

# FRONTLIST

NOVEMBER 2022

*2 Months Left*

*to revel in the Celebration of Literature!*



**PVLFF**

Pragati Vichaar  
LITERATURE  
FESTIVAL 2023

9<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Jan

Author's Marathon

Excellence Awards

"Immerse in the realm of Children's Literature to amplify kids' imagination and creativity"

**Special Feature**

with





# WELCOME MESSAGE



Dear Frontlisters,

I hope you all enjoyed the holiday season, the sweets, the lights, the parties, and the family time. Many of you were in Frankfurt, where Team Frontlist was also present. We hope you enjoyed our updates from there. We welcome you back with fresh energy. November is coming with high spirits to quench your thirst for children and picture books.

This month, we collaborated with Adidev Press, an independent children's publisher based in Singapore. They rolled out compelling illustrated children's books this year. Unquestionably, their collection is extraordinary enough to woo the hearts of all kids fascinated with Literature. Each book oozes vibrant illustrations and enriched content that assist children in augmenting their imagination and creativity skills. Frontlist would like to share the heartiest gratitude to Adidev Press for collaborating with us on the Special Feature.

With immense pleasure, I share the closing of the first part of the PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023. The entries for PVLF Author Excellence Awards closed on October 31st. We are overwhelmed with the response from the publishing community (authors and publishers alike). The jury has an unenviable job of shortlisting the entries for voting. On December 1st, we will announce the five shortlisted entries in each category for the PVLF Author Excellence Awards 2023. Get ready to vote for the best author beginning December 1st.

PVLF 2023 Author Marathon speakers are going to be revealed this month. Once again, the overwhelming response has made our job tough. Prepare yourself because we have just two months to enthrall you with edifying conversations. This time we have a virtual Author's Marathon for 5 days (9th-13th January 2023) and a one-day physical Author's Marathon on January 14th, 2023.

Our mission for developing an ecosystem around the publishing industry looks in sight for the first time now. Frontlist Media will always be indebted to all our fans for their support and motivation to keep this mission intact and drive us to work hard and consistently.

Enjoy Reading and get your hands on our November edition :)

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

Navita Berry  
Business Head

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**Frontlist Special**

- Spotlight Session: Importance of Children's Literature

**Frontlist**

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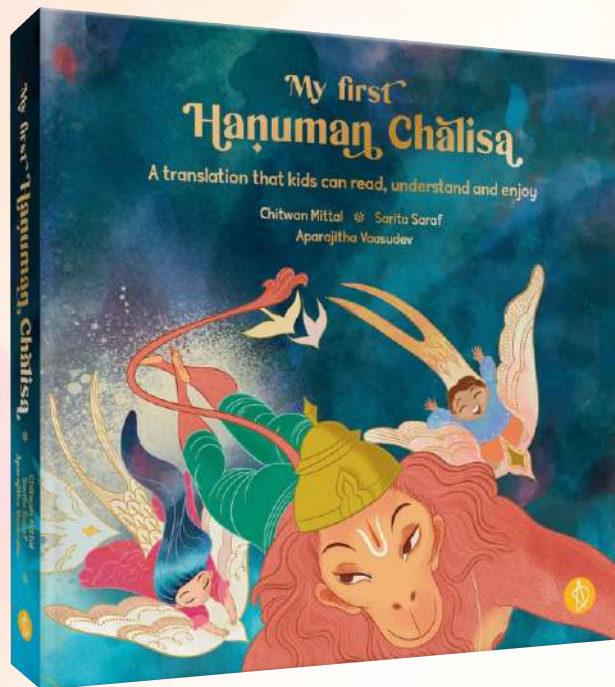
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# Special Feature

with



**AdiDev**  
— Press



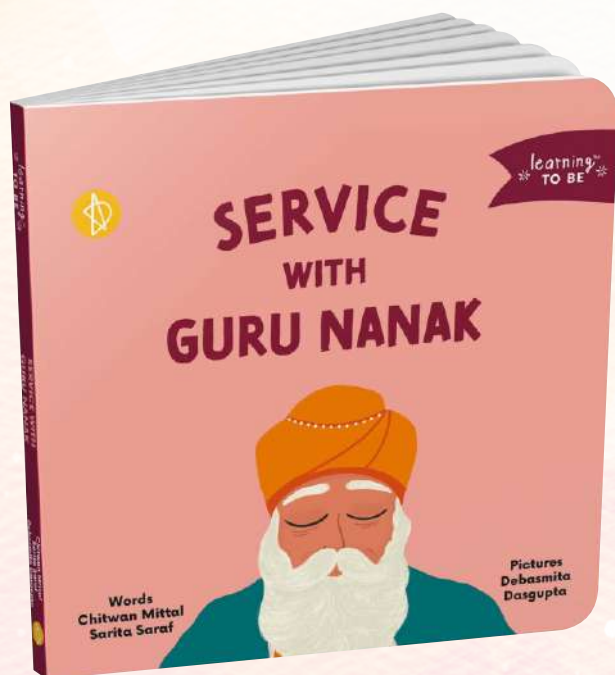
## My First Hanuman Chalisa

### ABOUT THE BOOK:

Hanuman Chalisa is one of the most important prayers in Hinduism. Many children worldwide grow up with stories of Hanuman and are taught to recite this prayer intuitively. Most children instinctively think of a few verses when they are afraid or want to pray for strength and courage. But many do not even understand what the verses mean. This book aspires to make the text of the Hanuman Chalisa, not just something that is memorised but also understood, cherished, and enjoyed by every child. The translation is in simple English with word meanings, and each page includes the original text in Awadhi with English translations. The text is constructed for readability at Grade 1-2 level. With this book, children will fall in love with Hanuman and treasure Tulsidas's simple prayer. Through stunning illustrations that bring the story behind this prayer to life, it will take children on a fantastical and wondrous journey.

**Authors:** Chitwan Mittal and Sarita Saraf

**Illustrator:** Aparajitha Vasudev



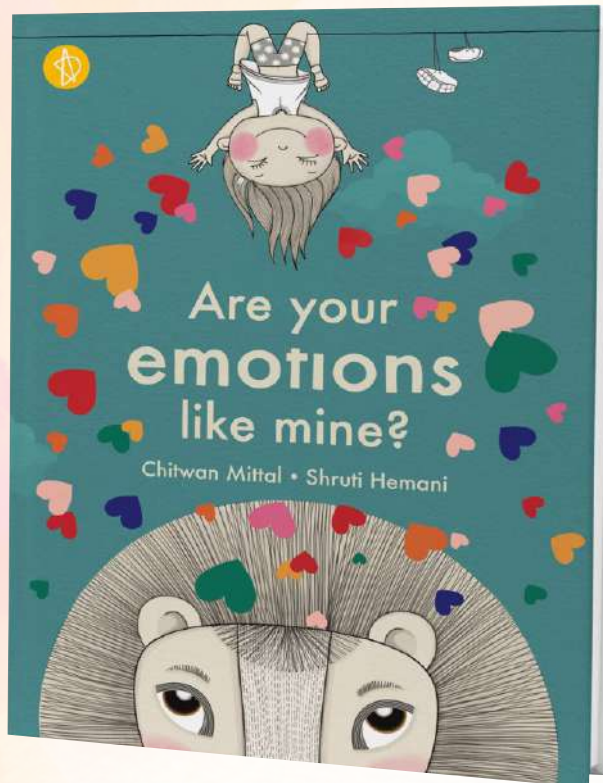
## Service with Guru Nanak

### ABOUT THE BOOK:

When the school bell rings and it's time for home, can you spare a minute or two? The teacher is tired from her long, busy day. Can you say, 'I'd like to help you?' The Indian Saint, Guru Nanak, believed that God lives in each and everything. He reminds us to remember that each time we serve, we are serving God. He encourages us to make service a part of our daily lives. This board book, Service With Guru Nanak, will enable children to explore how they can serve friends, family, and the environment in their everyday lives. The series, Learning TO BE, is a creative way to introduce your little ones to significant values engagingly. Written in simple text and magical verse, this series is perfect to read aloud to toddlers (2 to 4-year-olds) and excellent for beginning readers (4 to 8-year-olds).

**Authors:** Chitwan Mittal and Sarita Saraf

**Illustrator:** Debasmita Dasgupta



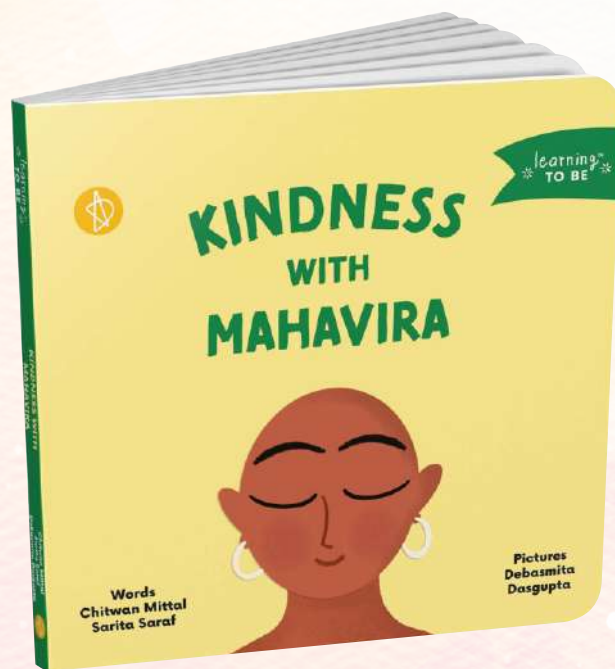
## Are your emotions like mine?

### ABOUT THE BOOK:

A young child can often be overwhelmed by the range of complex emotions they feel, that too in the course of a single day! The first step of dealing with their emotions is learning how to identify what they are feeling. *Are Your Emotions Like Mine?* does just that. With simple text and magical illustrations, this book for toddlers deals with the universal theme of emotions. It helps young children identify their emotions and teaches them how to cope through the simple strategy of taking a deep, deep breath. Also, the artwork in this book is unique. The illustrations are done by Shruti Hemani, an Architect, and Urban Planner. In this debut children's picture book, she uses simple line work inspired by traditional folk art from Rajasthan, India. The artwork is a celebration of diversity as it showcases the cityscape of Jodhpur's bustling, small town and unexpected visual imagery in the plethora of books that situate children in western cities.

**Author:** Chitwan Mittal

**Illustrator:** Shruti Hemani



## Kindness with Mahavira

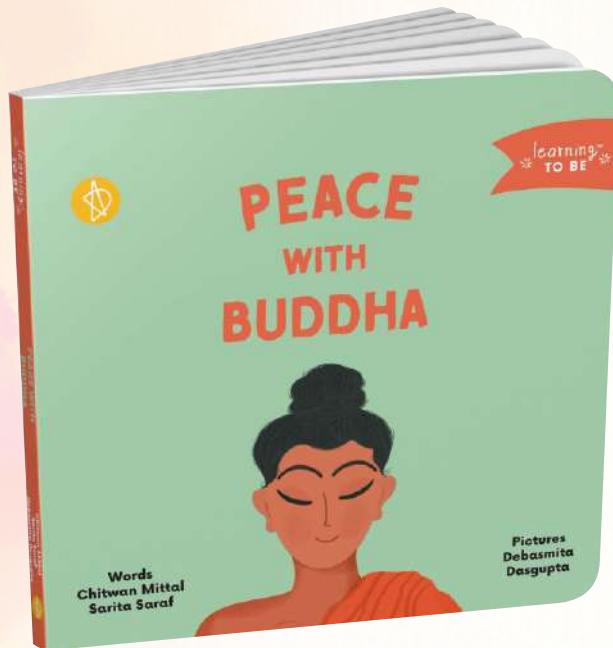
### ABOUT THE BOOK:

So, said he, *"Be kind to all! Humungous or little or really, really small!"*

The Indian saint, Mahavira, believed that all living beings have a soul. And that each soul is of equal value, be it an elephant, an ant, or a person. He encourages us to be kind to all. This board book, *Kindness With Mahavira*, will enable children to explore numerous ways of being kind to humans, animals, and themselves. The series, *Learning TO BE*, is a creative way to introduce your little ones to significant values engagingly. Written in simple text and magical verse, this series is perfect to read aloud to toddlers (2 to 4-year-olds) and excellent for beginning readers (4 to 8-year-olds).

