

# A 'RESTLESS BUSINESSMAN' WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THREE BEST-SELLERS

What do J.K. Rowling of *Harry Potter* fame, Richard Bach (who wrote the classic *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*), Stephen King, the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series and Margaret Mitchell who penned *Gone with the Wind* have in common with the portly son of PP Mahendra and Manju Sanghi?

If the five world-renowned authors participated in a contest to display the highest number of rejection slips for their first works, they would be beaten hands-down by the young Mr. Ashwin Sanghi who received 47 for his first book, *The Rozabal Line*! (Rowling received 12 slips, Bach 18, King 30, *Chicken* 33 and Mitchell 38.)

The rejection slips made him adopt the pseudonym Shawn Haigins and go for self-publication; but once he was able to discard the anonymity of his *nom de plume* and regained his identity, he got back his rather laconic, self-deprecating wit; as proof of which he described himself as follows – “a pot-bellied Marwari businessman”.

Now a best-selling author whose three works of fiction had clocked combined sales of nearly half a million, Mr. Sanghi was the guest speaker at the last meeting and spoke on “History, myth, fact and fiction”.

Mr. Sanghi, who was introduced by Dolly Thakore, started by saying that he was a very lucky man who appeared to have everything cut out for him in life. He went to the right school and then to the right college; he went to Yale for his MBA; married the right woman; and slipped comfortably into his father's business.

Yet, there was something that made him restless. He was not quite smitten



*I hold the world record of 47 rejection slips! The young author, Mr. Ashwin Sanghi, speaks at the last meeting*

by the kind of life that lay ahead of him. A few years after his 30th birthday, when he should have been secure in the fact that his future had already been chalked out, he was overcome by a restlessness that made him question himself.

Was this the life that he wanted to lead? Was he not in a rat race? And did he realise that even if he won the rat race, he would still remain a rat?!

The answer came to him in a fortuitous manner. While on a holiday in Goa with his wife, he happened to read a book *Jesus Lived in India* by a German scholar Holger Kirsten which held him spellbound.

**He had heard about the Rozabal shrine in Kashmir and knew that there were two bodies in it. One of these belonged to the 14th century and had a north-south burial (an Islamic burial); the second body was under the first one. It probably dated back to 112 AD and was buried in an east-west direction (making it a Jewish burial).**

This story fascinated him and he spent the next one year reading everything available on Jesus, his missing years, the Rozabal shrine and other historical markers pertaining to that period

Among the latter was the work of a Russian explorer, Nicolas Notovitch, who came to India in 1887. He had

found a scroll in a monastery in Ladakh which talked about one Isa and said that he had come there at the age of 13 to study under Buddhist masters.

Mr. Sanghi said he was so engrossed with this story that he soon had “50 or 55 books swirling around in my head and I had reached a point of analysis paralysis!” Then his wife suggested the stringing together of all that he had read into some kind of theory.

That was the first time that he thought of converting what he had read into a story. Soon, he decided to write a book, not a non-fiction tome that would end up as yet another dusty book on a dusty bookshelf, but to write it as fiction so that it entered the popular imagination.

“And so I started to write *The Rozabal Line*. I had never written more than 1,000 words but I would rush home every day after work to sit at the computer and start writing. I used to wait for the day to end so that I could start. And I would write till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. Soon enough I had about 100,000 words done and at that point I thought my work was over...”

“Then I started submitting my manuscript to editors, publishers and literary agents.”

That was when reality hit him hard. He received not one or two but 47 rejection slips. At his wits' end, he re-

arranged the letters of his name on a Scrabble board and came up with the pseudonym Shawn Haigins and self-published his first novel in 2007. It went on sale through the website [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

As luck would have it, a copy of the book reached Ms Hemu Ramaiah who was setting up the Landmark chain of bookstores. She managed to track him after a source at Random House told her that Shawn Haigins was actually “a pot-bellied Marwari businessman”.

When they met, she wondered why he hadn't published his book in India. He said he had been rejected by all the publishing houses. But she insisted that it was good and required a re-launch.

