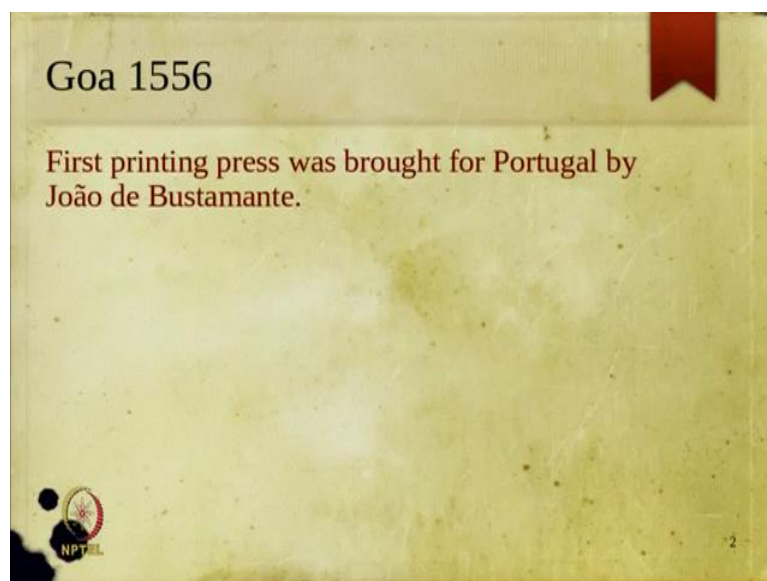
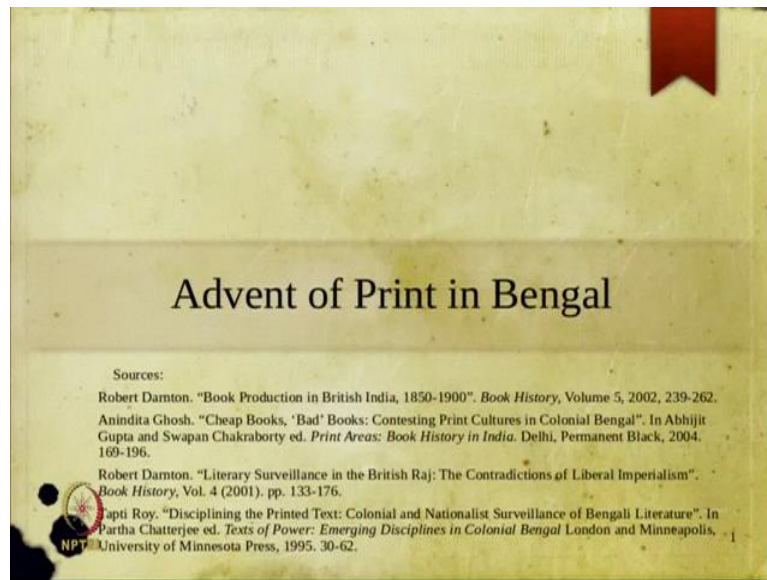


**Text, Textuality and Digital Media**  
**Professor Arjun Ghosh**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Delhi**  
**Lecture No. 16**  
**Print in Bengal**

The first place, where print really takes root in India is within the British Empire is Bengal. Certainly that is the place where the British established itself. Calcutta was the capital of the British Empire in 1911 and therefore, we need to study what kind of shape print took in Bengal.

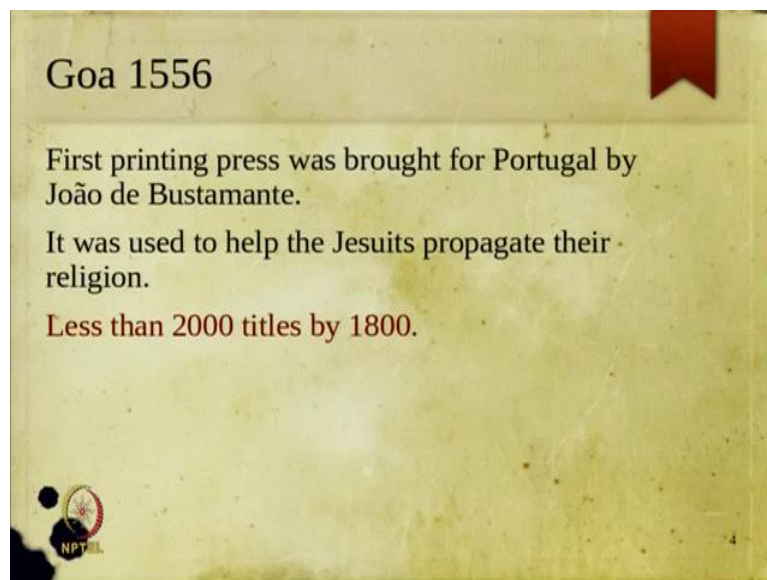
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What were the trajectories? What kind of response did it produce? But before Bengal we need to also look at how the first printing machine actually comes about in India. The first printing machine actually brought in by the Portuguese to Goa. It was a bit of an accident because they really wanted to take it to Persia and it was going to North Africa really and or one of those destinations.

And in those days there was no Swiss canal and therefore, the printing machine, which be transported on ship would stop over at the Portuguese colony in Goa and then go over to North Africa and for some reason that trip could not proceed after Goa and the printing machine remained and got established within the Portuguese colony in Goa.

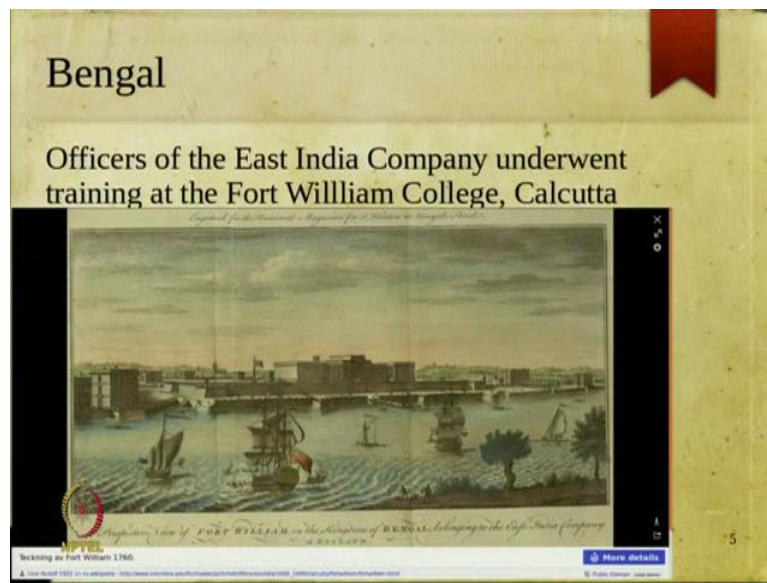
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And it was used by the Jesuits to propagate their religion. They figured out that they would use print in order to propagate religious learning and education, and try to convert people into Christianity. But really it remained largely missionary based exercise; there were few printing presses across the country, largely in the coastal areas. There were less than 2000 titles printed in India by the year 1800.

Print really takes root only by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century in India. There are some activity towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, but it is in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century when Indians start printing that print really becomes comes of age within the country.

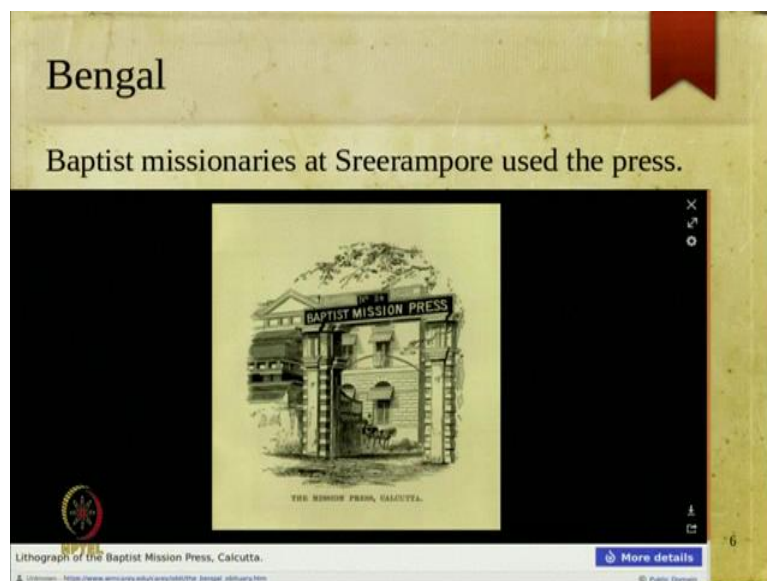
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Before that, the East India Company used print to other than the missionaries to produce, you know textbooks for officers who were trained in the Fort William College in Calcutta. They had to learn the Indian languages and therefore, the need for print books in Indian languages and therefore, the creation of typefaces. The first typefaces in some of the scripts used the subcontinent, both you know, things like Bangla and the Nagari script or the Nastaliq script.

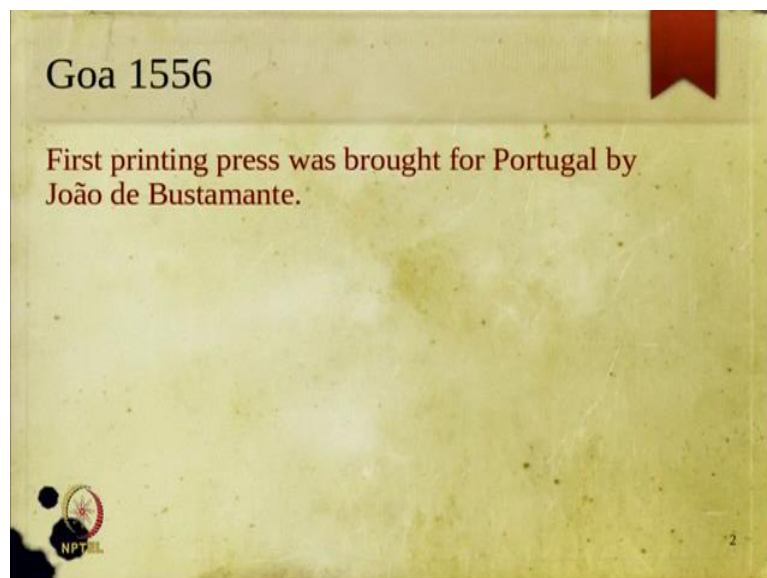
They were produced in Europe in England by metallurgical experts, not in India, the Indian typefaces start getting formed script produced in India much later. So it is because of this kind of training that in the Fort William College that books were necessary.

