

# FRONTLIST

MARCH 2022

## COMING UP WITH

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL



pragati  
vichaar

'Break The Bias'

8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

A DAY WHIPPED WITH POETIC VERSES



pragati  
vichaar

Poetry Festival

21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

*Celebrate World Poetry Day with Us*



# WELCOME MESSAGE

Hope you all are doing well!

Welcome to the month of March, which has now become synonymous with women's empowerment. This year's International Women's Day theme is 'Break The Bias', and we will be out there celebrating it with the event, 'PragatiE Vichaar - Break The Bias'. We are very excited to partner with 'PublisHer' and grateful to join hands with the International Publishers Association (IPA) and the Federation of Indian Publishers (FIP) for this remarkable event. The event will feature stories and sessions with some of the key leaders in global publishing - Bodour Al Qasimi, Monica Malhotra, Nitasha Devasar, Arpita Das, and many more.

With the feeling of exhilaration, I'd like to pay my respects to the publishing ecosystem for embracing us like family.

In March, we will also be celebrating the 'PragatiE Vichaar Poetry Festival' on World Poetry Day, on 21st March. It will be a mystical event to celebrate the charisma of Poetry. We have the top bards of our times like CP Surendran, Sudeep Sen, Abhay K, Amit Majmudar, and many more to bring out the deep reverence for contemporary poems.

We are also proud to announce another noteworthy event in April, the 'PragatiE Vichaar World Book and Copyright Day', to celebrate World Book and Copyright Day on 23rd April. We are thrilled to see the enthusiasm from the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisation (IFRRO) and the Indian Reprographic Rights Organisation (IRRO) for this event. More details will be available soon.

You all already know that we celebrated the 'PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival' and the PVLF Excellence Awards in January. While we announced the winners online and it was received by everyone with great enthusiasm, we had to defer the winners' felicitation because of the increased COVID cases in January. We are now overwhelmed with a flush of emotions to announce the PVLF Excellence Awards Winner Felicitation Night that will take place on 9th March 2022.

In the end, I'd like to say good thoughts never fail to bear fruit, and here we are executing new things every day with team spirit and flourishing ourselves to explore newer avenues.

Thank you for showing the immense faith within us, and we assure you that we'll bring new opportunities to create an amazing milieu in the Publishing Community.

**Write to me: [navita@frontlist.in](mailto:navita@frontlist.in)**

Navita Berry  
**Business Head**

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**01, Frontlist Magazine - March Edition**

EXCLUSIVE  
FEATURE



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Top Women in Publishing





# BODOUR AL QASIMI

*IPA President,  
Founder of PublisHer*

Bodour Al Qasimi is the CEO and Founder of Kalimat Group, a leading children's publisher in the United Arab Emirates. For more than a decade, she has been a driving force behind efforts to grow the Arab world's publishing industry, including Sharjah Publishing City, the world's first publishing industry free zone. She chairs the Sharjah World Book Capital 2019 Committee and leads various global initiatives to promote freedom to publish, youth and gender empowerment, and cross-cultural exchange. Bodour is currently serving as the IPA President, the second woman in its 125-years history, and the first Arab woman to be in this role.

She is the founder of PublisHer - It's an empowered community seeking creative and viable solutions to the many gender-based inequities that have long characterized world publishing and the other creative industries.

**Frontlist:** From M.Sc. in Medical Anthropology to becoming a key woman in promoting the publishing industry in Sharjah, how has your journey been so far?

**Bodour:** My journey has been nothing short of incredible, to be honest with you, I feel blessed and grateful for this journey. It started by chance, actually by accident. Although, I don't believe coincidences exist. However, this has been my experience in publishing. This accident has developed into a career for me, and I'm grateful for all these experiences, the accomplishments, the knowledge I gained, and the amazing people I met along the way. I learned the importance of cooperation and collaboration throughout my journey and how to work with colleagues from



around the world. I also learned that reaching a consensus on various issues is not always easy, you face some challenges and then get a big pushback from the status quo culture. Hence, I learned an ample amount of knowledge and gained a lot of experience on this journey. I absorbed that listening and empathy brings people together around meaningful conversations. Working on a global level has been an eye-opening experience for me influencing how I perceive publishing as a powerful component of human civilization and increasing my passion. For our industry, I feel very motivated to continue working with my colleagues from around the world, and the importance for us to reaffirm the role of publishing in social, cultural, and economic development worldwide. Now, let me tell you how I landed into publishing coincidentally. I would say that my oldest daughter, now in university, complained to me that she didn't have interesting books in Arabic, and that spurred my journey into publishing. I decided to set up my own publishing house just because of that one conversation that we had. So, in a nutshell, I believe it was fate, and it was meant to happen. I truly believe it's been the best experience of my life.

**Frontlist:** 2022 is the last year of your IPA Presidency. How do you want to make it memorable?

**Bodour:** So, just like my first year, I will be contributing and focusing on IPA and helping all my publisher friends worldwide. It's a critical time for our industry as publishers are facing many challenges. We all need to stick together and coordinate to find the solutions. Some of these challenges have allowed us to look for new solutions, digital transformation, and new business models. I really want to focus my energy during my last year as the President of IPA on supporting publishers to navigate these challenges and to benefit from any opportunity that they come across.

**Frontlist:** On this International Women's Day, how do you think the publishing industry will #BreaktheBias (theme of 2022), and

**how you shall continue to do so?**

**Bodour:** I think the first step for us is to recognize that our industry is still progressing in terms of getting more female publishers into leadership positions. When I started my journey in this industry almost 15 years ago, there were very few women in leadership positions. I've seen a big change happen since then, as diversity and inclusion started to take center stage in many of our conversations. However, I believe the main challenge, in my opinion, is that the progress is slow and not occurring globally, as we can see pockets of progress in some spaces but not all. Some markets are way ahead, and some are still beginning this journey. And that's where we need to support our colleagues and make sure that they keep up with all the changes happening. From a personal level, I will continue to lead this conversation inviting more publishers to join. And at the end of the day, what we do as publishers is enable voices. Therefore, it only makes sense that we lead by example. We should facilitate all the voices within the publishing industry to start talking to each other and make a difference.

**Frontlist:** What inspired you to start a community known as 'PublisHer' led by women to bring gender equality to the publishing world?

**Bodour:** My journey as an Arab female publisher had a big influence on me starting PublisHer. When I used to travel for business trips, especially to book fairs, I found that I was the only woman in the room and felt very lonely and out of place. I felt like there were no women around me, and it was always dominated by men. It never made sense to me, and I always used to ask the question, 'Why?'. It was a very conflicting situation for me to see. I saw many women working in the publishing industry, but there were very few that reached the leadership position. When I started working globally, I found that this is not a particular situation in the Arab world, it's the same in many other models. Hence, with the support of like-minded publishing colleagues, I established PublisHer as an organic movement inside the industry to create real and lasting change to mindsets and the status quo culture.

**Frontlist:** What types of issues have been managed by PublisHer to improve the gender bias in the industry?

**Bodour:** The most important step we took at the beginning of PublisHer was to unify our message, which is really straightforward, "The leadership positions should be determined by merit, not other measures." To drive this message home and support with concrete action, we started conducting interviews to highlight the success stories of female publishers and their organizations and how they contribute to the progress of our industry. So, these success stories are important as they play a role in changing the mindset of the people and instill confidence in the young generation of female publishers. Moreover, we wanted to change the practices that reinforce the status quo. Therefore, we launched the "Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit", which helps the publishing houses in reviewing their work, their hiring processes, and HR practices to implement more of an inclusive approach. This toolkit is available for free for anybody to download on the PublisHer website, which is [www.womeninpublishing.org](http://www.womeninpublishing.org). Since we've launched this toolkit, many publishing houses approached us for guidance as they wanted to create the change and said that this tool could help them do that. Lastly, we launched a mentorship scheme and a reverse mentoring program, which led to female publishers and young talent learning from each other through this program. It is just the beginning of it, but I'm proud of what we've achieved so far. We've created a movement, we've created awareness, we've created a community, and I believe that we'll see the positive impacts very soon.

**Frontlist:** What is the vision of PublisHer for the year 2022, now

**going into its 4th year?**

**Bodour:** We will continue what we started three years ago. We had to halt a lot of our events because of the pandemic. But we're hoping that things will pick up again. There's nothing to replace in-person events as we had very successful physical events that created a very positive and encouraging atmosphere for female publishers. We've been trying to replicate that virtually but hoping to go back to physical events soon. Our vision is still the same, it hasn't changed, but our resolve and determination have grown. We want to focus on growing the community, welcoming new stakeholders, creating new initiatives, and producing lasting change.

**Frontlist:** Do you think there is a possibility of change in international organizations like IPA, IFRRO, etc., by bringing diversity and exclusivity?

**Bodour:** Absolutely. Change is inevitable because evolution is a dynamic process, and we can't shield ourselves from it forever. So my message is, instead of resisting evolution, let's go with it. Let's flow. Let's open our hearts and minds to new possibilities. I believe in IPA specifically, as diversity and inclusion are on the agenda. We're also supporting all our member associations to discuss diversity and inclusion. Thus, creating positive changes through our membership on a global level.

**Frontlist:** How are you planning to #BreakTheBias this year in the publishing industry?

**Bodour:** Being the second woman President of IPA in 125 years is already a big step towards breaking the bias, I feel that's a huge achievement. I keep repeating that because honestly, it's taken us 125 years for a female leader to lead IPA. Now, the story needs to change and we need to create a positive image of IPA in supporting female publishers to reach leadership positions. We've already started that because my current Vice-President and the next IPA President is a woman, Karina Panza from Brazil. We are shattering stereotypes and I think we're really breaking the glass ceiling, as I can see a huge shift in people's minds. More and more colleagues have started accepting the idea that women can lead organizations like IPA. I believe that it's a mindset issue at the beginning. I feel that there are still pockets of resistance around. However, the more we talk about it, the more events we have like this, the more we'll be able to create consensus on this critical subject.

**Frontlist:** The Indian publishing industry is very male-dominated. What do you think they can do to develop more diversity?

**Bodour:** You know, there's an Arabic expression that says, nothing can scratch your skin like your nails. The meaning is that to develop more diversity in the publishing and the Indian publishing industry, we need men to create that change, and we need the leaders to create that change. So, to be champions and make sacrifices, it is necessary to see progress. And, I'm happy to see you do that. I think you've taken a huge initiative by creating a lot of awareness around International Women's Day by inviting me to speak and also by encouraging more women to be part of this movement and bringing this important topic to light. So, I believe you're already doing it, and you're already creating change with these kinds of conversations. I also believe that bringing opportunities to raise awareness is crucial, we should stand together in helping women assert their voices. It won't happen unless the current narrative is called into question and revised. Diversity and inclusion have proven beyond doubt that it brings benefits across the spectrum, embracing these ideals will support growth and the development of the publishing industry.

# TRASVIN JITTIDECHARAK

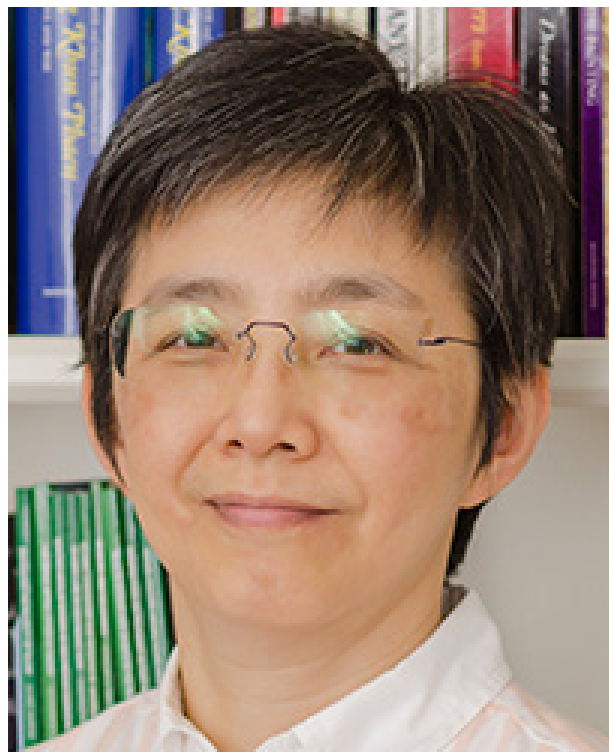
*Owner and Founder of Silkworm Books, Founder of Mekong Press and Mekong Press Foundation.*

Trasvin Jittidecharak is from Chiang Mai, Thailand. She began learning the art of the book trade from a very young age when her parents founded the Suriwong Book Center, the first bookstore in Thailand outside of Bangkok.

She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in publication design from Parsons School of Design in New York, and has since attended the Stanford Publishing Course for Professionals as well as a publishing training course offered by the Frankfurt Book Fair. In her early career, she illustrated many books.

Trasvin was active in promoting reading among children between 1986–1991. She supported the Mobile Library project. She started a children's magazine, Dinosarn, but later left the partnership, and the magazine was discontinued in 1993.

In 1991 Trasvin founded Silkworm Books, a general, independent publisher of English-language books on Thailand and Southeast Asia. Silkworm Books has a reputation for editorial quality. It is the only Thai publisher that distributes its publications in North America and the UK, through an agreement with the University of Washington Press. It is also collaborating with the prestigious École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) on a



new series that brings French research on Asia to an English-language readership. Silkworm has published work by many high-profile Thai authors, among them Prof. Pasuk Phongpaichit, Dr. Chris Baker, Dr. Dhiravat na Pombej, and Dr. Prapod Assavavirulhakarn. In 2010 it published its magnum opus, *The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, the translation of a famous Thai classical folk tale of 1,500 pages.

In 2005, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, Trasvin founded Mekong Press, later Mekong Press Foundation, in 2008, in order to support publishing activities in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and to establish a network of publishers in the region. Besides publishing works by local writers, Trasvin has organized workshops on copyediting in Laos and Cambodia, on copyrights for state-owned publishers in Vietnam,

and on the process of publishing for Vietnamese underground publishers.

Trasvin has served as a resource person in book design and publishing at both national and regional levels for organizations such as the Frankfurt Book Fair, UNESCO (Regional Office in Karachi), and the British Council (Bangkok office). She has served as a judge for a number of national publication design competitions, and since 1989 has been actively supporting adherence to copyright law in Thailand. In 2008 she became a member of the International Publishers Association's Freedom to Publish Committee and has become one of its most active members.

Trasvin has served as an advisor to the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT) since 2009. In 2011, as PUBAT representative, Trasvin, joined Bangkok Read for Life Group and successfully campaigned for Bangkok's designation as UNESCO World Book Capital 2013. The City of Bangkok subsequently appointed her to serve on the Bangkok World Book Capital steering committee as the international focal person for the Bangkok World Book Capital 2013. She was elected to serve on the Executive Committee of the International Publishers Association (IPA) for 2012–14 and 2015–17. Trasvin was the chair of the organising committee for the Bangkok 2015 IPA Congress. Trasvin organized and chaired the ASEAN Children's Book Illustration Contest hosted by ICCRF (International Children's Content Rights Fair).

**Frontlist:** As the founder of Silkworm Books- the only independent Thai publisher that distributes books in North America and the UK, what type of challenges have you faced in

#### **the industry as a woman?**

**Trasvin:** In Thailand, women had space in trading, even before it became the modern nation-state. A female poet who lived during the mid to the late 19th century was the only female commissioned to compose stories for different occasions. She wrote the life of another woman, a widow, who took over her late husband's business, sailed to purchase goods in South China cities for reselling. In the North, in another kingdom, women had to trade. In the feudal system, males were served six months per year to their lords and recruited to the army in wartime. Women also inherited their properties. When Siam took Lanna as part of the kingdom, the law changed, it became a more patriarchal society.

I never experienced intimidation among peers. It could be because I began to work with a university press, where people are liberal and sensitive. However, when I was growing up, our family was also a newspaper and magazine distributor in the upper Northern region. My father passed away when he was only 49, so the business became a women's run. The publishers' reps, all males, of course, didn't like working with us. Neither my mother nor sisters hung out, let alone treat them to brothel visits. Those days, it was a common practice. When I grew up and worked for a short time in Bangkok in a trading company. I loathed calling factories. In Thailand, we go by first names, so when a male received a call, they heard my voice and my name, indicating gender, their voice changed. They made it so clear that they don't take you seriously. So, I made up the name and officially changed it. Trasvin neither means anything nor tells whether it's a male or female. I confused them. It worked.

#### **Frontlist: You are a member of the PublisHer community. How do you think it is helping women in the publishing industry?**

**Trasvin:** On a personal level, PublisHer boosts individual confidence. It also clarifies that no matter in which department you belong, gender has nothing to do with the job. On the organizational level, it encourages—if not demands, the management to provide an equal opportunity and pay for all genders. However, sometimes even the business owner offers a chance to a female employee, and the employee may have a family reason for not accepting the offer. For example, if she has children and her husband requests her to sacrifice her job for taking care of children so that he has time to devote and advance in his position. While I believe that both men and women should share responsibilities and devote and advance in their positions together, instead of letting one sacrifice their job. Nevertheless, the employers must offer and try to find a suitable solution.

#### **Frontlist: You are the second woman in over 100 years to sit on the IPA's Freedom to Publish Committee and an active member too. You would provide what type of changes or guidance to the women in the association?**

**Trasvin:** When I was running for the IPA Board, I didn't think much until elected. The reason women stayed away from the IPA board could be that IPA functioned differently from now. Maybe there were not many female executives in the member associations, or they were not ready to travel due to personal obligations. All I did was step in and open the door. Since then, the IPA leadership has unanimously encouraged and recruited more women to run and serve. Since 2012, we have made much improvement. Now, IPA has a female President and Vice-President. Each IPA committee has a good balance of genders, and everyone contributes equally. We hope the association members will do the same. Some association has balanced genders on their board. Some still have to do more. Of course, we have to take each country and society's cultural context into account. In my association, the previous executive board of 15 members had 7 females and 8 males. Still,



the present board only has only two female members.

**Frontlist:** What inspired you to start your own publishing company?

**Trasvin:** It's destiny. I grew up within my parents' bookstore, and I could read before school. Books are everything for me, and I studied Book Design and Typography. In my late teen, the political situation in Thailand was exciting. We had freedom at that time, and everyone read. Reading moulded the youth and adults to dream of a better society. Books changed people for the better. Being an avid reader is equally or even better than conventional education. With the dawn of tourism in Thailand in the late 80s, a few English books about Thailand were written. 98% of those books were written by western authors. I thought it better to have books written by Thais, so I published them in English.