**Soon, the author called Shawn Haigins was killed and from his remains emerged the real author, Ashwin Sanghi, who was told to quickly develop a thick skin because all creative work attracted criticism.**

He was extremely anxious when the first review was about to appear in *The Hindu Literary Review*. It was written by Mr. Pradeep Sebastian who lauded the author. He said, “Ashwin Sanghi is being compared to Dan Browne... but we do him the greatest disservice by comparing him to Dan Browne because he is so much more”.

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## Manish and Manojj to report activities

Manish Reshamwala, Chairman of the *Bhavishya-Yaan* Committee, and Manojj Patodia of the Committee for Scholarships and Loans, will speak for five minutes each at the meeting of October 9 on the activities conducted by their respective Committees.

These presentations are part of the series initiated in fulfilment of President Nowroze Vazifdar's promise to have all Directors report to members about the activities undertaken by the Committees in their charge.

The above Committees fall under the Avenue of New Generations: Education and the Director in charge is Madhusudan Daga.

## Forthcoming meetings

October 2, 2012

Public Holiday. There will be no meeting.

October 9, 2012

“Multiculturalism: The Singapore experience.” A talk by the Consul-General of Singapore, Mr. Chung Ying Lin.



# Ashwin Sanghi expects Hollywood producers to bag the movie rights of his new novel

(Continued from Page 1)

That was the moment, Mr. Sanghi said, when he felt that he had arrived and that he could finally consider himself to be a writer. True enough, publishers started chasing him, his three books had together netted sales close to half a million and he was getting movie offers for his books. His second book was *Chanakya's Chant* and the third was *The Krishna Key* which was released in August and had gone up to the top of the bestsellers' list in just eight days.

Turning to his areas of interest, Mr. Sanghi said he loved reading about history and myths, subjects that got his adrenalin pumping. It was often said that a myth was a lie that told the truth or that helped uncover a deeper truth. Thus, all his books, the first on Jesus, the second on Chanakya and the third on Krishna, required him to dig deep – beyond the myth – and to figure out something that could be considered historical about that particular subject.

He had noted that people loved fiction that sounded like fact and facts that sounded like fiction. That was perhaps the reason why many television channels reported news in a sensational manner, complete with an appropriate soundtrack to highlight the "sensational news". Just as they presented fact as fiction, there were people who wanted to read fiction that sounded real.

Mr. Sanghi then showed a few simple graphics to describe the manner in which he looked at things and how he gave thought and word to his ideas.

In *The Rozabal Line*, he had mentioned the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (in a triangle with the Father at the top). But then he was surprised to note the similar-

ity with the Hindu Trinities. While the male Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva was represented by a similar (phallic) triangle, the female Trinity of Laxmi, Saraswati and Kali was an inverted triangle and looked more like a womb.

**When the two (male and female triangles) were combined, it yielded a hexagon, with Brahma at the top and followed in a clockwork direction by Saraswati, Shiva, Kali, Vishnu and Laxmi. And eventually, the hexagon resulted in the Star of David! This knocked him down as a writer.**

Similarly, the number 786, said to be holy in Islam, was used by people in different settings. For his part, he first wrote it in Hindi and then brought the numerals closer, touching each other in such a way that the image in the mirror revealed the mantra *Aum*!

"This is how my brain works; you can call it my left brain or my right brain. But for me the fact is that 786 connects to *Aum*. It is extremely interesting for me as a fiction writer because that's where I take interest in my stories."

Similarly, Mr. Sanghi said, Abraham was the patriarch of Judaism and lived in a place called Sumer or Sumeria. The word meant Sumatra and was probably derived from Soma, Somrasa or Somvaar.

In another dexterous exercise, the guest speaker first spelled the name Abraham. He then moved the first 'A' to the end – thus getting Brahma. Next, he said, it was known that Abraham was married to a woman called Sara. Interestingly, Brahma's consort was Saraswati – and the first four letters spelt Sara.

This example once again proved his theory that there were many things common in many religions or beliefs if

one went back in history to study them.

"Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am'. As for me, writing a book is all about enjoying the journey writing it... I am before you today because I have my own version of Descartes, which is, 'I sink, therefore I swam'." (An allegorical allusion to the fact that he nearly sank under 47 rejection slips!)