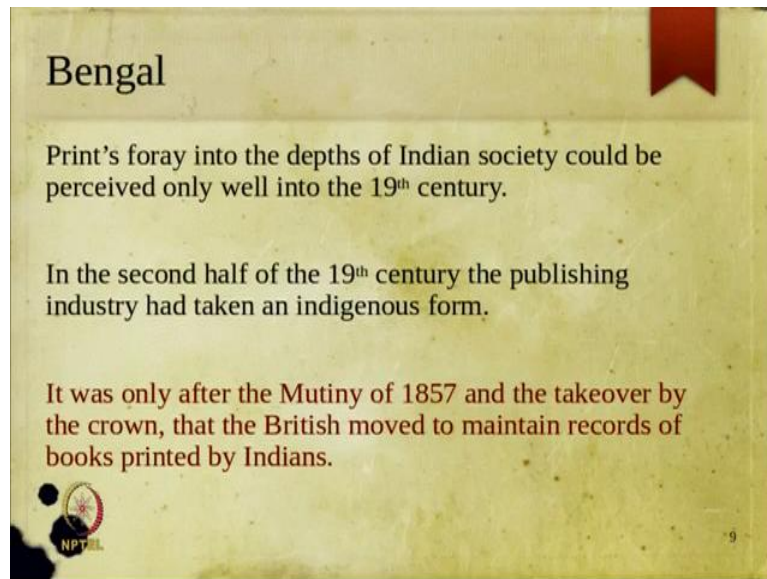
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Books were also necessary. The missionaries continue to operate and the Baptist missionaries at Sreerampore, the Baptist Mission press in Sreerampore used the press.

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But the prints foray into the depths of Indian society could only be perceived well into the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, you know. It is only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century that publishing industry took an indigenous form. Because one point that you need to understand that though the it was the missionaries who actually produced the text, they were, they had established the press, but they did not operate them. They were operated by Indians. So there were certainly European experts.

In fact, when we talk about the first printing press that was brought to Goa, it rarely came only with the printing press, it, the ship also carried in it technicians who were trained in printing technology and were able to operate the presses. But that was not enough, with the growth of the printing press they needed more and more people to be able to operate these, the press within India. And so the Indians got trained and they were the first printers, the indigenous printers, who would buy old printing machines and then use it to print and create an industry, create a market for themselves.

And as the printing industry grew, you know, one of the features of colonialism was that colonialism needed to take control of the land and one of the things that the British did while ruling this subcontinent is to create surveys. So there were, you had the Anthropological Survey of India, you had the Geological Survey of India, you know. So various kinds of surveys were created, various maps were produced, histories were written.

Because the Indians always wanted to know what kind of people there are, what their cultures are, what do they eat? In order to be able to exploit and rule them much better and in that entire process so the colonial missionary always, any administrative missionary always goes



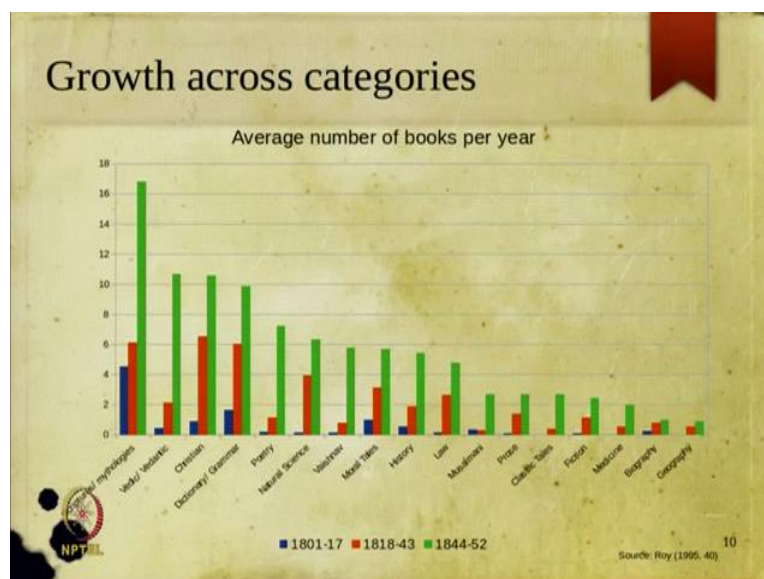
about trying to find out what is happening out there, and then formulate the policies in order to intervene.

This is true of the modern state as well. I mean, before the budget the previous day finance minister presents the economics survey, give a sense of what the the state of the country's economy is before presenting a plan for intervention, policy at a policy level. So even in this particular case, you know when there is a large industry and industry as big as a printing industry and in the context of Europe that we saw, how print was very importantly, political, was a very important political tool.

And so, therefore, for the British they needed also to gather a sense of what kind of material Indians have writing and what kind of things are getting circuited in the market? Whether there is anything about the British in it, what kind of thought processes? But really, this kind of record keeping on books printed by Indians did not begin along with the printing industry in India. It was only after the Mutiny, or around the Mutiny at that point of time in the 1850s. That the first histories of record keeping of books published by Indians did take place, more about that in a little while.

But it is on the basis of these records that we are able to really understand what kind of what was the shape what kind of texts were getting printed and what was it that Indians were reading? What kind of leadership was there? What kind of book market was there? How it operated? These are details which we get to know only through the colonial records. In fact, police records become a very important academic source for people to study history.

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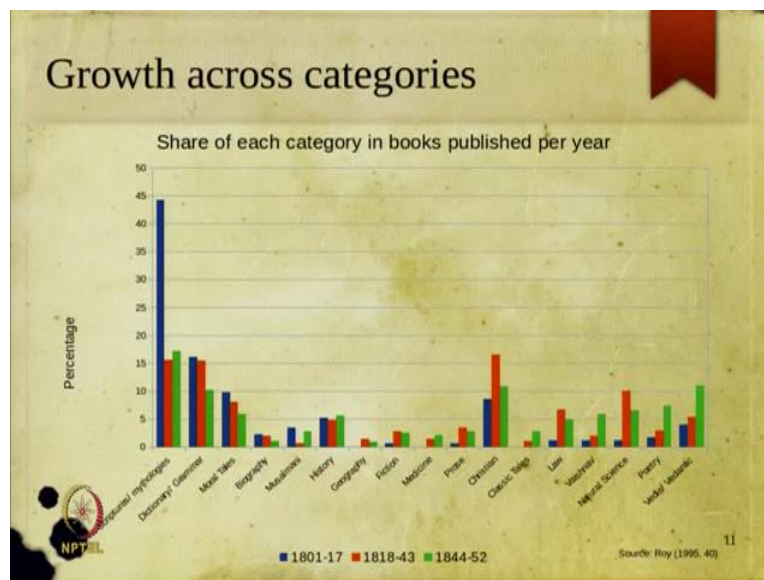
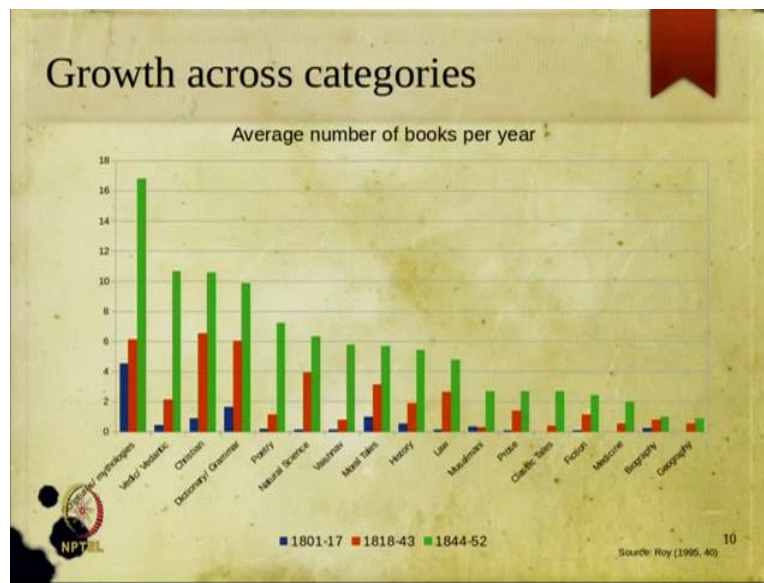
So, if we study some of these sources, we see that if you look at the average number of books per year, then we find books which were produced per year, these are the total number of printed editions that were available, the volumes in print that were available. On the left you find the ones which are-- these are been mapped across three reports between three phases, between 1801 to 1817, between 1818 to 1843 and 1844 to 1842, 52.

So, if we map that because the printed records would have some understanding as to when it was printed. So, it is possible to map all this and trace it. We find that by far, the largest number of books, were those related to scriptures and mythologies. Whereas you know, you had-- and then closely followed by Vedic works from the Vedas and quite similar to that in the third row is that of Christian books, works by Christian missionaries.

So the, within the Indian market we find there is a far greater interest in the scriptures and mythological works and religious works. And towards the middle we find some of these works which are based on history and law and classical texts and fiction is a far lesser category. Fiction and biography and geography, these are some of the smaller disciplines.

So, in terms of the total number of books which are published we find that actually scriptures and mythologies take on the market at a greater level. So, if year on year, we can see that the number of, the green line actually shows the final decade of this survey.

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But if we look at the share of each category of books within publishing. The previous slide was that which had to do with the absolute number. But if you look at the share then we find that actually there is a reduction of the number of scriptures and mythologies that is there. They still continue to be the green line as per, is still the highest as it shows, but in terms of the sheer within it because in the previous slide if you look at the absolute numbers, the blue lines are much smaller. The blue bars are much smaller we can see.

Whereas so within that it shows up, but as the green bars which is the final decays that is the 44 to 52 as they sort of grow, we find the actual proportion of the readership is, that is reading scriptures and mythologies which are in absolute numbers, the market is still saturated. So we find that in the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when print first comes in



really it is religious texts which are the first to get printed, you know. The mythologies, the mythological literature and works from the scriptures.

