

Prabha

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प्रभा



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Shaharnama

The Stories That Cities Tell





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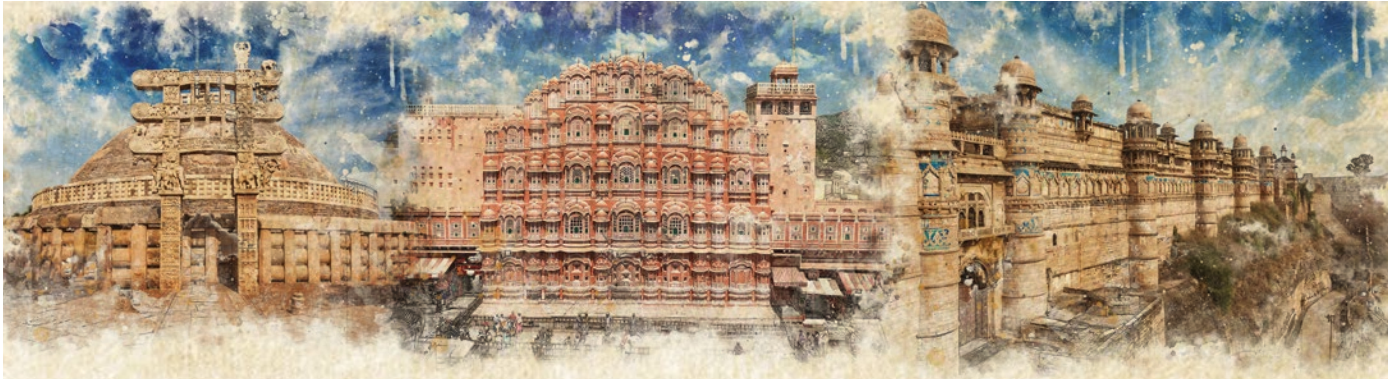
The Spaces of Our Lives

It is not often that we ponder the relationship between our lives and the spaces we live in. Our identities are not formed outside this relationship. A city is a point of departure: we challenge it oftentimes, leave it and go places, and explore the world only to realise how rooted we are to our cities. Our languages and accents, ways of interaction, sartorial choices, culinary habits, religions and festivals, ideas and thought processes, rationalities and irrationalities — all carry a distinct imprint of the cities we live in. To celebrate this beautiful bond humans forge with spaces, mostly unconsciously, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** curated a unique boutique literature festival, *Shaharnama*, held in association with Rajasthan Tourism, and supported by Shree Cement Ltd, **Ehsaas** Women, and ITC Rajputana. This memorable journey into the heart of many Indian cities, remembered and unremembered, filled our hearts with joy. This unique celebration of cities freed them from being only spatial realities. Their histories came alive in the eclectic discussions. Artists, photographers, cultural ambassadors and journalists brought to light the quintessence of their cities. Mesmerising music and dance performances added to the artistic notes of *Shaharnama*. The forgotten nooks and alleys of India's innumerable cities do not sound this poetic often!

Shaharnama was held over two days in Rajasthan. More than a dozen author sessions and a couple of art performances brought out the magic in Indian cities. Some sessions gave the audience a taste of the royalty and heritage of the cities, while others mused over the poetry lying in the alleyways that most do not pause in their everyday lives to explore. Some sessions reflected on how cities as old as time are being tainted by mainstream discourses, while others articulated what it is to love a city one is born in or grows up in. These discussions highlighted the importance of saving many cities and their unique cultures from being consigned to oblivion. What can we ever be outside the cultures that shape us? Through *Shaharnama*, we did not just communicate with the ones who have written the cities; we communicated with the cities as living entities. The speakers held the audience rapt as they wove, with words and photographs, their experiences of documenting their cities. There was joy and laughter, but most importantly, we felt the need to curate more unique events of this kind so that we can preserve our arts, cultures, heritage, languages and literature for posterity.

Manisha Jain





A Tale Of Many Cities

Cities are the sites where human histories unfold. Over decades and millennia, a city imbibes different stories and makes them its own. Stories grow and live in a city's arts, languages and literature, architecture, streets, culinary habits, traditions and festivals, and, most importantly, in its people. Most do not think about how a city began to live, or what its tales are. Some want to discover the tales, but do not manage to translate their thoughts into action. Only a handful have the eyes and ears to watch, hear and put to words the stories that different cities have to offer. Only by documenting a city's tales can we salvage its smells and tastes, its songs and laughter. To celebrate people's interest in cities and their cultures, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised *Shaharnama*, a two-day boutique literature festival in Rajasthan, in association with the tourism department of Rajasthan. Come, let us get lost in the streets of India's beautiful cities!



Shaharnama: The Beginning

What better way could there have been to set this one-of-a-kind festival, *Shaharnama*, in motion than with the mystical music of *Qawwali*? Aftab Qadri, Tariq Faiz and the group's rendition of *Sufiwadi Qawwali* left the audience enthralled. Thereafter, Vishvendra Singh, the Minister of Tourism of Rajasthan, inaugurated this boutique literature festival. He believes an initiative of this kind has a long way to go in piquing interest in cities and their narratives. This fascination can facilitate the tourism industry. Stories and histories remain unplumbed in every nook of any spatial reality. If tourists visit cities or towns with the desire to be more than a tourist and explore the cultural artefacts, many unknown tales will cease to remain buried beneath layers of time. In his inaugural speech, Singh highlighted the importance of this festival in acknowledging the cultural diversity of different cities in India.

Together with the co-directors of the festival, Neelima Dalmia Adhar and Apra Kuchhal, the Foundation's National Advisor, Vinnie Kakkar, and the General Manager of ITC Rajputana, Rishi Mattu, Singh lit the lamp at the inaugural ceremony. "I welcome all authors and the participants to Jaipur on this occasion," said Singh. "Cultural exchange is intrinsic to this festival, and I have great hopes that this festival will live up to its promises."

