

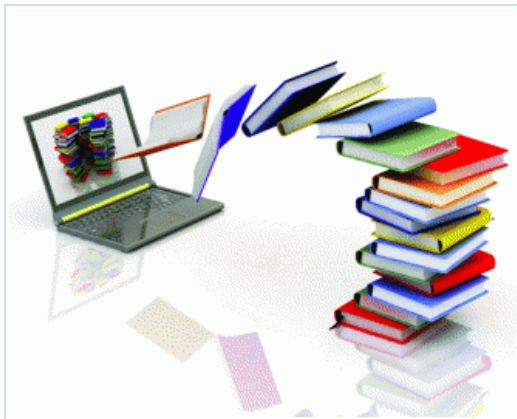


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## SUNDAY EDITION

### SELF-SERVICE, BEST SERVICE!

Sunday, 11 May 2014 | [Ananya Borgohain](#) | in [Agenda](#)



**There is no correct way of getting published. But what for sure is crucial is that one has a complete knowledge of the different modes of publishing — traditional, vanity, self-publishing, print-on-demand etc — before finalising the route suggests ANANYA BORGOHAIN**

There has been a significant shift from the traditional modes of publishing of late; more so in the West. Cyberspace seems to be blooming with opportunities for budding writers to get themselves published, particularly in the e-book format. Success stories of writers like Steven Berkoff, David Mamet, Barry Eisler and so on are making people more curious towards this method of becoming an author. In India, although the e-book format is not

yet mainstream, options like the Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) have been a sigh of relief for many aspiring writers.

Recently, *The Guardian* too joined forces with *Legend Times* to find the best self-published novels every month. It has also launched a new monthly prize that aims to find the best DIY (Do It Yourself) novels. Self-published books seem to be the newest trend and what makes it so appealing is that it negates the middlemen and fetches benefits for both the authors as well as the readers. Jon P. Fine, Director of Author & Publishing Relations, Amazon.com, says, “It is still a very nascent but growing market in India and we are very excited by the response we are seeing from authors based in India. Just to give perspective, in 2013, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) books accounted for about a third of the top 100 Kindle books on Amazon.com each week, on an average and in India, Amazon.in had over 20 KDP titles in top 100 Kindle in 2013.”

But how has been the quality of said books? With anybody and everybody having such easy access to being published, is the quality of good writing not being compromised? What happens when writing is reduced to an object of market dynamics or a route to merely make fame and money? It would be difficult to estimate that from a literary lens because the same could apply to the traditional mode of publishing as well where ‘bad’ books have been enough published and widely marketed as well. Sri Vishwanath, one of the KDP authors, who has also been ranked in the top 50 most popular authors in the “Mind Body and Spirit” by Amazon USA consistently for the last 12 months, says, “History tells us that generating revenue from creativity is a painful and many times a stressful process. But companies like Amazon and Apple who have opened a level playing field the percentage of success goes up from 2 per cent to 20 percent. I think one can absolutely make a career in writing through self-publishing. Though one has to be careful though as it requires full time commitment and tremendous perseverance.” Over quarter million of his books have been downloaded in the last two years in Amazon Kindle.

#### SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

One no longer has to wait for months and sometimes over a year for a response from a prospective publisher or book agent. Royalties too are henceforth enjoyed in high percentages. It doesn't take more than five minutes to put up a book on the site and instantly becomes available to the world since the book is available within two days of having uploaded it. A book can be published in multiple languages and be available in different apps as well, for instance, the free Kindle devices and apps. Parvathi Ramkumar, author of the self-published *The Grove of the Sun* says, “Self-publishing eliminates the dependence on middlemen. You enjoy direct control over your product. Particularly in genres like fantasy or mystery, publishers have set preferences. Say, they would require mythological fantasies, now my book is not mythological so for me self-publishing it was far more convenient. It's rewarding to receive good responses from readers across the globe.” Writer Rasana Atreya says, “*My Tell A Thousand Lies* was shortlisted for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia prize. At that time I had a contract with a publisher which I soon declined and opted to self-publish it.” Both Ramkumar and Atreya say

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## SUNDAY EDITION

All

### Hexa ho!

22 Jun 2014 | [Meenakshi Rao](#)

Spain out, Brazil struggling, two draws, three own goals, eight penalties and four red cards already — where exactly is the 20th World Cup going in football's most exotic and passionate home? MEENAKSHI RAO tries to

that in the future too, they would choose to self-publish their works rather than struggle with the traditional modes of publishing.

