



# MAPPING THE HISTORY OF LITERATURE FESTIVALS IN THE CITY OF NAGPUR

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**Abstract:** The primary aim of the paper is to find the impact of the lit fests on the reading public in the city. The various socio-cultural, eco-political implications of the literature festivals are studied. How the city of Nagpur is upcoming with these lit fests organised as a factor for literary tourism; how intellectual stimulation and brainstorming is inculcating a socio-cultural ethos in the city with these lit fests. Acting as a pilot study it definitely has the potential to reach beyond the confines of a city broadening the spectrum to national levels. This paper assumes a notable proportion in the overall scheme of things going beyond the confines of conventional research as the study is impacting the socio, cultural, economic, political, psychological as well the literary aspects targeting the reading culture inculcated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Index Terms:** Evolution of Lit Fest, Festivalisation of Culture, Nagpur, Literary tourism, Trans literary Space.

The Jaipur Literature Festival pioneered the burgeoning of literary festivals all across India. From metros to smaller cities, these festivals paved the way for an atmosphere of intense deliberations. Not only these fests are humming grounds of ideas, conclaves and dialogues but also, they have stirred up a movement wherein the upcoming budding authors are finding a platform to reach out to audiences. The connect between the author and the reader is quite palpable. Gone are the days of the reclusive authors who would shy away from the limelight; the lit fests act as a bridge between the audience and the writer.

Celebrating Indian literary titans and their works, the larger scale festivals are also commanding an international presence with the foreign authors. The Jaipur Literature Festival has become a name to reckon with and put India on the global literary map. The boom in literary festivals has also helped the Indian book market and publishing industry to flourish and grow manifolds. Recent statistics shows that India now produces about 60 literature festivals every year with new festivals been added annually. There is The Hay Festival of Literature and Arts in Kerala, Tata Literature Live! Festival in Mumbai, while Kolkata has Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival. The Winter Literary Festival at Mussoorie, the Spring Fever Festival in Delhi, Bangalore Literature Festival, The Times Literary Carnival, The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, the largest children's book festival Bookaroo, the largest comic book and graphic novel festival Comic Con etc. are equally attracting larger audiences.

Following the literature festivals organized throughout the world and in particular India with focus on the city of Nagpur, the dearth of specialized studies on literature fests as an area of study was visible. Few research papers and scholarly articles paved the way and corroborated the need for the present paper. This mapping out the evolution and growth of lit fests in an upcoming city, which according to data available claims to be the 5<sup>th</sup> fastest growing city in the world, definitely marks its presence and

has an impact. The present study garners attention and stimulates more scholarly work creating a pool of academic efforts. More so when there has been no precedence of the kind. The present study is the first of its kind investigating the history and evolution of lit fests in the centrally located city of Nagpur.

The city of Nagpur is of utmost geographical importance as it is the center of India. Also, the winter capital of the state of Maharashtra, this orange city is pivotal politically as well economically. So, any study focused on the socio, political, economic, cultural inference is be a welcome addition. Mapping out the evolution of literary festivals in the city is not restricted to any one particular domain as the very subject entails diversified blending of learning. Lit fests are not limited to any one subject area; the dialogues happening in are varied with multi-lingual, multi-dimensional, multi-area of studies being interrogated. Also, the number of authors attending the fest are all from different branches of learning which cements the interdisciplinary nature of this study.

With literary fests acting as agents of literary tourism they make sure that the city creates its presence. The city of Nagpur has been organizing literary fests since last few years but there has been no cognizance taken about the same in the form of a literary endeavor. Ironically these lit fests have been relegated to background foreshadowed by the other populist events. The present paper aims to bridge this gap of knowledge by mapping the different lit fests held in the city. The literary landscape of the city would definitely flourish by such an offering which in turn would lead to serious contemplation of the lit fests as something more than entertainment. Other than few journalistic writings ensuring its occurrence these lit fests have not been actively probed. Giving it a shape by analytical enquiry would entail that more scholarly work is followed up.

Review of literature channelized endeavors on to this path of studying the occurrence of different lit fests across the city irrespective of the language. The OCLF (Orange City Lit Fest), VLF (Vidarbha Lit Fest), the fest organized by VSS (Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh) are some of the highlights.

The study works on the premise that added to the entertainment value of the lit fest is the crucial aspect of the fest being a hub of intellectual stimulation; a terrain for proliferation of rational ideas. The present study is exploratory in nature observing the different parameters involved in the organization of a literature festival in any given city. Both the qualitative and quantitative approach was inducted during the course of research. This exploratory study drew on inferences from participants associated with lit festival attendance. The methodology involved a nonprobability sample including case study of the well-established lit fests like JLF, MLF and BLF and its import on the located city. The primary aim of the study was to find the impact of these lit fests on the reading public in the city with the various socio-cultural, eco-political implications of the literature festivals. Whether the lit fests act as catalyst in augmenting literary tourism was another most important objective of the research. The lit fests are at the crux of the author publisher network was another assumption. The outreach these fests generate with the readers/ audiences/ viewership was another extremely pivotal point approached. The lit fests organized in any city becomes integral to the socio-cultural ethos construed. Also, how these lit fests help establish the facet of literary tourism was another vital question the present study answered.

