

FRONTLIST

FEBRUARY 2023



Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh
*Minister of State for External
Affairs and Education,
Govt. of India*



Shri Bhupender Yadav
*Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate
Change; and Labour & Employment
Govt. of India*



PVL F

PragatiE Vichaar
LITERATURE
FESTIVAL 2023

9th-14th Jan

Author Marathon + Excellence Awards



WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Frontlisters,

January has been an amazing month for us all.

“Of all the lit fests and other literary events I have attended, this is the one with the most warmth” - This comment from a literary agent on a cold Delhi day at Hotel Claridge’s during the physical PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival made my day and was a perfect beginning to what 2023 has in store for Frontlist.

I knew PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023 would be a blockbuster. But a show of this magnitude I didn’t imagine. Thank you to everyone who worked with us, supported us and was there with us for all their love. It was utterly delightful to witness the admiration that we received, and will be our inspiration to create more such events promoting Indian Literature and its connoisseurs.

The Virtual PVLf 2023 acquired 2M+ reach, 200K+ visitors, and 600K+ minutes of viewership on the PragatiE platform. Another 200K+ views were witnessed on Youtube. We even had to ban an author in the excellence awards who was using scripting for proxy votes, such was the craze amongst the industry. Shri Bhupender Yadav Ji (Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change; and Labour & Employment) and Dr. RajKumar Ranjan Singh (Minister of State, Education and External affairs) were our chief guests for PVLf Excellence Awards and physical PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival on 14th January respectively.

After the great success of the PVLf 2023, we are coming up with the 2nd edition of the PragatiE Vichaar Poetry Festival, which will be held on 21st March, to commemorate the poetry which exemplifies one of the treasured and lyrical expressions of human emotions.

The month of February will see the return of the New Delhi World Book Fair in all its glory. The 31st Edition is an opportune platform to foster the love for books with the theme ‘Azadi ka Amrit Mahostav and will be held in Pragati Maidan from 25th Feb - 4th Mar, 2023. Team Frontlist will be there and would love to meet with all of you.

The month of January also saw the Chennai International Book Fair 2023 (CIBF 2023), which catapulted itself into one of the best book expos in the world. Our founder, Pranav Gupta spoke about India’s potential and growth in the global book industry at a panel discussion titled ‘Making CIBF a truly global event’ along with other key leaders from IPA and the industry.

Keep reading Frontlist Magazine and following Frontlist on the web!

Write to us: navita@frontlist.in.

Navita Berry
Business Head

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PVLF

PragatiE Vichaar
LITERATURE
FESTIVAL 2023

9th-14th Jan

Exclusive Coverage

The 2nd Edition of PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival: Celebration of Literature, Discussions and Recognition

The 2nd edition of the **PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival** was a massive success, garnering **2M+ reach** and **200k+ visitors**. The literature festival was a six-day event (Virtual+Physical) organized in a distinct composition from its previous edition. This year, the celebration was more significant, featuring diverse authors and introducing the Hindi world into the mix. With the theme of "*Taking Humanity Forward*," the PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival commenced its second rendition on **9 January** and continued till **14 January**.

Organized by Frontlist Media, the PVLFF has established a milieu for new and debut authors to get them recognized. The festival celebrated the true essence of Indian Literature and spread its joy by addressing prevailing issues. The event featured the PVLFF Author's Marathon from the 9th to the 13th of January, where renowned world authors, debut authors, and industry professionals led riveting and thought-provoking sessions on various topics under different sub-themes.

The virtual PVLFF 2023 went live on PragatiE platform. We garnered immense support from the entire publishing industry and the audience.

A total of **79 speakers** and **27 publishers** participated in the festival. 63 were part of the virtual literature festival from the 9th to 13th January, and 16 joined the physical event on the 14 January. There were 30 sessions, which accumulated over **600,000 minutes of viewership** with **150k+ views** on the virtual literature festival.

On **14 January**, the PVLFF 2023 kicked off with a classical dance performance by Harpreet Kaur Jass, followed by the lighting of the lamp by our founders and chief guest.

Dr. RajKumar Ranjan Singh was the Chief Guest at the PVLFF 2023, which commenced from 9 am onwards. He said, "*I am delighted to be here at PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023. This is merely an encouraging activity. Although we publish books regularly, we need to organize such festivals to promote the regular habit of reading by the communities. This is a good opportunity provided by the organizers of PVLFF, so if we continue these kinds of activities, India will soon be a Vishwa Guru.*"

After the inauguration ceremony, engaging series of conversations highlighting mental health and wellness, the question of is human existence for serving or living, the art of fiction, and how personal experiences and true narratives rule the roost. PVLFF's knowledge partner, Nielsen BookData, presented the importance of data in schools and children's book publishing, while Solh Wellness brought up the comprehensive issue of mental wellness.

On the same day, PVLFF Excellence Awards 2023 was initiated in the evening to acknowledge literary artworks and the publishing industry. **Shri Bhupendra Yadav Ji**, Minister of Labour and Employment, Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, was the Chief Guest at the event and he had a quite interactive session with the audience on his new book '*The Rise of BJP*,' co-authored by Ila Patnaik, an Indian economist.

Special Guest **Andre Breedt**, Managing Director of Nielsen BookData, and **Dr. K. Sreenivasarao**, Secretary of Sahitya Akademi, graced the occasion with their valuable presence.

The PVLFF Excellence Awards felicitation ceremony took place with great enthusiasm to honor and recognize the best literary works of the year. **RJ Sachin** from **RedFM India** announced the winners and it was indeed a spectacular awards Night.

220 authors & 40+ Publishers nominated themselves for the PVLFF Author Excellence Awards and went through Jury Selection. Our Jurors, Kaveree Bamzai (Best Debut Non Fiction & Best Non-Fiction), Lipika Bhushan (Best Debut Non Fiction & Best Children Author of the Year), and Ratna Joshi (Best Debut Fiction & Best Children Author of the year), shortlisted 5 nominees and put for Public Voting. The last (2022) edition of the PVLFF Excellence Awards garnered 42K+ votes for awards. However, we've reached a new milestone this year and **received 220k+ votes**.

PVLFF 2023 got immense support from esteemed publishers such as Wonder House Books, Dreamland Publication, Disha Publication Inc., Solh Wellness, FingerPrint Publishing, and Scholastic India. This year's venture helped us forge new bonds with Red FM India, Goodlyfe Project, WICCI, Neptune, and Blossom Kochhar. A special thanks to Nielsen BookData and Mr Andre Breedt for coming to India to specially attend the PVLFF 2023.

Frontlist Media organized the PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival, with the Federation of Indian Publishers [FIP] as an industry partner and brought by Nielsen BookData as the knowledge partner.

PVLF 2023 Morning Event



Felicitation of Chief Guest Dr RajKumar Ranjan Singh



“Adwaita” Dance by Harpreet Kaur Jass



Lighting of Lamp by Dr RajKumar Ranjan Singh



Our Founder, Mr Pranav Gupta addressing the audience

Physical Sessions at the PVLF 2023



Session: Can't we create a mental health solution with a one size fits all approach?

