

10th – Print Culture and Modern World II



Print Culture and French Revolution: Many historians argued that print culture created the condition within which French Revolution occurred. Three types of arguments have been usually put forward

1. First, Print popularised the ideas of the enlightened thinkers. Their writings provided a critical commentary on tradition superstition and despotism. They argued for the rule reason rather than custom and demanded that everything be judged through the application of reason and rationality.

2. Second, Print created a new culture of dialogue and debate. All values, norms and institutions were re-evaluated and discussed by public.

3. Third, by the 1780s, there was an outpouring of literature that mocked the royalty and criticised their morality. Cartoon and **caricatures** criticised the royalty for deriving pleasure at the expense of the common people.

The 19th century: The 19th century saw increase in mass literacy in Europe bringing in a large number of new readers.

Children, Women and Workers: As primary education became compulsory from the late 19th century, children became an important category of readers. Anything that was unsuitable for children or would appear vulgar to the elites, was changed. Women became important as readers as well as writers. Penny magazines were especially meant women, as these were full of essays about proper behavior and house-keeping. Some of the best known women novelists were Jane Austen, Eliot and the Bronte sisters (Anne, Emily Charlotte). Their writings became important in defining a new type of woman: a person with will, strength of personality, determination and the power to think. In the 19th century, lending Libraries in England became instruments for educating white-collar workers, artisans and lower-middle class people. Sometimes, self-educated working class people wrote political and autobiographies.

Children's Press: The Grimm Brothers in Germany spent years for compiling traditional folk tales from peasants and stories were published in 1812. The children's press was set up in France in 1857. This press published new works as well as old fairy tales and folk tales for children.

Further Innovations in Printing: By the mid-19th century, Richard M Hoe of New York had perfected the power-driven cylindrical press. This printing press printed 8000 sheets per hour. It was particularly useful for printing newspapers. In the late 19th century, the offset was developed which could print upto six colours at a time. From the beginning of the 20th century, electrically operated presses further developed printing technology. Methods of feeding paper improved, quality of plates became better, automatic paper reels and photoelectric controls of the colour register were introduced.

Strategies to Sell Books: Some new strategies to sell books were incorporated in 19th century. These were:

- Many periodicals serialised important novels in the 19th century.
- In the year 1920 in England, popular works were sold in cheap series, called the Shilling Series. The dust cover or book jacket is a 20th century innovation.
- Cheap paperback editions were brought to counter the effect of the Great Depression in the 1930s.

India and the world of print: Before the age of print, ideas and information were in written form.

Manuscripts before the Age of Print: India had a very rich and ancient tradition of hand written manuscripts in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian as well as in various



Vernacular languages. These manuscripts were copied on palm leaves or on handmade paper. Manuscripts were highly expensive and got damage easily. They had to be handled carefully and were not widely used in everyday life. The pre-colonial Bengal had developed an extensive network of village primary schools. Here, many students did not read texts because teachers dictated texts from their memory and students wrote them down. Many students thus became literate without reading any kinds of texts.

Print Comes to India: The first printing press came to Goa with the Portuguese missionaries in the mid-16th century. Jesuit priests learnt Konkani and printed several books. About 50 books had been printed in Konkani and Kanara languages in 1674. Catholic priests printed the first Tamil book in 1579 in Cochin and in 1713, the first Malayalam book was printed. In 1710, Dutch Protestant missionaries had printed 32 Tamil books.

Contribution of James Augustus Hickey: 'The English East India Company' began to import presses from the late 17th century in India. From 1780, 'Bengal Gazette' a weekly magazine was edited by James Augustus Hickey. It described itself as a commercial paper open to all, but influenced by none. So, it was private English enterprise in India. Hickey published a lot of advertisements, including those that related to the import and sale of slaves. He also published a lot of gossip about the Company's senior officials in India. The Governor-General Warren Hastings was angry due to this and he persecuted Hickey. Hastings encouraged Hickey for the publication of officially sanctioned newspaper that could counter the flow of information that damaged the image of the colonial government. By the end of the 18th century, a number of newspapers and journals began to publish. The first was the weekly 'Bengal Gazette', brought out by Gangadhar Bhattacharya in 1780, who was close to Raja Rammohun Roy.

Religious reform and public debates: The religious debates were carried out in public and in print from the early 19th century: The printing pamphlets and newspapers not only spread the new ideas, but also shaped the nature of the debate. The 19th century was a time of intense controversies between social and religious reformers and the Hindu orthodoxy over matters like widow immolation (sacrifice) **monotheism**, Brahmanical priesthood and idol worship.

Role of Newspapers: In Bengal as religious debates developed, different newspapers started to circulate a variety of arguments. Raja Rammohun Roy published the 'Sarnbad Kaumudi' from 1821 and the Hindu orthodoxy commissioned the 'Samachar Chandrika' to oppose his views. From 1822, two Persian newspapers, 'Jam-i-Jahan Nama' and 'Shamsul Akhbar' and a Gujarati newspaper 'Bombay Samachar' were published.

