

2016 Global Book News In Review

With

- **Prashasti Rastogi, German Book Office, New Delhi**
- **Minakshi Thakur, HarperCollins Publishers India**
- **Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, Kalimat Group (UAE)**
- **Trasvin Jittidecharak, Silkworm Books (Thailand)**

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KENNEALLY: The United States has by far the largest publishing industry of any nation in the world, followed by China and Germany. Some of the fastest growth is seen in national markets across Asia and the Middle East. Young populations with access to the Internet on smartphones are demanding content that is relevant to their dynamic circumstances.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. In 2016, our weekly program heard from publishers and authors across several continents. Out of those interviews emerged a familiar picture of problems and promise in the face of digital disruption.

Translation, as Salman Rushdie has noted, has its roots in the Latin for "bearing across." Books and other works in translation are the readers' tickets to others' nations and cultures.

Salman Rushdie, born in Mumbai, or Bombay as it was known then, acknowledges the common fear that something always gets lost in translation, yet he hopes, too, that something can be gained. In his native India, where there are 22 official languages and easily 100 more also spoken, publishers have a bounty of languages to get lost in and to gain from.

To learn more about the potential and the power of translation in the Indian publishing economy, I called in to New Dehli, where I spoke with Prashasti Rastogi, director of the German Book Office.

RASTOGI: Well, Christopher, the moment we say translation in India, it's suddenly music to my ears, because that's one issue that I passionately feel for, as well. But when we speak about the potential of translation, the potential is huge, because there's a huge, ardent, stable readership in Indian languages which on the global stage might not be so visible, and partially it is also due to the historical system that we have, and every time the flow of original works of fiction in English is more prominent on the global stage, but as far as translations are concerned, there's a huge readership there. There's a huge



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potential. There is a lot of classic literature which has made its way into English, but maybe the world hasn't warmed up to it so prominently, I would say. And the later entrants in writing are primarily writing in English, so that is why it's not as prominently talked about or seen.

But lately in India, there's a huge concentration on Indian languages. As you mentioned, technology is also deep-seated in the market, and we've seen rise of reading apps which cater to Indian languages, and that means books and news both are being disseminated to the readers in their languages, and the challenges of Indic fonts are being discussed, and publishers are also committed to publishing translations.

KENNEALLY: At HarperCollins Publishers India, Minakshi Thakur, is a senior commissioning editor as well as a published poet and novelist, whose first novel, *Lovers Like You and I*, was shortlisted in 2013 for the Tibor Jones South Asia Prize. She explained how she keeps watch for new and exciting authors across the spectrum of Indian languages.

THAKUR: We rely a lot on sources in the various languages. By sources, I mean writers in those languages, regional publishers, journalists writing in those languages, and various people – readers, passionate readers. So we have these sources that we develop over time, and we're constantly going back to them to check who is doing well, whose book is a huge hit, which senior writer we should publish, which are the classics in those languages. So we really depend on – we largely depend on these sources in the languages apart from the ones that we speak. Every person in India would tell you that he or she speaks or knows at least three languages, including English.

KENNEALLY: Right. And I would imagine, too, that as an editor, you are also challenged by trying to find a balance between going to the classics, going to those works which are essential reading for an Indian, and then also to being sure to nurture the next generation of writers.

THAKUR: That's right. Correct. We were earlier focusing a lot on the classics – not just HarperCollins, but other publishers who translate from Indian languages to English or to Hindi. That includes Oxford University Press, Penguin, and all the Hindi publishers. But now I think, especially at Harper, our focus has shifted to nurturing younger writers – not just younger writers, but people who have been writing in the last two decades and we know for sure that they will continue to write for some more time. So we want to build those writers as writers of HarperCollins. We want to build their canon, so to speak. We've been focusing more on powerful contemporary writing.

KENNEALLY: Everywhere in the world, the future of reading lies in many hands – in the small hands of children who read today on printed books and digital tablets alike, and it lies in the professional hands of publishers, who must anticipate changes in business models and technology even as they adapt to them.



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Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi is a strong advocate of literacy among individuals of all ages, and she has to her credit a number of publishing initiatives. She is both founder and CEO of Kalimat Group, based in the Emirate of Sharjah, one of the states of the United Arab Emirates.

