

**Radha**

How did you hit upon this idea of the book challenge at this particular point of time when many people believe that you know, books as books probably is not most in thing or trending kind of a thing in today's times.

**Mahesh**

, the the core of it is it comes from a larger thinking around how to engage with an audience, which is older, and not the usual cohorts, you know, millennials, Gen Z, and all of that. And silver angels. That's really what I do. I research a lot around longevity, lifespans, aging journeys, and so on and so forth. All that said, I think that's for another topic. But the book challenge is just two friends with complementary, sort of interest and expertise coming together to sort of experiment with something. And we started with the book challenge, because one, I addressed this audience in another format. And Anish being the expert on books. And being an agent, we started talking. And the book challenge sort of evolved from that informal conversation of sorts. The idea is always Yeah, so that's really where it started, but Anish.

**Anish**

Radha, the other thing is that books, books not being anything is sort of perception. But the fact of the matter is, publishers this year, even in a COVID year, have made more money than they've ever made. And I'm just talking about the Indian market here. So books keep selling. It's just that distribution channels keep changing. Maybe more sales are now happening online in sort of bookstores. So it's sort of evergreen, you know.

**Radha**

why 50+ ?, you know, I mean, that's, that's a, that's a kind of age group that I don't think any of the book publishing opportunities have tapped into off late right, or at any given point of time.

**Mahesh**

So I can say that, see, first of all, I don't think age has anything to do with ability. Right? So I want to put that disclaimer out. But the idea is that, again, I said, the core of the Book Challenge falls into a larger ecosystem that, you know, at least I'm trying to build, in some sense, right. And that is essentially the following. People in their 50s are likely to have held a passion for which they didn't devote enough time. because of other commitments, they probably want to look at an alternate journey for the next 2030 years. You know, they thinking about retirement and so on, so forth. Maybe there are they want to turn an entrepreneur. See, that is another possibility. They want to do certain things with, you know, a different group of people, because you know, they want to explore something new. So that's really the background to why 50 plus, now you can say it could be 55 plus it could be 60 plus it could be 45 plus, but I thought 50 Seems like halfway to 100 Mark, and you have another 30 years to plan. Like you were a 20 year old ahead of you. So this is a good time to start thinking about it. And the challenges a way to or the future challenges that come on, is a way to sort of think about that journey in the future. And reset if you want, readjust if you want, or just find a path that suits you, which is outside the outside what you're doing currently. So that's really where it started. So there is no particular data point or reason for that, except for this. Yeah.

**Anish**

And to add to that, Radha 50% of my clients are 50 Plus anyway. So it really makes no difference from that point of view. In fact, for certain genres, the older you are sometimes its advantages. For example, if you're writing a memoir, or if you're writing a work of nonfiction, where someone has developed 30 years of expertise. So for me, age absolutely does not matter. My, our oldest client is in his mid 80s, you know And he's still very prolific.

**Radha**

So this book challenge, does it have any kind of limitations on what kind of genre of writing

**Mahesh**

Yeah, I mean, I think, again, I'm not the expert. But from our discussions, what we realized is we are open to all genres, except maybe poet, poetry and academic books, right. Otherwise, I think the idea is to put the pen to the paper or get, start, start typing out what you have in your mind. And that's why the first part of the challenge is submitting a synopsis, right? So if you're able to synthesize what your book idea is, or you have it in pieces in different places, and if you're able to consolidate it and coherently presented to us, and that by itself is a good start. So obviously, there we are not evaluating anything on genre basis. But it's just are you able to put together something coherent. And I think I need probably knows this? Well, which is to sort of everything starts in a very rough format, but it matures and evolves, the writing the, the narration, and all of it. And of course, if there is marketability to that particular book idea, and then it obviously gets picked up. And there are different ways to sort of take it to the market. Right. So from the genre question, I don't think there is any particular preferred preference, we have to be honest. But I think the webinar we had over the weekend. And my understanding is that the non narrative fiction is a genre. That's fast catch. I mean, that's evolving fast, and there is an audience for it. So that's just a data point.

**Anish**

Whatever writing is submitted has to work within the genre. So if it's, if it's self help, it has to be great self help. If it is a memoir, it has to be a compelling and engaging memoir. If it is a work of literary fiction, then it needs to work for readers across age groups, geographies, and things like that, if it's commercial fiction. Maybe it is a little narrower. So any genre is fine, except like he said poetry and academic books because academic books have a whole totally different set of sort of evaluation standards, which have nothing to do with the trade book universe. And poetry again, it's something that is kind of specialized, and most publishers don't run a poetry list in India because it just doesn't sell. So there was no real point doing poetry

**Radha**

Yeah, and I just want to know once you have shortlisted, you know, authors or what is the kind of What is the kind of hand holding?

