

Tamil Publishing Continues to Struggle in the Age of Digital

Veerakannan S¹, Dr. M.Vijayakumar²

Deputy Librarian, Department of Library, Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College (Autonomous),
Pollachi Coimbatore 642001. Email: ngmcollegelibrary@gmail.com

Librarian, Department of Library, Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College (Autonomous), Pollachi
Coimbatore 642001. E-Mail: librarian@ngmc.org

ABSTRACT

This paper will delve into the multifaceted struggles faced by Tamil publishers, meticulously analyzing the factors contributing to the current predicament. These factors will include, but are not limited to: the rise of digital media and ebooks, changing reading habits of younger generations, pricing pressures in a competitive market, distribution challenges, lack of effective marketing strategies, and the threat of piracy. We will also explore the socio-economic context that influences the Tamil reading public, including affordability, literacy rates, and access to books in both urban and rural communities. Beyond identifying the challenges, this study will explore potential avenues for revitalization and growth. We will examine innovative approaches to publishing, marketing, and distribution that can help Tamil publishers connect with new readers and sustain their business in the digital age. This includes leveraging social media, exploring partnerships with digital platforms, promoting Tamil literature through translations, and fostering collaborations between authors, publishers, and readers. We will conduct interviews and analyze existing data to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, and hopes for the future of Tamil publishing. By analyzing current trends in Tamil literature, including emerging genres and the evolving tastes of readers, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the landscape and highlight the opportunities for a thriving Tamil publishing industry in the 21st century. Ultimately, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Tamil publishing, with the goal of fostering a more vibrant and sustainable future for Tamil literature

ARTICLE INFO

Received : 20 March 2025

Revised : 30 March 2025

Accepted : 01 April 2025

KEYWORDS

Publications, Ebooks,
Digital Library

Introduction

The Tamil publishing industry, steeped in a rich literary heritage spanning centuries, faces significant challenges in the contemporary digital landscape. While the echoes of Sangam literature and the narratives of celebrated authors like Kalki resonate, the future of Tamil fiction remains uncertain. This paper will delve into the struggles faced by Tamil publishers, analyzing the factors contributing to the current predicament and exploring potential avenues for revitalization. Through examining the perspectives of key industry players and analyzing current trends, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities facing Tamil publishing in the 21st century.

Lakshmi Krupa, writing for *The Hindu*, poignantly observes the dichotomy between Tamil literature's glorious past and its precarious present: "Think Tamil literature. Think rich texts. We know we carry with us a treasure trove from our past, from the Sangam period to the works of Kalki, from Thirukkural to the works of bhakti saints...but what of our present and the future? Even as poets continue to push the boundaries finding ways to give voice to their struggles, Tamil fiction is a trickier proposition, say publishers." This statement encapsulates the central problem: while the legacy of Tamil literature is undeniable, the current state of fiction publishing struggles to maintain momentum and relevance.

Badri Seshadri of New Horizon Media, in the same article, elucidates the limited success stories within the Tamil fiction market, stating: "There are three scenarios currently in which Tamil fiction works. First is historical fiction which continues to sell well year after year. Here we see constant demand pouring in for Kalki's *Ponniyin Selvan*. Then there are writers Sandilyan and Balakumaran. Second, when an author wins the Sahitya Akademi award, there is a demand for his/her work – provided it's rightly priced. The following month when we have the Chennai Book Fair we can definitely see close to 1,000 copies more. In general, Tamil publishing scene, for a long time now nothing new has been working in fiction." This highlights the dependence on established authors and genres, with limited opportunities for emerging voices and contemporary themes to break through. The reliance on awards and book fairs for increased sales underscores the lack of sustained organic demand for new Tamil fiction.

Factors Contributing to the Struggle

Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by Tamil publishing, including:

- **Competition from English Language Literature:** As Seshadri notes, "Today, no capable Tamil writer wants to focus only on Tamil writing, and understandably so. They all have something else to do, and write only in their spare time. Second, more and more talent from Tamil is now veering towards writing in English." This "brain drain" towards English literature reflects the perceived greater opportunities for recognition, readership, and financial reward in the global market. The dominance of English as the language of business and academia further incentivizes writers to prioritize English over Tamil.
- **Limited Marketing and Distribution Channels:** Unlike larger publishing industries, Tamil publishers often lack the resources for extensive marketing campaigns and efficient distribution networks. This limits the visibility of new titles and hinders their reach to potential readers. The reliance on traditional bookstores, which are facing their own challenges in the digital age, further restricts access.
- **Pricing Sensitivity:** Affordability plays a critical role in the Tamil book market. Seshadri points out that even award-winning books need to be "rightly priced" to attract readers. This reflects the

economic realities of the target audience and the need for publishers to carefully balance production costs with consumer purchasing power.