**Frontlist:** On this International Women's Day, how do you think you are going to #BreaktheBias (theme of 2022), and how shall you continue to do so?

**Trasvin:** Be an exemplar. When I was still working at my family bookstore, my sister-the boss didn't have an equal pay policy. We fought and fought, and I lost. I don't do what I dislike when I have my firm, I don't laugh hearing a sexist joke, and I speak up whenever I have an opportunity. We have to do what we preach, even in our dreams.

**Frontlist:** It is said that Thailand as a country is not for readers. What are you doing for the next generation, especially women, to start reading?

**Trasvin:** We are improving. The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand statistics' showed that women bought more books than men. However, the statistics are based on the Bangkok population. We have to promote reading for women in the provinces where many are illegible. During the pandemic lockdown, schools were closed, children had to study online, and mothers and grandmothers were devastated as they couldn't help their kids learn. Many years ago, a study showed that the more the mothers read, the better they raise their children.

**Frontlist:** The PublishHer is completing its 3 years in March 2022. How do you think it is performing to #BreaktheBias and forge gender equality in the publishing industry?

**Trasvin:** PublishHer's communities are growing, and it is too soon to say what we are trying to do, is bearing fruits or not. As I mentioned earlier, we have to consider cultural context, and some cultures, societies and spaces require more effort and different approaches. The pandemic has slowed us down. Hopefully, the development will be visible when we resume traveling and meet in person. Change takes time. However, publishers are a band of intelligent people, and most of us are open-minded and willing to change.

# SANYA PODAR

*Founder of Daffodil Lane Books*

Sanya Podar is the founder of Daffodil Lane Books. She is an avid reader and content producer.

After discovering a need for better, more diverse children's books in India, she set out to re-imagine the publishing industry.

In 2018, Sanya created Daffodil Lane, a name inspired by "little daffodil", the nickname she was lovingly called by her father. She started this venture after a week of the pandemic as a 'think tank' for children and a springboard for ideas.



**Frontlist:** You are an ideal example of a brave Indian woman entrepreneur who took the risk and started the Daffodil Lane Books right after a week of the pandemic. How did you emerge with the idea of establishing your own Publishing House?

**Sanya:** We had been working on the idea for almost two years before the pandemic and it just so happened that our launch date was a week after we went into lockdown. We had only two options - either we pushed it to a later date or continued with an online launch. We went with the latter because we thought the world was ready for our product and as it turns out, it was! Parents wanted respite from screens and our books made for great entertainment.

**Frontlist:** In today's world, most people prefer to read e-books and are well-consumed with digital technologies. Still, you have immense faith in the paper books. How can we persuade people to read more books rather than digital ones?

**Sanya:** As a new entrant in a vibrant industry, as I understand it, parents today are aware of the adverse effects of excessive use of digital platforms. In the pandemic and throughout the lockdown, the consumption of digital media among children has increased due to staying indoors, learning, and playing online. A trend that I noticed is that parents are looking for ways to engage their children with traditional content, like books. As a publisher, we need to stay relevant, and I want us to make a difference in this aspect. We, at Daffodil Lane Books, are doing that by tackling the sustainability of digital options by sourcing materials responsibly for most of our books. We also try to keep our format quick and engaging, not unlike their digital alternatives. Call me old-fashioned, but I think there's nothing in the world that has more cognitive and emotional benefits than sitting down with a book and turning pages with your child, and it shouldn't be swapped for holding a screen and pushing buttons.

**Frontlist:** It takes a lot of courage to start your own company, and within a year, DLB got a lot of recognition. What challenges have you faced in the publishing industry as a woman?

**Sanya:** I hope this is just the start – we've received so much love, but there have also been so many challenges! We have been deliberate in committing to only a selected number of books a year. It helps us meet the needs of our readers as well as we possibly can. It also gives us the liberty to craft and curate content that captivates. But having said that, being small is often mistaken with being a young or a new entrant, and thus the quality that we bring to the table as publishers sometimes gets ignored or overlooked. Young female entrepreneurs are also looked at as hobbyists and not careerists, which is infuriating and demotivating. But embracing challenges is what makes us limitless, so I have learned to ignore the noise at times and carry on with what I've set out to do.

**Frontlist:** Daffodil Books Lane is dedicatedly working towards spreading the magic of storytelling through books with animal protagonists at the same time without being preachy. What plans do you have in your mind to encourage women that are already working in your company or would like to join your venture in the future?

**Sanya:** We are always looking for good content! And that doesn't mean from only established writers. Children's writing is versatile and can be nostalgic as well – you won't know if you have a book in your hands if you don't give it a try! Whether you're a teacher, an academic, a new mom or even an engineer! If you have experience with a child (your own or in the family) and like telling stories, write to us with your manuscript at [info@daffodillanebooks.com](mailto:info@daffodillanebooks.com) no longer than 300 words. (Only accepting works in the English language).

**Frontlist:** On account of your first-hand experience, what

suggestions would you like to give young women stepping into the entrepreneurship world?

**Sanya:** Go for it! Build and create your own value. But, don't quit your day job before you have a plan. I worked on the idea of DLB at night while I was at my last job, and only when I had a blueprint chalked out did I take the next step.

**Frontlist:** As a woman, don't you think it's our responsibility to support women and their career growth. Share your thoughts on this.

**Sanya:** I think it's essential for both men and women to support women in business.

While a lot of the advice I received at the start of my journey has been from my husband, some of the greatest, most pragmatic and inspiring advice has come from successful peers who have been women! Such great things happen when we uplift each other.

**Frontlist:** It doesn't matter in our patriarchal society how much women sacrifice themselves. But it's high time to break all biasness to gain their self-worth. As a publisher, how can you bring new opportunities for women in this industry?

**Sanya:** For starters, we're an all-girls team! We love the candid bond we share at the office.

DLB also recognizes that women have so many roles and don so many hats. Therefore, we don't have a rigid work environment and follow more flexible work hours.

## DAFFODIL LANE BOOKS

The first of its kind 'boutique' publishing house in an industry where the business of books tends to be more about the number of copies sold rather than the stories told...

Small is our big.

We're thus deliberate in committing to only a select number books a year. This helps us in meeting the needs of each of our readers as well as we possibly can. It also gives us the liberty to craft and curate content that captivates.

While we love being small, DLB's books aim to make a big difference in the world!

Breaking the mould of today's regimented reading, we address contemporary topics. When's the last time you read your child a story about low self-esteem or deforestation or even empathy towards animals?

We're also meticulous in our choices. Be it the ethically sourced paper, the philosophy of every colour or even the personality of each of our characters...

And that's why a book by DLB is never rushed to production but is carefully crafted into a piece of art.

# LIPIKA BHUSHAN

*Founder of MarketMyBook*

An award-winning senior publishing professional, Lipika Bhushan heads MarketMyBook, a leading publicity and digital marketing agency for writers and publishers. She founded MarketMyBook in 2013 after heading Marketing at HarperCollins India for about 7 years. MarketMyBook has serviced some of the leading publishers and writers in the world since its inception.

Lipika contributes as an industry expert to various publications. Her poems have been published in the NavBharat Times and Amar Ujala. Lipika's essay was published in Global Pandemic Crisis: A Series of Literary Essays on Quarantine (Transcendent Zero Press, US) in 2020. Her first short story features in the anthology When Mommy Was a Little Girl (Ponytale Books) in January 2022.

**Frontlist:** You've worked with various publishers. To any average reader, they would appear to be the same. What differences did you see in terms of the functioning of these organizations?

**Lipika:** That's an interesting question. The commitment to quality and clarity about the kind of content they would like to publish is led by the same kind of passion across all publishers. There isn't much of a difference in their functioning but what is different is the publishing vision that drives each one of them to stay in the same business and yet set them apart from the other.

**Frontlist:** You come from a generation where people didn't encourage women's entrepreneurship. Today you're a source of inspiration to upcoming female entrepreneurs. What advice would you like to give them?

**Lipika:** I am the first generation of entrepreneurs in our family of bureaucrats and army personnel, but what allowed me to take that leap of faith was my father instilling great confidence in the decisions I took about life and profession. In addition, the biggest assurance was financial security and education, and these are the two things every man or woman must take care of before they take that entrepreneurial leap. Optimism to succeed is a must but knowing that you have something to fall back on in case of failure is also equally important to be aware of.

It is important to complete your education and continue to upgrade your skills. Also, work on securing your finances to cover your expenses when you start, you need to save and invest money. Women, especially, need to be more aware of financial management and train themselves to understand savings, allocation of funds, accounting, taxation, and investing right,



better.

What's worked with me is to identify and package my strengths. Identify what you are brilliant at and what you enjoy doing, and then take the plunge. And what you take great joy in is what people will sit up and take notice of and be willing to pay for.

**Frontlist:** Recently, you contributed one of your childhood memories to the anthology - "When Mommy Was A Little Girl". How was your experience working with other authors?

**Lipika:** When you have worked with some of the biggest and best writers globally (and not just the continent), it is tough to feel confident about your writing. Though I always penned my thoughts by way of poems and short stories, it was when Pranav Singh, the Publisher and the Editor of "When Mommy Was a Little Girl (Ponytale books)" nudged me to write, I pulled out one page of my life as a young girl and turned it into a story for young readers.

My poems have been published in Amar Ujala and Navbharat Times, and I also have an essay in an anthology published in the US, but this was the first time I was contributing a story for a young audience. It's been a beautiful experience of revisiting my summer vacations as a child spent in Garhwal. I was born and brought up in Delhi, but my parents ensured we experienced the real India in the village where their parents hailed from every summer. My children would be the third generation of city-bred children who have been cut off from their roots because of various compulsions.

It was important for me to use Garhwal as the backdrop, as I see very little writing in English coming out from that region. Generations have grown up to Ruskin Bond's Dehradun and Mussoorie, and many more stories from that region must be told to children today. It has a rich history and a vibrant culture that children need to know. The book has stories from many such parts of India that the city-bred children of today are only aware of on the map of India. I have personally enjoyed stories from the book of writers who have helped us peep into the lives in these small towns and villages.



**Frontlist:** Do you believe that today's publishing industry is at par with the rapid digitalization of the reader community?

**Lipika:** Publishing is the biggest creator of content, and it's about time they match to the digital requirements and consumption of readers. I think the publishing industry has a long way to match their pace with digitalization.

**Frontlist:** How did you emerge with the idea of establishing MarketMyBook?

**Lipika:** I was expecting my first child and wanted to give her time, and thus was contemplating quitting my job. But, I also didn't want to take a complete break and do something that allowed me the convenience of time. Since I was heading marketing at HarperCollins India, it was natural to pick something within the publishing domain. I had observed that every publisher had some titles, if given some extra time and effort, do much better. Some titles had the potential to do better, both in terms of visibility and sales. While publishers did their bit, a more focused and sustained effort could do wonders in making a book and its author a success.

Another observation was that while there were many PR agencies, none understood books as a product well enough to pitch them right. Book marketing needs you to not just understand books but love them. You also have to have a good sense of what is sellable about the book. Many times the marketing efforts go wrong and fall flat because one doesn't get the selling point right. Since it's one of the most diverse product categories, it needs the most agile and tactical brains to get the marketing right.

**Frontlist:** You have seen the marketing industry inside and out. How do you feel this industry can grow as a good workplace for women?

**Lipika:** It's one of those industries with a sizeable women workforce in which editorial, publicity, and digital arms of publishing are largely led by women. Any good workplace promotes diversity, builds tolerance towards diverging views, and creates a healthy atmosphere for striking a good work-life balance. Any good workplace for women has a convenient setup for pregnant women and excellent child care facilities for working parents.

**Frontlist:** What biases would you like to break to encourage women's empowerment in the patriarchal society?

**Lipika:** **Bias 1:** Everything comes easy to women due to their gender.

**Reality:** We have to work extra hard to get everything and to break the bias.

**Bias 2:** Women empower other women.

**Reality:** More often, it's our ilk that pulls the other down and stays quiet on issues of harassment at home. Feminism is to be practiced by setting examples of speaking up against all biases and standing up against harassment towards women.

**Bias 3:** Women need to be better than men.

**Reality:** Equality is gender-neutral and that's what one needs to aim for in every way. In privileged societies, there is no competition and one realizes it more when men too contribute to helping at home and taking care of children along with women today!

I believe in contributing to this cause of women empowerment, we must focus on empowering women from weaker sections of the society to get educated and get financially independent. How many of us job creators bring such women on board, especially in our industry, is the real question to ask.

# PREETI VYAS

*President and CEO of Amar Chitra  
Katha Pvt. Ltd.*

Preeti Vyas is the President and the CEO of Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd.; and the publisher of the iconic Amar Chitra Katha comics, Tinkle magazine, and National Geographic India. She is also the Founder of FunOKPlease Publishing which creates contemporary Indian content for children. Through her 26-year-long career, she has been a retailer, publisher, editor, author, and entrepreneur. Preeti is a seasoned bibliophile who believes the solution to any problem in life can be found within the pages of a book somewhere. She believes passionately in the power of children's books to shape the future of India and the world. She is a practicing Buddhist and lives in Mumbai with her 12-year-old son, a fantasy fiction enthusiast, Neel.





**Frontlist:** You've been associated with the Publishing Industry. How was your experience throughout your journey?

**Preeti:** From growing up in a family of bibliophiles to spending a 26-years career surrounded by content, it has truly been an amazing ride. I have had the good fortune of participating in every aspect of a book's life through the various hats I have donned as an author, editor, retailer, marketer, licensor, licensee, and publisher. The content and publishing space is growing rapidly in the digital era, and I feel like my journey has just started. Getting an opportunity to lead a company and a brand that is a persisting part of the childhood of millions of Indians is one of the biggest blessings of my life. I believe in karma, and I am convinced that this role, leading ACK into a new digital age, is due to the good karmas of many past lives!

**Frontlist:** How do Children's Books shape the future of India and the world?

**Preeti:** Books not only help develop a child's intellect and creativity but shape the mind as well. Reading books helps the development of individual identity and personality. It also builds awareness, empathy, respect, and eventually, character. As the famous quote says, "Readers are leaders". If we want the future of the world to be more peaceful, kind, and curious, we must encourage the reading habit among children with a fervent passion.

**Frontlist:** Our generation has changed immensely. Content penetration has also changed among children. How do book publishers like ACK create content to inculcate Indian values within their minds?

**Preeti:** At Amar Chitra Katha, we have been telling stories for over 5 decades, shaping a proud Indian identity and love for our past, a route to our roots. We take our place in a child's life as a serious responsibility and realize that parents and educationists are looking at us to provide the right values through our books. We are a route to your roots. That is what our mission is - to provide Indian children with a crucial link to their past. Children today are growing up in a globalized, shrinking world with non-stop stimulation across platforms and relentless media exposure. Indian children today need, more than ever before, to get to know their heritage and roots. While it is important that they are confident global citizens, it is equally important for them to own a proud Indian identity. After all, as they say, 'If you don't know where you are coming from, how will you know where you are going?'

The challenge, according to me, is to make children read Indian content as well, especially those who are growing up watching content from Disney and Marvel. At Amar Chitra Katha, we see this as the ultimate challenge- to get today's children to pick up our comic books, not because their parents are buying them, but because they find it engaging and fun to read. We do this in multiple ways:

- By choosing themes and topics which are relevant and of interest to today's children and writing them in a style that appeals to them.
- Adapting and evolving our art style to suit the artistic sensibility of this decade. We have the best technology available now and make sure our brilliant artists can create world-class art without losing the iconic Amar Chitra Katha visual language.
- Using the latest digital platforms to allow children to experience storytelling on multiple platforms, be it our apps, Kindle, YouTube, or podcasts. We are storytellers first and then publishers.

**Frontlist:** With the exposure to westernization, Children are lagging in learning Indian cultural beliefs. What approaches should be taken to educate children regarding Indian Heritage?

**Technology made children lose their interest in reading. How can children be encouraged to read more? Share your thoughts on this.**

**Preeti:** It is an urban myth that children are not reading anymore. The reading habit is growing, thanks to the effort of educationists, a growing awareness of the importance of reading among young parents, and a wide variety of children's books being available.

When I was a child, we did not have much available in Indian literature. You would either read an Amar Chitra Katha, a Chandamama, some assorted fairy tales, Enid Blyton, and the Soviet-era books which came our way. But today, we have over fifty Children's Books publishers in India, who are doing amazing contemporary work. It is a very vibrant field. New books are being published every month, schools are really pushing reading as an agenda, and many schools around the country are organizing their own Lit Fests and Book/Literature Week.

Today's generation of parents is aware of the importance of reading. They have a higher disposable income, than our parents did. They have availability and actually, the reading habit is growing. Many schools have a dedicated time slot for reading and there are a lot of innovative ways in which children are encouraged to read.

Here are a few ideas to encourage the reading habit in children:

- Allow them to explore the 'joy' of reading a book without any pressure or prescription. There should be no pressure on reading any particular author/genre or even on completely reading a book. Haven't we all left a movie or a restaurant halfway because it wasn't up to our expectations?
- Once children experience the joy of reading, they get hooked. Often I find that parents tend to put pressure on the child to read, and that takes away the joy of it.
- Buy books the way you buy clothes- regularly. The way the body is developing, the mind is also developing.
- Spend time and effort in looking for books in subject areas and genres that would be of special interest to the child. Every child does not need to read the same popular book/author. My advice is to allow children to pick the titles that they would like to read. Every child may not want to read fiction. There are so many titles and different genres. Allow the child to explore and discover their likes and dislikes.
- Don't compare with the reading levels of other children or with your level when you were their age, as every child will eventually find their comfort level and happiness zone.

**Frontlist:** How do you envision Amar Chitra Katha after the pandemic and in the coming years? How has the pandemic affected the Indian Publishing Industry? How did your company deal with the challenges of doing business during COVID-19?

