

FRONTLIST

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Celebrating the soul of the books and the minds of their creators.
Reader's first choice for the publisher's insights and literature happenings.

Join us from 9th - 14th January, 2023



PVLF

Pragati Vichaar

LITERATURE
FESTIVAL 2023

9th-14th Jan

FEATURING 'Exclusive Joy of Reading'

Learn from the best India's publishing has to offer!



WELCOME MESSAGE

Hi Readers,

Hope you all are enjoying the Frontlist Magazine!

Summer vacation has kicked off and it is the perfect time for the children to explore the literary world. In order to promote reading development, we have featured interviews from Publishing Industry professionals. Publishers who have collaborated with us have praised our magazine for inculcating the significance of reading among young generations.

Alongside these wonderful developments, Frontlist is also very proud to share the words of Mr Pranav Gupta, Founder of the Frontlist Media who was one of the key speakers at the WIPO SCCR Summit. He represented India and addressed the Publishing Industry's issues at an international level.

With accelerated enthusiasm, we would also like to announce the PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023 that will take place from 9th-14th January 2023. Its first rendition, PVLF 2022, had garnered a lot of appreciation from across the Globe, with a 24-hour Author's Marathon with 48 authors and 400K+ views.

This year, we are expecting a myriad of responses from everyone as PVLF Excellence Awards will be organised in Hindi Language as well. The Awards registrations will open soon so stay tuned for information soon and help us grow by spreading the word.

We now stand on the success of PVLF 2022 and it is our wish to make PVLF 2023 better at realizing our dream of creating a safe haven for all authors and books where they can express their views without fear or bias.

On the occasion of Hindi Diwas, we will also be coming up with an event to honor Hindi Literature and showing solidarity with Hindi Language where we will feature Hindi Publishers.

It has been a thrilling experience for us to organize such events that lay a common ground for Publishing Landscape. Thank you for accepting us at each and every level and assisting us to introduce new opportunities in the Literary space.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to all Literary members for providing the unfaltering support to transform our ideas into reality.

Write to me: navita@frontlist.in

Navita Berry
Business Head

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 New Delhi - 110002, India
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EXCLUSIVE JOY OF

Reading





ARPITA DAS

Founder-Publisher,
YODA PRESS

Arpita Das is the Founder-Publisher of the award-winning independent publishing house based in New Delhi called Yoda Press. She is a Visiting Faculty and Senior Writing Fellow at Ashoka University, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of PubliHer (womeninpublishing.org). Arpita is also the South Asia Series Editor at Melbourne University Publishing.

Frontlist: Yoda Press has been known for its blatant queer rights representation. How did you attract readers, particularly in the sexuality and popular culture genres?

Arpita: Social media promotions of our books help in this matter; we also get a lot of interest from columnists, bookstagrammers, and book editors for these books; but ultimately, these are books that have a loyal and avid readership, to begin with, and a lot of promotion happens via word of mouth for these lists.

Frontlist: How can we promote holistic reading development among young readers?

Arpita: Community libraries are a huge part of my answer to such a question, as are the neighbourhood libraries of our childhood. The idea is to not just inculcate a solitary reading habit but also discussions around books, i.e., book culture, right from the time when one is very young. Books and book culture are powerful and travel a lot via osmosis—just by being around, they exert an irresistible pull.

The second thing I would say is that the focus should also be on any kind of reading - as long as kids are reading and absorbing knowledge, which is making them do some critical thinking, whether it is on a screen, eBook, audiobook, listening to a podcast or whatever, it's fine. We cannot be rigid about the media anymore.

Frontlist: Parents are very selective when it comes to exposing their kids to content consumption. As a publisher, what initiatives should be adopted to build reading habits among children despite such challenges?

Arpita: As I said earlier, reading and discussions with a focus on critical thinking, spaces such as reading rooms and community libraries, even online spaces of the same sort, all of this would help make kids feel they can read whatever they like.

Frontlist: Books will never cease to be published, but the readership might fluctuate. How can we increase the readership across all genres to maintain the ratio of book publishing and readership?

Arpita: We need to be more flexible in how we perceive our readership and more open in terms of the media in which we make reading available. Also, convergence across media always helps garner attention for the books involved—movies, shows, podcasts, games, and apps.

Frontlist: Yoda Press has collaborated with publishing houses to bring more innovative books. How have these collaborations influenced the publishing ecosystem to create a holistic reading experience?

Arpita: I shall just speak about one genre, which we have published mostly ourselves, but now with Simon & Schuster also—our graphic books. The idea behind our graphic books is to tell a story in another genre, more vividly, more edgily, and to draw in another generation of readers. For instance, our most recent graphic book is a biography of the great Bhagat Singh, authored by a super talented artist and writer, Ikroop Sandhu.

Frontlist: Among all your working years, what change have you seen in the reading habits among all age groups?

Arpita: I keep hearing there are more distractions for young people now, but I don't buy that. When we were young, there was the TV and Radio, and our parents even considered Comics a distraction! Later there was Satellite TV. Every era has had different media, and books/reading has always been one of them. That is what we must focus on—books and reading have always been there. It might help, therefore, to stop being negative all the time, appreciate this fact and celebrate it more. These days, kids who are reading printed books are reading thicker books than ever before—look at the size of those Harry Potters, etc.! Kids these days are genre-agnostic, particularly Gen Alpha, the really young ones, and it would help for us to really move in step with that wonderful attribute of theirs.

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PIYUSH KUMAR

Director, Prabhat Prakashan

Piyush Kumar completed his Senior Secondary Education in Commerce at Bhagat Singh College, Delhi University. He completed his MBA from Delhi University with a Major in Marketing. He was selected as a Management Trainee by German MNC Siemens Ltd. in campus recruitment immediately after completing his MBA. He worked in the Projects Division for 2.5 years before quitting his job to join his family business, publishing. In conjunction, he completed his 3-year LLB from Agra University.

Presently, he heads the Prabhat Group (incorporating Prabhat Prakashan, Ocean Books (P) Ltd., and Prabhat Paperbacks). One of the leading publishing houses in India is Prabhat Prakashan. He has incorporated yet another imprint, Prabhat Paperbacks, which has published over twelve hundred books—the motto being 'Books for All'.

Piyush Kumar has been a pioneer in publishing quality English trade books for the Indian masses. In a short span of only 10 years, they have published over 600 books in the English language.

With ebooks getting immensely popular, Prabhat Prakashan has become the first Indian publisher to generate over 9000 ebooks on Kindle, selling over 1000 books every day.

Frontlist: It's been 63 years since Prabhat Prakashan has stood firmly in the publishing industry. Within these years, how has your publishing house contributed to developing reading habits among readers?

Piyush: It's great that we are in our 63rd year of publishing and growing each day by leaps and bounds. We started our paperback

division in the year 2002. In the last 20 years, we have published over 1200 top-class bestsellers in Hindi at a very affordable price. Readers are getting international bestsellers at a very affordable price.

Also, we have been publishing a Hindi literary magazine, "Sahitya Amrit", for the past 25 years with an avid circulation of over 10,000 copies, and this magazine is a super hit in the Hindi belt.

Frontlist: Hindi literature is losing its essence due to the English language. How can we encourage young readers to read more Hindi language books?

Piyush: No, Hindi literature is not losing its essence. We are selling books in huge quantities. Hindi is rising every day, still, we are doing lots of promotions offline and online and by more promotional activities at the primary school level for reading books in Hindi.

Frontlist: If we evaluate the ratio of Hindi children's books and English children's books, which language is more preferred by young readers and why?

Piyush: Among the young readers, English is preferred. It's up to the parents to develop reading habits in the Hindi language for them because of the pressure from society, and it has become fashionable for parents to force children to read books in English.

Frontlist: How important is it to develop Hindi reading habits among school-going children?

Piyush: It is critical to read in your mother tongue and national language, as only our mother tongue can provide new ideas to young readers.

Frontlist: Digitalization has multiplied the ways of content consumption. How has Prabhat Prakashan been adapting to this new change and running in the same race as other publishing houses?

Piyush: Unique things are happening in publishing today. We are publishing two new books each day. Our sales funnel is robust and is working at its best. We are blessed to have a great digital team, and we are happy to inform you that we have over 10,000 Kindle Books and have sold over 500 audiobook rights to different audio platforms.

Frontlist: Reading can be tedious sometimes, and that's why readers try different formats. How can we make physical books more interesting to enhance the joy of reading?

Piyush: 3D graphics in new software can enable us to produce more inter-city books where there is more engagement amongst the kids. Neither the physical books face any threat nor the digital books can replace them. We are also experimenting by publishing newer ways of publishing children's books.

Contact us for Event Collaborations

Email id: info@frontlist.in



ANKUR PATHAK

Director & Chief Operating
Officer, Garuda Prakashan

Ankur Pathak is the Co-founder and COO of Garuda Prakashan. He is an author also. His book series Vocab Made Easy Volume 1 and Volume 2 is quite popular among students. He has delivered guest lectures in various institutes of national importance, like IIT Kanpur, IIT Bombay, IIT Patna, etc. He is a columnist also. He has authored several articles in English and Hindi, which have been published on various online portals.

He is a practitioner and trainer of Yoga and Meditation. He has delivered an expert lecture at Banaras Hindu University under Faculty Development Programme.

Frontlist: There are several books based on Culture and Politics, illustrated blandly and failed to capture the attention of today's generation. What approach should we need to adopt to urge them to read such books?

Ankur: Thanks to social media, these days, the youth is taking a keen interest in Culture and Politics. They want to know the truth. They wish to understand politics through unbiased and authentic sources. They try to understand culture through the scientific basis behind it. The younger generation sees things logically. Their attention should be grabbed with such content which is unbiased, authentic, factual, and logical.

Frontlist: Ever since the Pandemic knocked into our lives, the reading consumption pattern has altered too. Some prefer audiobooks or other printed ones. How can we promote the reading habits within young minds for their holistic development?

Ankur: Everyone wants success and growth in his life. Knowledge is the key to success and growth. Reading habits help us in gaining knowledge of almost everything around us. Hence, essential for

our growth. We just have to communicate this benefit to young minds. We need to catch them where they are, like on Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, etc.

Frontlist: Millennials are more likely to read international authors. How can we shift their reading interest to read books by Indian Authors?

Ankur: Simply, by providing them high-quality content. So many books of Garuda Prakashan, like Saffron Swords, A Brief History of Science in India, etc., are popular amongst millennials. In today's world, content is the king.

Frontlist: It's been years since you've been working in this industry, and Garuda Prakashan has its special place here. How can we increase readership between the genres of Fiction and Non-fiction books? Answer on account of your first-hand experience.

Ankur: As I have mentioned earlier, focus on the good, authentic, unbiased, fact-based content, and you will start getting results. People want to know the true history of India. If you provide them with what they want with good intent, they will not leave you for sure.

Frontlist: Penetration of digital books has increased among children over the past two years, which has led to a rise in reading habits. What type of initiatives is Garuda Prakashan planning to bring change in their reading development?

Ankur: For children, we have brought out high-quality books with colored graphics. There is a book named Kid's Stories. It is an adaptation of Hindi writer Shri Siyaram Sharan Gupta. By converting it into a picture book, we made it interesting for children who otherwise might not be interested in the plain text moral stories.

Frontlist: How can we create a fun reading milieu among new readers to expand their literary progress?

Ankur: Schools can play an important role in it. They can make small reading groups where children can read books together, and they can plan some activities around those books. Some prizes can be given to proactive readers.

Frontlist: Our young generation needs to be more aware of their Indian Culture. As the Co-founder of Garuda Prakashan, what advice would you like to give to the modern readers for inculcating cultural ideologies among them?

Ankur: My advice is before making any opinion, negative or positive, one should do a thorough reading of the subject. It is the knowledge that ultimately makes us free, be it prejudices or biases. Always be a seeker and stay away from false propaganda.

Frontlist: As a valuable contributor to the Publishing industry, what needs to be changed to develop a reading culture that has been altered due to digitalisation?

Ankur: People should be made aware of the harmful effects of their increased screen time on mobile phones, computers, or television. It will help them in allocating their time to different activities, including reading.



AJAY MAGO

Publisher,
Om Books International

Armed with an MBA from UCLA and a home-induced flair for the book trade, Ajay Mago, Publisher, Om Books International, started the Publishing Division of an over-50-year-old book retailing outfit, Om Book Shop, in 1997, alongside a strategically planned expansion on the retail front. Ajay was instrumental in shaping Om Books International, which is today known for its wide range of books that it publishes with the finest authors from India and abroad. Due to his extraordinary business skills, OBI has been able to establish an international distribution network in the UK, the US, the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Germany, France, and Spain. While under his guidance, the retail venture, Om Book Shop, has made its presence felt in Delhi, Gurgaon, NOIDA, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, with other innovative trade-related moves on the anvil, Ajay wishes to further accelerate the growth and expand the retail venture all across.

Frontlist: Being one of the largest English-language trade publishers, have you ever considered applying the same level of significance to other languages?

Ajay: All languages are significant to us. Our efforts towards this consist of constant efforts to explore language rights sales of the books we publish in English. And this includes not just Indian languages but also foreign ones. The dynamics of local-language publishing are quite different, with distribution and pricing a major challenge. Also, good translators and editors are difficult to source.

Frontlist: Which genre has gained prominence over the last few years, and how has it influenced the reading habits of people?

Ajay: It's very difficult to say which genre works best when.

Certain genres have a continued level of audience engagement, for example, business books and motivational self-help books. People tend to look for inspiration from stories from real life. Mythologies have been popular, but I think everyone is doing too much of this. It is reaching saturation. And the quality of commercial mass-market fiction is too mediocre, though there are a lot of people who read these. I think the reading public is not too keen on good, literary works; they prefer simplistic books in the MBS space—or maybe publishing houses are not investing enough in this segment.

Frontlist: Many workshops are being organised for writing these days, but none for improving reading skills. Could you please discuss some ways to bring out the joy of reading among the younger generation?

Ajay: I am not even sure if reading skills can be improved through workshops. Even these writing workshops are a fad. Reading and writing are intensely private exercises. How can a group of people get together and develop reading habits? We live in an era where social media and marketing exercises dictate everything. It is for teachers and parents to introduce the habit of reading to youngsters. Like writing improves with practice, the habit of reading too has to be developed through constant reinforcement. No workshops help.

