

# MEDIA COVERAGE



The Bhutan festival of  
Literature, Art & Culture  
21~23 May 2012 | Thimphu, Bhutan





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## Mountain Echoes Lit fest begins May 20

Upasana Mantri Feb 28, 2012, 05:16PM IST

**Tags:** [Vir das](#) | [Universe](#) | [THIMPHU](#) | [queen](#) | [Mountain Echoes](#) | [Echoes](#) | [Bhutan](#)

*Man has forever been haunted by the idea of echo.*

You will find them in children's stories, in the tales of reflection and retribution, silence, colours and mystery. Inspired by this poetic phenomenon, *Mountain Echoes* is making a comeback following the overwhelming response received by the literati in both [Bhutan](#) and India. In its third year, Mountain Echoes will celebrate the true spirit of art begets art. The India-Bhutan Foundation presents Mountain Echoes 2012 - a literary festival bringing together the best in the field of literature and art, yet again.

It's said that there is no other way to grow but to hear stories from different perspectives and Mountain Echoes gives this opportunity to step in a parallel [universe](#) for four days this year from 20-24 May, 2012. Relish the beautiful weather of Thimphu, Bhutan and view theatrics, literary discussions and workshops against the magical backdrop of mountains and their candid beauty.

The literary festival, espoused by His Excellency Pavan Verma, India's Ambassador to Bhutan, also enjoys patronage of Her Majesty, the [Queen](#) Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

Mountain Echoes 2012 will entail many themes such as the need and importance of preserving language, stand up comedy, graphic novels, environmental writing, cinema, theatre, poetry, popular fiction and workshops. Some of the speakers at the festival are HM Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, Khyentse Norbu, Siok Sian Dorji, Dr Tashi Wangchuck, Dorji Wangchuck, Karma Singye Dorji, Khenpo Karma Tshering, Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, Dayanita Singh, Aweek Sen, Gulzar, Stephen Alter, Namita Gokhale, [Vir Das](#), Mishi Saran to name a few.



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31 MARCH 2012

## India Bhutan Foundation Presents Mountain Echoes Literary Festival 2012

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Date: 20 - 24 May 2012

Mountain Echoes is a unique literary and cultural festival set in the pristine beauty of Bhutan. The festival enjoys the patronage of Her Majesty, the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

Conceptualised by His Excellency Pavan Varma, Indian Ambassador to Bhutan the festival is an initiative by the India-Bhutan Foundation in association with Siyahi to share the many myths, legends and folklore from Bhutan and the Himalayan region of India.

The focus of the festival is to explore and celebrate the rich literary culture of both the countries.

### MOUNTAIN ECHOES 2012

Its Back! Mountain Echoes 2012, the Literary Festival that is set in the midst of a mountain paradise - Bhutan. This year promises to be bigger than ever with some hugely inspiring names from the world literature, theatre, film, music, art and culture.

Some of the confirmed speakers at this year's festival are: Advaita Kala, Aveek Sen, Dayanita Singh, Dorji Wangchuk, Kalpish Ratna (Kalpana Swaminathan & Ishrat Syed), Karma Singye Dorji, Kishwar Desai, Malvika Singh, Mishi Saran, Namita Gokhale, Patrick French, Pavan Varma, Pramod Kumar KG, Sonam Jatso, Stephen Alter, Swati Chopra, Tshering C Dorji, Vikram Seth, and Vir Das.

Catch the most heavenly Literature Festival on earth from the 20th to the 24th of May 2012 in Thimphu, Bhutan.

<http://www.asiawrites.org/2012/03/india-bhutan-founda>

Mountain Echoes, an annual literary festival organized in Bhutan, is promising to come back with themes such as the need and importance of preserving language, standup comedy, graphic novels, environmental writing, cinema, theatre, poetry, and popular fiction. This year's festival, scheduled from May 20 to 24, will feature speakers like Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, Opposition Leader Tshering Tobgay, and Indian writer and filmmaker Gulzar, among a galaxy of authors, academics, actors, singers, film directors and intellectuals from Bhutan and India.

Organised by India-Bhutan Foundation in association with Siyahi, one of India's leading literary consultancy, the festival will celebrate the true spirit of art begets art. This is the third year of the literary festival. Mountain Echoes underlines the importance of cultural conversation and spending time with one another as the world becomes increasingly globalised. The cultural, literary and artistic exchange of ideas, thoughts and sensibilities is expected to contribute to strengthening the relationship between Bhutan and India.

The literary festival is going to be supported by Indian ambassador, Pavan K Verma, and Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

**By Lobzang Yeshey**



# Bollywood and books in Bhutan

The mountain kingdom's annual literary festival may be small but it promises to be sparkling

**SHRABONTI BAGCHI**  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**M**ountain Echoes, the annual literary festival in Bhutan, promises to be that rare thing among lit fests in the Indian sub-continent today: free of controversy and focused on writers and writing. The Bhutan fest has acquired a quiet dignity and the status of a sleeper hit: significantly less of a madhouse than Jaipur and nowhere near as gauche as this year's maiden Kolkata affair. Festival organizers are confident the festival's presiding deities will see it through this time as well, and with the likes of Vikram Seth, Patrick French, Ali Sethi, Kalpana Swaminathan-Ishrat Syed, Dayanita Singh and William Dalrymple attending, that seems more than likely.

Now in its third year, Mountain Echoes will be held between May 20 and 24 in Thimpu, and will include a writers' retreat at Paro. The festival was conceptualised in 2009 by cultural bureaucrat Pavan K Varma, who has served as India's ambassador to Bhutan since that year; Jaipur lit-fest director Namita Gokhale; Mita Kapur, who heads Siyahi, a leading literary consultancy; and museum consultant Pramod Kumar KG. With support from the India-Bhutan Foundation and the strong patronage of Bhutan's elegant queen mother HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, who is also a published author, Siyahi has been organising the fest since 2010.

"It has been a rollicking ride for me personally," says Mita Kapur. "The first year, I just parked myself in Bhutan in search of Bhutanese writers. I met authors, poets and publishers — interestingly, most publishing there is done by bookstores — and was helped by suggestions from people like Kunzang Choden, who is probably the best-known Bhutanese author and who has been closely associated with



**HILL LIT:** Pavan Varma, Bhutan Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and guests at last year's festival

the festival from the beginning."

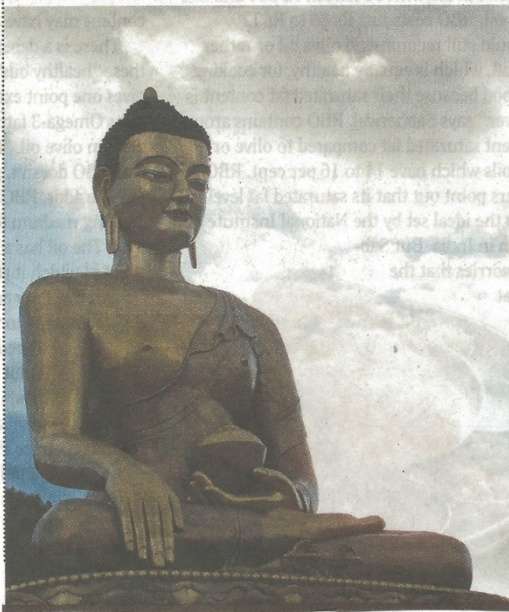
In 2011, besides a contingent of authors and literary personalities such as David Davidar, Anita Roy, Shobhaa De, Valmik Thapar, Samit Basu and Devdutt Pattanaik, there was a strong Bollywood presence as well — not literary hangers on but Bollywood folk with authentic intellectual cred; the writers, lyricists and directors of New Bollywood, if you will. This turned out to be a defining trait of the festival. So while in 2011, Imtiaz Ali, Jaideep Sahni, Rohan Sippy and R Madhavan descended in Bhutan, the 2012 edition will be attended by poets Gulzar and Javed Akhtar, who have made it an annual retreat, and scriptwriters Advaita Kala and Shakun Batra, lyricist Amitabh Bhattacharya, musician Amit Trivedi, Sharmila Tagore and Vishal Bharadwaj.

Kapur calls Mountain Echoes a "cozy, intimate" festival and the audience "naturally shy". "It is a mannered society," she says. "The minute you step down from the aircraft, you feel that, and it rubs off on everyone. The audience is engaged and intelligent, and when someone gets up to ask a question, you know they really have something to say and are not just holding the mike to get heard." While young school and college students from Thimpu and other parts of Bhutan make up a large number of attendees, groups from India have also been making it, says Kapur recalling how a group of students from IIT Madras turned up last year without the mandatory paperwork and had to be bailed out with the help of the Indian embassy. Groups from Jaipur, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata also schedule holidays in Bhutan to coincide with the fest, as do those from Shanghai, Malaysia and the Philippines.

For Namita Gokhale, co-director of Mountain Echoes along with Pramod KG, the festival is associated with a very personal and passionate attachment to the Himalayas. "I am from Kumaon and have always felt drawn to the mountains," says Gokhale. "I experienced an immediate sense of belonging when I first traveled to Bhutan 15 years ago to work with a Japanese health project, and along with that, a sense of grief at what we have let many of our Indian mountain regions become. Bhutan is pristine and pure, and I fell in love with it." Gokhale calls Mountain Echoes "the rare jewel of the festival circuit" and an "intimate festival with great depth", but avoids any comparisons with the DSC Jaipur Literature Festival, which she co-directs and is intimately associated with.

That's only fair, given that Jaipur is, in many ways, as much an antithesis to Mountain Echoes as India is to Bhutan: richer, bigger and more populated, certainly, but also louder and more chaotic.

*(Disclosure: This correspondent has been invited to cover the festival)*



## **India, Bhutan to refresh friendship over fine print**

Submitted by [admin4](#) on 25 April 2012 - 12:14pm

[India News](#)

By IANS,

New Delhi : A three-day confluence of narratives, ideas, literary expositions and cultural showcases from India and Bhutan will strengthen the growing South Asian cultural solidarity in the Himalayan kingdom next month.

The third edition of the Mountain Echoes festival, a literary collaboration between the India-Bhutan Foundation and Siyahi, a non-profit organisation, will open at the Tarayana Centre in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan May 21-24.

"We are fortunate to have South Asia in Bhutan this year with writers from India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. It is a continuum of cultural and linguistic identities across political borders," Namita Gokhale, director of the festival, told IANS.

She said "linguistic and cultural borders are completely different from the political borders".

"For example, Bangladesh and West Bengal share a common heritage and a common language though they are separate political entities," she said.

