CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE EVOLVING WITH CLICKS ON DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

The Internet has penetrated virtually into every sphere of our life, including literature and has a significant influence on both the readers and writers of literature. In the last two decades, printed books are increasingly replaced with PDFs and Kindle, recommendations are sourced from Goodreads.com and even politicians convey with tweets rather than poems. New media has changed the fate of reading and writing, consuming, and producing new literature, and thus brings new challenges in studying digital texts as well as printed ones. With technology, contemporary media and literature intermingle much deeper than before. Internet and social media have made expressing thoughts and gaining new perspectives from across the globe very easily.

Our reading habits and ways of consuming literary work have changed. Just like the news, a significant population in India now enjoys screens over books i.e., prefers reading books and news digitally on their phone, tablets, and laptops. Just like the printing press in the 20th century, new innovations like the internet, tablets, classroom smart boards and e-readers are again reshaping our learning and reading behaviours. The time of sorting through library shelves for books to find one piece of information is outdated. With the help of search engines, one can go through thousands of resources on almost any topic with just a click of a button. Search engines are a lot more practical and efficient in finding specific literary works than physical books and library archives. Many modern libraries have now started providing their members with facilities to borrow e-books and gain online access to their databases. As e-books have become popular around the world, many e-books reading services have emerged. Notably, Amazon Kindle, Nook, and Good reads offer their users millions of books and social reading information about them.

But surprisingly, the engagement of millennials in literary studies has reduced significantly over years. Alternative content like videos and audio podcasts are gaining popularity and command a lot more attention. Critics state that people are turning away from reading, preferring to see an image or play within it, rather than imagine one from carefully crafted words. A diet of abbreviated words and short sentences renders them incapable of reading and writing, stunted from employing language to its full capability, and unable to use vocabulary and grammar correctly. Youngsters are also experiencing shorter attention spans because of the internet and social networking websites. Things have changed from the pre-internet era when a student could lose himself/herself in a novel for days, as now, all one can do is watch the WhatsApp chats and Facebook posts swim by like shiny fish in the river of time-he-will-never-get-back. Reading insecurity has become a big issue at hand. Reading insecurity is the individual experience of thinking that you're not getting

as much from reading as you used to. It is setting aside an hour for that new book but instead spending it instead on social media and WhatsApp. It is criticizing your own attention span and missing the flow, the mesmerizing feeling of entering a narrative world of literature without bringing the real one along.

In this paper, I discuss how digital media and writing has altered aspects of how we access, distribute, analyze, conceptualize, and define literature. The digital media itself can be instrumental in reviving the literary heritage of India and can be read into through various new perspectives. After all, it is always a new perspective, a unique angle, that gives our existence a whole new meaning.

Keywords: *Digital Media, Contemporary Literature, Internet, Digital Libraries*

1.   E-Books are Changing the Way We Read, and the Way Literature is Written

In this connected age, our attention spans have shrunk down a lot, we're preoccupied almost always, and the authors have realized that too. Authors have now changed their style to appeal more to a disenchanted crowd who is busy on their TVs, phones, and laptops. In the book *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (2015), American linguist Naomi Baron surveyed the changes in reading pattern on a page on a device like phone, table, or laptop vs that on paper and found that amongst readers is an increased tendency to read summaries rather than full texts. On the internet, we are used to reading webpages in an "F" pattern: the top line, scroll down a bit, have another read, scroll down.

The f-shaped reading pattern on Digital Devices

Readers have also countered to the increased volume of digitally published books, papers, and news by skim-reading them. Business models and book styles have also adapted to changing reading behaviour, fiction has become shorter than before. Every major publisher is now experimenting with short stories, episodic fiction, compilations, and "e-only" books. The first encyclopaedias were written to solve the problem of reading too many books, in the 21st century, we are discovering new, quick reference tools on top of all literature which is spread across the internet. Now, you can simply select any word in your eBook reader and find its dictionary definition or encyclopaedia reference. If prose in a book appeals to you can switch on the highlight-sharing function and can see who else has highlighted it and liked it. In the last decade, academic study reports on major novels are less valuable than the Wikipedia pages created for them. The difference is that academic study guides are usually the work of a single, low-paid employee while the Wikipedia page contains the instant reaction of the masses: often wrong, but rarely worthless.

2.   Literature is Very Easily Accessible Now

Gone are the days when one had to go to a library to find a book they were looking for. With search engines like Google and Bing, finding literary work is a matter of a few clicks. Internet works at the speed of thoughts. A significant percentage of literary content is available for free and the rest at a nominal cost. The cost of eBooks on e-commerce websites is almost always lesser than the print versions. Let's go through a few online resources which are changing the way we access literature:

•   Gutenberg: Project Gutenberg offers over 57, 000 free eBooks. Their users can pick from free ePub books, and free kindle books, download them or read them online. You will find the world's great literature here, with a focus on older works for which copyright has expired.

•   Amazon Kindle: Amazon Kindle is an e-reader designed and marketed by Amazon. Amazon Kindle devices enable users to browse, buy, download, and read e-books, newspapers, magazines, and other digital media via wireless networking to the Kindle Store. For the last few years, you can access Kindle books on your phone and tablets as well. Kindle now also provides subscription-based services like Kindle Unlimited where you can access over a million books for a paltry sum of money.

- Audible: Audible makes spoken audio books, information, and educational content. Audible sells digital audio books, radio and TV programs, and audio versions of magazines and newspapers.

