



## **ABSOLUTE KHUSHWANT – (February 2, 1915 - March 20, 2014)**

The most read columnist is no more! A fearless writer, a man of great discipline, yet full of zest for life, an irreverent wit and considerable scholar.

The man who spared none and spread cheer with his celebrated column-'With Malice Towards One and All'(as 'The Tribune' rightfully quoted "Above all, there was malice to none!") was born in Hadali (now in Pakistan) on February 2, 1915. Known for his humors and abiding love for poetry, Khushwant began writing in 1969, and continued to contribute columns to various newspapers, until recently. He wrote about 65 novels ranging from politician commentary, to translations of Sikh religious texts and Urdu poetry. Among the several works he published, was a classic two-volume 'A History of the Sikhs' and others such as 'Train to Pakistan', 'Delhi' and 'In the Company of Women'. Fond of his evening Scotch with friends, he had a full innings--a century almost.



Khushwant was educated at Modern school, New Delhi. He did his Bachelor's from the Government College, Lahore, followed by a degree in law from the King's College, London. Khushwant edited 'Yojana', 'The Illustrated Weekly of India', and 'The Hindustan Times'. The man behind witty, fearless and acerbic writings was also a member of Rajya Sabha from 1980 to 1986. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 for his service to the nation, but returned the honour in 1984 in protest against the Operation Bluestar at Golden Temple. Subsequently, he was bestowed with an even higher honour, the Padma Vibhushan, in 2007.

Khushwant Singh's father, Sir Sobha Singh, was a prominent builder in Lutyen's Delhi. Khushwant practiced law at the Lahore High Court for several years before joining the Ministry of External Affairs in 1947. He got married to Kawal Malik in 1939, who died in 2001. He is survived by his daughter, Mala, and son, Rahul Singh.

Khushwant Singh has chronicled his life in his writings, so there is nothing that any of us can say of his personality that is not already known. It is equally true that he deliberately created a person for himself, immortalized by

the logo that illustrated his column—a 'Sardar' with a pen, sitting in a bulb, surrounded by books and a glass of whisky by his side. But as we all know of his tremendous discipline in writing, a man who stuck to his daily schedule and took pride in not missing deadlines—the perfect traits of a journalist and above all a perfect man.

The master of wit is dead now, the man who taught us celebrates life and lives every moment, is no more.

Composing his epitaph, he wrote,

*"Here lies one who spared neither man nor God;  
Waste not your tears on him, he was a sod;  
Writing nasty things he regarded as great fun;  
Thank the Lord he is dead, this son of a gun."*

He is gone, but lives in our hearts! **RIP KHUSHWANT**

(EDITORIAL BOARD, YPS, PATIALA)

## **SPORTS NEWS-**

### • **BEST SWIMMER**

Roopneet Kaur, Kaleka, XII Science, has been declared the Best Swimmer for the year 2013

### • **HOUSE POSITIONS**

- Cricket matches in under-14 age group: I-MH, II-PH, III-DRH

- Cricket under-17 matches: DRH, II-PH, III-MH

- Hockey under-14: I-PH, II-MH, III-DRH


- Hockey under-12: I-MH, II-DRH, III-PH

### • **INTER SCHOOL FIXTURES**

School Basketball and Cricket teams played matches against The Lawrence School, Sanawar, teams on Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> March.

The School lost the basketball match. The score was 43-45. Simranjeet scored 16 points. The School team won the cricket match in U-12 age group by 27 runs and in the U-19 age group by 186 runs. Mayank Markande scored 111 runs in the latter and remained not out.





Aerial view of Kasauli.

# REJUVENATING KASAULI

A visit that invokes mixed emotions! By Amrinder Bajaj

**M**y nurse had run away with my driver and my servant left without notice at the same time. To top it, the politics in my hospital was playing havoc with my nerves. Leisure, peace of mind, adequate sleep, time for writing, were riches I had in the distant past. Drudgery and chronic fatigue took their place, breeding irritability and ill temper. A holiday was badly in order and now. Foreign trips needed a lot of planning and formalities. Some place near and fast was what I had in mind. Even as I was wracking my brains regarding the destination, everything fell into place. And old friend dropped in and the talk turned to my desperation for an escape. Having worked as a microbiologist at CRI (Central Research Institute) at Kasauli for 5 years, she was still in touch with its director. Within seconds we were talking with him and accommodation

in the CRI guest house was arranged. A patient in the railways arranged train tickets from Delhi for Kalka Mail (I did not fancy prolonged road travel with my back problem) and we were set to go.

