



The crime writers' association being launched at the recently-concluded Jaipur Literature Festival

Crime syndicate

Crime writing in India has moved beyond mere pulp to financial fraud, mythological thrillers, Bollywood writers and so on. The latest twist is a crime writers' association, launched at the Jaipur Litfest

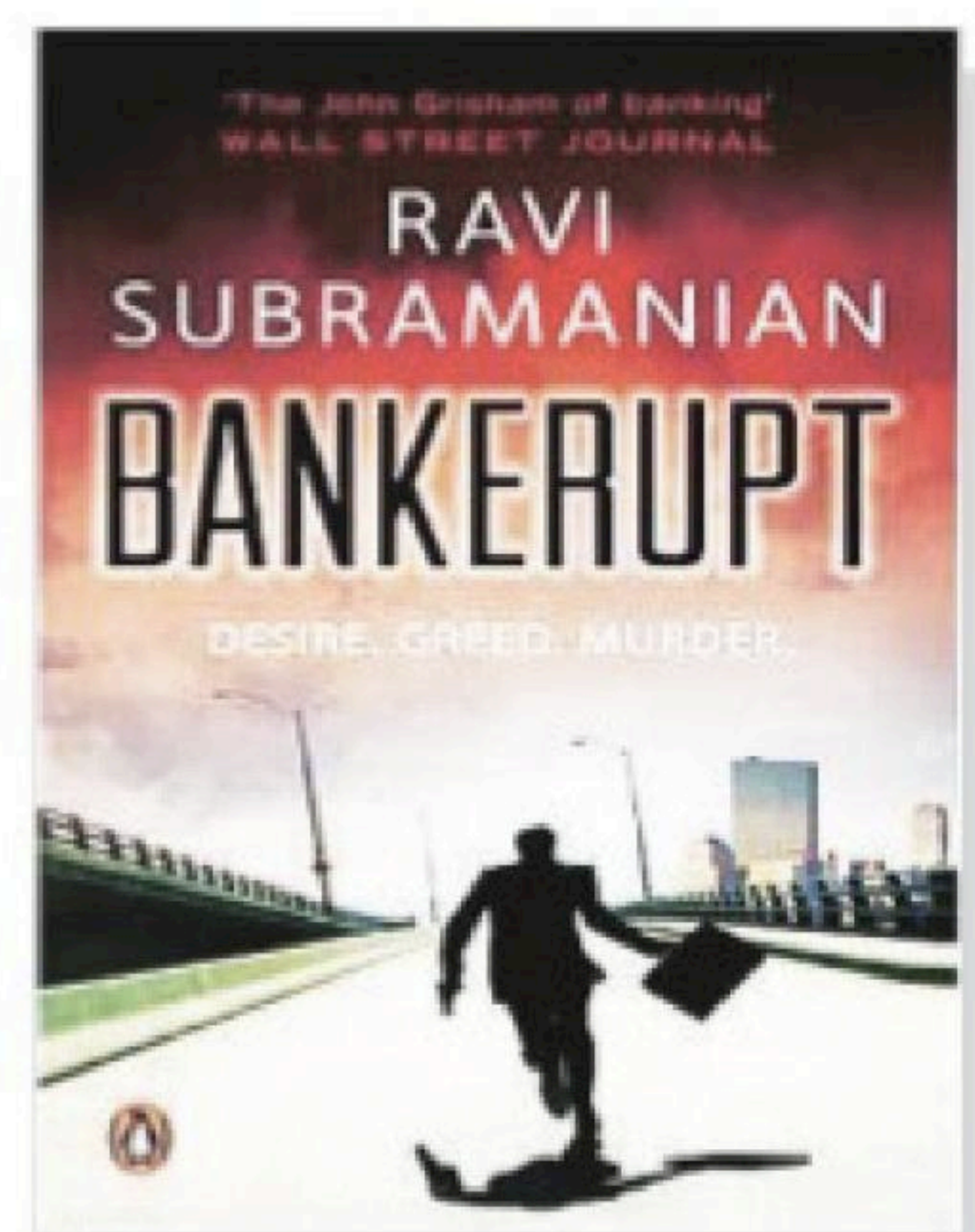
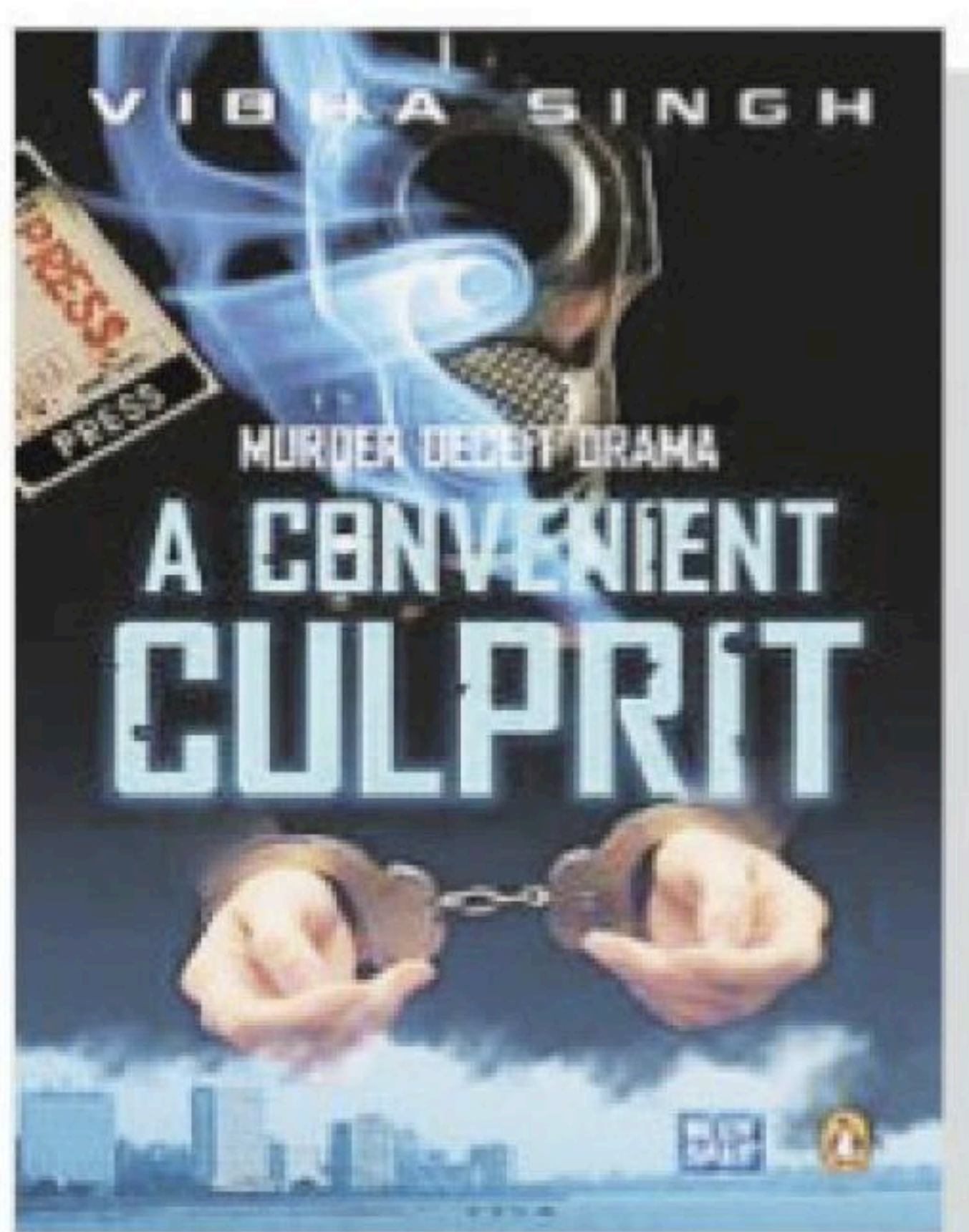
