

CHAPTER-1

In the field of visual arts, Printmaking occupies a unique position as a medium of expression. Art is a part of the culture complex and it is but natural that any change in the culture would affect the art-produced. Printmaking has reflected this phenomenon, more than any other form of art. Printmaking has enjoyed a varied status in the history of visual arts. It has been considered a lesser or trivial art on the one hand and then again, it's infinite qualities have also allowed it to be closest to the 'pulse-beat of human experiences'.¹ Printmaking has been a source of information, means of communication, or merely entertaining. It has been textual, visual, popular and functional. The impact of printmaking on the daily lives of all the people is immense. To quote P.H. Muir. "There are few inventions that have more radically affected the outlook and lives of everyone of us and almost every inventions since owes a great deal to printmaking"²

Today the several aspects of this medium have been defined and perfected separately. And Printmaking as a Fine Expression is independent and unique. Unique because the original method of printing – as it was invented has been handed down through the ages with very little change and adjustments. It retains its essentially intimate quality. At the same time it's versatility has allowed it to constantly grow and adapt itself from its beginning which can be said to have started with Primitive Art. The credit of visual artistic creation can surely go to the first cave painter, probably at the age of Cro-Magnon Man (C30,000-10,000BC) when the earliest rock-engraving and painting styles appear in caves.³

¹ Art & Change – Prof K.G Subramanyan (Viswa Bharti, Shantiniketan 1972)

² P H Muir – Book Collection – London 1995

³ Thresholds of the Paleolithic, Primitive Mythology, Joseph Campell, Penguin Books 1969

It is wondrous to imagine what instinct led him to make 'stencilled or coloured imprints of hand on the wall' of his dwelling. On the walls of a number of the caves claw marks of the Cave Bear have been found, and it has been observed that engravings and painting usually appear near these spots. The Bear was considered to be god on earth in disguise and its claw mark meant magic. Human Hand imprints were perhaps an imitation of the imprints of the bear.⁴ Probably another clue lies in the 'Foot Prints' left by the hooves of animals on the earth. For the cave-dweller these 'prints' were magical, for they led him to food and meant survival. These 'prints' were a fortunate sign. Therefore 'image' meant survival or existence for the first artist. (Plate 1, 2.)

Fritz Echinberg has rightly said – "The foundation of printmaking lies in the first incised line, the first scratch on the wall, the first impression made on a stone, seal or tablet; a piece of bone or horn. The Neolithic man was a primitive 'Neolithographer'. The Homo Sapien is the only race amongst living creatures who started the pursuit of art roughly 30,000 years ago. Most of this art may be called 'graphic' – drawn or engraved lines filled with crude colour. The primitive man was a curious being constantly experimenting and trying out new ways and means. He derived inspiration from the most ordinary. We are therefore indebted to this first artist who showed us what visual imagination is"⁵

The art of carving upon bone, stone metal or wood was common to Ancient Civilizations. For e.g. the carved votive seals of the Indus Valley Civilizations, which

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Fritz Echinberg – Art of the Print – Master Pieces, History Technique (1976)

were made by pressing a carved block on clay and the wood blocks, used in Egypt⁶ for printing textiles. The first part of printmaking technique-preparing a block – was not a mystery for the human kind. The next step of taking an impression from this carved block onto a 'suitable surface' did not take place until the 'suitable surface' – paper was invented. Paper was comparatively much more convenient to cloth or clay which was used before its invention.

Paper was invented in China in the year 105 A.D. It remained a Chinese secret until the Chinese prisoners in Samarkand in 757 A.D. and in Baghdad in 793 A.D. let it out.⁷ This knowledge was transmitted to Saracens in Spain in 1150 A.D. Knowledge of papermaking reached India in the 13th cent A.D.

Long before the printing process another form of printing existed in China – T'a-stone-rubbing⁸ Lamblack ink was perfected by the 4th to 5th century A.D. and it was discovered that impression from inscriptions upon stone such as Confusion classics could be rubbed off onto paper. A dampened, thin sheet of paper of the tough variety-was laid on the stone and rubbed vigourously so that it was forced into the incisions. Then a flat pad of black ink was rubbed on the surface so that the design appeared in white against black background.

Printmaking in China was needed for the huge quantity of religious literature and pictures in connection with propagation of Buddhism. This led to the invention of Block Printing for printing portraits of Buddha in 650 A.D.

⁶ Author M.Hind, An introduction to a History of Woodcut (NY 1963) Vol. I p.64

⁷ The Book of Fine Print – Carl Zigrosser (1948) Philadelphia Museum of Arts.

⁸ Ibid

“The earliest dated wood cut still in existence on paper is a Buddhist sculpture of 11 May 868 A.D. – called ‘the Diamond Sutra’ (Plate 3). It has a quotation below saying “Made by Chinese Buddhist monk in order in deep reverence to perpetuate the memory of his parents”. The Diamond Sutra entitled “Hiraka Sutra dating back to 868 A.D. is 6 sheets of text each 2.5 feet long and 1 feet wide and 1 shorter sheet in wood cut, pasted together to form a continuous roll of 16 feet. Sir Aurel Stein found it in 1907 in the Cave of 10,000 Buddha in China Turkistan.⁹ The refinement in the carving indicates that earlier cruder woodcuts must have existed before this.

‘Printing originated from stamping. A vast majority of Chinese woodcuts were made for books for Confusion Cannon, 932 A.D. or Buddhist Cannon or Tripitaka, 972 A.D. Buddhism depended on the written word for propagation and the quantitative possibility of Printmaking technique was suitable. Text supplemented by images could be produced in large numbers in a short duration. Pishang in 1043 A.D invented movable type of baked clay. In 1314 A.D. Wang Chang made the woodcut type and Koreans invented the metal type in Bronze in 1392 A.D.

In China Printmaking was used to reproduce already existing material rather than any original creative work. The printed image was a means to an end but never an end in itself. It was not a popular art; rather scholars used it. It was left to other parts of the world to discover the possibilities of the medium as a fine art. However, the contribution that China made in the medium through the invention of paper to the world is impossible to negate. On surveying the changes in Printmaking in the world, one would feel that the foundation of the medium lies in primitive art, it's origin in the carvings of the ancient

⁹ Ibid

civilizations, its birth with the invention of paper and its development as a printed image on paper in China. Thereafter its development branches off to different regions such as Europe, Japan and India. A brief history of Printmaking in these regions follows. The significance of needing to do this is to have a better understanding of the changes in the role of the medium and its expressions.

