

The Rise of Print Culture in the Nineteenth Century India: A Study of Serampore Mission press

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Abstract: When written records were unfamiliar to humankind, the main mode of transmitting both religious and secular knowledge was through oral narratives. People lived in traditional society and knowledge was handed down orally by the previous generations to the younger generations. The tradition involved a strict disciplinary regime in the reproduction and transmission of religious knowledge orally and through performances. But the advent of printing brought massive revision in the existing format of dispensing knowledge in India. The printing press was introduced by Portuguese Jesuit Christian missionaries in India. The first printing press was set up in Goa on September 6, 1556. However, Christianity in the Northern part of India owed much to the Baptist missionaries led by William Carey and his associates Joshua Marshman and William Ward. This paper looks at the rise of print culture and the role of Baptist missionaries of Serampore in the dissemination of printing presses in India.

Key Words: Printing Press, Knowledge, Culture, Missionary, Serampore.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Christianity in the Northern part of India owed much to the Baptist missionaries led by William Carey and his associates Joshua Marshman and William Ward. William Carey arrived in India in 1793 and remained six years in North Bengal before moving to Srirampore, a Danish settlement in 1800 to join fellow Baptist missionaries Joshua Marshman and William Ward, popularly referred to as the 'Serampore Trio.' From the beginning the missionaries realized the importance of education in disseminating the gospel in India. Carey, Marshman, and Ward started several schools for both boys and girls. In addition to starting educations, preaching and translation works, the trio also made a notable contribution to social and cultural development in India.

From the beginning William Carey was engaged in translating the Bible into the native languages. For missionaries realised that translation of gospel in their own native languages is much more effective in understanding the gospel in the most meaningful and in a personal way. Through printing the gospel was spread to a wider social class for it could pervade to places where physical presence was not possible at times owing to various reasons such as the existence of class. According to Carey 'by setting up a press we shall be able publish many little things in Bengali, which we can circulate through the country.'¹ He bought a wooden printing press in 1798 for his mission, he came across an advertisement. The establishment of the Serampore Mission Press, started by William Carey, Joshua Clark Marshman and William Ward in 1800, may be considered a watershed in the movement from scribal to the printed word.² This centre later became one of the most famous missionary centres in India and one of the greatest influences in Indian education and culture.³

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A.K. Priolker, in his pioneering work, "*Printing Presses in India*, on the history of printing in India traced the genealogy of printing and its early development."⁴ He argued that although Jesuit missionaries introduced printing in Goa in 1556, it did not help in the establishment of printing presses in other parts of the country. Printing activities were discontinued in Goa before it could fan out in other parts of the country because of the short sightedness of the political leaders in Goa.

¹ Eustace Carey, Memoir of Willam Carey, p. 319.

² Rita Kothari, Publishers' Perspective' in Orsini (ed) 'The History of the Book,' p.531.

³ Philip Hartog, Some Aspects of Indian Education Past and Present,' London, Oxford University Press, 1839.p.5.

⁴ A.K.Priolker, History of Printing Press and its Beginnings and Development. Bombay: Marathi Samsodhana Mandala.1958.

B.S.Kesavun, in his monumental book, "History of printing and publishing in India: A study of Cultural Re-awakening,"⁵ traced the origin of printing and publishing in India. His account on the history of printing in India provided the intellectual breakthrough in Indian languages, publication of translation, commentaries, collections and selection, composing grammars and dictionaries, lexicography, prose and poetry. According to Ulrike Stark, the arrival of protestant missionaries following the East India company charter of 1813 paved the way for the burgeoning of print and publishing production in India. It was the missionaries who introduced print and printed text and opened up a space for the interaction between Europeans and the natives through the medium of print. Printed text played a critical role in reaching out to both Hindus and Muslims community as during this period series of restriction on the mingling of different castes were existed. She claimed that natives first come in contact with printed text through the missionary tracts and school books as there was no any printing press before the arrival of the missionaries.⁶

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study followed the historical method of analysing the documents. The data were collected from the National Library, Kolkata and West Bengal Archives, Kolkata, Carey Library, Serampore, National Archives, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, Central Secretariat library, New Delhi. Apart from using various primary sources, the used of secondary sources, like published books, articles and newspaper reports were incorporated in this study also.

