

Evolution of Mytho-Fiction and Multilayered Narrative Structures in the Select Works of Ashwin Sanghi

¹Pradeep Kumar Sharma, ²Dr. Ravi Kumar Yadav

¹Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor

^{1,2}Department of English, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, [C.G.], India

Abstract: Ashwin Sanghi occupies a distinctive position in contemporary Indian English writing as the author most credited with popularising the conspiracy-driven “mythological thriller,” a hybrid form that fuses itihasa (received history-cum-legend), archaeology, theology, and geopolitics with the pace of the airport thriller. This paper traces the evolution of mytho-fiction across Sanghi's Bharat Collection, from *The Rozabal Line* (2007) to *The Ayodhya Alliance* (2025), examining how his engagement with myth has deepened from a single speculative premise into a civilizational architecture spanning nine novels and seven millennia. The paper further analyses the multilayered narrative strategies Sanghi employs, dual and triple timelines, frame narratives, epistolary and documentary inserts, and the alternation of short cinematic chapters, arguing that these devices are not merely structural ornaments but the technical means by which Sanghi enacts euhemerism, the interpretive move of reading myth as displaced history. Situating Sanghi alongside contemporaries such as Amish Tripathi and Anand Neelakantan, and drawing on the critical vocabulary of ‘Bharati Fantasy’ developed in recent scholarship, the paper argues that Sanghi's oeuvre both reflects and shapes a post-millennial Indian readership eager to see its ancient past narrated as usable, evidentiary history.

Keywords: mytho-fiction, Ashwin Sanghi, Bharat Collection, multilayered narrative, dual timeline, euhemerism, Indian English fiction, mythological thriller

1. Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a marked resurgence of mythological material in Indian English fiction, moving the epics and puranas out of devotional and pedagogical registers and into the vocabulary of the thriller, the techno-conspiracy, and the alternate history. Ashwin Sanghi, a Mumbai-based businessman-turned-novelist, has been among the most commercially successful and formally influential practitioners of this mode. Beginning with the self-published *Rozabal Line* in 2007 and continuing through the eight further installments of what is now marketed as the Bharat Collection, Sanghi has built a body of work in which the deep past of the subcontinent is not backdrop but engine: every contemporary crisis in his novels is eventually revealed to be the recurrence, or unfinished business, of an ancient one.

This paper undertakes two related tasks. First, it traces the evolution of Sanghi's mytho-fiction chronologically, showing how the genre's premises, geographical scope, and thematic ambition expand across the series. Sarfraz (2024) Second, it analyses the multilayered narrative architecture, principally the dual-timeline structure alternating an ancient and a contemporary plot through which this expansion is achieved, treating narrative form as inseparable from the ideological work the novels perform in re-presenting myth as history.

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Scholarship on twenty-first-century Indian mythological fiction has increasingly moved away from treating the genre as a derivative offshoot of postcolonial writing and towards analyzing it on its own generic terms. E. Dawson Varughese's study of post-millennial mythology-inspired fiction from India proposes the term ‘Bharati Fantasy’ for this body of writing, situating it at the interface of science, Hinduism, and itihasa, and arguing that it should be read through the lens of reader reception and the aesthetics of the ‘weird’ rather than through inherited postcolonial frameworks.

A second and complementary line of inquiry reads this fiction through the concept of euhemerism, the ancient interpretive strategy, named for the Greek mythographer Euhemerus, of treating gods and mythic events as garbled memories of real historical persons and occurrences. Tasleem et al. (2020) Recent doctoral research examining *The Krishna Key* alongside Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura* situates such euhemerist re-narration within the broader discourse of post-truth culture, in which myths function as emotionally potent, historically-coded narratives capable of shaping collective belief. This paper adopts euhemerism as its principal interpretive lens for Sanghi, while treating 'Bharati Fantasy' as the wider generic field within which his particular sub-genre, the mythological conspiracy thriller, sits. Dzüvichü & Yhome (2024)

Within this field, Sanghi's own critical distinctiveness lies in his refusal of the fantasy register that characterizes Tripathi's re-imagined gods-as-mortals narratives. Sanghi's novels almost never leave the present day for long: myth is invoked as a coded archive to be decrypted by present-day investigators, rather than as a fully dramatized alternate antiquity. Sarma (2023) This generic choice, conspiracy thriller rather than historical fantasy, is what necessitates his characteristic multilayered, dual-timeline structure, discussed in Section 4.

