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From Manuscript to Market: Print Capitalism and the Reconstitution of Telugu in Nineteenth-Century South India

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Abstract

This article examines how print capitalism transformed Telugu from a performative, manuscript-based textual culture into a standardized and commodified linguistic object in nineteenth-century South India. Prior to print, Telugu texts circulated through palm-leaf manuscripts sustained by patronage, scribal labour, and aural reception, operating outside regimes of textual fixity, ownership, and market exchange. The introduction of print reconfigured these conditions by embedding Telugu within new institutional, legal, and economic frameworks. Drawing on missionary archives, colonial educational initiatives, and indigenous publishing enterprises, the article argues that Telugu print culture emerged through the convergence of missionary experimentation, colonial bureaucratic rationality, and indigenous commercial investment. Grammars, dictionaries, edited editions, and copyright regimes did not merely disseminate texts but restructured linguistic authority, introduced regimes of textual property, and cultivated monetized reading publics. By tracing the transition from manuscript circulation to print capitalism, the article demonstrates how Telugu was reconstituted as a governable, ownable, and exchangeable language, laying the material foundations for modern linguistic consciousness and later linguistic nationalism in South India.

Key words: Print Capitalism; Manuscript Culture; Colonial Knowledge; Linguistic Standardization; Literary Property; Lexicography; Indigenous Publishing

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1. Introduction

For much of its pre-colonial history, Telugu textual culture operated outside the logics of commodity exchange. Literary works circulated as palm-leaf manuscripts within courtly, scholarly, and temple-based networks, sustained by patronage rather than markets and realized through performance rather than silent reading. Manuscripts were copied by scribes as mutable entities, embedded in social relations of transmission rather than regimes of textual fixity, ownership, or sale. The nineteenth century marked a decisive rupture in this order. With the advent of print, Telugu entered a new political economy in which texts became standardized, reproducible, priced, and legally alienable objects. Printing did not merely multiply books; it transformed Telugu itself into a commodified linguistic object-one that could be owned, exchanged, administered, and governed.

This article argues that the transition from palm-leaf manuscripts to print capitalism fundamentally reconstituted Telugu under colonial conditions in South India. Missionary presses, colonial institutions, and indigenous entrepreneurs together reshaped textual authority, property relations, and readership. Grammars, dictionaries, edited editions, and copyright regimes did not simply disseminate existing literary traditions; they reorganized the conditions under which Telugu could be known, valued, and circulated. Through these processes, Telugu was rendered

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standardized, ownable, and governable well before it became an object of linguistic nationalism. Existing scholarship has only partially addressed these political-economic implications of print. Histories of print in India have largely followed two influential trajectories. The first consists of technological and institutional accounts that treat print primarily as a medium enabling literacy and textual circulation, drawing on the models of Lucien Febvre, Henri-Jean Martin, and Elizabeth Eisenstein. While foundational, this literature often approaches print as a neutral technology rather than as a force that reshaped language itself. A second strand, influenced by Benedict Anderson (Anderson:1983), emphasizes print's role in producing linguistic consciousness and nationalist imaginaries, frequently reading nineteenth-century print retrospectively through later political outcomes. Departing from both approaches, this article situates Telugu print within the political economy of colonial knowledge, foregrounding how print practices transformed language into an object of ownership, administration, and exchange prior to its nationalist mobilization.

Bernard S. Cohn's *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* provide a crucial framework for understanding this transformation. Cohn argues that colonial rule was grounded in the conquest and reorganization of knowledge, in which the "command of language" became essential to the "language of command." Through classificatory practices-grammars, dictionaries, surveys, and archives-the colonial state transformed fluid cultural practices into fixed, governable categories (Cohn:1996). In nineteenth-century Andhra, this "investigative modality" was evident in the ways missionary and bureaucratic print reconfigured Telugu from a performative, manuscript-based tradition into a standardized linguistic archive suited to administration, pedagogy, and regulation. Drawing on this framework and the concept of Print Capitalism of Anderson, the article traces how Telugu print emerged through the convergence of missionary experimentation, colonial bureaucratic rationality, and indigenous commercial investment. Rather than viewing print as a vehicle for transmitting a pre-existing literary culture, it demonstrates how print capitalism reorganized linguistic authority, introduced new regimes of textual property, and cultivated monetized reading publics. By following the movement from manuscript circulation to commodified print, the article foregrounds how Telugu itself was remade as a modern linguistic object-governable, ownable, and exchangeable-laying the material foundations for later forms of linguistic self-consciousness and nationalism in South India.

