Nirmala Lakshman's 'The Tamils' wins Best International Non-Fiction at 45th Sharjah Book Fair

Topics: Awards & Honours · UPSC Prelims · TNPSC · SSC · Current Affairs



News

'The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community' by Chennai-based author and journalist Nirmala Lakshman won the Best International Non-Fiction Book award at the 45th Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF). Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi, Chairperson of the Sharjah Book Authority, presented the awards at Expo Centre Sharjah on 4 November 2026. There were 3,018 submissions across categories; the Best International Fiction award went to Marcia Hutchinson's 'The Mercy Step'. Published by Aleph Book Company in January 2025, the book explores Tamil history, society, literature, politics, religion, art and identity. The fair runs from 4 to 15 November 2026, with Oman as the Guest of Honour country. Lakshman called the book both a personal journey and an exploration of a complex history.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Book	The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community (Aleph, Jan 2025)
Award	Best International Non-Fiction Book
Presented by, date	Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, 4 Nov 2026
Fair	45th SIBF, 4–15 Nov 2026, Expo Centre Sharjah

Point	Details
Guest of Honour	Oman
Participation	3,212 publishers from 126 countries (WAM)
Fiction award	Marcia Hutchinson – The Mercy Step
Author	Former Joint Editor, The Hindu; created Young World, Literary Review

Background

- The author: Nirmala Lakshman is a former Joint Editor of The Hindu; she founded and edited The Hindu Literary Review, created the children's supplement Young World and launched the paper's annual literature festival. She holds a PhD in postmodern fiction and also wrote 'Degree Coffee by the Yard', on Chennai.
- Sharjah, UAE: Sharjah is one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah); the capital is Abu Dhabi. Sharjah has held the book fair since 1982 and was UNESCO World Book Capital in 2019. India was Guest of Honour at the Sharjah fair in 2019. Lakhs of Tamils work in the Gulf countries.
- Tamil history: Sangam literature, the Tolkappiyam and the Tirukkural show the antiquity of Tamil. Excavations at Keezhadi, on the Vaigai river in Sivaganga district, have yielded evidence of a Sangam-age urban culture. The book ranges from Chera-Chola-Pandya maritime trade and the Bhakti movement to the Dravidian movement and the Tamil diaspora.
- The Hindu: it was started as a weekly in Madras in 1878 by the 'Triplicane Six', including G. Subramania Iyer and M. Veeraraghavachariar, and became a daily in 1889. G. Subramania Iyer also founded the Tamil paper 'Swadesamitran' in 1882, where Subramania Bharati worked. The Kasturi Ranga Iyengar family has run The Hindu since 1905.

Tamil Nadu link: the author is from Chennai and the book is entirely about Tamil history and culture. The Hindu was founded in Madras in 1878. Since 2023 the Tamil Nadu government has held the Chennai International Book Fair (CIBF), funding translations of Tamil books into other languages.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

'The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community' by Chennai-based author and journalist Nirmala Lakshman won the Best International Non-Fiction Book award at the 45th Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF).

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Book: The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community (Aleph, Jan 2025); Award: Best International Non-Fiction Book; Presented by, date: Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, 4 Nov 2026; Fair: 45th SIBF, 4–15 Nov 2026, Expo Centre Sharjah.

What is the background to this news?

The author: Nirmala Lakshman is a former Joint Editor of The Hindu; she founded and edited The Hindu Literary Review, created the children's supplement Young World and launched the paper's annual literature festival.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. In which category did Nirmala Lakshman's 'The Tamils' win at the 45th Sharjah International Book Fair?

A) Best Intl Non-Fiction Book

B) Best Intl Fiction Book

C) Best Intl Publishing House

D) Best Arabic Novel

Answer: A – Explanation: Best International Non-Fiction Book – 4 Nov 2026. The fiction award went to Marcia Hutchinson's 'The Mercy Step'.

2. Sharjah is one of the seven emirates of which country?

A) United Arab Emirates

B) Saudi Arabia

C) Qatar

D) Bahrain

Answer: A – Explanation: The UAE – Abu Dhabi (capital), Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah.

3. The Keezhadi excavation site in Sivaganga district, which revealed a Sangam-age urban culture, lies on which river?

A) Thamirabarani

B) Cauvery

C) Vaigai

D) Thenpennai

Answer: C – Explanation: The Vaigai – south-east of Madurai. Adichanallur lies on the Thamirabarani and Poompuhar on the Cauvery.

4. Which country was the 'Guest of Honour' at the 2026 Sharjah International Book Fair?

A) India

B) Egypt

C) Japan

D) Oman

Answer: D – Explanation: Oman – 4–15 Nov 2026. India was Guest of Honour in 2019, the year Sharjah was UNESCO World Book Capital.

5. Who co-founded The Hindu in Madras in 1878 and also founded 'Swadesamitran'?

A) V.O. Chidambaranar

B) Subramania Bharati

C) C. Rajagopalachari

D) G. Subramania Iyer

Answer: D – Explanation: G. Subramania Iyer – one of the 'Triplicane Six'; he started 'Swadesamitran' in 1882, where Bharati later worked.

Sources: Khaleej Times, 5 Nov 2026; Gulf News; News Karnataka; WAM; Khaleej Times (dates, Oman); Aleph Book Company. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.