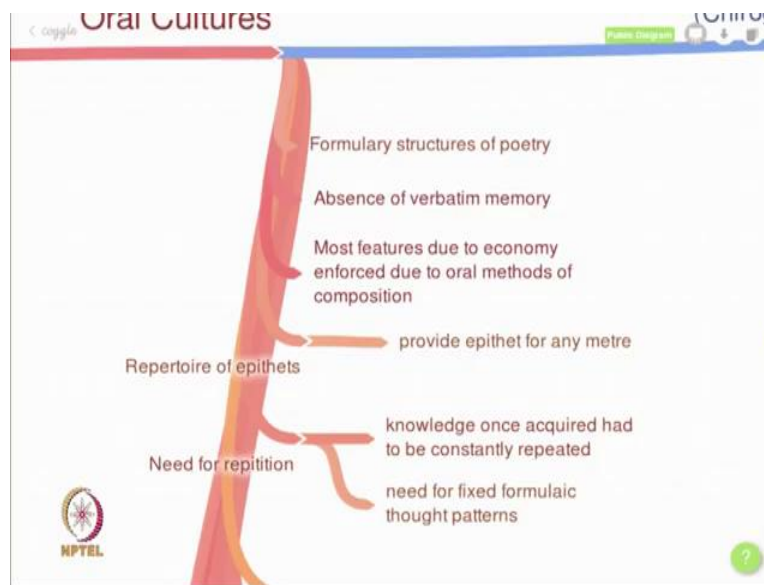


Text, Textuality and Digital Media
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Lecture 4 –
Walter Ong: Orality and Literacy
Part-2

We have already seen, how there has been a development of the various kinds of techniques through which texts are created. Before writing had come into being, overall forms of communication of ideas and stories- overall storytelling- had to depend on human memory. So, it did not have written formats which could substitute for human memory in any way. So therefore there were certain structures of poetry which made that process of remembering things through the mind easier.

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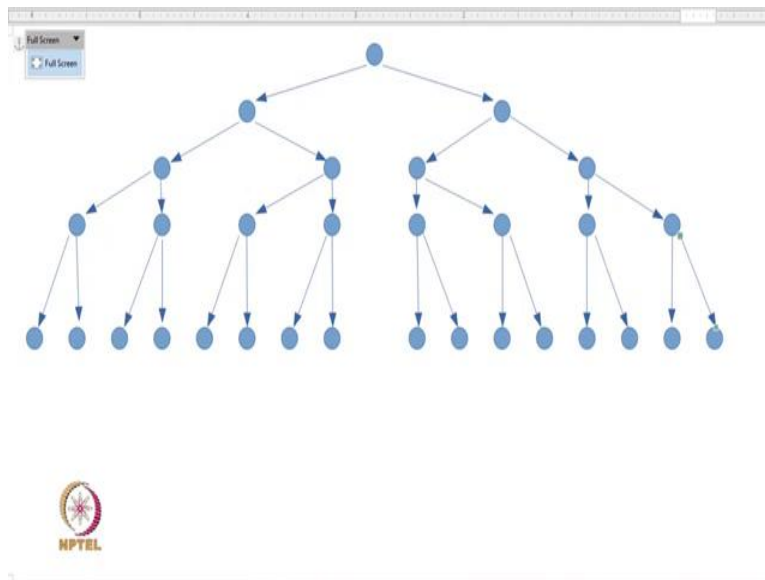


One of the characteristics of oral culture is that the various features of oral story telling and oral narratives primarily were due to a certain economy that was enforced due to oral methods of composition of stories. And the reason I am using the word stories is because I do not want to use the word poetry, because poetry is the most important feature. Because poetry has a certain formula to it. It has a certain scheme to it whether in terms of rhyme or rhythm. So, therefore some of the rhyme and rhythm is associated with poetry but what we need to understand is that the reason rhyme and rhythm is associated with poetry because it emanated as oral form. Rhyme and rhythm is not so much associated with prose because prose is more associated with written forms of storytelling.

So, that is a very crucial point that we need to understand- certain things that we take for granted were not so much natural or given. These were creations due to the certain conditions in which storytelling was happening- the technologies which were available or not available. So, we have oral form of storytelling which required the human mind to remember the progression of the story and that was made easier through certain mnemonic features which were conducted through things like rhyme and rhythm and their various poetic features. There were also each poet and when I say poet, we conjure in our mind naturally an idea of someone sitting down and writing poetry on a piece of paper, perhaps with a very beautiful tuned pen. That is not actually true.

In oral poetry, the troubadour or the Bard would move around from place to place and tell stories. And the stories were not written down anywhere because writing had not developed. They would have stories which they knew, and it would actually be wrong to say ‘the stories that they knew’ because they would know some bare bones of the stories. And they would make up the exact composition of the story then and there. Suppose while telling a story, someone asks a question or someone gives a certain response and the poet responds by telling another story.

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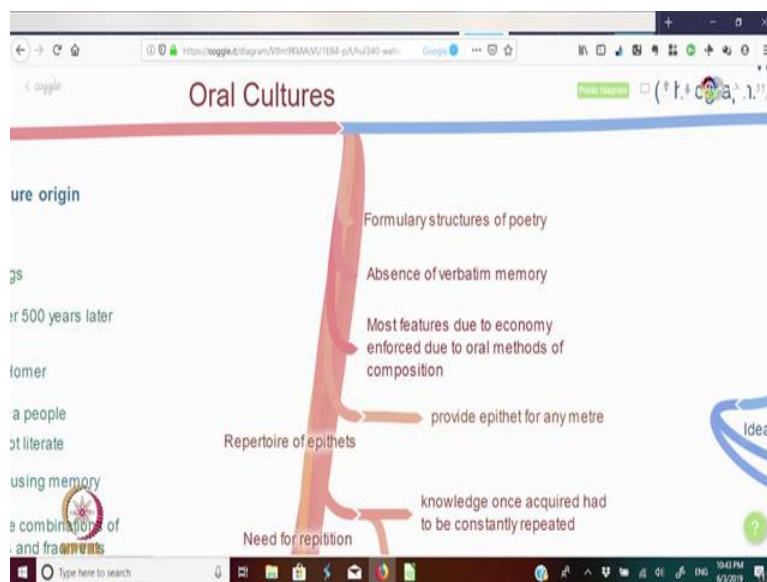


I had earlier referred to the story of the Panchatantra. In Panchatantra, you see there are stories within stories and the stories sort of branch out. It is a very branch like structure of a story which moves from one narrative to another to another and then returns back half the way, goes back to another narrative. And therefore the Panchatantra is not only five stories, there are many stories in it. And so in this process of storytelling, what happens with the the oral poet- the Bard- is that they have some bare bones of the story in mind which then is followed by the reiteration of it. The exact iteration of that particular story is at that moment.

