

What is it in Ashwin Sanghi's the Krishna Key an Evaluation of the Divine Krishna as A Grey Persona

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Abstract

The research is a detailed study of the mythological novel "The Krishna Key" by Ashwin Sanghi. It explores the different shades of the seraphic Krishna from a different point of view. Ashwin Sanghi ranks among the top-selling English fiction writers in India. He has written many bestsellers including The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant and The Krishna Key. In the novel, Krishna is portrayed as a complex character with shades of grey rather than as a purely divine figure. Sanghi's interpretation delves into the ambiguity of Krishna's actions and decisions, highlighting his human-like qualities, flaws and moral dilemmas. This portrayal adds depth to the character and invites readers to contemplate the intricacies of morality and divinity, it further blurs the lines between faith and fanaticism.

Keywords: Ashwin Sanghi, Krishna Key, Seraphic, The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant intricacies, faith, fanaticism.

INTRODUCTION

"The Krishna Key" by Ashwin Sanghi stands at the intersection of mythology, history, and fiction, offering a unique perspective on the legendary figure of Lord Krishna. This research aims to delve into the various aspects of Sanghi's work, examining its literary, historical, and cultural significance. Through this exploration, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how contemporary authors reinterpret ancient myths and legends, and the impact of such reinterpretations on modern literature and society. It also deeply gets into the nuanced representation of Krishna in Sanghi's work by exploring the complexities of his character and the implications for the narrative. By examining Krishna's grey persona, the research seeks to unravel the layers of morality, ethics, and human nature embedded within the novel.

Krishna's portrayal as a grey character in "The Krishna Key", sheds light on its literary, cultural, and religious significance and also contributes to a detailed study of the novel's narrative dynamics and thematic complexity.

Literature review

Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* (2012), is part of the haggardly genre of Indian mythological thrillers. By mixing mythology with thriller pieces, Sanghi plays the game of reinterpreting divine

figures, mostly Krishna. Sanghi's portrayal of Krishna is not merely a conventional devotional one, where God always acts according to dharma, but a complex warrior God who has a grey side to him and is literally on the line between dharma and adharma. In canonical texts like the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata, Krishna becomes a god with human characteristics, strategic, wise and playful. For scholars like David Kinsley (*The Divine Player*, 1979) and Steven Rosen (*Krishna's Song: A new Look at the Bhagavad Gita*, 2007), Krishna, as charioteer, philosopher and a God, Tsas horses behind him, comes to symbolize the strategic use of adharmic means for dharmic ends. They bring up, for example, Krishna's morally ambiguous actions, such as the killing of karna and deception in the kurukshetra war is justified to a great extent.

Sanghi's Krishna is also not just a divine guide of Arjuna; he is seen through the prisms of academic, archaeological and psychological exploration. The protagonist Ravi Mohan Saini's investigation of a series of murders that are connected to a reincarnated Krishna takes the narrative to flashbacks of Krishna's life that correlate history more than plain mythology. These retellings foreground Krishna's intelligence, political maneuvering and skill in exploitation of situation. In this recontextualization, Sanghi does not violate the sacred but stoops to make Krishna relatable on a contemporary level. The focus is not on unquestioned loyalty but rather scrutiny. For example, Krishna's staging of the war is presented as political realism rather than all-knowing divinity, a purposeful blending of moral absolutes. The nuanced portrayal in Sanghi's work arises from his exploration of themes like truth versus belief, history versus mythology, and morality versus necessity. By depicting Krishna as a figure who faces ethically challenging decisions, Sanghi invites us to reconsider the strict boundaries of good and evil. This approach aligns with postmodern literary criticism, which embraces the idea that a single character can be interpreted in various, sometimes conflicting, ways. Scholarly critiques from figures like Arundhati Roy and Meenakshi Mukherjee highlight that many modern Indian writers often reinterpret myths to tackle current moral issues. In Sanghi's narrative, Krishna emerges not just as a symbol of leadership and intellect, but also as a representation of moral compromise. The Krishna Key has sparked quite a bit of discussion. Some reviewers have lauded Sanghi for his ambitious effort to weave together historical fiction and thriller elements, while others have pointed out a tendency to lean too heavily on exposition and data dumps. On the flip side, many readers have really appreciated Sanghi's bold take on Krishna, seeing it as a fresh reinterpretation. There's been a lively debate among readers about whether Sanghi's version of Krishna is too secular or if this new approach is essential for keeping mythology relevant in today's world. By presenting Krishna as a potentially flawed character, Sanghi creates a striking contrast to traditional devotional literature, making the story more accessible to those who are rational, secular, or even agnostic.

