

The Gutenberg Gospel and the Vernacular Public Sphere: CMS Missionaries and Print Media in Colonial South India

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ABSTRACT

Christian missionaries played a very important role in the introduction and expansion of the printing press in colonial India. Their efforts influenced vernacular language development. The current paper focuses on the contribution made by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). This paper examines the distinctive and measurable contribution of the CMS to the print media ecology of South India. For example, the CMS established the CMS Press in Kottayam (Chacko, 2018). Apart from that, the CMS designed and produced indigenous vernacular typefaces. They published the region's first indigenous language journals. This research uses a Historical-Qualitative - Analysis to explore their contribution and the historical development of print media. Data are obtained from missionary records and academic histories. Results show that the CMS promoted the standardization of languages and literacy.

Keywords: CMS, Print Media, Standardization, Vernacular Public Sphere

INTRODUCTION:

Historical Background

The European printing press first reached India with the advent of the Portuguese in Goa in (1556). This was fully managed by the Catholic missions. The Protestant missions emphasized on the individual Bible study that promoted a drastic change and focuss attention on the print media. The revival in the Protestant missionary activity occurred during the 19th century. The CMS viewed the printing press as the basic method for conversion (1999). Print contributed tremendously to facilitate the mass dissemination of Scriptures. The missionaries acted as the main factors in colonial history of the media.

Missionary Typology

The CMS was an Anglican Evangelical society. The missionary work started in India early in the 19th century. They focused their work mainly in areas such as Travancore (Kerala) and Tamil Nadu. The CMS kept multiple attitudes and acted different from other societies like London Missionary Society (LMS) or the Basel Mission. The CMS was particularly interested in the expansion of educational institutions: schools, colleges, and presses. The religious and theological urge promoted vernacular translation and printing. This urge facilitated the development of technological diffusion. This was the reason for the rapid growth and popularity of CMS. Thus, this situation and objectives of CMS played a crucial role in vernacular print culture (Jeffrey, 1992). Therefore, the impact of CMS in education, pedagogy, culture and well-being is to explored in detail.

CMS did not come here to preach alone. They immediately recognized the potential of the Printing Press and made it their important target. This focus was

somewhat different from other missions. The printing process forced them to confront the chaotic nature of the existing scripts. One of the most important figures working relentlessly in Kottayam was Benjamin Bailey. His innovation was developing practical movable printing machine for Malayalam. It was a huge technical step forward. This resulted in the Standardization of Malayalam language. They developed uniform grammars and dictionaries. This new, printed, standardized language was mainly put to use for printing Bibles. The press published tracts, schoolbooks, and journals. This output helped the making of a vibrant Vernacular Public Sphere. This was a space where people could regularly read and debate printed ideas. Often students and also converts were provided with this platform. The CMS never intended creating a space for political debate. Their intentions were for religious conversion. However, in modern print technology and mass literacy, the group may have accidentally laid down the foundational infrastructure. The infrastructure was later used by the Indian nationalists and social reformers to contest not only the colonial rule but also the traditional structures of authority.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

While there is indeed recognition of the contribution made by missionaries to print, some studies embrace broad historical surveys, such as Priolkar 1958 and Murthy 1984, while specific works trace language standardization, such as Dasgupta 2011. The analysis of the CMS's technological and content-based innovations changed the entire social scenario. An attempt is made here to fill that lacuna. We examine the mechanism through which print activities undertaken by the CMS transformed South Indian public discourse.

Research Questions

This study addresses three core questions:

1. What types of technological and linguistic innovations did CMS bring into existence by the introduction of the press?
2. How did the periodicals and publications of CMS shape the public sphere and public discourse in colonial South India?
3. What were the unintended impacts of CMS print efforts for anti-colonial or social reform movements within the region?

METHODOLOGY

Approach

This research employs a Historical-Qualitative Analysis. The methodology purports to discuss, analyze and to interpret the historical data in their colonial context. The CMS Press is not merely a religious tool, but as a socio-technical institution (Lekshmi, 2015). It is to be examined in detail how this institution worked to support the progress of social change.

Data Sources

Primary source material includes:

Archival records of the CMS

Records and publications of the CMS Press, Kottayam

Missionary biographies

Secondary sources include:

Scholarly articles dealing with colonial public spheres and media history.

