

#COUNTER-POINT

How is it a Festival Without Celebrities?

There was also an exclusive pool side area available to the FoFs which was such an oasis from the crowded festival venues. But somehow one foreign family and I seemed to be the only one using it.



Rakshat Hooja
Open Source evangelist and Writer

I write this in response to Shailaza Singh's article 'From JLF to It can happen anywhere conference' which appeared on January 24, 2023. I am actually neither a fan nor a friend of the organizers (though we know each other - and hopefully may become friends) but this was the best organized festival of its '18+ years'.

My first point why I would never even consider going back to Digg Palace Hotel is that the sound was audible in all the venues. In Digg Palace Hotel, you had to strain to hear even in Durbar Hall.

About 270 sessions, no over-running in any session of note. Authors would get stuck in a venue at Digg Palace Hotel and not be able to reach the next venue for their own session!

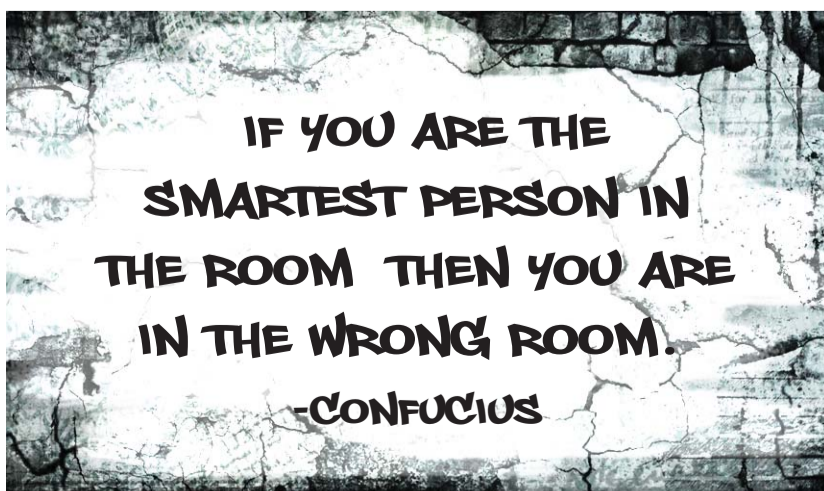
Another counter to Shailaza's article: there were at least 5-6 private sessions per day for the Friends of the Festival (FoF) ticket holders which were not listed in the general schedule and shared only

were interactive with audiences of under 30. Really good. The media just used the venue for the all-day snacks outside. Never saw a media person at a session!

Regarding bathrooms - the bathrooms outside the media lounge always had a line for the ladies while the gents was always empty. The participants seemed equally divided so not really sure what was happening there!



THE WALL



Then on to 1975 when I was SP Jaipur and got selected for a foreign posting to London as First Secretary in the Indian High Commission for three years. By then my father had retired and had psychological insecurities. In came Shekhar Saheb to offer his support whenever required and assuage my parents. Three years later when I returned, with a stroke of luck I got selected for deputation to the CBI where I could have been his subordinate once again but my parents refused! It was again Shekhar Saheb and Shri Anil Bordia who helped me out by taking me to the officers of the CBI and Home Ministry, Government of India to have the deputation order reversed.



Ashok Bhandari

My association with Shri Rajendra Shekhar, IPS Rajasthan 1957 batch is as old as my professional life in the Police Department. After allotment to Rajasthan (1966 batch), and initial training at Central Police Training College Mt Abu (as it was called then), I was posted to Jodhpur for practical training by Shri Shekhar as District Superintendent of Police. This is where I first saw him in uniform and I immediately knew that he was a person I would look upto till my own retirement from the Police service in 2003.

My parents lived in Jaipur because of my father's government service there. They naturally wanted me to be at home in Jaipur for the above training. But a cousin and well-wisher, Shri Anil Bordia IAS of the same batch and Rajasthan cadre as Shri Shekhar (they were also contemporaries of St. Stephens College Delhi), prevailed upon my father and the state government to have me sent to Jodhpur. My mother was a little indignant but Shri Anil Bordia silenced her by saying that good practical training was most important for me to become a successful police officer. After all, I was the first in our families. More importantly, he also emphasised that Rajendra Shekhar was the best he could think for this purpose.

And that is how I saw and saluted Shri Rajendra Shekhar, a tall athletic and handsome police officer in a crisp uniform, for the first time in SP office Jodhpur in November 1967. When I entered his office he stood up to return my salute and extended his hand for a warm but firm hand shake. Then he offered me a seat on his right and told me that during the first month I was required to sit under his watch and observe him run the district police office. I was neither a fan nor a friend of the organizers (though we know each other - and hopefully may become friends) but this was the best organized festival of its '18+ years'.