Situated in the Shiwalik ranges at a mean height of 6300 above sea level, Kasauli is the 'noblest hill station' in Himachal. There are many conjectures regarding the origin of its name. Some say that it was named after a neighbouring village Kasaul others, after a mountain stream 'Kaushalya'; yet others say that it is a derivation of the word Kusumawali – a row of flowers. The most macabre of all etymologies was Kow(tree) sulee (death by hanging). Khurki-wielding Gurkhas would loot and kill early British settlers on their way to the hill station and disappear into the woody mountain terrain. If caught, they were hanged to death from a tree. In fact, on many a headstone in the cemetery in Kasauli, Kasauli is spelt as Kowsulee.

After a restful sleep in a two-tier AC compartment, we reached Kalka at 5am. It was broad daylight and soon we were on our way up to Kasauli in a taxi. The road was smooth and wide (even I could drive here) till Dharampur from where it continued to Shimla while the narrower one forked to Kasauli. During the hour or so it took to reach this bit of heaven on earth we breathed in deep lungful of cool, fresh, pine-scented air, took in the lovely scenery and watched the sun rise over lush green hilltops. Rejuvenation had begun.

By 6.30am we were sipping tea in a lavishly appointed room at the CRI guest house with bay windows. We drew open the blinds to take in a stunning view of the valley below and the monkeys that terrorised the locals. As I had to suffer them for but a while, I found them rather cute with babies clinging their to underbellies. I did get to sample their temper later, when I went too close for snap and





The foggy view.



A wide view of hills covered with fog.

got snapped at by the entire clan! At Manki Point (where sadly photography was not allowed) was a tank with a tap and a notice which read 'Drinking Water'. A literate monkey opened the lid on top, dipped his face inside and took a drink! No wonder most tanks had huge stones placed on lids. Barbed wires were wound around lampposts and TV antennae, to ward off this menace. Once, during a nap I was startled to be woken up by a terrible sound emanating from the tinroof.

Even as I began to speculate and wonder

Without raining could it be thunder?

Or something drastically torn asunder

Or an army marching out to plunder

I learnt that it was thunder!

## A REMINDER

The director, who came a while later to see if we were comfortably settled, told me that I had delivered their only son 27 years ago; in fact, the first photo in their son's album was of me holding the baby! It was a small world indeed! He took us to his palatial home that had once belonged to the Maharaja of Patiala. The rooms were huge, the ceilings high, the walls thick and the furniture more than a century old. The garden had a



Khushwant Singh's house.

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swing, a wonderful view, birds, flowers and *mor pankh* trees; not the puny potted *mor pankhis* we have in Delhi but actual trees! It was indeed a huge place for single person and he did feel lonesome within its cold confines, for his family lived in Delhi.

Though Kasauli is one of the quietest hill stations (I had selected it for its tranquillity) there were many to-do things on my agenda, not the least of which was a pilgrimage to Khushwant Singh's house. Given my passion for writing, Khushwant Singh had generously asked me to spend some time here in solitude to polish my work. I would have loved to do so but, though I knew him to be a thorough gentleman (he wrote and spoke provocatively for effect) his reputation preceded him and my family did not allow me to avail of this wonderful offer. Reluctantly, I had given in then, though irrationally, quite like O Henry's story 'The Last Leaf', I had linked my becoming a famous author to a visit to his place. Now, albeit after his death, I got a chance to redeem my sense of self-worth after obtaining permission from Khushwant Singh's son. A paved path lined by conifers took us down a steep decline to his house. The caretaker let us in and avidly I imbibed all – the photographs, sketches, awards, books and the faintly musty smell. I sat on the sofa in his study, on the bed in the guest room where I could have slept had I





The Sunset Point – the enchanting view of nature's beauty.

taken up his offer, and finally committed the sacrilege of sitting on his bed. Though he had died a few months ago, I felt his presence by me, chuckling, as if to say 'now she comes'.