Frontlist: The evolution of digital media has broadened the availability of content for consumers. How does it affect the growth of physical books?

Ajay: The attention span of people has shortened. Anything over a screen page is likely to be scrolled past. But the true book lover will always go for the physical book. Also, content on digital media is too scattered and unreliable. So, physical books do provide that sense of being forever. People still love that experience of browsing books at book shops—nothing can replicate that feeling of smelling a new book and holding it in your hands.

Frontlist: What approaches should be taken by parents to develop reading habits in their children at an early age?

Ajay: Introduce them to books early on. Keep them away from the mobile and TV. Read aloud to them every night in the early years. Give them a sense of the world of books. Make them want to read, not to learn or prepare for exams, but to savour the experience of reading.

Frontlist: Edtech has changed the way people learn. Which way is more effective to encourage reading among young people: physical books or e-books? Please share your experience.

Ajay: The constraints of space have made ebooks popular, but nothing beats actual physical learning. The pandemic has shown us that. The issues teachers and students have faced with online classes and teaching has shown that nothing quite matches the actual physical experience of face-to-face learning with physical books. Technology can be an aid, but it cannot replace the physical experience.





UDAYAN MITRA & TINA NARANG

HarperCollins India

Udayan Mitra

Udayan Mitra is Executive Publisher at HarperCollins India. He has been an editor and publisher with leading publishing houses in India for over two decades.

Tina Narang

Tina Narang is the Children's Publisher at HarperCollins India, where she launched the children's imprint, HarperCollins Children's Books, in 2017. Before HarperCollins, Tina was with Scholastic India from 2005-17.

Frontlist: Ever since HarperCollins Children's Books Imprint launched, what changes have you reckoned in terms of promoting reading habits among children?

Udayan and Tina: It has been an exciting time since the imprint was launched. The children's segment has seen remarkable growth over the last decade, and if the current pace is any indication, it is likely to accelerate even further. It has, therefore, been the perfect time for children's publishers to grow their business as there is a growing acceptance of locally produced books.

What makes children's publishing even more vibrant and delightful is the variety of formats, genres, and styles - one of the key features of our children's publishing list from pre-primary to young adults, from picture books to illustrated chapter books, fiction, non-fiction, activity books, biographies, and more. Books that we hope kids will enjoy reading as much as we have enjoyed putting them together.

Time and again surveys have revealed that children like to read what they pick themselves. Libraries are the spaces that best demonstrate that. Kids pick up what they like without being prompted by a parent or an educator and choose what they are inclined to read.

Besides giving children a choice through a variety of products, we have also aimed to reach out to the reader through author and illustrator sessions and interactions in schools and elsewhere. Post-pandemic, these sessions have been conducted very effectively online. We believe getting kids to interact with authors will help them engage with the content and motivate them to read their books.

Book consumption surged by a whole mile during the last two years, and both surprised and delighted publishers across the board. This trend was perceptible across age groups, so adults were buying more books and reading more, and parents of young children and middle graders were seeking out books and buying them much more actively.

So yes, it is an exciting time for children's publishing, but the challenge is not so much creating books as creating readers. We have to continue to find new ways to engage young readers as the future of children's publishing lies as much in their hands as a determinant of what they will read as it does in the hands of the publishers publishing the books. And going forward, it is this synergy that will provide this industry with a truly vibrant nature.

Frontlist: If we evaluate the content consumption behaviour of the young generation, in your opinion, what kind of content attracts them?

Udayan and Tina: Children today are wired to a hundred different distractions, sometimes all at once. So, we have to find ways to engage this impatient and on-the-move generation with content that catches their eye and keeps them interested enough to turn the pages.

For pre-primary and younger kids, where most parents choose the books, popular formats include picture books, chapter books, and activity books. It's interesting to see that books for young readers are exploring new subjects.

There are also more chapter books being published now than before, providing a useful bridge for early readers between the simpler vocabulary and sentence structure of picture books to the more advanced narratives of middle graders. As surveys and bestseller lists reveal, humour is one of the most popular genres for children. Kids like books that make them laugh, from Roald Dahl to Geronimo, David Walliams' books, and much more. Another significant trend for publishers over the last couple of decades has been the series factor seen in the popularity of the Wimpy Kid, Percy Jackson, Goosebumps, and other such series that have sustained over the years. Another winning trend has been the diary format, from Adrian Mole, Wimpy Kid, and Tom Gates to Amos Lee and several others. The comic book and graphic novel are popular formats too. It also works well for kids who are not readers or struggle to read books with vast bodies of text.

Non-fiction has perhaps undergone the most revolutionary changes of all the genres, from a dull and formulaic approach to a more perceptive approach and more engaging and visual formats. The books are well-researched, organised into well-defined segments, and supplemented with the source material, bibliographies, and relevant graphics. Children find these image-rich books with smaller nuggets of information easier to engage. 'Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls' sparked off a global trend, including biographies that are a mix of powerful visuals and crisp, concise text. There is also growing popularity of narrative non-fiction: authors and illustrators are representing text in different ways, such as mixing fiction and non-fiction, mixing science fiction and history, or using multiple narrators and perspectives.

There is also a greater acceptance and willingness to try new formats such as books with augmented reality, audio formats, and books that involve an engagement online in addition to the print version, such as game books.

Finally, the reading preferences of young adults who are social media savvy and quickly tap into global trends to seek international bestsellers. They make reading choices based on personal taste and preference and consume a variety of genres. But this is also a segment in which themes trend for a while and then slip away to the background like the vampires did or sick lit. It is the most challenging yet exciting segment to publish.

Frontlist: What problems do all parents face when it comes to building reading habits in their children?

Udayan and Tina: Parents face several challenges when they set out to build reading habits in their children. What should my child read? Where to start, and what is the best time to start? While there are no hard and fast rules, there is no denying the fact that to create readers, it is best to start young. And a home that has reading material readily available and where parents read aloud to their kids from when they are very young is sure to set their children on a path of a lifetime of reading. For parents and educators, a useful place to find the best books for their children is the curated reading lists such as the 100 Best Books for Children, the 101 Children's Books We Love! and other useful guides to good books, also easily accessible online. Following the recommendations of popular bloggers and bookstagrammers is also useful and popular.

Another way to build a bond between books and children is to let them participate in the selection of the books they'd like to read. And to also find new reading experiences for children through new formats or to explore different kinds of learning experiences in the form of activities, play materials, science experiments, botanical explorations, etc. When their minds open up to the immense and rich world of discovery that lies outside the pages of a book, they will be ready to read and discover more within its pages too.

Parents also need to be cognizant of the fact that a lot of what children like to read is peer-driven. A book, a series, or a character will trend very quickly at school, in a classroom, or on a bus, and every child will aspire to read it out of interest, curiosity, or both. So it's good to keep track of these parallel reading trends.

Parents can also build on what interests their children. For a majority of children, seeing a book about something familiar – something that reflects their life experience – is all it takes to get them excited about reading.

Parents and educators can also interest children in reading and engaging with learning-based content by offering books that are infotainment – a mix of information and entertainment, content that doesn't just educate but entertains as well. Starting with educational picture books that are a mix of fiction and non-fiction, to storytelling to teaching academic subjects to make the learning of history engaging and interesting. For example, Anne Frank's 'Diary of a Young Girl' which can be used effectively to teach both social studies and history, or Malala Yousufzai's 'I Am Malala', which captures the atmosphere of a militancy-affected nation.

While all parents and educators are aware that strong reading skills are critical to a child's success in school, it is also true that kids will not simply take to reading just because they are told to. They need stronger motivation than that, and that's where the parent's role is critical – in providing books and creating a reading environment conducive to developing the reading habit and wherever possible to be effective role models too by reading themselves!

Frontlist: Being a leading publishing house in India, what

approaches can we apply to promote holistic reading development among readers?

Udayan and Tina: I would say one of the things that we must try to encourage – apart from the obvious desire that more people should read and that everyone should read more – is that all of us should talk about books as much as we can. Back in the days before social media, word of mouth was the most important platform for spreading information about books and sharing thoughts on the joy of reading a book. Social media and the various communication networks available to us now enable us to talk to each other much more frequently and much more easily – but outside certain readers'/publishers' groups, we don't talk much about books, do we? More conversations about books – and reading and writing – would certainly pull us together as a community, which is what we certainly are. As a publisher, one of the few heartening things for me in the pandemic years was the realisation that in the face of so much becoming uncertain, so many of us turned back to books, reading, and writing. This is a habit we must not let go of.

Frontlist: How has Digital Revolution influenced the readership among fiction and non-fiction books?

Udayan and Tina: For me, the most obvious benefit of having books available as digital editions is their easy accessibility and portability. You can store hundreds of books on one device and thousands more on the cloud, carry an entire library with you anywhere and download a new book at the click of a button from anywhere. This simply makes it easier to read – gone are the days when some bibliophiles would need to plan their packing around the number of hefty volumes they would carry with them for a week's holiday, leaving little space in the bag for other 'essentials'...

I feel there is a larger impact to this as well – it is easier than ever to carry a long book with you and read it in your good time; I would argue that this doesn't discourage us from picking up long books, and consequently, doesn't discourage writers from writing long books either. This is a positive sign for the future of long-form narrative – a tradition that has been around for centuries. One of the aspects of the digital age is that it supports short form content and its consumption – but interesting, it enables long form narratives as well!

Frontlist: The growth of digital media has increased the amount of content available to users. What impact does this have on the growth of physical books?

Udayan and Tina: At least where the Indian market is concerned, the growth we've seen in ebooks and current interest in audio books hasn't meant a decline in physical book sales. There are multiple ways of encountering and engaging with a book that is now available to readers, and I feel that they coexist nicely. One can argue that books do have to compete against the audiovisual media that has gained strength in the digital age: but my view is that the human sensibility is fascinated by stories, in whatever form we might encounter these, and stories pull us to books just as they do to films or OTT series – to my mind these are not necessarily competing platforms but complementary modes of encounter. Many books today lend themselves to film or OTT series just as they become ebooks and audiobooks – I think we are offering a reader/viewer a multiplicity of options to read/see/hear a story.

Frontlist: How significant is it to create a literary milieu to spread the joy of reading?

Udayan and Tina: I think it's extremely important. Both writing and reading are activities largely conducted in isolation – but books build a strong community among readers, writers, and everyone else who is part of the publishing industry, as few other things can.

When we've read a good book, we all feel the urge to share that joy of discovery and fulfilment with others; more conversations among ourselves about books can help strengthen the literary community that we belong to and also expand it manifold.



ARUP BOSE

Publisher, Srishti Publishers & Distributors

Born and brought up in Delhi, Arup's association with books and publishing has been since childhood. After working as a Risk Consultant and Mitigation expert for a leading insurer, he decided to hang up his boots and enter the world of publishing. The shift was a logical extension of his love of books and familial ties to the publishing industry. An MBA by education, he currently looks after the day-to-day operations at Srishti Publishers while driving the growth by diversifying into new genres and entering unexplored markets.

Arup is a prolific speaker and has spoken at various colleges, Lit-fests, and other events. He is a voracious reader and spends his free time reading books, listening to music, and mentoring upcoming entrepreneurs as a Business Development Coach. He has successfully helped many entrepreneurs scale up their small and medium-scale businesses to the next level. He has been invited to many key industry conferences and has been the key-note speaker at many of them.

Frontlist: Srishti Publishers have been ruling our hearts through their amazing fiction books. How has Srishti Publishers been able to change the readership of Fiction Books?

Arup: We at Srishti have always believed in publishing quality books for the masses, be it Fiction or Non-fiction. We have published books across various genres in the last twenty-five years.

A major shift in readership happened around 2007-08 when more and more young audience started consuming English Fiction written by Indian authors. The ease of accessibility, relatable themes, and simpler language made them an instant hit. It also led to a revolution that grew the commercial publishing side of the Indian publishing industry manifold.

We were at the forefront of this change, and we have been publishing books that young India wants to read—young at heart. We have worked at making literature more accessible while exploring multiple genres and categories.

Over the last decade and a half, Fiction books have seen a radical phase in experimentation in sub-categories, even if they seem similar on a macro level. Our list of titles comprises stories set on college campuses and a murder mystery set in the Harappan times. Stories that scream about societal issues like the acceptance of a third-gender child or a sensitive portrayal of the coming of age of a young boy.

The only rule of thumb we have followed is that the story has something new, the voice of the author is unique, and has the potential to reach out to millions of readers. If these facts hold, we would have been happy to experiment with genres within fiction and make them available to the readership.

Such varied genres help develop the readership, expand their consciousness about various societal issues, and sensitise them about critical issues in general as well.

Frontlist: You've been carrying out your father's legacy and making all the authors' dreams come true. As a publisher, what challenges have you faced till now in changing the reading habits of kids?

Arup: I have been an avid reader since I was a child. As someone who starts and ends his day surrounded by books, I, fortunately, have a unique insight into the minds of readers. What they think about books, what they look for and want to read. This insight is based on qualitative and quantitative data.

The biggest challenge that we have seen in the past few years is the addiction to digital devices amongst young readers. It's also true that habits foisted at a formative age have a way of staying with people for a long time.

So we can say that the main challenge is making reading a habit for young readers and opening them to the world of knowledge one can gain from books.

Frontlist: How can we reach holistic reading development among today's generation?

Arup: A sustainable solution for this problem can best start from home and school. If parents can be sensitised about reading habits and a culture of reading can be developed from a young age, it would be very helpful.

Frontlist: Digitalisation has altered the content consumption in young minds, and it might create a barrier or opportunity for all publishers. What's your view?

Arup: We, at Srishti, interact closely with dedicated readers from across the country who offer us a wide range of data as to what books they liked, what their reading choices were, etc. The digital mode of communication has made it easy for us to stay in touch with the readers and gauge their feedback.

These insights have led us to understand one thing – people are consuming content at a faster rate. They are reading books,

watching movies, or listening to music – but in new hybrid modes. So, instead of just depending upon traditional ways of marketing and retailing books, we need to embrace the digital world.

The use of social media to promote books, making books available across multiple formats like eBooks and audio books, etc., makes digitalisation a big opportunity for publishers. We just need to strategise and adapt ourselves to the new age and develop our resources accordingly to adapt to the new generation.

