

After the Half-Time Interval: Part-2

(A Translation of Shamik Ghosh's "Half Timer Pawr")

NOORA SHAMSI BAHAR

The next day, Lebu had really blasted a peto at the party's office. Well, he had tried to. The peto had fallen off his maimed hand, right in front of the table. It didn't bounce — rather sort of slumped — like a ball in a slow spin. Everyone shrank in fear. Babluda, the secretary, had pulled his legs up on the bench. He pressed his palms against his ears and stared, wide-eyed.

It was going to blow up, any minute now. Only it never did. When it was comprehended that the peto wasn't going to blow up, everyone ran out. Lebu stood there, paralyzed. Lebu's maimed hand shook wildly. Babluda was the first to slap him across the face. Then the rest came in. More slaps, followed by kicks. And then came the iron rods.

The police arrested Lebu that day. I'm sitting in the classroom and the Bengali teacher is going about with his lesson. He is swaying and moving his hands about. He looks at me, puts on a smirk and asks,

"Can you tell me the name of Sharatchandra's *baba*?"

I reply, "Sharat's *baba*? Who, Sir? Bankimchandra?"

"Bah! That's the answer! Good, very good. Sit, sit down."

So I sit. Surprisingly quiet classroom. All the boys around me are wearing orange shirts and steel-colored pants. The boy next to me has lowered his head and is doing something on his desk. A book lies open on the desk in front. I look attentively. The boy is drawing something. A man is lying on his back, with his limbs sprawled. His head is missing and a little above where his head should have been, is a red ball. I try to identify the boy for a while.

Lebu! How is he here? Lebu doesn't go to school here. Lebu is secretly sitting here in the class. If the Bengali teacher finds out, he will get smacked.

I whisper, "Lebu, what are you doing here? You have to escape through the window."

Lebu looks at me and says, "You had fouled, no?"

I feel breathless. What if the Bengali teacher notices? I notice that in the drawing, the man's right hand is trembling slightly, and the ball is plummeting rapidly. Right then, the whistle blows loud and clear. Sir is



blowing on his whistle and shouting out, "Half-time, half-time!"

Lebu slams his copy shut and stands up. He recoils his head into his collar and pulls his shirt upwards and off his back. Upon seeing Lebu's action, the other boys start doing the same. They are stripping. Beneath the shirt, there is no body. The higher the shirt is pulled up, the more invisible the body underneath. Gradually, all the boys around me disappear into the realm of non-existence. In the classroom, there are clothes lying across the floor, there are the desks, there is me, and there is the Bengali teacher.

Sir puts on a smirk as he looks at me and says, "Half-time!"

I wake up. My whole body is dripping in sweat. I push the sheets away. It reads one forty seven on the digital clock on the table.

Jennifer is sleeping next to me. Jennifer is my colleague, and my lover too. Pure blonde. Her ancestors are German. I gazed at Jennifer for a while. She is asleep and the blue glint on her white skin stands out. Unbelievably infatuating. A sweet smile on Jennifer's sleeping face. A dimple on her cheek. I am reminded of my dream. I feel a

strange sensation in my chest. Had I fouled Lebu? If I had forced Lebu to stay that day, would things happen the same way? Nah, things like that often happen to people like him, I guess. At least that's what I force myself to think.

I go to the washroom. I put my head under the faucet in the basin. I feel nauseated.

I had drunk too much today. Europeans can drink gallons after gallons. It wasn't right to compete with them. But to work on such a big project is not a matter of joke. The excitement that sparked within when thinking about what Thomas was going to tell me once I return to New York is what drove me to chug down all that booze. Thomas is my boss. An American in every possible sense of the word. Cognac. Right now, cognac is oozing out of my entire body. I wash my face carefully.

I draw the curtains and look outside. Nighttime London. Through the windowpane, I can see a myriad of wakeful houses of various sizes. All stuck together. Some tall, some short, it's all about who can surpass the other. During my student life, when things got monotonous while studying

home at night, I would go up to the rooftop. The areas neighboring the train tracks would be enveloped in silent darkness. The sly yellow light would peep through the thatched roofs in the slums. A lot of the times, I would see flashing lights dazzling across the train tracks at night, and muffled words would float towards me from afar. Petos would blow up. There would be fights over looting the wagon breakers' area. I have been drifting off. Where was I? I turn back towards Jennifer. I feel assured. I feel like touching her just to make sure I am not dreaming. Is this for real? Then I laugh to myself. It isn't something that was handed to me on a silver platter; I won this position for myself.

