

'I take the the title Indian Dan Brown as a compliment'

Ashwin Sanghi businessman by day, novelist by night turned into a bestseller fictionist overnight when his book *The Rozabal Line*, became a runaway hit, almost as soon as it hit the stands in 2008. One of the speakers at the Bangalore Literature Festival, Sanghi was part of the panel that discussed whether the current generation is turning into a 'Bestseller Generation'.

Excerpts from the interview

■ Do you think the present generation has turned into a 'Bestseller Generation'?

The topic seems to indicate that things are different today than they were a couple of generations ago. But we always had bestsellers. So to say that today's generation reads bestsellers compared to previous ones, is not right. We've always had them - whether it was Tulsi's *Ramayan* or the *Kamasutra*, for that time they were bestsellers. But yes, I think we now talk a lot more about bestsellers because the process has become much more transparent.

■ You've been called the Indian Dan Brown. What do you think of this title?

I am happy being associated with Dan Brown, amongst many others. But there are also those who pick up my books, thinking that it's going to be a typical Dan Brown book. For example, my second novel *Chanakya's Chant*, didn't have any element of Dan Brown. There was no hidden conspiracy, no archaeology. After *The Krishna Key* released, a lot of people compared my professor to Robert Langdon, but then again the material is hundred per cent different. I'm talking about the fact that the Mahabharata may have been a nuclear war, I'm talking about levitation, I'm talking about the Shiv Ling, it's a totally different from Dan Brown. So when people tell me they think I'm the Indian Dan Brown, I just shrug it off and thank them for the compliment.

■ Who are your biggest influences when it comes to your writing?

I think my biggest influence is probably Arthur because he spent years and years in re-



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search. He wrote books like the *Moneychangers*, *Airport*, *Hotel* and these books were a lot ahead of their time because he didn't have the internet for research, so you can imagine the hard work that went into writing something like that. The authors who have had a profound impact on my writing style are Fredrick Forsyth, Robert Ludlum, Jeffrey Archer, Shidney Sheldon - all master storytellers.

■ How obsessed are you with the idea of conspiracy theories?

Totally obsessed! See, a story is exciting not only when I can visualize it, but I can also think about the story behind the story. For example, when Rahul Gandhi yesterday made a remark about the ordinance, I was wondering what would be the story behind it, that what prompted it. Was it a publicity stunt, or was it a dispute between various power centers? That story behind the actual story is way more exciting. Ultimately, that's a conspiracy theory. The last book that I wrote, *The Krishna Key*, was exactly that. I wanted to explore the possibility that the Mahabharata was a real event. Could it be a technologically more advanced civilization? Was it a nuclear war? That was cooking in my head, which eventually turned into a story. The combination of mythology, history and science, that's what really contributes to a

story.

■ What books did you like reading growing up?

My reading has always been very varied. When I was a young boy, I used to get a book every week from my grandfather. During his lifetime, he has probably given me around a little short of five hundred books. And now when I go back into those titles, I feel they were so varied. Sometimes he would send me *Autobiography of a Yogi* and then sometimes it would be *Charles Dickens* or *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, *War and Peace*. So, I think I grew up reading maybe not a huge number of books, but a wide variety of books. And then simultaneously, my mother would give me the latest fiction she was reading, whether it was Forsyth or a Ludlum.

■ Do you get any time to read these days, now that your time is divided between your business and your books?

The research for my books takes around a year or a year and a half to complete. So I'm constantly reading, which doesn't leave me to do any reading of my own. I still make time to read authors authors like Rushdie, Guha, when I can.

Ashwin Sanghi is currently working on two novels. The first novel is a gritty, crime thriller set in Mumbai, which will release early next year. The second book, a departure from his usual settings and characters, will explore the business world.

— Shyam Krishna Kumar