

COMMENTARY / INSIGHT

Withered Books

 Abdul Jalil
Jalil JANUARY 11, 2020

0 Shares

Recently, in a seminar held at Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), a speaker put this question to the audience, "Name the last book that influenced you?"

Out of approximately 150 participants, only a few raised their hands. Keep this in mind that the participants constituted what we deem to be the intelligentsia of our nation i.e. academicians, researchers and MPhil/PhD scholars. The question arises why are there so few book readers in Pakistan? The answer to this question demands a structural enquiry into the social transition that took place around half a century ago. This transition has an indigenous aspect, but it should also be understood in a globalized context. In the 1970s, the whole world saw an influx of cybernetics and its sister disciplines and like all other technological innovations, it also has a sociological aspect. This sociological aspect not only changed the way we perceived our world but also impacted our attitudes and habits. The decline in the reading public is one such aspect.

"Reading maketh a full man," exhorted Sir Francis Bacon but what good such an exhortation is for an age marked by fragmentation and specialisation? We live in an information society in which data is perpetually created and recreated, where transitory experience is the order of the day. The information has taken the place of knowledge and the specificity of learning has compelled the learners to excel in one particular branch of a subject and be oblivious of its connection to the other branches of knowledge. Moreover, a split has been observed between the learning and the character of the learner.

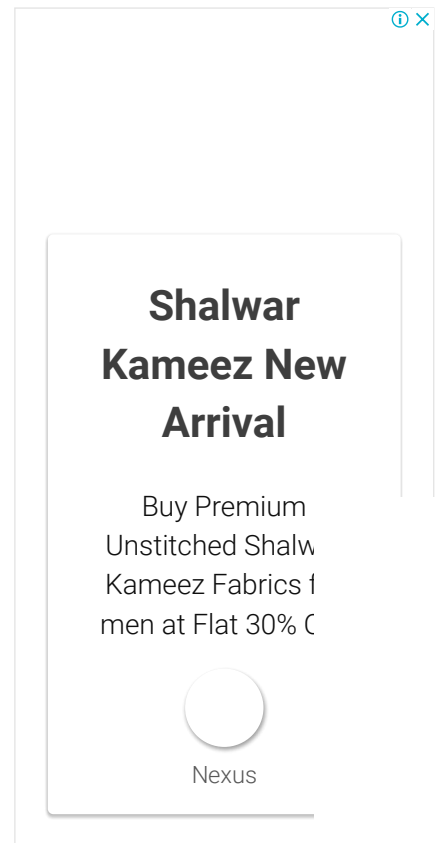
Men's Shalwar Kameez

Ad Shop from a wide range of Shalwar Kameez Collection.

Nexus

Open

Knowledge does not play any role in the character building of a person. As the socio-economic set up does not value multiplicity in learning, consequently, the individuals fee



Shalwar Kameez New Arrival

Buy Premium Unstitched Shalwar Kameez Fabrics for men at Flat 30% Off

Nexus

LATEST NEWS

Work From Home for a USA company Might Be More Fun Than You Think

Work From Home USA | Search | Sponsored

[Read Next Story >](#)

motivated to get themselves apprised of other experiences. The society does not need a “full man” but a person more and more informed about a particular branch of learning.

Another factor that makes an interesting point in this context is the fact that it was the first industrial revolution that swelled up the number of reading public. In England, through the Education Act of 1880, school attendance was deemed mandatory for all children, and the increase in literacy produced a class of the voracious reading public. Ironically, it was the third industrial revolution i.e. the cybernetic and information technology, which was responsible for the decline in book readership.

The 19th century revolutionised the printed words, while the 20th century did the same through the invention of electronic images. In his book, “The Society of the Spectacle,” Guy Debord has elaborated how contemporary culture is more and more about appearance and in such a culture “social relations among the people are mediated through the images.” In other words, we are living in a society of spectacle defined by images and screens.

The electronic media boom in the last quarter of the 20th century has completely changed the coordinates of our socio-economic being.

