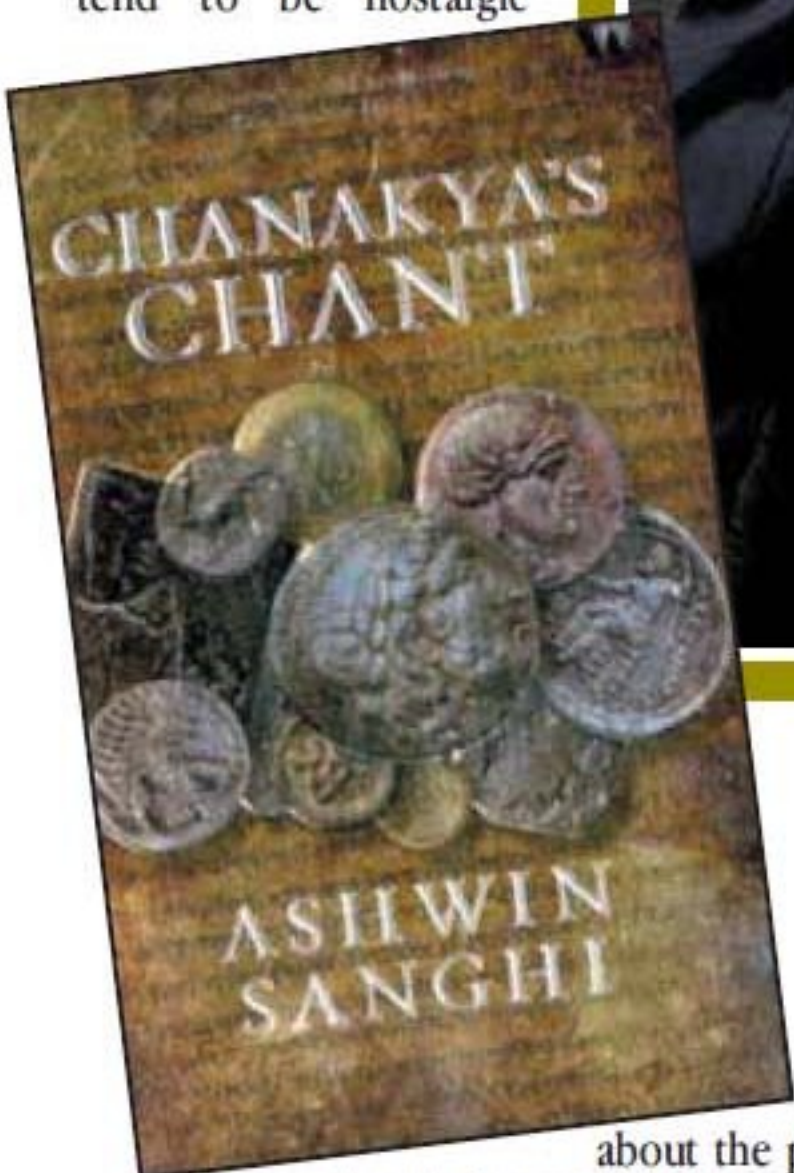


# A NATURAL HISTORY

**WRITER** Ashwin Sanghi no longer needs to hide behind the mask of Shawn Haigins to promote his books. One of the early examples of self-publishing became an overnight phenomenon with **The Rozabal Line** and then when **Chanakya's Chant** appeared, UTV Motion Pictures stepped in.

**First, how did Chanakya's Chant come about?**

I had just finished writing **The Rozabal Line** and it had become a bestseller. In 2009 I was at my wit's end about my next project and general elections had just got over... that was the second UPA government, which was coming in. I was at the Delhi airport returning to Mumbai and on the TV screen there was a footage of Karunanidhi having just arrived in Delhi... he had gone to Sonia Gandhi's house. There was a meeting scheduled where cabinet positions were to be discussed. When I reached Mumbai a news flash arrived on my Blackberry, saying that Karunanidhi was returning to Chennai because he wasn't happy with the positions his party was being offered. This was messy. And I wondered was it always this messy. Very often we tend to be nostalgic



about the past but was it truly better? That's how the idea for **Chanakya's Chant** evolved. I went back to history to look at the political upheavals of our time. We've had terrible times and should be grateful that we live in the present era. I decided to write a book where the modern political stage can be cor-

related to the times that have gone by. So, of course, I chose Chanakya. I started by picking up the DVDs of Chandraprakash Dwivedi's show that was to appear on Doordarshan. I locked myself in for days to watch the show. His adaptation was based on the **Mudrarakshasa** of which I got a translation. So on and so forth. What fascinates me more than history are its patterns; how history repeats itself. I can see so many parallels between the ancient politics of Magadh and current politics of New Delhi. The political gameplay hasn't changed.

**Did you consider selling the movie right to the book even when you were writing the**

**book?**

When the offer came, I hadn't even thought of marketing the movie right to the book. Siddharth Roy Kapoor called out of the blue and said the book had terrific cinematic potential. Two weeks later we signed a contract and UTV said they would stay true to the book. This was important to me because I didn't want my book turned into some sort of a romantic mush.

**So Ashutosh Gowariker is going to direct the film.**

As far as I know, at a formal level, it's still not certain whether Ashutosh Gowariker is going to direct the film. I know there has been substantial talks between Ashutosh and UTV. Cooking a movie takes time because a lot of ingredients are involved. I want to stay away from the movie because very often authors do a disservice to themselves by staying involved because it's like riding a different animal than writing a book. In recent times there have been many disputes between production houses and authors. Being from a business family, a lesson I was taught that it's wise to spend all your time before signing a contract. Once you sign it, lock the contact in a safe and forget all about it.

**You have left behind your pen-name, Shawn Haigins.**

**(Laughs)** I started working when I was 16 years old. By the time I decided to write a book, I had been in business for 17-18 years. I wanted to feel free to write the way I want. So I created this personality which is an anagram of my name. But I was rejected by too many publishers and had to self-publish. Now self-publishing is big and caters for the Kindle and e-book market. That was not the case when I self-published my first book. Back then statistics said a published book would sell 50-60 units, most of them bought by family members and friends. We sold 1,700 units. One of those units went to Westland. I was tracked down after a little effort. I was rejected 63 times before this. After reediting the book, it appeared under my real name. I was told if I were to meet people who expected to see a foreign writer, meets a potbellied Marwari gentleman, how can one promote the book!

**People have often compared your books with those by Dan Brown.**

I have loved every Dan Brown book and he had received a lot of flak. But it would be wrong to compare us. I have never tried to be Dan Brown.

**Ashwin Sanghi is published by Westland.**

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