

The Fault in Our Bookstores

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I don't remember the last time I could eye a book from my wish-list in the local stores. Novels by emerging voices, shortlisted for Man Booker, Pulitzer, and other prestigious prizes are barely seen. Mostly, non-fiction books that are barely read, classics, overhyped sappy teen romance, Harry Potter books and many other fantasy fictions (often in new avatars) line the shelves.

It is only logical to bring in books that are favoured by the majority so that the readers read and the business booms. But there remains a problem with this approach. When the same books, mostly by the same authors due to their unwavering popularity are churned out from the stores, the views of many impressionable readers become boxed. Because of the unending cycle of importing the overhyped books by the popular novelists, the readers cannot and do not want to look beyond their existence. Whenever the popular novelists release new novels, they are brought in abundance. However, there are many other entertaining, important, and beautifully written books out there, which are internationally discovered, and should be popularised in our local scene as



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well. I mean, Nicholas Sparks, Colleen Hoover, Rupri Kaur, and Cassandra Clare deserve a break, to be honest. Our bookstores adorn their collections by depending on the readers (read: the majority) and their suggestions. It's justified but it kills diversity because they are still so attached to the timeless and popular books that they totally ignore the emerging works that may even be better in quality. If they had

enthusiastically kept up with international publishing houses like Alfred A. Knopf, Riverhead, HarperCollins, Doubleday, etc and prioritised the "locally" less known globally famous debut novels, our bookstores would have been successful in catering to every reader, not just the majority, and I wouldn't have to write this article.

The ever stagnant collections lead the others into ordering books from

Amazon through various vendors. The wait is annoying and problematic, and the books end up costing a lot more than they should. It doesn't give us the option to randomly walk into a bookstore, browse through the books, and simply buy one that we like. At such times, we long for a literary insurgency. We do walk into random bookstores, and we do browse through the books, but we're tired of having to look at *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *The Da Vinci Code*, etc on entering. As for the non-fiction books, I don't think a lot of people would want to read a 300 page long book on growing money on trees while in bed. Unfortunately, such books are omnipresent in every bookstore, as though they're the stores' lungs, while many deserving books aren't.

Although there is a glimmer of hope since some bookstores like Charcha and Batighor are upping their game on enriching their collections and making them diverse, there is still a long way to go. I hope the days aren't far enough when we would be excused from having to notice the same books by the same authors (Roald Dahl, Paulo Coelho, Rainbow Rowell, E.L James) for countless years sitting on the shelves.

A mad descent into Indian soap operas

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

That one fateful day began like any other. I was in one of my many stages of being a freeloader by wandering about the house with my eyes glued to my phone, thumb on autopilot scrolling through senseless memes. But on that day, I decided to actually accompany my mother by sitting down next to her in the TV room and THEN continue scrolling through memes, as any ideal daughter should.

All was well until she kept asking me to watch the Indian show she was so invested in. I refused incessantly of course. It was a battle wherein my mother threw blows of sayings like "you never listen to anything I say" or "watching American television is the reason why you have back problems and bad grades" which I fought by making a case for the obviously superior shows I enjoy. How could she even compare Indian soap operas with a high IQ show that has had a sentient cloud of evil gas in one episode?

But eventually, I caved in and decided to give it a watch. It was the usual story where So-And-So, rich bad boy with no moral compass, falls in love with What's-Her-Face after crashing into her family's grain field in his sports car. Accompanying this arc were the quintessential dramatic camera angles/cuts,

expression freezes, and the sound of thunder when he asked her out on a date at the end. All the while, my mother watched with rapt attention, but I guffawed at the production value and left to continue my evening of being useless.



But that night, all I could think of was the episode I had watched. So-and-So and What's-Her-Face's overly cheesy but thoroughly epoch-making encounter wouldn't leave my head. I had to find out

what would happen to this star-crossed pair possessing absolutely zero chemistry.

The next day, I swallowed my pride and willingly sat down again to watch the following episode. My mother was utterly

delighted but I had to keep her in check by saying that I was watching solely for the purpose of laughing at it.

Thus the dark ages were ushered in. Every evening, my mother and I would

quietly sit together and spend thirty minutes in an intoxicated daze, only snapping out of it during commercials. Week after week, my mind would circle around their troublesome love story, the obstacles they faced from snobby family members, suspenseful scenes where What's-Her-Face would accidentally burn milk. I loved all of it.

But I couldn't deny that it was taking over my life. I, too, dreamed of a snobby stranger destroying my only source of income but then sweeping me away into a life of capitalism and hard-earned romance. I had the sound of thunder ringing in my ears whenever someone said something mildly inconvenient to me. I daydreamed of shenanigans with my evil mother-in-law.

I was on the brink of insanity, ready to tip over. But the universe did hold a silver lining for me, as the writers of the show decided to kill off What's-Her-Face by making her drive off a cliff in her new sports car. Finally, I had found some peace and could finally move on from this horror.

That is until they introduced her long-lost twin sister.

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