Session: Importance of Data in School and Children's Book Publishing, powered by Nielsen BookScan Data



Session: Is Human Existence For Serving Or Living?

Session: How personal accounts & true stories are ruling the roost



Session: The Art of Fiction

PVLF Excellence Awards 2023



Lighting of the Lamp by Chief Guest Shri Bhupender Yadav and Special Guests, Mr Andre Breedt & Dr. K. Sreenivasarao



Our Founder, Mr Kapil Gupta, while sharing his thoughts with Shri Bhupender Yadav Ji



Mr Andre Breedt, Managing Director of Nielsen BookData, addressing the audience at the PVLF Excellence Awards 2023 ceremony



Chief Guest, Shri Bhupender Yadav, discussing his book 'The Rise of BJP'



Ms Lipika Bhushan, Chief Marketing Consultant, MarketMyBooks discussing Shri Bhupender Singh's Book



'Shaam-e-Khaas' by Singer Rashmi Agarwal



Frontlist Media & PVLFF 2023 Team



Felicitation of Special Guest, Dr. K. Sreenivasarao



RJ Sachin, Red FM India, announcing the PVLFF Excellence Awards 2023

WINNERS LIST

PVLF AUTHOR EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2023

- Based on Nomination, Jury Selection and Public Voting

Category	Book	Author	Publisher
Best Debut Fiction	Ladies' Tailor	Priya Hajela	HarperCollins India
Best Debut Non Fiction	Nautanki Saala and Other Stories	Mohua Chinappa	OakBridge Publishing
Best Fiction	"One Day, Life Will Change"	Saranya Umakanthan	Fingerprint Publishing
Best Non Fiction	India, Bharat and Pakistan	J. Sai deepak	Bloomsbury India
Best Poetry	The Mahabharata in Rhyme	Sia Gupta	OM Books International
Best Children Author of the Year	Girl Power: Indian Women Who Broke the Rules	Neha J Hiranandani	Scholastic India
Most Celebrated Author of the Year	N.A	Sadhguru	N.A
Author Excellence Awards (Hindi)	Main Ishq Hoon	Neeraj Anand Choudhary	Bihaan Music publishers

PVLF PEOPLE'S CHOICE PUBLISHER AWARDS 2023

- Based on Nielsen BookData

There were five categories under this award section, and the top 3 Indian Publishers in each category were selected based on the Nielsen BookData.

Test Prep	Education	Children's Book	Trade Books	Hindi
1st- Arihant Publications India Ltd	1st- Arihant Publications India Ltd.	1st- Wonder House Books	1st- Fingerprint Publishing	1st- Prabhat Prakashan
2nd- MTG Learning Media Pvt Ltd.	2nd- Disha Publication Inc.	2nd- Dreamland Publications	2nd- Manjul Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.	2nd- Rajpal and Sons
3rd- Disha Publication Inc.	3rd- S.Chand & Company Limited	3rd- Om Books International	3rd- DC Books	3rd- Rajkamal Prakashan

PVLF READERS' CHOICE BOOK AWARDS 2023

- Based on Nielsen BookData and Voting.

English Language - In the category of Platinum (250K + Book Copies), Gold (150K - 250K+ Book Copies), and Silver (100k - 150k).

PVLF READERS'S CHOICE BOOK AWARDS 2023- ENGLISH

Category	Book	Author	Publisher
Platinum	Atomic Habits	James Clear	Penguin Random House
Gold	Grandma's Bag Of Stories	Sudha Murty	Penguin Random House
Silver	Inner Engineering	Sadhguru	Penguin Random House

PVLF READERS'S CHOICE BOOK AWARDS 2023- HINDI

Category	Book	Author	Publisher
Platinum	Aughaad	Nilotpal Mrinal	Hind Yugm
Silver	7 Kirdaar	Nitish Ojha	Notion Press
Gold	Ek Aaghaaz	Nitish Ojha	Notion Press

PVLf People's Choice Publisher Award 2023



Publisher: Wonder House Books
Category: Children's Book
Position: First



Publisher: Arihant Publications India Ltd
Category: Test Prep
Position: First



Publisher: Rajpal & Sons
Category: Hindi
Position: Second



Publisher: Manjul Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
Category: Trade Books
Position: Second



Publisher: Disha Publication Inc
Category: Education
Position: Second



Publisher: Disha Publication Inc
Category: Test Prep
Position: Third



Publisher: Dreamland Publication
Category: Children's Book
Position: Second



Publisher: Prabhat Prakashan
Category: Hindi
Position: First



Publisher: Arihant Publications India Ltd
Category: Education
Position: First



Publisher: FingerPrint Publishing
Category: Trade Books
Position: First

PVLF Author Excellence Award 2023



Author: J. Sai deepak
Book: India, Bharat and Pakistan
Publisher: Bloomsbury India
Category: Best Non Fiction



Author: Mohua Chinappa
Book: Nautanki Saala and Other Stories
Publisher: OakBridge Publishing
Category: Best Debut Non Fiction



Author: Neeraj Anand Choudhary
Book: Main Ishq Hoon
Publisher: Bihaan Music publishers
Category: Author Excellence Awards (Hindi)



Author: Neha J Hiranandani
Book: Girl Power: Indian Women Who Broke the Rules
Publisher: Scholastic India
Category: Best Children Author of the Year



Author: Priya Hajela
Book: Ladies' Tailor
Publisher: HarperCollins India
Category: Best Debut Fiction



Author: Sadhguru
Category: Most Celebrated Author of the Year



Author: Saranya Umakanthan
Book: "One Day, Life Will Change"
Publisher: FingerPrint Publishing
Category: Best Fiction



Author: Sia Gupta
Book: The Mahabharata in Rhyme
Publisher: OM Books International
Category: Best Poetry

PVLF Readers' Choice Book Award 2023



Author: Sadhguru
Book: Inner Engineering
Publisher: Penguin Random House
Category: Silver
Language: English

Author: Sudha Murty
Book: Grandma's Bag Of Stories
Publisher: Penguin Random House
Category: Gold
Language: English



Author: James Clear
Book: Atomic Habits
Publisher: Penguin Random House
Category: Platinum
Language: English

Author: Nilotpal Mrinal
Book: Aughaad
Publisher: Hind Yugn
Category: Platinum
Language: Hindi



OUR WINNERS OF THE PVLFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2023

Author Priya Hajela

(Winner of PVLFF Author Excellence Award 2023 in the Best Debut Fiction Category)



I was honoured that my book, Ladies' Tailor, was shortlisted for a PVLFF Excellence Award. However, winning the award for best debut author caused a feeling that hit me in the stomach first - did I deserve it - classic imposter syndrome. But then that feeling morphed into joy and gratitude for PVLFF, a young organisation on a quest to recognise new writers and give them a platform based on popularity and reach as well as the quality of their writing. Winning the award has brought more attention to the book, both from potential readers and the publisher. While the publisher has supported the book diligently, it is also understandable that their focus moves on to other titles as time goes by. A win pulls back attention to Ladies' Tailor, a much-appreciated gesture, however fleeting it may be.

