

Idea, Business and a Tale to Tell

Many entrepreneurs are turning into writers to chronicle their stories in both fictional and factual narratives

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Every startup has a story — of lofty dreams, soaring ambitions, sleepless nights and zero bank balances. Failure and success are so closely intertwined that only few survive to tell the tale. And who better to tell them than the entrepreneurs themselves?

As India's startup boom gains pace, entrepreneurs are turning into wordsmiths to chronicle the highs and lows of launching a business. They are penning both factual and fictional narratives of the country's nascent startup space with an eye to inspiring those keen to tread a similar path.

"My parents and family were not convinced when I planned to start an ecommerce company," says Varun Agarwal, founder of AlmaMater, a startup that sells merchandise to students. "Everyone thought it was for people who failed in college and couldn't get a job."

Frustrated by the lack of support, Agarwal, now 26, began venting his thoughts on a blog. Intrigued by the popularity of his online jottings, publishing house Rupa reached out to the young engineer with a proposal for a book.

Agarwal's racy narrative, "How I Braved Anu Aunty and co-founded a Million Dollar Company", has since sold 75,000 copies. "I looked up Google for advice on how to write a book," says the intrepid author who was dismayed he would have to turn out 50,000 words. A brief illness and forced recuperation gave him time to finally complete the task. "I wanted Anu aunty to be the reflection of all the negative forces that deter us away from entrepreneurship."

Literary fame has not dimmed the young en-

trepreneur's business instincts. Last year, AlmaMater received seed funding from the Indian Angel Network and expects to earn revenue of ₹7 crore in fiscal 2014. Agarwal who has also founded a production company, Last Minute Films, and Reticular, a social media marketing startup, is now planning a second book on his film-making experience.

"Startups by nature are interesting with certain quirks attached and when entrepreneurs translate this into a book it makes for interesting reading," said Kapish Mehra, managing director of Rupa.

Agarwal's book is selling well he said as it is a fictionalised account of his personal experience. "We have doubled the print run since publishing it first." For Vineet Bajpai, 35, his experience with teaching management studies made the book "The Street to the Highway" possible. Bajpai, who founded digital media agency Magnon Solutions in 2000, began with two rented computers in New Delhi, after quitting his job at GE Capital International Services.

"I have built it from scratch to a company with 250 employees and Fortune 500 clients" said Bajpai. He set out to write an essay on street-smart business that instead turned into a book that took him two years to complete. "The Street to the Highway" sold 4,000 copies in the first 30 days.

"While running a startup is a team effort, writing a book is a very lonely experience, and needs that much more willpower and discipline to complete. But both require the inner fire and passion," said Bajpai, whose new book "Build from Scratch" hit the stands only recently.

