



The Disappearing Bookstore Culture in Dhaka

FARAH MASUD

A bookstore is a cultural hub. It is a melting pot of old, new, foreign, and local books. But gone are the days when you could sit on the couches of Etcetera or surf through the shelves of Words n' Pages for hours at a stretch. Bookstores like those were so close to our hearts that they were almost like second homes.

These days, we hardly find bookstores that sate our thirst for literature except for a few like Pathak Shamabesh, Bookworm and PBS. And not all of us can afford to make time-consuming trips to Nilkhet.

According to bookworm and English Literature major Susmita Newaz, 21, "Most bookstores in Dhaka are pretty much decorative stationery shops that are called 'bookstores' because they sell textbooks and a few mainstream paperbacks."

Another avid reader, Tanzil Rahman, 17, shares his frustration by pointing out the lack of sitting area and the constant remarks of the salespeople who do not want you to stick around for too long if you are not going to buy anything.

Be it large and spacious or small and

cosy, bookstores allow us to have an experience that online shopping simply cannot replace. The physical interaction is a crucial part of the book-buying experience. You can browse through multiple shelves, touch the gorgeous spines of hardcovers, and flip through as many books as you want, without having to buy any of them. You can sit on the couches or lean against the shelves as you read, while being surrounded by the magic of written words and the irresistible smell of ink on paper. The atmosphere is that of a library, except that you don't have to be too quiet and if you really like a book, you can go ahead and purchase it.

One great thing about bookstores is that, if they carefully choose employees who are genuinely passionate about books, this can be helpful for both the readers and the stores. University students who want to work part-time can work at bookstores rather than going for restaurants or supermarkets. This way they can earn money by doing something they actually enjoy. This also means that the customers can speak to salespeople who are [somewhat] knowledgeable

about books and can give proper recommendations. They can tell the readers about great books that they may have overlooked. This face-to-face interaction is yet another brilliant aspect of bookstores.

Needless to say, bookstores are the ultimate hangout spots for bookworms. What could be more delightful than bumping into a fellow nerd who shares the same taste in literature as you? Many friendships and romances begin from conversations at a bookstore.

Bookstores are always great places for buying presents for a loved one. Although you can purchase a book online and send it directly over to the person's house, the act of taking your time out and searching through a variety of books, adds a personal touch that may be more meaningful to you and your friend.

If you're looking for works by local writers, a local bookstore would be your gateway. That's what makes a local bookstore so unique. Local bookstores help authors to reach out to their target audience. Some stores offer discounted copies of new books written by local authors

that further help with the promotion, thus increasing the authors' popularity and readership.

Certain bookstores even have a "used books" section that provides an outlet where you can sell old books that you own. One of the main reasons why our beloved bookstores shut down in the first place was that there was a dearth of customers. However, there was never a dearth of readers. Bookstores need to up their game in order to attract these readers. They could bring in professional or aspiring writers to host panel discussions, book-reading sessions, or even host reading and writing competitions.

The youths of our country need bookstores now more than ever. For a nation brimming with young Facebookers and Instagrammers, bookstores can open a whole new world. The idea of exploring and social interaction would certainly encourage young people to pick up the habit of reading.

Farah Masud is a humanbean and that is all you need to know about her. Please don't try to contact her anywhere, especially not in person.