Author Mohua Chinappa

(Winner of PVLFF Author Excellence Award 2023 in the Best Debut Non Fiction Category)



Winning the PVLFF Author Excellence Award 2023 in the Best Debut Non-Fiction for my first book, Nautanki Saala And Other Stories, is overwhelming. It is a reiteration of my faith in the craft and power of honest storytelling. As a housewife for over a decade, when all I had were lists of vegetables and household chores to be written down and notes to my friends, this award for my first book reinstates the beauty of accountability that I had nurtured even while I wrote the most mundane things. Writing has given my life a new birth, and it is like the metamorphosis of a butterfly. I feel fresh, and the award makes my enemies look at me with a newfound respect. This definitely changes the trajectory of my relationship with them, which feels great. Also, in this ever-changing world, where words most often fall on deaf ears, my words fell upon the world louder than before as PVLFF threw light in my shadows, bringing me up to a larger audience with my written voice. I promise to hone my craft further as I go forward as a writer. This award has given my writing credibility, which, as an author, is challenging to receive easily. I am thankful and will continue doing my work with more patience, acceptance, and respect for my readers, publishers and the entire community of book lovers.

Saranya Umakanthan

(Winner of the PVLFF Author Excellence Awards in the Best Fiction Category)



"I am honoured and privileged to receive the best fiction award for my book - One day, life will change. It is an inspiring romance fiction which is in the Nielsen best-seller list constantly. As the icing on the cake, receiving this award is a beautiful milestone in my writing career, and I would like to thank PVLFF sincerely for recognising the best writing talent and bringing it to the forefront. PVLFF has provided an excellent platform for authors across the country and an exposure to connect with elite people from the literature world whom you rarely get to meet. The events across the week were fun, interactive and informative. And most of all, this has given me the visibility I was hoping for. Thanks, PVLFF."



Neeraj Anand Choudhary

(Winner of PVLf Author Excellence Awards Hindi)

Awards are Wonderful. It is a word that carries thousands of emotions and respect and it was very whimsical when my book " मैं इश्क हूँ" won the Author Excellence Award after getting more than 39600 votes in a very prestigious event like PVLf Literature Festival 2023.

It is not even enough to show my thankfulness and honour in words. I am immensely obliged for the award that Frontlist Media, in association with The Federation of Indian Publishers and Nielsen Book Data have given to me. This achievement will be my inspiration to achieve a lot of meaningful success in the future. Thanks a ton.

I want to thank the organising team of PVLf Literature Festival 2023 and my readers in a saying:

मैं इश्क हूँ, इश्क में हूँ, इश्क के देनदार में हूँ

मैं तेरे अंदर बाहर, तेरे दरो दीवार में हूँ

जकड़ लेती है खुशियां मुझे हर पल, जब भी कभी उदास होना चाहता हूँ मैं

मैं बहुत ज्यादा बहुत ज्यादा बहुत ज्यादा तेरे प्यार में हूँ।



Kapil Gupta Co-founder, Frontlist Media

With 600,000 minutes of viewership and 240,000 votes, the entire publishing and authors community were excited about the PVLf 2023. PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023 was an incredible event. Shri Bhupender Yadav Ji was our chief guest for the PVLf Excellence Awards 2023 and Dr. Raj Kumar Ranjan Singh was our chief guest for the Morning Literature Festival. While we said that this year was amazing, next year will be bigger and better, and we will keep on improving year after year.

PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival will soon become the flagship literature festival in this country



Pranav Gupta Co-founder, Frontlist Media

PragatiE Vichaar Literature Festival 2023 was a wonderful literature festival with many authors and publishers becoming a part of this thrilling 6-day-long celebration of Indian literature and the Indian publishing industry.

Also, the PVLf Awards are truly one of a kind and have been encouraging Indian Publishers since their inception. I believe such awards are a great way to encourage the efforts made by publishers within different verticals of the publishing domain. PVLf Awards are unique, data-driven awards that we have been able to curate successfully. As Co-Founder of Frontlist, I am proud of the curation and how the results have turned out.

Special Feature

Chennai International Book Fair 2023 saw a grand debut

The first edition of the three-day Chennai International Book Fair (CIBF), conducted from January 16-18 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu's capital city, turned out to be a resounding success. The debut marked the beginning of a new chapter in Tamil publishing too.

As a co-event to the 46th Chennai Book Fair, one of the largest business to consumer (B2C) book events in India, the CIBF complemented it with a global business to business (B2B) component.

Representatives from 30 countries and numerous States of India participated: Azerbaijan, Israel, Canada, Indonesia, France, Georgia, Malaysia, Italy, Singapore, Bangladesh, Uganda, Armenia, Tanzania, Argentina, Turkey, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Sri Lanka, Germany, the UK, the USA, Thailand and Japan were among the participants.

The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. M.K. Stalin, announced a fresh translation grant of ₹30 million (USD 3.75k) as the first allotment to translate Tamil titles in 30 languages. Many schemes for translation grants through co-publishing and bulk library purchases have already been initiated. "The Tamil Nadu government aims to take Tamil to the world and bring the world to Tamil through the international book fair," said Mr. Stalin. The Chief Minister had set up 12,000 libraries in the rural regions of Tamil Nadu when he was earlier the minister for local administration.

"It was a very impressive start to the international side of the fair. I congratulate the fair organisers and promise my support in their future endeavours," said Ms. Gvantsa Jobava, Vice President, International Publishers Association and Editor/Head of the International Affairs, Intelekti Publishing, Georgia.

Mr. Aazhi Senthil Nathan, the International Partnership Consultant and founder of Aazhi Publishers, summed up the whole experience. "The success of this debut book fair, which was conceived within a short span of two months, is due to the trust of the global publishing industry. Chennai is on its way to becoming one of the top global hubs in the publishing sector. That position will be secured in a matter of time by creating an ecosystem for publishers and agents worldwide. This land of literature with voracious readers will continue to enthral the increasing tribe of book lovers in the forthcoming editions as well."

Well-known publishing houses and rights agents from many nations joined this debut event, which turned the spotlight on Chennai's unique presence on the global book fair map.

Ms. Judith Rosenzweig, Foreign Rights Director, Éditions Gallimard called it a "fantastic first edition".

In this year's fair, 365 memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were signed between the participating countries.

This event came about after a delegation from Tamil Nadu comprising government officers and publishing industry experts visited the Frankfurt Book Fair 2022 to get a better idea of how much more could be accomplished in the CIBF. The successful debut in Chennai showed what a team together in strength of mind and character could do.

Talk sessions and panel discussions marked the day on January 17. The next day saw an international conference titled 'Making CIBF a truly global event' in which Ms. Gvantsa Jobava (Vice President, International Publishers Association), Ms. Judith Rosenzweig (Foreign Rights Director, Éditions Gallimard), Mr. Robert Morgan (BookLand Press, Canada), Mr. Hasri Bin Hasan (CEO, Bookonomics Asia, Malaysia), Mr. Pranav Gupta (Federation of Indian Publishers) and Mr. Prashant Pathak (Publishers Without Borders) participated.