Lastly, I believe young minds want to consume the best quality content. As long as we can generate and provide the best possible content via our books, people will keep on accessing books as the most convenient form of entertainment.

Frontlist: How can we encourage them to read physical books in a technology-driven world?

Arup: Books are a source of knowledge. Books will always be venerated in our country, especially with a deep-seated respect for knowledge and education.

However, we can make the reading experience more fun to attract more readers. The way to do that is to ensure books are made available in more accessible formats, trendier genres, and a more colloquial language, enabling mass readership.

The digital mode of communication has made it easy for us to stay in touch with the readers and gauge their feedback. We need to use such feedback to delve deep into the quality and improve the offerings we have for our readers.

Also, publishers will now need to stop looking at books as just physical products. In today's technology-driven world, an eBook or an audio book is as much a book as a paperback or hardback is. As long as readers are reading more books, exploring and discovering new authors and stories, I think publishers need not worry. A common trend is that many readers start by reading with one of the nontraditional formats and over some time, transition into reading physical books as well.

So to conclude, inclusivity, being open to feedback, and constant adaptation to new inputs are the only ways to improve readership for books – physical or otherwise.

Frontlist: How has the romance genre outweighed other genres? Answer on account of your first-hand experience.

Arup: I don't think romance as a genre has outweighed other genres. Romance has and will continue to have a special place for readers in our country due to an inherent affinity towards the genre. Some of the greatest epics and stories of yore have romance at their core, and many modern ballads and pop culture also see romance.

However, other genres like Self Help, Motivation in Non-Fiction, Crime & Thriller, and Mythology in Fiction are equally popular and have vast chunks of readership in India.

A very unique thing about mass readership is that they do not restrict themselves to one genre. They read across genres in their quest to access varied content, develop their reading tastes, and gain knowledge from varied sources. So it makes every genre equally important, highly potent, and with a chance of mass acceptance.

However, as I mentioned, romance does have a special place in the hearts of readers due to an inherent preference for the genre.



SAURABH MITTAL

Co- Founder, Maple Press

Saurabh is an Operations Research Engineer from an Ivy-League University, Cornell, USA, and an MBA graduate of the flagship management programme of the Indian School of Business (ISB). He is the Founder-Publisher of India's leading children's book publisher, Maple Press, and Pblishing.com, a crowd-driving publishing platform. Coming from a family with a background in the book publishing space, he started working at the age of 21 and, for the last half-decade, has been able to carve out a niche for both his companies. His companies have published over 1000+ titles and sold more than 10 million books since their inception. Saurabh is an avid reader and investor when he is not donning the hat of a founder-publisher.

Frontlist: Maple Press has been associated with various social welfare organisations. How would your alliance with such organisations be advantageous to promoting the significance of literature in young generations?

Saurabh: Maple Press started to make good quality children's books accessible to millions who currently cannot afford them. Social welfare organisations do not have big budgets, and therefore, for them, procuring good quality and relevant content at affordable prices has always been a challenge. As more than 50% of our books are priced under Rs.100, it makes it easy for such organisations to do more with less.

Frontlist: Since Maple Press publishes books for different age groups up to 12 years, how can you persuade kids to read more during the summer vacation? Do your books have any special features to attract children to read more?

Saurabh: Maple Press's current catalogue has over 1200+ titles that cover all age groups. Recently, we have been focusing mainly on story books and activity books, which can keep children engaged for hours during their vacation. In the last year, we have come out with more than 200+ new books in these categories,

which are easily accessible through e-commerce portals and are priced very competitively. The content in our books is lucid, and most kids will be able to read them on their own. The vivid illustrations have been designed very painstakingly and add to the imaginative capabilities of kids. The activity books have been created in a way that they ensure continuous intrigue and learning at the same time.

Frontlist: Children are very adamant about reading physical books as they prefer to engage in technology more. To consider this challenge: how can we develop their reading habits among them?

Saurabh: Screen time for children has increased tremendously in the last two years with the closure of schools and online classes. We believe that parents can only keep their kids away from screens. Engaging with kids directly can overcome this challenge. Reading out of physical books, helping the kids solve activities and colouring in can help get kids engaged in the physical world. Finally, we believe that kids learn the most by observation. This may be a little difficult if parents reduce their screen time, but kids will also eventually do the same.

Frontlist: Why did you choose to publish books for different age groups up to 12 years old in the first place?

Saurabh: There was a requirement for good quality content for kids at affordable prices in India. While most of the books that had good content (text and illustrations) were imported and therefore expensive, on the other hand, the locally made affordable books were not up to standard with low-quality illustrations and grammatical inaccuracies.

Frontlist: What kind of books are most preferable among small kids? What new opportunities can we bring to promote Children's Literature?

Saurabh: Our retold illustrated stories from the Hindu Religion, such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Ganesha, Krishna, and Hanuman, have been very well received. Parents want their kids to be aware of our folklore, religion, and history. We are also seeing an increased demand for activity books that help with cognitive development and help keep kids engaged.

Frontlist: Which genre has risen to prominence in recent years, and how has it changed people's reading habits?

Saurabh: I think for us, the early learning segment has done well in the last couple of years. Be it writing books, activity books, or colouring books, demand for them has shot up due to a few factors – increased “at-home” time due to the shut down of pre-primary schools and daycare centers; an increased focus on off-screen time; and improved accessibility because of e-commerce growth.

Frontlist: EdTech has revolutionised how people learn. Which is the best way to encourage young people to read more effectively: physical books or e-books? Please share your thoughts.

Saurabh: It depends. There is no better way. We believe both the mediums are equally effective. E-books take the lead when it comes to convenience – easily accessible and storable, whereas physical books give a “back to roots” feel and allow for “off-screen” time activity.



NITIN JAIN

Executive Director,
B. JAIN Publishers Pvt. Ltd

Nitin Jain did his master's in business administration from SP Jain Mumbai and joined the family business at an early age. He has been responsible for diversifying the publishing business into other genres outside Homeopathy. In his early days, he brought out books on various subjects including Design, Business, Self Help. He was able to create distribution partners in Asian & African Markets where the company never exported before.

In 2008 he launched Pegasus which is now one of the leading children's books publishers in Asia & Africa. Under his leadership, Pegasus books are available in more than 100 countries and in more than 20 languages. In 2019 he launched Popcorn with a view to diversifying into the Children's Games & Toys Industry. Popcorn already has over 200 different products and a global presence.

He heads the handicrafts division where the company exports over 1000 unique products created by local Indian artisans from different parts of the country to the US & Europe. He also heads the Software division responsible for the distribution of Homeopathic Software and the creation of online homeopathic courses which various universities across the globe have recognized.

His passion for technology and teamwork has helped in creating stronger foundations and forging a growth path for the group.

Frontlist: How did B Jain Publishers Pvt Ltd become a blessing to the Homoeopathic Industry, and does this influence Homoeopathic Literature across India?

Nitin: Dr P N Jain started publishing homoeopathic books to fulfil the need of a few budding homoeopathic students and to make some extra money while he was working in a government institution. Little did he know that the books he was publishing will be required by homeopathic students across India and the globe. So he decided to open a publishing house in 1966 and take this as a full-time profession.

Back in the day, students would only get photocopies of homoeopathic books published in the US, and that too at a very high price. Dr Jain saw this need and made those books available in India by publishing them at a very reasonable price. B JAIN Books became the first choice for any person studying or learning homoeopathy across the globe.

Frontlist: Being a leading Homoeopathic Publisher, would you be able to rule the publishing community with Children's Books as well?

Nitin: The basic principles of publishing remain the same for a publishing house, and we have always believed in working with a greater audience rather than a niche. We understand that when working with a mass market, you need to offer premium quality, a reasonable price, and decent content. I am not sure "rule" is the right word, but yes, we are happy to be one of the leading children's book publishers in Asia.

Frontlist: Books genres such as Children, Health, Parenting, Self-help, Business, Spiritual, Naturopathy, and Mind-Body-Spirit, have been pervasive over the past two years. Do you think these genres gained readership over Homoeopathic books?

Nitin: Homoeopathy is a form of medicine and not so much a therapy that one could easily practice at home. Yes, we have a lot of readers who practice homoeopathy on their own out of passion, but it is an alternative form of medicine and requires 5 years of study, just like allopathy, to practice.

Homoeopathic Books have always been a student-driven textbook and reference book market. We used to publish a lot of trade books, including Mind-Body-Spirit, General Health, and Self Help Books, but slowly with the new mediums like youtube and numerous blogs, you can now follow your favourite author and their teaching in a much easier way than reading. The same goes for cooking and travel books. A lot of readers have turned to online as a medium for information rather than books.

Frontlist: What actions can we take to encourage reading behaviour among young generations?

Nitin: We at Pegasus have a firm belief that we all grow with books. Books have to be introduced at very young ages for them to feel comfortable with them. A lot of parents do not know which books to pick, and so they lose interest in buying books for their children and then leave this work to the schools. We all know the benefits of reading and how books make you better. Things have changed with parents spending more time with their children, trying to understand their needs and working with them rather than just feeding them. They understand the importance of screen time, and so we see a lot of new parents introducing books at an early age, and the child gets comfortable with books and realises that reading is not boring but very imaginative and fun-filled. So the earlier you can start exposing a child to books, the better reader they become, and there are a lot more books available now than before for children as young as 6+ months.

Frontlist: If we want to promote books, the joy of reading should

be there among consumers. The absolute readership can only be achieved by good content. What are your thoughts on this?

Nitin: Good content has a different meaning for each individual. Books like movies have their audiences, some might like that particular book, and some might hate it. Every individual is different, and their needs are different. The true example for me is this OTT Platform, also a competition for books. The need for content and the way and the amount of content getting consumed now are far greater than ever before, and people are still wanting more. When you publish good content, yes, it will stay for a long period, you will appeal to a larger audience, and yes, you might get new readers, but reading is an acquired taste, and it has to start early the reason to acquire can be many, and good content can be one of them.

Frontlist: How have B Jain Publishers been adapting themselves to the digital race to become paralleled in a technology-driven world?

Nitin: I am a firm believer in technology, and I believe tech has to go in hand with print for us (publishers) to succeed. This could mean as simple as making your books available online to publishing the whole content of the book online. We have gone a step further by using technology as a medium to deliver additional value to our print books. Most of our Children's Books are now internet-linked with some value addition available in the form of an app, be it a simple read-aloud App to AR App that makes reading more fun for children.

Frontlist: Which age group has the highest rate of book consumption when compared to other age groups? Please elaborate on account of your experience in the Publishing Industry.

Nitin: Textbooks are the biggest category by far, as it is linked to formal education. When we talk of books sold in retail, children's books have been probably the only growing category. When you talk about children's books, 0-5 years seem to be leading the age group for all publishers in India. I believe after 5 years, the children become independent readers, and those who like books tend to go beyond school books, but as of now, the demand for books decreases as the child grows older, maybe because of books being available in the school library or because of lack of time to read.

Hustling through the publishing ecosystem

We bring to you:

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VED PRAKASH CHAWLA

Founder, Dreamland Publications

Mr Ved Chawla was born in 1956 into a publishing family, providing education since 1937. He stepped into his family business in the year 1971. He is always passionate about publishing quality children's books that are completely pictorial and have easy-to-understand content.

He was impressed by international giant publishers' books, and he has always been keen to publish world-class books with a difference and established his own publishing house, "Dreamland Publications" in 1986.

Frontlist: How has Dreamland Publication been promoting holistic reading development among young minds in a systematic way?

Ved: Children are curious learners right from their development age. They get attracted to whatever colourful objects surround them. To learn more about those objects, they look for explanations from their parents or teachers to enhance their knowledge. Our books are well-designed in a systematic way with very easy-to-understand text matter in readable fonts and are adorned with beautiful, colourful images supporting them. These books attract children towards developing reading and learning habits that satisfy the questions arising in young minds. We endeavour to maintain and develop books for children from K-8 grade.

Frontlist: Since different and new technologies have been introduced, how can they be helpful for a publisher?

Ved: Different and new technologies being introduced into the market are just an additional feature in the publishing world. However, they can not replace printed books.

The feel or smell of beautiful books can never be replaced by costly electronic small gadgets or various applications.

Frontlist: How has the digital revolution influenced the readership of children's books?

Ved: Although the digital revolution is a promising and fascinating technology, it has yet to satisfy the thirst for knowledge. Parents still prefer to use printed books for their children to enhance their knowledge bank, as the books thoroughly explain the matter with appropriate illustrations and diagrams.

Frontlist: What impact does digital media have on the growth of physical books?

Ved: The digital media has no impact on the growth of physical books. The growth of physical books remains the same, and I foresee its increase in the times to come.

Frontlist: What challenges have you faced thus far in adapting to the new digitalisation world and how does it affect the distribution of children's books?

Ved: We have not faced any challenges with the new digital world. In fact, our sales have been constantly increasing.

Frontlist: What initiatives or efforts have been made by the publishers to increase the joy of reading among the new-age generation?

Ved: We are regularly adding to the number of titles in our catalogue and are always trying to develop new content banks with innovative designs and ideas.

Frontlist: Summer holidays are near, and parents are selective when it comes to exposing their children to content consumption. As a publisher, what initiative should be adopted to build reading habits among small age groups?

Ved: For the summer holidays and all vacations, we have added a number of activity books, colouring books, jigsaw puzzles, and other educational products to enhance the reading habits as well as other creative skills of small age groups. These products will definitely help them build their fine motor skills, observation skills, and various other skills that will make little ones confident. These books are the best option for kids to step away from screens and other devices.

Question:

Which is the quickest and probably the best books marketplace in India?

Answer:

It's Buy Books India.

BuyBooks
India.com



Scan to visit website



PVLf

PragatiE Vichaar

LITERATURE
FESTIVAL 2023

9th-14th Jan

We are coming back with our very own signature event, **PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023**, in which we will be hosting an Author's Marathon along with the PVLf Excellence Awards Physical Night from **9th-14th January 2023**.

Frontlist Media (India's #1 news E-Portal for the Publishing Industry) will conceptualise it, and **PragatiE** will host it (one of the leading virtual exhibition platforms).