**Preeti:** *Unprecedented.*

A word that was used ad nauseam to describe 2020-21. Nothing that happened during the pandemic had ever been experienced by the world before (and hopefully will never again be experienced either). With markets closed, customers were spending only on the bare essentials- food and medicines and business came to a standstill. On top of this was omnipresent fear, panic, and stress in the environment casting an ominous gloom over all industries. The comic book and publishing industry in India was no different. With book stores remaining closed (in some tragic cases, permanently shutting down) and e-commerce delivering only essentials (sadly nobody sees comic books as essential even amid a mental health crisis), the comic book industry and book publishers were forced to innovate. Covid-19 exacerbated

a long-overdue digital transformation of many industries and companies, and we were one of them.

On the 16th of March 2020, in response to the announcement of schools being shut indefinitely, we announced a campaign offering free access to all our books on the Amar Chitra Katha and Tinkle apps. Honestly, it wasn't a deeply thought out marketing tactic- it was simply us trying to do something to alleviate the boredom and sadness that a whole nation full of children were experiencing as they entered their favourite summer vacation period.

The results were phenomenal. We saw a nearly 300% growth in the number of sign-ups on our app, and to our surprise, nearly 25% of the new users were from outside India. And not just children, we found adults signing up too.

During stressful times, it is human tendency to reach out for comforting things, be it comfort food, music or content. Comfort helps alleviate anxiety. And comics like Amar Chitra Katha and Tinkle fall right into this category. We found Indian parents from all over the world downloading our apps and enjoying our content along with their children. Our newly launched ACK Learn Workshops also saw a fabulous response with children of all ages signing up to learn creative writing, listen to stories, learn Indian folk art, make their own comic books, and engage with our awesome editorial teams.

We had parents writing to us, telling us that they are using the screen mirroring function on their app to cast the content on a big screen, thus enabling the whole family to enjoy reading our comics together. This is a whole new way of enjoying a comic book, which is possible digitally and not possible in a physical form. And this would not have been possible had the pandemic not forced us to innovate and improvise. The screen mirroring function was always available, but previously there was no need for a parent to enable their children to read a comic book on a screen- a physical copy was always easily available.

We have also observed that the reading time on the app is excellent. The average reading time on our app has been nearly 20 minutes which is remarkable. This demonstrates that readers can remain engaged and focused and read the whole comic in 20 minutes, including covers. The average time to read a comic book in print version would be the same as reading it online.

During the pandemic, we also launched several new titles digitally, viz. the Shiva Purana called Mahadeva in 5 parts, many folk tales, a comic on the life of Vikram Sarabhai, and a three-part series in collaboration with the Indian Navy. At Tinkle, we released fresh stories every week in addition to hosting our superb archival content on the app. We also released the first-ever Tinkle Gold, a collector's print edition of Tinkle with all-new stories. On the new content creation front, it was business as usual for us.

This pace of digital growth we have experienced will not slow down. Consumers are adapting to a new way of life post-COVID, and the business environment will keep on evolving. As storytellers, we are agnostic to the medium. We are happy regardless of the medium readers choose to read our content, whether it is physically, digitally, or listen to them through podcasts or watch an animated version of the story. Pandemic or prosperous, environment notwithstanding, publishing comics is what we do best and hope to keep doing as long as human civilization survives.

As we enter into 2021 with hope and optimism, I look at this period with gratitude that our comic books and company not just

survived the pandemic, but thrived and brought succor and joy to lakhs of Indian readers across the world.

**Frontlist: The name of Uncle Pai is synonymous with Indian comics and Amar Chitra Katha. How is the current team at ACK taking his amazing legacy forward?**

**Preeti:** Uncle Pai was a genius. Every generation has a few iconic trailblazers who define that era, and our founder was definitely one of them. The impact of Uncle Pai's work on helping a whole generation of Indians take pride in their own stories is priceless. As we get ready to celebrate #UnclePaiDay on 17th September, we see our mission as two-fold:

**1) Keeping the Legacy Alive:** Ensuring that the comics created during his lifetime remain alive, widely disseminated, and read by a new generation is crucial. In this Netflix world, where we are constantly bombarded, with stimulation from around the world, our comics play a pivotal role in enabling children to connect with their Indian roots. We have revived some of the foundations on which Uncle built the company- a vibrant school contact program, the iconic Amar Chitra Quiz, a pan India Storyteller Circle, to name a few. Our books are in multiple languages, and we continue to sell a million+ copies of Amar Chitra Katha and Tinkle in their printed versions every year.

**2) Taking the Legacy Forward:** It's not enough to rest on the laurels of the past. Here are a few things we are doing to take Uncle's legacy forward.

- We continue to tell new stories with the same ethos as Uncle Pai. A new edition of Tinkle is published every week. At Amar Chitra Katha, we publish about 500 pages a year with new titles such as ACK Juniors, Param Vir Chakra, Shiv Purana, and Women Path Breakers of India. Our creative functions are still helmed by people who were mentored by Uncle.
- Tinkle has also evolved with time. Shambu is no longer a Shikari, but a conservationist, and Suppandi is no longer a 'servant'. Many new characters like Wingstar and Yog Yodhas have helped us connect with a new generation of readers.
- We have truly embraced the digital platform and are passionate about being present on any platform where content is being consumed. Our apps have over 1.2 million users, with a significant global presence. Tinkle is now released weekly on the app, along with many interactive elements. On average, in 3 months, 10 million of our books are read on the apps. We have podcasts, animated videos, skills on Alexa, and online workshops on ACK Learn.
- We partner with Government, armed forces, and public-private collaborations to create books that power social transformation and impact. Uncle Pai would have been happy to see the actual pages of our comics reprinted within the pages of history textbooks these days.

Uncle Pai's passion, perseverance, and vision continue to guide us every single day. We hope he is looking down upon us and smiling at our tenacity and all our experiments and innovations!

**Frontlist: With the exposure to westernization, children are lagging in learning Indian cultural beliefs. What approaches should be taken to educate children regarding Indian Heritage? Furthermore, how can children be encouraged to read more? Share your thoughts on this.**

**Preeti:** It is an urban myth that children are not reading anymore. The reading habit is growing, thanks to the effort of educationists, a growing awareness of the importance of reading among young parents, and a wide variety of children's books being available.

When I was a child, we did not have much Indian literature to read. We would either read an Amar Chitra Katha, a Chandamama, some assorted fairy tales, Enid Blyton, and the Soviet-era books which came our way. But today, we have over fifty Children's Books publishers in India who are doing amazing contemporary work. It is a very vibrant field. New books are being published every month, schools are really pushing reading as an agenda, and many schools around the country are organizing their own Lit Fests and Book/Literature Week.

Today's generation of parents is aware of the importance of reading. They have a higher disposable income than our parents did. They have the sources, and they make sure they educate their kids on the importance of reading. Thus, children do read these days. Many schools have a dedicated time slot for reading, and there are a lot of innovative ways in which children are encouraged to read.

Here are a few ideas to encourage the reading habit in children:

- Allow them to explore the 'joy' of reading a book without any pressure or prescription. There should be no pressure on reading any particular author/genre or even on completely reading a book. Haven't we all left a movie or a restaurant halfway because it wasn't up to our expectations?
- Once children experience the joy of reading, they get hooked. Often I find that parents tend to put pressure on the child to read, and that takes away the joy of it.
- Buy books the way you buy clothes- regularly. The way the body is developing, the mind is also developing.
- Spend time and effort in looking for books in subject areas and genres that would be of special interest to the child.

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# ANUPAMA JAUHRY

*Head of TERI Press & Associate  
Director, TERI*

With more than 27 years of experience in publishing, Anupama Jauhry joined TERI in 2010 as the Head and Area Convenor of TERI Press, Knowledge and Management Division. As the publishing arm of the organization, TERI Press has been instrumental in garnering, developing, and disseminating TERI's research, thereby bolstering TERI's outreach activities. Under Anupama's guidance and supervision, the Press has successfully captured a position for itself in the market, thus lending more visibility to TERI's publishing and research activities. As the Area Convenor, Anupama is responsible for driving the entire publishing programme, ranging from overseeing commissioning activities to budgeting, liaising with authors and other stakeholders, and providing the necessary direction vis-à-vis sales and marketing. Under her aegis, the Press is committed in bringing out market-competitive publications that not only further TERI's original research but also establishes TERI Press as a growing business within publishing. Adept at driving business growth through marketing and customer analytics to fuel better brand experience, Anupama specializes in planning, monitoring, and scaling knowledge-based products, publications, and services. She has worked with major publishing houses as Assistant General Manager and Publishing Manager. In her spare time she enjoys travelling, watching films, and spending time with her family.



**Frontlist:** It has been a long time since you have been associated with the publishing industry. Did you always want to be a part of the publishing industry? In addition to it, are you engaging with marketing as well?

**Anupama:** Yes, my association with the publishing field spans almost three decades. I stumbled into publishing, and soon I started enjoying the work, so I stayed on.

Yes, as the Head of TERI Press, I am responsible for TERI Press's entire operation, including marketing functions as well.

**Frontlist:** When it comes to entrepreneurship, people take for granted women. But nowadays, women have changed their mindset, and on the other hand, you've taken TERI's market position to an extraordinary level. What would you like to say to those who suppress women's voices and look at them as undeserving?

**Anupama:** Sheryl Sandberg says, "Women need to shift from thinking I'm not ready to do that, to thinking I want to do that – and I'll learn by doing it." I strongly believe in these words, and I would like all women to believe in what Sandberg says. So, instead of thinking about those who suppress women's voices, I would like to focus on the potential that women have. We are there on the top, and if there are stumbling blocks, we will overcome them. We are a force to reckon with, and we don't need to justify it to anyone. At TERI, over the last three decades, we are built block-by-block, from expanding our market reach across the country to across the globe. We have expanded our imprints from supplementary reading in colleges to books in the mainstream market, from magazines to journals to white papers.

**Frontlist:** This year's International Women's Day theme is 'Break the Bias'. What qualities should upcoming women entrepreneurs need to show their presence in the patriarchal society?

**Anupama:** Entrepreneurs, men or women, should have the ability to take risks, be confident, and be competitive. It is believed that women lack risk-taking ability, long-term vision and scalability,



and commitment. Above all, it is the drive to succeed that matters. It is not easy because women also have to balance their personal and professional lives. Compared to men, it is typically believed that women are less likely to be involved in product and process innovations or their marketing. A patriarchal setup believes women entrepreneurs tend to inhabit non-lucrative spaces even in the publishing sector, although that it is a women-dominated profession. I think women need to break this stereotype in the publishing industry. Believe in yourself first and foremost. With that, all battles will be won.

**Frontlist: As the Head of TERI Press and the Associate Director, what are the new opportunities you are looking for, for the betterment of society, as well as the organization?**

**Anupama:** Our purpose is to sensitise people about various issues related to energy, the environment, and climate change. In this space, we keep experimenting with various genres and formats to cater to various age groups. We also keep looking at different avenues like book fairs, schools, etc., to increase our outreach.

**Frontlist: Contributing 28 years of life within an organization is a momentous deal. How does working with TERI Press bring a change in your life?**

**Anupama:** Working in an environmental think tank has certainly made me more sensitive towards conserving the environment. I am conscious of how I live my life and try to create as little wastage as possible. I have learned tremendously from my research colleagues who are working in various areas of sustainable development. I have become a more confident professional, working in an unconventional space and leading an in-house publishing unit in a research and knowledge institution. It has helped me greatly to think out of the box to achieve both my own goals and that of my organization.

**Frontlist: Recently, TERI has collaborated with SAP India to make India a sustainable economy. How would this collaboration become beneficial for us?**

**Anupama:** The collaboration will leverage TERI's domain expertise in sustainability, specifically in Energy and Resources sectors; and SAP India's technologies to enable business processes, collaboration with value chains, tracking, and reporting capabilities to achieve sustainability. Key focus areas of the partnership will include:

**Climate Change Awareness:** to steer action and support the larger sustainability agenda in India

By accelerating climate change ambitions across industries helping their transition to a low carbon economy.

Resources and Sustainability Audit: to jointly offer sector-specific audit and efficiency improvement services and guidance.

Enabling industries to drive actions through sustainability reporting and analysis aligned to a global framework for the good of the environment, society, and economy.

Impact on Policy

Support government to make informed sustainability-related policy decisions through a data-driven approach that further helps to monitor the impact based on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) achievements.

Build a Net-Zero Path: Knowledge sharing and learnings of best practices, through the creation of case studies, success stories, and whitepapers, from major industries like Energy, Waste management, Government, and others.

**Frontlist: How much potential do all books published under TERI Press have to change the people's mindset towards the**

**environment and climate change?**

**Anupama:** Our books on environment and climate change, especially our children's books, are a great combination of scientific information and storytelling. Written in an accessible and engaging tone, they pack a lot of information and offer practical and easily-implementable suggestions and activities, which children can practice living more sustainably.

The books for adults help readers reflect on their attitudes concerning the environment and the ramifications of their actions. They stimulate a sense of curiosity among them and push them to consider the bigger picture about energy and the environment.

## TERIPRESS

We are an independent, multi-dimensional organization, with capabilities in research, policy, consultancy and implementation. We are innovators and agents of change in the energy, environment, climate change and sustainability space, having pioneered conversations and action in these areas for over four decades.

We believe that resource efficiency and waste management are the keys to smart, sustainable and inclusive development. Our work across sectors is focused on

Promoting efficient use of resources

Increasing access and uptake of sustainable inputs and practices

Reducing the impact on environment and climate

Our research, and research based solutions have had a transformative impact on industry as well as communities. We have fostered international collaboration on sustainability action by creating a number of platforms and forums. We do this by translating our research into technology products, technical services, as well as policy advisory and outreach.

Headquartered in New Delhi, we have regional centres and campuses in Gurugram, Bengaluru, Guwahati, Mumbai, Panaji, and Nainital. Our 1200-plus team of scientists, sociologists, economists and engineers delivers insightful, high quality action-oriented research and transformative solutions supported by state-of-the-art infrastructure.

# MONICA MALHOTRA

*Managing Director, MBD Group*

Ms. Monica Malhotra Kandhari, a second-generation entrepreneur, is the Managing Director of MBD Group. She started working at the young age of 16, and today she is recognised as one of the important pillars of the publishing industry for her efforts to promote education across the country. MBD is the only Indian-origin publisher to be included in the National Catalogue of South Africa. More than 100 MBD titles are accredited by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. Monica has also worked towards creating synergies with leading international brands like Microsoft and Intel, among others.

She has been elected Vice President (North) for the Federation of Indian Publishers and is a key member of CII and Co-chair (Publishing) at FICCI. Monica leads MBD's education business both in print and digital education spaces. She is also involved with the Design & Construction, Hospitality, and Real Estate ventures of MBD Group.

**Frontlist:** What are the biggest achievements you would like to share from your remarkable journey as the Managing Director of MBD Group so far?

**Monica:** I would like to mention that I got the platform from the very beginning when I was stepping into the publishing industry. I was highly fortunate to learn from the master himself, my father, Shri Ashok Kumar Malhotra, not because he's my father, but since he is known to be legendary in the field of education, refining education, as well as consumption of education in a unique way. I learned everything from him. I am an inquisitive person and also learning from the master was one of the three key things which were the first, I would say, the greatest achievement of my life from where this journey started. I had learned the nuances of the business for two years. I started quite early, at the age of 15. I always wanted to learn everything by myself. That's how I began the journey of 'Break The Bias'. I am an owner's daughter, so I



had to work rigorously to learn the trade. I was made to do one of my books myself and got awarded at the age of 17 or 18. Then I began to achieve numerous awards. MBD Innovation's journey started from there as we wanted to expand ourselves in every sector, whether it's education, hospitality, or anything else. We wanted to show our existence across the world.

I share about education per se, where we included a lot of things like capacity building, cultivating skills in people, opening our skill centers, partnering with the government, and paper manufacturing as well. We are backward and forward integrated into stationary manufacturing and now curating a big way into the digital space. We began with a lot of research for 5-6 years for the product requirements in places like India, where a diverse culture exists. Today, the MBD group provides all kinds of services and products which are significant for teaching and learning processes, whether it's digital or in print format, or in the curriculum framework, or whether it is single or hybrid, we customized it to the last mile. Since the inception of MBD, we've been following the culture and trends till the present times, and our services are easily obtainable to the masses at reasonable prices, displaying our greatest achievements. Today we have become the pinnacle of an Education company that covers all facets of providing learning and education.

On this special occasion of International Women's Day, I would like to talk about certain things like first, being a woman, I am the first person from my family who entered into a business space. I had this thought in the back of my mind - "whether I will be accepted as a woman or not, you know; what kind of biases will be there at the workplace?" I had to break the bias of being the daughter of the owner. Yes, there was a hesitation about people commenting, "she won't stay for too long" or "she's taking it as a hobby and will soon leave it."

I have learned one thing in life that there is no substitute to knowledge, and practical knowledge in itself has led to, I think, the 'survival of the fittest' around me, the technology muscle, which

I've created for the women working along with me. Therefore, I would say this has been an interesting journey so far.

**Frontlist: What are your thoughts and feelings on being honored as "TIMES ICON POWER" 2021?**

**Monica:** Each award which you get, you get a sense of encouragement, especially when this 'Times Icon Power Award' came during the pandemic.

Where I mean, I always say that this is for the team. But this time more, I think it's more because of the team. I mean, the way they have stood sincerely by the group's values has been remarkable. They were consistent, confident, optimistic, and determined. I think it is this time. So this award's credit goes to them. I am thankful to them, and it definitely is encouraging all of us as a group.

**Frontlist: MBD is one of the biggest education companies in India, and with outstanding initiatives like E-learning ventures, what is your next vision?**

**Monica:** The core of MBD is innovation, so if you look at the trajectory, the journey up till now, whether it was augmented reality, virtual reality or 3D learning, or apps, ICT programs, we were almost the first ones to bring to education in India and the cable segment. So I can proudly say that my team put that together. Like I wrote earlier, I have a quest for learning. My idea of learning is to visit different countries and analyze what those countries have to offer us, which we can bring to India, and India per se has numerous states. In fact, the students population is far and wide. I mean, there are so many things which you can bring to the table and fight for consumption.

We need to evaluate what suits best to our market from across the industries.

So, we see what is suitable to our market from even cross industries. Due to the prevalence of the digital era, we expand ourselves digitally as well. We are working as content partners for several government projects. When the pandemic started, our team worked together resolutely for an innovative product called Aasoka. It is an online learning platform for classes K-12.

Aasoka is a hybrid model and mobile app whereby we provide books, ERP solutions that facilitate distance and class learning, and teaching. Under Aasoka, we provide LTS that is called Learning and Teaching Solutions. It lays out all the solutions required by the school, whether it's from the SDA strategy perspective, a teaching perspective, or learning perspective and mapping. All solutions are adaptive and customized.

MBD always brought services at very humble costs. In India, not everybody has deep pockets to pay. People have the notion that digital objects are a bit expensive. But MBD would like to crash this embargo. Aasoka is a tool that you have to use effectively for hybrid learning. Not just in India, we would like to take this solution in different countries as well. As of now, it is suitable for developing countries.

**Frontlist: How do you balance your work and personal life?**

**Monica:** I would like to talk first about upbringing. My parents were progressive in thoughts and always told me that family comes first. It is good to be professional but better to strive first to be a complete woman. This thought I've been following in my life. I used to observe people. For instance, there are men and women in the same conference room, and you get a call from home. A man will react like, see I'm sensitive and a good human being if they're picking up the call. On the contrary, women are not

professional enough if they're doing the same thing.

Nobody has to feel embarrassed about having a family. So we all should strive to become complete humans. It gives me the liberty of designing each day differently depending upon what demands more of my attention today. There are a certain amount of hours that I have aligned to the family. Creating a balance between family and work is highly significant. The family would never understand if you put your personal life in the backseat. Disconnectivity from family leads to a meaningless life. I always give my time to my family whenever they need it.

So I believe, if anyone in the organization have an emergency at home and would prefer to work from home instead, I would allow it because I see their heart is in place, and their work has been delivered no matter what, and in whichever way they work. So I think it's more about being a complete human being. So that's what we should strive for. Otherwise, we will create another bias for ourselves in some years to come.

**Frontlist: As a woman entrepreneur, would you like to share some struggles and challenges you've faced in this male-dominated publishing industry?**

**Monica:** There's no substitute for knowledge. A person should only have respect for clarity in their mind, not for their background. It is very important what you take and what you give back? Certain ratios are not so humble in terms of women, and these ratios are everywhere. However, it is improving day by day.

It's going to take some another decades and centuries to bring this equality. Moreover, we have to bring equality in every sphere. Because every woman or man has their own individual capacities and capabilities, depending on what they want to do, it need not be that each job should have equal numbers. But if I talk culturally, in this publishing industry, with decision-makers, women are much more in managerial roles than anywhere else in the field. Whether it's on the editor level or decision-maker levels, for us, there's no dearth of women. There are women at every level, but if I talk about numbers, it will be flourishing as we progress along not only in this industry but many other industries as well. We have seen the progression to be much faster. As you go further down, it is much slower. But then, it is so challenging to bring about that paradigm shift or a change. We have to start at both macro and micro levels to bring out the presence of women in any field.

I'm not generalizing at all because everybody has their own obstacles and their own opportunities. So, it's very wrong if one thinks that being a homemaker is any less productive. Here if we are saying that our grandmothers and all who were homemakers, didn't do a good job, or they were not progressive, I think we are wrong somewhere. So it's all about whoever whatever is doing should be respected for the job. Many things are responsible for being what we are, where we are, and where we want to reach. I think we definitely have to respect each other. And it should first begin by reflecting on the biases we have in our own mind, which then clearly reflects in our work.

The first step of empowerment of whatever work you do, wherever we come from, we should respect that we want to strive for equality, we should try to be better than what we are today, not trying to be better than men. We should not strive to bring another inequality in 100 years or the next century to come and fight back. We need to be better than what we are today, from yesterday till today. We should give space to women for advancement, and this will make them feel secure to do anything that they want to do in life.

**Frontlist: MBD Group has grown its business in various areas since its inception. What have you planned till now for the sake**

### of women's involvement in the publishing industry?

**Monica:** I always think about the group at large when it comes to education, primarily about building skills. We own the hospitality, commercial residences, and hotels. If you look at the hotels, there are very few women involved in the frontline staff. But you would see that at the managerial level, there is women's involvement, even if it is at the mid-level or higher level of management. At higher levels, things are improving now. In publishing, women are there as decision-makers. And if I talk about even at the editorial level, the creative level has a lot of women involved. We have to leave this thought of who's men or women. In the publishing industry, we have lots of women who are in leadership roles, leading teams, leading the content, the animation teams, the teachers, the evaluators, the reviewers. Everything is burgeoning at a good pace.

### **Frontlist:** This year's theme for International Women's Day is 'Break The Bias'. Could you enlighten our readers and share your views on how important it is to empower women?

**Monica:** I feel that I totally agree that educating a woman is educating a family, and it means educating the society and then the country at large. It will definitely contribute to the country in every possible way and will also impact the GDP positively. It will also improve the standard of living of people. But then, I also feel that education is important for both men and women. For men to understand that woman has to be respected, even if she's a homemaker.

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### **Frontlist:** What would you like to advise our next generation of women entrepreneurs and those who are aspiring to break the glass ceiling?

**Monica:**

- 1) First, we need to erase the biases from our minds, then only you will be perceived if you come into your actions that you are not coming.
- 2) Determination has to be there that you have to do something. Whatever you have to do, you want to do it with perfection.
- 3) You have to avoid straining yourself thinking, that people around you are judgmental. It's just good for them. Just concentrate on striving to be a complete human. Then, all the other judgements will fail around us.
- 4) We need to understand how to isolate ourselves from negativity use knowledge, our studies, and our learning. Build up a team, motivate them, oversee them and deliver.

So ultimately, I believe that once we break these biases internally from our minds, only then we will be able to witness changes gradually outside in our surroundings.

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## MBD GROUP

MBD Group, one of the leading Education Companies in India with over six decades of experience, led by the futuristic vision of the Founder of the Group, Shri Ashok Kumar Malhotra, has diversified into various industries including E-Learning, Capacity Building, Stationery, M-Learning, Skill Development, Eco-Friendly Notebooks, Paper Manufacturing, ICT Infrastructure, Hospitality, Real Estate and Mall Development and Management. MBD Group has been continuously working for the cause of providing education to all with its mission to create an "MBD Product for every literate person". Shri. Ashok Kumar Malhotra has been honoured as the 'Publishing Icon' at International Publisher's Congress 2018.

The Group has presence in various countries including offices in South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Middle East.

## TRISHA DE NIYOGI

*COO & Director, Niyogi Books*

Trisha De Niyogi is the Chief Operating Officer and Director at Niyogi Books, an independent publishing house based in New Delhi. She began her career in publishing with SAGE Publications and has come a long way since then. She was a fellow at the Istanbul Fellowship Program 2020. She is an advisor to multiple organisations, including the heritage and education organisation, Heritageshaala, an initiative for promoting Indian Literature, Purple Pencil Project, and the Diversity and Inclusion platform, Belongg. She is trained in Bharatnatyam, plays piano, and practices Krav Maga. She holds degrees in Mathematics, Economics, and Business Administration.





**Frontlist:** The idea of giving significance to visuals as much as to the content of the book is very disparate from other publishing houses. As most of the publishers only pay heed to the content. What is the story behind this idea?

**Trisha:** 'What is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'

As children, we might have all read Alice in Wonderland. Alice's reference to the practical significance of images along with the text implies that human communication is multi-modal. Hence, when we started publishing in 2005, we wanted to stress this multi-modal communication through books. We have published books across a wide range of genres, including art, architecture, culture, history, heritage, linguistics, biographies, and more. We follow the international standards of book publishing and designing, and as I often quote, 'The true art of book-making can be seen in these illustrated books.'

Last year, in 2021, we went a step further and experimented with including audio-visual elements in our books. In the title, Voices from the Lost Horizon: Stories and Songs from the Great Andamanese, we have embedded audio-visual elements through QR codes to amplify the impact it might have on the readers.

**Frontlist:** Gradually day after day, women are also amping up their journey in the publishing industry. What would you like to say about this context?

**Trisha:** Well, it is music to my ears. With more and more women in leadership roles in publishing, I sincerely feel Diversity and Inclusion in this industry is far better achieved than in many other industries. But, even though we have more women in publishing, they seem to be significantly concentrated in departments like editorial, marketing, and administration. We still strive for better representation in the other departments of publishing too. There is still a long way to go.

**Frontlist:** Everyone has this notion in the back of their minds that

how a woman can prove herself in the male-dominated industry. Kindly share your thoughts on this?

**Trisha:** A woman needs to assert herself not only in a male-dominated industry but also in a patriarchal society. It is true even a privileged woman like me has to face slurs like 'you belong in the kitchen' because of my gender. But, it is up to a woman how we choose to react to it. In any situation, whether it is subtle or not-so-subtle, a woman needs to remain unperturbed, at the very least, if not motivated to accomplish her dreams or goals. Work Hard! Be Strong! Be Assertive!

**Frontlist:** People are very bewitched with westernization. Do you think Niyogi Books has the potential to encourage people to learn more about the human values, beliefs, and history of India?

**Trisha:** I don't think a single person has enough power to bring change in the world. As Rabindranath Tagore said, "Ekla Chalo Re", you start the movement. However, at the same time, we should know how to achieve momentum. We have to have like-minded people coming together. Therefore, through Niyogi Books, we intend to bring like-minded people together, and this could be our contribution to encourage Indian Literature, Art, and Aesthetics. It is ironic that when people start appreciating something Indian from abroad. We start taking it into consideration more gravely. It invariably happens this way. I've also seen that young readers gravitate more towards Western and English Literature. We, Niyogi Books, are trying to spur interest in Indian Literature. We are translating Indian Heritage Books into the English Language from different Indian languages. Consequently, it would be more accessible to Indian Readers. At the same time, we are translating foreign literature into indigenous languages. Hindi, Bangla, and other languages can help to foster more interest in Indian Literature and History.

This can be done merely by Niyogi Books. We need to show solidarity in the Indian Publishing Industry.

Books can not be published in isolation. We need to layout harmony. We're very grateful to see that a lot of collaborations are happening in the publishing community. It's not a question about 'What Niyogi Books do?'. It's about what the entire publishing industry should or can do.

**Frontlist:** How come Niyogi Books predominately represents the cultural heritage of India in their publications?

**Trisha:** Since we specialise in illustrated books, it is quite natural that the subjects we chose to work with highlighted the tangible heritage of India. When we are working with the arts, say paintings, it is very difficult to understand a painting without actually having it in front of us.

Also, having a background in the Arts, I am personally invested in the cultural heritage of India.

**Frontlist:** How did Niyogi Books start the 'Bahuvachan – the Hindi Imprint'?

**Trisha:** Since we have been working with translations from several Indian languages (to English) for a while now, along with the fact that we specialise in illustrated books, it was only natural for us to get into illustrated books in Hindi. Hindi is the first choice for communication in around 12 states, mostly in Northern and Central India. Located in Delhi, we are also closer to the Hindi-speaking and reading belt, and hence, it was natural for us to expand publishing in Hindi. Moreover, there was a birth of illustrated books in Hindi, which also gave us a further impetus to enter into the market.

Further, with the improvement in technology – not just in digital outreach but also internal programming, publishing in Hindi seemed a little easier than in the past.

# ARPITA DAS

*Board member of PubliSheer,  
Founder of Yoda Press*

Arpita Das is the Founder-Publisher of Yoda Press, an independent academic publisher in India. She is an alumna of St. Stephens College, University of Delhi, and School of African and Oriental Studies, London. Arpita leads the Yoda Press Workshops Series for Authors and Editors and is a Member of the Executive Board of PubliSheer (female publishing industry).

She has also taught as Visiting Faculty on the Creative Writing Programme at New Delhi's Ashoka University and as Adjunct Faculty at the School of Business and the School of Creative Expression at Ambedkar University.

She frequently writes on book culture, publishing, popular culture, gender, and bibliotherapy for various outlets. Earlier this year, she became the Series Editor of the South Asia Series at Melbourne University Press.

**Frontlist:** Arpita Das has been popularly known as an ally of sexuality, popular Indian culture, and the LGBTQA+ community. Is this the reason that Yoda Press started with the same vision?

**Arpita:** The LGBTQ+ list was a vital part of our vision right from the beginning. Our interest to develop that list also communicated our commitment to publishing books that were an accurate representation of our contemporary South Asian reality, albeit a non-mainstream one. Articulate LGBTQ+ voices were already there when we were setting up shop, but they were hard to be seen in books, and we wanted to change that.

**Frontlist:** How is it important to expose queer literature to spread awareness concerning LGBTQA+ emotions?

**Arpita:** Now, in the aftermath of the Indian LGBTQ+ movement's greatest triumph, in accomplishing the paradigm shift in the country's law, with the Supreme Court decriminalising homosexuality in 2018, I feel a huge step has been taken. It was a moment of pride for us that five Yoda Press titles were cited in that landmark judgement. It is important for us that all books published by Yoda Press are allies of the movement, and no book we publish reflects a heteronormative perspective because such a reality does not exist.



**Frontlist:** You've been associated with PubliSheer as a Board Member. How has been your working relationship with other women members from the publishing community, as everyone comes from different cultural backgrounds with different perspectives?

**Arpita:** I am thrilled about being part of the PubliSheer Board. It has been a deep pleasure to work alongside a dynamic and brilliant group of bookwomen from across the world, as well as to be a part of PubliSheer's projects such as the one on Mentoring as well as developing a Diversity Toolkit for the industry across the world. Transborder networks between bookwomen are vital, to my mind, because one can work with each other without the competitive baggage of one's local milieu and give serious feedback to each other about solutions and strategies.

**Frontlist:** Two years ago, Yoda Press collaborated with Simon & Schuster India. How's this collaboration turned out for encouraging the alliance within the publishing industry?

**Arpita:** Both our joint imprints, the one we started with Sage India for academic titles in 2015 and the one with S&S, is progressing well. For the niche/small to thrive, collaborations with large houses are important, and that is my understanding of how indie, small presses can continue to exist and do important work in the present ecosystem.

**Frontlist:** It has been 14 years since the inception of Yoda Press. How many new initiatives your organization has brought up thus far to encourage women authors?

**Arpita:** It has now been 18 years, as a matter of fact. We started in 2004. Both our instinct AND vision has always compelled us at Yoda Press to look for writings by women, authors who identify as LGBTQ+, and DBA authors. To be committed to Diversity and Inclusion is the cornerstone of our publishing list and out there for all to see and judge.

**Frontlist:** Yoda Press, as well as the PubliSheer Team, consists of mostly strong female members. Does this represent solidarity

among the women community? Also, share your thoughts in this context.

**Arpita:** Well, PubliHer is an organisation for bookwomen across the world. So, obviously it is peopled by women. As far as Yoda Press is concerned, we believe that our commitment to Diversity and Inclusion in our publishing list would be a sham if we did not first have a diverse team at work. So once again, the team has always been made up of those who identify as women and LGBTQ+ folks, i.e., it has always been gender-diverse.

**Frontlist:** You've been leading Yoda Press workshops. How do these kinds of workshops add value to the publishing industry?

**Arpita:** The workshops started slowly and experimentally in our office space in 2018, then gathered speed in their online version after the first COVID lockdown happened in early 2020. The overwhelming response to the workshops has meant that we have changed the format to a longer, more intensive, immersive version to be able to increase the number of seats; we are also now collaborating with many of our authors to run more specialised writing workshops. What we have realised is that there is a massive gap in terms of links between authors and the publishing industry; in the space of writing-mentoring and mentoring of young publishing professionals, and our workshops have been received with such love and excitement because they are working hard to fill this gap somewhat.

**Frontlist:** On the occasion of International Women's Day, what advice would you like to give to your fellows?

**Arpita:** To women in my industry, I would say, please stand in genuine solidarity with those who do not have power here. That goes out, particularly to more senior and privileged women in the industry.



working with so and so actors. I actually literally used to visualize it and make it happen while sitting. And when I look back, I just feel it's actually happened, and the universe conspires for something that you really, really want to do. And yes, it's been a beautiful journey on my way to being the Divya Dutta, but it feels beautiful that it is made by me, myself, and I think my mom somewhere is actually blessing me and making all these things happen, and I just feel lucky. It feels dreamlike. You know, we used to hear that dreams come true. It feels nice when you say that about your story.

**Frontlist:** What was your thought just before the day your book was about to hit the markets?

**Divya:** Well, the thought, just before my book hit the market, was actually butterflies in the stomach. It is something that you have lived with, just expressing all that you wanted to express, honestly. And now you wait for the result. But it is not something where the result comes instantly; you just know it's being launched, and you just take everyone's good wishes. You know it's another beginning, you know it's another feather in your cap, and you know it's an expansion of your horizons. It's a feel-good factor, and yes, I think that little nervous energy is extremely important and necessary as well.

**Frontlist:** While your journey has seen almost all the struggles an actor, or moreover a person goes through. Do you think you missed out on a few key points that would have acted as the highlights of your making to the audience and you would like to share with the Frontlist Media?

**Divya:** I feel everyone has a journey and everyone works hard, and everyone has ups and downs. And I just somehow, in a very strange way, feel fortunate that the way everything panned out, it became a very unconventional career. I'm doing my best now. What normally people do as newcomers or whatever, I think I've done it at the peak of my career now. And you know, romancing my heroes doing the kind of roles I wanted to do is all happening now in the present. So, I think it's a very unconventional journey, and I'm loving it, and I don't think it would have happened if I hadn't had those ups and downs. I think you learn, you grow, you get better with experiences. And of course, there's a timing that

## DIVYA DUTTA

*Actor and Author*

Divya Dutta is an actor, author, and now a poet too. Noted for playing a wide variety of roles in different genres, she has featured in more than 150 Hindi and Punjabi films. Her performance was highly-acclaimed in films like Veer-Zaara, Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, Delhi-6, and Badlapur. She has won several accolades in the film industry, including a National Award in 2018 as well as Filmfare, IIFA, and Zee Cine awards. Her memoir, *Me and Ma*, published in 2017, received many rave reviews and was turned into an audiobook, narrated by Divya herself. Her first poem, penned about the COVID-19 lockdown, 'Jab Sab Theek Hoga Na', was much appreciated and widely shared.

**Frontlist:** Before this journey began, had you ever thought that Divya Dutta would become 'The Divya Dutta'?

**Divya:** I love that question whether Divya Dutta thought if she'll be 'The Divya Dutta'. Sometimes life feels dreamlike. As a child, I used to actually daydream, giving myself the best actor awards,



someone up there has for you. So I'm pretty content and happy with the way things have panned, and I think so is my audience.

