

RESEARCH IS NEEDED TO CREATE FICTION

Ashwin Sanghi, who has grasped the imagination of people with his novels, believes that mythology will never stop being a part of India

Anannya Chatterjee

An entrepreneur by profession, writing historical fiction in the thriller genre is Ashwin Sanghi's passion. His first novel *The Rozabal Line* was self-published in 2007. His second novel *Chanakya's Chant*, a political thriller with roots in ancient Mauryan history, shot into almost every bestseller list within a few weeks of its launch. In fact the novel even went on to win the Crossword Popular Choice award, and UTV-Disney acquired the movie rights.

His third book *The Krishna Key*, hit number one on the A.C. Nielsen all-India fiction rankings within the first week of its

release. In 2013, Sanghi was included in Forbes' India Celebrity India 100 Rankings. Now a part of the Tata Mumbai LitFest, this powerhouse of talent opened his heart out, talking about his books and his other desires. Excerpts:

What gave you the courage to follow your dream of being a writer?

Two reasons: The first was the fact that my grandfather was an avid collector of books and would share a book each week with me. This tradition carried on for almost a decade. The end result was that I became a voracious reader. However, I did not know that I would ever sit down to write a book. Almost ten years after joining business full time, I visited Srinagar. The town has a tomb in the old quarter dating back to 112 AD. There are two bodies buried there,

one from the fourteenth century—an Islamic burial in North-South direction; the other of much greater antiquity, buried in Jewish tradition of East-West. The popular folklore surrounding the tomb was that Jesus had survived the

crucifixion, travelled to India and lay buried there. I was utterly fascinated by this incredible story and spent the next eighteen months reading everything about the subject. At the end of this hectic research period I had mountains of information swimming inside my head and my wife suggested that I pen it down. That is how my journey began.

What is the writing process like for you? How does your story grow?

I work as a businessman from Monday to

Friday for forty hours a week. On weekdays, my writing usually happens early morning between five and eight o'clock. Saturday is a day when I catch up with my latest project because I am able to write or research for several hours at a stretch. Sundays are entirely for my family. I usually take around eighteen months to write a book. The first six months are spent on research; the next three months are devoted to building the plot outline; the following six months are used to write the story and the final three months for editing and

polishing. Characters are incidental to the plot. One starts out with stick figures and fleshes them out as the plot develops.

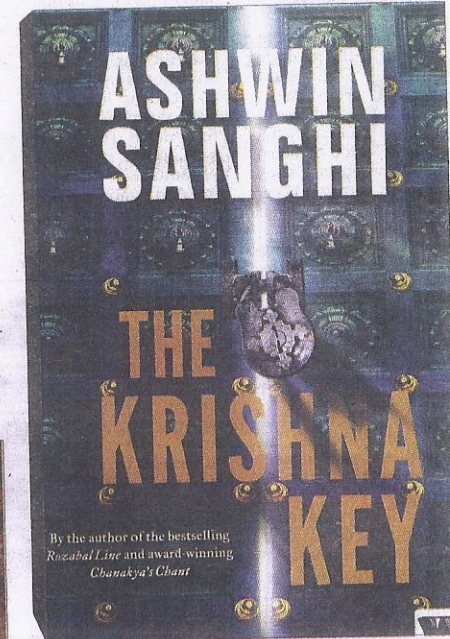
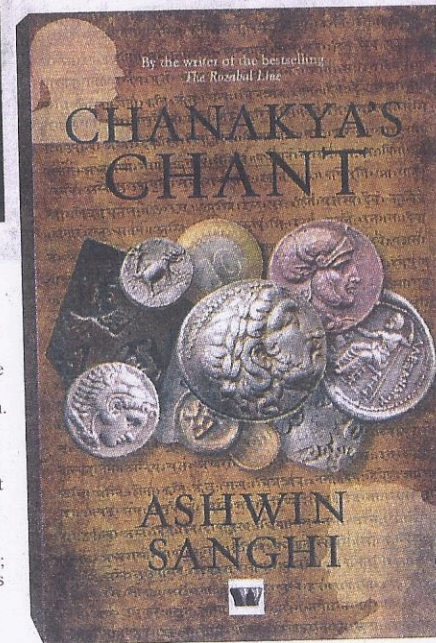
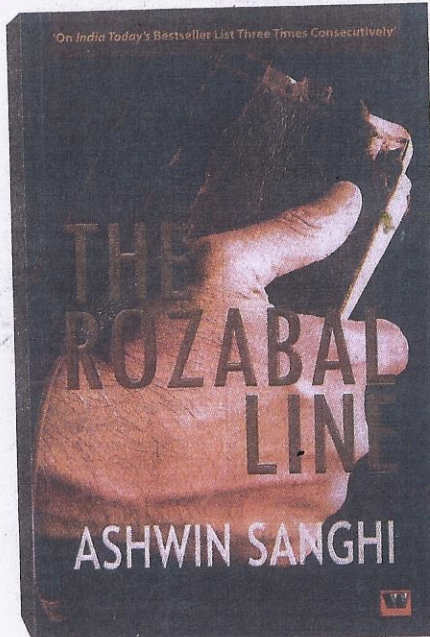
You have a fascination for history and mythology. How much do you enjoy the research that goes into creating these books and what advice would you give authors on research?

It is the starting point of the project. There is an old proverb which says if you are going to lie then lie as close to the truth as possible. That's precisely where research plays a role. It makes

your story much more believable. Having said that, however, research by itself cannot carry the story. Ultimately, research should be judiciously used to make the fictional plot and your characters seem much more real.

Indian authors have redefined the traditional notions of bestsellers these days. What would you attribute this rise of interest in reading?

I don't think India ever strayed away from mythology. The only difference was the pattern of consumption. When I

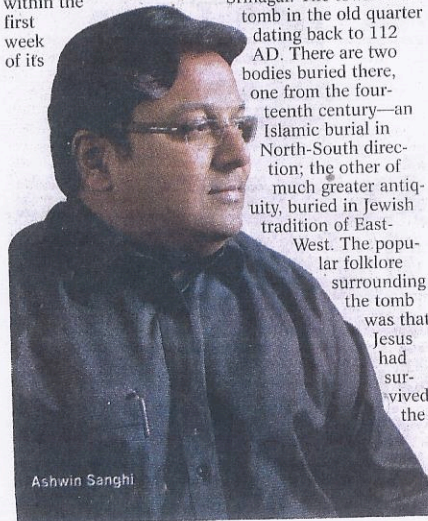


was growing up, I eagerly looked forward to reading my quota of Amar Chitra Katha comics from the neighborhood library. I also looked forward to weekends when I would visit my grandmother and she would narrate tales from epics. In later years, I began to look forward to the Sunday morning dose of Ramayana or Mahabharata. In the last few years TV cartoons have recreated for our kids the stories of Krishna, Ganesha and Bheema. The point that I am making is that Indian youth have always had

mythology surrounding them, but in different forms. The trend of mythology being retold in contemporary fiction is simply one more medium that has caught on.

What can your fans look forward to next?

I am currently co-authoring a crime thriller with James Patterson. This thriller will be published by Random House by mid-2014. I plan to follow that up with a business thriller that will be published by Westland towards the end of 2014.



Ashwin Sanghi