Singh also pointed out the important role a government plays in giving impetus to the tourism industry, which had reached an all-time low during the years of the pandemic. He explained the efforts that the government of Rajasthan is making towards simplifying many rules and encouraging stakeholders in the hospitality and tourism industries to set up their new business ventures anywhere in the state.

It was also a pleasure to witness the famed photographers, Sudhir Kasliwal from Jaipur, Rajasthan and Sandesh Bhandare from Pune, Maharashtra, exhibit their splendid photographs at the festival; through their pictures, they narrate their stories and document life in their cities. This festival gave a platform to artists and cultural ambassadors from far and near to celebrate their cities. Literally translating to 'the tales of the cities' in English, *Shaharnama* was a potpourri of all the things that together constitute the identity of different cities.

The City As A Muse

Shaharnama, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, brought together many artists who have written about their cities. This unique festival upheld the cultural diversities of different cities, alongside promoting tourism in these places. Vishvendra Singh, the Minister of Tourism of Rajasthan, inaugurated this festival along with other dignitaries.



Apra Kuchhal (Ehsaas Woman and co-director of the *Shaharnama* festival), Vishvendra Singh (Minister of Tourism, Rajasthan), Neelima Dalmia Adhar (Ehsaas Woman and co-director of the *Shaharnama* festival) and Vinnie Kakkar (Ehsaas Woman and National Advisor, Prabha Khaitan Foundation)



Vishvendra Singh addresses the audience



Apra Kuchhal



Neelima Dalmia Adhar



Rishi Mattu



Nidhi Garg, Apra Kuchhal, Unnati Singh, Vinnie Kakkar, Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Dipali Bhasin and Shrishti Trivedi with Vishvendra Singh

Spellbound By Qawwali



This special boutique literature festival called *Shaharnama* needed a befitting introduction. Aftab Qadri, Tariq Faiz and the group delivered a mesmerising rendition of *Sufiwadi Qawwali* that set the tone for the festival.



Sufiwadi Qawwali performance by Aftab Qadri, Tariq Faiz and their group of musicians



Vishendra Singh



Haji Syed Salman Chishty and Syeda Sehar Chishty



Kulsum Malik



Professor Anisur Rahman (Advisor - Urdu, Arabic and Persian Language Programme, Prabha Khaitan Foundation), Amitabh Adhar, Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Smita Bharadwaj, Unnati Singh and Nidhi Garg



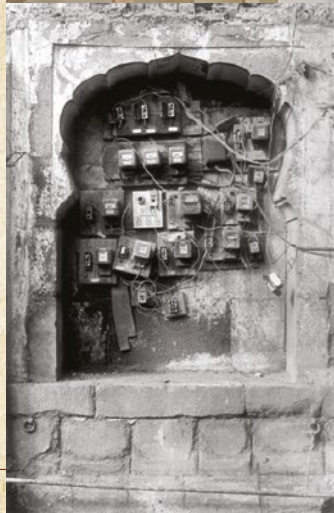
Eminent members of the audience

Telling Stories Through Stills

Still photographs can be as dynamic when it comes to telling stories as other art forms. The renowned photographers, Sudhir Kasliwal from Jaipur, Rajasthan, and Sandesh Bhandare from Pune, Maharashtra, exhibited their photographs at this boutique literature festival through which they presented the chronicles of their cities.



Vishendra Singh and Apra Kuchhal look at the works on display at the exhibition



Glimpses of the photographs exhibited at *Shaharnama*

Bhandare, a photojournalist, is adept at giving his photographs a distinctive flavour through a vision that he has developed over years. He has a unique way of communicating with inanimate landscapes and architecture through his lens. Gifted with the ability to see the world differently, many of Bhandare's photographs were displayed at the exhibition in Shaharnama. His photographs brought to life many forgotten nooks of Maharashtra.



A fifth-generation jeweller, photographer, cultural curator and historian, Kasliwal has committed himself to strengthening Jaipur's place on the international map. What better way to accomplish this than by capturing the quintessence of the city in photographs? Kasliwal's photographs of the lives and riches of Rajasthan were exhibited at this festival for one and all to acquaint themselves with and appreciate the cultures of the state.



The works of Sandesh Bhandare and Sudhir Kasliwal are displayed at an exhibition at Shaharnama

Taking a Trip Through India

The *Shaharnama* festival then went into full swing on the first day, with several intriguing sessions and discussions on India's culture, history, and cuisines. It witnessed the participation of more than 30 authors, poets, cultural ambassadors and journalists, all of whom turned their cities into their muses, and came together to share insights into the journeys behind their writing. Here are a few glimpses into the sessions that took place on Day 1 of *Shaharnama*.

Rediscovering Our Heritage



Changing Dynamics of Cities: From the Land of Maharajas to Paradise on Earth

In the first session, the journalist, Sandeep Purohit, and educationist, theatre director and activist, Feisal Alkazi, were in conversation with archaeologist, historian and author, Rima Hooja. Mewar, which lies in the south-central region of Rajasthan, is resplendent with the history of



Feisal Alkazi, Rima Hooja and Sandeep Purohit

a regal past. Purohit, who has authored the book *Rediscovering Mewar*, discussed the ancient, well-maintained monuments as part of his examination of Mewar's natural and cultural heritage. While the panellists contributed their own observations on Mewar, the conversation steered towards Kashmir and, especially, Srinagar. The Kashmir valley, often referred to as 'Paradise on Earth', is home to another section of India's princely history. The carefully preserved markers of this majestic past have served as inspiration for generations of historians, researchers, architects and laymen. Alkazi's book, *Srinagar: An Architectural Legacy*, delves into the cultural and architectural heritage of the 500-year-old city, bringing to life a bygone era. The discussion focused especially on how both places have undergone changes temporally, particularly with respect to their architecture, leading to a unique transformation of their spaces. The session, thus, offered the audience a novel perspective into the ever-changing social and cultural milieu of these two iconic places in India.