The festival in Bhutan will be an arc across cultures and languages like Urdu, English and Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, to build common ground, Gokhale said.

Gokhale, an acclaimed writer from the Kumaon hills in Uttarakhand, said the festival was also an ode to the passion for mountains and mountain-writing. "I have a long association with Bhutan. I have been going to Bhutan for the last 15 years. It is a privilege to do a festival in Bhutan," the writer said.

The festival in Bhutan, together with similar initiatives in Nepal and India, were part of a new Asian culture chain, she said.

The festival to be inaugurated by Gokhale will host writer-envoy Pavan Varma and Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk at the opening session.

The subsequent sessions will feature acclaimed Indian photographer Dayanita Singh, emerging Sri Lankan writer Ashok Ferrey, Bangladeshi writer Shazia Omar, Pakistani writer Ali Sethi and British writers Patrick French and William Dalrymple.

The star attraction of the festival is poet-novelist Vikram Seth, actor-writer Stephen Alter, who has written extensively on the mountains, and poet Gulzar.

Throwing light on the trends in Bhutanese writing, Gokhale said Bhutanese literature had a lot of "classical and Buddhist religious traditions drawing from ancient cultures and roles".

"But at the same time, contemporary literature is carving its niche with urban writers and a tribe of young bloggers like any other country in Asia. The emergence of good Bhutanese writing has imbued new confidence in the Bhutanese writers. The exchange of ideas is helping them," Gokhale said.

Some Bhutanese writers and artists to watch out for at the festival include actor Kelly Dorje, noted Buddhist scholar Karma Phuntsho, Kuenga Tenzin and story-teller Siok Sian Dorji, who form the contingent of a dozen talented voices in Bhutanese culture.

Mita Kapur of Siyahi, an organisation that promotes literature in India, says the festival has been designed as a social and holistic cultural exchange between the two countries with rich heritage and political legacies.

"We have tried to offer a bit of everything...literature, culture, food, textiles, Himalayas and cinema with representatives from fledgling Bhutanese movie industry and Bollywood. But have kept the participation small and intimate this year," Kapur said.

She described two conversations and a live demonstration woven around food and a brainstorming roundtable on "media and democracy" as the new highlights of the festival.

[http://twocircles.net/2012apr25/india\\_bhutan\\_refresh\\_friend](http://twocircles.net/2012apr25/india_bhutan_refresh_friend)



BHUTAN LITERATURE

## Pages From The Dragon Kingdom

AJAY MAGO



**M**OUNTAIN ECHOES, THE LITERARY FESTIVAL organised by India-Bhutan Foundation in association with Siyahi, brings into focus art and travel writing in its third year. Other fruitful discussions will dwell on the importance of preserving language, graphic novels, environmental writing, cinema, music, photography, theatre, poetry and popular fiction. Hear it from noted writers Patrick French, Mishi Saran, Stephen Alter, Ali Sethi, who will conduct sessions at the event. Bitten by the travel bug? Directors Vishal Bhardwaj and Shakun Batra can enlighten you on travel destinations. Plus, Vikram Seth, Karma Singye Dorji, Dayanita Singh, Gulzar, Kishwar Desai, Ugyen Pande, William Dalrymple, Sharmila Tagore, Wendell Rodricks, Namita Gokhale, among others, will speak. **May 20-24, Thimphu.** ■



ADITI GOYAL

## Showcase: Bhutanese gala

SWATI DAFTUAR

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*Mountain Echoes 2012 explores and celebrates the literary traditions and cultural nuances of both India and Bhutan.*

It's springtime in Bhutan and the Land of the Thunder Dragon is gearing up to host one of the fastest growing literary festivals in the world. Mountain Echoes is an annual literary and cultural festival set in the serene surroundings of Bhutan. An initiative by the India- Bhutan Foundation, in association with Siyahi, Mountain Echoes is an attempt to share the rich culture and many myths, legends and folklore of the Himalayan region, while soaking up the best of literature.

The focus is to explore and celebrate the literary traditions and cultural nuances of India and Bhutan. The festival promises to be invigorating and thought-provoking, with a line up of literary discussions, story-telling, photography exhibitions, contemporary dance performances, stand-up comedy and travel and environment writing by some illustrious and well known names.

The three-day festival will be hosted at three venues at Thimphu: the Tarayana Centre, the Taj Tashi and the Nehru Wangchuck Centre. Her Majesty Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck is the Chief Royal Patron. "The festival brings together the common threads of culture, literature, music, art and tradition between the two countries. We try every year to make the festival more holistic, and give it a contemporary spin. This year, we have a lot of cinema, travel and environment writing and a host of other activities planned that will attract everyone, not just booklovers. The two countries have a lot to share, and its the festivals attempt to provide that platform" says Mita Kapur of Siyahi The festival was conceptualised by His Excellency Pavan K. Varma, Ambassador to Bhutan. Namita Gokhale and Pramod Kumar KG are the programme directors. The programme reflects the popularity of contemporary and popular culture in Thimphu.

Some events include a talk by Vikram Seth on The Rivered Earth; "Bolo Bollywood" by Mushtaq Shiekh, Vishal Bhardwaj in conversation with Tisca Chopra; "A Life In Poetry" by Javed Akhtar in conversation with Mushtaq Shiekh; "Remembering Satyajit Ray" by Sharmila Tagore in conversation with Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri; "Once Upon A Hill" by Kalpana Swaminathan and Ishrat Syed and "Bhutanese Cinema On The Move" by Tsokye Tsomo Karchung, Thukten Yeshe, Phuntsok Rabten in conversation with Kelly Dorji. The festival will also see the launch of Mishi Saran's new book, The Other Side of Light, as well as a concert By Eka.

A perfect excuse to visit this beautiful country.

**Mountain Echoes 2012;** May 20 to 23, Tarayana Foundation, Taj Tashi and Nehru Wangchuck Centre, Thimphu.



# DECCAN Chronicle

## Lit fest in the hills

May 17, 2012

By **Sathya Saran**

**Tags:** [literary festivals](#), [Mountain Echoes 2012](#)

Imtiaz Ali in an earlier edition of Mountain Echoes fest in Bhutan.

Starting May 20, the mountain kingdom of Bhutan will reverberate for four days with literary voices who will cross words on writing that traverses subjects as varied as food, travel, sci-fi and fiction at Mountain Echoes 2012.

Created as a platform to celebrate the cultural and mythological links between Bhutan and India, which are bound together by the Himalayas too, this year's festival will go beyond literature to include themes like the preservation of language, of the environment, and writing of dialogues and lyrical compositions in cinema and beyond. Photography, travel and food are other aspects that will find space for discussion, as well as textiles and the tradition of weaving cloth.

Mingling their ideas and sharing their work will be writers from both the countries and from other parts of Asia as well. The mighty Himalayas are a natural backdrop for the fest, and loom over the theming of it. Much of the work being presented would have the mountains as a theme, but as the festival enters its third year, the endeavour is to include contemporary work, from both countries, and include music, cinema, as well as current issues. The last is why the event holds a session on media and democracy, where ideas can bring new fruit through a discussion at a round table.

On popular demand from Bhutan are well known literary names from Hindi cinema — including Gulzar, Javed Akhtar, Vishal Bhardwaj among others. Actor Sharmila Tagore, who has an entire session to speak through, is there, thanks to her long association with cinema, but also courtesy a personal request from the Bhutanese royalty!

Laila Tyabji, Kelly Dorji, Mishi Saran, Wendell Rodricks, Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple, Pavan K. Varma, Noa Jones and Patrick French are among the other speakers. Namita Gokhale and Pramod Kumar KG, directors of the fest, will also present sessions.

The festival was started by the Queen Mother — Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, herself a writer published by Penguin, and Pavan K. Varma, when he was posted as the ambassador to Bhutan. Their common literary interests led to the articulation of the need for a literary event.

Siyahi and the India-Bhutan Foundation got together to create the poetically named Mountain Echoes Festival. Bhutan is well represented as well. Karma Singye Dorji, author of *Dreaming of Prayer Flags: Stories and Images from Bhutan* and one of five winners of the 1995 Dag Hammarskjöld Award given by the UN Correspondents Association, is among the speakers, as is Dr Karma Phuntsho, a research associate at the Mongolia and Inner Asian Studies Unit, Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge.

Other speakers include Kuenga Tenzin whose first novel *Ensnared* became one of the bestselling novels in Bhutan, Kunzang Choden who writes on Bhutanese oral traditions, folklore and women, and Kuenzang Thinley who has authored more than 60 books in Dzongkha language. The Taj Tashi, the Nehru Wanchuk Centre, and the Tarayana centre are some of the venues of the festival.

The writer is the author of *From Me to You: Writings on Love, Life, Learnings*



and no we don't keep tabs on each other," adds the actor.



**MEN IN FOCUS:** (L-R) Rajiv Arora with his friend, Ajay Chopra and Jaimni Uberoi



**FROM JAIPUR TO BHUTAN:** Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck and Sundeep Bhutoria

# Jaipur 'lit' up Bhutan

**DAY 2, MOUNTAIN ECHOES  
LIT FEST  
MAY 21, MONDAY  
TAJ TASHI, THIMPU**

ON the second day of Mountain Echoes Literary Festival in Bhutan, city-based culturist Sundeep Bhutoria hosted a dinner at the Taj Tashi property in Thimphu, in association with Techno India. Apart from the authors like Gulzar, Vikram Seth, Patrick French, William Dalrymple, festival directors Namita Gokhale and Pramod Kumar KG, and



Indian Ambassador to Bhutan and author Pavan K Varma, many prominent Jaipurites were also present at this literary bash! Many of the guests chose to dress up in traditional Bhutanese attire, as they enjoyed cocktails and an authentic Bhutanese dinner.

The guest list also included the diplomats of other countries in Bhutan, film and TV celebs and, of course the chief guest Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck who also released the book *Posing Posterity: Royal Indian Portraits* by Pramod Kumar KG, before the dinner.

