

Maharaja's heirs deny tale of illicit love

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Story of Indian prince's Spanish wife 'spiced up'. Descendants want to stop plans for Hollywood film

It is a rags-to-riches tale of a beautiful Spanish dancer who won the heart of a rich Maharaja during the last decades of the British Raj that has become a runaway bestseller and is about to be made into a Hollywood movie.

Written by Javier Moro, the book *Passion India* chronicles the remarkable life of Anita Delgado, who began life as the daughter of a cafe owner from Málaga and ended up petty Indian royalty. Sales of the book have already passed half a million. However, the descendants of Jagajit Singh, the former Maharaja of Kapurthala, are determined to block future royalties and the planned movie of the book's version of the royal romance by Penelope Cruz, the actor, who bought the rights after "falling in love" with the story.

The reason, say the present-day royal family, is that *Passion India* is a "scandalous portrayal" where the facts have been "spiced up". The book in Europe claims to a "real story" but the Indian version admits to be "fiction". Mr Moro considers the work "dramatised non-fiction" based on "research and interviews".

This has done little to mollify the maharaja's family. "It is full of scandalous sexual innuendo. My great-grandfather is portrayed as uncouth and unsophisticated man yet nothing could be further from the truth," said Tikka Shatrughit Singh said.

Mr Singh, who today acts as an adviser to luxury brands in India, said: "In the European edition it is subtitled a real story but in India there is a disclaimer to say it is fiction. I have consulted lawyers and we will seek to correct these inaccuracies." A hundred years ago Jagatjit Singh was a man of considerable wealth in what today is part of Indian Punjab. He mingled with kings in Europe and was a mixture of the modern and the medieval: keeping a harem at his palace while making female education compulsory in his realm.

The Maharaja fell in love, according to *Passion India*, with Anita Delgado, a teenage dancer in a Madrid nightclub, and took her to India to become his fifth wife. Considered beautiful and witty, the maharani Prem Kaur, as she was known, was showered with jewels and attention.

However, claims the book, when the maharaja's health failed his wife turned to the arms of one of his sons from another marriage. When the lovers were caught, says Mr Moro, she was banished to Europe with a generous settlement. "This is nonsense and we have her diaries to prove it. In fact all this has been done before by the Spanish press who fabricated reports after the maharani died. It is terrible that people can do this to the dead," said Mr Singh. However Mr Moro told the *Times of India* that the princess did have an affair. "It was reported by a French newspaper at the time." Claiming that his portrayal of the atmosphere of wealth and opulence showed the maharaja was "more human", Mr Moro added that "he was loved by his people yet he was a womaniser".