

Dharmarajan: Systemic Changes In Distribution Needed

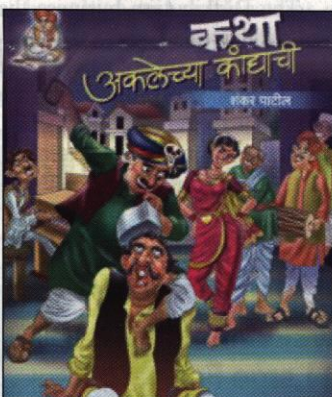
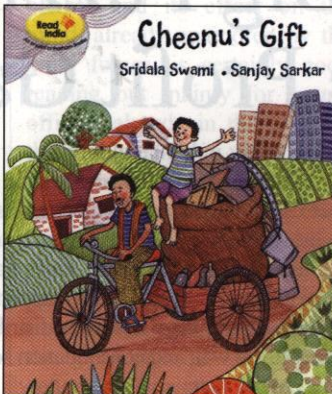
AS THE theme of World Book Fair 2014 is children's literature and text publishing, **Book Link** brings you a candid **Geeta Dharmarajan**, publisher of **Katha**, on what can be done to ensure visibility of Indian publishers, authors and illustrators in this special field.

Question: As a children's book publisher, how do you look at the WBF? Do events like this give a publisher like **Katha** greater exposure?

Answer: I see the WBF as a great opportunity to meet like-minded people, to explore the market and find out what children and their parents/teachers like. The WBF is still not too friendly to small and fiercely independent publishers like **Katha**. With the largest child population in the world, there is a lot of excitement in the world of books for children. Reading is a major concern, but India has a lot of excellent and exciting innovations in this area, linked to publishing. **Katha** is one of them. We hope the WBF catches this new wind! We would like it if the government can put premium on quality.

Q: Quality control is a huge issue in India, how can the non-school content provider deal with it best?

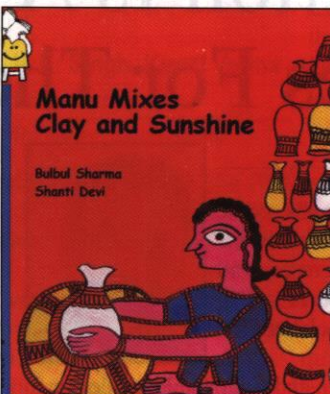
A: We, of course, need quality control all around. I am happy to see the creativity, the huge investments of time and private initiative that's shaping the world of publishing and printing. The same, however, cannot be said about book distribution. We need systemic changes to improve our antiquated sales and marketing machinery; to get rid of the inequity. We lag behind unnecessarily, due to our inability to learn from others who have honed their systems effectively. It is not necessary to reinvent every wheel. The RTE and SSA initiatives can make sustainable impact only if the basic habits of mind and heart are fostered through ideas; through colourful, well written and illustrated books. So — why cannot we reach books to India's expanding child populations, especially in the far-flung pockets of the Northeast? The LOC, tribal villages? I hear that books are a luxury and we need to give



children textbooks, but when will we have textbooks made children imaginative and creative leaders among books for children? These are all essential 21st century requirements! These are policy areas and the government must step in, take interest, innovate. There is need for more determination and less apathy in this matter.

Q: Where does language publishing for children stand today?

A: India has an exciting linguistic map. I see a lot of excitement in the thousands of children across India I've met this year — emerging first generation school goers, or fluent readers, reading in many languages. I have seen some lovely



Marathi books but I wonder if our Bhasha publishers are giving quality reading to our young readers in all our languages: well written, illustrated books that are crisp, evocative and fun to read, quality translations. Culture-linking is important in a globalising world that is becoming so monotonously mono-cultural and homogenized.

The heterogeneity that is India must be safeguarded for future generations and this can happen through multilingual publishing of the kind that **Tulika** does so well. I just wish more of us can do this.

Q: While foreign writing for children has huge market in India, Even the best of Indian work (even **Katha** books or **Tulika** or others...excellent books) do not make it

to the world market--how do you see this playing out in the coming years--what should be the strategy of Indian children's publishers?

A: Making it to a world market is not the only sign of success. Publishers depend on sufficient print runs to keep prices down and ensure quality books. And this is not always dependent on foreign markets. The road forward is to understand and satisfy India's huge need for children's literature.

