

'Creative spark is not enough'

Following the Literary Fest at Jaipur and want to become a writer? Ashwin Sanghi, an author who specialises in the thriller genre, gives you some helpful advice on making a good start



Make the write choice: Ashwin Sanghi believes that it is very easy to be a writer but difficult to be a good storyteller

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Ashwin Sanghi is an entrepreneur by day and a novelist by night. He has published novels under the pseudonym Shawn Haigins. He did his schooling at the Cathedral and John Connon School; a BA (economics) from St. Xavier's College; and an MBA (finance) from the Yale School of Management. He is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at Bangor

University, Wales, UK.

It was his maternal grandfather, a voracious reader and a poet, who would send him a book each week to read and ask him to send a letter about why he liked or disliked each book. Until 2005, he remained a reader without realising that there was a writer lurking inside him. A visit to Rozabal - a shrine in the heart of Srinagar, where none other than Jesus Christ is believed to have been buried, changed everything. "I was fascinated by the story

and began reading and researching everything that I could lay my hands on. Twelve months and 57 books later I had multiple theories swimming in my head. This led me to start work on my first novel *The Rozabal Line* - a novel of 100,000 words. Until then I had never written more than a 1000 words," he says.

Does going to a good school help? Sanghi believes that schooling and reading are necessary conditions but that's not sufficient. "The sufficient condition is the creative spark - the ability to imagine and narrate a good story. You can get the best editors to polish your language but you can't get someone to fire up your imagination. That has to be from within," he says.

Did he get help? Not really. He was rejected repeatedly by the publishing industry. "I had to self-publish my first novel, *The Rozabal Line*. But how does a writer become successful? It is my belief that the only thing separating many good writers from success is the stubborn and thick-skinned approach of getting up after every failure and rejection. Rejection is part of the process of getting published."

About the research programme that he is currently pursuing, he says that he set out to study for a PhD in creative writing and searched for a programme that would allow him to pursue his other goals in life while offering him the opportunity to critically examine his work.

He's of the view that it's very easy to be a writer, but it's far more difficult to be a good storyteller. "It has been said that easy reading is damn hard writing. A writer can make the process easier on himself by reading, thus imbibing the flair and subtleties of a multitude of writers from across the world."

His advice to students wishing to take up writing as a career is to become thick-skinned. "I believe that what differentiates a good writer from a published writer is simply perseverance. There are many great writers with wonderful manuscripts who simply gave up after being rejected by a few publishers. You want to be a writer... learn to become thick-skinned!"