

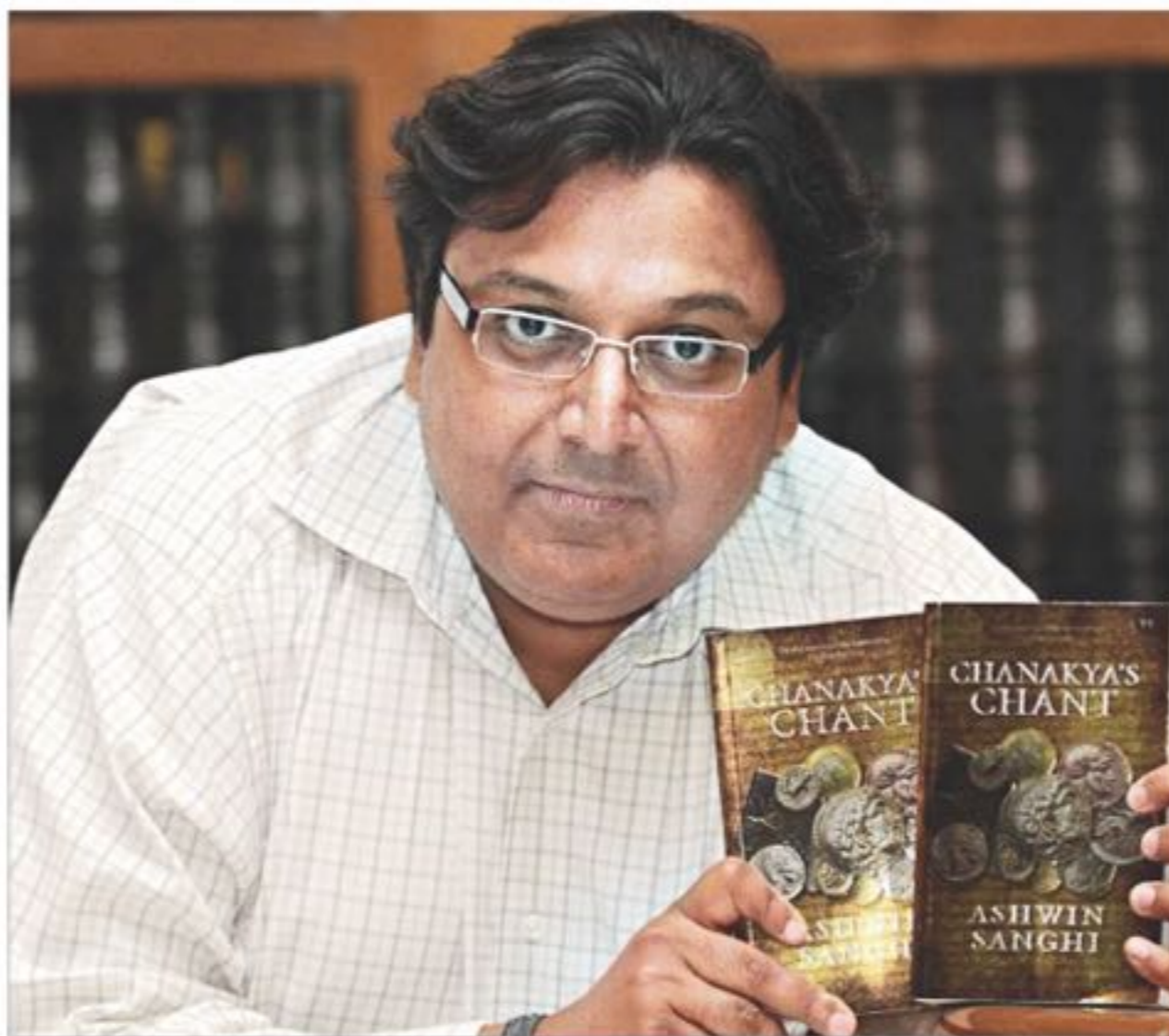
“Don’t just think about writing... write”

You are an entrepreneur as well as a well-received author. How do you juggle the two hats? Do you plan to turn a full-time writer any time soon?

