

Revisiting history

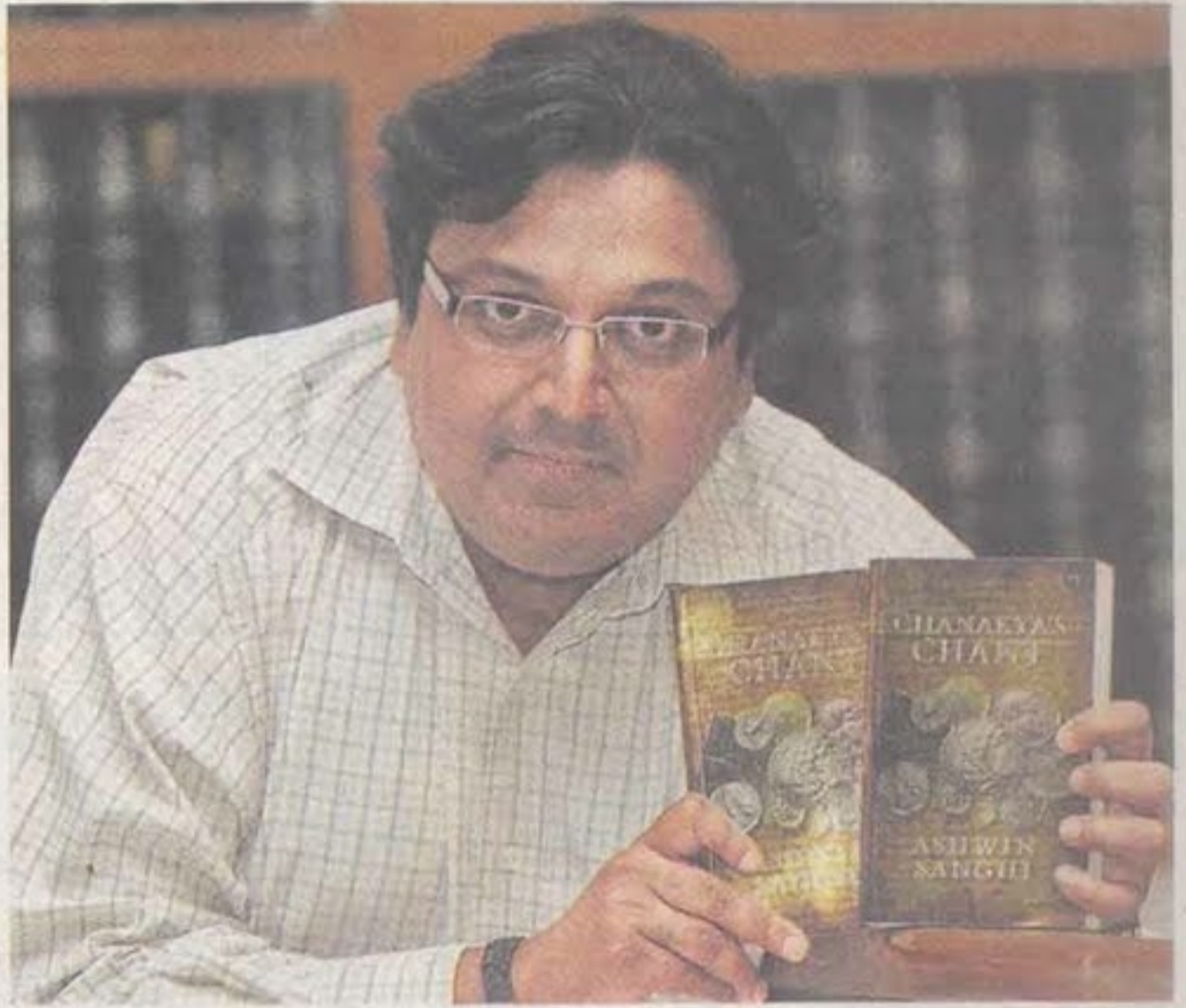
CHAT Author of 'Chanakya's Chant', Ashwin Sanghi talks about his love for history, intrigue and writing

Indian fiction in English is going through its own coming-of-age moment where new authors are experimenting with different genres and are not scared of promoting their books with the distinct Indianness instead of aping their western counterparts. Moving beyond college romance or chick lit stories, readers are also welcoming the historical and mythological thrillers that authors are dishing out. Ashwin Sanghi is one such author.

Businessman to author

With a management degree from Yale University and a stable family business Ashwin Sanghi penned his first novel *The Rozabel Line*, under the pseudonym of Shawn Haigns, which explored the idea that Jesus had survived the crucifixion and eventually settled down and died in India. Explaining the choice behind his pen name, Ashwin Sanghi says, "I was a businessman for 16 years of my life, so when I started writing I wanted to keep my literary identity separate. But later it became a marketing hazard as I did not want my readers to be shocked to see a Marwari when they were expecting a Shawn Haigns."

After a religious thriller, his second book *Chanakya's Chant* was a political thriller revolving around the life of the political strategist Chanakya during the rule of emperor Chandragupta Maurya, with a contemporary twist. The book also won the Vodafone Crossword Popular Choice Award 2010. The businessman-turned-author admits that he wanted to look beyond a mundane balance sheet and explore his creative side. After a prod from his wife, he began his literary journey. "Writing helps me create a different world that I can escape to," he says. But commenting on a full time writing career he quips in, "My worry is, if I don't have a day job my writing will be-



WRITE TRACK Ashwin Sanghi's book won the Crossword Popular Choice Award 2010 PHOTO: R. RAGU

come a part of my mundane boring life. I like to wear the boring hat in the morning and the exciting one in the night when I am writing."

Ashwin feels that history and historical figures will never lose their relevance and that's why these characters are being reinvented in various literary works. "The central tenets of politics remain the same, so Chanakya's politics will still find resonance in the contemporary set up," he explains. Is it easier to work around characters that readers are already familiar with? Certainly not. Treading on historical facts and weaving a fictional story around them is a challenge. "Initial work is on period research where the historical markers are absolutely non-negotiable. Once that is established, a writer can take creative liberties in terms of chronology to suit the story."

Think contemporary

An avid reader of fiction right from Leo Tolstoy to Irving Wallace, Ashwin says that the Indian fiction scene is going through a generational change. "We have finally shed our colonial hang-ups where the target audience is Indian.

The readers want to read more about their own roots. In fact, fiction was only limited to family sagas or individual struggles. But now writers are experimenting with thrillers and whodunits. Instead of reading an espionage story on the Soviet Union why not read on India-Pakistan," he points out. However, he stresses that the primary aim of a good writer is to keep the interest of the reader alive throughout the plot.

He credits the changed attitude of the Indian publishers to the growth of Indian fiction. However, commenting on the frequent usage of Indian English he says, "I am a part of the old school where I feel that purity of the language should be retained. But English is a constantly evolving language where new words are being added to the dictionary so I don't see any harm in experimenting with the language. Only poor editing standards need to be improved."

Continuing his romance with thrillers, Ashwin Sanghi's next book will deal with the world of business and economics slated for a next year release. "The subject is close to home for me," he says.

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