

# Sanghi's new mantra, *Chanakya's Chant*

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Ashwin Sanghi is out with his new book, *Chanakya's Chant*. City Express caught up with him while he was in Bangalore

**A**fter the phenomenal success of his controversial debut, *The Rozabal Line*, Ashwin Sanghi, an entrepreneur by profession, is ready with his second book, *Chanakya's Chant*. Shashi Tharoor while releasing the novel in Mumbai called it an "enthralling, delightfully-interesting and gripping read with historical research that is impressive."

The story moves between the past and the present, tracing the lives of the great Indian stateregist Chanakya, the power behind the king Chandragupta Maurya and Gangasagar Mishra, a Brahmin teacher from a village in present day India, the brains behind thrusting a little slum girl to become the Prime Minister of the country. We find out more from the author.

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■ **In *The Rozabal Line* you were dealing with a more sensitive topic (Jesus coming to India). With *Chanakya's Chant*, do you think you will attract less attention from the critics?**

I've never written for the critics. There was once a review that said, 'Ashwin Sanghi should have stopped after page 10.' But you can't listen to all that. You have to just keep writing.

■ **But readers, especially Christian readers, were not happy with *The Rozabal Line*. What is the worst criticism that you received from them?**

We are a country sensitive about religions and faith. Even when it comes to historical characters, it has a tendency to set off sparks. Unfortunately, we can deal with bad roads and bad governance, but not faith. People either hate my books or love it. Of course, there were many criticisms. There is a gentleman who till today sends me his blessings to 'save my soul'.

■ **The *Rozabal Line* was tagged as 'the desi Da Vinci Code'. That was pretty unfortunate considering your book was not much**

**like that of Dan Brown's.**

True. That tag turned out to be negative for me. The final turn my book took was not like *The Da Vinci Code*. *Rozabal Line* left you with a philosophical ending. A lot of people found the two books completely different. But if there is anything written about Jesus, people naturally link it with *The Da Vinci Code*.

■ **Do you think you did not find publishers because not many Indian authors write historical thrillers?**

The fact is that Indian authors were 'not supposed to' write historical thrillers. There was no benchmark when I had to self publish *The Rozabal Line*. But that scene is changing now. There are many authors who have started experimenting with different genres. We have started filling the layer between

the two slices of bread – award winning literature and chicklets.

■ **So, what made you come up with *Chanakya's Chant*?**

I wanted to write a fast-paced fiction this time. A couple of years ago, I was sitting in the airport in New Delhi and watching TV. The UPA government was coming into power. That was when I thought, 'has it always been this messy to create a government?' Was it this messy 2300 years ago? Yes. The dynamics were the same then. The only difference is that, then, kings went into battle and now people go to elections.

So I wanted to explore the topic.

Secondly, I was brought up in a business background. So anything remotely associated with the game theory fascinated me. I'm a fundamental believer in the power of *Shakti*. I wanted to explore that too. In the book, the power of Chanakya is your's

to take, provided that you use it for a woman. And today, is the age of women power.

■ **The dangerous thing about writing historical fiction is that you can end up diluting history. How did you manage to strike the balance?**

You need to have an internal barometre. I saw that more when I was writing *The Rozabal Line* than *Chanakya's Chant*. But when you are dealing with the very ancient, it gives the author full play. But having said that, the principle I've worked on is 'do no harm.'

■ **You have shown Chandragupta Maurya as a subversive man. But that was not the case in reality.**

I needed to do that. In the book I had to focus on two characters – Chanakya, from the past and Gangasagar Mishra from the present. I needed to make them the be all and end all. The historical bit in the book is also fiction. I have taken liberties in timelines and ancillary characters.

**Ponnu Elizabeth Mathew**

