



Young Adult Winner Citation

The Neev Book Award for distinguished children's literature recognises outstanding writing that leads to a fuller understanding of Indian lives and stories -- books that build empathy and resilience, explore conflict, negotiate identity, and inspire change. This annual award encourages and promotes Indian children's literature globally.

Publishers across India submit titles for consideration. An independent jury uses a rigorous process to establish a shortlist in four categories: Early Years, Emerging Readers, Junior Readers, and Young Adult. The criteria include the quality of writing, interpretation of theme, development of plot, portrayal of characters, crafting of setting, and the overall presentation of the book. After months of deliberation, the four books chosen for this award are those which best voice the evolution of Indian lives and stories.

The 2021 Neev Book Award, in the category of Young Adult, is presented to *Oonga*, written by Devashish Makhija and published by Tulika Publishers.

This novel uses the adventure story as a vehicle to explore how tribal protectors and conservators of nature can be historically marginalised and misunderstood by those in power. It helps young readers and adults see how we might move closer to stewardship by viewing the earth as tribal people do, and away from ownership and the resultant devastation that comes from the urban 'developmental' view point. This book is remarkable for building a powerful thematic structure by controlling several interacting leitmotifs. These interacting ideas bring within the novel's scope a staggering range of subtexts from hope in human wisdom to near despair at human depravity.

