

Politics as a Life-Changing Power in Society: Ashwin Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant* (2010)

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Abstract

Politics is quite a prominent as well as dominant force in an individual's life. Its ultimate aim is to acquire power whether its price is morality or the interests of a group of individuals. From ancient times power games have been a subject of utmost interest for all ranks of society. Ever since the emergence of humanity, the core element is centered on survival; the one who survives in the end becomes the winner and the leader, the one who can set new trends. Social identity, as Michel Foucault says, gets constructed on this very notion. Ashwin Sanghi's novel *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) makes that notion much more comprehensible. The great sage Chanakya and his present day equivalent Pandit Gangasagar Mishra decide the fate of rest of the characters by controlling all the vital decisions and competences in their lives. This article accesses literature as an arbitrator between the true identity and the conjectured identity. It also shows the political maneuverings of both masterminds of the novel in two different eras. It sheds light on the concept of identity formation and the factors responsible for forming and shaping identities of individuals under social and political influences. The entire novel is a supreme example of the merger of power and politics in an evil nexus which shape the fate of common people without their consent. To support the argument, Michel Foucault's theory of Normalizing Power will be referred to.

Keywords: identity formation, political nexus, Michel Foucault, power games, *Chanakya's Chant*, normalizing power

Introduction

In *Chanakya's Chant* (2010), Ashwin Sanghi asserts that "...politics is all about sentiment and symbolism."¹ Whenever there is a study of the 'identity' of an individual, it carries not only the study of the present but also the past of that particular person. By the past is meant previous experiences. Michel Foucault believes that our social, biological or psychological experiences are contingent historical forces; that is, they are not preordained or unavoidable. They have a huge impact upon the overall personality of a person. To understand the identity formation more clearly, consider a simple example of child building blocks in different shapes. Being the 'owner' of the blocks, the child knows which block is to be used in constructing what structure either a gun, a building, a train or a house. The blocks, although each one is different from others, are brought together in a single whole creating the desired structure as decided by the one who is putting them together. The same block which was acting as the trigger in the gun, is now acting as one of the bricks in the house, and so on. Similarly identities are not fixed in a traditional sense but are created and mediated by the rich, elite and powerful people. It is constructed brick by brick by discourses of society that individuals encounter each day.

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¹ Ashwin Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant* (Noida, India: Westland Ltd, 2010), p. 81.

This article studies the complicated role of power in politics with special reference to Ashwin Sanghi's novel *Chanakya's Chant*. Social identity gets shaped every day through a person's experiences with the world. "Identity is not fixed but rather a discourse mediated by our interactions with others" and this is where the role of politics begins.² The actual task of politics is to produce power relationships among different social strata and channel knowledge from the higher cadre to the masses. To support the argument, references from works by Michael Foucault³ and Walter R. Fisher⁴ will be used; these scholars have developed theories of identity formation and power games dominant in society from distinct positions. Since this research aims to diagnose the role of politics and power relationships prevalent in any society, it is contended that individuals are made to think that they are living according to their own will, but actually, it is an invisible power that surrounds them, which Foucault has termed as 'Normalizing Power'.⁵ It automatically manipulates one's behavior and makes him/her act according to the will of the power holders of society.

Chanakya's Chant

Chanakya's Chant (2010) is one of the best-selling and most read novels by Indian author Ashwin Sanghi. The novel is basically a historical fiction with a dual timeline. One plot deals with the kingmaker and great sage Acharya Chanakya and the other plot is about his present-day incarnation Pandit Gangasagar Mishra. Sanghi has drawn a comparative contrast between the two prominent politicians with exceptional skill: like Chanakya who took revenge of his father's cold-blooded murder by shaking the throne of Dhanananda, a corrupt and lecherous king of Magadha, Gangasagar too uses his witty political skills to hold a dignitary position in Cawnpore politics. To fulfill his aim, he uses many people and opportunities. All his schemes bear fruit when his handpicked soldier Chandini - an ordinary girl from the slums - becomes the Prime Minister of India after much hard work and scheming on the part of Gangasagar. The role of politics in human lives is totally selfish and hidden. Politicians can go up to any extent to get their purpose fulfilled. They do not hesitate to play blood games. For them, their only *dharma* is to attain their goal; the rest is merely a mob without feelings.