**Frontlist:** People know you as an actor, a writer, and perhaps an achiever. What more areas of life do you wish to explore?

**Divya:** I have never thought, what all I want to do. I just know whatever comes my way if I'm enjoying it, I'll pick that up. And that's how I became an actor, and that's how I became a writer. And I don't know what life has in store for me, but whatever it does, if I love something, I will pick it up. I don't know if it is production, direction, or writing screenplays. I have no idea what it is. But as of now, I think I am thoroughly enjoying being an actor and a writer.

**Frontlist:** How challenging and important does it become for an actor to have command over multiple languages?

**Divya:** Well, to know more languages is always an asset. But I think in my case, I've always enjoyed learning these new languages which I wasn't acquainted with because I only knew English, Hindi, Punjabi, and a bit of Hindustani Urdu. And I went on to play these different roles where I think the most difficult ones were roles in Tamil, Malayalam, Rajasthani, Haryanvi, and Bangla. So I think once you put yourself in the role and you just listen to the music of a language that becomes yours, even if it is for a short while, I enjoy that process. So to date, I do remember my dialogues from different languages. It feels nice. It feels that you're a part of that. So I think as an actor, you're also very fortunate that you kind of touch various territories, various languages, and various cultures being an actor through different languages.

**Frontlist:** Divya Dutta has been known for her versatility as an actor on the big screen. Did your versatile nature become the reason that you thought of penning down this book?

**Divya:** Well the thought of penning the book was to, of course, expand my horizons; one should always feel like growing and not be stagnant with what you are doing. And I do feel like it's an extension of my acting, and I think more than anything else, it was a follow-up from my first book, *Me and Maa*. After that book's response, everyone was asking what next. So this came out of that, and I think it's nice to even as an actor when the audience wants more of you, and now it feels nice that as an author, your readers want more of you.

# NITASHA DEVASAR

*Managing Director | Taylor & Francis  
India & South Asia, Vice President and  
Commercial Lead | India, South Asia &  
Africa*

Nitasha Devasar is the two-term President of the Association of Publishers in India (API), the trade body for international publishers in India, and is the immediate past president. Before joining Taylor & Francis, she was Academic Publishing Director at Oxford University Press India for 12 years.

A writer and commentator on Indian Publishing, her edited book *Publishers on Publishing: Inside India's Book Business* (2018) gives a panoramic insider's view. She sits on the Editorial Board of *Logos, Journal of the World Publishing Community*, published by Brill.

Nitasha is an adviser to the Women Leadership Forum of Asia and mentors aspiring leaders on the Taylor & Francis Group, Women Leadership Program. She was lauded as Channel News Asia's Woman of Substance in Asia 2017. Her leadership focus is on business and personal transformation, and she is currently working on a book on her leadership journey.





**Frontlist:** Ms. Devasar, you have donned multiple hats in your publishing career and have been a keen observer of the industry as well. What changes are needed to move the Indian Publishing industry to a growth trajectory?

**Nitasha:** Indian publishing is celebrating its 75th anniversary and is an \$8-10 billion industry. So, it has resilience and is a big part of our educational and cultural landscape. What we need is to harness this effectively by publishers of all hues, local and international, language and trade, COMING TOGETHER to build on what we create, impact our education system, and influence government policy.

Second, we need to embrace TECHNOLOGY and harness its power to grow our businesses and enhance customer value. And we can support each other for this.

Linked to the value is the QUALITY of our content. That is important to nurture and safeguard. This is what will make us sustain and grow. As an industry, our relationship with quality has been fraught. We cannot make an access or pricing a reason for diluting content quality.

Copyright protection is closely aligned to quality, and that is something we need to build more awareness of among our stakeholders and peers. Indian publishing is well respected globally, and we can, if we want, get support and help for all this from the international community.

**Frontlist:** You've worked for almost a decade as Managing Director at Taylor & Francis. How has your journey with Taylor & Francis changed you as a professional?

**Nitasha:** When I think about my journey, two things stand out: One, that as MD, I was in a position to make a difference to our business and our colleagues in India. It was both power and privilege to do something good, and I took it to heart. It has enhanced me as a professional and as a person.

Second, by being part of an international business, I have been exposed to a diversity of cultures, people, markets, ways of thinking and working as well as global best practices. That has widened my horizons and raised my aspirations, and this has helped me and my colleagues in India tremendously.

**Frontlist:** Your book, *Publishers on Publishing*, looks at the industry from the lens of its various constituents, but doesn't specifically cover anything on gender, why?

**Nitasha:** Thank you, that's a great question! I didn't cover gender because, frankly, I didn't consider it a factor. In fact, I never even thought of it, and that may have more to do with me than with the state of Indian publishing. I see myself as a publishing professional and not as a woman doing publishing professionally. So, I probably didn't look at the industry through that lens.

That is not to say, however, that this would not be a worthwhile exercise. Traditionally we have seen more women in Editorial and Commissioning roles and none in Sales. That still continues though we are seeing a lot more women in Marketing, which is a growing specialization, due to the increased focus on customers and providing bespoke value. Being in a commercial role myself, I would certainly like to see more women coming into Sales, as they are across the world. I don't think the binaries of creativity versus commerce that are attached to these functions and to genders are real. We do, however, need to create a work environment that supports women in these roles. Addressing the gender pay gap in the profession is also a consideration.

**Frontlist:** For your book, you worked with more than 60 publishing professionals, local and global. How was that experience?

**Nitasha:** Working with peers and professionals for my book was

fun and great learning. It reminded me yet again about why I love being in this profession: people were generous with their time and their contributions. Many even stuck to deadlines, and for those who dropped off, others stepped in at very short notice. I think if people consider something of value, they do step up, and we should remember that and align more closely to work to sustain Indian publishing.

**Frontlist:** You are an author yourself, alongside being a publisher. From a writer's perspective, what new avenues for authors are needed for better exposure?

**Nitasha:** Authors today have more choices and options, including self-publishing than, ever before. The other side of this is, of course, how to be visible and discoverable in this ever-expanding universe of content. A writer can, in theory, be both publisher and marketer, so what is needed is a partnership approach with the publisher at each stage of the process from manuscript to market. Social media is an effective tool for reaching out to your audience: using videos, book and chapter abstracts, and riding on trending subjects and waves on social media can all work well. If one is writing for a specific or specialist audience, reaching out on their networks with the value your work provides can be valuable.

**Frontlist:** This year's theme for International Women's Day is 'Break The Bias'. In this context, what would be your advice to women stepping into the professional world?

**Nitasha:** I would say, don't let who you are, restrict who you can be. It frees you to learn, grow and contribute. It can be hard because you may be viewed through different lenses in the workplace, but if you don't let your gender define you, you will look deeper to see how you can improve and develop professionally. In today's workplace, this effort to continually learn is an asset.

The other thing I would say is, embrace your otherness. Make you being different a strength, a positive you can harness to bring diverse perspectives and views to an issue. Again, this is hard, as our tendency is to conform and fit in or alternatively to rebel. But building resilience and staying power are important because only then will you be able to stay the course and succeed. So, don't give up or give in if you believe something is important.

**Frontlist:** In your career, you have smashed several glass ceilings, and young women could learn from your experiences. We have seen several recent books by successful women. Are you planning to share your journey in a book?

**Nitasha:** I don't know about 'smashing' ceilings, but I have had an opportunity to create and slip through some cracks! I do read the books by successful women and men with great curiosity. I am always looking for the secret sauce of success underlying their story. And, of course, I look for similarities with my own journey. Sometimes things resonate, but mostly I am left with a feeling that something is missing or it's not the whole story. It got me thinking about what these missing ingredients are. So, I am using my own story to explore all the unsaid and untold things one experiences in one's professional journey. It isn't always easy, so I understand why even successful people don't want to dwell on them. As my writing progresses, I am coming to believe it is important to do this, as much for myself as for others who are making their professional journey.

## DISCLAIMER -

Nitasha Devasar is the two-term President of the Association of Publishers in India (API) and the Editor of *Publishers on Publishing: Inside India's Book Business*. The views expressed are personal and do not necessarily represent those of the Taylor & Francis Group.

# GVANTSA JOBAVA

*EC member of IPA*

Gvantsa Jobava, born in 1986 in Tbilisi, is the current Deputy Chairperson of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association. She has an impressive leadership record in the publishing world. She has been the Editor and International Relations Manager at Intelekti Publishing/Artanuji Publishing, one of the biggest publishing houses in Georgia, since 2010. She is a member of the Executive Committee at the International Publishers Association (IPA) and was a 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair Fellow. She has published children's literature, poetry, and non-fiction, and she is the translator of Saul Bellow and John Lennon from English into Georgian and of Anna Politkovskaya's 'Putin's Russia' from Russian into Georgian. Her translation of John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' was shortlisted for the 2016 SABA literary prize for translation. She is also the Editor, with Becca Parkinson, of an anthology of Georgian short stories in English translation, *The Book of Tbilisi* (2017). She is one of the managers of Tbilisi's designation as UNESCO World Book Capital 2021. She was one of the managers with Georgia, being the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2018.

**Frontlist:** Currently, you are the Deputy Chair of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association. What change have you brought for women in the association?

**Gvantsa:** I have brought a big change for women in our association. Since 2013, I'm serving in the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association in different positions, and sometimes it has been challenging, very stressful, very emotional, but really beautiful years. Of course, sometimes we fail. But this gives us the strength and huge motivation to wake up the next morning in a very optimistic mood and start fighting for success even harder than before. I'm not sure if I managed to bring any change for



our women, but almost every day on any occasion. I'm trying to show them courage and devotion to our work, and also, I'm trying to be brave to make others brave too. And then trying not to get frightened so that others do not fear.

**Frontlist:** You are a member of the PublishHer community. How do you think it is helping women in the publishing industry?

**Gvantsa:** I've been a member of the PublishHer since the very beginning when almost three years ago, this community was created in London during the London Book Fair in 2019. I still remember that fantastic Yuning, which I spent with absolutely amazing women publishers from all around the world who appear to be full of enthusiasm and willingness to help and support each other. Even on that very first evening together, while sitting around the dinner tables. In small groups, we started exchanging our stories, experiences, doubts, questions, ideas, everything. We started talking about development and offered our support to each other. On that very first day, I truly realized that it was the start of an amazing movement, which was going to work in real life. That's exactly, what represents women's power!

**Frontlist:** What type of plans do you have as an active member of the IPA Executive Committee for the year 2022, especially for women?

**Gvantsa:** I think that the IPA Executive Committee, especially during the last few years, has shown its clear position and opinion about the huge importance of women empowerment in publishing, by electing two brilliant women publishers on senior positions - Bodour Al Qasimi, we all know her as the President, and also Karina Pansa as the Vice-President of IPA. We want to emphasise that it's time to see more and more hardworking, devoted, highly-professional women publishers in leadership positions. I'm willing to do my best to help keep this course IPA has chosen because a lot is to be done. It's extremely important that IPA as a professional union becomes an example for its members from all around the world. If we go on working on it

with the same self-confidence as we are doing it now, thanks to our new leadership, our attempt will have its very logical outcome in different industries as well.

**Frontlist: What inspired you to organize the Tbilisi International Book Fair (2013- 2016)?**

**Gvansta:** This is one of my favorite projects, and the Tbilisi International Book Fair is one of the most important projects of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association, and this year, we're planning to organize it for the 24th time. It has already become a huge tradition and one of the biggest cultural events in our career. So, being the organizer of this wonderful event together with my fantastic colleagues is a great honor and great pleasure at the same time. Everyone who is involved in the working process feels lucky for being a part of Tbilisi. And, especially before the pandemic, we, of course, used to visit several international book fairs per year and learned a lot from our foreign colleagues. Then we tried our best to use this knowledge to come up with our own book fair and made it attractive, not only for locals but for an international audience as well. And, currently it is the International Book Fair, except traditional book markets and literary events, this is the main platform which hosts more and more foreign publishers and authors with special programs in it. Each year offers its own publishing conference, a new pavilion designed especially for children's books, and very special unique project actors and actresses for literature.

**Frontlist: On this International Women's Day, how do you think you #BreaktheBias (theme of 2022) and how you shall continue to do so?**

**Gvansta:** If I speak about 2013 when at the age of 27, I became the first Deputy Chair of our association who was not the publisher but the employee of the publishing house. This happened because my boss trusted me, and he sent me to the local PA as his representative to work, to learn to fight. And in two years, I became the chairperson of the association with the help of unbelievable trust and support from my colleagues. However, in the beginning, when I started as a Deputy Chair, my age and occupation was really an issue. And it often happened that I was expected to change my mind or decision to respect someone's age advantage. But if you want to achieve success and gain respect and trust, if you really care about the future development and progress of your entire industry, sometimes you have to make really unpopular decisions, but it's part of any work, and we need to get used to doing it.

**Frontlist: It's said that in the Georgian Publishing Industry, women are dominating. Is it true?**

**Gvansta:** We can, probably women and men both. They should try and work on it a little bit more. And it's really possible because we have in our society a lot of developed people as well, who understand things perfectly and who we can involve in the process to empower women. As for Georgia, I remember that once I was interviewed about this topic already, and I compared the Georgia book industry to the paradise of gender equality, and I'm proud to tell you that after several years from that interview, we still managed to keep the same course. And if we look at the list of our member organizations, the percentage of men and women directors is 50-50 again, and on the association board, we have now six women members and one male member only. And in the association staff, we have only women. Nearly the same is the statistics in other literary organizations operating in Georgia.

According to these statistics, we can easily say that Georgian women are not only dominating but maybe even ruling the Georgia Publishing Industry. It looks like that. So I, of course, wish all other industries to have better statistics in terms of gender equality.

And I think that women should work on it. And they should also involve men who have the right views about it, some like popular personalities as well, to work on it to promote this topic in their countries. And a lot to be done, of course, and it's difficult, it's different. According to the different countries, it doesn't work the same way, you know, countries because it depends on the culture and a lot of things. But it is possible. I mean, it's really possible, and it really needs braveness. And it needs hard work, of course.

**Frontlist: The PublisHer is completing its 3 years in March 2020. What do you think it has done to #BreaktheBias in the publishing industry and provided viable solutions to the many gender-based inequities that have long characterized the world publishing and the other creative industries?**

**Gvansta:** PublisHer is a unique movement, which makes women's voices be heard. It gives women the stage to be seen and listened, listened to not only by men but by women also, because today, a lot of women in our world needs to hear the true stories, through examples, experiences, about how they manage—firstly, to survive, and then, to become the leaders in our equal society, they need the face that breaks the biases. And if women managed to unite the forces, and if more and more men in this universe start respecting equality, important change can be achieved. They need to believe that the real change starts from each of us. And this is how I say the mission of the publisher.

**Frontlist: Today is International Women's Day. What thought would you like to leave for women, coming after you, women, who would want to follow the same footsteps, or follow the same path, that you have walked on in your life?**

**Gvansta:** Well, I can say that you should be brave, and you should not fear. But you should know that it's a lot of work. We choose our life, and we choose what kind of life we want to live. And if we choose freedom, if we choose independence, then we should know that we need to work and fight for it every day.

In the case of men and women, it's the same because this universe is like these works like this, that if the person and the people want to be free and independent, they should know that it's not easy, it's a very difficult way. But it's on us. We should choose what kind of person we want to be. And also a lot depends on us, of course, on the society as well in which we live, because in some cases, it's really hard. Because of society, it's really hard to survive and to make your voice be heard. I understand the differences as well, of course, but we should know that in any society, it's possible if we work hard because we need to work, we need to educate and the most important, education is the way which gives us the freedom and independence. So we should fight for our right to education. So for me, it was beautiful, but it was the very hard way that I passed through. It was tiring, it was not sleeping many nights because of my work, but it's not done differently. So for success, we have to fight.

# MILEE ASHWARYA

*Publisher, Penguin Random House*

Milee Ashwarya is Publisher, Ebury Publishing and Vintage Publishing at Penguin Random House India. Her focus has been on championing the best voices in fiction and non-fiction while publishing a range of bestsellers across segments. Her authors include Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Piyush Pandey, Hussain S. Zaidi, Yuvraj Singh, Hindol Sengupta, R. Gopalakrishnan, Karan Johar, Ravi Subramaniam, Anand Neelakantan, Navi Radjou, Shilpa Shetty, Novoneel Chakraborty, Amjad Ali Khan, Shradha Sharma, Emraan Hashmi, Sonali Bendre, Radhakrishnan Pillai and Payal Gidwani Tiwari to name a few. A TEDx speaker, she is passionate about issues related to working women, parenting, and the environment. She was recently awarded the Women Achievers' Samman 2017 for publishing by the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) and the Distinguished Alumni Award 2017 for Excellence in Publishing by Hindu College, Delhi University.

**Frontlist:** A girl from the state of Bihar, which provides India with most of the IAS or SP officers, how does it feel to become one of India's most powerful women in Publishing?

**Milee:** There are brilliant professionals from Bihar in every field, not only civil services but also media, legal and more. I'm a proud Bihari and publishing professional.

**Frontlist:** It is said that you are passionate about issues related to working women. Please enlighten us on some of the similar issues you have published.

**Milee:** We've only recently published a lot of books on issues around women: Boys Don't Cry and Feminist Rani by Meghna Pant, as well as memoirs of women who have led interesting and challenging lives such as Sach Kahun Toh by Neena Gupta.

**Frontlist:** You were awarded the Women Achievers' Samman 2017 for Publishing by the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO). Do you think such titles and awards motivate the women working in the industry to achieve more?



**Milee:** Absolutely. Awards do that. They encourage people by recognizing the work that has gone in. There should be more such initiatives to motivate women and men alike. And yes, always nice to be appreciated. In fact, this one was particularly special as it was GOPIO.

**Frontlist:** On the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of Indian Independence, Ebury Publishing and Vintage announced the launch of a new imprint, 'Penguin Veer', dedicated to stories of and from the country's armed forces legacy. Does this genre of war, defence, and military stories excite you?

**Milee:** Yes, it does excite me. There is a wide and growing readership in this genre, and Penguin has published many bestselling and eminent titles, including The Brave: Param Vir Chakra Stories, 1965: Stories from the Indo-Pak War and Kargil by Rachna Bisht Rawat, and Vijyant at Kargil: The Biography of a War Hero by Col. VN Thapar and Neha Dwivedi.