The Chinese art of woodcut had a chance to flourish as Ukiyoe in the neighbouring Japan, where this indirect source of inspiration became a reflection on how immensely popular prints can become through editions.

The art of Ukiyo-e flourished between 1660 A.D. to 1860 A.D. in Japan. Some of the greatest Printmakers, skill and imagination can be seen in wood block prints. These prints became or symbol of independence and pride of the urban middle class.¹⁰ It was a spontaneous popular expression. These prints are special for many reasons.

The evolved in complete isolation from the rest of the world for the ports of Japan remained closed for traders between the 17th-19th cent A.D. Under the rule of Tokugawa Shogunate, who feared Christianity and wanted to consolidate his politician power, the ruler Iemtsu took this step.¹¹ This led to a totally self-sufficient social set-up with strict code of conduct within the society.

Ukiyo-e manner of expression was evolved by the lowest class of the newly rich merchant class, which needed its own cultural outlet, being debarred from taking part in any classical art form. Along with other art forms such as the Kabuki theatre, this art evolved due to a common need felt by the people. As such these prints became a reflection of the daily life of the middle class and became an expression of art. It became

10. Ukiyoe-Images of unknown Japan Lawrence Smith.

11. Ibid.

a means of communication, was decorative and used for advertising the popular aspects of the culture. They were made in large quantity, were sold cheaply and were a very common sight in most households.

Many Ukiyo-e artist however were originally from the more elite classical-school background, who gave up the greater art of silk and porcelain to devote themselves to more popular but lesser art of Ukiyo-e¹². There were also an amazing number of geniuses amongst these artist. Within the span of two centuries, many great Printmakers who had very unusual skills contributed to the evolvement of this art. It is amazing to realize that geniuses are not found equally distributed in any civilization evolution. Rather they seem to be found in clusters like 'constellations' in certain intervals. This validates the fact that recognizing 'geniuses' is in it a social-act wherein the remarkable characteristics, which makes one, outstanding is sequential. Almost like a chain-reaction when a certain style or manner is appreciated and becomes popular, it may be recognized in the next person who adds his own innovation to the previous contribution and thus this goes on. In Ukiyoe, each artist contributed as a reaction or supplemented the contemporary or predecessor and because of wide popularity, it was easy for the whole society to respond and encourage this.

The reciprocation that existed between popular demand and artistic genius is not clearly remarkable. It is to be assumed that this formed the inspiration for experiments and more intricate or sublime methods. In Japan where Printmaking started as a popular visual art – the evolvement of the medium is rather interesting. Here the personal

¹² The Japanese Print – A New Approach. J. Hiller.

mark/signature/identity or Kunstwollen of the artist and the time/age reciprocates and it is difficult to demarkate whether a particular Ukiyo-e artist initiated the mood in the spirit of his times or whether the spirit of the times inspired him to work in a particular manner. The mode is synchronic. There are some major exponents who mark the beginning of a particular manner of expression and there are many that follow these patterns. Because Ukiyo-e flourished in a more compact time frame and space, this study of reciprocal development can be scrutinized. Decorative, banal, informative exhibitiv and documenting works co-exists and the Japanese artist through their total dedication to their work made sure that the identity of the artist remains intact. He had a definite place in the social strata and his art occupied a reverential place in the society. Other than serving the purpose it is made for. When Ukiyo-e began in Japan, in India artist in princely courts were aware of the printed image (through presents by Europeans of prints to the royalty) and Printing presses which could type text had been set up in few part of India. When Ukiyo-e art came to an end, in Japan, in India a similar popular wood-cut tradition by the name of Battala flourished in Bengal in middle of the 19th cent A.D. and various techniques of metal engraving, etching and acquaint had become increasingly popular. Ukiyo-e's impact on Europe and India was immense. In Europe, Printmaking was rediscovered as a medium of expression and for the first time, there was an acknowledgement that art of a non-Christian country could be superior or inspiring. By end of the century Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artist became increasingly inspired by Ukiyo-e. Most Indian artist of the early 20th century owes a part of their sensitivity to Ukiyo-e.

Ukiyo-e exemplifies truly how printmaking can become a part of life-through their popularity number, demand, availability and capacity to fulfil the trivial as well as aesthetic need of a society. These prints were used as screens, fans, advertisement for tea houses, courtesans, actors and actresses, for landscape flora fauna, posters, and illustration for poetry and albums. Though considered as lesser than the classical counterpart, Ukiyo-e was an art born out of need and demand. And its transidental quality of beauty, portraying the ephemeral, graceful being full of evocative power has those qualities which express the beauty in art. (Plate 4,5, 6, 7).

Ukiyo-e proves that given the correct circumstances the medium of Printmaking can become an intrinsic part and a powerful expression which may minister the way of life in a society.

Ukiyo-e being confined to a compact time and space clearly shows the various characteristic of Printmaking. Such characteristics are also seen in Printmaking activities in Europe but they are stretched over a large time span and vaster area. The continuity of a particular reaction may not be seen. There are breaks, overlaps and recessions. Printmaking activities in Europe have been continuous from the time of its commencement in the late 14th cent A.D. However, the technique of enquiry existed before Printmaking on paper originated. Block printing which existed before type printing appeared in Europe may have been an independent European invention. Or whether it was inspired by earlier Chinese inventions is a matter of controversy. However, if the mammoth sized tusks incised by the primitive man are inked and printed or

if the engraved designs on the Bronze and silver mirror of the Greeks are printed on paper, what we know today as prints would be produced. Such evidence is available right up to the 12th century as pointed by Cary Zigrosser.

