

The Statesman

BOOK RECEIVED

Private India

By James Patterson &
Ashwin Sanghi
Random House
Rs 350

THIS is a continuation of the *Private* series, one of James Patterson's most popular worldwide which is based around the exclusive detective agency, *Private*, headed by Jack Morgan with offices across the globe. In India, the setting is Mumbai, the centre of Bollywood glamour, glitz and finance which results in a collaboration between Ashwin Sanghi and the world's No 1 thriller writer.

Ashwin Sanghi has been making headlines with books like *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*. Given the fact that the thriller focuses on whisky swilling Santosh Wagh, who is the Indian head of *Private India*, it is obvious that Sanghi's contribution is vital to pad out the Mumbai crime details and to provide information that Patterson would not have had access to without in depth research. And one is tempted to give Sanghi credit for the Durga connection in the novel, which is probably not too presumptuous an assumption.

Against the background of bombs and the Indian *mujahedeen* is the story of a serial killer who strangles with a cord of yellow silk. The victims are all women and there seems to be a strange thread linking them that niggles at Wagh's mind. His chief operator, the ravishing Nisha Gandhe is also puzzled but determined to get to the bottom of the deaths. And opposing them is the police officer Rupesh who was once Wagh's best friend but is now almost his enemy, for no reason that Wagh can figure out. The cast also includes the mysterious Nimboo Baba, the rich head of the beggars, Munna the gangster and a combination of the expected

drugs and sleaze to add to the seamy lower depths feel. Jack Morgan pops into the action and almost becomes a suspect ~ though readers familiar with the *Private* series will know that could not be the case.

The detailed descriptions of the bodies, the rituals and Mumbai's red light area are counterpointed by talks with the *mujahedeen*, hidden bombs and links to the blasts in the trains which made international headlines, where the action sometimes seems slicker. Of course this underlining ding-dong game of who wrote what chases the reader through the pages, underscoring the whodunit factor.

Characters are mainly on the surface, Wagh for example is the typical detective with a family problem which he drowns in whisky, though the book doesn't really need too much depth as long as it delivers its adrenalin fix.

As a page turner the book works compellingly, though the solution to the murders seems to take an interminable amount of time, finally seeing light nine corpses down. By comparison, the terrorist plot is like a time bomb ticking away until it reaches flash point at the very end.

