



## The 2021 JCB Prize for Literature Longlist announced

- The longlist of the most coveted award for Indian writing is dominated by debutant authors this year with 6 debuts.
- Three Malayalam translations make it to the 2021 longlist.
- As a reflection of the times, all novels prominently feature themes of self-reflection, duality and morality.

New Delhi, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2021: The longlist of the 2021 JCB Prize for Literature is announced today.

The list of ten novels was selected by a panel of five judges: **Sara Rai** (Chair), author and literary translator; **Dr Annapurna Garimella**, designer and art historian; **Shahnaz Habib**,



THE JCB PRIZE FOR  
LITERATURE

author and translator; **Prem Panicker**, journalist and editor; and **Amit Varma**, writer and podcaster.

The longlist of the most coveted award for Indian writing is dominated by debut authors this year with six debuts. Three works on the list are translations (from Malayalam).

The longlist was chosen from a wide range of submissions by writers from sixteen states writing in multiple languages published between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

The JCB Prize for Literature is awarded each year to a **distinguished work of fiction by an Indian writer**. The jury will announce the **shortlist** of five titles on **4<sup>th</sup> October**. The **winner** of the **Rs 25-lakh** JCB Prize for Literature will be announced on **13<sup>th</sup> 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 2021 longlist is:

- *A Death in Sonagachhi* by Rijula Das (Pan Macmillan, 2021)
- *What We Know About Her* by Krupa Ge (Westland, 2021)
- *Anti-Clock* by V.J. James, translated from Malayalam by Ministhy S. (Penguin Random House India, 2021)
- *Name Place Animal Thing* by Daribha Lyndem (Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2021)
- *The Plage Upon Us* by Shabir Ahmed Mir (Hachette India, 2020)
- *Delhi: A Soliloquy* by M. Mukundan, translated from Malayalam by Fathima E.V. & Nandakumar K. (Westland, 2020)
- *Gods and Ends* by Lindsay Pereira (Penguin Random House India, 2021)
- *The Man Who Learnt to Fly but Could Not Land* by Thachom Poyil Rajeevan, translated from Malayalam by P.J. Mathew (Hachette India, 2020)
- *The Dharma Forest* by Keerthik Sasidharan (Penguin Random House India, 2020)
- *Asoca* by Irwin Allan Sealy (Penguin Random House India, 2021)

The books by **Rijula Das**, **Krupa Ge**, **Daribha Lyndem**, **Shabir Ahmed Mir**, **Lindsay Pereira** and **Keerthik Sasidharan** are all debut novels.

**Commenting on the longlist for 2021 and the overall reading experience, Sara Rai, Chair of the jury, observed,**

*“While reading through the great range of books, many of them translations, that were in the running for the JCB Prize 2021, there were certain things that we had in mind -- a cohesiveness of plot and narrative, of structure and texture, metaphor, point of view, and acute angles of invention. We looked for the focused gaze and the unique voice, one in tune with the setting and situation in the book that despite rough edges was particular and at the same time universal. We were after well-written and well-edited books, those that transformed you in subtle ways by providing a new perspective on contemporary Indian*

*reality even if the work was one of historical fiction. We found that the books on the 2021 longlist not only met these criteria, but also passed the final test – they were unforgettable and stayed with us long after we had finished reading them."*

With COVID-related restrictions in place across the country, the JCB Prize for Literature is partnering with Amazon Books India for the fourth year in a row to ensure that the longlisted books reach people in every corner of the country. In addition, 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 longlisted novels across India and create a one-on-one interaction between readers and books.

**Commenting on the pairing of the longlisted novels with coffee, Namrata Asthana, Co-founder, Blue Tokai Coffee Roasters, said,**

*"Coffee and books have always gone hand in hand and we couldn't have asked for the work of more talented writers to pair our coffee with. We are grateful to be able to contribute to the JCB Prize for Literature, which continues to provide a platform to and recognize some of the most fascinating literature coming out of India right now."*

**Talking about the prize outreach, Mita Kapur, Literary Director, said:**

*"What we were looking for in the submissions this year, I think, was a sense of the world beyond ourselves. We reached out to publishers, big and small, across the country, working with books originally in English and translated from Indian languages. The books we received surprised us by showing us multiple ways of living and being, taking us out of the spaces our bodies and minds were confined to. Our continued dedication to look for great literature beyond the narrow confines of genre means that the longlist will have something for every reader."*

## JURY COMMENTS ON THE TEN LONGLISTED NOVELS

### **Rijula Das: *A Death in Sonagachhi***

Rijula Das has evaded the prevalent tropes of writing. It is very difficult to pin down the genre she is writing in – is it a love story, for instance, is it a murder mystery, is it a novel about social justice? The book makes light of the popular and wrong notion that literature needs to necessarily be heavy. It manages to achieve everything that good literature does while at the same time being entertaining. It is full of beautiful humorous touches and outstanding at zooming into details.

### **Krupa Ge: *What We Know About Her***

With an assured yet quiet voice, Krupa Ge brings forth a novel that is rich and layered in domestic history. The book is also a mirror of how memory is constructed, that it is not just the milestones but the smaller nuances that make it memorable. With a voice that is whip smart, this book achieves a lot without being noisy.

### **V.J. James: *Anti-Clock***

This book is so outrageous in that it's about a coffin maker. James has got lots of insight 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 feels so real because we see him through the eyes of the protagonist.

### **Daribha Lyndem: *Name Place Animal Thing***

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.

### **Shabir Ahmed Mir: *The Plague Upon Us***

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.

**M. Mukundan: *Delhi: A Soliloquy***

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 of 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.

**Lindsay Pereira: *Gods and Ends***

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.

**Thachom Poyil Rajeevan: *The Man Who Learnt to Fly but Could Not Land***

In this efficient translation by P.J. Mathew of Rajeevan's *The Man Who Learnt to Fly but Could Not Land*, Kerala society about three decades in and out of Independence becomes a canvas. The story is fashioned as a biography of a writer and shows Rajeevan's prowess and craft when he writes as K.T.N. Kottoor.

**Keerthik Sasidharan: *The Dharma Forest***

A wonderful retelling of the *Mahabharata*. Keerthik wears the philosophy very lightly and makes the book about the story and the worlds it creates. He has an uncanny insight into the characters and their internal worlds. It's a masterful and profound description of a layered and amoral world. The book brims over with its own exuberance.

**Irwin Allan Sealy: *Asoca***

Sealy's subject itself is a paradox. The man whose thoughts, words and deeds have created a legacy is also the man about whom very little is known. Sealy fills in the blanks of a life one knows through history textbooks alone and his prose and imagination are equal to the challenge, creating a rich and layered memoir of which very thin documented material is available.

## 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](http://www.thejcbprize.org). For updates, look for [@thejcbprize](https://www.facebook.com/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.

## 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](http://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](http://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*.