

5. Print Culture and the Modern World

The First Printed Books

Print in China

- The earliest print technology was developed in China, Japan and Korea.
- By the seventeenth century, as urban culture bloomed in China, the uses of print diversified.
- In the late nineteenth century, western printing techniques and mechanical presses were imported as Western powers established their outposts in China.
- Shanghai became the hub of the new print culture.

Print in Japan

- Around AD 768-770, Buddhist missionaries from China introduced hand-printing technology into Japan.
- The Buddhist Diamond Sutra was the oldest Japanese book which was printed in AD 868.

Print Comes to Europe

- In the 11th century, Chinese paper reached Europe via the silk route.
- In 1295, Marco Polo, a great explorer, returned to Italy from China and brought printing knowledge back with him.
- Italians began producing books with woodblocks, and soon the technology spread to other parts of Europe.
 - As the demand for books increased, booksellers all over Europe began exporting books to many different countries.
- But the production of handwritten manuscripts could not satisfy the ever-increasing demand for books because:
 - Copying was an expensive, laborious and time-consuming business.
 - Manuscripts were fragile, awkward to handle.
- In the 1430s, Johann Gutenberg invented new printing technology by developing first-known printing press at Strasbourg, Germany.

Gutenberg and the Printing Press

- Gutenberg learned the art of polishing stones, became a master goldsmith, and also acquired the expertise to create lead moulds used for making trinkets.
- Based on this knowledge, Gutenberg adapted existing technology to design his innovation.
- By 1448, Gutenberg perfected the system.
→ The first book he printed was the Bible.
- Between 1450 and 1550, printing presses were set up in most countries of Europe.

The Print Revolution and Its Impact

A New Reading Public

- Access to books created a new culture of reading.
- However, the rates of literacy in most European countries were very low till the twentieth century which was a major hurdle in spreading of this culture.
- So printers began publishing popular ballads and folk tales, and such books would be profusely illustrated with pictures.

Religious Debates and the Fear of Print

- People believed can lead to the fear of the spread of rebellious and irreligious thoughts.
- In 1517, the religious reformer Martin Luther wrote 'Ninety Five Theses' criticising many of the practices and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church.
→ This led to a division within the Church and to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

The Reading Mania

- By the end of the eighteenth century, in some parts of Europe literacy rates were as high as 60 to 80 percent.
- In England, Penny chapbooks were carried by petty pedlars known as chapmen and sold for a penny.
- In France were the 'Biliotheque Bleue' - low priced small books printed on poor quality paper and bound in cheap blue covers.
- Newspapers and journals carried information about wars and trade, as well as news of developments in other places.

Print Culture and the French Revolution

- Print culture created the conditions within which French Revolution occurred.
- Print popularized the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers.
- Print created a new culture of dialogue and debate.
- By the 1780s, literature mocked the royalty and criticized their morality were large in number.

The Nineteenth Century

Children, Women and Workers

- In 1857, in France, a children's press, devoted to literature for children alone was set up.
- Women became important as readers as well as writers.
- Penny Magazines were especially meant for women, manuals teaching proper behaviors and housekeeping.
- In the nineteenth century, lending libraries in England became a medium for educating white-collar workers, artisans and lower-middle-class people.

Further Innovations

- By mid 19th Century, Richard M. Hoe perfected the power driven cylindrical press.
- In the late 19th century, offset press was developed that can print up to six colours at a time.
- By the 20th century, electrically operated presses accelerated printing operations.

India and the World of Print

Manuscripts Before the Age of Print

- In India, manuscripts were copied on palm leaves or on handmade paper.

Print Comes to India

- In the mid-sixteenth century, the printing press first came to Goa with Portuguese missionaries.
- By 1674: About 50 books had been printed in Konkani and in Karana languages.

- Cochin, 1579, Catholic priests printed the first Tamil book
- In 1713, Catholic priests printed the first Malayalam book
- By 1710, Dutch Protestant missionaries had printed 32 Tamil texts
- From 1780: James Augustus Hickey began editing the Bengal Gazette, a weekly magazine.

Religious Reform and Public Debates

- From the early nineteenth century, there were intense debates around religious issues.
- Different groups offered a variety of new interpretations of the beliefs of different religions.
- In 1821, Rammohun Roy published the Sambad Kaumudi.
- In 1810, the first printed edition of the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas, a 16th century text published in Calcutta.

New Forms of Publication

- The novel, a literary form which had developed in Europe soon acquired distinctively Indian forms and styles.
- Other new literary forms such as lyrics, short stories, essays about social and political matters also entered the world of reading.
- Painters like Raja Ravi Varma produced visual images for mass circulation.

Women and Print

- Liberal husbands and fathers began educating their womenfolk at home.
- Conservative Hindus believed that a literate girl would be widowed.
- Muslims feared that educated women would be corrupted by reading Urdu romances.

Print and the Poor People

- In the 19th century, very cheap and small books were brought to markets.
- From the late nineteenth century, issues of caste discrimination began to be written about in many printed tracts and essays.

Print and Censorship

- Before 1798, the colonial state under the East India Company was not much concerned about censorship.

- By 1820s, the Calcutta Supreme Court passed certain regulations to control press freedom.
 - After the revolt of 1857, the attitude to freedom of the press changed.
 - In 1878, the Vernacular Press Act was passed which provided the government with extensive rights to censor reports and editorials in the vernacular press.
- Despite repressive measures, nationalist newspapers grew in numbers in all parts of India.