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How Ashwin Sanghi's wife awakened the writer in him

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When summer was at its peak and all his friends had left for vacations, a young member of a Marwari business family was packed off to spend time at its many mills and workshops. There he was taught the "hunar", or skills, of business, so that he could one day occupy his father's gaddi (seat). Write India author Ashwin Sanghi was barely 12 when he was first told to accompany his father and learn the intricacies of doing business. The young Ashwin resisted, asking what he was expected to do all day at his father's office in what was then Bombay. "Munim ji will teach you accounts," said his father, and Ashwin spent the next three months learning from the accountant.

"I was sitting there with Munim ji every day, learning debit and credit and all of that. At that time, I hated my family and I hated my dad. I would often think: 'Yeh kya hai, sab log ghum rahe hain.' They are having fun and here I am doing this nonsense," recalls Ashwin.

It soon went beyond holidays. Whenever there was a little breathing space, his father would find a way to drag Ashwin along to the office. The family also had an automobile business and during one vacation, Ashwin was sent to a mechanic at one of the workshops. Why? "To learn how to assemble parts of a scooter." The next holiday, he was sent to a car workshop.

When he joined college, the instructions were clear: "Attend morning classes, because I need you in office by 12 O'Clock." Thus he was regularly short on attendance during his five years at St. Xavier's in Mumbai, not because he was goofing off and having

fun, but because he was already going to work.

When he told his father that he wanted to pursue an MBA, the instructions were again clear: "If you can make it to one of the top 10 institutions, then you can go; else it's a waste," his father said.

He made it to Yale School of Management and spent two years in the US. Apart from graduating with an MBA degree, he also wrote a couple of articles in SOM Chronicle -- a monthly magazine at Yale. This was his first attempt at writing after a childhood spent in sustained reading of books that came from his mother and maternal grandfather.

Ashwin returned to India with his Yale degree and did nothing but manage his family business for the next five years. And that was when he married Anushika -- changing his life forever.

In his wife, Sanghi found somebody he could confide in, share his most intimate thoughts with. Though Ashwin grew up in a close-knit family, there were hardly any conversations around things like aspirations and hobbies -- it was all about business. But here was Anushika, his wife and friend, who was willing to listen to him and encourage him to explore other facets of life.

Ashwin had begun to realise that business was no longer exciting him. "At the end of the day you have to do what makes you happy. If you are going to just do what people expect you to do, then there's no point to it," he recalls telling himself some time in 2002, the year he first really considered moving out of business.

And what does one need at such a crucial stage in his life? A companion, perhaps. Ashwin found his in Anushika. As he expounded on what he wanted to do, on why the life he was living held no excitement for him, and how a different approach may lead to new experiences and discoveries, Anushika listened patiently. And when she spoke, her words were like a soothing balm for his aching heart.

"She is a big part of my writing journey because she gave me the confidence to not be stuck in what I was not enjoying. I was choking in that business environment, I was suffocated. I am a creative person... and as a creative person I knew I could no longer survive there," he said after a long silence.

The rest is history. Today Ashwin ranks among India's highest-selling English fiction authors. He has written several bestsellers (*The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant*, *The Krishna Key* and *The Sialkot Saga*). In addition, he has co-authored a New York Times bestselling crime thriller with James Patterson called *Private India* (followed by another in the series called *Private Delhi*). He was also one of the 11 participating authors in Write India First Season.

His latest novel, *Keepers of Kalachakra*, was released to much acclaim at the Jaipur Literature Festival last month. Ashwin will be in the national capital on Friday to participate in a session on his latest novel at Delhi Literature Festival. Entry is free and open to all.