

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Friday - Sunday, August 22 - 24, 2014 | W3

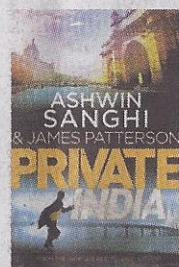
## CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

# The 'Private' Series Arrives in India

BY KRISTIANO ANG

**CRIMES AGAINST** women in India over the past two years set off a wave of outrage and reflection over their treatment in the South Asian country. They also inspired the plot of "Private India," the latest installment in author James Patterson's best-selling "Private" series.

"Private India" was co-written by Mr. Patterson, an American who has sold more than 300 million books in the past four decades, and Ashwin Sanghi, an Indian businessman-turned-best-selling author. The



novel, which was released in India last month and is slated for publication in the U.S. next year, centers on Santosh Wagh, an alcoholic private investigator trying to

solve a series of murders in which all the victims are female and appear to be mythologically inspired.

"Over the last few years, there's been a lot in the news about crimes against women," said the 45-year-old Mr. Sanghi, who is part of the third generation of the family behind the M.K. Sanghi Group, an Indian enterprise with interests in gas manufacturing, autos and hospitality. "If you look at the history and tradition of India, it's a culture that respects women—[and] one of the forces we worship is Shakti, the divine

feminine. I find it ironic there can be a dichotomy between worship in temple and the real world."

While "Private India" is positioned as a mass-market thriller, Mr. Sanghi said that he hoped the manner in which he depicted both the veneration of women in temples and their treatment in real-life India would "be all too apparent to readers."

"I have always believed a good book can educate and enlighten while entertaining," he said.

Based in Mumbai, Mr. Sanghi was educated at Yale University's School of Management. In 2007, he released his debut novel, "The Rozabal Line," a thriller exploring what would have happened if Jesus had survived his crucifixion.

"I had reached a plateau in my life where business was no longer giving me the excitement I wanted from it," he said. On a 2004 visit to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is also claimed by Pakistan, he began researching a tomb that is believed by some to hold the body of Jesus. After collating immense amounts of material, he decided to convert his research into a novel. "The Rozabal Line" drew comparisons to Dan Brown, the author of "The Da Vinci Code," and two other books followed.

"I still have a work week, but there used to be a time when I was a businessman who also used to be a writer," he said. "Now, it's vice versa."

Mr. Sanghi said he was initially reluctant to collaborate with Mr. Patterson, whose prolific sales record may in part be attributed to

**CRIME STORY** Author Ashwin Sanghi: 'I have always loved fiction that sounds like fact.'



From left: Random House India and Cornerstone; Ashwin Sanghi

the copious number of novels he publishes each year, many of which are co-written.

"My previous work was in the realm of history and mythology, so I was not too certain as to whether I could pull off something contemporary," Mr. Sanghi said. Still, the opportunity to work with Mr. Patterson was too big to turn down. "I have always looked at myself as

a work-in-progress, and maybe I'm slightly better off as a writer than I was two years ago," he said.

Each book in the "Private" collection follows the Private Detective Agency, the name of the fictional agency, as it investigates a crime in a different country. Mr. Patterson usually works with an author familiar with each territory, even if, as was the case with

Mr. Sanghi, he has never met his co-writer face to face.

Mr. Sanghi said that he worked on a brief outline that he sent to Mr. Patterson. After a more detailed plot was agreed upon, Mr. Sanghi wrote the first draft of the novel in four installments, before Mr. Patterson took over. A series of edits then followed.

"I have always tried to work with writers who will give a truly authentic feel to that city," said Mr. Patterson in an email. "Ashwin, too, is a fan of a fast-paced plot, and with his broad historical and mythological knowledge, there could be no better writing partner."

"James would send me back a bulleted list saying what works beautifully and also his recommendations," Mr. Sanghi said of the process. "With him, it was never, 'This is what I'm telling you to do,' but I had managed to incorporate most of his very reasonable suggestions by the first draft."

The result is a fast-paced thriller—chapters may only be a few pages long—where references to Indian mythology are juxtaposed alongside members from the intelligence services. To give the plot some authenticity, Mr. Sanghi visited a morgue to see how corpses were stored and followed a private investigator around.

"I have always loved fiction that sounds like fact," said Mr. Sanghi, who is currently working on a novel about a business family in post-independence India. "All fiction writers are very good liars, because we have to spin a story," he said. "But if you have to lie, lie as close to the truth as possible."