to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther said, "Printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one."

(c) Print and Dissent :

In the sixteenth century, Manocchio, a miller in Italy, began to read books that were available in his locality. He reinterpreted the message of the Bible and formulated a view of God and Creation that enraged the Roman Catholic Church. When the Roman Church began its inquisition to repress heretical ideas, Manocchio was hauled up twice and ultimately executed. The Roman Church, troubled by such effects of popular readings and questioning of faith, imposed severe controls over publishers and booksellers and began to maintain an index of Prohibited Books from 1558.



The Reading Mania

- (i) Increase in Literacy rate :** By the end of the eighteenth century, in some parts of Europe literacy rate was as high as 60 to 80 percent. As literacy and schools spread in European countries, there was a virtual reading mania.
- (ii) New forms of literature :** New forms of popular literature was printed which targeted new audiences. Booksellers employed sales persons who went around villages, carrying little books for sale. There were almanacs or ritual calendars, along with ballads and folktales. All forms of reading matter, largely for entertainment, began to reach ordinary readers as well. In England, penny chapbooks were sold by petty peddlers known as chapmen, for a penny, so that even the poor people could buy them easily. In France, 'Biliotheque Bleue' were printed which were low priced small books printed on poor quality paper and bound in cheap blue covers. Then there were the romances, printed on four to six pages and the more substantial 'histories' which were stories about the past. Books were of various sizes, serving various purposes and interests.
- (iii) Periodicals :** The periodical press developed from the early eighteenth century, combining information about current affairs with entertainment, about wars and trade, as well as news of developments in other places.

Ideas of scientists and philosophers (Issac Newton, Thomas Pain, Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau etc.) now became more accessible to the common people. Ancient and medieval scientific texts were compiled and published, and maps and scientific diagrams were widely printed. Thus their ideas about science, reason and rationality found their way into popular literature.

(a) "Tremble, therefore, tyrants of the world !"

- (i) It came to be believed by mid-eighteenth century that the books were a means of spreading progress and enlightenment.
- (ii) Many believed that books would liberate society from the tyranny and despotism and herald a time when reason and intellect would rule.
- (iii) Louise Sebastian Mercier, a French novelist of 18th century believed that : "The printing press is the most powerful engine of progress and public opinion is the force that will sweep despotism away." Heroes in Mercier's novels were transformed by act of reading, they became enlightened man. He believed power of print would destroy despotism.

(b) Print Culture and the French Revolution :

Many historians argued that the print culture created the conditions which brought about the French Revolution in 1789.

- (i) The print culture laid emphasis on the rule of reason rather than custom, demanded that everything should be judged through the application of reason and rationality, attacked the sacred authority of the church and despotic power of the state. Those who read these, saw the world through new eyes, eyes that were questioning, critical and rational.
- (ii) Secondly, the print culture created an atmosphere of dialogue and debate. As such, all existing ideas and beliefs began to be questioned by the public. Such a thing created the ground for social revolution.
- (iii) Thirdly, by the 1780s, there was outpouring of literature that mocked the royalty and criticized the monarchy. This process led to the growth of hostile sentiments against the ruler.

No doubt, print helps the spread of ideas, but people did not read just one kind of literature, they were also exposed to monarchical and Church propaganda. They were not influenced directly by everything they read of saw. They accepted some ideas and rejected others.

➤ The Nineteenth Century

Mass literacy in Europe brought a large numbers of new readers among children, women and workers.

(a) Children, Women and Workers :

- (i) From the late nineteenth century, children became an important category of readers. Production of school textbooks became critical for the publishing industry. A children's press, devoted to literature for children alone, was set up in France in 1857. This press published new works as well as old fairy tales and folk tales. Anything that was considered unsuitable for children or would appear vulgar to the elites, was not included in the published version.
- (ii) Women became important as readers as well as writers. Penny magazines were especially meant for women, as were manuals teaching proper behaviour and housekeeping. Some of the best known novelists were women : Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot. Their writings became important in defining a new type of woman : a person with will, strength of personality, determination and the power to think.
- (iii) In the nineteenth century, lending libraries in England became instruments for educating white collar workers, artisans and lower-middle-class shortened from the mid-nineteenth century self-expression. They wrote political tracts and autobiographies in large numbers.

(b) Further innovations :

- (i) By the mid-nineteenth century, Richard M. Hoe of New York perfected the power driven cylindrical press. This was capable of printing 8000 sheets per hour. It was particularly useful for printing newspapers.
- (ii) In the late nineteenth century, the offset press was developed which could print up to six colours at the same time.
- (iii) From the turn of the twentieth century, electrically operated presses accelerated printing operations. A series of many other developments followed. Methods of feeding paper improved, the quality of plates became better, automatic paper reels and photoelectric control of the colour register were introduced.
- (iv) Nineteenth-century periodicals sterilized important novels. In the 1920s in England, popular works were sold in cheap series, called the Shilling Series. Dust cover or the book jacket is also a twentieth-century innovation. In the 1930s publishers brought out cheap paperback editions.



