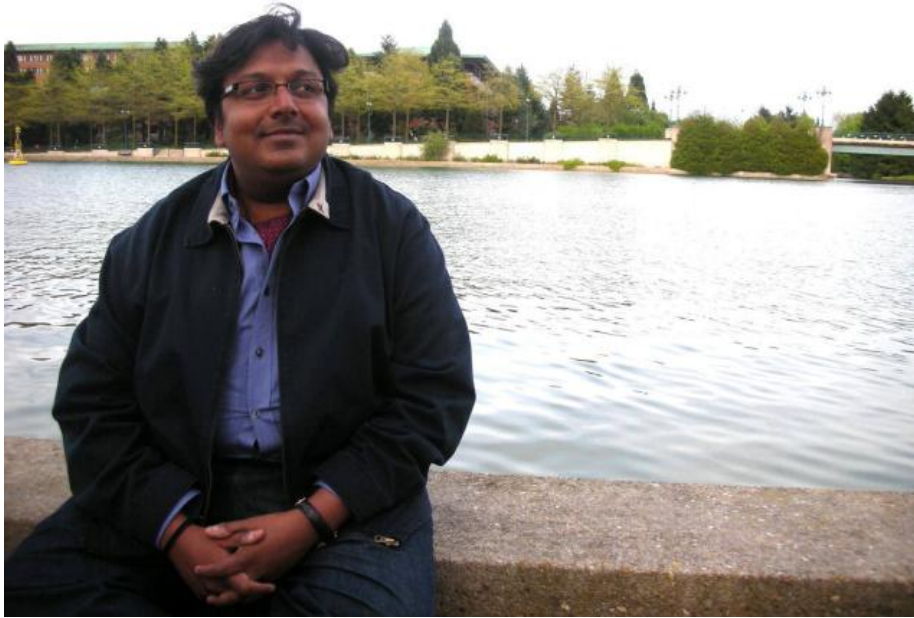


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Lining up the thrills

MINI ANTHIKAD-CHHIBBER



Ashwin Sanghi, writer of the thriller 'The Rozabal Line'

Ashwin Sanghi is finalising the screenplay of The Rozabal Line

The breathless conspiracy thriller reached India with Ashwin Sanghi's "The Rozabal Line". In town to talk about the spanking new reprint (Westland), the Mumbai-based Sanghi said, "The notion that Jesus may have left a bloodline came to my attention in late 1999 when I read 'Holy Blood Holy Grail' by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. I visited Srinagar and the shrine at Rozabal subsequently. That was the moment that I knew that I had to pull all the threads together and weave a story around these fascinating legends."

Initially published in 2007 under the pseudonym of Shawn Haigins, "The Rozabal Line" was later published by Westland, under Sanghi's own name.

The reason for this Sanghi says is because "I desperately wanted to have two separate lives, one as a businessman-entrepreneur and the other as a novelist. Creating the persona of Shawn Haigins was an ideal way to do this. However, when Tata-Westland signed up for publishing 'The Rozabal Line' in India they felt that it would be virtually impossible to market the novel effectively using my pseudonym and I agreed to publish under my own name."

Stepping in

The novel ventures into territory that Indian writers in English have not gone into before — the conspiracy thriller. "Genre is unimportant to me, it is the story that is. I spent my early years on a diet of genre fiction and wondered why Indian writers seemed to only write literary fiction. Satyajit Ray gave us his wonderful detective Feluda in 1965. Why did we stop writing commercial fiction — adventures, mysteries, suspense novels, and thrillers? We ended up ceding this space to foreign authors. I'm delighted to see that the scenario has dramatically changed over the last decade. I'm simply a manifestation of this evolving literary landscape."

While Sanghi admits to being "neither scholar nor researcher," the book has pages of foot notes that provide a fascinating starting point for all who wish to know more. "I spent around two years reading every book that I could find on the topic."

Describing the book as one "in which multiple characters revolve around a central story," Sanghi adds, "the book takes many little side trips to provide information in order to make the reader feel that what is being read is fact rather than fiction."

The novel, which deals with the notion of Jesus Christ in Kashmir, spans countries and centuries in a breathless mix of fact, speculation and fiction.

Sanghi admits that there were times when he "was ready to give up the exercise altogether. The main hurdle that I faced while writing 'The Rozabal Line' was that there was simply too much information that needed to be conveyed.

At times this information can be overwhelming to the average thriller reader, but it is precisely this information that makes the book extremely interesting to those who are fond of theological-historical conspiracies that are intricately woven.”

This abundance of facts is also coming in the way of translating the book onto screen. “I am currently in the process of finalising a screenplay for the book,” Sanghi says. “This process could take several months owing to the overwhelming information that is presented within the novel.”

While the book came out after Dan Brown's “The Da Vinci Code”, Sanghi says he has “no qualms about being compared with Dan Brown, in fact it pleases me. Because irrespective of whether you loved or hated ‘The Da Vinci Code’, you simply could not ignore it. Even though ‘The Rozabal Line’ is extremely different in story, content, style and premise, it was an expected outcome that such comparisons would be drawn.”

Sanghi calls himself “a cultural oddity, a Marwari businessman who actually writes novels. Yes, I can see the shock writ all over your face! I started working in my family business, which has interests in automobiles, real estate and manufacturing when I was 16 years old and was one of the youngest members of my graduating MBA class at Yale.”

Talking about his next novel, the 41-year-old says: “My next novel is a political thriller set in ancient India. I find it exciting to weave fiction around events that may have happened hundreds of years ago. My publishers plan on releasing it by December this year.”

Keywords: [The Rozabal Line](#), [Ashwin Sanghi](#)

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