

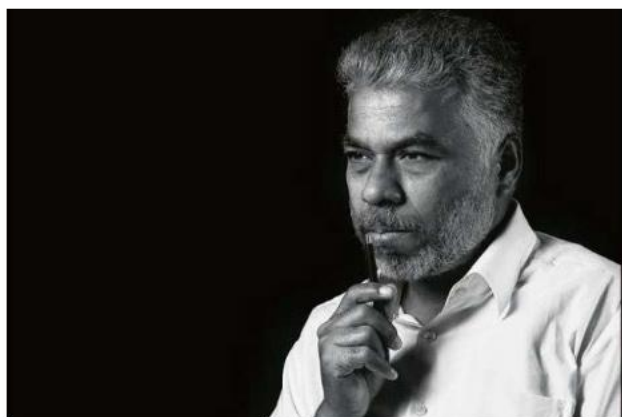
## Perumal Murugan, Zacharia in JCB Prize for Literature longlist

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*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*



**Mumbai:** Noted Tamil writer Perumal Murugan's twin novels, "Trial by Silence" and "Lonely Harvest" (Penguin Random House) and Malayalam author Paul Zacharia's maiden work in English "A Secret History of Compassion" (Westland) are among the 10 authors who feature in the longlist of the Rs 25 lakh JCB Prize for Literature 2019, India's richest, it was announced here on Wednesday.

"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," noted filmmaker Pradip Krishen, the jury chair, said.

"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," he added.

Noting that the jury was struck by the quantity of historical fiction currently being written, he said: "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."

According to Krishen, 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," he explained.

Krishen also regretted 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."

The other books on the 2019 longlist are:

- \* 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)
- \* 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)

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

The jury will announce the shortlist of five titles on October 4. The winner will be announced at the awards dinner on November 2. 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.

"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," JCB Prize Literary Director Rana Dasgupta said.

"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," he added.

The other members of the jury were author and critic Anjum Hasan; authors K.R. Meera and Parvati Sharma; and former Chief Economic Adviser to the Indian government Arvind Subramanian.

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 August 1, 2018 and July 31, 2019.