Views of Muslim Sects: In North India, the **ulama** were deeply anxious that the colonial rulers would encourage conversion and change the Muslim personal laws. The Deoband **Seminary**, founded in 1867, published thousands of **fatwas** telling Muslim readers how to conduct themselves in their everyday lives and explaining the meanings of Islamic doctrines. All through the 19th century, various Muslim sects and seminaries appeared with their different interpretations of faith. Urdu print helped them to express their different views.

Role of Religious Text: The first printed edition of the 'Ramcharitmanas' of Tulsidas, a 16th century text, came out from Calcutta in 1810. By the mid-19th century, the cheap lithographic editions flooded North Indian markets. From the 1880s, the Naval Kishore Press at Lucknow and the Shri Venkateshwar Press in

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Bombay published numerous religious texts in vernacular. These religious texts encouraged discussions, debates and controversies within and among different religions. On the other hand, newspapers conveyed news from one place to another, creating pan-Indian identities.

New forms of publication: Printing created need for new kinds of writings. Beside novels, other new literary forms like lyrics, short stories and essays about social and political matters entered the world reading. At the end of the 19th century, a new visual culture was taking shape. Painters like Raja Ravi Varma produced images for mass circulation. Poor wood engravers who made woodblocks, set up their shop near the letterpresses and they were employed by print shops. Even poor could easily buy the calendars and cheap prints for the decoration of his house and office. These prints influenced the ideas about modernity, tradition, religion, politics, society and culture. By the 1870s, caricatures and cartoons were being published in journals and newspaper commenting on social and political issues.

Women and Print: liberal husbands and fathers began educating their women folk at home and sent them to schools. After the mid-19th century, women's schools were set up in the cities and towns. Many journals began carrying the writings of women and explained why women should be educated. But some conservative Hindus believed that a literate girl would be widowed and Muslims feared that educated women would be corrupted by reading Urdu romances. Many women contributed to print culture. Prominent among were:

- Rashundari Debi, a young married girl in a very orthodox family, learnt to read in the secrecy of her kitchen. She wrote her autobiography 'Amar Tban', which was published in 1876 and it was also the first full-length autobiography in the Bengali language.
- Kailashbashini Debi From the 1860s, some Bengali women like Kailashbashini Debi, highlighted the experiences of women. She highlighted how they were imprisoned at home kept in ignorance, forced to do hard domestic work and treated unjustly by the same people for whom they served.
- Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai In the 1880s, women writers like Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai both from Maharashtra, wrote about the miserable lives of upper caste Hindu women, especially widows.
- Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein In 1926, famous educationist and literary figure, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein disapproved men for withholding education from women in the name of religion.

Print Culture and Women Education: Urdu, Tamil, Bengali and Marathi print culture also developed. Hindi print culture started seriously from 1870s. In the early 20th century, many journals edited by women, discussed about women's education, widowhood, widow remarriage, significance of national movement etc.

Books for Women: In Punjab, Ram Chaddha published the fast-selling "Istri Dharm Vichar" to teach women how to be obedient wives. The Khalsa Tract Society also published cheap booklets with a similar message. Battala was an area in central Calcutta. It published various types of popular books including novels and religious scriptures. These books were very cheap and illustrated with woodcuts and coloured lithographs. These books were popular among housewives.

Print and the Poor People: In Madras, towns of 19th century, very cheap small books were brought to markets and sold at crossroads, so the poor people could



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purchase them. Some public libraries were set up from the early 20th century in cities and towns and sometimes in prosperous villages. Another Kanpur millworker, Sudarshan Chakr published his poems in a collection called 'Sacchi Kavitayan'. In 1930s, in Bangalore, cotton millworker set up libraries to educate themselves following the example of Bombay workers.

Print and Casteism: From the late 19th century, issues of caste discrimination began to be written in many printed tracts and essays.

- The social reformers like Jyotiba Phule wrote about the injustices of the caste system in his book 'Gulamgiri' (1871).
- In 20th century, BR Ambedkar and EV Ramaswamy Naicker wrote about casteism and their writings were read by people all over India.

Kashibaba, a Kanpur millworker, wrote and published 'Chhote Aur Bade Ka Sawal' in 1938, which suggested the links between caste and class exploitation.

Print and Censorship: By the 1820s, the Calcutta Supreme Court passed certain regulations to control press freedom. The East India Company began encouraging publications of newspapers that would celebrate British rule. In 1835, Governor-General Bentinck faced urgent petitions by editors of English and vernacular newspapers. He agreed to revise press laws. Thomas Macaulay, a liberal colonial official, formulated new rules that restored the earlier freedoms.

Press: After the Revolt of 1857: After the revolt of 1857, the attitude to freedom of the press changed. As vernacular newspapers became assertively nationalist, the colonial government began debating measures of strict control. In 1878, the Vernacular Press Act was passed which was modelled on the Irish Press Laws. It provided the government with extensive rights to censor reports and editorials in the vernacular press. Despite repressive measures, many nationalist newspapers grew in all parts of India. They reported colonial misrule and encouraged nationalist activities. This in turn led to a renewed cycle of persecution and protests.

Balgangadhar Tilak wrote with great sympathy about the Punjab revolutionaries who were deported (expelled) in 1907, in his newspaper Kesari. This led to his imprisonment in 1908. Then it provoked widespread protests all over India.