**Frontlist:** What changes do you want to bring in the business side of the publishing industry, dominated by the male gender?

**Milee:** Publishing has a healthy ratio of women, I feel, and even in Penguin, there are several women at the executive and the management level. We are very proud of this fact.

**Frontlist:** The work of publishing before the pandemic is not the same now. Consumer behaviors have changed very fast. Do you think publishers need to adapt to the new mindset and skills to operate at the global level?

**Milee:** We've all been adapting, and yes, there needs to be more. In the age of digital media and consumerism, we need to offer our readers a choice, not only in terms of subject but also the format in which they wish to consume the book.

**Frontlist:** What shall be the line with which you want people to remember you?

**Milee:** She tried to fly without wings and dream with her eyes open.





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## India Book Market Report 2022 to be published by Nielsen BookData and FIP

Nielsen BookData and The Federation of Indian Publishers (FIP) are delighted to announce they have partnered to produce the second edition of the Nielsen India Book Market Report.

New Delhi, 17th February 2022—Nielsen BookData has partnered with FIP to produce the long awaited second edition of the Nielsen India Book Market Report. The first edition was published in 2015 and the publishing industry has changed enormously since then, not least withstanding a global pandemic. Nielsen BookData and FIP recognize the need for an updated report to provide the industry with an understanding of the current dynamics and the changes that have occurred over the last few years.

The partnership brings together two critical players, and their collaboration promises to deliver a report that provides a business-critical analysis of the market to inform and support the stakeholders of the Indian publishing industry.

Vikrant Mathur, Executive Director of Nielsen BookData, India said: “It is my great pleasure to announce our partnership with FIP and I’m delighted to be working with them on the second edition of this report. FIP is the leading federation for Indian publishers and our association with them will bring a new synergy to the report which will benefit the whole industry.” He went on to say: “The first India Book Market Report was released over 6 years ago but is still considered the “bible” for the Indian publishing industry. We are confident that the second report will not disappoint and will continue to provide a unique picture of the industry.”

Pranav Gupta, Joint Secretary of the Federation of Indian Publishers [FIP], who has been appointed as the Project Leader for this initiative from FIP said “It will be the first of its kind report that will study the contribution of the Indian literary publishing industry in India’s economy. It will help everyone in the publishing ecosystem to get deep insights into the Indian industry and align their business plan accordingly. This will significantly boost innovation. I want to Thank the entire leadership of FIP for trusting me with this huge responsibility.”

The report is expected to be available towards the end of the third quarter, 2022.

# PRAGATIE VICHAAR POETRY FESTIVAL



## List of Speakers



Hemma Myers Sood



Abhay K



Sudeep Sen



Rekha Mehra



Shalini Chhabra



KamalKishore Rajput



Sucharita Parija



Neil Daswani



Irfan Tarique Khan





**Maria Goretti**



**Gayatri Chawla**



**Amitava Nag**



**Deepali Agarwal**



**Gautam Kumar**



**Kala Ramesh**



**C P Surendran**



**Damayanti Barua Singh**



**Aftab Yusuf Shaikh**



**Anamika Joshi**



**Amit Majmudar**



**Menka Shivdasani**



**Naina Kataria**



**Raena Shirali**



**Sidhartha Mallya**





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## MEDIA COVERAGE

National Book Trust, India (under Ministry of Education, Govt. of India) organized an event for the book release of "Environmental Renaissance" which was held on 15 February, 2022 at NBT Head Quarters, New Delhi.

Environmental Renaissance written by Shri Niranjn Dev Bhardwaj is a book that elucidates the relationship between man and nature and explores multi-dimensional responses to resolve the current environmental crisis. The chief guest of the function was Hon'ble Justice Arun Kumar Mishra, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, India and the occasion was also graced by Prof. Govind Prasad Sharma, Chairman, National Book Trust, India, Shri Mahesh Chandra Pant, Chancellor National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Shri Yuvraj Malik, Director NBT in NBT Headquarters, New Delhi .

Frontlist Media has the privilege of Covering this event.

### Key points that were highlighted in the function

While releasing the book, Chief Guest Hon'ble Justice, Shri Arun Kumar Mishra, Chairperson NHRC expressed that it is the responsibility of every person to save the environment as fast development at the cost of the environment will only result in the extinction of the human race. He further added that books on such important topics should also be translated in Hindi as well as other regional languages and as the nation's biggest publisher, this should be done by NBT.

Author of the book, Shri Niranjn Dev Bhardwaj said that the domineering way of humans in respect to the environment, needs to make way for a more eco-centric approach so that we can leave a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous planet for our future generations.

Shri Yuvraj Malik, Director, NBT, while expressing his thanks to all the special guests, appreciated the author for presenting his observations on the environmental crisis in an easy manner. He also ensured that NBT will look into translating this book into other Indian languages.

Published by National Book Trust, India, the book 'Environmental Renaissance' aims to reorient this connection by asking the reader to take a step back from greed, irresponsibility, unethical approaches towards Earth. This book serves as a big stepping stone for environment conservation and readers are going to be motivated to look into the environment with strength and figure out their responsibility and utmost care to protect the environment.



# AUTHOR INTERVIEWS



## *"Pitch Perfect"*

Srimoyi Bhattacharya

For over 25 years, Srimoyi Bhattacharya has been helping brands and entrepreneurs communicate their best selves to the world. Srimoyi founded Peepul, her own public relations company, in April 2006. Peepul Brand Relations is one of India's top boutique PR firms in fashion, luxury, and lifestyle space. Over the years, the firm's clients have included marquee brands, like Hidesign, H&M, De Beers, Kama Ayurveda, Swarovski, Good Earth, Raw Mango, DLF Emporio, The Chanakya, and Sotheby's.

**Frontlist:** The world of PR is massive in its own terms. How big is the role of social media in making your company big, authentic, and at the very same time appealing?

**Srimoyi:** I would say it really depends on the sector you work in. And social media platforms should not be the only way of showcasing a company's values or DNA.

All industries have been reshaped by COVID-19 to a varying degree, but in India, I find that traditional media has been, perhaps, one that has been impacted and changed quite indelibly. At the same time, social and digital media have grown enormously in influence and power. What PR does via traditional media is help you talk to all your stakeholders, and social media helps you build a direct line of communication, especially with your customers. You need both, and they have to be in sync with one another, so you have a seamless universe of communication. One does not replace the other, even though these days I find that a lot of brands think they can swap one out for the next.

**Frontlist:** Ever since social media has approached the corporate scenes, the definition of talking and interacting has changed considerably. Do the companies of today have the potential to stand equally strong if the use of social media is decreased as a promotion tool?

**Srimoyi:** My peer and friend, Pareina Thapar, who worked as a journalist for years before co-founding Longform

Communications, represents some of the most compelling brands in India. She makes a strong case in the book for this question, and I believe the answer is in the balancing act.

"In the traditional landscape, everyone understood the functions of advertising agencies, PR agencies, media planning advisories, sales and marketing functions, etc. - there were defined boundaries. In social media, newer forms of roles have emerged and are ever-changing. For those who don't understand the medium enough, it can be overwhelming to understand and navigate different functions. E-commerce versus social media; storytelling and content strategy versus performance marketing - it is never-ending," she said. "But the main focus is the unification of brand voice [and goals] across all platforms. For instance, in-store experience and customer service may be a superb offline world for one brand, but it may have a terrible digital curation and brand messaging. On the other hand, a brand can be very good-looking digitally and off the mark in the real world. Being good on omni-channels is becoming essential to the survival of brands. There is no balance.

When you work on a brand's identity and storytelling, you have to be able to live in the past, present, and future all at the same time. Trends come and go and are definitely important because they keep you in the now. Learnings from the past help you recognise what is cyclical learning to be future-forward is important for your evolution. Being curious and having an appetite to observe and absorb is important, and this takes discipline to build. You also need to be nimble and quick on the uptake."

**Frontlist:** How do you visualize the development of women entrepreneurship in the country?

**Srimoyi:** We have many examples of women leaders in both the corporate and the lifestyle space. I find that our working environment is more compassionate here to family or personal constraints if I were to compare with other cities I have worked in like, Paris or New York. Governance will follow new societal shifts as more women join the workforce consistently and vice versa?

**Frontlist:** Does entrepreneurship bring equal opportunities to both men and women, keeping the gender walls aside?

**Srimoyi:** I moved to Mumbai in 2008 from New York and extended my company shortly after. In the course of the last 14 years of my career track here, I have never felt at disadvantage in my working environment. Perhaps this has to do with my profession in the beat I work with. I started in India with a project for ICICI Bank, in a field that was not my strength but where I could bring domain expertise. I always felt heard and respected in my strong opinions. I don't believe it is the case in all categories of business, in mine, diversity comes in many ways and has been a part of the fabric of our company. Companies like Godrej have been working towards educating in this space, and I believe more corporate groups should follow their lead.

**Frontlist:** Have the governmental policies become the reason for the start-up waves in the atmosphere of the country? What are the laws and policies supporting the start-up ecosystem around

the nation?

**Srimoyi:** The rise of start-ups has to do with the confidence of new generations in the future of an idea in our country, and #vocalforlocal has become more than a trend. I am proud to watch the number of young entrepreneurs who realise that serving a market of over a billion may make more sense sometimes for their category than looking at a white label in export, for instance. The Government has helped in bringing large-scale endeavours to the forefront, but, what I am interested in, is also the small shop with big dreams.

**Frontlist:** How important does it become for a venture to groom at the initial stages?

**Srimoyi:** It is critical for a firm to bring a strong culture with a defined ethos and values from its foundation. If voices are dissonant in vision or values, it shows in how the brand operates. Having a strong foundation helps groom and build a strong grip within before going out to the world.

**Frontlist:** You have such an ample amount of experience in PR; how do you rate networking, marketing, and PR playing an important role in the times of today?

**Srimoyi:** The one thing that has not changed about PR, no matter which country I am in or which industry I work with, is that this is the business of making connections and building relationships. We have to simply keep adapting basic skills of relationship-building to modern mediums.

What does it mean to build allies? That you create a community of people who believe in you, your brand, and your product or service, and they will support you as you grow. You can think of a core group as your champions, who become a true part of the journey, and you might even rely on some of them for advice or opinion. And eventually, you want this connection to amplify your message to your consumer. One of my greatest lessons has been to always consider what the mutual benefit is. An ideal network is one built on generosity and authenticity.

**Frontlist:** Do you think women entrepreneurs of this country, like Falguni Nayar (Founder - Nykaa) and Richa Kar (Founder - Zivame), are setting a standard for women entrepreneurship in the country?

**Srimoyi:** What the founding ladies have achieved is exemplary and sets a precedent for breaking all notions of the glass ceiling with incredible vision and clear execution. Beyond that, they have also set an example within our retail communities: you don't need to come from the field to build success, you own it through knowledge and understanding a white space.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

What do you do when you hear of an interesting brand or person? You Google them, visit their website and their social media platforms. It's their storytelling that draws you in, but what locks you down are the stories being told about the brand. In today's hyperconnected and hypercompetitive world, each new brand is vying for the same space on your screens and the brand with the most persuasive and authentic storytelling wins. A decade ago brands relied on mainstream media and celebrities to endorse them, but now each brand needs a sound strategy that involves traditional media, social media, influencers, micro-influencers, celebrities across all strata, and offline and online communities. So, for everyone that's in this game -whatever side they're on - the playing field has become complex and competitive, and this is where Srimoyi Bhattacharya comes in to help you get your Pitch Perfect. Whether you are starting a brand, have been running a company for decades, or are part of a large or small organization that sells a product or service, this book is for you. In Pitch Perfect, Srimoyi writes about the most valuable lessons she's learned in her career that spans 15 years and three continents. With inputs from Srimoyi's top clients, her network of editors, industry experts, and business heads, Pitch Perfect is a must-have bible on brand building and communication for anyone interested in winning the Indian consumer







### ***"The Mantra And Meaning Of Success"***

Rajesh Talwar

Rekha is a prolific reader, delving deep into Hindi literature, poetry and history. An avid gardener, she enjoys spending time in nature and travelling. Through her poetry, she brings peace, joy and contentment from her eyes to the reader's universe. A diverse world sparkling with pearls of wisdom.

Rekha Mehra's *Zindagi Teri Dhoop Chaon* is her first book of poetry.

**Frontlist:** You have made a point in the book that "Creativity and innovation will give you real success and fame." How would you elaborate on this statement and enlighten us more?

**Rajesh:** In the book, I speak of how you may be already successful, but if you want to become super successful, if you do something new or differently, that may take you to the next level. For instance, I speak of a meeting with the billionaire Ramesh Dua, one of the most modest but brilliant billionaires I have met. Mr. Dua was introduced to me through a mutual friend Praveen Kumar, a great educator. Now Mr. Dua has been in the footwear business (Relaxo Footwears) for decades, but he hadn't heard of the 'expanding slipper'. When I spoke to him about this innovation introduced in some African countries, I had an opportunity to visit during my time with the United Nations, he became excited. For those who may not know, the expanding slipper was an innovation that addressed the concerns of poor families with small children. Everyone knows that children rapidly outgrow clothes, shoes, and slippers. With this innovation, the same slipper could be adjusted to cover a certain age group so that when a six-year-old child becomes seven or eight, you don't have to buy him new slippers! One of the innovations I suggested to Mr. Dua, which he promised he would think over, was to recover plastic waste being dumped every year in the holy Ganges and use it to make shoes. I believe that all Indians would welcome such an initiative for, on the one hand, you are cleaning the holiest of our rivers, and on the other hand, you are making a useful product that everyone needs.

**Frontlist:** What are the great dangers of success according to

you?

**Rajesh:** The Beatles sang famously: 'Money can't buy me, love.' They could just as well have sung: 'Money can't buy me happiness.' Not only can money not buy you happiness, but it also doesn't provide you with any kind of insurance against depression. Why was Deepika Padukone battling depression? At the time the Bollywood actress made the confession, she was at the top of her game and 'had it all' so to speak. In 2020, she went to the Davos summit and addressed a gathering of world leaders on how we need to be more sensitive to those among us who are battling depression. And wasn't Michael Jackson a deeply troubled person, despite being so successful? Success and happiness are not the same things, as Deepika Padukone's example tells us. Thousands of successful people live deeply troubled lives; some of them such as Deepika, are even diagnosed with clinical depression. Think of the great filmmaker Guru Dutt, who gave us classics such as *Pyaasa* and *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*, and who committed suicide; or, world-famous actress Marilyn Monroe, who also reportedly took her own life. Deepika's video in which she speaks of her symptoms is easily searchable on the internet. She hated getting up in the morning to face the world. She wanted to just go on sleeping. She felt sad all the time. Eventually, she was diagnosed with clinical depression. My feeling is that people who look at success from the outside often think something along the lines of: 'Oh, how lucky! I wish I could be in that person's shoes!' When a person like Deepika is apparently blessed with good looks, a good figure, a good family, a successful career, money, and fame – surely all this is enough to make any person happy? What more does she want? Some people have so little, and she has so much. What an ungrateful person! Shouldn't she be counting her blessings? What does anyone know about the issues that Deepika is faced with? All is not always what it seems from the outside. It can be lonely at the top. Sometimes loneliness can grab you at the moment of your biggest success. In the documentary *Miss Americana*, pop singer and global celebrity Taylor Swift reveals how, after winning a major award, at the moment of her greatest triumph, she felt overwhelmed by loneliness. She felt sad because there was no one in her life that whom she could properly share her happiness with.

**Frontlist:** People's tendency to try hard multiple times to reach success, but with the same approach sometimes does not work the right way. We would like you to share some useful tips on how to avoid it?

**Rajesh:** Let me give you two important tips in this interview, which I speak of in my book. For the rest, you'll have to buy the book, which is 70,000 words plus and has a lot of tips. The first tip is: Listen carefully! And the second one is: Don't overdo your adherence to the truth! I speak here of these two tips based on my own life experience.

Many years ago, as a young lawyer, I applied for a part-time teaching position at Delhi University. The university tried to get lawyers, to teach subjects related to criminal and civil procedure and the Indian Supreme Court rules and procedure. The remuneration was not much, but such an assignment commanded prestige. Together with a lawyer friend of mine (this species is rare), named Rakesh, I went for the interview.

The interview went off reasonably well. The professors on the panel were civil and courteous. Towards the end, one of them asked me where I lived. He looked at my application.

'Is it Noida?' he asked, looking up.

'Yes,' I confirmed. The city was in a neighboring state, an hour's drive from the law center.

'Oh, that's too far!' he responded and looked around the table.

The Chair of the Panel nodded and explained that although they were satisfied with my qualifications and performance in the

interview, I lived too far away.

'But I have a vehicle,' I protested, 'and I promise to be regular.' 'We don't doubt your intentions,' said the professor gently, 'and thank you for your interest. However, it has been our experience that lecturers who live far away often miss classes – or reach them late. That, of course, is to the detriment of our students.'

The interview was over.

My friend Rakesh, who also lived in Noida, had a similar experience. He knew a couple of professors personally and had been more hopeful and was, therefore, more disappointed than I was. He had been almost certain that he would get one of the two posts advertised.

'It's a bloody scam,' he exploded. 'They already had their candidate.'

'I don't agree,' I said. 'Their concern was genuine – and legitimate.' Rakesh shook his head, not persuaded.

Six months down the line, a similar advertisement appeared in the papers. Once again, there were two vacant posts. Possibly the earlier-selected candidates had not performed satisfactorily – or they had not found the salary to be commensurate with the work involved.

I decided to apply once again. I informed Rakesh of the advertisement and asked if he would apply. It's always good to have company for an interview, and besides, there were two posts advertised.

'Nah,' he said. 'I tell you, it's all a scam.'

At the time, I had a cousin in the military who lived in the Dhaula Kuan Cantonment area, just a couple of kilometers from the University of Delhi's evening law center. I decided to use his address while applying instead of my own in Noida. A few days later he called me to let me know that a letter for me had arrived in the post.

The interview panel wasn't identical to the previous one, but there were a couple of professors who had been on the earlier one.

Once again, the interview went off well, and once again, towards the end of the interview, they asked me where I lived.