Despite the central A.C., I feel suffocated. I wish I could stand beneath the open sky. After a long time, I have a longing to go back to the rooftop of our home at night.

I put on my shirt and my pants. Let Jennifer sleep. I'll take the key. I'll fasten the Yale lock. I don't think she will wake up too easily.

There are a lot of people in the lobby downstairs. People are busy merrymaking even at this time of the

night. I step out of the hotel unhurriedly. The street facing the hotel is deserted. It's quite chilly. I recall the dream. Seeing Lebu after all these years? Ugh, I try removing the thought from my mind. I'm working on such a big project. And that too, in Europe. This time, I might go back to my country once. Haven't seen my old neighborhood for so long.

Immersed in my thoughts I didn't realize that I had walked quite a distance away from the hotel and into this alley. In these areas, it's common to get mugged at night. Shouldn't have taken such a risk. The alley is partially dark. There is a stoplight at a distance; the red traffic light is glowing. The street lamp is far off.

The advertisement's tagline is legible. Despite the distance, one could still read the block-lettered word, "REMEMBER."

"Hey mate. Give me some dough." Startled, I turn sideways and see a man emerge from the darkness. Dark, quite tall. A bluish-black shirt on his back. A baseball bat in his left hand. He keeps his right hand folded. Probably maimed. His *topi* covers his face. Dark, flat chin. Bulging, large eyes.

The man's face is not very visible. The structure can be made out in the faint light. As I stare at his face, I feel as if the man is metamorphosing into a thin, short figure. I gawk at his face with awe. It is as if the man was slowly transforming into Lebu.

Lebu? How would Lebu come here? "Hey Paki, give me whatever you have."

"Lebu? Tui Lebu? Amake chintey parchish na?"

"Paki bastard..."

The man is raising his baseball bat. If he strikes, my skull will be smashed. His right hand is trembling just like Lebu's. From afar, the light from the street lamp is floating towards us. I think to myself, I should move my left leg backward, and take on the back-foot position. What if a cricket ball jets out of the man's right hand? Will the ball bounce on the concrete pitch, or will it keep low?

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Story behind the DSC Prize Longlist for South Asian Literature 2018

On Wednesday, October 10, 2018, the much awaited longlist for South Asian Literature 2018 was announced by eminent historian and academic Rudrangshu Mukherjee, the chair of the jury panel for the current year for the distinguished prize. Featuring six women authors and three women translators, and two outstanding debut novels, the longlist represents the best of South Asian fiction writing over the last year. The novels include stunning portrayals of migration, war, oppression and the pain of displacement, the exploration of new found relationships and identities, and vivification of the personal struggles, hopes and aspirations that symbolize the urgent and divisive realities of contemporary South Asian life. The longlist announcement event at Oxford Bookstore in New Delhi was attended by publishers, authors and literary enthusiasts who welcomed the selection of the longlist.

