

Longlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction

**DEEPA
ANAPPARA**



DJINN PATROL

**ON THE
PURPLE
LINE**

'I love this book...
I just fell into it'

TAYARI JONES



SEE INSIDE FOR A READING GUIDE, RECIPE AND MORE

DISCOVER THE HEART-RENDING, UNFORGETTABLE STORY LONGLISTED FOR THE WOMEN'S PRIZE FOR FICTION 2020

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a sprawling Indian city, three friends venture into the most dangerous corners to find their missing classmate . . .

But what begins as a game turns sinister as other children start disappearing from their neighbourhood. Jai, Pari, and Faiz have to confront terrified parents, an indifferent police force and rumours of soul-snatching djinns. As the disappearances edge ever closer to home, the lives of Jai and his friends will never be the same again.

Drawing on real incidents, here is an extraordinarily moving and flawlessly imagined triumph of suspense.



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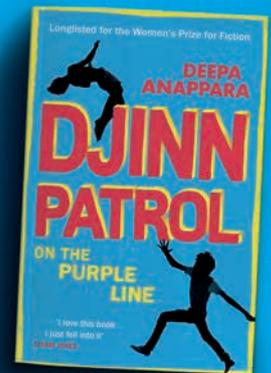
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deepa Anappara grew up in Kerala, southern India, and worked as a journalist in cities including Mumbai and Delhi. Her reports on the impact of poverty and religious violence on the education of children won the Developing Asia Journalism Awards, the Every Human has Rights Media Awards, and the Sanskriti-Prabha Dutt Fellowship in Journalism.

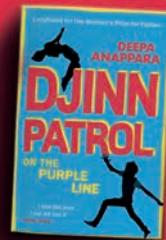
A partial of her debut novel, *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*, won the Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize, the Bridport/Peggy Chapman-Andrews Award and the Deborah Rogers Foundation Writers Award. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, and is currently studying for a PhD on a CHASE doctoral fellowship.

READING GROUP DISCUSSION NOTES

- How do the three mythical stories in the book add to the reading experience and to the uncertainty of the children's lives throughout?
- How did Jai's high-spirited narration impact your reading of a book that tackles so many serious themes?
- In what way does Jai's love of detective shows influence the plot of the book itself, and does this strand of the book remind you of any other stories with similar narrators?
- 180 kids go missing in India every day. How does the author explore this very serious issue through the eyes of a child narrator, and do you think this added to the severity of this issue?
- The fizzing energy of the bazaar is a constant in this book – did you feel that this conveyed a strong sense of place and was in itself a crucial element of the story as a whole?
- Do you think that exploring issues of education, poverty and inequality from a child's perspective enriched the narrative?
- This story is composed of a large cast of characters – who was your favourite and why?



IN CONVERSATION WITH DEEPA ANAPPARA



You worked as a journalist in India for over a decade. How did you make the move from journalism to creative writing?

Growing up in India, I always wanted to be a writer, but when the time came for me to make a decision about what my career should be, I knew it would be difficult to make a living from writing fiction. I became a journalist in part because it allowed me to engage with the world through writing, and in part because it offered me a platform to point to the iniquities and injustices in the society to which I belonged. When I was working as a journalist, I didn't feel the need to write fiction, but this changed with a move to the UK. Living in a different country, adapting to different circumstances, I turned to fiction, perhaps so I could keep writing in one form or the other. I found I had a reservoir of stories in my head from each of the encounters that I had as a reporter, moments and emotions that had to be edited out so that I maintained my impartiality as a journalist or so the text wouldn't exceed a certain word count. Writing fiction freed me from those constraints.

How did the idea for this book originate?

As many as 180 children are said to go missing in India each day.

The statistics vary wildly, and this figure could be higher or lower. It is impossible not to be aware of the stories of children who disappear if you have lived in an Indian city, as I have. Each time a shocking case of disappearance, or a cluster of disappearances, came to light, as it did when I was living in Delhi, what inevitably followed was armchair-sleuthing and speculation about the motives of the perpetrators. That the police had spectacularly failed to stop these crimes, and were guilty of negligence, further fuelled these conversations.