**Authors:** Chitwan Mittal and Sarita Saraf

**Illustrator:** Debasmita Dasgupta



## Peace with Buddha

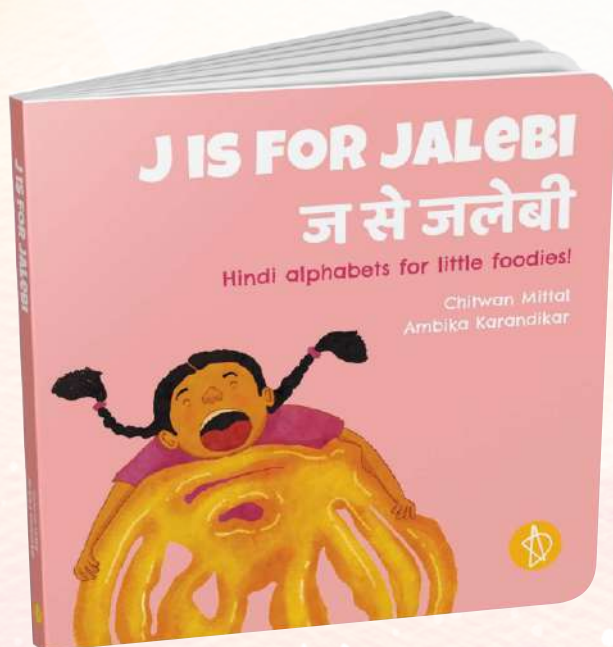
### ABOUT THE BOOK:

*"What happens when our wish comes true, and we receive our doll? We play with it but soon enough, we wish for a shiny ball!"*

Buddha did not want people to suffer, and he reminds us that desire leads to suffering. He encourages us to think of the path to peace as lying within ourselves. This board book, Peace With Buddha, will help children recognize the value of wanting less, finding peace, and connecting with their inner selves. The series, Learning TO BE, is a creative way to introduce your little ones to significant values engagingly. Written in simple text and magical verse, this series is perfect to read aloud to toddlers (2 to 4-year-olds) and excellent for beginning readers (4 to 8-year-olds).

**Authors:** Chitwan Mittal and Sarita Saraf

**Illustrator:** Debasmita Dasgupta



## J is for Jalebi : Hindi alphabets for little foodies!

### ABOUT THE BOOK:

*"kh is for khichdi. And kh is also for khana!"*

J is for Jalebi is a clever and fun way to introduce children to the Hindi alphabet and South Asian food vocabulary. There has never been a more exciting Hindi alphabet book. Your child will not be able to put it down! Stunning illustrations will make you feel the jalebis are in your own hands. This book is a must-have for those who have foodie babies! Simply put, just yummy! This board book is perfect for toddlers and pre-schoolers (2 to 4-year-olds)

**Author:** Chitwan Mittal

**Illustrator:** Ambika Karandikar

# Women in Sports

Titled Women in Sports, the set includes *Adaptability with Arunima Sinha* (Mountaineer), *Resilience with Bhakti Sharma* (Open Water Swimmer), *Transformation with Chandro and Prakash Tomar* (Sharpshooters), and *Trust with PT Usha* (Athlete). The stories of these outstanding women are sure to inspire and encourage many young children to live extraordinary lives.

These books have been written by award-winning Author and Poet Pervin Saket, using simple language and verse. Each book in the set has been illustrated by a different South Asian illustrator, allowing children to explore various visual styles. Each book ends with an inspirational message and has a historical timeline that showcases the journey of the protagonist, making this box set an outstanding addition to your child's library.

This set is simply the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES!

The set of four inspiring, easy-to-read, and vividly illustrated titles include:



## Adaptability with Arunima Sinha

Discover adaptability with Arunima Sinha, a national volleyball player who suffered major injuries and lost one leg in a scuffle with some thieves. She realigned her goals and became the world's first female amputee to climb the highest peaks.

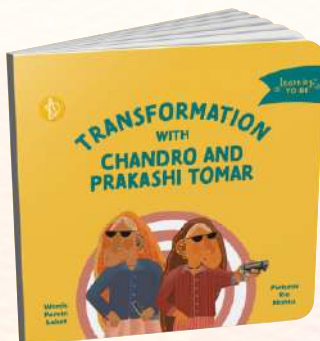
## Resilience with Bhakti Sharma

Discover resilience with Bhakti Sharma, an open-water swimmer who became the youngest and first Asian to swim in the Antarctic Ocean.



## Transformation with Chandro and Prakash Tomar

Discover transformation with Chandro and Prakash Tomar, sharpshooting champions from rural India who first fired a pistol in their 60s.



## Trust with PT Usha

Discover trust with PT Usha, a record-breaking athlete who honed her skill by working closely with her coach.





# Women in Science

This box set, Women in Science, includes four inspiring stories: **Commitment with Bibha Chowdhuri** (the First Indian Woman Physicist), **Courage with Anandibai Joshee** (one of the First women to become a Doctor), **Passion with Aditi Pant** (the First Indian Woman Oceanographer), and **Perseverance with Janaki Ammal** (the First Woman Botanist).

Written by award-winning poet **Pervin Saket** and illustrated by four talented illustrators, **Annada Menon, Boski Jain, Sahitya Rani, and Sriya Singh**, this box set will make an outstanding addition to your child's library. This simple text, written in verse, is the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES.

**Chitwan Mittal, Founder and Editorial Director of AdiDev Press**, says, "Books can be a medium for intellectual and aesthetic development. Therefore, we wish to use this series to introduce children to different visual styles."

The set of four inspiring, easy-to-read, and vividly illustrated titles include:



## Courage With Anandibai Joshee

Discover courage with Anandibai Joshee, one of the first Indian women to become a doctor. This simple text written in verse is the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES.

## Commitment With Bibha Chowdhuri

Discover commitment with Bibha Chowdhuri, the first Indian woman physicist. This simple text written in verse is the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES.



## Passion With Aditi Pant

Discover passion with Aditi Pant, the first Indian woman oceanographer. This simple text written in verse is the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES.



## Perseverance With Janaki Ammal

Discover perseverance with Janaki Ammal, the first Indian woman botanist. This simple text written in verse is the perfect way to introduce little readers to BIG VALUES.





# Interview

## Debasmita Dasgupta

Illustrator, Adidev Press

“

**Debasmita Dasgupta** is a London-based, internationally published, Kirkus Best Prize nominated Illustrator and Graphic Novelist. She enjoys drawing both fiction and non-fiction for children and young adults. She has illustrated a significant number of picture books, comics, and poems working with many international publishers. She has also published several graphic novels as an author and illustrator. With a Diploma in Comic Arts from the California College of the Arts, she was awarded as one of the 50 Creative Fellows by the National Arts Strategies (USA) in 2015 and an Arts Fellow under the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in the UK.

**Frontlist:** When did you start working with Adidev Press as an Illustrator? Could you please highlight your spectacular journey thus far?

**Debasmita:** First half of 2021 Highlight: Illustrating complex ideas through simple narratives. The ideas of kindness, peace, and service, which are the pillars of the first "Learning to be" series by AdiDev Press, can be extremely difficult to decode and make relatable to a child. Yet, AdiDev Press does it effortlessly. I feel that's the beauty and speciality of AdiDev that one should remember to celebrate.

**Frontlist:** With the lens of an illustrator, how is Adidev Press different from other children's book publishers?

**Debasmita:** Their attention to detail, from the making to printing to packaging and consistent promotion — these qualities are highly commendable.

**Frontlist:** What were the key challenges you faced as an Illustrator throughout your creative career?

**Debasmita:** When I started my journey, I was a self-taught illustrator trying to discover, learn and navigate the uncharted waters of children's visual storytelling and make a full-time living through it in 2010-11. I hardly had any known role models in India who I could reach out to and who could guide me through this journey. So I took a risk, but in hindsight, I am glad that I did it.

**Frontlist:** As an Illustrator, what additional aspects can be included in children's books regarding content and illustrations?

**Debasmita:** "Show, don't tell" is the mantra for illustrated storybooks. And in the process of showing, one could always take an inclusive mindset considering several

cultural, social, and spiritual elements that are otherwise not written in words. For example, the concepts of "harmony" and "diversity" are additional layers that can enhance the significance of the stories.

**Frontlist:** Since you've commended working experience with international publishers. What new possibilities Indian Book Publishing can introduce in terms of designing children's books?

**Debasmita:** Quality printing, packaging, and international marketing.

**Frontlist:** How do the illustrations in children's books differ from those in young adult novels?

**Debasmita:** The age groups for children's picture books and young adult novels (considering graphic novels) are completely different. Therefore the characters and visual details (forms and format) are distinct in each case.

**Frontlist:** You've been acclaimed with several awards under your belt. Are you planning to do something massive to establish a creative community or perhaps something else to enhance your artistic skills? Please share.

**Debasmita:** Well, I regularly mentor/train emerging picture books/graphic novel creators by engaging with different platforms and organisations. Additionally, I also do free online sessions for creators who want to earn a living through drawing on my Instagram page (@debasmitadasgupta). And I am always happy to collaborate to support emerging creatives from Asia.

# Thank You

for all nominations



Scan to visit the  
PVLf 2023 Website



## PVLf

PragatiE Vichaar

LITERATURE  
FESTIVAL 2023

9<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Jan

**WELCOME TO 2023 EDITION OF  
PRAGATIE VICHAAR LITERATURE  
FESTIVAL**



**Theme: "Taking Humanity Forward"**

**THE PVLf 2023 AUTHOR'S MARATHON SPEAKERS  
WILL BE REVEALED ON 25TH NOVEMBER**

**PUBLIC VOTING FOR  
PVLf 2023 AUTHOR EXCELLENCE AWARDS  
WILL COMMENCE FROM 1ST DECEMBER**

# EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE



## SAGA FICTION India's First Mobile Reading App

**India's First Mobile Fiction App, Saga Fiction**, embraces various commercial fiction genres focusing on quick consumption. Experimenting with a new style of storytelling, Saga compacts original stories into an episodic format. The serialised fiction approach is designed for hustlers looking for a respite from their fast-paced life with our bite-sized reads.

At Saga Fiction, they set a high standard of publishing and provide complete editorial support and exclusivity of publication to our authors. Forming plot lines, defining character arcs, and a structural edit: they walk with the author on the journey of writing a book for Saga. They offer great benefits, in terms of advance payments and royalties for the authors, upon commissioning their manuscript. Further, they market and promote each author's works separately from the app.

Now, **Saga Fiction** is set to foray into the world of print publishing. First, in the roll-out, Saga Fiction will release a bone-chilling crime thriller, *The Only Way Out is Death*, by best-selling author **Varun Gwalani**. Currently available on the app, the reprised edition of this fast-paced novel will hit the shelves in **November** this year.

Throwing their hat into the print-publishing ring, **Aakriti Patni said**, *"When we first launched Saga Fiction, we went ahead with a digital-first approach. But nothing is more poetic than the feel of paper in your hands. Being an avid reader, it was always a dream to publish a paperback I could cosy up with. While the pandemic has put a spotlight on everything digital, I think the book industry has taken a step in the other direction and rejuvenated the print market. Hence, I'm elated to announce that we, too, are stepping into the print market. Our first novel to be out in print is The Only Way Out Is Death by Varun Gwalani. We're starting this journey with a crime thriller, but we have multiple titles from across genres that we are excited to publish in print."*

*"Being in publishing early on, I got the opportunity to explore my passion for reading, writing, and editing, but with Saga, I came into so many more avenues such as app development, marketing, and now distribution, some of which are completely new to me. There are a lot more excel sheets than word documents to be looked at sometimes and more numbers than words, but ultimately, it's the stories that matter the most to me. At Saga, our goal is clear; to give readers entertaining and well-written stories and give writers the satisfaction of working with a publisher who can handle their manuscripts with care. We understand how daunting traditional publishing can be but with our editorial and marketing services. We hope to make the author's life easier and give our readers some of the best of the undiscovered stories,"* remarked the energetic **Co-founder, Pranika Sharma**.

From their diverse list of titles, the publisher plans to release the following books in the coming season:

- Romantic comedy - Eternally Single
- Rosa Alvarez by Neerja Pawar
- Philosophical fiction novel - Turtle A by Ellie Martin-McKinsey
- Thriller mystery - Power Of Nature by C L Peache

The app currently hosts novellas and short fiction ranging from romance, mystery, erotica, young-adult fiction, historical fiction, and bone-chilling thrillers. It champions various genres within commercial fiction and compacts these original stories into an episodic format for quick and easy consumption. Saga Fiction has grown to publish veteran and debut authors like Jonita Davis, C L Peache, Ankita Kulkarni, Elle Martin-McKinsey, Hope Bolinger, and more. The app also offers editorial, publishing, and marketing services to first-time authors.

**Unique features of the app are:**

- Curated reading list for every genre; also including the much demanded K-pop inspired books
- Bite-sized episodes for readers on the move or experiencing a block
- Customised push notifications with alerts on new episodes and exciting new authors
- Readers can resume reading where they last left off
- Customisable interface where a reader can bookmark, highlight, and change fonts and the background colour

# Interview

## SAGA FICTION'S FOUNDERS



**Pranika Sharma** obtained a Bachelor's in English Literature, followed by a Masters in Creative Writing from Loughborough University, UK, before working extensively with top publishing houses.



**Aakriti Patni** worked as an independent mass media professional and then pursued Masters in Magazine Journalism from City University, London. She has been part of newsrooms and brings strong editorial and digital marketing experience to Saga Fiction.

