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## Expansion And Development Of Relief Printing In Society

Lakhwinder Singh Research Scholar

Dr.Yatti Dutt Guide

Department of Ph.D (Fine Arts)

Desh Bhagat University,

Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

### Abstract

Printmaking has shaped culture in all parts of the world. Originally used as a form of communication, printmaking is now valued as an artistic medium with unique technical qualities. To create a print, the artist creates an image on a surface usually made of metal, stone, wood, or other material. If we describe the brief history and techniques of printmaking, then its roots can be traced back to prehistoric cave paintings and prints by humans, to the emergence of modern humans, who began to record their handprints on paper. **The block printing traditions of the Indus Valley Civilization represent the earliest foundations of printmaking, and their artistic and technological innovations continue to contribute to contemporary textile printing and visual culture.** In addition, the carved seals, repetitive patterns, and image transfer techniques of the Indus Valley laid the foundation for modern printmaking practices. Indus Valley, Mesopotamia where carved inscriptions were repeatedly pressed into clay for printing. These inscriptions represent their identity and trade. These **inscriptions later developed with woodblock printing in China**, where syllabified were carved onto blocks to reproduce text and images. Chinese scholars made rubbings from carved inscriptions around 200 AD, which was an early form of **printing that could be done on paper and silk**. The best example of this is the Diamond Sutra. In addition, Han Dynasty seals called chops were made by carving calligraphy characters on a flat surface of **jade, silver, gold, or ivory**. China introduced the practice of paper currency. The principle of buying and selling through currency made trade transactions much easier. European traveler Marco Polo discussed the use of stencils on Japanese and Chinese silk and paper currency while traveling to Europe. In **fourteenth-century Europe, woodcut prints became a popular way to distribute Christian imagery to the general public**. In Europe,

pictorial designs were being printed on cloth. **Block-prints were stenciled onto thick paper.** As a result, printing began to expand in Europe. If we talk about India, there is evidence of woodblock-printed textiles on the west coast of India, but the use of blocks for printing on paper was a foreign technique. Traditional Indian arts and crafts skills such as **goldsmithing, wood and metal carving, and iron work** already had a strong foundation in India. At that time, these seals were made of **stone and metal**, which have now become digital. The best example of this is the bar code scanner.

**Keywords:** Printmaking, Traditional, Printing Techniques, Relief Printing.

## Introduction

Printmaking is an artistic process based on the principle of transferring images from one surface to another, these techniques have been practiced for centuries and often involve manually transferring ink from a matrix (such as a wooden block, metal plate, stone, or screen cloth) to paper or another surface. Including **relief, intaglio, lithography, and screenprinting.** Printmaking has revolutionized society.

## Relief Printing

**Relief printing is a printmaking method in which a block of wood or linoleum is carved or cut, and the raised areas are incised.** The incised area is left uncut and the area is not printed. The incised area is incised using a brush or roller, a piece of paper is placed on top of it, and the paper is then printed, rubbed, or removed from the printing press by hand or with a tool called a baron to create a relief print. Common examples include **wood-block printing, linocuts, and rubber stamps,** which are known for their bold, distinct images, and were historically used in letterpress. Relief printing is the oldest method of taking an impression from an object and reproducing it. Handprints made from charcoal can be seen in many prehistoric caves. In modern times, a fingerprint is an impression of the lines imprinted on a human thumb that can be transferred to paper by applying ink to the surface of the thumb. Relief printing is a large family of techniques that include **block prints, woodblock prints, Japanese-style (ukiyo-e), woodcut prints, linocut prints, Western-style multiblock woodcuts, color woodblock prints, cardboard relief prints, etc.**



Photo-1

## Wood-block printing

**Wood-block printing** technique Wood-block printing is a traditional form of printmaking in which a design or pattern is carved into a **block of material, typically wood, linoleum, or rubber**. The carved block is then inked and pressed onto paper, fabric, or other surfaces to transfer the design. It is a manual and labor-intensive press process often used to create decorative patterns on textiles, wallpapers, and art prints. Its origins can be traced back to the **Chinese Pi Sheng around 1041 AD**, who created movable type characters from clay and glue. The method was novel, but not durable enough for large-scale printing.<sup>1</sup>