3. Ashwin Sanghi: Author, Method, and Oeuvre

Born in Mumbai in 1969 and educated at St. Xavier's College and Yale University, Sanghi came to fiction from a business background, a fact he has often cited as shaping his research-driven, almost forensic approach to plotting. His debut novel was rejected by mainstream publishers and was first self-published in the United States in 2007 under the pseudonym "Shawn Haigins." It was released in India by Westland in 2008 under his own name, establishing it as a bestseller. The novel that followed, *Chanakya's Chant* (2010), consolidated his reputation and received the Crossword Book Award for Popular Fiction, and it remained on bestseller charts for an extended period.

Beyond the Bharat Collection, Sanghi has co-authored the *Private India* series with James Patterson, written the non-fiction "13 Steps" self-help series, and continued to publish new installments of his flagship series at roughly two- to three-year intervals. In interviews, Sanghi has described a working method in which the first six to nine months of writing any Bharat novel are devoted entirely to historical research before a single chapter is drafted, underscoring the extent to which archival and mythological research is constitutive of, rather than incidental to, his fiction.

Table 1 summarises the nine novels of the Bharat Collection published to date, showing the mythic or historical substratum each novel excavates and the contemporary plot through which that substratum is accessed.

Table 1. The Bharat Collection: mythic substratum and contemporary frame

Title	Year	Mythic / Historical Substratum	Contemporary Frame
The Rozabal Line	2007	Legend of Jesus's survival and journey to Kashmir; Rozabal tomb	A global conspiracy thriller spanning the Vatican, Kashmir and Tibet
Chanakya's Chant	2010	Chanakya and the rise of Chandragupta Maurya (4th century BCE)	A modern political strategist engineering a prime-ministerial campaign
The Krishna Key	2012	Life and philosophical legacy of Krishna; the submerged city of Dwarka	A serial-murder investigation built around astrological and archaeological clues
The Sialkot Saga	2016	Draupadi/Mahabharata-inflected motifs of fate and rivalry	Two rival protagonists rising from post-Partition poverty to power



Keepers of the Kalachakra	2018	Buddhist Kalachakra cosmology and Tibetan prophecy	A geopolitical race involving climate science and Himalayan intrigue
The Vault of Vishnu	2020	Vishnu's avatars and hidden vaults of ancient knowledge	An Indus Valley archaeological mystery entangled with international espionage
The Magicians of Mazda	2022	Zoroastrian migration of the Parsis to Sanjan; Avestan lore	A present-day thread connecting Iran, Gujarat and global commerce
The Ayodhya Alliance	2025	The Ramayana's Ravana-Lakshmana episode; the Dvaitalingam legend	A defence-technology race linking India, Korea and CERN

4. The Evolution of Mytho-Fiction across the Bharat Collection

4.1 Foundational Phase: Single-Legend Conspiracy (2007–2012)

The Rozabal Line inaugurates Sanghi's method with a single, tightly-focused legend: the claim that Jesus survived the crucifixion and traveled to Kashmir, where the Rozabal shrine is said to mark his tomb. The novel's mythic material is comparative and syncretic rather than exclusively Indian, borrowing the conspiracy-thriller grammar popularised internationally by Dan Brown's fiction while grounding its resolution in South Asian sacred geography. Chanakya's Chant narrows the mythic register from theology to statecraft, braiding the fourth-century-BCE rise of Chandragupta Maurya under Chanakya's tutelage with a present-day narrative of political king-making, so that the 'myth' at stake is less supernatural than exemplary, a treatise on power disguised as narrative. The Krishna Key, the most overtly mythological of the early novels, treats Krishna's biography and the submerged city of Dwarka as an evidentiary puzzle to be solved through archaeology, astronomy, and cryptography, exemplifying most clearly the euhemerist procedure of converting divine narrative into decipherable history.