**Frontlist:** What inspired you to envision the "Saga Fiction" venture?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** Saga Fiction was born from a sheer love for reading and a lifelong friendship. Pranika and I bonded over books in our preteens, and we always dreamt of having a publishing house of our own. Lo and behold, 15 years later, we took the leap, and Saga was formed. We wanted to work with stories, shaping them to be the best version of themselves. As with readers, we wanted to bring to other readers stories they could devour and love the way we do. That's what we envisioned for Saga to be, a space for readers.

**Frontlist:** Could you please discuss what differentiates "Saga Fiction" from other digital reading platforms?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** What sets us apart from other reading apps is our content. We're very selective about the stories we showcase on our app and publish in general and the authors we work with. We have set about curating a special selection of titles in varied genres that would attract readers of all ages and sensibilities. Moreover, we have a meticulous and thought-provoking editorial process, where we work on the plot, characters, and more. As we tell our authors, we walk with you on the journey of writing a book.

**Frontlist:** After beginning as a digital platform, do you think it's wise to enter the book publishing industry? What potential impact could this milestone have on the growth of Saga Fiction?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** When we first started, we were never keen to be only digital. Print was always on the cards. Although, given the pandemic and the growth of e-publications, we thought that was the vertical we needed to start with. Now, after being in the industry for over two years, we've realized that the demand for print has always been there. People are hungry to read, and there is an equal demand and market for print and digital. It depends more on the readers, some may like to read on the go on their phones via our app or on Kindle devices while others need the feel of a physical book. It's simply that, as readers, we understand that need and would like to cater to all audiences within their comfort zone. Moreover, we're reaching a more extensive set of readers by establishing a foothold in both markets.

**Frontlist:** How has Saga Fiction opened its doors to provide a platform for debut writers?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** The publishing industry is unfortunately notorious for being a closed door. Traditional publishers often don't entertain unsolicited authors, stick to literary agents and have a strict set of rules for the kind of content they want to publish. That's where a new-age publishing house like ours comes in. We directly connect with authors and are keen on publishing diverse genres, voices, and stories. We love reaching out to authors ourselves!

**Frontlist:** What special discounts are available for app users to enhance the reading experience and attract more readers?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** The Saga Fiction app is getting an upgrade! We're launching a new coin currency on the app that will enhance the user and the reading experience while also making the app more affordable. Users can now earn reward coins by completing simple tasks and spending those to read on Saga Fiction. Additionally, we run giveaways and promotions on social media where readers can stand a chance to win free coins.

**Frontlist:** What unique benefits might the author leverage from this app?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** With the Saga Fiction app, the authors have the flexibility to experiment with different formats of writing; short stories, episodic series, and anthologies all have a place on the app. With an interactive comments section, authors have a direct connection with their readers, and the app gives them a great opportunity to build a community and reader base.

**Frontlist:** Do you believe you can generate more revenue in the book publishing sector after experiencing digital freedom?

**Aakriti & Pranika:** As great as our digital journey has been, we're sitting on untapped market potential with the print industry. In our experience, we've seen some readers shy away from digital, preferring to read in print only. With our expansion into print, we will not only reach a wider set of readers, but we will also be able to understand the digital and print reading markets better.

# Frankfurt Book Fair 2022

The world's largest book fair, **Frankfurt Book Fair 2022**, celebrated from **19 - 23 Oct, 2022** at the **Congress Center Messe, Frankfurt. Translate. Transfer. Transform.**, was the guiding theme this year. All exhibitors succeeded in celebrating the topic of "translation" in all its diversity, whether translating into other languages, media, genres or contexts.

Ever since the German Publishers & Booksellers Association launched the "new" Frankfurter Buchmesse in 1949, Frankfurt has become the **world capital of ideas** for one week every October. In 2023, the 75th Frankfurter Buchmesse will take place – 75 times it's been the **centre of the global industry**, a market for trade in international literary rights, a place for intercultural exchange, a trend barometer, a specialist conference, a glittering literary festival. That's also 75 times fostering the culture of debate – because as a place for free expression, the book fair has always been an important **advocate of democracy**, with all the conflicts that go with it.

## Facts & Figures

Frankfurter Buchmesse 2022 in numbers

**93,000**  
Trade Visitors

**4,000**  
Exhibitors from  
95 Countries

**87,000**  
Private Visitors

**6,400**  
Media Representatives

**104,000**  
Users on Buchmesse.de

## *Some Glimpses of the Fair*



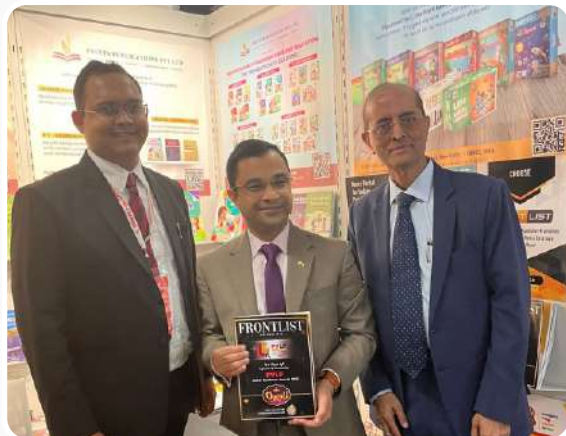




**Frontlist Magazine was displayed at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2022**



**Session by Mr Kevin Fitzgerald,  
Director of Information & Outreach  
World Intellectual Property Organization**



**Mr Pranav Gupta (Founder)  
introduced Frontlist Media to Dr Amit S Telang,  
Consulate General of India**



**Mr Pranav Gupta (Founder) was invited  
as a speaker at the Educational Publishers  
Forum Open Meeting by IPA at the  
Congress Centre, Frankfurt Book Fair, 2022**



# MEDIA COVERAGES

## Book Launch: “Engineered In India: From Dreams To Billion-Dollar Cyient”, by Author BVR Mohan Reddy, organised by Penguin Books

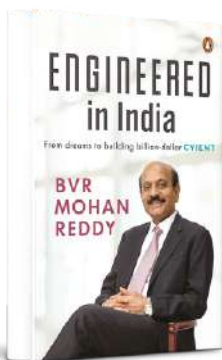
**Engineered in India: From Dreams To Billion-Dollar Cyient** by **BVR Mohan Reddy** was released at a function held at The Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, on **3rd October 2022**. The book, published by **Penguin India**, was unveiled by the Chief Guest, **Shri Amitabh Kant** (G20 Sherpa and Former CEO-NITI Aayog, Government of India). This was followed by a Fire-side chat with **Ms Debjani Ghosh** (President, NASSCOM) and Dr **BVR Mohan Reddy** (Founder Chairman and Board Member, Cyient).

The evening included riveting reflections from all the dignitaries and the author's experience in writing the book.

Speaking at the launch, the author **BVR Mohan Reddy** remarked, “*You are not known for what positions you have, but you will be known for what you leave behind, and I decided what I leave behind is creating this ecosystem for start-up entrepreneurs. Several people ask me why this name, 'Engineered in India.' In several ways, I am engineered in India, and I am intended, and I am a proud Engineered of this country.*”

Praising the book, **Shri Amitabh Kant** said, “*His memoir captures the resilience and diligence of the entrepreneur who wanted to deliver excellence and innovation at a particular point of time in India's entrepreneurial journey when excellence was not a very keyword. He has brought excellence, innovation, dynamism, vibrancy, and many lessons for the new age entrepreneur of India to draw from Mr Reddy's business acumen and people skill, both of which are very important in today's successful venture.*”

Applauding the book, **Ms Debanjani Ghosh** said, “*This book is a masterclass in leadership. Mr Reddy has narrated the journey through the lens of his experiences that you have gathered over the years from Seven-year-old Mohan Reddy to now, and you have so authentically shared learnings with us, good and bad. The authenticity and simplicity of the book are so relatable.*”



### ABOUT THE BOOK

mission that propels the company he incorporated, Cyient, to pioneer and excel in outsourced engineering services and introduce the brand ‘Engineered in India.’ *Engineered in India* takes readers on an entrepreneurial rollercoaster ride, allowing them to see human truths with tools that let them breathe life into their business aspirations and experiments.

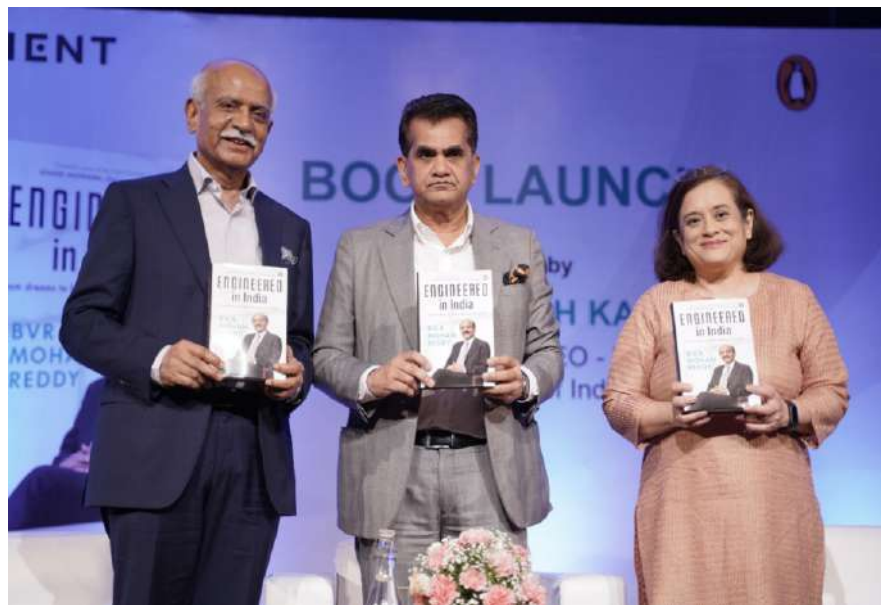
**Announcing the release, the author said,** “*Engineered in India gives experiential evidence of what it takes to ideate and scale a global enterprise. It also addresses the intangible dimensions of being an entrepreneur in India as well as offers practical lessons in customer centricity, people management, and crisis management. My hope is to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs to learn from my journey, dream even bigger, and engineer their own success.*”

**BVR Mohan Reddy** is an Indian Entrepreneur and Founder-Chairman of Cyient, a global technology solutions company. By pioneering outsourced engineering services from India in 1991, Mohan led Cyient to contribute over \$5 billion in cumulative exports, firmly placing India on the global engineering, research, and development (ER&D) services map.

### Engineered in India: From Dreams to Billion-Dollar CYIENT by BVR Mohan Reddy

This is the story of a young man who steps out of the precincts of IIT Kanpur in 1974 with a dream in his heart – to become an entrepreneur and contribute to nation-building. Undaunted by the dearth of experience and means to capital in Pre-Liberalization India, BVR Mohan Reddy's enterprising spirit takes the long and winding road, never losing sight of his ambition. He gains overseas education on scholarship and dons multiple hats for eighteen long years before embarking on his life's mission at forty. A

The author spearheaded several industry bodies and served as the Chairman of NASSCOM and Chairman of CII, Southern Region. He is also the Founding Director of T-Hub, India's largest start-up incubation centre. He took up several leadership positions to promote higher education. He is the Chairman of the Board of Governors of IIT Hyderabad and IIT Roorkee, a member of the Leadership Advisory Board (LAB) at the University of Michigan College of Engineering, the USA, and a member of the Court of Governors of Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI). He was the recipient of India's fourth-highest civilian award, the Padma Shri, in 2017 for his contribution to trade and industry.



**Book Launch: “The Most Incredible World Cup Stories”, by Author Luciano Wernicke, organised by Niyogi Books**

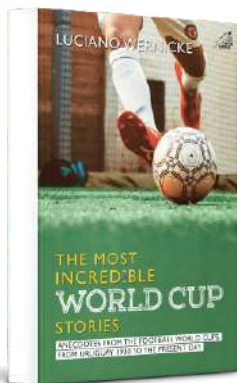
**The Most Incredible World Cup Stories: Anecdotes from the Football World Cups, from Uruguay 1930 to the Present Day** by Luciano Wernicke was released on 11th October 2022 at a function held at The Connaught IHCL SeleQtions, New Delhi.

The official unveiling of the book published by **Niyogi Books** took place in the august presence of **H.E. Mr Hugo Javier Gobbi (Ambassador of the Argentine Republic), José Antonio Chachaza Pereiro (Managing Director, Laliga India), and Ayon Sengupta (Editor - Sportstar, The Hindu)**. The unveiling was followed by a riveting discussion on the book and the upcoming FIFA World Cup.

**H.E. Mr Hugo Javier Gobbi, Ambassador of the Argentine Republic**, shared that as an Argentinian, he is happy that the book is authored by a compatriot who understands that football is not just a sport but an integral part of their nation's culture. He also shared that the book features a myriad of anecdotes that are not only enjoyable but also reveal how football is connected to culture, politics, society, etc.