Education and Evangelism

Education was most effectively used by Christian missionaries as an instrument for evangelisation. It is true for William Carey as well; George Smith also remarked that, 'Carey's missionary organisation would not have been complete without schools.'⁷ Shortly after arriving in Calcutta, Carey started a school in his locality at Mudnabaty in 1794, Carey said, 'I had some months ago set up a school, but the poverty of the natives often caused them frequently to take their children to work. To prevent this, we intend to clothe and feed them.'⁸ In 1800 Carey moved to Srirampore to join Joshua Marshman and William Ward. In the same year a Bengali Elementary school was opened with 40 boys at Serampore. William Carey was appointed as the professor of Bengali and Sanskrit at Fort William College in 1801, this appointment offered him more opportunity to expand/further his educational venture. With gradual extension of missionaries operations in the British territories, several schools were started in and around Serampore. By 1804 there were three schools in villages in Jassore district and one Dinajpur. Another school was started subsequently at Katwa. In 1808 the mission took over five schools in Malda district which was run by Henry Creighton.⁹ The most significant educational venture of the missionaries was the establishment of 'Benevolent Institution' in 1809-10 for Eurasian poor. However, their significant contribution to education had to wait until the charter act of 1813. Until 1813, the initiation of missionary activities within British territory was prohibited. The renewal of this act gave a great boost on education and printing activities in India. As Laird noted, 'the climax of their educational effort was reached in Bengal in 1816-1818, 100 elementary schools were established and Serampore College for higher education.'¹⁰

Serampore Mission Press and Publishing

Prevented by the East India Company from carrying out any mission activities in their territories, Carey and his associates formed a Baptist Mission station in Srirampore in January 10, 1800.¹¹ William Carey set up the press he bought in Mudnabaty for they needed the press for evangelical purposes, according to Carey, 'by setting up a press we shall be able publish many little things in Bengali, which we can circulate through the country.'¹² He bought a wooden printing press in 1798 for this mission, which he came across an advertisement. Carry said, 'I sometime ago saw a printing-press advertised for sale in one of the Calcutta papers. This I, considered as a good opportunity not to be neglected, and accordingly made a purchased of it for four hundred rupees and it is set up in my house.'¹³ The arrival of

⁵ B.S.Kesavun, History of printing and publishing in India : A study of Cultural Re-awakening Vol.1, South Indian origin of printing and its efflorescence in Bengal. New Delhi: National Book Trust of India, 1985.

⁶ Ulrike Stark Benares Beginnings: Print Modernity, Book Entrepreneurs, and Cross-Cultural Ventures in a Colonial Metropolis, in the ed. Book of Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, Founts of knowledge, Delhi, Orient Black Swan, 2016.

⁷ George Smith, 'The Life of William Carey', p.102.

⁸ Eustace Carey, Memoir of William 1795 January 1-15, William Carey (Carey rare from)part 4.p.211

⁹ M.A.Laird, 'the contribution of the Serampore missionaries to education in bengal' Cambrigde university press, Bulletin of the Soas, university of London, vol.31, No.1.1968), p.92-112.

¹⁰ Laird, p.94.

¹¹ Sadiq khan .wiliam carey and srirampore.p.204.

¹² Eustace Carey, Memoir of William Carey. 319.

¹³ Ibid.p.330.

wooden printing press by boat at Madanbati in Bengal was received with great jubilation by William Carey and his colleagues convincing villagers to believe that it was the idol of the Europeans.¹⁴ The foundation stone for the Bengali literature was thus laid with this establishment of this press. Now having a completely equipped printing press and foundry, they were in a position, to cast type any of the Indian languages.¹⁵ The first publication issued from this pioneering press was the Cary's translation of gospel of Mathew in Bengali. In 1801, Carey's appointment as Bengali teacher at the Fort William College enable him to undertake various translation works, composing grammars, and dictionaries besides publishing school text books in vernacular for students. Printing gave a great impetus in the growth of Bengali literature. The Calcutta school book society, setting up in 1817, responsible for supplying vernacular text to elementary schools at a very cheap rate were printed here, Dig-Darshan the first Bengali news paper Samachar Darpan and informative magazines for young readers were also issued from this press.

Carey also got Ram Boshu to compose a history of one of their kings, the first prose book ever written in the Bengali language; which was also printed for teaching purposes.¹⁶ In 1806 it was engaged with seventeen languages. Through the establishment of printing press in Serampore, Carey gave an immense stimulus to modern Bengali literature. Thus, began a fertile period for publishing, fostered by Governor General Warren Hasting and led by Sir William Jones and his generations of great Orientalist.¹⁷

The effect of the press on the natives have been reported by a journal called Friend of India, 'the Native have possessed a press of their own, and its operations have commenced with that vigour and effect which warrant the most sanguine expectations.'¹⁸ The first native who set up a press in Calcutta was Baboo Ram in 1807. He was followed by Gangakishore, formerly employed in the Serampore press. The extraordinary success of Gangakishore induced the natives to follow his footsteps.¹⁹ Later many more printing presses were set up in different parts of the country. This was reported by the missionary journal the Friend of India in 1820, 'within the last ten years, natives works have been printed by natives themselves and sold among the Hindoo population with great astonishing rapidity.'²⁰

