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Priate India does to Mumbai what *The Godfather* (Mario Puzo) and *Bonfire of the Vanities* (Tom Wolfe) do to New York. James Patterson and Ashwin Sanghi's new book showcases the vibrancy, tempo, money and soul (or lack of it) of a city that is as much the protagonist as Private Santosh Wagh, the head of the Indian branch of a premium investigation agency.

Readers of James Patterson's books will at once know that *Private India* is part of his immensely popular Private series based on Jack Morgan's adventures as the head of 'world's largest and most renowned private agency'. Patterson is envied and reviled by fellow authors, as evident in Stephen King's comment, "(Patterson is) a terrible writer (but he's) very successful."

Private India is fast paced; a proverbial page turner. Pressure cooker bombs, jam packed Mumbai locals, Mujahideens, protest marches from Azad Maidan, prostitutes of Kamathipura, corrupt police, and a swanky office with a hidden biometric entrance in an old building at the Crawford Market—all these ride on the roller-coaster story of a serial murderer who targets women, some famous and some with skeletons in the closet. The tabloid is represented by the cigarette smoking editor of *Afternoon Mirror* and its murdered reporter. Wait. There is more. The murderer borrows the 19th century thugs' modus operandi of killing with the *rumaal* (handkerchief) and there is a Nimboo Baba as well. Plus, there are several vignettes of Mumbai lifestyle packed concisely between the covers.

Sanghi, whose plot outline was selected by Patterson, talks about the making of the book and brand Patterson.

How did you and James Patterson connect for the book deal?

It was JP's (James Patterson) London-based publisher who reached out to me and asked if I'd be interested in penning an India-based thriller along with the master storyteller. I was concerned about attempting something away from the beaten path. After all, my previous books were thrillers with an abundance of history and mythology. *Private India* on the other hand was meant to be a purely contemporary crime thriller. But JP took care of that. He suggested that I frame the plot outline. This meant that I was free to introduce elements that excited me. This clinched the deal.

Hence the reference to Thuggee's *rumaal* and Durga's nine avatars. Are these totally Ashwin Sanghi's touch?

You guessed right. They are. In my previous titles the suspense, mystery and thrill emerged from a piece of research, a historical nugget or a hitherto unexplained theological connection. Those elements that are part of my DNA are bound to show up!

If we call *Private India* a 'Patterson's Masterclass in writing'

CHASING THE MURDERER

Ashwin Sanghi made headlines when he collaborated with popular author James Patterson for the book *Private India*. It has now hit the stands, and offers the requisite chills and thrills, he tells us



In The Atelier

ASHWIN SANGHI and JAMES PATTERSON

With three thrillers (and bestsellers) *Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* to his credit, Ashwin Sanghi is a method writer. He says, "I have always believed that a good book is one where the reader doesn't have to turn the pages... that the pages turn themselves, almost effortlessly." Patterson, meanwhile, has an enviable record of bestsellers, including the *Alex Cross* series and *Women's Murder Club*. In 2011, it was estimated that one in four of all hardcover suspense/thriller novels sold are written by him.

What did you learn?

Writing thrillers is not only about inspiration and imagination but also about craft. This is something one realises working alongside JP. There are a few simple JP rules that make a good thriller: amplify character traits—make them larger than life; eliminate fluff; build twists and suspense ever so often; never compromise pace; build conflict until the very end. Achieve these objectives and you should have a delicious thriller. There are some chapters in this book that are just about a paragraph long. It stems from the JP style of saying absolutely nothing that does not advance the plot. That is the key takeaway from this collaboration: less is more.

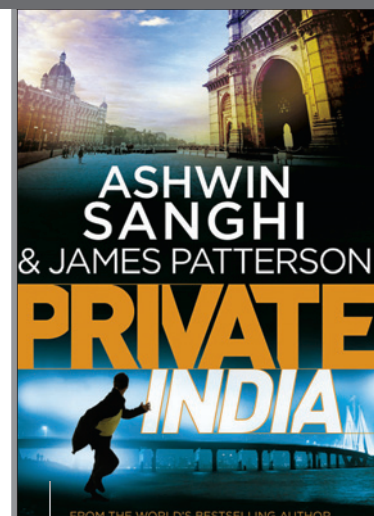
Take us through your writing process for this book.

The process of collaborating was new for me. JP provided a guideline as well as an existing set of international characters that needed to be woven into my story. Using his guideline, I developed the plot outline and spent around four months writing it. It was one of the most detailed outlines that I have ever written. The time spent on the plot outline included research in Mumbai and the police department. I also had several long interactions with a private investigator who operates in Mumbai besides visiting a morgue, a slum, a dance bar and the mangroves. I then proceed to

write the first draft while James wrote the final draft. All this happened with periodic interactions over email.

The good and the bad of a collaboration with James Patterson?

Much more good than bad. It was a chance to observe at close quarters the method in the madness. The collaboration also strengthened my firmly held belief that good fiction is much more about perspiration than inspiration. As regards the bad—the geographic distance between us, which made it impossible to actually discuss ideas in person. We made up for it through technology though.



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 striking again. In a city of over 13 million, he has his work cut out at the best of times but this case has him battling Mumbai's biggest gang lord and a godman who isn't all he seems. Then he discovers an even greater danger facing Private India. Hidden in the shadows is someone who could destroy the organisation and innocent Mumbaikars.

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The difference between Patterson's Private Jack and Sanghi's Private Santosh?

It's rather simple. Jack Morgan has almost succeeded in conquering his inner demons. Santosh Wagh is yet to get there. Sanghi's Santosh Wagh is Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*. Both are hopelessly intelligent yet out of control.

As a writer with a paperback to his credit, how will you answer the raised eyebrows of the Indian literati?

I am so glad you asked me that question. Commercial writing in India did not take off primarily because of our snobbish attitude towards it. Most Indian authors were busy churning out literary fiction and publishers continued actively searching for the next Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, or Jhumpa Lahiri. They could hardly be bothered with finding the Indian equivalent of Robert Ludlum, Frederick Forsyth, Jack Higgins, or Tom Clancy! Satyajit Ray would not have given us *Feluda* if an Indian market for mysteries, suspense, adventure and thrillers did not exist. It's sad that we allowed ourselves to cede space to foreign authors in these genres. I'm happy to see that this is changing rapidly now. We should have our own versions of Miss Marple, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot!