

# **Displacement of Myths in *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Krishna Key*: A Comparative Study**

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## **Abstract**

*This comparative analysis of *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi attempts to scrutinize the portrayal of institutionalized religions in the novels. The paper endeavours to trace the process of demythologization in relation to organized religion and gods of Hinduism and Christianity. The study also focuses on the exploitation of faith and religious beliefs as presented in the novels.*

*The works are different in terms of social, economic and cultural factors, but can be gathered under theological thrillers. The influence of Dan Brown upon Ashwin Sanghi is evident in terms of theme, style and narration. But the works divulge in the methodology used for the dislocation of myths. Christianity, Jesus Christ and Holy Grail are reinterpreted by Dan Brown by denouncing early Christian Church. *The Krishna Key* states and glorifies the technological supremacy of Indus valley civilization thereby suggesting that Krishna might have been a historical character. Dan Brown foregrounds rational understanding of religion by accusing early Church but Sanghi propagates the same by means of glorifying the past.*

**Keywords:** *demythologization, religion, faith, belief, exploitation, denounce, glorification.*

*The Da Vinci Code* authored by Dan Brown subverts the divine origin of Christianity accompanied by the symbolic reinterpretation of the Holy Grail. *The Krishna Key* deciphers Syamantaka not as a jewel of Krishna but as a nuclear isotope capable of nuclear transmutation. The reconstruction of Syamantaka in the novel endorses the scientific pre-eminence of the Indus valley civilization and implies the historical nature of Krishna. The novels depict the inhuman exploitation of human beings in the name of religion.

The dislocation of propagated myths in detective novels is accomplished by means of quest initiated by murders as the novels begin. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* begins with the murder of Sophie's grandfather. One clue leads onto another and it is revealed that Sophie's grandfather was an important member of the Priory of Sion, a secret society which nurtured people like Leonardo Da Vinci and Isaac Newton. Robert Langdon and Sophie get hold of the Cryptex, the main key to the Holy Grail and seek help from Teabing, a Holy Grail expert. At the end of the novel, Sophie turns out to be the living descendant of Jesus Christ.

In *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi, the central character Ravi Mohan Saini is accused of having murdered his best friend Anil Varshney. To vindicate himself he tries to get hold of the four seals found in Dwarka, Kalibangan, Kurukshetra and Mathura. The four seals along with a base plate constitute the Krishna Key which can unlock the true nature of Krishna to future generations. Saini dashes breathlessly from the submerged remains of Dwarka to the Somnath temple and revelation of mystery takes place in Agra. Pursuit is to find the murderer and to discover the secret location of Krishna's most prized possession. Eventually, Syamantaka is conjectured to be placed in between the two layers of the Taj Mahal doom.

Religion is necessarily an outcome of human fear of the unknown and failure.<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell believes religion to be a consequence of fear in his work *Why I am not a Christian*. Contemporary world includes many religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism which throw light on an ideal, and turn it into a role model. Each religion developed unique rituals to be performed, thus paving the way for many superstitious beliefs later on. The human beings, instead of seeking religion for solace, started losing comfort by forcing themselves to perform various religious rites and rituals.

Religion is definitely a source of solace for many people but undeniable is the fact that religion has been misused by many people throughout history. Radical writers and thinkers are against abuse in the name of religion. According to Marx, religion intoxicates human beings like opium, a drug capable of knocking down the consciousness of consumers. Marx views religion as a means of oppression.<sup>2</sup> The definition of religion by J. Krishnamurti, a writer and philosopher, religion is a generic aspect of human beings, "religion is something that includes everything,

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2010), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Fisher Pat Mary, *Religions Today: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 17.

it is not exclusive. A religious mind has no nationality. It is not provincial; it does not belong to any particular organized group.”<sup>3</sup>

The writer Dan Brown voices against organized church and negative influence of papal power upon people through his novel *The Da Vinci Code*. The conversation between Teabing, Sophie and Langdon is very crucial to the story line because it is Teabing, a Holy Grail expert who explains the evolution of Christianity through time.

According to historical records, Christianity came into being only after the death of Jesus. Constantine, the emperor of Rome, established Christianity as a state religion in the fourth century and proclaimed Christ as the saviour. Mary Magdalene was a potential threat to early church because she carried the bloodline of Jesus in her womb and it was she to whom Jesus had assigned the task of founding the church. So, the church propagated Mary Magdalene’s image as a whore. The evidences of her marriage with Christ were buried, thus transforming a mortal prophet into an immortal messiah.

