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James Patterson enters India with Ashwin Sanghi, and how!

Babita Basu

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When I heard this for the first time, I jumped. For reasons more than one. Because Patterson, one of the richest authors in the world, chose India as a setting. Because the Indian market for books is that big. And mostly because he comes to India holding hands with Ashwin Sanghi, India's leading thriller writer who I happen to know as a very pleasant person. So, in my capacity as a scribe, I could not but bombard him with some questions. And here are his answers:

BB: How did JP hit upon the idea of a JV with you?

AS: A dear friend who has read all three of my books and works for Random House suggested my name to her colleague who handles Patterson's books. 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 writing, the fit seemed a natural one. We discussed the issues involved for about a couple of weeks and topped it off with a signed agreement rather quickly.



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Babita Basu has been with the media for more than 16 years, and the written word, in any form, forever has her in thrall. A bibliophile, foodie and lone traveller, she writes on anything that stimulates her mind and merits comment.

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(James Patterson photo credit: Rankin)

BB: I guess the Private series will be set in various cities across the world - correct me if I am wrong. Is Private India the first volume, or are the other volumes happening simultaneously for JP?

AS: As you possibly know, James Patterson 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. While he has written around 97 novels, some of these are part of what is called the "Private" series. This 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. James Patterson has co-authored all the books in the "Private" series thus far—Private London along with Mark Pearson, Private #1 Suspect along with Maxine Paetro, Private Berlin along with Mark Sullivan, Private Oz along with Michael White. All books in the series involve deadly criminals being hunted down by Jack Morgan's team in different parts of the world. Private India will simply be an extension of that franchise to India.

BB: It's a new genre for you. What are your thoughts on it? What would be your specific role? Providing the backdrop and settings, and weaving in characters in the tapestry? To what extent will you be involved with the plot?

AS: My previous three books have been thrillers, but with a historical, theological or mythological backdrop. This collaboration is an extension of what I have already been doing—writing thrillers—but with an entirely modern and contemporary backdrop. James Patterson provides a guideline as well as an existing set of characters that need to be developed in the story. Using his guideline, I develop a plot outline. We discuss the plot outline in detail and freeze it after amendments. I then proceed to write the first draft. The second and third drafts are written by James Patterson. All of this happens with weekly interactions over email and video conferencing. Once both James and I are done with the story, the editors at Random House take over.

BB: Most important question - JP "writes" by mentoring and poring over the work of a team of expert writers who develop his plot. Will you be collaborating with those writers for Private India?

AS: No. The collaboration works one-on-one. No other writers are involved.

BB: Private India is certainly a landmark in the history of Indian writing in English. Let me ask you some stock questions - like the effect on aspiring writers, the future of Indian English writing, does this mean the automatic expansion of audience base for Indian writers etc. Shall we? *grins*

AS: It is probably the first ever collaboration between an Indian author and an American one in the realm of commercial fiction. I think it is indicative of a two broad trends: (a) that the Indian commercial fiction space is maturing and that international authors see it as an important enough market to ink such co-writing arrangements (b) that Indian commercial fiction is gradually acquiring a global flavour and at some point of time in the future one may see many more Indian bestselling authors on international bookshelves.

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