

## Business in spiritual books booms as people look for peace

'Everybody wants peace in life,' says a prominent publisher, explaining why books on the philosophies and meditation techniques of spiritual gurus, general religion, self-help guides and Indian mythology are fetching brisk business at the ongoing Delhi Book Fair.

The boom in religious books trade at the fair, say publishers, reflects the larger trend in the market, which has seen a sharp rise in the demand for spiritual books over the last three years.

'The demand for religious books is unbelievable. Everybody wants peace in life. There has been too much of crime and fiction. Over the last three years, we have seen a sharp rise in the demand for yoga, meditation, self-help and spiritual books. Even teenagers are buying spiritual books,' Ajay Mago, publisher of Om Books, told IANS at the book fair.

Consequently, books on Swami Vivekananda, Osho, Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, J. Krishnamurthi and a host of new age gurus - some written by the spiritualists themselves - are disappearing from the shelves by the dozens, along with the new reprints of the Bhagavad Gita, Ramcharitmanas, Vishnu lores, Buddhist texts, translations of Vedas, mythology and new tomes on palmistry and yoga.

The buyers are mostly high school and college students, young professionals and homemakers - in the age-group of 17 to 35.

A week ago, Om Books launched 'Journey Home', a biographical account of Radhanath Swami, an American yogi who migrated to India from the US 40 years ago.

'It is one of the biggest Om titles this season and a hit,' Mago said. The book is priced at Rs.395.

The publisher is also betting high on 'Sacred Secret' by Ravi Kapoor, 'about the seven wonders of the world and the spiritual secrets behind them'.

Gorakhpur-based Gita Press, which started in 1923 and is one of the oldest publishers of religious books in India, substantiates the trend.

'In 2008-2009, we sold Rs.32 crore worth of religious books - up from Rs.29.5 crore in 2007-2008 despite the downturn. We have had a print run of 80 million for Bhagavad Gita, 75 million for Ramcharitmanas and 76.5 million for Bhakt Charit over the decades. These are our three most popular titles till date - even at the fair,' production manager of Gita Press Lalmani Tiwari told IANS on behalf of Gita Press trustee Baijnath Agarwal.

Prices of books at Gita Press range from Re.1 (for the Hanuman Chalisa) to Rs.1,350 (for six volumes of the Mahabharata).

Spurred by growing demand, the Ramakrishna Mission Society has published 50 new titles this year - all of which are on display at the R.K. Mission stall at the fair.

'The most popular titles are 'Vivekachudamani' by Ranganathananda ji Maharaj, 'Understanding Consciousness', the fourth in 'Our Consciousness' series of books, 'Meditation as Spiritual

Culmination: Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali' by Swami Sarvagatananda and 'Encyclopedia of Hinduism' in three volumes,' said Swami Adi Purushananda, head of the Delhi publication division of R.K. Mission.

The books are priced between Rs.600 and Rs.1,500.

'Last year the Delhi R.K. Mission unit alone registered an increase of 30 percent in business and we have 150 centres across the world,' the seer said.

He cited two reasons for the growing demand in religious books.

'The younger generation is finally accepting spiritualists like Swami Vivekananda to overcome psychological stress. He is a national hero. Moreover, the prices of spiritual books are more reasonable,' Adi Purushananda said.

Harpreet Narang, a young Delhi-based professional and homemaker, felt 'that a time would come when Indians would no longer require spiritual guides and astrologers going by the number of religious books being published every year'.

Jagriti, a Delhi-based doctor, who bought books on palmistry and spiritual self-help from the fair, echoed the sentiment: 'I usually look up the internet, but the books are a big help.'

'As India is getting more materialistic, spiritual books are filling a huge void. Readers are starting young - and buying more spiritual books as they have a whole life to read,' Akash A. Shah, publisher of Jaico Publishing House, told IANS.

The total turnover of the Indian publishing industry is nearly Rs.100,000 million.

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