Chapter 7
Print Culture and the Modern World

❖ The First Printed Books
- The earliest print technology was developed in China, Japan and Korea. From AD 594 onwards, books in China were printed by rubbing paper.
- China remained the major producer of printed material by printing vast numbers of textbooks for the civil service examinations held for recruiting its personnel.
- Academicians and merchants used print in their everyday lives. Many people started to read and write.
- Shanghai became the hub of new print culture, catering to the Western-style schools. There was a gradual shift from hand printing to machine printing.

❖ Print in Japan
- AD 768-770: Buddhist missionaries from China introduced hand-printing technology to Japan
- The Buddhist Diamond Sutra was the oldest Japanese book.
- The illustrated collections of paintings depicted an elegant urban culture involving artisans, courtesans and teahouse gatherings.

❖ Print Comes to Europe
- 11th century: Chinese paper reached Europe through the silk route
- In Italy, Marco Polo brought the knowledge of print.
- Scribes or skilled hand writers were employed by wealthy or influential patrons and booksellers for increasing the production of handwritten manuscripts.
- However, the handwritten manuscripts could not satisfy the ever increasing demand for goods because the manuscripts were fragile, awkward to handle and could not be carried around or read easily.
- By the early 15th century, woodblocks were being widely used in Europe for printing textiles, playing cards and religious pictures with simple, brief texts.
- 1430s: Johann Gutenberg developed the printing press
- The first book printed on Gutenberg’s printing press was the Bible. It took three years to print 180 copies of the Bible.
- Printed books at first closely resembled the written manuscripts in appearance and layout.
• **1450-1550:** Printing presses were set up in most countries of Europe. 20 million copies of printed books flooded the European markets during the second half of the 15th century.

• The time and labour required for producing each book decreased and multiple copies could be produced with greater ease.

• Common people now had access to books and therefore the oral culture of a hearing public was now replaced by a reading public.

• Oral culture entered print and the printed material was orally transmitted. Printers began publishing new ballads and folktales with profusely illustrated pictures.

❖ **Religious Debates and the Fear of Print**

• The new printed literature was criticized as it was feared that if there was no control over what was printed and read, then rebellious and irreligious thoughts might spread. Those who disagreed with established authorities could now print and circulate ideas.

• **1517:** A 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.

• Several scholars think that print brought about a new intellectual atmosphere and helped spread the new ideas that led to the Reformation.

• **1558:** The Roman Church, troubled by effects of popular readings and questionings of faith, imposed several controls over publishers and booksellers and began to maintain an Index of Prohibited Books.

❖ **The Reading Mania**

• By the end of the 18th century, literacy rates in Europe were as high as 60 to 80%.

• Churches of different denominations set up schools in villages, carrying literacy to peasants and artisans.

• New forms of literature appeared in print that targeted new audiences.

• There were almanacs or ritual calendars, along with ballads and folktales.

• In England, penny chapbooks were carried by petty pedlars known as chapmen. They were sold for a penny and could be afforded even by the poor.

• Ancient and medieval scientific texts were compiled and published. Maps and scientific diagrams were widely printed. The discoveries of Isaac Newton and the
writings of Thomas Paine, Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau were also widely printed and read.

- People believed that books could change the world, liberate society from despotism and tyranny and herald a time when reason and intellect would rule.

**Print Culture and the French Revolution**

- Print culture created the conditions within which French Revolution occurred.
- Print popularized the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers. They attacked the sacred authority of the Church and the despotic powers of the state; thus, eroding the legitimacy of a social order based on tradition. Voltaire and Rousseau were widely read.
- All values, norms and institutions were re-evaluated and discussed by a public that was inquisitive, critical and rational. Hence, new ideas of social revolution came into being.
- **By the 1780s:** Literature mocked the royalty and criticized their morality. This led to the growth of hostile sentiments against the monarchy.

**Children, Women and Workers**

- As primary education became compulsory from the late nineteenth century, children became an important category of readers.
- **1857:** A children’s press devoted to literature for children alone was set up in France.
- Women became important readers and writers. The writings of George Eliot, Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters were read and enjoyed.
- In the 19th century, lending libraries in England became instruments for educating white-collar workers, artisans and lower middle-class people.

**Further Innovations**

- By the mid-19th century, Richard M. Hoe of New York had perfected the power-driven cylindrical press, which printed 8,000 sheets per hour.
- In the late 19th century, the offset print was developed that could print about 6 colours at a time.
- From the turn of the 20th century, presses operated electrically, methods of feeding paper were improvised, the quality of plates became better, automatic paper reels and photoelectric controls of the colour register were introduced.
- 19th century periodicals serialized important novels, which gave birth to a particular way of writing.
• **1920s:** In England, popular works were sold in cheap series, called the Shilling Series.

