

# Printmaking – Language of Mass Media and Cultural Identity – An Overview in Indian Context

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**Abstract – We use language to express our emotions, attitudes, ideas, thoughts and opinions, to gain acceptance or approval, to complain, and to receive and convey information. It is a means to communicate along with an individual, society or the mass. An art form plays an important role to bridge the varied cultural gaps through the ages. Like other languages art communicates with the people or society using visual imagery or references, according to the feelings behavior and emotional experiences expressed in the form of art, which makes the viewer to react or respond using their own understanding and interpret accordingly. Observation, pre-assumptions, experiences, findings, research are the major factors of an art language. Printmaking is one of the artistic medium through which an artist can reach to the people by his or her creative expressions using various surfaces to create marks, lines, scratch and image on to it and could take multiple impressions by which the individuality, society or the culture could be defined and recognized along with the time, space and subject. This paper is to focus and understand the skills and strategies of the cross-cultural communication, which may help to realize the process of artistic creation and using the unique way to speak or voice out creatively through the medium of printmaking.**

**Keywords: Culture, Observation, Creativity, Visual Art, Printmaking, Communication, Print Media.**

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In the history of evolution from orality to literacy, it is quite exciting as an individual experience may it be as a child or an adult learning to read or write the alphabets or using it collectively making use of a print media. Origin of a language is a question of debate since the centuries, the reason behind it is there is no such consent on it due to unavailability of through evidences till now, and therefore the scholars relies on the inferences from the evidence such as the archaeological evidence, cave art, fossil records, diversities in the languages and the communication system among other animals and the human language. Generally art is meant to convey a message through it, so art is considered as a form of language. In the visuals, images and symbols are incorporated, which tells a story and express a certain idea to the onlooker. Just like any message, it can misinterpret, misrepresented, or it couldn't serve the purpose.

Art is one such language which needs interpreters and comprehenders. Fundamentally, the art is a form of expression for its creator and so it is open to varied interpretation and comprehension by a viewer, based on their understanding and knowledge. In this way it is a language, which helps express one's

views and help others to connect with it. This connection between both ends is the essence of any language and art, for me is a language that has infinite powers to project humanity to greater heights.

Change in the means of communication skills have been witnessed by the time as through the primitive communication system such as voice or body language, through language and letters, printing, and now the age of internet. Mankind has created and exchanged information's through various communication tools. The development and progress of this process have become the foundation of human culture; trade of printing is considered the one such revolutionary media that serves to record and transfer information. After the primitive communication phase, the human brain starved to express his own ideas on cave or rock, and then to produce various letters such as pictographs, hieroglyphics, inscriptions on bones and tortoise shell, became the narratives to record, that's how the human printing culture began.

A print is an art form to express one's own ideas, feelings and emotions through making image on any matrix - single original surface by making scratch, dot, drawing or creating any mark. The matrix is then used to take impression on paper or any other transferable materials as to use for multiplication. A print can be taken by hand or using a machine for different print mediums. Inventions have revolutionized the life of human kind, society and the world. Printing revolution is one of those major blessings to the world.

Printing started from the wood block and travelled through varied materials, i.e. metal, plastic, rubber, stone, cloth and many more. Countries from the East (Asia) have played a huge role in the field of communication, whether it is through the invention of paper or use of bhojpatra to write on it, printing through ceramic matrix of china or even currently the digital information technology has made its own name of the south Asian countries especially china, Korea and Japan, competing with the west.

Printmaking originated in China once paper was invented (about A.D. 105). Relief printing travelled and used as an art form in Europe in the 15th century, when the process of papermaking was imported from the East. Since the time, relief printing has got improved by various techniques and it took as a form of major fine arts.

The invention of printing press in the west by Johannes Gutenberg played significant role in printing books and spread of knowledge using printed materials, and created revolution in the development of western civilization.

Printmaking was one of the earliest mediums of communication, long before the printing press was invented? The oldest prints found were embossed relief images on terracotta fired clay tablets, from the Harappa civilization. From Prehistoric man to the Sumerians, who made the first prints on paper to the Chinese who stenciled intricate designs on fabrics for the wealthy back in 2nd century AD, this technique is pretty ancient. The Japanese refined woodblock printing and editions were authenticated and distributed in Europe. However, it was only after paper was invented that prints of visual images and written data were mass produced.

A print is an impression of an image on one surface transferred to another surface of paper or other materials, by transferring ink from a matrix. The common matrices are copper or zinc plates, polymer plates for an incised image known as intaglio printing or the lime stone for printing a lithograph. Relief printing involves printing from a raised surface or stenciling process such as serigraphy. A simple example of this is a rubber stamp pressed onto a stamp pad and pressed onto a piece of paper. Use of printing applies in a number of activities, things and places, as we can say we are living in the world of

printing some or other way, as such it is involved in all most all such activities we come across in the life, if we notice.