Mr. Sanghi then answered questions.

He told Ashok Jatia that he was not keen on selling the movie rights to his new novel *The Krishna Key* because he expected to find a market in Hollywood which had already done Greek mythology and Roman history to death. Now the time was ripe for Hindu mythology and for Indian thought and spirituality to hit Hollywood screens.

President-Elect Nirav Shah raised a guffaw when he reminded the guest speaker that as Attendance Chairman he had written many letters to him on Attendance requirements. But now the rules were not as strict, so would he consider returning to the Club?

Mr. Sanghi disarmed Nirav by saying that he used to look forward to his letters. But he added that there were many other factors that had made him leave the Club.

Shailesh Raina asked whether he was contemplating a book comparing the major religions of the world as a unifying factor.

Mr. Sanghi said if one looked at the major thought and belief systems that existed, say, 5,000 years ago, one would find more things in common than one would expect. Bringing those things into the open would probably have a unifying rather than a divisive effect.

But for his next two books he was concentrating on a modern rather than an ancient sub-text. "Probably, five or seven years down the line, when I will

be a little more educated, that will be the time I will write on that... (the commonality of religions)".

PP Sandip Agarwalla wondered whether it was a mere coincidence that the three major religions of the world had their origin in Asia.

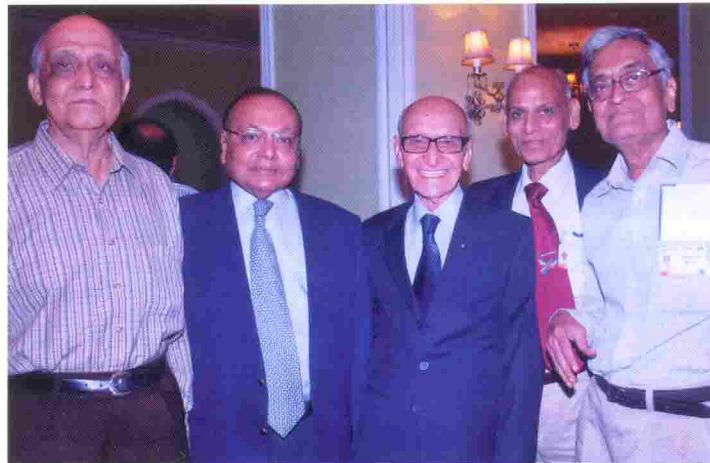
At this Mr. Sanghi regretted the "politicisation of history" as taught in the country. He said entire generations had been brought up thinking that there had been an "Aryan invasion" of India and that hordes of them had poured in from the western borders. Further, they were taught that at some point the invading Aryans had brought the Vedas and the Upanishads.

**"The funny thing is that we have this great civilization commonly known as the Indus Valley Civilization – but we don't have any literature associated with it. On the other hand, we have this humungous amount of literature in the Vedas and the Upanishads – which doesn't have a corresponding civilization attached to it!"**

"I find it incredible that historians for the last 50 to 100 years have completely ignored this. To a certain extent, it has a lot to do with the politicisation of history as it is taught.

"My personal view is, and I am prepared to be corrected... I believe that the Saraswati river was the lifeblood of spiritual thought in India. We have been reading in the Rigveda that some of the great kings lived along the banks of the mighty Saraswati. But for the last 40 to 50 years we were fed the notion that the Saraswati is mythical, that it doesn't exist. It is only in the last ten years that satellite images have shown that the dry river bed of the Saraswati does exist and that it flowed from the Himalayas to the Rann of Kutch."

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Enjoying the company of a former member. Mr. Ashwin Sanghi, who used to be a member of the Club, snapped with, from left, Apurva Diwanji, PP Sandip Agarwalla and Sameer Kaji. In the picture at right, Mr. Ashwin's proud father, PP Mahendra Sanghi, is flanked by Vasant Manohar, Natoobhai Brahmabhatt, Hon. Secretary Sitaram Shah and Dhananjaya Mehta



# 'If only people look at their mythology a little more seriously... that's what I do in my books'

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It was known that there was a river system that eventually dried up some 5,000 years ago, around 3000 BC. This suggested that climatic changes had forced migration to other places, climatic conditions being the biggest reasons for people to migrate.