Later, the kind doctor's driver drove us to the base of Manki (monkey) Point in his car. From there it was steep uphill climb in the rarefied air. We made it to the highest

point in Kasauli at 6430' above sea level stopping off and on to take in the scenery and deep lungfuls of fresh air. The Hanuman Mandir situated on the top was steeped in mythology. It is said that when Laxaman was critically injured during the war with Ravana, Hanuman was sent to get the Sanjivini booti from the mountains for his recovery. Unable to find it, Hanuman brought

back the entire mountain, leaving the imprint of his left foot at Manki Point. The huge cemented open area in front of the temple, roughly shaped like a foot, is also used as a helipad by the Air Force. In fact, the temple is situated within the Cantonment Area hence the strictness regarding mobile phones and photography. After religious sentiments and touristy curiosity were satisfied, I settled down to do what I like best – worship nature. Spread out in front of me was a feast of high mountains dimming with the distance from finely etched greens to bluing ranges at mid-distance and far off hazy silhouettes. Deep valleys clad in ancient trees, resounded with the sound of birds. A gentle breeze blew away my troubles and I could actually feel my spirits lift and fatigue melt away. We sipped a well-deserved glass of cold coffee before we made our downhill journey. The breathlessness of the uphill climb gave way to knee strain while descending but every second was worth it.

On the way back the driver dropped us at the heritage market where we watched Himachal Tourism promote the state with the help of skits and folk songs. A statue of a black dog in front of a shop had an interesting story to tell but no one seemed to know much about it. All I gleaned was that it was the image of a dog owned by a German long ago. The markets, neither this one, nor the Tibetan one further up, were great stakes but we bought few knick-knacks for people back home and settled at a small restaurant for a lunch of sambhar dosa. Even as I took my first bite, the skies opened up and it began to pour as if the clouds had decided to empty themselves all at once. It drummed on tin rooftops and plunged down lanes in muddy rivulets. It re-enforced the force of flies already inside, forcing us to hurriedly finish our meal even as we tried to fan them away with one hand. Like with the rains in any hill station, it stopped as suddenly as it came, leaving behind a clear sky and washed road without a single puddle, for the water flowed

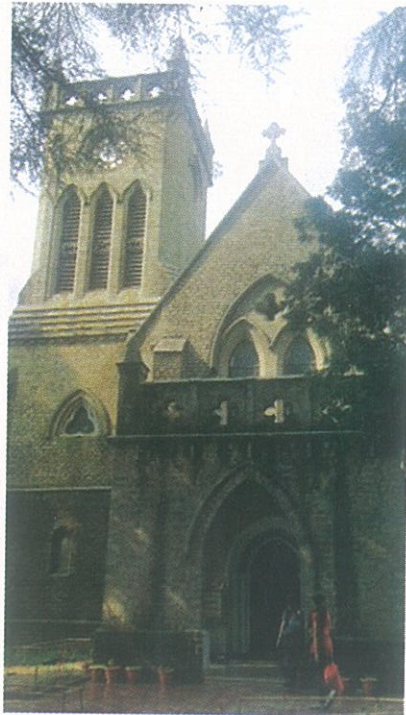
## Intriguing Kasauli Club



Being chiefly a cantonment area, Kasauli was cleaner than most hill stations and I was mighty glad of the fact. We trudged uphill past dripping leaves, vine-clad trees, moss-clad stones and pines bursting out of their barks, to our room for a rest. After a nap, I read an illuminating book on Kasauli by a local Ankur Bansal, gleaning nuggets of interesting information. Details of the Kasauli Club intrigued me. Situated in the upper mall, it was built by the British in 1880 at a height of 6142'. An exclusive 'whites' club where 'Indians and Dogs were not allowed' it was the epitome of gracious living. The ballroom would come alive

during Wednesday cocktail dance and Saturday dinner dance. There was and still is a dress code and servants are not allowed inside. It has a lounge, 3 bars, a dining room, card room, billiards room and a well-stocked library with rare, priceless books. There are tennis, squash and badminton courts for those interested in sports. At present it is still an elite club and though civilians are granted a reluctant membership, it is chiefly the domain of the armed forces. High-ranking officials and their elegant wives mingle socially over drinks, dinner and dance. When the weather is fine, the terrace of the club is full and a view of Chandigarh lights at night appears as if the sky has generously flung some of its stars earthwards. The panorama of lights is bordered on the left by an undulating parallel row of golden globes – the Kalka expressway – snaking to its destination. On bright days Chandigarh's Sukhna Lake is visible at a distance like a far-flung silver coin.





