

STATE OF BOOKS AND READING HABITS

Amit Tyagi

As we aim to create a knowledge society, books come as an important tool of dissemination of ideas and knowledge. In a civilized society, publication of books and other printed material is considered as an important activity. At times we find the books indispensable, as sources of preservation and dissemination of knowledge.

The publishing industry in South Asia as a whole and India in particular, has never seen better times. There has been an impressive increase in the number of titles originating from and being produced in the region, in addition to large-scale investment in retail, application of new marketing tools and increasing standards of book production. India with a whopping 55 crore people below the age of 30, and with a large and ever increasing middle class, book sales in the country could well surpass all expectations. It has also been observed that there is direct correlation between the level of literacy and the demand for the books.

In India, number of books published in English has been growing annually at the rate of 30 percent. As the publishing industry in the country matures, the number of literary agencies will also increase thereby cultivating a new generation of writers in a wide range of genres.

At least 600 living languages continue to be spoken in India (more if you count variants, dialects), of which 23 (including English) are recognized. Efforts are generally focused on only the scheduled list of languages. The languages and dialects other than these have survived in spite of the neglect, but they do not have a corpus of printed literature due to non-availability of publication infrastructure in these languages.

Internet and the modern technology are considered as a threat to the printed word. E-books, online publishing and apps pose a challenge to publishers. The techies and publishers don't yet speak a common language and the investments of time and money required are not manageable for the Indian publishers who are mostly small and medium-sized. The rapidly changing formats, platforms and software, make it further difficult for publishers to keep up with the technological challenges.

Despite these challenges, India is emerging as a big hub of book publication, even though the number of books published per person continues to be low. On a broader note, China had published 4.4 lakh books in year 2013, USA 3.4 lakh, UK 1.84 lakh and Russian federation 1.1 lakh. In India, over 90,000 titles were published in 2013 in which 26 percent were in Hindi, 24 percent were in English and the rest were in other Indian languages.

because, he always underlines and highlights the important portions and makes notes on the sides for his future reference. The habit of reading books unfortunately has been on the wane. This is true not only for the printed version but also for the e-Books because most people would rather watch than read. Watching alone is not always a substitute to reading. He says that popularity of e-Books is rising at a very slow rate because the tech-savvy population of India is still a small percentage of the total population. However, as literacy and technology grows, e-Books will also grow.



On the other hand, Chairman of National Book Trust **Mr. Baldev Bhai Sharma** says, the future of printed books in India is bright. India is quite serious about printed books because the ease and stability they offer is very important for the country. He said participation of lakhs of people in the book fairs organised by the National Book Trust proves this. He added many major publishers did brisk business this year. More than 12 lakh people participated in the recent New Delhi World Book Fair and there were long queues at many stalls to buy books.

He feels that as of now, internet and e-books do not pose much threat to printed books. People are still more interested in seeing, touching and experiencing the books they read. Besides, there are apprehensions that internet and smart phones will take a long time in reaching across the country. People still give more importance to newspapers and magazines even when the news has already been transmitted online or through electronic media such as TV. In many aspects, especially for detailed news, print medium is still considered more trusted.

to satisfy their curiosity, they need to read books that impart knowledge. He emphasized that the new generation must read books, to know history, literature, science and philosophy and their culture too.

Dr K Srinivas Rao, Secretary, Sahitya Academy says the future of printed books is totally secure and there is no danger looming over it, at least for the next few years. Till the time, Indian youth has the passion for reading books, the future of printed books is bright. Actually, in India, reading books is a part of our culture and we cannot get this kind of experience from any other medium. Tabs or online media cannot offer the feelings that we Indians are so used to - when we read printed books. The act of touching books, keeping them and arranging them in the book shelves impart a kind of self-satisfaction which is totally absent in online medium.

In India, there has always been a demand for good literature. This is the reason that the demand for literature is on the rise for not only Hindi language but also for Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Bengali languages. In future, the demand for literature in vernacular languages will increase even more.

New media may not be an alternative to printed books, at least in near future. In fact, in some ways, the new technology is only promoting and marketing printed books. For example, if someone praises a book on Face book or Twitter, the demand of the book sees a sharp rise. Similarly, online reviews are only increasing the number of readers. He suggests that in schools, there should be a 'library' period for kids where they can develop the habit of reading books routinely. Once children develop the habit of reading books, they will always be able to focus on books. Besides, there should be a consolidated system in the rural areas to read books. For this, old libraries in rural areas should be renovated and modified. This will be a big help for people who are not able to read books - just because they are not available.

Neeraj Mittal, Director, Bhavna Prakashan says in India, the future of printed books is secure. These books connect with us emotionally, which is why we get so concerned about conserving them. Books also make excellent gifts for friends, relatives and colleagues - which add to their value. Internet and e-books do not present any big or immediate challenge to printed books. Large versions of printed books are being prepared at a large scale in our country but it is also true that only small percentage of population in India use Internet. Moreover, it will take more time for the people to connect to the e-versions of books - the way they do with the printed books. In India,

forms and software, make it further difficult for publishers to keep up with the technological challenges.

Despite these challenges, India is emerging as a big hub of book publication, even though the number of books published per person continues to be low. On a broader note, China had published 4.4 lakh books in year 2013, USA 3.4 lakh, UK 1.84 lakh and Russian federation 1.1 lakh. In India, over 90,000 titles were published in 2013 in which 26 percent were in **Hindi**, 24 percent were in **English**, and the rest were in other **Indian languages**.

On the occasion of **World Books Day** on 23rd April, **Employment News** spoke to some of the eminent authors and personalities connected with the publishing industry to know their views on future of books and challenges this industry faces.

Famous author and Management Guru **Shiv Khara** says, the sales of printed books in India have been stagnating and going down gradually, because of the following reasons: (a) People do not want to carry bulk (b) Printed books are more expensive than eBooks (c) Environmental reasons (d) Lack of ease of cross reference. He said he personally prefers the printed books

there were long queues at many stalls to buy books.

He feels that as of now, internet and e-books do not pose much threat to printed books. People are still more interested in seeing, touching and experiencing the books they read. Besides, there are apprehensions that internet and smart phones will take a long time in reaching across the country. People still give more importance to newspapers and magazines even when the news has already been transmitted online or through electronic media such as TV. In many aspects, especially for detailed news, print medium is still considered more trusted.

He believes, electronic means of reading books are still not very popular in India and it will need big efforts to make them reach the general public. To promote the habit of reading books, it is important to produce good quality books which should be available at affordable prices. The trend of reading books is not fading. People buy books related to literature, sports, medicine and children's books - according to their own preferences. It is important to promote this at larger scale. Along with this, it is crucial to make printed books available in remote areas too - so that our youth can learn to enjoy them. He said, books are our best friends. Our youth is curious and

the future of printed books is secure. These books connect with us emotionally, which is why we get so concerned about conserving them. Books also make excellent gifts for friends, relatives and colleagues - which add to their value. Internet and e-books do not present any big or immediate challenge to printed books. E-versions of printed books are being prepared at a large scale in our country but it is also true that only small percentage of population in India use Internet. Moreover, it will take more time for the people to connect to the e-versions of books - the way they do with the printed books. In India, e-versions and printed books can complement each other well. Many of our countrymen don't even know about the electronic mode of reading books. The government, publishers, and digital media companies will have to work very hard on awareness campaigns to make e-books reach the masses.

He said that to stimulate the interest of the youth, we need to touch upon the feeling of happiness we get when we touch or collect good books. We need to note that the new-age children not only get attracted to mobiles and computers, but also to books.