Therefore, oral story telling is a performative form. A performance is by very nature, ephemeral. Ephemeral means it finishes off in the moment. It lives in the moment and finishes off in the moment. There is no record for it like, if this were a physical class and there were students sitting here, and there was no camera, then this would have been an ephemeral event.

This lecture itself would have been a completely ephemeral event. It would exist in the student's minds and in my mind in the recall, maybe some people would be taking notes. But the exact event cannot be reproduced. However, with a camera, this is getting recorded. But let me assure you that the camera is not recording everything. Camera is focused towards only a particular frame around me and probably the screen sometimes when it is cutting into it.

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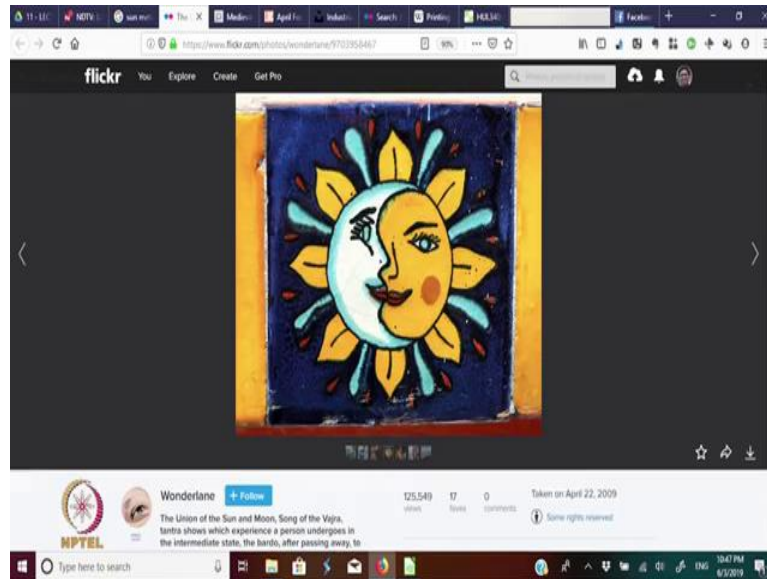
But it is not recording the little props which are lying at that corner of the room which are outside the field of the camera. Whereas, anybody who is seated here would have a full view of exactly what is happening, the exact context in which this performance in the form of a lecture is actually happening. So, let us not mistake and say that today it is possible to actually record and performance is no longer ephemeral. Because no matter where any performance is happening, someone or the other is holding out a camera and taking a video of it.

Yes, ephemeral quotient has certainly gone down. There are certain parts of the performance which is getting fixed in hard drives in physical memory. But performance itself is an ephemeral form and therefore oral storytelling is an ephemeral form. And therefore to return to my point, when the poet or the bard- the oral storyteller- is telling the story, the exact story is being told in the moment. It is not something that the person has learned by heart and therefore telling you.

But the person actually has a notion of the points that he wants to touch up on and at that moment they bring up examples, ideas, and as you see on the screen, bring up epithets. To explain epithets, take certain emotions like jealousy or anger. You give a certain example of what anger could be and therefore you tell a little story.

Those collections of epithets is something that the poet knows. This one to one correspondence between a particular epithet and a particular context is made in the moment. Certain poets would have certain favourite epithets. Certain poets would learn to pick and choose specific epithets in specific situations which are more appropriate, convey the idea better, and which the audience likes. A good poet would be somebody who would have a large repertoire of epithets, someone who is not repetitive.

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Imagine, if everybody compared the sun to a red rose or a flower or the yolk of an egg. If the poet constantly gives reference to the sun like a yolk of an egg, then the audience would be tremendously bored and would not like it. So, therefore the poet has to refer to the sun in various forms and that is the repertoire of the epithets. But there is no one to one correspondence. At various points of times it is like an array.

It is like a buffet of epithets that are there in the poet's mind- I have to talk about the sun now, I have to talk about the river now, I have to talk about the snow now. So, he picks up whatever epithet that comes to his mind which he can better apply. And that is what differentiated good poets from bad poets. As to what kind of epithets they use, that is true even today in the state of written poetry. Only thing is, in written poetry, once it is written down it gets finalized and fixed.

That is what a certain poet has written. It will not change once it is printed and passed on and sealed. Whereas, in the case of oral poetry rendition and oral storytelling, the epithets would keep on altering.

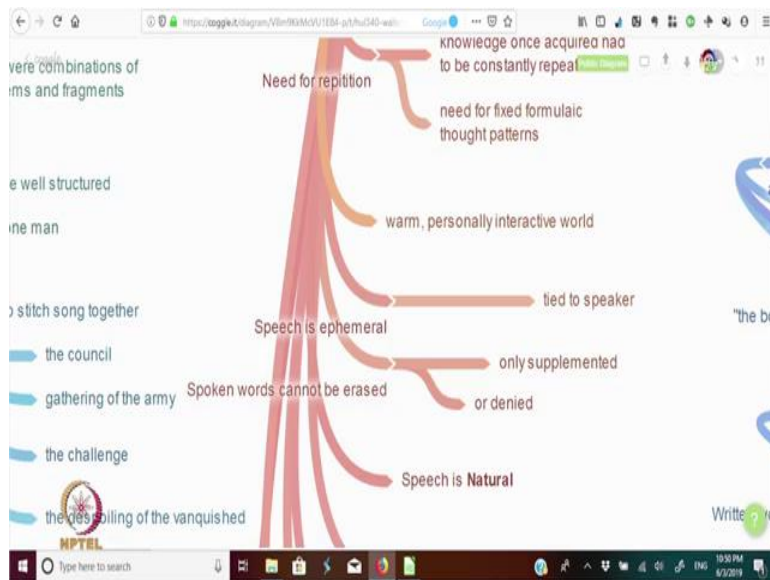
Now, the second point is that epithets will also have to be for various meters. So, there are various metrical patterns of poetry so that, the way we talk has a certain rhythm to it. So there is a tune which goes up and down and that's what makes it pleasant to the ear. Now, some meters are at a faster rhythm, some meters are at a slower rhythm, some meters are at a staccato rhythm, and some meters are at a more harmonious rhythm.