This edition of PVLf shall have PVLf Author Excellence Awards, PVLf Reader's Choice Book Awards, PVLf People's Choice Publisher Awards, and a 5-Day Author's Marathon dedicated to providing authors with a forum to market themselves. **Nielsen** is the **knowledge partner**, ensuring the awards are 100% reliable with their Book Scan Data.

"Taking Humanity Forward" will be the **theme of the entire PVLf 2023**.

THEMES OF THE 5-DAY AUTHOR'S MARATHON

Here is the list of themes that will be there during the Author's Marathon's 5-Day run.

Mythology/
History

Nationalism/
Patriotic

Mental
Health

Hindi

Children
Storytelling

Non-
Fiction

War and
Famine

Equality

Sustainability

Banned Literature
(Freedom To
Publish)

WHY SHOULD YOU PARTICIPATE IN PVLF 2023

PVLF is dedicated to enhancing Dialogue, Literature, Free Speech, Storytelling, and the promotion of writing as the world's most potent weapon of communication.

- Number 1 based Awards, Powered by Nielsen - With their Book Scan Data, Nielsen ensures that the awards are 100 percent trustworthy.
- Great Platform for New Age and Debut Authors - It undoubtedly works to provide a platform for debut authors to promote themselves.
- Engaging Interactions and Discussions - Over the course of the Author's Marathon's 5 days, we'll introduce new subjects for panel discussions and monologues with eminent persons.
- Global Reach - Our PVLF will be reaching out to a lot of people globally just like last year.

PVLF EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2023

- PVLF Author Excellence Awards
- PVLF Readers' Choice Book Awards
- PVLF People's Choice Publishers Awards

This year, PVLF Excellence Awards 2023 will be presented in two languages—English and Hindi to foster solidarity with Hindi literature as well.

AWARDS CATEGORIES:	
PVLF Author Excellence Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best Debut Fiction• Best Debut Non-Fiction• Best Poetry• Best Fiction• Best Non Fiction• Best Children Author of the Year• Most Celebrated Author (According to Nielsen Bookscan Data)
PVLF Readers' Choice Book Awards - According to (Nielsen Bookscan Data) + Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Platinum• Gold• Silver
PVLF People's Choice Publishers Awards - According to (Nielsen Bookscan Data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test Prep• Higher Education• K-12• Children Books• Trade• Hindi

Media Coverage

'Book Launch: The Art of Management' by Shiv ShivaKumar, Penguin Books



The event was organised for the session and book launch - **'The Art of Management'**, authored by **Shiv ShivaKumar** at the **All India Management Association** on May 9th, 2022, at 05:30 pm.

Mr Shekhar Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, The Print, was the guest of honour at the book launch event.

Shiv Shivakumar, the best-selling author of "The Right Choice," brings "The Art of Management" to add to the management arena. The book is published by **Penguin Random House India**. This is Shiv's third book and has insights from his journey and reflections coupled with practical wisdom from 21 industry leaders across disciplines, from Sachin Tendulkar to General VP Malik. The 21 leaders are drawn from 17 different disciplines. The eclectic list comprises people like Harsha Bhogale, Vikas Khanna, and Shereen Bhan, industry veterans like Hrishikesh Bhattacharya, and global leaders like Ollie Pekka Kallasvuo (former CEO of Nokia).

Shiv is an established thought leader in the Indian leadership space. He has led Nokia and PepsiCo and is now the Group Executive President at the Aditya Birla Group.

In "The Art of Management," Shiv talks about three elements of management in any discipline:

- * Managing Yourself
- * Managing Your Team and
- * Managing Your Business

In the Managing Yourself section, Shiv talks about the importance of looking ahead and not being defined by your roots, where you were born, or what resources you were born into. Specifically, Shiv lists managing time, ambition, learning, energy, and relationships with the organisation as variables to think about.

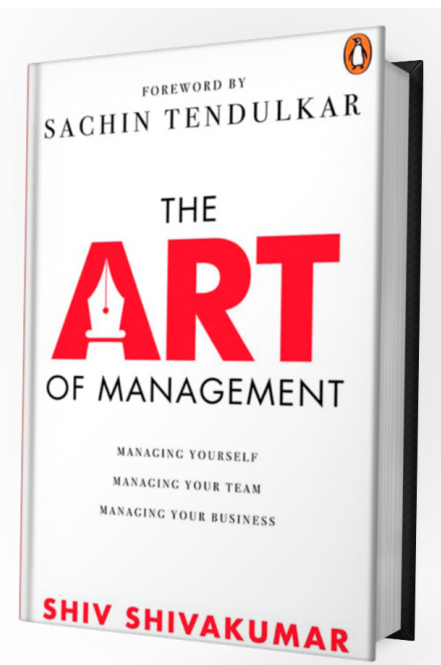
In Managing Your Team, Shiv talks about the importance of being fair to team members, being consistent in approach, being a coach without imposing your personality, and handling prima donnas and weight-carriers.

Prima Donnas are people who think that they are the reason for the company's success and that no one else matters. Interestingly, Shiv argues that having prima donnas is good as long as you don't sacrifice company values and balance. The prima donnas want instant and constant rewards.

The weight carriers are the people who run the processes in any organisation and typically tend to be solid middle managers or solid citizens who have given their best to an organization. The weight-carriers want recognition more than rewards.

In Managing Business, Shiv being India's one of the longest serving CEOs discusses the impact of digital, why digital business models are here to stay, and how digital business models are fatal for non-value adding middlemen. He gives examples of the book, the music, and the travel industries where the middleman has got wiped out if he/she doesn't add value.

Shiv illustrates many of his points through rich examples from the organisations he has worked in and led. The Art Of Management is in essence, Shiv's distillation of years of experience, wisdom, and deep reflection of thought process.





About Shiv Shivakumar

Shiv Shivakumar, or Shiv, as he is popularly known, is one of India's longest-serving CEOs. He is currently the group executive president of Aditya Birla Group. He has worked across multiple industries and categories and has handled over sixty brands in his career. He was CEO of Nokia in India and subsequently led the company's emerging markets unit; he was also chairman and CEO of PepsiCo South Asia. He is regarded as one of India's leading management and leadership thinkers and speakers.

About Penguin Random House India

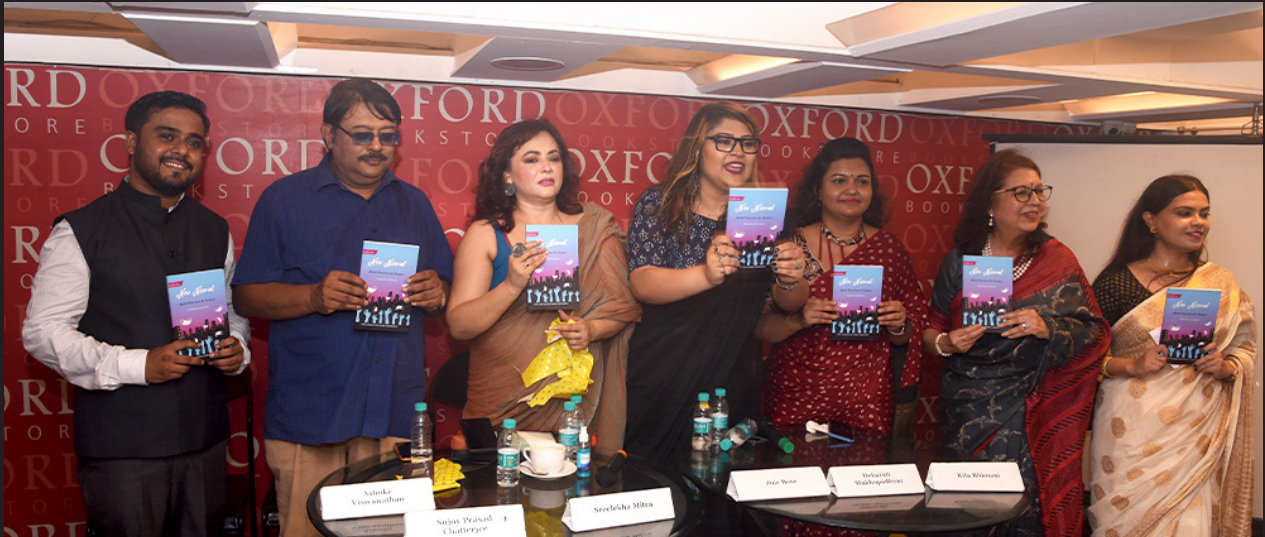
Penguin Random House India publishes over 250 new titles every year and has an active backlist of over 3000 titles. With a strong fiction and non-fiction list, it publishes across every segment, including biography, travel, business, politics, history, religion and philosophy, lifestyle, cookery, health and fitness, sports and leisure, visual books, and children's books. The children's titles are published under the Puffin imprint.

Penguin Random House India's illustrious list includes Booker Prize-winning novels and winners of virtually every major literary prize, including the Nobel Prize, the Magsaysay Award, the Jnanpith Award, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Several of PRHI's authors are also recipients of the Bharat Ratna and the Padma Vibhushan, India's highest civilian honours. Penguin Random House India is also the exclusive distribution partner for several leading local and international publishing houses in India and the subcontinent.



Media Coverage

Muktadhara 2022 - A Literary Event to Celebrate Tagore's 161st Birth Anniversary, Exceller Books



Unwrapping of the newly launched book titled 'New Normal: Selected Poems from the Pandemic' edited by Joie Bose

To commemorate the 161st birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, Exceller Books, a global publishing house with a decade-long experience, organised a literary event, 'Muktadhara 2022: A Tribute to Tagore by Exceller Books' at Oxford Bookstore, Kolkata, on 14th May 2022. Frontlist was the proud Media Partner for this enlightening event. The prime focus of this event was the stimulating talk on 'Where the Mind Is Without Fear and the Head Is Held High' and new book launches by Exceller Books.

The programme was set to motion with a brief introductory speech by Dr Sudipta Kumar Ghosh, the Founder & Chief of Exceller Books. As the inaugural speaker Prof Suranjan Das, Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, delivered an enlightening speech on the internationalism of Tagore. His erudite words reminded the audience of the international cooperation that Tagore dreamt of in a twentieth-century India. Mr Utpal Chatterjee, Veteran Journalist & Ex-Sheriff of Kolkata also shared his brilliant insight on various aspects of Tagore's life and philosophy.



Rita Bhimani, Veteran PR specialist and writer, sharing her thoughts on Tagore

The inaugural session was immediately followed by a discussion on 'Talk on Tagore: Where the Mind is Without Fear and the Head is Held High.' The list of invited speakers included: national award-winning filmmaker Ashoke Viswanathan, bestselling Bengali writer Debarati Mukhopadhyay, nationally acclaimed actress Sreelekha Mitra, popular elocutionist, and actor Sujoy Prasad Chatterjee, and veteran PR specialist Rita Bhimani and acclaimed writer Joie Bose. All these distinguished speakers spoke at great length on the topic and demonstrated the relevance and significance of the famous line of Tagore: Where the Mind is Without Fear and the Head is Held High in the contemporary time. Exceller Books was immensely honoured to offer the 'Tagore Samman 2022' to a few eminent personalities for their spectacular contributions in their respective fields.

In her address, Ms Anjita Ganguly, the Co-founder of Exceller Books, talked about their maiden journey in launching two new categories. To a houseful auditorium, she introduced the Exceller Select Series, a selected collection of books originally published by them. The first book under this category, 'New Normal: Selected Poems from the Pandemic' edited by Joie Bose, was officially launched at the event. They also launched their first audiobook 'Horizon Hunters' a short story collection by Dr Shikha Chatterjee and Elwin Dillu. This audiobook is narrated by Trinanjana Das. Ms Ganguly also explained the efficacies of audiobooks in the modern life situation, thereby making it a great choice for booklovers of our generation.

Exceller Books always believes in giving a platform to the new writers. And keeping this in mind, they called out to some aspiring poets for a vibrant poetry reading session. They recited their own poems and were felicitated in recognition of their talent. The event was hosted by RJ Dev from 92.7 Big FM.



Felicitation to Prof. Suranjan Das, Vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University by Dr. Sudipta Kumar Ghosh, Founder & Chief of Exceller Books



Felicitation to nationally acclaimed actress Sreelekha Mitra with the 'Tagore Samman 2022' by Mr. Utpal Chatterjee, Veteran Journalist & Ex-Sheriff of Kolkata



Felicitation to bestselling Bengali writer Debarati Mukhopadhyay with the 'Tagore Samman 2022' by Prof. Suranjan Das, Vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University



A lighter moment, Sreelekha Mitra, Debarati Mukhopadhyay, Joie Bose, Rita Bhimani (from the left)

Media Coverage

Pune Book Fair 2022

The 19th edition of the “Pune Book Fair” was organised this year, from Thursday 28th April to Sunday 1st May 2022 at Creaticity, off Airport Road, Yerawada, Pune. This was the largest book fair in Western India and was co-sponsored, among others, by Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, Pune.

At the Pune Book Fair 2023, displayed book stalls were set up by prominent publishers, booksellers, and service providers across India.

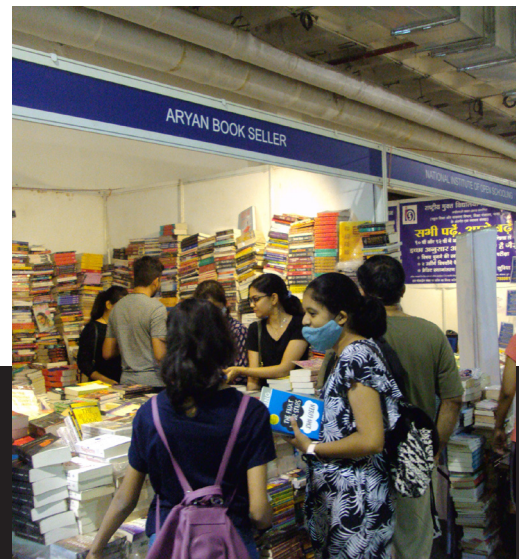
Renowned books on Education, Science, Technology, Health, Management, Business, Law, Religion, Politics, and Literature are showcased in various sections of the exhibition. Besides the English language, books in multiple Indian languages like Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Sanskrit, etc., were available at exhibition stalls.