The Church of England has clock with a long pendulum.

down the slopes to the plains. This reminded me of a unique way of water harvesting I saw in some houses. The sloping tinroofs had a tin gutter all around with a spout at one end through which the rain water from these gutters was collected in a large drum kept below. This solved the water problem in the hill station to a large extent.

## THE HEART OF THE CITY

In the heart of the city was the Church of England, an imposing structure in grey stone, amidst fir and chestnut trees. The precision clock with a long pendulum atop the steeple had, in times gone by, announced the hour with a deep sonorous sound that could be heard all over town. Due to lack of understanding about precision clocks, time here has come to a standstill, for over two decades. However, a sun dial outside the church still shows the longitudes and latitudes accurately. Inside was a serenity that brought solace to tortured souls and joy to those whose

prayers were answered, for over a century. It does not matter to what religion one belonged, any place of worship was worthy of respect and this one filled me with awe and tranquillity. Beautiful stained glass painting depicted Jesus flanked by Joseph and Mary.

I rang up the director to ask if we could visit the club on our own. He said that one needed a membership to be allowed inside and graciously invited us for drinks that evening. In the garden stood a 'Queen' letterbox (shaped like the queen of a chess board) which, like everything else in Kasauli, was more than a century old and was functional! The wooden floors had beautiful patterns, the reading room had the delicious smell of old books and the terrace had a view that took my breath away. I was told that the club was gutted twice by forest fires but rebuilt painstakingly retaining the old-world charm.

Dressed in becoming formals, my husband and I joined the director at the bar. While they had whisky, I sipped ginger ale that was accompanied by paneer and chicken tikka and roasted peanuts. Observing the courtesy of the armed forces gentry, I was filled with nostalgia for times gone by as I was born and

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The 'Queen' letterbox shaped like the queen of a chessboard.

brought up in the Air Force. I recalled the days when handsome officers would open doors for a young lady I was then. Marriage to a civilian came as a cultural shock, for most men in this world knew not the meaning of chivalry.

## AN EVENTFUL DAY

An eventful first day in Kasauli over, we slept a deep rejuvenating sleep in the lap of nature. The next day began with a sumptuous breakfast – appetite does become heartier in the hills, and a visit to the CRI. The Pasteur Institute was started in a small bungalow, in 1900 by David Semple for research and treatment of rabies, which is now a part of CRI. Due to this it is still called 'Kutte ka hospital' by the locals. CRI was established in 1905 and produces vaccines against typhoid, cholera, DPT, Yellow Fever, Japanese Encephalitis and a polyvalent anti-snake venom which is an antidote for the 4 main venomous snakes in India – cobra, krait, saw-scaled viper and Russell



...r. It also produces diagnostic reagents and gives  
vi...t graduation training in pathology and microbiology.  
p...il is an important part of the WHO vaccine programme  
C...d has acquired international fame. Not only does it  
ai...ply vaccines to 150 countries, the CDL also (Central  
st...ug Laboratory) tests samples from India and abroad for  
D...tency and toxicity. Tiny white mice and guinea pigs  
pay the price, as the testing is done on them. Next on the  
agenda was a visit to the CRI stables, at Drumbar Estate  
which house horses and mules. These noble creatures  
were injected weekly with snake venom and eight litres of  
blood was withdrawn from each horse every 4-6 weeks.  
After extracting the plasma which contained the  
antibodies against the venom, the red blood cells were  
injected back into the horse. This process was repeated  
till the horse was 22 years old, and the mule 25 years  
old. The complex also housed a rather crowded sheep  
pen that had a ram with curved horns and a newly calved  
sheep with her kid, segregated from the rest. I came out  
of the animal enclosure with mixed feelings – sorrow,  
guilt, gratitude and helplessness for the noble creature  
who served us well in life and death.

Lady Linlithgow TB Sanitarium in Kasauli, was the  
best in Asia. Situated in 47 acres of land, thickly wooded  
with pine and deodar trees, it had a high cure rate as it is  
scientifically proved that pine-scented air was therapeutic  
for TB patients. With the advent of drugs for TB, sanatoria  
became redundant and this property too became a part  
of the CRI. Those who survived the disease were sadly  
not wanted back by their families and stayed back to be  
assimilated as ward boys in the CRI.

