

The book that was written in prison

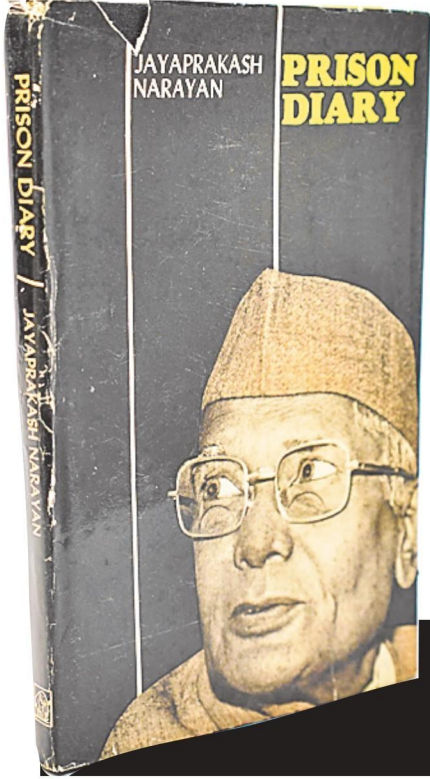


Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–1979), popularly known as JP, was a freedom fighter, socialist thinker and one of independent India’s most influential political voices. From his early writings on socialism and his role in the freedom struggle to his later advocacy of “Total Revolution,” his body of work reflected a lifelong engagement with democracy, social justice and political ethics. His prison writings, including Prison Diary, offer an intimate window into his reflections on freedom, citizenship and the state during some of India’s most turbulent political years

On June 26, 1975, Jayaprakash Narayan was arrested in the early hours after the Emergency was proclaimed in India. He was 72 years old, already in poor health, and one of the most prominent voices challenging the government of the day. He would remain in detention for several months before being released on health grounds in November. But during those months, JP was not simply waiting for freedom. He was writing. The result was Prison Diary, 1975, a deeply personal record of his detention. Published in 1977 by Popular Prakashan, the 144-page volume covers entries from July 21 to November 4, 1975, along with a letter addressed to the Prime Minister and additional material. Unlike a conventional political memoir, the diary brings together the personal and the political. JP wrote about his health, his reading, his assessment of the movement he had helped lead and his concerns about what was happening to India’s democratic institutions. The surviving record shows a man trying to understand a rapidly changing country while experiencing that change from inside detention. That makes the book unusual. It is simultaneously a historical document and an intimate diary. The entries move between the immediate realities of confinement and much larger questions about democracy, political responsibility and the future of India. He wrote about the people’s movement, civil disobedience and his political ideas, but also about subjects that might appear surprisingly distant from the crisis outside:

When Jayaprakash Narayan turned confinement into a record of democracy

Gandhi, the Bhagavad Gita, reading and reflection. There is also something revealing about the very act of keeping a diary in



detention. JP was writing without knowing how his words would eventually be received. According to the archival record of his writings, the diary was kept with no expectation that it would be published. That private quality gives the book a different character from a speech or political manifesto. His imprisonment also had a profound physical cost. During detention, JP’s kidneys failed, and he was released on November 12, 1975, on health grounds. He remained dependent on dialysis for the rest of his life. When Prison Diary appeared in 1977, it offered readers something more than a political account of the Emergency. It preserved the thoughts of a political figure experiencing one of the most consequential periods in independent India’s history from inside confinement. Perhaps that is what makes prison writing so powerful. A prison can restrict where a person goes. A diary allows the mind to continue travelling — through memory, ideas, doubt and hope. JP’s Prison Diary remains a record of that journey: one man’s attempt to understand his country, his movement and the meaning of democracy while freedom itself had become the question. Sometimes, when history closes the doors, the written word becomes the way out.

The original edition of Jayaprakash Narayan’s Prison Diary 1975, published in 1977, recording his thoughts during his detention during the Emergency

