

Prabha

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

प्रभा



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Let's Talk LIT

Behind the scenes and behind the page:
lit fest organisers on reading, writing and reflecting
Cover Story: Anant Vijay

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Prabha
खैतान

Celebrating the Written Word

On behalf of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, I take this opportunity to wish you a very happy and prosperous New Year. Winter is the season of gatherings and celebrations. The chill in the air and the clear blue sky creates high spirits which invigorates everything, including literature, as evident in the number of people thronging the different literary festivals being organised across the country. This edition of the chronicle features writings of curators of some of India's most popular literature festivals as they reflect on the present literary scenario in the country.

We, as an organisation, are growing, and so is our team of accomplished **Ehsaas** women. The Foundation has added more cities to its bouquet with your encouragement and support. This edition onwards we will be featuring our **Ehsaas** women city-wise to enable us to feature each of these amazingly dedicated ladies more adequately.

The enthusiastic inputs and contributions from well-wishers and members has taken the chronicle to new heights. We look forward to your words and thoughts as they add give us more encouragement. Do keep writing in with your stories and suggestions.

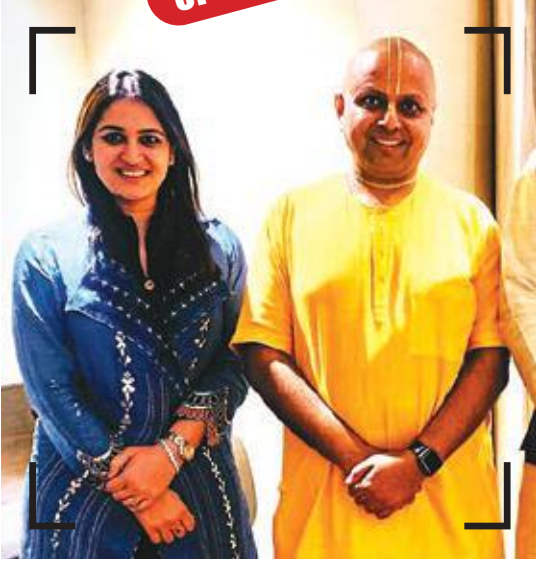
Hope you have a delightful read!

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the Foundation or its members.



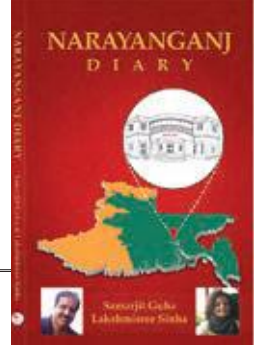
MANISHA JAIN
Communications & Branding chief,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

SNAPSHOT
OF THE MONTH



Our Ehsaas Woman of Udaipur, Shraddha Muridaa with Gaur Gopal Das

सहयोग



Book Launch

Narayanganj Diary by Samarjit Guha and Lakshmisree Sinha was launched by Sujat Sen, CEO, Future Hope, at The Conclave on December 26, 2019.

Narayanganj Diary, published by Allcap Communications, is the story of one of the most illustrious families of Narayanganj — the Guhas — who lived in a beautiful sprawling abode called Ananda Bhaban, till the Partition of the subcontinent compelled them to abandon their idyllic existence and move to Kolkata, and then spread across the world. Now, two members of the fourth generation of Guhas have painstakingly gathered information, anecdotes, and memories, fuelled by a compelling desire to keep alive their roots, to chronicle this disappearing saga of the Guhas of Narayanganj. The launch, which was supported by Prabha Khaitan Foundation, was followed by an engaging discussion on family memoirs.

Happy Birthday

PRABHA WISHES EHSAAAS WOMEN BORN IN JANUARY



Dimple Trivedi

1st January



Jyoti Kapoor

3rd January



Shruti Mittal

23rd January



Swati Agarwal

24th January



Shinjini Kulkarni

25th January

साहित्य उत्सवों की बहुतायत से बनती संस्कृति



इस बात को लेकर खूब हो हल्ला मचता है कि साहित्य के पाठक कम हो रहे हैं। कई बार कुछ प्रकाशकों तथा कई बार लेखकों से ये बात सुनने को मिलती है कि साहित्य के पाठक कम हो रहे हैं। एक समय तो ऐसा आ गया था कि इस बात को लेकर शोर मचने लगा था कि नई पुस्तकों के संस्करणों के प्रतियों की संख्या तीन सौ तक पहुंच गई लेकिन अब हिंदी के शीर्ष प्रकाशक खुलकर कहने लगे हैं कि तीन सौ का संस्करण नहीं होता है। पुस्तक मेलों में पाठकों की उमड़नेवाली भीड़ और प्रकाशकों के स्टॉल पर दिखनेवाला वैभव भी इस बात की मुनादी करता है कि पाठक आ रहे हैं और उनको कारोबार में मुनाफा हो रहा है।

खासतौर से हिंदी में ये माना जाने लगा है कि साहित्य के पाठक घट रहे हैं। आज से करीब सत्रह अठारह साल पहले हिंदी के मशहूर लेखक निर्मल वर्मा से एक साक्षात्कार में शंकर शरण ने कथा साहित्य के घटते पाठक को लेकर एक सवाल पूछा था। तब निर्मल जी ने कहा था — “पहले तो यह स्थिति है या नहीं, इसके बारे में मुझे शंका है। यह हमारे प्रकाशकों की फैलाई बात है, पर पुस्तक मेलों में जिस तरह से लोग दुकानों पर टूटते हैं, भिन्न भिन्न किस्म की किताबों को खरीदते हैं... एक पिछड़े हुए देश में पुस्तकों के लिए पिपासा

स्वाभाविक रूप से होती है, क्योंकि उसे अन्य साधन कम सुलभ होते हैं। पर अच्छी पुस्तकें नहीं पढ़ पाने का एक बड़ा कारण यह है कि वे आसानी से उपलब्ध नहीं होती। फिर कम दामों पर उपलब्ध नहीं हो पाती हैं। हमारी लाइब्रेरी की हालत भी बहुत खराब है। यूरोपीय देशों में शहर के हर हिस्से में एक अच्छी लाइब्रेरी मिलेगी। हमारे यहां बड़े बड़े शहरों में दो तीन पुस्तकालय होंगे, वह भी बड़ी खराब अवस्था में। तो अगर आप पुस्तक संस्कृति के विकास के साधन विकसित नहीं करेंगे, तो पुस्तकों के न बिकने का विलाप करना मेरे ख्याल से उचित नहीं है।”

निर्मल वर्मा ने बिलकुल सही कहा था कि लाइब्रेरी की हालत खराब है। देशभर के अलग अलग हिस्सों में स्थित पुस्तकालयों की हालत पर नजर डालने से यह बातें साफ हो जाती हैं। कई पुस्तकालय या तो बंद हो गए या हैं फिर रखरखाव में कमी की वजह से उनकी हालत इतनी खराब हो चुकी है कि पाठक वहां जाना नहीं चाहते।

इसी तरह से देशभर में जो लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं उनकी संख्या भी इस अवधारणा को निगेट करती है कि साहित्य के पाठक या साहित्य के अनुरागी हिंदी समाज में कम हो रहे हैं। इस वक्त देशभर में अलग अलग भाषाओं और शहरों में करीब सवा चार सौ लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं — छोटे, बड़े और मंझोले शहरों को मिलाकर। सुदूर तमिलनाडू से लेकर असम तक में लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं। बिहार के मधुबनी से लेकर सीतामढ़ी तक में लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल आयोजित होने लगे हैं। इसके अलावा दिल्ली के एक इलाके, द्वारका, के नाम से भी द्वारका लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल होने लगा है। कुछ लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल व्यक्तिगत प्रयासों से तो कुछ सरकारी संस्थानों द्वारा आयोजित होते हैं। अब तो निजी संस्थान भी इसमें रुचि लेने लगे हैं। एक के बाद एक इतने लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं कि एक ही स्थान पर एक खत्म हो नहीं रहा है कि दूसरा शुरू हो जा रहा है। लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजनों से ऐसा लगने लगा है कि साहित्य में लगातार उत्सव होते हैं।

पिछले कई सालों से देशभर में साहित्य, कला और संस्कृति को लेकर एक प्रकार का अनुराग उत्पन्न होता दिखाई दे रहा है। इसकी वजह क्या हो सकती है ये तो ठीक ठीक नहीं कहा जा सकता है, लेकिन इस बात का अनुमान लगाया





मेरे जानते हमारे देश में साहित्योत्सवों की शुरुआत जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजन से हुई थी। जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की शुरुआत जयपुर विरासत फाउंडेशन ने 2008 में की थी। जयपुर में पिछले तेरह साल से आयोजित होनेवाला ये लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल साल दर साल मजबूती से साहित्य की दुनिया में अपने को स्थापित कर चुका है।

हालांकि जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल को लोकप्रिय और चर्चित करने में सितारों और विवादों की खास भूमिका रही है। वहां फिल्म से जुड़े जावेद अख्तर, शबाना आजमी, शर्मिला टैगोर, गुलजार आदि किसी ना किसी स्टॉल पर, किसी ना किसी सेशन में अवश्य मिल जाएंगे। प्रसून जोशी भी। यहां तक कि अमेरिका की मशहूर एंकर ओपरा विनफ्रे भी यहां आ चुकी हैं। इन सेलिब्रिटी की मौजूदगी में बड़े लेखकों की उपस्थिति कई बार दब जाती है। इसको विश्वस्तरीय साहित्यक जमावड़ा बनाने में इसके आयोजकों ने कोई कसर नहीं छोड़ी और वी एस

जा सकता है कि देशभर में आयोजित होने वाले साहित्योत्सवों या लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की इसमें एक भूमिका हो सकती है। साहित्य और संस्कृति को लेकर अनुराग उत्पन्न होने की बात इस वजह से है कि लिटरेचर फेस्टिवलों ने लेखकों और पाठकों के बीच की दूरी को खत्म किया है। पाठकों को अपने पसंदीदा लेखकों से मिलने का मंच भी मुहैया करवाया है। इन साहित्य महोत्सवों में पाठकों के पास अपने पसंदीदा लेखकों की हस्ताक्षरयुक्त पुस्तकें खरीदने का अवसर भी मिलता है। लेकिन उनके पास लेखकों से संवाद करने का अवसर नहीं होता है। पाठकों के मन में जो जिज्ञासा होती है वो अनुत्तरित रह जाती है। कई बार यह लगता है कि पाठकों और लेखकों के बीच भी बातचीत का खुला सत्र होना चाहिए जिसमें सूत्रधार ना हो। हो सकता है कि ऐसे सत्रों में अराजकता हो जाए लेकिन लेखकों-पाठकों के बीच सीधा संवाद हो पाएगा।

दरअसल साहित्य में हमेशा से अड्डेबाजी होती रही है। पूरी दुनिया में लेखकों की अड्डेबाजी बहुत मशहूर रही है, कॉफी हाउस में लेखक मिलकर बैठकर साहित्यक मुद्दों से लेकर गॉसिप तक करते रहे हैं। अगर हम भारत की बात करें, तो खास तौर पर हिंदी में साहित्यिक अड्डेबाजी लगभग खत्म हो गई थी। लेखकों के साथ साथ समाज की प्राथमिकताएं बदलने लगीं और कॉफी हाउस जैसे साहित्यिक अड्डे बंद होने लगे। फेसबुक आदि ने आभासी अड्डे तो बनाए लेकिन वहां के अनुभव भी आभासी ही होते हैं। पहले तो छोटे शहरों में रेलवे स्टेशन की बुक स्टॉल साहित्यकारों की अड्डेबाजी की जगह हुआ करती थी। मुझे याद है कि बिहार के अपने शहर जमालपुर के रेलवे स्टेशन स्थित व्हीलर बुक स्टॉल पर शहर के तमाम साहित्यप्रेमी जुटा करते थे और घंटे दो घंटे की बातचीत के बाद सब अपने अपने घर चले जाते थे। हमारे जैसे नवोदित लोग पीछे खड़े होकर उनकी बातें सुना करते थे, जो कि दिलचस्प हुआ करती थी। वहीं पर बड़े लेखकों से लघु पत्रिकाओं में छपने का प्रोत्साहन भी मिलता था। कमोबेश हर शहर में इस तरह के साहित्यिक अड्डे हुआ करते थे। आज के लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल या साहित्योत्सवों को देखें तो वो इन्हीं साहित्यिक अड्डों के विस्तार नजर आते हैं।

नायपाल से लेकर जोनाथन फ्रेंजन तक की भागीदारी इस लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल में सुनिश्चित की गई। कई नोबेल और बुकर पुरस्कार प्राप्त लेखकों की भागीदारी जयपुर में होती रही है। लेखकों में भी सेलिब्रिटी की हैसियत या फिर मशहूर शख्सियतों की किताबों या फिर उनके लेखन को गंभीर साहित्यकारों या कवियों पर तरजीह दी जाती है। संभव है इसके पीछे लोगों को आयोजन स्थल तक लाने की मंशा रही हो क्योंकि इससे अलग तो कुछ होता दिखता नहीं है। यह प्रवृत्ति सिर्फ भारत में ही नहीं है बल्कि पूरी दुनिया में ऐसा किया जाता रहा है। लंडन में तो इन साहित्यक आयोजनों में मशहूर शख्सियतों को लेखकों की बनिस्पत ज्यादा तवज्जो देने पर कई साल पहले खासा विवाद भी हुआ था। यह आवश्यक है कि इस तरह के साहित्यक आयोजनों की निरंतरता के लिए मशहूर शख्सियतों को उससे जोड़ा जाए, क्योंकि विज्ञापनदाता उनके ही नाम पर राशि खर्च करते हैं। विज्ञापनदाताओं को यह लगता है कि जितना बड़ा नाम कार्यक्रम में शिरकत करेगा उतनी भीड़ वहां जमा होगी और उसके उत्पाद के विज्ञापन को देखेगी, लिहाजा आयोजकों पर इसका भी दबाव होता है।

जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजकों ने यह तो बता ही दिया है कि हमारे देश में साहित्य का बहुत बड़ा बाजार है और साहित्य और बाजार साथ साथ कदम से कदम मिलाकर चल सकते हैं। इन आयोजनों से एक बात यह भी निकल कर आ रही है कि बाजार का विरोध कर नए वैश्विक परिदृश्य में