The audience at the session

A Melting Pot of Religions



Anisur Rahman, Tripti Pandey and Syed Salman Chishty

Ajmeru - The Invincible Hills - Story of Ajmer & Pushkar

The second session of the day was particularly enlightening; it highlighted how the state of Rajasthan houses two of the most important places of pilgrimage – Ajmer and Pushkar. The speakers of the session held the audience rapt with their observations and remarks on the two historic cities. Titled *Ajmeru - The Invincible Hills - Story of Ajmer & Pushkar*, the session was a discussion on the spiritual significance of Rajasthan, popularly known as the 'Land of Kings'. Spiritual leader, scholar and photographer, Syed Salman Chishty, who is a descendent of the Chishty Sufi family of Ajmer Sharif (the hereditary custodians of the 11th-century Sufi shrine of Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chishty), was in conversation with Tripti Pandey, a noted travel and culture writer. They were also joined by the literary critic, poet and translator, Anisur Rahman, who moderated the session.



Priyanka Kothari, Ehsaas Woman of Nagpur, delivers the welcome note

The city of Ajmer, the seat of the *dargah* of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisty, has drawn devotees from across the country. Embodying the spirit of secularism, the *dargah* is open to people of all faiths and religions. Talking of this incredible pilgrimage destination, the speakers took the audience on a trip through the history of the magnificent hills of Ajmer, and its significance to the people of the country. A similar sentiment was echoed by Pandey, Rahman and Chisty about the holy town of Pushkar. Elaborating on how the Pushkar Lake has drawn generations of believers seeking hope and peace to Rajasthan, Pandey remarked, "What Srinagar was to the rest of the country, this little lake was to the desert state." Separated from Ajmer by the 'Nag Pahar' or Snake Mountain, it is home to the only temple dedicated to Lord Brahma in the whole world. Indeed, much like Ajmer, a visit to Pushkar Lake is considered to be the ultimate pilgrimage by many.

The Key to Our Culture

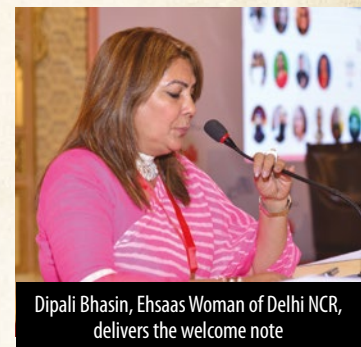


Aditi Dugar, Anoothi Vishal and Manish Mehrotra

Preserving Our Heritage: A Look at Local Traditional Cuisine

The true representation of a country's culture lies in its food. The amalgamation of a country's traditions, climates, geographical differences, social and political circumstances, values and customs becomes the food that is consumed by its people. Needless to say, the food habits and food cultures of a country remain ever-evolving and ever-changing. Discussing this transformation that has taken place in our palates, restaurateur Aditi Dugar and chef Manish Mehrotra engaged in a lively conversation with food writer, columnist and author, Anoothi Vishal, in the session *Preserving Our Heritage: A Look at Local Traditional Cuisine*. Exploring the change that local and traditional cuisines have undergone over the years, the panellists analysed specific changes that have taken place in the food being consumed over the past ten years. For instance, the standard "restaurant menu" has undergone a drastic improvement, with chefs experimenting with regional cuisines using local ingredients. This has also opened the doors to new culinary adventures and experiences.

The three experts delved into culinary links between different communities, regions and the country's rich food traditions, making it a tantalising session for the audience. But much of our history in food is getting lost because of the lack of preservation. "The biggest disservice to Indian cuisine has been the lack of documentation of our food," said Mehrotra, while underlining the importance of preserving our heritage.



Dipali Bhasin, Ehsaas Woman of Delhi NCR, delivers the welcome note



The audience interacts with the panellists

Exploring Bihar



Abhay K., Anant Vijay and Sudha Sadhanand

A Glimpse into Bihar: Exploring the History, Culture and Cuisine of India's Jewel State

A state with a vibrant cultural history, Bihar is popularly known as the 'Jewel State of India.' The folk culture of Bihar is especially rich, with its themes drawn from Hindu tales and lore. With an admixture of religions such as Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam, the state holds a unique place in the cultural and political matrix of India. In the fourth session of the day, journalist Sudha Sadhanand, who was also India's first bilingual anchor, spoke with poet and diplomat Abhay K. and veteran journalist and author Anant Vijay about the history, culture and cuisine of Bihar.



Ruhi Walia Syal, Ehsaas Woman of Jalandhar, delivers the welcome note

Abhay K., the author of *The Book Of Bihari Literature*, pointed out that Bihar is the ultimate representation of what makes our country diverse. The session revolved around the experiences of Abhay K. and Anant Vijay in Bihar, and what they thought of the land that was once the "jewel state" of India. Commenting on the diversity that the state offers to the country, Abhay K. said, "Bihar represents the whole of India." When asked if the former chief minister of Bihar, Rabri Devi, contributed anything to the state, Vijay responded that "a woman who did not know how to sign her name, ran a state with the help of bureaucrats and did not let the party disintegrate while her husband and the party chief was not around. This is the biggest takeaway from her reign."

Writing Cities



Vertul Singh, Mahek Maheshwari and Rasheed Kidwai

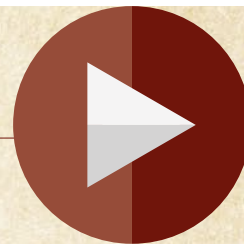
भ से भोपाल – म से मथुरा – A Journey Through These Reverberating Cities

Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, is a treat to the senses. Home to the Sanchi Stupa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the largest mosque in India, the Taj-ul-Masjid, the Fatehgarh Fort and the Bharat Bhavan (a multi-purpose arts centre), Bhopal is called the 'City of Lakes', with the Bhoj Tal divided into the Upper Bhopal Lake (Bada Talab) and the Lower Bhopal Lake (Chhota Talab). The lakes supply drinking water, and are used for recreation. Another one of India's cities, Mathura, on the banks of the river Yamuna, offers a similar experience. Presumed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna, Mathura is home to the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi temple, and is one of the seven sacred towns (Sapta Mahapuris), the others being Ayodhya, Haridwar, Kashi, Kanchi, Ujjain and Dwarka. An important site of pilgrimage, Mathura has drawn devotees since time immemorial. In the session, *भ से भोपाल – म से मथुरा – A Journey Through These Reverberating Cities*, Vertul Singh – author of the bestselling *Bhopalnama: Writing the City*, which speaks of the history of the city along with its peculiarities – and Mahek Maheshwari, author of *Krishna Janmabhoomi*, which focuses on providing clarity regarding the position of Krishna Janmabhoomi and the Shahi Idgah Mosque, engaged in a discussion on the two cities they have written about. They were joined by journalist and author, Rasheed Kidwai. Together, the panellists engaged in an enlightening discussion regarding the various aporias connected with the history and culture of the two cities.



Nidhi Garg, Ehsaas Woman of Bhubaneswar, delivers the welcome note

Taste of Royalty

*Gwalior and Lucknow: Where Royalty and Culture Reign Supreme*

This dynamic session saw the author and journalist, Mehru Jaffer, and IAS officer Smita Bharadwaj in conversation with journalist Sudha Sadhanand. Lucknow, home to magnificent architecture, delicious food, beautiful handicrafts and classical art forms, is the place where the finesse of regal living comes to life. Similarly, the land of Tansen and Baiju Bawra, Gwalior, transports one to the time when the *Maharajas* reigned supreme. While Lucknow-based Jaffer has written extensively about the city in her book, *A Shadow Of The Past: A Short Biography Of Lucknow* – a work dedicated to the city’s *nawabs*, painters, writers, revolutionaries, and freedom fighters, demonstrating Lucknow’s rich cultural heritage — Bharadwaj has explored Gwalior through a comprehensive collection of historical photographs in her book, *Vintage Gwalior*. While speaking of the life of cities, Bharadwaj said, “Every city has a cycle that chronicles the best and worst times. The timeline goes up and comes down.” Truly, for the audience at *Shaharnama*, the session was akin to experiencing the royalty and culture of Gwalior and Lucknow for the first time.



Unnati Singh, Ehsaas Woman of Indore, delivers the welcome note



Ehsaas Women of Jalandhar, Sonia Aggarwal and Ruhi Walia Syal, at the session

Responsible Development



Anant Vijay and L.P. Pant

Himalaya ka Kabristan

The Kedarnath flood of 2013, which claimed 5,000 lives, is a sore wound in the history of the state of Uttarakhand. At present, Joshimath, a town in Uttarakhand, is sinking, with cracks having appeared in houses and streets, pointing to another disaster waiting to happen. However, experts believe that these disasters have been in the making for a long time. The state also experiences landslides and flash floods regularly, resulting in the loss of human lives and property every year. In the final session of the day, veteran journalist L.P. Pant and author-journalist Anant Vijay discussed Pant's book, *Himalaya ka Kabristan* – which also happened to be the name of the session. The conversation encouraged the audience to look beyond the obvious in the context of the tragedies, especially natural disasters, that have ravaged Kashmir, Nepal and especially Uttarakhand. In the enlightening session, the two journalists dwelled on how the lack of planning is pushing the state toward greater disasters.

Bureaucratic myopia and the refusal to accept the long-term damages of short-sighted development are putting the state and its inhabitants at greater risk. The conversation explored how an excessive focus on heavy infrastructure-led development in a sensitive area of the Himalayan range in Uttarakhand is an open invitation to natural disasters. "They are focusing on highways to get more tourists, despite the devastation caused by the natural calamities. A hundred choppers are flying down to these remote parts," said Pant. Criticising the rampant commercialisation of the region, he added, "They first bottled the Himalayan water; now, they will package the whole of the Himalayas." The session served as a timely reminder of the adverse effects of unsustainable development.



Sonia Aggarwal, Ehsaas Woman of Jalandhar, delivers the welcome note



An Unending Love for Lucknow

The first day of *Shaharnama* concluded with a brilliant monologue, *Lucknowa Kissey*, by the storyteller, author and journalist, Himanshu Bajpai. In this concluding event, Bajpai took the audience through the lanes of the historical city of Lucknow and introduced them to the tales and personalities that transformed it into the majestic city of today. He also had the audience spellbound with stories that abound in Lucknow's rich culture – through *Dastangoi*, the traditional art of Urdu storytelling, Bajpai rendered the tales and the session unforgettable.



Shrishti Trivedi, Ehsaas Woman of Raipur, delivers the welcome note

Himanshu Bajpai holds the audience spellbound with *Dastangoi*

Of Ethereal Tunes



Hariharan performs

A musical evening with the renowned singer, Hariharan, was organised as a part of the first day of the *Shaharnama* festival. The event commenced with Apra Kuchhal, Honorary Convenor of Rajasthan & Central India Affairs, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, welcoming the guests. Hariharan began his performance by singing 'Padharo Mhare Des', one of Rajasthan's most popular folk songs. This was followed by several other popular songs which enthralled the audience. On this occasion, Kuchhal, along with **Ehsaas** Women Sunita Shekhawat, Rina Bhandari, Aakriti Periwal, Vinnie Kakkar and Neelima Dalmia Adhar, presented the legendary musician with a memento on behalf of the Foundation.