This novel is about king-making and power games working stealthily to get desired results, yet little research has been published on it to date. This text has attracted the attention of scholars either from the point of view of its presentation and plot or due to the powerful characterization presented by the author. This article will highlight the various powers and political nexuses that pulse behind the main plot and construct the characters accordingly. There is a scholarly article by Vijay Lakshmi Sharma⁶ on *Chanakya's Chant* in which he emphasizes the stream of consciousness technique used by Sanghi in this novel. According to Sharma, no writer of Indian tradition has studied history and geography in such detail as Ashwin. This novel is a result of his ten years of study of Indian myth, tradition, and history and it is a narrative basically born of conflicts. The way it interrelates the past and the present is the high point of narration in this era. Sharma read this text from a mythological angle and not politically.

² Steve Urbanski, 'The Identity Game: Michel Foucault's Discourse-Mediated Identity as an Effective Tool for Achieving a Narrative-Based Ethic', *The Open Ethics Journal*, vol. 5 (2011), pp. 3-9.

³ Margaret A. Paternek, 'Norms and Normalization: Michael Foucault's Overextended Panoptic Machine', *Human Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1987), pp. 97-121.

⁴ Walter Fisher, 'The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning,' *Journal of Communication*, vol. 35 (2006), pp. 74 - 89.

⁵ Johanna Oksala, 'Michel Foucault', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2022 [2003]). At: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/>. Accessed 29/05/2023.

⁶ Vijay Lakshmi Sharma, 'Book Review: Power Comes with a Price: *Chanakya's Chant*,' *Annals of Neurosciences*, vol 20, no. 3 (2013), p. 128.

To discuss the political and powerful impact that *Chanakya's Chant* has requires a multi-dimensional approach. The aura of power and politics engulfs all the major and minor characters of the novel, whether they are from the India of Chanakya's times (more than two millennia ago) or present-day Indian society. At the novel's beginning we encounter Vishaka, a *Vishkanyas*⁷ or poison maiden, trained by Chanakya to kill lecherous kings during lovemaking. This method was believed the safest in those times, because who would have thought that a king could die at the hands of such a delicate maiden while making love? Nobody even dreams that a beautiful young girl and her lingering kiss could be signing one's death warrant. This is how Chanakya kills Paurus, the mighty emperor of Kaikey and Magadha:

...His throat was on fire! Paurus let go of her hair in pain while clutching at his own throat as he felt the compound of arsenic and mercury scald his lips, tongue and throat. He tried to scream but no sound emerged from his larynx - it had already been destroyed by the Sankhiya poison on her lips. The ambrosial Vishaka continued to cradle his head in the warmth of her shapely bosom as she felt the living breath silently escape from him...Paurus, mighty emperor of Kaikey and Magadha was dead. Long live the king!⁸

It took Chanakya a long time to create an army of such poison maidens. His secret agents would find young girls for this purpose whose horoscopes showed signs of early widowhood. These girls were then fed a variety of poisons in graduated doses which made them immune to their ill effects. By the time these maidens reached puberty, they were quite toxic and only a kiss from them on someone's lips was enough to kill that person. That was the type of wit Chanakya had when it comes to destroying an enemy.

The second plot of the novel has a modern timeline, and is also full of such intrigues and underhand games. Here, the story revolves around Pandit Gangasagar Mishra whose father was a poor Brahmin. His only source of income was through teaching at a local government subsidized school. He had three children, two daughters and Gangasagar. In *shraadh*⁹ days, his father would get an invitation for lunch from one of his most wealthy patrons, Agrawalji. When Gangasagar's father dies leaving fifteen-year-old Ganga to look after the family of four with no source of income, Gangasagar starts working at Agrawalji's firm. This is the turning point in his life because Agrawalji is a cunning businessman who has only one aim in life; to make more and more money. Gangasagar starts learning his tactics gradually. When he becomes quite cunning and shrewd under the tutelage of Agrawalji, he leaves his employ not to break their bond, but to provide him political support so that together, they could make more money.

'In India's untidy democracy, politics and business shall always need each other. The former is about power and needs money to realise it; the latter is about wealth but needs power to create and sustain it. Let me become your political strength.'

'And what would you want from me?'

'Economic support. I shall repay it with political support when you need it.'¹⁰

In Sergiu Balan's view,¹¹ power is not something essential, possessed by institutions to be used as an oppressive tool against individuals and groups. Instead of being a tool of oppression, it is more of a method of oppressing the masses and individuals. In this sense, power is more like something that acts and operates in a certain way. There are incidents in the novel where Gangasagar promotes Ikram, a local mafia don in politics, to use his muscle power along with

⁷ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p.10.