पिछड़ जाने का खतरा भी है। हिंदी में लंबे समय तक बाजार और बाजारबाद का विरोध चलता रहा और इसका दुष्परिणाम भी हमने देखा है। जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के विरोधी ये तर्क दे सकते हैं कि यह अंग्रेजी का मेला है लिहाजा इसको प्रायोजक भी मिलते हैं और धन आने से आयोजन सफल होता जाता है। सवाल फिर वही कि हिंदी या अन्य भारतीय भाषाओं में हमने कोई गंभीर कोशिश की? बगैर किसी कोशिश के अपनी विचारधारा के आधार पर यह मान लेना कि हिंदी में इस तरह का भव्य आयोजन संभव नहीं है, गलत है। यह भी सही है कि विवादों ने जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल को खासा चर्चित किया। आयोजकों की मंशा विवाद में रही है या नहीं यह तो नहीं कहा जा सकता है लेकिन इतना तय है कि विवाद ने इस आयोजन को लोकप्रिय बनाया। चाहे वो सलमान रुश्दी के कार्यक्रम में आने को लेकर उठा विवाद हो या फिर आशुतोष और आशीष नंदी के बीच का विवाद हो, सबने मिलकर इस फेस्टिवल को साहित्य की चौहद्दी से बाहर निकालकर आम जनता तक पहुंचा दिया। इस बारे में अब सरकारी संस्थाओं को भी गंभीरता से सोचना चाहिए कि इस तरह से मेले छोटे शहरों में लगाए जाएं ताकि साहित्य में उत्सव का माहौल तो बना ही रहे, पाठक संस्कृति के निर्माण की दिशा में भी सकारात्मक और ठोस काम हो।

जयपुर लिट फेस्ट पर भले ही अंग्रेजी को प्रमुखता देने का ठप्पा लगा हो लेकिन न्यूज चैनल आजतक और दैनिक जागरण के साहित्य उत्सवों में तो हिंदी की दमदार उपस्थिति होती है। लखनऊ में आयोजित होनेवाले दैनिक जागरण संवादी को साहित्यिक मेलों से अलग स्वरूप दिया गया और उसको अभिव्यक्ति का उत्सव कहा जाता है लेकिन इसमें भी साहित्य के कई सत्र होते हैं और हिंदी जगत में इस आयोजन की अपनी एक अलग प्रतिष्ठा और सम्मान है। इसी तरह से साहित्य आजतक तो सिर्फ साहित्य और संगीत का उत्सव ही मनाता है। हिंदी में होनेवाले साहित्य उत्सवों को अब प्रायोजक भी मिलने लगे हैं। प्रायोजकों के मिलने से इन साहित्य उत्सवों में भव्यता भी आती है। बड़े साहित्य उत्सवों को अगर छोड़ दिया जाए तो कई साहित्य उत्सवों के प्रायोजक ऐसी कंपनियां होती हैं उनका लिटरेचर से कुछ लेना देना नहीं है लेकिन साहित्य और साहित्यकार की साख से जुड़ना चाहती हैं।



कई लोगों का मानना है कि जिस तरह से समाज के हर क्षेत्र में गिरावट आई है उसमें अपेक्षाकृत रूप से साहित्यकार और साहित्य कम प्रभावित हुआ है लिहाजा सबको साहित्य के साथ जुड़ना अच्छा लगता है।

साहित्य उत्सवों की विपुलता से उपरोक्त फायदों के अलावा भी कई फायदे हैं। इन आयोजनों में हर तरह के सृजन पर बात होती है। जैसा साहित्योत्सव वैसा लेखक, लेकिन साहित्य तो हर जगह होता ही है, कला पर चर्चा होती ही है, संगीत और गीत पर बात होती ही है। इन साहित्य उत्सवों में युवाओं की भागीदारी से एक संतोष भी होता है कि साहित्य पर अभी संकट नहीं है। जिस भी क्षेत्र में युवाओं की भागीदारी होती है उसके भविष्य को लेकर संशय की स्थिति नहीं होती है। चाहे जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो, जागरण संवादी हो, साहित्य आजतक हो, कोलकाता लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो, अर्थ फेस्टिवल हो हर जगह युवाओं की भागीदारी रेखांकित करने योग्य होती है। लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की इस बहुलता में सिर्फ एक ही गड़बड़ी होती है कि इसमें लोग एक दूसरे की तिथियों का ध्यान नहीं रखते हैं। जैसे अगर इंदौर में लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहा होता है तो उन्हीं तिथियों में देहरादून में भी लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहा होता है। जब साहित्य आजतक का आयोजन होता है उसी समय लखनऊ में साहित्य का समागम होता है। इससे पाठकों को ये नुकसान होता है कि वो बहुधा स्तरीय लेखकों को सुनने से वंचित रहते हैं। अगर प्रसून जोशी साहित्य आजतक में आते हैं और उसी समय लखनऊ में भी साहित्य उत्सव हो रहा होता है तो वो वहां नहीं जा पाते हैं। ऐसा कई बार कई लेखकों के साथ होता है। इसके लिए आवश्यक है कि इन लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल, कम से कम जो बड़े और स्थापित हैं, को लेकर कोई एक संगठन बने जिसमें सभी लोग अपनी तिथियों को लेकर, आमंत्रित किए जानेवाले लेखकों को लेकर विचार विनिमय कर सकें ताकि पाठकों का भला हो सके। इन साहित्य उत्सवों का खुले दिल से स्वागत किया जाना चाहिए क्योंकि ये किसी ना किसी स्तर पर साहित्य का भला ही कर रहे हैं।



Anant Vijay
Journalist, film critic, author and blogger



The More the Merrier



Marking the populous growth of the vibrancy and potency of the Indian literary and art forms across the past decades, the literature festivals in India are also moving towards an explosive growth like the Indian population. With more than 300 festivals and still

counting, I am more than happy

to have founded one in the most populous state of the nation. For I believe we need a lit fest in every city, district and every mofussil town of the country!

With the explicit utility of social media and the advent of instant messaging, the attention span of our coming generations has lessened and what has increased is the need for instant communication, the most common example being the alarming growth of food delivery apps or the growth of dating apps, where with a swipe to the left or right, people can choose whom they might be happy with.

As is the case with books, with the immense amount of information that is fed to our receptors within a span of 24 hours, especially information in video form which can be moulded to any political/socio/economic aspect, 'the compulsion for human imagination, the idea to interpret a concept or philosophy in a person's own imagination or to question a concept has arisen anew'!

With the rightward tilt of the world, especially with data becoming the most mined economic resource in the world overtaking oil, the need for something physical or a book is pertinent to combat a new age imperialism of the oligarchy.

It is in this despondent and dystopian future of physical existence of our 'books' as the most potent art form, that literature festivals provide a platform where thoughts can be free, where ideas can be debated and questioned. They are a little slice of 'real life art' — a haven of freedom where one would like to question, to research, to improve, to change, to evolve.

Evolution being the most primal of human needs, no evolutionary process can be complete without an evolution of our strongest resource — our brains to be nurtured with new ideas, books and literature to sustain this evolutionary process. However, what good an idea is, if not broken down to its bare minimal aspects?

It is this space that literature festivals have come to occupy — a second classroom where a question is appreciated rather than looked down upon, where a new idea can find lifeblood and evolution amongst those questions, or where the kinks and kooks of a revolutionary new principle can be debated upon and examined in minute detail.

The other important aspect of METAPHOR, the Lucknow Lit Fest, in particular is that it is a 'peoples' festival, accessible to people from all strata of the society, wherein anyone and everyone can walk in without having to procure a ticket/pass/registration. It is the only event of this magnitude in Lucknow, which is free of cost for one and all. The city folks throng the venue in large numbers during the three days when the festival is in session.

All lit fests across India expose people from the various strata of the society — the young person chatting at the corner chai shop, the middle-aged housewife or the retired army officer to some of the brilliant minds, the most talented actors and the most sought after writers, something that was inaccessible to the common man per say before the advent of the festivals.

One way of quantifying this positive impact of the festival is the ever-growing book cafes in the city, famous for Urdu *shayari* and Hindi sahitya, that hold open-mike sessions of poetry and discussions round the year, thereby providing not only food for thought but contributing to the economics of the city as well. The young and the old are courting literature with renewed interest, at times consummating the relationship into a full blown book written by them!

The lit fests also offer the audiences a chance to revisit our regional culture and languages. What was once commonplace and yet inherent to our day-to-day life and what is now going to be lost forever unless lit fests and similar events do not promote and conserve them, which is our identity, be it through our regional languages, food, folk arts, theatre or cinema.

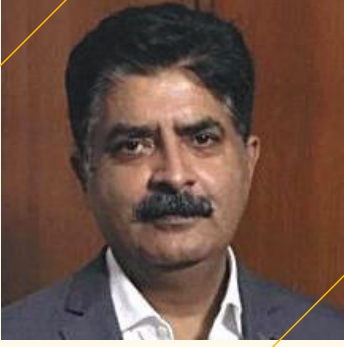
The festivals should be organised in every village and town by the civic societies and provide that heaven of freedom where liberty, equality, justice can really be present without the privilege and entitlement as goes with it in a class divided and caste stratified society.

For readers and writers alike, can never have enough of literary celebrations!

Kanak Rekha Chauhan

Founder director
METAPHOR The Lucknow LitFest

शब्द और बाज़ार के मेल का यह स्वर्ण युग



किताब, शब्द और बाज़ार के मेल का यह स्वर्ण युग है। भारत में साहित्यिक मेलों ने लेखकों, पुस्तकों, प्रकाशकों और पाठकों को समान रूप से आगे बढ़ने का एक आदर्श अवसर मुहैया कराया है। यह बेवजह नहीं है कि हिंदी के एक बेहद चर्चित आलोचक ने भारत में लगने वाले साहित्यिक मेलों की गिनती पांच सौ के पार बताया। यह और बात है कि इसमें पुस्तक मेलों की गिनती भी शामिल है। किसी दौर में साहित्यिक आयोजन केवल साहित्य अकादमी, राष्ट्रीय पुस्तक न्यास, भारतीय भाषा परिषद, हिंदी निर्देशालय और राज्य अकादमियों की जिम्मेदारी भर था। पर इस बात में किसी को ऐतराज नहीं होना चाहिए कि जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की सफलता ने इस क्षेत्र को एक नई दिशा दे दी। उसके बाद तो साहित्य में रुचि रखने वाले कई संस्थान घुसे और यह सिलसिला लगातार जारी है।

मेरी समझ से भारतीय भाषाओं, साहित्य, लेखकों, शब्दों, किताबों, पाठकों और उससे जुड़े लोगों के लिए इससे बेहतर समय अब से पहले कभी नहीं था। हालांकि सरकार और बाज़ार के स्तर पर अभी भी कोई ऐसी संस्था नहीं है जो ऐसे आयोजनों का लेखा, जोखा स्वतंत्र स्तर पर जुटाए और उनसे जुड़े आंकड़े उपलब्ध कराए। पर इसके न होने से इन मेलों के स्वरूप व आयोजकों, प्रायोजकों और भागीदारों पर कोई खास असर नहीं है। एक खास बात यह भी है कि ऐसे साहित्यिक आयोजन अब अंग्रेजी और हिंदी की परिधि लांघ कर भारतीय भाषाओं में भी आयोजित हो रहे हैं, जिनका असर राष्ट्रीय और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर हो रहा है। साल भर चलने वाले मेलों की इस फेहरिश्त की शुरुआत निश्चित रूप से राष्ट्रीय पुस्तक न्यास, भारत के सहयोग से दिल्ली के प्रगति मैदान में लगने वाले 'विश्व पुस्तक मेला' से होती है। भारी संख्या में भारतीय भाषाओं और कई विदेशी प्रकाशकों की भागीदारी ने निर्विवाद रूप से इस मेले को अंतर्राष्ट्रीय पहचान दी है।

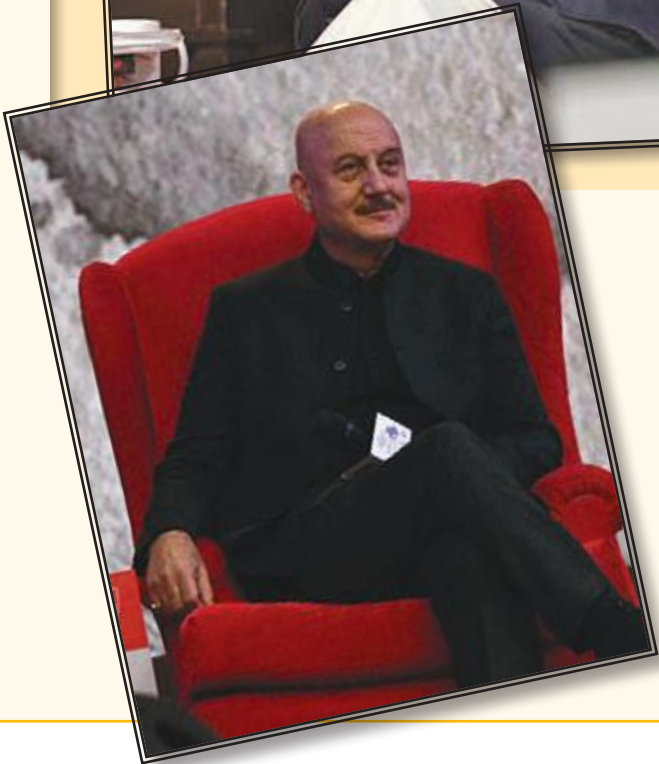
इस मेले के चलते भारत को दुनिया भर में आयोजित होने का मौका मिलता है। जैसे इस साल भारत मार्च में आयोजित होने वाले पेरिस पुस्तक मेले में अतिथि देश है। शब्द, साहित्य की महत्ता को ऐसे भी समझ सकते हैं कि जब नई दिल्ली में विश्व पुस्तक मेला हो रहा था, तब दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के हंसराज कॉलेज और महाकवि जयशंकर प्रसाद फाउंडेशन ने विज्ञान भवन में एक अंतर्राष्ट्रीय हिंदी सम्मेलन आयोजित किया, जिसमें 20 से अधिक देशों के तकरीबन 2000 साहित्यकारों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं, पत्रकारों, प्राध्यापकों, मर्मज्ञ विद्वानों और हिंदी सेवकों ने भाग लिया। जनवरी में ही जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल भी लगता है, जिसकी सफलता



और ख्याति को लेकर अब शायद ही भारतीय शब्द जगत में कोई ऐसा है, जिसे संशय हो। भारतीय भूमि पर विदेशी लेखकों का ऐसा जमावड़ा, इस मेले से बेहतर शायद दूसरी जगह कहीं होती हो।

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन के कलम, आखर, लफ़्ज, शब्द, चौपाल और किताब जैसी गतिविधियों, ब्रह्मपुत्र लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल, दैनिक जागरण के संवादी और बेस्ट सेलर सूची, दिल्ली पुस्तक मेला और राज्यों की साहित्य अकादमियों, जिनमें हरियाणा साहित्य अकादमी, मध्य प्रदेश साहित्य अकादमी, ओडिशा साहित्य अकादमी के अलावा दिल्ली की उर्दू, हिंदी, संस्कृत, मैथिली और भोजपुरी अकादमी और भारत कला भवन जैसी संस्थाएं शामिल हैं, के साहित्यिक, सांस्कृतिक आयोजनों के अलावा देश के कई छोटे-बड़े शहरों में लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल लगातार हो रहे हैं। जिनमें

देहरादून, शिमला, हरिद्वार, हल्द्वानी, बरेली, बुलंदशहर, बनारस, मधुबनी, पलामू, गोंडा, कटनी, उदयपुर, नासिक जैसे शहर भी शामिल हैं। दिल्ली, मुंबई, कोलकाता, बंगलोर और चेन्नई के आयोजन तो अंगुली पर गिने भी नहीं जा सकते। चाहे लिटरेरिया हो, टाइम्स लिट फेस्ट हो, जश्ने-रेखा हो सबका अपना चार्म है। इनमें 'साहित्य आजतक' तो भारतीय भाषाओं के महाकुंभ के रूप में स्थापित हो चुका है। यह साहित्यिक आयोजन सभी तरह



की गुटबंदी से अलग है और इसकी भव्यता को वही समझ सकता है, जिसने इस मेले में शिरकत की हो या इसकी कोई झलक देखी हो। निश्चय ही भारत में साहित्यिक मेलों का परिदृश्य काफी उज्वल है।

Sanjeev Paliwal
Senior executive editor, Aaj Tak



On Being Fully Booked



If you think writing a book is tough, try curating a literature festival. It's arguably the most painstaking, picky, exasperating, grovelling, eye-opening, disappointing, satisfying, gratifying task you can take upon yourself. Trust me on this. I've done it for the past nine years, joined along the way by my co, Namita Devidayal.