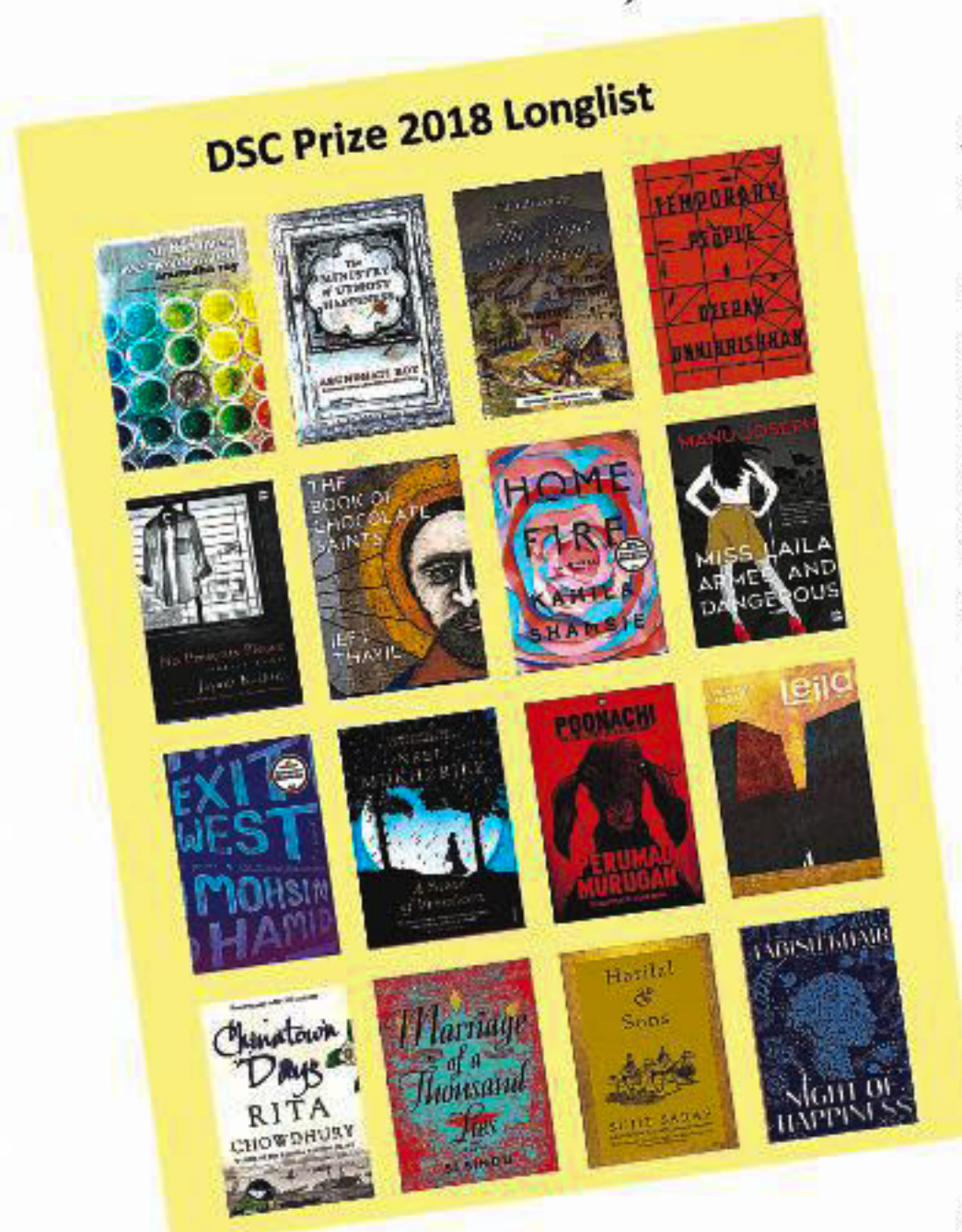
The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature is a relatively new venture that has been in the literary scenario only for the last eight years. The prize money alone is high enough to garner interest even though since 2017 it has been halved from \$50,000 to \$25,000. Founded in 2010 by Surina Narula to celebrate the varied literature of South Asian region, the prize is sponsored by DSC Limited, an infrastructure development and Engineering construction company headed by HS Narula, husband of Surina Narula. The prize aims to bring South Asian writing to a new global audience and to raise awareness of South Asian culture across the world. Another aspect to note is that the DSC Prize considers only full-length fictional words. Short story collections are not eligible for consideration.

For this year's DSC Prize, the South Asian Literature Prize & Events Trust received 88 eligible entries and for one month the five member international jury panel meticulously went through these entries to arrive at this year's longlist of 16 novels which they feel represent the best works of fiction related to the South Asian culture.