Just behind this complex was an age-old cemetery  
with graves as old as 1818. Young soldiers, little children  
and young women (life expectancy was short then) lay in  
eternal rest in peace on hill slopes amidst tall pine trees.  
As these graves and their headstones were sculpted by  
Muslim craftsmen, most graves also had names of their  
Muslim makers engraved on them too. The British  
returned to their homeland after Independence reluctantly  
leaving the remains of their loved ones behind.

'But there are hardly any remains left in them now.'  
Quipped my husband unthinkingly. It was not about  
remains at all. A grave served as a focal point to vent  
grief and garner peace by washing them with tears and  
laying fresh flowers on them, just as the devout go to  
places of worship.

'Not a bad place at all to rest.' I thought, resisting an  
urge to lie down on the soft bed of pine needles beneath  
towering trees and let the prevailing peace seep inside  
me.

Speaking of graves there was an older cemetery near  
the old military hospital and an exclusive one called the  
'Lady's Grave' at the base of Manki Point where a lovely  
young Englishwoman and her horse were buried. An  
expert horsewoman, she decided to ride to Manki Point –  
it was called Tapp's Nose then, one full moon night. The  
uphill climb was perfect but while returning the horse  
slipped carrying both of them to their doom!

We

# Talking Points

## The Old Man of the Mountain

By Rahul Singh

Kasauli oozes history. The area once formed part of the Gurkha kingdom of Nepal and a few ruined forts still dot the hillsides. On a clear day, you can see Subathu, where the first Gurkhas were inducted into the British army. Kasauli also resonates with the poetry and prose of Rudyard Kipling, the unofficial poet laureate of the British presence. My father, Khushwant Singh, loved Kipling's "If"; it also contains one of his most endearing traits: his ability to communicate with high and low, whether the humble villager, the rich businessman or the urbane intellectual.

*If you can walk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a man, my son!*

Kasauli, where my father did much of his writing, is an unusual and, in some ways, a unique place. For one thing, unlike other Indian towns and cities, it has changed little since it was first set up by the British, almost two centuries ago, as a cantonment to take on the Sikhs, their last major opponents for the domination of the subcontinent (the British had just defeated the Gurkhas).

My father would relate how during his

morning and evening walks on the Upper Mall, he would often see a leopard sunning itself on the path. When I was a young boy, he would show me the magnificent golden eagles, circling and wheeling in the air at Monkey Point, a hillock at the end of the Lower Mall.

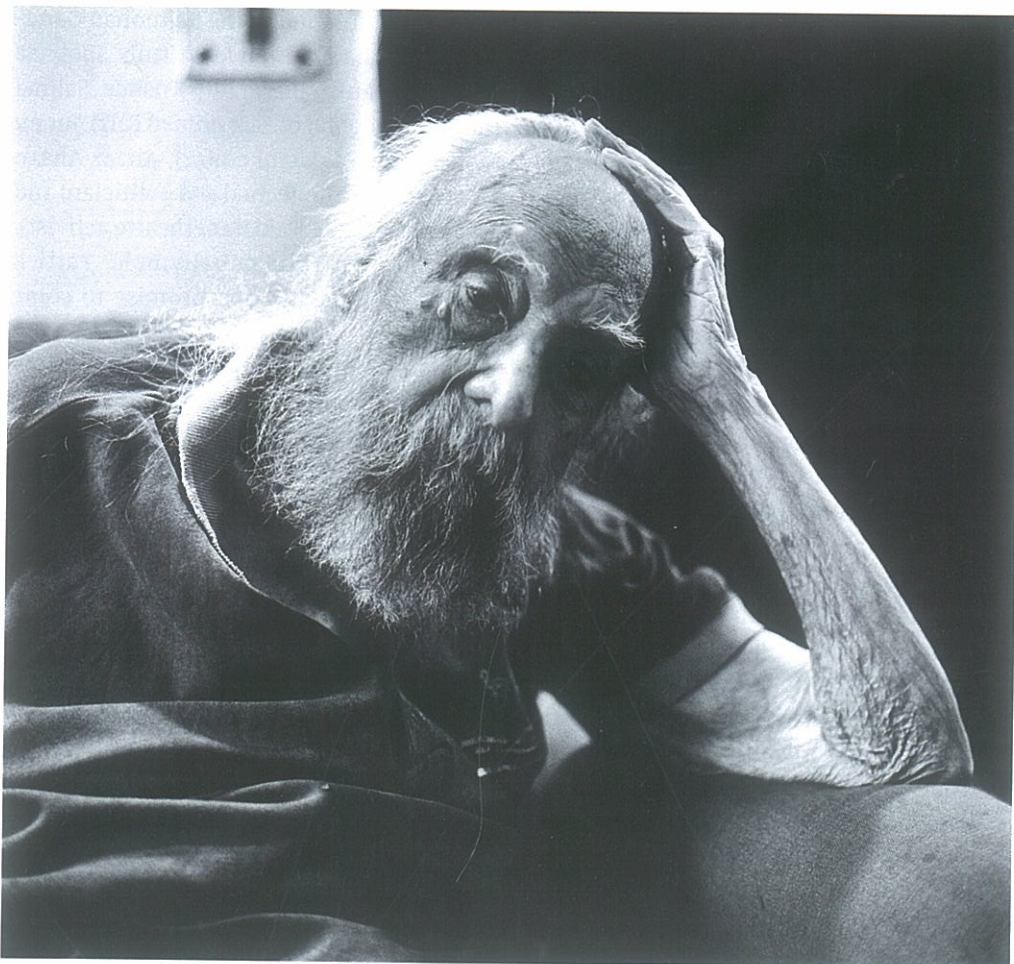
Sadly, the golden eagles have long disappeared from Kasauli and a leopard sunning itself is a rare sight. However, life in Kasauli, surrounded by trees, flowers and birds, instilled in my father a great and abiding love of nature. He bought a stone bird bath from a departing British neighbour decades ago and placed it in the garden (it is still there). In his diary he noted the birds he saw, using Salim Ali's books as guides. A sighting of the breathtakingly beautiful Paradise Flycatcher was always a celebratory event.

