Womenia

Zeenath Khan takes Hyderabad's history to Mumbai LitFest shortlist

Asra Ghouse

At 52, Hyderabad author Zeenath Khan turned years of persistence into her debut novel, 'The Sirens of September'. Now shortlisted for the Mumbai LitFest, her journey is a testament to perseverance

For Hyderabad author Zeenath Khan, who published her debut novel at the age of 52, the path to publication was an exacting journey that began in 2017. Now shortlisted for the 'Mumbai LitFest' in the 'Best First Book: Fiction' category for her novel, 'The Sirens of September,' Khan recalls discarding four or five drafts including trashing a manuscript of about 1,20,000 words while bringing the book to life.

"It was definitely a welcome surprise for me," says Khan, smiling at the recognition. She's also the second Hyderabadi woman to be shortlisted for the category in the past six years.

For someone who faced criticism for her commitment to writing about a subject, such as Hyderabad's history, Khan endured more than her share of judgement.

"Women are always told, 'You can't do this, you can't do that.' You know how much I was discouraged from writing the book? They were like, 'Oh, who will be interested? This Hyderabad topic is so boring.' But I think it's very important for women to pursue their passions, whatever they are," she reflects.

"My daughter, she cheered me on a lot," recalls Khan. "She encouraged me to not give up and keep at it." And the rest is history.

Set against the 1948 annexation of Hyderabad State (Operation Polo), the historical fiction novel brings to life a chapter of Hyderabad's history with lush, vivid prose and impeccable dialogue; it almost feels like tasting something exquisite.

"As a Hyderabadi, I believed I could lend authenticity," notes the author. "There's a certain understanding of the customs and the place that someone being from outside could not do."

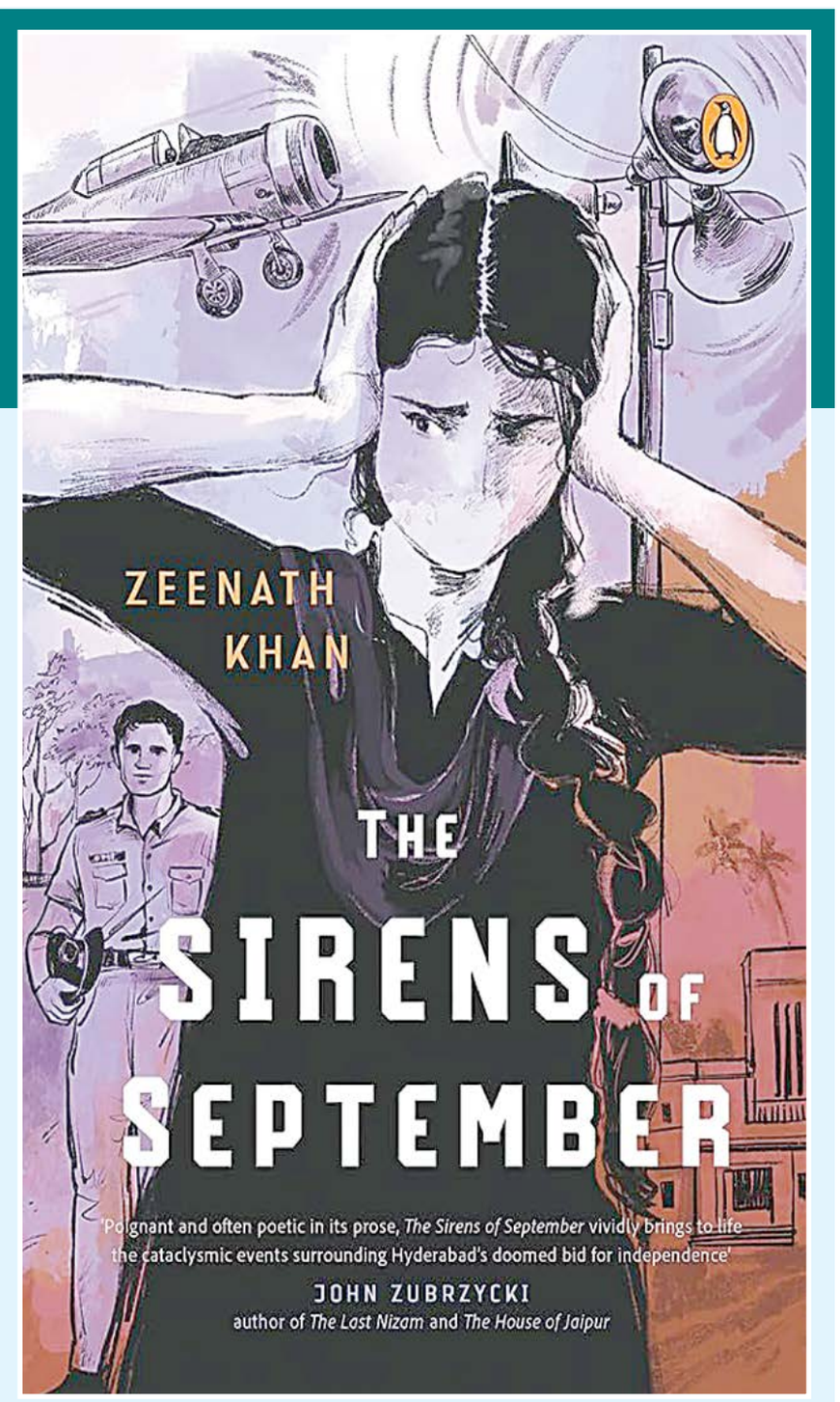
Through research across the United Kingdom and India, Khan honed her craft and narrative voice. "You have to persevere and believe in your story. And you have to be a bit humble also, because everybody thinks that their story is the best. But you have to be open to feedback, to criticism," she says. "I wrote to maybe ten or twelve agents in the UK; didn't hear back. Then Kanishka Gupta took it on in 2023. From there, after two or three revisions, it was handed over to the publisher and came out in 2025. My editor at Penguin Random House (India) was brilliant. She made suggestions without forcing me to do anything that went against my book," shares Khan, on the slow burn process of traditional publishing.

Zeenath Khan

Reflecting on the shortlist, she's humble. "It's a very subjective thing who wins because the genres of all three shortlisted titles are different. I'm just very excited and nervous."

But why this subject? "I wanted to create nostalgia for a time and place we cannot visit. I feel that if you write it as fiction and people get involved with the characters and their emotions, it leaves an impact," she shares.

"I think more people should write about the events of the South," says the author, who is hopeful that this shortlist will shift publishers' appetite for stories from the region.



Mommy-to-be Kiara Advani flaunts her new look in a baggy shirt to keep baby bump out of sight

Mommy-to-be Kiara Advani seems to be living her best phase. The actor was seen embracing a fresh look.

The actress, who is expecting her second child with husband Sidharth Malhotra, recently flaunted her new hairstyle in a mirror selfie, sporting a baggy and loose brown shirt paired with grey trousers.

Kiara took to her social media account to share a glimpse of her new look, and wrote, "Something about a haircut just makes you feel lighter."

The actress looked effortlessly stylish in the brown button-down shirt, which she paired with comfortable grey trousers and was seen posing for the mirror selfie.

The actress seemed to have deliberately chosen a loose and baggy outfit to avoid her baby bump being seen.

For the uninitiated, the actress and husband Sidharth Malhotra announced that they are set to embrace parenthood once again.

On October 7, Kiara and Sidharth announced their second pregnancy through an adorable social media post.

The couple shared a picture of their daughter, Saraayah Malhotra, holding a pair of ivory knitted baby booties, hinting at the newest addition to their family.

"Blessed once again with the greatest gift of all… Our hearts are so full of love and gratitude," read the caption.

Talking about Kiara and Sidharth's love story, they fell in love while working together on their film Shershaah, which was released in 2021.

After dating for some time, the couple tied the knot in February 2023 in a traditional wedding ceremony in Rajasthan.

The actors welcomed their first child, daughter Saraayah, in June 2025. (IANS)

Breast cancer doesn't always start with a lump

Breast cancer may not always begin with a noticeable lump, making awareness of subtle changes crucial for early detection. Recognising warning signs, undergoing timely screening and seeking medical advice can play a vital role in improving treatment outcomes

A small change in the breast, an unusual discharge or a slight change in skin texture may seem harmless, but sometimes these are early warning signs of breast cancer. During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, healthcare experts are urging women to pay closer attention to their breast health, recognise unusual changes and seek medical advice without delay.

Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers affecting women in India. While medical advancements have significantly improved treatment outcomes, delayed diagnosis continues to be a major concern. Many women ignore early symptoms because there is no pain, while others hesitate to consult a doctor due to fear, social stigma or lack of awareness.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer's GLOBOCAN 2022 estimates, India recorded approximately 1.92 lakh new breast cancer cases and 98,337 deaths, with breast cancer accounting for 26.6% of all newly diagnosed cancers among women.

The concern is equally relevant in Telangana. According to the Telangana government's Cancer Portal, approximately 30.35 lakh women's cancer screenings were conducted between March 2023 and March 2026. The state reports an overall cancer incidence rate of 125 per lakh population, highlighting the importance of strengthening cancer awareness and early detection efforts.

