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The 2021 JCB Prize for Literature
Shortlist announced

- Three debut authors in the running for India's most coveted literary award
- Shortlist reflects a deep rooted sense of community, time, and geography
- Two Malayalam translations in the shortlist

New Delhi, 4th October, 2021: The JCB Prize for Literature celebrates the very finest achievements in Indian writing. It is presented each year to a **distinguished work of fiction by an Indian writer**, as selected by the jury. The 2021 shortlist, as announced this morning by Mita Kapur, Literary Director of the Prize, across the JCB Prize for Literature's social media platforms is:

- *Anti-Clock* by V.J. James, translated from the Malayalam by Ministhy S. (Penguin Random House India, 2021)
- *Name Place Animal Thing* by Daribha Lyndem (Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2021)
- *The Plague Upon Us* by Shabir Ahmad Mir (Hachette India, 2020)
- *Delhi: A Soliloquy* by M. Mukundan, translated from the Malayalam by Fathima E.V. and Nandakumar K. (Westland, 2020)
- *Gods and Ends* by Lindsay Pereira (Penguin Random House India, 2021)

Commenting on the shortlist, the chair of the 2021 jury, Sara Rai said,

“Presenting a cross section of the multiple diversities in India, the five novels on this year’s shortlist speak in layered voices often laced with irony. Inventive and insightful in the way only literature can be, they create disparate worlds, each a microcosm with larger resonances and significance. The anguish of Kashmir, the turbulence of ethnic conflict in the north-east, the disharmony of lives spent in narrow social and psychological confines, each with their specific difficulties – the novels dive deep into these particular, ordinary lives and come up having discovered in them the extraordinary.”

With COVID-19 restrictions slowly easing, the Prize is back this year with new on-ground collaborations with stand-alone book stores and Blue Tokai Coffee Roasters with the aim to provide wider access to the novels across India and create a one-on-one interaction between readers and books. The JCB Prize for Literature is also collaborating with Amazon Books India for the fourth year in a row as its official online partner to ensure that the shortlisted books reach people in every corner of the country.

Talking about the collaboration Pragya Sharma, Director, media Amazon India, said:

“We are delighted to collaborate with JCB Prize for Literature as their official online bookstore partner. The award is a trustworthy and prestigious source for recognizing distinguished work of fiction by Indian writers. We are working together to nurture passion for reading in India and are excited to bring the high quality diverse books from award long list for our customers.”

With the winner to be decided soon, Mita Kapur, Literary Director, said:

“Things are looking up slowly and there are a few things that have kept us going through these times: empathy, love, art. The publishing industry has powered on in bringing a treasure trove of literature from all regions of India to the forefront to reach out to readers here and throughout the world. Now more than ever, we need to listen to the other, lose ourselves in a new story. These books will spirit you away to worlds unknown, yet familiar in the emotions each human heart shares with the other.”

Each of the five shortlisted authors will receive Rs 1 lakh; if a shortlisted work is a translation, the translator will receive an additional Rs 50,000. The winner of the **Rs 25 lakh** JCB Prize for Literature will be announced on **13th November 2021**. If the winning work is a translation, the translator will receive an additional Rs 10 lakh.

Shortlisted books: Jury comments, synopses and author biographies

Anti-Clock by V.J. James, translated from the Malayalam by Ministhy S.
(Penguin Random House India, 2020)

The jury says

This book is so outrageous in that it's about a coffin maker. James has got lots of insights into the characters. He is very inventive, very imaginative with a great sense of humour. There is a sort of eccentric genius animating the story with the anti-clock, a coffin maker, and an antagonist who is such a caricature yet feel so real because we see him through the eyes of the protagonist.

Synopsis

Anti-Clock is as much about class disparity and small voices against the powerful as it is about depleting natural resources and the frailty of human lives. At the centre of this novel is Hendri, the protagonist, whose whole life revolves around the moment he will exact revenge against the antagonist – the obscenely rich and larger than life - Satan Loppo.

V.J. James writes in Malayalam. Born and brought up in Changanacherry, Kerala, he currently resides in Thiruvananthapuram. An engineer by profession, he worked at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre. His debut novel *Purappadinte Pusthakam* was awarded the DC Silver Jubilee Award (1999), Malayattoor Prize and Rotary Literary Award. Other awards include the O.V Vijayan Award and Thikkurissi Award for *Anti-Clock*, and the Thoppil Ravi Award, Kerala Bhasha Institute Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Basheer Puraskaram and Vayalar Award for *Nireeshwaran*. The English translation of *Chorashasthram* was shortlisted for the Atta Galatta Bangalore Literature Festival Book Prize. The Malayalam film *Munthirivallikal Thalirkkumbol* is an adaptation of his short story *Pranayopanishath*.

Ministhy S. is an IAS officer working in the Uttar Pradesh cadre. She translates between three languages: English, Malayalam and Hindi. Her translation of *The Poison of Love* by Malayalam novelist K.R. Meera was longlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2017 and *The Unseeing Idol of Light* by the same author shortlisted for the Crossword Book Jury Awards in 2018. She has further translated *Sundar Kanda* and *Kishkindha Kanda* from Awadhi to English, and the poetry collections *My Home*, *After Me* by Agneya from the Hindi and *The Heaviness of the Rain* by Veerankutty from the Malayalam.

