

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE

Bookstores

of

Delhi

MID LAND BOOK SHOP 20



*Documenting the
enduring legacy of Delhi's bookstores*

88 PARAMOUNT BOOK STORE
BOOKS & PERIODICALS SELLERS
Mob: 996051212



JACKSONS BOOKS

Main Bazar, Pahar Ganj (Near Goldy Opticals), New Delhi



ANAND FOUNDATION
RITHIKA SUNDAR

A RESEARCH PROJECT



Bookstores of Delhi:

Documenting the Enduring Legacy of Delhi's
Bookstores

**Research Project by
Rithika Sundar**

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PREFACE

This research project on bookstores of Delhi intends to understand their history, legacy and contribution to the city's heritage. By visiting bookstores across Delhi and interacting with the owners of the bookstores, I gathered information about the history of the bookstore, the vision that brought it to life, the collection of books, the challenges faced and how they envision the future of their bookstore. Delhi is often known for its rich history and magnificent monuments, but let us take a moment to acknowledge the bookstores of Delhi that contribute to this city's intangible cultural heritage. In an era where e-books are flourishing rapidly, the story of each bookstore that has helped to build the literary culture of the city needs to be heard and understood. One can see a bookstore or a stall on almost every corner of this city, and this project is an attempt to know the stories and memories of these gems of Delhi. Each bookstore that I visited has amazed me through its collection of books and the journey each book owner has gone through to create their dream bookstore.



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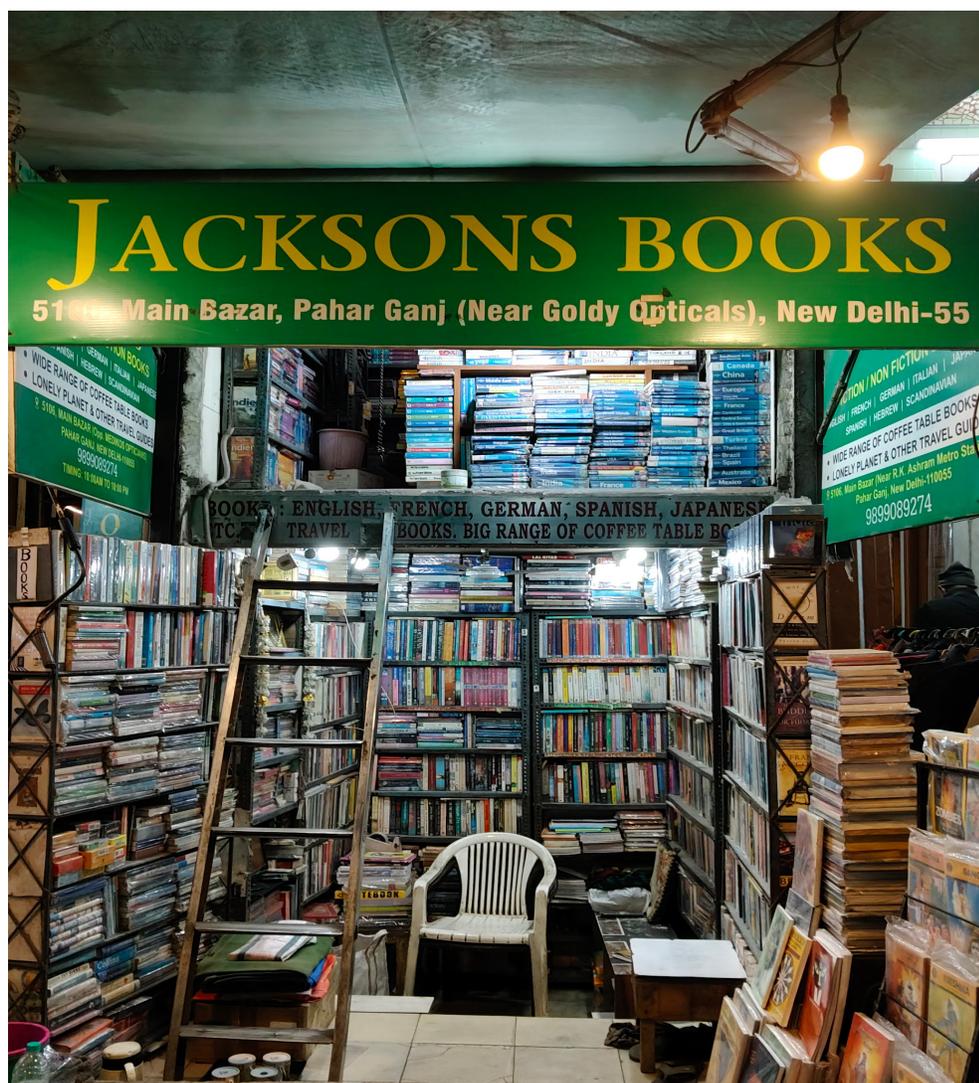
INTRODUCTION