All in all, he was a strict police officer and always led from the front. His honesty and integrity was often threatening to others.

Shekhar Saheb My Impeccable Mentor



Considerate Enough

He further enquired about my commute to office for which unfortunately I had no arrangements. On hearing that I would be happy to buy a motor cycle if I got a government loan, he made his second phone call to the DM on my behalf. Based on his solid recommendation, my application for loan and delivery of a brand new Royal Enfield motor bike materialised and I was seen making friends with constable drivers who taught me how to drive a macho bike. And for the short run, he asked his Reader (crime assistant) to hire me a bicycle at a reasonable rent, which turned out to be Rs 12/- a month including its maintenance!

When he went home for his lunch that day I munched on his packed sandwich, and lounged in his office. Later in the day I joined a game of hockey with the constables. For my commute and to change into shorts and a shirt, he was considerate enough to allow me a ride in his official jeep. Next day he asked his reader to put me in touch with the nearest SHO to my temporary home at Jodhpur with orders that he would take me along for night patrolling (Ratri gash) in his jurisdiction

thrice a week (not Saturday though). He was an outstanding sports man. At games I saw his bandaged knees and elbow and realised that he was an injury prone person but bothered very little about them. Every day, something new was revealed. When I saw my training chart, I found that he had attached me to the most crime prone area of the town with rampant caste and communal problems, and spur-of-the-moment fights picked by the students of community run hostels. He obviously wanted me to understand these complex dynamics of law and order and was essential for my training. All in all, he was a strict police officer and always led from the front. His honesty and integrity was often threatening to others to an extent that he even faced a false criminal case in Jodhpur's subordinate court till he was vindicated at the end.

Observe and Learn

Many important roads entered the town through the same jurisdiction from border areas which were prone to the smuggling of contraband-gold, silver, and, opium. At times I saw corruption by subordinate staff taking place in front of my eyes and I was tempted to bring it to Shekhar Saheb's notice, but he took cogni-

#IN REVERENT MEMORY

sance of such matters only through his regular channels and advised me to observe and learn from such experiences for my later life. I also saw him dealing with riotous mobs during a Muharram procession in the town both tactfully and firmly. For my hands on experience as SHO for two months during the summer, he sent me to a remote desert Police Station of Phalodi where there was neither electricity nor a police vehicle and the local DSP was told to assist and interfere only in abnormal circumstances. The permanent SHO was also sent on leave. I lived in the guest room of the Police Station, depended on the constables' kitchen for my meals and toured mostly on camel back (there were camel 'savars' at all desert police stations). It was hard but a novel learning experience of my life time.

Fast forward to 1971 when he was posted at Ajmer as SP and I at Pali! During an investigation, an over zealous SHO of my district picked up a few persons from Ajmer and started coercive interrogation at a remote police out-post of the Pali District. The matter became so serious that the Ajmer police were about to register a criminal case of kidnapping. A quick 'switch in time' by the two of us saved the situation.

Psychological Insecurities

Then on to 1975 when I was SP Jaipur and got selected for a foreign posting to London as First Secretary in the Indian High Commission for three years. By then my father had retired and had psychological insecurities. In came Shekhar Saheb to offer his support whenever required and assuage my parents. Three years later when I returned, with a stroke of luck I got selected for deputation to the CBI where I could have been his subordinate once again but my parents refused! It was again Shekhar Saheb and Shri Anil Bordia who helped me out by taking me to the officers of the CBI and Home Ministry, Government of India to have the deputation order reversed.

In 1982 I was promoted and posted as DIG Bharatpur to where Shekhar Saheb belonged. There were serious law and order problems there after the death of sitting MLA Deeg and Raja Man Singh in a cross firing with the police. This resulted in massive unrest and the arrest of some police personnel including seven RAC constables. At that time Shekhar Saheb was DIG RAC. Police were equally restive and it was feared that RAC personnel may rebel. Shekhar Saheb's assurances saved the day once

again. I could go on and on with many similar stories but it is neither time nor occasion to pen them. He has written many interesting books from which his capabilities percolate. However I would fail if I didn't mention the social and familial dynamics which developed between Usha and I, and Shri and Smt Shekhar especially after my retirement. During his farewell trips to districts just before superannuation, he decided that we would accompany them. So, we were with them during a moon lit boating dinner in the Pichola lake and Chetak smarak at Haldighati. We also did Darshana of the holy shrines of Nathdwara Shrinathji, Eklingji, Salaser and Deshnoh together. For a few years 'Mr Bean's' coffee place in C-Scheme and Das Prakash restaurant on MI Road Jaipur were our rendezvous for celebration of our birthdays and anniversaries. The purchase of a new car was celebrated by taking a week long road trip to Bundi (where he had been SP), Kota, Baran, Jhalawar, and Rawatbati. While I was in the BSP I took them to Tanote Mata temple and a few border posts in Jaisalmer on my official helicopter. The police and BSF officers all over were so helpful



Rajendra Shekhar.