Photo-2

Printed in northern China in the seventh century AD. The first surviving prints on paper come from China—sets of woodblocks depicting Buddhist themes that In the following centuries, Chinese artisans created numerous woodblock illustrations for books on a variety of subjects (agriculture, literature, medicine, botany, poetry). From China, printmaking followed the Mediterranean and the Silk Road. The concept of printing text and images spread rapidly to Europe and was well established there by the early fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Where the brilliant **Johannes Gutenberg developed a method of printing with movable cast-metal type around 1439, in Germany**. What is called the first letter-press printing machine soon became the best known traditional technique of relief printing. Throughout Western Europe, printing shops multiplied, leading to a rapid decline in published manuscripts. For the first time, even the common people could now read books.<sup>3</sup>

The best example of typography today is the “typewriter” and stop which can be seen with lawyers sitting in the courts of Chandigarh (photo) In India Block printing is an ancient and traditional art form of printing on **fabric, paper, and other materials which originated in India many years ago using vegetable dyes and natural colors**. In other forms in India block printing is widely known as “**woodblock printing**”, “**woodcut printing**” or “**hand block printing**”. Block printing art is done by following the beautiful process where the desired designs are engraved on blocks and natural colors are used for printing on fabrics. Traditional art of block printing Rajasthan, block printing was started in the 12th century and the rich art form of printing on fabrics was being enjoyed by kings and queens <sup>4</sup>

## Wood engraving

The earliest known engraving was in Chinese in 106AD. Chinese classics were carved into stone for an accurate permanent record. In this process, a thin sheet of wet paper was placed on a stone and the paper was pressed with a stiff brush. An ink cloth pad was then lightly rubbed over the surface to produce an inked impression. Although the relief image is inked on the upper surface of the paper (Plate No. 6) rather than on the surface itself, this is related only to the relief print.<sup>5</sup>



Photo-3

Until the eighteenth century, woodcuts were always cut into wooden boards that were cut lengthwise from a variety of medium-soft to hard-grained trees. A variety of medium-soft to hard-grained trees. Thomas Bewick, an 8th–10th century English engraver, is credited with the first use of end-grain wood. He cut his images directly into the wood with an engraver rather than with knives and gouges and printed them from the relief surface of the block.<sup>5</sup>

Other artists had experimented with wood engraving before Bewick became famous for his magnificent book illustrations. However, he used the method so extensively and developed it with such skill and sensitivity that there are no contenders for his status as an innovator. On this smooth, hard surface, he produced clean, fine white lines with excellent detail that did not break up in print. When these boxwood blocks were carefully inked and sealed in a press, thousands of sharp impressions were possible. This method revolutionized the use of illustrations for newspapers, magazines, books, and advertisements. Craftsmen soon adopted this new method to produce popular paintings on a large scale, which was embraced by an eager middle class, but little imaginative creative work resulted.<sup>6</sup>

**Japanese style (Ukiyo-e) Japanese style Hishikawa Moronobu, the founder of Ukiyo-e, created many hand-painted Ukiyo-e drawings in the 17th century.** Followers who admired his style formed the Hishikawa School.<sup>7</sup>

Ukiyo-e prints had a profound influence on the Western art world from the 1870s, and the Japonism style they inspired was reflected in many artistic mediums, including painting. Interest in ukiyo-e prints also encouraged a European revival of woodblock printing, which had almost disappeared as a fine-art medium.

Prints by artists such as Mary Cassatt, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, show the influence of the ukiyo-e style in their composition and use of patterns and flat areas of color.<sup>8</sup>

Ukiyo-e prints reached their height during the latter half of the 18th century. The most prominent artist during this period was Kitagawa Utamaro (1754–1806). The uniquely Japanese ability to capture the spirit of the subject, the yoshō-iwara ("happy quarter"), is nowhere more evident than in the depictions of courtesans living in the brothels of Edo. To understand the misery of these women, it is essential to acknowledge the melancholy of their lives in the brothels.<sup>9</sup>

### Woodcut Prints

Woodcuts are one of the best known and most widely used forms of relief print. A woodcut consists of a raised surface where an image is cut into **a block of wood with a U tool and a V tool**. The areas that are cut are left un inked, while the raised areas of the wood block are inked, representing the desired image that contains the positive image that is printed. **The background area, or negative space, is carved away, creating a white, or non-printing, area.** As with other relief prints, ink is applied to the raised surface with a roller, paper is placed on it, and the **image is transferred by rubbing the back of the paper or by running the block and paper through a press.** “This process allows for the creation of multiple copies of the same image, making it a popular method for the production of art and images, especially those considered distinct before the widespread use of modern printing technologies. It is one of the oldest methods of making prints from a relief surface, “used in China to decorate textiles from the 5th century.”<sup>10</sup>