I like to joke that a decade ago, I was a businessman trying to be a writer. Today, I'm a writer trying to be a businessman! These days, I start my day at office rather late by 12 noon. It is possible for me to do that because I am no longer actively involved in my family business. I'm usually at work for 5-6 hours but I do not attend office on weekends. I usually write in the mornings from 6am to 10am, which explains why I have to start my day late. My evenings are usually spent reading and researching. I am an introvert by nature and have a close circle of friends, whom I meet every few weeks. Other than that, I have virtually no social life. My life revolves around work, writing and my family. And honestly speaking, I like it that way.

Coming from an Economics and Business background, what inspired you to write? Tell us about your journey into the world of writing.

My passion for reading was ignited when my maternal grandfather would bombard me with books that were far ahead of my time. He would insist that after reading every book I must write a letter detailing what I liked and what I didn't. That was the genesis. But the spark happened much later. I was in Srinagar and ended up visiting the tomb of a Muslim pir. The shrine is called Rauzabal or "Tomb of the Prophet". Local land records acknowledge the existence of the tomb from AD 112 onwards. The sarcophagus at Rauzabal has been placed along the north-south axis according to Muslim custom but the true burial chamber beneath reveals that the grave of Yuz Asaf lies along the East-West axis as per



ASHWIN SANGHI, born on 25 January 1969, is an Indian writer in the thriller genre. He ranks among India's highest selling English fiction authors and has written several bestsellers (The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant, The Krishna Key, The Sialkot Saga, Keepers of the Kalachakra) and two New York Times bestselling crime thrillers with James Patterson, Private India (sold in the US as City on Fire) and Private Delhi (sold in the US as Count to Ten). All his books have been based on historical, theological and mythological

themes. He is one of India's best-selling conspiracy fiction writers and is an author of the new era of re-telling Indian history or mythology in a contemporary context. Included by Forbes India in their Celebrity 100 and winner of the Crossword Popular Choice, Ashwin has also mentors, co-writes and edits titles in the immensely popular 13 Steps series.

writers. Often, it is the writer who is chosen by a topic. In my case it was the chance visit to Srinagar. When my first novel, *The Rozabal Line*, emerged from that visit I became known by several labels including "mythological", "historical", "theological" and "conspiracy" thriller writer.

You have fictionalised history and mythology in your novels, even written two self-help books, but have always stayed away from contemporary Indian politics. Why?

Not true. *Chanakya's Chant* is a primer on contemporary Indian politics as compared to the politics of

FACE TO FACE

with

Ashwin Sanghi

Author

ancient India.

What was the research like for your latest book, *Keepers of the Kalachakra*?

Keepers of the Kalachakra was probably my most intense book. The primary challenge was that I had very little idea of quantum theory, not being a student of science. The other challenge was understanding the overlap between quantum theory and *The Upanishads*. I ended up reading more than forty books over a year just to get my head around the material. In addition to the reading were interviews and discussions with engineers and spiritualists.

In the fictional worlds that you create, how much of our contemporary society and its issues are reflected?

Most of my novels in the Bharat Series—*The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant*, *The Krishna Key*, *The Sialkot Saga* and *Keepers of the Kalachakra*—are stories that have a parallel modern and ancient track. Modern society and the challenges of such a society are always reflected in the modern track. But remember one thing though: my primary goal is to entertain. Educating and enlightenment are byproducts.

How do you deal with criticism and unfavourable reviews?

As regards criticism, that's only expected with creative endeavours like books, movies or songs. In the world of commercial fiction, your only yardstick should be your sales. If sales continue ticking away it means that your work is resonating with your readers and, in that event, criticism becomes irrelevant.

With the advent of social media, is the process of writing and marketing books changing?

I see social media as serving two distinct objectives. First, it helps me reach out to potential readers whenever I have a new book coming out. Second, it helps readers get in touch with me with their feedback, comments and views. I see it as nothing more than another communication channel. It can never be the totality of one's marketing focus.

As a writer, how long does it take a conception of an idea to its transformation into a book?

I spend several months on research. For a typical Bharat series book, this could be six to twelve months. I then spend around three months on the plot. The plot will usually have every twist and turn in the story, planned chapter-wise. It is only after these two stages that I start writing. Detailed plot ensures that I do not allow the pace to slacken except when I choose to. I am not a great writer but I am a decent rewriter, so I rewrite the manuscript several times before it goes in for editing. All in all, two years is the average.