Award-winning French author Ms. Maylis de Kerangal delivered a special address on January 18. Mr. Pradeep Arora (Federation of Publishers' & Booksellers' Associations in India) spoke on 'India: Language Publishing Trends and Policies.' Mr. Prashant Pathak of Publishers Without Borders said, "I was lucky to be part of the inaugural Chennai International Book Fair and Publishers Conference - an event well thought out and beautifully curated."

Glimpses of CIBF 2023





Introducing -Solh Wellness: A Comprehensive Solution

Solh Wellness is a preventive mental health platform that helps increase the psychological capital of every individual. It is the world's first mental health marketplace with a vision to ensure everyone is empowered with tools, solutions, and access to mental health support by normalizing the need for therapy. It provides affordable, 24x7 accessible, personalized, and accepted access to resources through an AI-driven, non-judgmental, safe space.

Solh Wellness Now Feature

Sometimes you need to talk out. Find a keen listener who can relieve your stress and make you feel better instantly.

- An expert team of counselors & Solh volunteers is ready to help right away
- Ability to put emergency contacts so they can be notified of your need for help when you need it
- Easy system to reach out to a medical practitioner or professional for further assistance as needed
- You can always be at peace knowing there is someone available for use when you demand

Book an Appointment

Everyone's life is full of stress, and everyone needs support. A highly qualified group of top mental health professionals improves your mental wellbeing thoroughly examined through a stringent selection procedure.

Start your mental health journey with 200+ mental health professionals. You also get expert advice for your mental health needs from our Solh Counselors.

- Ask for help or book online appointment
- Connect through live chat & video chat
- Search from a wide list of doctors who specialize in different kinds of treatments
- View doctors schedule and plan your consultation accordingly

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to download the app**



Media Coverage

Ms Priti Paul, Director of Apeejay Surrendra Group inaugurates the 14th Edition of Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival

- 100 Years of Oxford Bookstore is the festival theme for 2023
- AKLF 2023 is back on home ground at Park Mansions at Park Street. This historic edifice spread over 1.77 acres, won KMC-INTACH Heritage Award for the commendable restoration work and preservation of Kolkata's colonial-era architectural heritage.
- The 100-Year logo of the Oxford Bookstore was unveiled at the AKLF inauguration.
- The 14th AKLF began its journey on the auspicious occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary.
- The inaugural day hosted three sessions dedicated to the centenary celebration of the Oxford Bookstore – "Much More than a Bookstore," "Restore, Renovate, Re-use," and "The Oxford' Para'."
- As an inaugural bonanza for book lovers, bestselling author Jeffrey Archer was in conversation with Barry O'Brien.
- Pulitzer Prize-winning iconic writer Alice Walker; actor Dhritiman Chatterji; Australian author John Zubrzycki; poet Jeet Thayil; author Anuja Chauhan will be among over 100 speakers at AKLF, which will be held in its original onsite format with some hybrid sessions.

On the ground of the Park Mansions, Kolkata, the fourteenth edition of Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF) inaugurated by Priti Paul, Director, Apeejay Surrendra Group, in the presence of Maina Bhagat, Director, Oxford Bookstore and AKLF and Anjum Katyal, Director, AKLF on January 12, 2023, Kolkata.

The Festival inaugurated with the unveiling of the 100-year logo of the Oxford Bookstore. Priti Paul, Director of Apeejay Surrendra Group, said, "Today marks the start of our joyous celebration of books and readers in honour of Oxford Bookstore's 100th anniversary. After being severely impacted by the pandemic, it is heartening to see Oxford Bookstore rebound to a healthy and vibrant state, brimming with book lovers and buyers. We intend to continue the centennial celebration of Oxford Bookstore throughout the year, and AKLF 2023 is a great place to start. The 14th AKLF will be a four-day literary festival featuring the best in fiction, translations, poetry, cinema, history, mental health, mythology, gastronomy, dance, history, art, and culture. We also have a dedicated children's literature festival, the Oxford Junior Literary Festival, for young book and reading enthusiasts. I hope the 14th AKLF impacts everyone's life in Kolkata and beyond and fosters a love of literature."

On occasion, Maina Bhagat, Director of Oxford Bookstores and Director, AKLF, said, "As the 14th edition of AKLF unfolds a yearlong celebration of the Heritage Oxford Bookstore's Centenary, it is important to recall and record the iconic institution's journey over the decades - a journey which reflects the life, times and rich history of our great city. Oxford Bookstore has



Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2022

enabled generations of book lovers to bring the world closer through books, express their vision of the future at the bookstore's various platforms, and celebrate the diversity and richness of the human experience. It has enabled our stories, culture, and history to be passed on to future generations. You see, bookstores are dreams built of wood and paper. They are time travel and escape, Knowledge and power. Simply put, they are the best places (Neil Gaiman). As it steps into the future, Oxford Bookstore continues to strive for excellence and to be, simply put, the best of places."

Speaking at the inauguration Anjum Katyal, Director, AKLF, said, "I welcome you all to AKLF with a sense of hope and faith. I see AKLF, a festival of books, writers, and ideas, as a space of hope for a more inclusive society, a space of faith in humanity's ability to connect as human beings. Reading connects us across the world, class, color, religion, history, geography, time, and space. In celebrating 100 Years of Oxford Bookstore, AKLF celebrates the infinite and inclusive world of a true bookstore, which makes space on its shelves and in its heart for debate, dissent, and contrasting points of view; and which welcomes writers of every race caste and creed."

The inaugural session was followed by the session named "Much More than a Bookstore" where celebrated Kolkatans shared their relationship with the century-old Oxford Bookstore. The speakers were Anita Agnihotri, Dhritiman Chatterji, Jawhar Sircar, Sugata Bose, Suvaprasanna, and Barry O'Brien.

There was a hybrid session regarding 'Restore, Renovate, Re-use', which was on the occasion of 100 years of Oxford Bookstore, a discussion on the value of built heritage with the Director of Alliance Francaise du Bengale, Nicolas Facino, Director of Apeejay Surrendra Group, Priti Paul and State Convener of INTACH Kolkata, GM Kapur. The session was moderated by Mukul Agarwal.

The Oxford' Para': The presentation was on the revival of Park Street which was presented by Monica Khosla Bhargava, followed by Barry O'Brien (The Anglo-Indians: A Portrait of a Community) on Anglo-Indians, 'Calcutta 16', and the city. The session was based on Park Street and its surroundings, with its rich built and intangible heritage, which can be considered the heart of the city.



The 14th AKLF began today with the unveiling of the Oxford Bookstore's 100-year logo on the grounds of Park Mansions on Park Street. L to R_ Oindrilla Dutt, Jawhar Sircar, Nicolas Facino, Suvaprasanna, Bharati Ra

The inaugural day also hosted the international best-selling author Jeffrey Archer. "Jeffrey Archer Unplugged" saw the celebrated author in a virtual conversation with Barry O'Brien.

Poetry Café, a trademark segment of AKLF, began with "Verse and Converse: Poets in conversation, with readings," presented with IPPL, was coordinated by Ananya Chatterjee, Nabanita Sengupta, and Sanghita Sanyal across three sessions.

