

Text, Textuality and Digital Media
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Lecture 22
Rise of the Telugu Novel

In this lecture we will look at the coming of the novel in Telugu in the 19th century as we understand that the novel is a modern form and the history of the novel the coming of the novel in Europe and elsewhere in the world is linked intrinsically to the history of print.

Just to take you through that the set of ideas which lead to the rise of the novel is that increased urbanization leads to a clearer distinction between the work time and leisure time and the increased literacy means that people can make use of this leisure time through solipsistic modes of entertainment like reading and therefore the novel becomes very easily catering to this kind of an atmosphere where stories would be written in a way in which an individual can sit and read.

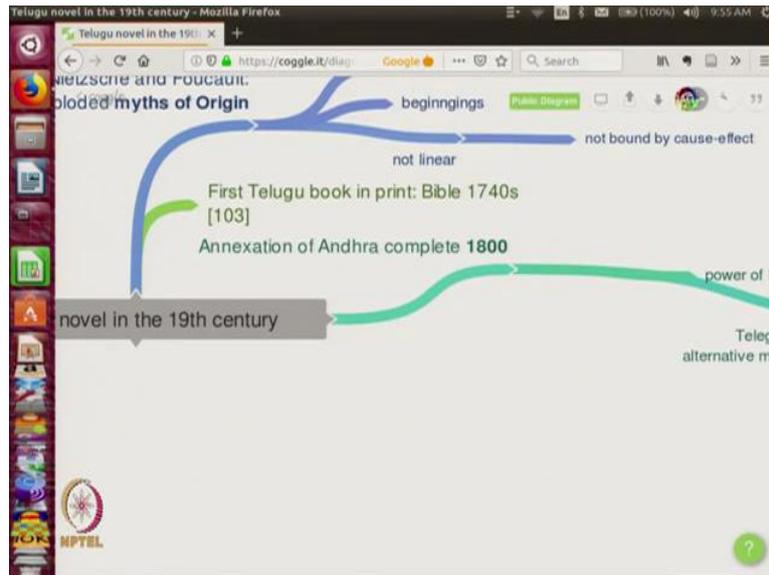
So these were not meant for collective reading. These were long passages long stories which were meant for reading silently individually and in India the novel form gets introduced through the Europeans. The Europeans of course when they come, as you have seen introduced their own education system and they tried to produce a picture before the Indians of the superiority of European forms and customs and the newly educated Indian students they understand they take these European forms to be superior to the pre-existing Indian forms of culture, literature and first they read these novels, then they tried to emulate them in their own languages the first attempt at translation and then the attempt to reproduce novel in their native languages and then the vernacular languages which gives rise to the first novels in India in the various languages in the 19th century

And this is typically a way in which culture actually operates in which it follows the trickle down effect of power. The forms of the powerful are the ones which dictate the way in which or encourage the growth in the territories in the peoples over whom power has been exercised.

We see that all the time, we see that in India today also, where there are multinational television companies and what happens is that if there are some shows Western game shows those shows get replicated first at a larger national level and because Hindi is a language that

is presented as a national language first gets emulated in Hindi but then there are versions of those same game shows in the local channels in the vernacular channels. So, we see this kind because and it is ultimately the powerful who are generating the forms which are produced and reproduced through these cultural networks and machinery