The longlisted entries contending for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2018 are as follows:

1. Anuradha Roy: *All The Lives We Never Lived* (Hachette, India)
2. Arundhati Roy: *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness* (Alfred Knopf, USA)

3. and Hamish Hamilton, Canada) Chandrakanta: *The Saga Of Satisar* (Translated by Ranjana Kaul, Zubaan Books, India)
4. Deepak Unnikrishnan: *Temporary People* (Penguin Books, Penguin Random House, India)
5. Jayant Kaikini: *No Presents Please* (Translated by Tejaswini Niranjana, Harper Perennial, HarperCollins India)
6. Jeet Thayil: *The Book Of Chocolate Saints* (Aleph Book Company, India and Faber & Faber, UK)



7. Kamila Shamsie: *Home Fire* (Riverhead Books, USA and Bloomsbury, UK)
8. Manu Joseph: *Miss Laila Armed And Dangerous* (Fourth Estate, HarperCollins, India)
9. Mohsin Hamid: *Exit West* (Riverhead Books, USA and Hamish Hamilton, Penguin Random House, India)
10. Neel Mukherjee: *A State Of Freedom* (Chatto & Windus, Vintage, UK and Hamish Hamilton, Penguin Random House, India)

11. Perumal Murugan: *Poonachi* (Translated by N Kalyan Raman, Context, Westland Publications, India)
12. Prayaag Akbar: *Leila* (Simon & Schuster, India)
13. Rita Chowdhury: *Chinatown Days* (Translated by Rita Chowdhury, Macmillan, Pan Macmillan, India)
14. SJ Sindu: *Marriage Of A Thousand Lies* (Soho Press, USA)
15. Sujit Saraf: *Harilal & Sons* (Speaking Tiger, India)
16. Tabish Khair: *Night Of Happiness* (Picador, Pan Macmillan, India)

Anuk Arudpragasam of Sri Lanka won the prize last year for *The Story of a Brief Marriage*.

This year's jury panel is headed by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Jury Chair, Professor of History and the Chancellor of Ashoka University and an internationally acclaimed historian of the revolt of 1857 in India. The jury members include Nandana Sen, a writer, actor and child-rights activist and author of six books, who has worked as a book editor, a poetry translator, a screenwriter, and a script doctor, Claire Armitstead, Associate Editor, Culture, for the Guardian in London who has been a theatre critic, arts editor and literary editor, and Tissa Jayatilaka, who has been the Executive Director of the United States-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission and is the author of several publications. From Bangladesh, there is Firdous Azim, Professor of English at BRAC University, Bangladesh, whose research has focused on women's writings in the early twentieth century Bengal. It is to be noted that Syed Manzoorul Islam and Fakrul Alam from Bangladesh too has served in the DSC South Asian Literature Jury Panel in the past.

The jury is now deliberating on the longlist and the shortlist of 5 or 6 books for the DSC Prize 2018 which will be announced on 14th November, 2018 at the London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE) in London. Thereafter the jury would meet once again to decide on the final winner that would be announced at a special Award Ceremony to be hosted in a South Asian city. The winner of 2017 DSC Prize was announced in Dhaka Literary Festival last year.

POETRY

The Master and His Yes-Man

(A Translation of Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Saheb o Mosaheb")

MOTIUR RAHMAN

- "Wonder! What a wonder!"
- "Wonder be it must!
Who can differ with you, Sir?"

- "A true wonder it was-
Just let me speak, okay?"
- "Your hint said it all,
Aye, Sir, aye!"

- "You know what? That day-"
- "You think I don't?
As of that day,
Do tell, whatever you may-"

- "That afternoon
It rained a little."
- "Hear, hear, I do, Master!
Such a story to tell!"

- "Oh, would you stop,
And let me just begin!"
- "Ah, what a story!
Hush you all, Sir to speak again!"

- "Where was I?
All is muddled now!"
- "Go on as you were.
With all ears, I avow!"

- "Listen! That day,
The sun rose at dawn!"

- "Sun at dawn!
Hardly do we see it in the morn!"

- "Thought I could go,
And have a little stroll."
- "Such a sight
Sir would never miss, at all!"

- "Couldn't make it though,
Had to stay home quietly."
- "Master of the house,
Why would he do a thing so unseemly?"

- "Doze did I off!
Don't know how and when."
- "Quiet, all! Sir be napping!
Call someone, bring a fan."

- "No! No! Not at all!
Wide alert I am!
- "That Sir is awake,
Surely have I told, all of 'em!"

- "Opened my eyes
To a crowd of blockheads!"
- "The vigilance of you, Sir,
How can we avoid?"

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