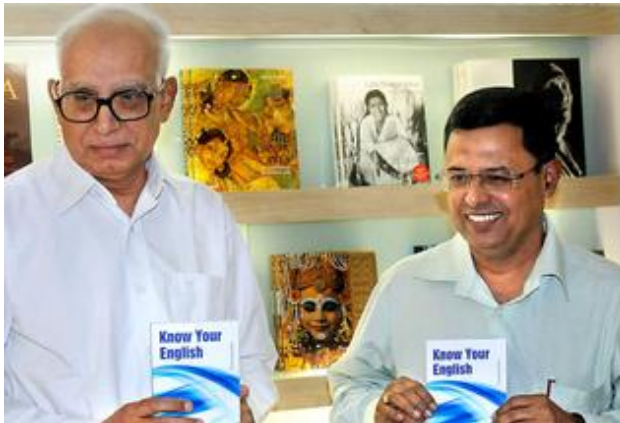


## Book tracing origin of idioms released

Staff Reporter

S. Upendran's book has much to offer for readers



Treasure trove: Director of Research, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, D. Balasubramanian (left) launching S. Upendran's book 'Idioms and their stories' at Oxford bookstore on Wednesday. — PHOTOS: K. RAMESH BABU

The volume owes it all to Isabella, the princess of Spain who married the prince of Austria. Her vow not to change her undergarment till the enemy is driven out got S. Upendran, the famed author of the column 'Know Your English' in *The Hindu*, begin his probe into the origin of words.

Knowing that Isabella as a colour's name derives its origin from the story above, he decided to delve further into the origins of idioms which he promptly shared with the newspaper readers. On Wednesday, his effort was released in the form of the book 'Idioms and their stories', through the hands of D. Balasubramanian, president of the Indian Academy of Sciences and Director of Research at the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute. It was a fun-filled session. To put it idiomatically, even as it rained 'kittens and puppies' outside, the author had the audience at the Oxford Bookstore 'in stitches' by 'tickling their funny bones'.

'Know Your English' was begun as a family affair by his father K. Subramanian, said Dr. Upendran, to be passed on to him in inheritance. His mother played typist, while he himself was the errand boy who would post it to Chennai.

Readers were occasionally treated to some unwitting witticism by way of typesetting errors. Thus appeared gaffes such as 'Female is used to donate sex' instead of 'Female is used to denote sex!' The age of computers and email had its own 'comedy of errors'. A full-length explanation by Dr. Upendran for the nonexistent word 'blasi' — the word 'blasé' converted to text format — had him face the wrath of the unforgiving readers. "Mr. Upendran, Know Your English before you pass it on to us," fumed a particular stickler — not only for words, but also for wit!

For Forrest Gump, life might have been a box of chocolates, but for the author, it has been an unopened inbox, opened if ever with a shudder. A storehouse of language he might be for outsiders, but for his aunts and uncles, he is always the butt of jokes. They would test his knowledge by asking him English equivalents of Indian relationships. Aunts were particularly taunting when they would press for English names of kitchen ingredients.

On a serious note, Dr. Upendran, who is also a professor in the EFLU, said knowing the origins of idioms would help in remembering the meaning better. The volume, published by the Universities Press and priced at Rs. 195, has explanations for 300 idioms. It will be followed by three more volumes respectively for 'Frequently Confused Words', 'Grammar and Usage' and 'Vocabulary and Pronunciation'.

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- *Knowing origins of idioms would help in remembering meaning better, says author*
  - *Three more books on frequently confused words, grammar and pronunciation planned*