



I want to spin a good yarn



In the atelier
ASHWIN SANGHI

He calls himself a cultural oddity in a family rooted in business. "I was not given a choice when I was young," he says about his foray into business at the age of 15. "On weekends, I would be in the office, working," he says. As a full-fledged businessman, when some of his own ventures tanked, he decided to wield the pen. He packed his bags and went off for a week's vacation with his wife. The idea was to write. "Writing was a release of pressure," he says. Later, as his business picked up, he credits the creative side (that was unleashed as a writer) for the turnaround. He has worked for more than 26 years and says it is time to indulge in his writing. Even as a writer, he has adhered to his business mottos of stability, clocking good growth and a steady pace.

His latest book, *Krishna Key*, will be made into a film, essaying the same journey as his second book *Chanakya's Chant*. Ashwin Sanghi is an entrepreneur by day and a writer by night, says **Jayanthi Madhukar**

Don't you think modern-day mythology has been done more than enough – a la Amish, Ashok Banker?

Author Christopher Brooker researched for many years and inferred that there are just seven basic plots and thousands and thousands of stories follow them broadly. So, naturally you will see similarities. There are hundreds of ways of writing mythology. But mythology does not interest me as much as history. I have always been keen on studying how mythology and history overlap. Where one ends and the other takes over, that's the exciting part. My book sees the epic Mahabharata through contemporary eyes and I have done it in my style.

Talking about your writing style, you had said that you are a carpenter and not a painter.

It is about building a plot in a step-by-step manner. That's how I write. For *Krishna Key*, I did about 10 months of intense research. Nothing else. This is more about method. Later, before I started to write, I analysed what would be in the book.

Any challenges?

Not really. Actually, what I write follows a certain pattern. My first book, *The Rosabel Line*, was written purely for me, *Chanakya's Chant* was for my readers as I was intent on writing a best-seller since my publishers didn't want me to be a one-book wonder. Thankfully, it turned out to be a best-seller. And now *Krishna Key* is again for me. The bottom line is that I want people to remember me not as an entrepreneur

or as a writer, but as a story-teller. I want to spin a good yarn.

You have sold the movie rights of *Chanakya's Chant*. And now, *Krishna Key* too has takers. Will you now drift into script-writing as well?

No way. I will leave that to others. Popular author Wilbur Smith had said that he had earned half of his money just by selling the movie rights of his books. I will stick to that. For me, writing a book is about complete freedom. I can write what I want, make my characters go wherever I want. But in a script, for the sake of budget, I can't make them scurry across the length and breadth of the earth. I can't do certain things for the sake of entertainment. Some good books have been made into bad movies and vice versa.

In your 'struggling days' as an author, you wrote under a pseudonym. What was it?

Shawn Haigins. Look at it closely, it is the anagram of my name. My first book, *The Rosabel Line*, was rejected by all publishers possible when I sent the manuscript to their offices in 2005. I had always felt that the story was amazing. It was about a tomb that is in the middle of Srinagar's market. Popular myth says that Jesus was buried there. I read many books on it including that of the 19th century Russian explorer Nikolas Notovitch's *The Unknown Life of Christ*. I went and saw the ancient parchment in a monastery in Ladakh

which speaks of a young 13-year-old boy's visit centuries ago. But publishers thought that the book wouldn't sell. I had it self-published and tried all tricks of the trade to push its sales.

Books or people? Who inspired you?

Two people inspired me. One, my maternal grandfather who sent me one book every week since I turned nine. To make sure that I read them, he would ask me to write what I liked about the book in a postcard. The tradition continued even when I went to Yale for my degree. As far as books go, when I was 15, my grandfather sent me *The Autobiography of the Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda. Another book that really touched me is Edward Fitzgerald's translations of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

Heard you are co-authoring with American author James Patterson? Is it like a piggy-back ride to fame?

That man is a legend. A publisher heard that he was looking for an Indian author and immediately suggested it to me. Patterson wanted someone who would write in a certain way and incorporate mystical elements into the plot. I worked out an idea and converted it into a plot. Patterson gave me the green signal. The experience is like a masterclass in writing. He has given me valuable insights on how to end a chapter and how to create an 'easy read'.

