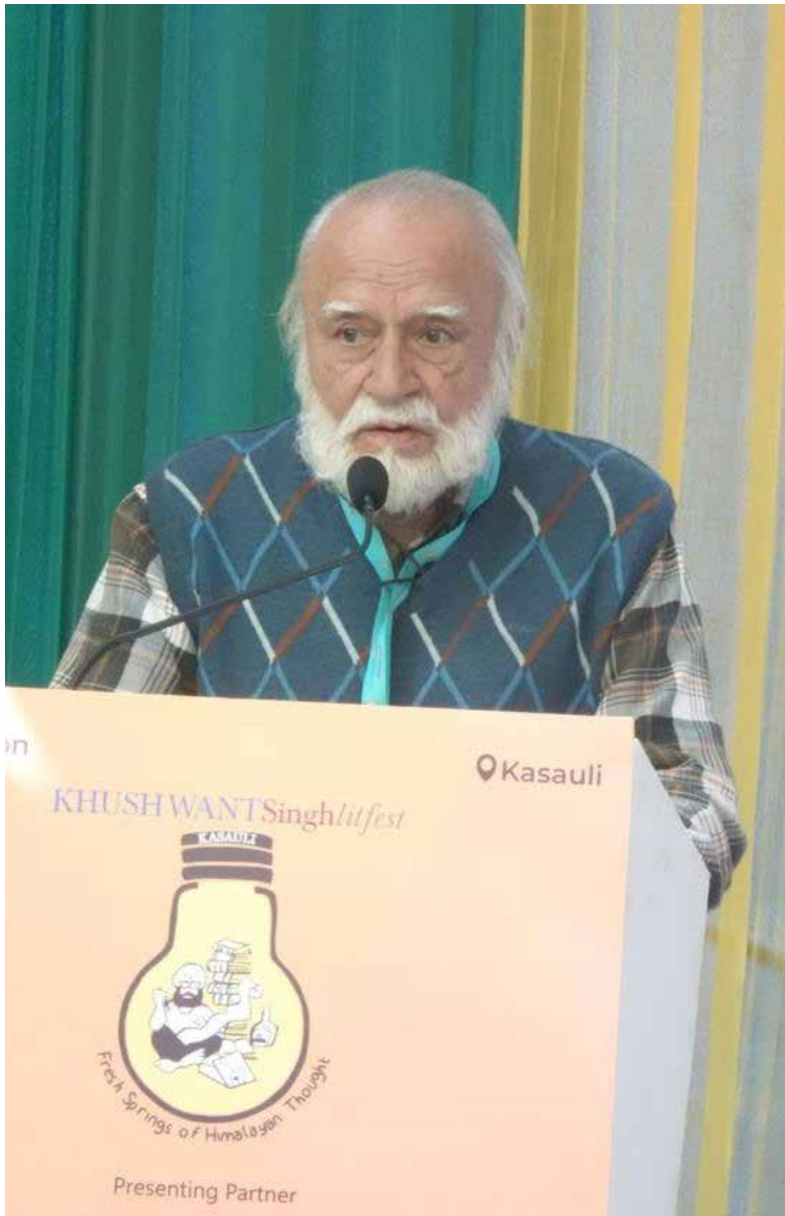


# Eclectic, Absorbing, Engaging

## *KSLF fondly relives the Nostalgia around the legendary Khushwant Singh*



The curtains came down on the 16th edition of the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival in Kasauli, a small hill station, 20 minutes away from the main highway connecting Chandigarh to Shimla, cutting off from Dharampur. With the excellent new 4-lane motorway, it takes some 75 minutes of comfortable driving. It is under a two-hour drive from Chandigarh airport.

*A report by* NAVIN BERRY

This was where Khushwant Singh's ancestors had their home, some decades back, and it is here where his son, Rahul Singh, a formidable journalist in his own right, having edited publications like the Readers' Digest, among others, has taken upon himself to hold, year after year, a literary event that celebrates the spirit of his late father.

Khushwant was an IFS class, quit to take on journalism, edited **The Illustrated Weekly of India**, with great aplomb. Even more so, he was known for writings, put together in numerous books and essays. He had a most liberal outlook on life, willingly and openly flaunted it, lived by his credo in full honesty. His was an unusual class, made friends with the rich and famous, with a rare stamp of integrity.

**It is this spirit that Rahul keeps alive, displaying a sense of liberalism and free flow of thought and ideas, from across the spectrum of new writings that make a mark every year or other.**

This edition, the 16th, marked a milestone in a sense that it had more buzz going than ever before; easily, the most largely and successfully attended that I have seen – as a disclaimer, I have been attending only in recent few years, ever since I became a regular at the Kasauli Club, a cantonment relic of the British Raj. The club has in itself become a major hotspot in this hill station, now gathering steam as a destination in itself, with newer

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**KSLF 2024 brought together the writers of today, in yet another coming together of minds, both young and old, yesteryears and contemporary. The opening session was a conversation with William Dalrymple, the flavour of our times. His current best-seller, *The Golden Road*, has brought rave reviews at a time when the present dispensation is fostering the idea of a new India, harking back to a time when it was considered the golden peacock.**



branded hotels opening and designer villas coming up in gated communities.

