



THE JCB PRIZE FOR
LITERATURE

The JCB Prize for Literature shortlist announced

Five greatest novels of 2018 demonstrate the universal ambition of contemporary Indian fiction

New Delhi, October 3, 2018: The JCB Prize for Literature's inaugural shortlist of **five distinguished novels by Indian writers** was announced today. Varied in their themes and settings, the novels nonetheless share an ambition: to reveal as-yet-undiscovered worlds through powerfully drawn scenes and characters.

Launched earlier this year, the JCB Prize for Literature was open for entries until May 31st 2018. On September 5th, after months of reading and evaluation, the jury announced a longlist of ten novels, which displayed the great diversity of contemporary Indian writing. After that, the jury convened once more to determine the shortlist.

The jury's statement said, *"In their different ways, these five novels all depict the collision of richly contemplative beings with the rapidly changing outer world. As such they stand as an eloquent record of our moment in history, and we feel they will be read for decades to come."*

Authors of the five shortlisted novels will each receive Rs one lakh; their translators will receive Rs 50,000. The final award – India's richest, at Rs 25 lakh – will be presented to the writer of the winning novel on October 24th; if the winning work is a translation, the translator will also receive an additional of Rs five lakh.

The JCB Prize for Literature 2018 shortlist:

Title	Author
<i>Half the Night is Gone</i> (Juggernaut Books)	Amitabha Bagchi
<i>Jasmine Days</i> (Juggernaut Books)	Author: Benyamin Translator: Shahnaz Habib
<i>Poonachi</i> (Westland Publications)	Author: Perumal Murugan Translator: N. Kalyan Raman
<i>All the Lives We Never Lived</i> (Hachette Book Publishing)	Anuradha Roy
<i>Latitudes of Longing</i> (HarperCollins Publishers India)	Shubhangi Swarup

Two of these novels are translations: *Poonachi* or *The Story of a Black Goat* was written in Tamil and translated by **N. Kalyan Raman**, who has made much contemporary Tamil poetry and fiction accessible in English. *Jasmine Days* was translated from the Malayalam by **Shahnaz Habib**, a poet and writer based in the United States. The shortlist also features a debut novel: *Latitudes of Longing* by **Shubhangi Swarup**.

Vivek Shanbhag, chair of the jury¹, said, *“The job of literature is to supply a language for reality, and these books are all exquisite in their description of the worlds – often very turbulent worlds – we inhabit. But literature is also a record of the sensitivity of the observer – and these novels are a testament to the beauty and richness of human experience.”*

JURY COMMENTS ON THE SHORTLISTED BOOKS

Half the Night is Gone: *“Amitabha Bagchi’s novel explores the inner and outer lives of the men in two families, one rich, one working class. It gently but perceptively explores their vanities and their failures, and the deeply-rooted passions that drive to make the choices that they do. Half the Night is Gone demonstrates a deep understanding of masculinity and will surely be read for decades to come.”*

Jasmine Days: *“Through the life of a young protagonist, Jasmine Days describes the lives of foreign workers in a Middle East country on the brink of a revolution. Beautifully written and translated, this compassionate and morally complex novel confronts some of the difficult questions of our times.”*

Poonachi: *“Funny and warm, Poonachi is a book that forces us gently to look at ourselves and our contribution to an unequal world. Perumal Murugan is a master story-teller who reflects profoundly on our transactional society and its inequities and struggles. Through the character of the lonely goat, he has written a powerful modern fable.”*

All the Lives We Never Lived: *“This beautiful novel, set in the southeast Asia of the 1930s, evokes beautiful imagery of places and landscapes. It does its work quietly and with great subtlety, but it is a novel of big ideas.”*

Latitudes of Longing: *“Lyrical, original and heartbreaking, Latitudes of Longing is a vast novel. In order to write in such detail about so many locations, the author obviously had to do a great amount of research, and yet it has the ring of total authenticity. A wonderful book which, with landscape, earth and sea as principal characters, seemed to invent a genre all of its own: ecological fiction.”*

MORE ABOUT THE SHORTLISTED BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Computer science professor by day and author by night, **Amitabha Bagchi** lives in New Delhi. He picked up the importance of stories as a child, when his father told interesting tales he had come across in his travels. Oscillating between pre-Independence and contemporary Delhi, **Half the Night is Gone** tells us of a rich merchant’s home in pre-independence Delhi and a novelist living in contemporary Delhi. It is a layered tale of paternal love, loss, and regret.

