

Reading by other means

A new generation of readers does not bank on books alone but taps a variety of digital sources

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Once in an interview, a woman remarked, "You must be an avid reader." I replied in the affirmative. Then she asked me about my favourite book. I told her that I do not read books as such. She was perplexed and held that today's generation has lost a taste for reading. I explained to her that digital sources have made the job of finding suitable content simpler. So, I was a reader but not a book-reader, in the traditional sense. Her surprise reminded me of the prudes obsessed with the printed book.

Some people have

abhorred the idea of e-books and blogs replacing the good old books. They have argued that new media lacks the potential to help learning in the way books have done so far. Apart from ridiculing today's generation for losing interest in reading and wasting their time on screens, some have mocked their intelligence quotient. But, this obsession with books does not make sense to me. Ultimately, books are a medium of exchange of ideas. We must give primacy to the ideas and not the medium.

Media have kept pace

with the change in technology. In ancient times, people used to transmit knowledge through verbal medium, apart from inscribing on the materials available then. Then, the paper was invented and documentation became easier. The invention of the printing press brought about another revolution and then came the computers. This change not only reflects the technological progress but also the democratisation of information that followed it.

But the transformation is seldom smooth due to the cultural lag. People

have always resisted the changes that compel them out of their comfort zones. Think about the opposition to the printing press during medieval times. The opposition to digital content could be viewed with a similar lens. Traditional book lovers need to realise that printed books were a revolution of their time and the digital media of today is its successor.

Digital media has made a plethora of content accessible to the masses in the remotest areas. Now, information is no longer a monopoly of the few on the privileged premises. Not only content consumption but also its creation is getting decentralised. This has also led to a rise in questions about quality and credibility. So, when a journalist told me that research has become easier, I disagreed with him. I said it had become even more difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. Technology has made things accessible, not easier; it has made things faster, not accurate. But still, technology has its merits anyway.