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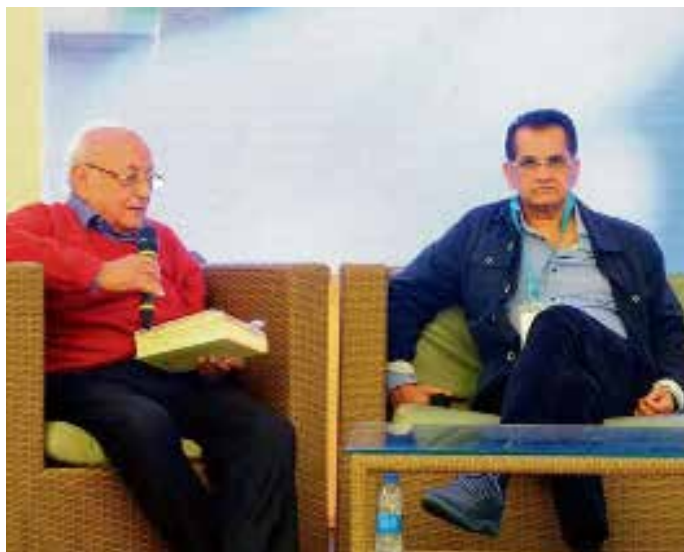
Over three days, 18th to 20th October, some forty speakers held the stage, in stand alone presentations, or in conversations with equally renowned personalities. The choice of subjects was all-embracing; eclectic, absorbing and inclusive. Some 800 attendees walked through the event.

a new India, harking back to a time when it was considered the golden peacock. William's book is a long narrative, researched in adulation of an India long gone by, when it traded its silks and spices with the Romans; when it had maritime trade with the Middle East, and when Buddha brought India close to the Eastern powers including China and much of the Far East. In an hour of spell-binding dissertation, Dalrymple took the audience in rapt attention, through a march in history, of which they knew little or nothing. His books sold out in plenty, as the author happily asked every buyer for his/her name and happily autographed it.

Full Circle has been endorsing the festival in recent years. It has a significant book counter where many of the attending writers fondly display their recent works, and typically, brisk sales do happen.

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**L Subramaniam** spoke with Namita Devidayal, on the harmonising Indian raga system with Western harmonic music; Army veteran **Ian Cardozo** spoke our amazing soldiers highlighting the human dimension of war; advertising guru **Prahlad Kakkar**, shared how he sent his suited and booted clients flying high; **Tasneem Zarkaria Mehta** shared how Mumbai had been her muse in energising museum culture; **Suhasini Haider** shared a conversation on India-China challenge with a panel that included **Ananth Krishnan**, **Alex Travelli** and **Kanti Bajpai**; historian **Radha Kumar** was interviewed by television anchor Bhupendra Choubey on democracy in times of conflict; there was film maker **Imtiaz Ali** conversing upon the golden period in Bollywood; eminent lawyer and activist **Saurabh Kirpal** spoke on justice, liberty and equality, a subject that he speaks on from his heart; Vikram Sahney spoke with veteran diplomat and socialite **Bhaichand Patel**; India's G20 Sherpa, **Amitabh Kant**, was in conversation with Rahul Singh on Viksit Bharat, in his capacity of author.



In his interaction with eminent journalist Prem Shankar Jha, India's Sherpa Amitabh Kant shared how the balance sheets of the government, the banks and those of the private sector have never been as good. Driven by government spending where its capex has moved from 1% to 4%, it is now the turn of the private sector to spur growth. Kant is a strong votary of growth at 10% per annum if we have to reclaim our space in the global economy. He recalled how post covid the government spending has gone into vast social sector sectors, building homes, toilets and infrastructure like over 80,000 kilometres of roads. These have become enablers for the private sector to build upon. He remains optimistic that the best is yet to unfold.

The choice of subjects was all-embracing; eclectic, absorbing and inclusive. Some 800 attendees walked through the event over the three days; at any time, there were a few hundred in rapt attention. The sessions went full day, from morning to evening, followed by much reverie and bonding over functions marked by music and entertainment. Never has one seen such a buzz around the bar, the outside lawns – each a loving recall of the charm and tranquillity of the club, at some 6,200 feet height, among the highest points in the hills of Kasauli.

KSLF has become an annual event to look forward to, for local residents, members of the club, coming from all over. This year, we saw an increased level of support, with prominent builder Viaanar being the presenting sponsor. Still, it is a labour of love, considering the Herculean costs involved in inviting speakers, what with soaring airfares, accommodation and the works. An extremely well-orchestrated event, flawless in execution, with a host of invited media, streamed live with dedication on Youtube. All those interested in hearing the debates this year, best is to get onto the Youtube channel.

*Altogether, an educative and entertaining three days, much to remember, and much to look forward to, for the next edition of the same. Thanks Rahul, thanks Niloufer, for keeping the spirit of Khushwant Singh going, giving Kasauli its annual reason to be come together, to celebrate a much loved hill station that we all hope stays this way, retaining its charm as a quaint and lovable home to so many. 📺*