

The Rozabal Line

Ashwin Sanghi
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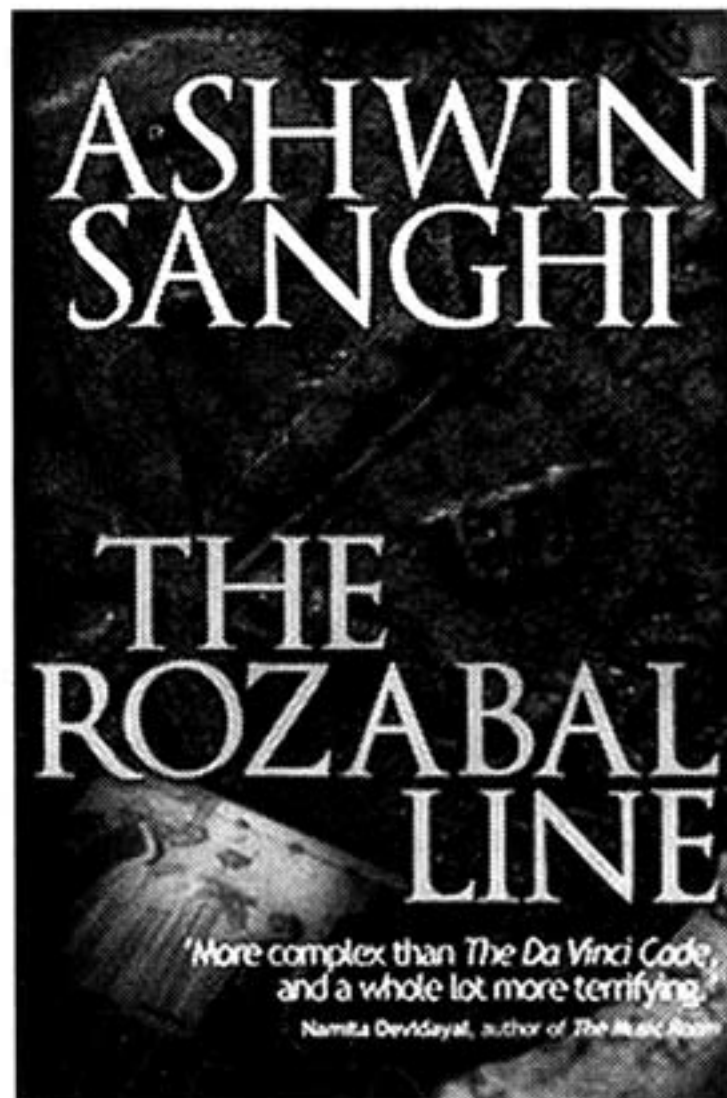
BY M.V.KAMATH

THE two central tenets of Christianity are virgin birth and resurrection. For Christians these are fundamental issues of faith, beyond challenge. Christ died on the cross, but briefly arose from his tomb to the utter surprise of his disciples. Did he really die?

In the first place, why did the Jews - Christ was one - have to appeal to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, for punishing him? The question has been raised why the vested interests of the Jewish priesthood did not take recourse to kill Christ by stoning him, an act for which no permission, apparently, of the Governor was necessary. The second question that has bothered some scholars is, why the Roman Governor decided to ignore Roman Law which denies burial of crucified men and allow Jesus' body to be handed over for burial to Joseph of Arimathea? These and many such questions are sought to be answered by the author, Ashwin Sanghi, an Indian, whose work 'The Rozabal Line' was originally published in the United States under the name of Shawn Haigins, a perfect anagram of Ashwin Sanghi.

The author makes it clear that this is a work of fiction, though incorporating religion, history and established facts, in a heady mix. For the reader it is perplexity confounded. What part of the text is factual and what part pure fiction? To his credit, Sanghi admits to being guided by earlier works like 'The Da Vinci Code', Holger Kersten's 'Jesus Lived in India: His Unknown Life Before and After Crucifixion', Michael Baigent's 'The Jesus Paper' (Harpen, 2006), Suzanne Olsson's 'Jesus in Kashmir, The Lost Tomb' and several other works. But what guarantee is there about their scholarship or credibility? The fact that somebody has made certain allegations does not automatically bequeath authenticity on his work. Having said that, one can read

HOLY FICTION



this speculative work with some curiosity.