The information has taken the place of knowledge and the specificity of learning has compelled the learners to excel in one particular branch of a subject

”

The simulation has replaced reality, and the virtual has become factual. Reading a book is an experience in time, while a media society is defined through space. It is a space devoid of temporality, and this is another reason why modern individuals seem to have lost interest in reading. Browsing through the images on the screen is a new form of hedonism and the society has overindulged itself in it.

Coming to our immediate context i.e. the decline in the reading habit in our country, it can safely be assumed that the above-mentioned overarching factors did play their roles notwithstanding some indigenous detriments as well. The prime factor is the flawed education system of the country. The system is based on rote learning and does not encourage creativity. Throughout their academic career, our students don't consider it necessary to read or consult books other than their prescribed syllabus.

As a result, even in their practical life, they can't seem to develop this habit. Secondly, we have not realised this as yet that knowledge is a broader term and the disciplines are connected. We tend to focus on just one field of interest and ignore the other branches of learning. Holistic education is inclusive of all branches of learning and thus such a model would encourage cross-discipline reading.

There is no question about it that the poor reading habit may have fatal consequences for the careers of students and the policymakers. Therefore, we must have to work on the habit of the readings.

The reading is a way of acquiring new information, knowledge and skill. If the market and society do not require fresh knowledge and discussion, then there will be no need of acquiring new knowledge and skills. The public libraries have been evaporated over the three decades. Similarly, reading clubs, storytelling times, reading competitions are not p

'The Mosquito Coast' — Apple's thriller remake is a disappointing journey

Prince William and Kate Middleton share new portraits for 10th wedding anniversary

'Things Heard & Seen' — a marriage story with ghosts starring Amanda Seyfried

KSE-100: Depleting volumes, Covid lockdown fears weigh down index by another 196 points

PAKISTAN

PM terms Bashir Memon's allegations 'false, baseless'

PPP, PML-N in close contest in NA-249 amid low voter turnout

NCOC unveils 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' plan to contain Covid spread on Eid

Pakistan has no control over Afghan Taliban: FO

Doors open for PPP to rejoin PDM, says Fazl

More Posts from this Category

BUSINESS

PM lauds overseas Pakistanis for keeping afloat national economy

CPEC to help increase dates cultivation in Pakistan

SECP launches combined digital registration with provincial agencies

Work From Home for a USA company Might Be More Fun Than You Think

Work From Home USA | Search | Sponsored

[Read Next Story >](#)

of routine life. Moreover, good and quality reading material are unavailable in small cities and towns.

Now, the schools, colleges and university should introduce regular reading periods daily. There is a dire need of support campaigns that provide regular encouragement to teachers and parents to motivate their student and kids to read regularly. Then there is a need for strong advocacy on the media from the celebrities of all walks of life.

This is not very difficult. PIDE is an example. Dr Nadeem ul Haq, the Vice-Chancellor of PIDE nudged the faculty, researchers and students by introducing a prize-based book reading competition among the students of PIDE in December 2019 and the above-mentioned seminar. We, at PIDE, believe that there are many more to come and other educational and research institutions will follow this example.

The writer is the professor of Economics at PIDE, Islamabad

0
Shares

Submit a Comment

0 Comments

Sort by



Add a comment...

[Facebook Comments Plugin](#)

This Is How To Use VPNs To Stream Movies In Nurpur Shahan...

TheTopFiveVPN | Sponsored

Remember Him? Wait 'Till You See Him Now

Horizontimes | Sponsored

Used Car Prices in Nurpur Shahan Might Surprise You

CPEC new route to boost trade, development, tourism: report

More Posts from this Category

WORLD

'Act now': Africa medics warn of India-like Covid surge

India Covid-19 deaths surge again, more global aid flown in

EU inches closer to Covid certificate for travel

More Posts from this Category

Work From Home for a USA company Might Be More Fun Than You Think

Work From Home USA | Search | Sponsored

[Read Next Story >](#)