Sundeep Bhutoria with Hariharan



Gayatri Rathore



Anant Vijay and Vandana Singh



Vinnie Kakkar, Apra Kuchhal, Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Kulsum Malik, Sunita Shekhawat and Aakriti Periwal with Hariharan



Kunal Kuchhal



Pramod Sharma



Amitabh Adhar and Tripti Pandey



Vinnie Kakkar, Jayshree Periwal, Saurabh Kakkar and Rupendra Periwal



Vinnie Kakkar, Jayshree Periwal, Saurabh Kakkar and Rupendra Periwal

The Magic that Cities Promise

The spaces we are born into and grow up in become an integral part of our identities. Humans, in turn, give these spaces their stories and histories. Cities are living entities as much as we are. They accommodate people and their countless narratives. A sense of belonging pushes many artists to record and write about their intimate relationships with their cities. The second day of *Shaharnama*, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, brought on stage many writers and artists who have given a voice to their cities and are immortalising them through their art. Many distinguished artists and professionals took us on a fascinating exploration of their cities and their plentiful narratives. We learnt about many stories of these cities that have always been there, but away from the public eye. The artists invited us to step into their shoes and explore the cities through their lenses, which have mixed their love for these cities with many factual details.

In keeping with the cultural value of this festival, Day 2 of *Shaharnama* began with two flamboyant music and dance performances by the Padma Shri recipient, Gulabo Saperia, and the renowned folk singer, Shakuntala Sarupariya. The audience was captivated by the latter's rendition of the Rajasthani song, *Dharti Dhoran Ri*. After this felicitous introduction, the second day of this boutique literature festival encompassed nine absorbing author sessions which witnessed discussions about cities from a myriad of perspectives.

The first session, *Exploring the Mythic and Historic Land of Ayodhya and Faizabad*, addressed how parochialism has intertwined with the established rhetoric on the history of Ayodhya. The second session, *Contrasting Cultures and Consequences: Darjeeling to Mumbai*, highlighted the coexistence of multiple cultures in a city. Held in Rajasthan, one session of this festival had to be committed to exploring the richness of the state's cultures and traditions. The third session of the day, *Birasat ke Kangoore*, accomplished the task of celebrating Jaipur's heritage. Thereafter, cities and their people's emotional responses to their histories and memories were discussed in an engaging session called *Delhi to Hazaribagh: Tales of Undying Cities*, the fourth one of the day.

The second day of this festival taught us that books are not the only way to chronicle any space. It can be done just as impressively through photographs. In the fifth session, *Enchanting World of Maharashtra*, the audience was teleported to the beautiful state of Maharashtra. The Pink City's royal legacy and ability to embrace people held the audience's attention in the next session, *Jaipur Soirée*. The highlight of the day was the seventh session, titled *Filmon ka Shaharnama*, which accentuated the role of Indian cinema in documenting even the tiniest bits of the cultures of different cities. This was followed by an equally interesting session, *Shaheron par Antakshari*, where poets sang the distinctive tunes of their cities. The last session of this literature festival was *Punjab Express*, where the speakers brought the histories of Punjab and its people to critical attention.

In this way, *Shaharnama* turned out to be a beautiful assortment of many ideas on cities and life in them. It underpinned the idea that there is beauty in plurality. A boutique literature festival of this stature had to end with something just as memorable. Following the eclectic mix of discussions, the Padma Vibhushan winner and sarod maestro, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, concluded this festival with some of his entrancing compositions and the Raga Bhairavi. His music lingered in the ears of everyone present there long after his performance was over. Let us take a look at the splendid day.

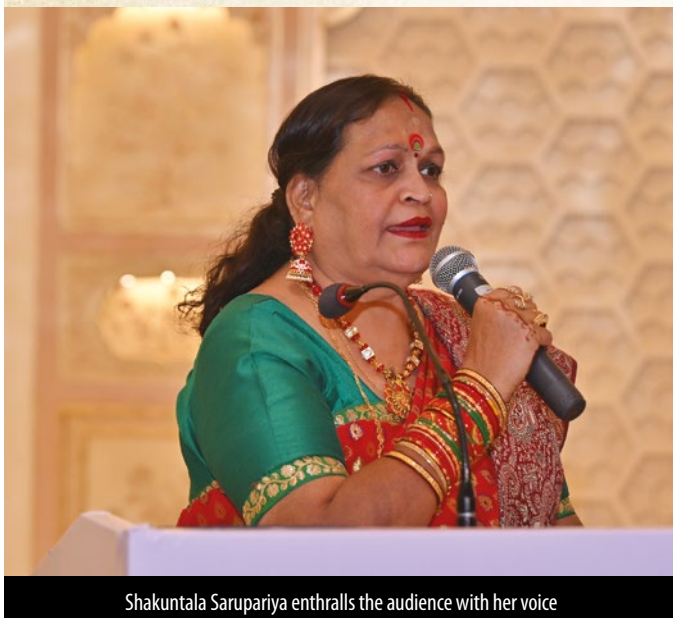
Experiencing The Arts



Held on two beautiful February days, *Shaharnama* was a unique celebration of cities and their numerous known and unknown tales. Performing arts are the best way to create a poetic atmosphere for an event like this. The second day of this boutique literature festival began with an enthralling dance performance by the celebrated artist, Gulabo Sopera. Sopera was awarded the Padma Shri in 2016 and several other accolades for her illustrious dance career. The opening ceremony also included a brilliant musical performance by the renowned singer, Shakuntala Sarupariya. Through their performances, the artists presented the richness of Rajasthan's artistic traditions.