India and the World of Print

(a) Manuscripts Before the age of print :

India had a very rich and old tradition of hand written manuscripts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, as well as in various vernacular languages. Manuscripts continued to be produced till well after the introduction of print. Down to the late nineteenth century.

Manuscripts were however very expensive and fragile and had to be handled carefully, and they could not be read easily as the script were written in different styles. So the manuscripts were not widely used in everyday life.

(b) Print comes to India :

Portuguese missionaries brought printing press to Goa in mid-sixteenth century. Jesuit priests printed several pamphlets in Konkani, after learning it. By 1674, about 50 books were printed in Konkani and Kanara languages. In 1579, Catholic priests printed the first Tamil book in Cochin. In 1773 the first Malayalam book was printed by them. Dutch protestant Missionaries printed 32 Tamil texts, these were translations of older works.

First regular periodical in India was the "Hickey's Bengal Gazette", brought out by James Augustus Hickey. Magazine contained advertisements, some about import and sale of slaves, juicy gossips about the private life of senior company officers. This enraged the Governor-General Warren Hastings. He persecuted Hickey, and encouraged publication of officially sanctioned newspapers that could counter the flow of information that damaged the image of the colonial government. End of 18th century, a number of newspapers journals appeared in print. Indians also began to publish Indian newspapers. First to appear was the weekly "Bengal Gazette" brought out by Gangadhar Bhattacharya.



Religious Reforms and Public Debates

Printed tracts and newspaper not only spread the new ideas, but they shaped the nature of the debate. A wider public could now participate in these public discussions and express their views. To reach a wider audience, the ideas were printed in the everyday, spoken language of ordinary people. Rammohan Roy published the Sambad Kaumudi from 1821 and the Hindu orthodoxy commissioned the Samachar Chandrika to oppose his opinions. From 1822, two Persian newspapers were published; Jam-i-Jahan, Nama and Shamsul Akhbar. In the same year, a Gujarati newspaper, the Bombay Samachar, made its appearance.

Print and the Muslims :

In north India, the Ulemas used cheap lithographic presses which published Persian and Urdu translations of holy scriptures and printed religious newspapers and tracts to counter Christian cultural invasions. The Deoband seminary founded in 1867, published many fatwas making Muslim readers aware of the code of conduct to be followed in their everyday lives and explained the meanings of Islamic doctrines. Urdu print helped them conduct these battles in public.

Print and the Hindus :

- (i) The first printed edition of the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas came out from Calcutta in 1810.
- (ii) The mid-nineteenth century, cheap lithographic editions flooded the north Indian markets.
- (iii) From the 1880s, the Naval Kishore Press at Lucknow and the Shri Venkateshwar Press in Bombay published many religious texts in vernaculars

Religious texts and books started reaching a very wide circle of people, encouraging debates and controversies within and among different religions. Print did not only stimulate the publication of conflicting opinions amongst communities, but it also connected communities and people in different parts of India, creating pan-Indian identities.

➤ New Forms of Publication

Printing created an appetite for new kinds of writing. As more and more people could now read, they wanted to see their own lives, experiences, emotions and relationship reflected in what they read.

- (i) The novel, a literary form which had developed in Europe, ideally catered to this need, it opened up new worlds of experience, and gave a vivid sense of the diversity of human lives.
- (ii) New literary forms – lyrics, short stories, essays about social and political matters, reinforced the new emphasis on human lives and intimate feelings, about the political and social rules that shaped such things.
- (iii) By the end of the nineteenth century, a new visual culture was taking shape. With the setting up of an increasing number of printing presses, visual images could be easily reproduced in multiple copies. These prints began shaping popular ideas about modernity and tradition, religion and politics, and society and culture.
- (iv) By the 1870s, caricatures and cartoons were being published in journals and newspapers, commenting on social and political issues. There were imperial caricatures lampooning nationalists, as well as nationalist cartoons criticizing imperial rule.

(a) Women and Print :

- (i) **Women education :** Writers started writing about the lives and feelings of women and this increased the number of women readers. Women got interested in education and many women schools and colleges were set up. Many journals started emphasizing the importance of women education.
- (ii) **Women writers :** In East Bengal, in the early nineteenth century, Rashsundari Debi, a young married girl in a very orthodox household, learnt to read in the secrecy of her kitchen. Later, she wrote her autobiography "Amar Jiban" which was published in 1876, was the first full-length autobiography published in the Bengali language.

From the 1860s, many Bengali women writers like Kailashbashini Debi wrote books highlighting the experiences of women. In the 1880s, in present day Maharashtra, Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai wrote with passionate anger about the miserable lives of upper-caste Hindu women, especially widows. The poor status of women was also expressed by Tamil writers.

(iii) **Hindu writing and women** : Hindu printing began seriously only from the 1870s. Soon, a large section of it was devoted to the education of women.

