OPENING REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE ON 'EPUB AND THE OPEN WEB PLATFORM FOR PUBLISHERS' AT ADOBE, NOIDA ON 30/11/2013

Kumar Vikram
Editor & Project In-charge
Research & Innovation
National Book Trust, India

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed privileged to get this opportunity to share some of my thoughts here in this significant conference 'EPUB and the Open Web Platform for Publishers' organized by IDPF and also supported by National Book Trust, India. We at NBT have been taking the slow, but steady development of the digital publishing network in India rather seriously and it is with this intention that last year we co-partnered with FICCI at the PUBLICON 2012 convention focussed on digital publishing issues. We organised an Indo-Korean Digital Forum at Seoul International Book Fair in June this year in association with Korean Publishers' Association on the sidelines of NBT's presentation of India as the Guest Country at the Fair.

We were a part of the International Anime Convention organised at NOIDA Film City in September this year, and only the last fortnight, we were a part of the National Workshop organised by CDAC-NOIDA in its endeavour to digitalise Indian Folk story-telling traditions through animation, and other web-based digital innovations. Personally, I have had the privilege of conceptualising and participating in all these initiatives with due support and encouragement of our top management comprising of the Chairman Mr. A Sethumadhavan and the Director Mr. M A Sikandar.

NBT as Facilitator

Our basic objective behind these engagements is to become a facilitator in communicating to the publishing as well as reading public the various challenges and opportunities involved in going digital in the Indian context. I am happy to share with you that NBT, under its Research and Innovation initiatives, is in the process of commissioning a thorough scientific study on the status and future of digital publishing in India so that this area of publishing, which is at quite a nascent stage, though lot many stakeholders are looking at it with expectations as well as doubts, gets the right data, analysis and perspectives for the stakeholders comprising of publishers, content creators, designers, digital distributors, service

providers—and of course the authors and the readers. And it is in this context, we find today's conference by IDPF an important event and it is the privilege of NBT to be associated with it, because besides the social, cultural, linguistic, economic aspects, the use of a standardised technology for digital publishing, which is the basic objective of EPUB, is a crucial component of this digital discourse.

I have just a few points to flag, a kind of a thinking aloud because most of us are in the process of learning, especially when it comes to digital publishing technologies, and hence the points that I make are generally concerned with the issues of final delivery of the content and the end users.

Open Web Platforms vs. Closed Apps

In the west, there are already some overenthusiastic analysts like Chris Anderson, Wired magazine's editor in chief, who tied to put forth an argument that the Web is being crippled by a world of apps and screens in its cover story in August 2010 issue disturbingly titled "The Web Is Dead. Long Live the Internet." However, analysts tell us that this may be rather unscientific way of looking at these developments. For example, NICK BILTON, in his review of this cover story wrote: "There's another piece of the puzzle too. Most of these apps and Web sites are so intertwined that it's difficult to know the difference. With the exception of downloadable games, most Web apps for news and services require pieces of the Web and Internet to function properly. So as more devices become connected to the Internet, even if they're built to access beautiful walled gardens, like mobile apps or TV-specific interfaces, they will continue to access the Web too, enabling each platform to grow concurrently."

This is just a piece of the discourse, and I mention it here only because as a public sector organisation, our basic concern is to be able to enrich and empower the large reading public—who are spread out all over India with their unique reading and linguistic needs; and hence any large scale innovation which is focussed at the individuals and not at communities need to be seen with a pinch of salt. Moreover, these discussions are yet to find place in our mainstream publishing discourse, and I personally feel that a lot of things have got mixed up in the name of discussing digital publishing. E-books, apps, games, animation etc, all are being referred as one whole bundle of content, whereas publishers are looking forward to discussing the digital changes which will impact the core areas of book-publishing, book

distribution and book reading. In this context, the presence of W3C with its commitment to open web is important.

Concerns of Indian Language Publishers and DRMs

I am sure this conference will discuss and address integral and crucial areas of book publishing in the digital age. I understand that there are certain crucial issues of Localization and Multi-lingualism in EPUB solutions and new innovations needed in terms of coding facilities in Indian context; then there are issues of Digital Rights Management in Open Web Platforms etc. and I hope that a better understanding of these issues will be arrived at in today's discussions.

I congratulate W3C, IPDF and especially Mr. Bill McCoy and his dedicated team for thinking about this initiative and organising it so efficiently. Thank you!

http://en.flossmanuals.net/an-open-web/_booki/an-open-web/an-open-web.pdf

http://codinginparadise.org/weblog/2008/04/whats-open-web-and-why-is-it-important.html

of National Book Trust, India as the national body for book publishing and book promotion in India and Indian books abroad

Frankly speaking, I have come here to learn from the industry and technology experts about the latest developments in EPUB 3, HTML5, and the Open Web Platform, and rather than get informed information about how to efficiently create and distribute eBooks and other digital publications.