

AN EVENING OF HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY WITH AUTHOR ASHWIN SANGHI

What you won't be when you are listening to Ashwin Sanghi is bored. The author of *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* delivered a talk titled "mythology deconstructed" at the Burdwan Palace that left the audience some part slack-jawed, some part laughing and some part thinking. The talk was organised by FICCI Ladies Organisation and Young FICCI Ladies Organisation. Sanghi started with how he got into writing, travelling through the myths of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the Jewish Star of David, down to the lucky number 786 and how it was used in the film *Deewaar*. Here are some highlights of the evening...

CONNECTING THE DOTS

"You might say I am mad but I see connections between mythology and history, science, linguistics, anthropology. I am not a scholar and I wasn't trained to be a scholar or a researcher.... But when you start making those connections you also start destroying, deconstructing certain commonly accepted ideas, beliefs and mythology," started off Sanghi.

The Amitabh Bachchan temple in Calcutta, where there is *aarti* going on of his picture at all times during the day and the *Amitabh chalisa* is



Author Ashwin Sanghi talks about myths, history and religion

read, came up on a slide. "I thought, what if I died tomorrow and returned 500 years later when Amitabh worship has really caught on and the *Amitabh chalisa* is sung by all, and someone comes and asks me, 'Do you think Amitabh was a real man or is he just a figment of our imagination?' That is the same place we find

ourselves regarding our mythologies," stressed Sanghi, using the logic to discuss the overlap between mythology and history.

Talking about Indian history and mythology, Sanghi concluded that in

"Promoting entrepreneurship and professional excellence is our main goal. The goal is to educate and empower and such an event is the right fit. The way Ashwin Sanghi connected history, mythology and the present was very interesting," said Neeta Bhoosra, the president of All India FLO.



"The youth today are no longer interested in our mythology. Making such connections will make it really interesting for them and make them read about it," said Parul Swarup, a governing body member of the Ladies Study Group.



"Not everyone has the time to read nowadays. But through this event we have been able to reach out to so many women. And the amount of research Ashwin has put in to this is nothing short of amazing," said Priya Seksaria, the chairperson of FLO Calcutta.



India there never really was a distinct line between history and mythology, "where *itihasa* and *purana* are considered the same and *The Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are considered history".

"We took people and started embellishing them. Suddenly a king sprouted wings and could fly. It did not make him any less real. It was just the poet's way of making the king a little more acceptable for future generations as a great man," was how Sanghi saw it.

Over the course of the evening, Sanghi jumped from religion to religion and civilisation to civilisation, trying to show how everything was connected. Whether it's the five-pointed Star of David in the carvings on the doors of the Sun Temple of Konark or the fact that the name of Saint Sara la Kali or 'Sara the Black', the daughter of Mary Magdalene, may actually be abbreviations of Saraswati, Lakshmi and Kali, the female trinity in Hinduism.

From the similarity between the name 'Noah' and the Hindi word for boat 'nao' and the uncanny resemblance of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre with the shape of the Shiv Linga, it made for an entertaining hour.

When asked if he is wary of retaliation from the purists, he was quick to quip: "That is why I write fiction."

Chandreyee Chatterjee
Pictures: Pabitra Das