The epithets will also have to match the meter of that particular point. That is very important. Because if there is no variation in the meter of the poem by the poet of the story in storytelling, then it is again something that is not going to be very interesting to the audience. So imagine that some poet tells poetry or story only in one rhythm, then it is not something that is interesting at all.

So you have to vary the rhythm. Good songs are ones which move fast then go slow, and then move fast and then go slow and vary their rhythm at various points of time. So, as the rhythm that is occurring at that moment of time of storytelling the epithet has to match. So, all I am trying to assert is that memory is not a verbatim memory of the entire poem.

A full epic could be hundreds and thousands of lines long. But that does not mean that in oral form, the poet remembered each and everything. They remembered a hell of a lot. And they did not have any written record to fall back upon. But they did not have verbatim memory. So, every rendition would vary from the previous rendition. That is exactly what I am trying to tell you. Then, let us move on, to discuss the need for repetition.

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Because nothing was written down, the only way to ensure the continuity of a text was repetition. That if I heard something, I need to remember it, repeat it again and again in order to make sure that I do not forget about it. And this is very specific, very important to understand because the way in which the memory, brain and neurons actually operate. This is something that we are going to pick on later in the course when you try to understand the changes that are being brought about due to digital media. But for now, let us understand that every time we encounter a certain new idea, it produces certain changes in the chemical and physical patterns of the neurons within the brain.

The neurons at the synapses ally with each other in very different ways each time. And that is how the brain actually remembers. Now, what happens is once you have heard something and you hear it again, that synapse sort of gets solidified a little bit more and then that synapse gets solidified a little bit more the next time there is a revision so then that is why when one is learning something, one is practicing something those are the things that are getting formed. Now, if we are not repeating something for a very long period of time we tend to forget it.

This is because, once the synapse is not being used it gets used for other things, and that synapse is sort of lost. But when we again remember it there is a sort of etching mark which is there on the synapse. It grows and falls back on it. So, this is the process through which memory operates. Human memory actually operates as a physical memory as well- something that we need to understand.

So therefore knowledge once acquired within the oral domain had to be kept alive by constant repetition. There is also another aspect to this. Because we understand without the presence of written text or written

document or scripted document, knowledge could pass from one generation to another only through repetition. It is only by through this process of memory that text could pass forward.

So therefore, you have in traditional societies, rituals where these oral texts have a very important meaning. They have to be repeated each time and for conventional understanding it is given the status of something sacred: that the repetition creates some important sort of changes. It has some magical powers which is something that we need not be concerned about right now.

But what is important is that the very act of repetition of these texts keep these texts into being. But another point that we need to also know, is that this act of repetition is not like a photocopy. It is not like a mechanical copy where the same impression is brought about in the next generations. Through each repetition, through each circulation, the text undergoes certain mutations. There are interpolations that are brought in. We just saw in the previous point that even for the same oral storyteller, every new rendering of a story is unique.

So therefore, it is too much to expect that across generations, or across geography when a story gets repeated and recounted, it would continue to be the same. So, across space and time, stories keep changing. That is why when you look at mythologies or mythological stories or legends, you find there might be a commonality between stories in various states of India or various countries of the world. But there are certain changes which are there. The basic tenant may be the same but there are certain changes to that story.

Because in the process of storytelling, they are getting adapted to certain space and times. So, they move through these time and spaces and the story gets adapted. So the repetition is never an exact and fixed repetition but rather it goes on in the form of an alteration or mutation. And therefore, newer stories are formed. The narratives become newer.

This is something that is very important to understand. Oral forms are always circulated within a personal interactive world. When I am telling a story, or I am giving a lecture with a room full of students, it is a very personal experience. I am interacting with each student physically. We all exist in the physical space whereas in the mechanical reproduction - maybe a digital reproduction through the camera- it is very impersonal.

It is not personal, It is impersonal. There is some hope for some interactivity across the forum and I strongly recommend that you bring up all your doubts, ideas and disagreements through the forum which I would be very happy to answer. However, there is no taking away from it that the physical interaction

which is there in the performative one- in the oral storytelling- between teacher and student is absolutely absent in this digitally reproduced world.

So, moving on, as I said earlier, speech is ephemeral. Speech is performative. Speech is ephemeral and it is tied to the speaker. This is very crucial as I said earlier. Without the presence of the speaker, storytelling does not come about. Someone else may be teaching this chapter, someone else may be teaching this essay but will not be teaching this essay in the same way. The same song could be sung by many singers, but each singer has their own voice and bring their own innovations to the singing of the song, to the rendering of the song. And so that is something undeniable. So speech is somewhere tied directly with the presence of the speaker.

This is something that we need to talk about- as to how is writing different from speech. When an author writes a book, the name of the author is there. So therefore the author is also tied to the scripted book. But the way the author is tied to the book to the narrative of the book is very different from the way the speaker is tied to the speech that is given. And that is something that we will figure out in some time as we go along. We will touch upon that theme as well. Spoken words cannot be erased. Once said, it is there in your mind. They may get obliterated and nobody remembers it anymore. There may be a very faint memory in the mind of people but they cannot be erased in the way a written word can be erased. Written word on the page can be torn up or if it is written with some other medium, you can erase it.

You can also scratch it out. You can rewrite it. You can do various kinds of things. But spoken words cannot be erased. It can only be supplemented or denied. Someone says, 'I have been misquoted. I have been misunderstood.' Because the words that were said are there. They cannot be taken back. You cannot go around and say that I am going to remove the post that I have put yesterday on Twitter.

That is not something that is possible in the case of spoken words; they can only be supplemented. I can add a clarification. I can say something. But I cannot remove it in any sort of way. Speech is natural only to the extent you must understand. Speech is natural, given that it does not use any physical tool. However, language is not natural. Language is something that is created by human beings for communication.

