

# words WORTH

By Srijani Ganguly

**T**HEY say that crime doesn't pay. But for the authors who dabble in the art of crafting crafty crooks and the brilliant (and, at times, maudlin) detectives who end up catching them, crime most definitely does pay. It pays so well that entire regions (Scandinavia being a prime example) get transformed into giant crime fiction-producing factories. It pays so well that icons are created — both of the fictional detectives and their very real makers. Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle, respectively, being a case in point. In India, only two have truly reached such an iconic status — Satyajit Ray with Feluda and Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay with Byomkesh Bakshi — but there is no need to despair. There is time, still.

Author Ashwin Sanghi, who has co-written two crime fiction novels based in India with James Patterson, believes that it is all a matter of time. And that the genre will soon be as popular as romance and mythology in India.

"World over, the top ten titles typically are crime fiction. I think it's a matter of time that it will catch on in India. We have to also understand the fact that commercial fiction writing is only ten years old in India. We've not had the necessary amount of time to evolve. I believe in the next two or three years, it will become one of



The 2015 film 'Detective Byomkesh Bakshi!' is based on Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's novels about the famous fictional detective.

Authors weigh in on the future of crime fiction in India

# CRIME PAYS

the dominant categories in the bestseller space," says Sanghi.

Anita Nair, who has delved into the disturbing world of crime with *Cut Like Wound* and *Chain of Custody*, too believes that the genre is in its early stages in India. "Crime fiction is still in its primary stage in India," she says. "The chances of it going global like Scandinavian noir will happen when characters and issues written about have greater dimensions than just the usual run-of-the-mill crime scene. We will have to wait and see if that will happen."

With one published novel (an espionage-based thriller called *The Bard of Blood*) under his name and another on the way, Bilal Siddiqui thinks that "in India there is a lot of scope for good crime fiction, especially because we are a country hungry to read good stuff written by local writers too."

When asked about his favourite crime fiction writers though, Sid-

diqui's answer is telling. He cites international stars such as Lee Child, James Patterson, Keigo Higashino and Sidney Sheldon to be his favourites. "I haven't read a lot of substantial Indian crime fiction," he adds, "so that makes it a little hard for me to pick. Having said that, I like Ravi Subramanian and Hussain Zaidi, and I have recently purchased a book by Vish Dhamija, who I believe is a good crime writer."

Suparna Chatterjee, author of *The All Bengali Crime Detectives*, says, "Among Indian crime writing, I am squarely biased towards Bengali authors like Satyajit Ray and Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay. While it is intriguing to imagine a cold blooded murder in a manor, deep in the English countryside, it is way

more exciting to read about murders that could have happened right next door."

Nair partially answers the same question, saying, "Internationally, I like the work of Ian Rankin, Peter James, Karen Slaughter, Mark Billingham and Henning Mankell. I am yet to read a body of work from an Indian crime fiction writer in English, and will have to bypass the question."

The question of popularity — whether Indian crime fiction is as read as much as the international kind — might hang in the air but the core mission which propels the authors to write is the same — to understand and comment on the human psyche. Even as the genre allows Nair to "make social commentary", it also allows Ian Rankin to ask the "central question of 'What makes

human beings do bad things to each other?'"

Crime fiction as well as dark thrillers deal with serious subjects. And perhaps that is why they are both not as high on the pecking order of an average Indian reader's list as a romantic novel may be. Novoneel Chakraborty — whose 'Stranger Trilogy' is a decidedly dark series — explains: "Dark thrillers, inherently, require the prowess of the mind and commercial fiction in India, unfortunately, comes with the baggage of being casual reads."

Perhaps what's deterring Indian crime fiction from becoming a commercial trailblazer is the absence of a figure like Stieg Larsson. Scandinavia, after all, already had well-established crime fiction writers when Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* stormed into the picture and changed the game forever.

Indian crime fiction will only go global when they attain dimensions greater than the usual crime scene

## RAPID FIRE

■ What do you think is the future of crime fiction in India?

*Crime fiction as a genre is in the space that mythological fiction was about eight years ago. Today, it's romance and mythology that are popular. Crime fiction is very low on the pecking order. I believe that in two to three years, we will see a spurt in crime fiction novels and find it to be a dominant genre.*

■ Do you plan to write a crime fiction novel solo, or do you wish to continue with James Patterson on the 'Private India' series?

*I don't plan to go solo to write crime fiction. My space as a solo writer is mythology. The partnership with James Patterson has worked since we both add different elements to the plot. Also, while writing my 'Bharat' series, I'm used*



**ASHWIN SANGHI**

The author talks about how crime fiction could be the next big thing in India.

*to writing hundreds and hundreds of pages. But crime fiction and thrillers like the ones that James Patterson writes are more of quick reads.*

■ Do you think writers should create plots out of real-life cases or from their own imagination?

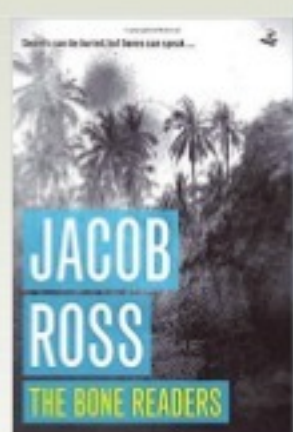
*It's difficult to say what influences what. For sometimes, fact is stranger than fiction. If you look at the US, there are many crime-related shows that are cropping up on Netflix and Amazon. It's becoming more and more strange. Also, quite a few of their shows are centred around serial killers, even though less than one per cent of crimes involve serial killers.*

*As told to Srijani Ganguly*

## FINE PRINT

One-minute reads from the high-octane world of books and publishing you might have missed

Jacob Ross has won the inaugural Jhalak prize for black, Asian and minority ethnic writers (BAME) for his crime novel *The Bone Readers*. Ross' book is about Digger, who works in a rogue police force on the small Caribbean island of Camaho, and can read bones under LED lights. Other than Ross, those on the shortlist of the £1,000 prize were Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Abir Mukherjee, Irenosen Okojie, Gary Younge and David Olusoga.



The Anthony Burgess Foundation has exclusively disclosed to *Observer* about the existence of a set of notes for three "lost" novels of Anthony Burgess. The author is most famous for *A Clockwork Orange*, a novel that was adapted into Stanley Kubrick's movie of the same name in 1971. Burgess wrote on many topics and genres, some of them being children's books, plays, film scripts and poems.



Sebastian Barry and Francis Spufford, amongst others, have been shortlisted for the 2017 Walter Scott prize for historical fiction. The two authors head a shortlist that also includes Rose Tremain and Man Booker winner Graham Swift, whose *Mothering Sunday* charts the journey of orphan Jane Fairchild's journey from servitude to independence. The award for the £25,000 prize will be announced at the Borders book festival on 17 June.

