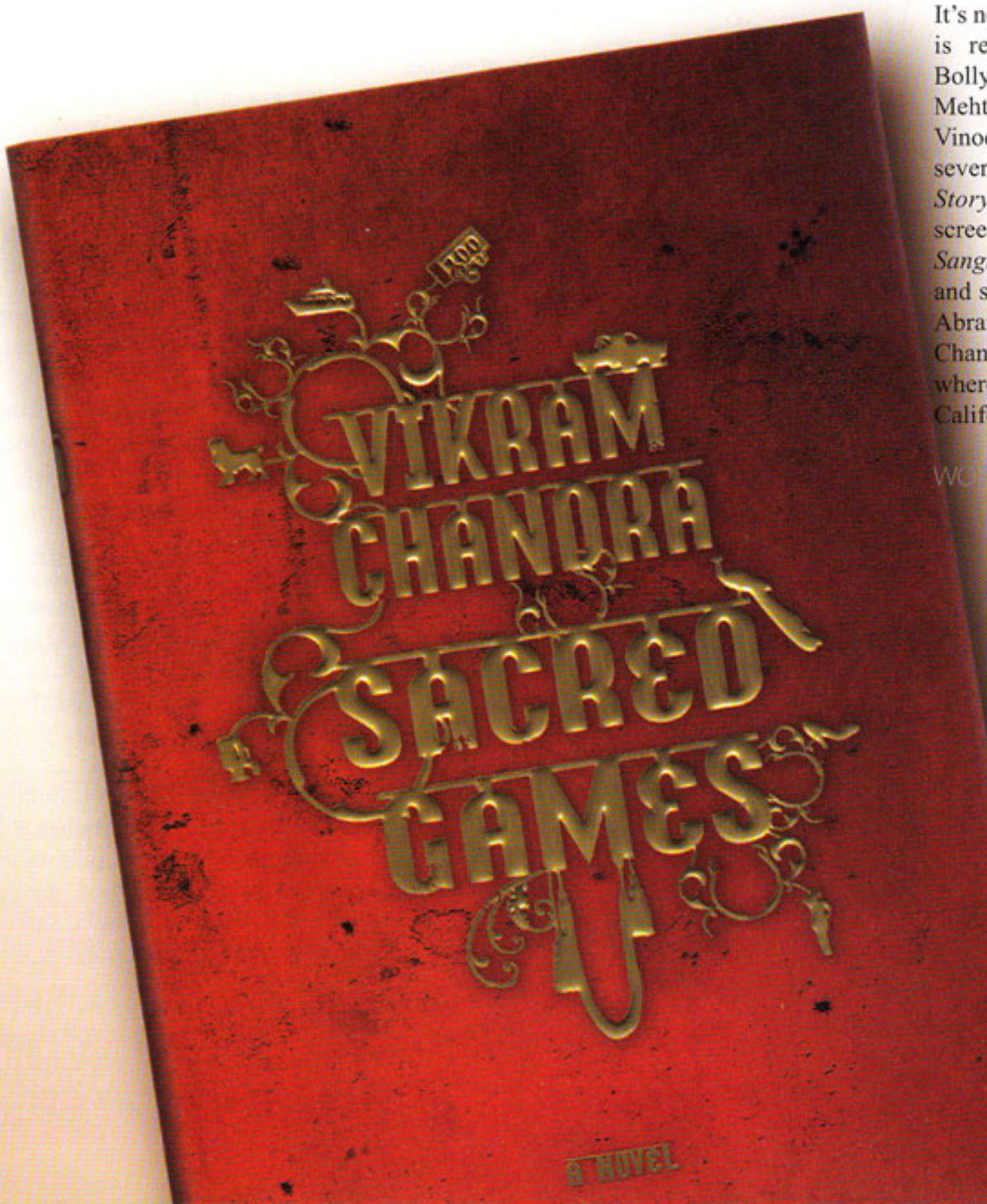
VIKRAM CHANDRA

Imagine being paid one million dollars in advance for a book. Imagine Ravi Shankar's soundtrack accompanying the book to make the reading experience more invigorating. The book becomes a bestseller and sells 20,000 copies in three weeks in India. It leaves publishers scrambling and sets off competitive auctions amongst publishers internationally.



This is not fiction. It is the real life story of Vikram Chandra and his newest literary endeavour, *Sacred Games*. Chandra spent almost a decade writing this epic crime saga of Godfather-like proportions meeting up face to face with the most notorious gangsters in Mumbai.

Published by Harper Collins in January 2007, this 900-page literary thriller is being hailed as a contemporary masterpiece. Harper Collins has even created a movie trailer on the book which plays in South Asian theatres across the greater Toronto area. *Sacred Games* brings alive the intricacies of organized crime in India through the story of a Sikh policeman who is investigating a powerful mafia kingpin. The book explores the life story of the two men, Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde as it intertwines with dark secrets, politics and even Bollywood stars. The book closely examines life in modern India where poverty and wealth co-exist and how the growing underworld breeds and feeds.

Born in Delhi, Chandra moved to the U.S. as an undergraduate student. After graduating from Pomona College in Claremont, he attended film school at Columbia University in New York. Chandra's first book *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book and the David Higham Prize for Fiction. While writing *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, he taught literature and writing and also worked as a computer programmer and software and hardware consultant. Chandra's short story collection *Love and Longing in Bombay*, also won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, this time for Best Book (Eurasia). It was also a *New York Times* Notable Book.

It's no surprise that Chandra belongs to a creative family and is related to some of the most illustrious names in Bollywood. He co-wrote *Mission Kashmir* with Suketu Mehta, a film that was directed by his brother-in-law, Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Vikram's mother Kamna Chandra wrote several Hindi films including *Prem Rog* and *1942: A Love Story*. His sister, Tanuja Chandra, is a director and screenwriter, who directed several films including *Sur* and *Sangharsh*. His other sister Anupama Chopra is a film critic and senior correspondent for *India Today*. His wife Melanie Abrams is also a novelist.

Chandra shuttles between Mumbai and Berkeley, California, where he teaches creative writing at the University of California. ANOKHI

WORDS PREETI THANDI