In language, there are some basic form of signaling that various animals use and communicate with each other. We know that dolphins or whales can communicate across great distances through the ocean. Almost 500 miles. So, even there, the exact signaling has developed. I think organisms do learn the

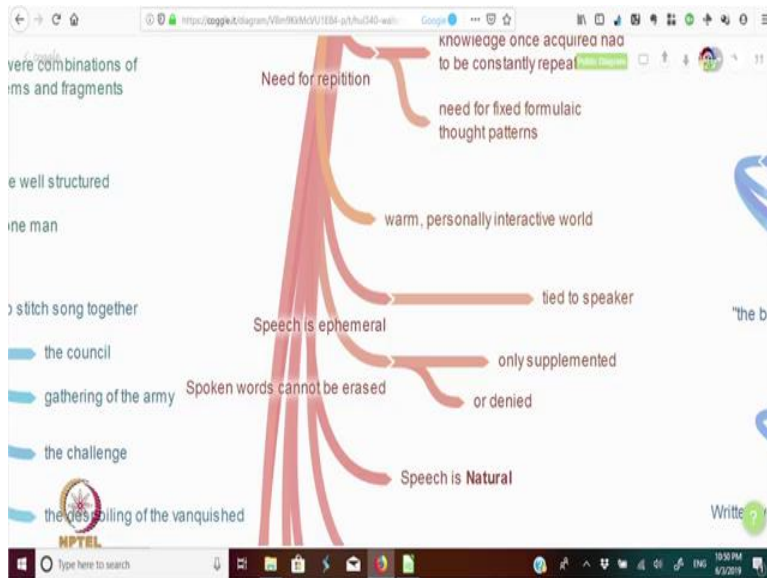
various kinds of signaling or symbolism processes. But human language is a far more evolved phenomena. We do not see the replication and evidence of it in the animal world and I had told you something about the use of the mouth for consumption of food and picking up food.

Human beings do not pick up food with the mouth which is why the mouth is organized very differently; this makes complex use of language possible. So, language is something that is innovative and more artificial but speech- the process of making sound- is natural only to the extent that we do not use any external tool like a pen or a keyboard. In orality, we cannot have charts or lists. Orality could narrate but not juxtapose. It cannot bring associations with each other. The words and speech are very important. When we said that the presence of the speaker cannot be denied, it is tied to the speaker. We also mean that the way I say something- the particular tonality, particular way of speaking- is something that gets tied to that the speaker. It is not something possible in the written.

In the written, that tonality could be lost. Orality is practiced in the presence of others and the oral code is something that cannot deal with the unfamiliar. It relegates meaning largely to the context. Usually, when we speak, in our mind we live in a literate universe. For us, we are interacting with the world of books as well as the world of lectures. But in a situation where there were no books or written material that was available- when writing had not yet emerged- the only way that people could communicate was to create the context within the world of the speech. You could not cross refer with other books or other things. So, that is something that writing actually develops better. It was not developed in the oral form.

In an oral form, you could not create charts or lists and provide a graph. There is no way to do that. So, the only way that oral tellers would have to impress upon their listeners was by the use of rhetoric. Rhetoric was less analytical. It impressed people through the use of flowery and interesting language, tone, tonality and argument.

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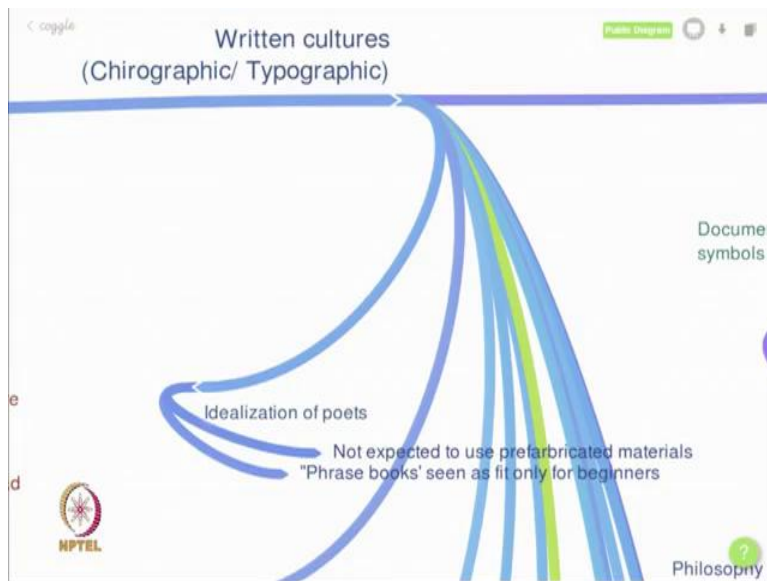
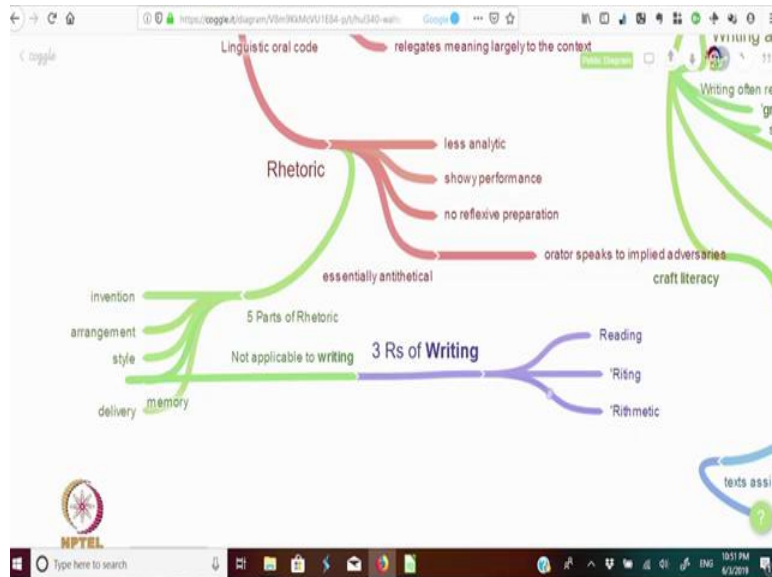


The rhetoric did not rely on analytical or factual resources. It is like getting impressed by somebody's way of speaking and not bothering whether the person is saying the truth or falsity. It is how convincing you are.

It is very difficult to imagine that in today's universe. Because the moment somebody has spoken, there can be ten thousand fact checks that could be done. But that was not accessible in an oral universe. People could not fact check. They would say 'Yes, he sounded convincing and therefore I accept it'.

So, rhetoric had various kinds of elements in it- invention; create newer epithets and newer ideas; arrangement; how to organize those ideas; style, what kind of language you use and delivery; how you present, what kind of tone, how well you talk, what kind of physical presence you have. And the fifth point is memory- how well you remember. That is a very important element. But memory gets reduced in the world of writing. There are three Rs of writing - reading, writing and arithmetic. Arithmetic calculation is something that is brought about through writing, and not through the oral process.

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Now if we move on to what happens in written cultures. When the early written cultures started coming into being, various poets relied on phrase books to try to create an additional memory and make it easier to remember the various epithets that brought in to their storytelling. Now, initially, it was looked upon as a negative practice; the ideal poet would be able to remember everything. We have heard of how Plato underplayed the importance of memory or he frowned upon the substitution of memory with writing. Because Plato felt that memory is a very important thing.

