
UNIT 10 THE EMERGENCE OF THE PRINT LED PUBLIC SPHERE

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- understand specifically the way in which the print culture developed in the early modern Europe;
- explain the changes which came about in the development of knowledge which came about in the wake of the development of the print culture in our period; and
- understand how the development of print culture revolutionized the literate European culture.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit brings you to an important aspect of developments in the early modern Europe, namely the development of the print culture in this period. As you know that in the medieval times European knowledge systems revolved around the scribal culture which basically consisted of hand written manuscripts which were basically copied and preserved for transmission. By nature this was a limited enterprise and the limited circulation of the copied manuscripts was the only way access to knowledge could be brought about. Moreover these manuscripts would be scattered in libraries or monasteries all over Europe and could be accessed only by a handful of people. The scattered nature of these manuscripts made the task of collating, comparing and analyzing the knowledge contained in these manuscripts a difficult job. This again in turn meant that only a limited number of people could engage in this exercise. With the coming of print the opportunities of accessing these works expanded and new dimensions arose which we will discuss.

10.2 RISE OF THE PRINT CULTURE AND RENAISSANCE

You have read about the renaissance in an earlier unit. It has been argued that the rise of renaissance fostered a distinctive ethos of humanism and individualism.

This indeed brought a forward way of thinking and flourishing of a revival of interest in classical learning. With the coming of the print revolution there was in fact initially an effort towards recovering past wisdom. Attempts were made to reconstitute the past systems of knowledge. However what was different now was that a new technology (printing) had been placed at the disposal of a dispersed community of scholars. As a consequence the reconstitution and communication about past works, lost languages and lost texts began 'to accumulate in an unprecedented fashion.' As Dr. Eisenstein points out the trend towards individualism gains a fillip with the rise of print culture. Now biographies of saints and kings of the scribal culture began to be increasingly accompanied by biographies of ordinary individuals pursuing more 'heterogeneous' careers. The scribal culture had not been able to preserve copyrights of individual works or patenting which the print culture now made possible. Moreover the print culture made possible the airing of private thoughts and individual idiosyncracies in the public domain. The scribal culture due to its limitations had not been able to publicise the works of say the Florentine artists of Renaissance. With the oncoming of the print culture the publicity of these artists increased manifold. Moreover their individual contributions were highlighted and made known on a large scale. Printing technology now meant that woodcut portraits of artists and their works now were made available which made it easier to match the names with the faces of the artists and this made their popularizing easier. Earlier during the period of scribal culture mostly conjectural portraits of the artists were available. Now even scientific achievements or engineering feats were made available to the larger public with the help of the printing technology of woodblocks etc. and their popularization meant that the new engineering and scientific sites became the new tourism sites in different parts of Europe.

In distinguishing the scribal phase of the Renaissance and the proliferation of communication made possible by the rise of print culture then it becomes possible to see the Renaissance in two phases. The first phase is that of the high achievements of the Italian artists and writers where Renaissance achieved its glory and the second phase in which the communication revolution brought about by the print culture disseminated the achievements and the attitudes of Renaissance far and wide. In fact the print revolution made it possible for this subsequent communication revolution. The fact that the new printing technology was now placed at the disposal of the Renaissance achievements meant that the Renaissance which was initially limited to a limited circle became accessible to a larger and widespread mass of people. This in turn also meant that its effects became more lasting and permanent. Notes Eisenstein, "in this light it seems misleading to stop short with the humanist movement in Italy when trying to account for the so called rise of classical scholarship and the development of auxiliary disciplines. Humanism may have encouraged the pursuit of classical studies for their own sake, sharpened sensitivity to anachronism, and quickened curiosity about all aspects of antiquity; but it could not supply the new element of continuity that is implied by the term 'rise'. Findings relating to lost texts and dead languages began to accumulate in an unprecedented fashion not because of some distinctive ethos shaped in quattrocento Italy but because a new technology had been placed at the disposal of a far flung community of scholars."

