

# THE HINDU

## For that thrill ride

Talking about his latest novel, *Private India*, which he wrote with bestselling author James Patterson, Ashwin Sanghi says a collaboration is like marriage.

MINI ANTHIKAD-CHIBBER

Ashwin Sanghi is part of the great Indian commercial fiction uprising. The Mumbai-based businessman is the author of three bestsellers — *The Rozabal Line*, *Chankya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* characterised by breathless plots spreads across space and time with interesting facts thrown in. His latest, *Private India*, is a collaboration with another bestseller writer, James Patterson. Patterson's *Private* series has lured Morgan, the head of an international investigative agency, solving crimes that has the police stumped. The books are collaborations and when Morgan comes to India, Sanghi seems like the perfect fit.

With writing being basically a solitary occupation, how did a collaboration between two bestselling authors across countries work? "It was different in the sense that I needed to invest a substantial amount of time on the plot so that both authors knew exactly where we were going with the story," says Ashwin. "It was different also in the sense that we needed to coordinate our activities and ensure that we were in tune with one another. But storytelling remains pretty much the same, no matter how you decided to approach it."

"A collaboration is like marriage," Ashwin adds. "You get lots if you give lots. Have you ever sung in a choir? To get harmony, you needed to sing accurately within a given



SITTING PRETTY Ashwin Sanghi

scale. If you succeed in doing that, the combined voices are harmonious. On the other hand, if you didn't the results were terrible!"

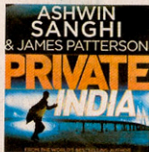
Ashwin insists *Private India* turned out how he envisioned it. "Both JP and I were very clear about the primary goal: to create a gripping read with adequate twists and turns. I think that we achieved what we set out to do."

*Private India* is a hunt for a serial killer with the Thuggee cult, Bollywood, gangsters, drugs, shady ladies, Navratri, ISI — practically the entire

kitchen-sink thrown in. "Not really," Ashwin clarifies. "We needed enough red herrings anyway. Furthermore, we also wanted to convey the full impact of Mumbai. What better way to do it than Bollywood and the Mafia? Thuggee and Navratri appear because of the fact that there is a historical and mythological angle to the plot. Looking back, there's nothing that I would have left out."

Santosh, the chief of *Private India*, has the habit of remembering little known facts that seems to echo Ashwin's historical-research-fuelled writing. "You are absolutely right. Santosh's memory and his habit of being able to connect obscure pieces of information are modelled on what I do in my writing avatar."

While the book has these distracting glossary-style diversions, Ashwin says they are part of the plot. "They are



not incidental to it. Furthermore, we have to remember that this book is not only meant for Indian audiences but also a global audience."

The 45-year-old says setting the book in Mumbai was "very easy. There is no better city for a crime thriller. Mumbai has it all. Wealth, poverty, glamour, sleaze, crime... it's the perfect backdrop for a fast-paced murder mystery."

The humanising of the cryptic Jack Morgan to the extent of having a relationship is Ashwin's doing. "Jack has a messed up personal life in the previous *Private* novels and I wanted to carry that element forward in *Private India*." *Private India* ends with Santosh, who is battling alcohol addiction, pouring himself a drink and having to make a choice between *Private* and alcohol. "Both JP and I decided to leave the novel with that particular question in the air so that we would be able to gauge whether Santosh needed to return. I'll be in a better position to answer that in a few months!"

When pressed for an answer, Ashwin laughs saying: "My guess is that he will choose Jack over Johnnie."

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