

SPECTRUM

features@lakelakehouse.lk / Tel: 011 2 429 429, 0112 429 228 / Fax: 0112 429 227
JANUARY 9, 2022



Reading, the wealth mantra

BY SACHITRA MAHENDRA

In a world packed with social media, video games and other entertainment whatnot, is the book losing its traditional prominence? Are we becoming more movie freaks than bookworms? Are we done with the classics of the bygone days switching to Netflix? Has digitalisation actually put up the shutters on the traditional habit of reading? These questions have been haunting us for the past years. Digitalisation is shaping our lives, we now know that. Its presence has been felt well since the pandemic hit the globe. Plus that makes some of us lament the loss of great old traditions.

The comment is free so that everyone can make one. Yet it is worth nothing unless backed by facts. That reading is a dying habit is a comment. But the fact remains otherwise. Exactly why it is important and interesting to consider what Steve Siebold has found in a series of interviews done with millionaires.

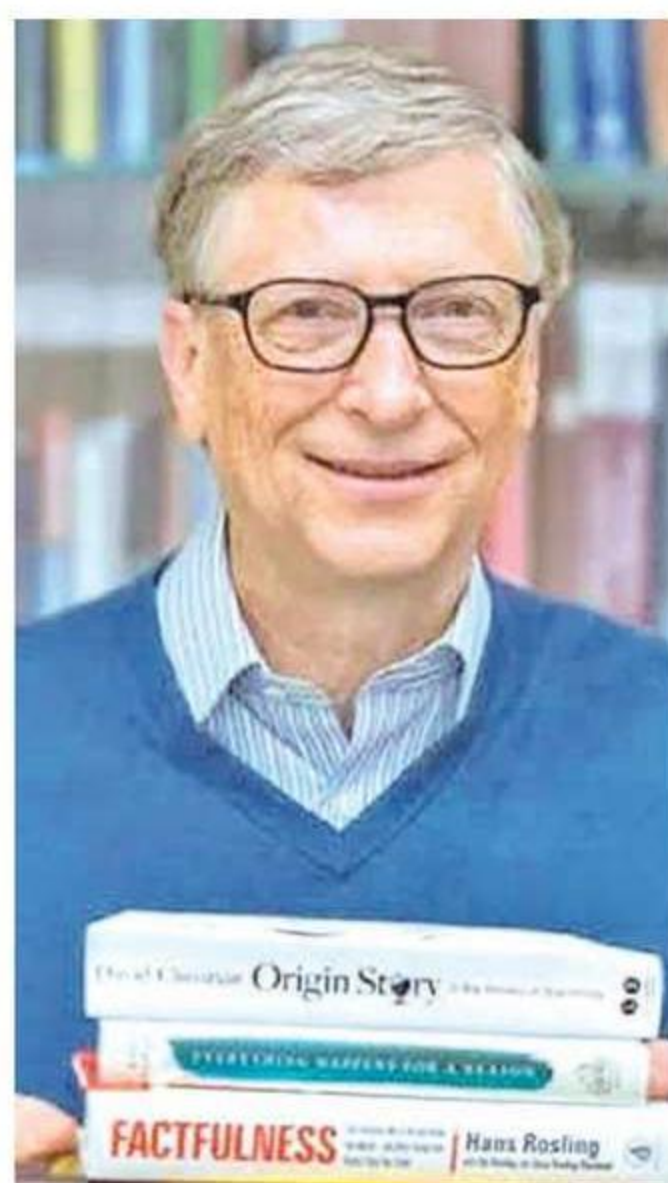
Success story

States Siebold: "Walk into a wealthy person's home and one of the first things you'll see is an extensive library of books they have used to educate themselves on how to become more successful." Siebold should know that since Thomas Corley, author of 'Rich Habits: The Daily Success Habits of Wealthy Individuals' replenishes this finding with statistical evidence. About 67 percent of rich people watch TV for one hour or less per day, while just 23 percent of poor people keep their TV time under 60 minutes. Corley also found only 6 percent of the wealthy watch reality shows, while 78 percent of the poor do.

All this determines a fascinating conviction. Reading could be reckoned a dying habit perhaps, but strictly among the run of the mill. Not among the ultra-rich and successful. Mind the keywords: ultra-rich and successful – that means the stratosphere confined to the richest of the earth.

One common habit

The world's richest men include Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Elon Musk



Bill Gates



Elon Musk



Mark Zuckerberg

and Jeff Bezos. They maintain one common habit. They are voracious readers. They would invest hours and hours on reading while the rest of the world while away scrolling up and down on social media apps.

During the early days of his investment career, Warren Buffet is reported to have read 600 to 1000 pages in a single day. That was some eight hours a day, we are told. Too good to be true! But then Elon Musk turns up to stun us even more with his claim to have read 10 hours a day before becoming the

world's richest man as the CEO of Tesla, an American electric vehicle and clean energy company based in Austin, Texas, United States. Musk is most known for his contribution to space transportation.

Musk was once asked how he mastered rocket science. His answer was not rocket science. It was just one sentence: "I read books." Of course, there is more to his answer than just a habit. As a child, Musk was constantly subject to bully at school. The books were the natural mode for his escapade. Fantasy

and science-fiction books made sure that he would finally become a legend. 'The Lord of the Rings' moulded what he is today.

Gates' reading habits

Bill Gates was once the richest man in the world and still stands tall. Those in the know are well familiar with his passion for reading books. Gates reads 50 books a year, it is said, which are nonfiction. With his philanthropic work and hectic lifestyle, this could be a bit too good to be true. Gates is said to be quite resolved on finishing a book he starts.

"I refuse to stop reading a book in the middle, even if I don't like it," Gates emphasised in an interview given to *Time magazine*, "And the more I dislike a book, the more time I take to write margin notes. That means I sometimes spend more time reading a book that I can't stand than a book that I love."

Jeff Bezos is now known as the world's richest man. His net worth is over \$90 billion. And the book lovers, especially the e-version, are familiar with what he has invented, Amazon. His entrepreneurial streak modified the way the world reads. Accomplished entrepreneurs tend to favour non-fiction over fiction. Bezos takes exception to that. The Remains of the Day by the Nobel winner, Kazuo Ishiguro, is Bezos' favourite novel. Then there are other nonfiction titles such as Good to Great and Lean Thinking: Banish Waste and Creating Wealth in Your Corporation which shaped Bezos' vision. The key thing about a book, Bezos goes on to say, is that the reader loses oneself in the author's world.

Not the richest man on the earth, but who walks among the rich, Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg is passionately continuing to devote more time to reading while his clients waste away time to earn him a fortune.

Local situation

The conclusion? The rich and the reading are synonymous, and the habit can hardly be associated with the less wealthy. This reasoning may sound rational if we turn to our own country.

MORE YOUTHS USE TECHNOLOGY THAN EVER BEFORE. BUT THE PROBLEM IS THEY DANGLE WITH IT FOR RECREATION PURPOSES RATHER THAN READING AND OTHER SERIOUS HABITS. ONE MAJOR OBSTACLE FOR READING ON PALM-HELD DEVICES IS THAT BOOKS IN THE VERNACULAR MEDIUM ARE NOT AVAILABLE IN E-FORMAT



NLDSB Director General, W Sunil



Bill Gates and Warren Buffet

Reading

Seven greatest readers of all time

Albert Einstein

The famous physicist had a library and was a prodigious reader.

Abraham Lincoln

As a young adult, he walked miles to borrow reading material.

Jeff Bezos

Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos loves reading and finds it a reason behind his financial success.

Reese Witherspoon

The Oscar-winner is a passionate reader.

Winston Churchill

A politician and prolific writer, he also loved reading books.

Oprah Winfrey

The media personality finds reading as key to success

Le Bron James

The basketball player reads books to take his mind off the game.

Benefits of reading

- Sharpens the mind, improving your memory.
- Builds and maintains social relationship.
- It lowers your blood pressure and keeps a healthy heart.
- Reading alleviates depression.
- Improves your vocabulary to a great extent

Interesting facts about books

- The longest title of a book contains 3777 words
- Stephen Bloomberg stole 23,000 rare books from 268 libraries that cost \$20 million.
- A la recherche du temps perdu is the longest novel in the world with 1,267,069 words



Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg

National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB) Director General W Sunil offers a picture of the Sri Lankan context.

"More youths use technology than ever before. But the problem is they dangle with it for recreation purposes rather than reading and other serious habits. One major obstacle for reading on palm-held devices is that books in the vernacular medium are not available in e-format."

Worse, the libraries are also gradually gathering dust with the essential triad of parents, teachers and children, losing interest.

"Tuition classes are devouring the children's time. It reduces the time for reading. They have homework given by both schools and tuition. Even though they are keen to read, they are pressed for time. Plus, they are exhausted when all is said and done. On the other hand, parents are keener to encourage children to study than read. With reading becoming lesser and lesser, the young generation has become mechanical," Sunil said.

Positive change, vital

It is time we changed this phenomenon. Our brains are wired for stories. Stories of heroes – whether they are real or otherwise – stimulate us to dream bigger. Platforms may take on various forms. We may be seeing more e-books and kindle editions than paperback and hardback. But old habits die hard. Throughout centuries reading has proven to be a habit among the elite. The accounts of Buffet, Gates and Bezos just substantiate that age-old claim.

But then that seems the message passed from the richest to the wretched of the earth: read more books than average and you'll be more successful than average. If you need to savour success, Gates and other billionaires offer more than proof. The earliest human knew no letters. But ever since the Homo sa-

piens came to terms with the shapes that are later to be known as letters, reading came to settle with us – and never to leave us. The prediction that reading would die a natural death is easy given the digital sphere and so many to watch and distract yourself from reading.

But then this could be easier said than done for most of us well attuned to scrolling up and down social media and instant messaging platforms. We have become the zombies bored and frustrated with the content in front of us brimming with negativity. Our attention span is increasingly becoming lower, simply because – to borrow the words of Steve Krug, the author of 'Don't Make Me Think' – the web users don't read, they scan.

Slaves of technology

We have been scrolling up and down for so long. Moving from one app to another has become our daily ritual. Netflix has recorded an average of 3.2 hours of streaming video per day in 2020. Podcasts are gaining ground. All this does us one thing: it decreases our attention span and places us at disadvantage in comparison to those with sustained attention. No one can be held accountable for this mess. Not even Mark Zuckerberg and the likes, for they shy away from the constant stream of contents to serious reading.

This virtual sphere is our welcome refuge in a busy negative world. But what it does is only lower our productivity, creativity and other nitty-gritty, leaving us in a whirlpool of tweets, text messages and other app notifications. The ultimate result: we have become the slaves of technology when it should be otherwise.

Thankfully the antidote is out in the open, offered by the richest of the earth. Read on. Read on more with sustained attention. Savour the classics. Devour the non-fiction. It will open doors to the world where wealth and success awaits.