There were special book stalls (Braille & Educational Aids) laid out only for physically disabled people. Showcasing books on different subjects, like Buddhism and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar by Ajantha Prakashan, Directorate of Census Operations, Govt. of India; self-help, spirituality, management, personal growth, and fiction of IRH Press Co. Ltd; National Film Archive of India, which represents the Glorious 100 years of Indian Films; and India's National Academy for Music, Dance, and Drama, embellished the book fair to a great extent.

To foster the development of small publishers and booksellers, the Enterprise section, consisting of Author Corner and Catalogue Display counter stands were set up at the literary fair. Leading newspapers in the region not only covered the book fair but also put up display stalls and underlined their collections.

The “Towards a Knowledge Society” lecture series was organised to educate all concerned, especially the younger generation.

The primary focus of the book fair was the English, Hindi, and Marathi Authors’ Meet.



Media Coverage

Book Launch of Modi@20: Dreams Meet Delivery, Rupa publications

Rupa Publications India and Bluekraft Digital Foundation have announced the launch of the book “Modi@20: Dreams Meet Delivery”, edited and compiled by BlueKraft Digital Foundation, on May 11th, 2022, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice President of India, received the first copy of the book in the presence of our Hon'ble Union Ministers, Shri Amit Shah and Shri S Jaishankar.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

The rise of Narendra Modi is a watershed moment in Indian politics. In fact, such is the magnitude of his influence on the country that India's governance paradigm and political history can be easily divided into two distinct eras—pre-Modi and post-Modi.

In 2001, Modi became the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat. He was undefeated in all subsequent elections and became the state's longest-serving chief minister. While Modi strode Gujarat like a colossus, propelling multi-dimensional progress, bigger responsibilities beckoned. Modi's exemplary success in Gujarat paved the way for him to be popularly elected India's Prime Minister in an overwhelming victory in 2014. He is a Prime Minister unlike anyone before, both in terms of appeal and body of work. As a result, in 2019, he was re-elected with an even bigger mandate.

His appeal is the result of his work in many domains over a long social, political, and administrative career. Modi's impact is not restricted to India alone, and numerous national and international polls regularly declare that he is the most popular international leader.

In 2021, Modi completed twenty continuous years as the head of a government. This book, a compilation of chapters authored by eminent intellectuals and domain experts, attempts a definitive and expansive exploration into the fundamental transformation of Gujarat and India over the last twenty years due to Modi's unique model of governance.

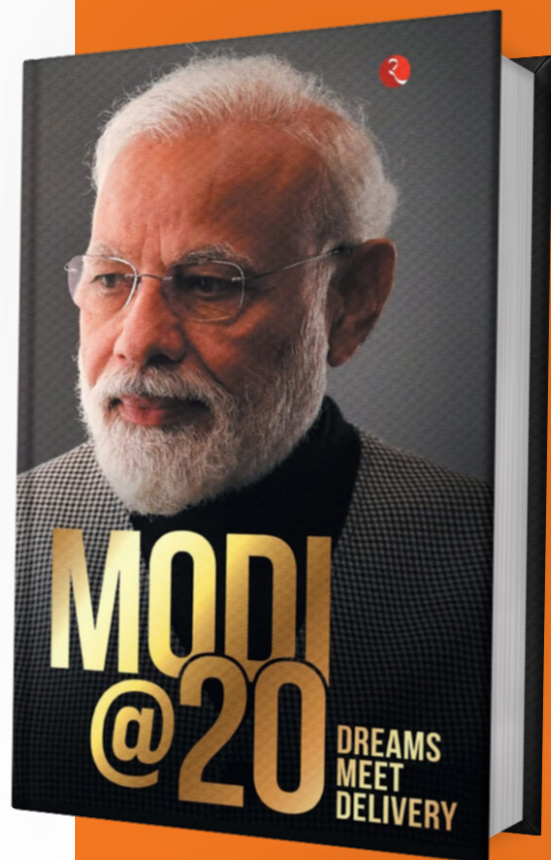
CONTRIBUTORS

Sudha Murty, Sadhguru, Nandan Nilekani, Amish Tripathi, Amit Shah, Arvind Panagariya, S Jaishankar, Lata Mangeshkar, Ajit Doval K C, P V Sindhu, Shobana Kamineni, Surjit S Bhalla, Pradeep Gupta, Anantha Nageswaran, Shamika Ravi, Uday S Kotak, Ajay Mathur, Anupam Kher, Ashok Gulati, Dr Devi Shetty, Nripendra Misra, Manoj Ladwa and Bharat Barai. Edited and compiled by BlueKraft Digital Foundation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BlueKraft Digital Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation actively working in the realm of policy and governance. The Foundation brings together a wide spectrum of leading policymakers, experts, and citizens to debate, discuss, deliberate, and formulate new ideas that will enrich India's development trajectory. Its work is primarily focused on promoting the spirit of voluntary participation in sectors such as holistic education, women and child empowerment, farmer welfare, conservation of the environment, digital and social media, and diaspora relations.

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PUBLISHING TALKS & TALES

World Intellectual Property Organization SCCR Summit

WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation) is the universal congregation for intellectual property (IP) services, policy, information, and cooperation. It's a self-funding agency of the United Nations, with 193 member states.

The mission of WIPO is to lead the development of a balanced and effective international IP system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all. WIPO's mandate, governing bodies, and procedures are set out in the WIPO Convention, which established WIPO in 1967.

Since 2019, WIPO has been organising the "Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights" Summit that happens twice a year. However, last year, they decided to organise only once due to the COVID outbreak. Luckily, WIPO will organise these kinds of events once again with the same enthusiasm next year. These are only speculations as of now. This year, WIPO organised the 42nd edition of the SCCR Summit on May 9–13, 2022, in Geneva.

It was a five-day long event and all the dignitaries from the publishing ecosystem discussed the ubiquitous issues of creative industries, cultural institutions, education, and research.



IPA DELEGATES

Moreover, a series of meetings were also conducted with the prominent personalities of the Publishing Industry.

Day 1 :

The first day of WIPO SCCR 2022 highlighted the impact of COVID on the copyright ecosystem, the election of new officers, and the approval of observers.

Mr Pranav Gupta, Founder, Frontlist, and Managing Director, Prints Publications, was invited to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, Geneva, to be a part of the SCCR (Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights) as one of the key speakers for the session, "Overview on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Creative Industries." It was a momentous occasion for Frontlist.

Day 2:

Following the first day of the SCCR 42, the main subject of day 2 was the Broadcasting Treaty.

All discussions were about ways to try to break the decades-long log-jam of a possible broadcasting treaty, and a range of reactions suggested the road to a possible treaty might yet be long and winding.

Day 3:

The third day of SCCR 42 began with more discussion and study of the new text on the broadcasting treaty, with the afternoon reserved for discussions on exceptions and limitations.

Day 4:

Day 4 of the SCCR's 42nd meeting started up where Day 3 left off, with talks on exceptions and limitations and remarks from observer organisations.

Day 5:

The day began with a focus on music, with the topic Copyright in the Digital Environment and presentations by a group of seven specialists who had prepared papers on various areas of the music industry in different regions.

The next SCCR will be presentations on cross-border usages, such as in online education and research. The WIPO secretariat will also be expected to provide toolkits for technical assistance programmes to help member nations implement laws and policies that encourage education research and cultural heritage preservation. These will be prepared with the help of experts and stakeholders from the beneficiary communities and rights holders.



**Mr Pranav Gupta,
Founder,
Frontlist at the
WIPO SCCR
Summit 2022**



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AUTHOR INTERVIEWS



"God Mode"

Sagar Kambli aka Zack Miller

Self-made, determined, and driven - the words that describe the protagonist of his debut novel and the author, Sagar Kambli just as well. This art school graduate has been a creative director for multiple leading advertising agencies and has shaped many advertising campaigns for over 15 years, nurturing an imaginative streak. With an inclination for in-depth research, a curiosity to know how the human mind works, and uncompromising attention to detail, Sagar's writing style is observant and meticulous.

Today, Sagar runs a second-generation business and is passionate about seeing the world through his interests in biking and photography. Sagar writes under the pen name Zack Miller.

Frontlist: You write under the pen name Zack Miller. What made you choose this name?

Zack: I have been in advertising as a Creative Director (Art) for many years and have earned a certain reputation. God Mode is my first book as a writer. As I was stepping into unknown territory, I wanted to create a new identity altogether. That is why I wanted a pen name in the first place. While I was writing the storyline of God Mode, I started relating to the protagonist (Zack Miller) in many ways. Hence, I thought of using the protagonist's name as my pseudonym.

Frontlist: You are an Art School graduate and have been a Creative Director for multiple leading advertising agencies. How did you decide to become a novelist?

Zack: As a Creative Director, I would come up with creative stories for brands regularly. But these were mostly 30-45 second television commercials. Somewhere along the way, I came up

with a plot that was different from my regular line of work, and I started penning it down. That's how God Mode shaped up.

Frontlist: What type of book do you like to read for pleasure, as authors tend to be avid readers?

Zack: I mostly read crime thrillers. I am a fan of Lee Child, Anthony Horowitz, Jo Nesbo, Michael Connelly, Chris Carter, and Higashino Keigo. Then other books keep me sane, like Karma by Sadhguru and Life's Amazing Secrets by Gaur Gopal Das. I also love reading mythology books by Devdutt Pattanaik.

Frontlist: Which is your favourite recently read crime fiction title?

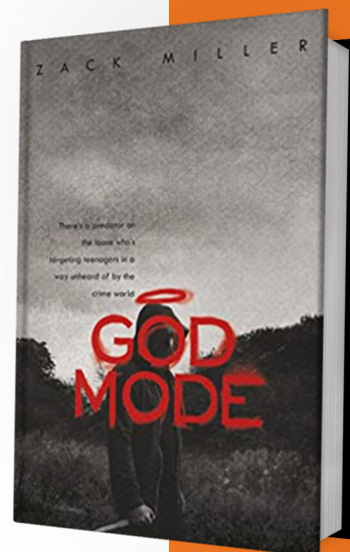
Zack: The Devotion of Suspect X by Higashino Keigo is my favourite book.

Frontlist: "Patience is the art of counting down before you blast off." Share the context behind the quote.

Zack: Acting out of impulse might lead to unpleasant consequences. Whereas patience is the true key to self-confidence and becoming a master of self-discipline. The other way to look at it would be to let the first impulse pass and wait for the second.

Frontlist: Thrillers tend to end chapters with a shocking reveal, confession, or unexpected twist, to keep the reader turning the pages. How did the story come to you?

Zack: The amalgamation of being creative and a fan of true crime is quite lethal. It's just a matter of channelling the byproduct of this amalgamation in a way that the audience can enjoy every bit of it. I would say that God Mode is that byproduct.





"Beneath The Walnut & Its Almond Chamber"

Hari Ram

From his childhood, Hari Ram (b. 1979) had a passion for discovering the truth behind life, steering clear of religious dogma. His journey of self-realisation was backed by pure logic and science, especially neuroscience, leading to the discovery of the non-dual.

This book, his first, is a consequence of his efforts to spread awareness about the least understood (and often largely misunderstood) working patterns of the brain that could help people break away from their existential angst, stress, and depression and experience true happiness. An alumnus of the London School of Economics, Hari is a management consultant by profession and lives in Hyderabad, India, with his wife Poornima and children Vyomesh and Smrithi.

Frontlist: "As you sow, so shall you reap." How did you use this quote in your book?

Hari: We have been hearing this phrase since time immemorial. A deed, whether good or bad, when undertaken, will come back to us. What does this mean? Not according to any line of thought or fancy philosophy, but actually? A subtle discovery during my journey of self-awareness was that the brain keeps track of all we want to do—promulgated by our self-talk—and throws it back at us. Such a throwback, if you allow me to use that word, results in either stress, anxiety, or momentary contentment.

Frontlist: This is your debut book. Share your experience of the same.

Hari: This book is special to me in many ways. First, it gave me the opportunity to explain a complex subject in a refreshingly simple way. Second, I've experienced significant writer's block many times. But from that block, a block of words came! Thirdly, this book helped me to experience some things I had a very conceptual understanding of – such as the nature of time and our true nature.

Frontlist: What are some of the common misconceptions about

the working patterns of the brain?

Hari: A common misunderstanding is that the brain is tricking the person or wired against the person. In my view, when every other part of the body selflessly works to strive for the individual's well-being, why and how would the brain be any different? The complex's top-floor organ is always around to help the person, not mislead or trick.

Frontlist: The title of the book is quite distinctive. Why did you choose this title?

Hari: The walnut is symbolic of the brain. The term for the amygdala, a vital part of the brain involved in processing emotions, is derived from the Greek word amygdale, meaning "almond". The amygdala is housed within a larger midbrain structure called the medial temporal lobe, which also houses the hippocampus, the orchestrator involved in memory formation and retrieval. The medial temporal lobe looks similar to an almond, and hence the name "Almond and its Chamber" symbolises various parts within it.

Frontlist: How can we choose to prevent being angry, stressed, and depressed and ultimately experience true happiness?

Hari: Look at anger, stress, depression, and even momentary happiness as logical responses. When you are happy, it must mean that what you aspired to has come true—like travelling to a place, meeting your family members and friends, getting a job, and so on. If I were to ask you why you are happy, you would immediately say that you are happy because what I aspired for came true, and so on. But if you ask why you are stressed or anxious, you will be clueless. Know that your stress and anxiety are also logical outcomes rendered by the brain that effortlessly works to ascertain whether or not your aspirations have been met. If they are not met, the brain is simply deciding that things are not what they should be and hence alerting you that you need to act! Such constant alerts lead to stress and anxiety.

Frontlist: We as humans have two kinds of memories - What are they? Please explain.

Hari: Internal (memories of oneself, one's identity, and its affiliations) and external (memories of everything around us, including people and things). By storage, these two types can be classified as working memory (those sets of memories that are used or recalled frequently) and distributed memories (those that are not used or recalled frequently).

Frontlist: Ego, memories, and self-talk - What are the connections between them?

Hari: Your sense of an individual self is memory. Think about it. Were you born with a name? You were born nameless, and your name is one of the first core memories you internalized as an infant. In my view, self-talk arises out of fear, and fear is an outcome of what lies in working memory.

Frontlist: Share bits of advice on how we can get a deeper understanding of ourselves?