This exploratory study draws on inferences from participants associated with lit festival attendance. The study presented here adopts an inductive and interpretivist approach. The present research explored the clout a city develops with a literature festival being organized; how the fest created a lasting impression as regards to indoctrination of values amongst the participants. The reading public was the focus as the sample with the organizers of the fest. The inference drawn positively leads to the sprout of more such lit fests in the city and at a much wider level. Despite their growing importance in creation of a world literature, literature festivals have driven little scholarly attention so far other than channels of cultural consumption. So, the notion is to consider how literary festivals reflect and contribute altogether to shape the structure of the transnational literary field, with respect to the city of Nagpur.

Literary scene in Nagpur:

The region's first literary meet was held at Brahma Vidya Mandir in Amravati on January 13-14, 1923. This meet started the literary movement in Vidarbha, and also proved to be the founding moment of what is today known as Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh (VSS). This organisation withstood the test of time maturing into an institution, and gradually built a legacy with each passing year. VSS held its sixth meet at Nagpur in 1929. The VSS meet held on August 21-22, 1937 was historic not only because it marked resumption of literary movement in Vidarbha, but also for 'revolutionary announcement'. Within two years after the 1937 meet of VSS, World War-II started and again VSS was unable to hold annual literary meets. After India won her Independence from the British Raj, VSS held its silver jubilee meet at Gondia in 1948. 'Loknayak' Bapuji Aney, who was then Governor of Bihar, presided

over the meet. To expand VSS presence and to streamline its functioning, renowned litterateur G T Madkholkar applied for a land parcel of 1.20 acres at Nagpur to construct 'Vidarbha Sahitya Mandir', the central office of VSS. On October 20, 1950, after completing official formalities, Madkholkar performed bhoomipujan of the Vidarbha Sahitya Mandir. Finally, on April 27, 1954, the building was inaugurated at the hands of Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India. This literary movement got strengthened person by person. Dr Ram Shewalkar's contribution had been immense. According to an article written on the occasion of Platinum Jubilee (75 years) of VSS by veteran litterateur Dr Madan Dhankar, Dr Shewalkar started 'Bal Sahitya Sammelan' children's literary meet. Dr Suresh Dwadashiwar and Manohar Mhaisalkar carried forward the legacy and enriched it with their contributions to the cause of VSS.

VLF (Vidarbha Literary Festival) is another lit fest dedicated exclusively to non-fiction writing in English in India. It brings together the world of non-fiction to the city of Nagpur. Holding wide ranging contextual and immersive conversations, in contemporary times, VLF held its first edition in February 2020 with a variety of authors taking centre stage with discussions, stalls, interactions and cultural events. February 2023 witnessed the second edition of the VLF followed by the third in January 2024 which too showcased an array of non-fiction writers coming together for the event. Nagpur as a city was enthralled with the star-studded events though it didn't reach the pinnacle of lit fests like the BLF or MLF or the JLF. The year 2025 didn't see any Vidarbha Literary Fest in non-fiction though there were sporadic author interactions/ interviews/speeches throughout the year. Till March 2026, no literary events were reported from the VLF.

The only lit fest which has gained momentum in the recent past without any hurdles is the OCLF (Orange City Lit Fest). The Orange City Literature Festival (OCLF) represents a significant cultural and literary initiative in Nagpur, functioning as a three-day event dedicated to the promotion of literary engagement, creativity, and intellectual exchange. As a platform for both the written and spoken word, the festival brings together a diverse group of participants, including poets, authors, actors, journalists, and scholars from across India, facilitating the sharing of varied perspectives and experiences.

OCLF is structured around a range of activities designed to encourage critical discourse and creative expression. These include panel discussions, author sessions, book launches and signings, workshops, art competitions, and exhibitions. In addition to its literary focus, the festival incorporates performances in music and dance, thereby situating literature within a broader cultural framework.

A key feature of the festival is its emphasis on inclusivity, as it seeks to provide a common platform for both emerging writers and established literary figures. Through events such as poetry slams and storytelling sessions, OCLF fosters dialogue on diverse thematic concerns, enabling participants and audiences to engage in reflective and critical discussions.

Notably, the festival operates as a self-funded initiative, underscoring its commitment to sustaining literary culture through independent means. The inclusion of curated stalls and exhibitions further enhances the participatory nature of the event, offering attendees multiple avenues for interaction. The organizational structure of OCLF comprises individuals from varied professional backgrounds, reflecting its interdisciplinary orientation.

