



**In India, Books Are Essential**

**Interview with Nitasha Devasar,  
Managing Director for India and South Asia, Taylor & Francis India**

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KENNEALLY: With thousands of publishers working in dozens of languages, India is the seventh-largest book publishing nation on Earth. The English-language book market alone is the world's third-largest, after the US and the UK. Yet the country's trade association for publishers is concerned over a possible decline in reading.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. The Indian smartphone market is the fastest-growing on the planet, with 300 million users. Indian-language news and entertainment available on those devices is leading a generation away from traditional print media, including books. The Association of Publishers in India considers books to be essential to India's future, as resources for educational ambitions and as outlets for creative expression.

Nitasha Devasar is API's newly elected president. At Taylor & Francis India, Devasar is managing director for India and south Asia. She is editor of *Publishers on Publishing: Inside India's Book Business*. She joins me now from New Delhi. Nitasha Devasar, welcome to Beyond the Book.

DEVASAR: Thank you, Chris, for that great introduction. I'm very happy to join you for this conversation.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to learning a good deal more about the Indian book marketplace and the work that you are doing there at Taylor & Francis, as well as in your role as president of the executive committee of the Association of Publishers in India. You were elected to that post just last October.

We mentioned the size and the scope of the Indian publishing market in the context of the entire Indian national economy. It's important to mention, of course, that India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. There's a heavy emphasis there on development in the IT sector. And I guess the first question today is to ask



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you whether publishers are cheering about the good times, or is the story more complicated than that?

DEVASAR: Well, with India, it's always complicated. You're right – the macro indicators for a high-growth country are largely positive. So you have a big educational sector. In fact, our higher educational sector is the fourth-largest in the world. We have a youthful population. You have growing internet penetration. You have growth of e-commerce. India is now actually the second-largest English-language market after the US and the sixth-largest overall. So we've moved up one position in the last couple of years.

Alongside – according to some estimates, 95% of all global content flows through India in some form or the other. So the publishing services industry has really grown over the last two decades. The geographies of research, as well, are shifting eastward. The pace of quality research coming from India is actually three times the global average. So there are new publishers entering all the time, both local and international. The number of Indian authors is growing. Book fairs and festivals abound. But the challenges are immense, as well.

KENNEALLY: Talk about those challenges. And thank you for updating me on the numbers there. It's a fast-moving target there, particularly with the tremendous growth going on in India. So congratulations at outpacing the UK there in the English-language book market.

The other substantial fact about India is its internet user base. If the number I have is correct – and you can tell me whether you know differently – but I was told that India has the third-largest internet user base in the world. So I wonder if you can tell the audience about the ways that digital access to books and other media are advancing education, creating opportunity, and so forth in India.

DEVASAR: Yeah, absolutely right. You're bang on with those numbers. But the interesting additional fact is that 50% of those internet users are actually using their internet on the mobile, so they're mobile internet users. That base is growing exponentially in both urban and rural India.

Also, interestingly, the Indian-language user base exceeded the English user base in 2016, so that by 2021, you're actually going to have half a million (sic) users in the Indian language, as compared to just under 200 million in English. This growth is, of course, supported by the growing penetration of internet by cheap devices, by high-speed internet services, by Indian-language-enabled handsets, which were mandated by the government earlier this year. And if we actually had more Indian-



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language content and if we had the tech support for it, by one estimate, this penetration could grow a further 24%.

**KENNEALLY:** As you mentioned at the start, Nitasha, this is a complicated story, and that English-language and other Indian-language story is one that fascinates me. India has really dozens of languages in addition to English as a national language. Talk about the complications in the commercial space, the marketplace, where there are just so many languages and so many different offerings for the population. It must be a cornucopia of materials that they have to choose from.

**DEVASAR:** If you look at book publishing, then 50% is English and 50% is other languages. In the other languages, of the 50%, 35% is Hindi, which is sort of like a pan-Indian language, and the remaining 15% is the other Indian languages. Now, we have 33 official Indian languages, but if you look at the growth, there are certain languages where there has been a growth in the usage, both in development of traditional publishing content and now in digital content.

