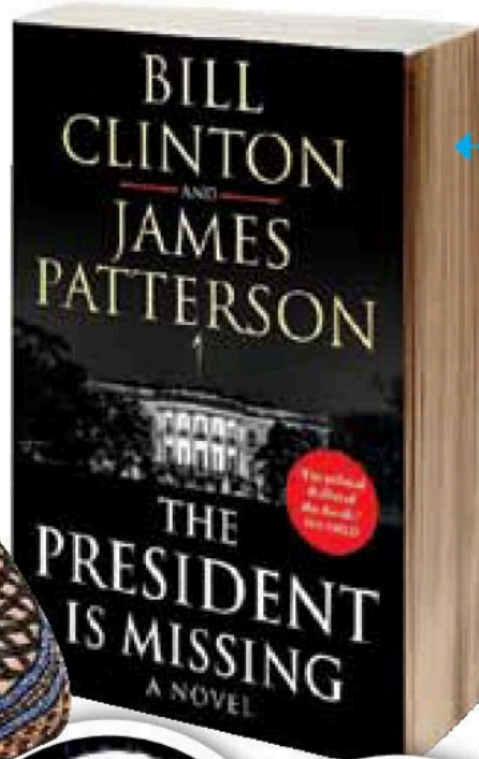


WHEN AUTHORS COLLABORATE...

CO-AUTHORING A BOOK HAS A LOT OF ADVANTAGES, BELIEVE WRITERS



Deepali Singh

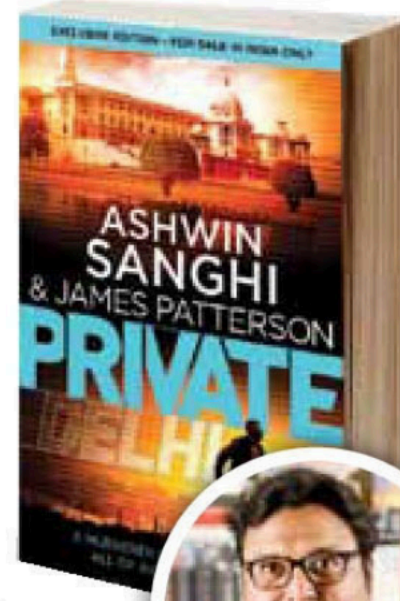
James Patterson, who has co-authored books with the likes of Candice Fox, Maxine Paetro, Mark Sullivan, Ashwin Sanghi and Peter de Jonge among others, has often been criticised for doing the same. However, that hasn't deterred the bestselling author from collaborating once again, this time, with the former President of the United States for the book *The President Is Missing*. "I'm big on teams," said Patterson in an interview to *Writer's Digest* in 2009 on co-authoring, adding, "I think teamwork is great. I couldn't possibly do all these stories. I have a file of stories that's 400 pages thick, and they're stories that I want to tell. I like the co-authored books. I think a lot of them are quite cool."

Closer home, there are a number of authors who have

attempted to do the same, with varying degrees of success. Devapriya Roy and Priya Kuriyan wrote *Indira: A Graphic Novel*, while Durjoy Datta collaborated with Nikita Singh on two novels — *If It's Not Forever It's Not Love* and *Someone Like You*. While there are several advantages of working with a co-author, most writers agree that picking one isn't a matter of just liking their work. Also, there are no hard and fast rules that apply when one is working with a co-writer.

NOT A SOLITARY PROCESS ANYMORE

One would imagine, and it's often said, that writing is a solitary



Ashwin Sanghi

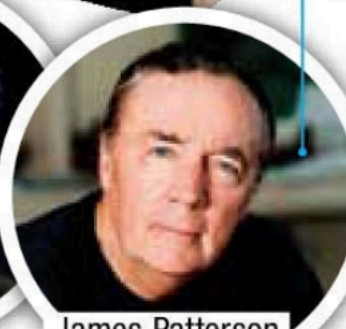
process. That, says Ashwin Sanghi, may still be true for literary fiction, but when it comes to commercial fiction, the author feels that two heads might be better than one. He says, "Writing is pretty much a team effort because very often you may require additional resources to do your research for you, or to help you with translations. Even in terms of editing and polishing of the document, there are more than two or three people involved."

