

# Will Chennai become the future of world publishing?



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“If a ruler wills it, he/she can achieve anything without administrative hassles or hindrances and without any empty rhetoric. This is the conclusion I’ve drawn (from the Chennai International Book Fair 2023 - CIBF),” said Hasri Hasan in his social media handle. Hasan had taken part in the international book fair on behalf of Malaysia. A big shot in the Asian publishing, Hasan had come down to Chennai to get books for over 500 Tamil

schools back in Malaysia. The comment about the CIBF assumes significance for it does come from none other than the CEO of Bookanomics Asia whose second nature is to regularly attend global book fairs.

### **First victory**

The Chennai International Book Fair, though held at short notice with strenuous efforts made by Chief Minister M. K. Stalin-led government, has grabbed the attention of the global and Indian publishing sectors. In fact, Tamil Nadu has clinched the first bout of success in its initiatives to take Tamil to the global arena and bring the world into Tamil. A large service to Tamil has been initiated though the grants given for the efforts to facilitate the world languages to have a taste of Tamil through translations.

The CIBF held for three days from Jan. 16 to 18, 2023 turned out so impressive with lots of comforts it offered that it cast a spell on all visitors. Several people were goggle-eyed, mouths agape, at 365 memorandums of understanding inked at the event. In this context, let the feedback about the international event from India and the world at large be discussed.

### **Assurance from world publishing**

Publishing industry guests from other states and from 30 countries, who participated in the three-day international book fair, are not just commercial traders; they are, in fact, movers and shakers of the global industry.

Gvantsa Jobava, vice-president, International Publishers Association, and editor and international relations manager at Intelekti Publishing, one of the biggest publishing houses in Georgia, was bowled over by the CIBF's façade decorated with impressive front covers of various books written in several world languages. When she noticed one of the covers to be that of a book in Georgia published by her publishing house, she stood astounded and amazed. After hectic activities spanning three

days, she came up with a video on the CIBF, which figured in the news bulletin aired by 1 TV, a Georgian television channel owned and operated by Georgian Public Broadcasting.

Gvantsa said, “I express my thanks to the organizers of the book fair and also will extend support to the future operations of the Chennai International Book Fair.” Her words are quintessentially an assurance from the world publishing sector as well.

### **Guests turn messengers**

Judith Rosenwick, who attended the event as a representative of Gallimard, one of the leading French book publishers, described the first-day spectacle as very fantastic. His enthusiasm rubbed off on the Italian guest Frances Verso of the Italian sci-fi publishing house ‘Future Fiction,’ who said in a social media post, “I signed on the dotted lines in 30 memorandums of understanding. This fair has gone beyond my hyped expectations.” He added, “On the second day itself, all my business cards got exhausted. Future lies here only.”

Delhi-based publisher Prashant Pathak, chief of Publishers Without Borders, said, “I was fortunate enough to take part in the Chennai International Book Fair in the first year of its inception itself and also participate in the concomitant publishers’ conference along with my friends from all over the world.” Besides, he sent a parting message to all co-participants, saying, “Like you all, I too have become an Ambassador of the Chennai International Book Fair.”

Shweta Khurana, editor of the journal All About Book Publishing, said, “I will give full marks for the excellent arrangements of the fair.”

Naresh Kumar Chutani, Additional Director, Capexil, a union government enterprise, said, “We will help the Tamil publishers try to reach out to the world readers.”

Pradeep Arora, president, Federation of Publishers' & Booksellers' Associations in India (FPBAI) and Neeta Gupta of Publishers Exchange and a few more, who came as our guests, finally left us as messengers.

### **Expectations over Chennai**

Pranav Gupta, honorary joint secretary, Federation of Indian Publishers (FIP), did one better, saying that UNESCO takes several initiatives after annually naming a city as World Book Capital. For 2023 Accra in Ghana has got the distinction and Strasbourg in France has been named World Book Capital for 2024.

Gupta made a clarion call, "Let a demand be put forward before UNESCO to declare Chennai as World Book Capital, 2025. If the demand is fulfilled, it will make a great impact, elevating Chennai to a higher status."

It warms the cockles of Chennai's heart to know that the maiden event of Chennai International Book Fair has become a runaway success, triggering sublime hopes and sweet expectations.

A good beginning has been made on this count, which India and the world as well have witnessed in awe. This great potential must fully be tapped down the line. For that, the onus rests on Tamil Nadu's writers, translators and publishers, in particular, and on all of us, in general.

How far the Chennai International Book Fair has made an impact can be gauged only when the memorandums of understanding are implemented and promises kept in the form of new books of global appeal available in all shops and fairs in Tamil Nadu. The impact can more effectively be felt when Tamil books, translated in world languages with the government's aid, are stacked on the racks even in the remotest libraries and stores in far-off non-descript places in the world.

I would like to quote the following line from Hasri Hasan: “It (CIBF) has turned one of important moments in my life.”

This may sound something like a little over-the-top magnanimous gesture typical of guests goggle-eyed at lavish hospitality.

But it is indeed nothing wrong to ultimately make Hasri Hasan stand vindicated.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**