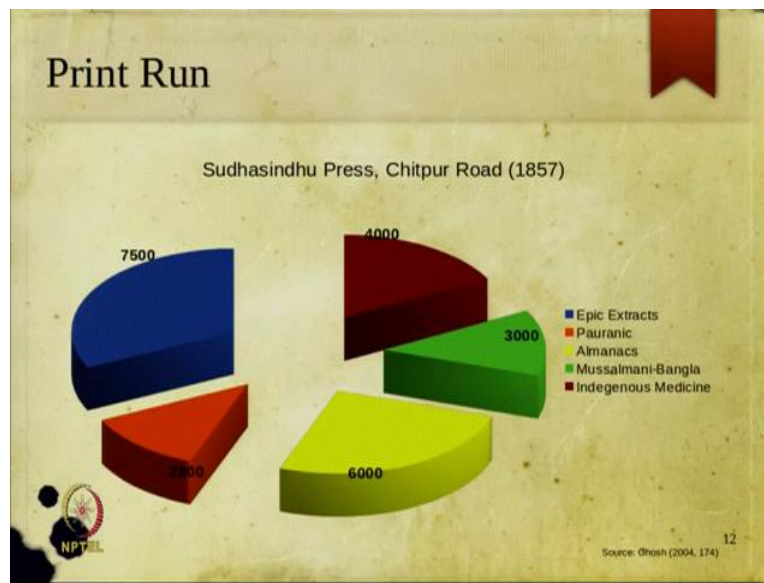
Primarily transferring things from the manuscript world to the printed world and this is something very similar to what we saw in Europe really. Where the first forays of into which print goes into, then the Bible was the first text that was published by the Gutenberg. So, but once the market is saturated and once the potential of print really comes about. Then we find that other genres of publication really takeover.

So, now you find that the growth really lies in the form of dictionaries and grammars and you also have poetry and fiction playing an important role, as we move towards the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more original works not works. So, there were two kinds of works which got printed very early on. One was those from the manuscript world, texts which were already in manuscript circulation or in oral circulation, primarily in manuscript circulation.

Or texts, European texts which were translated either as textbooks or for reading, you know, novels and other things or plays, lot of plays got translated, a lot of stories would get translated and printed in Bangla and other Indian languages. So, these were the first kind of things that would happen in print and this is by and large, what happened in Europe as well. There would be in the vernacular press, there would be the Latin or Greek texts which would be printed in translation and it was the first things that got printed.

It is only then when the print culture takes over that people start writing, authors start writing for the press, for printing. So that is when the original works that comes, that is which really takes place at around 1840s and 1850s. That is exactly when the Europeans start, they are feeling the needed for tracking this indigenous industry.

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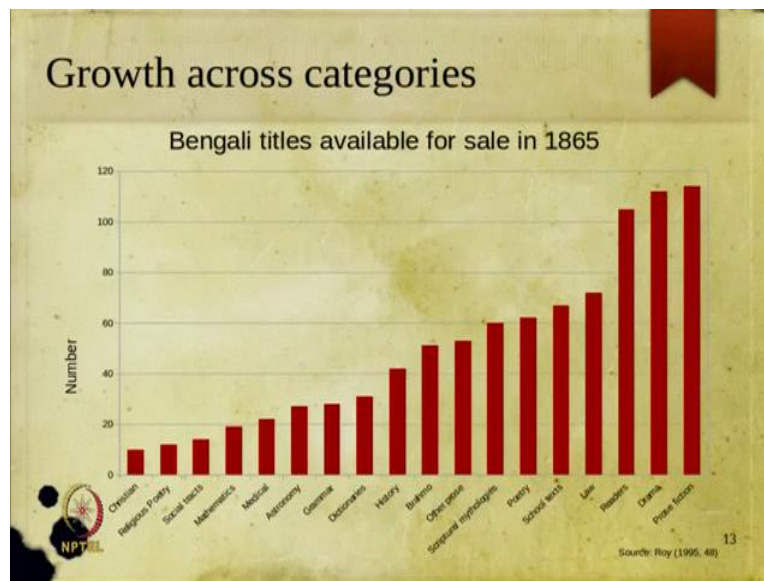


If we look at, you know, one example of a particular press, the Sudhasindhu press and its production in 1857 we find the total number of print runs. We find the vast number is there in dark blue slide which is the epic extracts were stories from epics which was extremely popular. Closely followed by Pauranic literature and then in yellow the Almanacs. The Almanacs play a very important role in astrological calculation of events and various life cycles, ceremonies and other kinds of things were determined by the Almanacs. So the Almanacs played a very important role.

So, those three blocks, really form part of the religious texts which are getting printed in vast majority. In green, you have the Mussalmani-Bangla texts which are also religious in origin, but religious with respect to the Muslims. So that occupies the far lesser horizon. But an important horizon, if you put all the four together, then the total number of religious texts with greater religious basis is overwhelmingly large and then you had that brown chunk which is 4000 volumes of the indigenous medicine, books on indigenous medicine which are produced.

So that gives you a picture of the kind of books that people were printing and people were reading in Bengal in Calcutta at that point of time and these books were not only restricted in to Calcutta, they were of course transported across eastern India, wherever people could read in Bangla.

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Now, if we look at Bengali titles which were available in sale in 1865. We find that by 1865, the previous slides that we looked at were still the 1850s, by 1865, you have overwhelming number of books, the largest number of book additions are that of prose fictions. So, now original work in Bangla are being produced and they are being read by a large number of people, literacy has also picked up, by now the schools have been working.

And right on the left-hand the smallest bar is that of Christian literature. So, certainly missionary activity is the only one that it is driving Christian literature which is very small and somewhere down the middle you find the scriptures and mythologies if I can point out, and beyond that some of the larger ones is poetry, school texts play a very important role and law plays a very important, legal leese becomes very important.

But the three big columns at the end are that of readers, people are reading, literacy has grown and there is drama and there is prose fiction. So, these so literature becomes very important material for print.

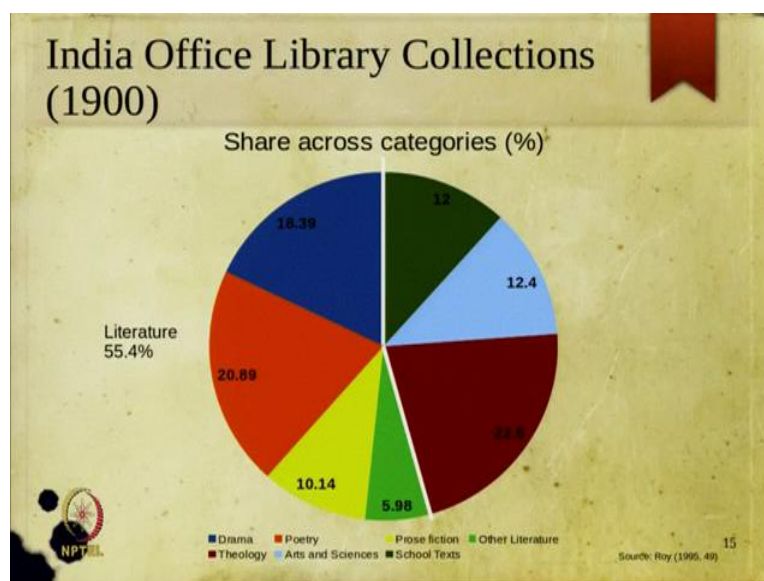
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And this is corroborated also further if you look at some more data 1880s, if you find the total number of translated works, works in translation is just 172 in that year whereas original Bengali titles is 979, which is far greater. But if you look at the picture in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 50 years ago, most of the literature would either be those which are produced from scriptural sources, from manuscript sources or translated from English into Bangla.

But by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century really the number of original Bengali titles which are being produced from Calcutta, the various Calcutta presses is far higher. So that is how coming of print really takes shape at around that point of time.

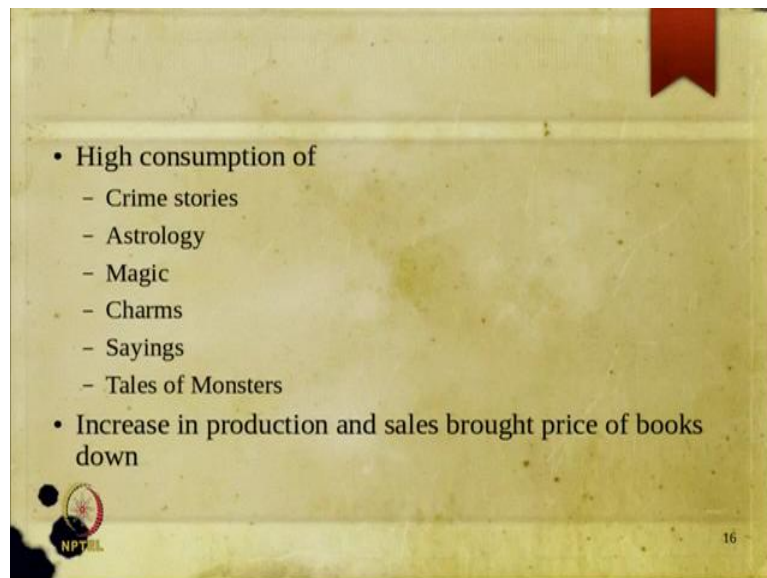
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Now, if you look at the collections of the India Office Library in the year 1900 and this would have details of books over several decades before 1900. So, nearly later part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, if we look at percentage wise, the collection, largely 55 percent of it is that of literature and within the category of subdivision, within the category of literature, we find drama is 18.39 percent, poetry is 20.89 percent, prose fiction 10.14 and any other forms of literature about 5 percent.

So altogether literature really is that which is getting printed a whole lot. What were some of the other categories? Theology, there's religious books which were books on religion 22 percent, arts and science is about 12 percent and school texts about 12 percent. That is those that are produced either by the school book society or which is the government agency or by various indigenous printers and publishers for alternative education. So that gives us a sense of what kind of literature which was available.