Delhi is a city with a great literary heritage. A city that has witnessed many legendary poets, scholars and thinkers who have made significant contributions to the literary and cultural life of the city. Ever wondered what keeps the city's literary heritage still alive today? It is the bookstores of Delhi and the passionate readers who carry forward the enduring legacy. The city has been housing many legendary bookstores over the years. From Faqir Chand Bookstore (established in 1951) and Bahrison's Booksellers (1953) to Midland Bookshop (1978) and May Day Bookstore (2012), Delhi has witnessed the growth and evolution of each of these bookstores. The city houses several other bookstores that are true gems to this city, such as Sisters of the People in Lajpat Nagar, a bookshop for a cause, where every purchase helps to fund the education of underprivileged children, and in the hidden lanes of Paharganj, lies Jackson's Bookstore that sells novels in over forty languages. Every Sunday, people head to Delhi Gate to their favourite Sunday book market, a spot that offers a huge variety of books. Even though Delhi had to bid goodbye to some of the bookstores that stood here in the past years, it is important to support and cherish the legendary bookstores that continue to contribute to its literary heritage.



JACKSON'S BOOKS

Jackson's bookstore, located in Paharganj, is one of the most legendary bookstores of Delhi. The journey of the bookstore began in 1982, when three brothers, Deepak Kumar Dialani, Ashwani Dialani and Pradeep Dialani, sold books at roadside stalls after the demise of their father. Later in 1996, the bookstore was established in Paharganj and carries forward a legacy spanning over forty years. The bookstore has a collection of a wide range of books in English, French, German, Japanese, Hebrew, Spanish and many more.



Jackson's Books, Paharganj



The story behind naming the bookstore Jackson's is quite intriguing. Deepak Kumar Dialani's father, Jai Kishan Dialani, once owned a shop in Connaught Place, New Delhi. As many foreign visitors found it difficult to spell his name, they began calling him Jack. The name "Jacksons" was chosen for the bookstore by combining his father's nickname "Jack" with "sons." The bookstore stands as a tribute to his beloved father.



Jackson's bookstore houses a collection of books in over forty languages. Books are sold at a 20 per cent discount, and the readers can get half of the purchase money back on returning the books. The bookstore has been welcoming many foreign visitors due to its diverse collection of books. From fiction and non-fiction, to travel books, autobiographies, history books and coffee table books, the bookstore offers a wide range of books for diverse readers. One could witness some of the oldest and rarest books at the bookstore, so old that they were priced at just one rupee in the earlier days. Deepak Kumar recalls that '*Shantaram*,' a novel written by Gregory David Roberts, is one of the best-selling books at the bookstore. The bookstore has the translated copy of this book in twenty languages, including French, German, Spanish, Polish, Russian, Hebrew and many more.



Deepak Kumar Dialani began his journey at the bookstore while he was in 10th standard. It began with selling books at a roadside stall, noting down what kind of



books the customers asked for and learning more about books. Today, as the owner of the bookstore at Paharganj, he regards himself as an encyclopedia of books. He is fond of writing and writes on cricket, and he is also an amazing storyteller, who narrates stories of books like Shantaram, his memories about the interactions with eminent writers like Arundhati Roy, Ruskin Bond and Howard Marks who visited his bookstore and his experiences with customers that he had at the bookstore.

Deepak Kumar Dialani at his bookstore, Jackson's Books, Paharganj

Deepak Kumar recalls that he used to ship a lot of books to his customers abroad and all over India under the Registered Book Postal service of India Post, which only cost around Rs 80 to send 5 kg of books, making it a more feasible and affordable option. As India Post discontinued the Registered Book Postal service, the number of customers gradually decreased as the rates for Registered Parcels grew to higher rates.



“People who are deeply passionate about reading will continue to prefer bookstores rather than e-books; the experience and aroma of books can only be felt in a bookstore, and a Kindle edition can never replace the joy of gifting a book,” says Deepak Kumar.

Deepak Kumar has been training his nephew in book selling and guiding him about how to engage with the customers. He is truly optimistic about the future of Jackson’s Books, and there at his store, he waits for his beloved customers whom he greets with a warm cup of tea and engages with great conversations about books and more. The collection of books in various languages and the beloved owner of Jacksons, makes this bookstore a true gem of Delhi.



A hand-painted lettering highlighting the foreign language collection, travel guides and coffee table books



PARAMOUNT BOOKSTORE

Walking through the lanes of Janpath, brimming with art and craft shops, one shop stands apart - Paramount bookstore. The bookstore was founded by Prem Naraiian in the 1950s, when he was 20 years old, under the name Prem Book Depot. The bookstore was originally located in C-Block, Connaught Place, and it was shifted to its current location in Janpath in 1964. Prem Naraiian's son Naresh Kambiri joined his father in the 1980s after completing his graduation, and the bookstore is currently run by him.



Paramount Bookstore, Janpath



The owner, Naresh Kambiri, believes that the vision of the bookstore is to keep the reading habits alive among today's younger generations. Earlier, books of arts, history and philosophy were in great demand at Paramount Bookstore. Naresh Kambiri recalls that, during the golden era of the bookstore, he sold many art books. As time went by, the contemporary readers who visit the bookstore show a major interest and enthusiasm in non-fiction, business readings and patriotic books.



Naresh Kambiri, owner of Paramount Bookstore

The bookstore is a favourite spot for the children due to the large collection of children's books with beautiful illustrations in them. When asked about e-books, he replied, "E-books can never replace books. Books are books." He regards e-books as no longer a challenge compared to the earlier days, and people today choose bookstores over e-books.



MIDLAND BOOK SHOP

Midland Bookshop in Aurobindo Market, Hauz Khas, was founded by Mirza Yaseen Baig in 1978. Mirza Yaseen Baig moved to Delhi from Hyderabad in 1970 and, after eight years, established his first bookstore, New Book Land, in Janpath. It was in 1984 that Midland Bookshop was set up in Aurobindo Market. The bookstore is currently run by Mirza Yaseen Baig's son and grandsons. There are two more outlets, one is Midland The Bookshop in South Extension-1 and the other is New Midland Bookshop in Gurgaon.



Midland Book Shop, Aurobindo Market





On every corner we look, there are shelves filled with books, and the bookstore provides a great collection of both fiction and non-fiction books. Harry Potter remains popular among kids. Among fiction, books by authors such as Colleen Hoover and Emily Henry are the most purchased by youngsters. Books like *Shattered Land* by Sam Dalrymple, *Heart Lamp* by Banu Mushtaq, *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles, and *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* by Jared Diamond are a few books that are popular at the bookstore.

Tauseef Baig, the grandson of Mirza Yaseen Baig

In dialogue with Mirza Yaseen Baig's grandson, Tauseef Baig, he shared that his grandfather, Mirza Yaseen Baig, envisioned providing a quality bookstore to the readers of Delhi. Midland Bookshop was one of the first bookstores in Delhi to offer discounts, and it continues to provide a twenty per cent discount to its customers.





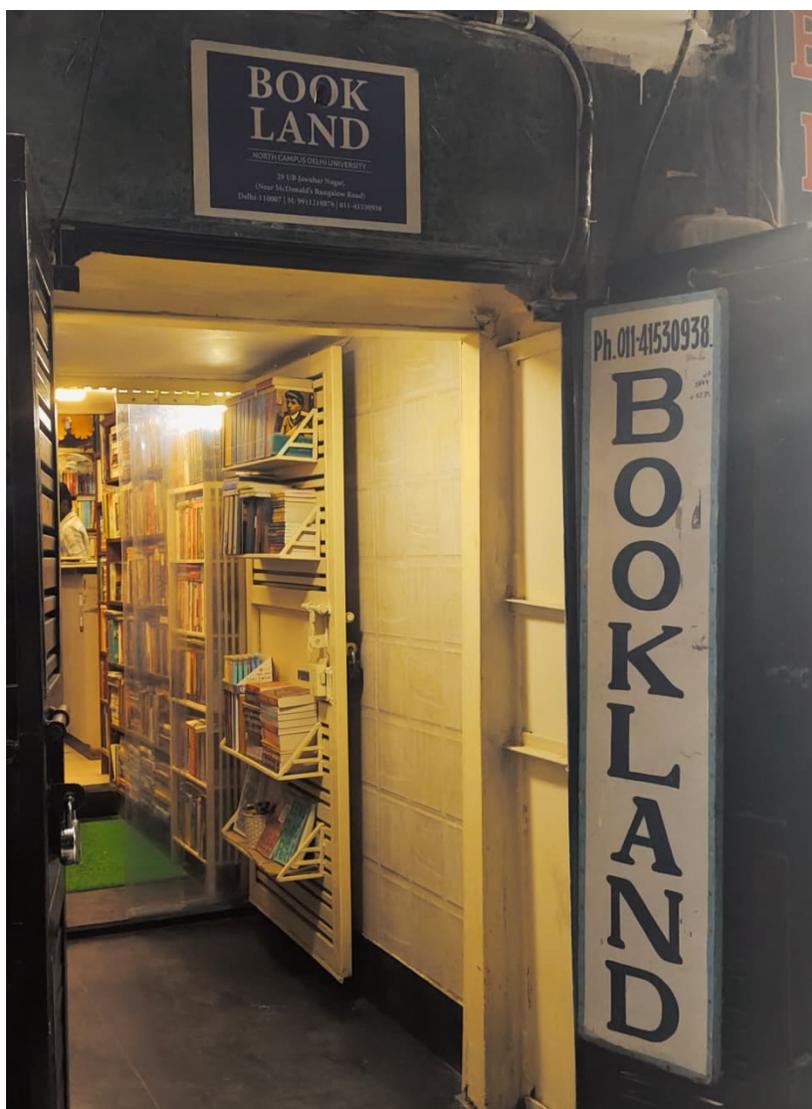
Customers of every age visit the bookstore, and visiting the bookstore is an exciting experience for the readers. On asking about the contribution made by the bookstore towards the reading culture, Tauseef replied, “In an age of misinformation, misinterpretation and misquotation, the relevance of a bookstore will always increase.” Tauseef mentioned that Kindle editions can never be an alternative to physical bookstores; it is mainly used for convenience. Midland Bookshop is one such bookstore where the

owners love giving recommendations to their customers, and it is bookstores like these that truly nurture reading habits among people.



BOOK LAND

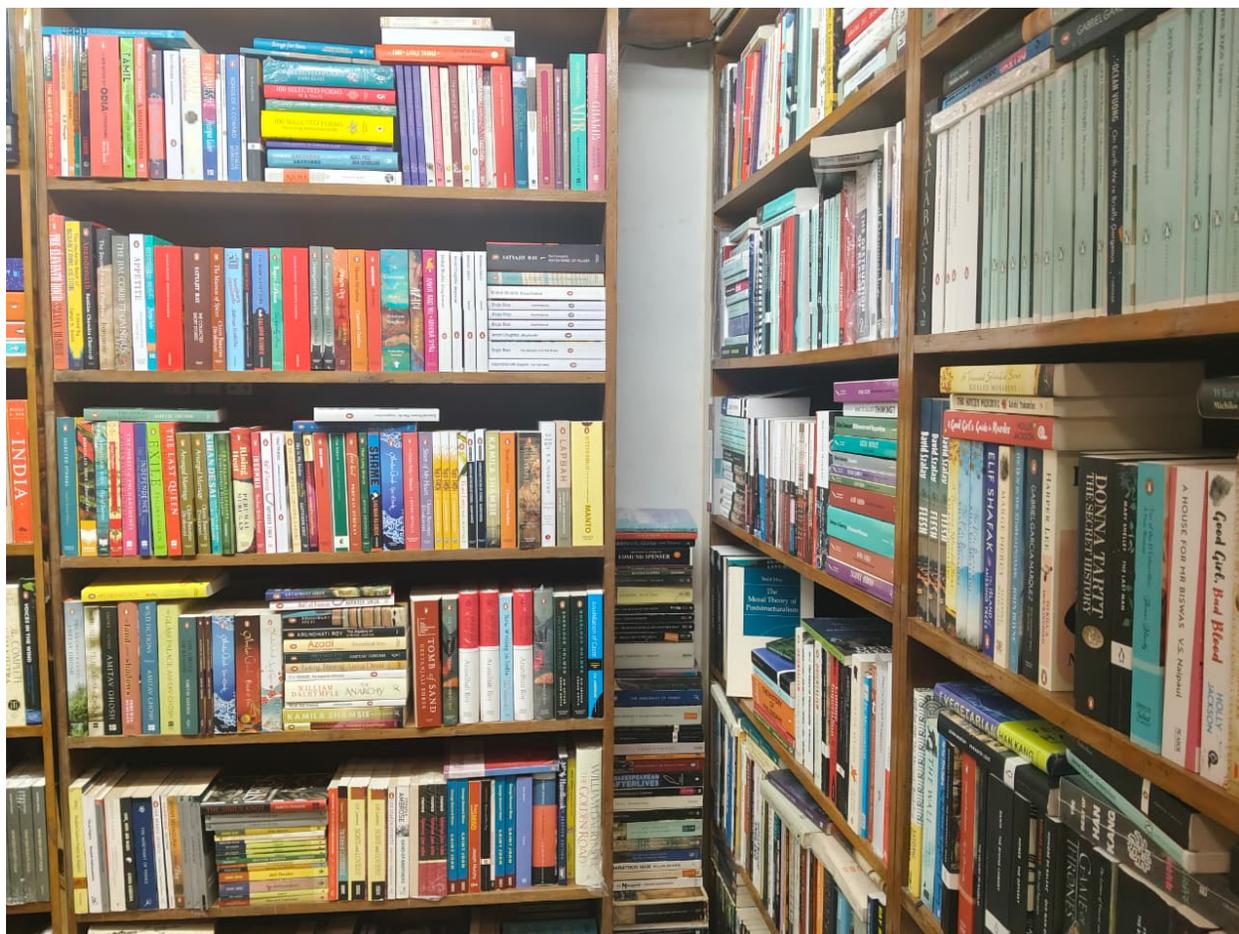
Book Land in Kamala Nagar, North Delhi, was founded in 1968 by Ragesh Rastogi. The bookstore was initially located in Bungalow Road, Kamala Nagar and later got relocated to its current location in Block UB, Jawahar Nagar, Kamala Nagar in 2022. Bungalow Road in Kamala Nagar once housed four prominent bookstores. These included Book Land, Datta Book Centre, University Book House and Khosla Publishing Company. It was these four bookstores that provided all kinds of books



Book Land, Kamala Nagar

to the university students. But, over the past few years, all three bookstores were closed down as the rent grew higher. Today, there is no bookstore on Bungalow Road, and what remains for the readers is Book Land, which has been relocated from Bungalow Road. The bookstore offers both new and second-hand books. On asking about today's readership, Sachin Ragesh Rastogi's son said that the choice of books made by the customers has changed over the years. But literature and fiction books always remain popular at the bookstore.





A few collections of books at Book Land

Even though the bookstore resides in a student neighbourhood, buying books comes as a last priority, since the students rely mainly on online copies. The bookstore also offers University books, but the sales of those books have declined over the years due to the availability of online copies. On asking about the contribution made by Book Land to Delhi's literary heritage, Sachin replied, “It has been more than fifty years, and the impact of the bookstore is huge, which can never be quantified. We have IAS officers and lawyers who once bought books from us, as well as teachers who buy books to teach their students.” Sachin opines that e-books are a challenge for the independent bookstores, and a lot of publishers are closing down, and one can never compete with the online reading platforms. “The message for the readers is that, visit bookstores, buy more books if you want bookstores to survive,” said Sachin.



FAQIR CHAND BOOKSTORE



Faqir Chand Bookstore, Khan Market





Faqir Chand bookstore in Delhi is one such bookstore that grabs the attention of everyone with its warm golden lights and climbing vines. Once you enter the bookstore, it amazes you with its great collection of books. In 1931, Faqir Chand founded a bookstore in Peshawar (present-day Pakistan). But after the partition, Faqir Chand, along with his family, moved to Delhi and then re-established the legendary

bookstore in Khan Market in the year 1951. The bookstore is currently run by the great-grandson of its founder, Abhinav Bahmi, who has been a part of the family business for the last ten years. When asked about his personal journey at the bookstore, he replied, “It’s been ten years in the bookstore, it’s been a beautiful journey, and I feel blessed with the legacy of the bookstore.”



A large variety of books on literature, history, cookbooks, children's books, and Urdu poetry amaze readers as they step into the bookstore. Urdu poetry is in great demand in the bookstore these days. In conversation with Abhinav regarding the sales and today's reading habits, he shared that the sales at the bookstore have always been good, and it has improved

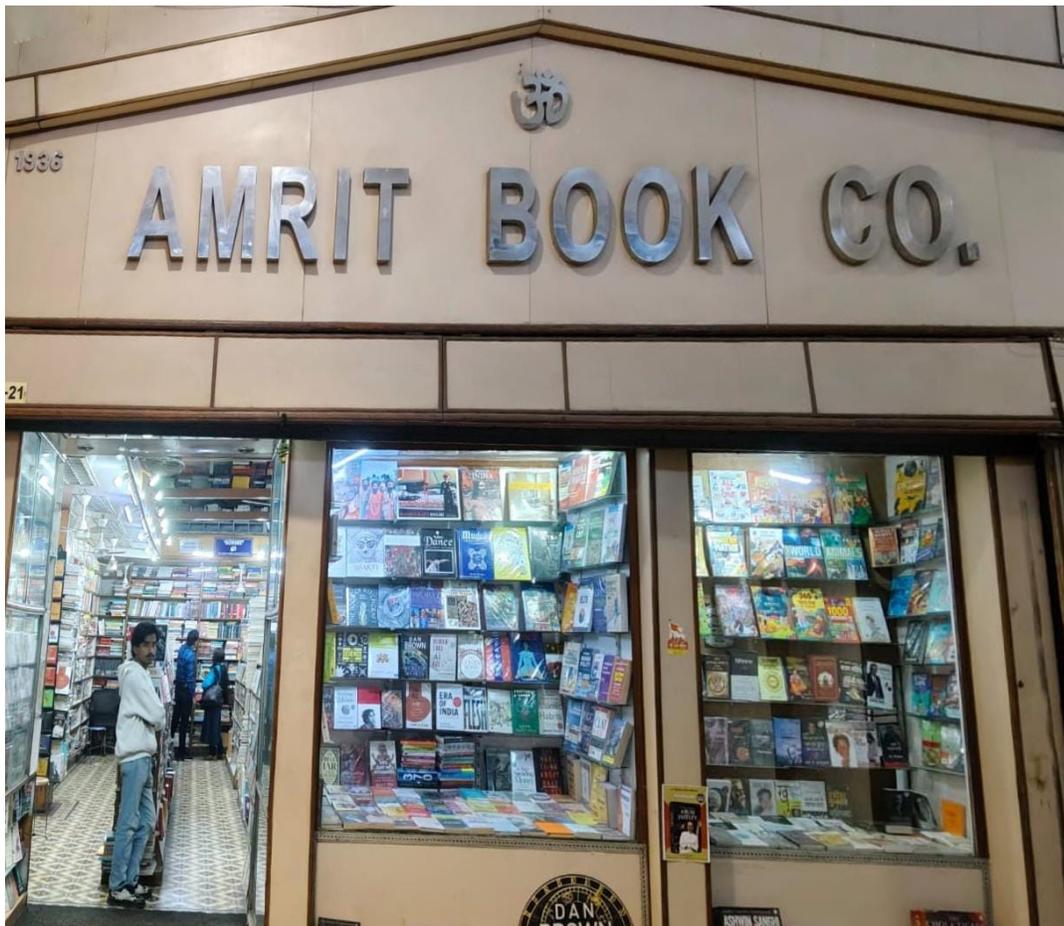


significantly since the pandemic. Lockdown has encouraged many people to get back into the habit of reading books. Some people have also realised the importance of physical bookstores and the experience of buying books. The bookstore also hosts signing sessions with authors where passionate readers queue up to get their copies signed. On asking about the future of the bookstore, Abhinav replied, “For me, it's about sustaining the legacy rather than expanding it, and we want to keep the heritage intact.” Abhinav shared that the bookstore carries so much nostalgia, and he feels really blessed to continue the legacy of the bookstore. Faqir Chand Bookstore in Delhi is one such bookstore that holds a lot of memories, stories and conversations of its people.



AMRIT BOOK COMPANY

Connaught Place in New Delhi has witnessed the rise and fall of some of the prominent bookstores of Delhi. The Bookworm, E.D. Galgotia & Sons and New Book Depot are a few bookstores that this city has lost in the last few years. The changing reading habits, rise in rent, and the increasing influence of e-books may have led to the fall of these bookstores. Yet, few bookstores still stand in Connaught Place for its beloved readers. One of them is Amrit Book Company, founded by Amrit Dhar Nullay in 1936. Today, the bookstore is run by his son, Prem and grandsons Puneet and Sumit.



Amrit Book Company, Connaught Place





The bookstore offers various kinds of books on history, literature, computer science, politics, economics, management and many more.

In conversation with Puneet, when asked about his journey at Amrit Book Company, he replied, “It’s been twenty-five years in the bookstore, and these past years have been really nice, connecting with beloved customers.” The bookstore has a legacy of ninety years, and it will hopefully welcome the passionate readers in the coming years.



THE ENGLISH BOOK STORE

Shri Sunder Das Chowdhri and Shri J.D. Chowdhri founded The English Book Store in 1936 at Abbotabad (present-day Pakistan). It was in 1950; the bookstore was shifted to Connaught Place, New Delhi. The bookstore offers a great collection of books in the field of aviation, and the bookstore is frequently visited by students, instructors and professionals in the aviation field. As the aviation sector holds a bright future in our nation, the bookstore also envisions a bright future, welcoming many more visitors. Along with books of aviation, one could find books on the military, wars and much more.



The English Bookstore, Connaught Place





A few collections of books at the bookstore

What makes the bookstore truly special is its remarkable collection of aviation books, offering students and aspiring pilots a great source of knowledge. It is bookstores like the English Bookstore that make a significant contribution to the reading culture of the city.



MAHILA HAAT SUNDAY BOOK MARKET

Sunday Book Market at Mahila Haat near Delhi Gate on Asif Ali Road is truly one of a kind, a literary space where passionate readers indulge in the world of books. The book market was relocated from the busy lanes of Daryaganj to the spacious open space of Mahila Haat in 2019. According to the sellers of the book market, Mahila Haat seems more convenient compared to the previous location at Daryaganj. Every Sunday, the book sellers with their wide range of books optimistically wait for the readers at their stalls. From morning to evening, people eagerly roam around each stall, excited to see the books on their wish list. One could see children not able to take their eyes off the beautifully illustrated storybooks. The book market offers everything a reader is looking for, whether fiction or non-fiction, history, art, science or guidebooks. The book market houses a large collection of second-hand books; some of the books carry a little note from the previous owner of the book. Apart from books, there are a few stalls that sell a



Mohammad Kaif at his stall in Mahila Haat Sunday Book Market

wide range of postcards, stamps and coins. On entering the market, on the right side is the stall of Mohammad Kaif. From his grandfather selling books near the Red Fort, Mohammad Kaif is the third generation to carry on the business of book selling. His stalls own a collection of novels, cookbooks and magazines. Mohammad Kaif has been selling books in the market for the last six years, and he regards that the book market has not flourished as it was in Daryaganj. He also has an online bookstore known as Malik Book Depot.



Walking ahead, there is Farid Anwar, selling children's books with well-curated illustrations. One could find books like Disney's Animal Story, Princess Tales, Dear Santa, Snowtime Tales and many more, which are sold for Rs 300 per kilo. Farid Anwar joined his father in book selling at Daryaganj book market in 1992, when he was a school student and carried forward the legacy of his stall at Mahila Haat. Small kids stand around the stall with great fascination and curiosity to get copies of their favourite fairy tale books. On being asked about the shift of market from Daryaganj to Mahila Haat, Farid Anwar stated that business is not as good as it used to be in the old days at Daryaganj. Apart from that, the spacious environment at Mahila Haat is far more convenient than the pavements of Daryaganj. Visitors at the book market can walk around the stall without any rush, as compared to the old days at Daryaganj.



*Farid Anwar at his stall selling children's books,
Mahila Haat Sunday Book Market*



Collection of children's books





Mohammad Amin at his stall in Mahila Haat Sunday Book Market

On the left side of the market is the stall of Mohammad Amin, where one could find books on history like *The Last Mughal* by William Dalrymple, *History of Medieval India* by Satish Chandra, books on international relations, Indian art, geography and a lot of guidebooks. When asked about how long he has been selling books at the market, he pointed to a teenage boy selling books on the opposite side, and he said, “I have been selling books at the Sunday market since I was of that age.” He is a part of the family-run bookstore, Mansoori Old Book at Okhla. He has been a part of the Sunday Book Market for many years and will continue to be a seller at the market in the coming years.

These are the stories of a few stalls at the book market. There are many more stalls in the book market which offer a wide variety of second-hand books. Each book seller has a story to tell about their initial journey at Sunday Book Market and memories about each Sunday they spent at the book market. Mahila Haat Sunday Book Market will hopefully continue to remain as an archive of books for the readers.



BRITISH BOOKS, JANPATH

Walking through the lanes of Janpath's shopping market, it is impossible not to take a look at British Books. Getting into the bookstore, one meets the owner, Subhash Kashyap, who has been carrying forward the legacy for the last fifty years. The bookstore has a collection of Hindi and English books, with a few Urdu books on poetry. Alongside, the bookstore offers a wide variety of children's books. The owner is also planning to sell books for competitive exams at an affordable price to



British Books, Janpath, New Delhi

the students who visit his bookstore. Subhash Kashyap has been selling the books at wholesale prices for many years. Apart from that, he offers a return policy, under which readers receive half of the purchase price back upon returning the book. There is no time limit for returning the book, and he remarked that, "whether five years or ten, read as much as you want." Readers can also make the payments in instalments without any time constraints. Subhash Kashyap believes that such policies can help in engaging the young minds with books.





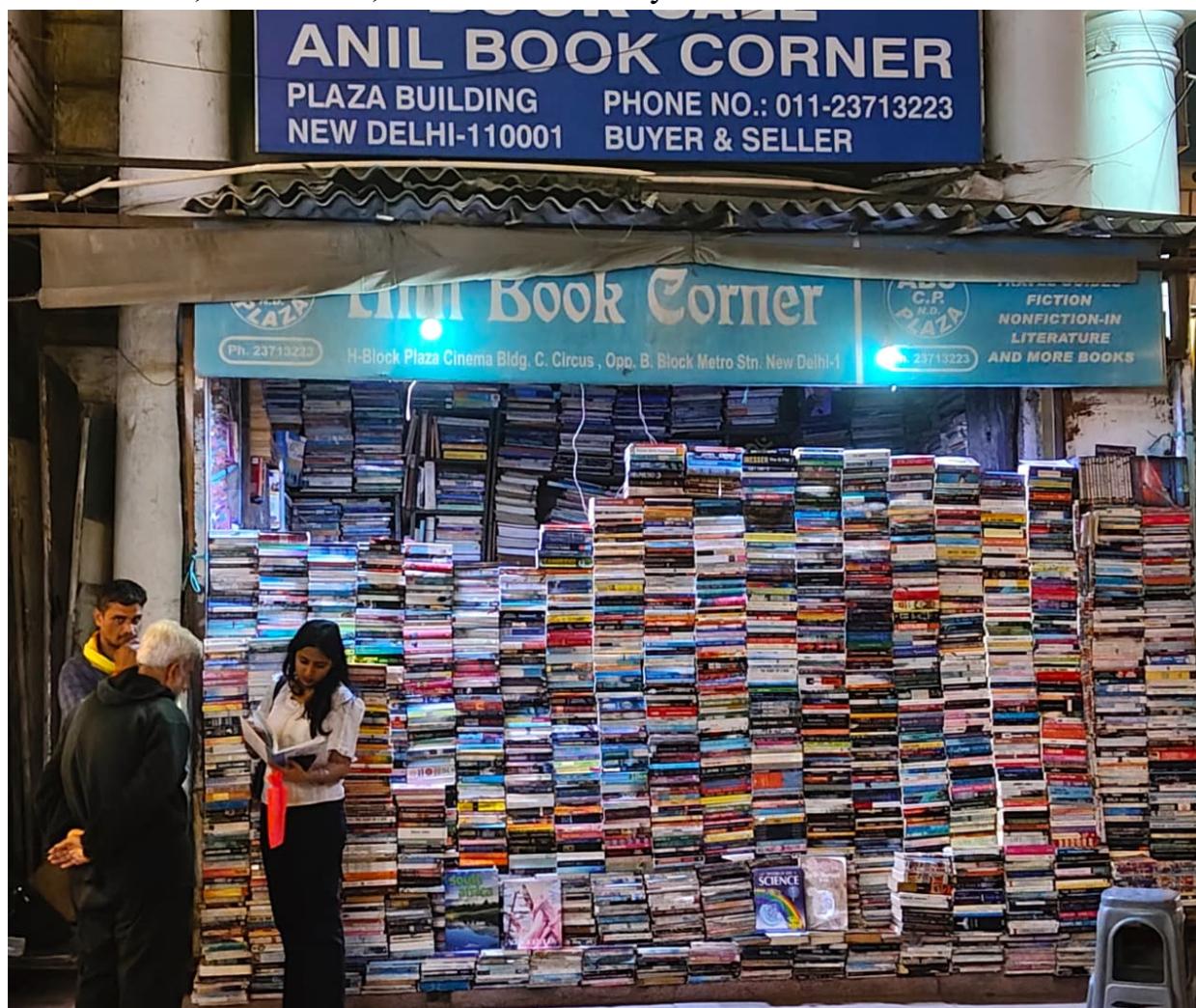
Subhash Kashyap, the owner of British Books, Janpath

Subhash Kashyap never considers e-books as a challenge for his bookstore. Upon asking about the future of the bookstore, he replied, “The bookstore will continue, the scheme of providing books at affordable prices will never be erased, and I will continue to educate those students.” Bookstores like these truly help in keeping the literary heritage of this city alive, and individuals like Subhash Kashyap, with a vision of building a community where reading and learning become more accessible and affordable. People who visit Janpath market always take a moment to spend some time in British Books and often end up taking their favourite books home.



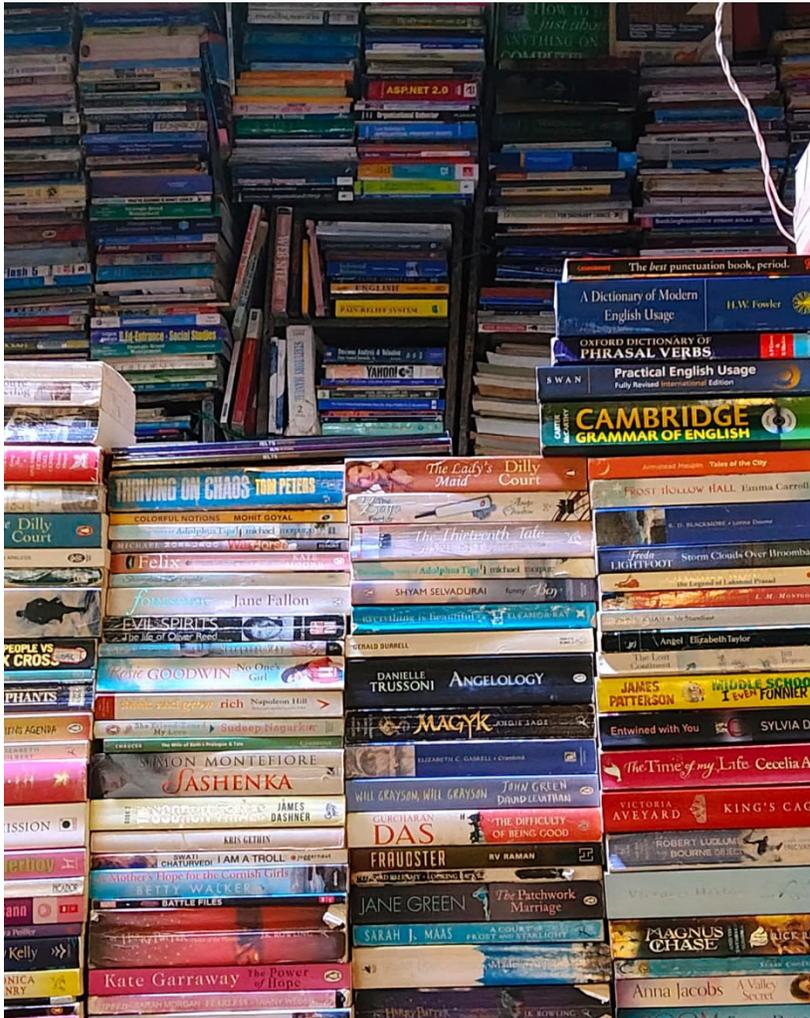
ANIL BOOK CORNER

In Connaught Place stands a bookstore that catches the eye of anyone with its well-arranged stacks of books. Anil Book Corner, founded by Anil Kumar, has been a part of Connaught Place since 1972. After the demise of Anil Kumar in 2017, the bookstore is currently run by his wife and son. One could often see Vinod, who has been working at the bookshop for many years, assisting the customers in getting their favourite books from the shelves. As written on the blue board, the bookshop offers fiction, non-fiction, literature and many more.



Anil Book Corner, Connaught Place





This bookstore offers a larger collection of pre-owned books at affordable prices, and the customers can even exchange their copies for new ones. Most of the customers who arrive at the store look for novels, as one can find many pre-owned copies at Anil Book Corner. In conversation with Vinod about his journey at Anil Book Corner, he said, “I feel happy selling books and seeing the customers revisit the bookstore as IAS officers who once bought books from the bookstore.”



CONCLUSION

Bookstores of Delhi have helped in building the literary heritage of this city. These bookstores have played a pivotal role in nurturing reading habits among people, especially the youngsters. The owners of each bookstore envision a bright future for their bookstore and believe that e-books can never be a replacement for physical bookstores. The joy of visiting a bookstore, browsing through its shelves and finding the perfect book is an experience that no digital platform can offer. Thus, the bookstores of Delhi deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated rather than overlooked or forgotten.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rithika Sundar is currently pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in History from Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi. She has a deep interest in Delhi and its layered past. Her project, Bookstores of Delhi, is an attempt to capture the history, legacy and stories of the beloved bookstores in Delhi. She has previously worked at Enroute Indian History.

