



**ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)  
BANGALORE**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
PRESENTS**

**THE PROF. BARBRA NAIDU MEMORIAL  
PRIZE FOR THE PERSONAL ESSAY**

**10TH EDITION**



**THEME: FINDING A SELF**

Submissions must be mailed to [barbranaiduprize@gmail.com](mailto:barbranaiduprize@gmail.com) by 20th May

Please contact Prof. Vijeta Kumar (9741057203) for any further queries.

# THEME

## Finding a Self

Organised by the Department of English  
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Bangalore

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### About the Prize

Prof. Barbra Naidu taught English for over two decades at St. Joseph's College, Bangalore and pioneered a remarkable engagement with the student body; one marked by a commitment to conversation, and to a notion of teaching shaped by the diversity of experiences and needs that students might bring. The Prof. Barbra Naidu Memorial Prize was instituted in 2013 as a way of keeping this engagement alive, and to find and reward talent in writing. Over the years, the prize has attracted writers, young and old, from India and abroad.

### This year's theme: Finding a Self

Is there anything to be gained from observing ourselves apart from an old-fashioned headache, or an undying romance that nobody but ourselves might want to partake of?

At least one dead man from the past seemed to think so. He said *gnothi seauton*, or 'know thyself'. Which sounds like good advice, but what are the means by which one may do this? The hand that seeks this understanding may hasten through the water but the thing that we seek might fragment and flee in too many directions, like guppies in a shallow pool from a curious child.

Do we get to ambush this self? What is this glimpse like? Or does this self lie in wait for us, and shock us with its presence, or its capabilities?

Some might argue that it is the relentless white silence of the page that draws out an inner cat, and bears the marks of its paws long after it has gone by. Is the self then the thing we deduce rather than see, the beast that we know by the odours and signs of its just-missed presence?

We are constantly reminded that we must have ambition. And there is the jumpy feeling that is slow to leave us after each such reminder. It is possible to wear a different skin, or look like another, or to nod and comply a lot, and indeed to thus spend a life in perfecting some other kind of Batesian mimicry for the social. If aspiring is the more honourable path we would like to make, what do we see of ourselves in doing so?

Some people say we become who we are because we hazard ourselves in trying, but does that thought lend itself to a definite shape?

Some situations offer us the opportunity to become invisible. Sometimes it is a command, and not a chance to. Sometimes it is because we have, without realising it, perfected the art of disappearing because we have been consumed by the chance to do work, to be with other people, to do new, unfamiliar things. Maybe this is what it is.

Now, more than ever, it seems like standing up like other ordinary people to be counted, to speak up, might be worthwhile. What do we find when we listen to these prompts? What compels us to shy away?

Perhaps the possible self is a state of not knowing, out of which we make choices nevertheless. We are curious to know how these things worked out for you. Your experiences, your observations, are each a key to a new door, a new world that we might share. Write, please, because it is still possible to do that.

### The Details

Ø Participants are expected to write a personal, exploratory essay. The submission must be original and offer a lively engagement with experience. The suggested range is about 1500--3000 words.

Ø The contest is open to school (Std. 8-12) and college students (UG or PG), and to the general public (any age). Prizes will be awarded in three categories: Best School Entry, Best College Entry, and Best Open Entry.

Ø Submissions can be sent by ordinary post to The English Department, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), No. 36, Lalbagh Road, Bangalore 560027, handed over in person above, or emailed as a word document to [barbranaiduprize@gmail.com](mailto:barbranaiduprize@gmail.com)

Ø The last date for receiving submissions (in any form) is the evening of 20 May 2022. The entries will be judged by an independent jury of writers.

Ø For more updates and information please follow the Meta- The Josephite Festival of Literature Facebook page and [@metajosephs](https://www.instagram.com/metajosephs) on Instagram. Prizewinning entries from previous years can be accessed at [www.metajosephs.in](http://www.metajosephs.in)

# BARBRA NAIDU PRIZE WINNERS

(CLICK ON THE CLOUD TO READ EACH ESSAY)



## BEING MULTILINGUAL

Prithwiraj Mukherjee, Overall Winner, 2013  
(Being Multilingual)

Excerpted from his essay -- "I was struggling with a new language once again. After successful conquests of Bengali, English, Kannada, Hindi, and even a smattering of Tamil and Sanskrit, my brain seemed to be saturated once again. Few people outside the school spoke English in France. The pronunciations were bizarre- the R's sounded like sputum-laden coughs and syllables were arbitrarily silent"

Judges - Nisha Susan & Gaurav Jain

Arjun Shatrunjay, Overall Winner, 2014  
(Finding Culture)

"The credit for my having won the Prof. Barbra Naidu Memorial Essay contest goes to the English Department. I've always loved writing, but it was the department which gave me my sense of aesthetics."

Judges - Nisha Susan & Gaurav Jain



## FINDING CULTURE

Ila Ananya, Overall Winner, 2015  
(Living Online)

"My personal essays usually start from a desperation to understand a feeling. I like the idea that I can write my way through different experiences to begin to see how that feeling might shift or change shape, and be alright with that shifting."

Judges - Sneha Rajaram & Purva Rajaram



## OF DISTANCES

Shefali Mathew, Overall Winner, 2016  
(Finding Family)

“The first thing I did when I finished writing was send it to my mom because this piece was about her so she had to read it. What happens a lot with the BN prize and the winners is that they are disastrously close to not sending their pieces in, my mom sat and made sure I sent this submission.”