⁸ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p. 9.

⁹ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p. 45.

¹¹ Sergiu Balan, 'M. Foucault's View on Power Relations', *Cogito: Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 2, (2010), pp. 55-61.

Agrawalji's money power, and the innocence and beauty of the daughter of a pan wallah Chandini Gupta to enter state politics and later, the national parliament. Sanghi's novel *Chanakya's Chant* mashes together ancient Indian history and contemporary politics. This novel provides a detailed examination of the sleazy and deadly game that Sanghi creates. Although he does not deny the influence of politics in his own life, he presents it sarcastically through the characters of the novel. We are all just pawns in a master game.

Power, Knowledge, and Politics: An Evil Nexus

The role of power in the life of ordinary people is not an easy thing to understand. It is very complex, and is intertwined with political support in any particular society. When there is a dominance of politics in society, individuals are always sidelined. Identity is misused by the powerful people and kingmakers of the society. They create a totally flexible and suitable environment which benefits them at both ends and the subjects fall prey to these set environments, considering it their fate. They are called 'subjects'¹² because they are subject to their pre-destined fate. Political power engulfs all the social, religious and economic rules in its own trap, and what comes next is a mere outcome of a pre-planned future. The superimposing of politics and power upon the lives of ordinary human beings is what Foucault terms 'Normalizing Power'.¹³ Individuals are always surrounded by this power, yet are unaware of it. This power builds one's character, traits, behaviours and social identity. Yet, on the contrary, a person is not always necessarily the same as that being projected in the society.

All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true'. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.¹⁴

There are numerous examples in the novel which show how individuals are mere puppets at the hands of their societal gods. For instance, Chanakya's deadly weapon - poison maidens, also known as *Vishkanyas* in the novel - are nurtured and fashioned in such a manner that they cannot live an ordinary life like other girls of their era lead. In a similar fashion, Gangasagar's prey Chandini, Ikram Bhai, Rajjo Bhaiya, Geoffrey, and even his confidante Shankar all trusted him blindly, but Gangasagar used their innocence as a tool to fulfill his unquenched desire for supreme power and political stature. He never gave a thought that all of them were human beings and not toys. Human beings have feelings and emotions which they preserve secretly in their hearts, and only open up to those whom they trust. Gangasagar, blinded by his passion for power, does not hesitate in even killing these people. He never asked what Chandini wanted from her own life, what plans Ikram Bhai had for his future, how dearly Shankar loved Chandini and so on. All he knew was that their love, emotions, and selfhood were a barrier to achieving his own ultimate goals, so he erased them out of his life when a suitable time came.

"People know what they do, frequently they know why they do what they do, but what they don't know is, what they do does."¹⁵ This is evident from the ending of the novel, especially when Chandini comes to know all the wrongdoings of her Uncle Ganga. She is left stunned, and breaks all ties with him. In order to give Chandini a high-profile life, Gangasagar

¹² Urbanski, 'The Identity Game', pp. 3-9.

¹³ Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109-133.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 27.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Vintage, 1988).

snatches the love of her life twice from her, and keeps pushing her one pedestal above her current position in politics. He even hides her own child's identity from Chandini telling her that it was stillborn. In a similar way, the ancient sage Chanakya performed the role of puppeteer when it came to individual identities and free will. He used and manipulated the 'subjects' as if they were puppets; as if they had no sentiments and emotions. The Vishkanyas who were raised to be weapons, too must have ordinary dreams like other girls of their age. They would never think of feeding themselves with poison every day, and washing their hands with someone's blood; the one with whom they laid down the night before. No girl in the world can dream to have such a meaningless life. Still, they fulfill commands from the mighty guru and transform from innocent maidens to bloodthirsty beauties.

Philosopher Walter R. Fisher¹⁶ sees human beings as 'storytellers' who usually view the world on the basis of an awareness of what he calls 'narrative probability'.¹⁷ This means 'their' side of the story, and their continuous effort of testing the authenticity of that story, which Fisher terms 'narrative fidelity'.¹⁸ This implies the experience is true in the context of other stories they know to be true in their lives. It is based on the notion that all meaningful communication is done through storytelling. We understand things from this art of storytelling or reporting of events. Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant* is an example of such storytelling experiences, where the entire plot and the characters are marionettes in the hands of wise Acharya Chanakya and his present-day duplicate Pandit Gangasagar Mishra. They both dominate the political, economic and social surroundings of all the major characters present in the novel. The way Acharya Chanakya, who lived about 2,300 years ago in India, made Chandragupta Maurya the king of Magadha by replacing a corrupt and evil king Dhanananda is totally mesmerizing, and this becomes possible only by Chanakya's strategy and tactics. This raises questions: Were Chandragupta Maurya or Chandini aware of their strings being pulled by their puppet-masters? Was it all being done without their consent? Was it a selfless effort to give a genuine and true leader to the nation in two different centuries or it was mere a revenge plan to satisfy one's hurt self regard?

