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WORDS' WORTH

MORE MONEY, BIGGER MARKETING PLANS AND A CAPTIVE, HOMEGROWN AUDIENCE — POP INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH IS A BOOMING MARKET. AND THE AUTHORS ARE LOVING IT!

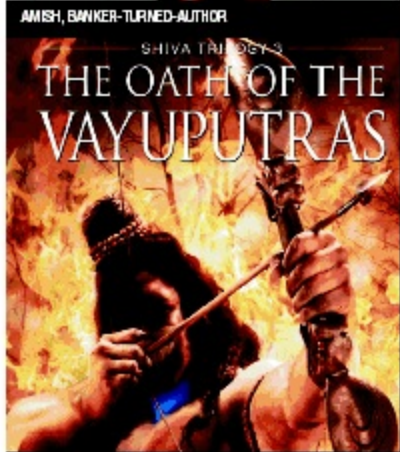


AMISH, BANKER-TURNED-AUTHOR

CHETAN BHAGAT AND AMISH WERE THE GAME-CHANGERS. BUT A HOST OF YOUNG AUTHORS, EXCITING STORYLINES AND SOME OUT-OF-THE-BOX MARKETING TECHNIQUES ARE CHANGING THE FACE OF ENGLISH PUBLISHING IN INDIA. THE GAINER? THE READER OF COURSE!



ASHWIN SANGHI, BUSINESSMAN-AUTHOR

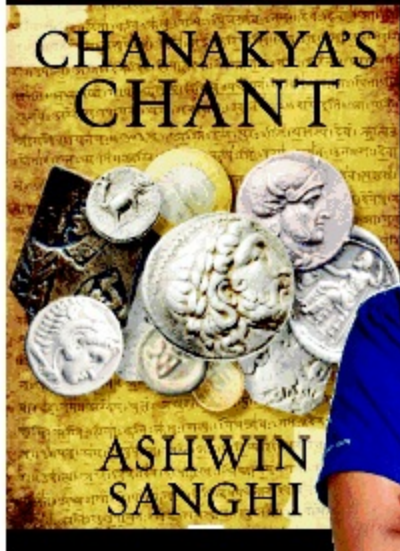


Copyright Question

Ho was just another banker with just another pit in job, but A Tripathi always had conviction. So when he wrote his first book, he self-published 3,000 copies with his buddy Atul, he thought he would recover the printing costs. Three years and three books later, his banking job is history. Amish's Medha series has sold more than 1.5 million copies, with retail sales worth ₹40 crore. The advance he's just received for his next project — a staggering ₹6 crore — has grabbed the headlines. And Amish is not alone. With more money flowing in, the Indian publishing scene is being buffeted by winds of change. From marketing to packaging and selling, everything in the process chain is getting a makeover.

Says Ashwin Sanghi, whose three books have sold more than 5 lakh copies, "It is impossible to guess the size of the market as no scientific study has been done. However, some say that the Indian publishing industry is valued at ₹500 crore. It is also believed that India is the third-largest English language publisher in the world. But none of these statistics have been empirically proved. What we can say with some confidence is the fact that the per capita consumption of books is still very low, thus making India a much more exciting market than the US or UK." Ashwin too had self-published 1000 copies of his first book.

The biggest change in recent times has been a change in the mindset of authors, fed many instead of writing for western readers, they now write for the home audience. "The market was exploited by TV channels, which is why they did great business. Publishers picked subjects that appealed to a niche readership and hence sales were not high. That meant lower salaries for publishing staff, lesser money for authors... it was a vicious cycle. Things changed with dynamic marketing strategies and subjects that appealed to Indian readers. Some authors with marketing background came in, and the cycle was just reversed," says Amish.



CHETAN BHAGAT, CORPORATE-TURNED-AUTHOR

PRICING IS THE KEY

The result was low-priced books and larger print orders, which changed things for the better. "We have tapped three generations of Indians. We are also concentrating on tier-2 and tier-3 cities like Bikaner, Indore etc. I had received the manuscript of Chetan Bhagat's Five point Someone on a Saturday evening and kept reading it straight for seven hours, even skipping dinner. When the book hit the market, people could connect with Alok, Hari and Ryan," says Kapish Mehra, MD of Rupa.

Bhagat's Revolution 2020 has sold 1.5 million copies, with 1 million copies selling within 100 days. Rupa has set a target of 2 million copies for his next book. At ₹40 each, and royalty varying from 10-15% for the author, if all 2 million copies are sold, it would mean a neat take-home of more than ₹4 crore for Chetan. Taking all his five books into account, Bhagat has already made approximately over ₹15 crore. The company has implemented innovative marketing strategies like wrapping entire local train coaches with the book covers, contests where winners get a chance to meet the author.

CHETAN BHAGAT

FIVE POINT
SOMEONE

WHAT NOT TO DO AT IT



TRICKS OF THE TRADE

■ Imagine a typical Mumbai local train, or a Kolkata metro, ambling to the platform with book covers all over the coaches

■ Thought only movies have original soundtracks? Think again. Now, even books have their OST, and trailers are screened

■ Meeting your dream author is not a dream anymore. Innovative contests, all thanks to marketing experts, give that chance and more

■ We live and breathe social media these days. And our favourite books have made it there too, with various book themes

■ And now, even contests to find authors with a good story to tell



RAVINDER SINGH, TECHIE-TURNED-AUTHOR

"Publishing has become more market driven. With a lot of activity in every segment — children's, self-help, business, fiction. I believe Amish's advance is justified by his sales record as well as our belief in him as a writer. But it doesn't necessarily mean a change in scenario as we currently have only two authors — Amish and Chetan — with sales in the million-plus range. It would be great for the industry if more authors began selling such large quantities," says Gautam Padmanabhan, Chief Executive Officer, Westland Limited.

