

# Did Jesus travel to India?

## Herald Mirror

Troubled Kashmir has not seen many western tourists over the past few years, but a small non-descript shrine in Rozabal locality here continues to quietly attract inquisitive visitors from abroad. Rozabal is the shrine of medieval Muslim saint Yuz Asaf, but several alternative theories floated in the West describe it as a tomb of Jesus Christ. Of late, a flood of literature, including a Da Vinci Code-type pot boiler called *The Rozabal Line* by Ashwin Sanghi, has had tourists flocking to the Rozabal shrine in Srinagar in recent months.

Such was the popularity that its caretakers were forced to close the shrine for Western tourists lest it "hurt local sensitivities". Some believe Jesus survived crucifixion, travelled to Kashmir, adopted the name of Yuz Asaf and is buried at Rozabal. The shrine as well as Ashwin Sanghi's thriller, *The Rozabal Line*, has found mention in the Lonely Planet Guide – a bible for most tourists – leading to renewed interest in the West.

At the crux of Sanghi's fictional plot lies the possibility that Jesus survived the crucifixion and traveled to Kashmir. Sanghi's thriller, which has remained a national bestseller for several months consecutively, shocks the reader at almost every page, but the author takes pains to assure his audience that his book is a good old yarn and that they should read it as a story, not history.

Did Jesus travel to India? Was Mary Magdalene from Maghada? Were Abraham and Brahma the same entity? These are just some of the questions that novelist Ashwin Sanghi has sought to answer via the new paperback edition of *The Rozabal Line*. The fictional element in the book, an amalgamation

of comparative religion and conspiracy theories, has been compared with Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* although the historical basis of the novel draws from several other books on the subject including *Jesus Lived in India* by Holger Kersten and *The Unknown Life of Jesus* by Nicolas Notovich. The *Rozabal Line* is a thriller that is inspired by the author's obvious fascination with linkages between the world's religions. Sanghi's novel travels from

Mesopotamia to Magadha, Jerusalem to Rome, highlighting the manner in which religions have learnt and borrowed from each other down the ages. "I find it amazing that both Jesus and Buddha fasted for forty days and nights. I am puzzled by the similarities between baptism and the Kumbh Mela. I find the similarities between Krishna and Christna incredible," says Sanghi excitedly.

The road to publication was a difficult one for Sanghi. "I couldn't find a publisher," he says matter-of-factly. He was forced to self-publish the first edition. Luckily Tata-Westland saw merit in his novel and published the second edition in 2008 and this went on to remain a bestseller for many months. More recently the Lonely Planet Guide to India described the novel as the core to the controversial theory that Jesus lies buried at the Rozabal shrine in Srinagar. This promptly sent hundreds of tourists flocking to the shrine until the caretakers were left with no alternative but to shut down the tomb to visitors.

Does he believe his own fiction? Sanghi smiles. "I have always loved fiction that sounds like fact and fact that sounds like fiction. The fun in this book is that you rarely know when you are switching from one to the other,"

he says.

Inter-spersed with religion and history, *The Rozabal Line* has been lapped up by bibliophiles. Encouraged by the readers' response, the author is now giving finishing touches to a script adapted from his book that will be made into a feature film.

The author makes it clear (unlike Brown who tried to pass it off as secret history) that the work is fiction. Two factors drove Sanghi to write it, and in a note to readers, he says: "I am saddened to see that the tomb remains in a state of disrepair with scant international attention. The *Rozabal Line* is my personal tribute to this tomb and to the person who lies buried within it. If I do earn anything from this book, I hope that I will be able to contribute it to the cause of preserving a global treasure – Rozabal." And the second and more important factor: "...to make ordinary people understand that the world's religions are more interconnected than we have ever imagined

and that this understanding is absolutely vital in today's age of religious conflict."