Another major issue raised by Michel Foucault is the relationship between the powerful and the masses. It is solely dependent upon those with the upper hand, the masters of society determine what to present and how to present. Foucault places emphasis upon who is speaking in what capacity and for whom. This is what makes the difference. If an average person speaks for his own strata, it is hardly of any significance to the society, but if the representative is of higher rank or higher strata of society, s/he is considered to be holding a certain authority to express things about those who consider themselves 'beneath' the speaker. One of the major contradictions in power-relationships is that to fight for liberty from power is the first step toward accepting its dominance. The very thought of getting rid of power is making us realize that we are subjugated. The actual power is subtle and transparent as air around us; it surrounds us but is never visible, nor do we realize its existence or extent. Society is a roller-coaster ride through these political, economic and religious games where the subjects are treated as 'objects' fulfilling various tastes of the kingmakers of the society.

¹⁶ Walter R. Fisher, 'The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration', *Communication Monographs*, vol. 52, no. 4 (1985), pp. 347-367.

¹⁷ Claudia Calabresi, *The Narrative Theory: Introduction to Critics, Defenses and Possible Resolutions* (2019). At:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337949018_The_Narrative_Theory_Introduction_to_critics_defenses_and_possible_resolutions?channel=doi&linkId=5df7a07aa6fdcc2837250030&showFulltext=true. Accessed 29/05/2023.

¹⁸ Calabresi, *The Narrative Theory*.

“Power is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and regimes of truth.”¹⁹ To an extent, as an individual we can control our actions, but when it comes to be as part of a social whole, we unconsciously follow the trending social waves. Ashwin Sanghi has beautifully fulfilled this notion: be it the army of Magadha, the generals and chieftains of Alexander the Great, or the prophecies of Pandit Gangasagar, the modern age Chanakya, regarding social turmoil. It all ‘seems’ natural and inevitable but is actually well-planned and bound to happen due to machinations of the power holders of society. The major aim of politics is to criticize and condemn the workings of neutral, secular, and free organizations/ institutions because they are free from any sort of power games and function independently. The political powers attack them in such a manner that the victim seems like the attacker, and the attackers themselves play as victims. As Foucault says, “power is knowledge.”²⁰ He clearly states that there is no power relation possible without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that can claim itself free from any of the power structures. The one who holds the power becomes the genuine controller of all knowledge; what needs to be delivered to the masses and what needs to be withheld from them. The masses have only an occult picture of reality as this ‘reality’ is created and designed by the crafty hands who direct their fates. These trendsetters have enough capacity to color things blue or red according to what will benefit them, and the common people follow unconsciously, considering it their independent decision, their democratic right. This is how power games build a nexus between the actual identity and the imposed identity.

The Shakti Mantra: An Epitome of Power

There is a Shakti Mantra that appears several times in the novel. This mantra is recited by the main character of the novel Pandit Gangasagar Mishra, whose father was a poor schoolteacher in Uttar Pradesh. He loses his father at the early age of fifteen with his mother and two unmarried daughters to take care of. Thanks to his father’s goodwill, Gangasagar joins one of the most successful businessmen of the town, Agrawalji, who hires him for the job of accountant. Since Gangasagar is brilliant, he learns all the business tactics in no time, and becomes his mentor’s favorite, with his sharp mindedness, loyalty, and his speed to fetch more profit. Soon, he becomes the personal secretary and advisor of Agrawalji. Gangasagar improves his wit and intelligence to such an extent that Agrawalji is now totally dependent upon him for his business deals and profits. When he leaves Agrawalji’s employment he does not spoil his relationship with him, because for Gangasagar, he is a hen who lays golden eggs. He knows very well that although his purpose of life is to enter the world of politics; he cannot do that on his own without financial backing. So, the deadly combination of money and mind become the two most powerful people of Kanpur.

