

# Fire on the mountain

*It can ignite minds or simply  
spark some Instawisdom*

**Bachi Karkaria**



The headline is the name of Anita Desai's quietly searing novel. But its faded setting, Kasauli, is more linked to the feisty Khushwant Singh. Though his own family retreat was at Mashobra, he preferred the deodars which guarded his privacy and his father-in-law's house in this Himachali hill station. It's the venue of a litfest dedicated to him – uniquely when he was still alive. Taking part in the KSLF is my own annual pilgrimage – and bragging right. Lofty journos and nubile nymphets may claim Most Favoured Protegee status, but I alone get to sleep in Khushwantji's bed here at Raj Villa. Never mind the windy draughts and wake-up hullabaloo of the monkeys on the cold tin roof.

Khushwantji was an eco-warrior before this became a junket. But his beloved Kasauli battled against a climate change which left my woollies skulking in my suitcase last weekend. Undeterred, KSLF '17 soldiered on atop its sylvan valley. Cantonment Kasauli has been spared nearby Simla's death by tourism. Chholey stall ke peechhey kya hai?

Litfests themselves have begun springing up like mushroom pizzas. They may contain gourmet truffles, but they're so must-go because they're perceived as the two-minute diet for intellectual attainment. So, from the cerebral spread at KSLF, you could snack on Instawisdom.

**erratica** Devdutt Pattanaik offered a trilogy of definitions: "Fact is everybody's truth. Fiction is nobody's truth. Myth is somebody's truth; so don't mock those who knock their heads on it."

Ashwin Sanghi shared received wisdom. An uncle almost drained his whisky glass to illustrate that "Beta, 90% success is due to good luck." And the remaining 10%? Inspiration? Hard work? No-ji, "It's due to bloody good luck!"

Vikram Seth read out his moving verse. Then, this most reclusive and most sought-after genius revealed his weapon against persistent 'inviters'. "To my blunt 'I can't come', they'll demand, 'Why not?' So, then, very politely, almost obsequiously, I say, 'Because, I'm afraid, it's just not possible'." This takes the matter beyond the realm of personal choice. "You have to clear your calendar," said Seth. OMG! Then what about today's obsession with 'Mujhhko dekho, dekho' and FOMO, the Fear Of Missing Out?

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**Alec Smart said: "Will the fireworks ban start with a bang and end in a whimper?"**

*bachi.karkaria@timesgroup.com*  
*<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/erratica>*