

The JCB Prize for Literature announces its most diverse shortlist in its 5th year



- The 2022 Shortlist finds representation from 5 languages- Urdu, Hindi, Bangla, Nepali and Malayalam
- Two debut novelists, Sheela Tomy and Chuden Kabimo make it to the list
- The shortlist was announced in Kolkata, followed by reading sessions from the shortlisted titles by Jayant Kriplani, Paramita Saha and Sandip Roy.

Kolkata, 21st Oct 2022: In its 5th year, the JCB Prize for Literature today announced its 2022 Shortlist at the Glenburn Penthouse, Kolkata in an intimate gathering of authors, translators and the literary community of the city. The JCB Prize for Literature is presented each year to a distinguished work of fiction by an Indian author, as selected by the jury. The Jury Chair, AS Panneerselvan, unveiled the Shortlist at the Kolkata event. The shortlisted novels are translations from 5 different languages including Urdu, Hindi, Bangla, Malayalam and Nepali, with 2 debut novelists on the list. Following the unveiling, Jayant Kriplani, Paramita Saha and Sandip Roy read passages from the shortlisted titles.

The shortlisted novels are:

1. *Imaan* by Manoranjan Byapari, translated from the Bengali by Arunava Sinha (Eka)
2. *The Paradise of Food* by Khalid Jawed, translated from the Urdu by Baran Farooqi (Juggernaut)
3. *Valli* by Sheela Tomy, translated from the Malayalam by Jayasree Kalathil (Harper Perennial)
4. *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree, translated from the Hindi by Daisy Rockwell (Penguin Random House India)
5. *Song of the Soil* by Chuden Kabimo, translated from the Nepali by Ajit Baral (Rachna Books)

Commenting on the shortlist, the chair of jury 2022, Mr. AS Panneerselvan said,

“Judging literature is a challenge. From exploring new content and deploying various literary devices, authors constantly try to push the boundary. Every step is crucial and every innovation is precious. However, when the final evaluation happened, these wonders of the mind gave space to the power of the heart, where empathy became the criteria for creating the shortlist. All the novels in the shortlist exemplify the idea of empathy, concern for fellow humans, and in a sense a worldview in which the head does not subsume the heart.”

The JCB Prize titles are present across bookstores in the country and is also available in an online store on Amazon. Pragy Sharma, Director, Media Business, Amazon India said,

“We at Amazon are delighted to be associated with the JCB Prize for Literature since its inception. Together, we are committed to nurturing the passion for reading in the country. India is home to many different languages and diverse cultures that produce a plethora of high-quality literature. The JCB Prize has consistently, over the last 5 years, been a trustworthy & prestigious source for recognizing these distinguished works of fiction by Indian writers and Amazon India is excited to bring these gems to readers across the country and beyond.”

With the winner to be decided next month, Mita Kapur, Literary Director, said,

“The fact that in the 5th year of the JCB Prize for Literature we have the most diverse shortlist yet, fills us with hope. This is a list that brings forth the many Indias across time and geography. This is truly representative of the spectrum of languages, authors and publishers that make up our industry, but most of all it represents the quality of excellent writing that India has to offer.”

Talking about the prize, each of the five shortlisted authors will receive Rs 1 lakh; and 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 **19th November, 2022**. If the winning work is a translation, the translator will receive an additional Rs 10 lakh.

Shortlisted books: Jury comments, Synopses and Author Biographies:

Imaan: Manoranjan Byapari, translated by Arunava Sinha (Eka)

The Jury says: *Imaan* is a completely novel iteration of the humanist tradition of Bengali literature. It presents a vivid portrait of people from the periphery but is neither voyeuristic nor patronising. Each character has agency no matter how circumscribed their life may be. A raw, deeply authentic and honest story which is also well-paced, poignant and eloquent.

Synopsis: Imaan entered Central Jail as an infant—in the arms of Zahura Bibi, his mother, who was charged with the murder of his father and who died when he was six. He left twenty years later, having spent his time thus far shuttling between a juvenile home and prison. With no home to return to, Imaan ends up at the Jadavpur railway station, becoming a ragpicker on the advice of a consummate pickpocket. The folk of the railside—rickshaw-pullers, scrap dealers, tea-stall owners, those who sell corpses for a little bit of money—welcome him into their fold, but the world of the free still baffles him. Life on the platform is disillusioning and far more frightening than the jail he knew so well. This free world too is a prison, like the one he came from, only disconcertingly large. But no one went hungry in jail. And everyone had a roof over their heads. Unable to cope in this odd world, Imaan wishes to return to the security of a prison cell. He is told that, while there is only one door out of prison, there are a thousand through which to return. Imaan—whose name means honesty, conscience—is he up to the task? Written in Manoranjan Byapari’s inimitable style, where irony and wry humour are never too far from bitter truths, this new novel is a searing exploration of the lives of the faceless millions who get by in our towns and cities, making it through one day at a time.