For one thing, we know so little about the life of Jesus. The claim is made that a boy called Issa, born in Judea, left his home when he was barely fourteen, and made his way to India to study the teachings of the Buddha. We apparently travelled through Sind, the Punjab and on to Magadh, where he studied the Vedas, took refuge in Buddhist monasteries and learnt Buddhist doctrine originally written in Pali. There is not the slightest reference to this anywhere in the New Testament. Max Mueller reportedly has strongly protested against any notion that Buddhism had influenced Christianity. Then on, what evidence is there that, after he was resuscitated with medicinal herbs, Jesus decided to make his way to Kashmir and Tibet, as is claimed? An even more unconfirmed claim is made that Jesus may have come to India along with St Thomas. Surely, if it were true, there would have been some record available in south India? Even more ridiculous, a suggestion is made that 'Issa' (Yesu, Jesus) married Mary and had a child by the name Sara who was born in India but was later sent to Gaul with her mother. Issa, it is claimed, remained in India and in due course, married a woman



of the Sakya Clan on the persistence of King Gopadatta, and sired a son, Benissa. This is letting imagination run riot.

The author quotes from a book Ikmal-ud-Din (what is its authenticity?) That said that 'Yuz Asaf' (Jesus) after roaming about in many cities, reached that country known as Kashmir (and) stayed there till the end of his life. Did Jesus really get married? The author quotes from another hook entitled 'The Woman with the Alabaster Jar' by Margaret Starbird and published in 1993, according to which the anointing of Jesus by Mary Magdalene was carried out as part of a sacred marriage ritual. Starbird writes: "Jesus had a secret dynamic marriage with Mary of Bethany. She was a daughter of the tribe of Benjamin, whose ancestor heritage was the land surrounding the Holy City of David, the city of Jerusalem. A dynamic marriage between Jesus and a royal daughter of the Benjaminites would have been perceived as a source of healing to the people of Israel." The reference to Mary Magdalene as a member of royalty is important, as is the reference to Jesus as belonging to the royal family of David, considering that their marriage would have been a powerful

dynastic alliance.

Sanghi himself writes: "It now becomes clear why Jesus was called 'the King of Jews', his title had not been merely a spiritual one, but also one that was temporal and political." Later on, he adds: "The political implication of such a union was undeniable, since it meant the very real potential threat of political upheaval, if ever an attempt was made to restore the lineage of Jewish Kings." Further again he avers: "This political element was seen as a threat by the Romans, and hence the need to crucify Jesus. The Romans had been quite happy to allow the Jews to manage their own religious affairs. There was no need to interfere. The intervention happened because of political reasons, not religious ones."

But now to go back to the title of the book 'The Rozabal Line'. The word Rozabal is supposedly derived from the Kashmir term 'Rauza-Bal', meaning 'Tomb of the Prophet'. The tomb reportedly has been in existence since AD 112 onwards and is situated in the Kanyar district of old Srinagar. But what is so special about it? Sanghi writes: "According to Muslim custom, the gravestone had been placed along the north-south axis... (But) the sarcophagus of Yuz Asaf lay along the east-west axis as per Jewish custom. Nothing else was out of ordinary here - except for the carved imprint of a pair of feet near the sarcophagus. The feet were normal human feet - normal, barring the fact that they bore marks on them, marks that coincided with the punctured wounds inflicted in crucifixion. Crucifixion had never been practised in Asia. So it was quite obvious that the resident of the tomb had undergone this ordeal in some other, distant land."

So, that's the story. One is free to believe it. Believe that Jesus did not die on the cross but was brought down unconscious, taken to the site of his tomb and restored to life, after which he left for distant shores, namely India. One can also dismiss it as speculation unworthy of attention. One must remember that this is a work of fiction. Provocative, but commanding attention. What is truth, Jesting Pilate is quoted as having asked Jesus. One might as well ask the same question of the author, in jest or in all seriousness. From what he has written it is clear that he will not pause for an answer.