You need to constitute all the ideas within your own self and body so that it is uttered in an authentic way. However, externalization of knowledge in the form of a written text is frowned upon. It is impersonal and therefore reduced. It is shown to access knowledge from an impersonal source; this is looked upon as something that is inferior.

Therefore, the ideal poet is someone who does not refer to phrase books. It is only for beginners to use phrase books. This is how the culture of writing develops at that point of time. And we were going to constantly see that as writing technologies- technology of textual communication- changes, the ideas of the previous set of technologies seeps into the new. And it lives with the new for a long period of time till such time as the new stands on it's own and in time gives way to a future technology altogether.

And so every time there is a change, it will bring something of the old and carry something of the new. One very important change in the written text is that the author cannot be reached. In an oral disputation, the speaker is always there. Someone can ask a question. Someone can dispute a point. But in the written text, it has a life of its own. It can travel without the author. So when someone is reading it and a question arises or a dispute arises, there is no way that the author can be reached to answer those questions.

So, imagine a situation where there is a debate happening and there are two speakers who are speaking. They say opposite points and there is a disputation and finally you come to a certain conclusion- a resolution. That resolution is what everybody really takes home. However, in a written text, if there is a dispute, after the dispute, the original text has not been removed. It is still there. So, it continues to say something. It is not necessary that all readers will read both text A and text B together. So the disputation and the proposition need not be looked at together. So, even after repetition, the proposition has a life of its own.

So this is the reason why there would have been a tradition where books would be burned. There is no way to undo the book, so therefore the book is burnt. The opposite is also true. When people get a sense that a book says something, it must be true.

Because it is linked to this idea that people are still not able to understand- how can a book speak? Because you get used to a person speaking from their own knowledge and experience. Knowledge is something that is supposed to be internalized.

A book of knowledge is not something that could be fathomed because the book is not a living, walking talking living being. It is only living beings who have experience and the book itself does not. A book is

an externalized storage of experience but not itself experienced. So though it contains knowledge, it does not actually contain the knowledge of going through an experience and reaching that conclusion.

So there is a confusion here; that books can stand on their own.

People think that if the book can say something that is true and has knowledge, then maybe the book has some magical quality. So there is an essential doubt, as to what a book really is,. Then, we move on to the idea that written words can actually be erased.

This is tied to the previous point that books are burnt and written words can be removed; this is before the coming of print. Print is more difficult to erase but written words can be erased. Even when certain ideas can be etched onto stone, they would actually chip off an entire piece in case someone had to rewrite it and inscribe it or change the stone altogether. So written word can be erased whereas spoken words cannot be erased. But at the same point of time- till such time that the text is erased- there is no way that the disputation of that text is complete.

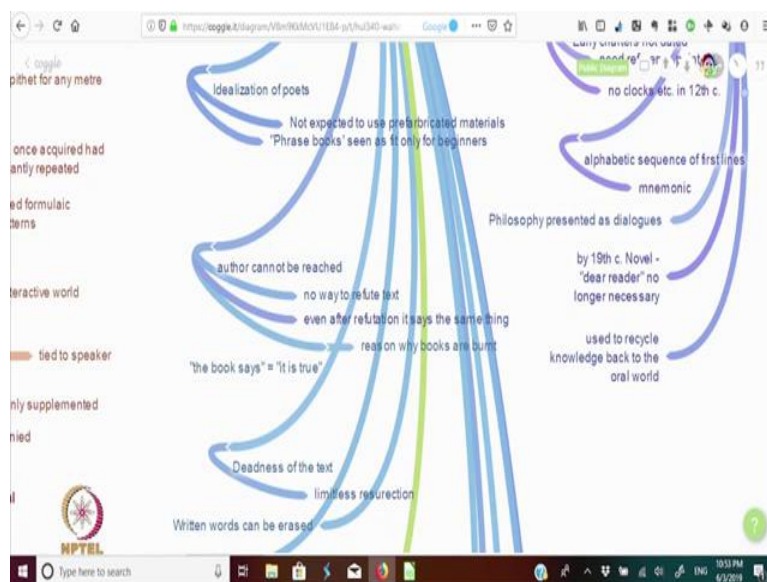
The disputation of text produces another text and you have to look at both the texts together. So I hope you understand this complication- that the coming of the text and the coming of writing at the same point of time makes erasure possible as well as makes the presence more secure. Till such time that a certain text is erased, it stays as it is. Even before the coming of print a certain text could have many manuscripts - not in the number of hundreds but certainly in scores or dozens. They could be there.

So if you get rid of one text and one manuscript does not mean that the other manuscripts are also gone. Or you can dispute over one manuscript but still the other manuscripts are being read without the presence of the repetition. And what you need to understand is sometimes these manuscripts are not great in number. The manuscripts when they are created would be very rare and they would be kept only with certain people- primarily ecclesiastical authorities, within churches, with priests, with certain maybe Royal families.

So, there would be great geographical distances between each manuscript. People would have to travel great distances to be able to read those manuscripts or access those manuscripts. Or they would not have access to the manuscripts. Not everybody could read or write. Most of these manuscripts would have been written in classical languages.

And not everybody had literacy. Literacy is something that was rare. We are talking about a largely non-literate world. So, you cannot imagine a situation where the presence of both the proposed text and the refuted text are known to everybody. The presence of these are known to everyone who is accessing that particular text. This is a very small literate world that we are talking about. The oral universe would have a larger presence and larger reach. The written universe would have reduced that reach, but that is a different point that we are going to look at in some time.

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Now, we understand we talked about how speech is natural and therefore writing is artificial. But when we say artificial we do not say it in a negative sense but a positive sense. The use of technology can

actually enrich human life and spirit. It enables realization of fuller and interior human potential. Why? Because now that it is possible to have access to writing, it becomes possible to have access to experiences of people across time and space. A particular individual, a particular scholar in an oral universe would be able to gain knowledge only from people whom he or she has met.

But with the coming of writing, knowledge can be acquired not only from great distances but also just the manuscript comes in. Then you learn about somebody else's ideas and somebody else's experience. Not only that, you also learn of the experience of generations of people before you. Now, in oral poetry, texts travel from generation to generation. Yes, they did. But then the amount of text that is available to a certain scholar or a listener was extremely restricted.

