

# I'm not a movie buff

Says author **Ashwin Sanghi**, whose latest book is being adapted into a major motion picture

Pics: Md Illias



Ashwin Sanghi

Sarah Salvatore

It's been almost a year since Ashwin Sanghi's second book "Chanakya's Chant" released and entered all major Indian national bestseller lists within a span of two months. But the buzz surrounding the book refuses to die. And it's all thanks to Bollywood. The Yale graduate, who published his first bestseller, "The Rosabal Line" under the pseudonym Shawn Haigins, is excited about the prospect of his book being made into a film, to be directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. On a whirlwind trip to the city, Sanghi finds time to chat with Hyderabad Times. Excerpts.

## What brings you to the city?

There is a student in ISB who read my book a about year ago. She wrote to me at that time and told me that my book had inspired her to write a manuscript of her own. About three weeks ago she wrote to me again informing that she had completed her manuscript and found a publisher too. She wanted me to come to the city to launch the book and I

couldn't refuse her. Hence the trip to Hyderabad.

## Your book, "Chanakya's Chant", is being adapted into a film...

Yes. Siddharth Roy Kapoor from UTV read the book and passed it on to his team saying that he felt it was written in a cinematic style. His team too responded in an overwhelming manner. They unanimously agreed to adapt it into a film. I honestly, did not go out there looking for production houses to adapt my book. It just fell into my lap. I received a call from the production house asking me to come for a meeting and two weeks later, I signed the contract. It was as simple as that.

## How do you feel about Ashutosh Gowariker helming the project?

As far as Ashutosh is concerned, it's totally between the production house and the film maker. I have no clue as to what the understanding between them is or whether they do have an understanding at all. All these things take time to cook. But yes, I did have a chance to chat with Ashutosh during a literary festival. We

are a mutual admiration society because I absolutely loved "Jodha Akbar" and he loved reading "Chanakya's Chant".

## Are you going to be involved in any capacity with the movie?

No. Although the production house did offer me the chance to co-write the script, the reason for me backing out are various. As a writer, you love every word you've put on paper. And then it becomes tough to take the right decisions in a rational manner. I have read great books which did not translate into great films. "Anna Karenina" and "The Da Vinci Code" is the best examples. But at the same time, you have something like "The Godfather". Mario Puzo's book was nice, but it was the movie which made it a cult classic. A book and a movie are different animals. You need a cinematic perspective to be involved in the motion pictures. And this is something I lack.

## Since you've fleshed out each character in the book, whom would you like to see playing the main protagonist?

Actually, I'm not much of a movie buff myself. My attention span is very limited and I watch just one or two movies a year. So, I have never thought about the actors who could play the different characters from my book.

## This whole trend of adapting books of Indian authors into films has been on the rise. What do you make of it?

I think it's a healthy trend. I hope it carries on. Over a period of time, hopefully there will be a better structure of arriving at an agreement between the writer and the production house because that is one area where we have had a lot of heartburn for no rhyme and reason. If those things were contractually obligated in a better way then we won't have so many issues later. Cinema has matured too. We are moving away from the formula culture. Today, there is a huge appetite for different stories. That's where the books of Indian authors come in.

## How do you rate yourself as a writer?

I'm getting there (*laughs*). For me, the critical element is if I can keep the reader hooked to a story. I even pay attention to stuff like chapter length and if I feel it's too long, I cut it short. I'm not the type to write, sit back and admire my prose. I want my writing to reach people. I don't write for a market. I write from my heart, something that appeals to me. The marketing, segmenting etc., can be done by your publisher, not you.

[sarah.salvadore@timesgroup.com](mailto:sarah.salvadore@timesgroup.com)