Gulabo Sopera with her troupe



Shakuntala Sarupariya enthralls the audience with her voice



Gulabo Sopera puts up a magical dance performance to the folk song, *Dharti Dhoran Ri*, on the second day of *Shaharnama*



A traditional dance performance



Unnati Singh and Shrishti Trivedi



Rasheed Kidwai and Priyanka Kothari



Dipali Bhasin, Neelima Dalmia Adhar and Smita Bharadwaj



Yatindra Mishra

Cities Of Contention



Yatindra Mishra, Smita Bharadwaj and Sutapa Mukherjee

Exploring the Mythic and Historic Land of Ayodhya and Faizabad

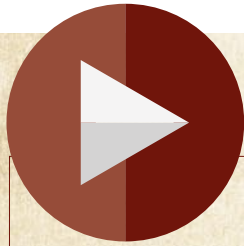
In the first session of the second day of *Shaharnama*, the poet, music and cinema scholar, Yatindra Mishra, and the writer, Sutapa Mukherjee, discussed the contentions revolving around Ayodhya and its twin city Faizabad in conversation with the author and bureaucrat, Smita Bhardwaj. These cities are ancient and tied to many histories and myths. With parochial ideas and religious sectarianism, many are tainting the legacy of these cities, as pointed out by the speakers. They mentioned how important it is on our part to see beyond the popular discourses and understand things for ourselves. Mukherjee has done a commendable job in bringing to light the voices of many people of Ayodhya who belong to different castes, classes and religions in her book, *Ayodhya: Past and Present*. Moving beyond political and religious occupations with the disputed land in Ayodhya, Mukherjee was asked to speak about the response of the people of Ayodhya to the Supreme Court judgement that laid the ground for the construction of the Ram Mandir. To this, Mukherjee said, “The people of Ayodhya, irrespective of their community or economic background, embraced this decision.”



Dipali Bhasin, Ehsaas Woman of Delhi NCR, delivers the welcome note



The audience



One City, Many Cultures



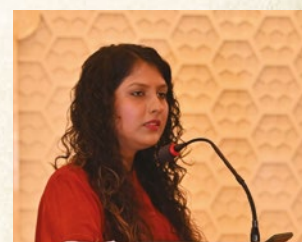
Jitendra Dixit, Parimal Bhattacharya, Aakriti Periwal and Rasheed Kidwai

Contrasting Cultures and Consequences: Darjeeling to Mumbai

Does a city have a single dominant culture or a coexistence of many? The author, Parimal Bhattacharya, who has written extensively on Bengal, and the journalist-author, Jitendra Dixit, who has documented many crimes and conflicts in Mumbai, discussed the multiplicity of cultures in India in conversation with the author-journalist, Rasheed Kidwai, and the educationist, Aakriti Periwal. With pluralism comes many problems – this is what the speakers drew our attention to. They discussed the diverse cultures in the cities and the complex undercurrents which surface from time to time. As a crime journalist, Dixit has significant experience in reporting on crimes, conflicts and the Mumbai underworld. He drew an analogy between Mumbai in the 1990s and Kashmir by saying, “At that point in time, Mumbai was going through a turmoil just like Kashmir. There was terrorism in both places. There was violence born of extremism in Kashmir; in Mumbai, it was due to gang wars and riots.”



Unnati Singh, Ehsaas Woman of Indore



Shrishti Trivedi,
Ehsaas Woman of Raipur

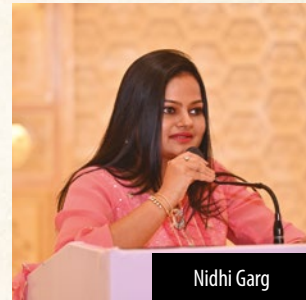
The Heritage Of Rajasthan



Jitendra Singh Shekhawat, Vinod Shastri and Ankit Tiwari

Birasat Ke Kangoore

Rajasthan's topography is unlike any other in the country. Alongside the marvellous forts and palaces, beautiful arts and vibrant folk traditions, the desert lends Rajasthan's culture a unique flavour that attracts people from far and wide. Vinod Shastri, a scholar of Sanskrit and the former vice-chancellor of JRSS University, Jaipur, and Jitendra Singh Shekhawat, an experienced journalist, came together to celebrate the heritage of Rajasthan's capital city, Jaipur, in conversation with Ankit Tiwari. The audience was drawn into the enriching discussion and taken on a ride through the streets and alleys of Jaipur, while exploring the rich legacies of the state. How does a city this ancient keep pace with the changing times? High-tech architecture and futuristic planning lie at the foundation of Jaipur's long life. Shastri also pointed to the holistic planning and the placement of the buildings in keeping with *Vastu Shastra* which has made the city one of its kind.



Nidhi Garg



What's In A Name?

Delhi to Hazaribagh: Tales of Undying Cities

Cities, like time, keep on changing, often inconspicuously. Only after many decades can one feel how far a city has come. Swapna Liddle, a notable author who has written on the cultural and intellectual life in Delhi through the nineteenth century to the present times, Adrija Roychowdhury, who debuted with her book, *Delhi, in Thy Name*, and Mihir Vatsa, a Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar recipient for his travel memoir, *Tales of Hazaribagh: An Intimate Exploration of Chhotanagpur Plateau*, explored the emotions of these cities and their people in conversation with Aakriti Periwal. They offered the audience a fascinating dive into the histories of Delhi, the many cities that remain buried under a bigger one, and so much more. People were left to wonder whether cities grow organically over centuries or leave some gaps in between. Our identities are tied to our names. How will we respond if our names are changed without our knowledge? Liddle believes it is the same for cities as well. On the topic of changing the names of many Indian cities in recent times, Liddle commented, “When you change the name of a place, you also change its history.” Thus, it is the duty of responsible citizens to preserve histories rather than distort them, and to save heritage Indian cities from an untimely death.



Mihir Vatsa, Swapna Liddle, Aakriti Periwal and Adrija Roychowdhury

The Magic Called Maharashtra

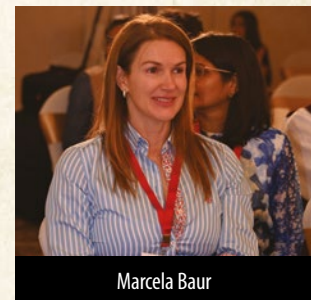


Sudha Sadhanand and Sandesh Bhandare

Enchanting World of Maharashtra

Photographs can be just as potent an art form as any when it comes to creating narratives. They speak even with the ones who are not initiated into the language of photography. The accomplished photojournalist, Sandesh Bhandare, is a master of writing stories through his photographs. In conversation with the popular bilingual anchor and editor, Sudha Sadanand, Bhandare took great pleasure in discussing at length the natural and cultural wonders of Maharashtra, that has a history going back many millennia, and, before Independence, was ruled by notable dynasties and entities. On his journey through many towns and cities of the state, he has captured many unforgettable moments of life in these places, the laughter and tears of their people. What his lenses capture brings Bhandare a sense of unrivalled satisfaction.