Hari: We have been conditioned since childhood based on our nationality, religion, caste, ethnic origin, skin color, and so on. Our true nature lies beyond all that social knowledge. Shed everything you know about yourself, and your true nature will emerge. And that true nature holds good for you, me, and all other beings and things around us. We may call it by different names – God, Brahman, Allah, Holy Spirit, and so on – but our labels don't matter. Our ancient scientists realized this and coined this beautiful word – Vedanta – which means Veda + Anta. 'Veda' means knowledge/memory, and 'anta' means the end. The end of memory. When there is no influence of memory, the truth shall emerge!



"Crunch Time: Narendra Modi's National Security Crises"

Dr Sreeram Chaulia

Sreeram Chaulia is a social scientist and opinion maker on international issues. He is a Professor and Dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs of O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat. He has previously authored five books, including *Modi Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of India's Prime Minister* (2016) and *Trumped: Emerging Powers in a Post-American World* (2019). He is a leading opinion columnist on international issues in newspapers and magazines in both Hindi and English and a regular analyst of world politics on radio and television.

Frontlist: The book has shone a light on the important events that define the new strategic culture of India, whether it was surgical strikes in 2016 or the Balakot airstrikes in 2019. Why did you choose this topic to write about?

Dr Sreeram: The topic of strategic culture goes to the very heart of International Relations and Defence Studies. I had been observing big changes in the way India was dealing with its two adversaries – China and Pakistan – since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to office. By 2020, with four major crises have already occurred, I decided that I had enough observations to begin revisiting the fundamental debate about India's strategic culture and its 'soft state'. As a social scientist, I felt I was seeing a transformation in real time that had to be articulated for readers so that they can appreciate the deeper changes to India's national security system and response matrix, which are underway.

Frontlist: This book gives a comprehensive analysis of how 'New India' conducted itself during the episodes of major National Security Crises. Share your experience while writing the same.

Dr Sreeram: Writing a book about contemporary national and international current events is always risky because one can get overtaken by the ebb and flow of events and the latest developments. One of the crises I have extensively covered in

Crunch Time, for example, is still going on. This is the China-India faceoff on the Eastern Ladakh-Aksai China frontier. So, I tried to avoid making any predictions about how the crises would ultimately end. Instead, I focused on the core issue of how the Indian state used to tackle such crises in the past and how it has responded more robustly and creatively under Modi. I see myself chronicling a structural shift and presenting it to readers in fairly simple, jargon-free language so that they are conscious that 'new India' has indeed arrived.

Frontlist: It is your first collaboration with Rupa Publications. What was it like working with them?

Dr Sreeram: Yes! Rupa is a very prestigious name in publishing, and I am honoured that they brought Crunch Time out. The degree of professionalism, punctuality, and empathy that Rupa's editors and staff bring to authors is really praiseworthy. In the spirit of mutual collaboration between author and publisher, I had numerous dialogues and discussions with Rupa's super-efficient team over months before the book hit the press. At every stage, from copy editing to marketing and retailing, I felt that I was in the best possible hands as a writer. Crunch Time has been listed as the 'Number 1 bestseller' in the 'International Relations' category on Amazon. No wonder Rupa calls itself the 'House of Bestsellers'. It deserves the tag every bit!

Frontlist: Where did you find all the relevant information you covered in this book regarding the National Security Crises?

Dr Sreeram: Apart from secondary sources, I conducted numerous interviews of senior figures from India's armed forces and its national security apparatus. These primary sources add great value to Crunch Time as they reveal hitherto unknown aspects of Modi's leadership and of the perceptions and preparations within the military as they faced up to the challenges thrown at them by China and Pakistan. I also had the advantage of talking to many Indian diplomats and academicians about the nitty gritty of the crises covered in the book, and this gives the book an edge compared to purely journalistic accounts that are more factual and less analytical.

Frontlist: What is your take on India's Current National Security Policy?

Dr Sreeram: In the Modi era, India has developed a National Security Strategy and it has raised the cost of aggression by both China and Pakistan by showing a firm willingness to use calibrated force and other instruments of statecraft. As I have explained in Crunch Time, there is a Modi effect on India's two foreign adversaries because they can see how India has moved past its earlier habit of absorbing attacks without raising the cost of aggression. The deeper reforms the Modi government has undertaken to make India's security apparatus more nimble, less predictable, and highly capable of springing strategic surprises on China and Pakistan mean that India is relatively safer and stronger today vis-à-vis its foreign foes than it ever was.

Frontlist: What do you think are some of the initiatives that need to be taken by the citizens for the betterment of the security of our nation?

Dr Sreeram: In Crunch Time, I talk about the 'boycott Chinese products' movement of 2020–2021 after the Galwan clash between the Chinese and Indian armies. That sort of voluntary willingness to accept the inconvenience and higher personal costs to push back against Chinese expansionism and hegemonism must be made a permanent feature of Indian society. Citizens must realise that the job of protecting the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity is not confined to Modi, the National Security Adviser of the armed forces. Eternal vigilance is, after all, the price of liberty. India's citizens must back the forces of national unity

and refuse to fall for misinformation and propaganda that lower the morale of the country's armed forces. We need a strategic culture of a state establishment that is fully integrated with social forces, not a state versus civil society dynamic. As the NSA Ajit Doval has reminded us, the "new frontier" of war is civil society. India's open, democratic society can be misguided and made to oppose India's national interests by petty political forces in the domestic arena and by external adversaries. As I show in *Crunch Time*, India paid dearly for letting itself be manipulated after the 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008. We cannot afford to go down that line again. If citizens do let up and slide back to allow the return of a "soft state", India's very future existence itself will be in jeopardy.



"A (Really) Stolen Election"

Mohan Kannegal

Mohan leads the Eruditus India and APAC businesses. Before joining the Eruditus group, Mohan built three digital education businesses – one as an entrepreneur and two as an intrapreneur. He co-founded MeritTrac Services—an online examination company that he scaled, exited, and integrated into the Manipal group. Mohan has also built and scaled software products – Pariksha Exam Delivery and EduNxt Learning Platforms – which have delivered 40 million exams and managed 250,000 learners. He launched Manipal ProLearn and scaled that business to 30,000 paid learners.

Mohan Kannegal is currently based in Boston. He finally found the time to write his first book of fiction. His second book will be a humorous take on Indian startups.

Frontlist: "Innovators are smarter than engineers." Why do you think so, and what was the concrete reason behind this statement?

Mohan: Firstly, as you will notice from the book, this is a debatable point, so it would be impossible to arrive at a concrete response to a point like this. I have used this topic in the book to build tension in the story – it is difficult for the character in the book to make this argument in front of a large audience consisting entirely of engineers.

Having said that, I can see how a convincing argument can be made with this assertion. It is true that in many cases, complex problems have been solved by taking a non-orthodox approach: the unorthodox (innovator) approach may be better than the orthodox ('trained engineer') approach.

There are so many examples of this. You can read about the Wright Brothers' innovative approach in the book. Similarly, in 218 BC, in the Rome versus Hannibal war, the Romans' orthodox approach was that an attack would come from the South because the Alps in the North are uncrossable. Hannibal, in an innovative and unorthodox move, crossed the Alps with elephants and attacked Rome from the North, and won a decisive victory, or more recently, the story of COVID vaccines with mRNA. For years, there was a standard approach to creating vaccines, which took many years. Then some innovators came along and took a completely different approach, and now vaccines are being made in six months.

But we must keep in mind that all problems may not need innovative solutions. Some problems may be better served with predictable solutions.

Frontlist: This book is about college life, friendships, elections, rivalries, and much more. What got you to choose this theme?

Mohan: This is a semi-autobiographical story. So, the plot and characters came from there. And elections really are the most dramatic expressions of human emotion. Further, since these events occurred over a few days, it makes it thrilling. I felt it was a perfect fit for a short novel. I have toyed with the idea of writing a longer version of the story with a full back story of the college years. But I suspect that would have been yet another campus caper, so I edited all of that out.

Frontlist: Tell us something about your college life. Does the story in the book resonate with your own in any manner?

Mohan: I went to college a long time ago. Much of what I have written exactly describes my college days. It was a wonderful time – pre-internet, pre-mobile. Life had a different pace. Nothing in life was "instant". Everything required time and patience. We sat and talked to friends for hours in a canteen over cups of tea. There was no mobile phone to distract from a conversation. And there was a spirit of doing things frugally because everything was in short supply. So, you shared everything with your friends. Friendships mattered a lot.

Frontlist: What do you think are some of the major differences between colleges nowadays and colleges in the 90s?

Mohan: Very noticeably, India and its colleges have become richer. The buildings and hostels are better. The students appear to be well-fed and dressed. Everyone is much better informed. There is so much information available on every aspect of life. If you don't like the lecture you are listening to, you can listen to the world's best professors or practitioners via Youtube.

Frontlist: Due to the rise of Edtech and the changes in study materials, what impact is it bringing to the higher education sector?

Mohan: Across our society, everything we do has been revolutionized by digital technologies. We now conduct most

parts of our lives online – payments, banking, ticket booking, shopping, and watching movies have all moved online. It is only natural that education will also be transformed by digital technologies. We will increasingly see Edtech offering high-quality education to millions of students while also making it easier to access (no commute) and cheaper. Much of this change has already happened.

Frontlist: What do you think are the major factors in college elections and politics?

Mohan: A charismatic leader, strategy and planning, fundraising, building a narrative, effectively communicating the narrative, and being extra-sensitive in gauging people's moods are the key factors in college elections and politics in general. Elections show us that human beings experience a range of complex emotions. Logic does not always work well. The ability to charm people with interesting narratives and stories is key to winning an election.



"The Boy Who Wrote a Constitution"

Rajesh Talwar

Rajesh Talwar has written thirty-two books, which include novels, children's books, plays, self-help books, and non-fiction books covering issues in social justice, culture, and law. He has practiced law, taught at university, and also worked in senior positions with the United Nations. He is a British Chevening scholar and the recipient of an Honorary Citizenship Certificate from the Mayor of Tulsa (Oklahoma). He has been interviewed by The New York Times on the state of law and justice in India. He has studied for shorter and longer durations at various universities, including Delhi University, Nottingham, Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard.

The Boy Who Wrote a Constitution is his sixth book for children. Rajesh has contributed to the Economic Times, The Guardian (UK), the Pioneer, the Times of India NIE, The Patriot, Manushi, the Sunday Mail, and the New Indian Express. He is a sought-after speaker at literary festivals across the country.

Frontlist: Your play is a fact-based drama on Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's childhood memories. Where did you get all the relevant information regarding the same?

Rajesh: Much of the material used in the play is based on Ambedkar's revelations about seminal events in his life. I have written two other historical plays, including one on Aurangzeb. In my experience, it's always best to go to the original source to avoid any distortions that may emerge in a second-person account. For this reason, I have drawn heavily on Ambedkar's memorable essay, "Waiting for a Visa." I have also used material from Ambedkar's authorised biography and other writings about him. I have tried to stay true to the events as they historically occurred, but since this is to be read and enacted by children, it needs to be lively and engaging. For this reason, I have taken a degree of artistic liberty in the portrayal of the incidents in Babasaheb's life. Many times, I have used Ambedkar's own words, to make the play as authentic as possible. For the benefit of the more circumspect reader, I have frequently put in endnotes providing appropriate references, so that the reader does not feel that his intellect is being manipulated in any fashion, and he can easily cross-check the facts should he wish to do so.

I was also careful not to write an introduction or preface that might influence the mind of the child, parent, or another person who might be reading the play. For this reason, unlike the case with most of my other plays—this is my eleventh play—I decided to include a postface at the end of the book instead of a preface at the outset.

Frontlist: This book tells children about Dr Ambedkar's difficult childhood and adolescent years as he wrote the Indian Constitution and became the country's first Law and Justice Minister. Could you please share some facts about his life that readers didn't know before?

Rajesh: Let me start by speaking here of Ambedkar's life experiences in the context of the right to be able to drink water from a public source. That should be a given, should it not? There is a focus in the play on a citizen's right to drink water from a public well, tank, or lake. For this reason, the play's subtitle is titled 'A Play for Children on Human Rights.' Three scenes based on Ambedkar's life history focus on the difficulty experienced by Dalits in accessing water from sources that are available to everyone else. In school, young Bhim experiences difficulty in drinking water, which is available to all other non-Dalit students. At the Daulatabad Fort, he and his Dalit friends are set upon by some Muslims who object to their drinking water from a public tank because they are Dalits. Finally, there is a scene that dramatizes the Mahad Satyagraha in which Ambedkar leads thousands of Dalits to Chowdar Lake for them to drink water just like anyone else.

Our other national leaders, Gandhi, Bose, or Nehru, did not face any real struggles in their childhood. Ambedkar did not even have money to pay his school fees. As a child, Gandhi experimented with non-vegetarian food when he came under the influence of a Muslim boy in his class, but otherwise, his childhood is not particularly interesting. That's why, perhaps, although so much has been written about the Mahatma, no one ever thought of writing a play titled 'The Boy Who Would Become a Mahatma.' Between Gandhi, Nehru, and Bose, Bose had a more interesting childhood perhaps, but Bose's childhood is also not comparable with Ambedkar's.

Frontlist: Dr B R Ambedkar had a difficult time in his childhood because of caste discrimination. Do you think it still happens nowadays?

Rajesh: Absolutely. There is no question. In fact, this is a question

one of the children poses to Milan, one of the other boys. Milan takes out a recent newspaper cutting to show the continued difficulties faced by Dalits, including Dalit children.

Not only have Dalits not been appreciated but, historically, they have been looked upon by the other castes with disgust and revulsion. This terrible situation continues. The untouchable is cleaning up your filth, but instead of appreciating him and being grateful to him for doing things that you find difficult, there are those amongst us who still think of the Dalit as someone dirty, whose mere touch would pollute him and render him untouchable. Dalits were and are asked to live on the outskirts of the village. They are not allowed to use the well that is used by the rest of the community, and the men, women, and children are repeatedly abused by so-called high and middle castes. And, if anyone among them should dare to protest, in many parts of the country, they will still be beaten publicly and humiliated. Every few weeks, we read reports of a Dalit woman being raped in a northern state.

Frontlist: How did Dr Ambedkar's actions influence the people in his life?