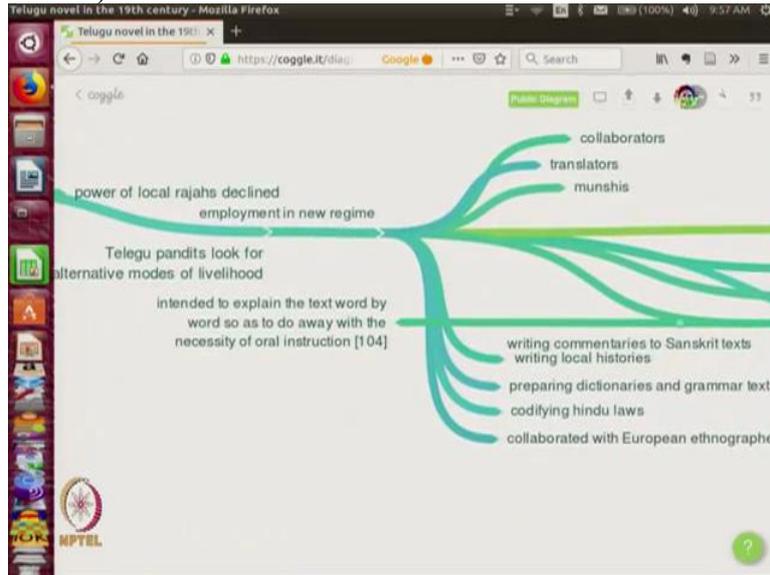
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And the other important point we see that the first Telugu book which is printed was the Bible in the 1740s and the Bible really it is something that gets tagged along. We also saw how the first printing machine that emerges in India was imported by the Portuguese to Goa in 1556 not directly to Goa but it ended up in Goa. But they were used by the Jesuits for their missionary activity and what missionary activity but to produce Bibles. So therefore there is an intrinsic link between the Bible and print and the growth of print worldwide.

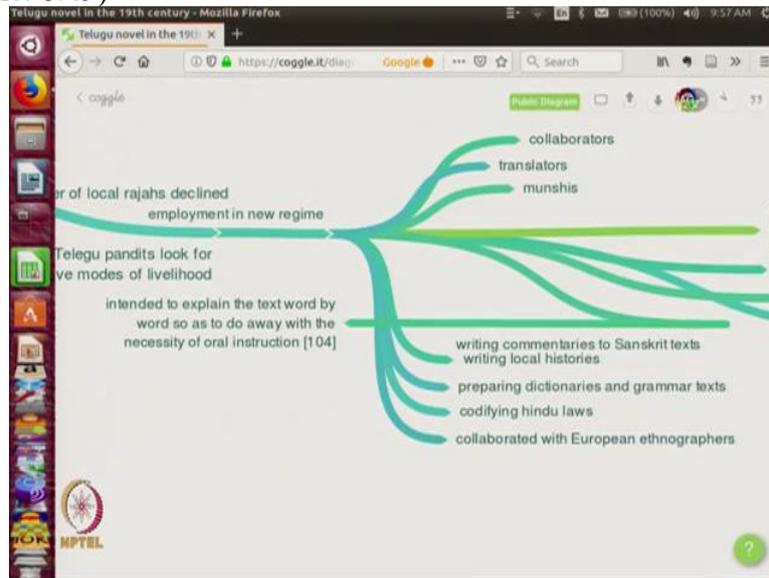
The missionaries in order to make inroads into newer lands and spread the word of Christianity they carry the Bible with them and they also tried to bring in the printing machine in order to produce the Bible in local languages in the vernacular in the native tongues all over the world and in that process they create typefaces in the local languages wherever possible. Wherever it's not possible, they often make use of the Roman alphabet in order to print in the local language. This is how a large number of printing gets initiated in the native languages all across the world including in India. So the first Telugu book which is printed was the Bible in the 1740s.

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The annexation of Andhra was completed in 1800. Remember, Hyderabad was still a princely state but Andhra today of course Hyderabad is part of Telangana. So, the Andhra that we are talking about was very similar to the Andhra that was annexed by the British and slowly as time went by, the power of the local rajahs declined. We understand that the local rajahs were the patrons of the arts and they would have employed a lot of these scribes and pundits and poets and they now needed alternative modes of livelihood and in order to do that they look for new employment under the regime.