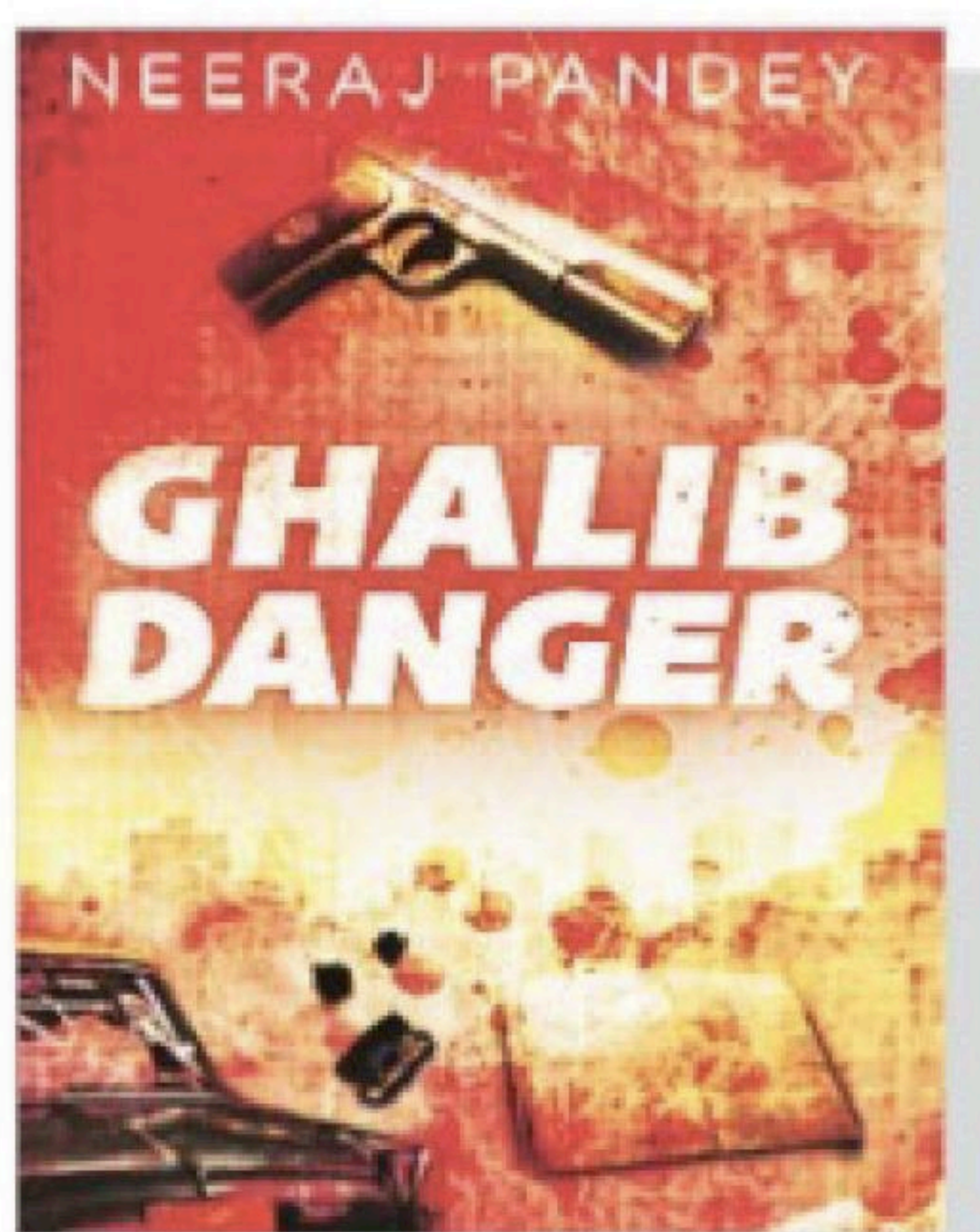
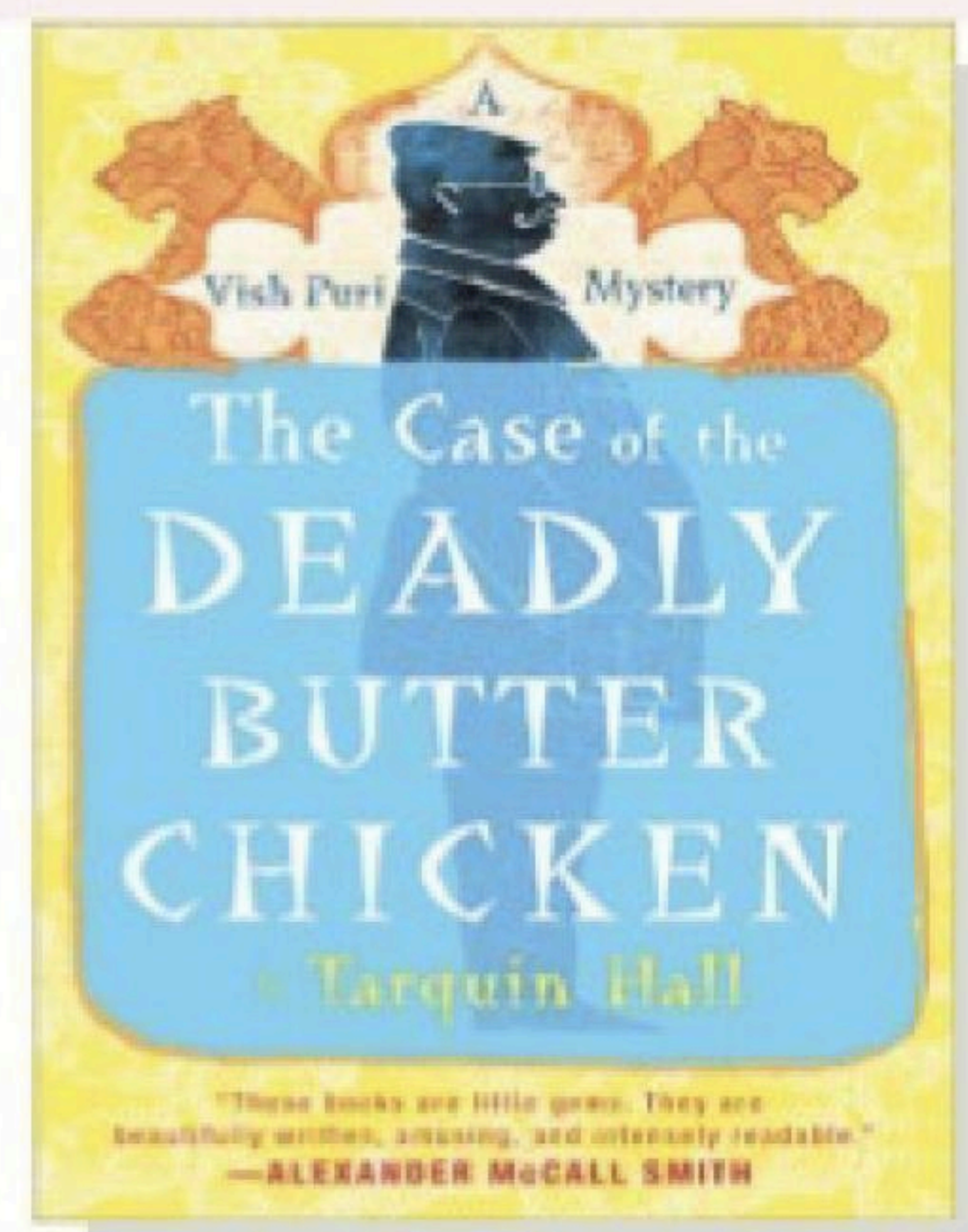
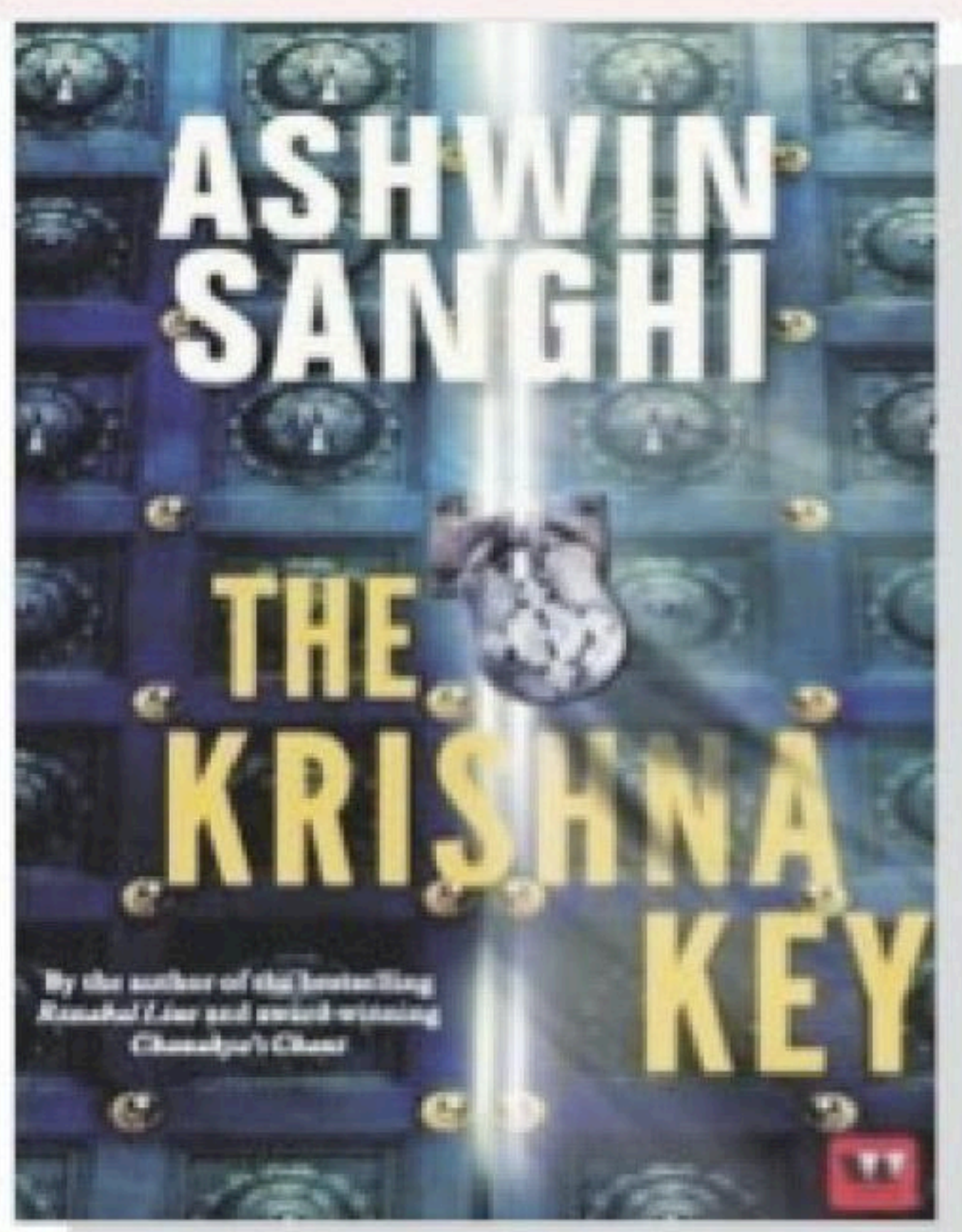
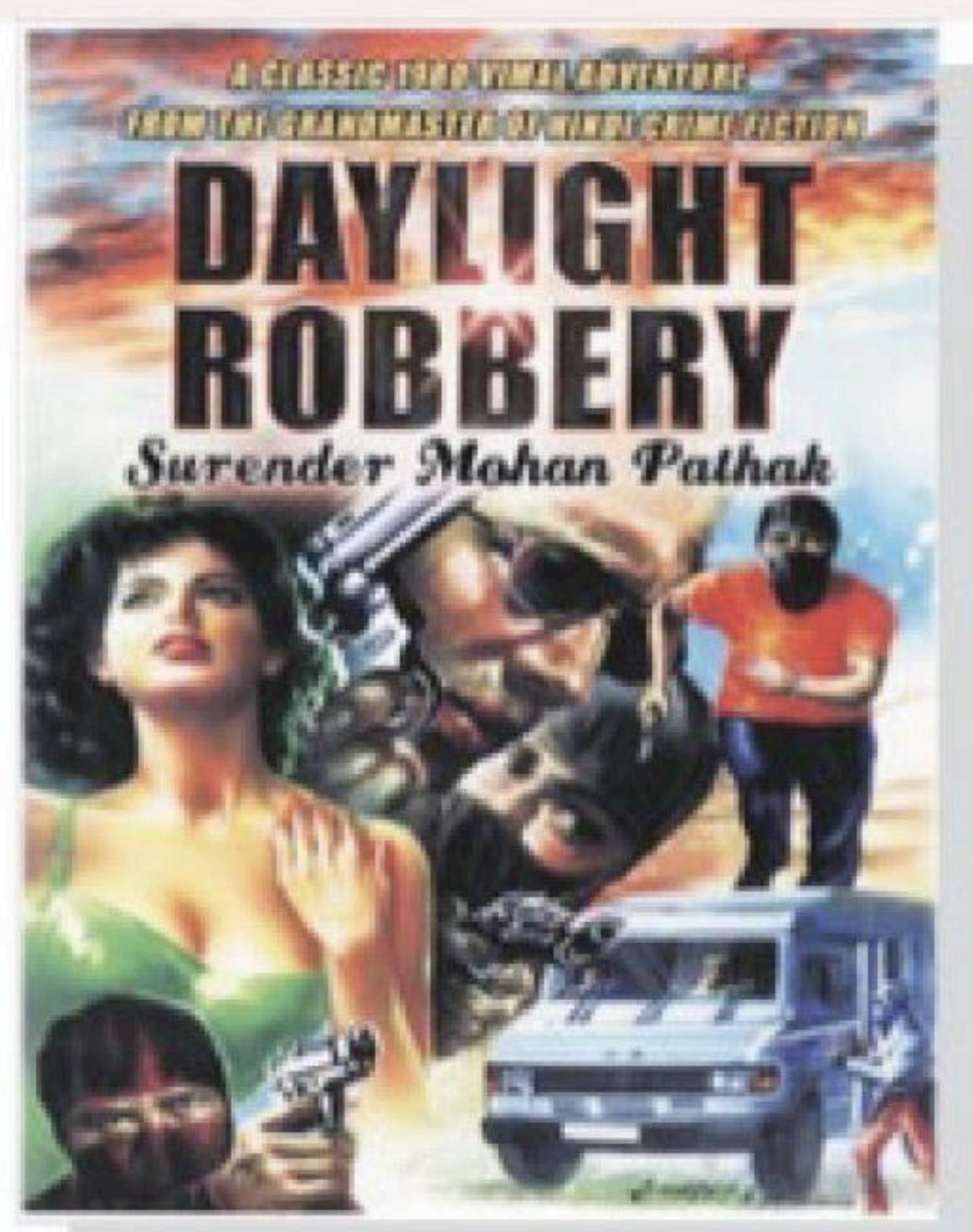
“A WAVE of crime writing is better than a wave of crime,” said author Namita Gokhale at the recently-concluded Jaipur Literature Festival. The occasion was the launch of the Crime Writers' Association of South Asia, a forum for crime writers to connect with agents and publishers. Founder-member Kishwar Desai also announced plans for a weekend festival of crime writing in Delhi this September.