The transition from the scribal culture to the print culture also enabled a situation where a new man could develop. This new man straddled both the worlds of the scribal culture and print and hence had a greater versatility. Leonardo da Vinci

displayed this versatile facets of this transition phase in his paintings and scientific drawings for example. With the growth of printing this versatility could also be copyrighted and patented. In Venice in the period between 1469 and 1474 we see the development of laws which gave legitimacy to the printed work and invention in terms of according them the right to patent. These laws 'transformed the anonymous artisan in to the eponymous inventor, released individual initiative from the secretive cocoon of the guild, and rewarded ingenuity with the luster of fame as well as the chance to make a fortune.'

It may be argued that along with these developments there also arose a new spirit of independence and a new claim to shape one's own life distinct from one's parents and ancestors. In contrast to the claims made by some scholars attributing this to the ethos of Italy recent studies have shown how this was helped by the culture of print. There is a proliferation of do it yourself manuals and self help books. These ranged from areas such as how to maintain one's own accounts, holding family prayers to easy steps to help in making your own drawings and pictures, mixing clay, surveying fields, design buildings and machines. This extended the opportunities for an individual to learn the new sciences and crafts. These self instructional literatures took the individual out of the classroom and provided avenues for self development and mastering of new skills in an environment away from the prejudices of a tutelage learning. An example of this literature is Thomas Morley's 'Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music.'

Accompanying these developments is the transformation of the concept of library. During the scribal period the library was a narrow closed space. The manuscripts were housed within the narrow confines of a monastery or abbey. Now with the rise of the print culture library was viewed as more of an open space where the multiple copies of printed works were available to more and more people. The multiplication of readership meant a greater access and a greater need for avenues to discuss these works. This meant commenting, analyzing and dissecting these works both orally and in print. The library then turned in to an open space extended from the actual collections to tea shops and gatherings where such discussions could take place.

Eisenstein also suggests that we look at the move from the scriptorium (scribal workshops) to the printers's workshops more closely before considering such factors as emergent capitalism or industrialization. The social relations of the printers' workshop were crucial in developing the notion that both heads and hands, book learning as well as practical activities could provide equally valuable sources of knowledge about the world. Unlike the earlier scriptorium and the later editorial office the printshop was a place where artisans and scholars worked side by side. The former learnt to appreciate intellectual issues while the latter acquired a taste for manual labour along with an editor's habits of mind. It was thus the Renaissance notion of learning by doing emerged 'more from the printers' workshop than from the diffuse spirit of the age' As Gilmore, the Renaissance scholar put it: the "invention and development of printing with movable type brought about the most radical transformation in the condition of intellectual life in the history of western civilization. It opened new horizons in education and in the communication of ideas. Its effects were sooner or later felt in every department of human activity."

It may be pointed out here that this interaction in the printers' workshop created a new cross cultural exchange as well that was experienced initially by the new

occupational groups that proliferated with the onset of printing. Even before a particular work came off the press there were constructive interchanges between the typefounders, correctors, copy-editors, translators, illustrators and others who took the editorial work forward. The early printers read the works which were coming off their presses and also read the works brought out by other printers. This resulted in an invigoration of intellectual activities and led to further creative ideas. The emerging mode of book production also brought together bookworms and mechanics. It produced the scholar printer—a new man who could handle machines and marketing of products along with the activities of editing texts, forming learned societies, fostering new methods of data collection and taking forward the learned disciplines. Consequently new forms of theory and practice in the printing world came up which were removed from the closed precincts of the monastic libraries in to the hustle and bustle of commercial establishments.

Printed editions of works also facilitated a new the trajectory of knowledge generation. The job of sorting out of knowledge could now be done by a wider community of readers who had the same text more easily available to them. They could now develop coordinated efforts in comparing and collating the textual information. They could put their heads together in correcting errors, finding anomalies and bringing in new information. A feedback process developed which brought in emendations in the knowledge put forward by the texts. Learning then changed from the process of recovery promoted by the scribal culture to that of discovery as progressive strides were made from the efforts of copying texts to enhancing the knowledge contained in them. This knowledge could then be further printed and disseminated facilitating further knowledge generation.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Distinguish between the two phases of Renaissance. How did the emergence of the print culture help in broadbasing the Renaissance?