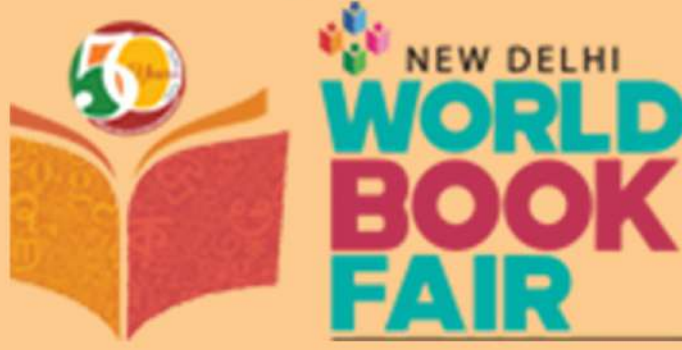
About Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival

Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, India's only literary Festival created by a bookstore and Kolkata's first literary Festival, reflects our city's vibrancy of thought, its engagement with the literary world at large, and explores literature as part of our tangible and intangible heritage. Celebrate books, music, art, film, and more with the finest creative minds in the nation and globally as events unfold at the city's magnificent heritage sites.



Ms. Priti Paul Director of Apeejay Surrendra Group addressing an AKLF session after inaugurating the festival virtually

Get ready to attend



The New Delhi World Book Fair 2023 is set to take place in its in-person format from 25th February to 5th March 2023 at ITPO's new International Exhibition Centre at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, to celebrate its 50 years journey; this edition is themed Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava.

It is Afro-Asia's largest book fair regarding sales, visibility, promotions, international exhibitors, copyright exchanges, trade visitors, and business sessions.

The book fair will exhibit the G20 pavilion, Award-winning books, Yuva authors, India@75, Sri Aurobindo, various photo exhibitions, Army band, Open-mic events at the Amphitheatre, and much more. NDWBF 2023 shall unite publishers and readers, authors, illustrators, and educationists in meaningful dialogue through various book promotional activities and programs.

France is the Guest of Honour Country at NDWBF 2023 (as a follow-up of the PM-President Joint Statement signed in March 2018), and book lovers will get a unique opportunity to enjoy French literature and culture at the Foreign Pavilion along with a variety of literary activities at the International Events Corner. France is putting up a special Guest of Honour Pavilion and is bringing about 60 delegates from France. Visitors to the fair will be able to meet many French publishers, illustrators, and authors and will be able to browse through several French books and translated works as well.

This year's NDWBF will indeed alter the publishing world in terms of fostering the love for reading, promoting local publishers & booksellers, and bringing new opportunities.

Date: 25th February - 05 March 2023

Venue: Pragati Maidan, New Delhi

Time: 11:00am to 8:00pm

Theme - Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav



Organiser



Co-organiser



Vasudev Murthy, Author of 'Yoga Sutras Simplified: A Soul-Searching Adventure with Patanjali'

Vasudev Murthy writes in multiple genres: classical music, management, crime, and humour. He draws inspiration from the violin, yoga, animal rights, and insane poets. His work has been translated into Japanese, Portuguese, Hindi, and Kannada. He lives in Bangalore.

Frontlist: How did the idea of simplifying complex Sanskrit sutras in layman's terms cross your mind?

Vasudev: There are plenty of books written on Vedic philosophy, and more by evolved individuals. I observed that most readers have challenges in comprehending complex ideas for various reasons, including the fact that they might not know much about Sanskrit or even Devanagari. This causes an average reader to pause and consider revisiting the text later, which he or she probably does not. Additionally, the current linear way of describing a text, line by line, may not always work. Often, readers want to know the basic idea, supplemented with graphics, personal anecdotes and more. Once I arrived at this formula, with help of my editor, the book flowed well.

Frontlist: What complex life questions does this book address?

Vasudev: There are quite a few. Here's an example.

- What is the purpose of this life?
- Who am I, truly?
- Why is my mind constantly in a state of unrest and what can I do about it?
- What are the distractions I might encounter while working towards the purpose of yoga?
- What are the limbs of yoga, with particular reference to social behaviour and internal discipline, and how does it help me?

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

- What is time?
- What are the sources of sorrow?

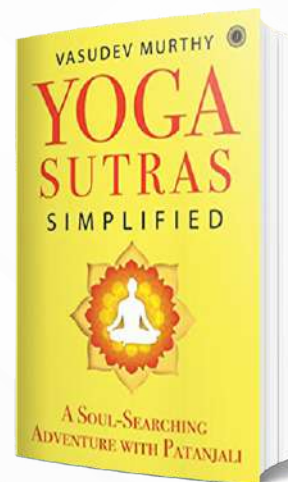
Frontlist: How does the book go beyond the physical aspects of Yoga?

Vasudev: The physical aspect – the asanas – are alluded to only briefly – twice, in fact - in the 196 sutras. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras define the philosophy of yoga and says that yoga is the stilling of the mind. But that is easier said than done. He explains the state of Samadhi, the distractions along the way, the solution, the structured eight limbs of yoga, the unusual abilities you may acquire, the three gunas that result in each of us looking at the world differently and the final glorious state of dharma megha samadhi

Frontlist: When did you first start practicing Yoga, and what changes have you experienced since rehearsing it?

Vasudev: I started my journey decades ago when I lived in the US. It was an intermittent interest and I was only looking at it, naively, as means to better health. Later, I enrolled in a wonderful Yoga school in Bangalore and developed additional insights. My reading of the Yoga Sutras was rather late, but had an immediate impact on me being able to be more deliberate in my actions and becoming more aware of how my mind was reacting. I practise Asanas and Pranayama every single day and I enjoy excellent physical and mental health.

Frontlist: Why do you believe people need to be well-versed in the Yoga Sutras? Please elucidate its advantages.



Vasudev: First off, the Yoga Sutras are a fantastic cultural and spiritual pillar of India. The advanced and superbly subtle ideas expressed in the Yoga Sutras will elevate your thinking. Yoga is, as you know, one of the greatest contributions of India to the rest of the world. Once you get a grasp of the philosophy of yoga, your mind expands and you ponder larger questions. The Yoga Sutras describe how the mind is modified constantly and what you can do to still your mind and then see the real YOU. We derive an understanding of the purpose of our life, the meaning of karma, the sources of sorrow, why we behave in certain ways, how to manage ourselves better and so on. We may understand the purpose of life. All this helps us use our time on this earth more effectively.

Frontlist: Simplifying ancient complex Sanskrit texts is a challenging feat to achieve. How did you conduct your research for this book?

Vasudev: I studied the Sanskrit text and then looked at a number of interpretations. The Yoga Sutras have been formally explained – though in the traditional liner way, sutra after sutra - by extraordinary people like Swami Vivekananda, B K S Iyengar, Edwin Bryant, Yogacharya Bhavnani and more. What was important, I felt, was to write around the collection of ideas, rather than focus on any single one. I tried to map whatever I was reading to events in my life to give it context. That worked. I used references to music and several other short stories to make the description more personal and accessible to readers. I divided the 196 sutras in eight chapters of about 25 sutras each. And there were three principles "takeaways," I listed at the end of every chapter. Very importantly, I used graphics to convey ideas. These days, people prefer graphics that convey the idea faster than words; this needs to be acknowledged.