Rajesh: Ambedkar fought hard all his life against discrimination. Possibly, two of his great achievements that still resonate with Dalits to this day are the burning of the Manusmriti, which preached discrimination against the Dalits, and the carrying out of the Mahad Satyagraha. Interestingly, the world knows about Gandhi's famous Dandi March in 1930 to protest the salt tax imposed by the British. But, far fewer people around the world, including in India, know that three years before Gandhi's march, in 1927, Ambedkar undertook a march to the Chowdar Lake at Mahad. Gandhi fought for Dalit rights, it is true, but if we are to be perfectly honest, we have to admit that for many years, the Mahatma was himself unclear on the issue of caste and caste discrimination. Ambedkar was also more of a realist than Gandhi. I believe that had Congress and Gandhi listened to him more, much of the post-partition violence and bloodletting that took place could have been mitigated. Ambedkar also understood that having a great constitution was by itself no guarantee that the rights enshrined within would be enforced.

Frontlist: What are some of the strongest instances that happened in Dr Ambedkar's life that you have mentioned in the story?

Rajesh: I have included a hard-hitting scene where young Bhim is made to sit at the end of the class on a piece of sack, unlike the other children, who have proper chairs to sit on. The same scene shows how difficult it is for him to even drink water at school, let alone think about eating food. Ambedkar himself writes in his biography that he could only drink water if there was a peon who could open the school tap for him. And if the peon was not available for some reason, he could not drink water. Four words, Ambedkar writes, summed up his situation: "No peon, no water." I have also included a reference to a little-known, life-changing train journey that Ambedkar undertook while still a child. The world is aware of Mahatma Gandhi's train journey in South Africa, where he was thrown out of a compartment despite possessing a first-class ticket. In comparison, even in India, far fewer people are aware of a similar, hugely significant train journey that Ambedkar undertook with his siblings while he was still a child. If Gandhi's famed train episode in South Africa exposed the racial bias of the colonizers, Babasaheb's journey exposed the terrible evil of caste that has afflicted India for centuries. The colonizers have long since left, but caste and caste discrimination continue to afflict the Indian nation like an incurable virus.

Upon his return to India, Ambedkar decides to work for the

Maharaja of Baroda, who financed his overseas education. The struggles he faces as a young man just trying to find accommodation are heart-wrenching. He stays for a few days at a Parsi guest house, but then the Parsis ask him to leave because he is a Dalit. He approaches a Hindu friend to stay with him for a few days, till such time that his official accommodation gets arranged, but the friend refuses because his cook is a Saraswat Brahmin. He then approaches a Christian friend, who also refuses because his wife was a Brahmin before her family converted and became Christian. Those Christians still retained some of their original prejudices. Can you imagine? At length, Ambedkar comes to the realisation that every community in India that is not Dalit itself discriminates against the Dalit, be it the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, or even the Parsis.

Frontlist: How has your journey been so far as an author? What changes have you noticed in the publishing industry?

Rajesh: I have written 32 odd books in different genres, including plays, children's books, self-help books, novels, and so on and so forth. This is my sixth children's book. Some of my books have been published by big names in the industry, such as Juggernaut, Hay House, and Orient BlackSwan. Others have been published by relatively small players. One of the big changes that have taken place over the past couple of decades is the rise of e-books, together with self-publishing, or Indie publishing. According to recent figures, it appears as much as thirty percent of all sales of e-books take place in Indie publishing. In the past, big publishers, as well as some big authors, would privately sneer at small publishers. Today, this is not possible. The scenario has completely changed and will continue to change.

The other thing I have discovered over time is that it is not necessarily the case that big names will treat your final product with greater care. Most of the time, it is a huge asset for any author to have a big publisher back his book, but this is not always the case. For instance, I have two writer friends who have had terrible book covers designed by big names in the publishing world. Unfortunately, they were not experienced enough to have kept some oversight over the process. Increasingly, the writer needs to take greater control and not just trust that he has written the book and everything else will be done by the publisher.

There is even a sad case of an author I know who spent five years researching a very important historical subject, and then finally found a big publisher after a year or so. Her experience with this publisher was terrible. Firstly, they made her wait for as long as three years before finally releasing the title. Secondly, the cover design was very pedestrian. As a relatively new and inexperienced writer, she did not realise at the time how important book covers could be. Thirdly, she had chosen a generic title, not realising that in this age of the Internet, for your book to stand out, it must have a distinctive title so that it shows up in the Google search. This was, of course, her own mistake, but one would have expected a big publisher to have had an experienced editor who could have guided and advised her to choose another title. Finally, the publisher did not invest in publicity at all, and so the book, when released, was left unnoticed by the media. She was left anguished by how, after all those years of effort, her book was ignored, despite being on an important subject.



"Charu Majumdar: The Dreamer Rebel"

Ashoke Mukhopadhyay

Ashoke Mukhopadhyay made a foray into literature with a host of startling articles and insightful documentations like *Terrorism—a colonial construct*, *The Naxalites: Through the Eyes of Calcutta Police*, etc. Mukhopadhyay won the coveted Ananda Snowcem Award twice for his articles. His zeal for seamless stitching of facts with imagination is also reflected in his novel *Abiram Jwarer Roopkatha* (A Ballad of Remittent Fever), long-listed for the JCB Award 2020.

Frontlist: If the invasion of Britishers hadn't happened, what kind of life do you think Charu Majumdar would have led?

Ashoke: In his early twenties, Charu Majumdar had witnessed tremendous exploitation of the peasant community by the landlord class as well as the occasional resistance put up by the have-nots in villages in the Debiganj-Boda-Pachagarh areas in the north of Bengal, where he was closely associated with peasants during the Tebhaga Movement, which was essentially directed towards the landlord class. Later, he was associated with the tea workers' movement in the Terai/Dooars region and the Bengal Dooars Railway workers' union; and these socio-political phenomena would have been there even if the British colonial rule hadn't happened. In fact, following the British departure from the Indian firmament, by and large, the same inequality and exploitation have prevailed to date. Hence, given Charu Majumdar's sensitivity, he would have had no other option but to become a revolutionary.

Frontlist: What kind of characteristics or attributes do you think Charu possessed to make people follow him to such an extent? Can one acquire such a skill set in their lifetime, or are they engraved in the minds of certain people only?

Ashoke: It was his simple, down-to-earth lifestyle, and oratory skills blended with genuine emotion that placed him above the rest. With his vast knowledge of Mao Ze Dong's thoughts and experience of the daily life of the downtrodden, he could carry the audience through laughter, pain, anguish, anger, and aggression in his speech; and he could do it with unusual elan. Who else

in Indian politics would say, 'A person who doesn't dream and cannot make others dream, is not a revolutionary'. His extensive knowledge of music, literature, history, and politics, coupled with a deep insight into the exploited class, had helped him to become a true leader of the masses. I think these qualities are etched in the hearts of very few people in history.

Frontlist: What are the key points from Charu Majumdar's story that you want readers to take away from it?

Ashoke: Vaskar Nandy (1938-2018), an old acquaintance of Majumdar, observed, "The communists in India had a set pattern in the discussion, but with Charu da, we never followed the archaic type... we used to discuss literature, politics, music, in fact, any subject under the sun." Charu Majumdar was known for his humane faculty, emotions, presence of mind, and confidence in his comrades-in-arms. In fact, Charu Majumdar was not your average communist. He was a communist with a golden heart, with a difference. There were gross mistakes in the revolutionary method formulated by him, yet, it was he who stood strongly against the rightist attitude of the then communists and rightly highlighted the question of land in India; also, the Naxalite movement in the 1970s, which first raised the issues of subalterns in the country.

Majumdar was ivory-ivory flawed but ivory still.

Frontlist: We are in the midst of rewriting history. Do you believe there will be more people like Charu or movements like Naxal in the next generation?

Ashoke: As long as there are imbalances, inequality, and exploitation in the social system, society, as a reaction to the unjust, will churn out fearless souls like Charu Majumdar. However, the movement to be launched by the next generation will not and should not be a copy of the Naxal movement, which made a good number of mistakes.

Frontlist: Do you think Charu Majumdar's methods and ideology will still work in the modern age?

Ashoke: It was Charu Majumdar who could successfully inculcate his theory of the "New Man"—one who would be able to conquer all thoughts of self and engage in unconditional self-sacrifice—in the revolutionary youth in the 1970s; and this selfless attitude is still the prerequisite of a genuine revolutionary who wants to see a New India. However, given the complexities of the modern age and the changed economic system, many of Majumdar's theories and methods, I am afraid, may not work.

Frontlist: If you had gotten the chance to be in the Naxalite movement, would you have participated in it?

Ashoke: I am a writer. My primary job is writing, and a writer needs to get into the skin of the character, but not necessarily be a part of it. I have chronicled various facets of the movement (1967–1972) in my Bengali novel *Atta N'tar Surya* (published in 2013 by Dey's Publishing), which is still a best-seller.

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"The Millennial Yogi"

Deepam Chatterjee

Deepam Chatterjee is a retired Indian Army captain. He took up film-making after a debilitating spinal injury compelled him to leave the army. It was during this period that he spent time with various spiritual teachers, including the Dalai Lama. Later, he trained under Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and taught the Art of Living courses before embarking on a journey of self-exploration.

A keen researcher as well as a chronicler of oral narratives, Deepam writes and lectures on Hindu thought, meditation, spirituality, mysticism, mythology, and wellness. He has translated a significant body of Sanskrit works into easily readable literature for young readers and mainstream audiences. His work appears regularly in newspapers and periodicals across the country.

Frontlist: "If we divide our lives the way we sort laundry, we will never find peace." Please share the context behind this quote.

Deepam: The protagonist, Jay, is at the nadir of his life when he meets Vini, his future mentor. Vini helps Jay reclaim his life.

Frontlist: What does "ambition" mean to you? Is it okay to be unsatisfied after fulfilling your ambitions in life?

Deepam: Often, we want to get stuff for ourselves and our loved ones or to impress people. Even when you fulfil such ambitions, you are bound to feel dissatisfied.

Ambition should be like salt in a dish. Too much or too little makes the dish inedible. We all need that small push every morning to seize the day. Carpe Diem!

Ask yourself, why do you do what you do every single day. Why do you get that haircut or buy a nice dress? What motivates you to earn more than what you need? Do you love sharing gifts with your loved ones and to see the delight on their faces? Do you want to help people who don't have enough? Do you feel the frustration that you don't have enough to help those who need financial help

and healing? Well, that's what ambition is for. Stoking this fire within yourself will fulfill you.

When you dream of having more to make this world a better place, you will feel completely different. Such ambitions will not leave you unsatisfied. However, when you decide to do stuff only to stroke your ego and for personal pleasures, you'll often end up feeling tired and dissatisfied.

Frontlist: This book includes age-old poems and music from many mystical traditions of India. What led you to make the same decision?

Deepam: The landscape of India's spirituality is vast and immersed in poetry and music. Surprisingly, although India is the land of great mystics, we don't have good literature on mysticism and spiritual fiction in English by Indian authors. We still recommend *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho to students in schools! I felt that we should have good literature written in simple English that has universal appeal. Since there was none available, I decided to write *The Millennial Yogi*.

Frontlist: You write on Hindu thought, meditation, spirituality, mysticism, mythology, and wellness. Which genre of writing are you closest to, and why?

Deepam: I don't compartmentalise. I love to write as my thoughts flow. Genres are secondary. However, I have realised that as time has gone by, my writings have veered towards Mysticism and Spirituality.

But that being said, I write in many other genres for the screen. It is exhilarating to get the brain to leap into different modes -drama, thriller, humour, romance, action, and even horror!

My writings are introspective and experiential. I love exploring the psychology of the characters. The characters in my stories often mirror my thoughts. In every genre, I like to explore the motivation of my characters, and hence, these myriad genres synergise, and the stories delve into many subtle layers which would otherwise have remained unexplored.

Frontlist: Is it compulsory to travel the path of suffering to attain the status of a "Self-Help Guru"?

Deepam: Absolutely not! Spirituality is joyous and filled with adventures! We must have the awareness that we are on our unique journeys. What one calls "suffering" need not be painful for another. However, we need to realise that when we constantly seek pleasures and comforts, we are sure to end up in a deep hole. Overindulgence in anything will make us sick. You might love ice cream, but try eating ice cream all day and night for a week! You will be sick! And, you'll not want to look at an ice cream cone for days after that! There's a great secret here. Anything you derive pleasure from can also be a source of misery and suffering. On the other hand, when you avoid going through painful experiences, you end up suffering too! There's a saying, 'Whatever you resist, persists!' Pain and pleasure are two faces of the same coin. When one travels the path, one realises that both are illusory.

One doesn't attain the status of a self-help Guru. It's ridiculous. Everyone has their own journey.

We're all on the same boat... and just because someone got into the boat a bit earlier, s/he has a slight advantage. If you are on the path, you can only call out to the ones on the shore to hop in! We're all going down the river, in the flow!

Frontlist: Share your advice on how to reclaim one's life.

Deepam: That's what this book deals with! The second half of *The Millennial Yogi* deals with many methods and techniques that help the protagonist, Jay, heal and turn his life around.



"December in Dacca: The Indian Armed Forces and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War"

K S Nair

K S Nair is the author of two books—Ganesha's Flyboys: The Indian Air Force in the Congo, 1960–62, and The Forgotten Few: The Indian Air Force in World War II—and of numerous articles in Indian, British, Canadian, Japanese, and US publications and websites. He is an IIT Delhi and IIM Bangalore graduate who has held senior positions in multinational and boutique firms as well as development agencies.

Frontlist: India's military strength is growing rapidly. What significant changes can you draw out between the present and the past? What do you think India's military strength will turn out to be in 2050?

K S: In the first half of the question, India's military strength undoubtedly owes a great deal to its past, to the traditions and honour that its armed forces are bound by. India's armed forces draw great pride from their past, justifiably and deservedly, and that remains true today. Significant changes since then include the expansion of war to more devastating levels because of the increasing destructiveness of modern weapons as well as the continuing extension of war-related violence beyond military personnel to the broader population. Both these changes make present-day warfare, and in particular, the escalation of warfare, more difficult to "manage" than in the past.

On the second half of the question, India's military strength in 2050, I see myself as a writer on military history, so I am more comfortable talking about the past than the future. But, I will say, I would like to see India's military capabilities retain the professionalism, resourcefulness, courage, and integrity of the past while taking on board some of the tactical and technical ingenuity and focusing on external enemies, which are the most successful modern militaries have demonstrated. This will require some cultural changes.