Printmaking started to be produced on paper when paper became available in sufficient quantity in the 15th century A.D. Printing originated in Upper Bavaria and Austria about 1400 A.D. Then it gradually spread to the other regions. By 1440 A.D., it had reached the Upper Rhine Valley. The earliest prints were in woodcut in the relief process. In the 15th century in Europe the demand for written material was minimal. Marginal luxuries such as a picture were fulfilled by the church.¹³

So even though paper made printing possible and printing made use of paper, the feudal European society did not need 'Art at Home'. Crusades provided the contact with distant places, which led to the growth and awareness of luxuries amongst a rich merchantils society who resided in Free Cities exempted from Feudal obligation. A taste was developed for art and it started to be used increasingly amongst the rulers, the church and the merchantile class. So it was once again the merchants in free cities who encouraged the fine print. As in the middle class of Japan, this trading community too felt the need art. One of the most common and popular form of printed image to evolve was playing cards (Plate 8). They were made due to popular demand. Either cheaply cut and printed or in elaborate intricate ways. In Germany and Italy in the early 15th century A.D. vast quantity of playing cards were produced.

13. The Book of Fine Print - Carl Zigrosser 1948 - Philadelphia Museum of Art.

It is difficult to pinpoint any one artist who developed wood-cut print. Printmaking was not strictly a fine art. It had various other uses. By 1450 A.D. the printing press for relief and movable type for text was invented and came into use. So the text and the image could be printed together. In Europe the credit for invention of movable type is ascribed simultaneously to Gutenberg of Mainz (Germany), to Coster of Harlem (Holland) Johannes Brito of Burges (Belgium) Panifilo Castalde of Feltre (Italy).¹⁴ This itself proves that the popularity of Printing was enormous. As if the technique of printmaking became the concern of many in different places and the pace of inventing further methods became a common quest. The art of printing spread in Europe through Italy in 1465 A.D., France 1470 A.D., Spain 1474 A.D., England 1477 A.D., Denmark 1482 A.D., Sweden 1483 A.D., Portugal 1495 A.D. and Russia 1553 A.D.¹⁵

Prints gained popularity basically because it could be made easily, in large quantity, was affordable and easy to carry. They became common objects such as iconic illustration pasted on travelling boxes of preachers lawyer and merchant, binding in books etc. (Pate 9, 10).

Religious images such as pictures of the Christ, Saints and other illustrations from the Bible were also the subject of prints. They were easily available for prayers, they

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

warded of illness and evil, they could be made Patron Saints. They were economical and available for the common man.

By the end of the 15th century A.D. the relief printing process was refined and its demand had increased so much so that we find guild artist employing professional cutters or 'formschniders' to produce refined woodcuts engravings etc. This is true of great artist such as Albrecth Durer (1471-1528) who drew his compositions and his formschniders skillfully executed the same on wood or metal. Durer formschniders were Hieronymus Andrea and Wolfgan Resch – they were guild artisans. (Plate 11, 12).

Woodcut started to be used for illustrations increasingly from 1470 A.D. onwards. The text and the image were cut out from the same block at the same time. One e.g. of such a work is 'Biblica Pauperism' or Bible of the poor of about 1465 A.D. from Netherlands.

Right up to the time when metal engraving and later Etching became more popular, Relief Printing became increasingly refined. Colour woodcut started at the beginning of the 16th century. Where colour was applied by hand initially, multiple blocks started to be used and later Ugo da Capri (1480-1530) has been accredited with the invention of the Italian or Reduction method. (Plate 13).

The origin of Etching technique cannot be ascribed to any one name for it is generally assumed that the metal engravers learnt their technique from goldsmiths.

silversmiths etc. The obvious advantage of metal was the smooth surface and refinement possible thereof. The earliest surviving intaglio is 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' of 1466 A.D. By about 1500 A.D. etching and drypoint had originated and started to be used increasingly. (Plate 14).

Intaglio reigned supreme until the technique of lithography became popular. It was invented by Alois Senefelder in 1798 A.D. By the first quarter of the 19th century this medium had captured the imagination of most and its autographic direct manner of expression was to its advantage and inspired many to take up as a medium of expression.

The Printmaking medium reveals some fundamental principals which brings forth a pattern in a apparently haphazard conglomeration. These points which have evolved are interesting for they convey a character of the medium. The Printmaking techniques which were invented one after the other added to its versatility. Along with changes in the style in European art, Printmaking techniques too were developed. So much so that a correspondence in technique best suited to a particular style is obvious. This medium has had continuous development technically from its conception. And the implication of such constant activity is also remarkable. The Western world, where this medium has left deep impressions, has experienced periods of intense activity followed by almost trivial banalities so much so that the medium becomes almost an excuse or substitute. Art of every region changes from age to age according to circumstances in form or content in purpose and usefulness. The versatility of the medium and its immense scope is reflected

by the fact that it has been made a mode of expression in various innovative forms advantageously and inspired many to take it up as a medium of expression.

Printmaking correspondence to the other medium of expression is reflected by the parallel changes in form and content. This fact is specially obvious in the history of European art. It's versatility in being a 'spirit of its age' – technically as well as conceptually comes forth if we read its evolution in this manner.

In Gothic times the "melody of the Northern Line" found reflection in the woodcut and wood engraving quality. Artists such as Dürer's and his contemporaries exemplify it through calligraphic characteristics in the rendering of bold lines through wood cut. A new note comes into works after Dürer's contact with the Italian Masters and the dramatic transition from Gothic to Renaissance becomes obvious. Interestingly the Gothic characteristic found in Dürer's woodcuts and the Renaissance qualities of refinement in his metal engravings. Florentine characteristic or 'Fine Manner' is found in engravings on Metal which have a system of crosshatching by finelines giving a wash effect. The Board manner of Florentine Engravings have used parallel lines rather like pen and ink drawings.¹⁶

The age of Baroque, when etching had been refined, was a product of leisure and luxury. The gesture became important for its own sake. It was played with, heightened and exaggerated by artists such as Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Callot, and Claude

16. Ibid.

Lorraine. Etchers who reflected the spirit of their age in a gesture or mannerism often for purely compositional effect for e.g. the delicacy of and subtlety achieved in Callots work are through repeated biting through their works.

The Dutch Realism was portrayed in the works of Rembrandt Van Ryn in 1606 (Pate 15, 16). His feeling for humanness and its intensity in making the real and ordinary accessible is evident in his works. In his work the dramatic intensity of light and shade was possible through drypoint and etchings.

The delicacy of tone of the 18th century is reflected through the aquatints and Mezzotints of Reynolds, Hogarth, and Piransi who contributed towards this characteristic. Other than the aquatint technique, the stipple and crayon technique were developed to reproduce the quality of pastel – artist such as Francesco Bartolozzi, worked in this medium. (Plate 17, 18).

