

# The Prof. Barbra Naidu Prize for the Personal Essay 2021

## Theme

### Breaking Away

ORGANISED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE

#### 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.

#### This year's theme: Breaking Away

In sport, to break away is to find a reserve of stamina and determination, and to thus pull away from the pack. Some of us may remember a jolly coming-of-age film with such a title, also the inspiration for the Hindi film *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar*, where the phrase stood in for the rites of passage, for the discomfitures of learning that define adolescence, and also for the hard-to-achieve but hallowed spurts in the sport of cycling that must necessarily precede victory laps and other sundry rituals of celebration. So, you could write about trying to find yourself, and about whether the learnings that this struggle offer are necessarily straightforward and easy to parse.

Whether young or old, sometimes our necessary schisms and secessions are within ourselves. The necessity of having to live with oneself, and hear one's own voice could prompt a plunging into alterities, into a prolonged quarrel with inherited or residual selves. These experiments may seem warranted to some, and quixotic to others, but offer nevertheless an invaluable testament of our small time, a living rather than a fossil record of the complications of choosing to be a person.

We live, also, in interesting times.. We have seen our civilisations falter in the face of a tiny, unseen foe, and yet there is much that endures. We have seen

unprecedented attempts at rendering executive privilege above question. We have also seen protest flower in unexpected ways. We have found that that a repressive moral and political consensus can be enforced by surrender media, by unending uncledom, and by WhatsApp wisdom. Some, who are in prison, remind us that they are because they chose to be free, and that without the critical voice, each society is doomed to be an open prison. In such times, it is more important than ever to acknowledge our bids for individual freedom, regardless of whether they end in success, or failure, or in that nameless hollow in between.

#### 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 **16 February 2021**. The entries will be judged by an independent jury of writers. All shortlisted entries will be published in the 2021 edition of our literary magazine **Engster**.

Ø Results will be announced on 26 Feb 2021. The prize-giving will be held on the same day. Prizewinning entries from previous years can be accessed at [www.metajosephs.in](http://www.metajosephs.in)