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# THE HINDU

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## The selfies of the book biz

From keeping track of sales to raking in the moolah with high royalties, self-published writers have plenty of reasons for going solo...



We were sceptical at first. “But won’t you miss the smell of old books?” we asked. As Gulzar wrote in one poem, what of the old flowers pressed between pages, what of asking for books, dropping them or picking them up as excuses for forging relationships with complete strangers? (“*magar woh jo kitabon mein milaa karte thay sookhay phool, kitabein maangne, giraanay, uthaane kay bahaane rishtey bante thay, unkaa kyaa hogaa, wo shayad ab nahi hongey*”). The pragmatists gave us their reasons. “Technology is the way forward; think of all the space you will be saving at home/office.” How unromantic, real estate as the trade off for books.

Slowly, however, reasons for embracing e-readers like Amazon’s Kindle are emerging. “Think of all the trees we can save,” they say. True. And here’s another compelling one: discovering interesting writers who are publishing exclusively on these e-readers. But why do authors choose to go solo online? Four of Amazon India’s biggest successes tell us, why they chose Kindle Direct Publishing.

### Sri Vishwanath

Ranked among the 50 most popular authors in the “Mind Body and Spirit” section by Amazon USA consistently during the last year and with over a quarter million books downloaded in the last 14 months on Amazon Kindle, Sri Vishwanath is among the best examples of Kindle Direct Publishing platform’s success in India. The 42-year-old cost accountant and company secretary, born and brought up in Mumbai, lived and worked in the United States. At 33, he came back to Mumbai to write.

Among the 13 books he has written in the last seven years, titles such as *Give Up Your Excess Baggage: 24 Simple Mind Exercises That Great Men & Women Effectively Use Every Single Day*, *The Power of Visualization - Meditation Secrets That Matter the Most*, *Seven Common Signs of A Spiritual Awakening* have seen great response. His latest book is titled *Stolen Idol*.

“Like everyone else, I went through traditional publishers initially but simultaneously explored the self-publishing

route. I kept writing books, got close to securing big deals but for some reason or the other the deal would fall through. Eight years later, after completing 13 transformational titles I uploaded all my books on Amazon Kindle. And readers in United States, the United Kingdom and other countries loved it," says a proud Vishwanath.

He has even helped his son Vignesh publish on the platform.

### **Parvathi Ramkumar**

**Parvathi is a full-time writer, professional book critic and now the author of a fantasy novel, *The Grove of the Sun*. "Writing, especially imaginative fiction, has always been a passion for me since I was a little girl," she says. The Bangalore-based author is also the granddaughter of noted Malayalam litterateur V. Madhavan Nair (Mali).**

**"*The Grove of the Sun* is a standalone high fantasy novel, unique in its setting and approach. It has Indian elements that are not drawn from mythology. It is about Order and Chaos in the whimsical land of Chimera, and one man's discovery that all that he's believed about his homeland may not be the truth after all," says Parvathi. "Fantasy, especially one that is not based on mythology, is relatively new in India," she explains. Since traditional publishers' response was lukewarm, Parvathi decided to go with KDP. "The book is available in India, the US and the UK, Australia, Canada, and many more countries. There are also no extra costs nor any middlemen involved, and as a whole, it is a quick and attractive way to market my writing," she adds.**

### **Rasana Atreya**

**Rasana Atreya, who holds a Masters in Computer Engineering, worked in IT for a few years until the yearning to be a writer got too strong to ignore. "My first book is about superstition, our (Indian) obsession with the colour of one's skin, and the power of manipulation. This novel came about because Indian television is overrun with advertisements from manufacturers of fairness creams that promise everything from good grades to nirvana, if only you use their brand," she says. "I was shortlisted for the Tibor Jones South Asia award in 2012," she adds. "Around that time I was also offered a contract by a publishing house. Ironically enough, it was these two things (the award and the contract) that gave me the confidence to strike out on my own with my book *Tell a Thousand Lies*. And their 70 per cent royalties don't hurt," she adds. "The response was much more than I'd hoped for or expected. I've received fan mail from places as varied as Mexico and Pakistan!" On some months, she says, she has also sold more than 1,000 books online.**

### **Ajay Jain**

**A full-time writer, journalist and a photographer based in Delhi, Ajay Jain has written travel books like *Peep Peep Don't Sleep*, and others such as *Super Brand You*. "I initially published on KDP as that was the only major e-publishing platform. More importantly, it allowed you to upload and list the book without any fuss. You could even decide your own pricing," he explains. "I am also able to tap into an international audience, set prices in multiple currencies and also vary the same according to the purchasing power of various markets," he explains, "In a nutshell, the distribution and simplicity of the platform ensures there are minimum barriers for publishers, authors and readers to come together."**