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# Offering tantalising alternatives

**CHAT** With *The Krishna Key*, Ashwin Sanghi returns to conspiracy thriller territory. The author tells MINI ANTHIKAD-CHHIBBER he is fascinated by the story behind the story

**A**shwin Sanghi gave us our own *Da Vinci Code* in the breathless theological thriller *The Rozabal Line* (2008). *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) was a political thriller with a timeline that alternated between the Mauryan period and the modern day. And now with *The Krishna Key* (Rs. 250, Westland Ltd.), Ashwin looks at the Krishna story. Intercutting between the 5,000-year-old story and the present, the book recounts a deadly fight to the finish involving a history professor, a cop with a troubled past, a remorseless serial killer, a brilliant fanatic and a search for a priceless artefact. Ashwin was in town for the launch of the book and over lunch discussed the book, conspiracy thrillers, history, myth, social media and more.

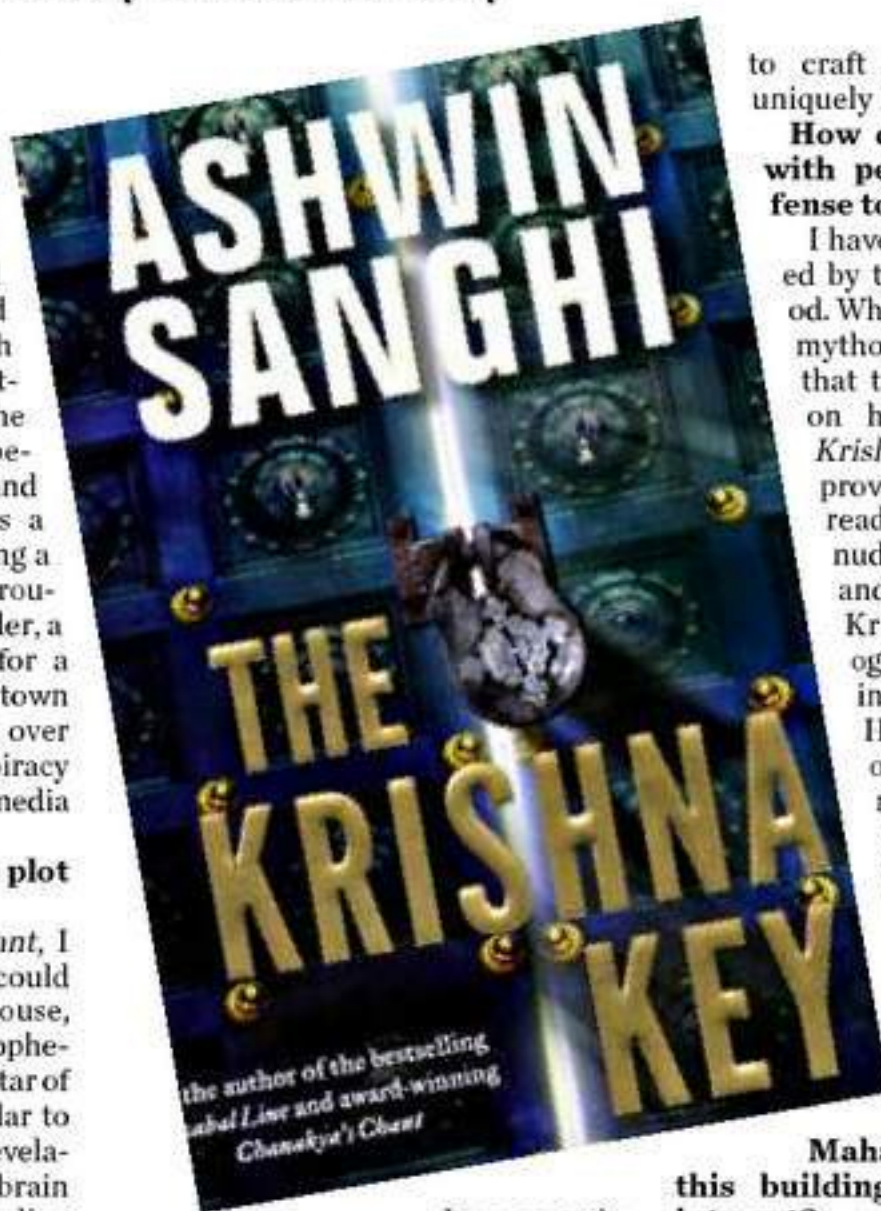
**How did you zero in on the plot for *The Krishna Key*?**

After writing *Chanakya's Chant*, I was looking for a story that I could sink my teeth into. At a friend's house, someone mentioned that the prophesised appearance of the tenth avatar of Vishnu — Kalki — was very similar to the prophecies of the Book of Revelation in the Bible. That got my brain into overdrive. I spent a week reading the Kalki Purana and there was no looking back. I knew that I wanted to write a book that would explore the historicity of Krishna and the Mahabharata but needed a modern-day reason for such a quest. That reason emerged via Kalki — an avatar that is yet to appear. I spent over three months outlining every twist and turn in the plot before I actually got down to writing it.

**Can you say something about the diagrams in the book?**

The old proverb that a picture is worth a thousand words is so very true. *The Krishna Key* plays with Vedic mathematics, Sanskrit shlokas, secret architecture, religious symbolism, ancient science and several other themes that are best explained via imagery.

**What is it about conspiracy thrillers that is attractive to readers?**



In a conspiracy thriller, it isn't the action but the possibility of a tantalising alternative to a commonly accepted version of events that creates the thrill. I like to call it the story behind the story.

**How would an Indian conspiracy thriller differ from its western counterpart?**

The definition of an Indian conspiracy thriller does not yet exist. To that extent, the pioneers of this genre in the sub-continent have the liberty of mapping the future contours. Two of my three books have been conspiracy thrillers. The vast majority of my readers have told me that they like my books because of the research. I think that this is a critical element in the conspiracy mix. But I do believe that Indian conspiracy thrillers can afford to borrow from multiple sources — action thrillers, mysteries, Bollywood, historical fiction and epics — in order

to craft an identity that is uniquely Indian.

**How do you plan to deal with people who take offense to the book?**

I have always been fascinated by the Mahabharata period. What excites me is not the mythology but the possibility that the epic may be based on historical truths. *The Krishna Key* is my quest to provide an entertaining read while attempting to nudge the Mahabharata and the character of Krishna from the mythology section of the library into the history section. How can anyone take offense to that? You may choose to disagree with my views but why would you be offended by them?

**Manreet Sodhi Someshwar's *The Taj Conspiracy* also dealt with the urban legends around the Taj**

**Mahal. What is it about this building that excites our interest?**

If you need to describe India with a single image, then the Taj Mahal wins hands down. It's a symbol that is no less iconic than the Mona Lisa or the Shroud of Turin. The Taj is not just a historical monument but also pivotal to a love story. Mix ancient architecture with romance, symbolism with conspiracy theory, and modern science with beauty and opulence, and you have the perfect recipe to pique any thriller junkie's interest.

**The writer and social media. Comment.**

Let's stop looking at social media as social media. It is simply a series of communication channels. In my world, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow me to reach out to my readers far more effectively than I would ever have been able to without them. These channels also allow me to receive direct feedback from my readers.



**A NEW LOOK** At a much-known story of Krishna that talks of the Kalki avatar