Name Place Animal Thing by Daribha Lyndem
(Simon Schuster India, 2020)

The jury says

“The book offers a clear sighted, honest and intimate view into a girl’s world. It describes the ordinary and in that it becomes extraordinary. Daribha’s writing is plain and elegant. She writes with a great lightness of touch where even heavy topics like insurgency are dealt with in an oblique

manner. The writer has managed to very skilfully inhabit a child's voice and a child's way of looking at things while keeping it all consistent."

Synopsis

Name Place Animal Thing follows 'D', the protagonist, over a decade, providing a glimpse into the city of Shillong and the life of girl entering womanhood through a series of vignettes, introducing the reader to people, places and life-changing events that were a part of her growing up years from seven to twenty.

Daribha Lyndem is a writer and civil servant currently living in Mumbai. She was born and raised in Shillong, studied English Literature at St Anthony's College and Delhi University, before joining the Indian Revenue Service. *Name Place Animal Thing* is her debut novel. She was named one of the Promising Writers of 2021 and Beyond by digital magazine Feminism in India, and her novel is in a list of 'Best Summer Reads of 2020' by Vogue India, and has reviews in The Hindu, The Caravan, and Firstpost. When she is not writing or working at her day job, she is either redoing her house for the umpteenth time or hoarding skincare products. She shares a flat with her three cats and husband where she writes and gardens.

The Plague Upon Us by Shabir Ahmed Mir
(Hachette India, 2019)

The jury says

"The book has this edge of insanity that matches the situation in Kashmir. The timeless emotion of Oedipus Rex is evident in what the author puts forth. The instability in the characters is reflective of the instability of Kashmir- with many subconscious factors working to make the book more evocative for the reader, and the story becoming more complex with each retelling."

Synopsis

Narrated from the perspective of four childhood friends, *The Plague Upon Us* is a tale of cyclical violence that plagues Kashmir, told with an urgency that the prose demands. Whilst at the centre is a story that finds resemblance with the facts and figures that come out of Kashmir, the writer forces the reader to submerge into this world as new facets get added with each perspective, leaving the reader with the question of their understanding of the story verses the real narrative, much like the outsiders view point on of the state.

Shabir Ahmed Mir is a writer and poet and has been awarded the Reuel International Prize for fiction in 2017. This is his first novel.

Delhi: A Soliloquy by M. Mukundan, translated from the Malayalam by Fathima E.V. and Nandakumar K.
(HarperCollins, 2020)

The jury says

"The book is a rambling, intimate epic. It captures what it means to be a small person in a big capital. How the relentless wave of history impacts these marginal people who have come to Delhi in search

for a better life. Mukundan has brought to life the very real characters in this book with great sincerity – all through the novel you are looking at the small things and through them understanding the big.”

Synopsis

Narrated by Sahadevan, a Keralite who moves to Delhi in his twenties, *Delhi: A Soliloquy* tells the story of the changes and growth of Delhi with Sahadevan’s life as the backdrop. Journeying through life, he comes across immigrants scattered across the capital city, all struggling in their own ways. The book is about forging friendships, and finding his own people in a city he comes to call home.

M. Mukundan was born and brought up in Mahe. He rose to critical acclaim and popularity with *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil* (1974). His stories and novels have been widely translated into various Indian languages, English and French. He has been awarded Ezhuthachan Puraskaram, the highest literary honour given by the Government of Kerala, the Crossword Book Award twice, first in 1999 for *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* and again in 2006 for *Kesavan’s Lamentations*, and the Sahitya Akademi award and N.V. Puraskaram for *Daivathinte Vikrithikal (God’s Mischief)*. His other major works include *Kesavante Vilapangal* (2009) and *Prasavam* (2008). He was presented with the insignia of Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government in 1998. He also served as the president of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi from 2006 to 2010. Four of his books have been adapted into award-winning films. *Delhi Gathakal* (2011), translated as *Delhi: A Soliloquy*, is based on his experiences of living and working in Delhi for forty years as a Cultural Attaché at the French embassy. In 2004, he retired from that position and returned to Mahe, his hometown.

Fathima E.V. is an award-winning writer and translator. Her translation of Subhash Chandran’s *Manushyanu Oru Amukham*, translated as *A Preface to Man*, was awarded the Crossword Book Award (2017) and the V. Abdulla Translation Award (2017). She was the translator-editor of the *Indian Ink Mag*, and her poems and short fiction have appeared in international anthologies and journals. She holds an MA and a PhD from the University of Calicut, and completed the TESOL course from the University of Surrey. Currently, she heads the department of English at Krishna Menon Memorial Government Women’s College, Kannur.

