



Mita Kapur flanked by Franck Thilliez and Vikram Chandra

THE WRITE WAY

COME JANUARY, AND THERE IS A SENSE OF LITERATURE IN THE AIR. THIS IS THE TIME FOR ALL THINGS BOOKS, AUTHORS AND ALSO A TIME WHEN RAJASTHAN TOURISM'S ZEE JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL (JLF) TAKES PLACE. **BY BINDU GOPAL RAO**



Mei Fong

Often described as the 'greatest literary show on earth' and the 'Kumbh Mela of literature', JLF has hosted nearly 2000 speakers and welcomed over a million booklovers over the past decade, evolving into a global literary phenomenon. This year, the festival had 350 writers, thinkers, politicians, journalists and popular cultural icons from over 35 different nationalities congregating at Diggi Palace in Jaipur.

The festival also featured a spectacular line-up of speakers representing the major awards including the Nobel, Man Booker, Pulitzer, Padma Vibhushan and the Sahitya Akademi Award. In its 11th edition this year, JLF played host to a whopping 200 sessions spanning a multitude of topics, trends, ideas and genres ranging from fiction, poetry and nonfiction to gender, environment, science, history, liberal arts, journalism, economics, travel and

cinema. All this happened over a five day period of intense activity from between January 25 and 29, 2018.

This year, for the first time, the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival also hosted a preview in Mumbai, followed by Delhi. In Mumbai, the preview was held at the magnificently restored Royal Opera House and found an opportunity to connect with a large number of Mumbai literature-lovers on their home ground. Another first this year was the sessions on music prior to the performances at the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival's Music Stage. These happened each day at 6 pm and featured hour-long curated discussions around music-based themes and explored narratives, trends and ideas in music's lush canvas. This apart, JLF also had many firsts in programming as well with many speakers making their maiden visit to the festival, and some even to the country.

Aside from the sessions, there were several book launches such as *Padmini*:

From left: Pushpesh Pant, Jim Mallinson and Bibek Debroy



The Spirited Queen of Chittor by Mridula Behari; *Citizen Delhi: My Times, My Life* by Sheila Dikshit; and *India's Heritage of Gharana Music: Pandits of Gwalior* by Meeta Pandit; many awards like the Ojas Art Award, the Vani Foundation Distinguished Translator Award, the French Book Award and the Kanhaiya Lal Sethia Award for Poetry.

Marquee speakers like British playwright Sir Tom Stoppard, winner of an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*, discussing his life and work in a fascinating free-flowing session called *The Real Thing*; a discussion aptly titled *The Great Survivor* where Hamid Karzai, former President of Afghanistan, and William Dalrymple discuss his life, legacy and leadership through the country's recent turbulent times, his views on India's role in Afghanistan past and present and his predictions for the future of his country; were some of the highlights of JLF 2018.

In *The Bridget Jones' Diaries*, novelist Helen Fielding spoke with publisher Meru Gokhale of the comic and the tragic, film and fiction and *Bridget Jones' bumpy ride to motherhood*. In *The Joy Luck Club*,

celebrated novelist Amy Tan spoke to Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi about her extraordinary life and her emergence as a writer of stature against many odds.

Also present at the event were Kathy Reichs, an American crime writer, forensic anthropologist, academic and producer of the TV series *Bones* (loosely based on Reichs' works); award-winning Indian film director and producer Anurag Kashyap; Indian art critic, art historian, Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awardee, BN Goswamy; British-born Indian origin essayist Pico Iyer, who leads a nomadic life between a Benedictine hermitage in California, Nara in Japan and international airports around the world; New York Times bestselling poet and illustrator Rupi Kaur; Indian classical dancer and Padma Vibhushan awardee Sonal Mansingh; Indian philanthropist and writer Sudha Murty; Sahitya Akademi Award winner Mridula Garg; 2006 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mohammad Yunus; Portuguese-American journalist Michael Rezendes, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his investigative work as a member of *The Boston Globe's* legendary Spotlight Team; and tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, were also present.

The ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival sets literary conversations, debates and dialogue against the backdrop of built and cultural heritage including curated art installations, world music performances at the Music Stage and cultural evenings at heritage venues like the Amber Fort and Hawa Mahal. "Each year, the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival celebrates the cultural riches of Rajasthan with heritage evenings. Bringing an amalgamation of music, poetry and art, this year the heritage events witnessed a visual delight with a multimedia theatre act *The Troth — Usne Kaha Tha* by the London based dance troupe *Akademi* in the 'Under the Stars at Hawa Mahal' segment. At the 'Majestic Evening at Amber Fort', maestro Ustad Kamal Sabri performed a sarangi rendition and musician Shekhar Ravjiani paid a musical tribute to his mentor Jagjit Singh. ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival's Music Stage featured an eclectic mix of musicians who performed in the mornings and evenings during the festival. Some of the leading names included Kailash Kher, Shilpa Rao, Grammy nominated David Gray, Afro Celt Sound System and Blackstratblues, among other performers, to create world class music for the audience," said a spokesperson from JLF.

A true champion of literary and artistic traditions and democratic discourse, the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival encourages freedom of thought through a range of voices from India and abroad engaged in informed and enlightened dialogue and promotes above all a love for literature. In addition to the revelatory discussions, the festival is setting the stage for unparalleled experiences in music, art and culture. ■

(Note: The photographs shown here are from a previous edition of JLF)