

# Literary India

India's love of words goes way back. The country has a more than 3,000-year-old tradition of epic poetry, an even older oral narrative tradition, and literary movements (in some 20-odd languages) that span the centuries. So it makes sense that literature would come naturally to folks here. Add in two bridge languages,

English and Hindi, that clear the way for literary exchange across the subcontinent, and a recent increase in wealth that allows many more Indians to buy books, and you have a veritable literary boom.

It's true that India's publishing industry is growing steadily every year, but it's the excitement about writing that's really surging. The Jaipur Literature Festival, now in its sixth year, is one of the reasons why. The very hip, very smart five-day gathering of writers from around the world is held each January in an old *haveli* (mansion) in Rajasthan's ancient royal city. Starting out as a small affair with just 17 authors, it has grown to become a major event for India's liter-

ary world, with 220 authors and some 30,000 guests attending in 2010. Over the years it's hosted some big names—Salman Rushdie, Anne Enright, Alexander McCall Smith, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Pico Iyer, and Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan—but also lesser-known authors like Bhutanese queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki, and Mahasweta Devi, the Bengali writer and activist whose work fighting for India's tribal peoples has made her a human-rights legend.

Dozens of readings, panel discussions, and concerts are held in the gardens, durbar hall, and a Mughal tent

of the old mansion, and in past years a Writers' Ball was held in the Jaipur City Palace. The festival has its glamorous side, but it's also free and open to the public; readings in various Indian languages, discussions about film and music, and children's workshops keep the festival fun and accessible.

The 2011 edition promises to be the best yet, with an author guest list that includes Fatima Bhutto, Candace Bushnell, J. M. Coetzee, and Orhan Pamuk, among others. Hit it on your way to or from your winter retreat and celebrate the modern descendants of India's ancient art.

—Amy Karafin



## Book Club

India's body of literature is vast, but here's a small list of titles to get you started, with a nod to both big-name authors and the lesser known. —A.K.

Aravind Adiga,  
*The White Tiger*

Kiran Desai,  
*The Inheritance of Loss*

Namita Devidayal,  
*The Music Room*

Amitav Ghosh,  
*Sea of Poppies*

Jhumpa Lahiri,  
*The Namesake*

Rohinton Mistry,  
*A Fine Balance*

Kiran Narayan,  
*My Family and Other Saints*

Arundhati Roy,  
*The God of Small Things*

Vikram Seth,  
*A Suitable Boy*

Omprakash Valmiki,  
*Joothan: A Dalit's Life* ■