—AH Correspondent



**WHAT'S UP?** Namita Gokhale



**Vikram Seth**



**HEY!** Patrick French



**ALL SMILES:** Tisca Chopra and Pramod Kumar KG



**Sharmila Tagore**



**ENJOYING THE LITERARY EVENING:** (L-R) Vishal Bhardwaj, Bangladesh ambassador to Bhutan and Gulzar with a guest



**FOR THE CAMERA:** Rahul and Mita Kapur



**CATCHING UP:** Ritu Oberoi (L) with friends from Jaipur



# भूटान लिटरेरी फेस्ट में जयपुर भी मौजूद



शर्मिला टैगोर

सिटी रिपोर्टर भूटान में सोमवार को माउंटेन ईको लिटरेरी फेस्टिवल आयोजित किया गया। इसमें कोलकाता के प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन के कार्यकर्ता संदीप भूतोड़िया और टैको इंडिया की ओर से रात्रि भोज दिया गया। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन थिंपू के होटल ताजशाही में किया गया। लेखक और कवियों में गुलजार, विक्रम सेठ, पैट्रिक फ्रेंच, विलियम डलरिम्पल सहित कई गणमान्य

लोग शामिल हुए। जयपुर के कई गणमान्य नागरिकों ने भूटान के खान-पान का आनंद उठाया। अधिकतर मेहमानों ने इस अवसर पर भूटान की पारंपरिक पोशाक पहनी। समारोह की मुख्य अतिथि भूटान की महामहिम राजमाता महारानी आशी संगेय चोडेन वांगचुक ने पोस्टरिटी : रॉयल इंडियन पोर्ट्रेट्स का विमोचन किया।



नमिता गोखले

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भूटान



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राहुल और स्याही जयपुर की मीता कपूर



विक्रम सेठ

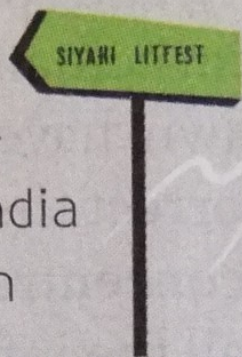


भूटान की राजमाता और संदीप भूतोड़िया



## High And Creative

SPEAKERS have been confirmed, mailers sent, venues all spruced up for Mountain Echoes, Siyahi's litfest in Thimphu. There will be over 70 writers, poets, filmmakers, artists, musicians, and fashion designers from India and Bhutan discussing



their art in the rarefied atmosphere of this hill country. Pavan Varma's book *When Loss Is Gain* will be launched, festival director Namita Gokhale will talk about her new book, *The Habit of Love*, Gulzar and Vishal Bharadwaj will talk about poetry and filmmaking in Bollywood and Vikram Seth will discuss his libretto *The Rivered Earth*.

event

# Mountain Echoes 2012

**Venue** Thimpu, Bhutan  
**Date** 20th – 24th May 2012

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*Mountain Echoes 2012* will entail many themes such as the need and importance of preserving language, stand up comedy, graphic novels, environmental writing, cinema, theatre, poetry, popular fiction and workshops...

## List of Speakers



Advaita Kala



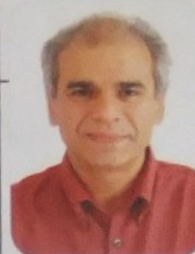
Dorji Wangchuck



HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck



HM Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck



Ishrat Syed (Kalpish Ratna)



Kalpana Swaminathan (Kalpish Ratna)



Dr. Karma Phuntsho



Karma Singye Dorji



Kishwar Desai



Sarla Razdan



Namita Gokhale



Shakun Batra



Shazia Omar



Stephen Alter



Swati Chopra



Thukten Yeshi



Vikram Seth



Gulzar



## **Bhutan literature festival 'Mountain Echoes' kicks off today**

May 20, 2012, 02.52AM IST TNN

**JAIPUR:** The third edition of Mountain Echoes, the Bhutan Festival of Literature, Art and Culture starting on Sunday at Thimpu, Bhutan, is all set to host some of the renowned personalities from literature, cinema, music, art, food, media and photography.

The festival organised by Jaipur-based Siyahi, will kick off on Sunday with a welcome address by Queen Mother of Bhutan, HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Indian ambassador Pavan K Varma and festival director Namita Gokhale, followed by an inspiring invocation of words and music, 'Gaata Rahe Mera Dil' by Sonam Dorji and Ali Sethi.

Few of the stellar names bringing all these different fields together include Vikram Seth, Gulzar, Ali Sethi, Patrick French, Dayanita Singh, William Dalrymple, Sharmila Tagore, Wendell Rodricks and Amitabh Bhattacharya.

The days to come will see a variety of fascinating and eclectic sessions on subjects ranging from linguistic traditions, spirituality, travel, Bollywood, folklore, music and lyrics.

Some of the promising sessions to watch out for at the Tarayana Center include 'The Rivered Earth' with Vikram Seth and Ali Sethi, 'Once Upon A Hill' with writer duo, Kalpana Swaminathan and Ishrat Syed, 'Transcreations: Poetry Dialogues' with Gulzar, Pavan Varma and Sukrita Paul and 'Tales from Far and Near' with Tshering Cigay Dorji, Karma Tenzin 'Yongba' and Kishwar Desai.

For those out to explore other aspects of art and culture, there are sessions such as, 'Moda Goa: History and Style' with Wendell Rodricks and Pramod Kumar KG, 'Exploring Cinema: Fifty Years in Films' with Sharmila Tagore and Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri, 'The Music Room: From the Classical to the Popular' with Ugyen Pande, Amitabh Bhattacharya and Rekha Bhardwaj.

The other venue hosting some of the sessions is Taj Tashi, Thimpu. Here, the audiences can catch Gulzar talking about the metaphor of travel in his poetry in the session, 'Musafir Hoon Yaraon', Dayanita Singh and Aveek Sen discussing the genre of 'Photo Fiction', Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple and Patrick French in conversation with Nidhi Razdan in 'Rolling Clouds: Dreaming Mountains' or learn some fun recipes as Sarla Razdan and Kunzang Choden talking to Mita Kapur in 'Hill Kitchens'.

While all these engaging sessions are on at these two venues, a third spot - the Nehru Wangchuck Center will be screening some unique and interesting films such as 'Bryan Adams: Bare Bones', 'Rocking the Hills', 'Sound Check' and 'A Composer's Dream and Living Stories'.



## **3rd edition launched at India House**

**«Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck launches “Bhutan: Through the lens of a King” during the opening of the 3rd edition of the Mountain Echoes Lit Fest yesterday in Thimphu.**

**Mountain Echoes 2012:** The third edition of the Mountain Echoes lit fest opened last evening at the Indian embassy in Thimphu with the launch of ‘Bhutan: Through the Lens of a King’ by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Lyonchhoen Jigmi Y Thinley, Ambassador Pavan K Varma, and festival directors, Namita Gokhale and Pramod Kumar, symbolically lit a lamp inaugurating the festival.

Ambassador Varma welcomed guests and participants and shared his thoughts on what Mountain Echoes has achieved since its first edition in 2010. “Today, Mountain has become a landmark on the literary calendar of both India and Bhutan,” he said.

He said Mountain Echoes has created a platform for creative people to interact, and that it is a concrete manifestation of “people to people contact” between Bhutan and India, but the most “important dividend” was that it had allowed for the discovery of new talented people in Bhutan. He pointed out that Bhutanese participation in the festival was highest this year.

In her inaugural address Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk specifically acknowledged some participants. Her Majesty said that it was a deep honour that Indian poet, Gulzar, was present for the festival, and his presence was an instant attraction for poetry and music lovers in Bhutan.

Her Majesty also acknowledged the presence of authors Vikram Seth, Patrick French and William Dalrymple, and acclaimed film actress Sharmila Tagore.

Pakistani writer and musician Ali Sethi performs at the opening of the third Mountain Echoes last evening at the Indian embassy, Thimphu

Festival director, Namita Gokhale, in her welcome address said that literature aims at human understanding and so stands forever beyond political borders. “So across the porous borders of the mind and the heart, we welcome you to a joyous celebration, of biodiversity, and of cultural biblio-diversity that respects different languages, different literatures, different ways of telling stories, and remembering them,” she said.

On launching ‘Bhutan: Through the Lens of a King’, a book of photographs taken by His Majesty, Her Majesty said that, by going through the book, viewers would be able to understand that His Majesty “cares deeply for his people, country, culture, environment, every aspect of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people”.

Pakistani writer and musician, Ali Sethi sang a ghazal in Urdu, followed by local musician, Sonam Dorji, performing a traditional song with the dramnyen.

The three-day literary festival begins today, with parallel events taking place at the Tarayana Centre, the Taj Tashi, and the Nehru-Wangchuck Centre.

**By Gyalsten K Dorji**

## **Mountain Echoes strikes a chord**

MAY 21, 2012

Almost the fag end of springtime in the country, and it is not just the blossoms and the fresh verdure it brings with it, but, this time, some of world's renowned authors, aspiring writers and others, who have nothing whatsoever to do with literature.

Mountain Echoes, a literary festival, began with the intention of creating a platform for filmmakers, writers, singers, songwriters, actors, poets and others with a creative bent of the two nations.

It provided a space for good conversation for literary figures from the two nations.

In fact, it provided an opportunity for some Bhutanese authors and aspiring writers to learn from their counterparts, who are renowned the world over.

It is also a space of opportunities for Bhutanese writers or aspiring ones to contact publishers and literary agents.

All in all, it is a space with ideas aplenty, swirling around, in that, Bhutanese, writers and aspiring ones can seek advice, guidance and inspiration, through directly meeting their favourite authors in person, or asking questions during panel discussions, on issues as diverse as the cultures of the two nations.

Today, as the literary festival is being celebrated for the third time in the capital city, its popularity has spread within the region, and is beginning to gain recognition around the world.

That can be said by gauging the interests writers from outside the region have begun showing in partaking at the festival.

Just as we are seeing more participants from within the region, like Nepal and Bangladesh, it is hoped the festival, as it matures, will attract those of nations beyond the region.

Perhaps, the next time around, we have more Bhutanese talking about the many myths, legends and discussing matters concerning our cultural diversity and tradition.

But these issues the country is rich in have hardly been written about, that the fear is about the looming threat to losing them much before they are documented.

It simply means that we ought to invest more time in researching and registering them, than just write and talk about Gross National Happiness all the time, even now as it has received global acclaim.

The tradition, cultures, myths and legends the country has aplenty to share with the world today, are embodiments of the philosophy anyway.

All that requires a cultural shift from that of oral one, which we have been so far, to developing a reading culture that is under threat of being ignored, with the visual fast becoming a tradition.

Perhaps, we could consider beefing up our national library that many of our school children flock to.

