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## The Ebook story

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***The smartphone surge with the easy access of reading apps on them and dedicated ebook readers like Amazon's Kindle are redrawing the book market***

The battle lines are drawn. The ones who hold a romantic view that paper books are more beautiful and glamorous and that people should be encouraged to buy them and have nice libraries the way they used to. Coffee tables at a quaint corner of a room or a fireplace may be. And then there is a growing segment of book lovers, rather tech savvy power readers, who would like to flip a page of the book in their tabs or Kindle and download a vast spectre of genres on the go.

While it may be too early to write off the charm of paper books, the smartphone surge with the easy access of reading apps on them and dedicated ebook readers like Amazon's Kindle are redrawing the book market and ebook readers may soon make a foray into average households. The trend may be more pronounced in metro cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Chennai and Bangalore, nevertheless, it is fast catching up in tier-2 cities like Vizag, Coimbatore and Bhopal.

When Amazon launched its new-generation Kindle Paperwhite e-book reader with enhanced features earlier this year, it was not only sold through over 250 top tech outlets in India but the prices were also slashed as a festive offer last month. This was a strong indicator of the fast growing e-book market in India with every other book being e-published.

In order to cater to this fast evolving market for ebooks, there has been a flood of e-readers and ebook apps of late - GooglePlay Books was launched in India last year; Amazon launched its Kindle range of e-readers and the Kindle Store. India's leading book seller, Flipkart recently launched multiple e-books reader apps with features that facilitate easy access to any section of the book on the go, book-marking of pages and reference to a dictionary while reading. In addition to this, there is also a text-to-speech feature where the app reads out the book to you, also useful for the visually challenged. The company launched with 70,000 titles in the e-books category, while today it has 5.5 lakh in the e-book format. Things are changing rapidly in the ebook market which has prompted top publishing houses to re-look at their strategy.

Says an Amazon Kindle spokesperson: "We see huge potential in the India market. India is amongst the top 10 markets for books and the third largest market for English books. This high propensity for reading, increasing Internet penetration and Internet-enabled devices plus a rapid growth of middle class population with increasing disposable income makes it a very promising market." Amazon India offers over 2.3 million Kindle books to Indian customers, including 5 lakh exclusive titles through Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). With Whispersync technology Kindle users can stop and start a book and pick it up right where they left off – even on different devices.

A cheaper pricing strategy compared to paper books has also helped to spur the growth in this segment. "Ebooks are like a moving library. My Kindle stores over 1,000 books and the prices are much cheaper. Books should not be luxury items; books should be everywhere. People shouldn't have to think hard about clicking that 'buy' button," says Shilpa Naidu, an avid book lover from Vizag and a dental officer with the Indian Army. Shilpa belongs to the fast growing number of ebook readers who have rediscovered the joy of reading in their busy lives through the touch of a screen.

Amazon adds that in India, apart from literature and fiction titles, children's books and mythological, biographies have become big too.

### Self publishing

The jumpstart of the Indian ebook market has led to a new breed of self published writers. For instance, Amish Tripathi opted to self-publish his first book 'The Immortals of Meluha' after being rejected by around 20 publishing houses. The book became such a hit online that publishers chased him soon after, resulting in a \$1-million contract with Westland India for his work 'Shiva Trilogy'.

Parvathi Ramkumar, Bangalore-based author and grand daughter of noted Malayalam writer V Madhavan Nair, says her debut fantasy novel '*The Groves of the Sun*' could reach out to readers across the world, thanks to the e-book platform. "It has been a very rewarding experience for me. The best part about being a self-published writer is that there is no middle-man. The marketing of the book solely lies in the hands of the writer," says Parvathi, who is currently working on her second novel and a novella.

Amazon says there are a lot of growth opportunities for aspirants from various forms of writing, including poetry, prose, fiction, non-fiction, bloggers from different communities such as chefs, travel writers, photographers. Its Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) books accounted for about a third of the top 100 Kindle books on Amazon.com each week. On an average in India, Amazon.in had over 20 KDP titles in top 100 Kindle list in 2013.

Rasana Atreya, who holds a Masters in Computer Engineering, worked in IT sector for a few years before she took to writing. She is the author of the Amazon bestseller '*Tell A Thousand Lies*', which was also shortlisted for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia Award. "When you self publish, you create your account on Amazon, smashwords etc, you upload the book and you control the pricing. This gives you complete control over your book. If you think your book cover is impeding sales, you can swap it out with a new one. If you want to price your book lower in order to temporarily attract more readers, you can do that as well. You can run promotions and track sales hourly," says the Hyderabad-based writer. *Tell A Thousand Lies* has received close to 450 reviews across Amazon UK/US and Goodreads. It has remained on the bestseller list in Eastern fiction since the time of publication in May 2012. Her latest one '*28 Years A Bachelor*' is set for release soon.

Yes, it is tough on the independent book stores, in times of ebooks and ecommerce. And for those of us who love the paper book, it's definitely a big change.

Keywords: [online book market](#), [Amazon](#), [Kindle](#), [smartphone apps](#), [e-book reader](#)



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