2. Telugu Manuscripts in the Pre-Print Era

Before the mechanization brought by print, Telugu literature existed exclusively in the form of manuscripts, typically inscribed on durable palm leaves. The culture surrounding these texts was fundamentally different from the modern paradigm of authorship and textual fixity. The original creator of a text did not claim to 'write' a book but rather to 'tell' or 'say' it, a tendency that persisted into the initial phases of the print era, where book covers sometimes stated the text was 'told by' the author. It was not until the 1860s, a period marked by the proliferation of Telugu printing under native enterprise, that the claim of authorship definitively shifted from 'saying' to the more concrete 'writing'(Arudra:1990, pp.263-265).

The production of copies relied upon skilled scribes, known as *rayasagallu*, who meticulously copied texts from a designated original. This reproductive process was conceptually described using biological metaphors: the original manuscript was revered as the "mother" (*matruka*), and the subsequent copies were considered her "daughters" (*putrikalu*). Significantly, these "daughters" frequently inherited *mutations*—variations and errors resulting from the inevitable human fallibility of the scribes. Recognizing this inherent imperfection, scribes routinely appended apologies to the end of their work, pleading for the reader's mercy and understanding regarding any errors (Arudra:1990, pp.263-265). This practice underscores a pre-print literary culture where the text was never perceived as a finished, static, or closed object. Instead, it was conceptualized as a collaborative, evolving entity, co-created through an implicit dialogue between the author, the scribe, and the reader.

Furthermore, the consumption of literature in the pre-print era was overwhelmingly aural rather than visual. Reading was not primarily a silent, individual activity; it was a communal experience centered on *hearing* the text recited. Evidence for this primacy of the spoken word lies in the *Phala Shruti* (the fruits of listening) sections often included by earlier Telugu poets at the conclusion of their works. These passages would enumerate the benefits-such as gaining wealth, health, or progeny-that would accrue to those who "heard, wrote, or read" the story (Arudra:1990, p.263). The explicit hierarchy of these actions, with 'hearing' frequently placed first, reinforces the notion of a community bound together by the shared, physical act of listening to recitation (Arudra:1990, p.264). Recent historiography has cautioned against treating such practices as evidence of a simple opposition between "oral" and "written" cultures. Scholars such as Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman argue that pre-colonial Telugu textuality operated within a performative and temporal framework in which manuscripts functioned not as imperfect substitutes for books but as records of embodied, repeatable performances. In this sense, the

manuscript preserved a "listenable" text whose meaning was realized through recitation rather than silent reading-a mode of engagement fundamentally altered by print culture (Narayana Rao & Shulman, 1998, pp. 3-7). The absence of textual fixity in this manuscript regime, shaped by regional scribal practices and iterative copying, also contributed to linguistic variation across Telugu-speaking regions. It was precisely this openness-textual plurality, performative realization, and regional variation-that print would systematically discipline and displace.

3. The Advent of Print Technology in India

The printing press reached India with the Portuguese in Goa in 1556, originally enroute to Abyssinia. Owing to political contingencies and the death of the Jesuit Patriarch John Nunes, the press remained in Goa, marking the beginning of printing in India (Priolkar, 1958, pp. 2-5). Early missionary printing relied largely on Roman script, following a "known to unknown" strategy that enabled European missionaries to access Indian languages and disseminate Christian texts (Mangamma:2010, p.5). As a result, early works such *as Conclusoes e outras coisas* (1556) and *Doutrina Christa* (1557) were printed in Roman characters, with *Compendia Spiritual da Vida Christaa* (1561) being among the earliest surviving imprints from Goa (Priolkar, 1958, pp. 7-16). Printing in indigenous Indian scripts emerged unevenly. Tamil was the first script successfully cast into movable type, pioneered by Joao Gonsalves and refined by Fr. Joao da Faria, culminating in the Tamil-script *Doutrina Christa* printed at Quilon in 1578-the earliest book printed in an Indian language script. Attempts to cast Devanagari types initially failed, delaying script-based printing and forcing works such as Father Stephen's *Christian Purana* to appear in Roman script (Priolkar, 1958, pp. 9-12). A breakthrough came only in the late eighteenth century when Charles Wilkins successfully produced a complete Devanagari fount in Bengal. His work enabled the printing of Sanskrit and Bengali grammars, including Grammar of the Bengali Language, the first book printed in Bengali movable type (Priolkar, 1958, pp. 52-53).