For starters, it wasn't meant to be. There I was going about my day job, when an impossibly persistent Times of India suit plonked himself on my office sofa, and said, 'There's no one else who's acceptable to everyone in the team. Do it for one year, please.' And he didn't leave till I thought, 'Wothehell, it's something new, and just for a year.' Well, you know the cliché about, the rest is... No complaints really because the experience has offered all the above adjectives.

It's painstaking because you have to stay on top of the global game, all the time. You have to know who you want at least 12 months in advance, and most likely, the biggies are booked for the next two years. But that's not all. It's an ongoing dynamic as stunning new books get published and you simply must get their authors on board. It would be easy to corral the usual suspects, but who wants easy?

We weren't just about literature. From the start, we abjured the ivory tower and took in all the eclectic passions of Mumbai — money, films, food, relationships — so as to hook the unbooked as it were. This was no way about dumbing down, it was rather an opening up. So, domain experts across disciplines had to be identified and then persuaded.

It's picky because you must write individually crafted letters, treading the fine line between admiration and flattery. Then do the reminders, another tightrope. You must do this often enough to ensure that they'll remember to come, and not so often that they get fed up and don't.

It's exasperating because of this. Though that's not the only reason. You need to depend on a back-end team over which you may have only dotted — line authority. Too often, we ended up reinventing the wheel each year.

The grovelling is necessary because half way down the year, those already signed up want to sign off. The reasons



vary from their wanting to start a new project, to being exhausted from book tours to mothers being diagnosed with a terminal illness.

Eye-opening. Aaah, you can be sure that what Carlyle said about no man being a hero to his valet de chambre is true about storied authors/historians/economists/

And fulfilment reaches a near mystical degree.

During the exertions and exasperations of the past months, you had kept telling yourself, and everyone not yet fed up of listening, that this is the last lit fest you're going to be bull-dozed into. But then comes the high of so many people coming up to thank you for the opportunity of hearing such greats, the satisfaction of not just pulling



scientists and lit fest organisers. That's why it's also disappointing. We get to see their seamiest, seediest side as objects of longtime admiration become unabashed hustlers. They want to bring families and/or five extra suitcases; they demand suites in undesignated hotels or five global stops on their way in and out. We privately instituted a Litpest of the Year award. We'd love to pander to brilliance, but alas, we are tied by purse-strings.

But Day One dawns, and the excitement switch flicks inside you as you step into the festive venue created after months of brainstorming with the event manager. It's a Cinderella moment to see the transformed site after the train-wreck it was the previous night. As the lit fest gathers steam, the frisson of interaction creates cerebral fission, releasing energy of nuclear proportions; the snowballing audiences sit riveted to the discussions and yes, to the bespoke entertainment created with equal care.

off one more success, but one better than the last. The adrenalin drowns your resolve and you take on the challenge to raise the bar one more time.

Bachi Karkaria
Director,
Times Lit Fest



Finding the Right Fit



Though literary festivals originated in the West, the largest lit fest in the world is held in India. However, while a small country like the UK has around three hundred lit fests, India still has only a few to reckon.

The last decades of the 20th century saw the rise of book fests in India. Since the founding of Jaipur Literature Festival in 2006, things changed. Other Indian cities

guilds and government agencies did not come forward to organise them. These two, by their inherent structure cannot promote individual publishers or single authors. They can only promote the trade as a whole. But lit fests highlighted individual authors and their books.

It was Jaipur that created a 'for profit' business model for lit fests in India, largely dependent on corporate sponsorships, which was soon followed by others. In the West, delegates pay to attend sessions and can buy tickets in advance for each session, whereas in India it is almost free. Paid attendance, as is practised in the West, is likely to have few takers here.

One significant feature of lit fests in India was that they were English Language centred. Other national languages, considered as regional languages had no place in it. The colonial hangover for English writers remained intact. Indian writers in English, who catered to an export market, were also welcome. This has now changed.



also started hosting lit fests. Presently there are around a hundred lit fests in the country.

Bookfests enabled the publishers and booksellers to gather at a single venue, so that the reader had access to multiple sources of books at the same place. Most of the bookfests were organised by publishers associations, individual publishers, and some, by government agencies such as the NBT. A few were organised by non-profit NGOs, such as Kochi.

Unlike book fests, lit fests were not places to sell books in the first place. They were places for readers and authors to meet and interact. Quite naturally, publishers'



Indian writers like Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan who are writing for an Indian audience and selling in millions could not be ignored. They are also a regular feature at lit fests. But, the marginalisation of the regional languages remains.

Kochi Lit Fest, which is run by a non-profit NGO, brings in writers from around 12 Indian languages every year to their event, which included Bodo, Assamese, Manipuri and Nepali last year. But, this may not be possible for a commercial organisation. Organisers have

problems accommodating large number of languages. A Tamil or Malayalam writer may not get an audience at Jaipur, unless the writer's works are already well known through English translations. The ideal will be opting for a bilingual model — bringing in writers from English as well as from the local language of the host city.

Kochi Lit Fest hosts events such as 'Sahityakarasangamam', every year, in which about 50 writers living around Kochi, get a chance to present their poems and short stories. This is in addition to celebrity Malayalam writers participating.

Another criticism of lit fests is that they are after established writers, the new ones finding it difficult to make a presence. In Kochi several first time writers, including teenagers from other states are given time to

exhibition ground. The readers in Kerala seem to be less worried about the ambience than content.

The 'for profit' model of lit fests is under pressure, as established writers demand huge sums for participation, in addition to their travel and accommodation expenses. The cost of running a show similar to Jaipur will cost dear to other festivals in the coming years. They will have to look for or create new models. Major lit fests in Kerala, of which two are commercial ones, one is organised by a non-profit, and another by a government agency, offer some answers. The last two also run a book fest parallel to the lit fest. Book fest venues in India are also ideal venues for a lit fest, but these are less explored.

Lit fests have to be brought back to their primary objectives — as a celebration of books and the love of



present their works. This is in addition to the opportunity provided to emerging writers, to release their books utilising the festival venue free of cost. In fact, the venue was used even by established writers, such as Novoneel Chakraborty, to launch their books last year.

Since most of the lit fests follow the Jaipur model, there is a notion that lit fests are to be held in a luxurious ambience, in and around a five star hotel, to succeed. This is not true. All the four major lit fests in Kerala have no connection with hotels. The lit fest in Kozhikode takes place on the beach and others are held in normal exhibition venues. Kochi Lit Fest even hosts some sessions in local colleges. The Kerala government, which started a lit fest in 2017 in five-star ambience had to shift their second edition to an

reading, a way for authors and readers to meet and engage. The existing British model may be appropriate for some large festivals, where not only readers, but publishers and literary agents meet to discuss rights transfer and other trade negotiations. The vast majority of lit fests in smaller cities will have to look for alternate models to survive. There can be an Indian model or models as well.

E.N. Nandakumar
President, Kochi International Book Festival



Every Lit Fest Has a Story



There is no precise number when it comes to literature festivals. They in-breed and multiply furiously all over the land even as you start to count. Here, there, everywhere.... Even schools and residential buildings organise their own lit fests. If one's not looking for a lit fest to attend, one's busy organising it.

With the Bangalore Literature Festival (BLF) and the Bengaluru Poetry Festival (BPF), both of which I'm involved with, the genesis can be traced back to a lack of such fests in the city's calendar. We'd speak animatedly of festivals far, far away and make plans to be in Jaipur or Mumbai. It seemed a fairy tale, to have our own festival, an event others travel for.

But now that we do have our own festivals, the singular feeling is that of frantic worry. Each edition has to be different from the last one; has to bring something new; must speak to all. It gets challenging to maintain the festive air as planning proceeds.

There is the frustration of funds, the ego of authors, lacks in the venue, the weather which is suddenly set to launch Noah's ark. But then there's the spirit of togetherness, the down-to-earth celeb author, the sun that smiles over that particular weekend like a film star booked to dance at a wedding.

In spirit and soul

The BLF and the BPF, both the city's own, have only one secret ingredient: teamwork. Without that curious combination of human beings, these could've well lapsed into battlefields, or at least unpleasant occasions. The magic, however syrupy it may sound, is the spirit of Bangalore. Volunteers who take up planning and scheduling bring it in spades to the table. The energy, the vibe, the chemistry — helmed by V Ravichandar and Srikrishna Ramamoorthy (BLF), and Lakshmi and Subodh Sankar (BPF) — make both fests more a fun learning than a dull matter of logistics.

Lit fests ask to combine a passion for reading with common sense. Visualise big, but groundwork is no less the oxygen. Preeti Gill, founder of the Majha House Literature and Culture Festival in Amritsar, says: "There are some 200 literature festivals in India now but Majha House is open through the year; it holds literary evenings, discussions and *baithaks* each month. The local community has been most enthusiastic and the fact that it is small, intimate, held in the lawns and rooms of Majha House (an ancestral home) makes it a one-of-a-kind space where authors and audience mix freely."

To be able to bring the best writers and writing from across the country to Amritsar is what Majha House has managed to do in the 15 months of its existence.

So sometimes it's the location. As Gill explains: "We named it Majha House because that is where it is located — in the Majha region, the heartland of Punjab. This region, before Partition, was the fulcrum of art and culture, of a composite culture. Much of that has been lost or forgotten and I felt we should try and bring back some of that *virsa* (in Punjabi, *virsa* means *virasat*, rich inheritance of literature, poetry, values). To me, the region represents



the indomitable spirit of Punjab, resilient and forward-looking in spite of all the cataclysmic events that it has been witness to, including the Partition and the horrific bloodletting that engulfed the region.”

Finding answers

Sometimes it's a particular audience segment. Says Shaili Chopra, founder of the Women Writers Festival, “The festival brings women writers together to explore writing from a gendered lens and find answers to gaps in their journey as a writer — from plot to publishing. The fest has been able to break away from lofty ideas and nourish with unique conversations that interest women. Both our audience (which also consists of men) and our speakers feel women pursue their writing different from the male gaze and extract different elements of a given



story. The success of this is evident from the surge of new books by women in our bookstores and sections now dedicated to showcase the badass new chick (age no bar) of our generations.

“Discussions at our festival go from love, relationships, feminism, parenting, self-help, the gender gap in workplaces, sexual identity, and more across fiction and non-fiction writing. Not to forget women writing isn't just about books and so find at our festivals a good dose of spoken word, poetry, even music. As we embrace digital, there is a shift in the concept of writing. We are now experimenting with books, micro-fiction on digital, long and short form, twitter novels, limericks, self-publishing and so much more. Hence it's the essence of the word, the language and how we play with it, that's more central to our festival.”

Sometimes it is age-related. As Vikram Sridhar, curator of the Kovai Bookalatta Festival for children in Coimbatore, says: “Tots are the toughest customers. Unlike adults, they are reading stories all the time and have high expectations.”

However they are born, and to whosoever they are addressed, all festivals have backstories in common.

Trials & tribulations

According to Manjiri Prabhu, founder of the Pune International Literary Festival (PILF): “When I look back at the journey of the last six years, I realise that the first year was a trial and error year. I had to work really hard to revive the festival in the second year, and in that sense, PILF was actually born in the second year, 2014. But the festival finally took off in its third year. It has been a journey fraught with challenges, ups and downs, but of course, loads of satisfaction.”

At the centre of it all, of course, is the festival itself. Prabhu adds: “Putting a lit fest together is serious business and requires months of hard work, commitment, passion, and teamwork. We call our festival a festival with a

heart! There is a social theme attached to create awareness in society and we hold an exhibition on a legendary author. The basic objective of the festival remains to celebrate the ‘word’ in all forms, to facilitate a direct connect between authors and the readers, and to create an inspirational platform for all creative people — at all levels of their careers — thereby promoting the culture of knowledge-based reading and learned appreciation of various arts and craft.”

And as Gill puts it: “The idea of an intimate community space, a non-intimidating platform where people could come to listen, to talk, to perform, where we could invite the best and the brightest to come tell their stories — this is why I wanted to create Majha House. I wanted it to be a living space full of people, especially the young people of Amritsar and Punjab who would find here a place where they can come freely to discuss and debate, create and write.”

Festivals have this in common: each strives to stand out from sister-fests and from its own previous selves. The run-up can be slightly headachy, with moderators who flatly refuse, panelists who don't agree with the theme, and writers who can't miss their morning swim, but then the festival happens and makes up for everything.

Every lit fest tells a story... of dreaming the same dream, of going with the flow, of surprises. The unknown — with both organisers and participating authors only human — is what gives lit fests their high.

Shinie Antony

Founding trustee and festival director,
Bangalore Literature Festival

*(This article was earlier published in Deccan Herald on
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Literary Festivals as Places for Democratic Expression

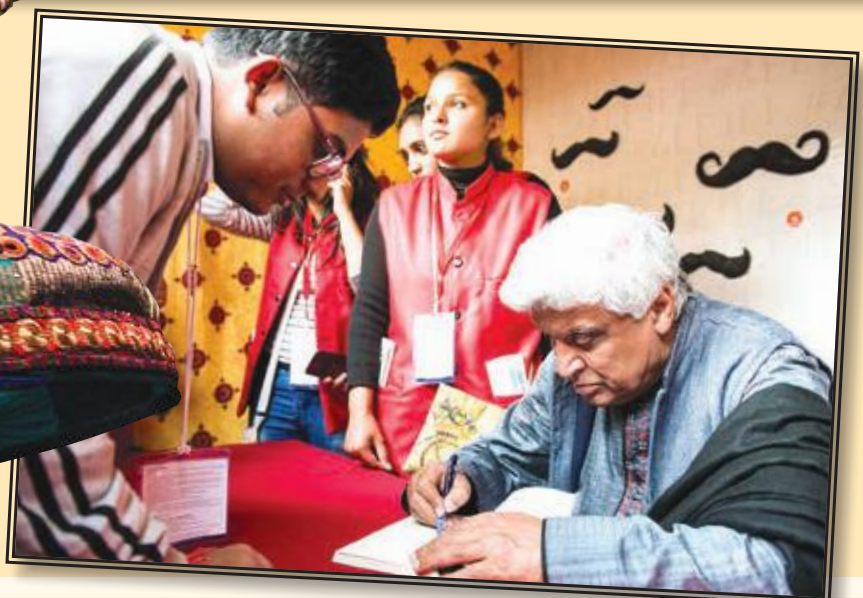


India has a rich and diverse literary culture, with its 22 national languages and its treasure of mother tongues and dialects, each retaining traces of their intertwined histories and heritage. The hundreds of literary festivals that have emerged across the nation in the last decade are effectively platforming both local and regional writing, as well as international voices. They create a place for democratic expression, for questioning as well as understanding different points of view. The stimulation of new ideas, of new ways of seeing our changing world, is as important here as understanding the continuum of history, of preserving the legacy of many pasts.