I remember him once wondering at how a British high commissioner in New Delhi, Sir Malcolm Macdonald—whose mistress was the famed Chinese-born writer Han Suyin, author of *A Many-Splendoured Thing*—found time to write a book, *Birds in my Indian Garden*. My father admired him, not so much for his abilities as a diplomat, or his love for beautiful and talented women, but for his deep interest in our feathered friends. I believe that Kasauli and Sir Malcolm's example got him to write *Nature Watch*, one of his best, though least-known books.

He was a great walker. He once trekked from Mashobra, near Shimla, to Kalka, a distance of some 120kms, all in one day. I'm sure he took some shortcuts! Until four years before he passed away, he regularly came to Kasauli in May–June, and then in September–October, the best time to be in the hill station weather-wise.

Apart from the weather and the sparklingly clear mountain air, there is the





Photograph: Dayanita Singh

tranquility—all conducive to reading, writing and introspection. After a hard day's work, at 7pm on the dot, my father would open his bar for any friends or visitors. Unless they were invited to stay for dinner, he would escort them out at 8pm. He was an early riser and waited for the papers; the crossword puzzle was a must. Indeed, when I last saw him alive on the morning of 20 March this year, he was busy solving the crossword puzzle, pen poised in the air. I think it was this habit that kept him mentally alert right up to the end.

Though my father did not distinguish himself in studies (he would love to relate

how he was always at the bottom of his class, in school and in college), history became his passion, as did poetry, particularly in Urdu (Faiz and Ghalib were his favourites). A short primer, *A History of the Sikhs*, written in his early years, was a precursor to a two-volume magnum opus with the same title. I believe it is this body of work, researched and written over a period of five years, with separate spin-off books, that will be his main academic legacy. Though he became a renowned, albeit a highly controversial national figure, with his editorship of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and his hugely popular weekly column, "With



# Talking Points

Malice Towards One and All", these will fade away with time. But his definitive *A History of the Sikhs* will live on.

So will his searing first novel, *Train to Pakistan*, an account of the Partition, partly based on his personal experiences. The tragic experience of Partition, especially those who had suffered by losing their near and dear ones and been financially crippled, turned many Indians into rabid Islamophobes and Pakistan-haters. But my father had an aversion to fundamentalists of all kinds, including those from his own religion. He mockingly called them *fundoos*. He also made fun of astrologers, palmists and so-called godmen, out to fool the gullible Indian public. He hated rituals and superstition.

In June 2012, during the Kasauli Week celebrations at the Kasauli Club, my long-time companion, Niloufer Bilimoria, suddenly came up with the idea of having a Khushwant Singh Literary Festival in Kasauli, the first such in the region and the first that would be named after a living writer. It seemed a bizarre idea but the then brigadier in charge of the Kasauli cantonment, Ananta Narayan, and his wife, Aparna, enthusiastically endorsed it. Subsequently, brigadiers Reddy and Lamba followed suit.