QASIMI: If we put it in a historical context, in the late 2000s, there were very few initiatives in the Arab world concerned with publishing or reading. We really didn't have that culture or that industry. And to see us now – a very small country, the United Arab Emirates – leading the way in the region and supporting content creation, supporting publishers – it's really remarkable to see how much has changed in the past 15 years. It's actually wonderful. And it's done with a collective mindset of working together and promoting it from the grassroots level, working with writers, with publishers, and getting passionate about it as well.

KENNEALLY: Right. Well, I was going to ask you about that passion for literacy and publishing. How did you come by that? Is it something you just enjoyed reading as a young child and it kind of became more than just a hobby but really a life's work? And what continues to drive you today?

QASIMI: That's an interesting question. I grew up with a love of books. My parents read to me constantly, and my grandmother told me stories about her childhood and fairy tales. And I really cherish those moments, and I wanted the same for my own children. When my oldest daughter was four years old, I really struggled to find great books in Arabic to read to her. I thought that was really frustrating as another. I thought I really want to share stories with her, but I can't find things that interest me and interest her as well.

So I decided to set up my own publishing house, which is Kalimat. It really came into being out of synergy of passion and need. I thought, if I'm feeling these sentiments, I'm sure there are other parents who feel the same way. Now we have over 100 titles to date. And we publish children's books, but we've also expanded, as you mentioned in the introduction, to publish adult fiction in our imprint Rewayat. We've also gone into the educational publishing industry, where we publish digital versions of our books on tablets in an educational format with the imprint Horouf.

KENNEALLY: Right. That is described as a first-of-its-kind initiative. For our listeners who wouldn't be familiar, what kinds of work have you undertaken there with Horouf, and how is it moving the educational approach to teaching and learning Arabic forward?

QASIMI: We've decided in Kalimat to embrace technology. We felt that it was something that we had to do as a small company, and we felt that it's something that we needed in order to move forward. So we've embraced it completely. And we've decided to work on making Arabic language teaching fun and interactive for kids. It's something that we see every day with children holding devices and playing iPads where they enjoy



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it and they're actually learning something from it. And we thought, why not take that and use it and put it into the educational schools and put it into practice where we could see results with it? It's been a real learning experience for us. It's something very new, very dynamic.

KENNEALLY: Attending the Digital Book World Conference in New York City from here native Thailand, Trasvin Jittidecharak was as eager as any to learn how technology is transforming the book business. Her perspective, though, makes Trasvin's reactions especially worth hearing. She founded Silkworm Books in 1987, and over nearly three decades Silkworm and Jittidecharak have earned a reputation for producing quality English language books on the culture and society of Southeast Asia. Trasvin Jittidecharak began learning the art of the book trade from a very young age, when her parents founded the Suriwong Book Center, the first bookstore in Thailand outside of Bangkok, in her hometown of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

JITTIDECHARAK: We used to have to – everything was transporting by train, and later on the highway was built and it was faster with delivery trucks and etc. But my father has imported books since the '60s, so I grew up and have color comics come from UK and the U.S., so that was fine. But at the time, we haven't had televisions. But I do get comics from the UK, so that was cool.

KENNEALLY: So you had an idea of Western culture based on the comic books.

JITTIDECHARAK: Exactly. I still remember my first Peanuts and other Marvel's comics.

KENNEALLY: I want you to help give a picture for the listeners of the changing world in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia. What does it look like when you see people reading today?

JITTIDECHARAK: I think it's amazing, in the sense that you would see people with their smartphone or device all the time, but I would like to let you know that my recent trip to Yangon, the cap – not capital, it's no longer the capital, but I say the biggest city of Myanmar, that I saw one young woman in her sarong, the Burmese traditional clothing, on the rickshaw, reading her smartphone in the broad sunlight. But my feeling when I saw that, I'm worried about her eyesight and the entire generation's eyesight, that if everyone keep reading smartphone in the broad daylight, we might go blind. The whole reason we'll go blind eventually.

KENNEALLY: So while it's good to see literacy rates rising in developing countries, there could be a downside. But happily, all it takes to solve the problem would be sunglasses.



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I'm Christopher Kenneally. Join us again soon on Beyond The Book.