The Early Church annihilated all obstacles on its way to attain absolute power. In the name of witch hunts, hundreds of radical women were burnt alive and thus, the supremacy of the sacred feminine was wept away. Teabing goes on to explain how institutionalized religion has wrecked havoc upon innocent lives. Dan Brown also talks of the *San Greal* documents probably might have been written by Christ himself and “Q” Documents, which can falsify the foundation of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Opus Dei society is an extreme form of religious exploitation. The society believes in corporal punishments and practices it vehemently. At times of desperation human beings tend to surrender themselves for exploitation. Bishop Manuel Aringarosa takes advantage of the vulnerability of Silas. Silas undergoes frustration and pain willingly in the name of God as per the norms of Opus Dei. He is made to believe that Jesus propagated self - inflicted punishments. Therefore as a devout Christian, Silas convinces himself that it is his duty to inflict pain on himself for his own mistakes. The defenceless position of Silas in the society is used by exploiters like Sir Teabing and Bishop Aringarosa. According to J. Krishnamurti, religion conditions the human mind. If a person proclaims himself to be a Hindu or a Muslim, he or she is conditioned by the religious experiences of others. In short, the person is burdened by faith and indeed compelled by his belief

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<sup>3</sup> J. Krishnamurti, *The Religious Mind* (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation, 2009), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi Books, 2009), 335-345.

to accept things without enquiry. Religion propagates conformity and makes us live in an illusionary world.<sup>5</sup>

Silas is compelled to murder in order to fight against people who are against Christ and his teachings. He turns out to be a serial killer and eventually dies for the sake of misplaced gratitude and faith. Similarly in *The Krishna Key*, religious dependence is utilized for capital benefits. Priya, student of murdered Anil Varshney under the leadership of Sir Khan trains Taarak to be the next Kalki avatar. Sir Khan misuses Priya and Taarak to attain the Syamantaka, the Philosopher's stone which is capable of nuclear transmutation.

Teabing and Langdon explain to Sophie the symbolic interpretation of the Holy Grail. The root word *San Greal* means the royal bloodline. Holy Grail also symbolizes someone who perpetrated the bloodline of Jesus. Teabing states that Mary Magdalene carried the royal bloodline of Jesus. Mary Magdalene was wronged because the Church hushed up all the proofs which portray Jesus Christ as a human being. So Mary Magdalene from the House of Benjamin who married Jesus Christ was perpetrated as a whore by the early Christian Church. As per the Priory of Sion, a secret society which guards the Holy Grail and nurtures the living descendants of Jesus, pregnant Mary Magdalene fled to France when Jesus was crucified. She gave birth to a girl named Sarah and their lives are chronicled by the Jewish people who protected them.

The real meaning of the Holy Grail is explained to the world through many symbols. The paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci, one of the grandmasters of the Priory of Sion, namely *The Last Supper* and *Madonna of the Rocks* explain the true nature of the Holy Grail. *The Last Supper* is considered to be a painting consisting of thirteen men - Jesus himself and his twelve disciples. Teabing explains the ambiguity within the painting to Sophie. After keen inspection, Sophie finds that the person who occupied the place of honour, at the right hand side of Jesus possessed flowing red hair and delicate features of a woman. Teabing goes on to explain how Mary Magdalene was entrusted the establishment of Church by Jesus himself and Peter, an important disciple of Jesus was envious of Mary Magdalene. Women were revered by ancient religions but Christianity demolished the idea of sacred feminine by portraying Eve as an offshoot of Adam and by recasting Mary Magdalene as a harlot in *The Bible*. Many symbols like the five pointed star and rose which were used to signify femininity lost their significance as Christian Church demonized the idea of sacred feminine.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Krishnamurti, *The Religious Mind*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 319.

The quest for the Holy Grail is simply a quest for the tomb of Mary Magdalene along with the *San Greal* documents which explain the other side of Christ story and other documents which can explicate Mary Magdalene's rightful claim to power.<sup>7</sup> Hence through repeated explanations by Langdon and Sir Leigh Teabing the novel *The Da Vinci Code* demythologizes or replaces the idea of the Holy Grail being an object. The quest for the Holy Grail ends in a prayer at the feet of Mary Magdalene, the wronged queen and lost sacred feminine. The demythologization of the Holy Grail effectively can be extended to demythologization of Jesus.

According to the *Bible*, Jesus was a messiah of God, the Son of God who has come to the world to redeem people of their impending sins. Jesus performed many miracles, preached and gave away his own life for the people on earth. After three days of the crucifixion he resurrected from the grave and ascended to heaven. As per *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus belongs to the lineage of King Solomon and King David. Jesus can be called a feminist because he handed over the significant work of establishing the Church to his wife Mary Magdalene. Dan Brown acknowledges the importance and impact of Jesus Christ on human beings through the words of Teabing in the novel.<sup>8</sup> Unquestionably, Jesus is an important influencing figure in history of mankind but his divine origin as claimed by the Church is to be challenged.