How do you handle writer's block?

I rarely face writer's block. The reason is my organised style of working. I spend several months collating research, then several months developing a plot outline. By the time I start writing, my job is like that of a child using crayons within a colouring book. With the outlines drawn, how difficult is it to choose which crayon to use?

Which Indian and international authors top your list of favourites? Also, what according to you are the strengths and weaknesses of Indian authors? Could you name a few authors who inspire your work?

I have been influenced by many authors. I grew up reading both classics as well as potboilers. My spiritual sense is influenced by Paramahansa Yogananda, my love for fast pace and racy plots is influenced by Jeffrey Archer and Frederick Forsythe, my fascination with historical re-telling is inspired by Dominique Lapierre, my passion for research is fuelled by Arthur Hailey and my Indianness of voice is influenced by Salman Rushdie. The truth is that I was brought up on a diet of commercial fiction and thrillers for most of my growing years: Jeffrey Archer, Sidney Sheldon, Robert Ludlum, Frederick Forsyth, Irving Wallace, Jack Higgins, Tom Clancy, Ayn Rand, Ken Follett, Arthur Hailey... the list is long. In the past decade, Dan Brown, John Grisham, Stieg Larsson, Ian Rankin and countless others were added to my list of favourites. Among Indian authors Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, R.K. Narayanan, Amitava Ghosh, Devdutt Pattanaik, Hussain Zaidi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amish Tripathi are writers that I enjoy reading. Increasingly, I find that I am reading much more non-fiction than fiction. Some of my favourite non-fiction authors are Gary Zukav, Richard Dawkins and Brian Weiss.

What things do you think are essential for a book to be successful?

Three things—story, story, story. Without a good story, your language skills and slick marketing cannot help.

What, in your opinion, is the secret of your success?

Good luck.

What is your message for the readers of TTIS? What are the three books you would recommend them to read?

Books that I would strongly recommend: *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda; *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu; Kautilya's *Arthashastra* translated by L. N. Rangarajan; *Freedom at Midnight* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

What will be your advice for aspiring young authors among our readers?

Here are a few pieces of advice. One. Don't just think about writing... write. Two. If you are not noticed, don't be dejected. It's not you but the market. Be prepared for rejection and criticism—it goes with the territory. Be thick-skinned and keep at it. Three. There are many platforms such as Wattpad and WritersDigest. Use them to get tips and feedback on your writing. Have the humility to accept that you are "work in progress" and attempt to improve your craft with every successive work. Four. Don't quit the day job. It will be many months or even years before royalties kick in and it's impossible to write when you are hungry. Five. If you become successful, keep your feet firmly planted on the ground and remember that the words on your pages aren't your own, but a blessing from Saraswati.

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Jewish custom. A carved imprint near the sarcophagus of Rauzabal shows a pair of normal human feet that bear crucifixion marks on them. I was fascinated with the notion that the man buried in the tomb could possibly be Jesus Christ. This led to my first book, *The Rozabal Line*.

Authors seeking to promote their books do all sorts of things. How, according to you, should they prioritise from these: attending literary festivals, multi-city book launches and digital marketing?

There has always been a bit of elitism in the writing world. Authors are not expected to sell their books. Frankly, why should you invest two years in writing a book if you are not going to market it? I tend to get my hands dirty in every aspect including cover design, video trailers, social media, distribution and promotions. This has only been possible because I have been used to doing all of that for my business. As regards prioritisation, your highest priority has to be ensuring availability and visibility. Whichever activities achieve that goal, should be your priority.

Why did you choose to write about mythology?

Genres and topics are never really chosen by the

Call it association football, soccer, calcio, futbol, futebol or any of the dozen other linguistic variants; this is the greatest game in the world by far. More than a game, it is a passion that knows no political boundaries and helps break down man-made barriers. Its power was evident when the award ceremony saw the Russian President Vladimir Putin, French President Emmanuel Macron and Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic stand side by side in heavy downpour to do the honours.



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IT'S ANOTHER DREAM

Today, football evokes dreams that govern peoples' lives around the world. It has developed its own culture and financial power. For a month, starting 14 June 2018, millions across the globe remained glued to their TV sets.