Benyamin, an author of over twenty books, says he knew nothing of literature till the age of twenty-one. A former electrical engineer, he lived in Bahrain for several years before he took to full-time writing. He now lives in Kerala. **Jasmine Days** is a story about young radio jockey Sameera Parvin who immigrates to an unnamed city in the Middle East and witnesses the Arab Spring of 2011. Her happy world starts to fall apart when she is forced to choose between family and friends, loyalty and love, life and death. The novel was

¹ Regretfully, the former chair of the 2018 jury, filmmaker Deepa Mehta, was obliged to retire from her position in September 2018 due to unforeseen professional commitments.

originally written in Malayalam and **translated by Shahnaz Habib**, who teaches writing at Bay Path University and consults for the United Nations.

Perumal Murugan lives in Namakkal, Tamil Nadu, and began writing at a very young age. His work has been deeply influenced by his Marxist education, and his reading of Periyar. He currently works as a professor in a college in his hometown. *Poonachi* is a tale of the life of a black goat. It is uncharacteristic of Murugan who is known for his realist narratives. Lurking just beneath the surface of this novel about goats, however, is a sly social satire. It was originally written in Tamil and was **translated by N. Kalyan Raman**, winner of a Pudumaipithan Award for his contribution to Tamil literature.

Anuradha Roy published her first stories when she was only fourteen, though her first novel did not come out until she was forty. She designs book covers for the publishing house she runs with her husband from Ranikhet, Uttarakhand; she says that if she didn't write, she would be a full-time book-maker. *All the Lives We Never Lived* tells the story of a woman who chooses her art over family, and her individual freedom over the country's independence. Amidst this drama her son, Myshkin, looks back on his mother's departure as the defining trauma of his life.

Shubhangi Swarup is a journalist, filmmaker, novelist and an educationist in Mumbai. She calls herself "a hopeless backpacker" and loves to travel, which is one of the reasons why her first novel goes through so many beautiful and intriguing places. *Latitudes of Longing* is a brilliantly-conceptualised debut that blends the natural with the supernatural, and the human with the otherworldly. Here, the characters are the landscape, and the landscape a character as mercurial and wounded as any of us. The novel explores fault lines and fissures that exist in humans as they do in geology.

To know more about The JCB Prize for Literature, please visit: www.thejcbprize.org

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ABOUT THE JCB PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Founded in 2018, the JCB Prize for Literature celebrates distinguished fiction by Indian writers. It is India's richest literary award.

The prize aims to enhance the prestige of literary achievement in India, and to create greater visibility for contemporary Indian writing. With a special focus on translation, it also aims to introduce readers to works of Indian literature in languages other than their own.

The Literary Director of the JCB Prize for Literature is the novelist and essayist, Rana Dasgupta. One of the responsibilities of the Literary Director is to appoint, each year, a Prize jury of distinguished individuals from a variety of backgrounds. All members of the jury read all novels entered for the Prize; they then jointly select a longlist (of ten books), a shortlist (of five), and a winner.

The 2018 jury consists of: novelist Vivek Shanbhag (chair), Yale University astrophysicist and writer Priyamvada Natarajan, entrepreneur and scholar Rohan Murty, and author and translator, Arshia Sattar.

All shortlisted writers receive Rs 1 lakh. The winner receives an additional Rs 25 lakhs. If the winning book is a translation, the translator receives an additional Rs 5 lakhs.

THE AWARDS CEREMONY

The winner of the JCB Prize for Literature will be announced at the awards ceremony in Delhi on the 24th of October. The winner will be presented with a cheque for Rs 25 lakhs and a trophy designed by the artist duo Thukral and Tagra.

ABOUT JCB

A leading global manufacturer of earthmoving and construction equipment, JCB 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.

Through its products, JCB has contributed significantly towards the development of India's infrastructure over the last four decades. JCB carries out significant CSR activities in the country, with a focus on the communities close to its factories. Today its outreach extends to fifty-four government schools and nine vocational training centres, through which it assists 16,000 students and trainees.