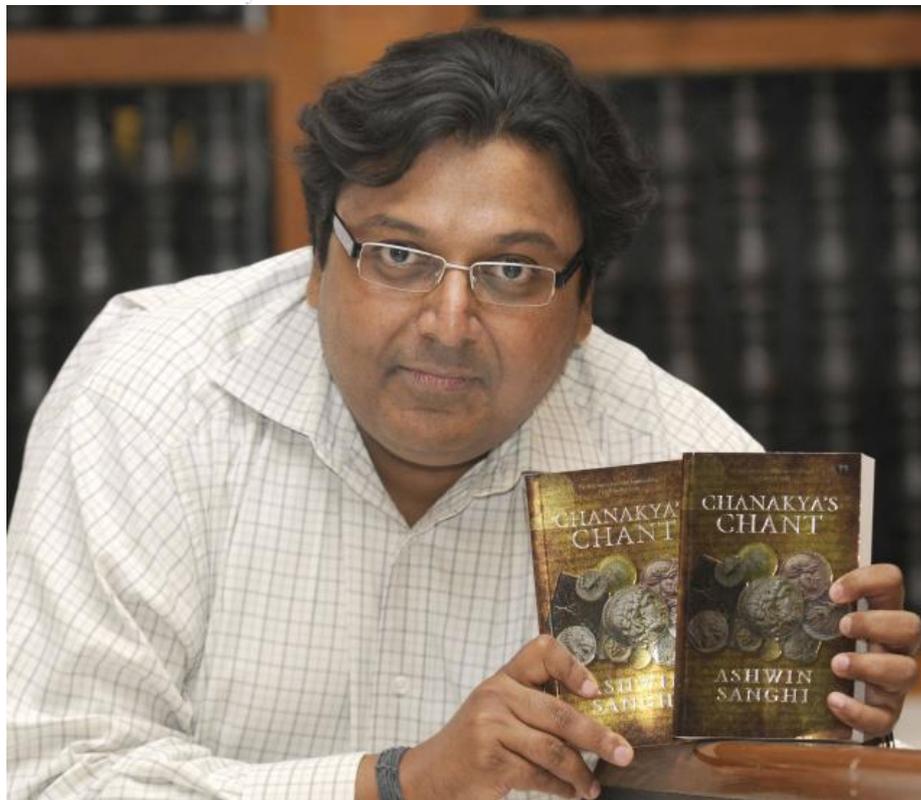


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Best of both worlds

Anusha Parthasarathy



SPINNING THRILLERS Ashwin Sanghi with his book "Chanakya's Chant" Photo: R. Ragu

The Hindu

Ashwin Sanghi's latest book "Chanakya's Chant" blends fact and fiction in an engaging way

The protagonists of Ashwin Sanghi's latest book "Chanakya's Chant" came to life against the background of tumultuous ocean waves. The trailer, screened at Vivanta by Taj, Connemara, introduced the audience to Chanakya, whose wisdom, cunning, and strategy made him a kingmaker 2,000-odd years ago, and Gangasagar Mishra, his contemporary version.

Parallel stories

History with a modern touch, the book tells parallel stories, revelling in the ingenious schemes of both men. While Chanakya's plans eventually win Chandragupta Maurya the throne of Magadha, Gangasagar helps a girl from a slum become the Prime Minister of India. Ashwin's previous book, "The Rozabel Line", was also based on history with a parallel, contemporary story running right through, but the author seems to have given "Chanakya's Chant" a twist.

"There is a need to demystify mythology and history. Many Indian readers want books rooted in Indianness and history and I believe ancient tales told in a contemporary context is a trend that's catching on. Youngsters today don't want to hear the same old stories. They want a rational explanation for everything," he says.

While the Yale graduate spends his mornings running his family business, his nights are spent spinning thrillers. As for "Chanakya's Chant", he always began work on the book each day with prayer and incense. "My kind of writing involves research; so I usually give myself an 18-month time-frame to complete a book. Six months for research, six for writing and another six for editing and production. But this time, everything came together in a year, which was a pleasant surprise," says the author.

To develop Chanakya's character, Ashwin not only spent months researching the kingmaker but also read his work, the "Arthashastra". "All the fundamental elements in my story are true. Chanakya was a Brahmin who studied in Takshila. He was a well-documented historical figure but the advantage that writers like me have is filling in the gaps between the records. That's where the element of fiction comes into play. Chanakya or Kautilya's character is based on what I read in his own book, the science of wealth. I wanted to see what it would be like if a person in the present-day context had Chanakya's powers," Ashwin explains.

While many of the plots in the story are inspired by real-life events that Ashwin picked up from the newspapers he read every morning, he says he strives to be an engaging storyteller. "I don't want to be a writer but a storyteller. I'd

like to provide a story that keeps you engrossed. If you told me that whatever research I did was great, I would be happy, but if you told me you went late to work because you couldn't put my book down, that's its real success," he smiles.

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