Online entrepreneurs Gagan Jain, 31, and

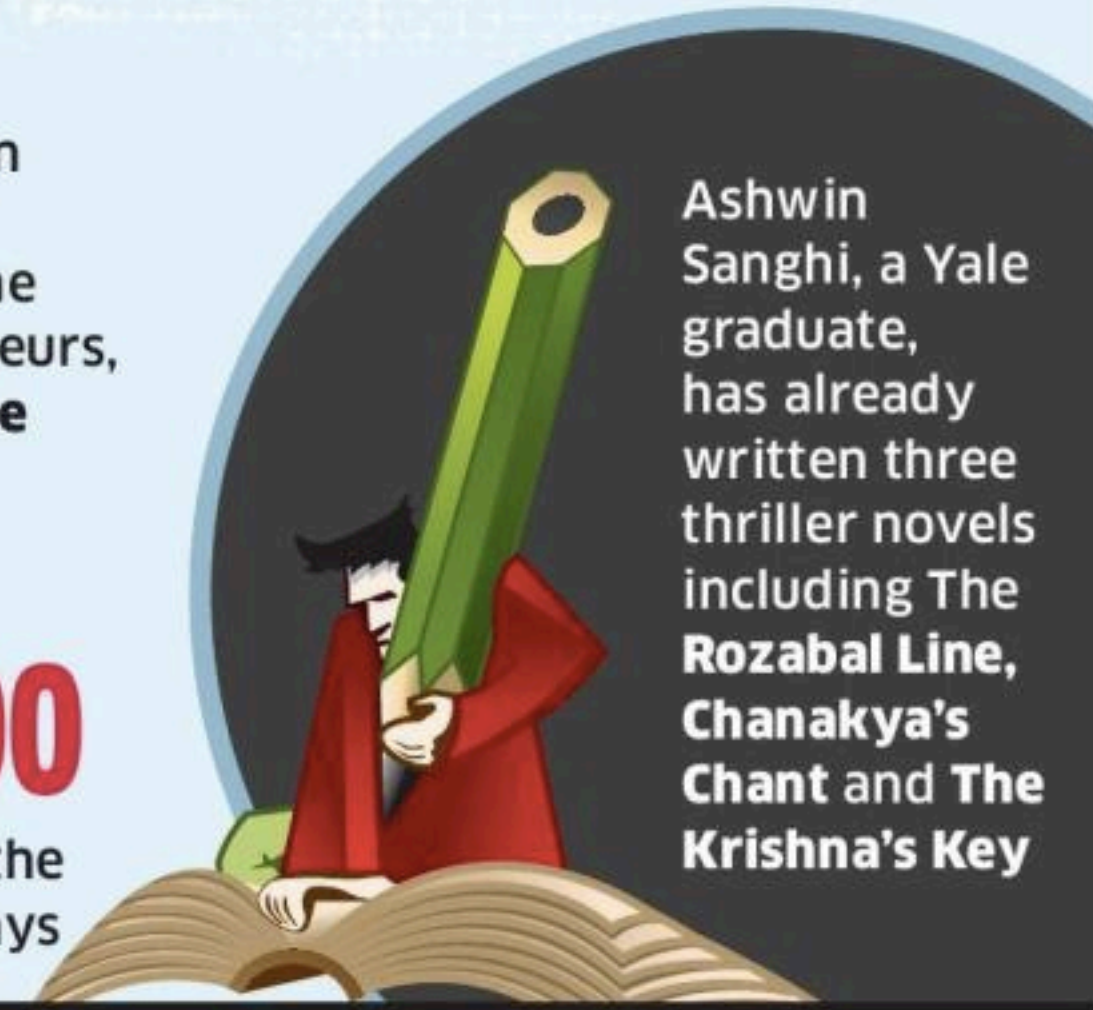
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Varun Agarwal, founder of AlmaMater, narrated "How I Braved Anu Aunty and co-founded a Million Dollar Company" that has sold **75,000** copies

Vineet Bajpai, founder of Magnon Solutions, authored "The Street to the Highway", which sold **4,000** copies in the first 30 days

Gagan Jain and Neeti Jain, online entrepreneurs, wrote "The Startup Diaries" that sold **1,500** copies in the first 45 days

Ashwin Sanghi, a Yale graduate, has already written three thriller novels including The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant and The Krishna's Key



Neeti Jain, 29, too have taken to writing about their experiences as they felt starting up was being glorified to the extent that many were loath to try their hand.

The couple interviewed six young entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds to get their stories, their struggles and mistakes while they made their idea into a successful venture.

"Coming from a small town, and having had a Hindi-medium education, writing in English proved to be a challenge," said Gagan who co-founded online portal Rangrage and is also a partner at Mad(e) in India. He earlier worked at ecommerce venture Monaysaver that is now Snapdeal.

The Jains' book "The Startup Diaries", sold 1,500 copies in the first 45 days. Jain is now keen to write a similar book on women entrepreneurs. While most entrepreneurs-turned-

authors have taken to telling business stories, Ashwin Sanghi, 45, has penned three thriller novels till date including The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant and The Krishna's Key. An entrepreneur, Sanghi returned from the Yale University with an MBA in Finance to work in the family business in automobiles and industrial gases.

Sanghi, who also interacts with startup companies, said the uncertainty of a startup venture is comparable to writing a novel. "Running a startup is all about dealing with uncertainty regarding the product development, as well as how the business scales.

In that way, writing a novel is similar, for we don't know how the novel will shape up, and how it will finally be received by readers."

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