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EDITORIAL

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Bookish All the Way. . .

Dhanalakshmi Ayyer, India



Book a seat, book a crime, book a book (in a library), and there is nothing in life that has escaped the 'book', it would seem. Ask the Japanese and he would tell you how it has become necessary in his country to book a slot in a cemetery, thanks to the limited land available in the archipelago, for every thing from industries and offices to homes and hospitals. And at the end of the day, whatever you may or may not do, it is all about 'book-keeping'. That who keeps his books in order escapes the wrath of the law in this world, and is blessed by the gods in the other world.

Books have become part of every day life. For some, it has become a way of life - though not all of them are in the publishing industry. The question has often cropped up if book-purchases as a part of the family budget, and book-reading as a claimant for a share in one's time and energy in every passing day and week, have begun losing their relevance. Most definitely, there was a shrinkage in

both after the explosion of the electronic media in the country and the accompanying rise in the price of 'imported books', as a fallout of the globalisation process and the depreciating rupee in the Nineties. Even today, what otherwise are exclusive book stores in our metropolises are often stuffed with toys and trinkets, greeting cards and music albums, as well. They have become lifestyle stores and books could be a part of that lifestyle! Come the year-end, and you have the Christmas trees and New Year Diaries too vying for shop-space, as do other and relevant trinkets all the year round be it Valentine's Day or *Holi* and *Raksha-bandhan* in India or Thanksgiving and Guy Fawkes Day elsewhere. In a way, these are the stuff that has come to support and subsidise book-selling in many cases.

> *...Yet, the fact also remains that book-reading as a habit has caught on well with the present generation. Where the attitudes have changed is in their choice of reading material, which is often more focussed, subject-oriented and subjective, thus. As with the rest of their life, GenX look up to the books only as a source of information and knowledge - and not always as an inspiration. Of course, in this they also end up sharing their time with web-reading and downloading information...*

Yet, the fact also remains that book-reading as a habit has caught on well with the present generation. Where the attitudes have changed is in their choice of reading material, which is often more focussed, subject-oriented and subjective, thus. As with the rest of their life, GenX look up to the books only as a source of information and knowledge - and not always as an inspiration. Of course, in this they also end up sharing their time with web-reading and downloading information. The latter is both the latest in information or opinion available on any subject, and is also available at the finger-tip - and literally so. You know to 'Google' your way through your reading and research, and you have won half your battle in writing one of your own - not that this means a cut-and-paste job! Unfortunately though, the traditionalists continue to hold the view that all that is not read from a hard-bound book is not original research, and all that is reproduced from research using the internet is just a cut-and-paste job worthy of all-round condemnation for plagiarism.

There are also the old-world bibliophiles who were passionate towards reading classics, and repeating every word of what they had read, committed to their prodigious memories. While it deserves all-round appreciation and awe, theirs was the generation to which 'knowledge' mostly meant a command of the English language and the knowledge of the literary works, from William Shakespeare to Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth to Chaucer and Spencer. Today, India has stopped producing clerks for the British East India Company, and Indians are making their presence felt, loud and clear, in all walks of research and management - across the world. For most of them, the Daffodils, if known, is just a flower, found not in India. Gray, they have heard of - and it is a weak shade of black.

Who then said, nothing is in black and white?

-Dhanalakshmi Ayyer
India

Editorial appearing in the Previous Issue

Editorial appearing in the Next Issue

Editorials - Cumulative Index