On one of his business promotion trips, Gangasagar happens to find a huge rock lying buried into the earth with the Shakti Mantra engraved upon it in Brahmi, a language of ancient India. This Shakti Mantra appears repeatedly in the novel through the main character Pandit Gangasagar Mishra. He keeps on reciting it under his breath every time he sees his plans for Chandini being fulfilled. For Gangasagar, this mantra is an epitome of female empowerment, and he firmly believes that if women want, they can turn the entire society into a better place to live. This mantra says:

Adi Shakti, Namō Namah;
Sarab Shakti, Namō Namah;
Prithum Bhagvati, Namō Namah;

¹⁹ Jonathan Gamenta, ‘Foucault: Power is Everywhere’ (2003). At: <https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere/>. Accessed 29/05/2023.

²⁰ Foucault, ‘Truth and Power’, pp. 109-133.

Kundalini Mata Shakti; Mata Shakti, Namah Namah.²¹

With this enchantment again and again, Gangasagar gains more wit and wisdom, like Acharya Chanakya who lived in Ancient India. He uses all the important links and apprentices to become the political guru of the country. His wisdom, Agrawalji's wealth, Ikram's manpower, and Chandini's humble background; all these factors work as ingredients for Gangasagar to attain his ultimate goal. This Shakti Mantra is used as a symbol of power used by Ashwin Sanghi. Whenever Chandini achieves something new, Gangasagar recites this mantra with his mouth. Similarly, Chanakya keeps on reciting this Shakti mantra to strengthen his wisdom and victory.

Politics: The Life-Changing Force

Politics is an interesting subject to discuss. Everybody has their own version of politics in their minds. Some consider it as a part of life, and others take it as a way of living life. From the beginning of human civilization to the present, politics has played a vital role in shaping future and identities of individuals. The social identity of an individual is different from his self-identity. What he plans for his life and what actually he has to choose are two different things. Foucault called this self-disciplinary theory "normalizing power." For most of our life, we accept whatever is expected from us as a member of society and we ignore our own desires and free will. In this novel, Sanghi has beautifully realized this issue of the impact of politics and power in the lives of ordinary people. They are not treated as individuals but 'subjects'. The power above them is presented as naturally existing, which seems so obvious that the subjects do not even feel they are under its influence. They think they are trying to 'fit in' into their social conditions, whereas in reality, all is imposed upon them without their knowledge.

Chandini has nothing to do with power or politics, yet she falls prey to Gangasagar's high ambitions, his dream to become the kingmaker. He handpicks her because of her ordinary parentage and extraordinary wit. He knows very well that she could be his ladder to win the world without doing any harm to himself. He uses his tactics and his genius brain to manipulate the circumstances around her so tactfully that she starts to trust her Uncle Ganga deeply. Chandini is totally spellbound by Uncle Ganga's way of doing things. She ultimately blindly follows Gangasagar and considers him to be her only well-wisher. One day, she is harassed by a group of local goons appointed by Gangasagar himself to convince her that she is not safe in the custody of her biological parents because she is a Hindu. So according to him, Chandini must be given in adoption to a local don Ikram Bhai to assure her safety. Chandini, although shocked to know that she will have to give up her own parents, accepts Ikram Bhai as her foster-father all because of Gangasagar's convincing power.

Pandit Gangasagar Mishra cannot afford any hurdle in his path; his ultimate goal is to make Chandini the Prime Minister of India. In order to achieve this, he takes many bold steps which are not always pleasant for his baby doll, Chandini. He is at the same time cautious enough not to let Chandini know that he is the mastermind behind all that has been happening to her. He sends her abroad for further education, where she falls in love with a white rugby player, Geoffrey. She gets pregnant then suddenly one day, Geoffrey goes missing. Due to her own ill health, Chandini must involve Uncle Ganga in all this. To add to her misery, she is told that her baby cannot be aborted. Hence she has no option left but to give birth to this child in hiding, which Gangasagar arranges for her. In the meantime, Geoffrey's dead body is found floating in a lake nearby, and Chandini is traumatised to hear this. Finally, her newly born baby is taken away without her consent; she is told it was stillborn.

Chandini has no one to rely upon except Uncle Ganga. She gradually tries to overcome her past and comes back to India. Gangasagar arranges for her debut in the world of politics of

²¹ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, pp. 8, 30, 62, 79, 111, 137, 163, 183, 246, 269, 287, 289.