When the first edition of the litfest opened in October 2012, we expected at most 200 people to turn up daily over its three days. To our astonishment—and delight—over 500 came! The same kind of attendance was repeated at the second edition last year, and we expect a similar turnout this October. Clearly, there is a hunger for such an event in such a perfect backdrop. Much that was close to my father's heart has formed the core of these festivals: the Indian soldier, the environment, Indo-Pak ties, and of course, humour. We have managed to get a galaxy of writers and celebrities to

come to Kasauli, including Rajmohan Gandhi, Jeev Milkha Singh, Sir Mark Tully, Shobhaa Dé, Prem Shankar Jha, Pradip Krishen, Salima Hashmi (daughter of Faiz Ahmed Faiz), Jugnu Mohsin (the Pakistani editor), Aitzaz Ahsan (the Pakistani intellectual and politician) and Madeeha Gauhar (Pakistani theatre activist). Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple, Patrick French and Ruskin Bond promise to come this year!

Indeed, this year's litfest will have a special meaning since my father is no more. For the first time, we will talk of him in the past. Yet, his amazing zest for life, his passions and the causes he fought for, will continue to light up our minds and hearts.





# A LITERARY AFFAIR

**Kasauli comes alive with the 3rd Khushwant Singh Literary Festival (October 10–12, 2014)**

A hallmark of the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival (KSLF), held in Kasauli every October since the last two years, is the warmth and intimacy of the gathering—combined with the pristine setting of tiny Kasauli, the old-world charm of the Kasauli Club, and the impeccable bearing of the military, without whose help this festival would not have happened. This magic of the KSLF will continue in the years to come as a meeting of minds celebrate the power of ideas that can transform our lives as well as raise awareness for causes.

The theme of our festival this October is the Art of Telling Stories—a concept straight from the heart of the master storyteller himself, Khushwant Singh. The added poignancy now is that for the first time we will talk of him in the past. And yet, his amazing zest for life will continue to light up our minds and hearts.

So, 'Once upon a time, there lived a king of columnists and prince of hosts, a hero of cats, a trencherman of toasts', to paraphrase Vikram Seth's writing on KS. Once upon a time, a man called KS was the master storyteller spanning the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries. Stories down the pages of his novels, stories over scotch and malt in his living room (whether Delhi or Kasauli), and stories in his weekly columns. Once these connected him to a population of millions, once these stories helped transform the lives of millions, and now these stories continue to leave a legacy for future generations to feed on, to evolve, to grow, to think. And perhaps enhance the joy of reading and learning.

Just as KS has delighted, enlightened and enraged his readers, so too the KSLF will engage you in the delightful yet fragile ecology of this region, preserved well thanks to the cantonment. Capt Amarinder Singh will revive the literature of Punjab; Madan Gopal will mesmerise you with Sufi spirituality; the festival's multi-religious culture and music will energise us; its rich heritage will give rise to an informed wanderlust; we will realise that the Indo-Pak or Punjab-Pak civilisation was one and that the people will continue to be one; we will commemorate our Indian involvement in WW I and remember the irrepressible Sam Manekshaw on his centenary; Vivan Sundaram will revive the memories of Sikh charmers in his family; Daman Singh will spill the first family stories; Upamanyu Chatterjee, Githa Hariharan and Shobhaa De have new surprises and stories up their sleeves; Rajdeep Sardesai

and Sagorika Ghose will spill their tales on anchoring, elections, and more; and how many of us know of the multitalented Salman Khurshid and his play? Bina Ramani's amazing life will mingle with Bollywood. Did you know that Kabir Bedi was published in an anthology edited by KS? Or that Amrita Singh is his niece?

The festival is open to all. And has been put together by friends of KS and lovers of Kasauli. From corporates such as Tata Housing, Pepsi, Sula; our regular supporters and friends—Trilochan and Bir Sahney, Rita and Arun Duggal, the delightful Kim Lalli; others like Rajesh Dogar, who took on every task from housing to feeding... it is as though the festival took on a momentum of its own, steered by the enormous goodwill of Khushwant Singh.

The evenings will be for music, dancing, and entertainment.

