

Book Link

August 2011

₹ 20

News, Views & Reviews about Publishing

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Book promotion or a hogwash?

By Manjula Lal

AS IF in answer to my rant in the last edition of this newspaper, the Ministry of Human Resource Development came up with a draft on National Book Promotion Policy that seemed to address all the issues that worry small publishers. But once the initial euphoria dies, any small publisher who has gone through the grind, like I have, will realize that things are not going to change very fast. Let's look at some of the salient features of the policy:

Policy: While sanctioning grants to libraries and institutions, it will be laid down that at least 50 per cent of the grant be used for purchasing books of Indian authors to protect the interests of local publishers.

Reality: Why only 50 per cent of the grant? It should be the whole amount, for there is no need to be so benevolent to foreign authors. Besides, what do they mean by "books of Indian authors." Even multi-nationals are publishing books by Indian writers. It is the Indian publishers who need the government's support.

Also, libraries are in no position to host books. Their shelves are groaning with old books, their buildings are outdated and their staff is sparse. Unless they are given more shelf space or allowed to dispose of the stocks, how will they handle new stocks?

Policy: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry should be asked to persuade the paper mills to bring down the cost of paper while the Ministry of Finance should be asked to take necessary steps to control the price of paper so that the prices of books remain affordable.

Reality: This sounds like an outdated notion in the age of liberalization and privatization. Besides, while we welcome any lowering of input costs, price of paper is not a major issue. It sounds also a bit impractical—since when do paper mills listen to the government?

Policy: The postal authorities will be asked to offer a most favoured treatment in the matter of postal rates on book packets.

Reality: All that is already in place but try going to the post office to get those special rates. First of all, the post office will not accept a packet

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German content to ride Indian mobiles

By Surajit Dasgupta

PROLIFERATION OF mobile phones in India can boost content development by Indian publishers big-time, according to the organizers of Frankfurt Book Fair (FBF). "Mobile phone content will really be a great opportunity," president of the fair Juergen Boos told the *Book Link*.

On being pointed out that the great penetration of mobile phones in the Indian market notwithstanding, much of the population did not have smartphones to be able to access Internet content, Boos proposed a marketing model where, to promote contents like those furnished by his company, handsets with advanced features may be initially distributed free!

Boos and vice president Claudia Kaiser, who are on a tour of India to promote Frankfurt Book Fair, which is being organised this October, said that this time the focus would be on integration of knowledge, as also on authors rather than publishers. Print publishing couldn't be isolated from other forms of content development such as animation, mobile and other e-contents, Claudia added.

While most Indian publishers visit FBF to buy rights, this time they will have the additional values if they plan in advance. There would be workshops, sym-

posiums and lectures aimed at sharing the development in advanced countries, Boos informed. The book fair will be a mirror of what is happening in the creative industry across India. "We have to transform technology into publishing business," he said.



Claudia Kaiser

Small-time publishers and entrepreneurship has made the Indian publishing scene more vibrant. Germany would like to hook up with India than China

At a time when most parts of the world are looking at India since it is a big market of English language books, how can Germany be left behind? Boos was confident that Germany had many things to offer to Indian publishing, more so in the field of civil engineering, law, medicine and chemistry. India, he held, had comparable advantage in computer science books.

On being questioned whether it would be a feasible marketing idea to spread their resources thin at a time when Indians by and large associate Germany with engineering alone, Boos said he would rather

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Juergen Boos

Amitav Ghosh, Adiga face to face

By Sudesh K Verma

TWO BOOKS by two top Indian authors were released in June and these were termed as the biggest literary events in the world. One was Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* and the other Arvind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*. While the former's *Sea of Poppies* was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2008, the latter's *The White Tiger* won. Both books have soared expectations of the publishers, and the industry too, that these will enhance reader interest in good fiction.

When two such competing literary events happen in the same month, they are bound to draw a comparison. A reader is faced with choice—though hardly—both books will vie for attention coming from different class and perspectives. One is history, the other a portrait of modern life. While *River of Smoke* is Ghosh's eighth book, *Last Man in Tower* is Adiga's second novel.

The choice was never so clear. Ghosh



Arvind Adiga

appears to appeal more to those who want to read history rather than the drama of modern realism that Adiga paints. Natural that he will have a larger appeal with the youth who dream



Amitav Ghosh

of their first house, more so in a metropolitan city like Mumbai or Delhi. The theme is contemporary and so is the treatment.