Expressing his enjoyment of reading the book, **José Antonio Chachaza Pereiro, Managing Director, Laliga India**, revealed that the book managed to surprise him with unique anecdotes that he did not know despite having read extensively about the history of football. He also revealed that the book is a very approachable read, and one does not have to be a football expert to enjoy it.

**Ayon Sengupta, Editor, Sportstar, The Hindu**, shared, *"This book can be a perfect read while football fans wait for the World Cup to take place after four long years."*



**ABOUT THE BOOK**

Once Pele said, "The World Cup is a very important way to measure the good players and the great ones. It is a test of a great player." Indeed, greatness goes hand-in-hand with the grandeur of this sporting event that, beyond the daily dose of human suffering, has embraced humankind to show a parallel reality of life.

*The Most Incredible World Cup Stories* traces the exhilarating journey of the biggest sporting contest through time immemorial—from its genesis to its more recent glories—with tales of grit, spirit, and heroics in every turn of its long-trodden path. Far from listing out the number-heavy statistics, this book aims at digging up the narratives that became eternal subtexts in this phenomenal journey, where a game became a political statement, prides got tamed, revenge proved sweet, and humiliation often cherished.

Luciano has already unearthed numerous stories of sports, unveiling the myths behind them, which have been read in 15 languages. This time he turns his gaze to the sport that has, at times, mattered more than life.



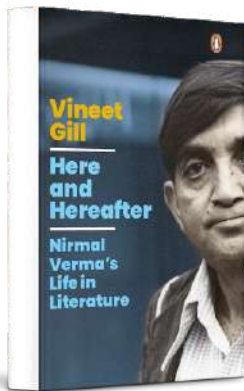
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Luciano Wernicke** was born in 1969 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a Journalism Graduate from the University of Salvador, he worked in the sports media, such as the magazine *El Gráfico* and the newspaper *Olé*. He also taught journalism techniques and text composition at the *Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos* for about twenty years. In 2019, he was assistant to the Costa Rica National Football Team Manager, Gustavo Matosas. Wernicke is the author of numerous books on sports, such as *The Most Incredible Football Stories*, *Doctor and Champion*, *Duel Never Won* (a comparative biography of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo), etc. His latest book, *The Most Incredible Olympic Stories*, has been published by Niyogi Books.



## Book Launch: “Here And Hereafter: Nirmal Verma’s Life In Literature” by Vineet Gill, organised by Penguin India

Penguin India’s *Here and Hereafter: Nirmal Verma’s Life in Literature* by Vineet Gill was released on Friday, 7th October, at India International Centre, New Delhi. The launch was followed by a conversation on the book with the author Vineet Gill and Ashok Vajpeyi.



### ABOUT THE BOOK

*at him as a cosmopolitan writer who was not confined to Hindi or "Indian" tradition. I wanted to highlight his achievements as a reader, essayist, and critic. I wanted to view his work in relation to that of his forebears and contemporaries and in relation to the politics of his time. And finally, I wanted to create a personal record of sorts—about my own life as a reader and writer and about how reading can lead to writing. I hope I have managed to bring together these disparate strands in my book."*

Vineet Gill is a writer and editor. His essays, often literary-critical in nature and occasionally personal, have appeared in various Indian and international publications. He has spent the better part of the previous decade trying to read and write and trying to build a life around those two interrelated pursuits. This is his first book.

The book is a masterly deep dive into the world of one of Hindi Literature pioneers and opens a window into his writing style and sensibilities. Vineet Gill looks at the scattered elements of Verma’s life as ingredients that went into the making of the writer. In Gill’s view, the places he lived in, the people he knew, and the books he read are all reflected in Verma’s stories and novels. As he attempts to understand the writerly sensibility in Nirmal Verma’s life and work, he finds that the personal and the literary are, on some level, inseparable.

This is a work of intense readerly analysis and considered excavation—a contemplation of Verma’s oeuvre and its place in world literature.

Announcing the release, the author said, *"It took me three years to finish writing this book, and most of that time was spent trying to find a form, an approach, suitable for my purposes. I didn't want to write a conventional biography but still wanted to engage with aspects of Nirmal Verma's life that shed some kind of light on his work. I wanted to look*



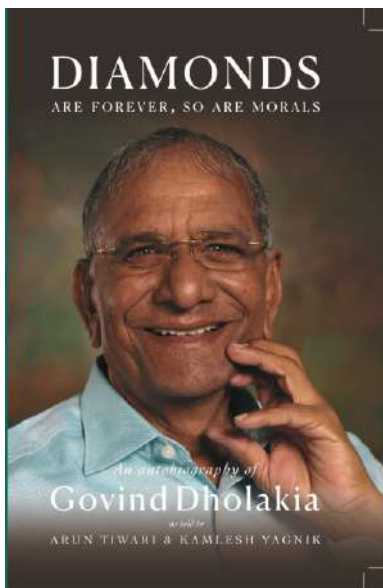
## Book Launch: “*Diamonds Are Forever, So Are Morals*” by Arun Tiwari & Kamlesh Yagnik, organised by Penguin Books

The Founder of a globally renowned and trusted diamond crafting company, Govind Dholakia, was in Delhi to share his life story of starting from earning Rupee One to building a multi-billion dollar company at the launch event of his autobiography “*Diamonds are Forever, So are Morals*” as told to writers Arun Tiwari and Kamlesh Yagnik.

The event saw some of the heads of leading startups and corporate heads, bureaucrats, and book lovers at the event. The diamond industry is one of the ancient industries of India, and it is unique as at the core of its business dealing is trust and faith. A fascinating story of a village boy who, to support a large family, started working as a diamond cutter and today is one of the leading diamond merchants in the country.

Govind Dholakia, whose biography *Diamonds are Forever, So are Morals* was recently published by Penguin Random House India, attributes his success from rags to riches to his family, the unseen force, and honesty. With a brilliant foreword by Lord Bhiku Parekh and endorsements from **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, and others, the book serves as a source of inspiration for all who aspire to grow their organisations with trust and ethics as the backbone.

The event that took place at FICCI, New Delhi, began with Sameer Mahale, Associate Vice President of Sales, Penguin Random House India, mentioning the achievements of the book, sharing how the book has been doing exceptionally well in the market and receiving massive media coverage in all leading print and digital media. It has also been inspiring many entrepreneurs and professionals.



Kamlesh Yagnik, the Co-Author of this book and President of Sarvajanic University and SRK Knowledge Foundation, shared that the book is for eternity. Values it exhibits transcend time, space, religion, class, color, and creed. Keeping with SRK's green initiatives and environmental awareness programme, the guests were presented with planters.

The Chief Guest, Rajat Sharma, Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of India TV, highlighted the three characteristics we must learn from Govind Dholakia, fondly called Govind Kaka. He stated that Kaka's life could be understandably divided into three parts: Health, Relationships, Time, and a lot to learn from.

The release followed a lively conversation between Lipika Bhushan, Founder, MarketMyBook, who began with the hymns from the Shreemad Bhagwat Gita, initiating conversation around Govind Dholakia's most inspiring moments from his life story, experiences, and principles that play a vital role in leading to success. Bhushan further added that the book speaks to us at several levels, such as leadership, society, community, family, and as individuals for all to emulate.

Towards the end of his interactive talk with an applauding audience, Govind Dholakia shared his motto of success in life: 'Always remind yourself that I am nothing, but I can do anything.' *Diamonds are Forever, So are Morals* is an insightful journey into the world of diamonds and how moral ethics in business have led him to build and lead a multi-billion empire.

# Solh Wellness

invites you to Solh Talks

## 'Make Mental Health & Well-Being for All a Global Priority'

A half-day event on Mental Health with some like-minded people, motivational speakers, and some medical professionals.



Wednesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022  
From 2:00pm to 5:00pm  
Followed by High Tea

India International Centre,  
Lecture Room No 2, Annex Building  
Lodhi Gardens, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi

RSVP: [navita@solhapp.com](mailto:navita@solhapp.com)



Organiser



NGO Partner



Download the app  
before coming to  
the event!



# SOLH TALKS

## AGENDA

**Organiser:** Solh Wellness App

**Venue:** IIC, Delhi | **Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

Time	Session	Speaker
02:00pm	Introduction of the event	Kapil Gupta, Founder Solh Wellness   Shama Soni Founder Ashwika Foundation
02:10pm - 02:30pm	Its always late but never too late	Kapil Gupta, Founder Solh Wellness
02:35pm - 03:00pm	Unlock your power with Healing	Akansha, Founder Shoonyata
03:05pm - 03:35pm	Breaking the stigma	Vir Philip Motivational & TEDx speaker
03:40pm - 04:10pm	The Wishing Chair	Sujata Parashar, Novelist & Founder at Talk it out Express
04:15pm - 04:45pm	Mental Health & Relationships	Dr. Geetanjali Kumar Practicing Counselor, Trainer, Parenting Coach
04:50pm	Closing & Thank you note	Laveena Gupta, Friends of Solh
05:00pm	High Tea	

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# AUTHOR INTERVIEWS



“

## Vinaya Chaitanya,

Author of "A Cry in the Wilderness:  
*The Works of Narayana Guru*"

**Vinaya Chaitanya** was born in Muvattupuzha – the place of the three rivers – in the foothills of the Western Ghats, before the invasion of rubber plantations, in 1952. He was accepted as a disciple by Nataraja Guru, disciple and successor of Narayana Guru, the philosopher-poet of Kerala. Vinaya has published books in Malayalam, Kannada, and English, including a translation of Akka Mahadevi's vachanas, Songs for Siva.

**Frontlist:** You're such a great translator, and we can see the effort and pain you've taken to translate the words of Narayana Guru. But since no translation can ever be perfect, what do you think got lost in the translation of this book?

**Vinaya:** To 'translocate the reader,' as A K Ramanujan beautifully put it, is often not as easy as one would wish, especially when translating mystical poetry. And in translating Narayana Guru, not only the content but also the form is fully symmetrical. They are all composed in classical or desi metres, and I could only try to do full justice to the content and not even attempt to imitate the style. These poems echo the sounds around the places where the Guru used to sit: near mountain brooks rolling pebbles, the sea murmuring or shouting, birds and the winds whistling, etc. I could not translate such audio-visual effects of the originals. I have tried to convey the Guru's meanings in an easy-to-understand language to benefit those who can't read the originals.

**Frontlist:** What is the significance of mythology in your life, and how has mythology altered you to disseminate wisdom to everyone?

**Vinaya:** Mythology tells us how to look at life. Some mythologies tell us that this is the only life at the end of which we will be judged by God, which means there is a climax to our life. Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain mythologies say that this life is one of the many lives you will lead, there is no climax to life, and life ebbs and flows.

Mythology made me realise people are not equal, and they are diverse.

**Frontlist:** In the book, you play a lot with the notion of truth and knowing. So, what truth would you love to share with us?

**Vinaya:** There is some inner core within all of us which is of light, and it is of the nature of love, grace, and empathy. It can be clarified through daily life. This truth cannot be found outside yourself, as you are the truth.

**Frontlist:** What is the place for Indian Spirituality?

**Vinaya:** Spirituality is not specifically Indian. The spirit is universal. But each culture has preserved it according to its conditions. The ideals of Peace and Love are found the world over. But this should not make us complacent. We have to revalue and restate the age-old or eternal into a living process. We have to practise what we preach.

**Frontlist:** What is the place for Indian Spirituality in today's modern world?

**Vinaya:** The modern world stresses the individual, and people make deals with the divine. Spirituality has a lot to do with turning inward towards the source and finding lasting sustenance.

**Frontlist:** What do you think is the role of death in this existence, and what's the difference between us human beings and the all-encompassing Brahman?

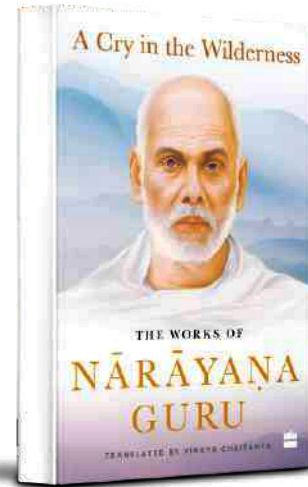
**Vinaya:** Death teaches us about life. To paraphrase Narayana Guru, if we are the waves of the ocean, then Brahman (the Absolute) is the ocean. The wave is only water, but it appears to have a birth, stay, and death when it rises, stays and merges back into the ocean. The whole time it is only water. But the purity of our life choices affects the quality of the water. We have the responsibility (through our choices) to see that the ocean stays clean.

**Frontlist:** What is the most significant difference between *Dharma and Karma*? And how do we adapt these to find life's real meaning and purpose?

**Vinaya:** *Dharma* means the natural way of rightness, which comes from a root suggesting "to support, to bear." Karma means action, which can lead to a reaction and thus cause endless consequences. Understanding releases us from all Karma. Awareness of our intentions, searching for higher values in life, and being honest with ourselves can help give increasing purpose and meaning to life.