Dr. Santosh Kumar Chellapuram, Consultant Medical Oncology and Hematology-Oncology at STAR Hospitals, Hyderabad, said, "One of the biggest misconceptions about breast cancer is that it always begins with a painful lump. In reality,

early breast cancer may not cause pain or any obvious discomfort. Women should never ignore changes in breast shape, skin texture or unusual nipple discharge. When detected early, breast cancer is often highly treatable, and timely medical attention can make a significant difference to survival and quality of life."

Doctors advise women to watch for warning signs such as a new lump in the breast or underarm, changes in breast size or shape, skin dimpling, nipple inversion, unusual discharge, persistent swelling or redness. Although these symptoms do not necessarily indicate cancer, they should be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

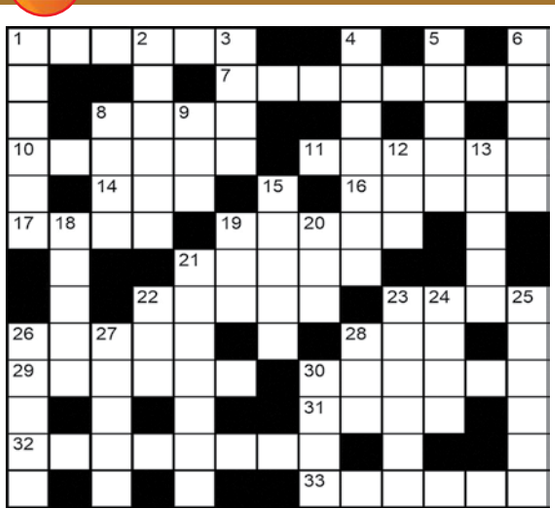
Age, family history, inherited genetic changes, obesity after menopause, alcohol consumption and certain hormonal factors can increase breast cancer risk. However, women without a family history can also develop the disease.

Regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, limiting alcohol and avoiding tobacco can contribute to better overall health and may help reduce cancer risk. Women should become familiar with the normal appearance and feel of their breasts and discuss appropriate clinical examinations and mammography screening with their doctors based on age and individual risk.

Dr. Chellapuram further emphasised, "Fear should never become a reason for delaying diagnosis. A breast lump does not automatically mean cancer, but ignoring it can be dangerous. Our message to women is simple: know your body, recognise unusual changes and seek medical advice early. Breast cancer awareness should not be limited to October; it must become a year-round priority."

With increasing awareness, improved diagnostic facilities and advances in cancer treatment, breast cancer is no longer a diagnosis without hope. This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the message is clear: early detection can save lives, and a timely consultation could make all the difference.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Phrase of distress (2,4)
7 Close by (8)
8 Unwilling to work (4)
10 Brings about (6)
11 Capital of Nagaland (6)
14 Sheltered side (3)
16 Titled ladies (5)
17 Auctioneer's cry (4)
19 They are used to photograph bones ? (1-4)
21 Be of use (5)
22 Leaves out (5)
23 Dry outer part of seed (4)
26 Visit briefly (3,2)
28 Comforter or quilt (3)
29 Oral (6)
30 Withdraw (6)
31 Prayer ending (4)
32 Pre-dinner drink (8)
33 Flowed out (6)

DOWN

1 960 grains make two ___ (6)
2 Rubbed out (6)
3 Beams of sunlight (4)
4 Foul-smelling, poisonous oil (7)
5 Obscure (5)
6 Cartographer's book (5)
8 Respite (4)
9 Last letter of the alphabet (US) (3)
12 Owns (3)
13 Repasts (5)
15 Make a speech (5)
18 Dominant (2,3)
19 Sixteen for Caesar (3)
20 Three-toed sloths (3)
21 Loss of memory (7)
22 Oaf, lout (3)
23 Safe harbours (6)
24 Once ___ a time : at some vague time in the past ? (4)
25 Caused a boat to turn over or fall down (6)
26 "Fiddlesticks!" (5)
27 Strength (5)
28 The finished edge of fabric (3)
30 Bollywood's greatest Mohd. ___ (4)

Solution to October 22

SUDOKU

			2		9	6		
	3		5		1			2
				6				
7		3					8	6
2								5
5	8					7		1
				2				
1			4		5		7	
		4	1		8			

5	8	1	2	6	9	7	3	4
2	3	4	8	5	7	6	1	9
6	7	9	4	1	3	5	2	8
7	1	5	3	4	6	8	9	2
9	2	6	1	7	8	3	4	5
3	4	8	9	2	5	1	7	6
1	5	2	7	8	4	9	6	3
8	9	7	6	3	2	4	5	1
4	6	3	5	9	1	2	8	7

Solution to October 22