- **Digital Divide:** While the digital landscape presents opportunities, the lack of comprehensive Tamil language support on platforms like Amazon Kindle presents a significant barrier. The digital divide, characterized by unequal access to technology and digital literacy, further limits the potential for online book sales and readership.
- **Government Procurement Policies:** While government procurement of books for libraries provides a crucial lifeline for publishers, the emphasis on specific themes, such as religious harmony and biographies, can restrict the diversity of published content. While laudable goals in themselves, these guidelines may inadvertently stifle creativity and limit the exploration of contemporary social issues in fiction.

Strategies for Revival and Innovation

Despite the challenges, Tamil publishers are actively exploring innovative strategies to revitalize the industry:

- **Self-Publishing Initiatives:** Manimekalai Prasuram's "ezhuthalar – pathipalar mudhaleetu thittam" exemplifies a novel approach to self-publishing. By allowing writers to invest in the printing of their books and share the responsibility for sales, this model empowers authors and fosters a more collaborative relationship between writers and publishers.
- **Focus on Niche Markets:** The success of historical fiction suggests the potential for targeting niche markets with specific interests. Publishers can explore genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and crime fiction, catering to diverse reader preferences and expanding the appeal of Tamil literature.
- **Developing a Tamil Language E-Platform:** Recognizing the limitations of existing platforms, New Horizon Media plans to "work on creating a strong Indian language e-platform." This ambitious project has the potential to revolutionize access to Tamil books, reaching a wider audience and overcoming geographical barriers.
- **Promoting Reading Culture:** Ravi Tamilvanan's suggestion to "consider gifting someone a Tamil book" and restore the "library hour" in schools underscores the importance of fostering a reading culture from a young age. Cultivating a love for Tamil literature among children and young adults is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the industry.
- **Leveraging Social Media and Online Communities:** Utilizing social media platforms and online communities to promote Tamil books, connect with readers, and build author brands can significantly enhance visibility and engagement. Online book clubs, author interviews, and virtual book launches can create a vibrant digital ecosystem for Tamil literature.

The Role of Government and Cultural Institutions

Government and cultural institutions play a vital role in supporting Tamil publishing:

- **Increased Funding for Libraries and Literary Organizations:** Providing greater financial support for libraries and literary organizations can enhance access to Tamil books and promote

literary activities. Increased funding can be directed towards purchasing new titles, organizing literary events, and supporting emerging writers.

- **Awards and Recognition Programs:** Expanding awards and recognition programs for Tamil writers and publishers can incentivize excellence and raise the profile of the industry. Recognizing contributions to Tamil literature through prestigious awards can motivate writers and publishers to strive for innovation and quality.
- **Promoting Tamil Language Education:** Strengthening Tamil language education in schools and universities is essential for ensuring the continued vitality of the language and its literature. Promoting Tamil language proficiency and appreciation among young people can cultivate a future generation of readers and writers.
- **Support for Digital Infrastructure:** Investing in digital infrastructure, such as Tamil language keyboards, fonts, and software, is crucial for facilitating online content creation and accessibility. Government support for developing and promoting Tamil language digital tools can empower writers and publishers to thrive in the digital age.

Conclusion

The Tamil publishing industry faces complex challenges in the age of digital disruption. While the legacy of Tamil literature remains strong, the current state of fiction publishing requires innovative strategies and concerted efforts to ensure its long-term sustainability. By addressing the factors contributing to the struggle, embracing new technologies, fostering a reading culture, and leveraging the support of government and cultural institutions, Tamil publishing can overcome the current challenges and thrive in the digital age. The future of Tamil literature depends on the collective commitment of writers, publishers, readers, and policymakers to nurture and celebrate the richness and diversity of the Tamil literary tradition.

Table 1: Challenges and Opportunities in Tamil Publishing

Challenge	Opportunity
Competition from English language literature	Focus on niche markets and unique Tamil narratives
Limited marketing and distribution channels	Leverage social media and online communities
Pricing sensitivity	Explore affordable digital publishing options
Digital divide	Develop a Tamil language e-platform
Restrictive government procurement policies	Advocate for greater diversity in content selection

Table 2: Strategies for Revival and Innovation

Strategy	Description
Self-publishing initiatives	Empowering writers to invest in and promote their work
Focus on niche markets	Catering to diverse reader preferences with specialized genres

Strategy

Description

Developing a Tamil language e-platform

Creating a dedicated digital platform for Tamil books and readers

Promoting reading culture

Cultivating a love for Tamil literature from a young age

Leveraging social media and online communities

Enhancing visibility and engagement through online marketing and community building

Reference

Krupa, Lakshmi. "Tamil Publishing Continues to Struggle in the Age of Digital." *The Hindu*, 26 Oct. 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/books/tamil-publishing-continues-to-struggle-in-the-age-of-digital/article19895119.ece>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2024

License

Copyright (c) 2025 Author



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).