



The Role of Thriller Fiction in Contemporary Indian Society: A Study in Context with Ashwin Sanghi's Novels

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Abstract:

The genre of thriller fiction is undeniably gaining popularity not only in India but around all the nations in the world. In the course of time, it has become an umbrella term that includes many other varieties like detective fiction, spy fiction, crime fiction, gothic fiction, mystery fiction and so on. However, the thrillers in the 18th and 19th centuries were written for the sake of entertainment as a part of mainstream literature but in the modern context, they are being read as a part of popular literature. The present research paper investigates the dynamic role of thriller fiction within the context of contemporary Indian society, with a specific focus on the works of Ashwin Sanghi. Positioned at the intersection of historical, mythological, and contemporary elements, Sanghi's novels serve as an ideal example reflecting the multifaceted layers of Indian culture, societal intricacies, and historical legacies. The study explores how Ashwin Sanghi's distinctive approach contributes to the broader discourse on societal issues, reader engagement, and the cultural identity of modern India. By conducting an in-depth analysis of his select novels, this research aims to provide insights into the ways in which thriller fiction, as exemplified by Sanghi's works, plays a pivotal role in shaping and reflecting the complexities of contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: *Thriller fiction, contemporary Indian society, historical elements, mythological references, societal reflections, cultural discourse, reader engagement.*

The thriller genre in India has undergone a remarkable change, transcending traditional storytelling boundaries and leaving an indelible mark on the nation's literary landscape. Rooted in ancient narrative traditions, the genre has experienced dynamic shifts, absorbing influences from diverse sources and reflecting the socio-cultural nuances of

each era. What began as suspenseful elements woven into epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana evolved during the colonial period, incorporating Western literary forms. In the mid-20th century, the thriller genre in India witnessed the emergence of detective fiction, mirroring societal changes after the independence. However, it is in the

contemporary era that the thriller genre has truly flourished, gaining widespread popularity. The advent of globalization and increased exposure to international literature have contributed to a richer, more diverse narrative techniques. Indian thriller authors, drawing inspiration from both their cultural heritage and global influences, have crafted narratives that surprise the readers. Following discussion is mainly focused on this very change in the genre of thriller fiction.

Ashwin Sanghi as a writer of thriller fiction:

Ashwin Sanghi is a renowned Indian author of thriller fiction in English. He has always sought a fine blend of traditional myth and theology with a contemporary society. His collection of thrillers called 'Bharat Series' currently contains seven novels that are based upon the ancient theology of India and the scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharat. He is well versed in writing captivating and gripping tales with his own fast paced narrative style. He is popularly called 'the Dan Brown' of India and he has been included among the most influential authors in India. His novels are best sellers as several million copies of his books are sold around the world. His unique vocabulary makes the readers fall in love with his style. The themes discussed in his novels are always a mirror held up to society. Crime, psychological issues, technological dangers, suspenseful murders, police thrill are the subjects of his thrillers. Reading him is not only an

entertainment but a part of an extensive research.

Thriller Fiction and its universal aim:

Thriller fiction is a popular genre of literature that is literature characterized by suspenseful plots, high stakes, and intense pacing that keep readers on the edge of their seats. The genre often revolves around protagonists facing terrifying situations, intricate mysteries, or psychological challenges, leading to a sense of anticipation and excitement for the resolution. While thrillers involve various sub-genres such as psychological thrillers, crime thrillers, or political thrillers, they all share a common goal: to captivate and entertain readers through tension, suspense, and unexpected twists. Thriller fiction aims to evoke emotional and psychological responses from its audience, engaging them in a rollercoaster ride of thrills and suspense while also offering insights into human nature, morality, and societal issues. Its universal aim is to provide an immersive experience that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, appealing to readers' innate fascination with the unknown and their desire for escapism and excitement. Thus, the definition of thriller fiction lies in its ability to transport readers to the edge of their imagination, where the thrill of the unexpected awaits at every turn of the page. Ashwin Sanghi's fiction especially his novels in 'Bharat Series' always bring this mysterious experience on every page.

Historical context of thrillers in India:

The historical context of thrillers in India is an evidence of the genre's deep-rooted presence in the country's literary landscape. While modern thrillers may seem like a recent phenomenon, their origins can be traced back to ancient Indian storytelling traditions. India's rich cultural heritage, with its epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, laid the foundation for narratives filled with suspense, intrigue, and moral dilemmas. These ancient epics, along with traditional folk tales, often featured elements of mystery and adventure, captivating audiences through their gripping plots and larger-than-life characters. During the colonial era, India experienced an influx of Western literature which further influenced the development of the thriller genre. British authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie gained popularity among Indian readers, leading to the emergence of homegrown detective stories and thrillers. Writers like Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay and Devaki Nandan Khatri introduced Indian detectives like Byomkesh Bakshi and Chandrakanta, respectively, paving the way for indigenous contributions to the genre.