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- 2) Discuss how the knowledge process changed from recovery of knowledge to the discovery of knowledge.

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10.3 RISE OF THE PRINT CULTURE AND REFORMATION

While studies of Renaissance often overlook the impact of the print culture in the case of Reformation it can hardly be missed. As Geoffroy Atkinson points out ‘the Reformation was the first religious movement which had the aid of the printing press.’ We then actually see a movement which was from the beginning

was shaped by the powers of the press. In fact the printing press played an important role in ushering in the Reformation. It may be further argued that the Reformation was the first movement to exploit press as a mass medium aimed at arousing popular support for its cause. Luther himself pointed out that printing was 'God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of Gospel is driven forward.'

This theme of assigning a providential role to printing for the masses was reaffirmed by Johann Sleidan in 1542 when he argued that "as if to offer proof that God has chosen us to accomplish a special mission, there was invented in our land a marvelous new and subtle art, the art of printing. This opened German eyes even as it is now bringing enlightenment to other countries. Each man became eager for knowledge, not without feeling a sense of amazement at his former blindness." In fact printing was seen by both the religious and secular (protestant divines and the enlightenment thinkers) as a marvelous device that ended the monopoly of learning by the priests, that did away with ignorance and superstition, countered the popes and helped western Europe to come out of the Dark Age.

As various historians have pointed out the very act of disputation with the established church was nothing new. That is what Luther did was only to extend the already existing space for academic disputations existing within the church to his Ninety Five theses. This action in itself was not revolutionary since conventionally professors of theology held disputations over issues such as indulgences. Luther himself told Pope Leo X that "it is a mystery to me how my theses, more so than my other writings, indeed those of other professors were spread to so many places. They were meant exclusively for our academic circles here... They were written in such a language that the common people could hardly understand them. They use academic categories."

It is the translation in to German, the printing of the theses and their distribution that made possible the wide publicity they received. Unless we look at these processes it would not be possible to understand how a message directed at a few people in the academic circles could acquire such immense popularity. This in turn means we need to look in to precisely the activities of the printers, translators, proof readers and distributors singly and in combination that it becomes possible to see how three different editions of the theses were printed almost simultaneously in three separate towns of Germany and disseminated. Moreover as Nauert points out the audience for academic disputations at this point in time due to the emergence of the scholar printer extended to laymen beyond the church and the university. This meant that this small groups of laymen in different towns due to their access to printing culture could take the process of selling the Lutheran disputations far forward due to the already existing practices of selling books to different towns and villages through a network of peddlers who were already doing house to house selling of printed works and books. Thus the new publicity techniques ushered in by printing helped in taking the message of Luther far and wide.

With reformation came the Catholic-Protestant divide. This was to become the most important turning point in the history of Christianity in the West. It entailed reexamination of the biblical tradition and transmission of the Bible itself. Questions such as what was to be included in the biblical tradition indeed got a

fillip with the rise of the printing press whence a large number of works appeared on the biblical oral, folk and written tradition. Indeed it gave a fillip to the investigation of that tradition by a large number of people. The number of works appearing in pursuit of this tradition testifies to this.

An important question which comes up with the rise of Protestantism is the rise of new attitudes often linked to the culture of thrift and hard work in the emergence of rising capitalism. The rise of these new attitudes is often debated by adherents of the Marxist or the Weberian point of views. However what is often glossed over is the unsterotyped behaviours of the real people. Dr. Eisestein points out that here by drawing a contrast between life styles and work habits of scribes with the printers we may reach a more nuanced understanding of the emerging behaviours of the people of early modern Europe. Here it may be [pointed out that the copyist working in a monastery scriptorium for atoning for his sins could write devotional works or would come to regard theology as a queen of sciences. But when a profit making printer worked to bring out devotional and theological works he evaluated them in terms of their sales value. To stay in business he was less likely to turn to orthodox theology or the Christian virtues preached by the monks.

