

# 'Not interested in writing for films'

**Ashwin Sanghi's book *Chanakya's Chant* will soon be presented on celluloid by UTV. Besides, there is much to know about this dedicated writer. An interview by karan bhardwaj**



TO write his latest book *The Krishna Key*, Ashwin Sanghi read over 50 books, including the *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsa*, *Kalki Purana* besides more than a hundred research papers and spent several weeks on travel. All his books are primarily inspired by history and mythology. Sanghi is an entrepreneur by profession but writing historical fiction in the thriller genre is his passion and hobby. Having authored three books so far, the fourth and fifth are already on the cards. Educated at Cathedral and John Connon School (Mumbai) and St Xavier's College (Mumbai), he also holds a Masters degree from Yale and is working towards a PhD in creative writing. Based in Mumbai with his wife and son, the writer reveals that reading and writing was an integral part of his childhood life.

**What makes history and mythology exciting for you?**

It is often said that a myth is a lie that conceals a deeper truth. For most of us, this means that a

myth usually contains a message such as the victory of good over evil or the triumph of dharma. But what if we were to interpret this sentence more literally? What if we were to peel away the layers of myth and find that the myth in question was actually based upon a historical event or character? Wouldn't it be exciting if we could go back in time and find that the mythological persona of Rama or Krishna was based upon real historical characters that lived and walked the very same earth? That thought is what gets my adrenaline pumping.

**But your education was in business. How did history happen?**

My life has been that of a businessman. My schooling and graduate and post-graduate studies were entirely oriented towards business and economics, not history or mythology. After 25 years in the business world, I visited Kashmir and found a tomb called Rozabal. The popular folklore around the tomb was that Jesus Christ lay

buried there. I was fascinated by the story and spent the next one year reading volumes of material on the subject. It eventually resulted in my first book, *The Rozabal Line*. The success of *The Rozabal Line* prompted me to write another piece of historical fiction, *Chanakya's Chant*. History, mythology and theology excite me. I get even more thrilled when the lines between these three subjects tend to blur.

**What drove you towards *The Krishna Key*?**

After writing *Chanakya's Chant*, I was looking for a story that I could sink my teeth into. At a friend's house, someone mentioned to me the fact that the prophesised appearance of the tenth avatar of Vishnu ~ Kalki ~ was very similar to the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelation in the Bible. That got my brain into overdrive. I spent a week reading the *Kalki Purana* and there was no looking back. I have always been fascinated by the *Mahabharata* period. What excites me is not the mythology but the possibility that the epic may be based on historical truths. *The Krishna Key* is my quest to provide an entertaining read while attempting to nudge the *Mahabharata* and the character of Krishna from the mythology section of the library into the history section.

**Can you throw some light on the research work for this book?**

The research was at several levels for *The Krishna Key*. First, I wanted to examine historical material that could tell us that Krishna existed, not merely as a mythological character, but as a historical one. Second, I wanted to examine the events of the *Mahabharata* in order to interpret them in a contemporary frame of reference. Finally, I needed to study archaeological evidence in relation to Dwarka. I ended up reading over 50 books ~ including the *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsa*, *Kalki Purana* ~ besides more than a hundred research papers and spent several weeks on travel.

**The rights for *Chanakya's Chant* has been bought by UTV. Are you excited?**

It is true that the movie rights of *Chanakya's Chant* have been bought by UTV. Their team consists of a bunch of professionals, who are dedicated to producing quality stuff and I consider myself fortunate that they have chosen to make this film. Scripting *Chanakya's Chant* for Bollywood is a challenge because the story is set in two separate time periods. Balancing aesthetic flavour of the historical story with the objective of commercial success is the key challenge.

**How much will you be involved in this film on your book?**

Hardly at all. Most authors tend to be in love with every scene that they put into their novels. This means that they are disinclined to allow deviations from the original story. I have watched

great films like *The Godfather* that were based on books that weren't outstanding. I have also seen films like the *Da Vinci Code*, which were rather mediocre in comparison to the original novel. I am practical enough to realise that a good book does not always make a great movie. The adaptation and approach in conversion is key and that is an art much better understood by others.

**Do you want to write for films?**

No. I have no interest in writing for films. I have story ideas for my fourth and fifth novels already in my head and I wish to concentrate on those.

**What drove you towards writing at first?**

My passion for reading was ignited when my maternal grandfather bombarded me with books that were far ahead of my 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 increased over the years. I was 35 by the time I sat down to pen my first novel ~ rather late in life. By that time, I had already been working for around 15 years in various divisions of my family's business. I had reached a point in my life when business growth was no longer exciting me. I was going through a difficult patch at work and I needed an activity that would anchor me and hold me steady in turbulent times. My wife and I were in Goa on a

holiday and she insisted that I use the trip to write a few pages of a story idea that I had discussed with her. At the end of that trip I had typed out around 10,000 words. There was no looking back.