Ghosh has documented the 19th century

opium trade from India to China, which was controlled by the British. He describes the various characters involved in the trade and their lifestyles, travails and predicaments. Adiga talks about modern Mumbai, where builders are trying to occupy every inch of land more valuable than gold and try all tricks to get their piece of land. They are the real alchemists, it seems.

Ghosh has got rave reviews (early launch), and the most-talked about is the one by former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor. Everyone has a positive word except for some readers who find the jargon too complicated. Adiga is getting reviews too, and may soon overtake Ghosh in the collection of accolades.

Adiga has specialized in writing about the happenings in civilization's underbelly. This is more pronounced in this book which often peeps into how scams related to construction activities happen--scams like the

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Bhagavad Gita: The Love Story

Papri Sri Raman

MANI RAO worked in television advertising in India, Hong Kong and New Zealand for 20 years and is now a Ph.D student of religious studies at Duke University. On a visit to India, Mani spoke about her poetry writing, translation and philosophy in an exclusive interview to *Book Link*.

Q: From your interaction with western scholars and the ordinary people there, what do you think is the West's perception of the relevance of a text like the *Bhagavad Gita* in today's world?

A: For those even slightly familiar with the *Gita*, Arjuna's dilemma feeds into the current debate about military deployment, and whether war is justifiable against injustice.

But there is a growing population of readers/seekers who—whether through yoga, gurus, reading or cultural exchange—are



Mani Rao was recently in Bangalore for the launch of her translation of *Bhagavad Gita*.

never actually read the entire *Gita* in Sanskrit, has not experienced just how lively and enjoyable it is. Also the reader who has never made it through the more difficult translations. I am told my translation will appeal to the younger readers in particular, because it is lively to read and can be read aloud in English as a poem.

Q: You have explained the *Gita* as a love poem. Large sections of India perceive Krishna as the eternal lover. Despite the *Gita*, very few perceive Krishna as the dispenser of ethics and code of conduct, the destroyer. It is easier to view Krishna as the lover. Is there a certain amount of escapism in that?

A: I guess a didactic speech will always be less entertaining than a love story. Also, the *Gita*'s canonization is recent compared to the legend about Krishna's love-play. In fact, the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* is quite different—in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna's word cannot be taken at face value; in the *Gita*, Krishna's word is God's word. There is room for all these personae, and for more. It speaks to the depth of our culture. Whether Krishna is advising Arjuna, or stealing butter, or hearts -- he embodies divine love, and by that is meant the love that is at the heart of all religion, the driving force in creation, the love that manifests as creation. You may consider this love as the essence of everything, or call it the "Love of God."

Q: In India, the publishing industry is supposed to be booming. And prose from a new India is flourishing. Why did you choose poetry at such a time, for the medium of your conversation with the world?

A: The *Gita* is a poem—my translation reflects that. By that I don't only mean the stanzaic structure, I mean the texture of poetry. In the *Gita*, word-pairs play off each other to explain philosophical concepts and it all flows rapidly, making it easy to memorize. Large sections of it such as Chapter 11 are emotionally charged and exuberant. The narrative is complex, dramatic and dynamic. Translating this into metrical poetry will result in compromises about the content, so free verse is suitable for the translation. Then using space flexibly suits the flexible syntax of Sanskrit and results in a dynamic poem. Besides this translation, I mostly write poetry—I have eight books of poetry. You may think poetry marginal, a non-conversation, but I think I am conversing with the world. Whether one is writing prose or poetry, the world is always a reader, one reader at a time.

The Song of God

In the translator's note Rao writes, "Gita's status as a holy text has held back the translator's hand," which "retard the pace of communication in English," this an observation on the umpteen previous translations of the *Bhagavad Gita*.



*The origin the end
the entire universe there is no thing higher
...water's flavour light in moon sun om in
all Vedas
sound in etheric space spunk in humans
the nice fragrance on earth...
always attuned I love her &
noted for singular devotion she loves me
and continues later:
& most secret of all again my last word
you are loved for sure by me...
heart be full of me be devoted to me
do the rites for me do homage to me
you'll come to me I promise truly you are
my love*

The *Gita* is, of course, sung as the Song of God, His word, to be recited aloud as opposed to the *Samaveda*, which is the monologue of the devotee (Ravana), akin to a litany.

"The *Gita* is not only a poem, it is a love poem. May fidelity, then be deep, complex and lively," says Rao. It was as fellow at the Iowa University (2005-2009) that this translation took shape.

