



The Indian author Ashwin Sanghi will lead two discussions on Saturday, March 7 as part of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature. Courtesy Ketchum Raad Middle East

## 'The Dan Brown tag has been both a bane and boon'

Afshan Ahmed

March 1, 2015 Updated: March 1, 2015 03:32 PM



### Related



10 notable moments from this year's Emirates Airline Festival of Literature

Mourid Barghouti brings his poetry to the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature

Our top picks from the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature

Emirati Talal Salem Al Sabri to share lessons from the road less travelled

Jung Chang to talk about her contentious book

Much like the American best-selling author Dan Brown, the Indian writer Ashwin Sanghi doesn't shy away from controversial topics – in fact, his thrillers depend on it.

His first, self-published English novel *The Rozabal Line* (2007) promoted the idea that Christ survived the crucifixion, while his upcoming book *Sialkot Saga* is steeped in the tumultuous 1947 partition of India and Pakistan.

The 46-year-old businessman-turned-author says the "tantalising possibility of an overlap between history and mythology provides an adrenalin rush".

Last year, Sanghi collaborated with the American author James Patterson on the crime-fiction novel *Private India: City on Fire*, which sold 250,000 copies.

The author, who will discuss his work on Saturday, March 7, at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, told us why being described as the Indian Dan Brown is not always a favourable comparison.

### What is it about mythology that makes it an intriguing source for thriller fiction?

Mythology per se does not inspire thrills. There is no thrill in Homer's *Iliad*, but the discovery of ruins in Turkey that could be ancient Troy makes the story exciting. In similar fashion, the idea of Krishna [a deity in Hindu

on the Empress Dowager  
Cixi

Topics: [Literary festivals](#),  
[World literature](#), [Writers](#),  
[Emirates Airline Festival of Literature](#)

mythology] as a mythological hero is interesting but not necessarily exciting. Couple that mythology with archaeological finds off the coast of Gujarat that could be Krishna's ancient city of Dwarka, and you have a thriller.

### **Were there any challenges in co-writing a novel with Patterson, given that most of the correspondence was through technology?**

The collaboration with James was an extension of what I had already been doing, but with an entirely modern and contemporary backdrop. James provided me with a guideline as well as an existing set of characters that needed to be developed in the story. Working with him has been a refreshing experience. My focus has always been on research, while the Patterson formula is pace and plot. The book has given us a chance to combine our respective strengths.

### **You are often labelled the Indian Dan Brown. Is the comparison a unique selling point?**

The Dan Brown tag has been both a bane and boon. It helped sales for the first novel, but also created expectations of a formulaic thriller in the minds of those who picked it up.

The end result was that those who did not care for Brown avoided the book, believing it to be just another thriller. Those who like him bought it expecting an Indian take on *The Da Vinci Code*, whereas what they got was rather different: a densely packed theological mystery.

The fact of the matter is that the stupendous success of *The Da Vinci Code* in 2003 sparked off an entire industry of theological thrillers and hence anything that was remotely connected to Jesus Christ, Mary Magdalene or the Sacred Feminine would be automatically lumped into that particular category.

I have no issue with debate, discussion and controversy surrounding a book but believe in Voltaire's view: "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

### **Why do you think Indian fictional characters such as Feluda by Satyajit Ray do not have the timeless appeal that western detective characters enjoy?**

The problem lay with the Indian publishing industry, which was unwilling to look beyond literary fiction. The West popped up so many great detective characters such as Miss Marple, Jack Frost, Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Alas, it was only Bengal that contributed two memorable characters: Feluda and Byomesh Bakshi. We now need lots more. It's sad that we allowed ourselves to cede space to foreign authors in genres such as crime writing and detective fiction. I'm happy to see that this is changing rapidly now.

### **Was there a particularly funny review you've read of one of your books?**

Oh, there are so many. For my novel, *Chanakya's Chant*, a newspaper critic said that my novel had the intellectual calibre of *Winnie the Pooh*. The truth is that Pooh is worth about US\$5 billion [Dh18.36bn] in annual sales. I would say that *Winnie the Pooh's* intellectual calibre is far greater than that of most ordinary folks.

**• Ashwin Sanghi will lead two events on Saturday, March 7: the panel discussion *Is There Such Thing as an "Indian" Novel?* at 11.30am, and the talk *Thrilling Private India* at 3pm. Both events are at**

InterContinental Hotel, Dubai Festival City. Tickets, Dh70, are available at [www.emirateslitfest.com](http://www.emirateslitfest.com)

[aahmed@thenational.ae](mailto:aahmed@thenational.ae)



[Add your comment](#) | [View all comments](#)

### Related



10 notable moments from this year's Emirates Airline Festival of Literature



Mourid Barghouti brings his poetry to the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature

Our top picks from the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature



Emirati Talal Salem Al Sabri to share lessons from the road less travelled

### MOST VIEWED [ARTS & LIFESTYLE](#) | ALL

1. Review: Bon Jovi fails to hit the high notes at Abu Dhabi concert
2. Meet the designer of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque courtyard - video
3. Cars are stars of Kung Fu yoga filming in Dubai
4. One on one with Manish Malhotra in Dubai
5. Meet the three Abu Dhabi-based explorers who conquered the Mongol Rally
6. A backstage look at the Bon Jovi concert in Abu Dhabi - in pictures
7. Bon Jovi reunite with UAE fans at Abu Dhabi concert - in pictures
8. Filipino student reaches X Factor Australia's final 11



## 9. Florence and the Machine to join Enrique Iglesias and Blur at Abu Dhabi F1 after-race concerts

[More Most Viewed](#)

ask me bazaar.com

FLAT 83% OFF

UNINTERRUPTED MUSIC WHILE YOU WALK!

HIGH QUALITY SPORTY MP3 PLAYER

MRP : ₹999  
Selling Price : ₹499

Buy Now

### EDITOR'S PICKS

Book review: A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories by Lucia Berlin



The long read: how one Syrian is trying to start over in Europe



Thrilla in Manila: 40 years on from an epic fight and a country in turmoil



Our top book picks this week: a searing indictment of the financial industry and more





## FOLLOW US



**Tweets** **Follow**

 **LifeNationalUAE** @LifeNationalUAE 1h  
Love to travel? See these top 10 destinations before the crowds – or climate change – alter them forever: [news.ae/1KZeG7o](http://news.ae/1KZeG7o)  
Show Summary

 **LifeNationalUAE** @LifeNationalUAE 1h  
Book review: A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories by Lucia Berlin [news.ae/1hiQDb4](http://news.ae/1hiQDb4)  
[pic.twitter.com/v1mMvMG8T9](http://pic.twitter.com/v1mMvMG8T9)



 **LifeNationalUAE** @LifeNationalUAE 1h  
Thrilla in Manila: 40 years on from an epic fight between Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier and a country in turmoil: [news.ae/1LWW1NK](http://news.ae/1LWW1NK)  
Show Summary

 **LifeNationalUAE** @LifeNationalUAE 2h

Tweet to @LifeNationalUAE

## SPOTLIGHT



Meet the three Abu Dhabi-based explorers who conquered the Mongol Rally

---

UAE legal Q&As: How does the social media law affect photography?