The printers publishing the new volumes infact basked in the reflected glory of the new trends in religion and reform. They invariably reinforced the impression that they were serving an elevated calling. But the emphasis was on their relatively autonomous status. On the one hand they fought against being relegated to a low and servile mercenary calling and on the other hand they struggled equally against being incorporated in to monkish or other religious prejudices. In that sense they tried to carve out an autonomy for themselves and often portrayed themselves as 'freemen working voluntarily at an excellent and noble calling'.

Indeed they determined a work rhythm for themselves in a situation where they were peculiarly vulnerable to work stoppages by strikes or theological infighting. Their pace of work was determined by the requirements of their relentless machines. Copying jobs were farmed out and the early printers even developed time and motion studies to keep their workers engaged all the time. In the process a work culture developed which discouraged idle chatter and subordinated friendship to impersonal efficiency. Moreover a culture of humour and satire developed which was directed at religious clericalism and inconsistencies of monkish way of life. As hand illumination was replaced by wood cuts and engravings new opportunities for anti clerical themes developed. Gradually jokes and humour were converted in to public scandal directed against the clergy.

The antipathy against clericalism was by no means restricted to one class of people. Infact it cut across class lines and found expression amongst nobles and commoners, middle class and the bourgeois sections of the society and as Hexter points out new polarities of lay-clerical, secular-religious or church-state emerged which cut across class and status lines.

Moreover a new culture of emphasis on reading developed. As John Hale points out nobles who only focused on dueling and hunting and did not know how to handle books suffered a loss of prestige. Lawrence Stone points out that royal councilors were increasingly called upon to 'think clearly, analyze a situation,

draft a minute, know law's technicalities and speak a foreign language.' This required an ability to read and assimilate books on diverse topics to hold a place in the court. Since the early sixteenth century nobles started acquiring private libraries leaving the nobility of the sword and the clergy behind. Learning by reading was now becoming as important as learning by doing. A legal bureaucracy sprang up which by the dint of its proficiency in reading and interpretation of rules, privileges etc. was carving out a space for itself.

However the coming up of literate and educated lay establishment did not mean the rise and growth of a new social class. It meant rather a new and different kind of schooling for the children of the privileged elite. It was emphasized that 'when the king needs someone to reply to a foreign ambassador, he will turn not to the horn blowing gentleman but the educated rustic.' It is in this context that when the Spanish courtiers complained to Habsburg Emperor Charles V about his appointing low born councilors he told them to see to it that their children were better educated. Dr. Eisestein points out in the sixteenth century schoolmasters and text book publishers came in to their own. This she points out needs to be differentiated from the rise of the bourgeoisie. This process in fact brought about the reconstruction of the European aristocracy. The rise of 'bookish education' led to the clergy being outed from some schools and then the bookish learning spread to the scattered countryside with the country gentry who had studied in the urban schools returning to their estates and manors. In the early modern Europe then it would not do to equate the rise of the reading public with the rise of the middle class. It was the aristocracy itself which was now reconstructed as men of letters. They in fact come up as freethinkers and libertines and also as connoisseurs, diletants and amateurs who were no longer impressed with pedantry and jargons and used vernacular rather than Latin language.

Moreover the shift in book production from the abbeys to the printers workshop contributed to the decline of ecclesiastical influence in the longer run. The bringing out of text books and the issues of shaping of the curricula became the site of an intense conflict between the church and lay officials. Earlier the shops and bookstalls of university stationers were subservient to the university and its colleges but now with the rise of the scholar printers the print workshops became independent centres which not only had the ability to confer reward and prestige but also the ability to attract wandering students and scholars like the monasteries of the earlier times. The leaders of the new firms now themselves gave patronage, jobs and boarding and lodging facilities to the needy students and scholars. In this context the scholars themselves led the way in challenging clerical monopolies of knowledge and learning. It made possible the rise of new humanism of scholars like Erasmus who could openly challenge clerical orthodoxies to build a new culture of learning and studying. As Dr. Eisestein points out 'Erasmus showed how men of letters could be emancipated from client status.. by harnessing their pens to the new powers of the press.'