**Frontlist:** What is one wisdom that you've garnered from Narayana Guru that you'd like to amplify here for your readers to understand what this book is about?

**Vinaya:** This book is about how we all are of one self-fraternity. We all seek happiness, regardless of how different each effort may be. At the risk of sounding old-fashioned, I'd say: "Believe in God and be Kind."



“

**R Seshasayee,**

Author of *"The Dance of Faith"*

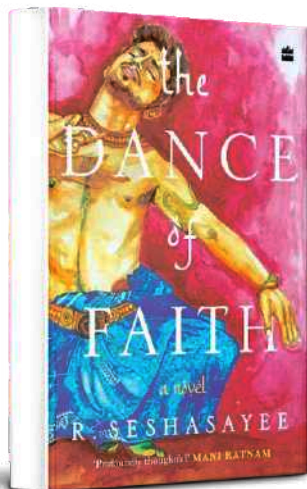
**R Seshasayee** is a very well-respected senior business leader. He has held several leadership positions, including Executive Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Ashok Leyland Ltd, Chairman of Infosys Ltd, and Chairman of IndusInd Bank Ltd. He is presently Vice Chairman of Hinduja Group and Independent Director of Asian Paints Ltd.

He was president of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), president of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), and has served on several committees of the Government of India, including the Board of Trade. He was also the Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum, Middle East.

Seshasayee is deeply committed to social causes and is the Founder Member of Korea University, Chairman of Cancer Institute, Chennai, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai, and Chairman of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation of India. He was a former Chairman of the National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli (NITT), and other educational institutions.

He served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Srirangam Temple. He has also received formal training in classical music and was, till recently, the Vice President of the Music Academy, Chennai.

*The Dance of Faith* is his debut novel.



**Frontlist:** Zaheer's father referred to his choice of shirt as a "girl's blouse." Why do you think toxic masculinity is so deeply engraved in society?

**R Seshasayee:** To answer the question as to why there is 'masculine toxicity,' we'd need to go back a long way in history and even anthropology. That is not a productive process for a solution.

But it's necessary first to acknowledge that pervasive male dominance, even in contemporary society, sometimes leads to masculine toxicity. Law cannot solve the problem. But writers, creative artists, and social activists should unhesitatingly call out toxicity and shame society into a whole series of micro-actions. But the change will take time, but one should remain hopeful because the last fifty years have substantially erased the blots of a few thousand years.

**Frontlist:** This story depicts how one religion's grip prevented a talented individual from pursuing his dreams. What role do you believe education should play in addressing this?

**R Seshasayee:** In my novel, I haven't depicted religion as 'preventing' the recognition of talent. I have put the searchlight on religion playing an obstructionist role in the pursuit of an art form that is needlessly bundled with another religion. I think that unbundling art, language, and even cuisine from religious bundles will eventually impact even building bridges between religions.

**Frontlist:** Zaheer's character is inspired by a person's real life, as you mentioned in the book. To what degree did you incorporate fiction in the story?

**R Seshasayee:** The skeleton is real. Even the muscles are facts. I have fleshed it out with fiction to give it a shape and form, to make it relatable.

**Frontlist:** From the story's beginning, only Anandhi encourages Zaheer to pursue his dream. After her husband's death, she stops speaking to Zaheer and sends him back to live with his father. What caused this sudden change of heart?

**R Seshasayee:** If you read carefully, there is a hint of a tribal palmist predicting the death of her husband if they had a son in two years. I wanted to depict the truth that Faith can poison even a motherly relationship like the one between Anandhi and Zaheer.

**Frontlist:** This book has touched upon various stereotypes that plague the world we live in. Still, nowadays, many eminent personalities are putting their foot forward in breaking such stereotypes and societal norms. What's your stance on this?

**R Seshasayee:** I completely agree that the last few decades have shown enormous progress in breaking stereotypes. But a fluid society where you could choose different identities effortlessly is still a long way off. Humanity as one is a goal that will require our shedding stereotyping. This, perhaps, will never be achieved. But we need to progress on that endless journey.

While a few enlightened individuals are leading the demolition of stereotypes, there is a counter move to draw thicker lines of our identities, such as religion, art, or whatever. There will always be counterforces with a vested interest in preserving stereotypes because that preserves extant power structures.



## “ Kevin Missal

Author of *"Sinbad And The Tomb of Alexander (Sinbad Series, Book 2)"*

**Kevin Missal** wrote his first book at 14, and at 22, the St Stephens graduate was a bestselling author with the first two books in his *Kalki series*, which were runaway successes.

Kevin loves fantasy fiction and has always been a fan of mythology. His books have been featured in publications like the Sunday Guardian, The New Indian Express, and Millennium Post. He lives in Gurugram.

**Frontlist:** You've written several Mythological Fictions till now. According to you, what is the future of Mythological Fiction in India?

**Kevin:** It's a bright future, and you can see the future right in front of you, especially this season. If you look at it, you can start from the *Brahmastra*. Then you begin with *Adipurush*, which will be coming in 2023. You can consider the book

*'War of Lanka'* by Amish Tripathi. You see, other mythology writers will release books around this time.

There's going to be a resurgence, and audible companies have started to work on Mythology. Mythology is a universal genre, especially Hindu mythology, as it discusses themes and concepts that anyone from a 10-year-old to a 100-year-old man can readily understand.

The concept of Mythology is because it's timeless. If I watch Ramayana on TV, which I used to watch in my childhood days, I would also love to watch it today and never find it boring.

The future of mythology is growing exponentially, and people will invest massive amounts of budgets in it.

**Frontlist: You wrote your first book at the age of 14. What inspired you to start writing at such a young age?**

**Kevin:** I don't know where the inception came from. I was constantly exposed to writing because my dad wanted me to be a reader. Hence, I used to play with many action figures when I was 10-11 years old.

I used to make up stories with those action figures. Whenever I used to go and watch a movie, I used to reenact or create more stories. These were the mediums from which inspiration had driven. The affection for storytelling even before writing was there. Then I was exposed to comic books and then books in general; I can also try writing.

As a writer, there's always a hunger to write more, and the story never dies. That's when I continued to write, perseverance kicked in, and things worked out during my book Kalki series.

**Frontlist: Why did you decide to write 'Sinbad'? What made you want to write a story about a sailor and add fantasy elements to it? What was your inspiration behind mixing these topics?**

**Kevin:** I've always been a massive fan of Sinbad the Sailor as a Kid, and I used to watch all of Sinbad's movies. I used to watch a lot of fun fantasy movies as well. I was thinking of writing about Aladdin as well.

However, Aladdin books were already available in the market. I wanted to write something not exposed to readers, and the Sinbad character is funny and adventurous. He embodies a lot of swashbuckling action, and one of my favourite movies was Pirates of the Caribbean. So I wanted to give and use that element.

**Frontlist: 'Sinbad and The Tomb of Alexander' is a re-imagination of 'One Thousand and One Nights.' What would you like to say about it?**

**Kevin:** I took inspiration from 'One Thousand and One Nights.' There were two Sinbad that people are aware of, one from 'One Thousand and One Nights' and the other from the movies that people have seen. Sinbad was not a very lovely character in 'One Thousand and One Nights.' He hated adventurers, someone who didn't like going into the sea and threw his wife into the pit, letting her die.

He was a nasty character in mythology. While in the movies, he showed us this great Savior and seafaring attitude. I was very interested in his character in mythology, what he was to what he had become. Sinbad hated adventure and was too much into food, and loved money. Here Sinbad is like a total hero. I wanted to include both things in one place, especially in the third book, which I'm working on now. In the third book, Sinbad will deal with multiple Sinbad, which means he'll go through a multiverse. He'll be in various realities. And he'll be seeing like other

Sinbad.

**Frontlist: You're pretty much into Indian mythology. But the Sinbad character comes from Islamic history. What suddenly made you change that you wrote something from Islamic History?**

**Kevin:** I generally didn't want to write something from Islamic History. But since Sinbad was from Islam, I had to. Still, during my History Honours days, I lived Islamic history, I think, the entire Caliphate time. The battles were very intriguing.

The research was already done because I had already given exams on it. I wanted to stay authentic to the characters. By then, India would not have been suited, and people wouldn't have connected to it since Sinbad traditionally is from Islam.

**Frontlist: This book is an amalgamation of Mythology and Fantasy. In the future, would you follow this same pursuit, or would you experiment with your genre of writing?**

**Kevin:** Sinbad is more of a passion project. I am sticking to Mythology only, and I won't be doing fantasy, at least for now. My next book, Durga, is very interesting and focuses on collective feminism and this book is absolutely necessary in today's world.

Then the next book that I'm coming out in December - January is Prahlada, the third part of the Samar trilogy. The next one will be Sinbad - Part 3.

**Frontlist: In this book, the devil attempts to resurrect himself after being defeated. Is there a reason he wants to conquer the world, or is there no cause, and he just wants to dominate the world?**

**Kevin:** The first instance of the book is that Iblis (Devil) has really risen, and yet the world hasn't ended. The world was supposed to end, and Sinbad was under the impression that he had lost everything. So why hasn't the world ended? What's he up to? So that's the interesting part. And I think, I can't tell, obviously, what Iblis is up to. I think it would be spoiler territory. I like to use tropes which are already existing, like a world-saving trope. Later on, I want things to get twisted.

**Frontlist: Everyone has their own perspective on life and sees things through their own lens. The daughter of the King opposes her father and falls in love with a sailor who prevents him from resurrecting. What is the demon king's daughter's perspective on the entire story?**

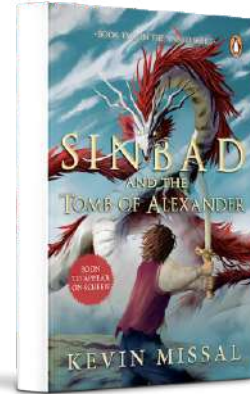
**Kevin:** Safeena is going through a lot of identity crises. I think that's what makes her attractive because the thing is, she's not someone who's figured it all out. But she wants to give it her best. And after how the second book ended. That book is fascinating. Now you don't know where she's going. And you don't see how she will react, what will be the ending and how the Sinbad and Safina story will transpire. I think our perspective here is that she needs to figure it out. She's giving her best to it and has the people around her to support her.

**Frontlist:** What advice would you like to give aspiring mythology writers?

**Kevin:** 1) Write on those characters and concepts which are not known, which are impossible to replicate. Don't go for something which is already done and dusted.

2) Write something that you genuinely believe in. When I write, I truly believe in good vs. evil and how our colleagues talk about atheism. And so, I think it's essential to consider what you're writing and focus on a theme that resonates with you.

3) Make sure you research before writing any concept related to mythology, and don't try to disrespect the culture you're writing about.



## “ Mani Rao

Author of “*Saundarya Lahari: Wave of Beauty*”

**Mani Rao** is the author of ten poetry books, including *Sing to Me, New & Selected Poems, Ghostmasters and Echolocation*. Her books in translation from Sanskrit include Bhagavad Gita and Kalidasa for the 21st Century reader. She did immersive fieldwork among tantric communities in Andhra–Telangana for *Living Mantra: Mantra, Deity, and Visionary Experience Today*. Mani has an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in Religious Studies.

**Frontlist:** What is the meaning of *Saundarya Lahari*, and why did you select *Saundarya Lahari* to compile a collection of poems?

**Mani:** *Saundarya Lahari* means a flood of – or a tidal wave of - beauty. It is a hymn in praise of Shakti, the primordial goddess.

I chose *Saundarya Lahari* because it insists on the absolute power of Shakti. The idea of the Mother Goddess is widely prevalent in Indian traditions. Don't we see high emotions during the Navaratri festival? This book joins that same devotional outpouring.

*Saundarya Lahari* is very popular, especially in South India – memorised and chanted – and has been sung by the who's who of Carnatic music. But, manuals of *Saundarya Lahari* tend to come with complex commentaries and details of rituals, so the meaning of the verses and the poetic delights have not had ample exposure. There are more than thirty-five commentaries on *Saundarya Lahari*. This immediately tells us of its importance in the history of Indian thought.

Finally, the world is a creative and challenging space. We need to harness our Inner Shakti better. Contemplating the divine source, Shakti, helps - it is a vibrant and energising experience.

**Frontlist:** How did you grow your penchant for learning mantras?

**Mani:** By experience. When you internalise a mantra, it transforms you. Mantras are said to be naturally occurring sound forms – perfect sound forms. They are bridges between our ideas and their manifestation. They are a great way to quieten the monkey mind and open the door to higher pursuits.

**Frontlist:** Do you believe people can learn the fundamentals of Tantric Traditions via this book?

**Mani:** No. *Tantric* initiation is done by a guru. This book will not teach anyone *tantra* worship. It is only a way to know something about the meaning of the words of *Saundarya Lahari*. It is a book for the general reader.

But yes, people can read here about the Srichakra (the inverted triangles that tantric sources declare as a blueprint for the cosmos). One verse encodes the Srividya (the 15-syllabic *mantra*), considered the core of Shakta tantrism. Some verses describe the rising path of the Kundalini through the *chakras* in the body of *Devi*.