Malvika Singh

There is a literature festival happening in Thimphu. Appropriately, it has been christened 'Mountain Echoes'. The resonance of this annual event was palpable when we landed at Paro airport, with the pilot having deftly handled the most complicated 'landing' in the world, maneuvering carefully among forested hills that appeared so close that you felt you could reach out and touch the lush foliage that covered the slopes. This Litfest is small and intimate, drawing together an eclectic group of writers, poets, filmmakers, musicians, photographers and other interested men and women to share ideas and experiences. Unlike the Jaipur Litfest that has grown into an oversized *bazaar* in which one has to jostle amongst unmanageable crowds to get to a venue or to listen to a 'reading', this one is focused and personalized, making it a truly special event. This year, the list of participants is diverse in age, skills and specialization: Gulzar, Sharmila Tagore, Vikram Seth, Wendell Rodricks, Sarla Razdan, Dayanita Singh, Aveek Sen, Ali Sethi, Mishi Saran, Kishwar Ahluwalia, Stephen Alter, Noa Jones, H.M. Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Kuenga Tenzin, Karma Singye Dorji, to name a few. The musical presentation at the inaugural has been titled "Invoking Words, Celebrating Music", which captures the thematic strain that will run through the three-day-long fest. The themes for 'conversations' are 'writing the spirit', 'dreaming of prayer flags', 'bolo bollywood', 'once upon a hill', 'my own language', 'woven narratives', 'transcreations — poetry dialogues', 'hill kitchens', 'unclimbed mountains', 'readings'. Here, discussions and conversations dominate, making the patterning of the festival far more complex than the Litfest extravaganzas in which 'readings' become merely an option to fill the slots. Like the country itself, Mountain Echoes has a lyrical, ethereal edge that transcends the mundane.

### Special treats

The other important aspect of all cultural events in Bhutan is that they have the royal family, cabinet ministers and bureaucrats actively participating in the various 'happenings'. This country protects and celebrates its cultural roots and constantly grapples with the changes that are enveloping the world. India has much to learn from the nations that give respect to their legacies. While countries build their national institutions and museums, We who were ahead of the game at the turn of the last century, have reduced our national institutions to shameful, dead edifices since 1947 that continue to remain neglected and abused. It is imperative that we build a sense of national pride and mark our place on the world stage.

Some special books are being released at the festival. *Bhutan — Through The Lens of The King* is a collection of photographs taken by the king of Bhutan during his travels across the country, connecting and engaging with his people, often undertaking the journeys on foot over hills and valleys. This selection was published by Roli Books at the time of the royal wedding. The other books include *Kuenden*, *The Valiant Son* by Kuenga Tenzin; *When Loss is Gain*, a debut novel by Pavan K.Varma, which is set in Bhutan; *Posing for Posterity — Royal Indian Portraits* by Pramod Kumar KG, which is a remarkable compendium of portraits identified and borrowed from private and public archives, a labour of love that took many years in the making. Far away from the turmoil of the political shenanigans in India, removed temporarily from the scams, the limitless greed and the overwhelming mediocrity that suffocate us, this opportunity to nurture frayed minds with words, stories, ideas, poetry, music, food and camaraderie is a godsend in this heaven on earth.





## Day two of Literary Festival discusses the spirit of writing

May 22, 2012

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The second day of the festival was held at Tarayana Hall

The second day of Mountain Echoes in Thimphu yesterday started with an engaging and frank conversation between Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck and Indian ambassador Pavan Varma. They discussed various aspects about the country starting from the rootedness of Bhutanese culture to rural empowerment, women as conduits for social change, the existential dilemmas faced by today's generation, the relevance of Buddhism in daily life, and the future of the country's unique concept of Gross National Happiness.

The Queen Mother spoke of all the efforts being made by the Tarayana Foundation towards the welfare of the Bhutanese people and said that as a nation they want the youth to inculcate the spirit of compassion and volunteerism. She thanked Pavan Varma for introducing Mountain Echoes to Bhutan because it encouraged the youngsters to read more, appreciate the authors and develop an interest in writing themselves.

This was followed by a session with Kunzang Choden, Swati Chopra on spirituality and writing the spirit. Swati Kunzang Choden followed up on the subject of the youth and the Bhutanese spirit. The younger generation, according to her, is walking the razor's edge and it is important for the elders to help them find the true Bhutanese spirit. She talked of how in her book, *The Circle of Karma*, the woman protagonist tried to find herself and her spirit in the changes that are happening around her. They spoke of the need to question traditions and their relevance in present times, particularly with reference to the position of women in spirituality. They discussed the questioning of patriarchal norms for seekers of enlightenment and the traditional prayer for a woman to ask to be reborn as a man in order to attain nirvana.

The third session of the day was an extremely interesting conversation about Vikram Seth's latest novel, *Rivered Earth*, introduced by Ali Sethi. Vikram Seth talked about how the book came into being over a course of time bringing together different traditions from the poetry of an Anglican priest, to the Braj Bhasha of Surdas and 8<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese poetry within one book. He spoke of how he found inspiration in one of his favorite poets, George Herbert's house in a village outside London and showed calligraphy representing the essence of the book, which is the elements of nature and rounded up the session with a dramatic reading of his poem on fire.

Then came the first Bhutanese session of the day with Kuenga Tenzin and Karma Singye Dorji, who is the writer of the book *Dreaming of Prayer Flags*. He spoke of how the book has stories that were told by his grandparents, and while it falls under the category of nonfiction in Bhutan you don't know where fact ends and fiction begins. But most Bhutanese people comfortably inhabit this ambiguous space between the real and the imagined. He also spoke of the perspective that one gains after moving out of one's own country and how he realized how precious his culture was after he left it.

After lunch, directors Namita Gokhale and Pramod KG launched Mishi Saran's book, *The Other Side of Light*.

This was followed by readings from authors from four different nations. Noa Jones read a piece about a near death experience in a Bhutanese bus from *We are all going*, Mishi Saran read from her new book, Ashok Ferrey read a true and moving short story about the Tsunami in Sri Lanka, *Last Man Standing* and Kuenga Tenzin read from his second novel, about a Bhutanese super hero *Kuenden the Valiant Son*.

This gave way to another Bhutanese session where Kishwar Desai introduced authors Tshering Cigay Dorji, an engineer turned writer, and Karma Tenzin 'Yongba' who was heading the Bhutanese Crime Branch of the Royal Bhutan Police. Both of them talked of where they found inspiration for writing their stories. Karma Tenzin 'Yongba' said that as a crime officer he got the opportunity to interact with a diverse set of people and found stories from real life situations and characters. Tshering Cigay Dorji spoke of how stories formed an important part of his childhood as he was growing up in a remote village. He spoke of the importance of folk tales that get transferred from generation to generation and how even after studying electrical engineering he was always interested in stories around him.

After this, Bollywood personalities filled the stage as Tisca Chopra moderated a session with Vishal Bhardwaj, Arshad Warsi, Shakun Batra and Mushtaq Shiekh. They discussed where they find their stories, how they look for ideas, the life of a script, the creative processes and the economic interests that drive a film's journey. A debate that guided the session was the objective of a film as Arshad Warsi said that the basic idea of cinema should be inclusive entertainment no matter what genre you take up and Vishal Bhardwaj argued that the director should stick to his creative vision. The members of the audience also picked up this subject as Sharmila Tagore questioned the value of privileging commerce over art and Pavan Varma spoke of the middle path where the filmmaker must keep the interest of the audience in mind while not compromising his or her own aesthetics and ethics.

The last session of the day was a fascinating presentation by William Dalrymple about his latest book, *Return of a King*, which chronicles the First Anglo-Afghan War that was fought between 1839 and 1842. He pointed out the uncanny parallels between this catastrophe that was a great defeat for the British and the present situation in Afghanistan. The British Empire, which was at its peak lost an entire army as only one soldier returned from the war to give the news. He said how the same kind of a battle is being played out in the same place, with the same kind of overconfidence and is bound to see a similar result.

He spoke of his experience of writing and researching the book over four years, traveling to Afghanistan to see the places where the war took place, talking to the descendants of the warriors that he is writing about, the feeling of watching history repeat itself and few lessons being learnt from the past.

As these sessions were on at Tarayana, another set of fascinating sessions were unfolding at Taj Tashi. The day there began with a session titled, Thimpu Dialogues with Ashok Ferrey, Kuenga Tenzin and Kelly Dorji in discussion and was followed by a session on the genre of photo fiction conducted by Dayanita Singh and Aveek Sen. They spoke of how a photographer tells a story through his or her pictures. The next session was a delightful hour about travel poetry by Gulzar who spoke of the metaphor of the journey in his work. The last session for the venue was a delicious rendering of hill recipes by Sarla Razdan and Kunzang Choden, introduced by Mita Kapur.

The Nehru Wangchuck Center, in the meanwhile, screened two fascinating films on music followed by a discussion between Navdeep Suri and Neela Venkataraman about the representation of India in the world through its music.

The evening then moved to the Clock Tower as the Delhi band Eka performed for an enthusiastic Bhutanese crowd cheering them song after song. They made the audience tap to their tunes with songs from popular Bollywood films and western albums.

The day concluded at Taj Tashi with Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck launching Pramod KG's book, *Posing for Posterity: Royal Indian Portraits*.

★★★★☆ 1 Vote



# Feast of words and ideas in land of emerald hills

**SAMHITA CHAKRABORTY  
IN THIMPHU (BHUTAN)**

Apu opens the door and asks his new bride to enter. "*Amar ghori*," he says. Aparna, decked out in her wedding finery, walks in with halting steps. Moments later, she sits by the window, wracked by near-silent sobs. This immortal scene from *Aparna Sansar* was screened for a packed hall as Sharmila Tagore, the Aparna of the reel, recounted her real-life experiences of working with the legend called Satyajit Ray.

But the references of "Manikda" or *Nayak* or Loreto House (where Sharmila enrolled after being asked to leave her former school for acting in a film) weren't being played out in Calcutta but in a place which though just an hour and a half away by air is effectively many worlds apart — Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.

Nestled in the emerald green hills and gentle summer breeze of the Land of the Thunder Dragon, Mountain Echoes, the Bhutan festival of Literature, Art and Culture is currently underway. This four-day celebration of the creative mind, which started on Monday, is a cosy gathering of people who want to tell and hear the stories behind the stories. And it has attracted names like Vikram Seth and Gulzar.

A joint effort by the India-Bhutan Foundation and Jaipur-based literary consultancy Siyahi, the festival enjoys the patronage of Bhutan's Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, who inaugurated the festival on Sunday at India House, the residence of Indian Ambassador Pavan K. Varma, himself a prolific writer. In its third year now, Mountain Echoes is being held under the guidance



Arshad Warsi, author Kishwar Desai and (right) Mita Kapur of *Siyahi* at a dinner at the Mountain Echoes festival in Thimphu. Picture by Tandin Dorji

of authors and Jaipur Literature Festival co-directors William Dalrymple and Namita Gokhale.