To discover where it all began, we must travel back two decades ago. The first-ever International Festival of Indian Literature was held in Neemrana in February

2002. The tagline we gave it was 'At Home in the World'. It brought together the great Indian writers of the day, from Sunil Gangopadhyay to U.R. Ananthamurthy, Khushwant Singh, Dom Moraes, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Ashokamitran, Bhalchandra Nemade, Paul Zacharia and so many others. I had the privilege of working with the then director of the ICCR, Shri Himachal Som, and being associated with the conceptualisation and programming of this event. I was witness to the transformational impact of writers from different language clusters and backgrounds speaking, engaging, arguing with each other. I sensed, I knew, that there was a great literary moment waiting to happen, if we could but break the divide and get writers from English and the Indian languages listening to each other, and I resolved to help make this happen. Ravi DeeCee of DC Books remembers our conversations and has been instrumental in setting up the enormously successful Kerala Literature Festival in Kozhikode. Pico Iyer recently reminded me of our passionate conviction that more such literary interactions were required and that we would somehow make it happen.

We had never imagined, at that moment, that this festival would in time find such extraordinary resonance amongst people, and become the template of literary discourse to be emulated. As co-founder and co-director, with William Dalrymple, of the Jaipur Literature Festival, I have observed the changes that such dynamic and



interactive literary events have triggered in the hearts and minds of book lovers. Authors have gotten the chance to interact with their readers and book lovers to hear the voices they could encounter only in print. Writers are able to spend time, informally and offstage as well as during sessions and panels, with other writers, thinkers and public intellectuals. They may write in different languages, they may have very different views on life, literature and politics, but the opportunity of listening in, speaking

Thimphu, the valley breeze of Dehradun, the sheer beauty of Abbotsford Nainital, each of these festivals has the feel of its region and heritage. They celebrate the local languages and also eagerly welcome others from India and across the world.

Literature is an infectious form of magic. Our shared stories and narratives enrich us and those around us. In 2013, in her keynote address at the Jaipur Literature



out, of agreeing to disagree, leads to the emergence of a collective mindspace and a real, rooted literary community across the borders of identity and ideology.

We have had the honour of hosting many of the world's greatest writers at the Jaipur Literature Festival. Almost all of them have commented on the remarkable quality of our, predominantly young, audiences. The festival is now the largest free literary event in the world. We have editions in the British Library in London, Belfast in Northern Ireland, in Houston, New York, Boulder, Colorado and Toronto in North America, as well as Adelaide, Australia, and Doha, Qatar — all bound together by the human imagination, creativity and desire to understand each other through our shared stories.

Reflecting on the wonderful literary events I have attended across India in recent years, I am struck by how each of them has a distinct identity and personality. Be it the rich tapestry of Rajasthan at Pushkar, the erudite vibe of Bhopal, the joy of Bhubhaneswar, the intensity of Kathmandu, the energy of Bengaluru, the warmth of Kolkata, the simplicity of Ahmedabad, the culture of Pune, the buzz of Mumbai, the mountain calm of



Festival, the great Bangla writer Mahasweta Devi declared that 'The right to dream should be the first fundamental right of people.' These many festivals, spread like stars across the subcontinent, have given us the right to dream and to share our dreams.

Namita Gokhale
Founder and co-director,
Jaipur Literature Festival and Mountain Echoes



The Changes and Challenges of Literature Festivals



India has a long tradition of celebrating literature. A land of great poets, thinkers and storytellers cannot but indulge deeply in appreciation of literary dialogue. Whether we talk of the classic debate of Mandana Mishra and Adi Shankaracharya, the mushairas hosted by the last Mughal Bahadur Shah Zafar, the celebration of theatre and poetry in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah or the literary interactions at Gurudev's (Rabindranath Tagore) Santiniketan, those were all festivals of literature. In recent years the term 'literature festival' has emerged in a modern and extensive form and for readers, writers and publishers, nothing better could have dawned on the

Indian literary horizon.

Pioneered by the Jaipur Literature Festival in 2006, India has now more than three hundred literature festivals that dot the national map. In my opinion, it's a very optimistic data and ensures promotion of literature of different regions. It has not only given rise to the number of authors emerging in different languages but has also given a boost to the publishing sector. However, most importantly, it has reinstated the desire to read in our youth and children.

Looking at the dire necessity of preserving languages other than the ones in active circulation, it cannot be done merely by making laws, it also needs to be written, read and spoken. The various literature festivals spanning from Rajnagar, Mithila to Kerala are definitely contributing towards that. Language and literature are not ignored by choice but for sheer convenience. It's obvious that the languages that help us in higher education and reaching admirable positions in careers would always supersede the languages that we grew up speaking. However, given an opportunity, inclination and time, we love to read, speak and hear the language of our past. Literature festivals across India are positively providing all three for us.



Apart from the authors' interaction with one another, the informal atmosphere that the festivals provide for an author-reader interaction is another commendable achievement. Here I cite my personal experience of meeting the likes of Narendra Kohli, Chitra Mudgal, Shashi Tharoor, Gulzar sahab, Nand Bhardwaj and many more over the years in different literature festivals, whom I only knew through their works, interviews and pictures.

is a dire need to recognise the real talent, worthy authors against the unduly and forcefully published. Also this results often in authors getting celebrity status, which may be used and abused. Readers and fans who are prepared to accept their revered authors as yet another human being, are sometimes surprised by their brazenness. The gap thus sometimes widens resulting in a disappointing



Another admirable development through the festivals is the interaction among regional, national and international authors. Sharing the same dais is bound to result in sharing ideas not only on their writings but also on many other relevant subjects. As the co-founder director of the Patna Literature Festival, I have fond memories of authors from different languages of Bihar interacting with national and international authors in an unmatched zeal and vice-versa.

When a trend sets in, it's expected to have both good and bad output. Some festivals may not deliver substantial material for its audience and then no matter how much they spend, they will be rejected by its audience. A well-researched curation is one of the prime requisites of any literature festival. Having said that, I do not deny or oversee the damages that are gradually being done to the quality of literature. Merit is not always the most important ingredient to get published in today's time and money does play its role. And in such a scenario, the onus of selecting the worthy authors to be promoted on widely visible platforms lies on the publishers and directors of the various festivals. The rampant internal politics undoubtedly affects the quality of speakers, though it is mostly the worthy authors that get the visibility. If not, festivals disappear in no time.

This is also a result of the intelligent Indian audience which filters wisely for itself. As each festival requires a large number of authors to participate as speakers, there

scenario. Since this author-reader interaction is a fairly new phenomenon, the continuity of the festivals would surely ensure a better rapport.

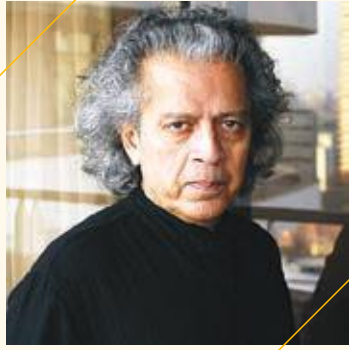
A festival that is for the society does need glamour and we must accept it. But that must not ignore the deserving and senior authors who have been read and forgotten. The youth constitutes 90 percent of the audience in most festivals but they too need to learn about the authors who contributed substantially in the past apart from the trending ones. The sea of audience does decide the success of a literature festival but the survival of any literature festival depends solely on its content.

Lastly, the most alarming situation that is arising today is the undemocratic nature and divide of the literature festivals. A debate is never feasible among writers and thinkers of the same ideology and for the same reason one cannot design a festival that is based on one strict theory. We need a bouquet of different ideas to rekindle our sensibility. We may find ourselves right or wrong, we may decide to change our views, provided we are given a potpourri of diverse possibilities. After all literature festivals are for the society at large and the celebrations must continue!

Aradhana Pradhan
Co-founder-director
Patna Literature Festival



The Importance of Literary Festivals



To my mind, one positive instance of the past decade in India is that the literary festival concept took firm hold. Whether large widely advertised literary fairs, small niche “destination” events, or urban festivals (like the one I run in Mumbai), this sort of platform

to bring authors and readers together over a couple of days to discuss various types of books and various aspects of writing and reading has had a huge response from the public — from teenagers to octogenarians, they throng such events. Many festivals have become part of a particular season and are looked forward to months in advance and many are attended by international authors as well as those from across India.

Last year, however, I was sad to see that some

have a responsibility to enhance the life of the community not just economically, but also culturally and socially. We have also had unstinted support from the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

The importance of literary festivals and similar events also lies in that they provide a space for the often robust articulation of opposing positions in a civil manner, and demonstrate that the most antithetical views can be examined and often resolved through debate and discussion in which disagreeing parties hear each other out. This is a necessary lesson for a harmonious and peaceful society, especially now that social media and television have become completely polarised.

I have attended several literary festivals in India and overseas. While the great littérateur Dr Johnson would have frowned on my making comparisons, I have most



mainstream literary festivals did not take place for want of funding. Several existing sponsors dropped out, perhaps in response to the economic downturn which the country is experiencing. It continues to distress me that the support of the arts and culture is seen by most sponsors, whether government or corporate, as an optional extra, and not an essential strand of citizen activity.

In this context I would like to sincerely thank and commend the Tata group for its decade-long steadfast commitment to the sponsorship of the Tata Literature Live! The Mumbai Litfest, of which I am the founder-director. In so doing they affirm that the industry does

enjoyed the Hay Festival in Wales. It is probably the oldest festival in the world, and certainly one of the biggest. It attracts all the best international writers and its sessions cover a wide range of subjects and are thoughtfully curated.

I urge your readers to attend lit fests in their cities — they will be surprised at the rich and amazing worlds of knowledge and imagination that they will enter at such events. And if they live in Mumbai they are warmly invited to the annual Tata Literature Live! The Mumbai Litfest in November. Entry is free, the Festival is held in both North and South Mumbai and spans a weekend — so no excuses!

Anil Dharker
Festival director,
Tata Literature Live! The Mumbai Litfest

Kalam Adds Flavour To Literature Festivals in Three Cities

Metaphor Festival 2019



Geeta Shree engages Akhilesh, Rahul Dev, Irshad Kamil and Piush Anthony in a conversation at a special session titled 'Ek Desh Ek Bhasha', at the Metaphor Festival 2019 on December 7 in Lucknow. The session was hosted by Prabha Khaitan Foundation under the aegis of **Kalam**.

Gujarat Literature Festival



Poet and lyricist Manoj Muntashir speaks about writing poems and penning film lyrics with Priyanshi Patel at the Gujarat Literature Festival in Ahmedabad on December 20.

Kanpur Literature Festival



Actor, director, activist Rasika Agashe being felicitated after a special session titled 'Humari Amrita' to celebrate the centenary of Amrita Pritam at the Kanpur Literature Festival on December 1.

Welcome To the Club



Sharbari Ahmed (right) in conversation with Deepthi Talwar

I didn't set out to write a feminist text. I think these women are feminists. I was focused on the characters and their story," said Sharbari Zohra Ahmed about her debut novel, *Dust Under Her Feet*. The author and screenwriter was in Bengaluru for **The Write Circle** session. The reading was followed by a conversation with Deepthi Talwar.

Ahmed read out excerpts from the novel that tells the story of Yasmine Khan and the nightclub scene in Kolkata of the 1940s. She discussed the various threads running through the narrative: the independence of the women at the nightclub, the many levels of segregation in Indian society towards the end of the British Raj, and the concept of identity. She elaborated on her choice to move back and forth in time throughout the story and addressed the criticism that the novel looked at motifs of race, gender and feminism from a modern perspective.

She spoke fondly about her visit to Kolkata to research for her book and how the old world charm of the city was just like her parents had described it.

Currently in the process of adapting the novel into a screenplay, Ahmed shared her dream cast (which included the

likes of Kalki Koechlin and Rekha) with the audience. Speaking about her experience working as part of the writing team behind the hit series, *Quantico*, she said, "[It] taught me to be more versatile and flexible as a writer." She also shared how being called upon to write the script for *Quantico* was a watershed moment for her.



Surekha Prahlad, Shruti Mittal, Anil Kathotia

Ahmed said that writing the book was a welcome change from the cacophony of the scripting room at times. Creative writing, she said, had honed her skills as a writer further.

Ahmed also hinted at several new projects, from a novel to a Broadway play, that she is working on next.

The Write Circle Bengaluru is presented in association with Taj West End Bengaluru and Ehsaas Women of Bengaluru



A Forgotten Hero Resurrected



Vikram Sampath (right) in conversation with Sunil Ramanathan

Historian and author Vikram Sampath was in conversation with senior police officer Sunil Ramanathan at **The Write Circle** Pune. The conversation focussed on Sampath's book, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past*, that reacquaints readers with a hero from the pages of history.

While there is seldom a political discourse in India that does not mention Vinayak Damodar Savarkar or Veer Savarkar, he has largely been forgotten by the common

man and is often misrepresented even by acolytes, feels Sampath. According to him, Savarkar's name and efforts towards redesigning the framework of modern India have been undermined.

The book treats Savarkar as a visionary who interpreted Hindutva appropriately. Hindutva, according to Savarkar, was the basis of a unified community bereft of any caste or religion. To him, religion was a personal choice. "Savarkar didn't see a dichotomy between Hindu Rashtra and secularism... Savarkar said everyone has the same DNA. So how can he be called divisive?" asked Sampath.

The book describes the inhuman conditions Savarkar had to endure at the Cellular Jail and how there, too, he had become the leader of the inmates. Always selfless, he was ready to compromise with his own comfort for better treatment of other inmates, said Sampath. The jail authorities did not allow Savarkar to keep in touch with his family and even withheld the news of a family member's death.

