



Title: Born Behind Bars

Author: Padma Venkatraman

Imprint: Nancy Paulsen Books

Publisher: Penguin Young Readers

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Format: Hardcover and Paperback

Age Range*: 10-14

Grade Range: Gr 5 Up

BOOK RESUME: BORN BEHIND BARS

BOOK SYNOPSIS

The author of the award-winning *The Bridge Home* brings readers another gripping novel set in Chennai, India, featuring a boy who's unexpectedly released into the world after spending his whole life in jail with his mom.

Kabir has been in jail since the day he was born, because his mom is serving time for a crime she didn't commit. He's never met his dad, so the only family he's got are their cellmates, and the only place he feels the least bit free is in the classroom, where his kind teacher regales him with stories of the wonders of the outside world. Then one day a new warden arrives and announces Kabir is too old to stay. He gets handed over to a long-lost "uncle" who turns out to be a fraud, so Kabir runs away as fast as his legs will take him. How does a boy with nowhere to go and no connections make his way? Fortunately, another street kid, named Rani, takes him under her wing. But plotting their next moves are hard in a world that cares little for homeless, low caste children. This is not the world Kabir dreamed of—but he's discovered he's not the type to give up. Kabir is ready to show the world that he—and his mother—deserve a place in it.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Thoughtfully and gently explores a troubled justice system, interstate conflicts over increasingly common water shortages, and a frustrating caste system. . . An optimistic and earnest tale of the power of hope and the gift of family in all forms." —*Booklist*, starred review

★ "Their experiences reveal the invisibility of low-caste people in Indian society, tensions between neighboring states over water supplies, and the unexpected kindness of helpful strangers. Kabir's longing for freedom and justice underscores bittersweet twists and turns. . . . Kabir engages readers by voicing his thoughts, vulnerability, and optimism: While his early physical environment was confined within prison walls, his imagination was nourished by stories and songs. This compelling novel develops at a brisk pace, advanced by evocative details and short chapters full of action. A gritty story filled with hope and idealism." —*Kirkus*, starred review

★ "This novel is for readers who are seeking realistic fiction that tug at the heartstrings. The story is authentic, and the emotion behind Kadir and his mother's relationship will induce tears. This is a true window book for many readers unaware of caste systems and the struggles within them. Venkatraman takes these complex topics and makes them heartfelt and resonant. A well-rounded story of a boy and his struggle to survive alone in the world. A suggested read for lovers of timely tales of children surviving all odds." —*School Library Journal*, starred review

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*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

"As in *The Bridge Home*, Venkatraman portrays children's experiences of poverty and other social issues; here, she explores Hindu-Muslim animosity, how the Indian caste system predetermines social status, and how biased institutions interact with (and ultimately fail) those of lower caste. This earnest, heartfelt adventure will transport many readers to a different setting while guiding them to draw parallels with contexts closer to home." — *The Horn Book*

"Twining themes of perseverance, friendship, and prejudice, Venkatraman renders the gripping circumstances surrounding Kabir and Rani's journey with a keen attention to character and plot, making for an immersive reading experience." — *Publisher's Weekly*

"Venkatraman has never met a heavy theme she did not like. . . .Borrowing elements of fable, it's told with a recurring sense of awe by a boy whom the world, for most of his life, has existed only in stories."
— *New York Times Book Review*

"Venkatraman, in a story based on a real child, illuminates some harsh realities of life in an India where the lower-caste are oppressed with impunity and where sectarian hatred and violence can make life dangerous. Her characterization is solid, especially of the women in the jail cell and of bold Rani. . . . Justice-minded youngsters will especially rejoice in Kabir's putting wrongs to rights."
— *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A Junior Library Guild Middle Selection
- A National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, World History & Culture Selection
- A South Asia Book Award for Children's & Young Adult Literature Winner
- A Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Books Selection
- A SLJ Best Books of the Year Selection
- An Arizona Grand Canyon Reader Award selection
- A CDE Recommended List (CA)
- A CDE Recommended List, Grades 6-8 (CA)
- A Flordau Sunshine State Young Readers Award selection
- A Georgia Children's Book Award selection
- A Nevada Young Readers' Award selection
- A New Jersey Garden State Children's Book Award selection
- A New Mexico Battle of the Books for Elementary Schools selection
- A Pennsylvania Keystone to Reading Book Award selection
- A Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award selection
- A Utah Beehive Award selection
- A VA Reads selection

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MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Teachingbooks.net resources](#)
- [Penguin Classroom Discussion Guide](#)
- [Penguin Classroom Story Writing Prompt with Author](#)
- [PEN Pals: Nikki Grimes and Padma Venkatraman Discuss Challenged Books](#)
- [SLJ Day of Dialog Meet and Chat with Author](#)
- [Dr. Bickmore's YA Wednesday Interview with Author](#)
- [Nerdy Book Club Guest Post by Author](#)
- [Uma Krishnaswami Interview with Author](#)
- [Watch. Connect. Read. Guest Post by Author](#)
- [Story in the Public Square Interview with Author](#)
- [Mirrors Windows Doors Interview with Author](#)
- [Braided Way: Faces & Voices of Spiritual Practice Interview with Author](#)
- [Highlights Foundation Interview with Author](#)
- [Kids Ask Authors Interview with Author](#)
- [Mackin Community Interview with Author](#)

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