



# Booker Prize's Link to Slavery

## Why in News?

The **Booker Prize**, one of the most prestigious awards in the literary world, has recently come under criticism for the historical links to **slavery** of its original sponsor, Booker Group.

- It's claimed that during the **early 1800s, George and Josias Booker**, the founders of the company, reportedly **enslaved close to 200 individuals**.

## What are the Key Facts About the Booker Prize?

- The prize was established in **1969** by **Tom Maschler** and **Graham C. Greene**.
- The Booker Prize is **awarded annually** to the author of the best eligible work of long-form fiction, written **originally in English** by an author of **any nationality**, and **published in the UK and/or Ireland**.
  - **The International Booker Prize** is a separate award for **translated works** into English.
- The winner of the Booker Prize receives a cash award of **50,000 Pounds**. Additionally, each of the shortlisted authors is awarded 2,500 Pounds.
  - Irish author **Paul Lynch** has won the [2023 Booker Prize for his novel 'Prophet Song'](#).

## How Booker is Linked to Slavery and Indentured Labour?

- **Britain** gained control of **Guyana** through the **Treaty of Paris in 1815**.
  - **Guyana** is a country in **South America** bordered by Suriname to the east, Brazil to the south, and Venezuela to the west.
  - Its economy was driven by the **sugar and cotton industries**, with **African slaves** providing labour in plantations.
  - The use of **African slaves** in British Guyana reflects the history of slavery in the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- The **Booker Brothers Josias & George** were involved in the exploitative slave-based economy of British Guyana. In a cotton plantation, **they enslaved nearly 200 people**.
- After **slavery was abolished** in Guyana in **1834** and African slaves were emancipated, the **Booker brothers received compensation for 52 emancipated slaves, totalling 2,884 Pounds** (equivalent to 378,000 Pounds in 2020).
  - Bookers convinced the British government to finance voyages to collect replacement sugar workers from India.
  - This led to the **exploitation of Indian workers who faced debt and unemployment** due to the East India Company's policies and were sent to Guyana by the East India Company.
- **The indentured labour system** lasted till about the 1920s, leading to a significant migration of labourers from India to Guyana.
  - **People of Indian origin** are now the **single largest ethnic group in Guyana** due to the scale of migration.



## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

*Prelims*

**Q. Which one of the following pairs is correctly matched? (2013)**

Geographical Feature	Region
(a) Abyssinian Plateau	Arabia
(b) Atlas Mountains	North-Western Africa
(c) Guiana Highlands	South-Western Africa
(d) Okavango Basin	Patagonia

**Ans: (b)**

**Q. In which one of the following groups are all four countries members of G20? (2020)**

- (a) Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey
- (b) Australia, Canada, Malaysia and New Zealand
- (c) Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam
- (d) Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea

**Ans: (a)**