That was also the time when the Ganges basin began to be inhabited, as did the Tigris and the Euphrates basins – in other words, weather changes around the Saraswati would have made the people move east or west. But the source was the same; the Saraswati was the source for all these developments and it was from there (Mesopotamia and Sumeria) that the Abrahamic religions eventually developed.

"When the origins are the same, the fundamental (original) thought processes also have to be the same."

Burjor Poonawala said he was not a very religious person. But he had read that religions were based on myths. If they were based on myths, it meant that people were looking at religions that had no truth in them.

"And if there is no truth in it, how can we believe in it? And yet, there have been more wars for religious reasons than for any other reason; more blood has been spilt during the wars of the roses; even in India and all over the world... and it is still happening."

Mr. Sanghi said every myth was based on a kernel of history; like an onion, one could peel off layers and eventually be left with a sliver of truth. India was famous for hero worship and deity worship. Mythological figures like Rama, Krishna and Buddha, all of whom were worshipped, must have been real individuals at some point of time.

There was a temple in Calcutta with a statue of film star Amitabh Bachchan

that was worshipped every day. At the same time, there were many youngsters who considered Sachin Tendulkar to be God. One thousand years from today, would there be temples devoted to Sachin and Amitabh? And would another Ashwin Sanghi and another Burjor Poonawala have a conversation wondering whether Sachin and Amitabh were real people or just myths?

"That's the way I like to think of mythology. I believe that at the end of the day, even if you do not take myths as the literal truth, you will see a significant dose of spirituality. If only people look at their mythology a little more seriously... that's partly what I do in my books. For example, my latest book, *The Krishna Key*, attempts to decipher whether Krishna was purely a mythological figure or was there a historical personality by that name? If yes, then can we move Krishna from the mythology bookshelf to the history bookshelf?"

Finally, Mudit Jain asked whether he believed what he wrote.

Mr. Sanghi made it clear that his novels were works of fiction (he called them "thriller fiction") and were meant to entertain. If they also educated and enlightened some people, that was a bonus.

There were many different theories, for example, about the life of Jesus. The Bible did not talk about 18 years of his life between the age of 12 and 33 which were known as the "lost years". There were also stories about Isa coming to study under Buddhist masters.

Closer home, behind the Taj Mahal Hotel, there were Kashmiri carpet-sellers with names such as Ahmed Joo, Mohammed Joo, Nazir Joo and so on. Where had the name Joo come from? It was actually Jew and they were from a settlement of Jewish people who had

come to Kashmir. Therefore, the ancient connection could not be ignored.

The same applied to Krishna. It was now possible to date the Mahabharata war with planetary evidence; there had also been recoveries from Kurukshetra, the Mahabharata battlefield, which indicated that the war had indeed taken place. Based on that, it would be possible to determine the date of the birth and death of Krishna.

Besides, a lot of other historical material was now available, for example, from the lost city of Dwarka that had been discovered off the coast of Gujarat. It was only a question of dating the material to see whether it fit in with the time period that had been spoken about.

"I think over a period of time, a lot of these little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle will come together and hopefully, at that time, we will have a very clear picture on many of these personalities. But obviously, (my books are) all in the realm of fiction," Mr. Sanghi added.

## September meetings of Office-Bearers

The following are the attendance statistics at the meetings of Office-Bearers during the month of September, 2012:

Number of meetings held	
President Nowroze Vazifdar	4
IPP Paul George	2
Nirav Shah	2
Ramesh Narayan	1
Sitaram Shah	4
Hiren Kara	4
Ishraq Contractor	1

## Meetings of Board of Directors

And here are the attendance statistics at the meetings of the Board of Directors in July-September, 2012:

Number of meetings held	
President Nowroze Vazifdar	3
IPP Paul George	3
Nirav Shah	1
Ramesh Narayan	2
Sitaram Shah	3
Hiren Kara	3
Ishraq Contractor	2
Dr. Vandana Bulchandani	3
Dr. Percy Chibber	2
Madhusudan Daga	2
Arjun Jolly	2
Ashok Minawala	2
Framroze Mehta	2
Sunny Pariyaram	2
Shermaz Vakil	2

## Why not get your favourite speakers at weekly meetings?

In pursuance of the President's request to all Directors and Committee Chairpersons to seek ways to improve the functioning and effectiveness of their Committees, the Programme Committee has invited members' views on the speakers they would like to hear at the weekly meetings, as also the subjects they would like them to speak on.

