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web sites

New Site Tackles Tough Issues

The number of Hindu-focused news portals are few, but a new, upcoming presence on the Internet hopes to fill that gap. The Chakra is a website that aggregates news stories relating to the four "dharmic faiths"-- Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. It has a particular focus on news overlooked by mainstream media. The Chakra has been active for over a year, and currently averages around 50,000 visitors a month. The publishing team consists of writers and volunteers from Canada, the UK and India, and they are aiming to expand their editorial team in India.

One of the site's early founders, says that The Chakra hopes to become the "Time Magazine of dharmic faith," with an emphasis on deep level insight and analysis for political/religious news.

Critique: The articles could do with more citations and links to original sources to confirm veracity, especially since skeptical readers may already find the focus on crimes and violations against Hindus and Hindu institutions off-putting. Many pieces lack journalistic objectivity and really should be classified as opinion pieces (all articles end with a disclaimer that "The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the The Chakra website and staff.") Nevertheless, this is a promising venture from a group that seeks to protect Hindu rights and believes in promoting the Hindu voice and presence online.

See: www.chakranews.com

beyond epub

iBooks Author Unleashes Rich Publishing

When Apple announced its new publishing tool iBooks Author in January 2012, it heralded yet another sea change in the world of online publishing and eBook creation. Self-publishing online has been a viable option for many years, but any sophisticated incorporation of audio, video or advanced graphical content required expensive expertise. iBooks Author sets a new standard for the creation of visually stunning, media-rich, interactive and engaging eBooks that can be read on the iPad and other iOS devices and created by someone without coding skills. The iBooks Author opens up a multitude of possibilities for dharmic educators to extend the power of digital textbooks, (which we discussed in the Jan/Feb/March 2011 issue), beyond just words and pictures.

One limitation of the software is that any book in the iBooks 2 format can only be sold through Apple's iBookstore and only be played on an iOS device.

Since iBooks Author is relatively new, we have yet to see its full-fledged effects. But key textbook publishers--McGraw Hill and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and others--were quick to partner with Apple to offer media-rich textbooks. iBooks have a tremendous potential for Hindus to create beautiful, captivating, rich media books. Imagine embedded audio clips of shlokas, and a video feature on doing puja, "read-aloud" capabilities, interactive quizzes and more--all available at the flick of your finger. An indicator of the acceptance of iPads for education: Chicago's public schools have spent \$500,000 on iPads for students.

See: www.apple.com/ibooks-author/