The 19th century was the age of the lithography (Pate 19, 20) and being an autographic and a more direct form of expression many artist took it up. By the time lithography had become popular, the identity of each artist individuality of expression had also become important. Each artist developed their very own unique style and manner of expression. For this lithograph technique was particularly suitable. Probably the accidental invention of Senefelder was due to the need to find a technique within Printmaking that could be autographic. From late 19th century the intense involvement in

a medium and pace of change is almost decade to decade. The changes in the role of the artist and art itself due to technical advancement, just reflects the transiency of life. This is one aspect of the fact. These same features can also be noted in another form that is the particular artist of an age confirming to his times and the through their particular manner of expression. Thus Remdradt's works make Dutch Realism possible or Ruben's Callot's, Van Dyck's works characterise the gestural luxury of their age's art. In both cases the medium of printmaking became a vehicle by which expression of zeitgist is possible.

Another feature of printmaking is that it caters to the mass. Whenever printmaking has been a spirit of the age-it has also been a 'spirit' of the common mass' – due to its multiplicity, affordability, communicability and transportability. In such times of immense popularity and in spite of the frivolity it assumes at such times the qualities that form a part of the cultural identity of age – and becomes a tradition (in presentation, refinement statement or mannerism) cannot be negated.

A third point that needs classification when discussing printmaking is that of imagery.

In the initial stages when printmaking was invented, text was the main printed part. Image existed before script was invented. But when printmaking started on paper. Text was printed before image – or figuration. Most records state the Text as the first printed matter. Book block were woodblock on which text and pictures was combined. It is only after 1450 A.D. that the technique of mechanical printing was invented for mass

production with the help of a press with durable movable type face, die and matrix and the first book the Vulgate Bible was printed in 1456 A.D. from the Guttenberg press of Mainz. From here the difference in the development of textual printing and image printing begins. Gradually textual printing became totally separate and had an independent technical development. However, today when we consider the history of the printmaking medium, we look to the imagery rather than the text.

The fourth point which I shall touch upon is in fact one which is common to all the modes of expression – the role of art and artist. This point is important for printmaking because this medium has been more technique or craft oriented than other means of expression. Today the Printmaker is accepted as a fine artist – he or she has a status similar to a Painter or Sculptor. However history relates that works of art has survived and their creator remains anonymous. In many stages in the history of printmaking, the printer is merely a technician and just a part of the process in creating a popular art. His particular style and manner of expression did not become significant. In several cases the painter or sculptor has merely indulged in printmaking activities to promote their art (e.g. Rubens) or as an experimentation when art was functional and artist belonged to specific guilds the groups were specialised to follow every dictum of preset colonial rules without deviation – within these guilds occasionally more efficient artist or artist with recognisable individual style did come up. In the printmaking field names of printmakers with such individuality have often surprised their contemporaries by their manner of expression. In the Japanese wood cut tradition, the artist, the wood carver and the publishers name is printed with each work. In the western world,

individual style which corresponds or supplements a periodic style gives the printmaker fame. In the Indian Printmaking history the printmaker's role from a technician to a fine artist is more prolonged – reason being lack in number of printmakers, or printmaking as a popular art. The artist's name is considered unimportant and also there existed a disregard towards the mediums capacity as a fine expression until very recent times.

In India in the Printmaking field, the discovery of individual creative artist, of the rebellious artist whose style is coveted by the Bourgeois whose eccentricities are glorified and became the hallmark of originality was not possible for the myth of the Rebellious artist had started dying by the time Printmakers gained in number and importance.

In the field of visual art the concept of free art of Art with a capital 'A' is a phenomenon which was evolved gradually due to social political, economic or aesthetic circumstances. In the beginning the artist was not liberated from social bonds and dependencies. Most of the great art that has come down to us existed due to a definite purpose. In the middle ages, the artist was a part of a guild and his status almost as that of a craftsman. Around the year 1500, the idea of the 'unique artistic personality, behind a work of art is seen. However their art evolved due to social demand. Even the greatest of artist worked for a commission and today we have only records of the successful artist. The artist whose works were unpopular and did not sell remained anonymous and very little is written about them. This circumstance is prevalent until the year 1800 A.D. Roughly with the beginning of the bourgeoisie, radical emancipation of the artist sets in. The French Revolution broke the connection with patrons in a symbolic sense.

Incidentally it is interesting to note that all printmakers welcomed the Revolution and some took active part in it. So the artist was no longer obliged to any patron but only to his artistic conscience and his works became increasingly personal. Gradually this entailed a separation from society and the artist became a bohemian – an outsider.

In the field of printmaking we have examples from European art – such as Hercules Segher (1590-1640) whose imaginative emotional expression with its intense identification to nature made him a misfit in the Dutch realism. His life was a struggle against poverty and despair. His outstanding works such as 'The Three Books' are seen as master pieces today. Honore Daumies who became a borderline case between fine artist and artist with a social purpose (through his caricatures) or Toulouse Lautrec whose posters also had a definite purpose along with being great expression in themselves. We have printers in the Indian history in the Battala artist whose individual contribution is unknown.

So Art for art sake with a bohemian artist behind is a reality of this century, for the printmaking medium, has always allowed extremes in all its factors.

In retrospect European printmaking history depends on the technical innovations or the ingenious handling of a particular technique by an artist at times. At other times it becomes more diffused. In the first case a particular artist raises interest and possibilities in the medium. So the Baroque phase has a particularly decorative playful attitude in printmaking and the cherubic fleshy or silhouetted forms personify the spirit of the age

specially through cameo prints. Along with this the position of the artist also varies. While the west has a myriad of printmakers who indulged in it and make a living out of it making cameo prints, text publications, prints for religious purpose or custom – the status as fine artist is isolated – Daumier, Durer, Rembrandt, Goya etc. Whereas the dedication of the Japanese artist made him revere his occupation and granted him a status right from the beginning as a serious occupant dedicated to his work. In India the status of the artist-printmaker and the medium itself underwent phases to reach where it is today. A technique which was learnt to fulfil demand for printed material into which illustrations were slowly incorporated to create further interest, to cheap popular prints which gave way to technically perfected commercial prints and then the slow separation and identification of fine prints as separate from its commercial counter part. There have been master technicians amongst printmakers, and yet the printmaker as a fine artist is only a recent phenomenon.