*Saundarya Lahari* is actually a complex and coded tantric text – commentators have noted other *mantras* coded within it.

**Frontlist:** What constitutes Tantric worship, and how does it vary from other religious practices?

**Mani:** Typically, it involves initiation by a guru. *Tantric worship* involves a deity and devotee and may include *mantras*, *yantras* (aniconic forms of deities and *mantras*), and ritual procedures. The objective is to cultivate *bhava* (emotional feeling) and aspire for oneness and identification with the divine. Ethics and discipline are of paramount importance.

**Frontlist:** The book is classified into two parts – **Ananda Lahari: Wave of Bliss and Saundarya Lahari: Wave of Beauty. How are these components interconnected with each other?**

**Mani:** In the first part, Shakti's power is described, as well as a description of Shiva and Shakti together. While the entire hymn is called Saundarya Lahari, the second part (verses 42-91) is a eulogy of the beauty of the form of the goddess and describes her from head to toe. Verses 92-99 are more prayerful.

There are legends about who composed the two parts, arguments about whether Adi Shankara composed both parts, and so on.

**Frontlist:** What lessons can readers draw from mentioned poems as it represents Indian Mythology in a broader sense?

**Mani:** A fundamental learning in tantra is that our body is an instrument and that the divine is embodied in the material world. But - this means - not just that you are divine but that everyone else is also divine  $\text{ॐ}$ , so one has to expand one's love well beyond oneself. We cultivate a yearning for the divine and the inner bliss described in the hymn (instead of being content with small pleasures).

**Frontlist:** Kindly share your favorite verse from all of them.

**Mani:** My favourite verse is no. 27 in my book, the shloka, which begins "*japojalpaḥ.*"

Let my chatter be  
the repetition of your name  
*mantra japa*

Let my activity enact  
mystic signs  
*mudra*

Let walking be the steps  
of circumambulation  
*pradakṣiṇa*

Let all food be  
offerings to sacred fire  
*āhuti*

May laying down be  
a prostration to you  
*praṇāma*

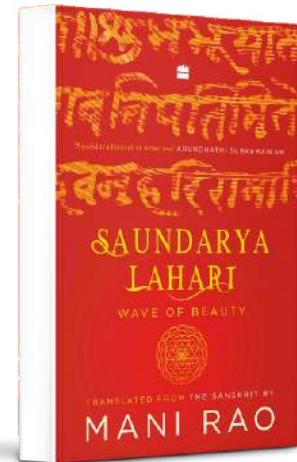
Let all pleasures that  
give me comfort be  
like an offering of  
my own self  
*ātmārpaṇa*


May whatever I enjoy be yours  
like recurring prayers

**Frontlist:** What attributes does Shakti possess that we couldn't find in any other deity, and what can we learn from them?

**Mani:** The hymn clearly spells out that Shakti is in a different category altogether. The world ends and begins with the closing and opening of her eyes, and even a speck of "*dust*" from her feet proves weighty for the gods. But - Shakti is often addressed as "*mother*" – she is the generative power, the source, full of compassion and love.


*Shakti* teaches us to harness our Inner *Shakti* and manifest ourselves better.






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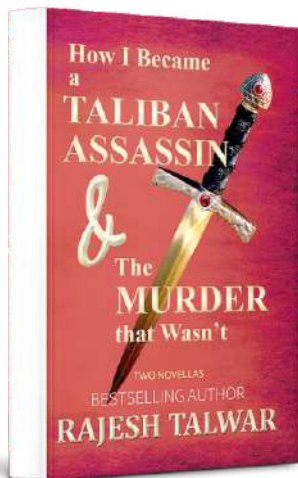
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## Rajesh Talwar

Author of “How I became a Taliban Assassin & the murder that wasn’t - Two Novellas



**Frontlist:** What were the primary deciding factors that led you to include two novellas in one book?

**Rajesh:** As a writer, I like to stretch myself. Although this is my thirty-fifth book, I haven't published a novella in paperback before this. I included two novellas because they had common themes, and a single novella might not have worked for my publisher. Taken together, too, they are a short read. I believe that the younger generation, which has grown up on Instagram and WhatsApp, might be drawn to reading a novella more easily because it involves a shorter investment of time, which they are always in short supply of. Recently, a young friend bought 'Tomb of Sand' the International Booker Prize winner – an excellent read, by the way – but confessed that when she saw the size and length, she felt intimidated. Having said that, a shorter

**Rajesh Talwar** has written twenty-nine books, which include novels, children's books, plays, self-help books, and non-fiction books covering issues in social justice, culture, and law.

His novels include *Simran*, on aesthetics, and *Inglistan*, on cultural contrasts. *An Afghan Winter* and *The Sentimental Terrorist* explore the theme of terrorism. *How to Kill a Billionaire* reveals the workings of the Indian justice system. *From the Lips of the Goddess – Mata Vaishno Devi* is on the sacred feminine.

Rajesh's plays cover diverse contemporary themes and historical retellings. They include *Inside Gayland*, *The Bride Who Would Not Burn*, *Conquest at Noon*, *The Killings in November*, *Kaash Kashmir*, *Aurangzeb: The Darkness in His Heart*, *Gandhi*, *Ambedkar* and *The Four-Legged Scorpion*, *High Fidelity Transmission*, and *A Nuclear Matricide*.

His non-fiction works include *The Judiciary On Trial*, *Courting Injustice: The Nirbhaya Case And Its Aftermath*, *The Third Sex And Human Rights*, *The Vanishing Of Subhash Bose*, *The Killing Of Aarushi And The Murder Of Justice*. Self-help books include *How To Choose Your Lawyer And Win Your Case*, *Making Your Own Will*, *The Divorce Handbook*, and *Indian Laws Of E-business*.

His books for children include *The Three Greens*, *The Bearded Prince*, *The Sleepless Beauty*, *Fabulous Four Battle Zoozoo*, *the Wizard*, and *Playwrights - A One-Act Play For Children On Human Rights*.

He has contributed to *The Economic Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Pioneer*, *The Times of India NIE*, *Manushi*, *The Sunday Mail*, and *the New Indian Express*. He is a sought-after speaker at Literary Festivals.

Rajesh works as Deputy Legal Adviser to the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan.

narrative must also be compelling enough to draw the reader in, and I do hope this is the case with these two novellas.

**Frontlist:** With the same theme, “Unfulfilled Love,” in both the novellas, what other similarities can readers draw between the two novellas? What are the similarities between the main characters of the two novellas?

**Rajesh:** “Unfulfilled love,” as you say, is a common theme that runs through both novellas. The main character in both novellas uses a first-person dramatic narration as the storytelling technique, which makes the experience more intense for the reader. Shamsheer Khan and Rahul, the main characters in the second novella, are passionate lovers, and both get their hearts broken. In both cases, it is

circumstances more than the choice made by the girl that leads to the 'unfulfillment,' and that, in some ways, makes the story even more tragic. No spoilers here.

**Frontlist:** Did you intend for your novel to address the Taliban issue? What are your thoughts on the Taliban issue?

**Rajesh:** As you may know, I have lived and worked for many years in Afghanistan, so the first novella is informed by my experiences in that country. In a way, since I worked for the United Nations there, I had a ring-side view of the events of the past decade or so. I did wish for my novella to speak about the terrible failure of the significant experiment carried out by the Western powers in Afghanistan, particularly the Americans. The first novella explains why the Taliban was successful in recruiting people to their cause, despite the fact that so many people, particularly women, despised them. Even Shamsheer Khan, the main protagonist in the first novella, despises the Taliban and what they stand for in the beginning. Yet he is compelled to join forces with them following the massacre of his family members. 'Collateral damage' is a word that is used far too easily and casually without realising the devastating impact it can have in a country such as Afghanistan, which is a largely tribal society. Suppose you slaughter a hundred people at a wedding because the pilot made a mistake reading the situation on the ground. In that case, you create not two hundred or three hundred enemies but tens of thousands of people who will hate you for what you have done and possibly seek vengeance, and they will not care that you say it was an accident. Each error made by a pilot or drone simultaneously drives hundreds of young men who have lost their loved ones into the arms of the Taliban, who can then say: 'Do you still have any doubt that the Americans and the West, in general, hold you in contempt and are not your friends? See what they have done! They have slaughtered the ones who are closest to you!'

**Frontlist:** Readers often adopt the characters' personalities or at least take something from them. What traits do you want readers to take away from the characters "Shamsheer Khan" and "Sunny Singh," and which do you want them to avoid?

**Rajesh:** Shamsheer and Sunny are both courageous people. Something to appreciate. Both have respect for women. Again, something to respect and emulate. In a way, Shamsheer deserves far more credit here than Sunny Singh because he has this inborn respect despite having been born into a patriarchal culture. I think Shamsheer Khan must not be emulated because while he is seeking revenge against a specific individual, he doesn't fully factor in the fact that he, too, may cause collateral damage and question himself sufficiently as to whether he would really want to do that.

**Frontlist:** In the brief post face, you mentioned innocent victims and innocent killers. How could a killer be considered innocent in the eyes of the law and a normal citizen?

**Rajesh:** In both the novellas, the killer believes that he should be considered innocent in the eyes of the law. Let's talk about the first novella first. In Afghanistan, under both Islamic and tribal law, if a person in a family is murdered, his

family members have the right to ask that the killer be executed. They can waive that right if the victim's family begs them, but it is their choice, and they can refuse to grant mercy.

So, as an Afghan growing up under Islamic and tribal law, Shamsheer Singh can tell himself that he is justified in what he is doing. He is seeking revenge against a specific individual who was responsible for a large-scale massacre. It is true that he is taking the matter into his own hands, but he is living in a state where the American who was responsible for the accidental deaths will never be tried, let alone get punished.

In the second novella, Rahul too may be considered innocent in the eyes of the law because he acted in self-defense in a way, and the two deaths for which he was responsible were accidental. However, he knows that under the Indian justice system, cases often take decades before a verdict is finally pronounced, and he doesn't want to risk the life of his surviving parent. So, in a way, you could say that he, too, is justified in not coming forward and confessing to causing the deaths.

**Frontlist:** What if the two main characters switch their roles? Would the result have been different?

**Rajesh:** That's an interesting thought, and it could have worked with another work of fiction. In the case of these two novellas through the character of Shamsheer Khan, Sunny Singh, and Rahul, the three main protagonists are all rooted in the place and the circumstances under which they grew up. Shamsheer Khan grew up in Afghanistan, Sunny Singh is a British-Indian and grew up in England, and Rahul grew up in India. All three characters are very much a product of their circumstances and setting. So, a substitution is difficult to conceive. Having said that, I believe that Sunny Singh and Shamsheer Khan share certain commonalities. Both come from communities that place a premium on courage. Sunny Singh reminds himself that he is a Sikh, and Sikhs must never fear anything. Shamsheer Khan, too, is brave and, in a way, an honourable person. And finally, despite having grown up in different countries and societies, both respect women. So, assuming we switch roles, just for the sake of argument, I wonder if the results would have been different. Possibly yes, because Sunny Singh has a more logical mind as compared with Shamsheer Khan, so he would actually factor in the fact that there could be collateral damage even if he seeks retribution against a specific individual. But that more logical mind is itself a product of being brought up in a different society.







“

## Arpit Vageria

Author of “*The Girl Next Door*”

**Arpit Vageria** is the bestselling author of *Be My Perfect Ending*, *You Are My Reason To Smile*, *I Still Think About You*, and *Chocolate Sauce - Smooth.Dark.Sinful*. The latest addition to this list is his book *The Girl Next Door*, which carries the message of love in the drastic pandemic-hit times.

*Be My Perfect Ending* is an emotional story of true love and companionship, which became a bestseller soon after its release. The book received a phenomenal response and debuted in the Top 50 of Amazon's bestsellers list in the pre-order stage. The book was a part of Amazon's Best Reads list for many months consecutively and went on to break all sales records. The book appears in many bestseller lists, including Amazon and the HT-Nielsen BookScan.

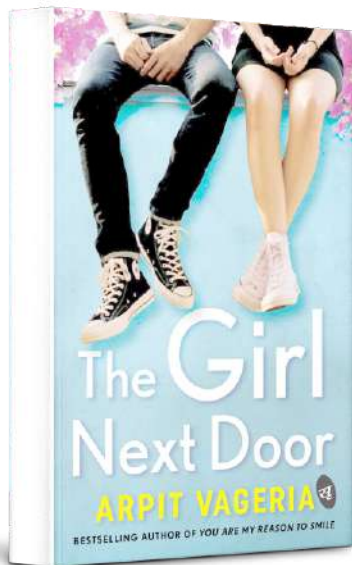
His book *You Are My Reason To Smile* was a runaway success as it flagged off as one of the top 5 bestsellers on Amazon. Later, it featured high on the Amazon bestsellers list in early 2017, apart from other prominent bestseller lists. Due to high demand from readers across the country, the Hindi translation of the same, titled '*Muskurane ki wajah tum ho*,' was released and became a tremendous success soon after.