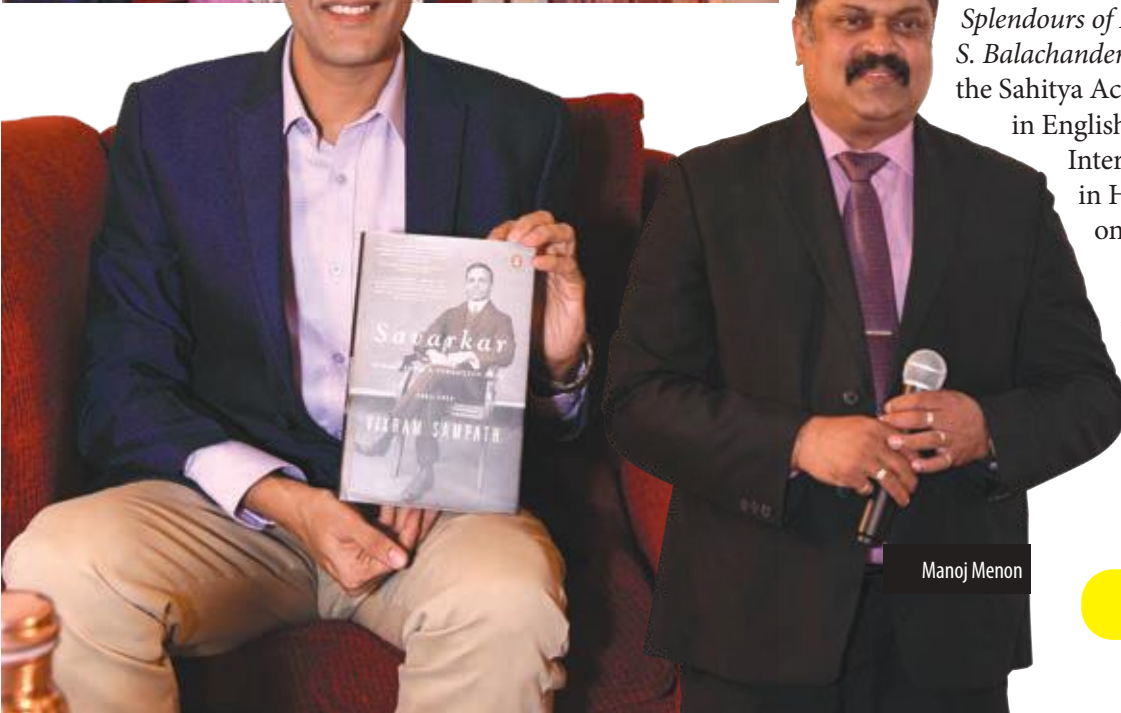
Sampath's other books are *My Name is Gauhar Jaan: The Life and Times of a Musical, Splendours of Mysore and Voice of the Veena: S. Balachander*. Sampath was awarded the Sahitya Academy's first Yuva Puraskar in English Literature and the ARSC International Award for Excellence in Historical Research for his book on Gauhar.

Ehsaas Woman of Pune, Amita Munot, delivered the welcome address at the event.

The Write Circle Pune is presented in association with The O Hotel, Lokmat and Ehsaas Women of Pune.



Amita Munot, Sujata Sabnis, Sunil Ramanathan, Vikram Sampath and Neelam Seolekar



Manoj Menon

Quantico Writer's Kolkata Love Story



Author Sharbari Zohra Ahmed

Hollywood screenwriter, playwright and novelist Sharbari Zohra Ahmed, best known for writing *Quantico*, the American TV drama-thriller series featuring Priyanka Chopra, was the star attraction at **An Author's Afternoon**, presented by Shree Cement in association with Taj Bengal.

Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the writer and her family moved to the United States when she was only three weeks old. Ahmed currently teaches creative writing in the MFA programme in Manhattanville College and is Artist in Residence at Sacred Heart University's graduate Film and Television Programme.

The writer spoke about her debut novel, *Dust Under Her Feet*, with Esha Chatterjee. The novel is set in Kolkata in the 1940s, although Ahmed has never lived in the city. Her connection to Kolkata was primarily through the memories recounted by her parents. "My mother's stories about Bengal inspired me to write about the Second World War. I knew from a very young age that I wanted to be a writer, and as a Bengali, it was always encouraged," said Ahmed.

A decade ago, when visiting Kolkata to research her book, she fell in love with the city. That love is apparent in the novel's vivid imagery of the city and its sights and sounds. Ahmed also speaks fluent Bengali and carries her nine yards with as much grace as anyone in West Bengal or Bangladesh.

The character of her protagonist Yasmine, the spirited owner of a nightclub called Bombay Duck, seems to be a counterpoint to the current environment of fear and outrage in the country. Ahmed said that this was deliberate. She spoke about the grit of Kolkata and how that has come to the fore in times of trouble. Even during the riots of the 1940s, residents of the city had proved that communal discord does not define them, according to the author. She feels that when Bengalis leave their country, they carry this



Esha Chatterjee



Vinita Surana

culture and essence of their motherland in their hearts.

Ahmed's novel is not only an ode to the spirit of the city but also a poignant love story. The ramifications of the Japanese bombing of Kolkata during the World War are also central to the story.

The Bengalis, especially Bengali women, she said with a smile, are very opinionated. And Bengalis are definitely "agitators" who never stop short of voicing their opinion. "The part which explains the sisterhood of the women, the relationship they shared and the patience with which they endured happened to be my favourite parts to write," she said.

Ahmed's *Quantico* assignment entailed writing the portions featuring Priyanka Chopra as the makers felt that a person from the subcontinent could do justice to her character. Her work has been appreciated and she is in demand for other screenwriting projects.

She spoke of her Off-Broadway playwriting as the stint she enjoyed the most. "I grew up in the United States,



Nirmal Brahmachari



Malika Varma

watching Hollywood movies, which were quintessentially of their culture. I wanted to merge that and Bengali culture with the British culture," said Ahmed. But getting her novel published was not a cakewalk. She spoke of the hindrances she faced because she was not of American origin. After that, the response to her book in India has been gratifying.

Her advice to aspiring writers: "Arrogance mutilates creativity and humility is the most important ingredient for an author's success."

Ayushi Kejriwal from Taj Bengal welcomed the guests and audience at the event. The author and moderator were felicitated by Nirmal Brahmachari.

An Author's Afternoon is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Taj Bengal, Kolkata.

Literature and Language — in Conversation with Jitendra Narayan Dash

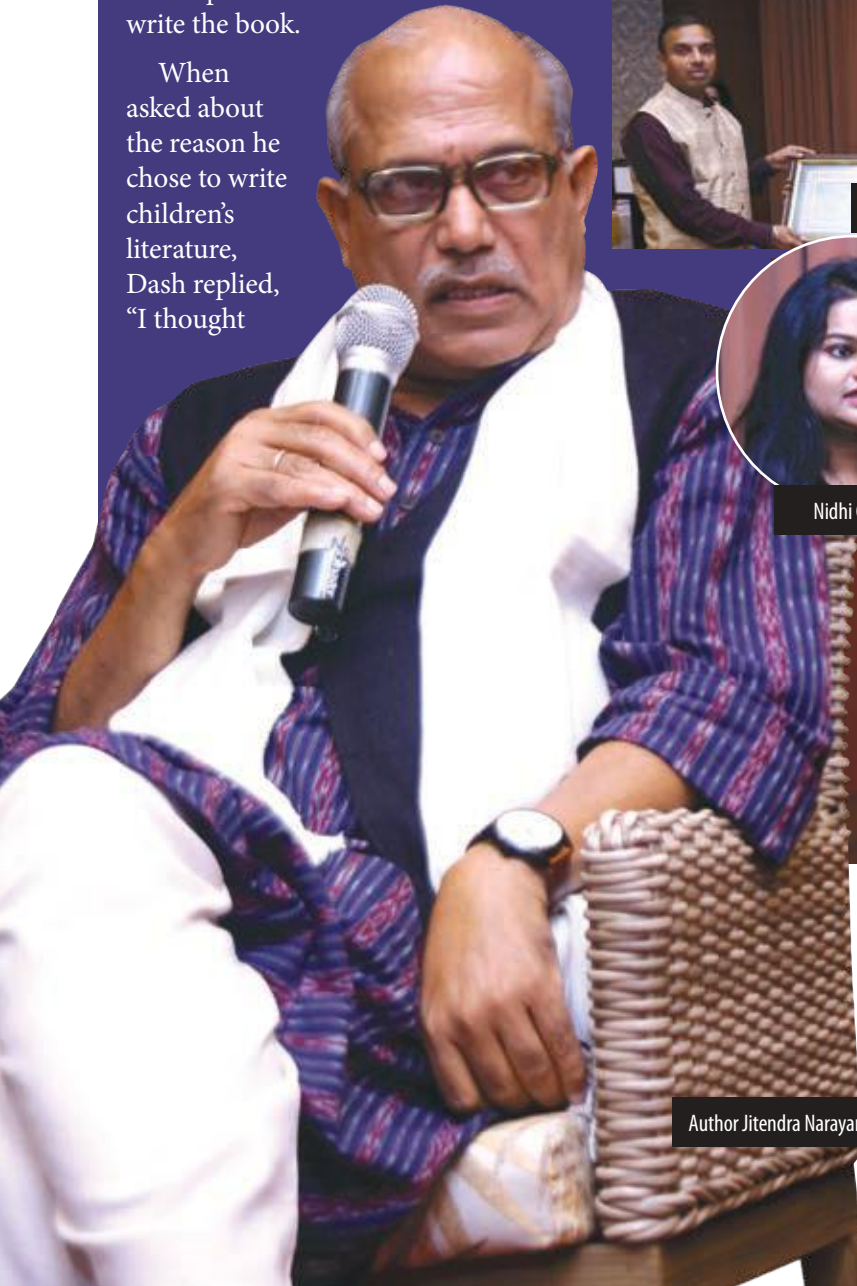
Renowned Odia literateur, Jitendra Narayan Dash (widely known as Dash Benhur), was in conversation with author Surya Mishra at Aakhar Bhubaneswar.

During the session, Dash, who has written over 140 books, including 90 for children, spoke about his life, his love for children's literature, and his recent biography, *Pagadi Purusha*, based on the life of Madhusudan Das, one of the founders of modern Odisha (known among Odias as Utkala Gourava). He explained to the audience the extensive research he had to complete in order to write the book.

When asked about the reason he chose to write children's literature, Dash replied, "I thought

of writing for children who would read these stories, poems and articles and when they grow up, they will not stray away from the Odia language." This statement is a true embodiment of the ideals that Aakhar stands for — the preservation and popularisation of regional languages through literature and art.

The author also shared his upcoming project, a book on the freedom fighter, Gopabandhu Das, popularly known as Utkalamani. The evening ended with a book signing session where eager readers got a chance to meet and interact with the writer.



Sanjeev Srivastava
felicitated Surya Mishra



Vikram Das felicitated Jitendra
Narayan Dash



Nidhi Garg



Vedula Ramalakshmi

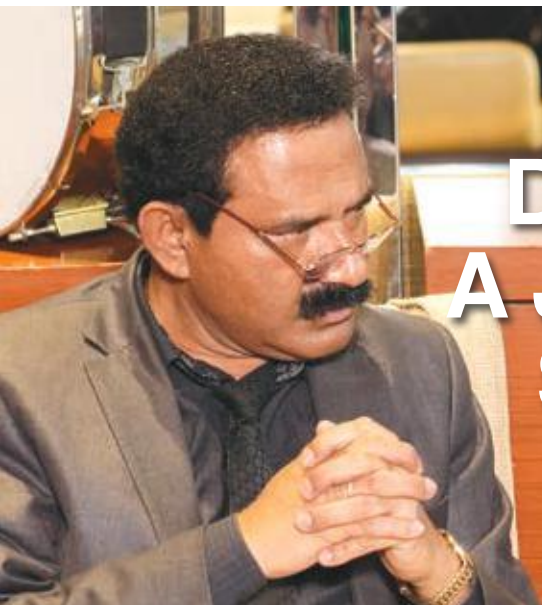


Surya Mishra

Author Jitendra Narayan Dash

Aakhar Bhubaneswar is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Mayfair Hotels & Resorts and Ehsaas Women of Bhubaneswar.

Beyond Disability: A Journey to Success



Lalit Kumar (right) in conversation with Vijay Kapoor

Acclaimed author, poet and blogger Lalit Kumar charmed and inspired the audience at Kalam Chandigarh. A polio survivor, Kumar is the founder of Kavita Kosh, Gadya Kosh and Techwalkin. He also founded WeCapable.com, a digital platform that spreads awareness on disability and motivates people with disabilities to lead a meaningful and productive life.

The National Award for the Empowerment of Persons

his academic and other talents. He narrated how his joy at being given a school award was marred when students insinuated that he had been chosen because of his handicap.

Parents need to be educated on disability so that they pass on to children the right attitude towards the disabled, said Kumar. He hoped that his book and life story would inspire and motivate people with disability to



Isha Sehgal



Manisha Jain, Lalit Kumar and Shalu Goel

with Disabilities was conferred on Kumar in 2018. The powerhouse of spirit and talent has postgraduate degrees in Bioinformatics and Information Technology. He spoke to Vijay Kapoor at the event.

Afflicted with polio at the age of four, Kumar remained undaunted in his quest to make something of his life. His book *Vitamin Zindagi* describes how he strived to succeed despite physical and socio-economic challenges. At the event, the author spoke of the support of his family, which helped him to persevere.

Kumar was constantly bullied in school for his disability and his teachers were often apathetic, ignoring

Thanks a million to PKF for giving me the opportunity to interact with such a great audience in Chandigarh
— Lalit Kumar

lead a normal life and succeed in their chosen field. The audience was left in awe of Kumar's spirit and zeal, their sympathy giving way to admiration.

An Ehsaas Woman from Chandigarh, Shalu Goel, delivered the introductory note and Isha Sehgal of Hyatt Regency Chandigarh the welcome note at the event. Manisha Jain, Ehsaas Woman of Chandigarh, gave the vote of thanks and Parul Tara handed over a memento to Kumar.

Kalam Chandigarh is presented in association with Hyatt Regency Chandigarh and Ehsaas Women of Chandigarh.

Himanshu Bajpai's Love Letter to Lucknow



The **Kalam** session of Meerut bore the feel of a typical Lucknawi *mehfil* as poignant poetry and eloquent prose was exchanged between poet and author Himanshu Bajpai and conversationalist Aslam Jamshedpuri. Bajpai, the perfect “Lucknowa”, has won acclaim for his book *Qissa Qissa Lucknowa*.

In conversation with Jamshedpuri, who is the head of department of Urdu, Chaudhry Charan Singh University, Bajpai said that his love for literature came from the environment of the Lucknow Chowk where he was brought up and the Lucknawi ethos that permeated the space.

Speaking about the Dastangoi tradition, he revealed that it has been very pivotal in reviving the culture of story-telling and listening which had over a period of time had become lost. Dastangoi, he said, gave him pleasure and satisfaction of expressing his mind and words which was lacking in his stint with journalism.

