

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Malaysian author's debut novel long-listed for prestigious Dublin Literary Award 2023!

By **Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal** - March 12, 2023 @ 9:30am



The author, Viji Krishnamoorthy.

AUTHOR Viji Krishnamoorthy's powerful debut novel — *912 Batu Road* — published by Clarity Publishing tells the story of two Malayan families through the devastation of World War 2 and the early 2000s, when their descendants carried on a secret love affair that threatened to tear both families apart.

The interest and excitement over Viji's novel have been amazing, and despite the difficulties brought on by the Movement Control Order, the book has already been

reprinted twice, shares publisher Rosalind Chua from Clarity, one of Malaysia's best small presses, which publishes a range of award-winning fiction and non-fiction titles.

Chua is hoping that Viji's nomination will spark more interest globally in Malaysian talent, in addition to encouraging more Malaysians to write. "We have so many stories to share with the world and so many different perspectives to offer global readers," she concludes excitedly.

AUTHOR-SPEAK WITH VIJI KRISHNAMOORTHY

Viji's book, *912 Batu Road*.

Q. When did you find out that you'd been long-listed for the Dublin Literary award?

A. I first heard about the nomination for the long list in September 2022 from my publisher, Rosalind Chua of Clarity Publishing. My immediate reaction was total disbelief! It still feels surreal and unbelievable that a little book written at my dining table all those years ago would breathe the same air as Anthony Doerr, Elif Shafak, Claire Keegan, Colm Tóibín and Geetanjali Shree (to name a few). Seems completely insane!

Q. What were your immediate thoughts/feelings?

A. I was very nervous about this book seeing the light of day, hence the 15- year hiatus. The warm reception afforded *912 Batu Road* has been reassuring. I had very little expectations and was so unsure of who might be interested in reading it. So, all this seems a little overwhelming.

Q. Which two award-winning writers do you admire and wish to be able to emulate? And what is it about their writing that impresses you?

A. I love different authors for different reasons. I can't pick two. Particular mention to the late A.A. Gill for his cleverness.

Q. What have you been up to since the publication of *912 Batu Road*? What has kept you busy?

A. I'm currently working on Book 2. The research and writing consume some of my time. I'm making up for lost time and am travelling more. Then there's this journey called life!

Q. What genres would you not touch with a barge pole? Why?

A. Two genres I wouldn't touch are horror and science fiction. I don't enjoy reading either or watching movies in this genre.

Q. What's the one genre you'd love to attempt?

A. I don't know if I can pin a genre down, but there are books that I've read and found the premise absolutely brilliant, like Q&A by Vikas Swarup, *The Time Traveller's*

Wife by Audrey Niffenegger, and *The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams. A good story that grabs you and doesn't let you go isn't easy to construct. When you've paid for the ticket, the presumption is you enjoy the ride!

Q. What books are you currently reading?

A. I've just finished *Radiant Fugitives* by Nawaaz Ahmed and I'm about to start on *Stories of the True* by Jeyamohan (translated from Tamil by Priyamvada).

Q. What's the first book that you read, which made such an impact on you? Why?

A. Different books have informed and carried me away at different stages of my life. As a child, it was Enid Blyton — from chairs that grew wings and midnight feasts, to letters written in invisible ink that captured my imagination, and the comics on Indian myths and legends published by Amar Chitra Katha.

As a young and impressionable teenager, I was into Mills and Boons and Janet Dailey in particular. Then there were *Malgudi Days* by R.K. Narayan, *A House for Mr Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul, all of Rohinton Mistry's books, *East of Eden* by Steinbeck, Elena Ferrante and Elif Shafak. And then there was John Keats for keeping me company when in an elegiac mood, and the maverick Emily Dickinson.

Q. Love affair with books...

A. A big shout-out to libraries! It was always a part of my childhood and adulthood. I've spent countless hours in various libraries for its sanctity and refuge and discovered so many favourites there.

I was head librarian in my Sixth Form and loved the quiet time I spent lost in the pages of several books. Libraries and librarians bind communities, matching a book to its reader. Pure alchemy!

I'm very grateful to our National Library for nominating *912 Batu Road* and humbled that it should be on the long list of the Dublin Literary Award.

ABOUT THE DUBLIN LITERARY AWARD

The Dublin Literary Award is presented annually for a novel written in English or translated into English. The Award promotes excellence in world literature and is solely sponsored by Dublin City Council, and administered by Dublin City Libraries.

It offers the world's most valuable literary prize of €100,000, which is awarded to the author if the book is written in English. If the winning book is an English translation, the author receives €75,000 and the translator gets €25,000. The winner also receives a trophy provided by Dublin City Council.