

'My wife told me to quit moping'

To balance 27 years of security in a mundane career, selling cars, entrepreneur ASHWIN SANGHI sought excitement with a parallel profession, as a versatile writer. He tells SHANA MARIA VERGHIS that his second book, a political saga is being scripted into a film by UTV

Born in the Baniya community, whose profession has them worship at the altar of the God of business, Ashwin Sanghi was baptised in the workings of his family's automobile dealership, when sixteen years. While still at school, he was learning intricacies of managing debit and credit for the firm.

Reflecting over how his life panned out since, this author of two books brooded, "Things were predetermined in a way. It was decided I'd go to a certain college for MBA. And I would marry at a certain age. Even who I would marry was almost foreknowledge." He added, "My future was mapped out. Pardon my French. This gave one plenty of security. But the trade-off was, boredom also followed."

UTV recently traded with Sanghi over his second book, *Chanakya's Chant* (by Westland), which is being scripted for a movie. So how did this entrepreneur wind up writing a best-seller set across two time-zones? One is in ancient India, involving Chandragupta Maurya and his canny PM Chanakya. The other is in mod-

ern India, where a neo-Chanakya mentors a young girl into state craft.

Sanghi today splits his life, between two worlds. His business, which he says "is the mundane part, although it benefits my family, in terms of financial support." And his recently started, writing career. He described the latter as "food for my soul," and its wheels began turning for him around 2001.

Sanghi's love of books, however, was a gift from his grandfather, who once ran a Rolls Royce dealership in pre-Independence India. The older man used to send his grandson expensive books, hoping to get him to read. But he soon realised the boy was interested in books only as collectibles.

So putting his business brain to use, he struck a deal with this descendant of his.

"My granddad told me he would send me new books, only if I sent him postcards writing about what I had read. This gradually got me to start reading seriously. And we went on this way till I was 24." When at Yale, he contributed articles to the campus paper but after that life detoured to business.



"I actually spent 27 years with the firm, before I became a writer," he mused. "Most people do not think of a parallel career in their 40s. But business over the years, provided little excitement or an outlet for creativity. There was hard-earned money

involved. It sets limits to what one could do. And my imagination wanted adventure, though I first thought of writing about my business background."

He said that things probably came to a head when his wife and he were

on a holiday.

Life and work were in the doldrums for him at that point. And then, "Over a glass of wine, my wife told me to quit moping and do something about it." Sanghi remarked, "She told me I had been yakking over so many stories I had in my head. Why not put them down?" During time-out in Goa, Sanghi's wife "thrust a laptop at me," and four days on, he was tapping away thousands of words. What he wrote then, hasn't been printed yet. Instead he wrote *The Rozabel Line*, a book based on theories of Jesus' visit to India. Then came *Chanakya's Chant*. After religion and politics he's back to more familiar territory. Economics. The stuff he wrote in Goa will become part of his book three.

Sanghi's first novel to get published, happened through a print-on-demand website. He did not incur much in terms of investment he said, except for blogging about it and creating a Facebook page. *The Rozabel Line* was primarily inspired by Holger Kersten's *Jesus Lived In India* and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, where Dan Brown found a story for *The Da Vinci Code*. This was where he had cut his teeth writing. "I was less bothered about the traditional story mode in this book, than with exploring diverse themes," he remarked. "So I wove in a lot of facts. Because I wanted to do justice to the story of Jesus in India. It got a lot of brickbats, since I connected it to the *Lost Tribes of Israel* and also wrote that Jesus was buried here. But I got a lot of positive feedback as well." He concluded, saying, "*Chanakya's Chant*, meanwhile, set out to be a page-turner, about how little politics changed over centuries. And it doesn't have parallels with the TV versions of Chanakya by Chandraprakash Dwivedi or Chandragupta Maurya." He concluded, "UTV signed film rights about two months ago."