

A murderer, who thinks he is a Vishnu incarnate, is on a killing spree whereas a history professor not only has to prove his alibi but uncover the mystery

MYTH AND MYSTERY



ANJANA BASU

✓ The opening pages plunge you straight into a gruesomeness worthy of *Da Vinci Code*. And murder committed by an avatar of the god Vishnu, the 10th Kalki avatar, to be precise, or so the murderer believes he is. There are a number of mystic emblems at stake which the murderer has been ordered to find. That, as I expected, was a dive into *Da Vinci Code* territory, four clues to be pieced together by a history professor Dr Ravi Mohan Saini, who finds himself on the run from Radhika Singh of the police force. Nicknamed the “Sniffer Dog” she fastens obstinately on the trail of her suspect, even though, quite frankly, I thought her hunt didn’t say much for her detective capabilities since she was determined to condemn the suspect through circumstantial evidence, without considering any options!

Sanghi does a smoke and mirrors with the mysterious Mataji who is the power behind the killings and who, like Radhika Singh carries *rudraksh* beads. And then there’s Priya who partners Saini and draws out of him all the historical snippets of scientific and mythological information that are relevant to the quest for the hidden power, which is “Krishna’s priceless legacy to mankind”.

However what the power actually does is unclear. Sanghi brings out the story of the *brahmastra* in the Mahabharata which, according to some theories, was the first of the nuclear weapons – but then as the story progresses, Krishna’s key turns into some other kind of mystic force.

Indian mythology fans will love the way that events from the Mahabharata and Krishna legend are used to provide



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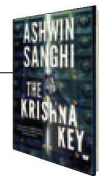
modern parallels. Not to mention that curious piece of trivia about Shiv *lingams* giving out nuclear radiation, which is why the nuclear reactor at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre is shaped like a *lingam*. *Bel* leaves are apparently an age-old radiation shield which is why they are used in Shiva worship. Even that Taj Mahal-Taj Maholaya story, which did the email rounds at one point, is brought in with a logical hook. Research is something one has come to expect from Sanghi after *Chanakya’s Chant*. In this book, in the style of history based thrillers, without the historical nuggets the modern story cannot exist.

I have a problem with the pace. It slows to a crawl to allow for all the information and my willing suspension of disbelief

got rather strained in places. However, women will certainly be glad to know that Sanghi thinks so highly of their capabilities, even to the point of making them the lead figures in the book. The villain bows to the superior intellect of his Mataji and the entire police force seems to kowtow to Radhika Singh, regardless of her occasionally misguided theories.

The story leaps from Mount Kailash to Dwarka to Agra with the murder count increasing and time running out for Saini, as success seems assured for the villains. But of course, every reader knows that the hero will eventually triumph and fall in love to boot.

Anjana Basu is the author of Rhythms of Darkness



THE KRISHNA KEY

By Ashwin Sanghi
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