'Amit Schandillia, author of 'Don't Forward That Text'

Amit Schandillia is a language enthusiast and history communicator with a background in computers and finance. Besides language, Amit has a long relationship with history and has produced hundreds of popular Twitter threads on the subject, both Indian and otherwise. He is particularly interested in making history accessible to laypersons by breaking down stories into thrilling, enjoyable reads. Amit also authors India Uncharted, an audio series on Indian history, with Storytel.

Frontlist: Why did you choose "Don't Forward that Text" as your book's title?

Amit: Texts are the most efficient vehicles of misinformation today. An overwhelming bulk of fakery that reaches us right now is in the shape of forwarded memes and messages. One may or may not be on social media, but everybody is on WhatsApp. Not all misinformation is propaganda, but an alarming proportion pertains to history. Naturally, there's value in stopping this spread. My book strives to pick apart some pieces of misinformation about our history and help break the chain, hence the name. I aim to engage my readers with reason and appeal to their sense of inquiry.

Frontlist: What inspired you to formulate a book that debunks fallacies associated with history?

Amit: History has grown into the fiercest ideological battlefield of our times, and it's only expected to grow fiercer. There's more misinformation being manufactured to subvert history than to subvert even science. Highly motivated ideologues increasingly realize that he, who controls the history, holds the narrative. In a world, as polarized as ours, the narrative is a potent weapon with severe and lasting real-life implications. From Tipu Sultan to Babri Masjid to beef, real blood is being spilled over who the narrative vilifies or deifies. While science misinformation is easy to debunk as scientific laws and theories are set in stone, history is filled with subjectivities and educated guesswork. That makes a compelling case for works that do their best to bring objectivity, nuance, and reason to the stories that matter.

Moreover, history is primarily seen as boring and pointless, a myth that I am interested in busting. History, especially Indian, is full of edge-of-the-seat thrillers and butterfly effects.

Frontlist: From the vast sea of misinformation available nowadays, why did you decide to address these thirty misconceptions?

Amit: Most of these are areas of solid contention. Subjects such as Aryan homeland, Tipu Sultan, and Swastika are incredibly controversial and rife with false narratives that cut across political lines. No ideology has the monopoly over deliberate obfuscations, identity politics, and flat-out

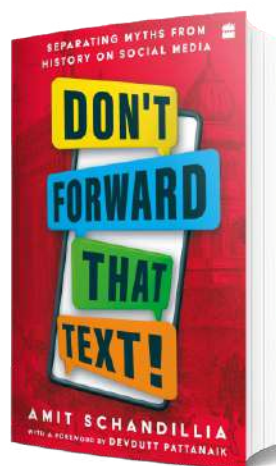
distortion. Therefore, I selected those first because setting the record straight on them would kill a big chunk of the misinformation market. I have also chosen a few that may still be less contentious but not as well-understood. Topics like the origin of sugar, toilets, and musical notations do not trigger ideological warfare but still come loaded with wrong impressions. These are topics where a yawning gulf exists between what you've always known and the truth. So yeah, these were my two parameters—controversy and obscurity.

Frontlist: Social media plays a big part in spreading misinformation among the masses. What approaches can we incorporate to stop being deceived by false information?

Amit: Fake narratives aren't as ardent to identify as they seem. There are tell-tale signs. The most prominent cue is the appeal to emotion. If a forwarded meme or story triggers a strong feeling in you, makes you furious, or makes you proud of something that isn't your achievement, it's most likely fake. Don't engage. If a text seems politically motivated, it most certainly is. In those rare cases, things seem authentic but still run against what you already know about research.

Research might sound intimidating, but with a whole world of information at your fingertips today, it isn't. Google things, and search them up on Wikipedia. These are very layman-friendly approaches. From there, you can always dig deeper, depending on your appetite. For instance, you can (and should) always check citations and references on Wikipedia. Also, if you are into reading books, try to read authors of different ideological backgrounds, which will help you gain perspective. Separating the wheat from the chaff is an art, but not the kind you can't master.

Frontlist: You've discussed in your book that Aryabhata wasn't the one who introduced zero to the world. What made you inquire about this centuries-old belief, and how did you conduct your research about it?



Amit: Zero is the most done-to-death topic among nationalist circles and is not even new. We invented zero, which we've heard as a solid mic-drop comeback to any criticism of India since childhood. It also featured in a Bollywood film where Akshay Kumar delivered a monologue on India's positives in response to a group of White men dissing our country. This monologue involved zero too. It's become this trope you can drop every time you need to shut down any sign of Indophobia in any situation. Not that I doubted its authenticity, but indeed curious about how a concept like zero could be "invented" by any one culture, and more importantly, what other cultures did in its stead! This curiosity only grew stronger when I read about the incredible mathematics of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Then the question became even more pertinent, how could they possibly be doing such complex maths without zero? However, I decided to go down that rabbit hole. That's when I came across an excellent work called *The Crest of the Peacock*, which I strongly recommend. This book taught me not just about India's contribution to zero but a vast pre-Aryabhata digit history that I was never aware of even in the slightest. From then on, I spent over a year reading many other works, including research papers, on ancient arithmetic. Once loaded with enough understanding, I decided to share it with everyone else. It's truly awe-inspiring!

Frontlist: Author Devdutt Pattanaik wrote the foreword for your book, so what made him the ideal choice?

Amit: Devdutt Pattanaik is India's foremost mythologist, the only mythologist, I'd argue. I have known him personally for more than two years, which is not merely a reason why I like him. Being a fan, I reached out to him and asked if he'd do a foreword for my maiden work. However, it's more than that. Mythology and history are so profoundly intertwined we fail to appreciate that the line blurs more often than not. As he keeps saying, mythology is personal history. Devdutt has a powerful sense of history even though he writes almost entirely on myths. It's he who introduced me to the very idea of history myth-busting. I always enjoyed history and storytelling but never saw it as a subject of "fact check" per se. A common allegory he often uses on social media is that of a swan and cockroach, where the cockroach brings nothing but disease and filth to the table but has a remarkable knack for survival. In contrast, a swan is beautiful and can even separate milk from water, but highly fragile. Separating milk from water being a metaphor for fact-check. In short, his idea of history and misinformation resonated with me, and there couldn't be a better pair of eyes to take an honest first look at my work which he kindly obliged with.



Khaqan Sikander, author of 'That Which Flows'

Khaqan Sikander is a steadfast proponent of the road less travelled. Throughout his life, he has been fortunate enough to work in conflict zones and live in refugee camps. He has survived a full-scale war, travelled the world, catalyze social-reform causes, handled nationally televised crises, and scaled businesses. These experiences have helped him develop as a global thinker yet a local actor, manifested in his ambidexterity as a management operation professional with strong leadership abilities.

