



UNCOMPLICATING MYTHOLOGY

New York Times
bestselling author
Ashwin Sanghi opens up
to Vinayak Surya Swami
about his love for the
written word, chancing
upon story ideas at
unlikely places and his
idea of an ideal vacation

Ashwin Sanghi hails from a family of businessmen but it was his creative bent of mind and flair for writing that guided him into the literary world. Today, he is one of India's most popular authors but the going wasn't easy. His first literary work, *The Rozabal Line*, was rejected by 47 publishers and literary agents before he self-published it in 2007. In 2008, a prominent publishing house re-published.

In 2014, his book *Private India* made it to the prestigious *New York Times* bestselling list. After that there was no looking back for this author, who has dabbled in all genres of literature: from fiction and non-fiction to mythology. We get talking to the prolific writer just as he launches his latest book, *The Vault of Vishnu*.

You grew up in a business-oriented family. How did books and literature come into the picture?

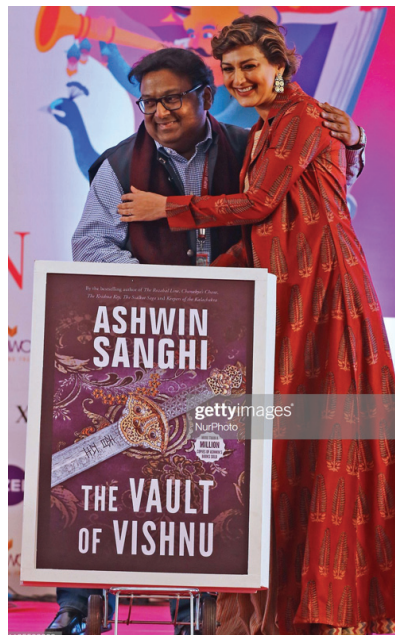
My *nanaji* [maternal grandfather], who lived in Kanpur, used to send me books

every week – that was what got me interested in the written word. Growing up, the arrival of his books was the only constant factor. The 300 odd books that he sent me served as my introduction to reading. I was a voracious reader and I believe that the storyteller in me emerged because of that.

Some of your early books were works of non-fiction but lately, your narratives delve into ancient mythology and interpretations of historical events. What do you enjoy writing the most?

The genre does not really matter because ultimately what one does when writing, is tell a story. If the story isn't engrossing, readers will not turn the page. Saying that, I'll admit that there is indeed a slight difference between writing fiction and non-fiction. With the former, I can let my imagination run free and be far more liberal with my narrative. My non-fiction books are usually done with co-authors as I do not consider myself an expert in

The author with Bollywood actress Sonali Bendre during the launch of his latest book *The Vault of Vishnu* at the Jaipur Literature Festival last month



every field. I try to take their expertise and portray the same in the form of an interesting story.

For your first book *The Rozabal Line*, you travelled to Kashmir for research and to Gujarat for *The Krishna Key*. How often do you travel for writing?

One always travels with a different mindset. I may travel to a city for a literary festival or for a particular book that I am writing. Then again, not all books demand moving around in search of material. *Chanakya's Chant* did not require me to travel at all as I was already familiar with the places I was writing about. But *The Krishna Key* involved writing about the life of Lord Krishna and for that, I visited places like Mathura, Vrindavan and Dwarka.

My new book, *The Vault of Vishnu*, is set in ancient China, so, I have spent almost six weeks in that country over the last two years.

Where do you like to travel to, when not researching for a book?

As much as I dislike saying it, I am quite monotonous when it comes to vacations. I have a few regular haunts as, for me, familiarity is important. I have a beautiful weekend home in Khandala [near Mumbai], where I usually go to catch up on my

writing. I love going to Mahabaleshwar and being close to the hills during monsoon. When I am looking to take a break – the beaches of Phuket and winters in London are what I enjoy.

Could you tell us more about *The Vault of Vishnu*?

When we think of India and China, the first thing that comes to mind is that they are Asian superpowers. If we look at ancient times, there was a flourishing trade between these two great nations. For example, Buddhism, which was born in India, travelled to China and then around the world from there. Similarly, South Indian martial arts are very similar to the practices in China. My book relates to these ancient flows of ideas, knowledge and technologies between these countries, and the implications in the modern day.

You have often recounted how the idea for *Keepers of the Kalachakra* came to you through a recurring dream. Does this happen often?

Every book involves the genesis of a core idea. *Chanakya's Chant* was actually born out of the oft repeated phrase “the good old days”. But I wondered, in the world of politics, were the old days really good? That led to a comparison between the politics of today and that of the Mauryan times. *The Krishna Key* emerged from a chance conversation I had with someone who spoke about Lord Vishnu's 10th avatar [or Kalki avatar], which was yet to come. The subject intrigued me and I immediately started my research and wound up with a thriller around the theme. *The Rozabal Line* was the result of an unplanned visit to the shrine [of the same name] in Kashmir.

On many occasions, there is more than one idea. It is only when I have juggled them enough and have one recurring thought, that I am actually able to direct my time and effort towards following it up.



Air India has some of the best professionals working for them - be it the ground staff, the cabin crew or the pilots. I consider it to be the safest airline. I have found it to be simply unbeatable on several routes!

Ashwin Sanghi