The history of printmaking of India shows similarity in its evolvement to the rest of the world. Printmaking technique reached our country late and was brought for a definite purpose. It's popularity, in the nineteenth century and its present status as a fine art suggest curious turns in various stages.

Like any other culture which has centuries deep history, in India too carving on wood, bone, stone and metal was well known. The seals of the Indus Valley Civilization 5000 years old found in Mohenjodaro or the Mudras meaning seals mentioned in the arthasastra of Kautilya 400 B.C. – 400 A.D. The Markera engravings of the Chera

dynasty in 466 A.D. in copperplate recording the deeds of land, the evidence of printing on fabric from stone block such as a small carved block found in Bhanu district of the North – West Frontier province in the 5th century A.D. or the wood block printed textile of Indian origin found on the Nile opposite Cairo in Egypt probably transported through trade called Fostat Fabric which are block printed and hand painted all show that Printing or engraving technique was not unknown in India. But the main difference was Printing on paper. This was not practiced though Paper became available to India by 13th century A.D. Printing on paper started only after 1556 A.D. the year when printmaking technique was brought to India by Jesuit Missionaries.¹⁷ Two press were set up by 6 Sept. 1556 A.D. in Goa. These presses were actually on their way to Abyssinia to help in the missionary work but due to certain circumstances, the ship was detailed in Goa. From Goa-printmaking gradually began spreading to other parts of India. So in a way, the presses were set up accidentally in 1556 A.D.

In India initially all printing was done on a Porus paper of very rough quality called 'Patna Paper'. This paper was not of good quality but importing, paper from England was not economical and it took too much time. The 'native' paper was sized with rice past and caught white-ants or book worms very easily. If they were arsenicated, they discoloured to an ugly yellow colour. It was only after a steam engine was used to operate a paper mill in Serampur in 1820 A.D. that good quality paper in bulk could be made in India.

¹⁷ Anant Kalebe Priokar, Two Printing Press in India, its Beginning and Early Development Maratha Samshodhana Mandala Bombay 1958 1958 p.2

However, through records previously noted it is clear that paper (needed to initiate printmaking) was available to India by 13th century and the matrix or blocks were also being made though for different purposes. So the question that arises is Why did India not start Printmaking on paper by itself? Why did it wait for 1556 A.D. to realise the need for printmaking? This can be partly answered through the conclusion based on the India socio-economic structure :-

Indian society had definite class of people with different occupation and needs.

Education – or reading was confined to a certain section.

Education was basically oral – the need for written text was not great – and whatever written scripts were necessary were in the form of hand written documents. In fact calligraphy was an art-form.

The demand for large quantity of text or illustration did not exist for educational, religious or communicative purposes. And India did not have one uniform language for all regions

So only due to the need felt by the Missionaries, to propagate Christianity, the Printing technique could start playing any role. The first six books that were printed by the Jesuit's do not exist anymore. Thus it is not known whether there was a visual illustration with the text.¹⁸ The presses in Goa turned out literature from movable metal type. So in India printing was started with metal type and not wooden block. And the main priority was the text. In 1674-75 A.D. Printing Presses were set up in Bombay by Bhimjee Parekh and in 1712 A.D. in Tranquebar, 1772 A.D. in Bengal by the East India

18. Dr. Nirmalendu Das.

company. So far the next two centuries, after Printmaking started in India in all the records on Printmaking the textual matter has primary importance. The illustration or image is generally found as a minor accompaniment. By itself printing of illustration in any book format or portfolio or single sheet were marginal until the 19th century.

Accordingly we have records of image in books only as :-

Compendio Spiritua dauida Christaa – by Jasper de Leao of 1561 A.D. which has the earliest evidence of historically ornamental wood cut initial at each opening chapter in relief process.

In 1579 A.D. first book in Indian language Doutrina Christiana, Tamil translation printed with an illustration in woodcut of Trinity in glory with the Holy ghost above God the Father and God the Son enthroned.

The first illustrated cover-page in relief process by 1568 A.D. and copper plate engraving by 1716 A.D. in Gramatica Damulica.

The Asiatick Researches of 1789 A.D. had fifteen engraving by an Indian artist.

The first Indian to make illustrations in printmaking in a book – Oonoodah Mogol in 1816 A.D. is Ramchand Roy.

British engravers settled in Calcutta in 18th century for projects such as Mapping India, undertaken by the East India Comp. By 1770 A.D.

The Indian socio-political situation changed after 1765 A.D. when the British East India Company established their control over the country. The Calcutta Presidency became their headquarters and for the next two hundred years the habits, lifestyle and culture of the English was aped and imbibed by the Indians. To be able to administer conveniently, the British system of education was propagated – for they wanted to know the country to attain maximum advantage from it. This led to a new kind of society where communication, recording and therefore need of printed material was felt. Books, journals, magazines, newspapers, almanacs with illustrations, documentation of Indian culture – costume, flora, fauna, landscapes, people musical instruments – “Some typical scenes of India such as the nautch girl, the suttee or the snake charmer” – which were taken home by foreigners as souvenirs. Printmaking visually recorded scenes, which were taken up by the camera by the end of the last century. To make the books attractive printed illustrations were added and this led to a new form of printing in India. In the early stage of Printmaking history of India the engraving was done by professionals and not by the artist themselves and it only existed in form of book illustration. Many foreign artist – few printmakers amongst them – visited India in the late 18th A.D. to early 19th cent A.D. Artist such as Thomas and William Daniell were the first to try printmaking on a large scale in his ‘Twelve views of Calcutta and Fort William (1787-94 A.D.) or Frans Baltasar Solvyn’s – A collection of Two Hundred and Fifty coloured Etchings descriptive of Manners Costume and Dresses of the Hindoos (1799 A.D.) etc. Publishers and authors until 1816 A.D. were foreigners. After this date many evidences of Indian artist and publishers are available – such as – sangeet Taranga (1818 A.D.) published by Radhamohan Sen Das and has six etchings by Ramchand Roy.

