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What's luck got to do with it?

Ashwin Sanghi talks about his debut into non-fiction

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He has been described as India's Dan Brown. Ashwin Sanghi's *The Rozabal Line* was a theological thriller built around a fascinating premise. He followed that up with the political thriller *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* which saw Ashwin return to history and religion with a hunt for a serial killer. Ashwin also collaborated with international bestselling author, James Patterson, for *Private India*. With *13 Steps to Bloody Good Luck* (Westland), Ashwin steps into the non-fiction category. The prolific writer shares his thoughts on luck, genre fiction and more. Excerpts.

Could you tell us about the genesis of 13 steps?

At a literary festival in Chennai, a young lady asked me, 'What are the factors that contributed to your success as an author?' I narrated a story to her about how almost every publisher and literary agent had turned down my work.

Frustrated, I had described my situation to a close family friend who said, 'In life, 99 per cent is about good luck! Just remember that, son.' In a slightly argumentative tone I asked him, 'But uncle, what about the one per cent? Surely that must be hard work or talent?' Laughing loudly, he had declared, 'The final one per cent? That's called bloody good luck, my boy! Simply keep at it and wait for your bloody good luck to kick in!' That conversation was the genesis of this book although it took me a decade to actually get down to writing it!

The book makes for easy



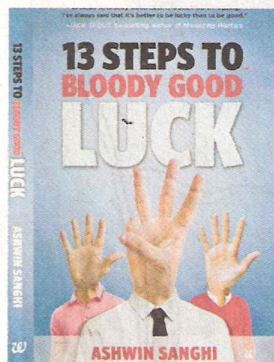
HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY ARE SUBJECTS CLOSE TO HIS HEART *Ashwin Sanghi*

reading. Was that by design?

Oh absolutely! The old adage "easy reading is hard writing" is so true. One needs to consciously work towards making the reading compelling and easy to digest. I wanted this book to be read by a very wide audience and hence the attention to this particular aspect.

How difficult or easy was the research?

The research was much easier than that required for my fictional work. Most of my fictional work revolves around mythology, theology and history. These tend to be touchy topics that involve the sentiments and personal beliefs of individuals. As a consequence, one has to be meticulous with the research. I was not treading into sensitive territory with this book. In any case, it's much easier to access current material



than ancient stuff. Usually my potboilers take around 12 to 18 months to conceptualize, plot, research and write. This one took around four months in total.

How did you gather the inspirational stories and quotes?

I have maintained an "idea bank" for the past decade. It is simply a dedicated email ac-

count. If I read an interesting article on the web, I email the link to my bank. If I see something of interest I take a picture and email it to my idea bank. If I read something interesting, I take a picture of the page that interests me and email it. As of date, I have around 15,000 emails in the bank. That's more than enough material to last me a lifetime.

Luck harvester, luck quotient — were they always there in your subconscious or did you have a Eureka moment as you sat down to write this book?

Some of them emerged as I worked on the manuscript. Comedian Milton Berle once said, 'If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door!' I found that witty but I figured that one needs to invest one's time in building something other than a door. That something else was what I labelled the

"Luck Harvester". "Luck Quotient" emerged as a discussion with a friend. He kept asking me about why luck could not be quantified or measured. Luck Quotient was a way of attempting to explain the unexplainable.

From historical fiction to a collaboration with James Patterson to non-fiction, how has the journey been?

I couldn't have asked for more. I am one of those individuals who gets bored rather easily. My wife is always irritated when I get up halfway through a movie because the story no longer holds my attention. It is precisely for this reason that I do not want to be compartmentalized. By writing in multiple genres and across varying sub-genres, I hope that I can keep myself excited and charged. I have realized that the journey is more important than the destination. I honestly don't care where I am going, but I love the process.

Which genre do you prefer?

I prefer fiction that sounds like non-fiction; alternatively non-fiction that sounds like fiction. I guess I am a confused individual.

Which is your favourite story in 13 Steps?

Jean Cocteau, the French writer, artist and film director was once asked if he believed in luck. 'Of course,' he replied. 'How else do you explain the success of those you don't like?' I cracked up on reading this. Witty, yet poignant.

What is next on the anvil?

It's a historical thriller with a business dimension. It's called *Sialkot Saga* and I hope to publish it by the end of 2015. It's a story that kicks off in 1947 on one side of the Indo-Pak border and ends 70 years later in Amritsar on the other side.