Post-independence, the socio-political landscape of India provided fertile ground for thrillers that explored themes of corruption, espionage, and societal unrest. Authors like R.K. Narayan and Khushwant Singh incorporated suspenseful elements into their novels, reflecting the challenges and aspirations of a newly independent

nation. In contemporary times, the Indian thriller genre is flourished, with authors like Ashwin Sanghi, Chetan Bhagat, and Amish Tripathi gaining widespread acclaim for their gripping narratives. Ashwin Sanghi often blends historical, mythological, and contemporary elements to create multi-layered stories that enchant the modern readers.

Contemporary themes in Indian thrillers:

Contemporary Indian thrillers explore variety of themes that reflect the complexities of modern Indian society and address pressing issues faced by individuals and communities. Some of the prominent contemporary themes in Indian thrillers include 'Corruption and Political Intrigue'. These narratives often depict protagonists fighting against corrupt officials or uncovering political conspiracies. 'Crime and Investigation' is also the major theme of the modern day Indian thrillers. These stories usually focus on detectives, police officers, or ordinary individuals entangled in criminal activities and explore the themes such as murder, kidnapping, organized crime, and the pursuit of justice. Ashwin Sanghi's 'The Sialkot Sanga' is one of such gripping tales that revolves around crime and politics. Social Justice and Human Rights: Indian thrillers frequently tackle issues of social inequality, discrimination, and human rights violations. 'Terrorism and National Security' is undeniably the burning issue discussed in the contemporary Indian thrillers. Ashwin

Sanghi's 'The Rozabal Line' and 'Keepers of the Kalachakra' concentrate on the problem of terrorism and internal conflicts, many thrillers revolve around counter-terrorism operations, intelligence agencies, and the fight against extremism. These narratives explore the complexities of national security and the sacrifices made by those tasked with protecting the country. 'Technology and Cybercrime' is getting a popular theme of many thrillers in India. These stories explore the dark side of the internet and the vulnerabilities of modern technology. Another crucial theme discussed immensely is 'Psychological Thrills' that deal with the themes of mental illness, trauma, and psychological manipulation. Amitav Ghosh, Ashwin Sanghi, Amish Tripathi and Chetan Bhagat have widely used such themes to generate suspense and thrill. The themes like 'Historical Mysteries and Mythological Intrigue' have become the soul of Modern Thrillers: Many contemporary Indian thrillers draw inspiration from history, mythology, and folklore, blending past and present to unravel mysteries and uncover hidden truths. Ashwin Sanghi brings the historical myth of Krishna and retells the tale of Mahabharata in contemporary style in his novel 'The Krishna Key'. However, the nature and style of thriller fiction is consistently changing according to the tastes of modern readers. We can say that contemporary Indian thrillers serve as a mirror to society, offering readers a gripping and thought-provoking

exploration of expectations of modern India.

Contemporary Indian Society and the Role of Thriller Fiction:

In contemporary Indian society, thriller fiction can play a significant role that can be more than just entertainment. Through its gripping narratives, intricate plots, and exploration of diverse themes, thrillers are required to serve as a mirror reflecting the problems and challenges of modern India. These narratives may provide readers with a riveting escape into worlds filled with suspense, intrigue, and adventure, offering a temporary relief from the realities of everyday life. However, thriller fiction also now a days serves as a vehicle for social commentary, addressing pressing issues such as corruption, political intrigue, social injustice, and terrorism. By engaging with these themes, thriller authors contribute to broader societal discourse, raising awareness, sparking conversations, and inspiring critical thinking among readers. Moreover, thriller fiction provides a platform for cultural exploration, based upon India's rich heritage, mythology, and historical events to create narratives that resonate with contemporary audiences.

To conclude from the above discussion we can ultimately point out that, the role of thriller fiction in contemporary Indian society transcends the traditional function of being the means of pleasure and entertainment. Authors like Ashwin Sanghi are providing a rich tapestry of thrillers to attract the attention

of the readers towards the issues in contemporary society. The thriller fiction is expected to serve the function of both the crime detectives and the social reformers.

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