

LEISURE BOOKS

PATTERSON  
UNLIMITEDA former policeman with a troubled past  
is at the heart of this collaborative thriller

PRIVATE INDIA  
by Ashwin Sanghi and  
James Patterson  
Random House  
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## BETWEEN THE COVERS

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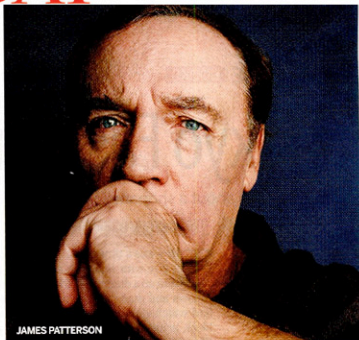
By Prachi Bhuchar

It is an unusual combination and at first glance you almost dismiss it as being plain gimmicky. An Indian thriller writer who dabbles in history and draws on mythology teams with the world's biggest-selling novelist. Together they are searching for another runaway success. Ashwin Sanghi and James Patterson have collaborated for the first time to bring Patterson's popular 'Private' series to India. Private is called one of the finest private investigation agencies with branches around the world, a smart but obvious technique for Patterson to be in cahoots with writers from various countries and churn out *Private Berlin*, *Private LA* and *Private London*.

Says Patterson: "I had read Sanghi's work and knew that he was a popular writer in India. I think he has done a great job with *Private India*, including all the details that bring India alive. I love the fact that the atmosphere is so different; it has mythology as well, which has a fresh appeal."

Patterson works out of Florida, where he lives with his wife and their 16-year-old son. For the India project, Patterson and Sanghi worked in tandem for about a year. Patterson, who parks himself on the *New York Times* best-seller list every time he comes out with a book—and that is several times a year, says there's nothing unusual about literary collaboration. "If you look at a lot of art in Europe, many of them are the work of collaboration between artists. Similarly, look at Hollywood or even television shows—it is all collaborative, hence not unusual. Somehow, when it comes to books, people find it tough to understand. When you collaborate, you have to listen to the other person. Americans are unfortunately not very good listeners, but I try!"

In *Private India*, Sanghi's penchant for mythology comes through with its cults, the Navratri festival and even Goddess Durga becoming an intrinsic part of the plot; Patterson's love for high drama and suspense is equally evident.



JAMES PATTERSON

The book opens, no surprises there, with a murder—of a Thai doctor in a Mumbai hotel. She has a yellow scarf around her neck and her hands are tied with strings. There is a flower on one hand, and a fork on the other. There is also a small, Viking toy helmet tied to one of her toes.

Eight such killings take place in Mumbai. Every victim has a yellow scarf, with trinkets placed around them.

The man who has to get to the bottom of these killings is Santosh Wagh, an ex-policeman, who heads Private India. Wagh was handpicked by Jack Morgan, a former CIA agent who heads Private Inc. Wagh is a compelling if somewhat pitiable character with a troubled past. Like many of his peers, literary detectives such as Ian Rankin's John Rebus or Jo Nesbo's Harry Hole, Wagh is often torn between the job and the drink, here Jack Morgan and Johnnie Walker. That apart, Wagh has a sharp mind and impeccable powers of reasoning. He is also an inexhaustible fund of trivia that helps him solve mysteries.

The case of the serial killings is handed over to Wagh and Co by Mumbai Police. Our one-point introduction to the city's police force is Rupesh, a cop who shares an uneasy, strained relationship with his former colleague Wagh.

Patterson says characters are important in a thriller. "Santosh Wagh is one of the most memorable characters I have created. His tragic past adds to his personality," he says. The central characters are well-developed, but others are also sketched well: a vile godman, an underworld *bhai* and a powerful lawmaker with a penchant for gambling.

In his attempt to give the series a strong Indian accent, Sanghi adds too many unnecessary details. But Patterson disagrees: "I love the fact that the book is so full of detail. Sometimes when you read a murder mystery you know where it is going. Not so in this case."

While you will not read *Private India* for its quality of prose, the combination of Patterson's fast-paced style and Sanghi's India touch works. "The idea was to get readers in the US familiar with India and those in India to get a taste of fast-paced storytelling," says Patterson. Even so, the climax could have done without the Bollywood-like theatrics that run into several pages. In thrillers, less is more.

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