



Making MOST OF myth

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ASHWIN SANGHI'S TAKE ON HIS FOURTH BHARAT SERIES NOVEL

Ashwin Sanghi loves marrying myth with modern mayhem in parallel narratives to show how past mirrors the present and the future. Like the first three novels of his Bharat series, *The Sialkot Saga* also draws from both recent and ancient history to thread together the lives of two ambitious, treasure-seeking men trying to find their feet in a newly-minted independent India.

Dubbed as the Indian Dan Brown ever since his debut novel on Jesus Christ, *The Rozabal Line* — a tag that he tries hard to shrug off — Sanghi has also co-authored a crime thriller set in Mumbai with James Patterson. *Forbes* India included him in its Celebrity 100 rankings. His second novel, *Chanakya's Chant*, received the 2010 Vodafone-Crossword Popular Choice Award. He will be in the city on Saturday for an interaction with Amit Rawat about the book, which was launched in April this year. Excerpts from an interview:

So, your business background finally caught up with you. The murky pursuits of money feature prominently in *The Sialkot Saga*. Which of your two protagonists do you most identify with?

The Marwari-Baniya DNA is a powerful one! It was inevitable that it would catch up with me. I was a businessman for the better part of 20 years before I took to writing. During my early writing career, I stayed away from business-oriented topics. But, after I wrote *Chanakya's Chant*, which dealt with the games people play in politics, I was convinced that I could easily write a book about the games people play in business. The story of Arvind being sent to learn accounting from the munimji at his father's Calcutta office could easily be my own

story as a teenager. But, I hope neither of the protagonists are like me!

How keen a student of history were you? If you were, why do you want to retell past facts in the garb of fiction?

Spanish novelist George Santayana famously remarked, "History is a pack of lies about events that never happened, told by people who weren't there." I was fascinated by history during my school years but later began to question it. The problem with history is that it is political. But, fiction gives me the necessary elbow room to introduce viewpoints without treading into a political quagmire.

The Sialkot Saga also has a fair sprinkling of India's pre- and post-Independence history. How did you research for two different chronologies this time? And, what were the hiccups?

Believe it or not, my research started with an Excel spreadsheet! The first column plotted the years from 1947 to 2010. The next two calculated the ages of the two protagonists, Arvind and Arbaaz, in each of those years. The fourth tracked what was happening in India — politically, economically and culturally. The last column had what each of them would have been doing during that time period. The ancient track involving Ashoka, Samudragupta and so on was the easier bit. But, trying to get the contemporary history of India right was tough. Movies, music, restaurants, celebrities and culture are usually never part of the historical narrative, but it's these that provide the flavour of the time. Extensive interviews with people who had lived those years in those cities filled those gaps. It finally resulted in a plot outline that ran to over 10,000 words.

From Mumbai's violent underbelly to a quasi-free economy's frantic gold rush, you have tried to showcase a nubile India's post-Nehruvian mayhem. Fiction aside, where do you actually see the Indian economy going?

I believe that India continues to be a beggar sitting on a golden bench. How is one to make the beggar wake up and realise the value of the bench he is sitting on? I believe that the period from now stretching to 2050 will see transformative change. It will be messy and surrounded by political cacophony, but it will come for sure.

Like *Chanakya's Chant*, do you have any silver screen plans for *The Sialkot Saga* as well?

The Chanakya's Chant project never took off. *The Krishna Key* is currently being scripted and, if all goes well, we should have a movie in a couple of years. *The Sialkot Saga* spans the lives of the protagonists over 63 years (1947 to 2010). I am not sure whether a movie will be able to effectively compress the story into 140 minutes. It seems a natural candidate for a TV series, though.

What else do you have up your sleeve?

Working with James Patterson was a great experience. *Private India* even hit the *New York Times* bestsellers' list. We are currently working on another one and hope to publish it by the end of the year. My foray into non-fiction, *13 Steps to Bloody Good Luck*, is being developed as a series of books written by co-authors and edited by me. I hope to bring out the first book in this series later this year. My next book in the Bharat Series will probably happen in early 2018.

WHERE: Crossword Bookstore, Ozone, Aundh
WHEN: May 28, 6 pm



Bake it good

Nurture your love for baking at the Nim's Cake n Craft Studio. This time around, they are back to help you master the art of eggless baking. The eggless baking workshop will include some classic cakes with icing, cupcakes and tea time cakes.

WHERE: Nim's Cake n Craft, Jangli Maharaj Road
WHEN: May 2 **CALL:** 8888884747



Setting the beat

Taal Inc. will play a set of West African rhythms apart from featuring some new guests in their ensemble. Besides, there will be surprises in store. DJ Sonu will also be performing.

WHERE: Euriska, Koregaon Park
WHEN: May 27, 9 pm



Drink and be merry

Bar Bar will be celebrating its first anniversary with free shots for the first 50 people who walk in. So, head to the venue to participate in the merriment and taste some great food.

WHERE: Level 1, Phoenix Marketcity, Vimannagar
WHEN: May 30, 3 pm onwards



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