The idea for this novel came to me because of my anger at a system that had failed the very people it was supposed to protect. My novel returns their agency to the children who are caught up in a horrific, chaotic situation. They are determined to speak for themselves, and hold onto a narrative that is spinning away from them.

Did you always know Jai would be your narrator? Did you do anything special to find his voice?

Before I started writing the novel, I thought Jai would be my main narrator, but I saw his role as similar to that of Watson's in a Sherlock Holmes novel, with Pari, his friend, playing Sherlock. But once I started writing Jai, I found that he had to be the centre of the attention; he wasn't interested in merely recording another person's actions

or achievements. I was guided by his voice, and while he is a sensitive and observant child, he's also self-obsessed in many ways, and ultimately that determined the shape of the narrative.

As I was writing this novel, I read a number of books with child narrators, and also watched films with child protagonists. Ultimately, however, Jai is a composite of many of the children I had met as a reporter, in bastis like the one I have written about in the novel. They were witty and cheeky and worldly-wise and innocent all at the same time. I drew from the memories of those encounters to write Jai and the other characters in the book.

Why did you decide that the disappeared children also needed a voice?

I started writing the novel because children had not just disappeared from their homes, but also from discussions, and from the position they should have occupied at the heart of public discourse. So it was important to me that they be present on the page, narrating their own story, without it being refracted through another lens. In my chapters, they represent themselves, and reveal themselves as they truly are. Without their voices being present, I feared they would not be fully realised, and remain a statistic. In my novel, when we hear the children speak for themselves,

we realise that even those closest to them don't know everything about them.

There's such levity and fun in this book despite its dark themes—why was humour important to you in this novel?

I didn't take a conscious decision to write the novel this way. I wrote the first paragraph of the novel, which at the time was Jai's first chapter, and it was his voice that suggested to me how the story should be told. Jai has his own unique view of the world, he is full of good cheer and mischief, and I would have done his ebullience a great injustice if I had adopted a more mannered or muted tone.

There was a time in my life when I thought that only serious, melancholic literature was 'worthy' writing, but as I have grown older, I find that I am more appreciative of writers who are able to capture the absurdities of life, or to find the undercurrent of humour in each moment, no matter how difficult the circumstances the characters find themselves in. I would have found it impossible to write a relentlessly dark novel about Jai and his friends; doing so would have been equivalent to denying them their humanity. I wanted the characters to be much more than the sum of their problems.

The three mythical stories are such a wonderful aspect of this book—why was it important for

you to include them?

In each of the cities I lived in India, I encountered stories of ghosts and other supernatural beings who lived in tombs or trees, or in the ruins of forts and deserted areas, and often made their appearances late at night. I felt that such stories would be particularly important to children like the street-children who narrate Mental's story. Their lives are uncertain, filled with danger and close encounters with death; it seemed natural that they would be more aware of ghosts than those children who had the safety and comfort of families and brick-and-mortar homes to return to each day. The novel also has a mythical story about a fort where djinns are believed to live, which is inspired by a real place. (While ghosts are the dead who appear to humans, djinns, though variously interpreted across different regions, are typically meant to be spirits made from smokeless fire that may be good or bad, can possess humans, and appear in human or animal form.)

In my novel, the characters are going through a difficult, painful and chaotic time. Institutions of the State have abdicated their responsibility towards them. They turn to the supernatural for answers, to fake gurus for help, because those meant to support them have failed them. The mythical stories, about ghosts and djinns that will protect

them or take revenge on their behalf, offer both the storyteller and the listener a degree of comfort, and a sense of control that is absent in their own lives.

Did any books or other art forms influence you?

To write *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*, I drew from the detective novels that I had read as a child: *The Famous Five*, *The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and *The Three Investigators*, among others. I was also inspired by the books with child narrators that I had loved as a child. These included RK Narayan's *Swami and Friends*, books in my mother-tongue Malayalam such as the writer Nandanar's *Unnikuttan Lokam* ('Unnikuttan's World'), and children's books from the erstwhile-USSR that many Indians like me grew up reading, such as *Victor Dragunsky's Adventures of Dennis*. What connected these seemingly disparate books was that at the centre of each one of them were children who were funny and real and often irreverent.

