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Ch 7 Print Culture and the Modern World

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Write in Brief

1. Give reasons for the following: (a) Woodblock print only came to Europe after 1295. (b) Martin Luther was in favour of print and spoke out in praise of it. (c) The Roman Catholic Church began keeping an Index of Prohibited books from the mid-sixteenth century. (d) Gandhi said the fight for Swaraj is a fight for liberty of speech, liberty of the press, and freedom of association.

Answer

(a) Woodblock print was invented around the sixth century in China. It came to Europe, along with Marco Polo, in 1295. Marco Polo returned to Italy after many years of exploration in China, and he brought the knowledge of woodblock print with him on his return.

(b) Through the publications of his protestant ideas, Martin Luther challenged the orthodox practices and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote 95 theses criticizing many of the practices 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. He also translated the New Testament of which 5000 copies were sold within a few days.

These were impossible without the printing technology. Deeply grateful to the print, Luther said, "Printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one."

This is the reason why Luther was in favour of print and spoke out in praise of it.

(c) The Roman Catholic Church had to face many dissents from mid-16th century onwards. People had written many books that interpreted the God and the creation in their own ways or as they liked. Therefore, the church banned such books and kept the record of such banned books. It was called the Index of Prohibited Books.

(d) Gandhi considered that the liberty of speech, liberty of press and freedom of association were three most powerful vehicles of expressing and cultivating public opinion. Therefore, he said the fight for Swaraj was a fight for liberty of speech, press, and freedom for association.

2. Write short notes to show what you know about: (a) The Gutenberg Press (b) Erasmus's idea of the printed book (c) The Vernacular Press Act

Answer

(a) The Gutenberg Press: The first printing press was developed by Johan Gutenberg in 1430s. It was a developed form of the olive and wine presses. By 1448 Gutenberg perfected this system. The lead moulds were used for casting the metal types

for the letters of alphabet. The first book he printed was Bible. He produced 180 copies of Bible in 3 years, which was much faster by standards of the time, at the time.

(b) Erasmus's idea of printed book: Erasmus was the Latin scholar and a Catholic reformer. He criticized the printing of books. He thought that most of the books are stupid, ignorant, scandalous, raving, irreligious and seditious. According to him such books devalue the valuable books.

(c) The Vernacular Press Act: Modelled on the Irish Press Laws, it was passed in 1878. This law gave the government tyrannical rights to censor reports and editorials in the vernacular press. If a seditious report was published and the newspaper did not heed to an initial warning, then the press was seized and the printing machinery confiscated. This was a complete violation of the freedom of expression.

3. What did the spread of print culture in nineteenth century India mean to: (a) Women (b) The poor (c) Reformers

Answer

(a) The spread of print culture in 19th century India benefitted Indian women through learning and education. The liberal families supported the education of women to study or read as they believed education and reading would make the women corrupt. This led to the counter reaction, as most of the oppressed women began to study and read books and learnt

writing in secrecy. Some literate women started to write books and their autobiographies. Rashasundari Devi, a young married girl wrote her autobiography “Amar Jiban” which was published in 1876. Overall, the print culture in 19th century India helped in spread of the feeling of self-reliance among Indian women.

(b) The poor people benefitted from the spread of print culture because of the availability of books at a low price. The readership among them increased due to the publication of low priced books. Public libraries were also set up from the early 19th century, expanding the access to the books where all people could gain knowledge. Encouraged and inspired by the social reformers, the people like factory workers too set up their libraries and some even wrote books. Kashibaba, a Kanpur mill worker wrote and published ‘Chote aur Bade Ka Sawal’.

(c) Indian reforms of 19th century utilized print culture as the most potent means of spreading their reformist ideas and highlight the unethical issues. They began publishing various vernacular and English and Hindi newspapers and books through which they could spread their opinions against widow immolation, child marriage, monotheism, Brahmanical priesthood and idolatry to the common people of the country. In this way the spread of print culture in the 19th century provided them a space for attacking religious orthodoxy and to spread modern social and political ideas to the people of different languages across the country.

Discuss

1. Why did some people in 18th century Europe think that print culture would bring enlightenment and end despotism?

Answer

Many people in the 18th century Europe thought that the print culture has the power in it to bring enlightenment and end despotism. This would help in spreading of literacy and knowledge among all class of people. Social reformers like Louise, Sebastian Mercier, and Martin Luther felt that the print culture is the most powerful engine of progress and public opinion and hence, it would definitely bring enlightenment and an end to despotism.

2. Why did some people fear the effect of easily available printed books? Choose one example from Europe and one from India.

Answer

Some people especially from upper class and powerful class feared the effect of easily available printed books. Their cause of fear was that due to the spread of literacy among the common people they may loose their position or authorities. Some people feared that this may lead to the spread of rebellions and irreligious thoughts. For example -

→ In Europe, the Roman Catholic Church tried to curb the printed books through the Index of Prohibited Books.

→ In India, the Vernacular Press Act imposed restrictions on Indian press and various local newspapers. Also, some religious leaders and some people from upper castes expressed their fear.

4. What were the effects of the spread of print culture for poor people in nineteenth century India?

Answer

The effects of the spread of print culture for poor people in nineteenth century India were:

→ The poor people benefited from the spread of print culture in India on account of the availability of low-price books and public libraries.

→ Enlightening essays were written against caste discrimination and its inherent injustices. These were read by people across the country.

→ On the encouragement and support of social reformers, over-worked factory workers set up libraries for self-education, and some of them even published their own works, for example, Kashibaba and his "Chhote Aur Bade Ka Sawal".

5. Explain how print culture assisted the growth of nationalism in India.

Answer

The print culture immensely helped the growth in the growth of nationalism in India in the following ways -

→ Through vernacular press, oppressive methods of colonial rule were reported.

→ The misrule of government and its initiative on curbing the freedom of press spread the nationalist ideas that demanded freedom of press.

→ Nationalist feelings and revolutionary ideas were secretly spread by the dailies like - The Amrit Bazar Patrika, The Indian Mirror, Kesri, The Hindu, Bombay Samachar etc. Through these newspapers national leaders always tried to mobilize public opinion of Indian masses and unite them for the cause of nationalism.

→ The print culture helped in educating the people who then started to be gradually influenced by the reformist and nationalist ideas of the various Indian leaders like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Tilak, Subhas Bose and Gandhiji etc.