

In the dustbin of time

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Once ubiquitous, typewriters are a rare sight these days. Photo: Raju V.

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With computers, typewriters have made a vanishing act. However, there are still some left who eke out a living from these metal boxes

Not too long ago, there was a time when typewriters were the only means of typing words. Journalists, writers and office clerks particularly were among those who regularly used these square boxes with metal hands tipped with an alphabet each. Remington was the first company that introduced typewriters in India. The clat, clat of a typewriter soon became a familiar noise in many office establishments.

But in today's scenario when newer technology has opened a whole new world of typing gadgets on super-fast mode, many youngsters would admit not even having seen a typewriter. With the advent of computers, the ubiquitous typewriter suddenly vanished from the scenario. The Godrej group was the last manufacturer of office typewriters in the world.

Milind Dukle, General Manager, Godrej, recalls, "The era of 1991-92 was the peak time when typewriters were in huge demand. Around 50,000 typewriters were sold per year then. We used to export these machines to many Asian and African countries as well. However, we have stopped manufacturing them now because of falling demand from customers."

Like the big players, many small and typewriter dealers gradually shut shop due to the advent of computers. One such firm is Delhi-based Universal Typewriter Company, which remained in the business for about six decades. Even though it stopped manufacturing long ago, the stock left from then on is being sold in the market even today.

"Godrej Prima models are still being bought by people and both Facit Remington 2000 and Remington Superwriter models are sold as second-hand machines in the market. Generally, the demand is in government offices, typewriting institutes, colleges and courts," says Vineeta, a worker in Universal.

Earlier, many young people had to take training in typing skills in order to clear tests for certain government jobs. So, learning how to type fast many an edge in the job market. Deepak Jain from Delhi's Jain Typewriters reminisces, "Earlier, students used to come in large numbers to our institute to learn typing as it was needed in the commerce stream and also in vocational studies, besides recruitment tests in government jobs. But for the last four years, the number of students has declined due to the government's decision of taking typing tests on computers instead on typewriters."

However, typewriters are still a means of livelihood for some. They are often spotted near local courts making legal documents for a fee.

"All my life I have used typewriters to prepare legal documents. I am not used to computers; I feel it will be time consuming for me. I can roll out a document on a typewriter much faster. I also cannot afford to pay the electricity bill," says Deen Dayal, a typist in the city's Tis Hazari Court. For now, people like Deen Dayal can have a way, but one wonders for how long.

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