

For Immediate Release: Wednesday 4th September 2019

The 2019 JCB Prize for Literature Longlist announced

- Four women and six men on the list for richest award for Indian writing
- Longlist dominated by debuts, showing Indian writing full of new talent in 2019
- Two works on the list are translations (from Tamil and Bengali)
- Jury make unusual move of putting “twin” novels by one author on the list together
- Turbulence of contemporary world prominent in all novels

Mumbai, 4th September, 2019: The longlist is announced today for the **2019 JCB Prize for Literature**.

The list of ten novels was selected by a panel of five judges: **Pradip Krishen**, filmmaker and environmentalist (Chair); **Anjum Hasan**, author and critic; **K.R. Meera**, author; **Parvati Sharma**, author; and **Arvind Subramanian**, economist and former Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India.

The longlist was chosen from a vast range of submissions by writers in fourteen states writing in six languages (Bengali, English, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu) published between 1st August 2018 and 31st July 2019.

The JCB Prize for Literature is awarded each year to a **distinguished work of fiction by an Indian writer**. The winner receives **Rs 25 lakh**. The 2019 winner will be announced on **2nd November 2019**.

The 2019 longlist is:

- *Ib's Endless Search for Satisfaction* by Roshan Ali (Penguin Random House India, 2019)
- *There's Gunpowder in the Air* by Manoranjan Byapari, translated from the Bengali by Arunava Sinha (Westland Publications, 2018)
- *The City and the Sea* by Rajkamal Jha (Penguin Random House India, 2019)
- *Milk Teeth* by Amrita Mahale (Westland Publications, 2018)
- *The Queen of Jasmine Country* by Sharanya Manivannan (HarperCollins India, 2018)
- *Trial by Silence and Lonely Harvest* by Perumal Murugan, translated from the Tamil by Aniruddhan Vasudevan (Penguin Random House India, 2018)
- *A Patchwork Family* by Mukta Sathe (Speaking Tiger Publishing Private Limited, 2018)
- *My Father's Garden* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar (Speaking Tiger Publishing Private Limited, 2018)
- *The Far Field* by Madhuri Vijay (HarperCollins India, 2019)
- *A Secret History of Compassion* by Paul Zacharia (Westland Publications, 2019)

The novels by **Roshan Ali**, **Amrita Mahale**, **Mukta Sathe** and **Madhuri Vijay** are all debuts.

Perumal Murugan's two novels, *Trial by Silence* and *Lonely Harvest*, are twin sequels to his *One Part Woman* (2015). Each of them explores an alternative set of consequences to the profound sense of betrayal with which the earlier novel closes. Pradip Krishen says, “Perumal Murugan’s remarkable two novels, which begin from the same situation, succeed in being both completely different and equally convincing as novels, and we on the jury felt they belonged together on the longlist.”



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Commenting on the longlist for 2018, the chair of the 2019 jury, Pradip Krishen, said,

"We on the jury had a wonderful time discussing these books together. The longlist we have chosen is varied, but all these books do what great fiction should: they take risks, they make arguments - and they touch a magic chord, one that keeps thrumming in your head and heart long after you've put the book away. It's impossible to generalise about these ten books. Indian fiction today is a richly bewildering category, and this longlist is correspondingly varied and complex. These are novels about working-class struggles and upper-class unease, historical evocations and contemporary conflicts, each written in an absolutely distinctive voice."

Commenting on the experience of reading the entries, Pradip Krishen said,

"All of us on the jury were struck by the quantity of historical fiction currently being written. Indian history is now, like never before, the inspiration for novels that address the concerns of the present – painful memories of colonialism, the costs of nation building, the divisiveness of caste and religion, and the need to see the world through the eyes of women. As readers, we wondered what this said about the current zeitgeist."

It seemed that the very best of today's novelists are impatient with the old political pieties. The problems of contemporary Indian life are often too stark and amoral to be resolved in such simple ways. Many of the books we selected for the longlist expressed powerful hopelessness, irrevocable damage. Characters are constantly trying to resist a malevolent reality of which, nonetheless, they are fully a part. It is fascinating that in three of these novels, for instance, narrators get college admissions not on merit but thanks to family members pulling strings."

Finally, it is difficult not to remark that several fine novels written in other languages were let down by poor translations. As a jury, it was sad for us to have to reject novels for this reason."