In this session, Bhandare also offered all a slice of life as it is lived in Jaipur through a specially-made short film with an inventive voiceover that enlivened photographs clicked at the crowded marketplaces and other spaces in the city.

Sonia Aggarwal,
Ehsaas Woman of Jalandhar

Marcela Baur



Tête-à-tête with the Pink City



Tripti Pandey, Apra Kuchhal and Mozez Singh

Jaipur Soirée

Famed as the Pink City of India, Jaipur's identity is owed to the dusty pink hue of its architecture. It boasts a royal legacy that attracts tourists and history aficionados alike. Tripti Pandey, the author of the book, *The Half Empress*, which transports readers to the royal corridors of nineteenth-century Jaipur, and the storyteller and filmmaker, Mozez Singh, whose book, *Jaipur Splendour*, provides a panoramic understanding of many things that make Jaipur what it is, discussed the beauty of this city with the co-director of *Shaharnama*, Apra Kuchhal. There is something in Jaipur that keeps people riveted to it, Singh believes. It is there in the stories of its *Maharajas* and queens, in its forts and palaces, in its arts and gems, in its languages and songs. When asked what inspired him to write about Jaipur despite never belonging to it, Singh commented, "I did not choose Jaipur as the subject of my book, Jaipur, chose me." He beautifully captured the power of this city to welcome anyone and everyone. He continued, "The publishers saw my work as a filmmaker and reached out to me. I readily agreed because I have always felt a connection with Jaipur. I have been visiting this city for quite some time now. Earlier on, I was in the Jaipur House at Doon School for six years." Pandey shared fragments of the affair of Maharaja Sawai Jagat and the courtesan, Raskapoor. In 2019, Jaipur was declared a UNESCO world heritage site. A city this old and steeped in history must be protected from the tarnish of time. One of Sundeep Bhutoria's projects, the *Sounds of Pink City*, was played in this session.

Ruhi Walia Syal,
Ehsaas Woman of Jalandhar

The audience engages in a Q&A session with the panellists

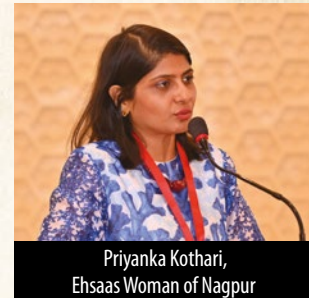
Cities In Indian Films



Sudha Sadhanand, Anant Vijay and Yatindra Mishra

Filmon ka Shaharnama

Most Indians share an intimate relationship with cinema. Sometimes, we find our lives reflected on the screen. Sometimes, these films articulate our unfulfilled aspirations and wishes. Over many decades, Indian films have portrayed the narratives of various cities and reflected on the lives of people from different walks of life. They have grown to be veritable representations of human lives in many shapes and colours. The author-journalist, Anant Vijay, the bilingual anchor and editor, Sudha Sadanand, and the poet, music and cinema scholar, Yatindra Mishra, indulged in an enthusiastic conversation on how cities have been depicted in Indian cinema and music. Many such films have also played a crucial role in constructing a national identity. The trio discussed the nuances of representation and how actors bring that out through their acting skills and highlighted the styles and accents of different film stars in the country to make the session all the more interactive. Sadanand brought the house down with her impeccable mimicry of the accents of many Bollywood actors who hail from different cities. Cinema, after all, is a great way of immortalising spaces. Many of people's memories of Bombay are associated with Bollywood films based in the city through the 1970s and 1980s. Mishra pointed out that Bareilly has nothing to do with jewellery manufacturing in particular, but the song, *Jhumka Gira Re Bareilly ke Bazaar Mein*, has implanted a connection between Bareilly and *jhumkas* (earrings) in our minds, thanks to this timeless piece of music. The content of films is changing to keep up with the times. When asked about the overdose of sexual and violent content in mainstream media and OTT platforms and the detrimental impact of these on youngsters, Vijay said, "It is parents' responsibility to raise children, not OTT's or films. If children are learning from these sources, their parents are failing them."

Priyanka Kothari,
Ehsaas Woman of Nagpur



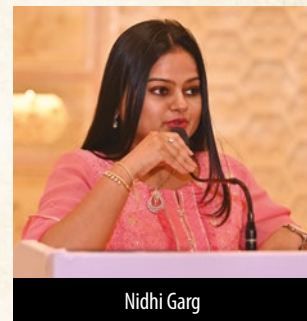
Cities As Songs



Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Lokesh Kumar Singh 'Sahil' and Aalok Shrivastav

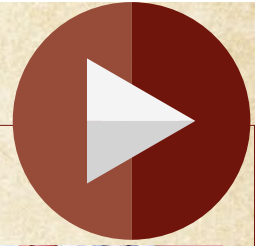
Shaheron Par Antakshari

Generations may come and generations may go, but a city goes on forever. We make songs for the cities to embody. In this session, the audience experienced how cities are the muses of many artists. The brilliant poet and thinker, Lokesh Kumar Singh 'Sahil', and the acclaimed poet, lyricist and journalist, Aalok Shrivastav, joined in on a lyrical conversation on cities and their songs with the author and co-director of *Shaharnama*, Neelima Dalmia Aadhar. This session came along as lyrically as a round of the game *Antakshari*. The flowing exchanges between the poets mesmerised the audience. They mused on cities, people, their own bodies of literature, and so much more. While introducing himself as vivaciously as he could, Sahil said, "Art is what differentiates between humans and animals. I am trying to become a human from an animal."