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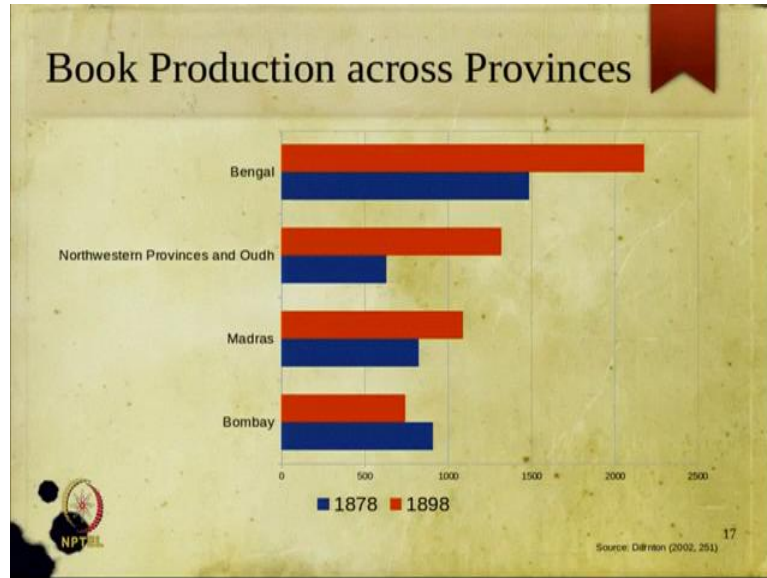
If we look at within the literature, what were some of the important things that were being read by people, crime stories, astrology, magic, charms, sayings, tales of monsters and the increase in production and sales actually brought the price of books down. So cheaper books people were reading is become, literacy was growing and it sort of leads to the increasing size of the book market and the readership.

And when so many ideas are getting circulated the government really needs to have a look and see what exactly is happening in that space, whether there is any danger to the



government or not, and that is something that takes place through the surveys in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

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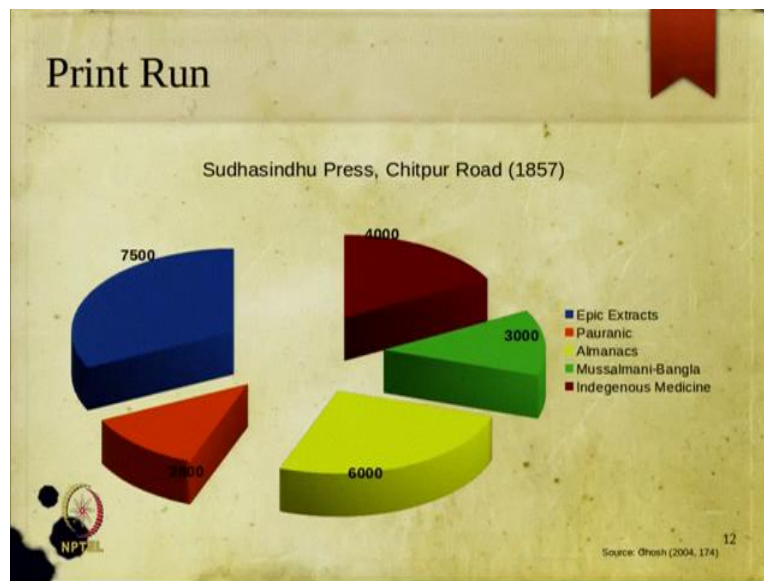


For a moment to understand what was happening in Bengal. We let us look at how book production was getting shaped across provinces and we have plotted two particular years 1878 in blue and 1898 in red. So you have Bengal, you have the north-western provinces and Awadh. Awadh which is by and large, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, you know, that is the area.

You have Madras, which is southern part of India which would of course include the modern day Karnataka, Kerala and you know parts of Kerala and southern parts of Andhra Pradesh. Leaving aside Hyderabad, which was a princely state and you had Bombay. The Bombay is by and large, Gujarat and Maharashtra and certain western parts of Madhya Pradesh. So you can look up in the geographies of the British provinces.

But if we look at the figures we find that Bengal far outstrips any of the other provinces and the second important one is that of Awadh and the north-western provinces and that area really other than the Bombay province, every other area really records a growth in publications.

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### Almanac

Circulation of Alamancs in 1867-68

- 22 editions
- More than 1,70,000 copies

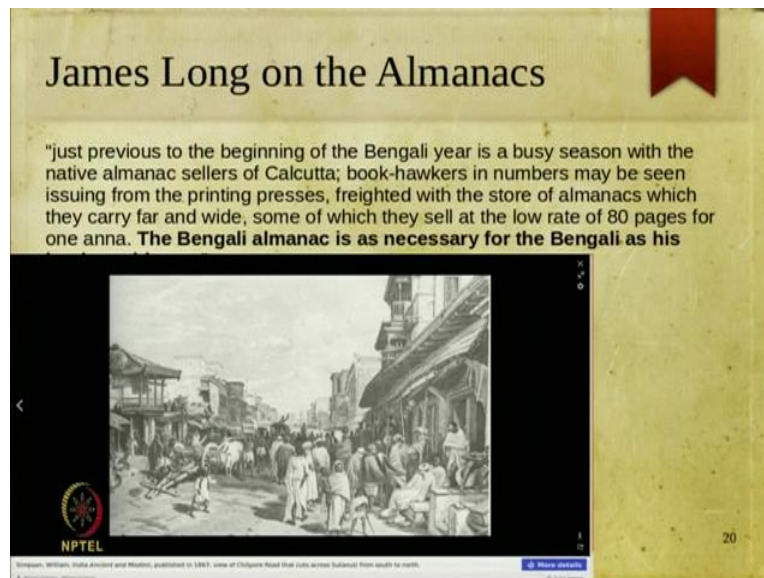
Now we did note that the Almanac was a very important sort of publication. We saw in that slide that the almanac, the one in yellow actually occupies the second largest number of volumes that were published in terms of the number of printed books that were circulated. So we need to, let us take a closer look at the almanac itself, so these.

So in 1867 or in Bangla the almanac would be called the Panzica or it is basically a record of various astrological calculations on the basis of which various ceremonies, life-cycle marriages, the first rise ceremonies and other kind of things or even buying house or various business decisions would be taken on the basis of these astrological calculations. Earlier, of course, people would certainly require a Pandit to be able to say exactly what particular day or time one should perform these ceremonies.

But now with the printed volume this becomes a household knowledge and every household would like to have an Almanac within their collection and every year a new Almanac would get printed when the New Year starts. So in 1867-68, just to give an idea, there were 22 editions of this Panzica, which were published by various private publishers. They would differ in their readings and slightly or their presentations, edition and information.

22 different editions and more than 1,70,000 copies were printed, right from Calcutta and of course they circulated into the entire Bengal province if not even outside the Bengal province also. So, and such was the extent of the growth of the Almanac that the missionaries sort of were felt that they needed to intervene and they tried to counter the track Society of India. They tried to in association with some of the missionaries, they tried to counter the influence of the native almanacs by issuing a Christian almanac. But it did not sell well, nobody there were not too many takers.

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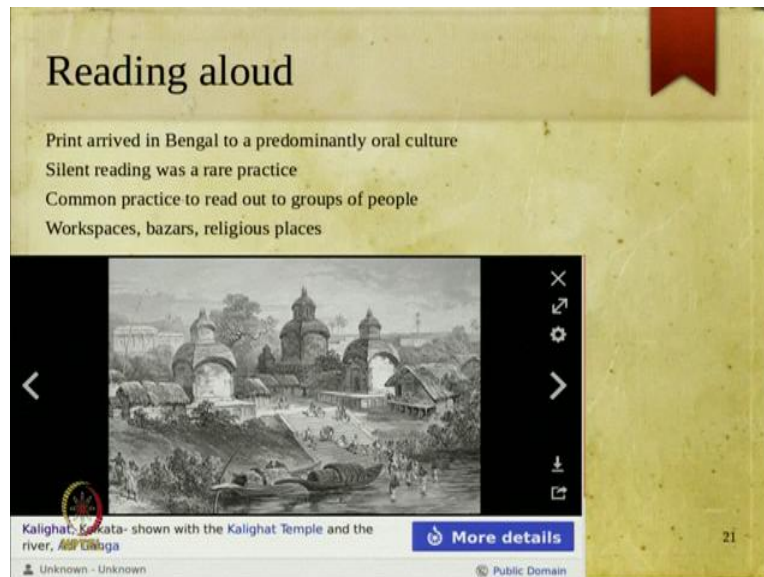


So, Reverend James Long a very important figure of the times, you know who was also important in surveying or making note of the various kinds of texts that were in circulation. He noted that on the Almanacs that just previous to the beginning of the Bengali year is a busy season with native Almanac sellers of Calcutta; book-hawkers in numbers may be seen issuing from the printing presses, freighted with the store of almanacs which they carry far and wide of which they sell at a low rate of 80 pages for one anna.

The Bengali almanac is as necessary for the Bengalis as his pan or his hookah. So that is important, so therefore it becomes almost a household commodity and this image that you see

is an image of the Chitpur road, place where a large number of these presses were situated, were established and played a very important role in the shaping of the Bengali public sphere in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

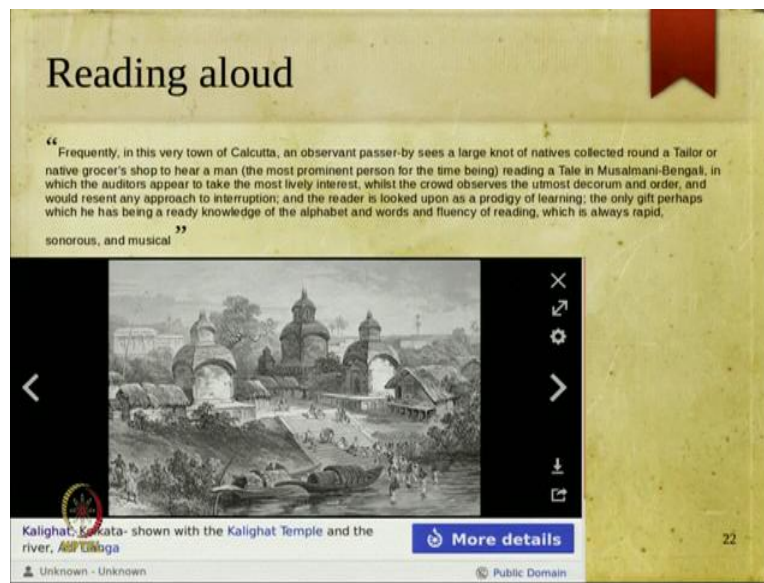
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The other, some other interesting points about how print circulation took place. Now these circulation figures may give us a sense of the total number of books that were printed and distributed. But they did not actually give us the entire catchment of how many people were influenced by this book because though print arrived in Bengal to a predominantly oral culture and silent reading was a rare practice and the people did not begin by reading silently.