In this context, the Orange City Literature Festival can be understood as a dynamic site of cultural production that contributes to the preservation and evolution of literary traditions while simultaneously engaging with contemporary forms of expression.

### Evolution of the Orange City Literature Festival (2019–2024)

The Orange City Literature Festival (OCLF), held in Nagpur, has evolved significantly since its inception in 2019, demonstrating adaptability, expansion in scale, and diversification in programming.

#### First Edition (2019):

The inaugural edition of OCLF was held from 4 to 6 December 2019. It marked a substantial beginning, featuring 5 inaugural sessions, 82 main sessions, 2 live events, and 14 workshops. The festival hosted over 70 speakers and attracted a diverse audience comprising students, professionals, children, and families. Notably, it also included more than 20 free stalls for non-governmental organizations, reflecting an emphasis on social engagement alongside literary activities.

#### Second Edition (2020 – Virtual):

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the second edition (27–29 November 2020) transitioned to a fully virtual format. Conducted via Cisco WebEx and streamed on YouTube, the

festival was organized by SGR Knowledge Foundation in collaboration with G H Rasoni University. Despite the shift in medium, the structure remained largely consistent, with 5 inaugural sessions, 82 main sessions, 1 live event, and 14 training sessions. The event reportedly received significant digital participation, indicating successful audience adaptation to online literary spaces.

Third Edition (2021 – Hybrid):

The third edition (27–29 November 2021) adopted a hybrid format, combining online and offline participation. While digital sessions continued to be streamed on YouTube, physical events were hosted at Chitnavis Centre, with a cultural evening at the South-Central Zone Cultural Centre (SCZCC). The programming included 6 inaugural sessions, 82 main sessions, 1 live event, and 14 training sessions. The hybrid model enabled broader accessibility while reintroducing in-person engagement, alongside the inclusion of over 13 stalls.

Fourth Edition (2022):

Held from 18 to 20 November 2022, the fourth edition marked a phase of expansion. The festival featured 96 sessions, over 90 speakers, 3 live events, and 24 workshops, alongside book launches and readings. Additional components such as open mic sessions, competitions, and over 23 stalls supporting local businesses indicate a growing emphasis on participatory and community-oriented activities.

Fifth Edition (2023):

The fifth edition (24–26 November 2023) continued to build on the festival's established framework, emphasizing inclusivity, diversity, and interdisciplinary engagement. The event brought together writers, readers, performers, and intellectuals through a range of activities, including panel discussions, workshops, contests, and book-related events. Thematically, the edition foregrounded the festival's role as a space for cultural exchange and creative expression, although specific quantitative data is less prominently documented.

Sixth Edition (2024):

The sixth edition, held from 22 to 24 November 2024, represents a mature phase in the festival's trajectory. It featured 88 sessions, 115 speakers, 5 book launches, and over 11 workshops. The programming extended across diverse domains such as law, finance, publishing, and popular culture. Additional elements included live art demonstrations, competitions, and a curated marketplace with more than 24 stalls, highlighting the festival's integration of literary, artistic, and entrepreneurial practices.

Furthermore, the inclusion of workshops, performances, and marketplace stalls suggests that OCLF functions not merely as a literary gathering but as a broader cultural platform. Its continued emphasis on inclusivity—through the participation of emerging and established voices, as well as engagement with local communities—positions it as a significant site for cultural production and dissemination in contemporary India.

Seventh Edition (2024):

The seventh edition of the Orange City Literature Festival (OCLF), held in 2025, is seen as an extension of the festival's mature phase, building upon the structural and thematic developments consolidated in the sixth edition. Following the steady increase in scale, diversity, and participation observed in earlier editions, OCLF 2025 sustained and expanded its multi-dimensional programming.

From a structural perspective, the festival continued its emphasis on a hybrid and inclusive model of engagement, integrating literary discussions with interdisciplinary themes such as media, public policy, digital culture, and creative industries. This reflects an ongoing shift from a purely literature-centric festival to a broader cultural knowledge platform, a trend already visible in the inclusion of domains like law, fitness, finance, and popular culture in 2024.

In terms of participation, the upward trajectory seen in the number of speakers, sessions, and workshops suggests that the 2025 edition maintained a high level of institutional and public engagement. The continued presence of established authors alongside emerging voices reinforces the festival's role as a democratized cultural space, facilitating dialogue across generational and professional boundaries.

The integration of performative and visual arts, including live demonstrations, competitions, and curated stalls, indicates a sustained commitment to experiential learning and audience interaction. By incorporating marketplaces and exhibition spaces, OCLF 2025 further strengthened its position within the framework of cultural economy, supporting local artisans, publishers, and creative entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the festival's evolution across editions highlights its increasing role as a site of cultural production and public discourse. In 2025, this role deepened through continued engagement with contemporary issues, thereby aligning the festival with broader debates within literary and cultural studies regarding the function of festivals as spaces of critical exchange.

