

HISTORY OF BOOKS AND READING



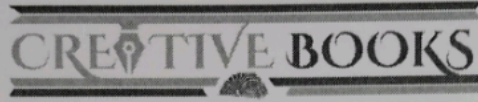
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History of Books and Reading

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Dedication

*To all the known and unknown forces—
the visible mentors, silent inspirations, unexpected
encounters, and unseen energies—
that guided, challenged, and carried me through the journey
of this book.*

Foreword

The first effort in writing is the “vowel shift technology”, man’s profound invention, which reflected the human desire to communicate, preserve, and share ideas. It was driven by both technological innovation and cultural shifts, laying the groundwork for modern literacy, education, and global knowledge exchange. The idea and evolution of writing and storing recorded thoughts marked the necessity of Books, which have the longest history put to work for knowledge transfer for posterity. The efforts of human beings for communication started with throwing stones, scratching, drawing and scribbling. Then they began to communicate in various forms and media, garnering their innovations in storing information.

This book is divided into five parts and fifteen chapters. In Part 1, the first chapter deals with the origins of Writing and the Book. Early writing emerged historically, and can be traced in several parts of the world, with cuneiform in Mesopotamia (around 3200 BCE) and hieroglyphics in Egypt (around 3000 BCE) being some of the earliest related efforts. Though the oldest forms used for writing were Papyrus, Parchment, Clay tablets, Paper, Parchment, Vellum, Pencils, Wax tablets, stone and various types of metals and Wood, these were historically the earliest techniques blending writing skills, showcasing the knowledge dissemination process.

The second chapter, the origin of writing and record keeping, is one of the most significant milestones in human history. It marks the transition from prehistory to history and enabled the development of complex societies, governance, trade, and culture. Formal writing from Pictographs to tally marks to Sumerian Cuneiform (c. 3200 BCE, Mesopotamia), Egyptian Hieroglyphs (c. 3100

BCE), Indus Script (c. 2600 BCE), Chinese Oracle Bone Script (c. 1200 BCE). The first impact on civilization was the appearance of Alphabetic writing around 1200 BCE (e.g., Phoenician alphabet), forming the basis of Greek and Latin scripts. Writing and record keeping enabled the rise of cities and bureaucracies, preserved cultural and religious traditions, facilitated communication across time and space and allowed historical documentation and legal continuity.

We can see more about this in Chapter 3, The Symbols to Letters: The Birth and Impact of the Alphabet. The earliest surviving written literature is from ancient Mesopotamia. The Epic of Gilgamesh is often cited as the first great composition, although some shorter compositions have survived that are even earlier (notably the “Kesh Temple Hymn” and “The Instructions of Shuruppak”). Greek Alphabet (c. 800 BCE) and Latin Alphabet (Roman, c. 600 BCE) and Arabic and Hebrew Alphabets were major technologies in those days. With the invention of parchment and the codex—a bound collection of pages—books took a new form in ancient Rome. Monasteries in medieval Europe became the centers of book production, where monks meticulously copied texts by hand. These manuscripts were often adorned with gold leaf and elaborate illustrations, reflecting the labour and reverence with which knowledge was treated. They paved the way for Literacy and Learning, Cultural Transmission, Scientific and Technological Progress, which facilitated the recording and sharing of scientific discoveries and supported the growth of libraries, universities, and archives.

Later, Chapters are seen through the eyes of the author, going towards the origin of the Book. Whatever the history of books may become in the future, their past shows how a field of knowledge can take on a distinct scholarly identity. Today, we see books with the invention of paper have the biggest historical achievement of the human race, furthering their growth. According to UNESCO and other sources, about 2.2 to 2.7 million new books are published worldwide every year. Books were technology for various purposes. The human race is educated using marvellous technology called “Book”. Books are the future, and every idea

that human beings get is from books. Books spread to grow in digital progression.

The **origin of the book**, discussed in **Chapter 5**, highlights that books are among humanity's greatest inventions—vessels of knowledge, imagination, and memory. Their evolution tells a story as rich and complex as the words they contain. From clay tablets and papyrus scrolls to illuminated manuscripts and printed novels, the history of books serves as a mirror to human civilization itself.