The typical practice would be that some literate person would be reading out from a manuscript to large groups of people, which could be work spaces or bazaars or religious places, you know mandirs and other places, you know what they call the Chunditala. And, so, and that tradition continued into modern-day India in the form of people reading out newspapers or people gathering around the radio, and so a large number of people would be listening to these stories, you know.

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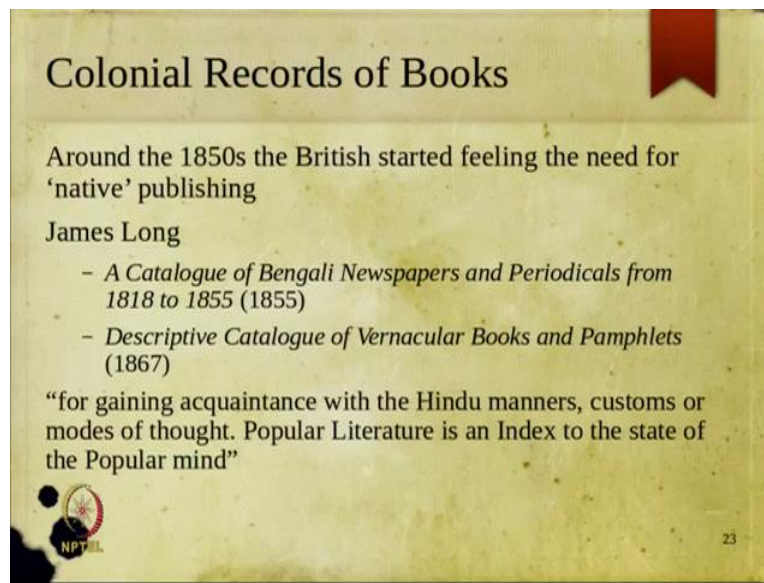


In fact, some once again, if you look at some observers which say frequently, in this very town of Calcutta, an observant passer-by sees a large knot of natives collected round a Tailor or a native grocers shop to hear a man reading a tale in Mussalmani-Bengali. In which the auditors appear to take the most lively interest, whereas the crowd observes the utmost decorum and order, and would resent any approach to interruption; and the reader is looked upon as a prodigy of learning; the only gift perhaps which he has being a ready knowledge of the alphabet and the words and fluency of reading, which is always rapid, sonorous and musical.

So it is read it in a singsong fashion and that is the kind of scape that you would have people would be partaking of the content of the books, a far larger group than the actual number of readers, so one particular world. So this kind of a shared reading, so you did not have libraries that kind of a library culture which develops in Europe. But you have this kind of a culture of reading aloud, reading in groups which actually amplifies the effect of these printed volumes of the books that were being produced in Bengal at that point of time.



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Now, I was talking about the colonial need for recording of the books because it was by about the 1950s, you know there was this uneasy feeling, even before the mutiny actually takes place of the possibility of a large exercise that was happening, within the Bengali printing industry and possibility of unrest. Very interestingly other than the cantonment areas Bengal was by and large a non-participant.


The Bengalis were largely a non-participants, you may have heard the story of Mangal Pandey and his contingent. But other than that you did not have too much of effect of the mutiny among the Bengalis. Yet the British felt that, the Europeans felt that there is a greater need to maintain records for these publications. So, Reverent James Long played the pioneering role of putting together several reports or catalogue s or descriptive catalogue of vernacular books and pamphlets.

From the period of 1818 down to 1867 we saw those graphs were produced from his records earlier. And he produced these records and submitted to the colonial government. Ostensibly the purpose of this particular exercise was for gaining acquaintance with Hindu manners and customs or modes of thought. Because popular literature is an index to the state of the popular mind and if you've got to rule the people, you need to know what they're thinking and the way to understand that is by maintaining a record of what people are reading and therefore maintaining a record of what is getting published and in what number, by whom, by which press and other kinds of things.

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## Colonial Records of Books

1856: Secretaries of the government directed that “one copy of each work of every description in original Bengali, published by the Native Presses of Calcutta” should be sent to the India House Library in London.



The western park end of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's building in 1866. It was then occupied by the ...

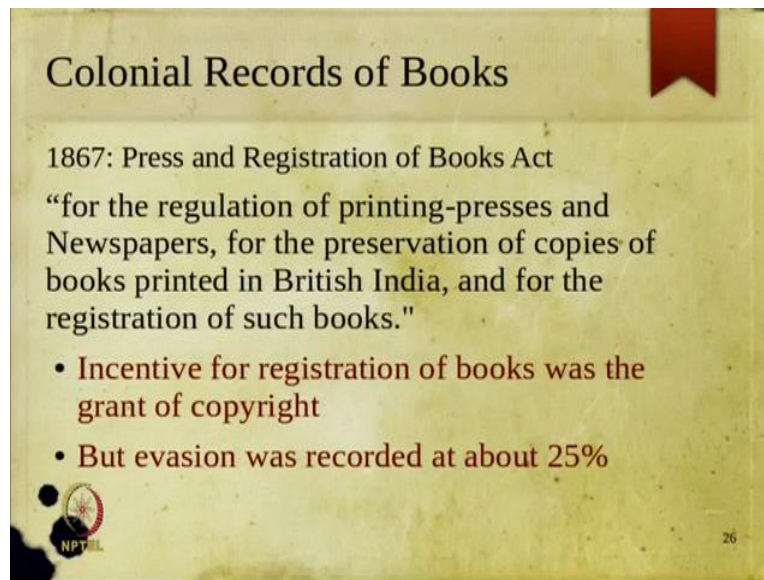
Illustrated London News - [https://www.lin.org.uk/lin\\_years](https://www.lin.org.uk/lin_years) Public Domain

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So in 1856: the secretaries of the government directed that one copy of each work of every description in original Bengali, published by the native presses of Calcutta should be sent to the India House Library in London for ready reference. Mind you with the various laws which governed, and policies which governed India now will get shaped henceforth through the British Parliament because by 1857, after the mutiny the East India companies farmaan is abolished and the Crown takes over. The administration of the Indian subcontinent of the Empire in India.

And so therefore for ready reference is these books had to be submitted to the India Office Library and therefore the India Office Library now, which is a section within the British library becomes this very, very important source for historians, and other academicians to go to. If they want to study the colonial period in any sort of way.

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So that which was an important source of administrative control becomes a very important archival resource for academicians today. And in 1867, they formerly passed the Press and Registration of Books Act and the Act declares as its purpose for the regulation of printing presses and newspapers, for the preservation of copies of books printed in British India, and for the registration of such books.

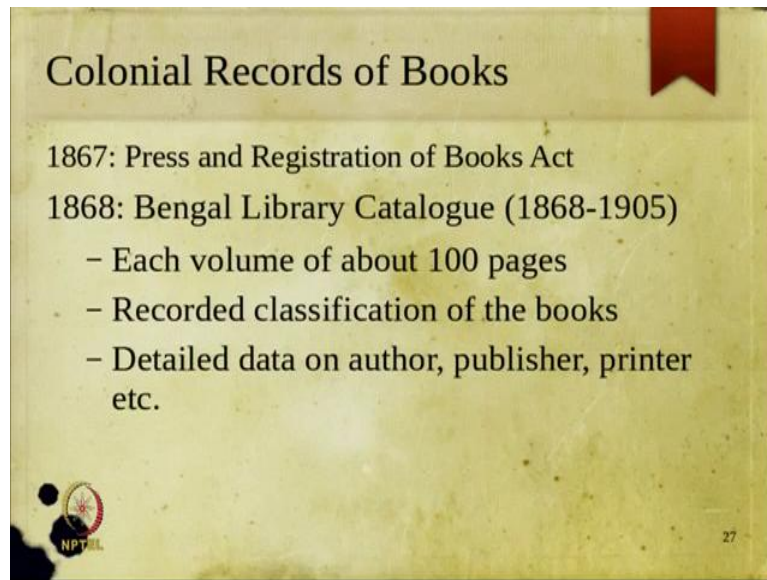
Now, so printers were required to actually come and register the books and submit a copy. So, the incentive that was given was that then it will be granted copyright. Now what we see very interestingly here is again the coming together of administrative need for control or surveillance and the market incentive of copyright.

We have seen that in the European domain, when we and what we see is also in the form of within the Indian context, within the Bengali context also that the registration of books is an important tool for the European government, for the British government to actually take note of what kind of tool to oversee, what kind of literature is getting produced and read and circulated among the Indians.

But in order to incentivise that reporting they grant that economic incentive of granting copyright to that particular printer. But it was also felt that there was about invasion rate of about 25 percent, 25 percent of the publishers did not bother to register and therefore they did not really want any legal protection of the copyright also for various reasons, either they were ignorant of the law or they were printing books which were not, which were politically dangerous and also, it could also be that they themselves were pirating and therefore they

would not submit the copies or they had other mechanisms of mitigating the threat of violation of copyright. Copyright really comes into being at that point of time within this country.

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Following this, you had the Bengal library Catalogue, till about 1905 the commission catalogue, which was to produce from these books which were submitted to the registrar and each volume had about a 100 pages and there was a recorded classification. So that there will be these tables which would have various columns, under which there will be detailed data of, the author of the book, the publisher, the printer, how many pages there were and also about the overall theme of the book and various other kinds of details which was, what kind of paper would have been used, what kind of print run there is.

So all these various detailed data would have to be, would be catalogue d and this catalogue s would be printed and so each volume of that catalogue had about a 100 pages, and was published for about 40 years for the colonial records.




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## Colonial Records of Books

1867: Press and Registration of Books Act  
1868: Bengal Library Catalogue (1868-1905)  
1871: Column 16 for “Remarks” added

- Notes on quality
- Instances of admiration
- Watching out for **signs of danger** or **discontent** among the ‘natives’



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In 1871 a column was added to that particular catalogue, which was for remarks, which could note quality, they could also admire good publications and certainly watching out for signs of danger, it's kind of an abstract which would be published. Which means someone, some officers who is instructed to read and in most cases it would be a British officer who would be reading and who would be trained in the vernacular and would be noting it and noting and remarking as to what kind of literature is being produced. So it is for an overview for the administrator to figure out what kind of ideas are being circulated within the Indian population at large.

