
The Evolution of the Printing Press in Kerala: A Catalyst for Social and Political Change

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the printing press in colonial Kerala marked a transformative period in the region's socio-political and cultural landscape. Introduced by Christian missionaries in the early 19th century, the printing press played a pivotal role in spreading literacy, religious texts, and political ideologies. Newspapers and periodicals such as *Kerala Patrika*, *Malayala Manorama*, and *Al-Ameen* fostered political awareness and mobilized resistance against British colonial rule. The press also became a powerful tool for social reform, advocating for caste equality, women's education, and progressive ideas. Despite British censorship and restrictions, print media continued to thrive, influencing public discourse and fueling nationalist sentiments. The printing press not only democratized access to knowledge but also shaped the cultural and intellectual awakening in Kerala. This study examines the impact of the printing press on colonial Kerala's political movements, social reforms, and cultural transformations.

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Introduction

The press media, which disseminates detailed information to society, developed from the invention of the printing press. The press serves a significant function in the realm of mass education.



Printing technology has documented the history of global events from the past to the present. At the outset of the 15th century, Europe experienced a significant transition. It was identified as the Renaissance in Germany. The Renaissance led to the invention of the printing press. The first printing press was developed by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany in 1436. The press he developed is referred to as 'Letter Press Printed' or 'Movable-type Printing.' His invention facilitated the production of numerous books, marking the onset of the Renaissance period. The newly invented printing press facilitated the mass production of the Holy Bible. Consequently, the European missionaries found it essential to develop a Malayalam printing press modelled after the Western printing press. Among the various missionaries who arrived in India, Spanish missionary John Gonsalvez is regarded as the most significant due to his role in establishing the Malayalam Printing Press. In 1577, he created the Malabar types at Vaippikkotta in Santacruz, Bombay. He is referred to as the Indian Gutenberg or the Father of Malayalam printing due to his invention of Malayalam types. Subsequently, printing progressed, and another Spanish individual, John De Bustamante, introduced advanced printing technology in Goa. In 1550, he printed the first book. This book is recognized as a thesis in philosophy. This book was introduced into circulation, leading to the advancement of printing technology. Francis Xavier arrived in India in 1542. Books were printed in Tamil under his direction. Padri Markose Jorge, a follower, published Christiya Vanakam and Christiya Mahathvam in Tamil at the Cochin Press.

Malayalam Printing Press in Kerala

In 1810, Colonel Munro assumed the position of British resident in Travancore. Benjamin Beiley requested assistance from the Travancore Government to establish a press for the publication of Malayalam works. The British residents provided comprehensive government support, leading to the establishment of the Christian Missionary Society Press in Kottayam. Benjamin Beiley, a Christian missionary, is recognized as the 'Father of the Malayalam Printing Technology' for initiating the establishment of the first Malayalam press. Beiley appointed one carpenter and two blacksmiths to create the 28 modern Malayalam letters. At the start of 1812, the Malayalam printing press commenced operations in Kottayam.

Following 1812, Malayalam types were systematically carved in Kottayam, Mangalore, Varapuzha, Kodungaloor, Cochin, and Vaipinkotta. The introduction of scientific advancements in various presses prompted the government of Travancore to establish government-operated presses. The inaugural government printing press commenced operations in Trivandrum in 1839. In 1847, technician Gundert contributed to the preparation of Malayalam letters. He was interested in preparing a hand press. In



1847, a hand press was established in Talaserry at Illikkunnu due to his efforts. Beginning in 1847, printing technology experienced continuous growth. Periodicals commenced publication from various printing presses established in Kottayam, Trivandrum, Talassery, and Thrissur. Consequently, printing presses were established in nearly all centres of Travancore. The proliferation of numerous printing presses contributed significantly to the ongoing development of Malayalam literature, which in turn facilitated the advancement of journalism in Travancore.

LMS Printing Press

Following 1811, advancements in printing press technology led to the establishment of numerous printing presses and publishing houses across Travancore. The London Missionary Society founded several educational institutions in Kanyakumari District. The London Missionary Society established numerous schools across Kanyakumari District. The missionary identified the necessity for a printing press in the Kanyakumari District to facilitate the provision of notes and other materials. In 1818, Christian missionary Mead assumed leadership of the London Missionary Society. The printing press established by Mead in 1820 was located in Nagercoil within the boundaries of Travancore. The London Missionary Society, having established a strong presence in Nagercoil, resolved to extend its influence over Kalkulam Taluk and Neyyoor served as the headquarters of the London Missionary Society in Kalkulam. In 1830, the clergy Mead established a press in Neyyoor, the headquarters of Kalkulam Taluk. Beginning in 1832, the Neyyoor press produced educational materials and a monthly publication titled 'Sanariya Prathikal'. In 1831, the Neyyoor London Missionary Press published the bulletin titled 'Desopakari'. Eventually, the press in Neyyoor encountered significant challenges in maintaining the publication of the Dosopakari bulletin. Nagercoil London Missionary Press assumed responsibility for the publication of the Desopakari issue. Over time, the London Missionary Press in Neyyoor was unable to continue operations. The London Missionary Press in Neyyoor was amalgamated with the London Missionary Press in Nagercoil.