The days boast of a kaleidoscopic line-up of sessions, ranging from Vikram Seth's libretti to Wendell Rodricks's take on "style in the kitchen". Then there's Gulzar's travel poetry and conversations with authors new and veteran. Bollywood has found much favour, be it a talk on how a story becomes a script and a script a film or a very filmy rock concert by the Delhi band Eka in the town centre where the entire population of Thimphu seemed to have converged on Monday evening!

A dinner hosted at the Taj Tashi by Calcutta's Prabha Khaitan Foundation and Techno India Group for the launch of Pramod Kumar KG's *Posing for Posterity: Royal Indian Portraits* by Queen Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuk was like a sensory overload, where one could suddenly find oneself

sitting beside Gulzar, rubbing shoulders with William Dalrymple at the bar or sharing pasta with the wacky Arshad Warsi!

But Mountain Echoes is not just about Indian and foreign writers. It's as much about Bhutanese writers and Bhutanese readers, with participation from the likes of bestselling author Kuenga Tenzin or Kunzang Choden, the first Bhutanese woman to write in English. Tea-time chats with the local people are as insightful as the sessions about this traditionally modern people who got the television and the Internet the same year (1999)!

One of the highlights of the festival was the first session on Day Two, held at Taj Tashi. Eloquently titled *Rolling Clouds: Dreaming Mountains*, it had Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple — or Willie if you will — and Patrick French talking about the many routes to travel writ-

ing. Vikram spoke about his wholly accidental journey through Lhasa and Tibet and how when he got tired of telling people about his travels that he took his dad's advice and wrote up *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet*.

A young Bhutanese lady in the audience addressed her question to Vikram, which can be summed as: "Bhutan lies between two giants, China and our dear friend India. Given that the two countries don't really engage with each other and if things turn bad we the people of Bhutan will suffer the repercussions, I want to ask you if you have considered writing about China, given your knowledge of that land."

Vikram is not keen on writing about China just yet, he said, but the question is itself an answer — to why a meet like Mountain Echoes was needed and how it is working wonders.



MAY 22, 2012

## Gender discrimination in religious practice

Gender inequality took over to blend with spirituality in the second session of the Mountain Echoes festival, which began yesterday at the Tarayana Centre in Thimphu.

Three women speakers constantly argued and discussed that women have equal spirit to attain the level of spirituality as men, while they referred to religious traditions that underestimated the spirits of women.

The conversation revolved around Buddhist traditions where, at one point, Swati Chopra, who writes on spirituality and its relevance to modern lives, explained the Madhyamika ideology and the middle path teaching, associated with change and impermanence.

According to her, the irrational system that became a tradition blocks change, where women are deprived from certain spiritual teachings, even in Buddhism.

"Change has to be enlightened change, not just jettisoning tradition in entirety, but certain aspects of tradition should be questioned, which unfortunately in India there is less tolerance of questioning tradition," she said.

The oral tradition of Buddhism, which says that to achieve nirvana one has to be born as man is 'irrational', Swati Chopra said. "If there is no gender in enlightenment or nirvana, according to Madhyamika teaching, why do we have to be born as man to achieve enlightenment?" she questioned. "In enlightenment, you can't be even Buddhist."

Well-known Bhutanese author, Kunzang Choden, said that, while there are beliefs being implanted that a woman would take nine generations to achieve nirvana, there are no such written references so far noticeable.

"Three years ago, a woman asked Jamyang Khyentse rinpoche, if a reference can be found that says so, and rinpoche said he couldn't find it anywhere," Kunzang Choden said.

She said the protagonist in her book, *The Circle of Karma*, is also looking for her spirit, and believes she will find this through literacy. She receives basic teaching from a spiritual master, shaves her head, and wears the robes, but realises that appearance is not everything, and that spirit and appearance don't go together.

"You can't just trash tradition, we have to segregate it," Kunzang Choden said, referring to patriarchal society. "With education, empowerment, opportunities, you begin to question things."

When a male from among the audience asked how men are responding to empowerment of women efforts, Swati Chopra said, "They dig in their heels, and use tradition as a reason, but women also don't support women, as a result of internalising tradition; but right now there is nothing to worry about, the wave is still being built."

"Nunneries follow the same curriculum as the monk body, but smaller nunneries don't have any set curriculum, but very ritualistic kind of practices, no qualified teachers, no proper classrooms," explained Dr Tashi Zangmo, director of Bhutan nuns foundation.

"Households prefer male monks for pujas, while they invite nuns only when there are prayers that include fasting," she said.

**By Samten Yeshi and Gyalsten K Dorji**

MAY 23, 2012

## **Discourse on travel writing**

*A genre that is no way dying, the distinguished panel agreed, despite the internet*

The second day of Mountain Echoes began with some of the most notable writers attending the literary festival discussing the relevance and significance of contemporary travel writing to society

The discussion, which included writers Vikram Seth, Patrick French, and William Dalrymple, largely covered two aspects of travel writing, its relevance in the age of the internet, and its significance in addressing cultural clashes.

All three writers were in consensus that, despite the existence of the Internet, travel literature still provided knowledge that went beyond the information available on the worldwide web.

Historian William Dalrymple said that human beings remain a rich field of exploration because of their diversity. He provided an example of a girl in India, who, despite being exposed to western education and customs, was persuaded to follow the traditional practise of sati. He said that answering the 'why' behind actions committed by people is what still makes travel literature relevant today.

The other historian speaking at the session, Patrick French, also presented an example. He read an excerpt from his 2011 book, *India: A Portrait*, about the religious beliefs of a tribe in northeast India. He said that this information about the tribe had been transferred to him in Thimphu, during the last Mountain Echoes, over a cup of tea. He said a reviewer in India had called him one day, saying that he could not find this information anywhere on the internet.

"So there is one little nugget of knowledge about one people in a remote part of north east India, which I happened to learn while drinking tea in Thimphu," said Patrick French. "Sometimes you can have the illusion that everything is there through electronic means, but it isn't."

William Dalrymple also pointed out in response to an audience member's question that the death of travel writing has been predicted for more than a hundred years.

Patrick French and William Dalrymple slightly disagreed when discussing the relevance of travel literature when it comes to culture.

William Dalrymple pointed out that during one of the previous day's sessions, a Bhutanese audience member had pointed out to a Bhutanese writer that he valued the Bhutanese writer's work more than he would a foreigner's observation. The argument being that a Bhutanese writer can understand a local situation better than an outsider, and so will produce more authentic work.

William Dalrymple said that travel writing is an attempt at empathy and sympathy, to try and understand the other. He said it is a mistake to see it as a form of cultural imperialism. He added that it is the essence of humanity to understand different cultures and peoples.

While he agreed in principle, Patrick French said that, in the case of Bhutan, perhaps an exception is required. He pointed out that no full history, by a Bhutanese, with Bhutanese sources, is available in English. He said that there are some cultures, where it is required that the viewpoint comes from within in order to make it more accurate.

William Dalrymple responded that, while there is a need for the internal view, it should not negate the value of another human being attempting to understand another culture.

Vikram Seth also added his take on the issue by saying that a foreign writer, as opposed to a local one, could provide a different style to cover a culture. He said that in Bhutan there are no limitations on what can be written as a result of fear, as might be found in Iran or Myanmar, but that there might be limitations as a result of cultural respect. He said that, in that case, a foreign writer could provide the different style to writing the local topic.

During the Q&A session, the speakers were asked whether setting out to write travel literature could be seen as artificial, when compared to simply going on the journey and then writing about it once complete.

William Dalrymple said that the essence of the travel writing is to be able to record everything, sounds, textures, interactions with people, the effect of the environment on your skin, etc. "It's exhausting," he said, "you're never off duty." He said it is the same as working, and that some of the best travel books that have been written are because of the artificialness of setting off to write one.

The session ended with Vikram Seth and William Dalrymple reading excerpts.

**By Gyalsten K Dorji**



# The Bhutanese

‘Bolo Bollywood,’ a crowded session in the Mountain Echoes

*By Tashi Deki | 23 May 2012*

A quick and contagious murmur of ‘Circuit’ was fixated on the lips of every Bhutanese audience during the ‘Bolo Bollywood’ session of the Mountain Echoes on Monday.

No, there wasn’t any electrical short circuits at the Tarayana center. It was just the Bhutanese Bollywood (Indian Film Industry) fans ogling Arshad Warsi the Indian actor who played and brought fame to the character ‘Circuit’ in the Bollywood film ‘Munna Bhai MBBS’.

“Oh! There he is ‘Circuit’, wearing black with the shades,” whispered two ladies pointing their fingers as soon as they entered the hall of Mountain Echoes.

Arshad Warsi shared his personal feelings during the session on films, scripts and acting.

“whatever genre u go for, the basic idea should be entertainment,” advised the actor to a query from the crowd.

The speakers present in the session were Shakun Batra, who is a director, a writer Mushtaq Shiekh, Vishal Bhardwaj, an Indian film director, writer, screenwriter, producer, music composer and playback singer and well known actor Arshad Warsi in conversation with beautiful actress Tisca Chopra.

The session was a crowded session of all other sessions of the day. It discussed about the genre of films and the inspiration behind the film making and so on. Film is not made looking at the audience; instead a film should find its own audience says, Vishal Bhardwaj. If you have conviction, you are bound to get your audiences, he added.

Responding to a question from Tisca Chopra, Arshad Warsi, said a good script can be made into a bad film and at times bad script can be made into a good film.

“I would say director plays a vital role,” he said.

The on-going session were put to an end with the current going off but ‘circuit’ jokes kept the Bhutanese audience engrossed even in the wake of the darkness. And the photo session with the speakers was a welcome announcement for the audience.

The Mountain Echo festival is an initiative of the India – Bhutan foundation in association with Siyahi.



MAY 23, 2012

## 50 years of cinema

**Mountain Echoes [Day Two]** How well known and admired Sharmila Tagore is was apparent from the packed room of people who had come especially to see and listen to her talk on exploring cinema – 50 years in films during the mountain echoes lit fest yesterday evening.

Both young and old as well as mothers with sleeping babies and all those who grew up watching Hindi films listened to Sharmila Tagore's journey into films at the age of 13 and the changes in the film industry since then. They hummed along when some of her songs were played on the screen.

Sharmila Tagore said films then were shot in lavish sets but they moved to actual locations after it became expensive. "But the whole film started being dubbed which I thought was terrible because you have to redo the whole thing, which really impacted on the acting," she said.

Sharmila Tagore said she was asked to leave school by her principal if she went into acting. "My parents were very supportive but my principal felt that it would be a terrible influence in the students," she recalled.