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## Signs of discontent in Bangla literature

The reports indicated proto-nationalism

- Songs denouncing foreign exploitation
- Lamenting lost glory of ancient times
- Satires on the British



The fatal blow

[More details](#)

Unknown





So these remarks, these catalogues, these surveys, these various ways to track the book publication, tried to record the signs of discontent in Bangla literature and the reports did indicate proto-nationalism, songs, which denounced foreign exploitation, or they would be lamenting lost glory of ancient times, or there could be satires on the British or there could be satires on the elite Bengali classes and who have been, who are in close contact with the British.

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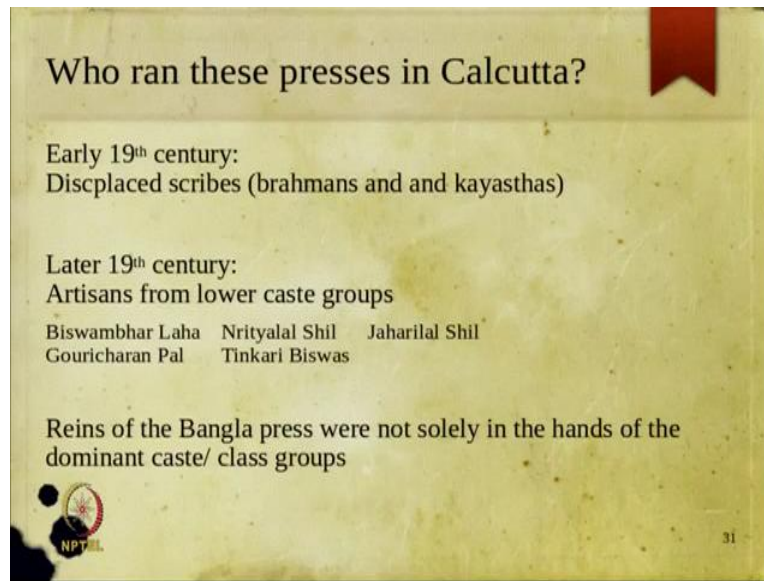


But there was no action which was taken. Nationalism was treated as a theme among many other themes, religious and satirical and other kinds of themes which could be there. But it was not really until the movement against the partition of Bengal, when really the irrational movement starts outpouring, the nationalist sentiment starts outpouring and really the growth of what is of terrorism within Bengal in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the British censored, initiated censorship of the print.

So, it was, till then it was just noted as one of the themes. They were watching it closely, but never felt threatened enough and till that point of time, the colonial government it was the heyday of the Empire really, you know this idea that the sun never sets on the British Empire that the heyday of the Empire, it was felt that this is a permanent system. Nobody thought in another 50 years this Empire would be done and dusted and gone.

So, and Indians did not have that scene, and it is not till the 1930s that the Congress is going to give a call for complete independence. That kind of worldview was not really there. The Congress was just about being formed by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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So now let us look at the people who were looking after these presses, who were the ones who were running these presses in Calcutta? In the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century these were the displaced scribes, because they were the ones who were making, who were helping the formation of the first printed texts through the printing of the Scriptures and various mythological stories from the manuscripts.

So, a lot of displaced scribes looking for better opportunities move to Calcutta, get urbanized primarily belonging to the upper caste Brahmans and Kayasthas. By the later 19<sup>th</sup>-century, you had these presses being run primarily by artisans from lower caste and this sort of corresponds to the graphs that we saw earlier of the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, really the number of scriptures and mythologies being higher. Whereas later on, it is other kinds of stories and fantasies that may start getting told a lot more, getting printed a lot more.

So the later 19<sup>th</sup> century had lower caste groups like, you know some of the names which are there, Laha, Nriyalal Shil and Gouricharan Pal and Tinkari Biswas. So these were the important printers, who came about in the later 19<sup>th</sup>-century. So therefore, the argument is that the reins of the Bengali press, the control over the Bengali press, the people who ran these presses, who decided what gets printed, what gets circulated, was not nearly in the hands of the dominant caste, class groups.

Important input that we need to understand that is that when we talk about colonialism, we do talk about the fact that there were different classes that colonialism produced, that those who got educated through the western educational institutions, educational colleges and

universities and schools, primarily there was, they became the elite within the Bengali groups and these were the more elite caste groups primarily who first took to this kind of education, the western education and they formed what is typically termed as the Bhadrakalok which is a term which is used, the genteel population.

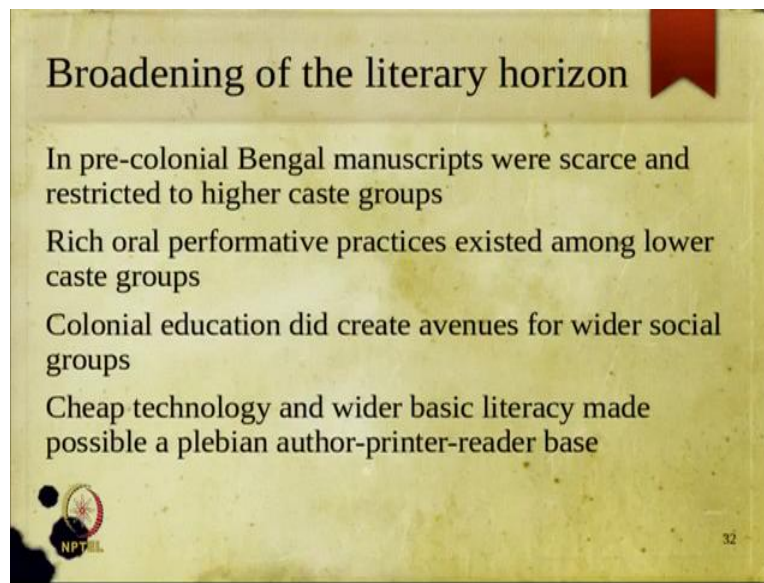
Whereas the rest of the population is those from the lower caste groups and others, it's not that all people from the higher caste groups were part of the Bhadrakalok population. But within the margins of the Bhadrakalok population they would be there. So that would be the larger composition of Calcutta and Bengal at that point of time.

And it would be assumed that it is the Bhadrakalok because they are educated within western education system. They are more sympathetic to the colonizer and they are more dependent on the colonizer. So they share a kind of contradiction and compromising relationship with the colonizer. But the Bhadrakalok also tries to this elite tries to disassociate themselves from the other classes and sort of prove to the British-er their worth and look for better, more favors from the British. That kind of relationship is there.

But what we see from the analysis of printing in Calcutta we find that it is not nearly the Bhadrakalok which actually, though being the elite they did not have control of the printing press. There were different kinds of presses, something that we will come to. So the literally horizon was broadened. So what we find is that if in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century it was the upper caste groups which were producing.

So this literate upper caste groups which were producing the first text of printing and those were from the manuscripts, it is in the later half of the century that the oral literatures, the oral sort of narratives start getting into print, which sort of skipped the manuscript you would find fewer number of manuscripts in this particular. So this will be the non literate groups of people, non literate population who would nevertheless have a literature. But that literature would exist within oral and performative forms.

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**Broadening of the literary horizon**

- In pre-colonial Bengal manuscripts were scarce and restricted to higher caste groups
- Rich oral performative practices existed among lower caste groups
- Colonial education did create avenues for wider social groups
- Cheap technology and wider basic literacy made possible a plebian author-printer-reader base

NPTL 32

And print sort of broadens that horizon. So in print you have the manuscript, the scriptural literature as well as the non-scriptural literature working together. So in precolonial Bengal you had manuscripts which were scarce and restricted to high caste groups. But what happens is with the coming of print now there is some kind of democratization that the relationship is not with the control over the manuscript, which is controlled according to a location, whether the mandir or certain mutth or religious family, a family of priests or something.

It is available in the market, if you can pay for it, you can have it. So we saw that with the almanacs. Whereas earlier, it would be in the hands of the Pandit to determine exactly where, when a particular ceremony would take place. But once you purchase the Almanac you can independently also decide as to where, when a particular ceremony would take place. Of course, most people would still take the advice of a Pandit but that there is a broadening of that horizon.

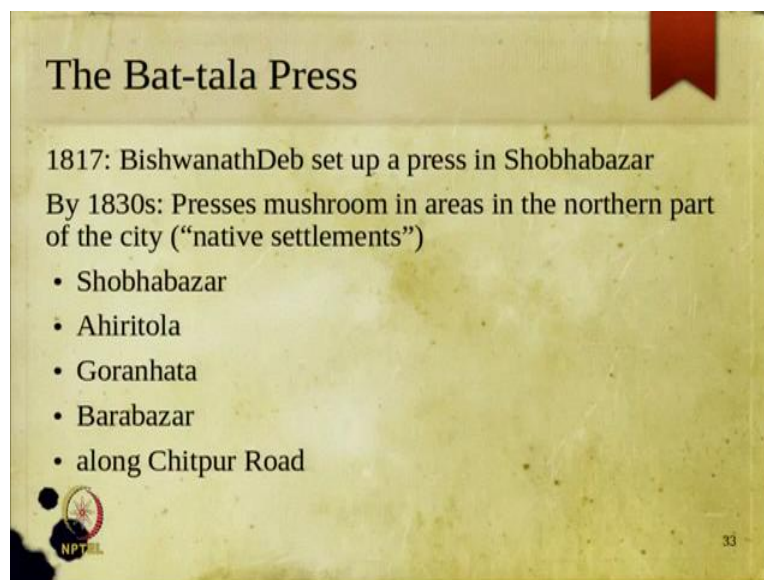
So, this rich overall performative practices which existed among the lower caste groups would start entering into the printing domain as well and therefore there is a mixing of availability of the kind of books which are there in the market. Of course, this market could also be segregated that certain kind of printers would print only certain kind of books.

But for the customer, the customer can move from various shops and collect their books and colonial education also created avenues for wider social groups, it added literacy, earlier literacy would be restricted to certain castes alone. But what colonial education did was it

created far wider avenues for across castes and most importantly cheaper technology, you know, made this, since and wider basic literacy made this plebeian author-printer-reader base possible, you know more ordinary books were far cheaper.

And they could be more expensive books, but people in the bazaars they would go around purchasing the cheapest book, cheapest edition of a particular book and that sort of increased that literally horizon, people who read or people who had enjoyed already seen that, you know it is not only people who literacy but once somebody within a particular group is literate enough to be able to read it out to everybody else. Then everybody else is also partaking of that literature. So there is a broadening of the horizon.