But I think it is also important to recognise that maintaining our military strength up to 2050 and beyond will also require some changes beyond the armed forces. These include a more productive and nimble indigenous weapons manufacturing sector and more robust R & D than we have demonstrated in the past.

Frontlist: Being a graduate from the leading institutes (IIT & IIM), what impact did it have on your writing journey?

K S: To be honest, I have often argued that those qualifications are not particularly relevant to the writing that December in Dacca represents (history, and military history in particular). They would, of course, be relevant if I were writing on technology, management, or policy (which I have done, though not at book length).

But several editors and publicists tell me that those labels open doors and add credibility. Writers are always glad of that.

Frontlist: Do you think, perhaps in the future, India and Pakistan can co-exist peacefully? Is there a possibility of having no borders between these two nations?

K S: I would go even further and say that long-term stability and prosperity for both countries necessitate peaceful coexistence. As I wrote in December in Dacca, I believe it is important that we in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan too remember the Bangladesh Liberation War in a believable way, which is not dismissed by the rest of the world as triumphalism by the victors or obduracy by the losers. Coming to terms with our shared history is a worthwhile objective.

And it would contribute to a future in which India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the other countries of South Asia live in harmony with each other and form a broadly united front to address the common developmental, environmental, and governance issues that most developing countries face.

Frontlist: Which kinds of incidents led you to address issues related to Indian wars and history?

K S: The answer to that is the same as I gave when I was responding to similar questions about my last book, The Forgotten Few. I lived outside India for some years, particularly during globally significant anniversary years such as the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the centenary of the start of the First World War. I realised from events around those anniversaries that many other countries treat wars they have been involved in with a degree of broad-based remembrance (which is not the same as "celebration") and with a continued desire to improve their understanding. Doing so in a clear, honest way helps them become more confident about their nationhood and makes for a more informed version of patriotism than blind nationalism. I would like to see India develop that kind of informed understanding and confidence about herself and her history, including her military history.

Frontlist: There is a quote, "History repeats itself." Do you think incidents like the Bangladesh liberation war could happen again? If so, how can events like that be prevented?

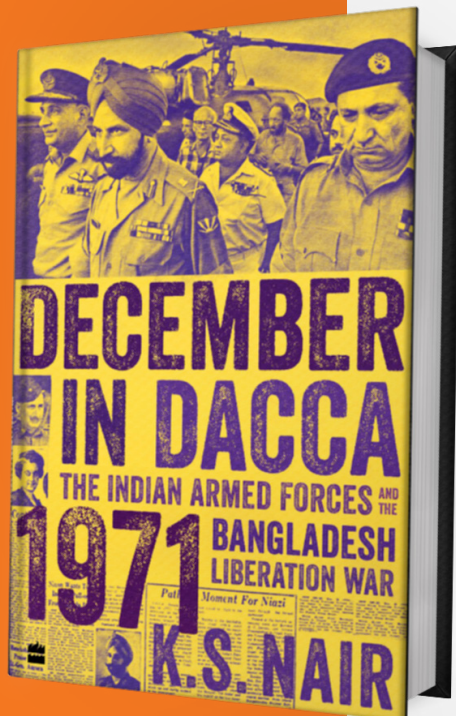
K S: Very much. I think the current Russia-Ukraine conflict is, in many ways, very similar to the Bangladesh Liberation War—with the difference that this time, Western countries are showing a rare unanimity in condemning the aggressor. At the time of the Bangladesh Liberation War, for reasons of their own, the United States was unable to see past certain narrow political interests and came down on the wrong side of history. So the parallel isn't perfect – but yes, I do believe history is repeating itself and does in many other places and at many different levels.

The prevention of events like that is again a question to which the answer goes very much beyond military history; it involves politics, diplomacy, and even ethics. I will only say that if we want to prevent such events in the future, countries need to be prepared to concede some authority to international institutions with appropriate mandates for peacekeeping as well as peace enforcement. Unfortunately, in the current era of hyper-nationalism, most countries (including many Western democracies) seem to be bad-mouthing and undermining such institutions and refusing to submit themselves to the jurisdiction of such institutions.

Frontlist: You have classified the book into three sections and have termed them “different storms.” Can you please elaborate on that?

K S: If I may disagree slightly, I wouldn’t describe the three sections of December in Dacca as three different storms. I would describe them as the three periods around any storm. The first section, ‘The Gathering Storm’ (which is also, the title of the first volume of Winston Churchill’s history of the Second World War), describes the events leading up to the storm. The second section, ‘Navigating the Storm’, describes the way the Indian armed forces and their commanders conducted the war, in the same way, that the captain, officers, and crew of a ship caught in a storm at sea work together to navigate safely through the storm. The third section, ‘After the (First) Storm’ (which is again a tiny homage to the title of the last movement of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, ‘Song After the Storm’) is partly a description of how Bangladesh, the country that was most devastated by the 1971 war, struggled to pick itself up and emerge from the wreckage left behind by the storm.

It was a turbulent process, with many slips back among all the steps forward. But after fifty years, Bangladesh today shows remarkably strong Human Development Indicators and has overtaken India in per capita GDP. India should be proud of its founding contribution to what is now a success story.



“The Black Magic Women”

Dr Moushumi Kandali

Dr Moushumi Kandali is a bilingual short-story writer, art historian, and translator. Her stories have been published in several national and international literary magazines and edited anthologies such as “Oxford Anthology of North East Writing”, “Penguin Anthology of fifteen classic Assamese short stories”, “The Greatest Assamese Stories Ever Told”, published by Aleph Book Company, and many others. She has received several prestigious awards for her creative writing. Her stories have been translated into German, Korean, Spanish, and others, along with several Indian Languages. She has published four collections of short stories, three research books on visual Culture & Art, and two books of translation so far. Her doctoral thesis had been a pioneering attempt at mapping and documenting the entire modernist discourse of Visual Art in North East India. She has published on a regular basis in several international and national research journals about India’s contemporary visual and literary cultures. Before joining the current position in the Department of Cultural Studies at Tezpur Central University, she had taught in the School of Culture and Creative Expressions at the Ambedkar University of Delhi for several years.

Frontlist: What are the main issues of gender inequality faced by women from Assam, Tripura, and Sikkim?

Dr Moushumi: It’s not only about the women from the four states mentioned here; it’s for all the eight states from the north-eastern region of India. Now the question is, in which context are we talking about this issue of gender inequality? Are we talking about it within their region or the larger context of the pan-Indian scenario? Within the region, there are issues related to gender inequality. We should remember that the North East is not a homogenous region but a region with diversity, heterogeneity, and different location-specific ground realities. The situation in Meghalaya might be different from the ground realities in Assam

or Tripura. But there is discrimination at multiple levels within the patriarchal system everywhere, be it within or outside. Now, when it comes to the larger context, many women from these states are perceived in different ways by certain sections in other parts of the country because of their different physiognomy or looks or maybe because of their seemingly unconventional ways of living, which are considered non-normative from a different perspective.

Frontlist: The chapters of the book are quite anomalous. Please share your objectives behind choosing the same.

Dr Moushumi: One can call it "anomalous" because it is not a novel but a collection of ten different short stories with different themes and subjects. Collections of short stories can be anomalous or might look anomalous at first glance. However, if you delve deep enough, you will see that there is a common connecting thread, a thread that binds the characters. Hailing from the North-Eastern part of India, the characters from most of these stories meet the multifarious facets of humanity within a setting in the "mainstream" Indian metropolis, where they struggle to cope with their circumstantial challenges while chasing their dreams. They are mostly from the lower or middle strata of society, with roots in diverse indigenous cultures and 'different' looks from North East India! Finally, it is about their lived experiences and marginalised existence, about suffering and survival all at once.

Frontlist: What do you think is the main root cause of the discrimination faced by them?

Dr Moushumi: I think I have already replied to this question. It is all about the process of othering by a certain section of the mainstream. It is related to a particular kind of perception and subsequent stereotyping.

However, I am not generalising here, not at all. I will not fall into the same trap and take part in the same process of othering that I am trying to question through my stories. For me, there is no other. There should not be.

Frontlist: What is the current status of Assamese women in Indian politics?

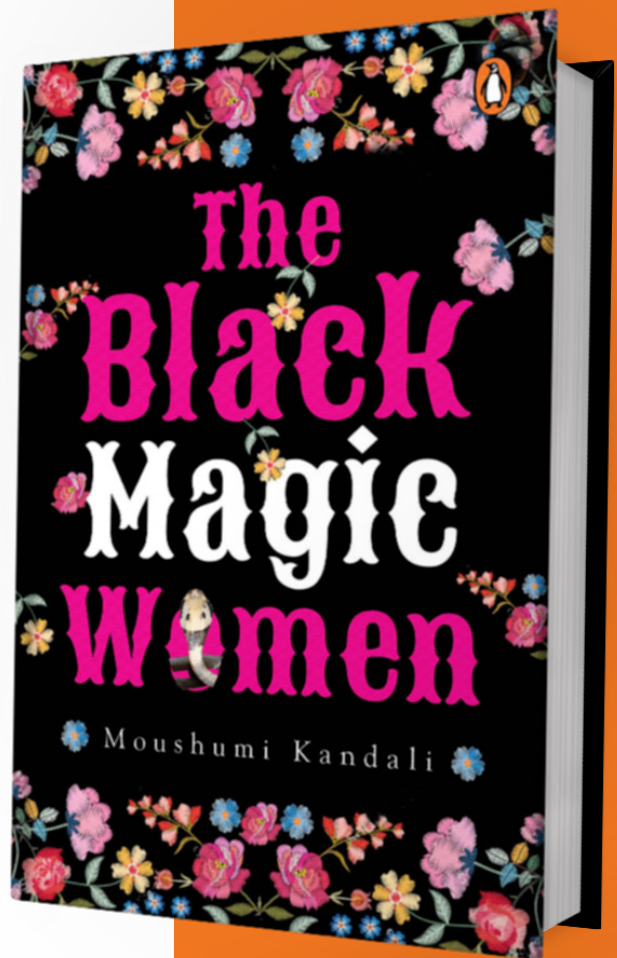
Dr Moushumi: If you are speaking about participation in active electoral or party politics, then statistics might point to the lower side of the pyramid. However, if you are talking about political awareness and an informed understanding of political dynamics, the women of Assam are very much engaged in politics. There had been active participation of women in politics since the Freedom Movement. We had a young woman martyr Swahid Kanaklata Baruah who led the procession in one of those protest movements during that time. In pre-colonial history, to there are references to women warriors like Mula Gabhoru, who fought against the Mughals! Overall, we can say that women play an active role in this regard.

Frontlist: What are the top 5 factors behind stereotypes for women from the North-East? Kindly elaborate on why these factors even exist and if you have some concrete solutions to offer?

Dr Moushumi: See, I am not a social scientist who has done academic research on this particular area to give five or ten top ten factors behind such stereotyping or offer 'Concrete' solutions in this regard. I am a writer who has woven some narratives based on observations and some empirical lived experiences of people I met at different points in time!

At the most, I can say that there should be more awareness and knowledge about the people from your own country because

they are also your people, who might look slightly different or who live differently when it comes to cultural manifestations or different geo-social expressions. From the point of view of the National curriculum, there should be more texts about this part of the country, their tradition, history or culture. The popular media should try to be more inclusive when it comes to the dynamics of representation. For instance, when you have popular mainstream narrations in different media such as cinema, plays, or mass media forms such as advertisements, why can't we have a few more representations or faces from these states? Acquaintance begins with visibility which will eventually lead to acceptance.



FRONTLIST SPECIAL


FRONT LIST

— SPOTLIGHT SESSION —


On the topic

‘Why do Literature Festivals matter?’

OUR DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS ARE



Hemma Myers Sood
Author



Dr Tarana Husain Khan
Writer and Food Historian

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS ENLIGHTENING SESSION

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OUR DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS ARE



Kala Ramesh
Haiku Poet



Kapil Gupta
CEO, Frontlist and Festival Director, PVLf

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS ENLIGHTENING SESSION

This month's Spotlight Session highlighted the theme: **“Why do Literature Festivals Matter?”**

We featured those publishing industry experts who have enough experience in organising and attending literary festivals.

List of Panelists

- 1) Kapil Gupta - CEO, Frontlist; and, Festival Director, PVLf
- 2) Kala Ramesh - Haiku Poet
- 3) Dr Tarana Husain Khan - Writer and Food Historian
- 4) Hemma Myers Sood - Author

Have a look at some of the points that we covered throughout the session as follows:

- The significance of literature festivals and their contribution to helping our social structure to advance the literary arts.
- They exchanged views on how literature festivals augment the importance of reading and storytelling among audiences.
- Additional literary gathering opportunities for authors are available.
- Through this session, our professionals were able to gather different perspectives on giving the same prominence to small-scale events that we offer larger ones to encourage solidarity in the publishing ecosystem.
- Experts' first-hand experience is acquired from literature festivals.

FACEBOOK LIVE



KARTIKEYA LADHA

This month, we had a Facebook Live session with Kartikeya Ladha. He is a well-known author, influencer, and traveller.

His latest book is "Life Unknown: A Passage through India," which entails his 1000 km pilgrimage by foot across South India.

In the live session, he discussed the path of self-discovery, which he is still searching for. According to him, a person needs self-introspection to get a deeper understanding of themselves. He has spent 4 years of his life in a nomadic way. Mostly, he shared his penchant for philosophies and how Buddhism came to him in his childhood days. In a nutshell, he is a normal person who doesn't know the meaning of his life's existence yet.

He will be coming up with his fourth book, which might give all readers an amazing aroma of his new thrilling adventure.

NISHTHA ANAND

Our 2nd Facebook Live Session was with Nishtha Anand on May 13, 2022.

Nishtha Anand is an author of 'Awakening the Rainmaker' (#1 Bestseller in Human Resources), TEDx Speaker, and LinkedIn Top Voice 2022.

In this live session, we got to know how an investment banker turned author is on the mission of bringing 'Gender Inclusivity' across the Corporate Landscape. She talked about how the lack of industrial experience among youth who just started their corporate career and ended up facing biases made her write the book.

Also, she shared that she interviewed numerous women personalities for the 'Awakening the Rainmaker.'



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