Author: Manoranjan Byapari was born in the mid-fifties in Barishal. After he migrated to West Bengal at the age of three, he lived in two refugee camps before he moved away at the age of fourteen to work. At twenty-four, he became politically active with the Naxals after meeting famous labour activist Shankar Guha Niyogi. It was in prison that Byapari taught himself to read and write. Later, when he was working as a rickshaw puller, he had a chance encounter with Mahasweta Devi who asked him to contribute to her journal *Bartika*. He has since then published eight novels, four volumes of memoirs and over fifty short stories. His essay *Is there Dalit writing in Bangla* which was translated into English by Meenakshi Mukerjee for Economic and Political Weekly launched him into mainstream prominence. He worked until recently as a cook with the Helen Keller Institute for the Deaf and Blind in West Bengal. He won the 2019 Hindu Prize For Non-Fiction for his biography *Itibritte Chandal Jiban* translated into English as *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit*.

Translator: Arunava Sinha translates Bengali fiction and nonfiction into English. Fifty-one of his translations have been published so far. Twice the winner of the Crossword translation award for Sankar’s *Chowringhee* (2007) and Anita Agnihotri’s *Seventeen* (2011), respectively, he has also won the Muse India translation award (2013) for Buddhadeva Bose’s *When The Time Is Right*. He has been nominated for the Independent Foreign Fiction prize and the Best Translated Book award in the US. He is a recipient of an English PEN translation grant for Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay’s *The Yogini*. Besides India, his translations have been published in the UK, the US, and in several European and Asian countries. He has conducted workshops at the British Centre for Literary Translation, UEA; University of Chicago; Dhaka Translation Centre; and Jadavpur University. He is an associate professor of practice in the Creative Writing department at Ashoka University.

The Paradise of Food: Khalid Jawed, Translated from Urdu by Baran Farooqi (Juggernaut)

The Jury says: *The Paradise of Food* is a brutal and mesmerizing account of the contemporary body, home and nation told through the food and kitchen. In a world consumed by hyper-consumerism, the book provides a bracing counter-narrative making it an important piece of work. The incredibly skillful translation highlights the poetry and music of the original text.

Synopsis: A landmark Urdu classic translated for the first time. It tells the story of a middle-class Muslim joint family over a span of fifty years. As India – and Islamic culture – hardens, the narrator, whose life we follow from boyhood to old age, struggles to find a place for himself, at odds in his home and in the world outside. But to describe the novel in its plot is to do its originality no justice. In this profoundly daring work – tense, mysterious, even unfathomable on occasion – Jawed builds

an atmosphere of gloom and grotesqueness to draw out his themes. And in doing so he penetrates deep into the dark heart of middle-class Muslims today.

Author: Khalid Jawed is one of the leading Urdu novelists today. He is the author of fifteen works of fiction and non-fiction, and is a recipient of the Katha Award, the Upendranath Ashk Award and the UP Urdu Academy Award. He is a professor at Jamia Millia Islamia University.

Translator: Baran Farooqi is a professor of English at Jamia Millia Islamia University. She is the acclaimed translator of *The Colours of My Heart*, a selection of poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Valli: Sheela Tomy, Translated by Jayasree Kalathil (Harper Perennial)

The Jury says: *Valli* is a beautifully written work that transports us into another time and place. It presents a world gone by in which the natural world is an extension of the human world. The prose has many textures, with letters and quotes from scriptures, making for deeply satisfying reading.

Synopsis: High in the Western Ghats in northern Kerala is a land of mist and mystery, of forests and folklore, rich with the culture of its indigenous people, the Adivasis. Its old name was Bayalnad – land of the paddy fields – but it would come to be known as Wayanad. Its resources attracted outsiders – traders, colonialists, migrants from the lowlands, and eventually, the timber and tourist industries. Exploitation of the forest led to the exploitation and enslavement of its people, and as the forest dwindled, so did the Adivasis' culture, their way of life, even their language. But these were not changes quietly and willingly accepted; Wayanad became a key centre of direct action and uprising, and a stronghold for the Naxalite movement.