Born and raised in Pakistan, he is a French and American-educated executive management professional with degrees in Management, Economics, Diplomacy, French, Spanish, Arabic & Creative Writing. In addition to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused assignments in the Middle East (UNRWA, Lebanon, 2006), Latin America (UNESCO, Costa Rica, 2007), and Africa (UNIDO, Senegal, 2009), he has been working in the corporate sector of Pakistan over the last decade and plus. He has read French, Spanish, Arabic, Creative Writing, Management, Economics, and Diplomacy.

Currently, he serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Healthx Pakistan, part of the Trudoc International group, a multinational healthcare management company with operations in over 10+ countries and a customer ecosystem of 24 million plus members across the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

That Which Flows is his debut book which is garnering a lot of appreciation from diverse readers.

Frontlist: What prompted you to name your book "That Which Flow?"

Khaqan: This title is derived from a famous saying, "Behta paani saaf hota hai peene ke liye, Insaano ko bhi waqt ke saath behna chahiye" which translates to "the flowing water is clean for drinking, people should also flow with time." The flowing body of water signifies its purity. Therefore, people should also flow with time. When I say flow, I mean evolve with time because you need to be a better version of yourself with every passing day. If we stagnate like the water, we will also go stale. So that's the concept behind the title.

Frontlist: Since your book is a memoir, please enlighten the audience about your book.

Khaqan: Yes, it is a memoir. However, it's a different kind of memoir. It's a travel memoir, which is very distinct, as it discusses two different kinds of travel. There is one kind of travel, which I call "Extensive travel," which all of us do, for instance, from Delhi to Mumbai or from your place to your office. That's called physical traveling.

Then there is another form of traveling, which I anoint as "Intrinsic traveling," representing the inner journey we all are making within ourselves. For example, your inner journey from today to two from now. My book "That Which Flow" traces the intersection between these kinds of travel, which means a reader on one side will be traveling the world with me, right so from the Middle East to Latin America, to Africa to Europe to the USA, and see the world as I saw. But the other kind of travel that the readers will see is a young boy's transformation into a mature man as he goes through different phases of life. For instance, I was living in a refugee camp, surviving a war, living in communist countries to living in Africa.

Frontlist: You have mentioned that this is a story of how you attempted to change the world, and instead, the world changed you. Please elaborate on the statement of how exactly the world changed you.

Khaqan: Youth is an asset to a country, not a liability. As far as youth idealism goes, as a young individual, you challenge the world and strive to make it a better place, change it, or leave your mark. However, as you begin doing some of these things, you realize it's more complex than your anticipation. Changing a world and making it a better place is not a man's job, and it requires continuous and constant efforts of many different people and communities to bring about even a small change. And so what happened was, when I tried to do that, I realized that some things about this world are not supposed to be changed, and I started to see beauty in them as they are.

Speaking of the transformation I experienced and the intrinsic journey I've made, I realized that we tend to be somewhat close-minded when we're young. So, how I experienced the change when I traveled around the world and interacted and met with different people of different cultures opened me to new opportunities and exposures, which significantly changed and shaped my overall personality. I have become more patient, accepting, and tolerant towards things. war victims endure. Could you share insights into the writing process of this book? How did you draft the storyline for this book, and how did you conduct your research?

Khaqan: It took me around 16 years to write this book. At started writing this book at a time when I didn't realize I was penning this book. It was around the time when I was stuck at a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, in Beirut. I turned to writing to process the extraordinary events that transpired around me. I just started writing about whatever was happening to me, like therapy. I found solace in it. I confided in my writing. It was my coping mechanism.

I kept writing for years, unbeknownst to the fact that I was sitting on a book. After realizing it, I finally began structuring the whole book. I studied the art of writing and how you construct a book. What is the narrative arc? How do you develop characters? What is the power of dialogues? How do you sequence events? Formulating this book was a fun experience for me since it's a nonfiction book. In retrospect, I had to do a lot of research to ensure that the book was accurate. It was a mix and match of organic storytelling, putting a structure around it and packing it with research.

Frontlist: You have been a victim of war and have faced the wrath of hatred. Can you describe your life as a refugee?

Khaqan: I would describe myself as a willing or partial refugee. When I was working with the United Nations, I went to work with refugees. I've mentioned in the book that I chose to stay in the refugee camp. However, while making that decision, I was not under the impression that I would get stuck there.

While living at the refugee camp, I closely examined the lives of people there and learned about the people stuck there for decades. This overall experience equipped me with a different perception of the world, which was beyond anything I had ever known.

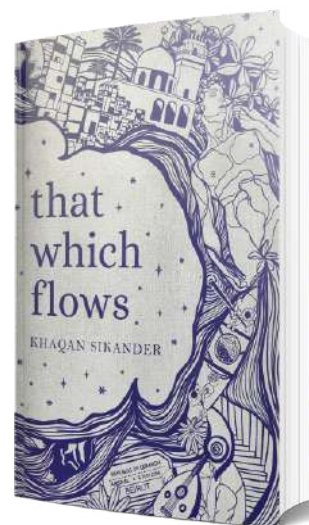
Before experiencing that, it was like I had been living in a bubble. After all, those things happened to me, and I could put myself in their shoes. It gave me a different perspective on the world. This experience taught me a lot. I left the refugee camp, but the camp never left me.

Frontlist: How did living in a war-torn country alter your perception of life?

Khaqan: Living in a refugee camp and experiencing life as it is, I realized how fragile life is and how much we take it for granted. In my opinion, life is simple. You don't need millions of followers or a Ferrari to feel happy. I saw people derive happiness from the smallest things around them because they didn't have the luxury to go for big things. These were the people who felt the deepest gratitude. They never complained. Can you imagine the kind of life they live? These were some of the lessons that got stuck with me.

Frontlist: Any incident you would like to share with the audience has significantly impacted you.

Khaqan: One of the incidents that are coming to mind right now is when I was living in Africa. Although it's not massive, it has taught me extensively. I was living on this remote island in Africa, where you would have to use a boat or swim your way through to get from one place to another. The boat that we had there was not a motorboat. The entire island's population was around 100-200 people, and was situated northwest of Africa.



This was the region where the slave trade started around 500-600 years ago. I was residing in a village of fishermen, and most of the people living there were women. The people in that village depended on fishing for their daily food supply, and I also went fishing with them. One day, I was eating with them, and suddenly a fish bone got stuck in my throat. When that bone entered my throat, I felt a sharp pain, and I couldn't breathe. As I mentioned, we were on a remote island, and there were no doctors.

This lady was sitting across me with her 5-6 children sitting in a circle around a campfire. She glanced over and noticed that I was gagging and in severe pain. We had fish and rice at that time. She took some rice, formed a ball out of it, and asked me to swallow the ball of rice without biting it. I was surprised and thought, how can I swallow the entire ball without chewing?

In her view, the rice ball was supposed to allow me to swallow the fishbone. So, I couldn't do it and ended up being stuck with a fishbone in my throat for eight hours. Ultimately, the fishbone came out, and I was relieved of the pain.

This entire situation helped me learn a new lesson life is full of fishbone, and you have to get better at swallowing rice balls and dealing with it. These taught me a lot in life.