Rajendra Mitra editor of Bengali illustrated periodical 'Bididharta Sangraha' was conscious of the close interdependence of verbal and visual process. In 'Rahasya Sandardha' he mentions – "The new researchers have established that pictures have a beneficial impact on the mind. Hence this periodical considers it's duty to offer from time to time beautiful pictures to please the mind."

The printmakers in India can be divided into several categories.

Those who came from Foreign countries and printed at the government presses – largely British who were interested in documentation work.

Those who worked along with these printmakers and were Indians. They took up the profession of printmaking for it was gaining immense popularity as a mode of communication and slowly became a profession.

The traditional skilled craftsmen of India who belonged to certain caste – varna, gotra and kula.

After the middle of the 19th century we also have academically trained Indian printmakers from the various art schools set up by the British in different parts of the country.

However, the categories mentioned above did not remain mutually exclusive. There is constant overlapping and interchanging amongst them.¹⁹

¹⁹ Calcutta Woodcuts Aspects of a Popular Arts - Nikhil Sarkar (page 12)
Wood Cut Prints of Nineteenth century Calcutta ed. By Ashit Paul Seagul Books Cal – 1983

The company trained Indian printmaker executed their works in fine lines. The tonal gradation was done by parallel lines or cross hatching. The traditional engravers made heavy, definite regular lines and tones were made through hatching thick and thin lines.

In spite of these differences they both used indigenous sources such as folk or court art and slowly incorporated the western perspective.

Printmaking became immensely popular in India in the 19th century in the Battala a small book-district in Calcutta. Being the capital Calcutta developed a large neoliterate urban mass. So the need for printing grew and the Battala prints came to signify the illustrative need of the public.

The first press in Calcutta was set up in 1807 A.D. by Baburam in Khidderpore. This district arose due to a demand in cheap publication by the urban mass. Book illustration gave way to single-sheet display prints by 1850 A.D. There were 46 printing presses run by Indians. Its subjects were religion, history, erotica, crime, legends, calendars, portraits, iconography, day to day genre scenes, illustration of epics such as Mahabharata, Ramayana and Chaitanyas' life and dramatic court cases. These became a source of information and communications, souvenirs for pilgrims and advertisements. They were produced in large quantities and made by the wood block in relief process. The colour was applied crudely by brush. (Plate 21, 22, 23, 24).

Since these prints do not have signature of any artist, it is generally assumed that the Battala artist were a mixture of traditional wood engravers who came to Calcutta in search of work after their patronage in the princely states diminished, such as from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc. As the demand for these prints rose they moulded their craft to cater to popular taste. Prints became a family occupation and work was distributed amongst the members of the family.

Often the Kalighat patuas were reproduced in woodcut. But the other subjects like history, erotica, crimestories, legends court cases, day to day scenes were spontaneous expressions without any precedent. In this it is comparable to the Ukiyo-e though Battala was comparatively for a shorter time duration. The subject matter was so popular that the lithography presses incorporated these and gradually gained more popularity. The Battala prints derive their inspiration from indigenous sources – folk art, miniatures, Kalighat pattas and European paintings. The mixture of all these give the Battala prints a uniqueness. The Battala prints show that a close relationship between existing life and art is possible and ‘this relationship is so integral that it can be called organic or intrinsic’²⁰

Due to rapid advancement in technology and advent of lithography which was introduced in 1822 A.D. in Calcutta by two French artist – Mr. Belnos & Mr de Savignhac, the popularity of wood cuts started to lessen. Chromolithography and its advantages gradually took up the market. The themes in lithography remained same as for relief prints (Plate 25). By early quarter of the last century the idea to set up

20. Dr. Ratan Parimoo. Indigenous culture and the Function of the Art Educator – Identity of a culture.

lithographic press was being tried out in different places in India. Inks started to be manufactured and lithographic stone of excellent quality was discovered in Kurnool in Bellary district of Madras. This private enterprises gave an incentive to join the field

Single sheet colour lithography were in popular demand. This demand is reflected By the fact that :

Wood cut prints popularity diminished.

Many foreign publishers joined the competition to produce oleographs.

The kalighat patuas started to be made in lithographs – the outline was printed and colour, applied by hand.

Many prints were made in foreign countries such as Australia and Europe to be sent back to India to meet the demand. They were cheaper than those produced in India.

The Battala prints popularity declines by 1880-90's A.D. It did not disappear at once. It gradually retreated to its original book illustration format.

Evidences of printing outside Calcutta came in form of stamping with wood cut blocks like in (1850 A.D.) a manuscript was commissioned by Maharaja Rao Vijay Singh (1815-1857 A.D.) of Alwar. In 1870 A.D. woodcut prints were used by Sikhs as a reminder of their glory, valour and religious identity. Topics such as battle scenes, or themes such as a train with Sikh driver and passengers were also popular.

Lithography press was set up outside Calcutta, in Madras (1827 A.D.) Bihar (1828 A.D.), Lucknow (1830 A.D.) Raja Ravi Verma (1848-1906 A.D.) set up a press in Girgawn in the later half of the century. (Plate 26.)

Regional lithography developed in South India and in Punjab after the 1850 A.D. and had indigenous development. Those in the South were reminiscent of the South Indian glass painting and primarily traditional in subject and treatment. Initially lithography was used to outline a work which was then filled by hand colour e.g. The Hindoo Pantheon Published in Madras by the Oriental Lithograph Press – 1841-45 A.D. etc.

The Punjab lithographs were on glory of Sikhs, Hindu mythology, folk themes like Laila Majnu etc. Their affinity to Pahari miniatures is combined with the Western academic tendencies. Portraits, landscapes and other secular themes were the subject matter. In fact the Miniature became the prototype and the lithography which developed in different parts of the country after 1850 A.D. reflects this. The Western impact was more technical rather than stylistic. By 1860 A.D. through chromolithography a poor imitation of western academic trends evolved and traditional and folk styles were done away with. The themes however remained Indian.

The zeal of various missionaries and individual publishers during this phase in Indian history needs to be noted. For through the art of Printmaking, they could inform the public about the world. Unusual animals, different ethnic tribes, geography, place.

region culture of different, places of the world became the subject matter. These were meticulously illustrated and information about them printed alongside to create interest. Christian missionaries often took upon educating the public rather than just preaching. In printmaking they found the ideal method to reach out to many at the same time.