Judges - Nitin Manayath & Purva Rajaram



## FINDING FAMILY

Drishti Rakhra, Overall Winner, 2017  
(Walking, like deciphering)

“I guess I wanted to do this so I put my mind to it and made it happen, and when it did happen, I was in disbelief. A massive chunk of the writing happened at Glens, one day with Vismaya, I wrote the biggest piece that day and I knew I had a strong start, I didn’t go back to it until the day of the deadline, because we were always so busy with something. During Shefali’s year, I had recieved a speical mention so I knew there was something- I wanted to do justice to the something, I picked up on cues, I started looking at the sky more, much more than I do now, walked a lot, and paid attention to footpaths.”

Judge: Nakul Krishna



## AMREEKA-JAIPUR- HOME

Archita Raghu, Overall Winner, 2018  
(Friending-Unfriending)

“I was writing my essay in buses, in children’s libraries and at my internship offices. I think everyone should write madly. Write especially if you feel like you’re dying.”

Judge - Srinath Perur

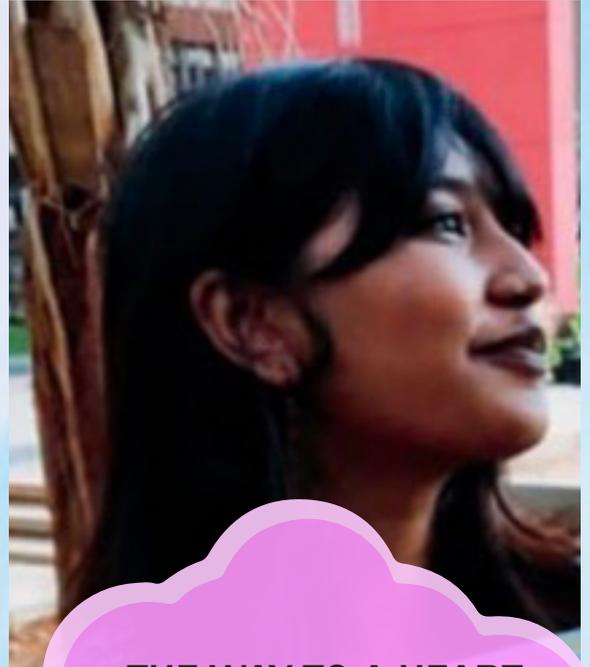


## IF COURAGE WAS STILL MY FRIEND HE WOULD CALL ME COWARDLY

Shalom Sanjay, Overall Winner, 2019  
(Voyaging the kitchen)

“On the day the winner was to be announced, I was going to leave early, VJ ma’am asked me to set up the chairs for Meta and organize a few odds and ends. Then she told me that an editor from a magazine would be interviewing students for an internship that day, and that I should stick around for the interview. I spent an hour going over possible questions and practicing my ‘interview voice’. When I won, I was huddled in a corner, riddled with anxiety for this big interview. Apparently, there was no interview. After running out of chairs for me to set up, VJ Ma’am came up with the fake interview plan so that I wouldn’t leave before the winners were announced. When Arul Sir announced my name, it felt like I was swimming in water. Nothing seemed clear and I was in a daze. It was one of the best moments I’ve ever experienced and till today, I don’t have the words to describe it. I just want to say thank you so much to Arul Sir and VJ Ma’am. They opened my eyes to a whole new creative world and how best to write about it. But most importantly, they taught me that when you love writing, you should write from your heart, even when you think it’s not perfect.”

Judge - Tejas Harad



**THE WAY TO A HEART**



**IN BLOCKED LETTERS**

Shweta Philip, Overall Winner, 2020  
(Making Do)

“When I won, I felt like I had gotten away with pretending to be something I am not because of how frustrated I was with myself while writing the piece. But to everyone attempting to write for The Barbra Naidu Memorial Prize this year, I’d like to say, ‘Whatever you do, don’t stop trying to write.’”

Judge - Samanth Subramanian



## TWO NOTCHES WITH LOVE



## THE SPACE BETWEEN FEARS AND ALPHABETS

Pranav and Eshwari, Overall Winners, 2021  
(Breaking Away)

Pranav - “Actually I had an obsession with the prize because I started late, which I am starting to think is better than having started early. But I wanted to be a writer and didn’t really have-it’s difficult to get proof, right? You know? All the people who had won before were really good writers, and I really badly wanted that. I would obsess over all the winners and read their work, and all the recent past winners were girls and I thought my odds were less, and I just wanted to win it to know if I am a good writer or not. Yeah, so when they announced the contest, I was ready for it. I was waiting for it because I really wanted to give it my all. And, when the announcement came, I started writing it. I read the theme and the story just came to me. I had this image of the road- because he lived in the opposite house, the road splitting apart, I do not know if that was in a dream, or if I envisioned it. And I didn’t even go into the given reading of the prompt. I simply took its literal meaning and wrote with that.”

Eshwari - “The only inspiration I honestly had was the deadline. I think if I didn’t write, I would cry all year, and I knew I wanted to write. Wanting to write has made me write even when I am exhaustively riddled, the want enables me to puke words. When I submitted for the BN in the first year, some self-discovery happened to me, and I wanted to see if it happened every time. It did. I never understood who needed to listen to me, but I wanted to, and writing gave me that reassurance.”

Judge - Paromita Vohra