Interestingly, according to the latest census data, 50% of young Indians are bilingual, and as high as 33% can be trilingual. This happens through migration, so you move for jobs or you move for education. So interestingly enough, one of the biggest growth languages where content is consumed digitally in a regional language is Telugu, which is the language which comes from the states where the most IT professionals come, both in India and in Silicon Valley. Because of migration, they have multiple language and they use multiple languages, but they still want to consume news and entertainment in their own regional language. So it's complex. It's interesting.

The other twist to this is that the language of higher education in India has been and continues to be English. So your higher education space is dominated by English. There, too, things are changing, because the government is keen in its second phase of Digital India to have more focusing on education and to have more – not just non-book-related content, but that content be available in regional languages. But because historically English has been the language of higher education – unlike Europe, we don't have a whole body of technical or scientific literature which exists in regional languages. We don't even have the vocabulary. So all that is now being recognized, and efforts are being made to address it. But obviously it's distant.

**KENNEALLY:** We are speaking right now with Nitasha Devasar. She's the newly elected president of the executive committee of the Association of Publishers in India. She also serves as managing director for Taylor & Francis in India. Nitasha, among the many things that you have been involved with there in the Indian



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publishing marketplace is to edit a book called *Publishers on Publishing: Inside India's Book Business*. It's a snapshot, but as you mentioned regarding the marketplace, it's a complicated snapshot, and you consulted more than 60 different actors in that marketplace to get their perspectives, their viewpoints on the Indian publishing world. Tell us about what that experience was like to edit that all together and to bring together all those different voices.

DEVASAR: Actually, one of the reasons for doing the book was the fact that there's so little available on Indian publishing. And one of the reasons why there is so little available on Indian publishing is because Indian publishers rarely agree on any issue. So I sort of took the bull by the horns, and I decided to try and compile – have conversations with all hues of publishers and try to make sense of all this chaos and also not be afraid of all the contradictions and different things that people were going to say. So it started off on an impulse, in a sense, but also out of a sense of frustration for the fact that we didn't have anything which people could refer to, while we were such a significant industry. And perhaps the fact that the voice of publishers wasn't heard was one of the reasons why our significance and importance wasn't appreciated. So that was the back thinking of it.

But I have to say that I had an advantage being an insider. I'm almost 25 years in Indian publishing, so I could get people from all – so whether it's local Indian publishers or it's multinationals or it's people from allied, related – whether it's publishing services, it's distributors, it's booksellers, it's literary agents, it's people who run book festivals, and taking into account new trends like self-publishing – I could get access to a wide variety of people.

And I must say people were very generous in sharing, because one of the comments – I have a few reviews out, and one of the reviewers mentioned about how he was so amazed that people were so honest. I think being an insider helped in that process.

We gave people the option – you can have a conversation, so you can be in interview-based things, because I wanted actually publishing professionals to share there, so it's publishers on publishing to share. I knew that these were busy people with jobs which kept them busy 24/7, so I gave them the option of having an interview. That really helped, because people were able to do that. And I actually brought it out, and the whole idea and putting the book together was about six months.

KENNEALLY: Nitasha, I want to ask you about the challenges that multinationals like Taylor & Francis may face when they enter the Indian market and try to grow there. Certainly, as publishing markets in the US and Europe have matured, India has



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looked like a market full of opportunity. But I imagine there are challenges that global actors face when they want to achieve these ambitions in India. Tell us about those.

DEVASAR: You know, you have to understand that there are certain enduring challenges which have existed for a long time. The Indian market, for example, is very segmented because of the size of the country, the size of the subcontinent. It's highly price-sensitive. There are also regional variations, so one size does not fit all. The positive side of that is, of course, which means both print and digital can survive simultaneously. Smaller players, medium-size, and big players can all be there. But the downside is that it makes it very complicated for people to come in.

