

# Entrepreneur by day, novelist by night



**Ashwin Sanghi** is aware that making a film that has multiple stories and moves from one city to another will be a complicated task, says **Madhur Tankha**

His first book interspersed with religion and history was lapped up by bibliophiles. Encouraged by the readers' response, Mumbai-based author Ashwin Sanghi is now giving finishing touches to a script adapted from his book "The Rozabal Line" that will be made into a feature film.

Ashwin is aware that making a film that has multiple stories and moves from one city to another will be a complicated task: "Sometimes the stories narrated in the book are about 3000 B.C. and 5000 B.C. The film will have to be shot in multiple locations as the book moves from India to Afghanistan to Iran to Japan. The film-maker will have to understand all the nuances from the book to make the film relate to the audience."

The author-turned-scriptwriter doesn't want to restrict the scope of the script by concentrating only on Bollywood. He is working on the script along with his friend Uday Gunjekar, who is based in the US and makes travelogues: "For years I was not even in touch with Uday. One fine day he called me after reading my first book that was written under my pseudonym and said we should start working on the script. He is probably one of those who know the ins and outs of the book."

Producers or production houses would be approached towards the beginning of next year when a fully-bound script that has an international appeal is ready.

"It has to be a manageable script, possibly one that any film-maker of world-class status would like to lay his hands on. My gut feeling tells me that it will be some production house from the United Kingdom. However, the director can be someone from our country. We here have some fine Indian film-makers who are well connected with international production



## **BUSINESSMAN BY PROFESSION:** *Ashwin Sanghi*

houses."

Making it clear that he is not cut out for the task of directing his film, Ashwin says he is a good story-teller.

"At the end of the day, I am basically a raconteur but am not competent enough to make a film that would involve different stages of film-making and have diverse and difficult characters. But I feel that we need newcomers as far as the star cast is concerned. If we rope in a big star then he would only be playing himself. So we need a fresh face the audience can identify with. Even my book was a maiden venture and it became so successful."

Ashwin is satisfied by the fact that his book has given a fillip to tourism in the trouble-torn State of Jammu & Kashmir.

"After Lonely Planet highlighted that my book has mentioned that Jesus Christ was buried in Kashmir, a number of tourists have been flocking to the Rozabal shrine." The fictional element in the book, an amalgamation of comparative religion and conspiracy theories, has been compared with Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* although the historical basis of the novel draws from several other books on the subject including *Jesus Lived in India* by Holger Kersten and *The Unknown Life of Jesus* by Nicolas Notovich.

Pointing out that *The Rozabal Line* was originally published in 2007 under his pseudonym, *Shawn Haigins*, Ashwin says it was actually an anagram of the author's real name: "I wrapped up the book towards the end of 2005. However,

for the next one and a half years I was extremely frustrated because I could not find any publisher. The self-published book sold surprisingly well on *Amazon.com* and then caught the attention of Westland Books. The novel was subsequently published as an Indian edition in 2008 by Westland under my name and went on to become a bestseller...."

While Ashwin is heartened by the fact that Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* has given a huge platform to Indian film-makers to rope in big international production houses, he nevertheless is in disagreement with what has been depicted in that film.

"My film is going to be different from *Slumdog Millionaire*. While it highlighted India's abject poverty, my film will bring self-pride among Indians. Some readers have told me that Boyle's film demeaned Indians as it showed slums and poverty-stricken people. They thought my book was packaged in a way that it was immensely readable and made them feel that India was all set to become an economic super power. It was always a spiritual super power. So this is what we have to highlight in the film," he says.

A businessman by profession, Ashwin was educated at Cathedral and John Cannon School, Mumbai, and St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. He went on to complete his MBA from Yale University, joining his family's business interests in automobiles, real estate, exports and manufacturing in 1993. He continues to work full-time while pursuing his literary interests part-time.

Ashwin's passion for reading was ignited when his maternal grandfather Ram Prasad Gupta would bombard him with books that were far ahead of his time.

"He would insist that after reading every book I must write a letter detailing what I liked and what I didn't. In the beginning, it was a tedious process but my imagination and knowledge has increased over the years," he adds.

A workaholic, Ashwin is also pursuing a Ph.D. in creative writing from the University of Wales, which he hopes to complete by 2011.