(iv) **New journals** : In the early 20th century, the journals written by women became very popular in which women's education, widowhood, widow remarriage etc, were discussed. Some of them offered household and fashion lessons for women.

(v) **Teachings for women** : In Punjab, Ram Chaddha published Istri Dham Vichar to teach women how to be obedient wives. The Khalsa Tract Society published cheap booklets with a similar message. In Bengal, an entire area in central Calcutta – the Battala – was devoted to the printing of popular books. Peddlers took the Battala publications to homes, enabling women to read them in their leisure time.

(b) Print and the Poor People :

(i) **Public libraries** : Public libraries were set up from the early twentieth century, expanding the access to books. For rich local patrons, setting up a library was away of acquiring prestige.

(ii) **Highlighting the issue of class discrimination** : From the late 19th century, many writers started writing about the issue of class distinction.

(a) Jyotiba Phule wrote about injustices of the caste system in his book Gulamgiri (1871)

(b) In the 20th century, B.R. Ambedkar in Maharastra and E.V. Ramaswamy in Madras wrote powerfully on caste and their writings were read by people all over India.

Local protest movements and sects also created a lot of popular journals and tracts criticizing ancient scriptures and envisioning a new and just future.

(iii) **Poor workers and print** : Kashibaba, a Kanpur millworker wrote and published Chhote Aur Bade Ka Sawal in 1938. The poems of another Kanpur millwork, who wrote under the name of Sudarshan Chakr between 1935 and 1955, were brought together and published in a collection called Sacchi Kavitayan. By the 1930s, Bangalore cotton millworkers set up libraries to educate themselves, following the example of Bombay workers.

➤ Print and Censorship

(i) Early measures to control printed matter were directed against Englishmen in India who were critical of Company misrule and hated the actions of particular company officers. The company was worried that such criticisms might be used by its critics in England to attack its trade monopoly in India.

(ii) By the 1820s, the Calcutta Supreme Court passed certain regulations to control press freedom and the company began encouraging publication of newspaper that would celebrate British rule. In 1835, Governor General Bentinck agreed to revise press laws. Thomas Macaulay formulated new rules that restored the earlier freedoms.

(iii) After the revolt of 1857, as vernacular newspapers became assertively nationalist. Enraged Englishmen demanded a clamp down on the 'native' press. In 1878, the Vernacular Press Act was passed, it provided the government with extensive rights to censor reports and editorials in the Vernacular press. From now on, the government kept regular track of the vernacular newspaper published in different provinces.

(iv) Despite repressive measures, nationalist newspapers grew in numbers, reported on colonial misrule and encouraged nationalist activities. When Punjab revolutionaries were deported in 1907, Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote with great sympathy about them in his Kesari. This led his imprisonment in 1908, provoking in turn widespread protests all over India.

GLOSSARY

1. **Calligraphy** : Decorative writing; Art of writing beautifully using fine pen ink, etc.
2. **Autobiography** : Story of one's own life written by the author himself or herself.
3. **Anthology** : Collection of passages from literature, especially poetry and song.
4. **Mechanical Press** : A press for printing which is operated by machine.
5. **Scribes** : Ancient & medieval copyist of manuscripts.
6. **Manuscripts** : Book or document written by hand; authors original copy hand written or typed, not printed.
7. **Vellum** : Fine parchment originally from skin of calf or other animal. Manuscript written on this.
8. **Parchment** : Skin of animal like goat or sheep specially prepared for writing, painting etc.
9. **Foliage** : Leaves, Leafage.
10. **Compositors** : One who setup type for printing.
11. **Ballad** : Sentimental song with repeated melody ; poem or song in short stanzas narrating a popular story.
12. **Tavern** : Inn or public house where people gather for a drink.
13. **New Testament** : Part of Bible concerned with teachings of Christ and his earliest followers.
14. **Protestant Reformation movement** : A movement of protest against the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church. The movement was led by Martin Luther, a German monk.
15. **Chapbooks** : Cheap pocket size books available at roadside shops of books.
16. **Lithography** : A process of printing from stone or metal surface so that the ink addresses only to the design requested to be printed.
17. **Vernacular Language** : Language or dialect of the country, language spoken by a particular clan or group.
18. **Despotism** : A system of governance in which absolute power is exercised by an individual, unregulated by legal and constitutional checks.
19. **Ulemas** : Legal scholars of Islam and the Sharia (a body of the Islamic law).
20. **Fatwa** : A legal pronouncement on Islamic law usually given by a 'mufti' (legal scholar) to clarify issues on which the law is uncertain.
21. **Marco Polo** : Marco Polo was one of the greatest explorers who returned to Italy in 1295 after many years of exploration in China. Marco polo brought the knowledge of woodblock printing to Europe.
22. **Biliotheque Bleue** : These are low priced small books printed in France. These were printed on poor quality paper and bound in cheap blue covers.
23. **Johann Gutenberg** : Johann Gutenberg was a German goldsmith and the inventor credited with inventing the movable type of printing in Europe.