*I Still Think About You* was also ranked at #6 in the bestselling charts of Amazon for the summer of 2016 and is still prominently present across all bestseller lists.

*The Girl Next Door* opened as the #2 bestseller on Amazon in pre-order and has entertained thousands of readers ever since. It is a story of love set in the heart of the country during the national lockdown, and it contains a strong, positive message of love in the pandemic-hit times. In the face of such hardships as the world has never seen, this book sets the foundation for a happier today and tomorrow.

He is currently working on an interesting story, which will be released soon. Arpit is also a Scriptwriter by profession and has Co-written TV shows and award functions like *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Zee Cine Awards (Red Carpet)*, *Lux Golden Rose Awards (Red Carpet)*, *GIMA Awards (Red Carpet and curtain raiser)*, *Zee Silver Jubilee*, *Indian Idol*, *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge*, *India's Next Superstars* and festive events for different channels in the past. Arpit has also done broad stories for a couple of TV serials as well.

He has recently worked on prominent reality shows like the latest seasons of *Indian Idol*, *Sabse Bada Kalakar*, and award functions like the *IIFA Awards – New York*, *Zee Rishtey Awards*, and *Big Zee Entertainment Awards*.



**Frontlist:** As the narrative progress, returning from Mumbai taught Ishaan the value of family and friends, and he met the love of his life. How important are all these aspects in life?

**Arpit:** Very important. I'd rather say- Most important. As you touch your mid-20s, you realise how important it is to have your family and someone you love beside you. You'd hardly realise they're around when everything goes per your plan, but the mid-20s are more about unexpected things than planned ones.

The family you wanted to run away from in your early youth days, you want to come back to them. Life becomes a full circle when you realise that family is everything.

You meet your friends over meaningless cups of coffee and still love discussing all that you've done in your early days. Every time you discuss, it brings a smile to your face.

So, I'd say family and friends are equally important.

**Frontlist:** What inspired you to become a romance novelist?

**Arpit:** I've been that person who'd go down to any level to please my girl. I am my biggest inspiration when it comes to love. My whole writing journey started because I thought a few words wouldn't be enough to express my love for someone.

I wanted to tell you how lovely it is to love someone and get loved. What a special feeling this is. There were still a lot of things that should've been said in stories but weren't said.

My passion for love and an urge to tell the untouched part of romance inspired me to become a romance novelist.

**Frontlist:** What distinguishes real love from romance novels and books? Why should anyone not relate to unrealistic stories?

**Arpit:** Real love is 'Real Love,' and romance novels are more about 'How real love should be.' The novel glorifies the beauty of love even more.

It's one's choice to relate to an unrealistic story or not because, most of the time, our realities are different. Their unreal could be my real as well. Romance novels sometimes set expectations that reality doesn't meet mostly, but no complaints; we live in a world where love sets a new definition every day.

We might witness a love story inspired by some romance novel that turns out to be a blockbuster in real life.

**Frontlist:** You stated at the end of your book that this would be your final love story. Why do you believe love is fading in our world, and what needs to be changed?

**Arpit:** The honesty in it. The era of selfless love has gone, and the era of selfish love is here. We make perceptions on the basis of people's assumptions. We're not ready to give enough time to our relationships nowadays, which is bothering me much.

Sometimes we need to turn back the clock and see the wonders of the love stories from the previous era to enjoy the beauty of it. We need to be a little more sensitive towards love than we are.

The whole attitude toward love should be changed, and its

purity should be found back. We need people to understand that love isn't lust, and lust isn't love. They're two different extremes that just meet sometimes.

**Frontlist:** Romance novels set unrealistic expectations for love. Young people inspired by the book try to imitate it, resulting in unhealthy love life. What do you think falls short in such situations?

**Arpit:** Their commitment. Their intent and efforts. People are taking 'Love' very casually nowadays. It isn't about understanding what one says. It's about understanding what one doesn't say. Love is all about understanding the silence.

**Frontlist:** What makes your romance novel unique?

**Arpit:** The unusual plots of the story, I guess. Maybe the relatability? To each its own, I guess. I might find it unique in terms of the plots I chose, and someone might find it unique because of the dialogues I use.

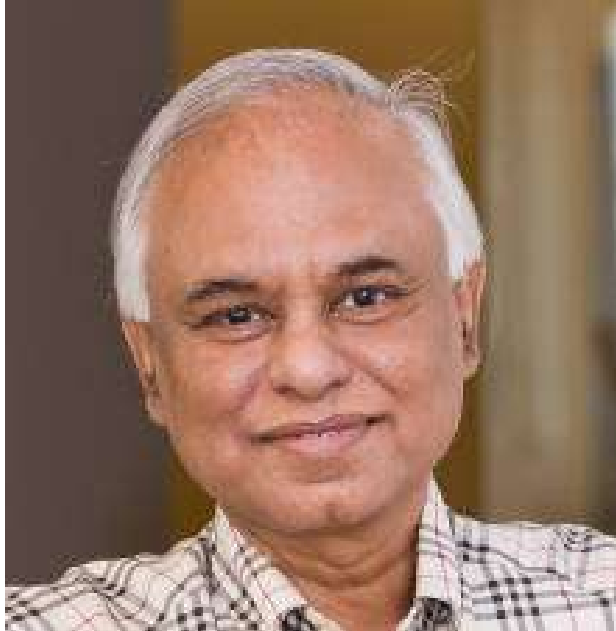
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## Rajesh Srivastava

Author of *“The 10 New Life-Changing Skills: Get Them & Get Ahead”*

**Rajesh Srivastava** is an alumnus of IIT Kanpur and IIM Bangalore. He spent over three decades as a manager in various sectors like beverages, food, commodities, personal care, and education. He was the President of J K Helene Curtis Ltd (a Raymond Group Company). Rajesh then moved to education and became an adjunct faculty at IIM Indore and COO of SP Jain School of Global Management. He now works as a consultant and holds workshops for companies like Siemens, Mercedes Benz, Reliance, and IE Business School (Spain), among others. Throughout his career, his writings have appeared in various publications, including Outlook, Telegraph, Mid-Day, Business Standard, and Mint.

**Frontlist:** How have these Life-Changing Skills mentioned in this book transformed you as a professional?

**Rajesh:** I have achieved professional success by applying these life-changing skills during my career. Here are two examples.

- **Creativity:** It is a learned skill activated when traditional thinking is bypassed, and the imagination is allowed to wander freely to import, combine and connect ideas in new and imaginative ways to come up with big ideas.

I used ‘creativity’ to come up with the name McDowell Signature.

I was flipping through a magazine when I noticed an advertisement for Signature Bindi. That got me thinking - Signature Bindi feels so incongruous because ‘bindi’ is vernacular while ‘Signature’ is western. But McDowell Signature sounds so cool! My subconscious mind had miraculously made a connection between two dissimilar ideas, bindi, and whisky, in a new and meaningful way.

- **Smart Problem Solving:** The business world is littered with problems. Smart problem-solving skills arm us with perspectives, tools, techniques, and frameworks to come up with smart solutions.

When I am stuck on big ideas or need a second opinion, I ‘step into the (big) shoes of people’ I admire & respect. I do this by posing a simple question: What would Steve Jobs do? I pose the same challenge to Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk to get more options.

Here is an example. I wanted a second opinion on whether I had reimagined the deodorant market correctly as ‘perfume.’

I crafted the following question: how can the deo category be reimagined to reignite the market?

This question I posed it to the three stalwarts & I wrote down their likely responses:

- **Jeff Bezos:** Identify the pain points customers face with the existing best-selling deo. Then design a deo that reduces or eliminates them.
- **Steve Jobs:** Create a better product that gives a pleasurable customer experience.
- **Elon Musk:** Challenge the tradition of the industry.

Based on the directions given by these giants, I arrived at the following decisions:

- Young people of opposite genders want to come closer, but body odour (BO) drives them apart. I needed to reduce or eliminate this pain point.
- Create a better product by formulating a recipe that has more authentic French perfume. It will enhance the users’ mood and give them a pleasurable experience.
- Challenge the tradition of the industry by marketing deodorant as ‘perfume.’

I amalgamated their thoughts into a cohesive strategy and concluded that the deodorant should be sold as ‘perfume.’

Today ‘perfume’ has become a generic benefit of the deodorant category & the category has grown 1000x since I reimagined it.

**Frontlist:** Creativity, one of the higher cognitive skills, is too overrated. Everyone aspires to be creative nowadays. Do you think this skill can be acquired, or is it just innate?

**Rajesh:** Creativity is a learned skill and, through practice, can be mastered. Everybody should aspire to acquire this skill.

There are several factors that enable creativity. Here is a

partial list:

- **Unbounded curiosity:** This requires people to reawaken the child in them by renewing their friendships with 'five' childhood friends: Why? Where? When? What? How? If this sounds complicated, follow Albert Einstein's advice: Question everything!
- **Keen Observation:** To sharpen the sense of observation, learn to:
  - Slow down
  - Refrain from multitasking
  - Observe everyday things with a fresh pair of eyes
  - Be mindful of what you are doing. This will help you be present in the moment

These simple strategies will help set your mind free to form associations and be creative.

- **'No' Time:** It is the quiet moment in which people can isolate themselves from the noise and distractions of the world. During this time, they can take a walk or spend some quiet time alone. These moments relax them and are ripe for creative thoughts to take birth.
- **Positive Environment:** It helps us think more clearly and creatively. In this environment, our brain accesses learning, wisdom, and experience and can combine them in new and unexpected ways. It results in free-flowing creativity.
- **Bombard your mind with new experiences completely outside your chosen field.** You can do this by:
  - Seeking out 'new' people, places, and experiences
  - Increasing the diversity of your acquaintances. You are exposed to different viewpoints and perspectives in their presence
  - Cultivating varied interests
- **Modest constraint:** Constraint enhances creativity. It forces us to think in ways we may skip in prosperous times. But there is a caveat: constraint should adhere to the Goldilocks' Principle, which is that too much constraint will choke creativity and too little will give it free rein. When it is just right, it spurs creativity.

If the constraint is self-imposed, then it spurs even greater creativity.

In the 2000s, the Audi racing team desired to win Le Mans under a self-imposed constraint: it could not go faster than its competitors. Working with this self-imposed constraint, it developed diesel-powered cars requiring fewer fuel stops than gasoline-powered cars. Audi went on to win Le Mans three years in succession.

- **Freedom to fail:** New ideas are born through experimentation. Experimentation, by nature, is prone to failure. Permit yourself to experiment and fail. But learn from each failure.

Apart from learning from your own failures, learn from

other people's failures as well. After all, you can't live long enough to make them all yourself.

- **Healthy body:** Focus on getting sufficient sleep, nutrition, and exercise.
  - Sleep offers the body and brain time to restore and recover.
  - Regular exercise reduces anxiety and improves the quality of sleep.
  - Nutrition leads to a healthy body and a healthy mind.

These three are the basics for brain functioning and ignite our creative side.

**Frontlist: At the end of each skill chapter, you've mentioned a chart to make it more comprehensive. How did you decide on the layout of penning down this book?**

**Rajesh:** While studying at IIT Kanpur and later at IIM Bangalore, I used to summarize everyday class sessions into summary notes. Just before the examination, I merely went through the summary notes and did well on the examination.

I followed the same technique while writing this book. At the end of every chapter, I have given a summary of each skill. If a reader wishes to get a quick recap of the skill or to re-acquaint it, then all she has to do is go through the summary, and she will be up to speed with the skill.

**Frontlist: How can this book assist corporate employees in developing new-age skills and motivate them to relinquish their comfort zone?**

**Rajesh:** The earlier 3 Industrial Revolutions (3IRs) created blue-collar and white-collar jobs, which required people to carry out instructions, not question authority and follow the time-tested systems and processes.

Now, we are in the midst of the 4th Industrial revolution (4IR), also called Industry 4.0. It is creating 'green collar' jobs, which need people to 'think, reflect and act.' To develop these abilities and perform the green collar jobs efficiently, it is critical that professionals develop certain skills - the 10 new life-changing skills:

1. Creativity
2. Innovation
3. Critical Thinking
4. Framing the Right Question
5. Smart Problem-Solving
6. Lifelong Learning
7. Storytelling
8. Influence Without Authority
9. Humanness
10. Entrepreneurial Spirit.

If corporate employees do not possess these skills, then they will be like birds whose wings are clipped, and they will

not be able to soar. Therefore it is in their interest to learn these skills so that they come up trumps in their professional career.