When I reflect on the time I spent with him, I grade him as a top trainer, friend and a thorough gentleman. Our bonding has survived for 56 years and I felt devastated to lose him yesterday. I don't know how to define him - a friend, senior colleague elder brother or all rolled into one.

Declining Health

Today as I am writing this memorial on Shri Rajendra Shekhar. After he has been consigned to ashes, my heart is very heavy with grief. We started seeing his declining health ever since he contracted Covid two years back. He tried to revive his routine of evening walk, and morning Yogs exercises but it was evident to all that he was fast losing his grip. They stopped going to parties and attending social functions. Watching Pakistani plays and cricket matches took most of their evenings. They stopped travelling to Delhi and Mumbai to spend time with their children. So the children stared coming singly or together to look after and cheer them up. But before it became better, he started developing breathlessness. Antibiotic drugs and an Oxygen machine helped but only in limited measure. On 16th January 2023 he had an attack of hypoxia and had to be shifted to a hospital in a state of coma. On the night of 23rd January, he took his last breath.

When I reflect on the time I spent with him, I grade him as a top trainer, friend and a thorough gentleman. Our bonding has survived for 56 years and I felt devastated to lose him yesterday. I don't know how to define him - a friend, senior colleague elder brother or all rolled into one. Respect and reverence for him came to me and Usha spontaneously as ours was a Providential association. Therefore, his demise feels like an unprecedented ordeal. Many of my colleagues and friends who had worked with him have conveyed similar sentiments today.

We can feel the immeasurable loss of Sheelaji, Sanjeev, Bharat, Arjun, Shami and the larger Shekhar family. We pray to the Almighty to give peace to the departed soul and courage to his family to bear this loss.

Om Shanti
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Indian Republic Day

Marking the day when the Constitution of India came into effect, thereby making India a republic, Indian Republic Day is a national holiday with parades, speeches, and cultural performances all over India. It's a time for Indians to come together and reflect on their national identity and the values that unite them as a nation. The Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26th November, 1949, but it came into effect on January 26th, 1950, thus making India a republic.

#JLF2023-OPINION

Where is the Spirit of the Festival?



It is just another hotel with white walls and can hardly match up to the cultural and historical legacy of the festival. What happened to Sanjoy K Roy's idea of heritage or the feel-good factor?



Shailaza Singh
Published author, poet and a YouTuber

It is understandable that the long-time fans and friends of JLF would not have liked the article 'From JLF to It can happen anywhere conference' which was published on January 24, 2023.

However, despite some voices of dissent, I maintain my stand that this year's JLF wasn't the JLF that Jaipur has grown used to. From the time of its inception in Digg Palace Hotel till today JLF has been proclaimed as the 'greatest literature festival' in the world. There are different versions of JLF all over the world which are based or inspired by the original JLF.

Once, while addressing a gathering at Ashok Club in Jaipur, Sanjoy K Roy, the co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival was quizzed on what criteria does he select the venue for the many versions of JLF across the world. At that time, rumours were rife that JLF will be shifted out of its original home in Digg Palace Hotel. He replied that he was constantly looking out for venues with a lot of heritage value and a feel-good factor. He said that for him it was important that the venue was a place which had its own history and stories that could house and integrate the spirit of the festival.

While it is understandable that owing to its location or other factors, it may have increasingly become difficult to house the rapidly burgeoning crowds and manage the logistics in Digg Palace Hotel, however, that should not mean that the festival should be held in a business hotel like Clarks Amer, which hardly has any heritage value attached to it. It is just another hotel with white walls and can hardly match up

to the cultural and historical legacy of the festival. What happened to Sanjoy K Roy's idea of heritage or the feel-good factor that was such an integral part of his plan for JLF? Even if one would argue that Clarks Amer has excellent facilities, I beg to differ. The washrooms had queues, the interviews with the authors were difficult to record since the entire media section was housed in a hall where sections were created by mere plywood walled 'rooms' which had no sound proofing and hence if you were conducting an interview with another author in one of the 'rooms' amidst a press conference in the main hall, only God can help you with your recording or interview as you strained to hear what the author had to say above all the din. The food that was served was merely 'sustenance' as many people described it. Simply including dal, bhatti, churma or gatte ki sabji does not transform hotel food into authentic cuisine of Rajasthan which is another integral part of the legacy and culture of Jaipur.

