

# ‘Writing is an art, crime writing is a craft’



Ashwin Sanghi

**B**ESTSELLING AUTHOR Ashwin Sanghi has just released *Private Delhi*, the second book in the *Private* series, for which he collaborates with American author James Patterson. Speaking with Namrata Rao on the sidelines of the recently-concluded Noir Literature Festival in Delhi, he talks about the challenges of collaborating with another author and the future of the crime fiction genre in India. Edited excerpts:

**How does the partnership with James Patterson work?**

It's a fruitful partnership. James is the world's highest-selling writer and having written two books with him, I can see why. Given that India is alien territory for him, usually the plot idea emerges from me (in most other instances, it is James who offers it). I write the first draft of the manuscript with the second and third drafts written by him. The challenge, to a very great extent, is getting the plot. We end up going back and forth several times.

**A certain section of readers are of the opinion that the *Private* series doesn't match up to your solo books...**

The people who say this are maybe coming from a place where they are used to reading Ashwin Sanghi when he is at his best in the space of mythology and history. The moment you eliminate those elements, they say it's too dry. I don't say they are wrong. But for any creative work, be it a movie, book or painting, no

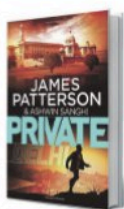
two people can have the same opinion. There are also those who have loved the *Private* series... So who is right? Maybe all of them are.

**Is there an increasing appetite for crime writing and reading in India?**

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that increasingly, more writers are exploring the genre. No, in the sense that English fiction is still dominated by romance and mythology. The change is visible, but slow. If you visit a book store in London or New York, you will find that crime thrillers rule the charts, accounting for a large chunk of the titles. That is not yet the case in India. As far as Indians reading more *desi* crime fiction, the reason is rather simple. When you read Stieg Larsson, Gillian Flynn, Lee Child or Paula Hawkins, you are reading about alien countries and people. There is something make-believe... With Indian thrillers, you are reading stuff that you can relate to. For example, we see pristine laboratories in CSI, but that is not the case in India. Morgues in the West are not as filthy as the ones here. Police investigation and medical examination also work rather differently.

**What are your thoughts on the experimentation that's coming in the crime fiction genre in India?**

I am happy to see *desi* writers moving out of their comfort zones. While writing is an art, crime writing is a craft. Thus it's important for *desi* writers to be creative within the boundaries of the genre. In every genre, you will always have sub-genres sprouting. It's a matter of time before every genre will explode into many sub-genres. In a space like mythology, for instance, for a long time, people like Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik and I were all clubbed together. Today, Devdutt is attempting to explain mythology in simple words. Amish is attempting to retell mythology with his own twist, Anand is telling mythology from the angle of not the victor, but one who has lost. And I take mythology and spin it into a modern contemporary tale... Frankly, these are totally different spaces, but they are all clubbed under mythology. So basically, sub-genres are a natural outcome as the market grows.



**PRIVATE DELHI**  
James Patterson & Ashwin Sanghi  
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**What is the future of crime writing in India?**

Very bright. And not just in English fiction. The non-fiction space has also seen hits such as *Aarushi* by Avirook Sen. In Hindi, there are already established writers such as Ved Prakash Sharma and Surender Mohan Pathak. What we are now seeing is an interest in crime writing in the English fiction space with writers such as Novoneel Chakraborty, Uday Satpathy, Ravi Subramaniam and Piyush Jha. As I said, romance and mythology dominate the charts as of now in India, but that inflection point will definitely come. We are seeing the first green shoots. We just need to stay on course.