

# Mark the date

For 100 years now, The Bangalore Press calendar has tracked the passage of time, retaining its vintage charm even as it adapts to suit changing preferences



Adding years The familiar red-and-black calendar; (right) carry-on almanac. IMAGES: BINDU GOPAL RAO

and was bought both by the general public and the government. Priced 2 annas (13 paise) when it was launched, the 12-page calendar today sells for ₹35 each.

After Independence, the images of the maharajas were replaced with those of freedom fighters; in 1960, the calendar switched to a red-and-black design, which remains its trademark till today.

### Print matters

The wall calendars come in two sizes — regular and a 'jumbo' version, which was introduced about 10 years ago. The table calendar format was launched in 1988 and a Hindu almanac, Mallige Panchanga Darshini, was added to the product line in 1990. Soon, in keeping with changing demands, date blocks and desk refill calendars were manufactured.

"The apartment culture had started in Bangalore and there were no walls that could be drilled without causing inconvenience to the neighbouring flat, so we launched the table top [version], which we used to call TV Top calendar," recalls Ananth. Given the digital advances, the e-calendar was launched in 2010. Today, you can also download a free e-calendar on your computer, while the company's mobile calendar can sync with your Google calendar.

The e-calendar links to a blog on the company's website where the significance of certain days is explained for the benefit of the younger generation, says Ananth.

Besides producing 18 lakh calendars each year, the nearly ₹200-crore company publishes over 100 kinds of diaries with themes ranging from religious and cultural to social and professional; examples include the Bhagavad-Gita Diary, Heritage Diary and Vishnu Sahasranama Diary. Its Upanishad calendar features a selection of verses and their meanings from the scriptures.

The company also prints books on food, nutrition, agriculture and philosophy, the *Samskrutha Kannada Dictionary*, and does commercial printing for school notebooks and other projects.

"When I visited Canada, I was surprised to see the Bangalore Press calendar at Windsor University in Ontario, in the office of a professor. When I asked her about it, she told me that she was fascinated by the calendar as it uses a vertical format for dates while most others have a horizontal design," says Ananth.

The postal department released a special cover to commemorate the 100th edition of the calendar — it is no mean achievement that its publisher is among the few score companies in India that are more than 100 years old.



We launched table-top versions for apartments

Growing up in Hyderabad, the one ritual at home I remember at the beginning of each year was the arrival of 'The Bangalore Press' calendar. Printed in Bangalore (now Bengaluru), the calendar was fascinating to my young eyes with its details that went beyond the usual listing of festivals and holidays. Besides marking the days for full moon (Poornima), new moon (Amavasya) and other lunar phases such as Ekadashi, there were markings for 'auspicious' and 'inauspicious' hours based on astrology. Then you had a plethora of information on chariot festivals in different temples in Karnataka. The calendar has remained an integral part of my life for over 40 years now, even after I moved to Bengaluru. This year, surprised to discover that the calendar was in its 100th year, I was eager to learn more about its historical beginnings and legacy.

### Royal past

The Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co Ltd on Mysore Road is a heritage building complete with arches, wooden windows and high ceilings. It houses the office and press of The Bangalore Press, a public limited company. Managing director Ananth HR traces the history of the company and the calendar all the way back to the time of the erstwhile Mysore ruler Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar (1884-1940). The king was in England to have his son's wedding invitation cards printed. His diwan (prime minister), the legendary engineer and statesman M Visvesvaraya, advised him that the cost of printing was so high that the money could instead be used to set up a printing press in the state.

They asked the London Royal Company to set up a printing unit in Bangalore (part of the

erstwhile Mysore province). The colonial British government in India, however, tried to scuttle its establishment, as it feared it would publish anti-British material. To work around this hurdle, Visvesvaraya constituted a managing committee with KP Puttana Chetty (a British-Indian administrator who served as the first president of the Bangalore municipality) as founder-chairman and C Hayavadana Rao (historian, member of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Indian Historical Records Commission) as secretary. Set up at the Mysore Road location where it still stands today, The Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co Ltd finally began operations on August 5, 1916, by printing documents for the Mysore province.

In 1919, after his retirement as diwan, Visvesvaraya became an advisor for the Bangalore Press. The company's iconic wall calendar was his brainchild; he was inspired by a calendar he had seen in the Sindh province that listed both public holidays and religious events. The first Bangalore Press calendar came out in 1921. The green-and-white design featured photos of the maharajas of Mysore in the four corners.

Initially printed in English, the calendar came out with a Kannada version in 1936. In fact, it was the writer Masti Venkatesh Iyengar — then a senior copywriter at the press, long before his elevation as a Jnanpith awardee — who pushed for the Kannada calendar and even offered the copyright of his works for publication by Bangalore Press in return.

The calendar was sold through retail stores

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