Nidhi Garg

Tales From Punjab



Rasheed Kidwai, Mini Sampatram and Amandeep Sandhu

Punjab Express

Punjab has been witness to one of the most brutal phases of Indian history: Partition. Millions of people were caught in a liminal space; they belonged neither here nor there. This pain has survived like intergenerational trauma. In this session, Amandeep Sandhu, the writer of *Punjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines*, and the author and political analyst, Rasheed Kidwai, embarked on a conversation with Mini Sampatram to discuss the past of Punjab and many other topical subjects which revolved around the life of the different communities in the state. In this concluding event, Sandhu pointed out the need to free writings from the limitations of genre and accommodate different forms of writing in the literary world. Biases have to be cast aside, and several kinds of writing, literary or otherwise, must be explored to get a more comprehensive picture of various happenings. To Sandhu, "Writing is a subjective art. You cannot be objective. Writing is happening everywhere. For me, there is only good writing and bad writing."

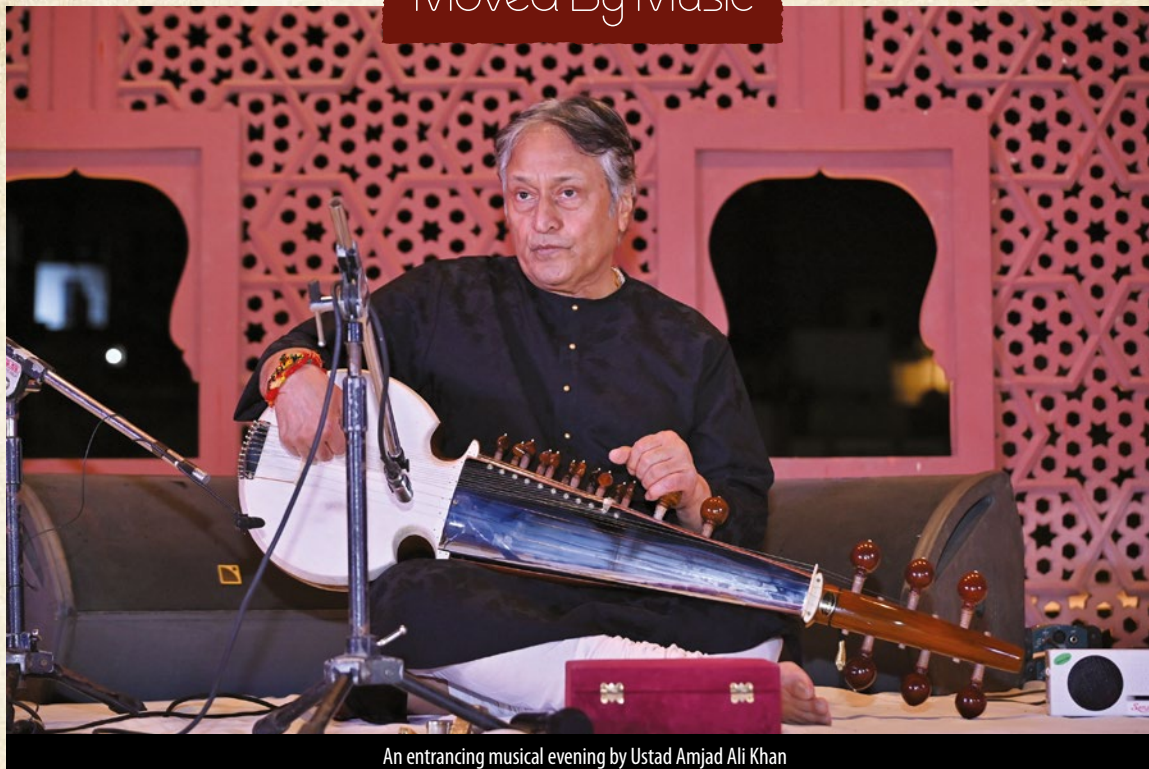


Unnati Singh



Members of the audience interact with the panellists

Moved By Music



An entrancing musical evening by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan

All good things must come to an end... but they can end in a splendid manner! *Shaharnama* concluded with a performance that will remain etched in the minds of everyone who witnessed it. The Padma Vibhushan winner and sarod

virtuoso, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, did not just provide a fitting end to *Shaharnama*; he created poetry with his fingers, leaving the audience entranced and wanting more of his music. The co-directors of *Shaharnama*, Apra Kuchhal



Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Apra Kuchhal, Sunita Shekhawat, Vinnie Kakkar, Rina Bhandari and Aakriti Periwal with Ustad Amjad Ali Khan

and Neelima Dalmia Aadhar, delivered the welcome addresses to begin the concluding performance of the festival. A blue pottery plate, native to Rajasthan, was presented to Ustad Amjad Ali Khan by the **Ehsaas** Women of Jaipur. The maestro then began weaving magic by playing *Maand*, which was followed by *Ekla Cholo Re*. He offered a glimpse into the intimate relationship between *swar* (voice) and *shabd* (word), the harmonious union of which creates music. The audience's heart was full as he kept on playing. The musical evening reached a crescendo when he played the Raga Bhairavi, with which *Shaharnama* reached a memorable conclusion.

Generations will come and go; but the city has a life of its own.



Sonia Aggarwal and Ruhi Walia Syal



Rina Bhandari and Sunita Shekhawat



Dipali Bhasin, Nidhi Garg and Apra Kuchhal



Unnati Singh, Priyanka Kothari, Dipali Bhasin, Nidhi Garg, Neelima Dalmia Adhar and Aalok Shrivastava



Vinnie Kakkar and Saurabh Kakkar



Neelima Dalmia Adhar and Amitabh Adhar



The audience enjoys the enthralling performance

अपनी भाषा अपने लोग

Handscripted by Paresh Maity

Prabha
प्रभा

You take delight not in a city's
seven or seventy wonders,
but in the answer it gives to a
question of yours.

— Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

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