

**Diaspora publishers swim against tide**

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By SUNIL RAO

How is the diasporic South Asian publishing industry faring in Canada?

"That's a tough question to answer," celebrated author M.K. Vassanji told Focus. "It depends on whether you're talking to the bigger, established publishing houses, or to the smaller book publishers."

Vassanji should know. He today helps his wife Nurjehan Aziz with Tsar Publications, the Toronto-based nonprofit book publisher that has offered the initial platform to many promising authors.

As every year, the small book publishing house that regularly punches way above its weight held its 2011 annual Fall Book Launch last week to celebrate the release of seven interesting titles of fiction and poetry.

It doesn't get any easier. But it does add a strong cultural voice to Canada's mosaic - just as the books launched, complete with one detailing in lyrical poetry the horrors of state imprisonment and torture.

Nurjehan noted that as Tsar does every year, this year's offerings too formed a mixed bag of both new talents and writers who've earlier published with Tsar.

"That gives a balance to our offerings," she pointed out.

Latha Viswanathan set the tone for the evening. "Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to again visit Toronto, which I love," she announced, before launching into a hilarious reading - complete with a pronounced South Indian accent - from her latest release, *Lingering Tide and Other Stories*.

Viswanathan is today based in Houston, after residing in several parts of the world and turning her hand to several jobs, including journalism, copywriting, teaching and editing.

Viswanathan's stories, set in suburban Toronto, New Jersey, Texas, and India, depict the lives of immigrants through the themes of family adjustment, loss, and starting afresh in a new place.

They draw out the conflicts in three generations of Indians whose lives interconnect even as they straddle the old and the new.

Jennifer Rahim brought a Caribbean flavour to the proceedings with readings from her collection of poems, *Redemption Rain*.

Everyday happenings often become the inspiration for her poetry: "I was quite taken with the story in which a Pakistani American comes to Canada in search of his beloved Chaunsa mango - only to have himself caught at the border when he tries to smuggle some back to the US, because of the smell," she smiled.

"See, how our past doesn't let go of us!"

The result? The poem *Mango Diplomacy*.

Loren Edizel, a strong new talent on the Toronto horizon, had those in attendance hooked to her rendition from her novel *Adrift*, as the mystery deepened into whether the old man did kill or didn't? before she ended with an open-ended climax.

Easier to write than get it published

Hailing from Turkey but having spent most of her life in Canada, Edizel told Focus candidly when asked how she viewed the scene for writers here: "Well, it took more time for me to get my book published than to write it."

Celebrated Tamil poet R. Cheran brought the evening to a rousing finale with his recitation of *Two Mornings and A Late Night from You Cannot Turn Away* (in Tamil, with English translations), about his own arrest and torture in Sri Lanka, during his earlier days.

Speaking earlier to Focus, Cheran smiled: "There's a huge amount of talent here! but as for getting it recognized in the mainstream - that's another issue altogether!"

Tsar Publications focuses on multicultural literature, particularly Canadian authors and subject matter. For details visit [www.tsarbooks.com](http://www.tsarbooks.com)