'Dhula Kuan. At the cantonment. A ten-minute drive.'

The professor who had asked this question looked at my application and saw that this was indeed the address provided.

'Wonderful!' The professor smiled. 'When can you start?'

Now, the thing is that I knew that I would be regular and not miss any classes, despite the distance involved. For this reason, while the concern of the professors was legitimate, I don't think I was being deceitful or even unethical. Even if I was, I believe this much is acceptable. It is possible to overdo one's adherence to the truth.

**Frontlist:** People, after getting successful most of the time, freeze their creativity, which makes it hard for them to maintain their success in the long run. What would you like to say about that?

**Rajesh:** There are several reasons why the creative spirit can be disturbed by success. The phenomenon itself is well-documented, but philosophers and psychologists either have not considered the issue important enough to investigate or have not, in any event, provided a satisfactory explanation for why it happens.

I can think of at least three reasons.

The Rise of the Ego: Success makes you self-conscious. You become more aware of yourself, but not in a positive way – rather, it must be said, in a negative way. You feel you are somebody; your ego is constantly massaged by friends, fans, and the media. With the rise of an ego that lay dormant when you were nobody, or at least nobody important, you cease to be a messenger for the beyond, which is where the creative spirit lives. This is what

happened with Khalil Gibran, who kept writing after he became world-famous but could never match the eloquence of The Prophet, his own creation. This is what happened with Arundhati Roy and The God of Small Things; this is what happened with Mario Puzo and The Godfather. Arundhati took more than two decades before she wrote her second novel. Mario Puzo never wrote anything significant after The Godfather. And this is what has happened with scores of other creative spirits.

The rise of the ego creates a kind of disorder in the personality. A person becomes more self-conscious, and the feeling of self-importance can become overwhelming.

Remaining grounded is not easy. Unlike the others who are mentioned above, why did M.F. Hussain continue to paint till the end of his days? Why did his creative spirit not freeze? Or, for that matter, take Salman Rushdie, who won the Booker Prize long before Arundhati but went on to write many more important novels, even being awarded the Booker of Bookers at a later stage.

There are no clear answers to such questions. The creative phenomenon is a mysterious one. In Hussain's case, I like to think that it may have had something to do with the fact that he rose up from the slums of Mumbai. Did his struggles for many years keep the painter grounded even after he became a star feted and recognised on the international circuit?

I consider ego to be the primary cause for the phenomenon of 'freezing', but there may be other factors as well.

The Pressure of Success: Once you are successful, there is pressure on you to maintain that success. Pressure to create is never good because it introduces the idea of timelines, and the free spirit is no respecter of time. It lives in eternity. There is a reason Vikram Seth could not complete An Unsuitable Boy, the sequel to A Suitable Boy, the novel that made him a literary star and a millionaire. The author tried hard, but after several extensions let down his publisher and his agent, despite having taken an advance. What happened? His creative spirit had frozen. Strict deadlines are never good for the true artist. I remember reading a book by a famous Indian journalist, where the scribe blamed journalism for destroying the writer and potential novelist in him. Now, many of us may think that if you want to be a great writer of books, it makes sense to become a journalist. It will help you make a living till the time that your first book is a great critical and commercial success. It will keep you connected with the craft of writing, with other scribes, and with the publishing world, in general.

All of this sounds logical enough, but if you are forced to churn out material, factory-like, sticking to deadlines that your editor sets you every week, the well of creativity within you will start to dry up.

It's like the farmer who uses too much fertilizer and plants crop after crop, which sucks up all the water in the land without allowing time for it to be replenished.

There is a famous saying that sums up the issue: 'The desire to finish in an artist is criminal.'

The Importance of Leisure and Space: A third reason why the creative spirit might freeze is that once you attain stardom of a kind, irrespective of the sphere in which you have attained it, your life and lifestyle change. Many successful people have written about how their life changed once they were successful. In India, you are besieged by chamchas, for one thing. The media hound you. Leaving aside those who gather around and wish to bask in your reflected glory, there are other important people who also wish to be close to you. For instance, Subodh Gupta, a rising young Indian artist, was invited by Shah Rukh Khan to a party in his house because Shah Rukh's wife, Gauri, noticed his work

when it was exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London. With success, your circle of friends automatically expands. You now do not have the same leisure and space that you had before.

The famous philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote an essay titled 'In Praise of Idleness'. In that essay, he says that idleness is unnecessarily maligned. It is in our idle moments that we uncover new truths and make fresh discoveries.

The essay is an interesting one, but the title is a clever distortion, designed to make the essay sound more provocative to potential readers. Russell should rather have titled his essay 'In Praise of Leisure'. After all, it is up to the person what he wishes to do with his leisure time. He may choose to be idle, or he may choose to spend his time creatively.

Russell may argue that it is sometimes in idle moments that we have a breakthrough, but on the other hand, even in those seemingly idle moments, our subconscious is busy at work. The issue is having the leisure, time, and space to do the things you wish to do.

#### **Frontlist: What is the Art of Compromise?**

**Rajesh:** It's all about striking the right balance. Don't make any major compromise, but don't be too rigid. For instance, sometimes you must listen to market forces. Mario Puzo did so when he wrote 'The Godfather' after he found that the excellent novels he was writing within the genre of literary fiction were not earning him a decent living.

At the same time, if you only listen to the market, you will tend to be imitative. You will create copycat products, write formulaic fiction, or make overly derivative movies that will most likely bomb. Even if you are lucky and succeed in making a profit, you will acquire an unsavory reputation as a businessman without ethics who steals ideas. It is unlikely that you will produce something that has real quality and is also commercially successful.

If you bow to the market too easily, a few things will automatically follow as a kind of karma that will lead you astray from the path to true success. For example, if as a songwriter, you compromise on the lyrics (perhaps you introduce salacious lyrics to please the crowds), you can only aspire to mid-level success. If you compromise on the quality of your music, this will also have an impact on your reputation.

You will disappoint your fans and dent your own brand image. It will be the equivalent of an own goal.

If you compromise too easily, your talent will gradually but surely dissipate.

This does not mean that you should be rigid and inflexible, on the other hand.

The American novelist Henry James could have stuck to his guns and said: 'No, I want to be a playwright, not a novelist.' Likewise, Mario Puzo could have told himself: 'No, I will continue to write only literary novels and will attain success as a literary giant. I will not lower my level to write a mainstream novel.'

For that matter, Madhur Jaffrey, an actor who became a famous cookbook author, could have told herself: 'Cookbook? I don't even know how to cook! I will just focus on my acting career.'

In each of the aforesaid cases, such a decision would have demonstrated excessive rigidity.

When to compromise and when not to is a very important decision to make, and there are often no easy answers.

Life throws each one of us a great opportunity at some point in our lives.

Don't be in a hurry to turn down an opportunity that presents itself. Think the matter over carefully, take advice from experts or friends if necessary, sleep on it, and only then decide.

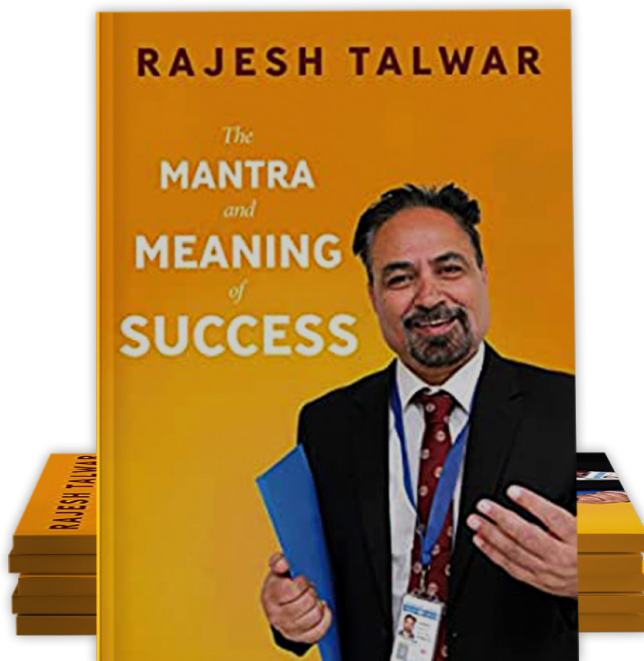
**Frontlist: Would you choose a path to your own dreams or your parents' dreams for you?**

**Rajesh:** Choose your own path, but do not throw all practical considerations to the wind. A while ago, I watched a BBC program in which a famous Jewish American architect was interviewed, a tall man in his late sixties. He had designed landmark buildings across the world.

The interviewer asked him a standard question: Had he always wanted to be an architect? He explained that this was not the case. In his youth, he wished to be a painter. A painter, his mother told the young lad, would always find it difficult to earn a living. A strong-minded woman, she suggested other careers instead in which, once he finished his studies and if he did well, it was more or less guaranteed, he would make a decent living. They had heated arguments over the next few days. In the end, his mother came up with a suggestion that was a compromise in some respects but one that he found acceptable. The architecture was that compromise. He could indulge his artistic fantasies; at the same time, he would make a decent living.

He was asked if he regretted the decision.

'Never,' he said. 'It was the best decision of my life.'







**“पारदर्शी – मेरी नज़र से”**

Prateek Kashyap

One of the many faces hidden behind a mask is that of an author. A personality composed of a mix of traveller, observer, and an entrepreneur who has tried to express the experiences he has come through with transparency.

Relying on the zeal to learn daily from the happenings around him, he tries competing with himself day after day. He is not a bookish person but finds stories by listening to people. He believes that society can be glorified only by the transmission of love from one to the other. He keeps wandering from city to city on the way to find himself. Keeping a nomadic heart and recognizing himself as a believer of love, he just walks away.

**Frontlist:** What is poetry according to you? What is the most significant thing for an artist to brush into any form of art?

**Prateek:** “Anything that flows directly through your heart is Poetry.” This is the most generous answer I give anyone asking me this question. An essence of honesty and a blend of purity that a soul is made up of, added with a rhythmic tone; when comes out together to scribble the most aesthetic piece on paper tends to be an art and justifying that art is a work of an artist or a poet in this case. This is the most significant thing for an artist to brush, according to me. When you start observing art or poetry with these eyes, you’ll only come across the innocence of the art. It ultimately leads you to believe in the idea of creation.

**Frontlist:** Society evils play a crucial role to hinder the growth of human beings. What societal evils have you discussed in this poetry book?

**Prateek:** Any pinch close to your heart reciprocates the quickest.

This is something I’ve always felt personally. We already have to deal with various kinds of emotions after we are born, and if negativity surrounding you doesn’t help you grow on an upward trajectory, you start feeling oppressed under the pressure of society. In the age of modernisation, the evils have also coated a layer upon themselves. The wreckage of the heart, the pain, crushed dreams, societal cages are a few topics that I chose to put up with all the transparency I’ve witnessed with my experiences.

**Frontlist:** This book has 21 poetry that underlines the desire for liberation. What is the meaning of Freedom to you?

**Prateek:** Anything that sets you free to commit mistakes and allows you with security and space to work upon them for the sake of growth is freedom. The fear of failure has never allowed people to be free. The ones who’ve discarded that fear know well about what freedom smells like.

The whole idea behind writing a set of 21 poetries was that people read, realize, rectify and let the book go. If the writings inside the book move forward to help even a single human being to self-realize where things have gone wrong, I’ll be a satisfied person.

**Frontlist:** The 20th poem - ‘Mere Bhitari’ illustrates restive thoughts. What is the message you are trying to convey to all readers?

**Prateek:** It’s not the job of a poet to make people understand his poetry. Where poetry goes beyond the idea of imagination, making someone sets an obstruction on that image of the people. The person reading should always allow their mind to think and tune along the lines.

“मेरे भीतर (Mere Bhitari)” is an idea of rebellion. A rebel who has lost the belief in the word ‘settlement’. When one starts syncing into their comfort zone, boredom knocks. You’re blessed with the life of a human, the most advanced body of civilization; then why not lead the planet to light with all you’ve got. There’s no point to add any cushion to the best you can achieve and keep doing the same work daily. It’s not the purpose of life you’ve got. One should know their purpose in life, else it’s just a life wasted. It is just a part of a poem that I’ve presented above, and the rest again hangs upon people to relate.

**Frontlist:** As a debut author, how difficult was it to get published?

**Prateek:** Not much, I’ll say. Once you’ve written something, there are various ways to present it to the audience through the innovations we as humans have made. I got proper assistance while my book was going through the publishing part, so it was not a very big challenge for me, honestly.

**Frontlist:** As a young author who’s grappling with life’s obstacles and portraying his perspectives towards society through this book. What advice would you give to same-age adults out there about life?

**Prateek:** I’m an explorer. I’m on a learning curve every day. And this is how I visualize myself to be. So as said above, I’m no one to add advice to others’ lives. You are your own biggest teacher. In one way or the other, you’ll find ways to guide yourself through.





### ***"Heroes the Colour of Dust"***

Amit Majmudar

Amit Majmudar is a novelist, poet, translator, essayist, and diagnostic nuclear radiologist. Majmudar's latest books are the poetry collection *What He Did in Solitary* (Knopf, 2020) and *Godsong: A Verse Translation of the Bhagavad-Gita, with Commentary* (Knopf/Penguin Random House India, 2018), as well as two novels published in India, *Soar* (Penguin Random House India, 2020) and *Sitayana* (Penguin Random House India, 2019). Winner of the Anne Halley Prize and the Pushcart Prize, he served as Ohio's first Poet Laureate. He practices diagnostic and nuclear radiology full-time in Westerville, Ohio, where he lives with his wife, twin sons, and daughter.

**Frontlist:** You are a diagnostic nuclear radiologist, and on the other hand, you're an author as well. How do you help your mind switch roles?

**Amit:** I don't feel very much tension between the two roles. With Radiology, it's a time-limited, focused activity, very much a job. I do the job while remaining myself, my essential self, which is a writer. In any case, radiology itself consists of the preparation of reports on studies such as CT scans and x-rays, and as such, it is one more form of writing!

**Frontlist:** Where did you find the inspiration for writing such a topic for the children?

**Amit:** Literally, in my childhood home in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. My parents were moving out and putting the house up for sale, so it was one of my last visits there. I got this idea for a children's book at night while thinking about growing up in that house, and I sat down at the dining table after midnight and just started writing the first chapter. Scarcely ten minutes had passed between the idea and the execution. The other inspiration is my own wife, A. B. Majmudar, the author of a fantasy adventure for children called *The Torchbearers*, was released by Puffin India in 2020 and is going to be released in the United States shortly. I had never written for children before, but her example inspired me to think in that direction creatively since I saw how enthusiastic children can be as readers.

**Frontlist:** How did you come up with the concept that related birds with Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March?

**Amit:** As it happens, I have an intricately researched historical novel about Gandhi and Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) forthcoming in July 2022 with HarperCollins India. So Gandhi was very much in my mind. As for the sparrows, I am a big fan of Panchatantra-like or Aesopic fables and stories starring anthropomorphized animals, whether it's a Pixar or Disney movie or a novel like *Animal Farm*. Talking birds just felt right!

**Frontlist:** What is your favorite chapter from the book that is very close to your heart?

**Amit:** I think it's the first chapter of the novel. I retain this distinct memory of writing it in my childhood home, which has since been sold, and which I will never set foot in again. It makes me feel that this novel, my first for younger readers, is a goodbye gift from that house to me. The emotion I had as I began writing, this wonderment, this excitement—"Who are these sparrows? What kind of name is 'Thunderfluff', and why does it sound so right? Where is this story coming from? What is going to happen?"—it felt like I was transcribing something passively or receiving a gift. A gift from the house or from my own childhood.

**Frontlist:** How does your book resonate with the children?

**Amit:** Well, so far, from the feedback I've gotten, children enjoy the humor and the derring-do! Every reader will have his own reaction, different parts they like or don't like, but I can only hope that a book with action and adventure, a love story, a revolutionary spirit, and wit will have something for every taste.

**Frontlist:** How do the sparrows in this story represent a metaphor?

**Amit:** I think that the sparrows can be thought of as humble, seemingly powerless individuals capable of doing great things when they unite in a righteous cause.

**Frontlist:** In our minds, while reading the book, we think the sparrows can be associated with the weaker sections of the society while the Brahminy Kite is superior. Would we be correct in thinking so? If yes, how did you come about teaming them up for a common cause?

**Amit:** I think that is certainly one interpretation, particularly because Pandit Shiva, the kite, is so much larger and more powerful than the sparrows, but he does help them. That idea of presenting unity across bird species came from my research into Gandhian political efforts for my forthcoming historical novel about Partition, *The Map and the Scissors*. Consider how Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Gandhi himself, all came from different castes, and how, once they attained Independence, they asked the members of still another group, B. R. Ambedkar, to write India's Constitution. The Independence struggle, particularly under Gandhi's guidance, was a remarkably cross-caste endeavor for its era. That was one secret of its success.

**Frontlist:** This book mostly covers many deep and serious issues in a comical story. How did you manage the writing style?

**Amit:** I think that is the art of fiction for children. Consider the *Harry Potter* series or Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series. Both handle very deep and serious issues, but they do so in a way that children can enjoy reading. That is why grown-ups, too, can enjoy those books, and this one.

**Frontlist:** Are you planning to expand and write in different genres for children as well as you do for adults?

**Amit:** Absolutely. I plan to occasionally turn my hand to children's books, and I am writing one right now, in fact. It doesn't have talking animals in it, only humans, so in that sense, it marks a departure. Yet again, I just came up with it—I extemporized the story to my children during a long car ride, and they guffawed so hard that we all agreed I had to write it. I hope to depart in new ways, too, that I can't predict now. Serendipity seems key! I write a lot of poetry and mythology and fiction and nonfiction, so I stay busy, but I feel this is a branch of writing that's worth adding to my repertoire and exploring the possibilities.



### **"Towers of Silence"**

Berjis Desai

Berjis Desai, 64, lawyer and writer, studied at Cambridge and Bombay. A former journalist with Gujarat Daily, he retired as the Managing Partner of one of India's leading law firms.

He is the author of Oh! Those Parsis, and The Bawaji, both have received critical acclaim. Towers of Silence is his third book and the first fiction novel.

An ordained Zoroastrian priest, he is acknowledged as the authentic chronicler of Parsi culture. He is married and lives in Mumbai.

