International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad
(Deemed to be University)

The Gutenberg Parenthesis (HS3.301)

End Semester Exam

Max. Time: 3 hours **Max. Marks: 100** **01 May 2025**

Instructions:

- Answer any two questions from Section A and one question from Section B.
- Your responses should demonstrate engagement with course readings, lectures, and in-class discussions.
- Each answer from Section A is worth 30 marks; Section B is worth 40 marks.

Section A – Analytical and Interpretive (Answer Any Two in 700-800 words)

1. "Alphabet letterpress printing, in which each letter was cast on a separate piece of metal, of type, marked a psychological breakthrough of the first order." Explain what was broken through and what it led to. (CO1, CO2, CO3, CO6)

2. In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay famously argued that a single shelf of English books was worth more than all the literature of India and Arabia. Do you think that after two centuries of that it is safe to say that English is an Indian language? (CO2, CO3, CO4, CO5)

3. Discuss the assertions that the advent of the script led to the emergence of historical consciousness, and that oral cultures cannot have literature. (CO1, CO4, CO5)

4. "In post-print societies, the return of oral features through digital media is not a reversion but a transformation." Critically examine this statement with reference to Thomas Pettitt's 'Gutenberg Parenthesis' framework and the digital cultures we inhabit today. In what ways are we returning to oral-like practices, and in what ways are we departing from both orality and print? (CO3, CO5, CO6)

Section B – Creative and Reflective (Answer One in 1000 words)

5. You are invited to curate a new archive titled *"The End of the Page"*. Write an introductory essay for the archive that reflects on the historical arc of communication: from orality to print to digital media; and what it means to "archive" anything in the digital age. (CO5, CO6)

6. The Government of India invites you to write a policy paper answering the question, *"Should We Contintue to Teach Reading and Writing Skills to Primary School Students?"*. Drawing on the course

material, evaluate whether and how the skills, values, and worldviews associated with print culture remain relevant in a digital world. Write as if your position paper will have a major impact on India's education policy (perhaps like Macaulay's did). Some of the points to think about are

- How the history of script and print in India (especially typographic standardisation and language reform) shaped modern Indian languages;
- How issues of script, language, identity are being shaped by new digital mediums;
- What does knowledge and education mean in a post-print world; and
- What lessons can be drawn from the print era when dealing with today's multilingual, digital, and politicised environment. (CO4, CO5, CO6)