Likewise the spread of printing workshops in Europe was also non stereotypical. Though on the whole the printing presses gravitated towards the protestant regions it was affected by many different variables and concurrent changes. Dr. Eisestein points to the role of wealthy religious refugees in providing the fillip to printing in Geneva in the 1550s. It may be argued following her argument that religion did play a role but in unexpected and paradoxical ways in the growth of printing

centres so we may not see the rise of printing purely in terms of catholic-protestant divide. Here she also points to trade patterns coming down from the medieval ages and the new patterns which emerged in the wake of capitalist and mercantile developments. However even here the specificity of developments of the printing industry has to be kept in mind. As she [points out] moreover the expansion of the printing industry probably affected the rate of development of many other enterprises—not merely because typefounding is related to metallurgy; paper mills to textile manufacture; publicity and advertising to sales; but also because the rate of technological innovation and supplies of skilled labour were likely to develop most rapidly in regions where printers also flourished and book markets were growing’.

It was this manner of growth of the print industry that set the parameters for the culture of print. This culture was against dogmatic approaches to lived experience and also theology. To quote Dr. Eisenstein again ‘from the days of Castellio to those of Voltaire, the printing industry was the principal natural ally of libertarian, heterodox and ecumenical philosophers. Eager to expand markets and diversify production, the enterprising publisher was the natural enemy of narrow minds.’ It was this feature of the printing industry which was to give a specific focus to the growth of what Hegel called the human mind over the next few centuries. Even as we come across the development of reading publics and the growth of an independent press in the later centuries this particular broad mindedness stands out. It is this feature again which characterized the rise of the enlightenment philosophes whose lineages cannot be reduced to particular religions or orthodoxies but can be regarded as an attempt to push human thought towards the broadest humanist dimensions even when some religious dimension can be attributed to them.

Here it may be pointed out that the ground for the spread of broad minded humanist ideas was prepared to a large extent by the reformers, the Erasmians and the men of letters. This led to the widening of the reading public. Though certain sections of the clergy objected to Bible reading by women, apprentices and husbandmen these objections were overcome and the way was cleared towards bringing more social groups in to the folds of a reading public. Moreover the social penetration of literacy which came about with the expansion of bible reading also changed the character of group identity and fuelled rising expectations from education. Indeed as various historians have pointed out many ‘low born’ Londoners cited the importance of printing press and education in their lives. They engaged in book learning and brought out tracts and pamphlets proclaiming themselves as ‘free born’. With education there also arose an informed political culture. Debates and political mobilization marked the rise of this new political culture. Changes in the position of the householders also occurred with the rise of the new printing culture. Do it yourself manuals for the householders like ‘A Werke for Householdiers’ (1530) had help for the householder in terms of putting him in charge of how he would worship and even carry out his lay activities. As Wright points out: “Through prayer and meditation, models for which they could find in scores of books, the draper, the butcher... soon learned to approach God without ecclesiastical assistance... The London citizen learned to hold worship in his own household... the private citizen had become articulate in the presence of the Deity...”

Check Your Progress 2

Emergence of the Print lead
Public Sphere

- 1) How did Luther's academic disputation with the Church become the great Reformation? Discuss.

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- 2) Discuss the changes in attitudes which came about with the rise of the print culture during the Reformation.

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10.4 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you were able to understand:

- how the print culture emerged from the culture of manuscripts writing and dissemination in the early modern Europe,
- how the emergence of the print culture influenced the nature of Renaissance,
- how the emergence of print culture shaped the Reformation.

10.5 KEYWORDS

Humanism: The movement within Renaissance which placed man or human being at the centre of universe instead of God as was the case in the medieval times.

Heterogeneous careers: Variety of career options which open up after early industrial and commercial developments.

10.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 10.2
- 2) See Section 10.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 10.3
- 2) See Section 10.3

10.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as Agent of Change*, Volumes 1&2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, 1979

Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, Volume 1, Polity Press, London, 2000



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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY