

Shreekshetra Pustak Mela

Inauguration of 15th Shreekshetra Pustak Mela at Puri Zilla School, Puri on 3.1.2009

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to inaugurate Shreekshetra Pustak Mela. At the outset, I extend you all a very happy new year. I am given to understand that this Pustak Mela is in its 15th year. From a very humble beginning it has now grown to be reckoned as a leading book fair in the state. I commend the effort of the Pustak Mela Committee for organizing this book fair successfully year after year and in the process drawing appreciation from all quarters. I congratulate the members of the committee and I am sure they will continue to show same spirit and commitment in furthering interest towards books.

It is heartening to find book fairs are now organized regularly much to the delight of book lovers and more significant, it is no more confined to certain specific places. It enables the readers with an exhibition of books from different publishers on variety of subjects and also interest, which one can not get at a single place. The very purpose of book fair is to foster reading habit and enhance book awareness among the people of all ages. The book fair committees are organizing book fairs to bring books near the readers enabling them to purchase books of their own choice and of course at some concession price and in the process have a good personal collection of books. It is very well said, with every book one buys, one adds a millimeter to his / her mental stature. In my case it also adds a day to my life. Book fair gives that opportunity to increase one's collection of books.

Very recently, I had the pleasure of inaugurating a children's book fair at Bhubaneswar, which was organized by women only. This book fair is unique in the sense that it caters to the needs of the children by offering them with a large number of books on varied subjects. It was then followed by two other book fairs at short interval. They all have generated so much of enthusiasm that people anxiously wait for it to start so that they can know about new publications and buy their selected books. I am happy to find that Shreekshetra Pustak Mela has drawn that kind of enthusiasm for itself and promises a lot

for the future. Puri is famous for the abode of Lord Jagannath and also as a tourist place. With tourists from all over the country and abroad visiting this place, Shreekshestra Pustak Mela at this time of the year should take advantage by displaying books on wide range for the visitors to buy and enrich their knowledge on our state and country.

After all books are the medium that can instruct, inform, entertain, motivate and inspire. Reading books is a simple and positive way of growing up as a person. The accumulated knowledge of mankind is made available in printed form as books. By reading it, one gets to know new things, places and persons that always give a great pleasure. It also helps one to develop interest in something one does not know earlier. Reading opens a whole new world to the readers. On not reading, one misses out a great way of learning as well as a wonderful way of improving life.

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind. It should be encouraged right from childhood and should be seen that no one is deprived of benefits and pleasures of reading. It is a social responsibility to ensure that everybody is able to read. Facilities of education and libraries should be expanded. In a state like ours where literacy rate particularly among tribals and tribal girls is very low, it is needed to show a sense of urgency to improve the literacy. I have taken up initiative in launching a literacy drive programme called 'Gyanaloka' involving NSS students of college and university in community work. The response and enthusiasm is very high and it will soon achieve its mission of improving the literacy rate in the state.

Book is the real friend of human being. It helps in moulding one's character and enhances knowledge and wisdom. One should make habit to read and buy books. It is true, science has progressed a lot and electronic revolution has now made it possible to get information on line. But the demand for printed materials and books will always be there. Not only the display and sale of books is the only aim of the book fair, it is also to be the greatest medium for enhancing social and cultural values. When love for books is developed it leads to strengthen the character and helps in creating good human beings.

Here, I would like to commend the book publishers for their keen interest in participating the book fair and urge them to take necessary measures for publication of books in large number looking at the interest of readers. I would also appeal to the parents to bring their children to the book fair so that they develop interest in books. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating 15th Shreekshetra Pustak Mela and wish it a grand success.

Jai Hind