Bajpai read out excerpts from his book that showcased the lives, speaking styles and cultural beliefs of Lucknow. The journalist-turned-author enthralled his audience by bringing forth a slice of the lives of the general people of Lucknow through his depictions. He explained how his attempts to go deeper into simple lives was his way of stopping the ill-feelings that are now being spread in the country. Bajpai added that language was not a creation of religion but was more intrinsic to the place that it belonged to. As such it was in everyone's capacity to practice and propagate a language irrespective of one's religion.

Ehsaas Woman of Meerut Anshu Mehra delivered the welcome address, Garima Mithal delivered the thank you note and Seema Sharma presented the author with a memento.

Kalam Meerut is in association with Dainik Jagran, Crystal Palace and Ehsaas Women of Meerut



Dastangoi, the ancient art of Urdu storytelling, has been brought alive once more in recent times by people like Himanshu Bajpai. The author held the audience captive at **Kalam** Faridabad with his enchanting presence as he talked about his book, *Qissa Qissa Lucknowa*.

The book is a compilation of famous anecdotes, stories and fables that pertain to his native Lucknow. Bajpai chooses to write about the society and culture of Lucknow. The *qissas* (stories) centre on various topics including *paan*, *bhaands* and *kathak* dancers. This is what makes the book distinct from the other numerous writings on the city. “The focus,” Bajpai often says, “is on the *awaam* (people) and not the nawab.” Bajpai is able to show outsiders Lucknow through his eyes.

The author, in conversation with Priya Vasisht, shared his journey of becoming a dastangoi, how he had trained under Mahmood Farooqui and how he was inspired by Ankit Chadha. He also told stories about the common man of Lucknow, and every tale had a moral value inherent in its narrative. Bajpai left the audience mesmerised as he recited a few verses and *shayaris* for them. *Qissa Qissa Lucknowa* will soon be published in Urdu and English as well.

Kalam Faridabad is in association with Dainik Jagran and Ehsaas Women of Faridabad



Priya Vasisht



Seema Sharma



Alpika Garg



Anshu Mehra and Garima Mithal



Shweta Aggarwal

A Spirit No Acid Can Scar



Reshma Qureshi in conversation with Preeti Mehta

“He who has overcome his fears will truly be free,” said Aristotle. Reshma Qureshi embodies those words. An acid-attack survivor, the model, vlogger and anti-acid activist Qureshi was in conversation with Preeti Mehta, an **Ehsaas** Woman of Jodhpur, at **The Write Circle** in Jodhpur.

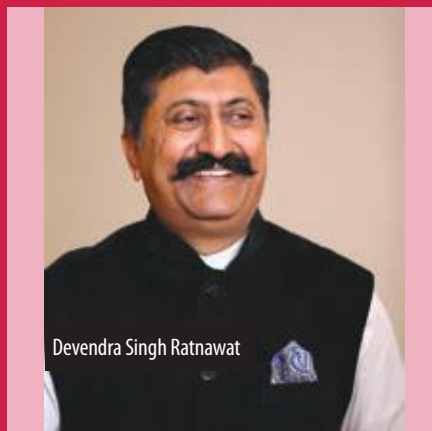
The youngest of five siblings, Qureshi grew up in a loving family in Allahabad. While she was still a minor, her sister’s estranged husband threw acid on a burqa-clad Qureshi, mistaking her to be his wife. Neither the actor Qureshi’s cries moved bystanders into helping her. Even hospitals would

not admit her without a police report. She begged and pleaded for first aid that was eventually administered after five hours. Her brother-in-law was arrested but his accomplice let off since he was a juvenile.

The trauma made Qureshi suicidal. She could not bear to look into the mirror. Ria Sharma of the NGO, Make Love Not Scars, became her beacon of hope, acquainting her with stories of acid-attack victims who had fared worse. This was the turning point. With the support of her family, Reshma became determined to face the world with confidence. Ria arranged crowd-funding for her long and challenging surgeries, which caused pain but revived her spirit.

Reshma narrated how she became the brand ambassador of Make Love Not Scars and made beauty

videos as part of an awareness campaign. Another high point was when she walked the ramp in the New York Fashion Week. Her campaign led to a Supreme Court ruling banning over-the-counter sale of acid. Her book, written by Tania Singh, is the saga of a woman scarred



Devendra Singh Ratnawat



Preeti Mehta, Sushma Sethia, Reshma Qureshi and Shelja Singh

physically but not in spirit.

An **Ehsaas** Woman of Jodhpur, Shelja Singh, delivered the welcome note at the event. Reshma was felicitated by the general manager of Taj Hari Mahal, Devendra Singh Ratnawat. Shelja Singh gave a vote of thanks.

The Write Circle Jodhpur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Taj Hari Mahal and Ehsaas Women of Jodhpur



Celebrating a New Idea of Femininity

Author Neelima Chauhan had the audience in the **Kalam** session at Nagpur enthralled with her simple words and relatable yet interesting take on life and human relationships.

An associate professor of literature at Zakir Husain Delhi College (E), University of Delhi, Chauhan's books *Patansheel Patniyon Ke Notes* and *Officially Patansheel* have been hugely appreciated by readers for its lucid views and uncomplicated prose.

Praveen Tuli, **Ehsaas** Woman of Nagpur, gave the welcome speech while Neeta Singh, also an **Ehsaas** Woman, was the conversationalist for the session.

The title of



shifts roles she becomes a vamp in everyone's eye.

Her book drew a lot of negative reaction. She was trolled and often berated for her open and candid words. Chauhan shared that this only made her feel more strongly about her work.

Chauhan read out anecdotes



Neeta Singh



Priyanka Kothari, Neelima Chauhan, Parveen Tuli



The audience at Kalam Nagpur

her book might be a tad misleading as the literal translation of the word 'Patansheel' means degenerating or fallible. Neelima, however, provided a totally different interpretation of the word. According to the author, 'Patansheel' denotes the celebration of femininity where one attempts to defy the stereotype. She said that her work reveals the bold attempt of today's women to thwart gender roles enforced on them and to seek a new individual identity for herself.

The author talked about how the moment the docile daughter-in-law or the doting mother alters her priorities or

“
My heartfelt thanks to team Kalam Nagpur. Today's programme was absolutely wonderful. I am grateful to Prabha Khaitan Foundation and the **Ehsaas** Women's team. I convey my gratitude also to the enthusiastic audience at today's discussion
— Neelima Chauhan
”

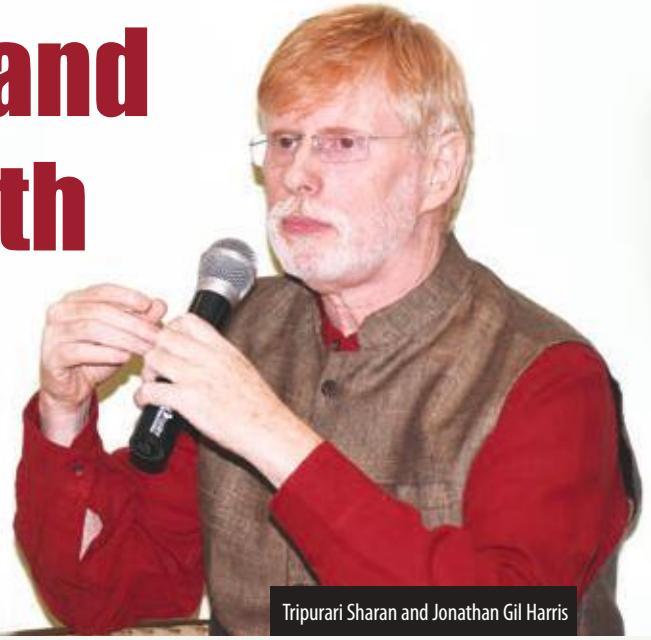
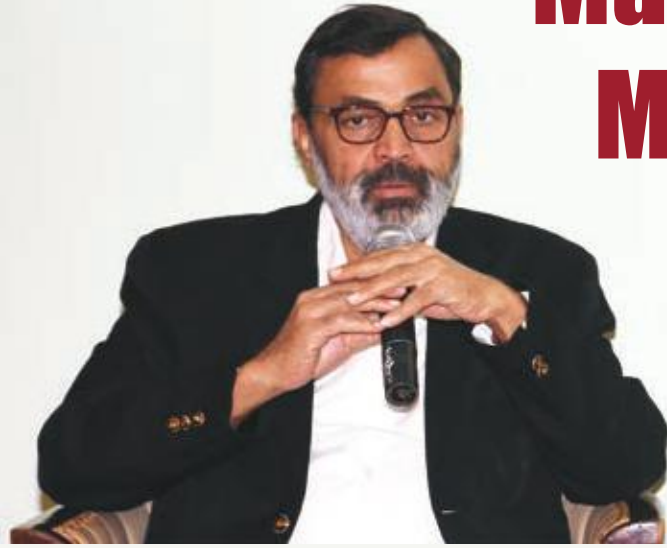
from her book that showed how little nuances in the workplace too could portray different interpretations.

One of the most prolific and identifiable voices of the modern woman, Chauhan's style is simple and her thoughts forthright and lucid.

The author was felicitated by Vikas Pal. The welcome note as well as the vote of thanks was given by Praveen Tuli.

Kalam Nagpur is presented in association with Lokmat, Radisson Blu Hotel Nagpur and Ehsaas Women of Nagpur

Masala and Macbeth



Tripurari Sharan and Jonathan Gil Harris

What made Wiliam Shakespeare's plays popular in his own time was the entertainment value they provided, their 'masala' factor. Author Jonathan Gil Harris spoke about this masala factor and how it made the bard so popular in Indian culture in a conversation with Tripurari Sharan at **The Write Circle Patna**.

Harris spoke about his book *Masala Shakespeare: How a Firangi Writer Became Indian*, which offers an idiosyncratic history, both personal and cultural, of Shakespeare's pervasive presence in India and Indian languages, from the Nautanki theatre of the North to the Kathakali dance form of Kerala, and from Indian literature in English to the Bollywood film industry. Jonathan pointed out how many Indian movies are based on Shakespeare's plays like *Omkara (Othello)*, *Maqbool (Macbeth)*, *Haider (Hamlet)*, *10ml Love (A Midsummer Night's Dream)*, *Ek Duje Ke Liye, Ishq* and *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* (all different takes on *Romeo and Juliet*).

Harris also said that he found similarities between the structure of the Globe Theatre and that of Indian movie halls. Like the Globe, the less expensive seats are closer to the stage/screen and the expensive seats are higher up or in the balcony where the rich used to sit.

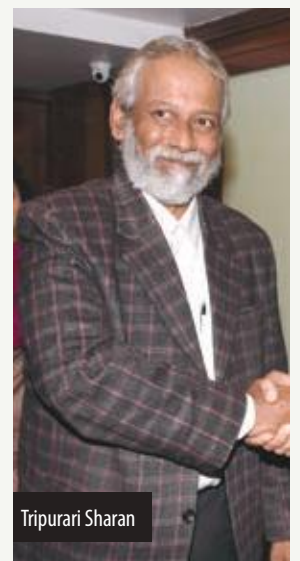
Harris described the first Hindi movie he saw, *Lagaan*, and how he fell in love with the lines of the song *Mitwa* — "O

mitwa, sun mitwa, tujhko kya darr hai re, dharti apni hai, apna ambar hai re." He was impressed by the profundity of the lyrics.

Harris first learnt a sanskritised form of Hindi at George Washington University. When he started living in India, he found that the language was more universal with a number of English words thrown into everyday conversation. He shared with the audience how he fell in love with the pluralism, the diversity in food, culture and religion. He stressed on the fact that we should not lose touch with this pluralism, this 'masala' in our lives.



N. Vijay Laxmi



Tripurari Sharan

The Write Circle Patna is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Hotel Chanakya and Navras School of Performing Arts.

Aakhar Salutes Rajasthani Language Crusader Kishan Lal Verma



Kishan Lal Verma and Vijay Joshi

Aakhar Jaipur provided an opportunity for literature lovers to interact with the acclaimed author Kishan Lal Verma who was in conversation with lecturer and author Vijay Joshi. The city's literati were able to hear about the life and views of the author and it was also an occasion for the gathering to ponder on the future of the Rajasthani language.

Speaking about his childhood, Verma, who was born in the Kamkheda village of Rajasthan's Jhalawad district, stated how his father wanted his children to be educated but lacked the means for the same. Elaborating further on his personal life, Verma added that his parents were labourers and thus his childhood was spent in much hardships. Education dawned in his life when a village elder compelled his father to admit him to the village school — a task that entailed a 10-kilometer walk for him. Quite naturally, a career in literature was not in his vision at all but he persevered with odd jobs that included washing dishes and tailoring. It was in such circumstances that he secured an admission in nursing. With pride he added that the struggles of his early life made his foundations that much stronger for the future.

He informed his audience that the evening of December 13, 2015, would always remain special in his life because that was the moment when an image of Lord Krishna and Arjuna in a calendar drew his attention and he felt the first stirrings of his literary career. He shared his feelings with his friends who in turn encouraged him to pen down his thoughts. That was how his foray in literature began.



Pramod Sharma

In the course of the programme Verma, who has authored numerous books in the Rajasthani language, read out selected portions of writings and introduced the gathering to excerpts from his *Jai Jai Rajasthani Jai Jai Rajasthan* publication.

Aakhar Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with ITC Rajputana and Grassroot Media Foundation.

A Dehati Ladka Charms Audiences In Jaipur and Ajmer

Many books have been written on a country lad's Odyssey into the urban jungle, but poet and novelist Shashank Bhartiya stands out for his comic satirical style that makes the familiar plot refreshing.

Bhartiya spoke about his literary journey at **Kalam** in Jaipur, where he was in conversation with journalist and writer Dr Vinod Bhardwaj. Apra Kuchhal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Jaipur, delivered the welcome address following which the Bhartiya and Bhardwaj dived into the life of a public service commission officer and author.

Shashank, who hails from Gonda in Uttar Pradesh, pursued his education in Lucknow. However, like most people from the rural background, his family too thought that unless he clears the UPSC exams, his education and achievements are incomplete. An inspector with the Income Tax department in Pune, the author shared how his job security grants him the freedom to pursue his passion for writing and pays his bills.

Shashank explained that it was his mother who had helped him etch the first letters and overseen his initial education prior to formal school, hence he chose to dedicate his book to all mothers. His sisters, he said, were his greatest fans as well as critics.

Talking about his inspiration, he said, "Whatever happens in a novel is usually taken from what happens to the author or to people around him," adding that it was the same for him.

The audience was delighted with his readings of his poetry and his prose and charmed by his refreshing frankness.

The session was brought to a close with a thank you note from Kuchhal. Lata Kaku, a member of Jaipur Book Lovers Association, felicitated the author and Prashant Gupta presented a memento to the conversationalist.

Kalam Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Bhaskar and WeCare



Author Shashank Bhartiya

Conversationalist Vinod Bhardwaj



Prashant Gupta

Author Shashank Bhartiya was also the guest at **Kalam** Ajmer where he was in conversation with author Vimlesh Sharma.

