

Celebration of great book and Evolution of a home library

Books are our companions

Coming into contact with a good book and possessing it, is indeed an everlasting enrichment of life. Book becomes a permanent companion. Sometimes, they are born before us; they guide us during our life journey and continue for many generations. I had bought a book titled "Light from many lamps" in the year 1953 from an old book store in Moore Market, Chennai. The editor of this book is "Watson, Lillian Eichler". This book was my close friend and also companion for more than five decades. The book was so much used; it had to be bound many times. Whenever there is a problem, the book wipes away the tears based on the experience of great minds. When the happiness overwhelms you, the book again softly touches the mind and brings about a balanced thinking. I have realized the importance of the book again, when a friend of mine who is in the judiciary presented me with the new edition of the same book in the year 2004. He told me the best thing he can give me was this book. May be fifty years from now the same book may take a new avatar. Basically great books are eternal.

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My favourite Books

Quite often I get e-mails, letters and questions from the youth whom I meet on my visits to various parts of the country. The overwhelming questions from them are:

1. Which are the books that are your real companions?
2. What is the book that you are reading currently?

I have told them that I cherish reading number of almost all the books at different times. The books that are enjoyed and intellectually elevated are: "**Man the Unknown**" by Dr. Alexis Carrel, a doctor-turned-philosopher and ;i Nobel Laureate. This book highlights how the mind and body have both to be treated in an ailment as the two are integrated. You cannot treat one and ignore the other. In particular, students who dream of becoming doctors should read this book. They will learn that the human body is not a mechanical system; it is a very intelligent organism with a most intricate and sensitive feedback system. The human system is indeed an integrated life package made of psychological and physiological systems. The second book which I venerate is Thiruvalluvar's "**Thirukkural**", which provides an excellent code of conduct for life and the author's thinking beyond a nation, beyond languages, beyond religion, and beyond culture indeed elevates the human mind. The third is Light from Many Lamps, the importance of which I have already shared with you. Of course there are many other books I love.

Role of Authors in Human Lives

Authors of the books play a very important role in human lives. A good book from an author is a great knowledge and wealth for many generations. Some times a book may not inspire the reader during the author's life time. But importance of the book's message becomes more and more clear as the time passes and its value is realized by the society. Then the book starts shining. Of course there are some classics which shine continuously for many generations. Authors and publishers have to realize that they, in an integrated way are responsible in making the book and the knowledge reach the society and people.

Holy Geometry Book

Here I would like to refer an incident in the life of Albert Einstein. At the age of 12, he experienced a wonder in a little book given by his mentor Max Talmud with Euclidean plain Geometry which he called "Holy Geometry Book". Einstein calls this as a miracle. Through this book, Einstein made contact with the realm of pure thought. Without expensive laboratories or equipment, he could explore universal truth, limited only by the power of human mind. Mathematics became an endless source of pleasure to Einstein especially if intriguing puzzle and mysteries were involved.

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When the society is bombarded from multiple directions through electronic media, print media throughout the day and night, how the

knowledge seeker can get the right type of book to enrich his mind. India has approximately 2.3 lakh Village Panchayats. I visualize establishment of village knowledge centers in these Panchayats to empower the villagers with the knowledge and to act as a nodal center for knowledge connectivity for the villagers. Initially 100 remote Panchayat a may be chosen for the Model Pilot project. Based on this experience, it will be possible to replicate Village Panchayat Knowledge Centers in other Panchayats.

Panchayat Library

This Center will be equipped with 1000 books of different subjects. In addition it will have a computer terminal, telephone connections, Modem, Printer, Photocopier, camera, Scanner, Internet connection and other support facilities for functioning as a digital library. The knowledge center will provide hard copies of relevant pages to the member* of the village, if required. Also the center can have facility for reading the text with an audio output so that people, who are unable to read, can benefit from the library. The knowledge center can also be used for collection, digital storage and dissemination of village specific information pertaining to agriculture, craftsmanship, arts, artisan techniques, informal judicial system practiced in village based on values, local remedies for simple ailments, village stories with moral values, village history, village folk songs, village cultural traditions, traditional medicinal practices followed in villages and village marketing information and methods. Such information presently is being transmitted through word of mouth and with changing generation, it is being lost.

Mobile Lending Library

The movement of "Mobile Lending Library" particularly in urban and semi-urban areas will promote book reading habit at an affordable cost. This will become part and parcel of the urban development ministry. I have come across two models one in Chandigarh and the other in Virudhunagar, in Tamil Nadu, which attracts large number of readers, particularly the youth. The Chandigarh model called BROWSER envisages payment of graded membership fee and availability of large number of books for the member. The Virudhunagar model enables the student to draw comics, adventure, fiction, magic books at a small fee of 50 paisa per hour. This small fee forces the students to concentrate and read the material with speed.