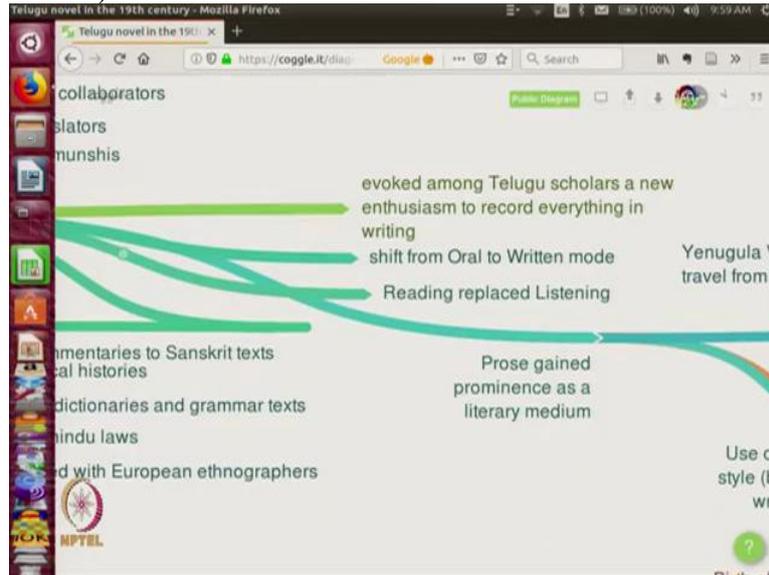
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And they found work as administrations because the British when they start governing this territory they need collaborators which will help them govern this territory and they need translators and they needed Munshis, Munshis those who would write for them write letters write farmans for them and they also on their own- once they take to this kind of writing and take to this kind of printing- they start writing commentaries to Sanskrit texts in a way that the text could be explained word by word so as to do away with the need for oral instruction. They would also be preparing dictionaries and grammar texts in emulation of the English grammar texts that there would be, they would also be writing local histories, they would be codifying Hindu laws and so the Hindu law books would come out because the legal system needs it and they collaborated with European ethnographers.

Ethnographers who would try to maintain records of the kind of people kind of practices and customs and culture as we have seen the colonizer, one of the important needs of the European colonizer was to know the land very well, land and its people very well so that they could formulate effective policies through which they could control and manage the colonial territories.

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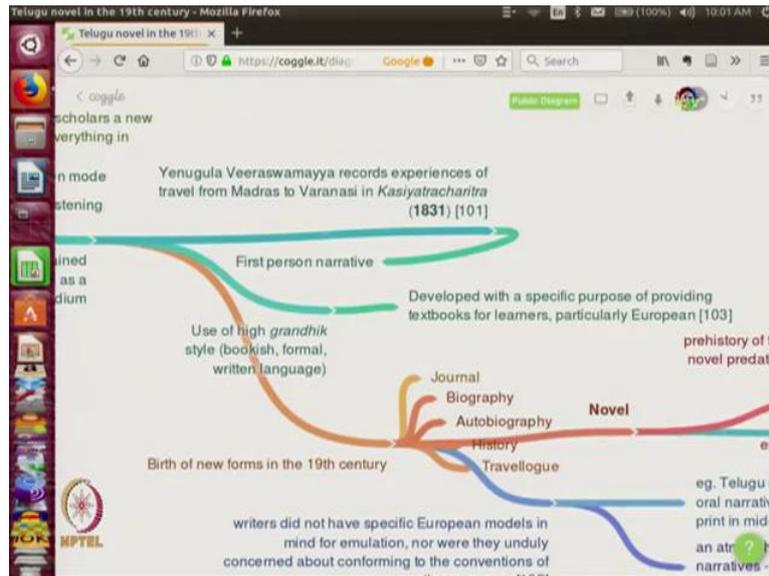


So, this set of practices which were first brought about by the Europeans and then they were taken up by the Indians in association with the Europeans and now slowly after that the Telugu scholars were trying to exercise it on their own and this evoked among the Telugu scholars a new kind of enthusiasm to record everything in writing.

So writing becomes the new power mode of expression. So, slowly the shift was happening from oral to the written the printed mode and reading was replacing listening. It is a slow process but this was slowly and surely happening and as we have figured out that when in the written world in the manuscript world and in the print world prose often gets greater prominence than poetry because poetry is akin to the oral method of communication.

We have gone over it time and again to look at the relationship between poetry and oral performative s.

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So, we see that 1831 we find that the first early Telugu records are coming about. This is a recording of the experiences of travel from Madras to Varanasi in Kasiyatracharitra 1831 which was a first person narrative. This is a new kind of, so this is the story of one person travelling and it's in a prose written mode, some kind of a novelty and the styles that were being used for these particular works that were printed. You had use of a high bookish grandhik style which is very formal written language which was used, not a very colloquial language, it is kind of developing a new kind of language for the printed world.

