

# Asian Festival of Children's Content, Singapore

**-Delegates enriched with multiple breakout sessions!**

*With a plethora of sessions on the platter, the AFCC, Singapore ensured that all delegates found something or the other suited to their interest.*

**A** FCC is a festival that brings together content creators and producers with parents, teachers, librarians and anyone interested in quality Asian content for children around the world. From May 30 – June 4, 2014, Asia's children content creators literally converged at National Library Building, Singapore. As many as 550 delegates registered at AFCC.

Lawrence Wong, minister for Culture, Community and Youth and 2<sup>nd</sup> minister, Ministry of Communications and Information inaugurated the festival. Vijay Thakur Singh, high commissioner of India in Singapore was the special guest on the occasion. The function was also attended by Claire Chiang, chairperson, AFCC, R Ramachandran, executive director, AFCC and Dr MA Sikandar, director, NBT, India among others. Earlier, the Focus Country Pavilion was inaugurated by the Indian high commissioner in the presence of the dignitaries.

As per Claire Chiang, chairman, AFCC Board of Advisors, "Through focus on transmedia, Young Adult fiction, bilingualism, and children's literary translation, AFCC has made significant strides in priming a new generation of writers and content creators to tackle these goals with an eye on Asian content. This year, the programme line-up for the Young Adult and Translation special focus is stronger and more vibrant than before."

While Elaine Ng, chief executive, National Library Board said, "Asia is characterised by its diversity in culture, languages and people. For the children growing up in this region, literature offers one of the most enjoyable ways to appreciate and learn about its richness."

Speaking to AABP, R Ramachandran, executive director, National Book Development Council of Singapore, the organisers of AFCC, remarked, "We are happy to keep restricted audience as we



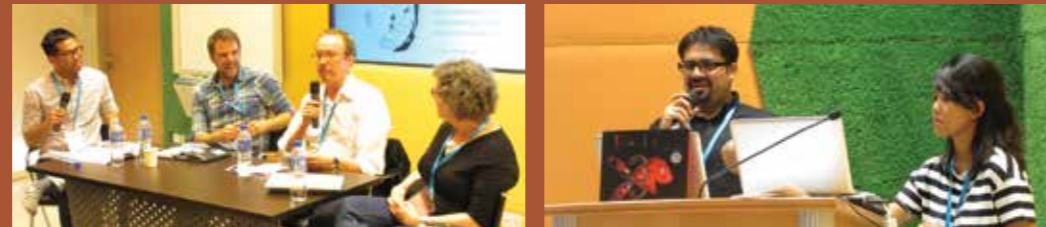
Sampurna Chattarji Subir Shukla Deepa Agarwal Arup Kumar Dutta & Navin Menon



Nina Sabnani, MA Sikandar and Manas Ranjan Mahapatra (standing)

Divik Ramesh and Usha Venkatraman

Atiya Zaidi and Leila Seth



Few more sessions in progress...

feel that each delegate here is capable of subsequently enriching a multiple number of people. As such, though the number of delegates might not be that large, the message will spread across." He also appreciated the efforts of National Book Trust, India for bringing books from India in different languages and hoped that their association will go a long way.

While MA Sikandar, director, National Book Trust, India, said that they are happy to participate at AFCC as they got overwhelming response from Singapore counterparts. "There are no hiccups in understanding our expectations and limitations equally," he said. Sikandar forseees a great future towards this initiative, which might bring new opportunities for writers and publishers from India.

Also, guest illustrator for 2014 – Atanu Roy's illustrations impressively featured in the AFCC programme booklet and on the AFCC website.

## Country focus: India

India was the focus country at AFCC being the quintessential land of fables, with a long and rich tradition of storytelling for children. An ubiquitous presence in most Indian stories has been nature, birds and animals of every description. They have at times donned the role of the narrator and at others that of a wise teacher. Contemporary publishing for children in India is not only exciting but vibrant and varied, meeting the needs of a modern sensibility. Born of India's rich diversity in languages and culture, the new crop of publishers, writers, and illustrators are giving a new texture to both content and style. India's rich indigenous artistic traditions are increasingly being used to great effect to enhance the visual appeal of books. From picture books to literature for young adults, their strong imprint is clearly visible. Graphic novels have always been a part of children literature. Today's publishers, writers, and illustrators are not averse to experiments. But in their experiment and innovation, they remain distinctly Indian.