**Mahesh**

So, as I said, this is an experiment that we are running, first and foremost, right. And we're going to evolve what we can do at different stages in this challenge. But the goal is the following, right? So there

are going to be some people who are probably really good, and they just not written, and it will show in their writing, and they will probably go through different stages, and they will become a winner. And that particular person gets a two hour coaching session with Anish on how do you take that book? What sort of the feedback that you know, he critique and feedback? And then which provides How do you take it? And how do you repurpose that, or evolve that manuscript? Right? We're not in this challenge, we are not promising a book contract, we are not promising publishing none of it. So we stop where the winner is announced. And then the critique is provided, right, in some sense, for people who probably are not ready at this point, and there is things to do to evolve a better and coherent piece, a manuscript, we're thinking of doing short programs, with, again, experts on different areas. Now, what those areas will emerge out of the evaluation of the synopsis, or engagement with the small community that we have built. So that's really where we're looking at, in the future, right. So this is, again, voluntary in the sense that you've like any challenge, you start the challenge, and there are things that you have to do skill based, you have to learn and then you have to cross milestones. Our goal is a lot of the people who have shown intent will go through different stages, and we will be able to sort of bring in experts to equip them with the skills required the confidence, and all of it to sort of take it to that next level. We did think about something like a book coach, but we have not really evolved what that looks like, could there be somebody who can advise you through these parts? Again, these are going to be paid or free, depending on how it evolves. So we were thinking through that right now.

### **Anish**

, I obviously think silver angels is a very interesting, initiate, which will keep evolving. And through this process. If I can discover some great writing talent, that's just a bonus, you know. And, in my experience, writing talent can come from literally anywhere, any process. It's a lot of serendipity involved.

### **Radha**

I just want to know, what's the kind of response you've got so far? How encouraging is it?

### **Mahesh**

We've got over initially, there were 30, or 35, 37s submissions. I mean, which is the intent, right. And then at the webinar, there were around 17, who showed up there a lot of people who couldn't connect or couldn't show up and they wanted a recording. So we created an FAQ. So the answer to your question is probably the Feb 10th deadline, when people have to turn in their synopsis. So that will really show us how much of the intent is getting translated into, you know, submissions. So yeah.

### **Radha**

And do you intend to do this like a like a kind of an annual program or like a recurring program?

### **Mahesh**

There is no periodic city to it that put, like I said, it's an experiment. So tomorrow, we might do something in Hindi. We might do something in Malayalam or Marathi or Tamil. So that's one option, right? And second is to sort of do it by a particular genre. Again, that's not something that's that get makes it too narrow. And the third option is to sort of look at multi formats. Can we look into something like an audio book or a online journal? I mean, can we look at other forms of writing outputs that can be

sort of evaluated and turned into a challenge? So, so so for example, somebody who has built a digital local digital archive, and wants to sort of do a session and replicated across the country and interested people go through those sessions and sort of build their own digital archive of local history. So this could be something that we can do now that will require certain research methodology, gathering of information, putting this together digitally and archiving it online. And which means building a website or something of that nature, maybe turning it into smaller audio pieces for people to just listen on the go. So like I said, you know, you started with this, and you said, you know, technology's opened up a lot of opportunities in that sense, right. So we don't have to necessarily restricted to book now that within the writing sort of sphere, but there are other spheres that we will continue to explore, which is around travel, cooking, could be mentorship, or nonprofit work that somebody wants to do, or somebody wants to build a small business sitting at home, right? So we the challenges will be around that. It's people who can go through a challenge and complete a journey. That's really our goal, through these challenges. And we want to make it exciting, interesting, engaging, offers short formats, long formats, and so on, so forth. That answers.

**Radha**

what has been your experience of the kind of demand that stay for regional books? And have you seen that also having an increase in demand during the pandemic?

**Anish**

See, the regional market works a little differently. And there is one sort of defining feature with the regional markets is that it's a very fragmented market. So with the sort of, let's say, surety, I can tell you that this is what has happened with the English books market, I can't give you that level of assurance. However, what happens with the regional book market is that when a book takes off, it really takes off, and they hit numbers that an English publisher wanted, but that that occurrence happening is a reasonably rare phenomena. So I would say I think the average book sells in lower numbers in regional books, but the winner there sells in a multiple of the English language winner, if that makes sense.

**Radha**

So that means, you know, it's like, winning by a mile,

**Anish**

Yeah. Yeah, it is winning by exactly. So I think, I think the word of mouth effect in regional language publishing is much stronger compared to English language published.

**Mahesh**

I think the purpose behind everything is that the focus is on longevity, which is people are living longer. And we have I mean, we have had a conventional idea of how we have to live, which is work in retirement. And we should probably look at it in stages by our ability to do things. And the book challenge is one small piece in that puzzle. But it's at the end of it, it all comes down to individuals to sort of figure out their own journeys. But I think they have to start seeking out opportunities invest time

in these kind of initiators, because they have a very high long term return in terms of physical and mental well being. So that's really quick thing that I would like to add. Yeah, thank you Radha.

**Anish**

I'll just add that this cohort, if you call this 50 Plus audience, they obviously have a variety of stories to tell. And at the same time now, there are tons of avenues where the stories can appear. But what tends to be missing is a pipeline, which, where either these stories can be monetized, or these stories can be read. For that to happen, the stories either need to go through some kind of an editorial process, or people have to sort of think through the various stages like, Is My Story best suited for a blog or a self publishing platform? Or a book or a movie or an audio book? So I think if, if these sort of challenges sort of attain scale, then maybe those conversations can be had, you know, of, how do I get my story in front of the right kind of audience. And whenever there is, whenever monetization happens, it doesn't really matter if the writer is looking to make money or no. But when monetization happens, there tends to be skin in the game. So the odds of it getting read tend to be higher.

**Radha**

Absolutely, completely agree with you. Thanks for your time, Mahesh and Anish, it was great talking to you, and all the very best for your venture.

**Mahesh**

Thank you Radha.

**Anish**

Thank you Radha.