The man who had first tasted success with commercial fiction, Anurag Mathur, was probably way ahead of his time. "When *The Inscrutable Americans* was printed in 1991, it cost ₹40 each book. The book has seen the 50th reprint now and costs ₹100. The market has become really attractive for authors, we couldn't even dream of the things happening now, good books are selling well too," says Anurag Mathur.

Low-priced books has really helped. "When we were in college, we had to think twice before buying a book, say like *A Suitable Boy*. Such books were pretty expensive. Keeping price low has opened up the market. When we launched the *Red Romance* series, each book cost ₹89, its now ₹59 and we will not take it above ₹100. It's a price that people will pay even at a railway station. We have 24 titles in the series now, the first six titles are sold out," says Sandhya Sridhar of Pogorin publisher.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

So what are the changes in marketing? "There's emphasis on good production quality and innovative marketing plans over the past few years. The emphasis on digital marketing is growing at a fast pace although I personally feel that a balance is important between traditional and social media marketing," says Anurima Roy Sr Manager Marketing — Academic & Trade, Bloomstary Publishing India. The publishing industry in India is the only one that is growing, or else so many big houses would not have set up operations here in these few years," she adds.

While Chetan Bhagat and Amish might have been the game-changers, others like Ravinder Singh, Durjoy Datta, Proset Shoenoy, Devdutt Pattanaik, have also made a name for themselves. "Publishers in India have always been open to first-time authors — we've had to be, since we didn't work with agents for a long time — and we continue to read and accept unsolicited manuscripts. The thrill is in discovering a new voice, publishing a brilliant new tal-

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ANURAG MATHUR

“THE EMPHASIS ON DIGITAL MARKETING IS GROWING AT A FAST PACE IN INDIA ALTHOUGH I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT A BALANCE IS IMPORTANT BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING”

ANURIMA ROY

ent, nurturing an author or a book, helping the author and book to travel across the world, have it translated, find foreign publishers. It's always wonderful finding a star. Two of our initial acquisitions have been first-time authors, Maria Chaudhuri's *Beloved Strangers* will be published in January and Khadimul Islam's account of his family moving from Pakistan to East Pakistan in 1971, will be published later," says Ditya Kar Hazra, publisher at Bloomstary.

All those who thought being a techie was the cushiest job, might have to do a double

take, since Ravinder Singh of *I Too Had A Love Story*, has quit his plum job of senior program manager at Microsoft just a few days back to become a full time author, and also a publisher. However, he thinks there is still room for more. "I believe we have just touched the tip of the iceberg. Publishing is still unstructured and disorganized in India. Literary agents are an integral part of the industry in the West, but here, they are just a handful. The whole idea of submitting a manuscript is very random here. There's no transparency on the status of your work. Possibly only the retailers have a structured market. Despite all the success, I have seen prominent bookstores close down in Delhi itself. There has to be more method in the madness," says Ravinder, who still feels he is an author by chance.

BOLLYWOOD CALLING

Online bookshops and huge discounts have been an incentive for booklovers too. "It's true that online bookstores have affected the sales of stores, but they are selling a huge number of books, simply because they offer a lot of discount on the books. Our website is a unique online bookshop where even retailers can make bulk purchases, it will hence ultimately trace back to net sales," says Bhawishwanti Mukherjee, publisher and bookseller.

Hollywood showing an interest in commercial fiction has also brought about changes. The Aamir Khan-starrer *3 Idiots*, based on Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*, was a hit. His *3 Mistakes of My Life* was turned into *Kit Po Che* on screen and tasted success. Amish's *Meluha* has been picked up by Karan Johar, with the buzz that Hrithik Roshan might star as Shiva. Ashwin's *Chanakya's Chant* has been bagged by LTV and work on the movie will start soon.

While nobody wants to share figures, industry sources say Bhagat's *2 States* was sold for around ₹65 lakh and Ashwin's *Chanakya's Chant* for ₹50 lakh. "Hollywood is too powerful and they did not let us have any rights after the film was made. Which means we would lose out on the film's success. That too is changing, and as of now, I am confident they will cut corners to accommodate us in the profit sharing," says Ashwin.

Most publishers agree that they are sitting on a sea of good stories. Those who've already made a name for themselves have more books coming. Let them make the money, we say, a few more good books are all we want.

MANIL SURI



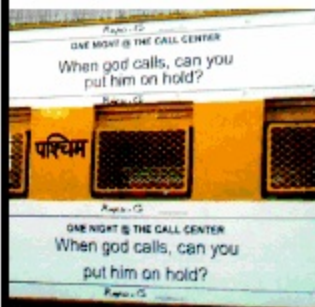
NUMBER CRUNCHING

■ ₹40 crore is *Meluha* series' net retail sales

■ ₹50 to ₹65 lakhs are spent for film rights

■ ₹15 crore is the possible royalty paid for just five books

■ ₹5000 crore is the estimated Indian publishing market



BHAGAT'S BOOK COVER ON A TRAIN COACH