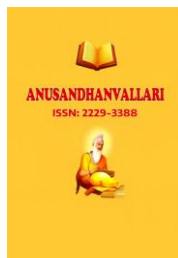
4.2 Expansion Phase: Civilizational Scope (2016–2022)

With The Sialkot Saga, Keepers of the Kalachakra, The Vault of Vishnu, and The Magicians of Mazda, Sanghi's canvas widens in two directions simultaneously: geographically, beyond peninsular India to Tibet, the Indus civilization, and Zoroastrian Iran and Gujarat; and temporally, into pre-classical and even prehistoric strata of the subcontinent's past. This phase also marks a shift from myth-as-singular-legend to myth-as-civilizational-memory: each novel proposes that a specific community's founding story, Partition refugees, Buddhist Tibet, Harappan India, migrant Parsis, encodes a hidden continuity between ancient technology, cosmology, or trade and present-day Indian power. The recurring device of a suppressed or forgotten 'science' embedded in myth, which becomes fully explicit only in the series' later installments, begins to take shape here.

4.3 Consolidation Phase: The Civilizational Arc (2025)

The ninth installment, The Ayodhya Alliance, most fully realizes the expansion phase's tendency. Opening with Ravana's deathbed confidence to Lakshmana about a metallurgical secret called the Dvaitalingam, the novel connects the Ramayana to a contemporary defense-technology race involving an Indian industrialist, a South Korean technocrat, and a CERN researcher, its plot spanning locations from Ayodhya and Kailasa to Rome, Damascus, Thailand, and Korea. Sanghi has described the nine Bharat novels as unified not by shared characters or setting but by "the civilizational arc of India," a framing that retrospectively casts the entire series as a single expanding argument: that Indian myth, read correctly, is a repository of historical and scientific fact whose recovery has present-day geopolitical stakes.

Read sequentially, then, the evolution of Sanghi's mytho-fiction moves from an isolated theological conspiracy, through the excavation of specific civilizational memories, to an explicit, self-conscious thesis about mythology as a form of encoded national history, a trajectory that mirrors, and arguably helped to popularise,



the broader post-truth-era Indian appetite for reading myth as usable historical evidence identified in recent scholarship on the genre.

5. Multilayered Narrative Structures

Sanghi's mythic material could, in principle, have been dramatized directly, in the manner of Amish Tripathi's fully realized mythic-fantasy world. That Sanghi instead almost always routes his ancient material through a contemporary investigating consciousness is the defining formal choice of his fiction, and it is this choice that produces the multilayered narrative structures examined below.

5.1 The Dual (and Triple) Timeline

The dominant structural device across the Bharat Collection is the alternating dual timeline: chapters set in the ancient or historical past are interleaved with chapters set in the present day, the two strands converging only in the closing sections of each novel. The Ayodhya Alliance extends this into an explicit "tale of two timelines" structure, with the ancient Ramayana-era strand and the contemporary defense-technology strand running as clearly labeled, alternating tracks; earlier novels such as *The Krishna Key* and *The Sialkot Saga* achieve a similar effect through shorter, more tightly interleaved chapters rather than named sections. This oscillation performs two functions simultaneously: narratively, it manufactures suspense by withholding the connective logic between eras until late in the text; ideologically, it enacts the euhemerist claim itself, since the reader is made to experience the ancient and modern strands as versions of the same underlying event.

5.2 Frame Narratives and Documentary Inserts

Sanghi frequently nests his ancient strand inside a discovered-document or frame-narrative device a manuscript, an inscription, a legend recounted by a dying character which is then 'unlocked' by the contemporary investigators. The Rozabal Line's inciting incident, a mysterious box found where a Mahabharata manuscript should be, is paradigmatic of this technique, as is Ravana's whispered secret to Lakshmana in *The Ayodhya Alliance*. Such frames allow Sanghi to present myth simultaneously as story and as evidence: the frame marks the material as narrated legend even as the plot insists on its literal historicity.