Nandakumar K. started his career as a sub-editor at *Financial Express*, after completing a master’s degree in Economics, followed by stints in international marketing and general management in India and abroad. Having travelled in over fifty countries, he claims he can speak enough German and French to save his life. Strangely, his tryst with translation started with a paper in French on the blood diseases of fishes for his sister-in-law, using a borrowed dictionary. He is now an empanelled copy editor with Indian publishers and IIM Ahmedabad. *Delhi: A Soliloquy* is his first published translation from Malayalam. He lives and works in Dubai.

Gods and Ends by Lindsay Pereira
(Aleph Book Company, 2019)

The jury says

“With a biting sense of humour and a quirky voice, Lindsay Pereira puts forth an intriguing debut. Part of the attraction lies in its unconventional form and structure. Each of the residents of Obrigado

mansion seem to be competing in being more malevolent and pathetic than the other, making each of them particularly foul, but Pereira doesn't offer any excuses for them, making them all unforgettable."

Synopsis

Obrigado Mansion, in Orlem, Mumbai, with its leaking roofs and breaking facades is home to many from the small roman catholic community that lives there. Its thin walls and overall impoverished state has brought together a bunch of people who despite not liking each other are very similar. The bleakness in the lives of its residents is almost reflected in the physical state of the mansion itself. Pereira's quite wit underlines the storyline from the get go, when he begins the story of the residents- Obrigado in portugese means gratitude, and that is the one quality missing in all its residents.

Lindsay Pereira is a journalist and editor. Born and raised in Bombay, he studied at St Xavier's College and the University of Mumbai and holds a PhD in literature for his work on gender attitudes implicit in nineteenth-century Indian fiction. He was co-editor with the late Eunice de Souza of *Women's Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Indian Writing in English*, published by Oxford University Press. This is his first novel.

ABOUT THE JURY

Sara Rai (chair) is a writer and literary translator working with Hindi, Urdu and English. She has published three collections of short stories in Hindi with her first novel, *Cheelvali Kothi* (The House of Kites) published in 2010. The German translation of her selected short fiction, *Im Labyrinth* (The Labyrinth) won the Coburg Rückert Prize 2019, and was also nominated for the Weltempfänger Prize, Frankfurt 2020. Her translation of Vinod Kumar Shukla's *Blue is Like Blue* won the Atta Galatta Prize 2019 and the Matrubhumi Award 2020. Over the years, her work has been translated into Urdu, German, French, Italian and English.

Dr. Annapurna Garimella is a designer and an art historian. Her latest book is a co-edited Marg volume titled *The Contemporary Hindu Temple: Fragments for a History* (2019) and her upcoming edited volume is titled *The Long Arc of South Asian Art: A Reader in Honor of Vidya Dehejia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2021). Annapurna is the Managing Trustee of Art, Resources and Teaching Trust, along with heading Jackfruit Research and Design.

Shahnaz Habib is the author of the nonfiction book *Airplane Mode*, and the translator of the novels *Jasmine Days* and *Al-Arabian Novel Factory*. She, along with the author Benyamin, won the JCB Prize for Literature for *Jasmine Days* in 2018. Her writing has appeared in *The New Yorker* online, *Creative Non-fiction*, *Agni*, *Brevity*, *The Guardian*, and *Afar*, among many others. She currently teaches writing at The New School and consults for the United Nations as well.

Prem Panicker is the editor of Peepli.org, an independent website dedicated to longform multimedia storytelling. He has worked as a journalist and editor for over 30 years across print and digital mediums. Prem was one of the team of journalists who helped start Rediff.com and has also worked as the Managing Editor for *Yahoo! India*. Prem conducts storytelling workshops, and consults with various media houses from time to time.

Amit Varma is a writer and podcaster based in Mumbai. He writes *The India Uncut* Newsletter and hosts the longform conversation podcast, *The Seen and the Unseen*. He has been a journalist for over two decades, and won the Bastiat Prize for Journalism in 2007 and 2015. Amit also teaches the online course, *The Art of Clear Writing*.

NOTE 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](#) on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

KEY 2021 DATES

Longlist announcement: 6th September 2021

Shortlist announcement: 4th October 2021

Winner announcement: 13th November 2021

2018 WINNER

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

2019 WINNER

The Far Field by Madhuri Vijay.

2020 WINNER

Moustache by S. Hareesh, translated from the Malayalam by Jayasree Kalathil.

ABOUT JCB

JCB India is a leading manufacturer of Earthmoving and Construction equipment. The company entered India in 1979 and is a fully owned subsidiary of the J.C Bamford Excavators UK. It has five factories at New Delhi, Pune and Jaipur. Its Sixth factory is coming up at Vadodara. Over the years, JCB's products have contributed significantly towards the development of Infrastructure in the country. It has invested in creating a local supply chain and JCB's Made in India products have been exported to over 110 countries. The company's CSR initiatives today extend across three in-house foundations, nine of the Sustainable Development Goals and reach out Women, Adolescent Girls, Children, Rural Artisans and Youth. It also established two pioneering CSR projects, Nila House, a centre of excellence for craft in Jaipur and an annual prize for Literature, celebrating distinguished works of fiction by Indian writers, The JCB prize for Literature.