While being a true reflection the various places and times, that this medium of expression existed on the borderline between crafts and art is a fact which has to be acknowledge. It is only in the 20th century that printmaking attains an identity as a medium of fine art and gradually gains acceptance and with this the aspect of Modern Indian Printmaking commences.

However, the history of the medium and the implications there of , cannot be ignored. When understanding the characteristics or particulars of Modern printmaking the change in the identity of the medium cannot be sidestepped.

The coexistence of traditional craftsman (who had learned the technique of printmaking to meet the demand for printed matter) and the professionally skilled academically trained printmakers is a curious fact of the later past of the 19th century. The definition of printmaking remained a means of reproducing in quantity already existing matter. Comparatively in the West, Printmaking was already an accepted form of fine expression and the Ukiyoc prints too were gaining international acclaim. In India inspite of the interaction amongst foreign artist (hobby – painter or amature artist who came to sample the Indianness) – and it is natural that some exposure to the local artist to

European ways of expression would take place – the Indian printmaker remained a documentary artist to a large extent. It is curious to realise that a potential medium such as printmaking did not strike any prolific printer as an independent mode of expression.

Printed matter such as documentation or commercial or textual printing did occupy the major portion of interest in the medium. Printmaking as a fine expression and its commercial counterpart segregated when the quicker and true representative method of image reproduction by mechanical means in the form of letterpress process block method was invented by one Upendrakishor Roy Choudhary. He was a co-founder amongst many who had tried to perfect this method. From then on roughly 1st quarter of this century commercial printing diversified to adapt this quicker more mechanical method.

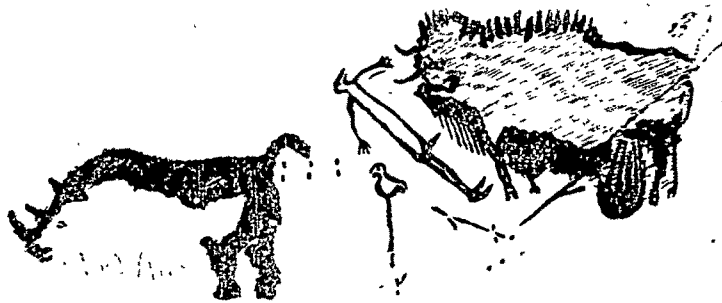
Any sign of the position that printed image had attained as a fine expression in other regions of the world (Europe, Japan) curiously did not materialise in India. Battala prints which had spontaneity of expression too petered off to book illustration. Lithography medium gained popularity but again as image to accompany text or a calendar art of god, godless or as labels, stamps of products to be sold. By itself these mediums were not independently explored. Until this century there is no examples of the mediums expression other than its usefulness as reproduction of preexisting image or as advertisement or illustration for items or objects.

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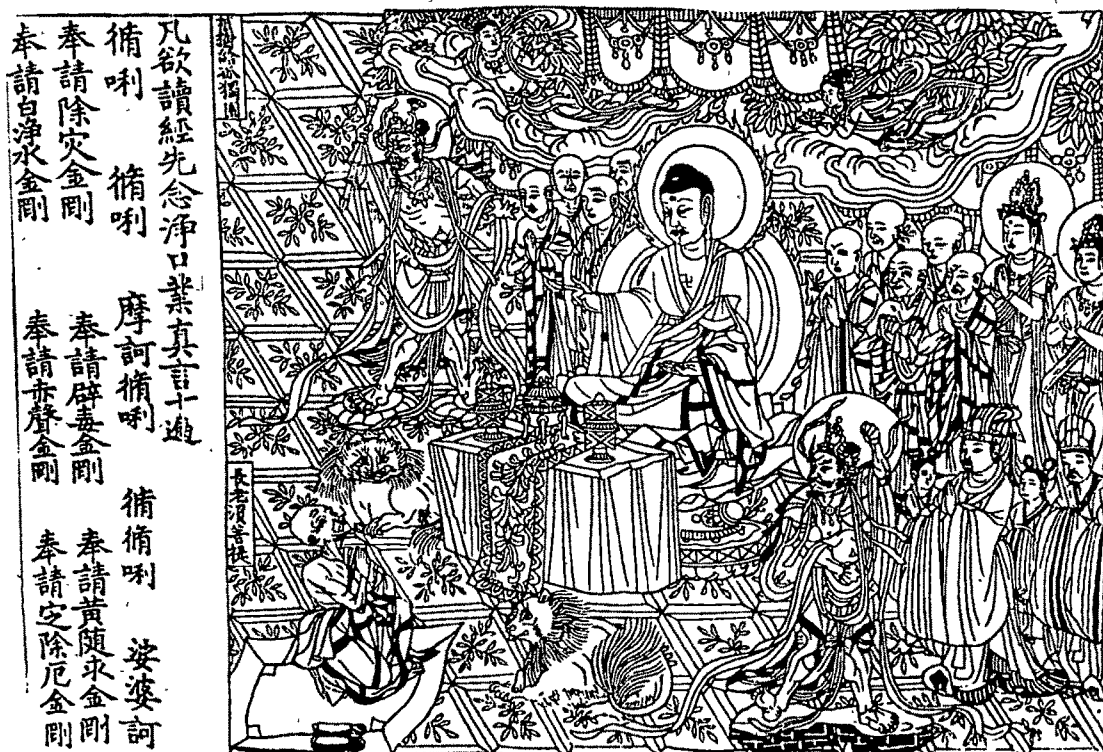