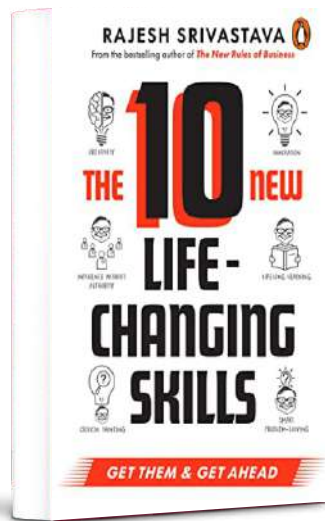
**Frontlist:** How have influential leaders marked their presence in our society, and what change have they brought into any ordinary person's life?

**Rajesh:** Influential leaders have leveraged these skills to change the world for the better – forever:

Steve Jobs came up with the idea of smartphones which has changed the world forever.

- Elon Musk has deployed these skills to get the world to embrace clean transportation and dream of colonizing Mars.
- Jeff Bezos has revolutionized retailing.
- Jack Dorsey has got the world to communicate through 280 characters (read: Twitter).
- Reed Hastings has changed the way we entertain ourselves.
- Mark Zuckerberg changed how we interact - socially.
- Larry Page & Serge Brin have changed how we 'search.'

The list is long of influential leaders who have deployed these skills to make our world a better place.



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## Aayush Gupta

Author of *"My Name is Not Devdas"*

**Aayush Gupta** is an author-screenwriter. He's been a part of writers' rooms in Eros, Zee and is currently associated with Yash Raj Films. He has produced and presented shows for All India Radio's External Services and National channels. Under his banner, Guddi Productions, he has directed and co-produced multiple nonfiction shows and documentaries.

**Frontlist:** What inspired you to choose the title *"My Name is Not Devdas,"* since it sounds like a movie title? What sets this apart from that?

**Aayush:** The book is written in the first person – from the POVs of Devdas, Paro, and Chandramukhi. The title, *My Name Is Not Devdas*, reflects this and hints at the underlying theme of the book, which is identity. Our 'hero,' for the lack of a better word, makes it clear in the first chapter that he is NOT named Devdas, and is merely using it as an alias, so that his true name and true identity may remain hidden.

We did have a couple of other options that didn't make the final cut, and my favorite was suggested by a friend, "Here Lies Devdas."

**Frontlist:** In what ways are the characters in the novel different from those in the film?

**Aayush:** I'm not sure which film we're talking about since there have been more than a dozen notable adaptations, and I'll guess that you meant Bhanjali's *Devdas* (2002). The characters are pretty different, as is the world. For one,

most film adaptations have been the story of Devdas, with Paro and Chandramukhi revolving around his story. In this book, the attempt has been to tell the stories of three characters, equally driving the overall narrative.

Putting it simply, Paro is a badass who evolves from being a so-called charity case into a claw-your-way-up-no-matter-what kind of girl. Chandramukhi, on the other hand, is a survivor, who's been through hell and back, and in Devdas, sees hope of a new beginning. Devdas, meanwhile, is a pseudo-feminist who masquerades as a woke torchbearer of political correctness while being a pretty broken, selfish young man.

**Frontlist:** Has this storyline been inspired by a true story or a situation you've heard about?

**Aayush:** A few years back, during my post-graduation at DU, I had a bitter argument with a close friend about the JNU incident. We didn't speak to each other for weeks after our row. I wondered if I would be willing to forego a friendship, a relationship, over differing political beliefs. I patched things up with my friend, but I am sorry to report that I still do not have an exact answer.

The question still troubles me - and is the central thought of My Name Is Not Devdas. How much do our upbringing, beliefs, and baggage affect how we treat the people around us?

**Frontlist:** Could your novel also be for children since it contains appropriate words for adults?

**Aayush:** I wonder if children would be the correct audience for this. There are disturbing themes and sometimes violent scenes that might not suit kids.

**Frontlist:** Does a love triangle within the novel indicate that it is a love story?

**Aayush:** Love is one of the many things that propels our characters ahead - drives them, so to say - but I am not sure if it is a love story in the traditional sense of the phrase. If you want someone only after they've left you, is it love? If you irreversibly destroy someone you love, is it love?

**Frontlist:** Could your novel also be for children since it contains appropriate words for adults?

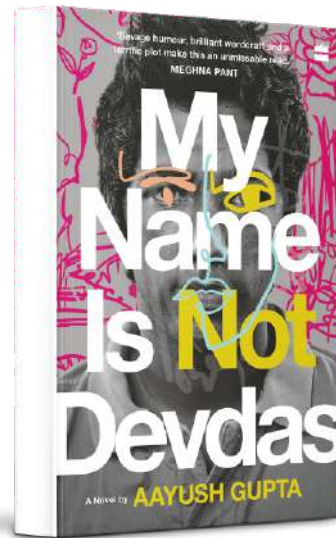
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**Frontlist:** What perspectives or beliefs have you challenged with this book?

**Aayush:** This is the age of information - where we are ABSOLUTE in our beliefs and invariably know that we are right. So much so that we'll spend hours picking fights on social media with friends, family, and strangers - and yet not engage in actual dialogue. No flexibility, no discussion, no listening. We'll easily walk away from years of friendships, experiences, and shared moments, all to prove a point - that we are RIGHT - never asking ourselves if it is worth it. This book asks those questions and hopefully will make you mull over your answer.



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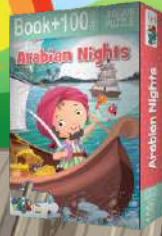
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# Spotlight

by **FRONT LIST**

We are back with our special conversation from **Frontlist's Spotlight Session** in November edition. This time, we featured **Children's Authors** who discussed the theme **"Importance of Children's Literature."**

The primary objective of opting for the Children's Literature subject matter is to emphasise the significance of literature among kids and the author's writing style of children's books.

Children's literature plays an integral role in young children's development; they are the first and foremost passage in every kid's life to introduce them to the literary world. Children's books with illustrations make them more mesmerising to capture the best attention from children. We must encourage kids to read more as the root should be firm first to grow into a healthy tree.

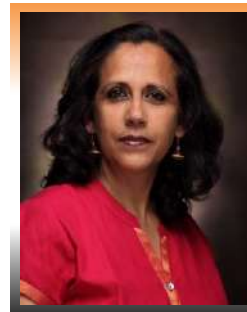
## List of Panelists:



Ashok Rajagopalan

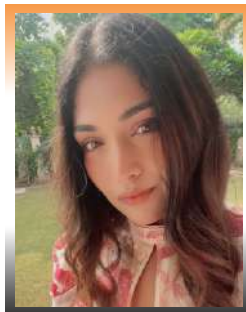


Vaishali Shroff



Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan

## In conversation with



Laveena Gupta, Founder at Advit Toys



# Conversation:

Spotlight  
by FRONT LIST

**Frontlist:** What is the role of Literature in children's lives?

**Shobha:** We read Literature about children's books that discuss how it informs their vocabulary and expands their imagination. Straightforwardly, Children's Literature helps you discover new things, whether in terms of humor, wonderful illustrations, history, references, etc., over the kinds of books that I've been writing, some of them in verse. It is essentially an opportunity for children to learn new words and concepts since they don't like to be stuck in a particular place. That's what I've discovered, being both the mother and the grandmother, they enjoy traveling with their imaginations. Literature gives them an opportunity, and along with this, the child gets exposed to new words if they start learning them at an early age. It expands certain cognitive skills, learning about new places, concepts, and how to read and write.

Characters, adventures, and illustrations give you a visual component to the stories, and there are dramatic visuals that children can engage with and a written text. Sometimes, parents complain about children not getting an opportunity to read because they're caught up in visual mediums. I feel like literature has brought new avenues for child's development. Even today's AI can provide you with the human depth and emotion that books can sometimes give. A life without books is quite an empty life.

**Vaishali:** I feel Literature sets children free. It allows them to interpret and perceive the world in their ways. Reading is a way of seeing, you know, something that a child learns at birth. It allows children to have conversations they usually wouldn't be able to learn in society. For instance, conversations with characters, new worlds, and new places they haven't known existed.

As a human race, we all are natural storytellers. Storytelling is a way of life for us, and it sets us apart from other species and is vital for survival and growth, and I think Literature takes that forward.

Reading is also an act of listening. When you're reading, you have all these voices emerging in your head, and you learn how to empathize with characters, understand different words, and live in a more inclusive world. I believe that is what Literature does, and it brings so many worlds before a child and expands their horizons in ways we will never know.

**Ashok:** Children who read books and their families, I appreciate them a lot. When I was in school, books only competed with other physical games. Back then, in Chennai, we didn't have a TV. TV was introduced very late and was only for two hours a day. We weren't allowed to see movies, and TV was supposed to be for older people. Hence books were a mere source of entertainment for children at that time.

Readers now are much better than when I used to read.

Today, we have diverse people who read, and I appreciate the modern kids and parents for still being readers.

**Frontlist:** How do illustrations play a significant role in evoking emotions in any children's book?

**Ashok:** As I grew older, I didn't feel the need for illustrations. Because half of the work is done by the reader after the rest of the work is done by the writer. Even now, I don't want illustrations.

Especially for children, when you have to make them read, illustrations are very important. For the younger age group, we require more illustrations in picture books. And as they grow older, they need fewer illustrations. Gradually, adult people send off illustrations.

However, for younger readers, we need illustrators.

**Shobha:** Illustrations are, in so many ways, .advance the story. And luckily, Ashok has the ability to both write and illustrate his books. I have written a number of children's books that were published in America. When it comes to picture books, the illustrations are almost as important as the text in many ways because picture books are usually read aloud to little children. So when you say, do illustrations play a significant role? Absolutely. Like the emotions evoked by the illustrations. For instance, my book: Parvati The Elephant's Very Important Day discusses a little adventure story about a temple elephant. And there's a scene that Tanya Voss has drawn that is exceptional, in which the elephant is having a bath, and you can almost see the excitement she's feeling.

The illustration does so much to advance the poetic story that I've written the book and rhyme. Emotions definitely are evoked. And suppose you're being read to in the initial stages with a picture book; somebody's reading to you because you haven't really learned how to read yourself, the pictures, and then hearing the words; it's actually a cognitive connection. It's a connection between looking at something visually and then hearing the words that describe it. So it's a very, very crucial part of a particular genre of children's books, which are picture books. But I would agree with Ashok that as we get older, you almost want your own imagination to imagine the visual, and that's when you're reading yourself. Of course, you get to what they call YA - young adult books, and you probably don't need any illustrations. So illustrations can be significant, but it depends very much on the kind of children's book you're looking at.

**Vaishali:** When we are younger, we need illustrations. And then, as we grow older, we are weaned out of those kinds of books. I think that is something that needs to change. When a child is born, the first thing they do when they open their eyes is connect with the world through images. They see, they observe things, and everything is about images for them.

# Conversation:

Spotlight  
by **FRONT LIST**

As children grow, they build this visual intelligence, and somewhere down the line, as Ashok said, when we grow up, the very same medium is taken away from us.

We need to reintroduce that to children who are in middle school or high school. Picture Books should be age-agnostic, and graphic novels are doing a fantastic job these days, reintroducing that medium across ages. We can't underestimate a child's visual vocabulary and intelligence, and these books only help us add to our creative repository.

The power of the visual medium is something else. When the visuals, the images, and the words are together, they are limitless, the way you can read the story and perceive it.

**Frontlist:** How do you differentiate a children's author from an ordinary novelist?

**Vaishali:** I would request you to remove the ordinary before the novelist. Because any piece of writing and the writers themselves go through their share of internal and external struggles to put their work out.

There is no difference between a children's author and any other author because the process of writing remains the same, the storytelling remains the same, and it's only the audience that is changing.

The treatment of the subject may vary, so there is no real difference between a children's author versus an author who writes books for adults. But having said that, there are very obvious differences.

For instance, the most obvious difference is the language. You have to be more cautious while writing for children, and it has to be more age-appropriate.

Many people think that when you're writing for children, you need to tone things down. You need to leave the gory things out and make them more digestible for them. We should not underestimate how children can understand and read stories. Toning things down is something that should not be done, but yes, it can be. A good writer will always use their magic with language and share the same details in a way they can understand.

**Shobha:** Writing as a skill or art approach us in many ways. However, talking about children's writing is a very large space. You've to be very mindful of the number of words used in children's books. In America San Francisco, Picture books cannot ever be more than 1000 words, usually around 600 words, along with illustrations, and they can go a maximum of up to 1000 words. If you pitch any publisher anything over 1000 words, you can't catch your pitch to getting published.

If we discuss what is the difference? Obviously, if somebody is writing specifically for children in picture book format, they are a very different kind of author than the novelist for adults.

Method of writing, thinking process, storytelling, etc., has similarities. If you are writing for a young age group, you are

giving them an opportunity to pick up the language, i.e., repetition and musical elements. Repetition helps enforce words in children's minds, and all of these things can be taken advantage of by children writers.

However, you have to be mindful of certain kinds of subjects matters and what kind of children's book you are working on. I have had the good fortune of working on a number of different age groups for children. So I'm a bit more mindful of the differences in those kinds of books to learn very swiftly.

At last, children's writing, children's authors, and children's literature are rather large in terms of their capriciousness.

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