Kanpur. Soon she becomes the MLA of her area, then MP, then Minister of External Affairs and ultimately fills her nomination for the CM candidature of Bihar. Her bad fate does not just stop at snatching her love of life and her child from her. She is now an adopted daughter, so she can hardly mistrust her foster father Ikram Bhai. Gangasagar uses Ikram as a ladder for Chandini to climb new heights in her political career. He builds her castle in the air brick by brick, and most of its bricks are drenched into the blood of innocent people who by some way or the other cross his path. Chandini is not aware of anything. She is just a puppet at the hands of an expert puppeteer. Later, Ikram Bhai dies suddenly when elections are near and Chandini gets a record victory on sympathy grounds. He was about to fly to some destination by his private chopper about which only Gangasagar knew. Suddenly the helicopter crashes while taking off and even his body parts are not found to perform the last rites. All this happened so suddenly and publicly that everyone including Chandini considered it an accident.

Chandini is now important in the public perception, and needs a personal assistant who not only assists her but also keeps an eye on all her activities. Gangasagar appoints an old apprentice Shankar as her personal assistant-cum-bodyguard. He has a soft spot for Chandini since his youth, but due to dread of Gangasagar, he never told Chandini of his feelings. Then one day, in a tender moment, Chandini feels light-hearted enough to forget her miseries for some time. They spend the night together and it is a life changing moment for Chandini who has been deprived of physical love ever since she lost Geoffrey. Shankar is not only physically but emotionally connected to Chandini. He assures her that he will always protect her, but at the same time he is afraid how to tell all this to Gangasagar. When finally, out of his innocence and honesty, Shankar explains the entire episode to Gangasagar, the latter cannot control his anger. “‘You were supposed to watch over her, not bloody sleep with her!’ roared Gangasagar...”²² Gangasagar is furious at the thought of his puppet being involved in a love affair. He had worked really hard to achieve his goal and was not ready to give it up so easily. So the best thing he could think of was to eliminate Shankar forever from the life of Chandini.

His inhumanity is beautifully explained in the novel when Gangasagar hires someone to kill Shankar and make sure that he dies on the spot. He wants a foolproof plan, and leaves no chance to miss the opportunity to eliminate Shankar from Chandini’s life. Even his hired truck driver makes it doubly sure that the task assigned to him has been fulfilled properly and there is not a chance of mistake. This is further explained by Sanghi as follows:

...Shankar had reached the bus stop that lay across the street. He looked to his right and left before crossing the street. Without warning, the Tata truck wheeled up, the driver having apparently lost control of his vehicle. The massive twenty-five-tonne monster smashed into Shankar, crushing his bones into dusty death. Shankar's mangled body lay in a mess of blood and pulpy gore as the truck driver looked in his rearview mirror and drove on.²³

Chandini, now a mature woman, who has a stature of her own in the state politics and in the parliament, is at present, one of the most eligible candidates to be nominated for the position of Prime Minister. She comes to know all about Gangasagar and his evil deeds. She feels betrayed and disheartened at the thought of being used as a puppet by the person she trusted blindly. She lost the love of her life twice because of this filthy, selfish person whom she considered her role model. Her entire life had become a joke; she had no control over her life and any decisions. Even her parents had to surrender to Gangasagar’s will and had to give their only daughter to be adopted by a man of another religion and above that, a mafia don, a criminal. All this is unbearable for Chandini. She decided to snatch her hand away from her so-called mentor, Gangasagar, and breaks all ties with him.

²² Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p. 146.

²³ Sanghi, *Chanakya's Chant*, p. 147.

Conclusion

It could be argued that individuals are predestined to meet their fates, but that this is not a divine act, rather an evil nexus of power and politics. Throughout their life, they keep on believing that they are living their life freely, but the reality is far different. From one's birth until death, there are numerous encounters with societal gods who decide what society is going to be. Power and politics are inseparable and when one tries to get rid of any superimposing power, s/he actually admits the existence of such a dominating force in politics. Thus this dirty game has selfish motives and admits no personal feelings. The power holders of society can dominate the individual only by making them realize how important it is to maintain law and order in the society. Gradually, one after the other, all the decisions and happenings which seem personal to one, get affected too by the power dominance in the society. Ashwin Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant* is a novel that interrogates these philosophical issues. In the modern narrative, Chandini is a nuanced example of being a pawn of social power. In the end, she finds solace, but the price she paid to meet the expectations of Pandit Gangasagar, it is clear to readers, is too high.