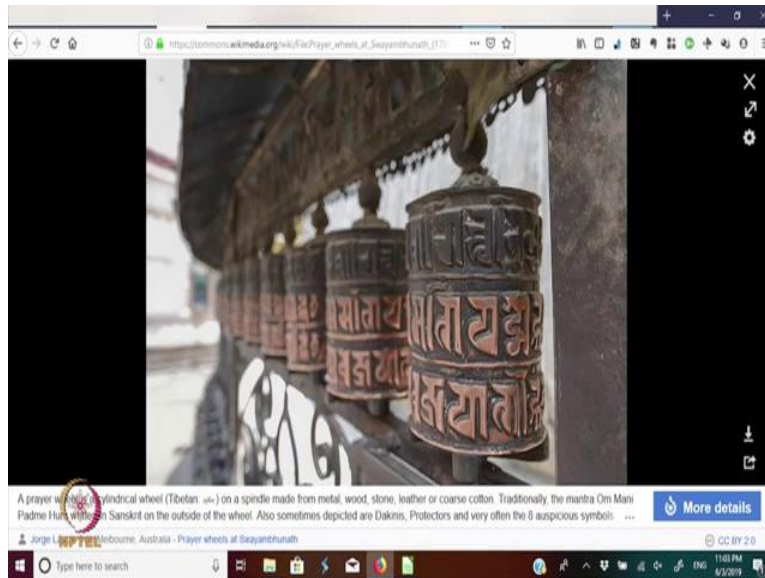
Because now manuscripts have a certain mobility; one, they can travel across geography; two, when oral texts travel from one generation to another, they do so by mutation. Whereas in the written text, that mutation is minimized. When a manuscript is there, it is slower in change. Till that manuscript is written down, the text remains the same. Yes, it is possible that someone else copies that and that copy has some interpolations into it. But the process is much slower than that of oral rendering. In the oral rendering, every rendering is unique.

Whereas in the chirographic world, every rewriting is unique. Every time someone refers to the text and speaks or reads it, it remains the same. This is something that we need to keep in mind. So, the changes in the text, and the possibility of change in the text has been arrested, has been reduced not as much as it would be arrested in print. Writing is still a manual form of reproduction.

It is slowed down. So two points - across time and space, more texts become available to the scholars. And intellectual capacity of the human species becomes enhanced to a great aspect. Now, because of the various characteristics of texts- the text actually externalizes human experience and keeps it outside that of the human body- this brings about an association between writing and power. Till now, rhetoric was powerful but now, writing is linked with power; the text itself can have a certain experience and contains a certain knowledge.

So, text is often regarded as some kind of secret or magic power. So there would be people who would write a Mantra or some sacred word on a piece of paper, wrap it around and wear it as an amulet on your body to have that magic power or chant.

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When you go to some of the Tibetan monasteries, you see jap jantras which has a certain description on it and you twist it around and it has that magic power. So also, text gets associated in the early chirographic world with some kind of secret or magic power. And this emanates primarily from the idea that what is supposed to be here is a storm that talks or a piece of papyrus that talks or parchment that talks. Can inanimate objects have any speech? But here the book speaks. So, the book has magic.

So, that is the association which is there. But there were other associations also. All early chirographic societies had limited literacies. Only the most learned people, primarily the priests, would have literacy. Even the Royal families and rulers would sometimes be illiterate or non literate.

Because this is one of the ways in which knowledge is controlled and knowledge is linked to power. The more you know, the more you can question. So therefore, the capacity to know has to be reduced and the only way to reduce the capacity to know is by reducing the capacity to read and therefore reduce literacy. So, not everybody was allowed to learn reading or writing.

This restriction of knowledge is not only coming about in the chirographic world. Even in the oral universe, not everybody was allowed into every space where oral renditions took place. For example, rituals would be conducted in sacred spaces.

Certain people of certain caste or certain ethnicities will not be allowed into those sacred spaces. Those sacred spaces would 'lose their purity'. If there was anybody from another caste or another ethnicity who entered it, there would be certain purification rituals which would be conducted in order to return the

sacredness. There would also be punishments to people who would intrude upon that sacred space. Thus, the space for various kinds of oral renditions would have been extremely restricted.

Even today, there are certain rituals within the family which are only for women and men are not allowed into that space. So, there is a certain kind of restriction that oral rendering can also bring about. And that is primarily by restricting access to that space. This restriction of access has been historically there. Because knowledge is associated with power. The more you know, the more you can question and the more you can therefore challenge authority. I would argue through this course, that each new form of technology would have newer forms of making this restriction possible. Also, with each new form of technology, issues get democratized even more.

So, very importantly, there is a tussle between a democratizing progressive trend within communication technologies versus the need of the powerful to restrict the flow of knowledge. Copyright is another very important mechanism through which knowledge is restricted. Print can lead to the proliferation of knowledge. Copyright becomes one mechanism through which you ensure that cheap access to knowledge becomes more difficult.

Most of the times we pay more for copyright than the actual printed physical book. Access is also restricted. These particular set of lectures are accessible because the users can access lectures purely by generating a login. You cannot probably access it without a login. But there is no pay associated with it, unless you want to take the exam.

As far as I understand, that is the current mechanism through which these courses are running. But still, this is a far more democratic and progressive form in educational platforms. There are many other online courses which ask you to pay a certain amount of money and it restricts the access to a certain set of people who have the capability of paying that amount. The fees that you have to pay for educational institutions restricts the access to that institution. So, knowledge in various ways gets restricted across time and in the early chirographic world, literacy was one way in which knowledge was restricted and made possible.

In an oral universe, there was no way that someone from the restricted sections -whether they were from a particular caste or ethnicity- could actually enter a space where knowledge was being distributed.

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For example, if you read the stories of early 19th century women learners in India like Rassundari Devi, you find in her autobiography *Amar Jiban (My Life)*, that she stole time from housework to read and write.

She would sit in the kitchen with a piece of charcoal and try to learn the alphabet. The moment there were footsteps, or sounds of a footfall, she would quickly keep the charcoal and all the writing implements away because she did not want to be seen reading or writing. Otherwise, life would have become very difficult for her. Because she would have been admonished and had tremendous restrictions placed on her. But it was her determination to read and write and women were not allowed to read and write because reading and writing is associated with access to knowledge.