**Frontlist:** How can you describe Berjis Desai as a person in real life?

**Berjis:** I think I would describe myself more as a writer rather than as a lawyer. It has always been a dilemma for me which career to pursue. I certainly do not regret being a lawyer, and it has taught me a lot in life and the profession. Therefore, it would be ungrateful to say that, but my preference has always been for writing, and increasingly, I am devoting much of my time to my other activities and also substantially in writing.

**Frontlist:** 'Towers of Silence' is a fictional book that depicts the heritage of the Parsi Clan. How did you come up with the idea of writing down this book?

**Berjis:** We come from a town called Navsari in Gujarat, which is the most famous and important center for Parsi refugees who first came to India some 1300 years ago. Navsari is also the spiritual headquarters, the religious headquarters of the Parsis. I've spent almost all my school summer vacations with my grandmother there, and I heard stories from many of those who were then in their 80s and 90s. My novel is based on a real-life story, which happens in the life of a major Parsi clan in Navsari. And of course, it has been fictionalized in parts as any novel is, so that effectively is the backdrop against which this novel was written.

**Frontlist:** The previous books that you've written to date based on Parsi Heritage are non-fiction. This book would be your first attempt to write a fiction novel. How did you put together the real-life story with the blend of fiction?

**Berjis:** Well, it wasn't really a challenge because I had been writing short stories and other works of fiction for a variety of reasons. Since I was in the legal profession, I did not want to get them published. However, as we speak, there are two novels currently under process. It's not that I am writing fiction for the first time, but of course, the structuring and editing of the novel, organizing, connecting and coordinating it was more of an organized effort than writing fiction. Writing fiction comes rather easily to me.

**Frontlist:** Some research shows that the Parsi Population will be dwindling in the upcoming years. What should the Parsi clan do to preserve their culture as you're acknowledged as the authentic chronicler of Parsi Culture?

**Berjis:** We have reached a stage where there are only about 80,000 to 90,000 Parsis in the world. There are many Zoroastrians that are not Parsis racially or ethnically nevertheless follow the Zoroastrian religion. So possibly, there are something like 3 million Zoroastrians, but only about 80,000 to 90,000 Parsis left in the world. And the situation of demographic decline is very serious. We are almost staring at extinction. And unless a major miracle happens, there does not appear to be any easy solution. So, the government of India and UNESCO have started an effort in the last six or seven years called Jiyo Parsi, which by means of IVF and various other subsidized initiatives, they have managed to give birth to something like 600 additional Parsi babies in over five and a half, six years now. 600 may seem a small number in the context of India, but it is a huge, huge number in the context of Parsis, and there's some hope for that. While I believe that extinction may default and demographic decline, its acceleration may be faulted. But ultimately, over the next 100-150 years, whether we will survive even in any meaningful way is a question mark.

**Frontlist:** 'Is every little thing hopelessly preordained, and do we suffer from the illusion of decision making?' asked the antagonist in the story. What would you like to say in this context?

**Berjis:** I do think as a result of my experience and my learnings, and I do believe in this, that, however strange it sounds, we underestimate the extent to which things are preordained, at least the major things in life. And we do suffer from an illusion of decision-making in the sense that we believe that I did this, and I did that, and actually we do nothing. We are just instruments, and we are being used as instruments by whatever the cosmic forces are, and we just have to flow along with the process of life. So this feeling "I", "Ego", I don't think that makes any sense. And, the moment you realize that you're only an instrument, or a soul, which has been given the vehicles of the body and the mind to work out your karmic debt, and to learn whatever you have to learn in this incarnation, life will become much easier, and tolerable.

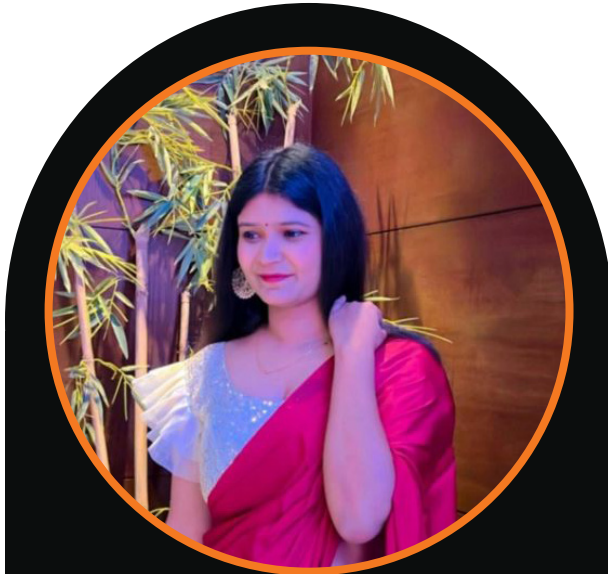
**Frontlist:** When did you find the Parsi Zoroastrian Guards Of The Holy Fire (PZGHF), and what is the vision of founding this public Religious Trust?

**Berjis:** About four years ago, that's a Trust essentially to protect heritage, very ancient fire temples, particularly in the city of Bombay and Thane, which is around nearly 50 temples are there, some of them as old as 300 years or 330 years, and several are in a state of disrepair. Several don't have funds because of the dwindling population, the footfall of the worshipers is hardly there, you have one or two worshipers during the day, then there is a lack of Zoroastrian priests to tend to the fire requires to be tended

24 hours a day. So there is nobody to tend to the fire. So now the laymen also are acting as Officiating priests. So all these issues exist, and properties are being lost because they are not properly taken care of and maintained. So, this idea of this Trust is to help as much as possible, to ensure that these things are protected. So, it's just now a small beginning, but we are expecting that in the next couple of years, this will grow into a substantial moment. So, it's more from a viewpoint of preserving heritage fire temples and to protect them from any external or internal forces, which will cause erosion or destruction.

**Frontlist:** It ought to be the dream of any author that their readers remember them for their distinctive thoughts and writings. What do your readers learn from your writings?

**Berjis:** I think my objective as a writer is, first and foremost, to entertain, and also to make readers think and become more aware of themselves because I believe that we often see very little what we don't see, which is all around us, and which is there for us to see to develop those insights. But the objective is essentially to entertain and to ensure that people become more compassionate, develop more humility, see the universality of life that essentially is the object of these writings.



### ***"Seeking Death – A Boon With A Curse"***

Mini Bhardwaj

Mini Bhardwaj is a 27-year-old girl who hails from Delhi and works in Mumbai as a publicist. She has completed her graduation from Delhi University and also holds a degree in Master of Journalism and Mass Communication.

'Seeking Death – A Boon With A Curse' is Mini's debut novel that is inspired by her journey.

**Frontlist:** "His pain, his suffering, could all this be true? Could immortality be a curse?" What would you like to say in the context of the quote?

**Mini:** We grew up listening to stories that to achieve immortality, people had reached the extent. Amrit Manthan is one of the famous amongst them. But what if a man has this boon, but actually, it's not. Ashwatthama is one of the main characters of Mahabharata. He is the man who has a curse of immortality. He is seeking death every day as per our Mahabharata tales. For us (humans), immortality is a boon, but for him, it is a boon with a curse.

**Frontlist:** Why do you think the manner of showing devotion towards God has changed in today's generation?

**Mini:** There was a time when worshipping God is a part of devotion and meditation, and because of that, we heard in stories God paid them visits easily, which we term as darshan. But in today's time, people have even forgotten that. There is a lack of spiritual knowledge and devotion that it doesn't happen these days. People are more of bribing God by prasad or other things rather than having devotion, and this is the reason that people of these days are not connected with the higher self- GOD.

**Frontlist:** How is the pain and suffering of Ashwatthama alive in Kalyug?

**Mini:** Ashwatthama was cursed for killing the Upapandavas (five sons of Draupadi) and changing the direction of Brahmastra into Uttara's womb with having an intention to kill Parikshita. But these days, it's a normal thing. Like, abortion is a normal thing these days. It was a lesson for us to not to commit this crime, but we Kalyug people don't even care about it much. People have there certain reasons to do but, in the end, it's a crime and not just a crime, it's a sin, and Ashwatthama is the best example of it.

**Frontlist:** 'Spiritual enlightenment' and 'Idol worship', how do you describe it?

**Mini:** I think both are connected. I believe in energy. We all are one energy. All you have to believe in that doesn't matter if it is in Spiritual form or idol worshipping. I do both! Idols represent the energy of the higher self.

**Frontlist:** Share some glimpses of the truth about the death of the great warrior of Mahabharata, Ashwatthama.

**Mini:** Well, it completely depends on your beliefs. People who have faith in God believe that God exists, but an atheist thinks God doesn't exist. I think readers should read my book if they really want to know about the death of Ashwatthama. But I will say this for sure that there is always an essence of reality in every rumor.

**Frontlist:** Positive, negative, and shades of grey. How do you look at Ashwatthama?

**Mini:** In my childhood days, when I used to hear the stories of Mahabharata, Ashwatthama was having a negative image, but still, there was some kind of attachment for him. But when I started doing research on him, my perspective towards him really got changed as we judge him for what he did, but what about us. We are also doing the same thing. As I said, abortion is common these days. This very single thought made me realise that he is not negative. He is suffering for what he did. He is so powerful as he is handling the curse of immortality. He has the power and courage to handle that, which makes him more and more powerful.

**Frontlist:** What learnings should one derive from the life and story of Ashwatthama?

**Mini:** There are so many. If we dig into his wife, we saw miserable pain, loneliness for eternity, greediness. So we should learn from his mistakes, and we should take a step ahead for making our society better and better every time.



**FRONT LIST**

*Organises*



**pragati  
vichaar**

World Book &  
Copyright Day

**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2022**



*Stay tuned*  
**WITH US!**



## INSIDE STORY

# Tata Trusts' Parag Initiative Announces Parag Honours List 2022

*The annual list features the best books for children and young adults published in the past one year across Hindi and English in an effort to promote good quality children's literature in India*

**India, February 8, 2022:** Parag Initiative of Tata Trusts today announced the 3rd edition of the Parag Honour List for the year 2022. This robust list features a wide range of original writings across categories like picture books, chapter books, and young adult books. With a focus on curating a comprehensive collection of remarkable literature in English and in Hindi, the list aims to promote access to good quality children's literature that librarians, teachers, parents and children can refer to and read.

### HINDI BOOKS FEATURED IN THE PARAG HONOUR LIST 2022

BOOKS ▼	AUTHOR ▼	PUBLISHER ▼
Lightning	Prabhat	Jugnoo Prakashan
Betiyaan bhi chahein Azaadi	Kamla Bhasin	Pratham Books
Machhali Nadi Kholke Baithi	Sushil Shukla	Eklavya
Ye Sara Ujala Suraj Ka	Sushil Shukla	Eklavya
Basti mein Baadh	Maya Yadavan, Neha Patel, Tinam Nishad, Pooja Singh	Shaheed Schoo
Bees Kachodi Poodhi Tees	Shriprasad	Jugnoo Prakashan

Kerala ke Kele	Prayag Shukla	Jugnoo Prakashan
Ek Kahani	Vinod Kumar Shukla	Jugnoo Prakashan
Gyarah Rupaya ka Fountain Pen	Amit Datta	Jugnoo Prakashan

## HINDI BOOKS FEATURED IN THE PARAG HONOUR LIST 2022

BOOKS ▼	AUTHOR ▼	PUBLISHER ▼
Animal Alphabet	Manjula Padmanabhan	Jugnoo Prakashan
Asamo, is that You?	Canato Jimo and Ogin Nayam	Pratham Books
How I Feel	Varsha Seshan	Pratham Books
Ikru's First Day of School	Sunaina Coehlo	Pratham Books
Jamlo Walks	Samina Mishra	Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India
Our World Hamari Duniya	Sandhya Rao	Jugnoo Prakashan
Sometimes Mama, Sometimes Papa	Nandini Nayar	Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India
The Grand Chapati Contest	Asha Nehemiah	Duckbill, Penguin Random House India

This is Where We Live	Manjari Chakravarti	Pratham Books
Tiger, Tiger, Where Are You?	Mujahid Khan	Pratham Books
When Adil Speaks, Words Dance	Lavanya Karthik	Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India
Who's Next?	Mini Shrinivasan	Eklavya
Home	Author Fausto Aarya De Santis	Pratham Books
Coming Home	Priti David	Karadi Tales in partnership with PARI
Kashmir! Kashmir!	Deepa Agarwal	Scholastic India
My Name is Gulab	Sagar Kolwankar	Tulika Publishers
No Nonsense Nandhini	Aparna Karthikeyan	Karadi Tales in partnership with PARI
Noon Chai and a Story	Adithi Rao	Tulika Publishers
That Night	Bijal Vachharajani	Pratham Books
Have You Met the Parsis?	Anastasia Damani	Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India
Hop On: My Adventures on Boats, Trains and Planes	Ruskin Bond	Talking Cub, Speaking Tiger Books
Nature Society Series - Maharashtra, Odisha, Lakshadweep and Rajasthan	Yemuna Sunny	Eklavya



The Boy Who Played with Light - Satyajit Ray	Lavanya Karthik	Duckbill, Penguin Random House India
The Grass Seeker	Uddalak Gupta	Pratham Books
The Secret World of Mehlii Gobhai: The Man Who Found Art Everywhere	Jerry Pinto	Pratham Books
Bena's Summer	Shibal Bhartiya	HarperCollins Publishers India
Strong as Fire, Fierce as Flame	Supriya Kelkar	Scholastic India
The Blue Horse and Other Amazing Animals from Indian History	Nandini Sengupta	Hachette India
The Teenage Diary of Abbakka - The Warrior Queen of South India	Kavitha Mandana	Talking Cub, Speaking Tiger Books
10 Indian Heroes Who Help People Live with Dignity	Somak Ghosal	Duckbill, Penguin Random House India
A Germ of an Idea	Charudatta Navare	Eklavya
Noon Chai and a Story	Adithi Rao	Tulika Publishers
Gods, Giants and the Geography of India	Nalini Ramachandran	Hachette India
How to be a Writer	Ruskin Bond	HarperCollins Publishers India
Postbox Kashmir: Two Lives in Letters	Divya Arya	Duckbill, Penguin Random House India
Queen of Fire	Devika Rangachari	Duckbill, Penguin Random House India

# SPOTLIGHT SESSION

FRONT LIST

## SPOTLIGHT SESSION

on the topic

*"Author- A Profession Of Creativity"*

Featuring



Aparnaa Jadhav



Gaurav Gupta



Pooja Misra

Timings : 25th February, 3:00 PM

*Don't Miss out on this Interesting Session*

This month's "Spotlight Session" had three speakers Aparnaa Jadhav, Pooja Misra, and Gaurav Gupta. The fascinating theme of the session which needs to be discussed was 'Author- A Profession Of Creativity'.

The key reason to choose this theme was to get insights from authors on creative satisfaction, profession, material success, and storytelling.

It was indeed an informative and insightful session with lots of laughter and joyful chatter.

**Here are some key points from the discussion between the panelists in the session:**

- The panelists described what creativity is all about to the authors.
- Few authors discussed how creativity comes naturally to people.
- Creativity is the utmost important part while writing something irrespective of whatever the trend is going on.
- The panelists gave some interesting tips and tricks to all the budding writers out there.
- All the authors poured some fascinating tips to become a good storyteller.
- Creativity vs. Material Success? What should we choose at the end of the day?

**47, Frontlist Magazine – March Edition**

## INSTAGRAM LIVE

**FRONT LIST**

Catch Your Favourite Author on

**INSTAGRAM  
LIVE**

**GAURAV GUPTA**  
AUTHOR

February 4, 2022 | 6:00 PM

**LIVE**

Like every Friday, we had the opportunity to talk to Dr. Gaurav Gupta in our Instagram live.

We discussed about him, his book, which is called "Cyber Unsafe: A Handbook for Preventing Computer Frauds and Cyber Crimes".

Gaurav Gupta is the first Indian to earn a Doctorate in Digital Forensics. He was bestowed with the Young Scientist Award of the Indian Science Congress in 2010 by Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Gaurav is on a mission to create awareness about technological frauds in society. He guided us on how to become cyber safe and further enlightened us on the topic 'Cyber Safety'.

We got to know some of the unknown facts about him at the end of the session.

## FACEBOOK LIVE

**FRONT LIST**

Facebook Live



**Aftab Yusuf  
Shaikh**

11 FEBRUARY | 6 : 00 PM

We came up with yet another live session, but this time on Facebook in the second week of February with Aftab Yusuf Shaikh, a true poet who talked about his experience, his work in poetry, and compared today's poetry on social media with traditional poetry.

Mohammed Aftab Yusuf Shaikh is a poet, writer, and teacher based in Mumbai. His writing has been published in a large number of anthologies and journals. He has also published five collections of poetry, the most recent being Tehzeeb Talkies and a novel, The Library Girl. Aftab has always had a strong connection with Delhi and its history - he believes that every part of the city tells the stories of thousands of people and that its many layers will always intrigue and excite him.

It was such a soothing session with lots of insightful awareness.

## FACEBOOK LIVE

**FRONT LIST**

Facebook Live

A portrait of Sahaj Sabharwal, a young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue jacket. A small Facebook LIVE icon is in the top right corner of the image.

**Sahaj Sabharwal**

We had a Facebook live session with a talented young author and poet, Mr. Sahaj Sabharwal, on 18th February 2022.

Sahaj Sabharwal is an accomplished writer, a poet and also has many talents.

He had been honoured with many awards for poetry writing at the State level, National level, and International level. He mostly writes motivational thoughts, and on topics related to social issues for spreading awareness among the people. His writings are regularly published in many newspapers, magazines, websites, anthologies, and other media platforms.

We got to know more about him, and his fascinating thoughts through this live session.

## FACEBOOK LIVE

**FRONT LIST**

Facebook Live

A portrait of Rekha Mehra, a woman with short grey hair, wearing a colorful floral patterned jacket. She is holding a book. A small Facebook LIVE icon is in the top right corner of the image.

**Rekha Mehra**

We had an interactive Facebook live session on 25th February at 6 pm with Rekha Mehra.

Rekha Mehra's *Zindagi Teri Dhoop Chaon* is her first book of poetry. She comes from a Punjabi Arya Samaj family, and her parents fled to Lahore amid the turbulent Partition. The Mumbai-based poet was born in Banaras or Kashi, the oldest living city in the world.

It was an interesting session with lots of beautiful discussions.



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