Many times, at the plotting stage itself, you require one or two people to make sure the plot is tightly woven."

Contd on P5



Bill Clinton



James Patterson

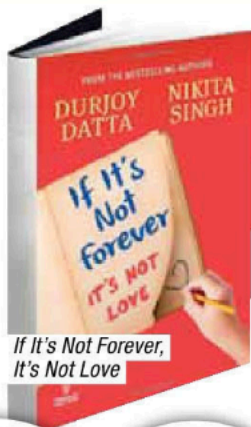
WHEN AUTHORS COLLABORATE...

"Frankly, I think the days are gone, particularly when one is talking of commercial fiction, when one can think of writing as a solitary process," says Ashwin. The bestselling author of books such as *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*, has co-authored two books with Patterson, including *Private India* and *Private Delhi*. He has also written three non-fiction self-help books in the *13 Steps* series with co-authors and intends to bring out three new titles this year; again, with other writers.

SYNERGY BETWEEN THE WRITERS

Just like readers, writers, too, have their favourite authors. But picking a co-author to work with is not a simple matter of calling up somebody whose work you admire and asking them to work alongside you. For two wordsmiths to work together on a book, there has to be synergy between the two. Take, for instance, Anirudha Bhattacharjee and Balaji Vittal, who have written three books on music together; the latest one being *SD Burman: The Prince Musician*.

The two authors were on the same college quiz team and share a passion for music and films. "There is an innate trust and understanding between the two of us. And you have to trust your partner's judgement," says Balaji, while Anirudha adds that they are on the



If It's Not Forever,
It's Not Love



Nikita Singh



Durjoy Datta

same wavelength when it comes the understanding of a song. "The feelings and appreciation of things around us, including music, language and also, literature is mostly along the same lines. Secondly, the three books we have written till now are all on music. In that sense, we share a common passion that is music and also music of a specific genre," he says.

NO HARD AND FAST RULES

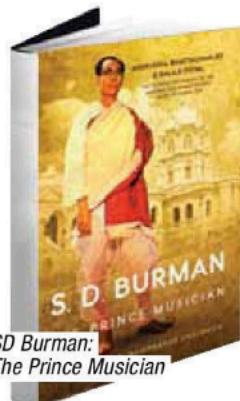
Working with a co-author can be pretty effortless, provided you work according to a plan. Ashwin puts it down to the difference between singing a solo and performing in a choir. "When you do the latter, you have to hit ex-

actly the right notes in order to ensure that the output is a harmony. So you have to work along a plan, and that is very critical when it comes to collaborations." In his two books which he co-authored with James, one of the writers would start off with a fairly detailed plot outline, and then the other would develop the first draft based on that plot outline. The second draft was then done by the first author and so on. "So the manuscript moves back and forth between two people almost like a shuttlecock," he says.

The process differs with different authors and genres. In Anirudha and Balaji's books, they would first make a list of chapters to write. "Some of the first drafts were written by me and some by him and the other would review them. For instance, if I have a good chunk of interviews on a particular topic, then I would take up that chapter. If there was something to be written on the technical aspect of music, then Anirudha would take that up, as that is his forte. Everything was based on understanding," says Balaji.

TWICE THE IDEAS

While the process may differ for different authors, the one thing that stays the same are the advantages of collaborating with another person. "You get an alternate viewpoint," says Balaji, "It also means that two people are doing research on the same subject, thereby



SD Burman:
The Prince Musician

widening its scope. So it's simple Math — two times the ideas, two times the research."

Bringing together complementary strengths to the table makes a huge difference to the quality of the product. For instance, in *Private India* and *Private Delhi*, it was the combined strengths of thrillers — James' forte — and India — Ashwin's domain, that made the books such good reads. "My strength lies in research and then being able to craft that into intriguing and mysterious plotlines. James' strength lies in being able to amplify the thrills of a particular story. So in that sense, I would say we compliment each other," he says. As for disagreements, Ashwin says they would normally be at the stage of the plot outline, not at the stage of writing. "I think the problem in collaboration lies when people expect to write books as if they are writing in a solitary environment, and then expect that formula to work in a collaboration."