

★ **Vinod Mahanta** ★

**O**n a digital photoframe, the pictures of Buddha, Gurunanak, and Jesus among many other gods keep changing. Every morning at his plush Napean Sea road apartment, Ashwin Sanghi lights an incense stick in front of the ever-changing gods on the screen before rushing off to work. And it's the same amalgam of tradition and modernity that Sanghi, a director of MK Sanghi Group, doles out in his books. His last two books, 'The Rozabal Line' (2008) and 'Chanakya's Chant' (2010) can be best described as racy fiction woven around bits of history, mythology and religion. A reluctant writer, Sanghi, an MBA Finance from Yale, calls his genre 'faction' (fact+fiction). His third book 'The Krishna Key' has just hit the stands. Speaking with CD he discusses the money, mythology and his motivations. Edited excerpts:

**How come a believer in Laxmi started chasing Sarawasti?**

In the Sanghi family there is no one who has undertaken intellectual pursuits. But my maternal grandfather sent me a new book every week for years since the time I was 12. He would say Laxmi is very chanchal make sure that Saraswati is with you. The tradition carried on till I was 23. That inculcated in me a passion for reading.

**And how did that translate into writing?**

When I came back from Yale, I started working with my dad. For next 12-13 years I didn't do anything apart from business. In 2002, I was going through a rough patch and getting very frustrated. On my wife's suggestion, I took a holiday to Kashmir. While at Srinagar, I went to Rozabal. The myth is that Jesus was buried there. I was so taken by the story that for next fifteen months, I read everything I could lay my hands on about the subject, some 60 books. On another holiday in Goa, my wife suggested I write a story based on the facts I had gathered. I sat down and wrote 4000 words in 5 days. That's where it became interesting and over the next year I completed the story.

**Often when creativity flows onto the business side, it's either a great combination or a complete disaster. How has your experience been?**

What I have found is that in a family business structure sometimes what is needed is a sense of discipline rather than creativity. You have to take everyone's ideas and make it work. When you are dealing with money, there is a limitation on how creative you can be. Till the time I found a creative outlet, I was trying to be extra creative at business which would always put me in a situation of conflict with other stakeholders. The moment I started writing my creative impulses were finally channelised. So now I go with flow in business rather than being in a conflicted state.

**You have spent so much time researching the facts about personalities like Jesus, Krishna, and Chanakya and also exploring deeper philosophical questions in our ancient texts. How has this affected the way you think?**

Of course, you tend to internalise some things. At times it changes the thinking on certain concepts. For example, at the time I was writing 'Rozabal Line' I was heavily influenced by Brian Weiss and Raymond Moody. The whole idea of past life and karmic balance was top of mind. Recently when I was writing 'Krishna Key', a lot of my thinking was related to how did the universe come about, what does the big bang tell us. Is it possible to co-relate the Big Bang with Einstein, and is it possible to co-relate Einstein with Upanishads? At times, I start thinking of myself as a bundle of energy with possibly some amount of intelligence attached. My thinking on the universe as a whole has undergone a change. So I think there's something Karmic about what's happening to me or some random generation mathematical model at work. When you live with a subject for 9-10 months, it changes your thinking.

## SOCRATIC DEBATE

**Writing is a lonely activity while businessmen have to be amongst people all the time. How do you manage that duality?**

I have always been a bit of an introvert. In fact my dad used to force me to meet people so that my interpersonal skills improve. As an individual I was happiest when left alone. My mom explains it best. She says if I hadn't become a writer I would have become a Sanyasi. She says you continue to be with your business but everyday you retreat into your goofa to write. It's the way destiny plays out. Fortunately my family has been very supportive though in the beginning they were very concerned that I might turn into a writer.

**Now with fat royalties, writing has become another viable career option. Ever thought of turning into a fulltime writer?**

If I wanted I could pick up writing as a fulltime vocation and still be able to maintain my lifestyle. At the moment, when I leave home every morning that's for work. When I come back in the evening to write for 2 hours, that's my passion. I don't do it because I need it. If I make writing my work, I don't know whether I'd have any passion left.

**How many rejections did you face before you self published your first book?**

I wrote to about 200 odd publishers and literary agents. Most of them didn't even reject they just didn't reply. About 30-40 of them replied thank you but no thank you.

**Why hide behind a pseudonym Shawn Higgins for your first novel 'Rozabal Line'. Was it fear of rejection?**

I didn't want the world to know it was me. I am an atrocious writer and I was worried that people would make fun of me. I also have a reputation as a businessman so I thought if someone wanted to throw a stone, let them throw it at someone they didn't know. Also with the kind of writing I wanted to do, I didn't want my avatar as a businessman to become a constraint. I also didn't want people to get confused about my identities as a business person and a writer.

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Best selling author  
and businessman  
**Ashwin Sanghi** on money,  
mythology and motivation

# The Storyteller