The point is when it comes to Jaipur, there is no dearth of heritage and yet modern hotels or venues that could have been logistically and economically possible venues for a festival of this stature which has been taken to the different parts of the world mostly on the basis of its heritage value and the city and the culture it represents. Funding doesn't seem to be a

THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT

one does not hold a music festival in the middle of an industrial area where the sounds of lathe and other machinery will simply kill the music and the atmosphere which a music festival creates. Similarly, a purely business hotel like Clark's Amer cannot be the venue for a festival.

problem with JLF with government ads being published in its brochures and numerous sponsors in its kitty. The fact of the matter is that one does not hold a music festival in the middle of an industrial area where the sounds of lathe and other machinery will simply kill the music and the atmosphere which a music festival creates. Similarly, a purely business hotel like Clark's Amer cannot be the venue for a festival which prides itself on being such an ambassador for art and culture for the world. Just like a beautiful painting cannot be put in just any frame, JLF needs a venue which creates the ambience it speaks of.

As far as the crowds are concerned, people have always wanted to go out and explore different things. Gathering a crowd is not a difficult thing to do. Put a three-legged man or



anything different or strange in the middle of the PanchBatti in M.L. Road and you can get a crowd there too. Even flop movies or movies of Govinda or David Dhawan have the ability to attract crowds but that does not mean that they are classics or they should be recorded in history as works of art or representatives of the culture of any place.

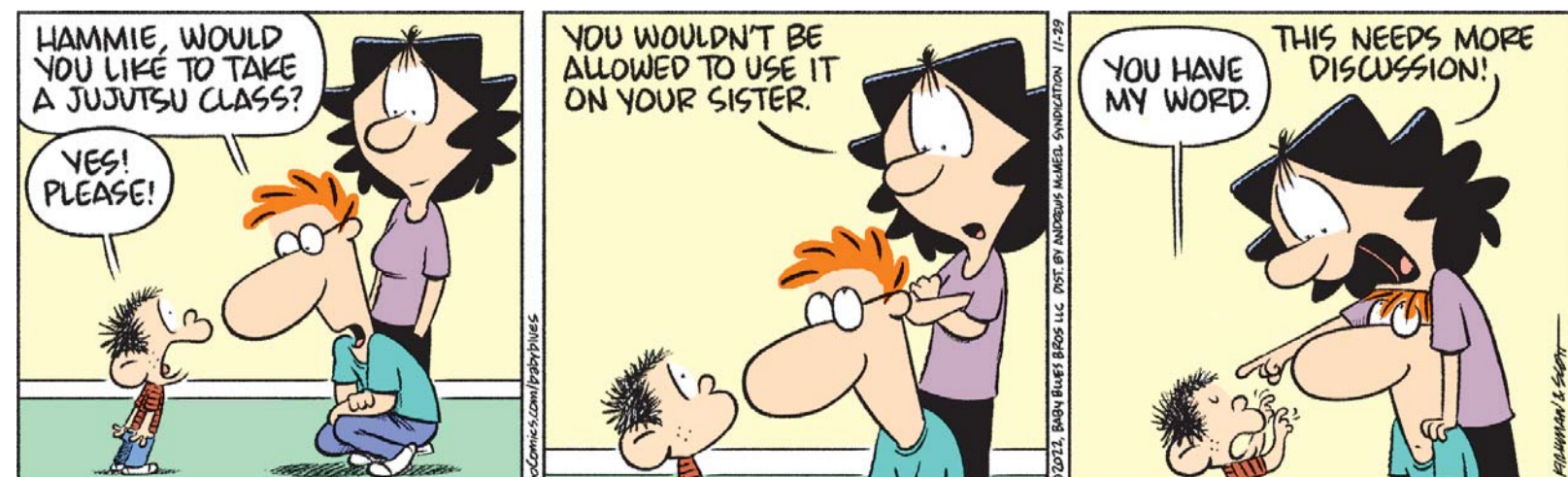
The question is not about the crowds or celebrities or even food; the question is about the spirit of the Jaipur Literature Festival. Where is the JLF which breathed art and culture and created an atmosphere where people could imbibe the centuries old ambience of Jaipur City? Where is the JLF where you felt that you have entered into a parallel world of literature where stories came alive and you could actually not just talk with the creators but also meet them and understand them as living and breathing humans and not just stars?

JLF 2023 is merely an event where sessions happened, books happened and authors came but the festival did not happen.



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

