

The Inner Circle #18 — Two Lakh Crore, Seventy Per Cent, and the Line That Does Not Connect Them

Dr. Dibyendu Choudhury

Author · MSME Specialist · Vedic Scholar

17 September 2026

Dear Inner Circle,

Three times this month I sat down to write about the business of being a writer in India, and three times I thought I was writing about something different. A market report. A royalty schedule. A judgment of the Delhi High Court.

They are not three subjects. They are three places where a large and genuine number is announced and then fails to arrive at the person who wrote the book.

BOOKS & WRITING

The Market Is Growing Above the Writer's Head

On 3 September, in Delhi, the Federation of Indian Publishers and NielsenIQ BookData put a number on the Indian book trade for the first time since 2022. Two lakh crore rupees by 2030–31, twenty-six thousand active publishers, some 375,000 people employed across publishing and printing, third largest book market on earth.

The proportion inside that headline is more useful than the headline. Print stood at about 10.1 billion dollars in 2025; the digital marketplace at 700 million. Digital is running at under seven per cent of print — not of the whole market, of the printed book alone. Almost every aspiring author I meet assumes the future is a file and the past is paper. The measurement says otherwise.

What the report does not resolve is the transmission. Indian-language publishing is named as a growth engine, and it is one — but growth measured as revenue there is mostly

education, devotional titles, examination guides and mass-market fiction. Honourable business, and not the same business as literary transmission.

Consider what closed quietly while the market was being counted. The JCB Prize for Literature ran seven editions, 2018 to 2024 — twenty-five lakh rupees to the author, ten lakh to the translator, which was the unusual and important part. Nineteen of its thirty-six shortlisted titles were translations out of Indian languages. It did not run in 2025 and is not running now, and there was no announcement.

The money was never the mechanism. The mechanism was that an editor in a Delhi acquisition meeting could hold up a manuscript translated from Kannada or Odia or Assamese and point at a national platform that would give it a fighting chance. That argument had a name and a date and a shortlist. It no longer has them. And prizes do not create translations — *Tomb of Sand*, from Hindi by Daisy Rockwell, and *Heart Lamp*, from Kannada by Deepa Bhashti, existed in English because somebody made the translation happen first.

Translation is infrastructure, not a nicety funded out of goodwill when a sponsor feels generous. Infrastructure resting on a single private patron is not infrastructure. It is a favour.

BOOKS & WRITING

Seventy Per Cent Is a Rate With a Condition Underneath It

Every conversation with a first-time Indian author eventually reaches seventy per cent, and that number does an enormous amount of persuasive work. Against a trade royalty of seven-and-a-half to twelve-and-a-half per cent of list price, it is not an improvement. It is a different universe.

The number is real. The condition attached to it in India is the part nobody quotes. For the India Kindle Store, seventy per cent applies only to books priced between Rs 99 and Rs 599 — outside that band you drop to thirty-five. And underneath sits the clause I have never once heard read aloud in an Indian writing workshop: for sales to customers in India, as in Brazil, Japan and Mexico, a digital book must also be enrolled in KDP Select to be eligible for seventy per cent.

"In the United States and the United Kingdom, seventy per cent is available on a non-exclusive listing. Here it is not."

So the real choice is seventy-with-exclusivity against thirty-five-without, and which is correct depends on facts about your readership that the platform does not know and cannot price.

Write the arithmetic down and a second thing appears. On a Rs 199 ebook, seventy per cent gives roughly Rs 139 gross, less a delivery fee charged per megabyte — noise for clean text, a permanent levy on every copy of anything illustrated, which is most mythological fiction of any ambition. At thirty-five per cent there is no delivery deduction at all: about Rs 70, and no exclusivity. Print runs differently again, at sixty per cent of list minus a printing cost driven by page count. Which yields a rule no writing course I know of teaches: genre chooses your margin before you do.

BOOKS & WRITING

Two Doors, Each Closing From a Different Side

Then, in July, the Delhi High Court decided the ANI matter against OpenAI — Justice Amit Bansal, after thirty-two hearings. Storage of the copied material fell within the fair dealing exception in Section 52(1)(a); training on it was held not to infringe; the outputs were held not substantially similar to the originals. And the court, invited to read a commercial-use bar into Section 52, declined.

The consequence is evidentiary. The burden now sits with the claimant to show memorisation or reproduction — that the model has retained and can emit the protected expression, not merely that it was trained on it. Proving your book sat in a corpus is hard; proving the model has memorised your sentences requires access, expertise and money no individual author has.

Separately, the Copyright Office considered an algorithmically generated work and found — this is the interesting half — that such a work can meet the originality threshold. It was rejected anyway, for naming the machine as author. Authorship attaches to a person. I am

deliberately giving you no date or file number for that one; both are circulating, I have not verified either against a primary source, and I would rather leave a gap than add to the noise.

Stand them together. The input side is open to the machine; the output side is closed to the writer. Neither holding is a scandal alone. It is what happens when two sensible decisions from two forums are laid over one another and nobody's job is to look at the overlap.

What survives all three. None of it touches your copyright in what you have written; someone who copies your chapters and sells them is still infringing. What has gone is the theory that training would prove licensable and the courts would build the tollbooth. In India they have declined to.

What is left standing after three erosions is the same thing each time. Not the text as a commodity, but the relationship with the person reading it — your name, your way of seeing a subject, a direct channel to readers who came for you rather than for a recommendation engine. The only asset here that no report, royalty band or judgment can reprice without your consent.

Until the next edition — write the difficult thing, and keep the channel to your readers in your hands.

Dr. Dibyendu Choudhury

Author, MSME Specialist (NI-MSME), Hyderabad

FROM THE SHELF — SEPTEMBER 2026

If you want to see what a body of work assembled under these conditions looks like, the nine published books are gathered at the book portfolio page.

[Browse the Book Portfolio →](#)

The three essays behind this edition are on the blog, free to read.