



'I have been called the devil'

Debutant Ashwin Sanghi weaves in the age-old theory of Jesus surviving crucifixion and being buried at the famed Rozabal shrine in Kashmir in his book, *The Rozabal Line*

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The first time he brought out his book in 2007, it was under his pseudonym Shawn Halgins. And since he didn't find any takers for the book, he had to self-publish it. Things would have stayed much the same too, only if he hadn't chosen to write *The Rozabal Line*. The story that mixed history with religion and had a whiff of conspiracy surrounding it created enough noise in the online world, enough to get its current publishers (Westland Ltd.) to reach out to the author behind the anagrammatical pseudonym Shawn Halgins — Ashwin Sanghi.

PLAIN VANILLA TO HOT CHOCOLATE FUDGE

A self-confessed fan of thrillers, Sanghi has a simple reason as to why he penned his first book around such a tricky topic. He says, "I am not the first person to tackle this subject. There are at least 30 - 40 books that have been written on this subject. But what I found reading them was, they were very dry. They were books you or I wouldn't pick up at the airport. For an interesting topic as this, you have lost a huge crowd there itself."

A Yale graduate, Sanghi has got the sure-fire formula right. He explains, "When you talk about history plus theology, you don't present it like vanilla. What you need is a dollop of hot fudge, nuts and chocolate sauce to make it interesting."

CONTROVERSY IS IN THE MIND

A racy page turner, the book in Sanghi's words is "a potent combination of history and religion." A plot line that hovers around historical characters like Jesus Christ, Osama Bin Laden, Mary Magdalene, the Illuminati and Opus Dei has the book getting the 'controversial' tag. Sanghi is nonchalant about it. Commenting on it, he says, "Honestly speaking, controversies are more in one's mind." That said, "I think the reason why my



Ashwin Sanghi likes to call himself 'an entrepreneur by day and novelist by night'

book is getting such a response might be because, for the first time, the subject has been written in a commercial format." Even as he jokes about the various news reports about the Rozabal Shrine seeing more travellers thanks to his book, Sanghi remarks, "I think it's not about controversy; it's just that many people, who have not heard of the theory (of Jesus's life in India) and the shrine are reading about it for the first time."

"I am probably the 101st person who is addressing the subject. The fact is that the crowd then takes a file of its own, in the reader's mind," he opines.

CONSPIRACY MAKES FOR AN INTERESTING READ

Sanghi readily agreed that he has been called a conspiracy theorist. "I am ok with it," he admits because conspiracies make stories more interesting. As he explains, "If you just say Jesus was crucified, it's normal. But if you say that Jesus survived the crucifixion that

makes for an interesting read. JFK getting assassinated is not interesting but add that there might have been a conspiracy behind it, and that makes it interesting."

FAN MAIL- HATE MAIL

The book as expected managed to raise the hackles of many. As he jests, "I have been called God Almighty and I have had people calling me the Devil." The best comment he has ever got is from a reader who wrote, "I have read other Indian authors who write for the Booker (Pritz) and are more interested in writing bad about the country. You have brought us a sense of pride."

"You are India's Dan Brown," reads a fan's comment on his website. Laughing heartily about the hate mail he has received, he says, "You could fill up pages on the whacko comments I have got. I have people telling me that I am wrong and then there are people declaring that I will go to hell!"