Rana Dasgupta, Literary Director, said:

"It has been fascinating to watch the five members of the jury read and discuss the very large and varied body of entries we had for the 2019 Prize. All of them have demanding expectations of contemporary literature, and they debated with enormous passion. Their search for literary excellence has produced an extremely varied list, which takes us to very different aspects of the contemporary Indian experience. There are many treasures in this list, and I encourage everyone who wishes to understand what 2019 means to spend time exploring it."

The jury will announce the **shortlist** of five titles on **4th October**. The **winner** of the **Rs 25-lakh** JCB Prize for Literature will be announced at the awards dinner on **2nd November**. If the winning work is a translation, the translator will receive an additional Rs 10 lakh. Each of the 5 shortlisted authors will receive Rs 1 lakh; if a shortlisted work is a translation, the translator will receive Rs 50,000.

The **2018 JCB Prize for Literature** was awarded to *Jasmine Days* by Benyamin, translated from the Malayalam by Shahnaz Habib and published by Juggernaut Books.



PRESS RELEASE

JURY COMMENTS ON THE TEN LONGLISTED NOVELS

Roshan Ali: *Ib's Endless Search for Satisfaction*

A well-sculpted debut novel about an ennui-ridden, disaffected, unmoored youth in contemporary urban India. Full of dark humour and wise-cracking angst, its laid-back style comes back and smacks you in the jaw as you realise you are in the midst of a fascinating experiment with language. An anxious, brilliant read.

Manoranjan Byapari: *There's Gunpowder in the Air*

Telling the story of a jailbreak during the Naxal days in Bengal, this novel reminds us of the power of writer-as-witness. Beginning as a series of vignettes in a prison, it builds up, through a narrative of controlled anger and humour, into a devastating critique of what it means to be free. It leaves us with no answer, but just a sense of dread.

Rajkamal Jha: *The City and the Sea*

An emotional allegory about toxic masculinity and its aftermath, this novel provides rare insight into the other side of violence. Jha has chosen to write about a horrifying theme, and he finds an original and unusual language for the evanescent, shadowy feelings which persist after terror.

Amrita Mahale: *Milk Teeth*

A wonderfully executed novel, told with patience and control: its characters emerge slowly, through detail and incident, as do the different worlds of the city they inhabit. This is not just the story of a neighbourhood in Bombay, or a young girl's coming of age, but also an exploration of class, religion, sexuality, capitalism - all done with a deft imagination and lightness of touch that, nonetheless, raises difficult questions about India's urban middle and upper classes.

Sharanya Manivannan: *The Queen of Jasmine Country*

In fresh, inventive language, Manivannan re-creates the awakening of Andal, the teenage poet of Tamil mythology. The yearning for a sensual and spiritual union with God - beautifully metaphorized in the jasmine garland - is rendered with skill and control. Andal's inner landscape and the natural world through which she moves with passionate instinct come together in a compelling evocation.

Perumal Murugan: *Trial by Silence and Lonely Harvest*

It is unusual for any writer to release two novels in one year, and we have taken the unusual decision of including both on the longlist. Both novels are sequels to Perumal Murugan's own "One Part Woman", both therefore start from the same situation - and both are equally compelling and equally true.

In one way, these novels try and answer an eternal question: when hurt by love, does one respond by hurting back, or hurting oneself? In another way, and taken together, they provoke another thought: how much do we control our future, if at all?

Mukta Sathe: *A Patchwork Family*

A tantalizing beginning lures the reader into a searing story of a disintegrating household that becomes an investigation of the larger social themes of rape, patriarchy, caste and justice. A portrait of a brutally self-serving middle-class, written in an effectively unadorned style and told in the voices of two characters two generations apart, joined in their increasing disquiet.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar: *My Father's Garden*

This is a writerly reflection on loss and disenfranchisement, both romantic and political. Shekhar handles big and complicated questions about social privilege, everyday corruption, sexual desire and community ties with beautiful ease, and produces a slim book that nevertheless delivers powerful blows.



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Madhuri Vijay: *The Far Field*

It is a wonderful experience for a reader to be inside the head and heart of this flawed, fallible but always plausible narrator-as-protagonist, protagonist as perpetrator, observer and (sometimes) victim. Without referring to overt politics, this personal story captures all the moral complexities - and the attendant hubris - of outsider intervention in Kashmir.

