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Jasmine Days by Malayalam writer Benyamin wins JCB Prize for Literature

The book, translated by Shahnaz Habib, gets Rs 25-lakh trophy in inaugural year of award



The much-awaited JCB Prize for Literature, which has garnered much attention in its inaugural year, was finally announced on Wednesday. Malayalam writer Benyamin won the Rs 25 lakh award for *Jasmine Days*. The award has a special focus on translation and aims to introduce readers to gems in regional languages. An additional Rs 5 lakh will be awarded to the translator, Shahnaz Habib in this case.

In its first edition, the prize was judged by a jury comprising film director Deepa Mehta, entrepreneur and scholar Rohan Murty, novelist and playwright Vivek Shanbhag, translator and expert in Indian classical languages Arshia Sattar and author Priyamvada Natarajan.

Benyamin is the author of over 20 books. *Aadujeevitham or Goat Days* won him the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. *Jasmine Days* (Juggernaut Books) is a story of a young radio jockey, Sameera Parvin, from Pakistan who immigrates to an unnamed city in the Middle East where she witnesses the Arab Spring of 2011. The novel was originally written in

Malayalam in 2014 and translated by Shahnaz Habib, who teaches writing at The New School and Bay Path University and consults for the United Nations.

Benyamin - born Benny Daniel in 1971 - is from near Pandalam, Kerala and has lived in Bahrain since 1992, when he turned 20.

The shortlist included *Poonachi or The Story of A Black Goat*(Westland) by Tamil writer Perumal Murugan, translated by N Kalyan Raman, *All The Lives We Never Lived* (Hachette) by Anuradha Roy, *Half The Night Is Gone* (Juggernaut Books) by Amitabha Bagchi, and Subhangi Swarup's debut novel, *Latitudes Of Longing* (HarperCollins Publishers India)