Printmaking came to India through Portuguese Missionaries in Goa in 1556, exactly after a hundred years of invention of the Gutenberg press, when they imported a press from Lisbon to propagate the spread of Christianity amongst the Indian people. Europeans and later Britishers have introduced various printmaking technology in India to run their offices, to introduce the English teaching systems, printing newspapers, magazines and so on, also many European and British artists, engravers and lithographers visited India during 17th and 18th century and produced art works, mainly scenes from various cities of India, life and culture of people in India, through the time Indian artisans and technicians were introduced to it and they obtain a chance to learn it and start working with these artistic multiplication techniques of printing. Amongst all Ramchand Roy is known to be the first Indian artist to create his own matrix and print image for the book called 'Anand Mangal' or (Onoodh Mongol), these earlier books and published materials in various forms for various purposes were real identity of Indian culture, people and heritage, by which we can identify the time, people and the life.

The artists perceive printmaking as to reproduce his or her work of art, to respond the social issues, or to react the circumstances and to convey the artistic thoughts and creative ideas in response, or to reach out the people more than a single person un like a painting or a drawing.

Around the world and in India artists have used the printmaking as a tool to reproduce their works in past and in the present time. Only thing is that printmaking techniques have changed as new technology introduced to the world, which is much faster as well as cheaper in the sense of reach ability to the human society. Gradually woodcut, intaglio, movable type printing, lithography, offset, serigraphy and currently the digital technology has advanced the earlier one. Through the time each medium has played important role to be used to connect the mass, whether it could be through the advertisement or education purpose, or labeling to the products, entertainment pictures, or could be made use of the popular culture identity imageries, each has created its own market.

The artists have incorporated a number of subjects to reproduce their ideas and thoughts in their work from religious to political, natural to artificial and imaginative. The extensive use of the techniques of various print medium surfaces such as metal, stone, wood, plastic or rubber have been understood and tried out its maximum output to out come from it. Though all these mediums are highly technical, laborious and time taking in comparison

to any other two dimensional art practice. Many such artists printmakers from the west are Piranesi, Albrecht Durer, Rembrandt Van Rijn, William Blake, Toulouse Lautrec, Joan Miro, William Cartridge and many more, who have practiced printmaking and made strong communication with the society as to voice out their self-expression as well they established the printmaking medium to give a stable and prominent reputation.

Some important time as the Bat-Tala printing activities flourished in Kolkata during the early 19th century till the end of the century, or the printmaking club began by the Tagore family, where artists have gathered to reproduce their work and made communication possible with the society. Till the time printmaking with various mediums have made an identity as a creative art form and places like Punjab, Maharashtra, Chennai, Lucknow and other places artists have started producing there art work and later in the end of the 19th century Raja Ravi Verma the noted Indian painter by establishing the Oleo graphic press in Ghatkopar, Mumbai in 1894, that created an identity as to communicate with society by reaching out to every house of Indian middle and elite class. All these printing and printmaking activities artists have their voices, through the images and visuals that speak of the particular time, self or the social condition, incidents and situation of an individual or the society.

The artistic language have often played an important role to capture, display and revolt against the anguish situations or by capturing the images related to war, famine and riots in the art works. Also contribution of artists during the Indian freedom movement is very important as using the tool of art to produce posters, or portraying Gandhi as the Indian freedom hero in one of the linoleum cut print by noted artist Nandalal Bose. When a particular artist practices he is identified by his art, that creates his own identity, and the expressed image or subject in the works are again identified by the social situation, condition or humanity and the power of that artistic expressions involved in it. The role of an artist is to know, search and study related to his or her interest and to bring on to surface and to circulate amongst the viewers or the art appreciators, they could be cherished or criticized.

## CONCLUSION

Seeing the printmaking as a tool of communication with the individual, group or the whole society, it gives the creators freedom to express their views, ideas and thoughts in different way, using visuals, images instead the words, which also allows the viewer to communicate using their identity as to see and understand through their inner eye and to be a part of the situation, social condition and witnessing the identity of the culture for the future generations to come. The medium of art or the printmaking is still not that wide spread amongst the common people in

the society due to its limitations to the people of interest or the appreciators, or the gallery people for selling purpose of it for a restricted class. I feel that this kind of creative art language should be more approachable to the people, the people also have to take interest in such things and I wish government also make efforts to develop such system right from the early school days that everyone should be able to responsive to such activities where one can be connected through artistic communication as a language in the urban civilized society.

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