CMS Printing Press

In 1821, Christian missionary Benjamin Beiley established a press in Chalukunnu, Kottayam District. In this press, English, Tamil, Malayalam, and Sanskrit types were utilized. The inaugural publication of this press was the Bible in the Malayalam language. The printing press was brought in from England. Furthermore, he also prepared the wooden press. In 1828, he imported an additional two printing machines for the C.M.S Press from London. Maharaja Swathi Thirunal of Travancore served as



the patron of this press. In 1857, a printing machine was imported from the United States. The press published numerous books in Sanskrit. A significant number of tracts related to religion and public meetings were printed and disseminated by this press. The press continues to produce numerous periodicals and books.

Maharaja Swathi Thirunal of Travancore began laying the groundwork for a press in 1838. At Thiruvananthapuram, the printing press known as the Government Press was established by the government. It is now known as the Government Central Printing Press, and it evolved from the Government Press.

The Kerala Vilasam Press

During the reign of Uthram Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore, Kathakali reached its peak of prominence. Easwara Pillai was the most renowned artist among the Kathakali performers. He was closely involved in the activities of the palace. With the assistance of Uthram Thirunal Maharaja, he organized a press. Until this point, all presses in Travancore were initiated solely with the support of Christian missionaries. The Kerala Vilasam Press was the first press fully organized by a native, independent of any foreign missionary assistance. This press has published numerous Malayalam books. This press printed a Malayalam magazine. The inaugural Malayalam magazine, 'Vidhyavilasam,' was published by this press. Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran authored a book in Malayalam titled 'Shagundalam' was published by this press.

After receiving training from Ramavariyar, Kunjuvariyaathu created the press, which became known as 'Maliyammavu Kunju Variyathu Press. Famous Sanskrit writings and Malayalam commentary were published by the press. This press met the demands of Malayalam, Sanskrit, and English speakers. This press excelled in advanced printing techniques in the early 20th century. Vidhya Vilasam Press was established by Chaturangapattanam Kalahastiyappamudaliyar, a resident of Andhra Pradesh, in 1861. He received an appointment as a Munisif in Calicut. During his time in Calicut, he cultivated an interest in Malayalam and was inspired to establish a press. He published the works of Ezhuthachan and Kunjan Nampiyar in Malayalam. Despite not being a Malayali, he exhibited a significant interest in the publication of Malayalam literature.

Western Star Press



The early presses placed significant emphasis on the printing and distribution of Malayalam newspapers. A significant number of foreigners residing in Cochin, Calicut, and Ernakulam were unable to comprehend the Malayalam newspapers. Westerners expressed interest in establishing a press dedicated solely to printing English-language publications. A European named Paul Melvin Walker undertook the challenge. Journalists Devji Bhimji and Kurian from the Malayali community gathered local news and information to assist Walker. Western Star Press was the inaugural press to publish periodicals in English in Travancore and Cochin. Charles Hason served as the inaugural editor of the Western Star Journals.

Sri Ramavilasam Press

K.G. Parameswara Pillai established this press in Quilon. His educational background was limited. He showed significant interest in the publication of ancient works from Travancore. In 1926, he established a press called Rama Vilasam Press. In 1928, he published the magazine 'Malayala Rajyam.' In 1933, the monthly magazine 'Malayala Rajyam' transitioned to a daily publication. He authored numerous publications. The Dasopanishads were the most significant. This book includes commentaries authored by Parameswara Pillai. He urged numerous writers and scholars to contribute their work, assuring that all writings produced by the scholars would be published. Consequently, based on his assurance, numerous writers emerged to publish books, and Rama Vilasam Press initiated a significant development in the history of the press movement in Travancore. Beginning in the early 19th century, Christian missionaries and the Indigenous population of Travancore endeavoured to influence the development of the printing press in the region. Printing presses were established from Kanyakumari to Kasargod. In the early period, letter printing was organized by technically qualified individuals. Movable types of letters were utilized in all printing presses across Travancore. The printers required a significant amount of time to produce the printed materials. Following the advent of power printing machines, the printing process has significantly accelerated. The 'Mangolodayam Press' was established in Trichur. The Mangolodayam press employed advanced printing techniques. The invention of modern printing techniques has led to the introduction of advanced electronic printing, both in Travancore and globally.