The analysis is based on a close reading of these texts, relating technological capabilities to their socio-cultural consequences.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION (CMS IMPACT)

The establishment of the CMS Press in Kottayam, Travancore, in 1821 is rightly called a watershed in the history of printing in Malayalam (Chacko, 2018). The leading missionary role fell to Rev. Benjamin Bailey. No ordinary printer, he was a pioneer in type design and casting. He had the unenviable task of reproducing the somewhat intricate Malayalam script in movable type.

The existing handwriting script was rather ill-suited to metal type, and Bailey succeeded in designing and casting the first practical, easily readable Malayalam movable types (Lekshmi, 2015). This proved to be a giant technological stride. It converted Malayalam from a purely scribal language into a print language. In fact, this accomplishment democratized reading and writing. The high cost of manuscript copying, along with the hard labor involved in it, was reduced. The CMS Press became a model for other printing ventures in South India.

Contribution: Linguistic and Literary

The most important influence of CMS was the standardization of languages. Missionaries standardized the Malayalam language for the sake of translation of the Bible. Many books were published by the missionaries during the period. English- Malayalam dictionary was published in the year 1846. They contributed for the

development of a common written prose (Dasgupta, 2011). They contributed to the development of the language from dialects to a unified print medium (Guha, 1999).

The Vernacular Public Sphere

The CMS publications moved beyond purely religious texts, embracing almanacs, school textbooks, and early journals. These materials engendered a new kind of readership-one that was accustomed to receiving information both rapidly and consistently. Even though, evangelical in content, it nevertheless introduced concepts of news, linear history, and objective information.

The CMS actively created a 'Protestant public'. This was a community of readers and converts bound by shared printed material (Jeffrey, 1992). This sphere extended beyond the immediate church community. It included students in CMS schools and curious non-Christians. The act of reading a printed journal elicited public discourse. Periodicity and serial communication became normalized. This provided a critical foundation for indigenous journalism and political debate later on. In shaping an emerging public opinion, the press became an essential medium.

CSI Missionaries and Novel writing

A facet of the cultural heritage of CMS and its successor institutions is very much reflected in South Indian literature. The Church of South India (CSI), inaugurated in 1947, unified the efforts of CMS, LMS, and other Protestant missions (Hough, 1951). Clearly established CSI missionary characters have been relatively rare, as the CSI itself focused mainly on indigenous leadership following independence. Characters embodying the institutional and cultural heritage of the former CMS are wide and greatly extensive. This section explores one aspect of how that legacy is presented in fictional literature.

Foundational Archetypes

Lady Morgan's *The Missionary* is an Indian Tale that established an important literary archetype in 1811. The tale shows a conflict between a Christian missionary and Indian culture. There are multiple themes in the novel like cultural clash, conversion, romantic complexity and the like. It has become a literary model. Many authors imitated this style of narrative and adopted this model to reflect the missionary work in Kerala.

Literary Representation of the CMS/CSI Legacy

Many writers of the vernacular literatures of the period depicted the impact of the missionary work in South India. Many literary figures explored and examined the CMS roots in Kerala., Many such writers deal with the social and cultural values of mission-founded Christian communities. Novels of O. V. Vijayan are a case in point. He has a flavor to discuss the political and social values along with the ethical and religious values of the people of Kerala. He has stronger overtures toward political critique; the mission-school-educated character is an archetypal figure. Such figures are the sign of the success and sometimes the alienation of the CMS's educational and print infrastructure. These literary figures are

fundamental. They show that the impact of CMS was not only technological and linguistic but deeply cultural and personal. The press enabled the education that created this new class of Indian Christian intellectuals. The novels serve as cultural evidence of the pervasive socio-educational imprint of CMS.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The social and cultural relations of CMS with colonial South India was a classic case of a paradoxical historical force. Their purposeful aim was evangelical conversion. The approach had secular effects far beyond the religious brief. The moveable printing press was a case in point. CMS missionaries such as Benjamin Bailey did not merely import technology. They adapted it by creating sophisticated typefaces for Malayalam. This act alone helped in the linguistic standardization of the language, spurring mass literacy (Chacko, 2018). The publications from the CMS Press really promoted a vibrant vernacular public sphere.. The CMS had built the very instruments to challenge colonial and orthodox structures of authority. The Gutenberg Gospel, became the cause for social and political change and awakening.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Such studies should be directed towards comparisons in the future. A comparison of the print methods of the CMS with those of the Basel Mission or the American Madura Mission would be instructive. This would isolate the socio-technical variables specific to the CMS model. Further work should also be done on the reception history of CMS publications within non-Christian communities. This would give a more nuanced understanding of the formation of the public sphere.

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