

## spotlight

MEET THE  
'PAST' MASTERAshwin Sanghi; (bottom): the cover of *Chanakya's Chant*

'I've always seen myself as a thriller writer,' says Ashwin Sanghi. As we see *Chanakya's Chant* fly off the shelves, we know that he has no illusions.

KUSUMITA DAS

THE ASIAN AGE

When Ashwin Sanghi started the process of writing *Chanakya's Chant*, the only thing he had in mind was to break away from the "desi Dan Brown" title which his first book *Rozabal Line* had earned him. "I wanted to test my ability as a storyteller and see if I could write a book that compels my reader to get to the conclusion," he says. Looking at the stupendous success *CC* has met with, one can safely say that he has achieved his goal. Currently the page-turner is ruling the number one spot on a leading magazine's list of bestsellers.

The mechanics of Machiavellian politics that veers between ancient and

modern history, seems to have gone down well with the masses, despite the popular notion of politics being "complicated".

Credit goes to his effortless storytelling which strings some gripping characters in a tight plot that imparts a few crucial history lessons in a fun manner, while also leaving a core message behind.

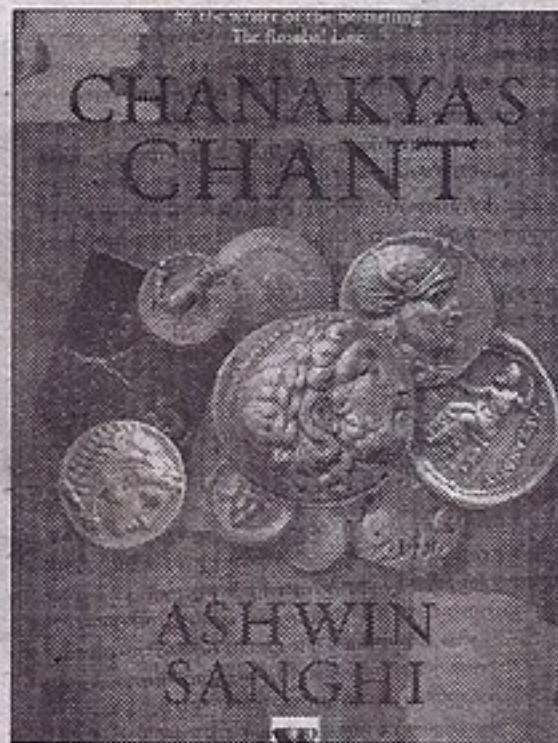
While there are instances of taking creative liberties, one must also remember that

Chanakya is one of the least documented characters in history. "While Puran has a few sketchy references, I got most of my material from the Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshash* and *Arthashashtra*, penned by Chanakya himself. What works to the advantage of writers like me, is the fact that there are huge gaps in history that we can fill with fiction. However, the writing process is not just based on gut instinct. In fact, a lot of rationality comes into play during the editing stage," says the author.

The idea of the book stemmed from his observation of present day politics. "Whenever I look around in today's political world, I feel a strange sense of déjà vu. It's like things haven't changed much from what they were 2,000 years ago," he says, adding, "In fact, politics today is so twisted, that Chanakya is more relevant than ever." After his debut novel, Ashwin says that he didn't want

to get boxed into the category of theology and religion. "One needs to set boundaries for himself. Religion is something you don't want to mess with. After *RL* I wanted to explore something completely different. If there is one thing I am terrified of, it is the audience's expectation of content. And this was my chance to explore politics," says Ashwin who considers *RL* to be his training ground. "I realised my mistakes but I feel my biggest advantage was that I gate crashed into writing with a novel, and not through short stories and blogging," he adds.

The device of parallel storylines seems to be the USP of the book. "If you want to succeed in the market you need to present your content in a very digestible format to the audience," observes Ashwin, who doubles as a businessman by day. Ask him what's the best compliment he's got for *CC*, and he beams: "A day after the launch, someone called me and said he bunked office that day because he couldn't put the book down!"



## THIS DAY, THAT YEAR



April 18, 1963 saw the birth of one of America's most popular talk show hosts, Conan Christopher O'Brien. He is also known as the man who wrote for the iconic *Saturday Night Live* and was the writer and producer of *The Simpsons* for two years.