

My idea of writing is to enlighten and yet entertain: Ashwin Sanghi

Prathamesh Bhandekar



Ashwin Sanghi

Sunayana Suresh

Ashwin Sanghi is someone who has grown up on a generous diet of classics, non-fiction and best-sellers. His idea of writing is to entertain and enlighten. The author is working on his next two books currently. One of these is a collaboration with American author James Patterson (who has had 19 consecutive number one bestselling novels) for a crime thriller that will be out in early 2014. Excerpts from a chat with the Indian author...

You were comfortably 'settled' in your family business. What made you take to writing?

I've always been fascinated by books. When I was young, my grandfather used to hand out a book — which would be anything from a biography to a classic — to me every week and ask me to write a piece on what I thought about it. On the other hand, my mother used to love reading thrillers and bestsellers. These would be everything from the Frederick Forsyths to the Sidney Sheldons and these page turners would automatically be passed on to me. I grew up with a mix of two varied sensibilities — one of them entertained and the other enlightened. As for my dabbling with writing, it was a chance trip in Kashmir that got me obsessed with a particular tomb. I became so obsessed with reading every possible detail about this, where the idea of writing a story based on this became a natural offshoot. And that's how my journey into writing began.

Your books have a lot history and mythology. How do you choose on them?

I believe that patterns tend to repeat themselves and there are connections between the past and the present. There is the old proverb that reads 'you can't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been'. For me history is like that. When you take history and combine it with myth, then you get mystery. That is what gets my adrenaline rushing. This is the reason why all my books, until now have been in that space where history meets mythology. Going forward, with my next two books, I am going away from that space, because my project with James is purely a contemporary project.

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As for my next book, it does have elements of history, but it is about modern history, set in 1937, 10 years before Independence. My idea of writing is to enlighten and yet entertain.

A lot of authors these days are fascinated with mythology when it comes to fiction...

I think it is partly because we are in India and India is a treasure house of stories. We are

a country of storytellers, and for the longest time, it was an oral tradition. We have tons of these stories which the younger generations aren't aware of. But, we cannot tell the story in its own form, as it won't hold interest. This is where people like me come into picture, where we take elements of from those stories and give them a modern twist, most often in the form of a thriller.

You're collaborating with James Patterson. What can readers expect out of this association?

It is a modern day crime thriller. While it does have the Ashwin Sanghi elements to the narrative, for all practical purposes it is a

modern day crime thriller. James is the most prolific thriller writer that there is. There is a method to his madness. His publishers had read my works. I got a call from them asking if I would be open to writing a book with James, since he was writing one set in India. He doesn't want to do it on his own as he felt he would lose its flavour. This is how this alliance happened. I am quite thrilled about this. The

book should be out in early 2014.

Your contemporaries are now writing screenplays. Will you follow suit?

It may sound very strange, but I love the freedom that writing a novel gives me. It is an unhindered experience. If I come after a bad day, I can decide that my protagonist will die on page 100 of my novel in a 350-page story. I could take the action of my story from Mumbai to Venice to Timbuktu to Tokyo and not have to worry about will it do to the production of the film. That freedom of writing you don't get in other formats, I'd rather leave it to someone else to deal with the headache of drafting my book into a screenplay.

HOT LAUNCH