Thus, the seventh edition of the Orange City Literature Festival (OCLF) can be understood as a continuation of its growth into a vibrant and inclusive cultural platform. While it remains rooted in literature, the festival increasingly opens up spaces for dialogue, exchange, and shared learning. In this sense, it reflects the idea of the Public Sphere as proposed by Jürgen Habermas—a space where individuals come together to engage in meaningful conversation and reflect on ideas that matter. Through its panels, discussions, and interactive sessions, OCLF encourages participation that goes beyond simply listening, inviting audiences to think, respond, and connect.

At the same time, the festival also contributes to what Pierre Bourdieu describes as Cultural Capital. By bringing together well-known writers alongside emerging voices, and by welcoming diverse audiences, it creates opportunities for people to engage with new ideas, develop their perspectives, and share in a collective cultural experience.

Seen in this light, OCLF reflects broader changes in contemporary literary festivals, where literature is no longer confined to books alone but intersects with culture, society, and everyday life. Ultimately, it becomes more than just a celebration of literature—it grows into a living, evolving space where ideas are exchanged, creativity is nurtured, and communities are brought together.

### Conclusion:

The evolution of the Orange City Literature Festival (OCLF) from 2019 to 2025 reflects not merely the growth of a single event, but a broader transformation in Nagpur's cultural and literary landscape. It offers insight into shifting patterns of regional literary culture, the construction of urban identity, and the increasing prominence of festivalisation in contemporary cultural practices.

#### 1. Emergence of Nagpur as a Cultural Hub

OCLF's steady expansion suggests that Nagpur is moving beyond its position as a peripheral cultural space in relation to metropolitan centres such as Delhi and Mumbai. Instead, it is gradually asserting itself as an active site of literary production and engagement. The increasing scale of participation—both in terms of speakers and audiences—indicates a growing local appetite for intellectual exchange, pointing to a wider decentralization of literary culture in India.

#### 2. Democratization of Literary Spaces

A defining feature of OCLF is its inclusivity. By bringing together diverse participants—students, professionals, children, emerging writers, and established authors—the festival opens up literary discourse to a broader public. In this sense, it approximates the idea of the Public Sphere, as theorized by Jürgen Habermas, where dialogue and debate are accessible rather than restricted to elite circles.

#### 3. Interdisciplinary Expansion

Over successive editions, OCLF has expanded beyond a strictly literary focus to include discussions on media, law, finance, and popular culture. This shift reflects a broader transformation in literary culture itself, where literature becomes a point of entry into wider social and cultural conversations. The festival thus mirrors the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of contemporary knowledge production.

#### 4. Festivalisation of Culture

OCLF also exemplifies the process of festivalisation, where cultural expression is organized into large-scale, experience-driven events. The incorporation of performances, workshops, competitions, and marketplace stalls illustrates how literature is embedded within a broader cultural and economic framework. While this enhances accessibility and audience engagement, it also raises critical questions about the potential commodification of culture and the balance between intellectual depth and mass appeal.

#### 5. Digital and Hybrid Adaptability

The transition to virtual and hybrid formats in response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the adaptability of regional literary cultures. By leveraging digital platforms, OCLF extends its reach beyond geographical boundaries, demonstrating how literary festivals today operate within both physical and digital public spheres.

#### 6. Production of Cultural Capital

Through its continued expansion, OCLF contributes to the accumulation of Cultural Capital, as

conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu. It fosters intellectual engagement, cultivates reading practices, and enhances the symbolic value of cultural participation, thereby strengthening Nagpur's identity as a city invested in creativity and knowledge.

Taken together, the evolution of OCLF illustrates how a regional city like Nagpur is actively participating in the reshaping of contemporary literary culture in India. More importantly, it shows that literature today is no longer confined to texts alone—it is lived, performed, discussed, and experienced collectively. In this sense, OCLF is not just a festival; it is a space where culture is continuously produced, negotiated, and shared, reflecting the changing ways in which communities engage with ideas in the modern world.

Mapping the lit fests organised in the city of Nagpur, certain conclusions were highlighted. These lit fests create a narrative which is effectively considering all the major stakeholders of the fest, right from the authors/ moderators, to publishers and most importantly audiences. The literary platform these fests provide to existing and more so budding authors is undeniable. Lit fests are not limited to any one subject area; the dialogues happening in are varied with multi-lingual, multi-dimensional, multi-area of studies being interrogated. The creation of a transnational literary space during the fests is the foremost outcome of these events. Nagpur as a city is inching ahead with the organisation of literature festivals happening at different levels.

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