

'It is fact that inspires my fiction'

Deepshikha Bhattacharyya

■ deepshikha.bhattacharyya
@hindustantimes.com

Ashwin Sanghi's decision to team up with James Patterson, of the Private series fame, had surprised many. Dubbed as India's Dan Brown, Sanghi's thrillers, *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*, have been best-sellers. The author, who has so long been writing historical, theological and mythological mysteries, has shifted to the world of private detectives and writers about Mumbai's underbelly with his new book, *Private India*.

HT City speaks to the author on the book which released last week.

The Private series is already a hit. Wasn't it difficult to write a series someone has created? You are absolutely right. This book is the eighth installment of what is known as James Patterson's bestselling Private series. The series is about a global detective agency that is called in to solve criminal cases that baffle the police. The fictional head of this agency is a charismatic chap called Jack Morgan. All books in the series involve deadly criminals being hunted down by Jack Morgan's

team in different parts of the world. Private India is simply an extension of that franchise on the India shores. This particular story is set in Mumbai and attempts to convey the impact of the Maximum City through Bollywood, mafia, god men, politicians and business tycoons.

How did you go about developing the plot given that James and you live in different countries? James provided a guideline as well as an existing set of international characters that need to be woven into the story. Using his guideline, I developed the plot outline. We discussed the outline in detail

and froze it after amendments. I then proceed to write the first draft while James wrote the final draft. All of this happened with periodic interactions over email. Once both James and I were done with the story, the editors at Random House took over. For the most part though, I contributed to the plot and characters whereas James contributed to pace and style.

Why the decision to bring Private to India?

The decision was prompted by James Patterson's publisher in London. Given the fact that all three of my previous titles have been thrillers with

short chapters, compelling pace, and unexpected hooks every few pages, traits that are amply evident in James Patterson's Private series, the fit seemed a natural one.

The characters such as Nimboo Baba seem very real. There is an unmistakable similarity with a seer who was in news recently. It is fact that inspires my fiction. The old proverb that fact is stranger than fiction is absolutely true. The best ideas for my stories emerge from what is happening in the world around me. The character of Nimboo Baba is no exception.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In Mumbai seemingly unconnected people are dying, strangled in a chilling ritual and with strange objects carefully arranged with the corpses. For Santosh Wagh, head of Private India, the Mumbai branch of the world's finest investigation agency, it's a race against time to stop the killer. And then he discovers there may be an even greater danger facing Private India. Hidden in the shadows is someone who could destroy the whole organisation along with thousands of innocent Mumbai citizens.

Chanakya's Chant on the big screen soon



Ashwin Sanghi

FROM P1

You have spoken about the autopsy suit at the Bombay hospital and the mortuary. We are used to reading about sanitised autopsy suits in American novels. How did you feel while writing it? Did you visit the places?

Actually, the autopsies at major hospitals in Mumbai do involve the use of gowns, aprons, gloves and masks. The conditions are far from satisfactory but they are still significantly better than those in small town India. We wanted to keep the descriptions within 'Private India' as near to the truth as possible and hence I did undertake visits as well as interviews.

This book reveals Mumbai's underbelly. Is it all fiction?

Again, Mumbai's underworld has inspired fiction; and often fiction has inspired the underworld! But yes, for the most part, the story about Mumbai's undisputed mafia don is fiction.

Will we see Santosh Wagh any time soon in another novel?

It depends. As you know, Santosh's best friend is Mr

Johnnie Walker. It's possible that his liver may kill him before the next murderer does! On a serious note though, it is too early at this stage to see whether we will have more stories featuring Santosh. Let's see the response to Private India first.

What are your upcoming novels?

My next fiction offering should be out by June next year. It is called Sialkot Saga and is a fast-paced conspiracy about a business dynasty.

Your favourite mystery writer?

There are many. I was always addicted to Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle's works. In addition authors such as PD James, Patricia Cornwell, Thomas Harris and Mary Higgins Clark also succeeded in whetting my appetite for crime novels.

2 states was a big hit. Will we see any of your novels on screen anytime soon?

I think that you will see Chanakya's Chant on the big screen and The Krishna Key on the small screen at some point of time in the near future.



HOW WAS IT COLLABORATING WITH JAMES PATTERSON?

Working with James has been a refreshing experience. My focus has always been on research and plot while the Patterson formula is pace and character. This book has given us a chance to combine our respective strengths. As you possibly know, James is the world's highest selling author having sold more than 260 million copies of his books worldwide. In recent years his novels have sold more copies than those of Stephen King, John Grisham and Dan Brown combined. After having co-authored a book along with him, I now understand why he is so successful.