A decisive shift occurred with the indigenization of type production. The Indian artisan Panchanna Karmakar, trained by Wilkins, (Marshman, 1859, pp. 178-179) produced Devanagari types at the Seerampore Foundry under William Carey. This reduced dependence on imported types and established Seerampore as a major hub for printing in Indian languages, laying the technological foundations for large-scale vernacular print (Priolkar, 1958, pp. 65-66).

4. The Commencement of Printing Activity in Telugu

Against this backdrop, the emergence of Telugu print must be understood not merely as a technological arrival but as a reorganization of linguistic authority shaped by missionary, bureaucratic, and commercial imperatives. In the early European settlements, Telugu speakers

were often referred to as *Gentu/Gentoo*, and their language as '*Telinga*.' The first printed appearance of Telugu characters dates to John Fryer's 1698 book, *A New Account of East India and Persia*, though Fryer mistakenly interchanged the Telugu and Tamil (Malabar) scripts due to his unfamiliarity (Fryer:1698, pp.33&57, Mangamma:2010, pp.7-9).

Crucially, the first Telugu book was printed outside of India, in Halle, Germany, during the 18th century. The trajectory of Telugu printing, from this foreign origin to the establishment of native presses, can be delineated into four overlapping phases: 1. The Missionary Initiatives, 2. The Colonial Bureaucratic and Educational Needs, 3. The Phase of Preservation and Reconstruction, and 4. The Rise of Native Enterprise.

4.1 The Missionary Initiatives

Early printing in Telugu was concentrated in three mission centers: the Danish Tranquebar Mission, the Seerampore Mission in Bengal, and the London Mission Society (LMS) at Visakhapatnam.

4.1.1 Benjamin Schultze and Halle

Benjamin Schultze, a German Christian Father at the Danish settlement of Tranquebar (present-day Tamil Nadu), made the early successful attempts to develop types for printing in Telugu. After seven years at Tranquebar, Schultze moved to the English East India Company-controlled Madras in 1726, where he established a free school. Recognizing the presence of Telugu-speaking students, he learned the language himself and prepared *Gramatica Telugica*, a grammar designed for European learners, writing the Telugu portions in Telugu script. He also translated Bible lessons. Due to health issues, Schultze left for Halle, Germany, where he continued to prepare Telugu types. Using these, he printed four Christian theology books in Telugu in 1746 and 1747, making them the earliest known books printed using the Telugu script, albeit in Germany (Arudra:1990, pp.268-73). He also produced the *Conspectus Litteraturae Telugicae* (1747), which used Roman script to explain Telugu characters to a European audience (Mangamma:2010, p.8).

4.1.2 The Seerampore Mission

Following Schultze's efforts in Germany, the printing of Telugu books in India began at the Seerampore Mission near Calcutta, a Danish settlement free from the restrictions imposed by the English East India Company on missionary activities. Under William Carey, the mission, aided by Marshman and Ward, was already a polyglot center. Telugu printing was initiated from 1811, utilizing a fount thought to have been imported from England in 1807 (Arudra:1990, p.282). The New Testament in Telugu was printed here in 1818 (Priolkar, 1958, p.66). Recognizing the

efficacy of local production, Carey, permitted by the Charter Act of 1813, later entrusted the Madras-based Auxiliary Bible Society (formed in 1820) with continuing the printing of Christian literature in South Indian languages (Mangamma:2010, p.75).