With multiplexes, marketing system and technology in place today to disseminate, making movies has become cheaper. "In our time films took three or four years to be made," she said. "Today, Bollywood has so many investors, they are able to finish the film in a limited time, salaries have gone up, and it's really a proper industry now."

Being the first generation working people, Sharmila Tagore said there was no value attached to working people then. "We were working in films and that was really looked down," she said.

Actors those days were very tight tasked and heroines were portrayed stereotypically as obedient, goody-goody, innocent and young. "And that's why they had to have a vamp otherwise how do they show how normal people lived," she said. "So those things are now disappearing. Now Saif can do Love Aaj Kal and be coolly accepted whereas I couldn't do that."

During the session on "Bhutanese cinema on the move" Bhutanese actors and producers talked about the infant Bhutanese movie industry, which needs support to keep the industry "moving." Distribution and screening Bhutanese films, they said was one of the biggest challenges faced by the Bhutanese movie industry today, they said.

**By Sonam Pelden**

**Echoes of nature** May 24, 2012

By **Sathya Saran**

**Tags:** [Gulzar](#), [literature](#), [lyricist](#), [poetry](#)

This is the second time Gulzar is reciting his poems at the Mountain Echoes Lit Fest in Bhutan. He was here for the first year and his presence this year has created much excitement. Moreso as he is reciting a series of yet unpublished and unheard before poems which have “travel” as a theme.

He leafs through his papers and recites six poems, some brief, and one which he says is the longest he has read yet, anywhere. There are poems about the airhostess making announcements on the plane, tongue-in-cheek he echoes some of our own fears, about safety jackets and planes landing in water, or catching fire. There are poems about “nature”.

The one about a tortoise which ventures out from inside its pond to go looking for a river that his great grandfather had come seeking and left off to live in the pond, was moving enough to bring a lump to the throat. As was the poem he wrote addressing the river in Bhutan, on which a dam is being built.

Though the theme was travel, the underlying concern for the environment could not but be noticed, and tinged the humour and the poetry with an edge of sadness. In an exclusive interview, Gulzar admitted his deep concern for the environment, and his love of nature. “I have written countless poems on trees and birds and hills and rivers,” he said, adding that there were specific poems on the walnut tree, the apricot tree, and the river at night which he said made him think ‘that the ribbon of the night had unravelled’.

Travelling was one passion, and “as the only way to see India, though it is a vast country, is to drive, so I drive. I find it relaxing”, he said. The poems were an obvious result.

“I have travelled from Mumbai to Kanyakumari at least four times, and stopped in Karnataka, en route in the rains. The Hampi poem was a result of one of those drives. I have driven to the farthest corner of Nagaland, and during the making of *Lekin* I must have driven 5,000 km in Rajasthan alone. I remember telling Lataji, the credit should read ‘Written, directed and driven by Gulzar’,” he says with a laugh.

“I notice the small things, and the images I see stay in my mind. Sometimes I make notes, sometimes I write the poem down, and polish it later. I wrote a poem this morning,” he adds. Thus in the poem about the tortoise which has allusions to the race his ancestor had won against the hare, the description of the tortoise coming out of the pond is so accurate it is almost a visual.

“I collect driftwood, and at that time, I notice the creatures around water bodies,” he said. “I must have seen a tortoise sometime, and it stayed in the memory.”

Of such small details seen and collected in memory is Gulzar’s poetry made. Little wonder then it touches the familiar in our lives and urges us to make it our own. Then a twist of a phrase and a turn of a sentence from the poet startles us, and makes the poem a work of art to understand and admire.





## **Bhutan takes a dose of Gross Literary Happiness**

By Penny MacRae (AFP) – May 23, 2012

THIMPU — South Asia's love of literature festivals has spread to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, which features in many an exotic travelogue but is pretty much a blank space on the global literary map.

The Mountain Echoes Festival held this week in the Bhutanese capital Thimpu is part of a growing South Asian circuit that currently comprises thriving literary festivals in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

The Thimpu event, which was first held in 2010, is by far the smallest, drawing daily crowds of just 300 or so to its community centre venue, to listen to 70 speakers and authors from the region and beyond.

In the festival line-up, India's presence dominated, reflecting its literary powerhouse reputation in the region. Contemporary Bhutanese literary voices in what is still one of the world's most insular nations are few and far between. Sandwiched between India and China and with a population of 700,000, Bhutan is famously known for inventing "Gross National Happiness" -- a development philosophy that sees the government measure the mental well-being of citizens, not their material wealth.

Historically, Bhutanese literature has been largely associated with revered religious scriptures written in the script of the national language Dzongkha and a rich but largely oral tradition of folk tales.

"To a large extent, our literature has remained cloistered within the monastery fortress," Karma Phuntsho, a Bhutanese scholar and research associate at Britain's Cambridge University, said.

The "Land of the Thunder Dragon", as Bhutan is also sometimes known, had no roads or currency until the 1960s and allowed television only in 1999 in a bid to shield itself from foreign influences.

But since the 1960s, English has been the medium of education in Bhutanese schools, and is the language of choice for the members of the country's fledgling contemporary literary scene.

"We're finding our voice in the English language, and in so doing we make our experience of Bhutan more accessible," said Karma Singye Dorji, a popular writer whose 2009 collection of stories and essays

"Dreaming of Prayer Flags" was published abroad to critical acclaim.

"In English, we can open a window on Bhutan to the world," he said.

But Bhutan's grand old man of letters, Kuenzang Thinley, who has authored more than 60 books in Dzongkha, fears the growing cultural dominance of English is smothering the national language as a voice of expression, resulting in a loss of cultural identity.

"With the spread of English through school education, literary activity in Dzongkha has been declining," Thinley told a session at the festival.

Bhutanese schools devote only an hour a day to Dzongkha, which is similar to classical Tibetan, and while it is still widely spoken, it is done so with varying levels of fluency.

Only a few Bhutanese can write Dzongkha easily -- mostly monks in Bhutan's many monasteries -- and its "viability as a national language against the onslaught of English is being tested more than ever", Phuntsho said.

"It is difficult to preserve our own local language," acknowledged Lily Wangchuk, executive director of the Bhutan Media Foundation.

"Most of us have been taught in English. I think TV has shaped and played a huge role in making English so predominate -- so much so that those who only speak Dzongkha sometimes feel inferior if they don't speak English," she said.

Kunzang Choden, Bhutan's best-known woman novelist, said the most important thing was to foster a love of literature, no matter what language it was written in.

"We're making the transition from an oral to a literary tradition but the distractions of TV and the Internet are intervening," said Choden, who writes in English and helps run reading programmes for youngsters.

"The reading culture is still quite poor as the problem with us is our literature is mostly religious. We want to cultivate a love for books, a love for the feel of books that will stay with them all their lives," she added.



## Final take on filmmaking

May 25, 2012 - [Sathya Saran](#) | [Age Correspondent](#)

### Share

It's rare to be privy to an earnest conversation among filmmakers of different styles on filmmaking. The Bolo Bollywood session at the Mountain Echoes Literary Festival gave some insights, as filmmakers Vishal Bhardwaj, Mushtaque Shaikh, Shakun Batra and Arshad Warsi traded modus operandi and discussed the making of cinema in their individual styles.

#### On finding the idea for a film:

**Vishal:** Ideas keep coming by the hundreds. One thinks each is a great one, then wakes up and looks at them in the morning and it seems pretty bad. The idea that works is one with which you can live with for the next two to three years, while it transforms into a script and then into a film. I got the idea for Maqbool as an adaptation of Macbeth after trying to write an original underworld film, that did not work out. But while reading Macbeth I saw the potential, and it happened.

**Arshad:** Sometimes an idea can come from a person one meets. The character of Jolly in Jolly LLB was a real person, and grew from there into a film.

**Mushtaque:** All that is very fancy and creative, but sometimes it is the mundane fact that one is contracted to write a film, and must therefore find the idea.

**Vishal:** But ideas are like disease. They take hold of you and force you to give them your attention. You work on them for six months and then realise you are at a dead end. It's labour lost.

#### On making ideas into scripts:

**Shakun:** It is not easy. One has to live with the idea for a while, and then let it take its course. There is every chance an idea will change as you develop it, a story may take a strange turn, a situation may change. You have to let it happen, it rules you, makes you captive.

**Vishal:** Some ideas are harder to script. Kaminey was a tough one. I had to keep up the two parallel stories and keep each interesting and real.

**Shakun:** I think Pulp Fiction changed the point of view of films, bringing in a new genre. Babel from many stories becoming one was another example. It is a trend that is catching on, but scripting it is tough, filming tougher.

Mushtaque: The uncertainty of so many characters moving together is a challenge. It is engaging, but if you lose touch with any of them, the viewer loses interest and loses the thread. When you go back to his story, they have lost the plot.

### **On Book versus Film:**

Shakun: A book is so different and difficult to adapt. A book can run anywhere in time, space, place. It can move in any direction. A film is more linear. More visual. It is just two hours, and has to be concise.

Vishal: If there is a conflict in the mind of the reader, if he has read the book and imagined the characters or scenes in a certain manner and the film does not match that, he does not like the film. A book allows the luxury of imagination. In cinema we do the imagining and show the result. It may not work for everyone unless it is really cleverly made.

### **On writing for TV:**

Mushtaque: It's very different from writing for cinema. Here, I have to write everyday, there are actors waiting, sleepless thanks to nonstop shooting and if I delay they may die of lack of sleep (laughter). I have to deliver day after day.

Vishal: I still do not have the confidence to write singly. I have writers with me and we discuss a lot, and then write.

Suman: It is necessary for the writer and director to know the same scene the same way, sometimes the director interprets a scene differently. Sometimes it adds, but often it loses the nuances the writer had in mind.

### **On writing for the gallery:**

Vishal: If a film is made with conviction and passion, it will find an audience. I do not have the audience in mind when I make my films. As Javed sahab once said, if you make a film for the audience and they do not like it, you are left high and dry. However, if you make it for yourself, and if the audience does not like it, there is at least one person you have made happy, and who surely likes it, yourself!

And on that note the discussion came to a happy end!