Serampore Mission Press activities were not confined only to the missionary's work. It was also involved with printing textbooks for the Forth William College and elementary vernacular schools on various subjects, translation work, composing dictionaries and grammars for students etc. Indian Journalism was born in Serampore press. The first Bengali newspaper Samachar Darpan and Dig-Darsun which was educational periodical for juvenile or young people with English and Bengali were issued from this press beginning in 1818. Its contribution to Indian education played a crucial role as it formed the foundational part of modern education in the annals of Indian history. The Serampore missionaries were also at the forefront of establishing higher educational institutions for the general public. The Serampore College set up in 1818 was among the first to disseminate modern ideas of education in India and perhaps the most remarkable educational venture was the pioneering work for the education of girls. By 1826 there were more than hundreds girls school were there and m

The dynamic power of print was most effectively used by the Christian missionaries in India to further their religious interest. The missionaries needed the press for evangelical purposes in propagating their faith with the objective to translate and popularise the scripture in Indian languages.²¹ Print was not only a key to spreading the gospel and Christian propaganda, but it was also crucial to the missionaries' mission of proselytizing through education. Print also further helped the missionaries to bring about a propagation of a religion in a more personal and easy way because the printed word could pervade easily to any individual or group. At times when the missionaries faced barriers in spreading the gospel in certain Indian society due to class existence, printing by multiplying texts struck right at the heart of person to person in the transmission of Christian knowledge.²² Nevertheless, missionaries became the pioneers of vernacular printing in India. The first book printing in India was in Tamil in 1577 by the Portuguese. Books such as catechisms,

¹⁴ Ibid. p.190.

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¹⁶ Ibid.454.

¹⁷ Gramham Show and John Randell, 'From Conversion to Subversion:250 years of printed book in India, John Randell ,Book Of Asia,Uk,2015,p.III.

¹⁸ Friend of India 1820, Vol -1,p.

¹⁹ George Smith, The Life of William Carey, 1885, p.274.

²⁰ Friend of India, quarterly 1825 vol.4. p.146.

²¹ B.S Kesavan, 'History of Printing in India'p.190.

²² Francis Robinson, 'Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia in ed volume of Nigel Crook's 'Transmission of knowledge in south Asia. Oxford University Press, New Nelhi.p.69.

confessionary, and the lives of the saint were produced and the same was true of the books printed by the protestant in the eighteen century.²³

Opened in 1802, the Serampore mission soon grew into the largest printing press in south Asia, inaugurating a period in the history of Indian language printing that was dominated by missionary activity.²⁴ The removal of the press law by the Governor General Lord Metcalf in 1835 was the opening of flood gates of printing for the native printers. The first publication issued from this pioneering press was the Carey's translation of Gospel of Mathew in August 1800 printed in 125 demi-printed pages. The mission press was involved in two kinds of printing; Biblical literature and text books for the Fort William College, and elementary vernacular school.²⁵ Accordingly, a large number of people first encountered the printed word through missionary tracts and school books. Tithi Bhattacharya had pointed out the power of print to immortalise all literary and knowledge. The technology of print thus found the required compatibility with the idea of print as a devise for civilizing.²⁶

When Carey was appointed as a professor to teach Bengali, there were no books or any other tools to assist him, he therefore compiled a Bengali grammar and printed it. Carey also got Ram Boshu to compose a history of one of their kings, the first prose book ever written in the Bengali language; which was also printed for teaching purposes.²⁷ In 1806 it was engaged with seventeen languages. Through the establishment of printing press in Serampore, Carey gave an immense stimulus to modern Bengali literature. Thus, began a fertile period for publishing, fostered by Governor General Warren Hasting and led by Sir William Jones and his generations of great Orientalist.²⁸ In Carey also got Ram Boshu to compose a history of one of their kings, the first prose book ever written in the Bengali language; which was also printed for teaching purposes.²⁹ The Serampore mission press issued between 1801-1831 more than two hundred and twelve thousand volumes in 40 different languages. This does not merely translation of the Bible but also included large number of original works. Serampore press first began and standardised printing in many of the modern Indian languages. Languages like Marathi and Assamese owed their first printed book in this press. From 1805 to 1834 William Carey printed and published Marathi books in Serampore mission press. The Bible in 1807 and the Marathi English Dictionary in 1810 are two notable publications.³⁰

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4. CONCLUSION:

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²³ Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2003, p.9.

²⁴ Urike Stark, *The coming of the Book in Hindi and Urdu*, in 'The History of the Book in South Asia.' ed. by Francesca Orsini. Surrey: Ashgate publishing company, 2013, p.37.

²⁵ Ghosh, Anindita, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing And The Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society: 1778-1905*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.110.

²⁶ Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class Culture: Class Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal: 1848-85*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁷ Ibid. 454.

²⁸ Gramham Show and John Randell, 'From Conversion to Subversion: 250 years of printed book in India', John Randell, *Book Of Asia*, UK, 2015, p. III.

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³⁰ *The Govt of India*, 'the early exhibition of Carey and early fine printing', Calcutta, 1955, p.4.

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