4.1.3 London Mission Society (LMS) at Visakhapatnam

The true regional focus for Telugu printing began with George Cran and Augustus Das Granges of the LMS, who arrived in Visakhapatnam in 1805. They focused on learning Telugu and translating the Bible, assisted significantly by the native scholar Subbarao, who had converted to Christianity and renamed himself Ananda Rao. Visakhapatnam was initially a center of *production* (translation), not *printing*, as the early tracts were sent to Madras for printing at the Asylum Press (1808) and later to Seerampore (1812) for the printing of the Gospels. The translation of the entire New Testament was completed by Edward Pritchett, Gordon, and Ananda Rao and was printed at the Commercial Press, Madras, in 1818. This Visakhapatnam version was praised by scholars and civil servants like A.D. Campbell for its clarity and simplicity compared to the Seerampore version (Arudra: 1990, p.288). The LMS only secured its own printing press in Visakhapatnam in 1840 (Mangamma: 2010, p.74).

4.2 The Colonial Bureaucratic and Educational Needs

While missionaries pioneered Telugu printing for religious ends, the English East India Company inaugurated printing activity for secular purposes: to meet bureaucratic and educational requirements in Madras.

The Madras Government had intermittent access to printing presses before establishing its own in 1812. This included a French press seized during the attack on Pondicherry in 1760-61 and gifted to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) on the condition of Company access (Mangamma: 2010, p.43). Separately, the Madras Male Asylum (MMA) was permitted to establish a press in 1800 to teach printing as a craft (Mangamma: 2010, p.78).

The formal institutionalization of print for colonial governance occurred with the establishment of the College of Fort St. George in 1812. Constituted by the Board of Examinations, its primary mission was to expedite and perfect the training of junior European civil servants in local languages, with Telugu being one of five compulsory languages alongside Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Marathi. The College Press, a central component of this institution, was responsible for producing works in Oriental languages and managing a library of Oriental Manuscripts (Mangamma: 2010, pp.93-95).

The College Press issued a small but significant corpus of early secular Telugu works, many of which were explicitly designed to render the language legible and teachable to colonial officials.

These included A. D. Campbell's *Grammar of the Teloogoo Language* (1816), the first book published under College supervision, and his *Dictionary of the Teloogoo Language* (1821); J. C. Morris's *Teloogoo Selections* with translation and grammatical analysis (1823) (Mangamma: 2010, p.101); C. P. Brown's translation of the *Verses of Vemana* (1829) a work of enduring importance for the preservation of Telugu manuscript traditions and Ravipati Gurumurthy Sastry's compiled and corrected *Tales of Vikramarka* (1819) (Mangamma: 2010, pp. 101, 171 & 179). Though limited in number, these publications were commercialized, sold primarily to the civil servants undergoing training, as documented in the price lists advertised in magazines like the Telugu Journal *Vartamana Tarangani*, (Arudra:1990, p.291) indicating that even bureaucratic print functioned within a controlled, semi-commercial economy. As historian Stuart Blackburn observes that the printing of oral tales (such as the *Tales of Vikramarka*) was not a neutral act of recording. It involved a 'textualization' that froze fluid oral performances into static, standardized prose, rendering them suitable for colonial pedagogy but stripping them of their performative vitality (Blackburn:2006).

The College Press was complemented by the Madras School Book Society, established in 1820 under government patronage. Funded by a grant from Governor Thomas Munro and managed by a committee of Europeans and Indians, the Society aimed to supply non-religious schoolbooks and moral tracts in local languages. Its output included reprints of Calcutta editions, College Press publications such as the *Tales of Vikramarka* and the *Verses of Vemana*, as well as original translations of pedagogical and geographical works intended for classroom use (Mangamma: 2010, p.250).

As Bernard Cohn has argued, the colonial compilation of grammars, dictionaries, and standardized texts constituted a "command of language" essential to the exercise of the "language of command." Through these print institutions, Telugu was not merely taught or preserved; it was transformed into a governable archive, restructured to suit the administrative imperatives of the colonial state and stripped of its localized, unruly variations (Cohn:1996, pp.16-56).