And this language actually was something that was developed by Europeans for the purpose of creating textbooks. They needed textbooks, for one, they needed textbooks for European administrators to learn the local language and even so these kind of administrative practices are in place even today.

So, if anybody gets selected into the Indian Administrative Services and they are allotted a certain cadre and a certain state of India and one of the things they have to do is they have to learn the local language learn to read and write in the local language this is pretty much the process that was put in place by the British in India when they formed the administrative services.

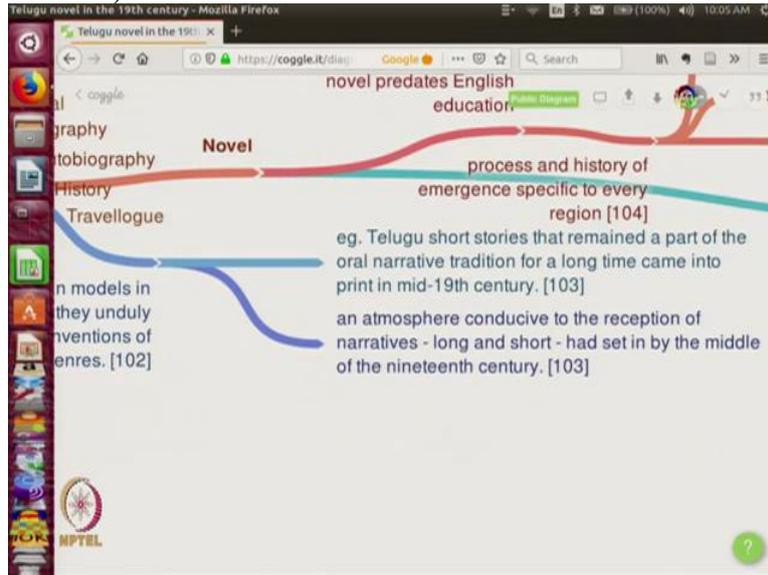
And the other reason they needed textbooks was to actually educate, for the education system through which they would the British would produce the set of staff who would help them

administer the land the clerks and the other kind, other support staff that would be there. Now as we have already noted that the various European forms, prevalent forms of literary production appear hegemonic and they are then taken up by the vernacular writers, who are nevertheless educated in English or in European institutions and they tried to emulate this particular kind of writing forms.

So, there were new kinds of forms which emerged in print, journals, biographies autobiographies, history, histories and travelogues. They were not concerned about, one point that needs to be noted is that in this essay Shree Vijay Shree points out that writers were happy to actually experiment and change the conventions of these genres. They did not follow these genres completely. They were not pressurized to do that. Nevertheless they were emulating these genres but they were also adapting it. So this is the way forms work. This is the way language works: when we are in India we speak English; we speak English not in a British way in an English way but there are many Englishes in India.

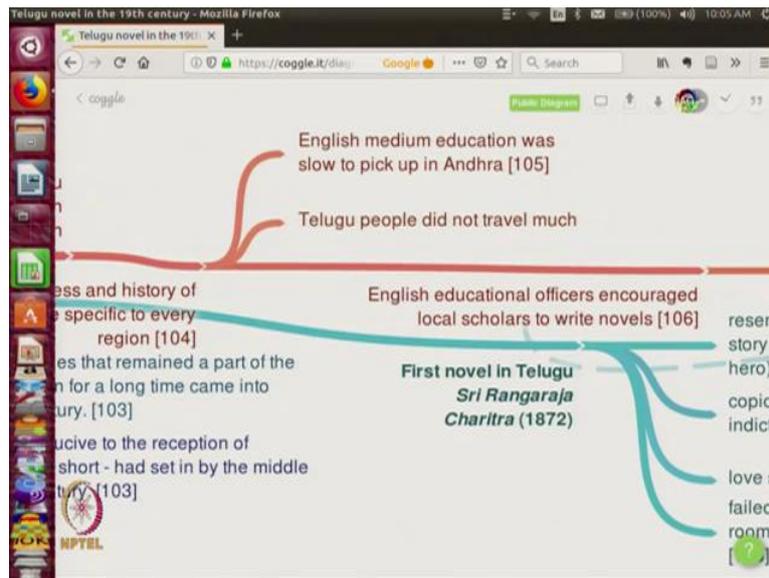
The English that I am speaking in is not British English. I am very much speaking an English that belongs was developed in this particular subcontinent and within this subcontinent there are many Englishes not one depending on which part of India we belong to and we all have a right to speak English in our particular ways and that was something that was realized by these early writers who did not hesitate to actually experiment with the form.

