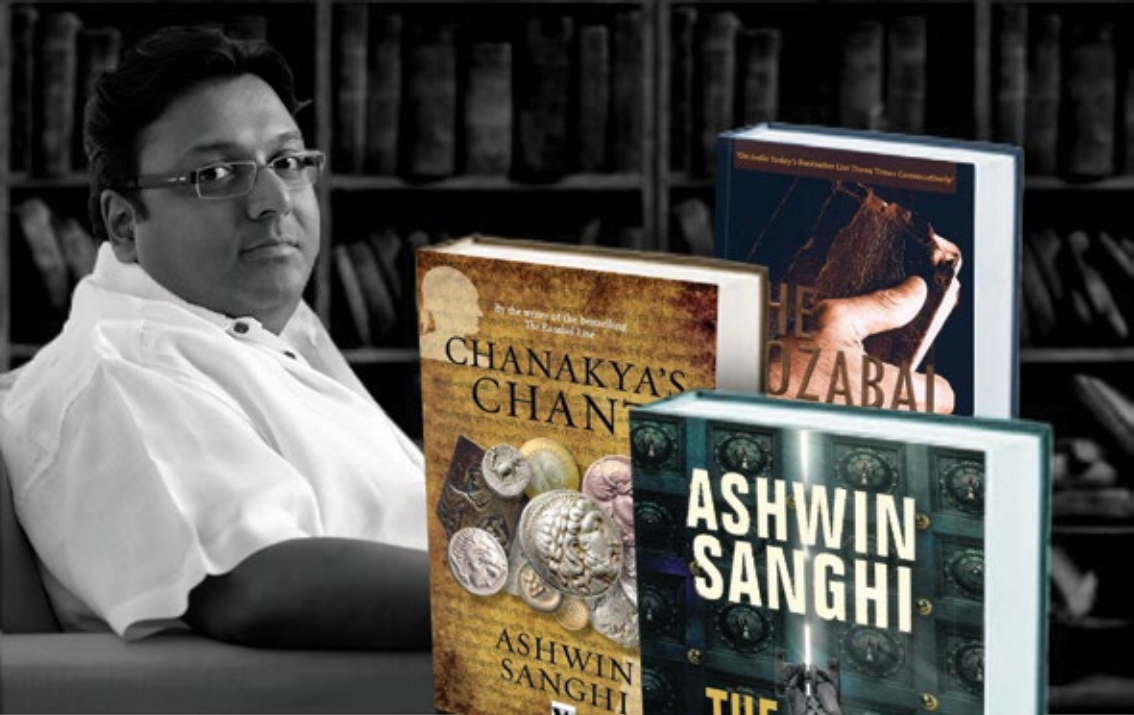


A frontrunner in the burgeoning league of Indian novelists gunning for historical fiction, Ashwin Sanghi opens up about matters concerning faith, life and the Great Beyond

■ Bijoy Bharathan

*Spirituality entails
self-awareness*





Of Belief and Scepticism

I acknowledge the existence of a greater power in the universe. I believe that I am a manifestation of this power, as are all the elements and entities of our world, both animate and inanimate. I see God as a source of energy rather than as a person, although we refer to this great power by countless names. It is the energy from the singularity that created the Big Bang that we now see as mass and matter. I believe that death is simply the desire of our core (we may choose to call this soul) to reunite with this universal force or energy.

Spiritual Sutras

I have never been an atheist. That is not to say that I have ever been overly religious.

I embrace spirituality in a very broad sense, my maxim being 'do no harm'. I see it as an awareness of the fact that the nature of one's actions can, and do alter outcomes, even in one's own life. I'm pretty certain that the universe is governed by a tit-for-tat or debit-for-credit logic. We know that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So how can we possibly convince

ourselves that this law would not operate in a karmic sense?

Creative Rebirth

The first five years of the new millennium were very rough for me and I ended up visiting a spiritual medium. During that session, my maternal grandfather spoke to me through the medium and asked me why I had given up on the creative passion of my life — reading and writing. It reinforced my belief in the theory of the transmigration of the soul and it prompted me to reengineer my life around a creative pursuit. Now, when I sit down to write, I see the words flowing through me,

I see God as a **SOURCE OF ENERGY** rather than as a person

not from me. When I read a passage the following day, I wonder how I wrote it.

The Krishna Connection

I've always been fascinated by characters with shades of grey. Krishna is the lovable cowherd of Gokul and Vrindavan. But he is also the ruthless strategist of the Mahabharata. He is the brave combatant who kills Kansa and several demons. But he also flees the battlefield and gets labelled Ranchordas for the rest of his life. He is a real human being in every sense of the word. I can relate to the idea that he is full of contradictions, just like many people you and I know.

About Ashwin Sanghi

Having secured his credentials in business from Yale, Ashwin Sanghi embarked on a stint in fiction after much deliberation – a little late by his own admission. The entrepreneur and acclaimed writer of *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and the latest, *The Krishna Key* is a member of a growing cult of authors in India, who dabble in historical fiction while balancing full-time day jobs.

Ashwin's initiation into the literary world came via a gentleman, who spoke the language of both poetry and prose. His late maternal grandfather, a voracious reader and poet would send his grandson a book each week to read. "At the end of the week, I had to send him a one-page letter about why I liked or disliked the book," reveals Ashwin. Thus began the gambit that set into motion a chain of events – think conspiracy theories involving messiahs, statesmen and mind-boggling twists in the tale.

Ask him what drives the storytelling mechanism in him and Ashwin says, "What excites me is historical material that I see myself personally connected to. India is a treasure trove of ancient wisdom and I love being able to bring that to the forefront. It's where my own roots lie. And what intrigues me is not the mythology, but the



possibility that an epic might be based on historical truths, which explains my fascination with the Mahabharata. My new book is an attempt to nudge Krishna and the Mahabharata out of the mythology aisles of the library and into the shelves of history."

The author's second novel *Chanakya's Chant* is set to be made into a full length feature film by UTV. But he's barely content resting on past laurels as he tells us what's next in line, "For the first time in my life, I will be writing a work of fiction that has its roots in modern Indian history rather than in ancient legend. It is based upon an incident that had occurred during the partition of India. I had written around 35,000 words of the story before I commenced writing *The Krishna Key*."