Kasauli has been a summer home to KS for over half a century. It is here, in Raj Villa, that he has done most of his writing, including his columns syndicated across some 20 publications, translated into 17 Indian languages and over 125 novels (bookfinder.com), including works of non-fiction. And like his popular '11 secrets to a long and happy life' that keeps popping up on the internet, the KSLF will be our secret to a short and happy festival amid the never-ending pines, inspiring mountains, cheerful flowers and warm people. And yes, you shall hear the Nightingale... ■





# 'DEBATE, TALK AND LEARN TO LAUGH AGAIN'



Nanki Singh

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Various topics were touched upon in the second half of the session that started with the topic of how our country suppresses the voice of its writers it deems provocative.

Author Jaishree Mishra, politician Salman Khurshid and editor Ravi Singh, in a discussion moderated by Suheil Seth, spoke about how as a society we should aim for getting our voices heard and stop pandering to various religious groups in the country.

"Today, we fight and scream at each other, not debate. We should not get so easily offended. I want to tell India it should learn to laugh again," said the fiery adman Suheil Seth.

The session after it was on tiger conservation in India and the declining culture of wildlife parks as seeing wild life doesn't seem to be the priority anymore, but merit seems more so with various hotels in most parks offering parties at night. The discussion consisted of journalist Bob Rupani and IAS officer Raghav Chandra, who is currently posted as additional secretary and financial adviser to the ministries of culture in Delhi. It was moderated by Vivek Menon, who is founder, executive

## 5 poets shortlisted for Khushwant Singh prize

**JAIPUR:** Five poets shortlisted for the inaugural Khushwant Singh Memorial Prize for Poetry will be awarded at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2015. The shortlisted authors are Sridala Swami for 'Escape Artist', Ranjit Hoskote for 'Central Time', Arundhati Subramaniam for 'When God is a Traveller', Keki N Daruwalla for 'Fire Altar', Joy Goswami for 'Selected Poems' translated by Sampurna Chattarji. The shortlisted poets were

announced on Friday by Suheil Seth, founder of the prize, at the annual Khushwant Singh Literature Festival in Kasauli district. The winner will be awarded at the Zee Jaipur Literature Festival to be held during January 21-25. The award, worth ₹2 lakh, was established earlier this year. The poets were shortlisted by a jury comprising Ashok Vajpeyi, Jeet Thayil, Namita Gokhale, Pavan K Varma and Soli Sorabjee.

director and chief executive officer of the Wildlife Trust of India. What followed was a session on the value of commercial fiction as opposed to literary fiction, which saw authors Manju Kapoor and Jaishree Mishra in conversation, moderated by columnist and lifestyle writer Vinita Dawra Nangia. Later, author and English professor Suchita Malik read out some excerpts from her book 'Women Extraordinaire' which had been launched a few months back. This was followed by the most awaited session, wherein politicians Mani Shankar Aiyar and Salman Khurshid, Pakistani writer Asif Noorani and Pakistani Art historian Fakir Syed Aijazuddin, in a discussion moderated by Rajdeep Sardesai, spoke about

Khushwant Singh as a bridge between India and Pakistan and the state of relations between the two countries.

In the last two sessions, author Laxmi Dhaul read out and explored through a slide-show her book, 'In the Shadow of Freedom', a factual account of her father AG Tendulkar, once married to Thea von Harbou, author and script-writer of German films such as Metropolis and M. The book explores their relationship in World War II, her father's return to India, India's independence, and his marriage to her mother Indumati Gunaji. The final session saw art critic and writer Alka Pande explore the immortal legend of Heer Ranjha. A slide show presented Heer Ranjha sung about by various folk musicians of Punjab.



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1. (From left) Senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid, Pakistani writer Asif Noorani, journalist and author Rajdeep Sardesai, Congress member Mani Shankar Aiyar and art historian from Pakistan Syed Aijazuddin attending a session on "Khushwant Singh as bridge between Pakistan and India". 2. Author Khushwant Singh Ahluwalia along with Amritsar MP Captain Amarinder Singh. 3. Writer Shobhaa De and her husband Dalip releasing a book written by the former. 4. Indian translator, author and director Arshia Sattar at the fest. 5. Salman Khurshid along with moderator Suheil Seth attending the session on "At Home in India: The Muslim Saga" on the second day of the three-day Khushwant Singh Literary Fest in Kasauli on Saturday.