Vijay Balan, author of 'Swaraj Spy'

Vijay Balan was born in India and moved to the United States for college. Vijay began his career in aerospace, including working on the Space Shuttle propulsion system. A rocket scientist turned storyteller, he enjoys using the written and spoken word to make arcane concepts easily understood.

Frontlist: What was your notion behind naming the book "The Swaraj Spy?"

Vijay: Starting with the title of the book, the word "Swaraj" translates to self-rule, and it was a slogan during India's freedom movement. The Great Lokmanya Tilak famously declared- "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it.

The story arc of my book has the Indian freedom struggle as its background. It is also about a secret spy school where the book's protagonist, my great uncle, was trained by Japanese intelligence and the Indian National Army, called the Indian Swaraj Institute. This spy school was set up by the Japanese and the INA to defeat the British in World War II, get them out of the war, and thus gain India's independence.

Perhaps my book is primarily about personal change and how the cruelty of war and the duplicity of espionage affect a person. So the book is also about how my great-uncle found his own Swaraj or rule but in a very different way.

Frontlist: Your book is a perfect blend of Historical Fiction and the discrepancies of war. Please walk us through the writing process of the book.

Vijay: The idea for this book was given to me by my late father, who told me stories about my great-uncle. These stories were extraordinary, and as I grew up, they stayed with me. About 13 years ago, I had an epiphany and thought this story needed to be told. However, when I began writing this story, I found that this 80-year-old trail had gone cold, and nothing was left. It was like assembling an old, battered puzzle with the most missing pieces. I started digging deeper and traveled to different parts of the world to meet people. Another reason I traveled was to get a picture of the place I wanted to write about.

The process of writing this book was very gradual. The story emerged from the fog, which was much more incredible. The twists and turns were more exciting than the little nuggets my father had left me.

I have chosen to stick closely to the research's facts and use my narrative to present those facts. While writing this book, I faced an exciting challenge. Since I was running a fintech consulting firm and working on this book, I realized that business strategy and creative writing occupy two different brain hemispheres.

I wrote this book between client assignments. When juggling between two areas, your mind needs a little time to adjust and get into the zone of writing. As a writer, giving yourself time to get into the right frame of mind is essential. It allows the words to flow more efficiently, and a higher level of clarity enhances imagination and creativity.

However, the heaviest lifting came out after I wrote my first manuscript. I decided to use the time I had while knocking on doors trying to get published to rethink my writing. I realized that the distance gave me a new perspective, but I also decided to take advice from people I respected, including those who told me to trim 30% of the book. This process requires a lot of patience, and your ego needs to be kept aside, which is problematic because, as a writer, you invested in every word, paragraph, and scene. However, it is vital to do it dispassionately.

There's a quote incorrectly attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci, but it was said by the French writer Paul Valerie. The quote goes, "A work is never finished, but merely abandoned." At some point, you have to stop tweaking it, let it go, and let other people savor it.

Frontlist: Your book profoundly depicts India's struggle for freedom. What message do you think the young generation might be able to draw from it?

Vijay: A large percentage of people in India are under 30. Most people take freedom for granted because the freedom struggle, the Quit India movement, and World War II were long ago. These are things you read about in textbooks. Most people do not know that freedom was won after centuries of struggle and bought with great sacrifices. However, the younger generation can not relate to that.

All over the world, people talk about history in the abstract, so it becomes difficult for people to understand it. That's why I use the suggestive style, putting readers in different time zones and places, giving them an experience similar to my characters. Another form I use in my writing is the story's effect on people. I explore in depth how the events of a particular time affected people's lives. I strive to make history accessible to people without being too overt. Young people who read the book can understand that freedom came at a price, and they get a chance to compare their lives and the challenges they face today with those who lived during colonial rule.

Frontlist: What made you write a story about India's liberation and add a new perception to it through the lens of a patriot spy?

Vijay: I love writing about unknown history, and the Swaraj Spy is one such story. For instance, while most people are familiar with Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violent struggle for freedom and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his contributions, they are still unaware that Captain Mohan Singh was the first leader of the INA. There was an INA before, which most people don't know about, and it collapsed due to the tension between the Japanese and the Indians. The Indians demanded an explicit commitment to freedom, whereas the Japanese refused to abide by the cause. There are lots of fragments of history that are yet to be discovered.

The book subtly raises more essential questions between the lines about the good and bad guys among the British, the Japanese, and the Indians. The answer, however, is not always clear.

From the point of view of the story's protagonist, he witnesses many things: the arrogant British, the brutality of the Japanese occupation, the duplicity of espionage, the tensions between Japanese and Indians, and the dark side of colonial administration and justice.

Readers will gain a different perspective on life today and compare it to what happened 80 years ago. Many of the events helped shape today's reality. As Mark Twain said, "History does not always repeat itself, but it often rhymes."

Frontlist: While actively participating in India's struggle for freedom, the story's protagonist is also on a mission to rescue his fellow agents. How did you connect these two parallel trails that the story follows?

Vijay: The Swaraj Spy is about three overlapping journeys: the physical journey of the main character, which goes counterclockwise from the rice paddies of Malabar to Madras, from colonial Singapore to lazy Penang, and from the pagodas of Burma to India. The second journey is the personal transformational journey of a paramilitary officer. The third journey is the backdrop that is India's tumultuous march to freedom. The Non-Cooperation Movement, the INA, the Quit India Movement, etc., are all part of India's struggle for liberation.

Readers are free to relate to the various features of the book, such as the fascinating adventure in a striking landscape, the issues of karma and the human condition, or the more extensive geopolitical changes.

Frontlist: Your book is based on the life of your granduncle. To what degree did you incorporate fiction into the story?

Vijay: In my opinion, fiction is the vehicle that carries the facts. For example, if I were to write a story in which the Japanese won the war, it would be considered historical fantasy fiction. The tale of Swaraj Spy, however, is primarily based on fact. Fiction comes into play when I let readers see, smell, and experience what my characters go through.

Frontlist: What tips would you like to give aspiring Historical Fiction writers?

Vijay: The first thing I recommend writers do is to be clear about the readers they have as an audience for their work. For example, I chose to write about readers who love language and love to read but aren't necessarily historians. The point is to keep them engaged without coming across as scholarly. Use your narrative as a vehicle to share the facts you've researched.

If you're writing about an unfamiliar story, take the time and effort to research it thoroughly. It may take some time, but you'll enjoy the journey. Once you dig up the facts, they'll tell their own story, and your job will be to provide a vessel to shape the water within.

Try to bring readers along by giving them a sense of what the characters see, hear, and smell. Let this flow into your text without going into too much depth. A vivid writing style is necessary to transport readers to another place and time. Storytelling is an art that takes years to hone.

As I mentioned earlier, I focus on how the story affects people and how people react differently to different situations. It's an added advantage if you're keen to observe people, places, and sounds.

In my case, I've had the privilege of traveling a lot, and I have a repertoire in my head of different places I've been, sounds I've heard, smells, and people I've met. When I write, these repositories are beneficial.



"Poetry is when an emotion found its thought, and the thought has found words" ~ Robert Frost

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