As a focus country in AFCC 2014,

All About Book Publishing

The team behind the successful event.



National Book Trust (NBT), India, focused on some of these aspects of Indian children's literature at NBT Pavilion. The Indian presentation included a special exhibit of over 200 recently published children's books in English, Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil, a set of specially curated panels displaying a visual journey of children's literature in India and illustrative elements including cut-outs of amazing legendary characters like Vyasa and Ganesh, Tenali Rama, Birbal, Swami etc. from Indian mythology and storytelling tradition. The pavilion was designed by Debabrata Sarkar, deputy director (Art), NBT, India.

NBT, India organised various panel discussions to reflect and discuss various aspects of children's literature in India and children's publishing in India. The first session on A Brush with Creativity: My Colourful Story was given by popular illustrators Atanu Roy and Nina Sabnani, and moderated by Atiya Zaidi, publisher, Ratna Sagar. The speakers talked about the evolution of distinctly Indian way of illustration, their role and contributions towards that process, Indian illustration vis-à-vis tribal art forms of India and changing face of Indian illustration. While, a session on 'What girls are doing in our stories: gender issues in Indian's Children Literature' was moderated by Gitanjali Chatterjee, deputy secretary, Sahitya Akademi, with eminent speakers Justice Leila Seth, first woman judge of Delhi high Court and V Geetha. The speakers traced the paradigm shift of portrayal of girls in stereotype roles to gender equality in Indian children's literature.

Another interesting session was on 'Past, Present, Future: Reinventing Children's Literature' by Subir Shukla, a developer and innovator of quality-oriented primary education in India and Sampurna Chattarji, a poet, novelist, translator and children's author. Sampurna enumerated her own journey as an author, challenges involved in the process and how to reach the hearts of the readers. While, Subir talked about the book, that just published in millions, and not thousands. He mentioned about the *Sarv Shiksha Abhiyaan* as well.

Eminent authors Deepa Agarwal and Arup Kumar Dutta took the audience through their journey as storytellers in the session 'The Child in Me: My Writings', moderated by Navin Menon, editor Publications, Children's Book Trust. Navin talked about how she met both

the panellists as authors many years ago. Deepa opined that combining fun with message in stories is a key factor in children books. While, Arup shared that whenever he writes a story, he spends time within the situation for a few weeks so as to write near to reality.

Session on 'India in Pictures: Comics and Graphic Novels' was moderated by Manas Ranjan Mahapatra, head, National Centre for Children's Literature, while the panellists included Nina Sabnani, an artist and storyteller and MA Sikandar, director, NBT, India (in absence of Manas Ranjan of ACK Media). The panellists looked at the influence of comics and graphic novels such as the *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Diamond Comics*, *Chandamama*, etc. Sikandar opined that people of any age need not to shy from reading graphic novels in public.

Last but not the least, the 'Jungle Chat: Animal and Birds in Indian Stories' was efficiently moderated by SK Khurana, editor, *All About Book Publishing*, with Usha Venkatraman, a storyteller, classical vocalist and puppeteer and Divik Ramesh, eminent Hindi poet, translator and author. Khurana highlighted that the earliest use of animals in Indian literature was probably as similes. Indian folklore is rich and imaginative and remains the most interesting source for children's literature. Usha enticed the audience with a storytelling session with the use of puppets. Her stories were based on animal and bird characters and so were her puppets. While Divik discussed the role and influence of animals in contemporary literature. He mentioned the *Panchatantra*, written in Sanskrit in 200 B.C., the *Jatakas*, the *Puranas*, the

*Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* epics, as well as a large number of ancient Indian Sanskrit classics – all have animal characters.

Other noteworthy events included the event Meet the Indian Literary Stars followed by the India Night on June 1, 2014 created a pleasant forum of interaction between authors and illustrators from India and other parts of the world. SR Nathan, former president of Singapore, Vijay Thakur Singh, high commissioner of India at Singapore and Sim Ann, minister of state, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Communications and Information were the honoured guests on the occasion. The Hindi and Tamil renderings of the AFCC title *Water* by Christopher Cheng and brought out by NBT were released on the occasion.

Another evening session worth mentioning was Children's Literature Lecture by Fatima Sharafeddine, which focussed on book as an interactive tool



Fatima Sharafeddine

between the child and language in the Middle East. While, networking night Makan & Mingle was also a big hit on June 3, 2014.