Figures in the crypt of Lascaux

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CAVALLIER DE COUPE

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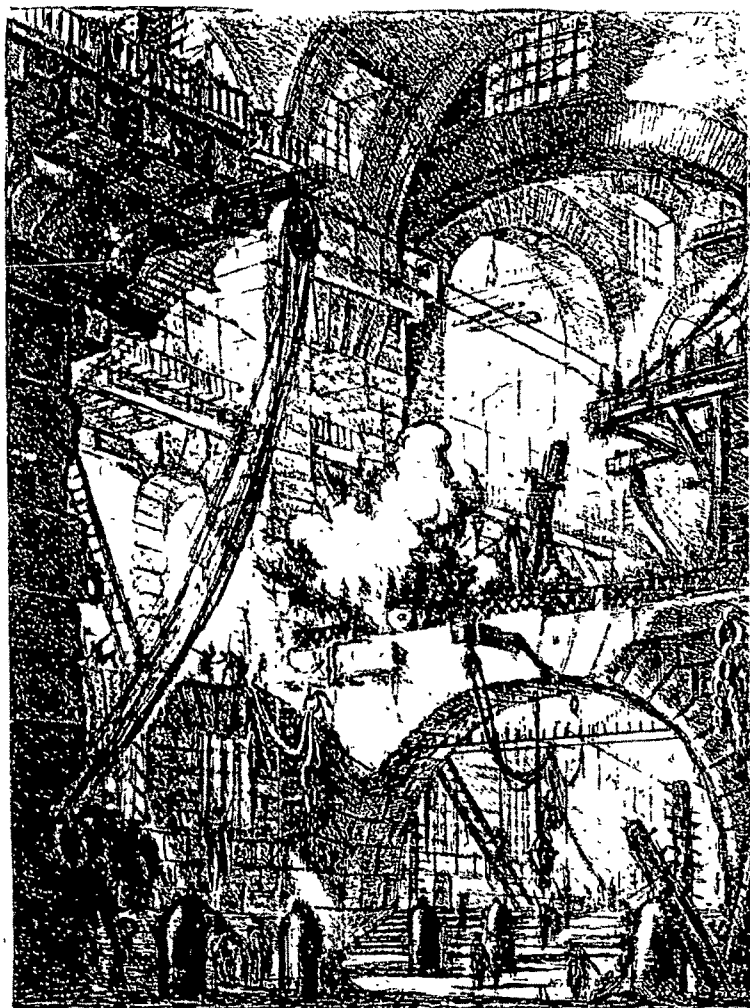
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Plate 4 Nirmala Ashtar, an incarnation of Vishnu.
Engraver unknown. Coloured woodcut.
V.M. R5140 (A). 25 x 39 cm.

Mildred Archer engravers from printing in Calcutta. Caleb Garland, Richard Britton, Upjohn and James names, like the Francis Dormae could be added points out, the from eighteen do not bear the Hence it is quite other artists to to have assisted casting types for *A Grammar* (1778).¹² The plate of John A the first of its local artisans with the European and printing. to *A Grammar* credits Charles the casting of 'he has been with all the va metallurgist, and the printer that he had, Bengali artists to assist him. Thomas Dani to Halhed's, was as 'a Bengali know I was of Engraver, Co. Printer's Devi Baillie, writing has a different artists tho' to advice them well. All Dani were stained Contemporary sufficient evidence of local artisans run by the British eighteenth century proprietors of Press announced manufacturing for several years

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Plate 18 The figure of Nirmala Ashtar (A).
Engraver unknown. Coloured woodcut.
V.M. R5140 (A). 25 x 39 cm.

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A comparative picture of Kalighat paintings and
Battala woodcuts.
Kali of Kalighat, Kalighat painting, c. 1865.



Kali of Kalighat, Chitpur woodcut, c. 1870.



Hand with fresh-water shrimps, Kalighat painting,
c. 1880.
In verse recounting the secret love of
Vidya the beautiful princess and Sundar,



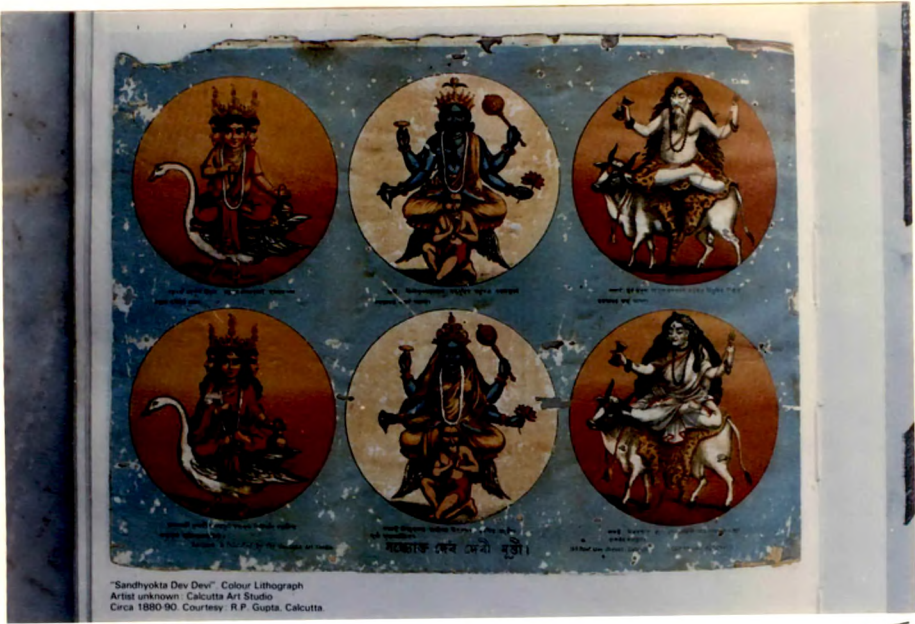
Hand with fresh-water shrimps, Chitpur woodcut,
c. 1880s.
In Bengali verse, which happened to be
an edition of *Vidyasundar*, followed by

the hero and the heroine facing each other between them the pipe of the hero the hero a ve former, with E the hero hold the heroine a peacock on his in the Kalighat But the wood the gallant and at the table d One should s for the loving couple, source Hana Knitzko contemporary portraits, and flowers, peace and the woman

These subjects even their composite were acquired high art of of Bengali and traditional miniatures often show hands as if of different a theme picture and art since The theory of the portraits the Battala woodcuts There has been characteristic An art historian

The figure century Bengali lyrical but heroines have jewellery and their swiftness more diverse moustaches sometime treatment of Venetian other accents the 'composition' in fact quite counterpo

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"Sandhyakta Dev Devi". Colour Lithograph
Artist unknown. Calcutta Art Studio
Circa 1880-90. Courtesy: R.P. Gupta, Calcutta.

25



Pururusa & Urusha
Design by
Raja Ravi Varma
Raja Ravi Varma Press
Madras, 1890
Courtesy: R.P. Gupta, Calcutta

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