

Old Indian-Korean love story graces book fair



President Park Geun-hye tours the Indian Pavilion as the guest of honor at the Seoul International Book Fair at COEX in Seoul on the June 19 opening day. To her left is Jitin Prasada, Indian minister for human resource development. To his left is A. Sethumadhavan, chairman of India's National Book Trust. Minister Prasada gave a copy of the book "Sri Ratna & Kim Suro" to President Park. / Yonhap

By **Kim Se-jeong**

At the Seoul International Book Fair last week, India had a reason to highlight the comic book "Sri Ratna & Kim Suro — The Legend of an Indian Princess in Korea."

The story is about a prince of the Gaya Kingdom in the Korean Peninsula (52-532 AD) named Kim Suro marrying Sri Ratna the princess of Ayodhya Kingdom in India.

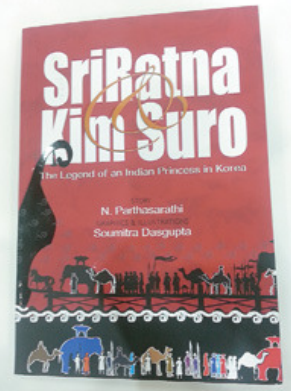
What makes this story special is the author.



Jitin Prasada
Minister of Human
Resources Development

N. Parthasarathi is a former ambassador to Korea. He had written a 276-page novel while serving in Korea between 2005 and 2008. The book was published in 2007.

India's National Book Trust (NBT) condensed the original story into a comic-book length suitable for children for the book fair, celebrating 40th anniversary of Korea-India diplomatic ties this year.



Minister for the Indian Department of Human Resources Development Jitan Prasada, who flew to Seoul to attend the opening, reiterated the significance of the comic book in carrying out diplomacy.

“Cultural aspects are important and that’s where you engage with people. And books are one medium which travels to people’s hearts and minds, easier than other means.”

The Human Resources Development Ministry and the NBT, a public agency promoting publishing in and outside India, were in charge of the preparation for the participation.

One copy of the book was given to President Park Geun-hye, who was at the opening ceremony on June 19, at COEX in Seoul.

“Sri Ratna and Kim Suro — The Legend of an Indian Princess in Korea” was one of more than 1,000 Indian books on display.

The NBT also brought 10 Indian children’s stories in Korean, a special presentation for the book fair.



India's National Book Trust brought 10 Indian children's stories in Korean./ Korea Times photo by Kim Se-jeong

India was the guest of honor at the annual book fair, which ran until Sunday.

Representatives from 23 Indian publishers traveled to Korea, along with six authors and one illustrator.

Former Ambassador Parthasarathi is one of many career diplomats around the world that has proven talent for writing.

The Chilean diplomat Pablo Neruda — his real name is Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto — is a renowned poet.

The film “Slumdog Millionaire” was based on a novel written by another Indian diplomat Vikas Swarup.

The NBT’s goal was to find a Korean publisher who is interested in translating it into the Korean language.

Chairman of the NBT A. Sethumadhavan expressed India’s acute interest in young readers in Korea.

“I’ve learned almost 30 percent of the book market in Korea is dominated by children’s books. This is huge.” This explained a big number of children’s books showcased at the pavilion.

Indian books are new to Korean readers.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is probably the most well-known and familiar Indian author to Koreans in light of one of his poems on Korea. Tagore won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, becoming the first non-European laureate.

The Indian pavilion is a reflection of rapidly growing bilateral relations.

The commerce is dominant having accelerated with the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) which entered into force in October 2010. CEPA is a different name for the free trade agreement.

One Indian diplomat said incumbent Ambassador Vishnu Prakash also speaks volumes to the Indian government’s seriousness in deepening ties with Korea as well.

Prakash is a former spokesman for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and arrived in Korea early last year.