Photo-4

**The oldest woodblock print with an image appears in the 17-foot-long Diamond Sutra Scroll, printed by Wang Chih in 868 AD.** This intricate figurative image with text was discovered by a Taoist priest when he opened a sealed cave in East Turkestan in 1900. Because the text and image were cut from a single block, the combination is called a block book in the West. The intricate and sophisticated images in the **Diamond Sutra** suggest that the Chinese had a very long history of **printing on paper and textiles from wooden blocks**. Color printing from multiple blocks dates from the same time.<sup>11</sup>

**The craft was developed in Europe around 1400, about six centuries after the invention of the woodblock in the East.** Early woodblocks in both regions were mostly simple sacred images for sale to

pilgrims. The lines were drawn on the side of a wooden plank. Perhaps the most ambitious of the early European books to contain printed pictures is a modest description of the Nuremberg Chronicle, a history of the entire world published in Nuremberg in 1493. Thanks to this adaptation in the printing of text and image.<sup>12</sup>

In Bavaria, Austria, and Bohemia, religious images and playing cards were first made from wooden blocks in the early 15th century, and the development of printing from movable type led to widespread use of woodcuts in the Netherlands and Italy. **By the 16th century, the black-line woodcut reached its greatest perfection with Albrecht Dürer and his followers Lucas Cranach and Hans Holbein.** The woodcut process was widely used for famous paintings in the 17th century, but no major artist used it. It was replaced by wood engraving in the early 19th century, which reproduced paintings and sculptures more easily and accurately than woodcuts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Woodcut Multiple-Block Prints**

The multiple-block technique, in which there is a separate block for each color, requires a lot of etching, but the advantage of the single-block technique is that, when making Western-style prints with oil-based inks, the artist does not have to print the entire edition at once. When using oil-based inks, it is not necessary to wet the printing paper; therefore there is no real time limit between color passes. And because each block is inked separately, it is possible to experiment with color variations of the same image.<sup>14</sup>

### **Woodcut Single-Block Multicolor Prints**

You can also use the single-block reduction method for multicolor prints. For each color pass, you remove more material from the block. Any areas that are not cut away will pick up ink. Each color is printed on top of the previous one. When engraving, the entire edition must be printed, because the printable area of the block is reduced with each pass. Typically, **colors are built from light to dark, so that dark colors do not fade when overprinted with lighter colors.** Depending on the opacity of the ink, the underlying colors can affect the color of the colors printed over them. (For example, printing red over yellow will make orange.) With the single-color reduction method, the edition stops when the last color is printed.<sup>15</sup>

### **Linocut Prints**

“The most common graphic technique practiced in schools is linocut. Inexpensive offcuts can be obtained from any linoleum store. (Smooth, relatively thick linoleum without patterns is best. If the linoleum is for machine printing, it is glued to a board; the board and linoleum together should not exceed the **required width of 23 mm (1 in)**. And the lines are cut with a lino cutter, a knife or a hollow chisel. It is a good idea to first make temporary proofs in the linoleum by rubbing it with a spoon or paper folder”<sup>16</sup>

The use of linoleum as a craft material and as a means of introducing young children to printmaking has caused many serious artists to avoid it. Just because a material is simple, easy to obtain, and easy to cut doesn't mean it doesn't offer some good properties. "Linoleum has been used in many wonderful ways by great artists such as Matisse and Picasso.<sup>17</sup>

“In the early 1920s, British artist Claude Flight began experimenting with linocut, wanting to create a new form of art that celebrated the speed, and hustle and bustle of the new post-war world. He began teaching at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in 1926 and it was here that he was able to share his passion for the technique with his students, the first linocut exhibition, organised by Flight and featuring work by his students Cyril Power, Sybil Andrews and Dorit Black, took place at the Redfern Gallery in 1929 and was a huge success. The students became known collectively as the ‘**Grosvenor School**’ and their work was characterised by multiple blocks of colour with a sense of dynamic movement and design, with urban transport and sport featuring as popular subjects although it was actually then 18