## BOOKS

# MOUNTAIN ECHOES, THE THREE-DAY BHUTAN FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE, ART & CULTURE, COMPLETED A VERY SUCCESSFUL THIRD EDITION IN THIMPHU ON WEDNESDAY. A QUICK t2 CHAT WITH FESTIVAL DIRECTORS NAMITA GOKHALE AND PRAMOD KUMAR KG

*It's the first evening of Mountain Echoes 2012 and PRAMOD KUMAR KG is a busy man at Taj Tashi. But he steals a few moments for t2*

## How did Mountain Echoes come about?

Well, three years ago when we started Mountain Echoes, we found a great potential in Bhutan because here was a large group of young people very eager to talk about a variety of things — literature, languages, arts... One of the things we fervently felt about in Mountain Echoes was that we wanted to create a platform for people who do not just write... there are many cultures that don't have scribbled texts but they have oral stories, they have traditions, they have myths... So, one of the focuses of Mountain Echoes was that along with literature in the written word, we would also celebrate the spoken word, more so because the oral traditions are now slowly being lost. We've seen that happen very much in India and we didn't want that happening in Bhutan. Not to say that we can



Queen Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck releases Pramod Kumar KG's *Posing for Posterity: Royal Indian Portraits* at Taj Tashi during Mountain Echoes, held in Thimphu from May 21-23.

Picture by Tandin Dorji

control it but at least we can record it and celebrate it.

We also realised, my co-director Namita Gokhale and I, that Bhutan was the perfect place to get a group of people away and get them to talk among themselves and to interact with the local authors.

Bhutan is a very young democracy, an extraordinary young king who is really, really enthused to bring modernity to his people and in a way that is good for them, not just the way we blindly copy... all of these factors made Bhutan the ideal place to hold such an event.

**You were one of the first directors of the Jaipur Literature Festival. When you started it, did you ever think it would become so big?**

No, we didn't (laughs)! In fact, the first year when I started the Jaipur Literature Festival, I remember there were 30 people in the audience and 18 authors. But we had an extraordinary time because we realised that it was something good and it stemmed from the pure reason that while I lived in Jaipur I could never find a forum where I could discuss books. Initially the idea was to start a book club!

## Tell us a bit about your book *Posing for Posterity*...

It's a book on the portraits from princely India or royal India. It starts from the beginning of photography in India (1839) and comes up to the pre-independence era. All the pictures in the book are pictures of royalty in India and the focus is on trying to show as many images as possible from archives from within the country. We have vast unexplored archives in the country with amazing material. For the history of photography of India to be told, tapping into these archives is very important.

The second idea behind the book was to let people know that posing for photographs as we see it today is not something which came to us from heaven, you know. We had to evolve our own expertise on how to get it right... it originates from theatre sets and theatre backdrops... the book talks about all that.

*The last dinner of the last day of Mountain Echoes is drawing to a close at Taj Tashi and NAMITA GOKHALE has finally found a moment to sit down...*

## What has been your biggest takeaway from Mountain Echoes 2012?

You know the joy and energy of cultural creativity... of just people talking to each other across boundaries amid these sacred mountains... I just had a wonderful three days!

The South Asian session on the last day [May 23] was one of the most brilliant... [titled *Across Boundaries: Beyond Borders*] We had Shazia Omar from Bangladesh, Sujeev Shetty from Nepal, Kunzang Choden of Bhutan, Ashok Ferrey from Sri Lanka, Ali Sethi from Pakistan... each telling their own stories... with such passion, yet with so much detachment. That session moved me possibly more than any other in this whole festival.

## Now that the three days are over, how do you feel?

Oh, there's a feeling of calm! I am an obsessive worrier. I was just now telling someone, I don't worry about the big things, I worry about the little things. Because when you are connecting people, god lies in the details. But I also feel exhilarated. Yes, working backstage, of creating the scaffolding, to make creative interactions possible is always tiring but it's also very rewarding.

## Speaking about the South Asia session, as an author from the sub-continent, do you feel compelled to tell India's stories through your books, be it fiction or non-fiction?

Well, frankly no. I'm essentially a free spirit, a floating cloud. I'd hate to be labelled. I think most authors would hate to be labelled. But at the same time, we do want to be rooted, to be grounded. See, the point of literature is that it is transcendental. Literature is about human nature and human nature is both rooted in its ground realities but also a little universal. And I personally feel that I belong to this little town called Earth.

**Samhita Chakraborty**





## Lessons in harmony

SWATI DAFTUAR

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*Mountain Echoes brought the cultures and stories of India and Bhutan together seamlessly, enriching both.*

One has to be careful when calling things unique nowadays; the word gets thrown around so. But Mountain Echoes, held in the arms of the one country that has somehow managed to move ahead and stay still in harmonious juxtaposition, is definitely unique. An initiative of the India Bhutan Foundation, with HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk as its Chief Royal Patron, Mountain Echoes 2012 was held in Bhutan last week, and the symbiosis of cultures and ideas that took place over the course of four days gave a whole new dimension to the concept of literary festivals.

This year, Mountain Echoes also challenged and explored the very concept of literature and art; and the popularly accepted notion of what defines literature. The strong presence of another culture, another people, with new concepts and definitions, made it possible to cast a fresh look at the idea of literature, giving it a more holistic shape and embracing and incorporating ideas and concepts that were hitherto isolated. Suddenly, you found yourself discussing mountaineering and textiles, with not even a sliver of doubt in your head that they were, in fact, crucial aspects of literature. "This year, we expanded the festival and broadened the scope of literature, bringing together unconventional concepts and issues, instead on merely focussing on books and what is conventionally known as literature," said Mita Kapur, Founder and Head of Siyahi, and organiser of Mountain Echoes.

### Discovering a culture

Almost every Bhutanese person is multilingual, speaking Dzongkha, Hindi and English fluently. There are not many of them, and the country's population is barely over seven lakhs. Land-locked and never colonised, the Bhutanese people have kept their culture close to their hearts, and their sacred mountains untouched and unclimbed. They have chosen to forego the increased inflow of foreign investments, banning mountaineering to protect a climate they guard so fiercely. "The idea of climbing mountains and conquering peaks is a very western concept. We don't look at our mountains with the idea of conquering their heights. They are sacred to us; we want to feel close to them spiritually, we live in harmony with them," said Manju, a young Bhutanese girl, during the "Unclimbed Mountains" session.

Bhutan doesn't have coffee chains and malls. Its people are happy, the happiest in the world, according to a recent study, and while cinema, music and books are still in their fledgling states, the sense of peace that pervades this Buddhist country tells you that none of them are in a mad rush to grow up. "Till recently, a couple of years back or so, our radio stations didn't have clocks. If a show was good, it went on. If it was bad, it ended. For a very long time, we worked on instinct, not by clocks," said Siok Sian Dorji, Director of the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy.

## Judicious mix

The sessions, held over four days, covered a wide range of issues, ideas and topics. Apart from mountaineering, textile and food was discussed, with experts like Wendell Rodericks and Laila Tyabji in the panel. At the same time, the discussion introduced HM Ashi Sangay Choden, the patron of the Bhutan Textile Museum in Thimphu, Bhutan. Already enriched by the presence of authors like Vikram Seth and William Darymple, the panels gained further by the presence of acclaimed Bhutanese authors like Karma Singye Dorji, the author of *Dreaming of Prayer Flags: Stories and Images from Bhutan*, and Karma Tenzin 'Yongba', who not only founded and headed the Crime and Special branch of Royal Bhutan Police but also writes detective fiction.

This festival was also about stories, stories from different cultures and times, stories that weave into the fabric of a country's history. We heard of the Divine Mad Man of Bhutan, Drukpa Kunley, and the Goan people's resistance against the Portugese. We heard of the eccentricities of the Nawabs of Hyderabad and of Kuenga, the Valiant son who emerged a superhero.

Many things were familiar, the pacific, unargumentative note to the discussions, certain faces, and many issues. Yet, one wouldn't be justified in calling Mountain Echoes yet another identikit Literary Festival. Of course, the fresh mountain air of Bhutan, the delightfully clement weather, and the small, intimate gathering helped endlessly; and set in the folds of Bhutan's sacred, prayer flag-clad mountains, Mountain Echoes 2012 succeeded in setting a definite benchmark in the register of literary festivals.

Keywords: [Mountain Echoes](#), [cultural heritage](#), [India](#), [Bhutan](#)

## Bibliofile



### High And Mighty

When Jigme Khesar Namgye Wangchuck, the Dragon King of Bhutan, gets time out from his royal duties, he takes up the camera. His new book, *Through the Lens of the King* (Roli), released last week at Mountain Echoes, the annual literary festival in Thimphu, captures his country's splendour. It has stunning pictures of the mighty Himalayas, of the many monasteries and forts, and of village folk on fields. And the king also has a keen eye for detail. For instance, there is this caption: This young girl from Jurmi village is wearing a necklace of miniature phalluses, carved in wood by her father, in the belief that they will ward off the evil eye and protect her.

### Peckish For Pages

The spectacular Taj Tashi was one of the lit-fest venues. At a dinner, someone from the group chatting with filmmaker and songwriter Vishal Bharadwaj (*Maqbool*, *Omkara*) mentioned he is also a great short story writer. As there were top publishers around, a mini bidding war ensued. But he discreetly steered the conversation towards the poetry of Gulzar, standing next to him, saying his stories were still amateurish.



### Not A Tall Story

Overheard at the Zhiwa Ling, the sprawling resort at Paro, Vikram Seth to bartender: "Please take a tall glass. Ok, now pour the vodka till I say stop. Ok, stop. Now, the litchi juice, I'll tell you when to stop. Ok, stop, stop. Now, some ice please. Keep adding. Ok, stop. Could you please add some more litchi juice now, just a little bit. Yes, that's fine. Now, top it up with some vodka please, so that it floats at the top. Yes, that'll be it. Thanks very much."



Bhutan Celebrates Third Annual Literary Festival, Mountain Echoes

May 29, 2012 5:04 PM EDT

**Over the last week in the mountain country of Bhutan, poets, musicians and writers gathered for the third annual literary festival. Karma Singye Dorji reports on the scene.**

The hills were alive with the sound of music and literature this week in the mountain-rimmed Himalayan capital of Thimphu, Bhutan.

The Buddhist kingdom's third annual literature festival, Mountain Echoes, opened May 20 with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony holy to Buddhists and Hindus alike. Wedged between China and India in a mountainous terrain slightly larger than Switzerland, Bhutan boasts a small population, pristine environment, and a rich Buddhist heritage that informs its much-lauded policy of "Gross National Happiness," which is "the measurement of national success by the happiness of its people rather than gross domestic product." "Festivals like Mountain Echoes help create literary conversations and dialogue across the Himalayan belt and South Asia," said Namita Gokhale, founder of Siyahi, the Indian literary consultancy firm that coordinated the festival. "In a moment of intense change, they conserve continuities and help grapple with new modernities."