The earliest known books were not books in the modern sense. Thousands of years ago, the Sumerians etched symbols into clay tablets, preserving laws, trade records, and myths. In ancient Egypt, papyrus scrolls allowed for longer narratives and began shaping what we recognize today as written literature. These early texts were scarce and sacred, often limited to priests, scribes, and the ruling elite. The importance of scholarly outreach has transformed into a “treasure of knowledge”. These sacred knowledge forms were kept in closed and chained enclosures as storehouses of knowledge by kings and the kingdoms.

Everything changed in the 15th century with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable-type printing press. The Gutenberg Bible, printed around 1455, sparked a revolution. Suddenly, books could be mass-produced, literacy rates rose, and ideas spread like wildfire. The press played a pivotal role in the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, democratizing access to information and empowering revolutions in science, politics, and philosophy.

The Industrial Revolution ushered in cheaper paper and faster printing technologies, expanding the reach of books even further. The 20th century saw paperbacks, libraries, and public education transform books into everyday companions for people of all walks of life.

The historical aspect of printing and the revolutionary impact it had on mass communication in Europe is well covered in Chapter 6. Goa and the history of books have a rich tradition, highlighted

by the establishment of the first printing press in Asia in 1556, as detailed in Chapter 7, followed by an in-depth exploration of the History of Books in India in Chapter 8.

Before the Printing Press, India had a long and rich tradition of written knowledge. From the Indus Script to ancient Indian manuscripts, scribes used various materials such as palm leaves (“Talapatra”), birch bark, cloth, and eventually handmade paper. Palm leaves, abundant in South India, were dried, polished, and treated with starch before use. Writing was done using a sharp metal or bone stylus, and the text was made visible by applying black pigment.

Chapter 9 focuses on books as scholarly objects, while Chapters 10 and 11 emphasise the cultural imprint of books and the movement proclaiming that “Reading is a fundamental right.” From Chapters 12 to 15, the narrative moves through libraries, the book trade, and the transformation brought about by the digital age. E-books and audiobooks have redefined reading once again. While some fear the physical book may become obsolete, the resilience of print tells a different story. Bookstores continue to thrive in many cities, libraries are evolving into vibrant community hubs, and physical books remain enduring symbols of authenticity and permanence in a world dominated by fleeting digital screens.

The history of books is not just about how words are stored—it’s about how ideas are shared, preserved, and fought over. Each shift in book technology has empowered new voices and redefined what it means to be informed, to be entertained, and to be human.

Libraries and archives have long served as foundational gateways to human knowledge. As repositories of books, manuscripts, records, and digital content, they not only preserve the intellectual heritage of civilizations but also provide spaces for reading, research, and lifelong learning. The growth of such institutions reflects the broader evolution of libraries. Libraries grew as national assets and library science for better organization of knowledge.

New era of digitization continues to turn both physical and digital pages, we are reminded that books are more than just objects—they are bridges between minds, built to outlast lifetimes. Every new effort of times of yore of books is always endeavouring to conquer the “world of books”, and hence books will be part of history and part of the future.

The efforts to look into the history of books represent a vision that traces the flow of knowledge as it evolves through various media over time. This ‘book of books’ offers a point of reflection on the historical development of books.

The exemplary work and efforts of Dr. Milind Mhamal, Assistant Professor and Programme Director of Library and Information Science, Goa University, whose intense endeavour in bringing this book may rightly earn him the title ‘man behind books.’ His interest in exploring the historical aspect of the book and its association with information sources, dedicating himself to the discovery of the truth of the ‘history of books,’ is resounding and will remain in the pages of the history of books.

Long live books.....

