

e-books has a lot of grey areas which need to be addressed

Book publishing in India is a family business, a fact known to one and all. Rajpal & Sons is presently seeing the fourth generation. Pranav Johri joined the family business just two years back but he is poised to continue the tradition of Rajpal & Sons for many many more years to come. Here, he shares his views on book publishing in conversation with Varsha Verma.

For Pranav Johri of Rajpal & Sons, book publishing is in their blood. He is the fourth generation to join the family business. "I believe that whenever a new generation comes in, it brings in new ideas, new initiatives and new approach, which gives our family business a thrust," he said.

So what is his take on the much talked-about e-books? "E-book is a small phenomenon right now as it has a lot of grey areas as so how to get into it, how to keep a control over it, how to keep the copyright safe and how the revenue is recorded and flows back to the publisher, to name a few. We do not want our books to be mass product. We do not want e-books to have the same fate as music. When the music was digitized, it became a mass product, available free to download at number of websites. Today, most of us prefer to download the music from net and use it instead of buying it from the music store. This needs to be avoided at all costs; e-book files need to be safeguarded," he told.

Pranav, however, feels that e-books have a lot of potential and everyone needs to get into it. "It is a convenience media

and prospective readers can check the books online and order them later on. Infact, these have a potential to increase the sales of conventional books. These can be a great marketing tool. Besides, I feel people would still like to hold a book and dog ear it while reading it at night," he remarked.

"Even in developed countries like US, the percentage of ebooks versus conventional books is mere 3-4 percent and maybe after 10 years, may reach to 5 percent, the conventional books are bound to stay," he added. Pranav, however, opines that although the bookshops might be replaced and shrink in size, become the online hubs for retails, but the books are bound to stay. And even this would take atleast 10-15 years to go.

Coming to the readership trends, Pranav told that the readership trends are changing and the fast moving books are self-help or self-development books, books on spirituality, motivational books, classics and lifestyle books. For Rajpal & Sons, their all-time bestsellers are '*Madhushaala*' by Harivansh Rai Bachchan, '*Manas ka Hans*' by Amritlal Nagar and '*Kitne Pakistan*' by Kamleshwar. "The recent bestsellers include all of Abdul Kalam's books, *India 2020: A vision for the New Millennium*, *Jinnah*, *autobiography of Benazir Bhutto*, R.K. Narayan collection in Hindi and spirituality collection by Krishnamurthy," told Pranav.

"Lot of translations are done at Rajpal & Sons and some of these sell even better than the original version. All the books of Amartya Sen are exclusively published by us and are very well accepted by the readers. R K Narayanan's collection in Hindi is also a big hit," he told. Presently, Rajpal & Sons has around 800-1000 titles.

"The readership trend is changing, their tastes are changing. Not many people are interested in literature, some of them like to have a quick read," added Meera Johri, MD, Rajpal & Sons.

"We mostly have bigwigs when we come to our authors but we also encourage young, budding authors, who are more acceptable in self-help and self development books," informed Pranav.

One of the biggest challenges which Pranav sees today is piracy of books.



Meera Johri, managing director, Rajpal & Sons

"We do take action against people selling pirated books, but it is only on the surface level, the problem is not resolved at the root level. Infact, the industry has to come together and address this growing menace." So, why does piracy occurs? "I feel that the distribution and reach is not good and controls at printers and binders are not adequate. Besides, the availability of titles is another concern. For example, pirated books at traffic signals are sold easily as they are readily available to the masses. Also, there are still a lot many places in India which are not connected well and hence the books do not reach such remote areas."

Pranav also feels that information sharing is not very smooth and there is a scope for better integration of the industry. "When you come out with a new book, you should have means and ways to reach to wider audience."

For their distribution network, Rajpal & Sons have their own sales team in place, besides wholesalers in major cities. They also supply to big retail chains as well. However, they do not export directly, but some retailers or parties do it for them. "But for the Indian sub-continent, we handle export ourselves," informed Pranav.

So, what are the future plans for this dynamic gentleman? "Infact, we wish to continue our tradition of publishing prominent books by prominent authors to become classics or landmark books," he concluded. ■



Pranav Johri