Particularly read-aloud-able is the section 'I AM', where this universal dialogue goes on:

And then Krishna asks Arjuna: Has your ignorance & confusion been destroyed? Rao's new translation of the *Īśāvāsya Upanishad* can be found in the new international translation journal *Asymptote* dedicated to literary translation and bringing together in one place the best in contemporary writing. *Just what is amratam? Deathlessness? Immortality? Fame? Ambrosia? Does crossing mean to go through, or to go past? To die, or to overcome death? (12.)*

familiar with such ideas as rebirth, *ātman*, and liberation, and once they read the *Gita* in its entirety, they seem to take a more holistic view of the text, its ideals of equanimity and detachment, its recommendations on diet, lifestyle and meditation. For them the *Gita* is directly relevant, a practical guide to living well and evolving spiritually. Just as in the 19th century, the *Gita* became dear to Emerson and Thoreau and shaped transcendentalism, today the *Gita* has a role as a universal spiritual text. Meanwhile, the culture-curious and heritage-learners see the *Gita* as a medium through which they familiarize themselves with Hindu beliefs.

Q: In India, there are now two generations of people who are affluent, tech-savvy, highly mobile, how do you think can the *Gita* influence them? Do you think your adaptation can bring them closer to the philosophy inherent in the *Gita*?

A: All translations, adaptations and retellings help sustain the life of the original they represent. Everyone knows the story of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* but who has read them in Sanskrit? The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* continue because they have been assimilated into languages, been performed in dance and drama, became a part of the folk tradition. *Gita* already has hundreds of translations, and each translation finds its audience. Mine speaks to the reader who may know some *shlokas* and concepts but has

The Beautiful & the Damned sans the opening chapter

Book Link Correspondent

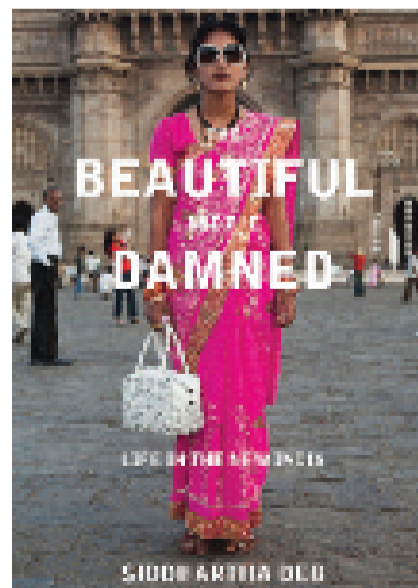
SIDDHARTHA DEB'S book *The Beautiful and the Damned* is a narrative non-fiction account of contemporary India. It was published in the UK earlier in the year, but, writes Deb in the *Guardian*, "The same book will now come out in India, but without its first chapter. Instead, there will be a note explaining that an injunction was issued against the chapter by a small provincial court in India, making it legally impossible to publish it until the matter had been resolved in the courts."

The proscribed chapter was published in the February issue of the *Caravan* magazine. On 30 April, a court in Silchar, a small town in the north-eastern state of Assam issued an injunction against a the *Caravan* article and the chapter. No notice was received by any of

the defendants before the injunction was issued. The suit, for which court fees of Rs 11,000 (£150) were paid, claims damages of 50 crore rupees (£7m) for defamation from the publisher and editor of *Caravan* magazine, Deb, Penguin and Google India.

Deb writes that in a sequence of five narratives that looks at the lives of Indians from the very rich to the very poor, the first chapter focused on Arindam Chaudhuri, a tremendously successful management guru who runs a group of companies that includes a cluster of business education schools. Deb says, his story on Chaudhuri is based on "a series of interviews with Chaudhuri, a flamboyant, pony-tailed figure who is chauffeured around Delhi in a Bentley."

Deb describes his portrayal of Chaudhuri as a "nuanced portrait of the man and his business. It looked at the aspirations



unleashed in the new India, both in figures such as Chaudhuri, whose face stares out at one from advertisements in virtually every newspaper and magazine of note, to the largely provincial middle-class students who flock to his schools."

Deb also recalls the fate of another book, on another Indian business magnate in another decade. It was the book *The Polyester Prince* written by Australian journalist Hamish McDonald, a biography of Dhirubhai Ambani, "a shrewd investor who built a vast business empire that was inherited by his feuding sons Anil and Mukesh, two of the wealthiest individuals in the world. McDonald's book was published in India last year in an updated version under the title *Ambani and Sons*, but the original book, to be brought out in 1998, faced injunctions from Dhirubhai Ambani's company.