An Inspector in the Income Tax Department of the Pune Zone, Shashank Bhartiya has been a regular contributor of socially relevant articles as well as stories and poetries to many national dailies. He has gained recognition for his comic satirical style which has blossomed through his novel *Dehati Ladke* and is easily accepted among the upcoming stalwarts of the Hindi



Vimlesh Sharma



C.P. Dewal

literary writers of the day.

In course the of his speech, Bhartiya clarified that his foray into literature began with his desire to write stories. One short story stretched into a novel and before long he was deeply immersed in what brings him such immense joy today. Even today he feels that he cannot visualise himself as an author as some random thoughts come to him and he pens them down. He added that his belief that he is able to present his thoughts and depictions to his readers in their own simplistic ways is what brings him the most satisfaction.

Elaborating on his book, he said that as he penned down his thoughts for the book he had realised that this was not just a story of his own personal journey but also that of the many others like him who had set out on similar journeys but had somehow failed in achieving their goals. Thus his much lauded *Dehati Ladke* is everyone's story. He reiterated that it was the author's duty to ensure that his thoughts are conveyed to his readers with clarity and understanding.

"The reader must always be the pivotal point of an author's universe," said the author.

Bhartiya's inner beliefs shone through his speech. "Literature is never meant to exist as a unit behind politics, rather it is meant to play the role of a torch illuminating the path that politics will follow," said the author.

On the occasion he dedicated a poem that he had written to his father and his recitation of the same, namely "*Hum baath nehi karte...*", moved many in the audience.

Kalam Ajmer is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with WeCare and Ehsaas Women of Ajmer.

A Poet's Plan — Manoj Muntashir Talks Love, Struggle and Success at Kalam Raipur and Bilaspur

“For those who have a Plan B, Plan A never succeeds,” said acclaimed lyricist Manoj Muntashir at the 43rd edition of **Kalam Raipur**.

The lyricist and screenwriter, who was in conversation with Gaurav Girija Shukla, founder of the Abhikalp Foundation, stated that while writing dialogues for *Baahubali* certainly brought him to new heights of success, songwriting was always his first choice.

He recounted a beautiful poem that he felt resonated with his life experiences, “*Aankhon ki chamak, jeene ki lahak, saanson ki ravaani wapas de. Main tere khat lauta doonga, tu meri jawaani wapas de.*” (Let the sparkle of the eyes, the glitter of living, give back the flow of breath. I will return your letter, you give back my youth.)



Gaurav Girija Shukla



Harkaran Singh



Pritha Shukla



Bharat Bhaskar

Muntashir spoke passionately about his poetry collection, *Meri Fitrat Hai Mastana*, which became a bestseller within a month and a half of its release, even though the poems compiled in the book had never been used in any film.

The Raipur literati all received an autographed copy of the book. Manoj thanked **Kalam** and said that it was one of the best organised events he had been a part of.

Kalam Raipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Hyatt Raipur and Abhikalp Foundation.



Arjun Lal Agrwal and Sagya Tandan



Garima Tiwari

Nowadays many old songs are being remixed and recreated. If not done properly, a song may lose its sweetness and originality in recreation, said Bollywood lyricist Manoj Muntashir at the fourth episode of **Kalam Bilaspur**.

In conversation with Sangya Tandon, Muntashir spoke candidly about the struggles and successes of his life. He was frank and candid about everything, from his personal journey to the political scenario in the country.

Muntashir told the audience that you have to love your work, no matter how hard the struggle. He described how he came to Mumbai with only Rs 700 borrowed from his father and even had to sleep on the sidewalk before he got any success.



Sayyid Jafar Ali

Muntashir humorously compared Mumbai to a situation of unrequited love. If you try to talk to or persuade the girl, she doesn't return your feelings. But if you stay strong, slowly her heart melts and she starts loving you. That's the way Mumbai starts loving you, explained Muntashir.

Speaking about the need for hard work to which he credited his success, Muntashir said that the determination of the youth from middle-class families in small cities was very strong and how they are better prepared for life's struggles.

Kalam Bilaspur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Nayi Duniya, Abhikalp Foundation and Ehsaas Women of Bilaspur



Celebrating a New Beginning



A celebratory lunch at ITC Welcome Hotel Amritsar, on a chilly December afternoon, marked the warm beginnings of Prabha Khaitan Foundation's activities in the city



Apra Kuchhal, Sundeep Bhutoria, Praneet Bubber, Meeta Mehra and Sheetal Khanna



Gayatri Gill, Jeena Bahal and Namrata Khaira



Shweta Sandhu, Dr Jaspal Sandhu and Gunbir Singh



Vinita Gyaani



Preeti Gill



Kulminder Gill, Arvinder Chamak,
Dr Sarabjit Behl and Lochan Kundra



Reena Kundra, Shveta Aggarwal, Arushi Verma,
Aarti Khanna and Sumeet Taneja



Jasmina Sachdeva and
Gupratap Khaira



Kanav Aggarwal, Advitya Khanna, Rohit Khanna,
Rishabh Aggarwal and Manjot Bubber



Shashi Nayyar and Tanny Grover



Reena Kundra, Shveta
Aggarwal and Jasmint Nayyar



Shivdullar Singh Dhillon

New Year, Horizons



Praneet Bubber and Anindita Chatterjee sign the MoU



Meeting in Progress

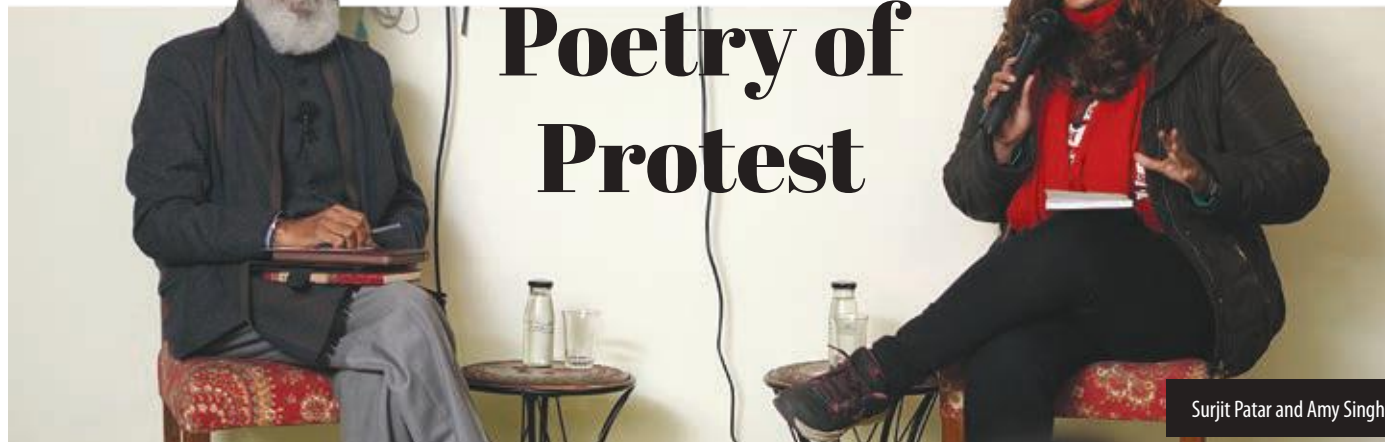
Prabha Khaitan Foundation has been persistently working to enhance and promote the rich and vast cultural heritage of India through its various activities and platforms over a long period of time. In keeping with this endeavour, the foundation has augmented a new alliance.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation and Phulkari Women of Amritsar signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), a collaboration towards creating avenues for mutual enhancements. On the day of signing, members from both organisations were present to witness this milestone. Anindita Chatterjee, executive trustee of Prabha Khaitan Foundation and Praneet Bubber, founding president of Phulkari Women of Amritsar, signed the document, promising to collaborate and cooperate wholeheartedly with each other to achieve mutual goals.

The MoU ensures that both parties work in synergy to promote performing arts, literary and cultural events in Amritsar engaging local artists and litterateurs. The Foundation hopes to present the extensive cultural and literary heritage of Amritsar to the world on a larger scale more productively. This new partnership will go a long way towards helping both organisations fulfil their common goals. The collaboration lays the foundation of connecting more people to the vibrant world of Punjabi tradition and lifestyle.



The Poetry of Protest



Surjit Patar and Amy Singh

Gupratap
Khaira

Jasmit Nayyar



Preeti Gill

Arvinder
Chamak

I feel that a poet is like a tree, which takes in carbon dioxide but gives back oxygen. A poet takes in all the dark realities of life and pens down verses of hope, love and dreams.” This is what Punjabi poet, Dr Surjit Patar had to say about why he uses trees as symbols and metaphors in his poetry.

The first ever session of **Aakhar** Amritsar kicked off with Patar in conversation with young and upcoming performance poet, Amy Singh. During the conversation, Patar described his journey as one of Punjab’s foremost poets and why he favoured writing ghazals. He treated the audience to a recitation of some of his most loved poems and even sang a few in his mellifluous voice.

Speaking about early influences upon his poetry he said, “I used to write as a child as well, but it was many years later that I began my journey as a poet and poets such as Shiv Kumar Batalvi and Bawa Balwant were my inspiration.”

Patar’s poetry of resistance is currently a part of many student protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The poet expressed a sense of hope for the future while lamenting the divisive political atmosphere of the country.

Amy also uses her own poems as a form of protest. She said, “Words, verses become a powerful tool of peaceful protest. In today’s time, when we all need to rise and speak out against the divisive forces, such conversations and inspirational verses hold great significance.”

The evening saw a full house with about 60 lovers of Punjabi literature, all of whom enjoyed the readings and the conversation very much.

Aakhar Amritsar is presented in association with Majha House

Lessons From Life



Deepak Ramola and Akanksha Kapur Arora

Everyone has a life lesson and that is their legacy,” says Deepak Ramola, young polymath and author of the poetry collection, *Itna Toh Main Samajh Gaya Hoon*. Ramola was in conversation with Akanksha Kapur Arora at **Kalam** Amritsar.

Ramola spoke about his journey as a writer, from his school days to his career, songwriting for Bollywood, up to the writing of his first collection of poetry. He read out a few verses from his collection of over 90 poems. His unique voice and manner had the audience enthralled from start to finish.

He said that the inspiration behind his writing and also the reason he started Project FUEL (FUEL stands for Forward the Understanding of Every Life Lesson) are the lessons he has gained from his own life, which made him think about how everyone’s life could have a lesson that was worth sharing with the rest of the world. This is what he aims to do via Project FUEL. He collects the stories of various people from all walks of life and presents them in interactive formats that enable people to engage with and learn from the experiences of others. “I aim to collect at least a million stories and life lessons from across the country and globe and probably compile a book,” he said.

Kalam Amritsar is presented in association with Dainik Jagran, Taj Swarna and Ehsaas Women of Amritsar.



Sumeet Taneja and Deepak Ramola



Apra Kuchhal



Sheetal Khanna, Praneet Bubber, Jasmit Nayyar and Preeti Gill

Love and Other Affairs



Author Vijayshree Tanveer

Stories don't come into the mind on their own, they're roaming around in society. You only have to pay attention," said author Vijayshree Tanveer while talking about her journey as a writer at the Kalam session in Agra.

Tanveer was in conversation with Anupama Bohra about her widely successful collection of short stories, *Anupama Ganguly Ka Chautha Pyar*, where the stories centre around relationships between men and women and how they can become fraught with tension and hardships. She stressed that she considers extramarital affairs (a topic many of the stories touch upon) as not a bold, but an important and serious subject. She wanted to portray the desperation, depression and dissolution that plagues the lives of these broken people.

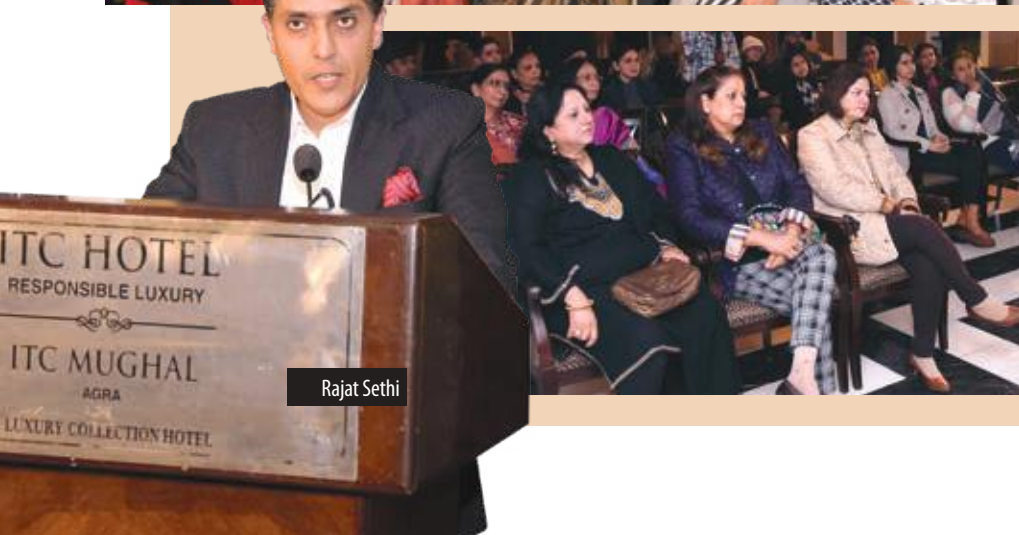
On being asked why she chose to move away from writing poetry, she answered that she had always felt that she had more to say than could be captured in a poem and that poetry has a kind of absolute privateness about it.

The conversation was followed by a short question and answer session with the audience where Tanveer talked about the sympathetic manner in which she has tried to portray her female characters and gave the audience a glimpse into the struggles she faced in her own life because of her unconventional marriage. She said, "Marriages take place after much thought, but love just happens."

Kalam Agra is presented in association with Dainik Jagran, ITC Mughal and Ehsaas Women of Agra



Shweta Bansal, Neelam Mehrotra, Vijayshree Tanveer, conversationalist Anupama Bohra and Vinti Kathuria



Rajat Sethi

An Evening of Dance

On December 27 Hyatt Regency Kolkata came alive with the tunes and movements of Rajasthan as guests at the Sur and Saaz session were treated to an evening of dance performances by Padma Shri recipient Gulabo Sapera of the Kalbeliya tribe and her troupe.

The performances not only demonstrated the typical Kalbeliya dance of the Naag community, they also did a bit of Chakri, a popular folk dance of the Kanjar tribe of Rajasthan.

The audience was enthralled by a male dancer performing the Bhavai with the water-filled *matka* balanced over just four plastic glasses.

Gulabo's story is a touching and powerful one. Buried alive after her birth, this jewel may have never emerged, had her aunt not rescued her from this fate. She invented her own style of dance based on the

“

I am overwhelmed with the hospitality of the people of the Foundation. They took care of our smallest of need and comfort. Extremely happy that our performance was enjoyed by the audience and hope to work with the Foundation more
— Gulabo Sapera

”



Gulabo Sapera



Malika Varma: What I just witnessed was absolutely mesmerising. I had heard about Gulabo and her troupe from many. To be able to see her perform in Kolkata was absolutely stunning. It felt good to know that she has been able to spread her craft as she desires. To be able to bring such cultural heritage to Kolkata felt really good and I hope it will make a difference.