Three centuries after the period of Jesus, Christianity gained popularity among people of Rome while pagan rituals were being practiced. Emperor Constantine decided to merge the doctrines of paganism and Christian beliefs in order to gain the support of people. Teabing explains how Constantine himself was baptized in his death bed too weak to protest. Hence Christianity as religion emerged as a hybrid religion to begin with. Dan Brown deftly disintegrates the nature of the Holy Grail and explains how Christianity is a consequence of transmogrification. Dan Brown directly voices against the organized religion by accusing the early Church of transforming a human being into a messiah and subordinating women in the society.

Ashwin Sanghi, in his novel *The Krishna Key*, establishes the scientific superiority of Indus valley civilization rather than dislocating the foundations of religion like Dan Brown. By talking about Mahabharatha war as about a nuclear war, Sanghi suggests the existence of vast repository of scientific knowledge. The novel portrays Dwarka as a real city created by Krishna for his people, the remains

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 341.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 313.

of which are present even today under the sea. *The Krishna key* indulges in reinterpretation of Krishna, but the act of demythologization is passive and implied in comparison with *The Da Vinci Code*. The demythologization of Krishna is attained by means of various historical explanations given by Saini regarding Krishna and through the researches of four people murdered in the novel - Nikhil Bhojaraj, Anil Varshney, Chhedi and Rajaram Kurkude.

Sanghi explains the scientific supremacy of Indus valley civilization in disciplines such as medicine, astronomy and architecture. Through the words of Chhedi, the author delineates how ancient civilisations possessed knowledge about stem cells, cloning and in vitro fertilization.<sup>9</sup> The hypothesis of Dr. Nikhil Bhojaraj is that if Dwarka the city of Krishna exists, then Krishna must have existed for real. Through the explanations of Dr. Nikhil Bhojaraj's assistant Sanghi, he puts forward the idea that in those days people were skilled enough to build a city like Dwarka. One of the students of Professor Rajaram Kurkude states how the archaeological investigation at Mohenjodaro revealed traces of nuclear blast. Moreover, skeletons were found lying or seated as if people were dead in the midst of daily work, which serves as proof for instantaneous arrival of death without prior knowledge.

*The Krishna Key* makes use of an effective narrative strategy to establish the historical nature of Krishna. Each chapter of the novel begins with Krishna's narration of his own life. Sanghi juxtaposes the mythical story of Krishna with the contemporary story involving Ravi Mohan Saini. The juxtaposition of the fictional past with the present enables readers to compare propagated stories of Krishna and rational explanations provided by the novel. In the guise of religion, the human nature of Krishna is veiled and mystified. Krishna is portrayed as a fictional character, as a person with divine powers who saved Draupadi, a king maker, a strategist who helped Pandavas in the stories. In the process of mystification, historical truths are lost and ignored as fables. Hence apposing past and present narrative results in effective demythologization.

Sanghi does not attack the basic foundations of Hinduism like Dan Brown. Instead, he glorifies the knowledge possessed by the ancestors. Dan Brown deconstructs the divine origin of Christianity, in order to establish a rational understanding of religion. Sanghi instead of deconstruction, indulges in glorification of the past to bring about radical understanding of religion.

Demythologization and re-mystification are brought out in the novels for better rational comprehension of faith and not to destroy faith. It is the duty of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ashwin Sanghi, *The Krishna Key* (Manipal: Westland Ltd., 2012), 189.

believers to fully understand the nature of their faith before acknowledging it. As Langdon says in *The Da Vinci Code*, “Those who truly understand their faiths understand the stories are metaphorical.”<sup>10</sup> Human beings have mixed up faith in divine power and faith in institutionalized religion. Robert Langdon in *The Da Vinci Code* locates the Holy Grail and Ravi Mohan Saini of *The Krishna Key* finds out the Syamantaka. In both novels, the search ends but the treasure is never accessed. On account of the future faith crisis, Langdon never reveals the location of the Holy Grail. Saini is not interested in destroying a historical monument like Taj Mahal, so truth about Krishna and Syamantaka remains eternally sealed for the future generations.

*The Da Vinci Code* and *The Krishna Key* are set in two opposing cultures and spatial and temporal fields, but the nature of crime and the consequences are comparable. Institutionalised religions are misused by people like Sir Khan, Teabing and other respected authorities of religious institutions. Dan Brown and Ashwin Sanghi stir the intellect of the readers through their works. Faith is necessary to live a happy life but blind faith placed upon man-made organized religions and gods may prove fatal. Religion should promote love, peace and the motive of any religion should be to create better human beings. Mary Pat Fisher in her book *Religions Today: An Introduction* says, “tragically, religions have often split rather than unified humanity, have oppressed rather than freed, have terrified rather than inspired”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 450.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, *Religions Today*, 23.