Malabar Press

During the 19th century, printing presses proliferated in Travancore. No progress occurred in the northern region of present-day Kerala. The northern region of Kerala is referred to as Malabar. Although



the southern regions of Kerala exhibited high levels of education, Malabar displayed a lack of engagement with educational advancements. The national movement aimed at expelling the British was at its peak. In 1903, Congress meetings were organized in Kozhicode. During the decade from 1920 to 1930, the Congress movement spread throughout Malabar. Malabar emerged as a significant centre of the Congress movement. The Congress leaders disseminated the concept of the freedom struggle across Malabar. Public meetings were conducted. However, public meetings did not generate the anticipated political awakenings. The Congress decided to establish a press and, through language publications, aimed to foster political awakening. In 1920, Congress leaders initiated the press in Malabar. The Malabar Press published four Malayalam newspapers and subsequently initiated the publication of an English newspaper as well. Consequently, the Malabar press played a crucial role in fostering political awareness in the previously underdeveloped Malabar region. Malabar constituted a region within the British-administered Madras Presidency. The development followed an alternative pattern. Malabar exhibited a deficiency in educational attainment. The Malabar region exhibits lower literacy levels in comparison to Travancore and Cochin. Travancore and Cochin exhibited a high level of literary advancement. Until 1951, the literacy rates of Kozhikode and Palakkad were significantly below the state average. However, Malabar exhibited greater involvement in the freedom struggle compared to Travancore and Cochin. The number of Malayalam and English newspapers published in Malabar was quite limited. In Kozhikode, four Malayalam newspapers and two English newspapers were published. The Malayalam newspapers opposed the activities of the Congress. The press in Malabar was inaccessible for the publication of any Congress activities. The Malabar printing did not show improvement. Consequently, the newspapers from Malabar exhibited a distinctive form of publication. Newspapers in Travancore supported the freedom struggle, while those published in Malabar disseminated news opposing the Congress. In Kerala, two types of publications were identified. Travancore and Cochin were governed by indigenous rulers, while Malabar was under British administration. The Malabar newspapers endorsed British activities, whereas the newspapers of Travancore and Cochin opposed British policy. Consequently, various versions were published concurrently in the newspapers.

Conclusion

Between the 16th and 20th centuries, presses in Kerala significantly contributed to disseminating information to the general public. The publication of papers in both Malayalam and English provided Keralites and English speakers with knowledge about India and the world. In South Travancore, presses



established by missionaries and supported by the Travancore Kings produced dailies and books in Tamil. Consequently, this broadened social and political awareness among the majority of the population south of Travancore. The development of the press in the 20th century in Travancore led to significant radical reforms, advocating for changes in the region's social and political conditions. The press in Malabar during the late 19th and early 20th centuries significantly influenced public opinion, facilitated awareness, and mobilized individuals for social and political transformation. The region, previously under British colonial rule, experienced the rise of newspapers and periodicals that significantly impacted the nationalist movement, social reforms, and cultural awakening. The extensive publication of newspapers and periodicals in the 20th century facilitated movements against the caste system and provided leadership to these efforts. Establish the rights of marginalized communities. With the rise of nationalism, the rights of marginalized communities gained traction universally. Certain newspapers endorsed the farmers' agitations, as evidenced in the proceedings of various conferences.

During the Guruvayur Sathyagraha, prominent newspapers and journals published editorials acknowledging that the ruler embodied noble values and wisdom, which could be more effective in addressing other deficiencies within Hindu society. The papers consistently opposed the division within Hindu society. The press encouraged social activists to employ constitutional, extra-constitutional, and even unconstitutional methods of struggle. The press promoted Western concepts of equality and brotherhood to address the needs of untouchables. The newspaper readership was also alerted to the societal ills. The press provided robust support for social and religious reform movements while openly opposing human cruelty. The incisive editorials of the newspapers effectively instigated a transformation in the social dynamics of Travancore. The objective of newspapers was to serve as the voice for the voiceless and the hope for the hopeless. The newspapers endorsed movements advocating social equality. The freedom struggle in Kerala was significantly influenced by patriotic writings published in newspapers. The newspapers facilitated essential political education for society. A significant number of individuals became informed about political events in the country via political journalism. The nationalist newspapers and journals in Malayalam consistently aimed to keep the public informed about events and developments during the struggle for freedom. The newspapers and the press serve to inform the public about daily events, both in Kerala and globally.

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