Indisputably the best-selling genre in books, a taste for thrillers can be traced to kids' literature. Who hasn't enjoyed the mysteries cracked by the *Famous Five* or *Secret Seven*, or the *Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drews* of adolescence?

Talking of Indian authors, Surender Mohan Pathak's books have been popular for years, and for the more refined reader, *Byomkesh Bakshi* and *Feluda* have been fulfilling the lust for intrigue.

Today, there are further genres in crime writing. If Ravi Subramanian writes only about financial fraud, Penguin has come out with an imprint, Blue Salt, dedicated to Bollywood and noir; Ashwin Sanghi uses historical and mythological characters for maximum effect, while writers like Tarquin Hall have popularised characters like Vish Puri.

“Indian publishing is growing rapidly and writers are writing on different genres. Crime has al-



ways been a genre that does well. Since the publication of Steig Larsson's trilogy, crime novels have been reinvented and Scandinavian crime writers are doing very well, including Jo Nesbo. This renewed interest worldwide has also made way to India. Writers in the past were more inclined to literary work, but in recent years Indian writers are

writing more commercial stuff and the sales have been great. Scandinavian crime thrillers have helped change the mindset for crime publishing,” says Rahul Srivastava, managing director, Simon & Schuster India.

He adds that Kishwar Desai's book, *The Sea of Innocence*, was quite successful and they have been getting repeat orders for it,

and might order a reprint.

Interestingly, the Crime Writers' Association is also supported by the Norwegian Fiction and Non-Fiction Abroad (NORLA). Margit Walsø, director, NORLA, and Jørn Lier Horst, celebrated Norwegian author of the *William Wisting* series of novels, were present at the Jaipur Litfest. Both echoed the need for

more translations, particularly when writing in a country with a population of five million people.

“Interest in homegrown crime writers along with other commercial genres has been growing in the past couple of years and it's interesting to see writers (and, of course, readers) willing to open up to new genres and even experiment with them,” says Poulomi Chatterjee, managing editor, Hachette India. Among Hachette's successes in Indian crime writing, she counts Swati Kaushal's *Drop Dead* with the spunky SP Niki Marwah; historical crime set in the Mughal period with Muzaffar Jang as the 'detective' in Madhulika Liddle's books; and Zac O'Yeah's noir crime (*Mr Majestic: The Tout of Bengaluru* and *Once upon a Time in Scandinavistan*).

“Crime reading has universal appeal. It is read by a wide segment of readers. So many writers are taking to writing crime stories because it has a bigger market compared to other genres,” feels S Hussain Zaidi, co-publisher of Penguin's Blue Salt imprint.

Penguin India publisher Chiki Sarkar sums up: “Crime novels are a genre that readers historically have been, and still are, deeply interested in. Realising this, we decided to publish crime books by first-time authors and the results have been fantastic so far.”