Prof. V. M. Bankapur,
Professor and Dean,
Faculty of Science and Technology,
Rani Channamma University,
Belagavi

Preface

The history of books and reading is a rich, complex, and multidisciplinary field. It spans the domains of history, literature, library science, publishing, sociology, and cultural studies. Historians often consider it their territory, literary scholars see it as part of their critical tradition, librarians view it as an extension of their professional domain, and those in the book trade—publishers, printers, and booksellers—claim it as their own. And yet, in practice, this subject remains largely neglected. Despite its central importance to human culture and intellectual life, very few write about it, and fewer still take responsibility for exploring its vast terrain in a comprehensive and accessible way.

My own engagement with this subject has been shaped by a unique blend of roles: that of a lifelong reader, a creative writer, an experienced publisher, and a hands-on librarian. These roles, combined with my current work as a teacher in library and information science, have allowed me to approach the history of books and reading not just as an academic exercise, but as a deeply personal and practical inquiry.

Three years ago, the subject “History of Books and Reading” was introduced as an optional paper in the Master of Library and Information Science Programme at Goa University. This proved to be a turning point. As I explored existing literature on the topic, scattered across disciplines and perspectives, I realised the value of a multidisciplinary approach. Reading widely and deeply across fields gave me new insights and reinforced my belief that no single discipline can claim full ownership of this subject.

What particularly inspired me to write this book was the enthusiastic response of students. Many chose this optional course not only from library science but also from other disciplines. Their interest and curiosity affirmed the need for a comprehensive yet accessible book that could serve students, researchers, professionals, and general readers alike.

This book, therefore, is both an outcome of years of practical engagement with books and a product of reflective reading and teaching. It attempts to bring together the many threads—historical, cultural, technological, and intellectual—that define our long and evolving relationship with books and reading. I hope it contributes meaningfully to a subject that deserves far greater attention and inspires others to explore its many fascinating dimensions.

Dr. Milind C. Mhamal

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HISTORY OF BOOKS AND READING

History of Books and Reading by Dr. Milind C. Mhasale is a comprehensive and engaging exploration of one of humanity's greatest cultural inventions – the book. Tracing the journey from ancient clay tablets and palm-leaf manuscripts to printed volumes and digital formats, this work offers a sweeping narrative of how books have shaped and been shaped by civilizations across time. The book delves into the evolution of writing systems, materials used for recording knowledge, the development of libraries and archives, and the social and intellectual role of reading. Special attention is given to the Indian context, including the history of books and libraries in Goa and the influence of Portuguese colonialism on local literary culture. It also explores contemporary challenges and transformations in the digital age, such as e-books, audiobooks, and AI-generated texts.

Written in a lucid and accessible style, this book is ideal for students, librarians, researchers, and general readers interested in book history, reading culture, and knowledge preservation. Rich with historical insight, literary context, and cultural reflection, *History of Books and Reading* not only documents the past but also invites readers to consider the future of reading in an increasingly digital world.



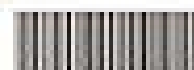
Dr. Milind C. Mhasale is an acclaimed writer, translator, and academic with over three decades of dedicated service to literature, education, and librarianship. He currently serves as Assistant Professor and Programme Director of the Library and Information Science Programme at Goa University. Prior to this, he worked for 27 years as the College Librarian at St. Agnes College of Arts and Commerce, Píaz, Goa.

Dr. Mhasale has authored and translated several noteworthy books in Konkani, Marathi, and English, spanning short stories, biographies, bibliographies, and philosophical texts. His Konkani translation of

Outline of Indian Philosophy by M. Hiriyana, titled *Bhārtiya Tatvagnānesho Itihas*, received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Translation Award in 2024, along with multiple other state and literary honours. They include the Goa State Best Librarian Award, Konkani Bhasha Mandak's Translation Award, Gomantak Marathi Akademy Award for best published books, and the Padmashree Bhabubh Borkar Literary Award from the Goa Hindu Association. He continues to inspire readers and scholars through his prolific and meaningful literary engagement.

A committed scholar and passionate advocate of Goan linguistic and cultural heritage, he has significantly contributed to the enrichment of regional literature and knowledge systems. His works are widely appreciated for their clarity, depth, and cultural sensitivity.

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