

Whose words are we promoting? Cartelisation of Anglophone Trade Book Publishing

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In the cartelised setup of Anglophone trade book publishing, Indians can easily access books produced by UK and US publishers due to Commonwealth rights and multinationalisation in the publishing industry. However, it is not a two-way street: books written by Indian authors published by local Indian publishers or the Indian subsidiaries of multinational publishers often do not cross the domestic border to reach an international readership, nor access the associated economic and social awards. Thus, India is seen as a 'market' country rather than a source of literature worth reading abroad. Even within India, due to the cultural hegemony of the UK and US, the books generating the most revenue are foreign titles. Thus, Indian writing in English is treated as 'less than' its British and American counterparts, within India and abroad.

The paper will examine this cartelisation, the role that multinationalisation plays within it, and their combined postcolonial impact upon local Indian publishers and writers. The paper will also ask: does publishing have a social responsibility? Are British publishers responsible for catering to and platforming the international communities they reach?

The paper utilises secondary research within Indian, Kenyan, Australian and Chinese book history and publishing, as well as postcolonial theory. The paper is informed by primary research conducted via semi-structured interviews with senior professionals in the UK and India at literary agencies and multinational and independent publishing firms, such as Penguin Random House, Hachette, HarperCollins, Scholastic, Faber & Faber, Atlantic Books, Juggernaut, Yoda Press, and Srishti Publishers & Distributors.

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