

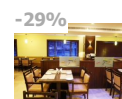
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What do Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi have in common

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What do Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi have in common with John Grisham, EL James and Robin Sharma? They all started their journey as authors via the platform of self-publishing. Many acclaimed and noted works today have been self-published. Although, it's not just in recent times that authors have had to resort to publishing their work themselves. The early works of Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson, Jane Austen and EE Cummings were self-published too.

Over the past few years, American markets have seen a slew of self-published books hit the shelves. Last year, according to an analysis of data from Bowker Books In Print and Bowker Identifier Service, it was reported that the number of self-published books produced annually in the US had nearly tripled, growing 287 per cent since 2006, and tallied more than 2,35,000 print and e-titles. And, with the increasing demand, even options for authors to self-publish have gone up. Besides Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, one has Smashwords, BookBaby, Barnes & Noble's Nook Press and Booktango. The options are seemingly endless. All of these options allow you to publish your work either as an eBook for download on an iPad, Kindle, Nook, Sony Reader or iPhone and Android devices. Many of these service providers also allow you to create hardcover books or paperbacks as print-on-demand options. Virtually, all of them allow you to set your own price that you wish to charge for every purchase.

India has slowly woken up to the phenomenon that is changing the business of books. More often than not, Indian authors turn to self-publishing after their manuscripts are serially rejected by large, reputed companies. This did not mean that their work was not good enough, as is evidenced by the popularity of some self-published books. The big names in the publishing business have a constant inflow of manuscripts to consider, and as a result, some gems do get sidelined or ignored. The biggest problem is simply being read. The average publisher is inundated with submissions and lacks the bandwidth to read each and every book proposal that is received.

Recently, the publishing giant Penguin announced in India the launch of Partridge, a self-publishing imprint, in partnership between Penguin Books India and Author Solutions. Andrew Phillips, the President and CEO of Penguin Books India, gives us an over-view of the process of how self-publishing works. "With Partridge, an author would come to us on our website and select a package which would ideally suit how they want to develop and publish their work. There are six packages at different prices, with different services. They then work with our team to fulfill the services provided in their package, as we assist them to get their title live. Other services are also available to our authors—editorial services, marketing services and book production services. The usual result is an e-book in distribution around the world and a print-ready file available for single or bulk orders."

Cinnamon Teal, Potli and Power Publishers are some popular self-publishing platforms in India. Typically, once their self-published work amasses a fan following, authors sell the rights to their book to a publishing giant. From a content perspective, some authors want to tell a story to a niche market or tell a very personal story, and self-publishing gives them the opportunity to do so while a traditional publishing company may not be in a position to publish their work. Self-publishing platforms do not charge upfront fees, so there is no funding constraint for the author. These platforms are more interested in taking a percentage from the sales turnover, no matter how small that turnover may be.

Amish Tripathi, known for his Shiva trilogy, and Ashwin Sanghi, the best-selling author of *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*, are two of India's most successful authors, who initially published their own work. Both are unanimous in saying that the decision to do so was forced upon them. Amish's books were rejected by publishers over 20 times. "So, it's not that I had a choice. My agent invested in the printing and I invested in the marketing. I don't come from a wealthy background, so I had to invest what I could from my salary and savings. And, that's how the journey began. When I was launching the book, I wasn't really thinking that I could make money from it. I assumed the money I was investing was not going to come back. This wasn't a business decision; it was something that I wanted to do for my personal satisfaction. I didn't really care whether the book succeeded or not. I was doing it because I wanted to do it." But, the payoff has

been staggering and unprecedented. Amish's Shiva trilogy is considered as one of India's most successful series.

According to *Forbes*, Amish's earnings, just by book sales, have crossed more than ` 16 crore in the last two years. Earlier this year, Dharma Productions bought the movie rights for his first book in the Shiva trilogy, *The Immortals of Meluha*. Then, there is also Rasana Atreya, the self-published author of *Tell a Thousand Lies*, which was shortlisted for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia prize. She was offered a publishing contract by one of India's largest publishing houses soon after, but she declined the offer and continued down the road of self-publishing.

Andrew, for one, is optimistic about the opportunities for Partridge in India. "We know that many Indians love to write and tell their stories—Penguin India receives many unsolicited manuscripts every month, as do other publishers, and it's just not possible to publish every one. Having a self-publishing option with a reputable publisher should therefore be highly attractive to authors. I firmly think the phenomenon of self-publishing not only in India, but also in other markets around the world, is here to stay. Some authors like to have more choice in how they publish, some can't find traditional publishing deals and want to tell their stories, and some choose self-publishing as their preferred route to market from the start," he says.

Ashwin likens the publishing industry across the world to the music business that was caught between a rock and hard place when Steve Jobs decided to sell music tracks at 99 cents via the iTunes Store. As a result of self-publishing gaining momentum, some of the key roles of the publishing industry have become redundant. Ashwin says, "Anyone can print a book these days. Getting an ISBN number and distribution is also not too difficult." So, what value does the traditional publisher bring to the table? "I would say that the key value addition is in editing, marketing and distribution. To that extent, you do not have these resources available to you as a self-published author."

When it comes to editorial freedom, authors taking the self-publishing route definitely have more say and control. Andrew sheds some light on the benefits of self-publishing, "There is often a shorter development cycle and production cycle. So, this can mean a faster time to market. Authors also retain all their rights when self-publishing, which can be attractive to some of them, but at the same time, this leaves them free to explore traditional publishing opportunities as well if they arise. Some authors also like the idea of marketing themselves and managing their campaigns which is necessary when self-publishing."

Skepticism about the quality of writing in the case of self-published novels abound. Often, they are not taken as seriously as a novel backed by a publisher. This is because of the assumption that because a manuscript was not picked up by a traditional publishing house, it won't be good enough. Ashwin is candid and agrees that self-published books often suffer from being low on quality, "simply because of the process of trial by fire. The well-established literary agents in New York or London receive around 1,00,000 unsolicited queries a year! In one agency, only four new writers were taken on last year, putting the odds of an author without connections getting representation from one of these biggies at roughly 1 in 11,111. The ones that make it through traditional publishing, by default, are the better written books."

We ask Amish if the criticism is valid and he responds somewhat fiercely, "Edgar Allen Poe and Jane Austen's first books were self-published. I think you would agree with me that they are not low quality. Self-published books will be like books published by the industry—some of them will be good, some of them will be bad. It is the way it is." The key point, according to Amish, is freedom of expression—that's what self-publishing is about. He does not see it as an issue of editorial control or quality. Amish is convinced that a lot more authors will take the self-publishing route in the future to get their voices heard. Well, so are we.

By Manali Shah

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