4.2.1 The Commodification of Text: The Story of *Andhra Dipica*

The story of the *Andhra Dipica* encapsulates the transformation of a literary work into a marketable commodity during the colonial period. This Telugu-Telugu dictionary, compiled by Mamidi Venkayya (a *komati* by caste) from Machilipatnam, was a pioneering attempt at Western-style lexicography in Telugu, containing thirty to fifty thousand alphabetically arranged entries. Completed in 1806, prior to the College's establishment, it suggested a nascent, independent intellectual drive for standardization (Mangamma: 2010, p.121).

Upon its founding, the College of Fort St. George recognized the *Andhra Dipica* as an invaluable educational resource. Between 1812 and 1813, the College Board offered to acquire its copyright for 1000 star pagodas. Venkayya, rooted in traditional society and physically infirm, initially requested a permanent land grant near Machilipatnam instead of a cash payment. This request was denied due to the land being under *Zamindari* control. In 1814, he accepted the financial offer, which included the 1000 pagodas and a perpetual monthly allowance for himself and his widow. The agreement was definitive: the copyright transferred fully to the Government, prohibiting Venkayya and his descendants from printing the work, though manuscript copies for private circulation were permitted. This contractual exchange formalized the legal and commercial commodification of a major Telugu literary work. Despite the acquisition, the College Press failed to publish the dictionary, and its first known printed version appeared in 1848, published elsewhere (Arudra:1990, pp. 234& 236).

4.2.2 C. P. Brown and the Colonial Reconstitution of Telugu Textual Authority

The literary and philological interventions of C. P. Brown mark a critical moment in the colonial reconstitution of Telugu textual authority. Viewed as a benefactor or "reviver" of Telugu literature, Brown's work is more productively understood as part of a broader colonial project that transformed Telugu into a standardized, governable, and institutionally owned linguistic object. His activities-spanning manuscript collection, editorial collation, lexicography, pedagogy, and print publication-did not merely preserve an existing literary tradition but actively reorganized its internal hierarchies, modes of circulation, and conditions of value.

Brown's engagement with Telugu manuscripts exemplifies this transformation. He systematically gathered palm-leaf and paper manuscripts from across the Telugu-speaking regions and subjected them to rigorous processes of collation to establish *saadhu paṭhalu* (authoritative or "correct" versions) (Arudra:1990, p. 203). In doing so, he translated a manuscript culture that had historically accommodated textual plurality, regional variation, and performative flexibility into a regime of editorial fixity. Variants that had once coexisted as legitimate instantiations of a text were reclassified as errors, deviations, or corruptions. Print thus functioned not simply as a medium of reproduction but as a technology of textual discipline, redefining authority as singular, stable, and externally adjudicated.

This editorial logic was reinforced through Brown's extensive print output. His editions of Vemana's poems-first published with an English translation in 1829 and later as a Telugu-only edition in 1839(Arudra:1990, p.170)-froze a corpus that had long circulated orally and performatively into a canonical printed form. Similarly, his publication of early Telugu poetry

such as *Nala Charitra* (1841), *Harischandra Dvi-pada* (1842), and the initiation of *Vasu Charitra* (Arudra:1990, p.210) transformed genres associated with performance and manuscript circulation into objects of silent reading and textual study. These editions simultaneously expanded access to Telugu literature and redefined the terms on which literary legitimacy was conferred.

Brown's grammars, dictionaries, and instructional texts further embedded Telugu within colonial infrastructures of knowledge. His *A Grammar of the Telugu Language* (completed in 1837 and published in 1840), along with the *Telugu–English Dictionary* and *English–Telugu Dictionary* (both published in 1852), rendered Telugu legible to colonial administrators, missionaries, and educators. These works did not merely describe the language; they standardized its forms, hierarchized its usages, and aligned it with the epistemic needs of colonial governance. The *Andhra Margadarsi* readers and related pedagogical texts extended this process by cultivating new publics-both European learners of Telugu and Telugu speakers learning English-thereby situating language acquisition within a monetized and examinable framework (Arudra:1990, pp. 205 & 212).

Equally significant was Brown's role in the archival capture of Telugu textual culture. His cataloguing of Telugu and Kannada manuscripts for the India Office Library and his donation, in 1845, of an extensive personal collection of 2,440 Oriental manuscripts-over half of them Telugu-to the Madras Literary Society (Arudra:1990, p.213) marked a decisive transfer of textual property. Manuscripts that had once circulated within localized networks of scholars, temples, and households were relocated into colonial institutions, where they were reclassified as objects of scholarly knowledge and imperial custody. This movement, from regional circulation to institutional ownership parallels the legal commodification exemplified by the *Andhra Dipica*, but on a far larger and more systematic scale.