This world cup will be remembered for its many upsets and unexpected turn of events. While the young French team proved its mettle again and again, the Croatian and Belgian teams, who took the second and third positions respectively, won many hearts and will be remembered for their outstanding performances!

“ I think it's important to find the little things in everyday life that make you happy. ~ Paula Cole ”

Wisdom Results From One's Efforts

The English thinker, John Locke used the term 'tabula rasa' to describe the mind of an infant. The concept of 'tabula rasa' suggests that at birth, the mind is in a blank slate. Corresponding to each level of growth and development, an individual learns new things and gains

life or knowledge of what is proper or reasonable or the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding and common sense. Whichever way wisdom is interpreted, fundamental to the idea of wisdom is that it takes time and comes with experience and development of the ability to think, analyse, judge and act.

It is not something that one is born with but acquires over time. A person not willing to seek knowledge, make sense of people, things, events, apply perception, judgment and action can never gain wisdom and be



knowledge. Using the faculties of insight and perception, the individual makes sense of that knowledge and executes that knowledge to make sense of the world around him/her. Clearly, birth does not guarantee wisdom. It requires conscious effort from the individual. Also, it is fair to say that the more effort an individual makes the more knowledge/wisdom he/she will gain.

Wisdom can be variously described as knowledge gained by having many experiences in

called wise. People renowned for their wisdom such as Plato, Aristotle, Siddhartha and Chanakya and others weren't born wise but gained wisdom over time and with a lot of effort.

Just as birth cannot guarantee wisdom, it can also not be inherited. After birth every individual needs to develop those faculties within himself/herself that enable him/her to be receptive and perspective to new experiences, learning and hence wisdom. A wise person distinguishes himself/herself from the crowd by his/her proper sense of judgment, considered opinion, common sense and insights, all devel-



oped as a result of great effort. However, an individual can certainly benefit from the wisdom of ages passed on in the form of legends, stories, books and so on and learn from them. In such a scenario too the wisdom of ages can only act as a guiding light. It is up to the individual to decode the wisdom to suit his/her position and gain from it. Oscar Wilde said, "With age comes wisdom, but sometimes age comes alone." This implies that wisdom is not a necessary by-product of age. One may grow old and yet remain unwise or foolish. This is because wisdom requires effort. Patience, discernment, sound judgment and understanding are some of the essential ingredients of wisdom. Wisdom comes only to those who make a conscientious effort to avoid the path of foolishness and walk the path of enlightenment.

Wisdom is the result of one's experiences and cannot be taught. The transmission of knowledge or learning can in itself not result in a person gaining wisdom. Only if the person takes the pains to make sense of that knowledge or learning or only if that knowledge or learning shapes his understanding of fundamentals and influences his action positively, can he be called a wise person.

Sreetama Biswas, X, St Paul's Boarding & Day School

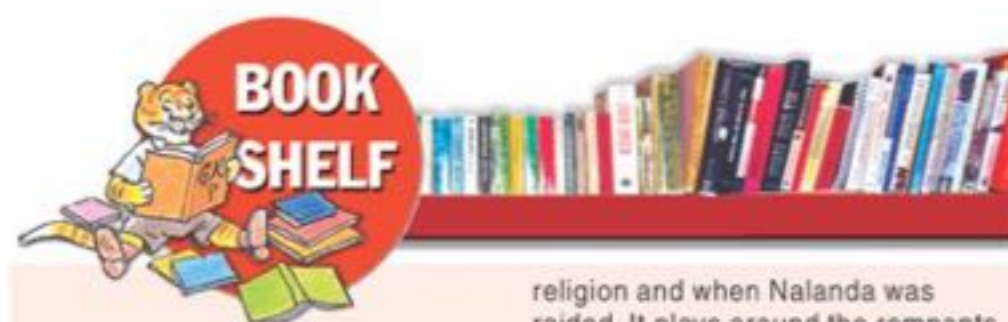


SEND IN YOUR CONTRIBUTION



Should Everest expeditions be stopped immediately to save the mountain from pollution?

Email your views in 3 sentences to ttschools@abpmail.com within 7 days. Please mention your name, class and school name.