Paul Zacharia: *A Secret History of Compassion*

A madly inventive satire featuring a quixotic writer and his quasi-human sidekick on a quest to locate the elevating in the crass and the sincere in the ironic. This irreverent saga, celebrating wit and wisdom, is structured like a giant spider web and weaves together meditations on creativity, religion, Marxism, marriage and the future of mankind.

NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT THE JCB PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

The JCB Prize for Literature was set up in 2018 to enhance the prestige of literary achievement in India and create greater visibility for contemporary Indian writing. The prize encourages translations and aims to introduce new audiences to works of Indian literature written in languages other than their own. It is funded by JCB and administered by the JCB Literature Foundation.

For information about the Prize, please visit: www.thejcbprize.org. For updates, look for [@thejcbprize](https://www.facebook.com/thejcbprize) on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

KEY 2019 DATES

Longlist announcement: 4th September 2019

Shortlist announcement: 4th October 2019

Winner announcement: 2nd November 2019

2018 WINNER

Jasmine Days by Benyamin, translated from the Malayalam by Shahnaz Habib.

ABOUT JCB

JCB is a leading global manufacturer of earthmoving and construction equipment, the JCB Group has been active in India since 1979. Through its subsidiary, JCB India Ltd, the UK company today employs 5,000 people in India, and operates five state-of-the-art factories: in Ballabgarh (near New Delhi), in Pune, and in Jaipur. Products made in these factories have been exported to more than 93 countries around the world. Over its journey of close to four decades in India, JCB, through its products has contributed significantly towards the development of Infrastructure in the country. JCB is committed to being a socially and ethically responsible company at both a global and local level. For the past 20 years, JCB India has been working across India with vulnerable communities with the aim of providing them access to a better quality of life through education, enhanced income, business and skill development, and supporting traditional arts, culture and heritage.



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ABOUT THE JURY

Pradip Krishen (Chair) is a filmmaker who taught himself botany and became an ‘ecological gardener’, restoring degraded habitats with native plants, mostly in the desert regions of western India. He is currently Project Director of the Rao Jodha Desert Rock Park, Jodhpur, the Abha Mahal garden, Nagaur and Kishan Bagh, Jaipur, and he curates the garden of the Calico Museum, Ahmedabad. He has written *The Trees of Delhi: A Field Guide* and *The Jungle Trees of Central India: A Field Guide For Tree-Spotter*s. His films include *Massey Sahib* (1986), *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* (1988) and *Electric Moon* (1991).

Anjum Hasan is the author of the novels *The Cosmopolitans*, *Neti, Neti* and *Lunatic in my Head*, the short story collections *A Day in the Life* and *Difficult Pleasures*, and the poetry collection *Street on the Hill*. Anjum was, until recently, Books Editor at *The Caravan*. She has been Charles Wallace Writer-in-Residence at the University of Canterbury and visiting professor of creative writing at Ashoka University. She is currently a Homi Bhabha Fellow. Her short stories, essays and poems have been published in *Granta*, *Baffler*, *Five Dials*, *Wasafiri*, *Drawbridge*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Asia Literary Review*, *Caravan*, and several anthologies.

K.R. Meera writes fiction in Malayalam and essays in English, and has published four novels, five novellas, six collections of short fiction, two children’s novels and two collections of essays. She has won all the major Malayalam literary awards, including the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award (for best novel and for best short fiction), the Vayalar Award and the Odakuzhal Award. Her works in translation include *Hangwoman*, *The Poison of Love*, *The Unseeing Idol of Light*, *Yellow is the Colour of Longing* and *The Gospel of Yudas*.

Parvati Sharma began her writing career with *The Dead Camel and Other Stories of Love*, which earned her praise for its depictions of love and sexuality in urban India. Her novella, *Close to Home*, was acclaimed as ‘tender, acute and pulsing with real Indian life’. She has also written a book for children, *The Story of Babur*, and, most recently, a historical biography, *Jahangir: An Intimate Portrait of a Great Mughal*. Sharma lives in New Delhi, where she has worked as a travel writer, editor and journalist.

Arvind Subramanian was Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India and is now a Visiting Lecturer at Harvard University. His award-winning book *Eclipse: Living in the Shadow of China's Economic Dominance* was published in September 2011. In 2011 *Foreign Policy* named him one of the world's top 100 global thinkers. He has written on India, growth, trade, development, institutions, aid, climate change, oil, intellectual property, the WTO, China, and Africa. He has published widely in academic and other journals.