Ramaswamy Mantena's interpretation of Brown is instructive here. Mantena argues that Brown's philological labour cannot be separated from the epistemological imperatives of colonial modernity, in which languages were abstracted, stabilized, and historicized to be governed (Mantena:2005, pp.513-515). From this perspective, Brown's often cited *Plan for the Revival and Promotion of Telugu Literature* (1828) appears less as a benign programme of cultural preservation than as a blueprint for reorganizing Telugu literary life according to the norms of print, classification, and institutional authority (Mantena:2005, pp.521-522). Revival and regulation, Mantena suggests, were not opposing impulses but mutually constitutive processes within colonial knowledge regimes (Mantena:2005, pp.526-530).

Seen in this light, Brown's legacy complicates any simple opposition between colonial domination and indigenous cultural survival. His work undeniably preserved a vast corpus of Telugu literature that might otherwise have been lost. Yet it did so by transforming Telugu into a standardized, ownable, and governable language embedded within print capitalism and colonial institutions. Brown thus stands as a pivotal figure in the transition traced in this article: from a manuscript culture sustained by patronage and performance to a print regime structured by property, pedagogy, and market exchange. His interventions exemplify how colonial print did not merely disseminate Telugu texts but fundamentally redefined the conditions under which Telugu itself could be known, valued, and claimed.

4.3 The Rise of Indigenous Enterprise

Indigenous presses did not emerge in opposition to colonial print regimes but within the epistemic norms they had already consolidated. Textual fixity, standardized language, and market valuation-first institutionalized through missionary and bureaucratic print-became the very conditions under which indigenous enterprise operated. The critical shift from institutionally driven print to commercial-market-driven print occurred in the early decades of the 19th century. As book consumption expanded as a market, local investors began to see print as a viable area for profit. This entrepreneurial entry coincided with the liberalization of press restrictions. Sir Charles Metcalfe, acting Governor-General, introduced the Press Act of 1835, which replaced the restrictive Licensing Regulations of 1823 with a mandatory registration system. This act, for which Metcalfe was hailed as the "Liberator of the Indian Press," accelerated the proliferation of privately-owned printing presses, as evidenced by their increased numbers after 1835 (Grover:2018, p.268).

By the mid-nineteenth century, Telugu printing had decisively moved beyond missionary and colonial educational mandates and into the hands of Telugu scholars and businessmen. This indigenous transition was defined by three key objectives: the preservation of classical texts, the standardization of authoritative editions, and the cultivation of a paying reading public.

4.3.1 Preservation and Standardization

The founding of the *Aadisaraswati Mudranalayamu* in 1854 by Vaavilla Ramaswamy Shastri exemplifies this trend. Encouraged by religious authorities, Shastri undertook the systematic work of collecting fragile palm-leaf manuscripts and transforming them into durable, error-free printed books. His press prioritized textual fidelity and philological care, focusing on Sanskrit and Telugu classics such as *Amuktamalyada* and *Bharatamu*, thereby presenting print as a medium of cultural preservation rather than just dissemination or conversion. *Aadisaraswati*

Mudranalayamu is widely credited as one of the earliest Telugu-owned presses to cast its own types, significantly reducing the dependence on missionary or colonial foundries. This innovation signaled a robust technological self-sufficiency and cemented the economic viability of printing as a native industry (Subbarammayya:2015, p.19).

4.3.2 Princely Patronage and Textual Authority

Indigenous printing also flourished under the patronage of regional elites. The establishment of the *Sharadambaa Vilasa Mudrakshara Shala* in 1889, supported by the Venkatagiri ruler Kumara Yachendrulu, demonstrates how print integrated with traditional aristocratic authority. This press published both the ruler's own compositions and important scholarly commentaries, such as the *Paramartha Chandrika* (Subbarammayya:2015, p.24).

