

# 'Stories from childhood and a time gone by are still relevant'

*Priya Kuriyan and Prabhat, felicitated for their contributions to children's literature, in conversation with The Hindu*

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Among the artists honoured at the Tata literary festival were Priya Kuriyan and Prabhat, who were felicitated for their contribution to children's literature. The authors spoke with *The Hindu* about the thinking that goes into the creation of a literary work for children, and why *Aesop's Fables* and *Panchatantra* are relevant even today.

Both the authors were awarded the Big Little Book Awards at the festival on November 17. Mr. Prabhat won the award for the Best Children's Author (Hindi), while Ms. Kuriyan was selected as the Best Children's Illustrator.

Ms. Kuriyan, who has worked on graphic novels

like *The Elephant in The Room*, said illustration and writing go together. "Drawing a story plays a major role in telling it. When I collaborated with writer Devapriya Roy on a novel representing the life of former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, it was a mixture of illustrations and prose. It was aimed at millennials who, I think, have not been directly impacted by Ms. Gandhi's rule growing up," Ms. Kuriyan said.


She also spoke of her maiden wordless novel, *Ammachi's Glasses*, based on the years she spent with her paternal grandmother in Kerala. "It is just 28 pages long, and focuses on a day in our life when my grandmother could not find her glasses," she said.



**Simplifying literature:** Priya Kuriyan and (right) Prabhat receiving awards for their work. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Her works also include graphic narratives of the Muzaffarnagar riots, highlighting the story of rape survivors. "Picking a subject like this is obviously a conscious choice. I believe children can subtly be made

politically aware by exposing them to art that is not directly political. There are obviously certain ideas behind why a statue is of a certain skin tone or why we chose a certain body language in depicting a

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PRABHAT  
Children's author

character," said Ms. Kuriyan.

Mr. Prabhat, who got his first books, *Kalibai* and *Paniyon Ki Gadiyon Mein* published in 2005, said works like *Aesop's Fables* and *Panchatantra* are still relevant. "The text that we are exposed to today is very complex, while books that a Vishnu Sharma or an Aesop wrote were not reflective of all human shades; they focused on the good and the bad. The protagonist was good and the antagonist was not. It is easier to process

such characters and therefore the books are still widely read."

Like Ms. Kuriyan, Mr. Prabhat has also depicted his childhood in *Gadariyan ki Kilkari* (Shriek of a Shepherd), inspired by shepherds he saw in his locality while growing up. "Children should be taught in their mother tongue initially because the essence of literature can only be understood through that language. They can always switch to another language later, but teaching in the mother tongue is essential as otherwise, much of it is lost in translation. Also, in India, education is imparted only to help kids win a livelihood, which is why I feel literature, irrespective of language, is losing its importance," he said.