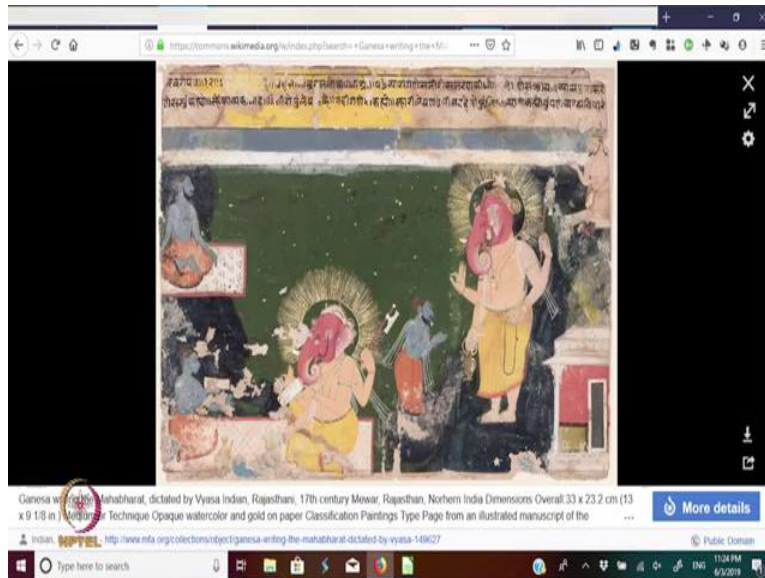
As a result of knowledge, you cannot be restricted by physical restrictions of space. So, these societies with limited literacies regarded writing as dangerous because writing would mean the possibility of knowledge passing on or getting into the wrong hands.

At the same time, illiterate people- people who are non-literate- would look upon the text as magical. They would also rub the books on their foreheads or lay on these books or pray on books. And writing is not just going to a shop and buying a pen and writing.

In the early days of writing, one had to create the implements through which writing was made possible. You could not go to a shop and buy a book, an exercise copy, a pencil or a pen and start writing. You had to create your own pen. You had to go and get that piece of feather and cut it exactly with a sharp implement. Also, you had to know exactly how to prepare the ink and constantly use it.

When you are writing with a feather or quill, you have to constantly make sure that the sharpness of the quill is maintained. It is like a pencil. You have to constantly maintain that sharpness. So only a few people could write. So sometimes, the oral poets who were good at creating texts- like poetry- were not very good at writing because it was a certain craft and they did not have the knowledge of that craft.

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So you have a case where Ved Vyas would require the help of Ganesha to write the Mahabharata, because he could not write. He was probably not literate enough. So he could create but Ganesha would write for Ved. Ganesha was the scribe.

We lose the tone and intonation in the written form. The mannerisms and ways in which words were spoken was not present. But with time, we included the exclamation mark or the question mark in order to bring in a little bit of the tone through punctuation.

When actors have to look at plays, they have to figure out exactly how a certain sentence or a certain line has to be uttered. Because the text of the play itself does not give them the tone. The tone has to be created. Another characteristic of writing is that writing has to be done solitary, i.e. it has to be done alone.

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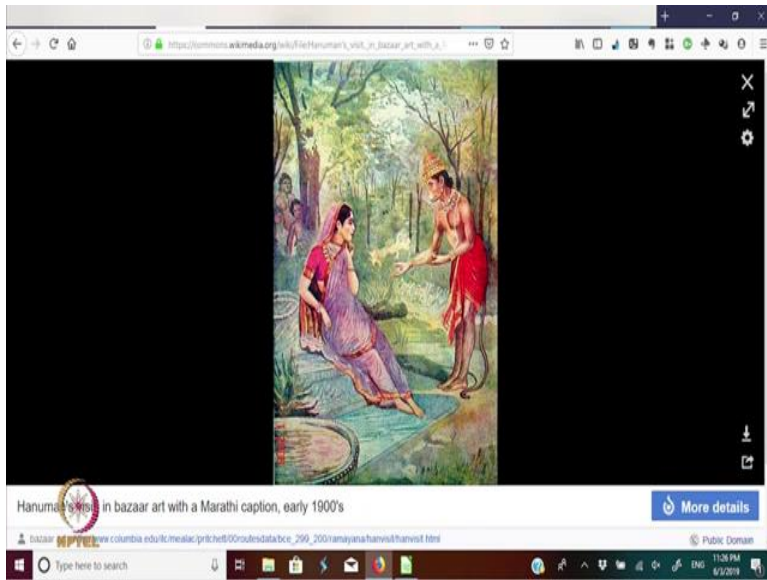


Most people find it very difficult to write in a group whereas, speech is something that is created in the presence of others. It is very difficult to speak without a room full of people. I am trying to do something that most teachers are not used to: to speak to an inanimate camera right now, and imagine that there are students on the other side of the camera. To have a classroom full of students would make communication a lot more easier, because that is what we are habituated to. But, writing in a room full of people with everybody speaking is a far more difficult exercise. Even in an examination hall, silence is maintained because you are required to write on your own. And this is something that is very difficult for poor families. This is also a question of access.

So these are some of the characteristics of early chirographic resources. In the early period, when writing came about, there would be messengers who travelled from one place to another and uttered the message of the speaker, or, the speaker would be present himself. But, when kings or rulers sent certain documents in written format, they required a kind of physical assurance of authority along with it. It is very interesting to note that when someone puts a document together, how do you authenticate that document? Because before writing, there would either be a knife or a sword or even a seal or a stamp.

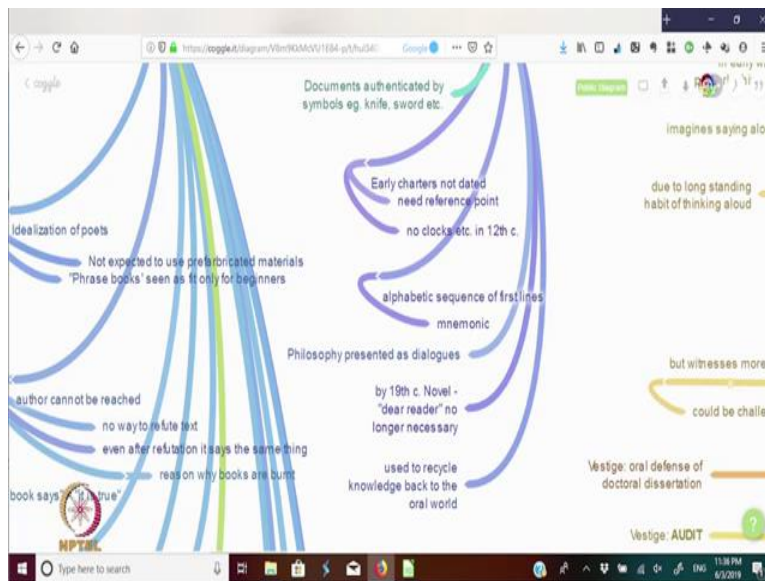
As long as things were written by hand, you needed a physical immutable form to authenticate that piece of writing. But in today's day and age, when you type something, print it out, and a typed piece is there, it is not authenticated through a seal or a sword.