The festival was attended by a wide range of literary luminaries from across the world like the poet Gulzar, whose song "Jai Ho" received international attention with the success of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, [Patrick French](#), [William Dalrymple](#), and Vikram Seth of *A Suitable Boy* fame. Among Bhutanese speakers featured at the festival were the Queen Mother of Bhutan, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, author of [Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan](#) and the venerable master of Bhutanese letters, Lopen Kuenzang Thinley, who has penned more than 60 works, including songs, grammar and historical research, and Bhutanese scholarship in the kingdom's native language, Dzongkha.

“The mountains provide a natural source of inspiration,” Lopen Kuenzang Thinley said. “They not only form our political and geographical boundaries but define our stories and our lives.”

The impact of modernization and change was a recurring theme at the festival. It was acknowledged that despite the perceived beauty and serenity of Bhutan there were new challenges facing the kingdom—rising youth unemployment, the migration of rural people to its towns and cities, and the temptations of materialism beamed into the bedrooms of its population by satellite TV and the Internet.

Karma Singye Dorji

“It is very important for our country to be mindful of the changes,” said the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. “We must keep our traditions and the spirituality intact in our lives.”

Bhutan, known to its people as Druk Yul, which translates as “Land of the Thunder Dragon” did not have roads, medical facilities, and modern (Western-style) schools until the early 1960s. Satellite TV, which had previously been banned in the kingdom, was introduced in 1999. The Internet followed soon after. In a rare move that is seen in Bhutan as an act of enlightened leadership the kingdom’s much-loved fourth hereditary king Jigme Singye Wangchuck—who coined the phrase “Gross National Happiness”—ushered in democratic reforms by stepping down in late 2006. Today a democratically elected prime minister leads the government.

‘The Buddhist masters have taught us that you have the best resource for happiness within you, and that’s your mind.’

Among the new books launched at the festival were

[\*Bhutan: Through the Lens of a King\*](#), a book of photographs by Bhutan’s fifth king Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck and [\*When Loss Is Gain\*](#), a story set in contemporary India and Bhutan that deals with life, disillusionment, death, the rational, and the spiritual.

The festival ended on May 26 with a panel discussion on the “Blessings of Bhutan.” Speaking at the final session, the Bhutanese research scholar, Dr. Karma Phuntsho, talked about the need to preserve the kingdom’s unique outlook on happiness.

“The Buddhist masters have taught us that you have the best resource for happiness within you, and that’s your mind.”



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EXPLORING CINEMA

## Swiss slopes in the mountain kingdom

Shrabonti Bagchi | May 26, 2012

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*At a literary festival in faraway Bhutan, sessions on cinema proved to be among the most riveting.*

A taxi cruises out of Thimpu, Bhutan's capital, heading towards the mountains.

The road lies parallel to the gurgling Wangchuk, the river that cuts through the

serene capital city, and as it winds its way past police check-posts, posh porticoed houses of the Bhutanese rich and the tired, fragile-looking yet lovely homes (the Bhutanese have yet to learn how to make an ugly building) of the less privileged, it resounds with the strains of a Bollywood song playing on the taxi stereo. Tu shayar hai, main teri shayari croons a tinny Alka Yagnik, confirming the somewhat undemocratic view that Hindi film music from the '80s and '90s has been kept in business by the peculiar charm it seems to hold for taxi, auto and bus drivers from across the globe.

Later the same day, at one of the last sessions on the concluding day of the Mountain Echoes literary festival, Vishal and Rekha Bharadwaj discussed the role classical music has played in Bollywood. "During the '80s and '90s, classical training became a curse," said filmmaker and composer Bharadwaj (Omkara, Maqbool). "It was only after Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan came on the scene that classical-derived music gained acceptance."

At a literary festival that boasted the presence of Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple, Patrick French - who tweeted constantly about the fest and then set out for the Himalayas where his next book is set - Namita Gokhale, the Kalpish-Ratna duo, exciting young authors from the subcontinent and top Bhutanese writers, the Hindi film industry made its presence felt with energetic debates that signaled the growing maturity of Bollywood writing.

During one of the most watched-out for sessions, Sharmila Tagore, dressed in a pale yellow chiffon sari, looked intently at the screen where the famous memory game scene from Satyajit Ray's Aranyer Din Ratri was playing. She was in conversation with film-writer Shantanu Ray Chowdhury of Harper Collins in a session titled 'Exploring Cinema: Fifty Years in Films'.



Tagore reminisced about being a favoured Ray heroine, her transition from Bengali films to the industry in Bombay, and the ways in which Indian films and filmmaking have changed in the 50-plus years that she has spent in front of the camera: "When I went to Bombay, it was a bit of a culture shock for me coming from an industry that had very little artifice," she says. "In Bombay, the heroines had to play by many rules. They wore white. They sipped on Coca-Cola. They never smiled. They were always chaperoned by their mothers. And there I was, living in a hotel. I was a suspect, a misfit from the beginning. I horrified people by dancing at parties. After one of those, Shakti Samanta came and yelled at me. But I just wanted to have a good time!"

During a lively discussion moderated by Tisca Chopra - an unconventional actor who knows her Tarantino from her Inarritu - Vishal Bharadwaj, Shakun Batra (who wrote and directed *Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu*), Arshad Warsi and writer Mushtaq Sheikh from the House of Balaji debated the merits of pure entertainment versus intellectually motivated cinema. That provided the laughs, but the meat of the session came from the discussion on film writing. "Ideas (on which to make films) keep coming, but you have to be careful in your selection because you will give two years of your life to that idea. I have spent six-seven months on a script and then realised it wasn't working out, and have had to move on," said Bharadwaj, revealing that he was most comfortable directing films that he had written himself. "I can't do it any other way. I have to feel a complete sense of ownership over the material."

The quintet - with Bharadwaj and Chopra chipping in from the audience - found its way to the dais once again the next day for an animated conversation on locale and the importance of destination in cinema. It was inevitable that this would start with a faintly sneering recap of the days when a Yash Copra film was incomplete without a heroine in a pastel-coloured sari cavorting on snowy Swiss slopes, but what followed was an interesting revelation of the dynamics of location-shooting and the reasons filmmakers were often forced to choose a foreign location, where the red-carpet would be rolled out for them and all kinds of concessions and conveniences created, over a place like Mumbai, where bribing local officers ate away into the budget of the film.

"The weather, crowds, corruption - all make it very tough to shoot in Mumbai, which used to be the main outdoor shooting destination at one time," said Warsi. "Most people who accuse filmmakers of choosing to shoot abroad for aesthetic reasons don't know the challenges of shooting in India, including technical challenges. The high concentration of pollutants in the air, for instance, creates a barrier between the object and the camera, and that is not desirable at all." Warsi, better known for his role as Circuit, sidekick to the loveable thug Munnabhai, came across as someone who engages with the craft of filmmaking deeply. Warsi is also directing his first film.

The final proof that the lines between cinema, art and books is blurring came during fashion designer Wendell Rodricks' session on his recent book, *Moda Goa*, a rigorously researched, beautifully styled book on the sartorial history of Goa. Pointing to a slide of actor Lisa Ray on the screen in one of his creations, Rodricks said: "I want to give all of you here a scoop. Lisa is getting married in October this year and I am designing her dress."

## **Love, war, writing top Mountain Echoes**

### **Shrabonti Bagchi TNN**

Thimpu:Mountain Echoes — a cozy, intimate festival of literature, art and culture held annually in Thimpu — kicked off on Monday with crackling sessions on books, music and films. In its third year, the three-day festival has drawn big and interesting names from south Asian writing and filmmaking.

On day 1, Vikram Seth spoke about *The Rivered Earth*, his latest book of four libretti. A libretto is a text used in, or intended for, an extended musical work such as an opera or operetta, and Seth's work has been set to music by British composer Alec Roth. Seth was in conversation with young author Ali Sethi, son of veteran Pakistani journalist Najam Sethi.

Incidentally, Seth currently lives in the Wiltshire house in England once occupied by Herbert. Much to the disappointment of many, Seth refused to discuss the book he's working on — *A Suitable Girl*, the jump-sequel to the celebrated *A Suitable Boy*, which he jokingly referred to as 'the big book'.

A strong Bollywood flavour swept the Mountain Echoes. Auteur Vishal Bharadwaj and popular actor Arshad Warsi discussed the relative merits of making enjoyable versus intellectual films.

Sharmila Tagore and Gulzar joined in from the audience. The concluding session was conducted by William Dalrymple, who held the audience spellbound through a riveting monologue on his forthcoming book, *Return of a King*, on the first Afghan War, which he revealed holds interesting parallels with the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan by American and British forces.

"I wish we could have given Bush and Blair a 10-minute history lesson on how the British were trounced by Afghan forces between 1839 and 1842. They might have learnt how, by preemptively imagining a threat, you can make it real," Dalrymple said.

I wish we could have given Bush and Blair a 10-minute history lesson on how British were trounced by Afghan forces between 1839 and 1842.

**William Dalrymple | AUTHOR**

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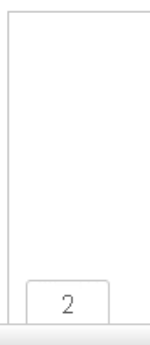
# Truly grateful to India, says Bhutan PM Jigme Thinley +2



Amrita Tripathi, CNN-IBN

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As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visits Myanmar, another country in the neighbourhood dealing with rapid change has dismissed talk of India's big brother attitude. The Prime Minister of the world's youngest democracy Bhutan Jigme Thinley, spoke exclusively to CNN-IBN's Amrita Tripathi on elections, India, and more.

**Here is an excerpt of the interview:**

**Amrita Tripathi:** *We're very privileged to be speaking to his excellency the Prime*

*Minister in Thimphu, Bhutan. And Bhutan being the world's youngest democracy, you'll be coming up on elections, within the year.*

**Jigme Thinley:** Our elections are due sometime in the spring of next year. This will be on completion of five years of my term, the term of our government - the first democratically elected government. The big challenge has been more in terms of promoting a culture of democracy. Getting people to understand the meaning and essence of democracy, in understanding their role and ensuring it works to their advantage, and not to the advantage of politicians.

**Amrita Tripathi:** *I do want to ask you, your message as Bhutan's Prime Minister to India at this point.*

**Jigme Thinley:** The most important message I have to convey is truly the deepest appreciation and gratitude of the people of Bhutan and the royal government, for the generous support and assistance we have received in all these years. Bhutan is being appreciated by almost all visitors for the way we have conducted our development in our unique way, guided by our philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which is a way of balancing material growth and development with spiritual growth as well. Much of what we have achieved has been because of the support, cooperation and guidance we have received from India. So, thank you so much.

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