Spanning the time between the 1970s and the present, *Valli* is a tale of four generations who made this land their home. It is told through a diary that Susan – the daughter of two teachers, Thommichan and Sara, who eloped to Wayanad so that they could live together – leaves for her own daughter, Tessa. And in telling their story, Valli tells us stories of the land and its people, of interdependence and abuse, repression and resistance, despair and contentment – stories as vast and magical as the forest itself once was.

Author: Sheela Tomy is a novelist, short story writer and scriptwriter. *Valli* is her debut novel, for which she was awarded the Cherukad Award for Malayalam Literature in 2020. She is also the author of a short story collection, *Melquíadesnte Pralayapusthakam (Melquíades's Book of Floods)*, published in 2012. Sheela has won several awards for her short stories, including the Abu Dhabi Arangu Award (2007), the Puzha.com Short Story Award (2008), the Doha Sanskriti Award (2012), the Doha Samanwayam Award (2012) and the Kamala Surayya 'Neermathalam' Award UAE (2014). Born in Mananthavadi in Wayanad district, Sheela currently resides in Doha, Qatar. Her second novel, *Aa Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruthu (Do Not Ask the River Her Name)*, is set to be published later this year.

Translator: Jayasree Kalathil shared the JCB Prize for Literature in 2020 with S. Hareesh for her translation of his novel, *Moustache*. She received the Crossword Book Award for Indian Language Translation in 2019 for her translation of N. Prabhakaran's *Diary of a Malayali Madman*, which was also longlisted for the Mathrubhumi Book of the Year Award. She is the author of *The Sackclothman*, a children's novel that has been translated into Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi. Her other translations include *Theeyoor Chronicles* by N. Prabhakaran and *Adam* by S. Hareesh.

Tomb of Sand: Geetanjali Shree, Translated by Daisy Rockwell (Penguin Random House India)

The Jury says: Wild and unruly, *Tomb of Sand* challenges our notions of what a novel should be. The impression of several novels within one give it a carnivalesque atmosphere. This novel is witty and irreverent yet filled with tenderness and psychological insight.

Synopsis: In northern India, an eighty-year-old woman slips into a deep depression after the death of her husband, and then resurfaces to gain a new lease on life. Her determination to fly in the face of convention - including striking up a friendship with a transgender person - confuses her bohemian daughter, who is used to thinking of herself as the more 'modern' of the two. To her family's consternation, Ma insists on travelling to Pakistan, simultaneously confronting the unresolved trauma of her teenage experiences of Partition, and re-evaluating what it means to be a mother, a daughter, a woman, a feminist. Rather than respond to tragedy with seriousness, Geetanjali Shree's playful tone and exuberant wordplay results in a book that is engaging, funny, and utterly original, at the same time as being an urgent and timely protest against the destructive impact of borders and boundaries, whether between religions, countries, or genders.

Author: Author of three novels and several story collections, Geetanjali Shree's work has been translated into English, French, German, Serbian, and Korean. She has received and been shortlisted for a number of awards and fellowships and lives in New Delhi.

Translator: Daisy Rockwell is an artist, writer and translator living in northern New England, USA. Apart from her essays on literature and art, she has written *Upendranath Ashk: A Critical Biography*, *The Little Book of Terror* and the novel *Taste*. Her highly acclaimed translations include, among others, Upendranath Ashk's *Falling Walls* and Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, published in Penguin Classics.

Song of the Soil: Chuden Kabimo, translated from Nepali by Ajit Baral (Rachna Books India)

The Jury says: *Song of the Soil* is a shining example of how one can write about a violent incident without recreating the violence. The author blends bildungsroman with a conflict story with great dexterity, bringing out new aspects of both forms. This book is able to make poetry out of brutal situations but does so with honesty, humour, and gentleness.

Synopsis: On a day of earthquake and rain, a young man gets bad news. Ripden, his childhood friend, has been swept away by a landslide. So he makes his way back to Malbung, the village of his birth. The memories come rushing back. Of growing up together; the harsh teachers at school and playing truant; bullies and backyard fights. He remembers, also, the day they ran away from home to Lolay to find out about Ripden's father, vanished years earlier in the revolution. There the pair meets Nasim, a man who spends his days breaking rocks by the riverside.

