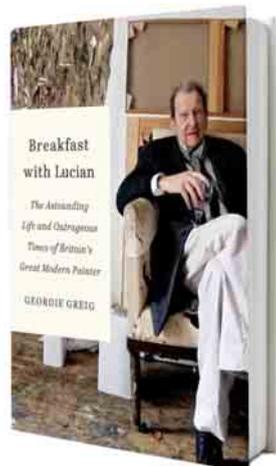




Lucian Freud in his studio. His many works include a portrait of pregnant model Kate Moss (left), which sold for £3.5 million in 2005. Photos: EPA



The lunatic details start early and keep coming. You turn each page the way a rat hits the little lever for another pellet of crack



throughout his life as if he were a flying squirrel in paint-flecked work boots. This volume goes long on his “serial sexual opportunism”, his playing of “musical beds on a grand and anarchic scale”. He married twice, and has many acknowledged and unacknowledged children, but always had overlapping lovers.

In Greig’s account, he could be a sadist. “He became quite vicious, really hurt breasts and things,” according to a lover. He liked anal sex with women, an acquaintance reports, because it was redolent of utter domination.

He liked his girls young – as young as 16, 17 or 18. He got them to his home by offering to paint them, often obtrusively naked. A 22-year-old managed to fend him off, and we read about an early painting session: “He started walking up and down and gesturing as he undid his belt.” After a fight with one lover, he mailed her “a postcard with a crude drawing of her defecating”. No dummy, she held onto it.

Freud painted with agonising slowness and required his models to be present for every brush stroke. Sessions could drag on for more

than a year. After sitting for four months for a portrait, of her breast-feeding her son by Mick Jagger, model Jerry Hall was late for a session or two. Freud got his revenge, we read, by erasing her from the painting. He inserted a man in her place.

We do witness Freud commit acts of kindness and generosity in this well-illustrated book, but they are few and far between. In the stray details accumulated here he is mostly cruel, loutish, self-centred.

Freud probably was all of these things, some or most of the time. But there is never a sense of seeing him whole in *Breakfast With Lucian*. Greig turns him into a cartoon, a man without texture.

Almost our last image of Freud here, appropriately enough, is of him two years before death, during a photo-shoot, bopping a wild zebra on the nose. The animal bolted, and he clung to it. He was sent to the hospital with a groin strain, though many feared he’d been hurt much worse. It all worked out, sort of. Kate Moss showed up and gave the wicked genius “a cuddle in bed”. *The New York Times*

Expat brings New Delhi alive in entertaining detective series

British author and New Delhi resident Tarquin Hall is the creator of Vish Puri, India’s “most private investigator”. Vish Puri solves crimes with panache, even as he pooh-poohs Sherlock Holmes. He also eats his way through the streets of Delhi and silently suffers the meddling ways of his mother, the venerable Mummy-ji. Alexander McCall Smith has called the Vish Puri books “little gems”. In the fourth and latest in this series, *The Case of the Love Commandos*, Hall delves into complex issues such as caste, “love marriage” and politics. He talks to **Charukesi Ramadurai**

Before Vish Puri, your writing was primarily non-fiction. What prompted this move to detective fiction? What especially made you create a middle-aged Punjabi detective?

I was looking at writing a book about modern India. Inevitably it would have been a book about economics and politics, and the people in the middle of it all. It might have been good, but probably have been pretty dull. Then I did a feature story for *The Sunday Times* newspaper in Britain on real Delhi detectives and how they make their bread and butter doing matrimonial investigations. I profiled two of them and they were a lot like Puri: middle aged, intensely proud and capable. Afterwards I found myself thinking about how a mystery set in Delhi would be a great way of talking about modern India, of getting under the skin of the place. I liked the idea of having an older man because he would be able to look back on the changes and find himself at odds with the new landscapes developing around him. Also my wife has quite a few Punjabi uncles who are a lot like Puri, so I feel like I know that character inside out.

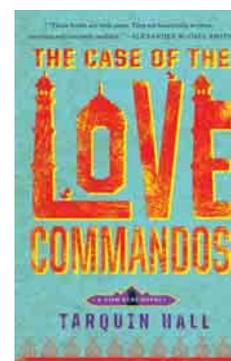
decision from the start or did this evolve as you went along?

My motivation was to write about India today, to describe the “churn” as you put it, but to make it accessible to readers in the rest of the world. I pick a different theme each time. The first book, *The Case of the Missing Servant*, is essentially about middle-class urban India and their relationship with society. Puri’s client is a lawyer fighting the Rajasthan water mafia; a poor girl from Jharkhand gets caught in the middle of it all. The third was all about Partition and the scars it left. My latest, *The Case of the Love Commandos*, talks about caste, genetics and identity. I also weave in lots of places of interest.

I know you live in Delhi, but in your Vish Puri books, you manage to establish a rather insider feel of the city, from the language to the way Delhi society thinks and moves. How did that come about?

I’m an outsider and of course I do get some details wrong from time to time. The sort of things that someone who grew up here would know inside and out I often have to ask about. That said, I have spent quite a lot of time here now, almost 10 years. And obviously I’ve got to know my wife’s family very well.

Although Delhi is a very frustrating place to live in terms of traffic, noise, pollution, not to mention inflation, bad schools and endless honking, it offers a lot in terms of history, sheer spectacle and, above all, friendships. I find it endlessly fascinating.



I have to ask about Puri’s relationship with his mother. Are there any particular insights about

older women in India on which you have chalked out Mummy-ji’s character?

No, not really. I’m not sure where Mummy came from. She kind of popped into the first book after someone tried to shoot her son. It was a natural progression and since then she’s stuck around, putting her nose where it doesn’t belong and invariably proving herself to be invaluable. I’ve grown to like her and she’s tremendous fun to write. I’m planning to write some short stories that feature her exclusively.

Finally, how do you see Vish Puri as being different from the countless other fictional detectives?

As you say they are “countless” detectives out there. For all I know there may be another overweight Punjabi middle-aged male detective. But he’s definitely authentic – the pride, boastfulness and the *jugaad* approach [a frugal, flexible attitude to innovation]. That’s all 100 per cent true to life. Also, I don’t think there’s another Indian detective who eats quite like he does. Not one with a love of chilli pakoras and chicken frankies, at any rate.

When people think of Indian detectives, they think of pre-matrimonial background checks. What else do they really do? What did you uncover during your research?

The detectives I met deal with all manner of cases. That’s what I find so fascinating about them. One told me that he went undercover in a Goa nudist colony – although I’m not sure I entirely believed him. But it’s kind of incredible what they get into: all the big crimes you would expect like murders, missing persons, kidnappings, blackmail, theft. Some of these investigations prove to be really complicated and require a huge amount of skill to solve. And then you have all the wacky stuff. Like dogs being kidnapped for ransom. And landlords wanting evidence that their tenants are eating meat when they’re supposed to be vegetarian. I love that sort of thing.

So far the books are set in the context of some “churn” in Indian society, like tension between the traditional and the modern. Was this a conscious