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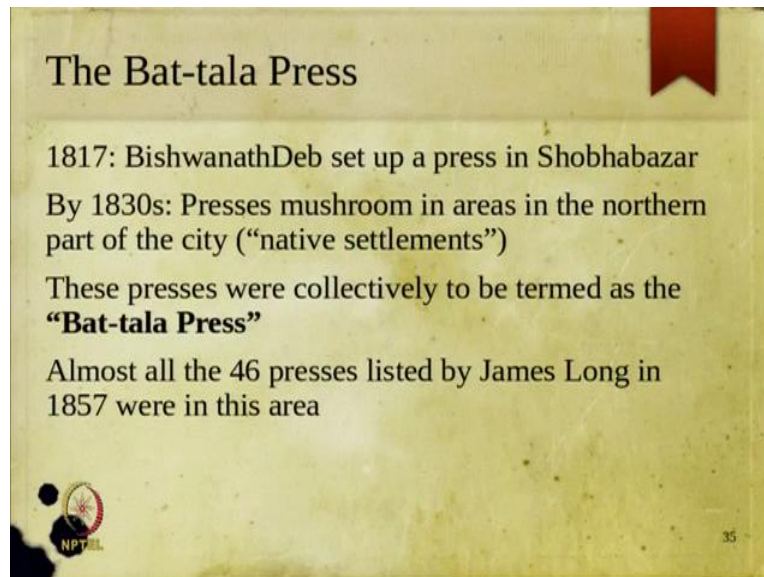
And this at the centre of this broadened horizon is the proverbial Bat-tala press. Now, Bat-tala is a particular area in Calcutta in the north of Calcutta, so around Chitpur road. So in 1817, someone called Biswanath Deb, who set a press in Shobhabazar and before that there were no presses in this area, the presses were towards the southern part of the city, not the southern part of present day Calcutta. Most of the southern present-day of Calcutta did not exist in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

So southernmost would really be the European locations of Fort William and Park Street and Esplanade and those kind of areas. But the southernmost extent of the native population would be more towards what is present day College street and Jorasanko and those kind of areas, but the northern part, so that is, towards Chitpur road and Ahiritola and Baugh bazar, Bada bazar. These were the areas where these presses were getting setup and this



mushrooming of these presses really happened at around 1930s, around the northern extent of the native settlements. And these presses are collectively called the Bat-tala press. There is no one press, but there are huge number of presses.

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The Bat-tala Press

1817: Bishwanath Deb set up a press in Shobhabazar

By 1830s: Presses mushroom in areas in the northern part of the city (“native settlements”)

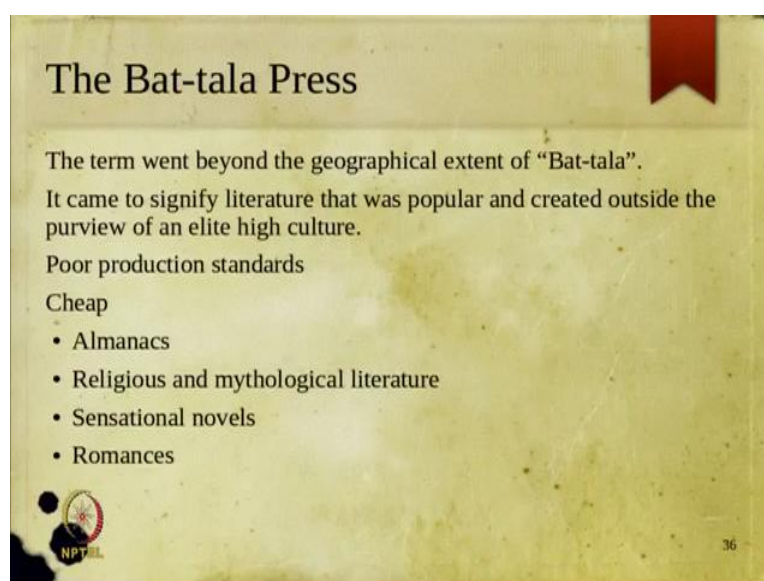
These presses were collectively to be termed as the **“Bat-tala Press”**

Almost all the 46 presses listed by James Long in 1857 were in this area

NPTL 35

So by, you know and by 1846, James Long says there were 46 presses in that area, which is a very, very sizeable number for not a very large area, if you will take the length, across the breadth of that area would be about 5 to 6 km that is all. And within that concentration of an area, there would be so many presses which would be present.

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The Bat-tala Press

The term went beyond the geographical extent of “Bat-tala”.

It came to signify literature that was popular and created outside the purview of an elite high culture.

Poor production standards

Cheap

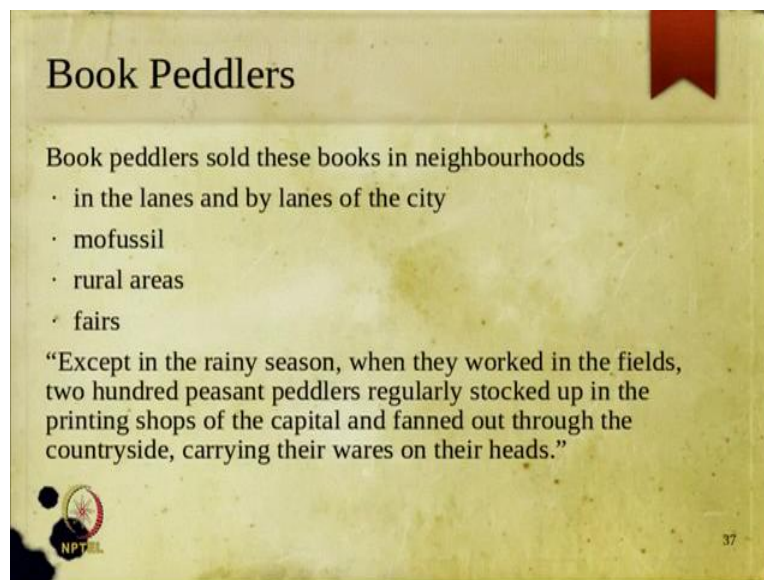
- Almanacs
- Religious and mythological literature
- Sensational novels
- Romances

NPTL 36

And the term really went beyond the geographical extent of bat-tala. It came to signify a literature that was popular and created outside the purview of elite in high culture. So, and they followed, they wanted to produce cheap books cheap Almanacs, religious and mythological literatures, sensational novels and romances, you know, those are the kind of stories which were percolating in from, also from the oral narrative traditions.

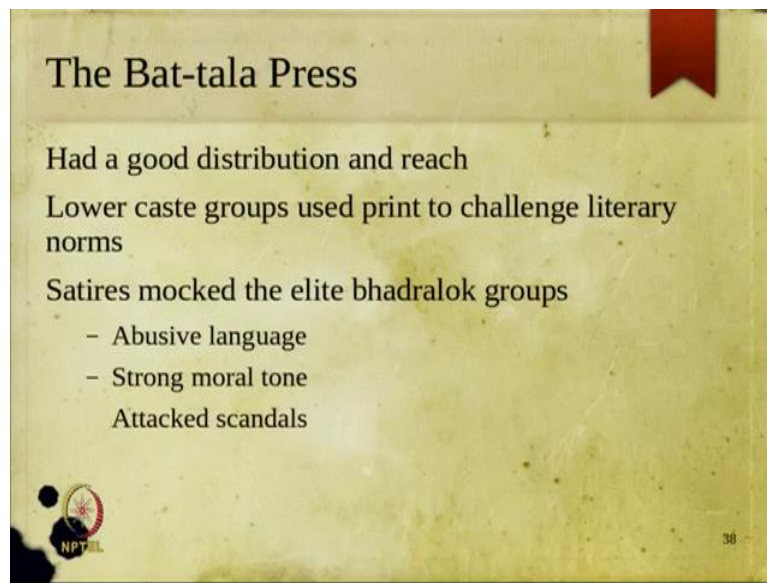
And so in order to maintain a high circulation, they did not pay attention to very high production standards, produced cheap paper, poor ink and the typefaces would be old, maybe second-hand but it led to this growth of a huge number of books which were available.

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And this growth was amplified by the presence of the book peddlers, people would carry these books on their heads or on their backs and move through the lanes and bylanes of the city in the mofussil towns, in the rural areas, in melas and fairs hawking themselves, you know so one observer writes here that in, you know, except in the rainy season, when they worked in the fields, two hundred peasant peddlers regularly stocked up in the printing shops of the capital and fanned out through the countryside, carrying their wares on their heads.

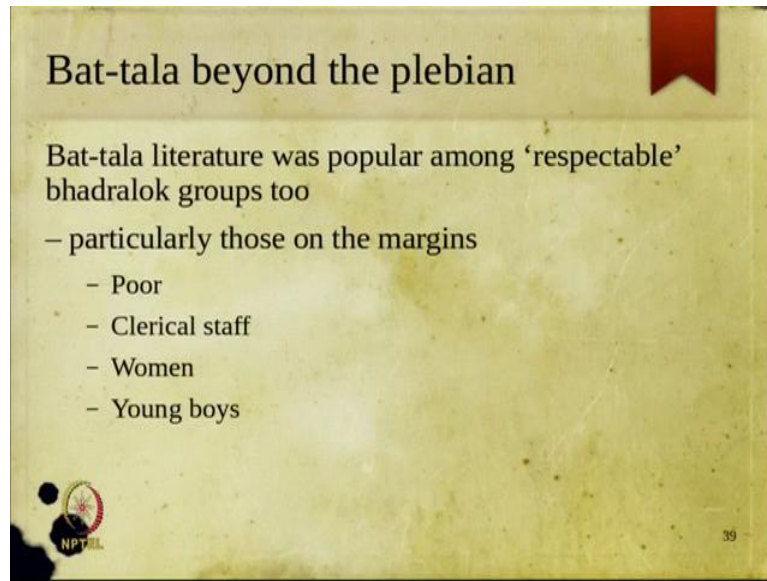
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And this made sure that the bat-tala press had a very good distribution and reach. This is like home delivery, people could buy it from their homes and this meant a great deal because these books were now available to even women, who could buy these books from their homes and therefore the bat-tala press had that effect on women and therefore the Bhadrlok was very worried about it. These, because you know they were worried about what the woman in the family are going to read. What little children are going to read?

So because these books were challenging the literary norms, the kind of norms that the elite Bhadrlok groups were following and sometimes these satires would mock at the Bhadrlok groups because they were the elite, they were the power group within Calcutta and there would be abusive languages would be used against the Bhadrloks, strong moral tone would be used and there would be scandals, and other such stories which would be attacked.

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**Bat-tala beyond the plebian**

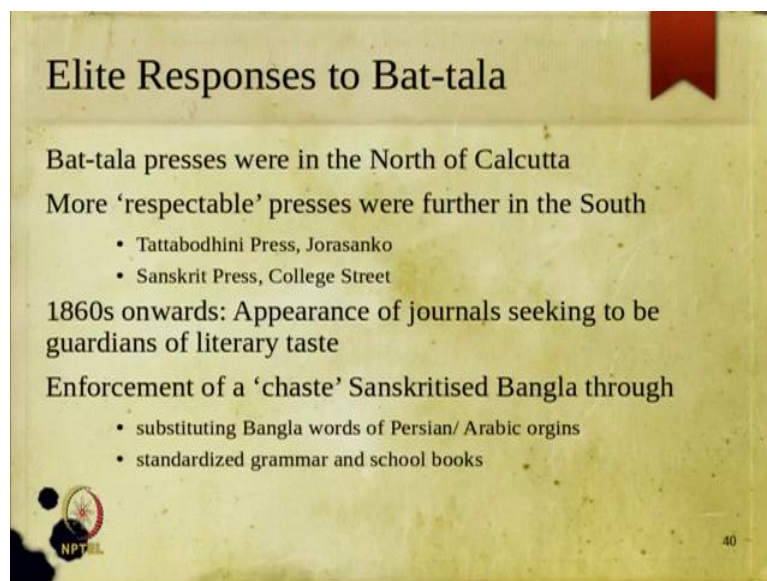
Bat-tala literature was popular among 'respectable' bhadralok groups too

- particularly those on the margins
  - Poor
  - Clerical staff
  - Women
  - Young boys

NPTL 39

And however, and as I was saying that this is not merely being read only by the lower caste groups. The readership actually extended across to the so-called respectable bhadralok groups also. Particularly those on the margins of the bhadralok groups, people who were poor or the clerical staff, women I mentioned and young boys, school boys. They would go around with their pocket money and buy these cheap literature and read them. So people were very, very worried.

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**Elite Responses to Bat-tala**

Bat-tala presses were in the North of Calcutta

More 'respectable' presses were further in the South

- Tattabodhini Press, Jorasanko
- Sanskrit Press, College Street

1860s onwards: Appearance of journals seeking to be guardians of literary taste

Enforcement of a 'chaste' Sanskritised Bangla through

- substituting Bangla words of Persian/ Arabic origins
- standardized grammar and school books

NPTL 40

I mean the elite were very worried. They were responding to it. They, you know, and they tried to enforce some kind of a discipline. But before we talk about that let us talk about the



more respectable presses which were further. It was the southern part of bat-tala, the south of the bat-tala there's the Tattabodhini press in Jorasanko, Sanskrit press in College street. These were the more respectable presses.

And 1816 onwards they started publishing journals to be guardians of literary taste. So the bhadralok of the house would subscribe to these journals, so that their children, the women could read. So their journals for women and there were periodicals for children which were getting published, Shakha, sandesh and various other journals which were extremely popular also.

So they worked as kind of enforcing a certain kind of literary taste and they worked on the language, they tried to create a chaste Sanskritised Bangla, because with the spoken language was a mix of various kinds of things. There were two kinds of, so they tried to substitute the Bangla words which were from Persian or Arabic origin and they tried to standardize the grammar of the school books. So they tried to sanitize the language a lot, move some of the colloquial every day abuses that could be there within the language.

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**Forms of 'high' literature in Bangla**

Written in Sanskritised Bangla

- Distinct from
  - **Musalmani-Bangla**: included words of Persian/ Arabic origin
  - **Everyday spoken language**: included rustic expressions and sexuality

Imitating European literary forms

- As opposed to indigenous forms often of oral tradition

Reports of the colonial government displayed a preference for **Sanskritised Bangla** (treated as a mark of 'civilization') over **Musalmani-Bangla** (referred to as "low" and "vulgar")

NPTIL 41

And so these forms of high literature, which was as opposed to the low literature, which was that of, that was from bat-tala was written in Sanskritised Bangla which was distinct from other kinds of Bangla which could be there. That is the Mussalmani-Bangla which included words from Persian and Arabic. Remember, before the coming of the British, Bengal Sultanate, you know, the Murshidabad was the capital of Bengal at that point of time.



Siraj Dola, who lost the war in the Battle of Plassey and that is when the British become the lords of Bengal, the rulers of Bengal. So, the rulers of Bengal in the precolonial era primarily were the Muslims, Islamic rulers and certainly a large majority of the population of Bengal, certainly the eastern part of Bengal because Bengal extended all the way to present-day Bihar so largely the present population, which was a Muslim population,

If you look at, study the stratification of Bengali society you would find that though the rulers and the administrators were all Muslims, Islamic rulers, the peasant population were also largely Muslim peasant. The huge majority of the peasantry of Bengal were Muslims but you had the landlords class which was predominantly Hindu.

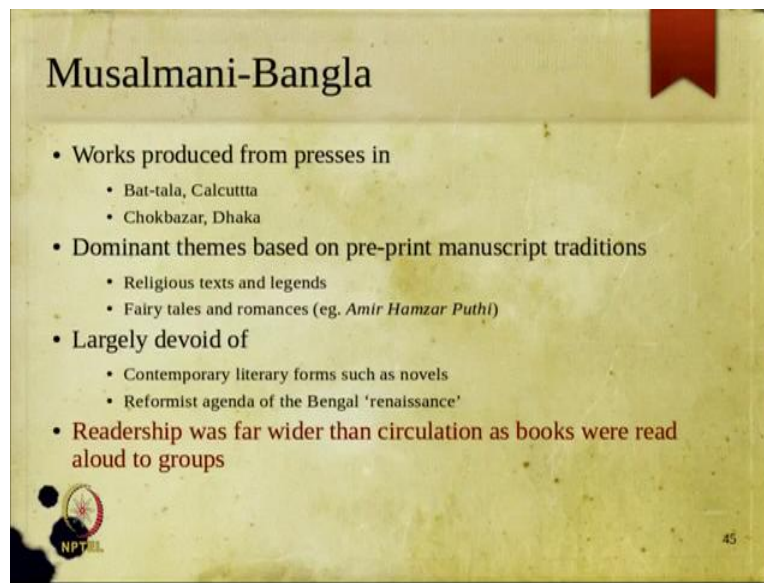
I am not saying that there were no Hindu peasantry. I am just talking in terms of larger demography, that was the kind of shape that was there. So therefore in everyday conversation there is a lot of words which were, because of this kind of milieu every day conversation before the coming of print there was a lot of intermixing of words, which will be there and Bengali itself, which emerges from Pali and Prakrit base.

Then interacts with Persian and, words of Persian and Arabic origin which were used for administration and that gives shape to a particular language which is today termed as Mussalmani-Bangla. But when Sanskritization happened, what would happen is that they would remove these words of Persian and Arabic origin and replace them with more Sanskritised sort of words.

The other was the difference between Shadu bhasha and Shulid bhasha. Shadu bhasha is the high language, the respectable language and Shulid bhasha is that which is used in the everyday in the bazaars. So there is this distinction of these two kinds of language. The other way of identifying high literature was that which was imitating European literary forms. There is drama or the novel, you know or the sonnet forms of writing poetry.

So, as opposed to the indigenous, forms are often oral traditions. So the reports of the colonial government also those surveys, there is a column 16 that we showed, treated you know Sanskritised Bangla as a mark of civilization and literatures which are written in Mussalmani-Bangla as are referred to as low and vulgar, you know.

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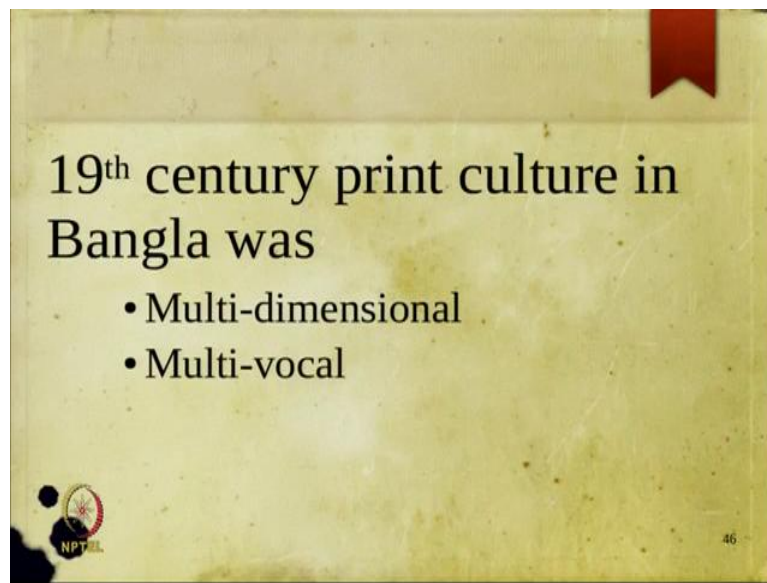


But works were certainly printed and produced in Mussalmani-Bangla. There were also Chokbazar in Dhaka in addition to bat-tala in Calcutta where these works were produced and the works that were produced contained, you know the dominant themes based on pre-print manuscript and oral narrative traditions, you had religious texts and legends and fairy tales and romances, you know, the stories of Amir Hamzar were very popular.

And these were largely by and large devoid of the contemporary sort of literary forms, the emerging literary forms and the novels or any sort of reformist agenda that was part of the Bengali renaissance. The Mussalmani-Bangla literature was by and large devoid of any form of reformist agenda.

The readership was, of course, far wider than the circulation of the books and were read aloud to loud groups, read aloud to larger groups. So, therefore if we are going to only take. Because mind you the most of the audience of these books were poor people, who may not be literate, but they could listen to these books get read. So once again, if we purely look at the number of Mussalmani-Bangla texts that were printed it will not give us a sense of how many people were actually partaking of these books.

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So all in all 19<sup>th</sup>-century print culture in Bangla was multi-dimensional, was multi-vocal, there were multiple players, there were multiple subjects, there was, it was a large public print culture, which was there. Which has been studied in detail by scholars it is a fascinating story. I would encourage you to read some of the essays that I have referred to in this lecture, and there are more reference readings which are readily available, please go out and read them. Thank you.