Esha Dutta: What do I say about a performance of this stature. She is absolutely fascinating and her life story is equally fascinating. Her performance was truly fabulous. At her age to be able to perform at this level awesome. The entire credit goes to her stamina and her energy which gets translated on to the stage. This was one of the most enjoyable **Ehsaas** programmes that I have been a part of.

Gouri Basu: The performance was very good. The Bhavai performed today was one of the best performances I have witnessed. They did a lot of new movements today. Innovation is very important for the survival of any dance form. So I am glad that they have brought in newness in their performance today.

Nilisha Agarwal: This was truly a learning experience for all of us. This was the first time I got to watch a Kalbeliya performance. My favourite part of the performance was the male dancer dancing with the water-filled *matka* balanced over just four plastic glasses. It was as though we have brought Rajasthan to Kolkata.



movements of the snakes that she saw in her village.

Not only has she created the exceptional dance form, the costume and the jewellery used during her performances is designed by her as well. Gulabo wants to share her craft globally and so she has started the Gulabo Sapera Dance Academy where, along with teaching the Kalbeliya sapera dance, she wishes to train the girls of her community to become economically independent by teaching them jewellery-making, designing local costumes or learning folk music and instruments. It is her innermost desire that the girls of her community rise above all social hurdles to conquer the world.

The guests were more than eager to match steps with the veteran dancer when she invited them to join her at the end of her performance.

The event is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Hyatt Regency Kolkata, Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture and Ehsaas Women of Kolkata



Kumar Shobhan

Spreading Christmas Cheer

What better way to celebrate Christmas than to spread warmth on a winter's night? That is exactly what Prabha Khaitan Foundation did through its Blanket Distribution Drive. The foundation collected blankets and clothes from various individuals and distributed them to the underprivileged across the country. On December 25, actress Rituparna Sengupta distributed the same, along with food boxes, on behalf of the Foundation's initiatives in the city.

Sundeep Bhutoria, trustee of Prabha Khaitan Foundation, said, "We must always share the joy of festivities with others. Apart from our initiatives in performing arts and literature, we also try to promote humanitarian causes such as these."



Spreading Cheer and Warmth this Winter

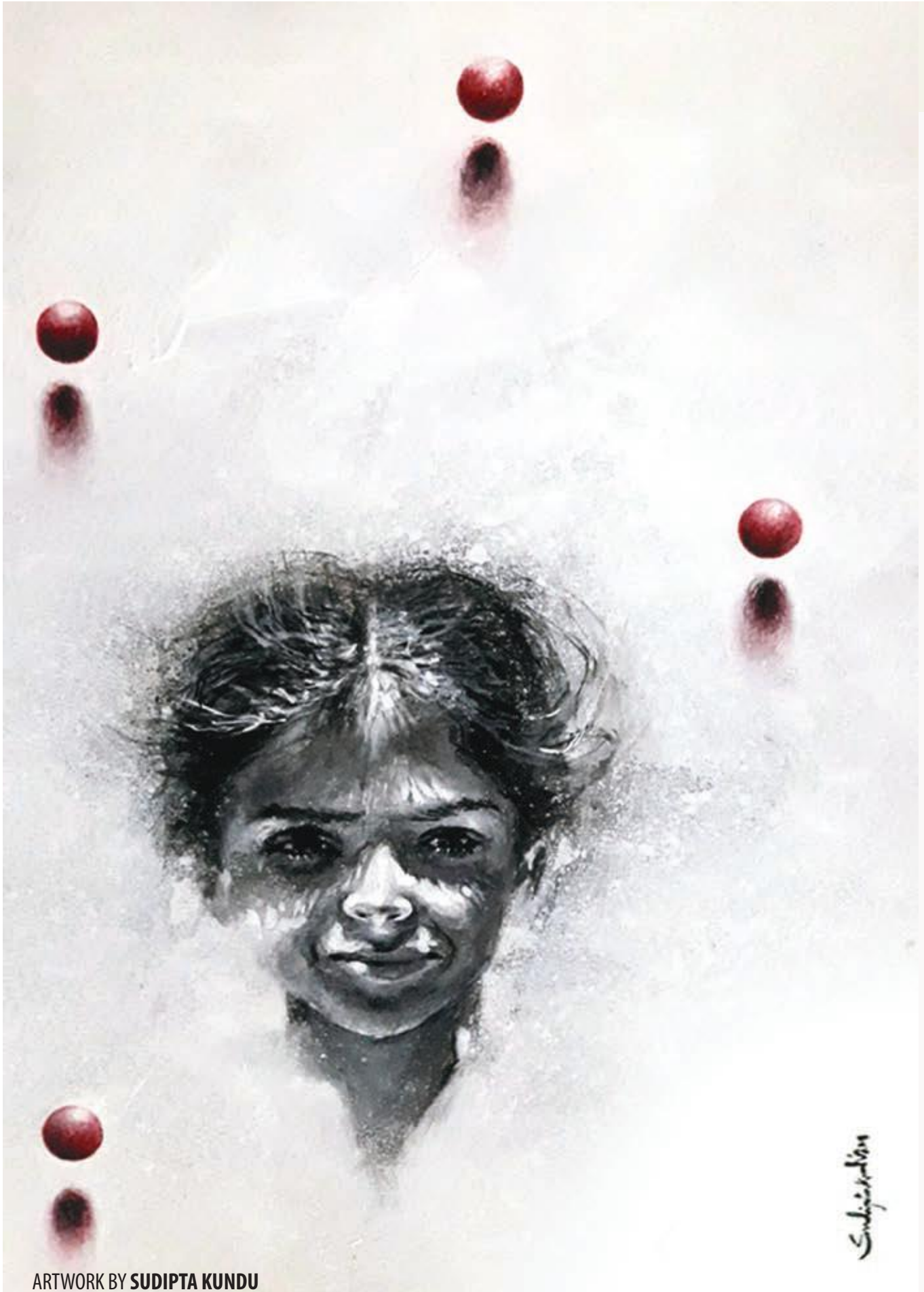


On Christmas Eve, Prabha Khaitan Foundation turned Santa Claus and spread warmth in the winter season to people of the streets as they handed over blankets to the Progressive Book Stall SFI.



Dancer and choreographer Avirup Sengupta, in association with Prayas, presented "Let's Bring In A Smile", a socio-cultural programme in aid of special children and underprivileged children on Christmas Eve at Uttam Mancha. The programme, which felicitated the children and brought a smile to their beautiful faces, was supported by Education For All, a Prabha Khaitan Foundation initiative.

Prayas endeavours to help underprivileged and special children be independent, self-sufficient and become a part of the main stream of society.



Sudipta Kundu

ARTWORK BY SUDIPTA KUNDU

A Celebration of the Girl Child

January 24 is the day when the country celebrates its girl children. The central government's Ministry of Women and Child Development started observing the day as the National Girl Child Day in 2008 to spread awareness about the inequalities faced by girls in India, their rights and the importance of their education, health and nutrition.

The need for such a day is evident from the numbers thrown up by the last Census. It found that only 65.46 per cent of women were literate against 82.14 per cent of the men. The 2011 Census had brought to light various other types of gender discrimination that persist in the country. The lopsided sex ratio was a clear signal that more needed to be done for the girl child. According to the 2011 Census, India has 943 women for every 1000 men. The number of girls below six years of age for every 1000 boys of the same age had declined from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 to 918 in 2011.

The findings of the Censuses prompted the Union government to take a number of steps to ensure a healthy and happy childhood for girls. Banning of gender identification through prenatal tests, Save the Girl Child campaign, crackdown on child marriages and introduction of self-help groups to provide a better livelihood are some of the schemes that have contributed to improvement in the condition of the girl child.

Among the recent schemes, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is notable. The scheme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 at Panipat in Haryana, which in the 2011 Census had the poorest sex ratio of 877 women for every 1000 men. "Let us celebrate the birth of the girl child. We should be equally proud of our daughters. I urge you to sow five plants when your daughter is born to celebrate the occasion," the Prime Minister had said while launching the scheme. He had lauded the

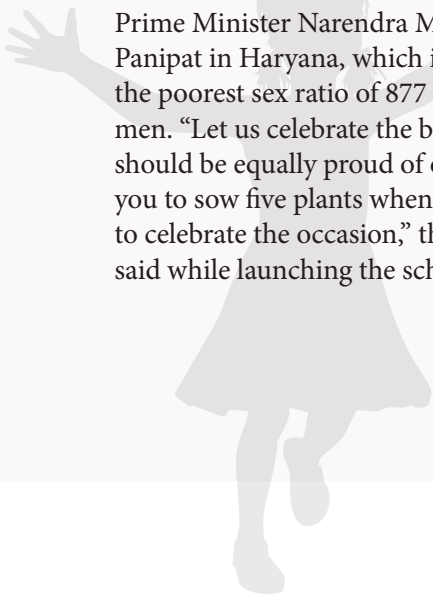
"unparalleled accomplishments of the girl child" and their role in "nation building".

In 2018, after the sex ratio at birth improved in the 161 districts that had implemented Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Modi expanded the scope of the scheme, which is a joint project of the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Human Resource Development, to cover all 640 districts in the country.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development organises several programmes, including the anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, on January 24. Each year's National Girl Child Day has a theme. The theme last year was 'Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow'. The states organise their own programmes to mark the occasion.

Much remains to be done, especially about educating the girl child. According to a report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 32.4 per cent of girls aged between 14 and 18 years opt out of schools because of 'family constraints'.

Four years after India started observing the National Girl Child Day, the UN designated 11 October as the International Day of the Girl Child. The aim is similar: "to highlight and address the needs and challenges girls face, while promoting girls' empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights".



Passion for Education

Preeti Mehta came to Jodhpur as a young bride. But it wasn't long before she made herself known in Jodhpur society as a well-spoken, cultured, creative individual who could always be banked upon for any help.

Preeti wears many hats. She's an educationist, runs a successful food business, a health enthusiast and an avid reader. But her main passion lies in food and education. For a few years she ran her own montessori school Little Genius, which was considered a forerunner, bringing the latest techniques of toddler education to the city.

A part of Kitaabo, the Blue City Children's Literature Festival, which is attended by over 17,000 youngsters, Preeti organises many workshops on illustrative storytelling, theatre and improv, culinary arts, health and nutrition. Preeti is also an involved Rotarian as a charter member of the Rotary Club Of Jodhpur Padmini, the first all-women Rotary Club in Jodhpur.

She enjoys working with kids for her projects and conducts workshops for underprivileged children. Preeti's passion is to travel all over the world, but London and San Francisco top her list of favourites.



The Best Things in Life Happen Unexpectedly

Shelja Singh is the director of Manvar Desert Camp & Resort, a known name in the hospitality industry in western Rajasthan that has put Indian rural tourism on the global map.

Born in the erstwhile noble family of Bijolia (Mewar) and travelling all over the country with her father, who was in the defence forces, she grew up as a modern woman in sync with traditions. Through her travels she discovered India's multicultural society, art and music of different regions, which developed her multifaceted personality and a strong aesthetic sense.

As a student, she was interested in literature,



The Art of Giving

Sushma Niraj Sethia is known in Jodhpur as an impeccably dressed, well-spoken, flamboyant go-getter.

Born and brought up in a traditional household in Mumbai, Sushma moved to Jodhpur a few years after her marriage to Niraj Sethia.

She joined her husband's handicraft business and very soon started its offshoot, ICRAFT, along with her sister Sejal. At ICRAFT, they have been designing and supplying home accessories to leading home decor stores in Mumbai for the last 13 years and it now has its presence on popular online sites as well.

Coming from a family of prominent jewellers in Mumbai, Sushma had learnt about the trade at her father's establishments. She has held several jewellery exhibitions in Jodhpur, under the brand name Soul Tara by Sushma Niraj Sethia.

Blessed with an aesthetic frame of mind, she has honed her talent by creating eclectic works of art which adorn every room of her beautiful home. She launched her art professionally with the show Colours of Life in 2019.

No stranger to philanthropy, thanks to her parents, Sushma leads from the front when it comes to working for the welfare of others. She is the charter president of the Rotary Club of Jodhpur Padmini and is always striving to lead the club to new heights.

Her zeal to keep learning and reinventing herself led Sushma to become one of the **Ehsaas** Women of Jodhpur who brought **Kalam** to the city, which according to her, is the perfect platform to learn about new things and interact with people from varied spheres of life. Sushma credits her husband Niraj as being her biggest support system, along with her three sons Harsh, Himanshu and Divyansh.



music and sports. Not only has she won many awards for her singing, she was also selected for the nationals in basketball by the School Games Federation of India. An MBA degree holder, Shelja married a Mayo and St. Stephen's College alumni, Moti Singh Rathore, and followed him to the Thar Desert where the young entrepreneur had decided to take the road less travelled and set up an enterprise to sell the true rural experience of the desert.

Shelja, who believes in seizing the opportunities life has to offer, realised very early that progress can be made by combining, supporting and nurturing local communities. The couple gave employment to local people, trained them and enhanced livelihood of many rural households.

Shelja also realised the potential of the area in terms of arts and crafts and gave the local craftsmen and weavers a boost by using their products — from pottery to fabric and papier mâché — to do up the interiors of the resort and by giving them a retail outlet in the crafts shop at the resort.

For Shelja taking on the **Kalam** platform happened unexpectedly and was one of those enriching opportunities that she chose to seize because it allowed her to explore her love for literature.

A mother of two boys, Parth and Idhant, Shelja believes that the best things in life have happened unexpectedly and the best stories have begun all of a sudden.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Guest	Event
Ratneswar Singh	Kalam Nagpur, Gurugram
Vikas Kumar Jha & Usha Uthup	Kalam Kolkata
Divya Prakash Dubey	Kalam Mumbai
Irshad Kamil	Kalam Hyderabad
Sundari Venkatraman	The Write Circle Jaipur, Raipur
Anant Vijay	Kalam Patna
Shivshankar Shrinivas	Aakhar Patna
Dr. Tejsingh Jodha	Aakhar Jaipur
Vir Sanghvi	Kitaab Book Launch Jaipur
Sunita Budhiraja & Pandit Jasraj	Kalam Kolkata
Adam Burakowski	Ek Mulakat Kolkata
Kalam Special Session-Arth Festival	Kolkata



Ratneswar Singh



Vikas Kumar Jha



Usha Uthup



Divya Prakash Dubey



Irshad Kamil



Sundari Venkatraman



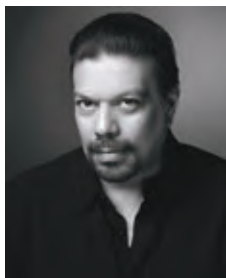
Anant Vijay



Shivshankar Shrinivas



Dr. Tejsingh Jodha



Vir Sanghvi



Sunita Budhiraja



Pandit Jasraj



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