I also took inspiration from popular culture in India, from the Hindi films that my characters would have watched. Reality cop TV shows like the ones that Jai, my main narrator, loves, proved useful in showing me the route Jai would follow to solve a crime.

A TASTE FROM BHOOT BAZAAR

'I twist the lid open and fish out all the notes. There's 450 rupees, the most money I have ever seen. I put fifty rupees back, screw the lid tight, and stand the tub back on the mango-powder tin. I hide the rest of the money in the pockets of my cargo pants. My hands have gone clammy and my tongue is scalding-hot in my mouth. Stealing money makes you feel terrible. But having 400 rupees in your pocket feels excellent. I can eat anda-bhurji and bread-butter for a whole year with this money. Maybe not a whole year. Maybe a month.'

Anda-bhurji recipe

(Serves 2)

2 large eggs	1/4 tbsp ground coriander
4 spring onions	1/2 cup spinach
2 green chillies	1 tsp of chilli powder
2 medium tomatoes	1/4 tsp of turmeric powder
1 tsp of cumin seeds	A pinch of salt
1/2 tsp mustard seeds	1 1/2 tsp of oil
1/2 tsp garam masala	Coriander leaves for garnishing

Chop the spring onions, tomatoes and the green chillies.

Beat the eggs in a bowl.

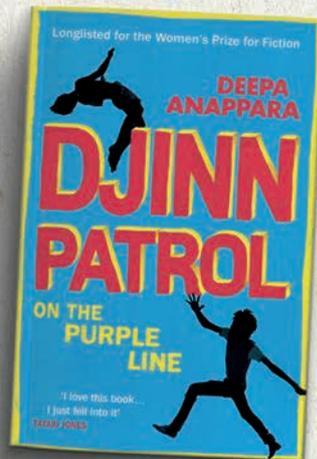
Heat oil in a frying pan, on a medium heat. When the pan is hot add the cumin and mustard seed and cook for 10 seconds before adding the chopped spring onion and chillies.

Fry off the ingredients until a light brown. Next, add in the chopped tomatoes and cook for two minutes. Add the spinach and cook till it wilts.

Then add turmeric powder, chilli powder, garam masala, ground coriander and salt. Mix all the ingredients together and cook for a further three minutes.

Finally add the beaten eggs into the pan and mix until the eggs begin to scramble. Fry for a further two minutes before removing the pan from the heat. Serve the eggs with the coriander leaves for garnish.

A QUICK EXTRACT FROM DJINN PATROL



I Look At Our House With—

—upside-down eyes and count five holes in our tin roof. There might be more, but I can't see them because the black smog outside has wiped the stars off the sky. I picture a djinn crouching down on the roof, his eye turning like a key in a lock as he watches us through a hole, waiting for Ma and Papa and Runu-Didi to fall asleep so that he can draw out my soul. Djinns aren't real, but if they were, they would only steal children because we have the most delicious souls...

Praise for *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*:

'Anappara creates an endearing and highly engaging narrator to navigate us through the dark underbelly of modern India'

Observer

'A heartrending tale'

The Times

'A drama of childhood that is as wild as it is intimate'

Chigozie Obioma

'Extraordinarily good, deeply moving and thought provoking with brilliant characterisation. A very important book'

Harriet Tyce

'Djinn Patrol is storytelling at its best. The prose is not just sympathetic, vivid, and beautifully detailed, but also completely assured and deft'

Anne Enright

'Rich with easy joy, Anappara's writing announces the arrival of a literary supernova'

New York Times Book Review

'Anappara's characters brim with swagger and spirit and she creates a world of wit, warmth and heart'

i Newspaper

'A captivating literary style... A dazzling, wonderful book'

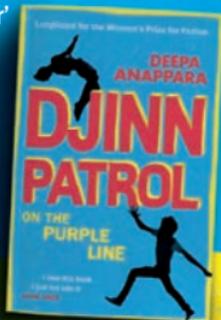
Daily Mail

A vivid, immersive debut laced with wonder'

Financial Times

'A moving and confident novel about the preciousness of life'

Nikesh Shukla



VINTAGE