5.3 The Short, Cinematic Chapter

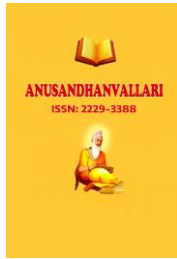
Formally, Sanghi's chapters are markedly short, frequently ending on a cliff-hanger or revelation that motivates the cut to the alternating timeline. This chapter's architecture, often compared by reviewers to the pacing of Dan Brown's fiction, is what makes the dual-timeline structure legible at speed: each strand advances only incrementally per chapter, so the reader's attention is continually redirected across eras rather than allowed to settle into either. The device thus functions less as a mere pacing convention and more as the technical infrastructure that sustains the parallel-and-convergent logic of the dual timeline described above.

5.4 Multi-Sited, Multi-Institutional Plotting

A further layer of complexity is added by Sanghi's habit of distributing his contemporary strand across multiple institutional actors, corporations, intelligence agencies, religious orders, and research laboratories, each pursuing the same mythic secret for different ends. In *The Ayodhya Alliance*, this takes the form of a defense conglomerate, a South Korean technology firm, and a CERN physicist converging on the same ancient secret; in *The Vault of Vishnu*, archaeological and espionage plots intertwine in a similar way. This multiplication of institutional viewpoints functions as a third narrative layer atop the temporal dual-track structure, allowing Sanghi to stage debates about the ownership and use of historical knowledge, scientific, national, corporate, and religious, within the plot itself.

6. Thematic Continuities: History, Science, and Geopolitics

Across the evolution traced in Section 4, three thematic constants recur, each reinforced by the narrative structures analyzed in Section 5. First is the claim that ancient India possessed advanced scientific or technological knowledge that was subsequently lost or suppressed, a claim that, in Sanghi's fiction, is always



recoverable through the decoding of myth. Second is the persistent linkage of this recovered knowledge to present-day national security or geopolitical advantage, most explicit in The Ayodhya Alliance's defense-technology plot but present in embryonic form as early as The Rozabal Line's geopolitics of religious conspiracy. Third is an underlying argument about historiography itself: that it has been conventionally translated as 'history,' but encompassing legend, genealogy, and moral instruction together is a more reliable, if more heavily encoded, archive than colonial or purely secular historiography has allowed. This last theme is what most directly aligns Sanghi's fiction with the post-truth-era dynamics identified in recent scholarship on Indian mythological fiction, in which myth's emotional and communal authority is redeployed as a form of historical evidence.

7. Comparative Positioning within Contemporary Indian Mythological Fiction

Placed alongside Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy, which fully dramatizes its mythic material as fantasy set in a reimagined antiquity, and Anand Neelakantan's Asura, which re-narrates the Ramayana from Ravana's point of view within a single historical register, Sanghi's distinguishing contribution is precisely the dual-timeline, conspiracy-thriller architecture examined above. Where Tripathi and Neelakantan ask readers to inhabit a reimagined mythic past directly, Sanghi asks readers to solve it from the vantage point of the present, a structural choice that arguably accounts for his particular appeal to readers of international conspiracy fiction and for the frequent critical comparison of his work to Dan Brown's. This comparative distinctiveness supports the paper's broader claim that in Sanghi's oeuvre, multilayered narrative form is not incidental to but constitutive of his particular contribution to the mytho-fiction genre.

8. Critical Reception

Sanghi's novels have generally been well received by both popular and literary press, with critics repeatedly noting his skill at blurring the line between myth and verifiable reality. Reviews of The Ayodhya Alliance in the Indian press have praised its fusion of mythology, contemporary geopolitics, and science, while also noting, as reviewers have of the series's more expansive later installments, that the sheer geographical and temporal scope Sanghi now attempts can strain narrative coherence even as it demonstrates his continued ambition. This tension between expanding scope and narrative control is itself a useful index of the evolutionary trajectory traced in this paper: the more civilizational Sanghi's mythic claims become, the more structurally demanding and, reviewers suggest, occasionally overextended his multilayered narrative architecture must become to sustain them.

9. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the evolution of mytho-fiction in Ashwin Sanghi's Bharat Collection cannot be separated from the evolution of the multilayered, dual-timeline narrative structure through which that fiction is delivered. From the single-legend conspiracy of The Rozabal Line to the seven-millennia, multi-continent architecture of The Ayodhya Alliance, Sanghi's novels progressively enlarge both the scope of the myths they excavate and the structural complexity required to hold ancient and contemporary strands in productive tension. Read through the lens of euhemerism and situated within the broader field of post-millennial Indian 'Bharati Fantasy' identified in recent scholarship, Sanghi's fiction emerges as a significant, formally distinctive contribution to the genre, one whose central technical achievement, the dual-timeline conspiracy structure, is inseparable from its central ideological claim that Indian myth is decipherable history. Future research might productively extend this analysis through detailed narratological mapping of chapter-level timeline alternation across the full Bharat Collection, and through a reader-reception study of how Indian and international audiences interpret the historicity claims embedded in Sanghi's narrative form differently.

References

- [1] Ashwin Sanghi. (n.d.). Ashwin's books. Retrieved from <https://www.sanghi.in/p/books.html>
- [2] Bookshelf. (2025). The Ayodhya Alliance by Ashwin Sanghi: A masterful blend of ancient wisdom and modern intrigue. Retrieved from <https://www.bookishelf.com/>



-
- [3] Dawson Varughese, E. (2021). Genre fiction of new India: Post-millennial receptions of 'weird' narratives. Routledge.
- [4] Dzüvichü, K., & Yhome, V. (2024). A Contemporary Reflection on Economy and the Quest for A Simplified Lifestyle: Revisiting Thoreau's Walden. ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies, 2(1), 29–35. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhgyan.v2.i1.2024.23>
- [5] Goodreads. (n.d.). The Ayodhya Alliance by Ashwin Sanghi. Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/>
- [6] Goodreads. (n.d.). Bharat series by Ashwin Sanghi. Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/series/428586-bharat-series>
- [7] HarperCollins India / PR Newswire. (2025, June 2). HarperCollins Publishers India presents master storyteller Ashwin Sanghi's latest adventure-thriller in the chart-topping Bharat Collection, The Ayodhya Alliance [Press release].
- [8] Mythlok. (2026). Ashwin Sanghi: Rewriting ancient Indian legends. Retrieved from <https://mythlok.com/experts/ashwin-sanghi/>
- [9] Open Magazine. (n.d.). Ashwin Sanghi: The mythmaker. Retrieved from <https://openmagazine.com/special/ashwin-sanghi-the-mythmaker>
- [10] Sarfraz, D. (2024). Silent Cries of Indo-Pakistani Women as Portrayed in Naga-Mandala and Kala Meda Bhes, A Comparative Analysis of two Feminist Play. ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies, 2(2), 18–23. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhgyan.v2.i2.2024.31>
- [11] Sarma, S. (2023). Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Philosophy: A Study of its Relevance in the Contemporary World. ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies, 1(1), 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhgyan.v1.i1.2023.68>
- [12] Shemin, K. (2025). Reincarnation of myths as history and science: An exploration of the use of mythology in select twenty-first century Indian English fiction [Doctoral thesis, University of Calicut].
- [13] Tasleem, N., Raghav, R. S., & Gangadharan, S. (2020). Gamification Strategies for Career Development: Boosting Professional Growth and Engagement with Interactive Progress Tracking. Journal of Frontiers in Multidisciplinary Research, 1(1), 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJFMR.2020.1.1.24-31>
- [14] Wikipedia. (n.d.). Ashwin Sanghi. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashwin_Sanghi
- [15] Wikipedia. (n.d.). The Rozabal Line. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rozabal_Line