4.3.3 Translation and the Expansion of Readership

Other presses, like the *Jyotishmate Mudrakshara Shala* (founded in 1890), actively sought to democratize access to classical knowledge. By translating Sanskrit epics (*Raghuvamsam*, *Kumarasambhavam*) into Telugu prose, they catered to a growing readership that lacked formal Sanskrit training but desired cultural competence. Translation, in this context, was an explicit strategy for enlarging the Telugu reading public (Subbarammayya:2015, p.50).

4.3.4 Diversification and New Publics

The final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the segmentation of the print market. The establishment of *Manjuvani Mudrakshara Shala* and *Saraswati Grandhamala* in 1898 marked a shift toward diversified portfolios that included periodicals and literary series. Magazines such as *Manjuvani* and *Gruhalakshmi* were targeted at specific demographics, notably women, signifying the emergence of differentiated reading publics and a modern literary market (Subbarammayya:2015, p.40). This fragmentation of the audience mirrors what A. R. Venkatachalapathy characterises the Tamil print sphere as the emergence of a "province of the book," in which reading practices increasingly shifted from collective oral recitation to private, silent reading, enabling new forms of middle-class subjectivity (Venkatachalapathy: 2012, pp.1-6 & 33-44).

The indigenous presses shared a common economic denominator: they operated within a fully monetized system sustained by sales, subscriptions, and patronage, rather than missionary or direct state funding. In doing so, they reinforced notions of textual fixity and defined authorship-norms introduced under colonial print regimes-even as they reclaimed control over the definition of authoritative Telugu literature. While these presses significantly expanded access to texts, their continued emphasis on Sanskritized vocabulary and elite literary genres also reproduced existing

cultural hierarchies. Beyond their economic and textual consequences, print reshaped how Telugu itself was imagined. As Lisa Mitchell shows, print-mediated practices were central to transforming Telugu from a language used for communication into an emotionally charged object of attachment-most powerfully embodied in the figure of *Telugu Talli*. This process enabled the visualization of the language as a unified entity and laid the foundations for the linguistic nationalism that would shape twentieth-century Andhra politics (Mitchell:2010).

5. Conclusion

The transformation traced in this article was not the simple diffusion of a new technology but a fundamental reordering of the conditions under which Telugu existed as a language. Print reorganized relationships between text, authority, and value, displacing manuscript regimes that had accommodated plurality, performance, and regional variation. In their place emerged expectations of fixity, standardization, ownership, and exchange that reshaped how Telugu texts were produced, circulated, and read.

This reordering unfolded through layered encounters between missionary practices, colonial administrative rationalities, and indigenous scholarly and commercial ambitions. Missionary experiments in grammar, translation, and typography-initiated processes of standardization, while colonial institutions systematized them through pedagogical, legal, and archival frameworks. Grammars, dictionaries, edited editions, and copyright arrangements did not merely describe Telugu; they actively reconstituted it as a linguistic object suited to administration, education, and regulation.

Indigenous presses complicate any interpretation that treats these changes as purely colonial impositions. Telugu scholars and entrepreneurs appropriated print to preserve literary traditions, establish authoritative editions, and expand readerships. Yet they operated within the epistemic and economic norms consolidated by colonial print, reinforcing textual fixity, standardized language, and monetized circulation even as they asserted cultural authority. Print thus became a site of negotiation rather than resistance, enabling indigenous agency while stabilizing colonial forms of linguistic order.Equally significant were the changes in reading practices and publics. Print fostered new modes of silent, individualized consumption and segmented audiences along lines of education, gender, and taste. While these developments broadened access to texts, they also reproduced cultural hierarchies through the privileging of Sanskritized registers and elite genres. By the late nineteenth century, Telugu had been decisively reconstituted as a bounded, standardized, and exchangeable object-no longer only a medium of performance or communication but a language that could be edited, priced, owned, and institutionally managed.

This material transformation helps explain the later affective and political investments in language that shaped twentieth-century Andhra politics. Linguistic nationalism did not arise solely from ideological debates; it was grounded in the everyday practices of printing, selling, cataloguing, and reading texts. By foregrounding these institutional and textual processes, this article demonstrates how print capitalism altered not only the circulation of Telugu texts but the very terms on which the language itself could be known, valued, and claimed in the modern world.

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