

Rediscovering books in lockdown

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Ever since the commencement of the nationwide lockdown in March and the work from home guidelines put in place, Yasmin Alam says that she has more time on her side to read some books.

"I do not have to wake up, get dressed, and commute from Uttara to Banani every day under the sweltering heat and am generally tired of bingeing Netflix in my free time", Yasmin said.

Aside from the books long gathering dust in the bookshelves, many of us have been using Google books, Kindle, and iBooks apps perhaps more than ever before as we harken back to reading yesteryear classics for feel-good moments and (il)legally download pirated new ones to expand the horizons of knowledge.

The raging pandemic has put a painful bind on publishers and readers alike hindering physical and social mobility. This has resulted in the book lovers'

paradise known as Nilkhet being shut down meaning bibliophiles cannot have the chance to get hold of their beloved hardcover books.

However, just like everything else, technology has synthesized our previous lives in an easy manner through any medium of communication, be it through the phone, the tablet, or the PC itself. Online book deliveries are still possible, ensuring an unhindered form of communication is still kept in contact between publishers, sellers, and readers.

Globally, the publishing industry has been almost decimated by the pandemic, with publishers unable to print new books. In spring, printing titles dropped to almost an abysmal zero. Despite some pushbacks, reading sessions and book festivals such as Hay Festival were shifted online to cater to the bookworms scattered throughout the world.

Some of us need a steady stream of

smooth calming voices when relaxing or doing regular office work that is not too much strain on the body or mind. In such cases, audiobooks come in handy with readers having their favourite books being recited to them like a gentle lullaby.

Mahbub, a freelancer, who ekes out a living during the pandemic by putting his creative energies in drawing and writing, says that when the work pressure is low, he loves lying down and listen to audio recitations of snippets of poetry and at times, chapters from his favourite childhood novels, particularly Harry Potter. None other than the charming Stephen Fry voices the Harry Potter audiobooks. Who would not want to have the crisp and panache voice of this man flowing through your eardrums?

While, audiobooks in Bangladesh can be acquired through either Amazon or other platforms such as iBooks, the

world-renowned platform for audible books, Storytel, has seen a 38 per cent growth in its subscription rate with 45 per cent increase in its streaming revenue.

Even in hardships such as the current times, people seek solace keeping online bookstores afloat in a time of great economic downturns. The pandemic has brought down sales figures of many Indonesian publishers – both major and independent ones. That being said, it is still not uncommon for books to be not be ordered online. There is a gradual increase in online sales stemming from people cooped up inside at home during the large-scale social restriction period.

In such times, while we seek out new meaning through words and stories, let us try to read as much as we can while in the same vein, support our local publishers and the employees in the online book stores.



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