As I see it, it isn't far-fetched to say that libraries will now be ranked based on services they provide and access they have to online resources rather than according to the richness of their own collections. As publishers engage in price wars and focus on selling higher quantity than quality, the depth of literary content keeps on reducing. No wonder, it will be very difficult to produce another Leo Tolstoy in this world, as passionate followers and readers immortalize an author!

3. Social Reading in The New In-Thing

In the paper-back era, the relationship which mattered was between a person and a book, i.e. one to one between a reader and the book. So many of us discovered the utter delight of getting lost in the pages of a good book. But this generation is hooked on social reading, i.e. one person reads, and others listen to his/her opinion about the book over the internet. The opinion of others helps a reader decide on what to read next.

Social reading has been evolving for some time now in the classrooms, book groups, scripture discussions, reading aloud, bedtime stories, author events, and literary festivals. Social reading is everything that surrounds the experience of reading electronic books (eBooks). Traditional books, physical paper books, are fantastic. You can read them cover to cover, bookmark them, do gear them, write notes in the margin, underline your favorite passages, treasure them, keep them, and lend them to your friends. eBooks let you do these things too. eBooks make sharing opinions easier: the bookmarks that you make, your notes, your progress through a book. And in addition, you can save, share, email and store your whole reading experience, and read along with friends, as in a reading group.

Here are some examples of Social Reading which are changing reader habits:
- While reading an eBook, you find a section you like and select the text and email, WhatsApp it to a friend.
- While reading an eBook, you choose to send the reading data to a social reading service. The service records all your bookmarks, so you can search and return to them later.
- In a classroom, a teacher makes annotations in an academic course eBook. She then exports them and sends it to her students, who can import them into their own copies of the book.

Social Reading is a powerful technique which is enhancing discussions around literary and academic work. It is an excellent use of Social Networking and can also be implemented in our classrooms. Good reads, an example of Social Reading, is a "social cataloging" website that allows individuals to freely search its database of books, annotations, and reviews. Users can sign up and register books to generate library catalogs and reading lists. They can also create their own groups of book suggestions, surveys, polls, blogs, and discussions. Next time try checking out a book review before investing time in reading it.

4. More Movies & TV Shows are now based on Literature

While books need sentences, movies must set up concrete imagery through the screen to make us feel and experience it. Cinema conveys a lot more than books do, even though they are telling the same tale. The relationship between these two art forms is infinite as they both directly deal with images and the world of promises. With the internet, we are consuming literature digitally as videos in the form of Movies & TV shows.

There are a sizeable number of great films (and bad movies too) which have been adapted from books and classics. Of course, we have all seen or heard of Ramayana and Mahabharata TV shows as kids. But now engaging TV series for adults are based on books. For example, Game of Thrones, a very popular TV show right now is adapted from George R.R. Martin's book series Game of Thrones or the Hindi TV show Stories by Rabindranath Tagore is adapted from the stories of Rabindranath. Even the Oscars have now created an award for Best Adapted Screenplay, showing evidence of a wide film production based on literature. Creativity in on-screen literature on-screen is not just about adapting existing books but also about the interpretations & additions of the Director to the author's writing. Some movies are also creating their own kind of literary style by focusing on a famous author's life or by adopting specific cinematographies, directions, dialogues or edits to create a literary or poetic aesthetic.

Stories by Rabindranath Tagore is a 2015 Indian Hindi television series directed by Anurag Basu

5. Conclusion

All literature, be it poems, essays, novels, or short stories are created to help us address human nature and understand circumstances which influence all people. We have understood through the prism of literary works - the need for growth in life, understanding doubts and fears of success and failure, the importance of friends and family, the infectious goodness of compassion and empathy, and the realization of imperfection. We learn that life must be lived to the fullest. We need literature to connect with our own humanity.

Literature also lets us hear the voices of the past and work with the present. It is the way for the present to connect to the possible future. With literature, we learn about history we didn't experience, customs & traditions which are not familiar. With what we read and imagine, we unlock the culture of the time and gain perspective on life. Literature allows us to interpret our own life and emotions and build relationships with the story. As humans, there are many limitations to our lifetime experience like the time we have, geography we are in, and point of view of our family, work colleagues and friends. Literature and reading transcends all these barriers and open a life full of possibilities. Literature has become more than just an art form, or writing deemed to have artistic or intellectual value. With the coming of Digital Media, literature has become synonymous with information and life heuristics. We are consuming a lot more information than ever before, we are reading on a lot of devices and spending a lot less time reflecting on the readings. This information explosion has opened for us a sea of new opportunities for the avid reader but repelled the amateur reader. Summarization is preferred by the new generation over reading full texts. The ease of access of information is helping a student to access a lot many more books and they are choosing to skim through them first. Over time, as they identify the depths of the readings, they go on to read the classics and traditional literature and nurture the joy of reading, even if it's e-books on their e-readers.

The advent of writing marked a great step in human civilization for many reasons such as transmitting knowledge, ideas, events and even feelings. Overall, the use of Digital Literature will also help us transcend the time and social barriers and offer insight of the human beings and the society as it also conveys emotions, experiences, and psychological explanations of human behaviours. With the use of technical innovations, a lot more value will be unlocked, usages will change, but I sincerely hope that Literature (even Digital) will continue to serve its most important objective – to open a world of possibilities for humans.

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