

Of scholars without borders

A cursory perusal of the neighbourhood bookstores will reveal that most of them have closed down their business, or worse still, diversified into selling trinkets, curios, greeting cards or imported crockery, whereas books and other reading materials are incidentally placed. It is also often the case that a bookstore which one so fondly patronized for years, and was an assured source of obtaining low-cost editions and books at bargain prices is taken over by an entity that is keen to place the store in a shopping-mall ambience. Interviews with some of the leading bookstore managers/owners at Chennai not only substantiate these fears, but also justify the lack of business to the wane in reading habits, specially amongst the youth. One is left to ponder whether this is really the case, or is one more of those carefully constructed 'trends'. For instance, in towns less than 70 km south of Chennai there are hardly any bookstores, and students pursuing undergraduate courses depend on 'guides' or buy their books from the city. It is worse as one tries to find reading material in towns that do not have the presence of educational institutions historically. In such places, finding even a

basic textbook is a Herculean task and the strategy of students is to source a textbook and photocopy the same, cover to cover, not often realizing that this is unethical.

It is in this context that an initiative like the 'Scholars without borders' (SWB) (www.scholarswithoutborders.in) becomes extremely relevant. This on-line bookstore is meant to ensure access to reading material for students, especially those residing in the peri-urban and rural areas of India. In many ways, this initiative could strengthen the potential service that information hubs and centres that many of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have pioneered in rural areas. Started by R. Ramaswamy (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) in August 2005, SWB operates on the principle of no loss. While on-line transactions normally entail the use of a credit card, SWB makes an exception, taking into consideration the Indian clientele by allowing payment through demand drafts, cheques and wire transfer, and uses the Indian Postal Service (VPP) to deliver.

In addition to making available books of reputed publishing houses such as Orient Longman, Oxford University Press,

Permanent Black, Katha and Cambridge University Press, the store also provides access to a number of periodicals, proceedings and audio-visual material. SWB is a gateway to open access journals and free e-books. Open access journals are dominated by those connected to medicine and health care, apart from the ones published by the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore. A unique feature of the SWB is that it makes available publications of NGOs. For instance, the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems, Chennai which has been working in the area of 'Vruksha Ayurveda' and has produced a range of audio-visual and printed resource material, can be sourced through SWB. Ramaswamy hopes to shortly expand the list of such organizations and make the store a repository of study material that has hitherto remained inaccessible.

JAYSHREE VENKATESAN

(*S. Ramaseshan Fellow*),
Care Earth,
No. 5, 21st Street,
Thillaiganga Nagar,
Chennai 600 061, India
e-mail: jvencatesan@careearth.org

Research paper writing

Unlike in foreign countries where a course on research paper writing in English is inclusive at the Bachelor's and Master's level, we in India are yet to include this aspect in our syllabi. This includes how to quote others' work, the type of scientific English to be used, what constitutes plagiarism, etc. In India, neither at the Master's level nor at the Doctoral level are such aspects taught. As a result, research scholars do not know how to present their results or write their theses. It is high time that a chapter is included in the syllabi at postgraduate level and in the first year of the doctoral programme. Such a step would make a young research

scholar avoid committing mistakes while referring to others' work when he/she takes up research projects. Many a times an upcoming research scholar may commit mistakes due to lack of awareness, ignorance or even deliberately. In order to avoid such mistakes and to improve the quality of research article writing, it is suggested that books be published by experts belonging to different branches of science depicting examples of how mistakes are normally committed, how to avoid them, how to write a research paper and how to cite others' work. Such books would improve the writing skills, increase the quality of our publications and make

sure that the contents are not infringing upon others' work. Nowadays enormous amount of information is available on the Internet. Here again, mistakes are normally committed by not quoting the particular website when it is referred to. We should also be cautious about some dubious websites.

V. VENKATESWARA SARMA

Shri A.M.M. Murugappa Chettiar
Research Centre,
Taramani,
Chennai 600 113, India
e-mail: sarmavv@yahoo.com