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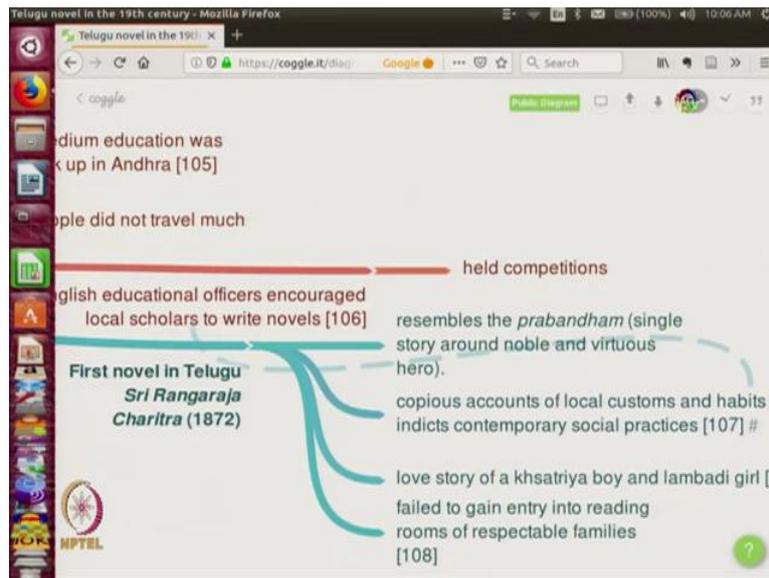
For example, Shree Vijay Shree says that Telugu short stories remained a part of the oral narrative tradition for a long time before coming into print in the mid-19th century. And they made use of this atmosphere where stories would be received.

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Now specifically to look at the novel form the novel form was something that took time to develop in the Telugu language and it was what Shree Vijay Shree notes here is that the English medium education was slow to pick up in Andhra and one of the reasons given is that the Telugu people did not travel too much, so they were not so much interested in encountering newer kind of experiences. These are two important reasons why the novel form did not pick up. However, the English educational officers encouraged local scholars to write novels and they in fact held competitions.

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So the identifiable first novel in Telugu was Shree Rangaraja Charitra 1872 which again maintains this mixture between a European genre and the Indian existing traditional forms of narrative. So this novel resembles a prabhandham, the prabhandum is a story around a noble or virtuous hero which mixes well because the novel as we see in Europe also is the story of an individual but this individual is not noble and virtuous which is more of the epic type of hero kind of an epic hero.

But in the European novel the hero is someone who is picaresque, who takes risks who moves out who engages in adventures falls into trouble learns from them that is the individual who grows out whereas here what we find it is a story around a noble and virtuous hero.

So, it is a certain mix of forms and the novel also makes copious accounts of local customs and habits and also comments on contemporary social practices. We see that happening very well in other early novel forms also we see that in the early African novels also which when they are written they maintain a certain record of the accounts. It's a way to culturally represent one's community, one's people. However, this novel because it was again speaking of a certain enlightenment a certain atmosphere of liberty, it's a love story across castes, so this novel did not gain entry to reading rooms of respectable families.

But what is important here to note is that this adventurousness which was engaged in the first novel writing, there is a mixture of newness with conservatism of style and the two kinds of

things are coming together. What we see is that in the coming together of an oral tradition with a printed tradition, mixing together, it produces, trying to produce a certain new kind of a literary form and that literary form may find social acceptability or not find social acceptability and that is the moment of the birth of the novel in Telugu.