Theoretical framework

The nuanced portrayal in Sanghi's work arises from his exploration of themes like truth versus belief, history versus mythology, and morality versus necessity. By depicting Krishna as a figure who faces ethically challenging decisions, Sanghi invites us to reconsider the strict boundaries of good and evil. This approach aligns with postmodern literary criticism, which embraces the idea that a single character can be interpreted in various, sometimes conflicting, ways. Scholarly critiques from figures like Arundhati Roy and Meenakshi Mukherjee highlight that many modern Indian writers often reinterpret myths to tackle current moral issues. In Sanghi's narrative, Krishna emerges not just as a symbol of leadership and intellect, but also as a representation of moral compromise.

Sanghi's portrayal of Krishna isn't just that of a passive divine figure; he's an active player in the course of history, skillfully shaping outcomes, outsmarting foes, and steering events with a clever strategy. The complexity of his character shines through in these revisions—while he aims for what's considered the greater good, the ways he goes about it often spark ethical debates. Myth criticism provides a lens to explore how the traditional image of Krishna has evolved into a modern mytho-historical figure that mirrors today's anxieties and uncertainties.

Sanghi's fresh take on Krishna really shines when we look at it through the lens of postmodern literary theory, especially the deconstruction ideas put forth by Jacques Derrida. Postmodernism turns its back on grand narratives and absolute truths, opting instead for a world of fragmentation, multiplicity, and ambiguity, all of which are beautifully woven into *The Krishna Key*. The novel portrays Krishna through a narrative that jumps back and forth between the past and present, blending fact with fiction, and faith with rational thought.

Deconstruction helps us see Krishna not as a static figure but as a character whose identity is influenced by various viewpoints, historical, mythological, scientific, and philosophical. This approach breaks down the divide between the divine and the mortal, pushing readers to rethink the validity of traditional moral categories. By shaking up Krishna's divinity, Sanghi encourages us to delve into the contradictions that lie within myth itself and within Krishna's character, who sometimes has to set aside idealism for the sake of practicality.

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One important aspect of this framework is ethical literary criticism, which delves into how literature grapples with moral questions and the ethical challenges faced by its characters. Take Krishna, for instance; his actions, like endorsing deception during the Mahabharata war or employing manipulative tactics, land him in a moral grey area. Scholars like Martha Nussbaum highlight how literature can foster moral reflection by showcasing characters who navigate complex ethical landscapes.

In *The Krishna Key*, Krishna is depicted as someone who makes tough choices for the sake of a greater dharma. This perspective aligns with utilitarian ethics, where the morality of an action is evaluated based on its outcomes. By examining Krishna's choices through this ethical lens, readers are encouraged to ponder whether the ends truly justify the means and if moral righteousness always requires moral purity. This grey persona, then, isn't a flaw; rather, it mirrors the complexities of real-world ethics, where effective leadership often demands compromise and foresight instead of strict idealism.

The narratological approach really enhances our understanding of Krishna's complex character. Gérard Genette's insights into narrative voice and time help us see how Sanghi's choices shape how we view the characters. The story unfolds through two narratives—one that follows the main character, Ravi Mohan

Saini, in the present, and another that dives into Krishna's past. This setup positions Krishna not just as a god, but as a historical figure whose life reflects the thrilling events of today.

This structural parallelism blurs the lines between myth and reality, suggesting that Krishna's actions still hold significance in our modern ethical discussions. The variety of perspectives also challenges any one-dimensional view of Krishna, emphasizing that morality is not fixed but rather shaped by context. Moreover, this framework connects with Indian cultural studies, which explore how myth and literature operate within the socio-political landscape of contemporary India. Scholars like Devdutt Pattanaik and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan have highlighted how modern takes on mythology help redefine national and cultural identities. In Sanghi's portrayal, Krishna is not just a distant deity but a relatable Indian figure grappling with issues of truth, justice, and belief in a rapidly changing society. This approach shows that *The Krishna Key* is more than just a thriller; it's a cultural artifact that mirrors shifting ideas about leadership, divinity, and morality in the Indian psyche. The nuanced depiction of Krishna resonates with an audience that is increasingly wary of absolute moral stances and is drawn to more complex portrayals of power and virtue.