Members have also been requested to suggest good speakers whom they know personally and whom they can invite to the Club. Besides, they can come forward to formally introduce the guest speakers or to propose the vote of thanks.

For all of these purposes, they can contact Haresh Jagtiani at [hmj@hmjagtiani.com](mailto:hmj@hmjagtiani.com) or Anil Harish at [anil.harish@dmharish.com](mailto:anil.harish@dmharish.com).

## Birthday donations

President Nowroze Vazifdar at the last meeting thanked members who had made birthday contributions.

He said that Cyrus Guzder had donated Rs. 5,001, Khurshed Poonawala Rs. 3,000 and Aziz Jhaveri Rs. 2,500.

## For cancer patients

Hoshang Nazir and Khurshed Poonawala have donated Rs. 25,000 each to provide financial assistance to cancer-stricken patients.

President Nowroze Vazifdar thanked both members at the last meeting for their generous contributions.

## 'Oberoi Melting Pot':

## Gul requests support

PP Gul Kripalani made an earnest plea to members at the last meeting to support the forthcoming "Oberoi Melting Pot" as they had been doing over the years. The popular international cultural programme will be held for the 15th time this year in the Regal Room of The Trident Hotel from 6 pm on Sunday, October 14.

The Rotary Club of Bombay is one of the partners of the programme which, according to Gul, "will be an evening full of fun, frolic and entertainment... Over 150 food items representing the cuisine of some 30 countries will be prepared and served on the occasion. There will also be some wonderful wines, whiskies and delectable victuals."

The proceeds from the event would be given to four worthy causes chosen by the Rotary Club of Bombay in consultation with the other stakeholders.

The donor cards have been priced at Rs. 3,500 each and will be available at the Rotary Secretariat. Members may collect the same on payment of Rs. 3,500 per pass by means of a cheque drawn in favour of Rotary Club Bombay Charities Trust No. 3.



The guest speaker with old friends, fans and admirers. Mr. Ashwin Sanghi snapped with Chander Alimchandani, Shobha Jagtiani, IPP Paul George, First Lady Niloufer Vazifdar and PP Dr. Adi Dastur



## ROTARY CLUB OF BOMBAY

FOUNDED 19 MARCH, 1929

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### OFFICE-BEARERS 2012/13

**PRESIDENT** NOWROZE VAZIFDAR  
Immediate

Past President Paul George  
President-Elect Nirav Shah  
Vice-President Ramesh Narayan  
Honorary Secretary Sitaram Shah  
Joint Hon. Secretary Hiren Kara  
Hon. Treasurer Ishraq Contractor

### CLUB SERVICE: New Members

Director in charge Nirav Shah  
Membership PP Sandip Agarwalla  
Classifications PP Dr. Adi Dastur  
Information PP Dr. Kekoo Kavarana  
Membership

Development &  
District Conference Ramesh Narayan

### CLUB SERVICE: Programmes/Meetings

Director in charge Framroze Mehta  
Attendance Arvind Agarwal  
Programme PP Hareesh Jagtiani  
Fellowship PP Ashish Vaid

Bulletin, Website  
& Public Relations PP Arun Sanghi  
Sergeant-at-Arms Roda Billimoria

### COMMUNITY SERVICE: Medical - I

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Chairman Emeritus,

Talwada PP Dr. Rahim Muljani  
HTEC, Talwada PP Dr. Rumi Jehangir  
ADMC, Talwada Dr. Sorab Javeri  
Oral Health Dr. Rajeev Narvekar