### Etching Linoleum



Photo-5

Linoleum can be etched with caustic soda (sodium hydroxide) and printed as either a relief print or an intaglio print. **Various resists, such as etching ground, asphaltum, heated paraffin wax, or varnish, can be painted onto the block and later scratched or cut away.** Caustic soda, which must be used in a saturated solution, is very hazardous and must be handled with care. It is brushed or dissolved onto the linoleum and refilled when it loses its strength. Unfortunately, deep etching takes hours, and this damage is a serious hindrance.<sup>19</sup>

The method of working with linocut is similar to that of woodcut and similarly the method of taking the print is similar to that of woodcut. The artists who brought woodcut and linocut into their work in Indian relief print are Ramendranath Chakraborty, though the name does not necessarily ring a bell among the new generation, is still remembered with reverence by many senior printmakers and artists in relief print. **Sanat Kar, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Jogen Choudhary** and others recognise him as one of the key players in establishing printmaking as a highly innovative medium in the field of modern Indian art. A glance at his prints reveals his natural passion for art, his ability to capture the locale with all its charms, and a deep engagement with hitherto lesser-known mediums such as woodcut, linocut, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Chitoprasad was one of the most socially engaged artists of the last century. His main field of expression was **through satirical drawings, sketches and woodcuts, linocut prints** and he is perhaps best remembered for his depiction of the Great Famine of 1943. Usually when one tries to depict social anxiety, social loss or social devastation, a mixture of sympathy and indifference is involved to capture the essence

of such issues. **In 1924 Nandalal Bose visited China and Japan, and when he returned he had with him an authentic collection of Chinese rubbings and Japanese coloured woodcut prints.** The artists of the Kala Bhavan came into direct contact with original prints from the Far East. Nandalal's vision could readily adapt it to the creative possibilities and scope of graphic art. He experimented and worked with various printmaking media such as **woodcut, wood engraving, linocut, etching, dry point, lithograph and even unconventional matrices such as cement block, rubbing and relief process after.** It is generally agreed that Pablo Picasso was the first to explore linoleum as a medium for artistic creative expression during the 1950s. **But before Picasso's efforts, Nandalal Bose chose linoleum block to illustrate Rabindranath Tagore's book, Sehaj Path, a Bengali alphabet book for children, published in 1930-31.** The linocut illustrations from that book are remarkable for their strong graphic characters. "Another master printmaker, Harinder Narayan Das, popularly known as Haren Das, was a highly respected artist in India who worked almost exclusively in the mediums of woodcut, wood engraving, linocut printmaking. At a time when oil painting ruled the consciousness and prints were considered inferior, Das chose to work exclusively with printmaking. . Das's prints are technically and artistically superior. A masterfully crafted balance of black and white, sometimes washed with thin layers of color, detailed rendering of objects and elements, simplicity of composition and small format are all hallmarks of his prints, whether in woodcut, etching, dry point or linocut."21

## Conclusion

In conclusion, relief printing has played a significant role in the cultural and social development of society. Its simple yet effective techniques allowed art, ideas, and knowledge to reach a wide audience. By connecting creativity to everyday life, relief printing supports communication, education, and cultural continuity. Even today, it remains an important medium that reflects social values, preserves traditions, and encourages artistic expression across different communities and generations. The expansion and development of relief printing played a significant role in shaping society by making images and information more accessible to the public. Starting with simple seals and woodblock prints, relief printing gradually evolved into a practical method for reproducing text, religious symbols, and decorative motifs. Its development was closely linked to social needs such as communication, education, and cultural exchange. Relief printing enabled the spread of religious teachings, folk tales, and visual traditions to wide segments of society, including those who could not read. Over time, it supported the growth of book production, posters, and popular images, strengthening community identity and shared knowledge. In many cultures, relief printing became a bridge between art and everyday life, used in textiles, manuscripts, and public notices. As techniques improved and materials became more affordable, relief printing encouraged creativity and craftsmanship, as well as contributing to social awareness, literacy, and the preservation of cultural heritage for generations.

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Photo-1- Block-prints were stenciled on thick cloth.

Photo-2- **woodblock**

Photo-3- **Wood engraving**

Photo-4- **Woodcut Prints**

Photo-5-Linocut print