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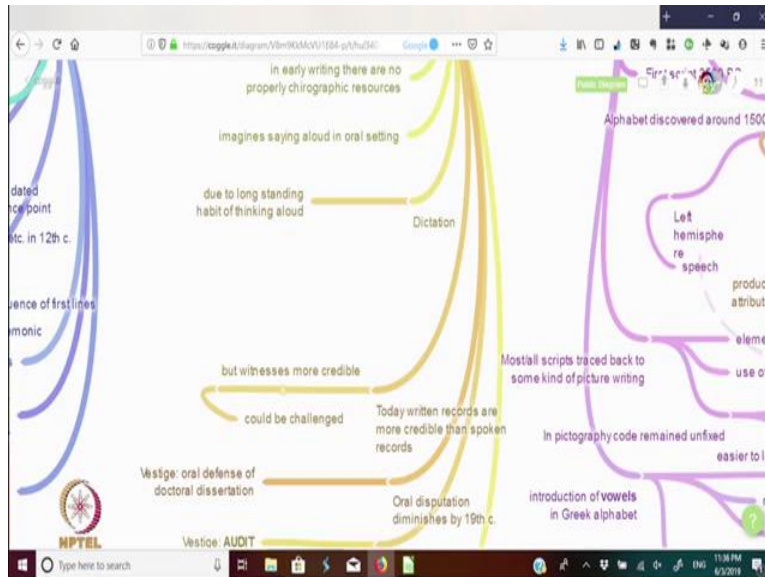
I just wish to remind you of the story in Ramayana for example, when Hanuman takes Ram's message to Sita. How does Sita know that it is Ram who has sent the message? Through the ring. So, it is the physical object that actually authenticates the message. Either it is the physical object that authenticates the message, or you know who the messenger is. But in this particular case, Sita had no way of knowing who Hanuman was.

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However, when there is a typed printed piece, it does not carry the manual form of writing. So, it is authenticated through the signature. So, it is important for us to know that various kinds of the processes of writing might not always be the same as in earlier days and age.

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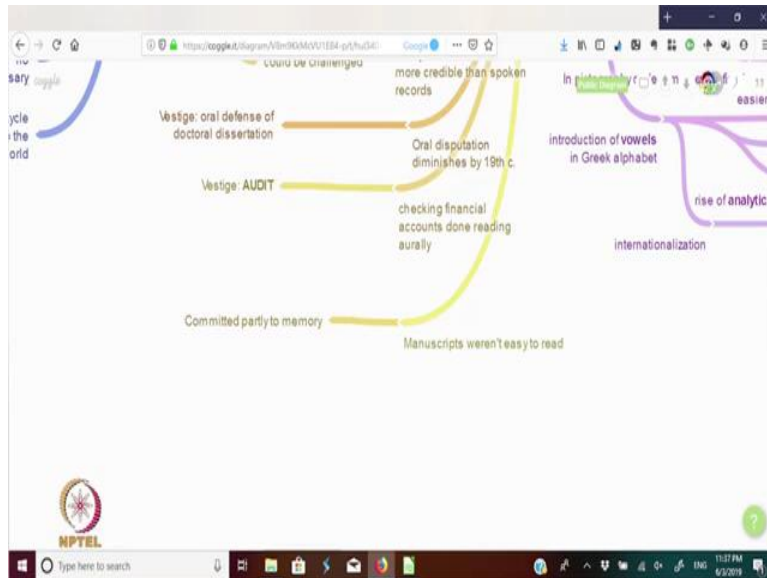
Till about the 13th or 14th century, there was no such thing as clock time. There was no clear sense of date, and year, and so you had to refer to epochal periods.

So, early charters did not have a clear sense of when they were written. Time would not be written. Also, very early forms of writing would emulate the oral pattern. So, the Iliad, or Odyssey and other forms of poetry still followed the oral poetic process. It is only later on that forms associated with the written form—the Almanac- or in the case of print, the novel, came into being. But, even in the early novels, the writers would use terms like Dear Reader, today I will tell you about this story. So, it is a more conversational tone. It is like someone sitting down and telling a story.

Thus, that oral remnant and vestige of the oral form continues into the written printed form. It is only much later by about the 19th century that the use of terms like ‘dear reader’ has stopped. There are certain features of older technologies which continue into newer technologies where the technology itself may demand a different practice. And it is only when the technology comes into being, that the vestige is dropped and this new practice comes into being.

Even in early writing, when manuscripts were used, people used to speak aloud. People looked at it as a tool for memory and speaking aloud. It was almost like a teleprompter. It was used like a teleprompter.

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It is important to understand that certain vestiges from the oral world continue into the written world. For instance, in the entire process of auditing and in defense, you take an interview. The written exam is followed by an interview and when that happens, you fall back into the practices of oral knowledge. It checks whether you really have the knowledge with you, whether you can only express yourself in writing or also in speech too. That is what the oral defense or the viva really is. It is a vestige of the oral forms of disputations, where scholars would sit across and dispute in the presence of others. So, the interview or the viva is a remnant of oral practices. Those of you who know a little bit of accounting would know that there is a process called audit. There is a written document which notes down the accounts and it is audited, meaning it is verified.

Now, this is again a vestige of earlier practices because an audit is oral. Before the coming of writing, you did not have a process of presenting written accounts. You go to the shop, you buy whatever, and say I spent this much on oil, this much on vegetables, that is the record. That is how financial accounts was done by oral means and that term has stuck. So, there are many things in our practices which are vestiges of previous practices of the oral world. I will leave you with one last point about manuscripts.

Early manuscripts were not easy to read. This was because vowels, at least in the Roman universe and in fact in various other languages, developed much later. So, the only way in which one could read the manuscript in the early periods of writing was by reading it aloud. It was very difficult to read something without the vowels in place. The moment writing comes into being people, stopped remembering texts, stopped memorizing texts or stopped speaking from memory. Writing only became an aid to memory. The writing was used as a reference and written manuscripts could only be read aloud. They could come

alive only in their reading aloud and not in silent reading. That developed much later. So I will stop here in this essay and we will take it on in the next lecture.

We will look at another essay by Ong where he discusses the issues of writing a whole lot more. Thank you.