### COMMUNITY SERVICE: Medical - II

Director in charge Dr. Vandana Bulchandani  
Control of TB Dr. Rohini Chowgule  
Cancer Aid Zinia Lawyer  
Heart Care and Health Dr. Aashish Contractor  
PolioPlus &

Differently Abled Shyamniwas Somani

### COMMUNITY SERVICE: Non-Medical

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RCC and Child Care Joseph Koshy  
Old Age Homes/ Senior Citizens Naresh Kumar Jain  
Rural Development Dilnavaz Variava  
Environment Jagdish Malkani

### VOCATIONAL SERVICE

Director in charge Shernaz Vakil  
Rotary & Public Awards Ram Gandhi  
Four-Way Test and Moot Court Contest Suhail Nathani  
Vocational Training &

Night Study Centres Bimal Mehta

### INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

Director in charge Ashok Minawala  
Rotary Foundation & Matching Grants PP Arvind Jolly  
R.I. Programmes & Slumber Kit PP Rajnikant Reshamwala

### NEW GENERATIONS: Education

Director in charge Madhusudan Daga  
Bhavishya Yaar Manish Reshamwala  
Scholarships & Loans Manoj Kumar Patodia  
Management Studies Poonam Kumar

### NEW GENERATIONS: Youth

Director in charge Arjun Jolly  
Interact Meera Alreja  
Rotaract Ravindra Fotedar  
Road Safety Deepak Kapadia

## Loans for vocational training: Interest rate as low as 2%

The Rotary Scholarships and Loans Committee has completed formalities whereby the Club has tied up with Union Bank of India for "Rotary loans" to be disbursed by the Bank to needy students wishing to undertake a Vocational Training Course to enhance their career prospects.

Among the vocational courses available to students are those for operating computers or learning trades such as electricians, plumbers, machine lathe operators and so on.

While the maximum loan amount has been pegged at Rs. 50,000, it has also been decided that the loan will have to be repaid within a period of two years along with interest at a highly subsidised rate of 4%.

However, in case a Rotarian comes forward to guarantee the repayment of the loan, then the amount will be directly disbursed by the Club itself. In such cases, the interest levied will be only 2%.

Application forms for the scheme are available at the Rotary office. Any member who wishes to help a needy and deserving student may contact Ashok Jatia for the same.

## 'The Joy of Giving' week at YMCA Boys' Home

Bimal Mehta, Chairman of the Committee for Vocational Training and Night Study Centres, has invited all members with their families, especially children, to a celebration of "The Joy of Giving" week at the YMCA Boys' Home in Versova, Andheri.

The event will be held from 3.30 to 5 pm on Saturday, October 6. Books, clothes and toys will be distributed and a game of basketball played.

Bimal has requested members who would not be able to attend to send their collections of old toys, books and clothes either to the Rotary office or to his residence (Villa Ramona, A.B. Dubash Lane, Off Matru Ashish, 37A Napean Sea Road, Mumbai 400036).

## Happy Birthday



Suresh Kotak  
October 2



Ramesh Mehta  
October 2



Purnima Sheth  
October 2



Alok Saxena  
October 3



PP Arvind Jolly  
October 5



Cavas Majai  
October 5



Meera Alreja  
October 6



Dr. Hemraj Chandalia  
October 7

## Spouses

Vijaya Venkatram

October 2

Vatsala Jatia

October 3

Amnavaz Poonawala

October 3

Rekha Ruia

October 3

Divya Mafatlal

October 5

Sweta Vakil

October 6

Arwa Tapia

October 7

Niloufer Vakil

October 7



Vikram Daiya  
October 7



Ritu Desai  
October 8



Sorabh Jain  
October 8



Vijay Jatia  
October 8

## At the last meeting

(Held on September 25, 2012)

### ATTENDANCE

Members	141
Visiting Rotarians	3
Rotaryanns	4
Guests	2
Total	150
Svc. box collection	Rs. 2,800

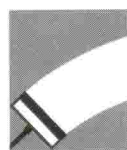


Poonam Lalvani  
October 8

## Service Above Self

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Clarity is  
our promise  
Windscreen Wipe