• Book jackets were also introduced.

❖ **India and the World of Print**

• India had a very rich and old tradition of handwritten manuscripts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and other vernacular languages. Manuscripts were copied on palm leaves or on handmade paper. They would be preserved between wooden covers or sewn together. They were highly expensive, fragile and illegible.

• **Print Comes to India**

  ➢ **Mid-16th century:** The first printing press 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

  ➢ **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 19th century, there were intense debates around religious issues. Some criticized existing practices and campaigned for reform, while others countered the arguments of reformers.

  ➢ Public tracts and newspapers spread the new ideas and generated discussions and expressions from the public.

  ➢ **1821:** Raja Ram Mohan Roy published the *Sambad Kaumudi* 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*. A Guajarati newspaper, the *Bombay Samachar*, was also published.

  ➢ In North India, the ulema were deeply anxious about the collapse of Muslim dynasties. They used cheap lithographic presses, published Persian and Urdu translations of Holy Scriptures and printed religious tracts and newspapers.

  ➢ **Calcutta, 1810:** The first printed edition of the *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas, a 16th century text, appeared.

❖ **New Forms of Publication**
• New literary forms such as novels, lyrics, short stories and essays about political and social matters reinforced the new emphasis on human lives and intimate feelings and the political and social rules that shaped such things.
• By the end of 19th century, visual images could be easily reproduced in multiple copies. Painters such as Raja Ravi Verma produced images for mass circulation.
• Cheap prints and calendars were easily available in the bazaar. These prints shaped ideas about modernity and tradition, religion and politics, and society and culture.
• By the 1870s, there were imperial caricatures lampooning nationalists as well as nationalist cartoons criticizing imperial rule.

❖ Women and Print

• Liberal husbands and fathers began educating their womenfolk at home and sent them to schools.
• Many journals began carrying writings by women and explained why women should be educated.
• Conservative Hindus believed that a literate girl would be widowed and Muslims feared that educated women would be corrupted by reading Urdu romances.
• **1876:** Rash sundari Debi’s autobiography, *Amar Jiban,* was published. It was the first full-length autobiography published in the Bengali language.
• **From 1860s:** Few Bengali women such as Kailashbashini Debi wrote books highlighting the experiences of women.
• **In 1880s (Maharashtra):** Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai wrote with passionate anger about the miserable lives of upper-caste Hindu women, especially widows.

❖ Print and the Poor People

• Very cheap and small books were brought to markets in 19th century. Madras towns sold at crossroads, allowing poor people travelling to markets to buy them.
• Public libraries were set up from the early 20th century. These libraries were mostly located in cities and towns and at times in prosperous villages.
• **1871:** Jyotiba Phule, the Maratha pioneer of ‘low caste’ protest movements, wrote about the injustices of the caste system in his *Gulamgiri.*
• **In the 20th century,** B. R. Ambedkar in Maharashtra and E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker in Madras, better known as Periyar, wrote powerfully on caste and their writings were read by people all over India.
• **1938:** Kashibaba, a Kanpur millworker, wrote and published *Chhote Aur Bade Ka Sawal*. The poems of Kashibaba and Sudarsan Chakr (another Kanpur millworker) were compiled in *Sacchi Kavitayan*.

• **By 1930s:** Bangalore cotton millworkers set up libraries for educating themselves. These were sponsored by social reformers who tried to restrict excessive drinking among them, for bringing literacy and, sometimes, for propagating the message of nationalism.

❖ **Print and Censorship**

• **Before 1789:** The colonial state under the East India Company was too concerned with censorship.

• **By 1820s:** The Calcutta Supreme Court passed certain regulations to control press freedom and the Company began encouraging publication of newspapers that would celebrate the British rule.

• **In 1835:** Faced with urgent petitions by editors of the English and vernacular newspapers, Governor-General Bentinck agreed to revise press laws. Thomas Macaulay formulated new rules that restored their earlier freedoms.

• After the revolt of 1857, press freedoms were clamped down.

• **1878:** The Vernacular Press Act was passed, modelled on the Irish Press Laws. It provided the government with extensive rights to censor reports and editorials in the vernacular press.

• **1907:** When the Punjab revolutionaries were deported, Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote with great sympathy about them in his *Kesari*. This led to his imprisonment in 1908.

• **During the First World War,** under the Defence of India Rules, 22 newspapers had to furnish securities.

---

Contribute to this Revision Note:
If you find anything of importance missing from this note, email it to us at revision-notes@meritnation.com, and we’ll add it to this note under your name!