Methodology

The current study takes a qualitative and interpretive approach to dive into how the divine figure of Krishna is portrayed as a morally complex, or "grey," character in Ashwin Sanghi's novel *The Krishna Key*. Since the topic blends literary and philosophical elements, the methodology focuses on analyzing the text, comparing it with other works, and interpreting its themes, all backed by a diverse theoretical framework. The goal here isn't just to summarize the story or recount the plot; it's about critically engaging with how Sanghi reshapes Krishna's image and what it means to depict a divine character with moral ambiguity in today's fiction. This research unfolds as a qualitative literary investigation, utilizing close reading, narrative analysis, and comparative mythology as its guiding tools. The interpretive aspect of the study enables a thorough examination of Sanghi's storytelling techniques, character development, and thematic emphasis, particularly regarding the reimagining of Krishna's character within a modern thriller context. Since Krishna's portrayal in the novel is influenced by both direct references to mythology and symbolic hints woven into the contemporary storyline, the methodology also includes a look at intertextual references, especially to the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, and Indian Puranic literature. The heart of this study revolves around a close reading of *The Krishna Key*. It carefully selects passages that illustrate Krishna's life through a rich mythological narrative, alongside those that connect his legacy to the modern thriller plot. These excerpts are analyzed in detail, focusing on literary elements like tone, voice, allusion, foreshadowing, and juxtaposition, all of which help shape Krishna's character. Special emphasis is placed on scenes where Krishna's actions blur moral lines—like his use of strategy, deception, and manipulation to achieve what he believes is a greater good. These moments are then assessed through the lens of contemporary literary ethics and philosophical thought.

To explore how Sanghi's portrayal of Krishna diverges from or aligns with traditional mythological depictions, this study takes a closer look at *The Krishna Key* alongside foundational texts like the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, and various interpretations by both ancient and modern scholars. By making these comparisons, we can see how Krishna's moral framework has evolved, from being a divine arbiter of cosmic dharma to a figure reinterpreted through the lenses of human rationality, history, and scientific thought.

The methodology is shaped by an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates myth criticism,

postmodern literary theory, ethical literary criticism, and Indian cultural studies. This mythological perspective helps us pinpoint Krishna's archetypal characteristics and how they have transformed in today's context. Postmodernism equips us with the tools to break down binary moral categories (like divine versus human and good versus evil), while ethical criticism opens up a dialogue about the moral intricacies of Krishna's choices, especially when viewed through the lens of consequentialism and utilitarianism. Cultural studies provide a wider socio-political backdrop to understand Sanghi's reinterpretation of Krishna in relation to modern Indian identity and belief systems.

To bolster the analysis, the study also draws on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, critical essays, author interviews, and reviews of *The Krishna Key*. Works by theorists such as Northrop Frye, Jacques Derrida, Martha Nussbaum, and Devdutt Pattanaik are referenced to enrich the discussion surrounding mythology, ethics, and the reinterpretation of religious figures. These secondary texts not only provide a solid theoretical foundation but also offer critical insights that enhance our understanding of the primary material.

As a literary and interpretive study, this research comes with the usual limitations that qualitative methodologies bring. Interpretations can be quite subjective, influenced by the researcher's perspective and theoretical background. Additionally, the focus is solely on one text by Ashwin Sanghi, without delving into his wider body of work or other modern takes on Krishna. The aim is to explore the moral ambiguity of Krishna within the specific narrative of *The Krishna Key*.

By employing a mix of close reading, comparative mythology, and theoretical analysis, this approach strives to peel back the layers of meaning in Sanghi's portrayal of Krishna as a morally complex character. This method provides a rich and nuanced understanding of how mythology is reshaped in today's literature, and how divine figures are reinterpreted to resonate with the intricacies of modern morality, ethics, and belief systems. Ultimately, this methodology aspires to connect the dots between ancient storytelling traditions and their reimaging in contemporary narratives.

Conclusion

Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* takes a daring and thought-provoking approach to one of Indian mythology's most cherished figures, Lord Krishna. Instead of depicting him as a perfect divine entity or an unreachable spiritual icon, Sanghi presents Krishna as a morally intricate, humanized character who challenges the simple labels of good and evil. This nuanced portrayal is important not just in literary terms but also culturally, reflecting a growing trend in modern literature to question absolutes and delve into ethical gray areas.

By closely examining the text through the lenses of myth criticism, ethical literary theory, and postmodern deconstruction, this study reveals how Krishna is transformed into a figure who is strategic, politically savvy, and occasionally ethically ambiguous. His actions, while ultimately aimed at upholding dharma and justice, are often driven by practicality and the consequences of his choices rather than by idealism or purity. This layered characterization reflects the complexities of real-world leadership and morality, presenting a Krishna who feels relatable and relevant to today's readers, rather than distant or purely divine.

Moreover, Sanghi's narrative style—merging mythological flashbacks with a fast-paced modern thriller—creates a rich reading experience where mythology, history, and fiction intertwine. The blending of ancient tales with contemporary scientific exploration and cultural conspiracies invites readers to see Krishna not just as a mythological figure but as a symbol of India's philosophical and

historical continuity. In the end, Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* prompts readers to rethink traditional notions of divinity and virtue. By depicting Krishna as a morally grey character, the novel encourages us to move beyond binary moral frameworks and embrace the complexities inherent in both human and divine decision-making. This fresh interpretation not only breathes new life into a timeless figure but also reflects the evolving moral and cultural landscape of 21st-century India, where questions of faith, truth, and righteousness are more fluid and contested than ever before.

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