Nasim narrates to them an extraordinary tale from his younger days. Of himself and other child soldiers of the revolution; building pipe guns and homemade bombs; fighting pitched battles with the police; training in jungle camps and enduring drink-fuelled night time raids; witnessing a massacre in the town square; and suffering a final, unforgivable betrayal. Set in the foothill town of Kalimpong in the Himalaya, *Song of the Soil* brings alive the story of the revolution for a separate state of Gorkhland in the late 1980s. Clear-sightedly, it lays bare the many faces of violence. And in doing so, it asks the vital question: Who, ultimately, wins in a revolution—and who loses?

Author: Born and brought up in Kalimpong, India, Chuden Kabimo is an Indian writer writing in the Nepali language. His debut book *1986*, a collection of short stories, won the Aashrani Rai Smriti Puraskar, Manipur, in 2017 and the Yuwa Sahitya Akademi Puraskar, in 2018. His novel *Faatsung* has been translated into three languages— English, Bangla and Hindi (the latter two are due soon) — and published in three countries —India, Nepal and the UK.

Translator: An alumnus of the International Writing Program-2011, Iowa University, Ajit Baral is a writer, translator, editor, publisher, and director of the Nepal Literature Festival. He is the author of *The Lazy Conman and other Stories*, *Interviews Across Time and Space*, and co-author of *By the Way: Travels through Nepal's conflict*. He is also the co-editor of an anthology of Nepali short stories in English, *New Nepal, New Voices* and the editor of *First Love*, a collection of memoirs. *Song of the Soil* is his first book-length translation.

ABOUT JCB LITERATURE FOUNDATION

The JCB Literature Foundation, a not-for-profit company registered under Section 8 of the Indian Companies Act, is single-handedly responsible for running the Prize.

In 2018, JCB India established the JCB Literature Foundation, whose purpose is to promote the art of literature in India, and whose principal activity is to administer The JCB Prize for Literature. A leading global manufacturer of earthmoving and construction equipment, the company has been active in India since 1979. JCB's desire to create an enduring cultural legacy in India is based on this substantial and long-standing involvement in the country's social and economic life.

ABOUT THE JURY

AS Panneerselvan (Chair) is an Indian journalist, editor and columnist. He heads the Centre for Study in Public Sphere, Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai. He is also the author of *Karunanidhi: A Life*, his definitive biography of M Karunanidhi, and the editor of an anthology of essays produced by journalist fellows, *Uncertain Journeys*. In 2022, the Government of Tamil Nadu has conferred him with the GU Pope Award for his literary contributions. In his extensive career in the media, he has worked with several prestigious media houses and networks, including the Sun Network, Outlook magazine, the Hindu, amongst others. His next book is the *Periodic Table of Tamil Modernity: 1858 to 1968*.

Amitabha Bagchi is the author of four novels. The first, *Above Average*, was a bestseller. His second novel, *The Householder*, was published to critical acclaim, the third, *This Place*, was shortlisted for the Raymond Crossword Book Award 2014, and the fourth, *Half the Night is Gone*, won the 2019 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature and was shortlisted for the 2018 JCB Prize for Literature. He has written and published several research papers over his extensive career as a researcher and professor, specialising in Computer Science.

Dr J Devika is a historian, feminist, social critic and academician. She currently researches and teaches at the Centre for Development Studies. She has authored several books and articles on gender, politics, social reforms and development in Kerala on publications like *Kafila*, *Economic and Political Weekly* and *The Wire*. She has translated both fiction and non-fiction books between Malayalam and English, including the translation of Nalini Jameela's autobiography and the short stories of KR Meera and Sarah Joseph.

Janice Pariat is the author of *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, *Boats on Land: A Collection of Short Stories* and *Seahorse: A Novel*. She was awarded the Young Writer Award from the Sahitya Akademi and the Crossword Book Award for Fiction in 2013. In 2014, she was the Charles Wallace Creative Writing Fellow at the University of Kent, UK, and a Writer in Residence at the TOJI Residency in South Korea in 2019. Janice also teaches Creative Writing and Art History at Ashoka University. Her novel *Everything the Light Touches* is forthcoming.

Rakhee Balaram is an Assistant Professor of Global Art & Art History at the University of Albany, State University of New York, where she specializes in modern and contemporary art. She is the

author of *Counterpractice: Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Art of French Feminism* and *20th-Century Indian Art: Modern, Post-Independence, Contemporary*. Her curatorial work includes *Fragility*, an exhibition of contemporary Indian art. Her research has been supported by the Art Histories Fellowship in Berlin, the ICI Berlin Institute of Cultural Inquiry, and the Tata SPEAR grant, among others. Balaram holds double doctorates in French Literature from Cambridge University and History of Art from The Courtauld Institute of Art.