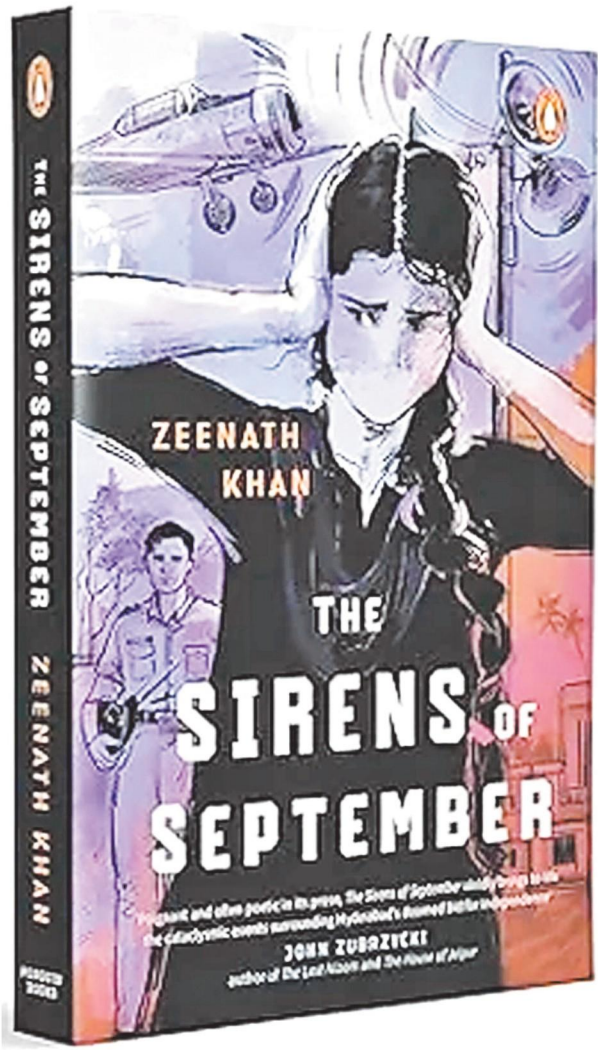
The Sirens of September

A historical retelling of India’s 1948 takeover of Hyderabad

It was on a summer evening in 2017 during a walk along a sea-facing boulevard in Mumbai that Zeenath Khan came up with the idea of a novel with India’s annexation of Hyderabad as the backdrop. The entire episode had “all the ingredients for an exciting novel - lavish settings, wayward characters, intrigue and high-stakes, says Khan, who divides her time between Hyderabad and New York City. Thus her debut novel “The Sirens of September” was born. Published by Penguin, “The Sirens of September” is a historical novel that tells the tale of India’s 1948 takeover of Hyderabad through real and imagined characters. Khan says while books and cinema have often depicted India’s Partition, the simultaneous drama played out in the south has been relegated to academic papers. “The Sirens of September” is a story about a lost world not unlike the American South depicted in “Gone with the Wind” and the “Sicily of The Leopard”, she says. “It tells the tale of princely Hyderabad’s collapse through real and imagined characters. Throughout my writing process, I tried to instill a sense of nostalgia in my readers for a time and place that we cannot regain. ‘The Sirens of September’ narrates the events leading up to Operation Polo from the perspective of the losing side,” Khan told PTI.

Operation Polo was the code name for the Indian military operation launched on September 13, 1948 that led to the integration of the princely state of Hyderabad with India. “On a summer evening in 2017, while I was walking along a sea-facing boulevard in Mumbai, it occurred to that the backdrop of India’s invasion of Hyderabad had all the ingredients for an exciting novel - lavish settings, wayward characters, intrigue and high-stakes,” Khan says. Protagonist Farishte is a 15-year-old aristocratic teenager who navigates political intrigue, international

espionage, and a long-distance courtship with an air force cadet while her gilded world tumbles around her. “I conjured the character of Farishte even before I had figured out my novel’s plot. My protagonist was going to be an aristocratic teenage girl who was idealistic, clever, and brave,” the author says. “Her personality was a foil to the adults in the novel whose character attributes ranked high on the dark triad,” she adds. According to Khan, writing a historical fiction novel from a female point-of-view was challenging, as back in 1948 a young girl had limited agency. “Yet if I’d written it from the point-of-view of the middle-aged men in charge, it would have been rather depressing as, whether or not they admitted it to themselves, they helmed a sinking ship,” she says. For her research, Khan scoured all the newspapers I could find from the years 1946 to 1948. “Pathe videos on YouTube were a great help. I read books and watched movies that depicted life in the 1940s to describe modes of transport, communication, and fashion. Biographies, memoirs, and first-person narratives including those from family members were invaluable,” she says. (PTI)



A primer with a compass: review of Manish Ranjan’s ‘Artificial Intelligence - Concepts and Applications’

An eighteen-chapter introduction to AI that asks to be studied rather than skimmed – and insists that the subject belongs to the citizen as much as to the engineer

The book opens with two questions asked thousands of kilometres apart. A seven-year-old in Mumbai asks her smart speaker, “Alexa, are you alive?” A philosophy professor in Oxford asks her seminar what it means to think. That both questions lead to the same doorway is the wager of this volume, which sets out to explain artificial intelligence to the student, the administrator, the farmer and, as the author puts it, the prime minister — without condescending to any of them. The design is unapologetically pedagogic. Each of the eighteen chapters arrives with a preview, learning objectives, key terms defined in household images (an algorithm is “a recipe your grandmother follows to make soup”), an interdisciplinary lens — philosophy here, ecology there, moral philosophy and international law further on — and closes with discussion questions and a mini-project, complete with evaluation rubric. Readers allergic to the classroom may bristle; students, teachers and civil-services aspirants will recognise the apparatus for

what it is — an author who expects to be studied, and has done the organising himself. What distinguishes the volume from the imported primers crowding this shelf is its centre of gravity. The history runs from Dartmouth, 1956, through the generative explosion of 2022, but it arrives, deliberately, at New Delhi in February 2026 — the India AI Impact Summit, the first hosted by a Global South nation. A full chapter examines Bharat’s ‘AI for All’ blueprint — sovereign compute, models in 22 languages, digital public infrastructure for 1.4 billion citizens — and another takes South Asia’s two billion people seriously as protagonists of the AI story rather than its afterthought. The cotton farmer in Telangana reaching global markets through a Telugu voice assistant is offered not as sentiment but as design brief. The treatment is current to a fault — summits, surveys and AGI timelines dated 2025 and 2026 abound — which guarantees vividness now and revision later; a second edition is practically scheduled by the subject matter. And the author’s

fondness for frameworks (a Strategy Canvas, a Policymaker’s Scorecard, a twenty-question Readiness Checklist) occasionally gives the final chapters the air of a well-run training institute. But the underlying claim survives the tidiness: that AI is “a mirror that reflects the choices societies make”, and that the difference between its futures is not technical but human. For undergraduate classrooms, administrative training academies and the general reader who wishes to argue about AI from knowledge rather than headline, this is a serviceable and quietly ambitious companion. Its final instruction — “Build it wisely. Build it for all.” — reads less like a slogan than a syllabus. Nations that merely consume a technology inherit its rules; nations that understand it get to write them. This volume’s deeper service is to move the Indian reader — student, teacher, administrator — from the first category to the second, one chapter and one classroom at a time. It deserves a place not on the shelf of AI books, but on the syllabus of AI citizenship.