The other side is, of course, piracy being a big issue, both online and offline, because of the price sensitivity. There is also low copyright awareness, low consciousness of quality. The distribution networks are complex, convoluted. Payment cycles are long. You will be amazed to learn that the average price of books in India has actually declined over the last three, four years and now stands at about 308 rupees, which is less than the price of a Starbucks latte here.

So these are all challenges which international publishers who even have a presence here for a long time are facing, have faced, but through their regional offices, through their local publishing programs, they have come to understand the needs of this market. Low-priced local editions are brought out for this market. Taylor & Francis brings them out, many other publishers. This is the only market in the world where we have special pricing. So you have low-priced editions. We are localizing international lists by getting more good-quality research content from here into global programs, especially in the STEM areas, tying up with local institutions of repute, partnering with stakeholders to address gaps in quality, in copyright awareness. You know, you can see that the challenges are there, but alongside, there are ways that multinationals are trying to work with these challenges and still take advantage of the vast and varied growth opportunities that this market provides.

KENNEALLY: The other area in India that is important to talk about with you, Nitasha, is scholarly research publishing. Some of the figures there are also startling, and I hope I've got these right, too. India ranks third in article submissions around the world and fourth in the percentage of acceptances to scholarly research publishing worldwide. But you mentioned some of the challenges that prevail there in India at home. What is API doing to try to raise standards and raise visibility for Indian research?



DEVASAR: The key space we are trying to operate in is to build the value proposition of Indian publishing. It's a significant part of global publishing, but somehow it hasn't got that recognition in the Indian context. India is pushing itself to be a knowledge economy. What is the role that publishing plays in that? It's a really important role that publishing plays. There's a really important role of copyright in establishing a knowledge economy.

These are the kind of issues we want to specifically – we have been working on and continue to build momentum on, and we are trying to do this by partnering with key stakeholders for creating awareness around copyright. So one of the things we do individually and as groups is publishing ethics and copyright workshops. We do them in universities. We do them for early-career researchers. We have librarian workshops to discuss publishing ethics. So that's one big thing.

A couple of years ago, we brought out a small booklet to demystify the Indian Copyright Act and for people to understand what it means from the point of view of being a student or a researcher or a librarian or an institution. So that's one big thing that we do.

The other is that we actually are trying to work with other agencies – so there's the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there's the Federation of Indian Publishers, there are the government agencies, the government departments – so that we can create awareness around this value that publishing can bring to a growth nation like India and to influence policymaking at all levels of government. We realize, of course, that things take time, and this will take time to change, but we can't give up. We can't give in. And we are clear on that – that we have to work together as an industry to address these issues for India and for Indian publishing.

KENNEALLY: Right. Of course, the Indian expatriate community is global. As you mentioned, Silicon Valley has a large Indian expatriate community there, certainly in the UK, and many other countries around the world. Is there a role for the Indian expatriate community to play in – I suppose they maintain links with publishing and media, certainly through the internet and otherwise, but is there a potential role for expats to play in helping to achieve some of the ambitions you have for Indian research discoverability and so forth?

DEVASAR: I think that's an excellent thought, because expats everywhere, they don't lose that connect with their country. For example, expat Indian authors based anywhere in the world want to be visible and available to their peers in this country. So wherever in the world they publish, they always want Indian editions. They always want special pricing so that students in India can use their content, to



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recognize them. And we haven't actually leveraged this in any significant way, and that's an excellent thought as influencers to use them, which we could perhaps – we need to bring authors as part of this if we are to get copyright awareness and the importance of publishing recognized within the country. We do need our authors, whether they are locals or expats, to side with us and work together with us. That's, again, one of the big things that we want to do as publishers.

**KENNEALLY:** We have been learning about the Indian publishing market today and look forward to staying in touch with Nitasha Devasar. She is the newly elected president of the executive committee of the Association of Publishers in India, as well as managing director for Taylor & Francis India. Nitasha Devasar, thank you for joining me today on Beyond the Book.

**DEVASAR:** Thank you very much, Chris. I appreciate this opportunity to talk about Indian publishing and to share with you all our exciting and important activities and challenges. Thank you very much.

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