HOW IT WORKS

There are several portals where one can upload their book viz. Barnes and Nobles, iBooks, CreateSpace, Lulu, Pothi.com, Amazon, et al, following their respective rules as mentioned in the websites. They have video tutorials available as well. The cover images, file formats allowed, conversion to PDFs or .txt files, and so on are listed on the web sites and have to be meticulously followed. For instance, KDP asserts, "Kindle Direct Publishing converts your digital text so readers using the Amazon Kindle or Kindle for PC or mobile devices can read it. It also collects basic details about your content, including author, content type, cover image, and list price, and makes that information available along with your content on the Kindle Store. If you already have an Amazon.com account, you're ready to go. Just visit the Kindle Direct Publishing home page and sign in. If not, click Sign Up to create an account." Both paperback and e-book options are available herein. Atreya adds, "The paperback is published on demand. I hired help for the cover and book jacket; formatting needs help because ebook formatting is different from paperback formatting, but it's fairly manageable. It's still different from vanity publishing." Vanity publishing is when the author has to pay the publishing house to publish the book.

THE PRIVILEGES

It becomes helpful when shipping and distribution are no longer needed. One just needs to follow the walkthrough mentioned on the websites and a book gets conveniently uploaded. It is also possible to see the hourly hits and the amount of control is magnificent. Writer Ajay Jain complains, "One doesn't get a proper hearing from the traditional publishers. It becomes disillusioning. In stark contrast, self-publishing is very easy and fulfilling." Fine asserts, "Our vision for Kindle is to have every book, ever written, in every language, all available in less than 60 seconds. We provide an endless selection of titles, and present them in a useful, easy-to-search way, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day and our KDP platform helps add such valuable authors whose work is appreciated by a global audience. We offer millions of titles, provide customer reviews, features such as Search Inside the Book to allow readers to preview books before purchase, get targeted recommendations, and access Author Pages to read about and follow their favorite authors, participate in discussions, and discover related authors."

HOW TO DECIDE THE PRICE OF THE BOOK

Thorough research is required in this aspect. It is important to look at other ebooks and tally with their prices and have a good grip over the market knowledge. Vishwanath explains, "For established authors who are traditionally published through big publishing houses the price range in amazon is between \$2.99 to \$9.99. For newbies or those who are not household names should begin with 0.99 cents. The reason is readers take a chance and dont think twice when the price point is 0.99 cents. Once you have established credibility then price is elastic, it is not an issue anymore. I started with \$2.99 but then made it 0.99 later." Atreya recalls, "I moved the price of my book from \$3 to \$4 after it fared well. It is generally advisable to keep it under \$5." Jain too adds, "One also needs to consider how much has been invested on external help. I have paid `10,000 and more to editors and at times professional editors have done it for me for free. Now if I need to cover my expenditure then I will have to quote the final price accordingly." Amazon's website clearly states, "Digital books with a file size greater than 3 megabytes up to 10 megabytes must also have a list price of at least \$.99, and digital books with a file size of 10 megabytes or greater must have a list price of at least \$2.99."

DEMERITS

There is an evident stigma associated with self-publishing in India. Unlike *The Guardian*, *The Hindu's* Literary Prize guidelines state that no self-published book can be an entrant for the prize. Alliance of Independent Authors is now calling for booksellers, reviewers and literary festivals to reconsider their judgement on the quality of self-published writing. Also, even if there could be enough sales, distribution outlets are restricted, more so because they are not available in bookstores. As Atreya says, "CreateSpace can be too expensive at times. Pothi.com then becomes a more viable option." If you work with an editorial team of the portal, it will help design and finalise the manuscript. For instance, in CreateSpace, they offer packages for services they offer to the author. The higher the requirements of the author – copyediting, custom design, ISBN number, formatting, et al – the higher would be the price of the package. For those who want to hire their own team, Vishwanath offers a solution here, "Honestly for digital books you don't need to spend a cent in formatting. Editing is very important and again you can get editors for \$300- \$800 a book and at the same time you can even get them for \$50 from fiverr.com. In designing I spend lot of time going through stock photos and picking up a good picture. The picture costs around \$3 and cover around \$10 in fiverr.com."

Also, Amazon Kindle does not offer to print the book. The 70 percent royalty too is only applicable for sales of the book to customers in the Available Sales Territories. For sales to other customers, royalties are calculated at 35 percent, and these transactions appear at a 35 percent rate in the sales report. They also reserve the right to reset the cost of the book. But Atreya argues, "Traditional publishers too may promise 25 per cent royalty but it's not really that. There's also the book agent's cut involved."

It's difficult to pinpoint the right way to get published, maybe because there's no absolute one. Publishing is not academic or literary, it's commercial marketing, to generalise. But what for sure has to be more important is for one to have a complete knowledge of the different modes of publishing – traditional, vanity, self-publishing, print-on-demand – and so on, before one finalises one's route.

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My contract comes to an end at this World Cup and there will be no epilogue. You can understand well as to why.

Ivory Coast football team coach —Sabri Lamouchi

River Ganga is a leader of other rivers like Narendra Modi is the leader of the nation.

Union Minister —Uma Bharti

I love my name and I will keep to that even after marriage. People know me as Rani Mukerji, and they will always know me by that name.

Bollywod actor —Rani Mukerji

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