Keepers of the Kalachakra

Ashwin Sanghi

One of India's greatest storytellers, Ashwin Sanghi, is back again after a long gap with yet another magnum opus and this time its size and grandeur are simply awe-inspiring. If you've read Ashwin Sanghi, then you must be well aware that his books weave science, mythology and religion intricately. Similarly, *Keepers of the Kalachakra* too has multiple stories running parallelly, spreading out across the globe - India, Russia, Syria, Turkey, China, Tibet, Australia, America, among others. It is a historical cum mythological cum science-fiction thriller, which focuses on Vijay Sundaram, a straightforward scientist, an absent-minded, good-natured nerd with a humble upbringing. A front-runner in quantum science, he is recruited by Milesian Labs, a secret research organisation, to conduct cutting-edge research in his area of interest, only to find himself getting sucked into a mess that he can't comprehend. His stint at the lab situated in a secret location in Uttarakhand's forests, sets him on a trail that unravels incredible secrets which jeopardises his life. Unbeknownst to him, the world around him is falling apart and he is sucked into the heart of this invisible war, which will soon decide the fate of humanity and shake the foundations of the Earth.

The beauty of the author's writing lies in his intricately designed plots and diverse characters. This is quite visible in this book. The plot digs into vexed issues of the clash between several faiths, radicalisation, terrorism and polarisation. The views of the main characters around Islam, Islamophobia and world politics are intriguing. The story trails back to the time of the Ramayana, when Buddhism was established as a

religion and when Nalanda was raided. It plays around the remnants of the Buddhist tantric practices today and a few who don't want these practices don't fall in the wrong hands.

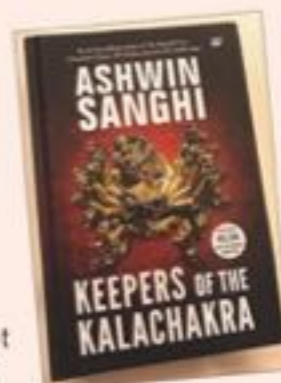
Sanghi switches storylines mid-book, alternating between intelligence agencies, radical Islam leaders, Sadhus and many more seemingly irrelevant parallel occurrences to ensure that the story moves at a breakneck pace, keeping the reader hooked to the plot making it unable to put the book down. As the plot progresses, and we move from Sri Lanka to Ayodhya, to the libraries of Nalanda, to the Turkish war and many more significant historical events and locations, the research put in by Sanghi comes to light. The writing makes use of many mystical concepts, scientific theorems & researches, historical incidents and conspiracy theories. Ashwin blends these beautifully with the story and this ocean of information present is condensed, which shows that Ashwin has taken a lot of pain to explain it in the simplest term,

making it easier for the reader to understand. This makes the book not just entertaining but also informative. Furthermore, the book also has a good number of pictures, diagrams, and illustrations to further enhance the reading experience. I also liked that fact that Ashwin has provided an exhaustive list of 58 references which contain books, opinion polls, articles and essays that he had read for this book.

With plot twists unlike any ever seen before, this book will keep the readers glued until the last line. It is undoubtedly a compelling read, one of those "on-the-edge-of-your-seat" thrillers. Even though the climax is a little hurried, the sheer detailing of the characters, and the amazing merging of parallel plots makes this book an enthralling read.

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Price: Rs 399/- Publisher: Westland



Did You Know?

Sanghi's Chanakya's Chan won the 2010 Vodafone-Crossword Popular Choice Award for logging the highest sales in 2010.

SOME IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE

TTIS is now majorly interactive. A lot of the sections will have a question at the end and readers can respond to them at ttschools@abpmail.com

Readers can send in articles for the following columns in the paper:

- Open Forum
- Book, Film and Music reviews
- School News
- Four Columns (Note: The Four Corners have been renamed Four Columns)
- Creative pieces like Poems, Short stories, Travelogues

- Your queries for new columns like **Scien-Terrific & Tech-Connect**
- Express your views about TTIS and other issues in the letters to the editor section, **Speak Out**.
- Interviews of Celebrities
- Snaps for **Tiger Shots**
- Articles sent in should be ORIGINAL and not lifted from any website.
- Article should be brief and to the point.