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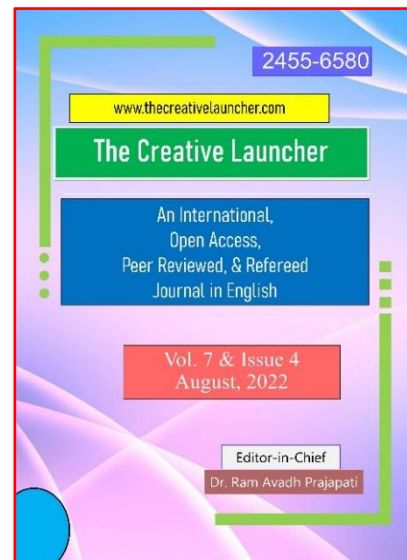
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Research Article



Solving the Riddle of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*

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Abstract

The paper focuses on analysing the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. These are the depiction of religion (Christianity), conspiracy theories, myths and history used in the novel.

There are five novels by Dan Brown of the Robert Langdon series. These are *Angels and Demons*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Lost Symbol*, *Inferno* and *Origin* respectively. *The Da Vinci Code* is one of the novels of the Robert Langdon series by Dan Brown. Robert Langdon is the central character in these novels. Robert Langdon, the professor in Harvard university, reveals mystery of a murder in Louvre Museum in Paris. He reveals secret plots conspired by various secret societies like the Priory of Sion, the Opus Dei, and the knights Templars. He also talks about Catholic Church conspiracies to gain domination and conspiracy theories about Jesus Christ and his supposed daughter from Mary Magdalene, the royal bloodline conspiracy theory. He also talks about historical Jesus and says that he was not a divine figure. He was also made of flesh and blood like normal people. This novel contains his own version of the history of religion and culture, the search for the keystone to find the mythical Holy grail and conflict between Christian secret societies.

Keywords: Christianity, Conspiracy Theories, History, Holy Grail, Secret Societies

Daniel Gerhard Brown is an American music composer, singer and novelist. He graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy, US. He is very famous for his novels that give a thrilling feel including themes of arts, myths, Cryptography, history and conspiracy theories. Dan Brown has made his reputation as the best seller thriller fiction writer. His novels are overloaded with conspiracies and cover ups. He has dealt with various questions about the cover ups done by religious institutions and the involvement of secret organisations in them. The novel *The Da Vinci Code* started an uproar in the Christian world. According to him this book might work as a stimulating agent "for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion and history"¹ and to conquer "religion's true enemy- apathy...".²

Dan Brown has established himself as a thriller novel writer. His genre is conspiracy fiction. A conspiracy theory gives answers to the unanswered questions. It tries to reveal the hidden secret behind an incident. Mostly they are of political motives. Conspiracy theory is defined as: "A theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators."³

Every conspiracy theory presents facts and logic to prove its existence true. Some call conspiracy theories conspiracy facts. Most conspiracy theories are of a world domination plan by some secret organisation that is covert in nature.

Dan Brown's novels are considered Popular Fiction. Conspiracy theories are very popular among people due to their easy access to social media and other sources of information. Dan Brown has tried to analyse the relation between conspiracy theory and religion and its impact on popular culture. In the novel *The Da Vinci Code* he shows the conflict between good and evil. In it, Dan Brown shows the conspiracy of the Catholic church to cover up the truth that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and the Catholic church hid this truth for 2000 years for keeping away women from the church. Brown's central claim in this novel is

based on a conspiracy theory that Jesus' wife Mary Magdalene was bearing the child of Jesus when he was crucified. She fled to France for escaping her possible assassination. Thus, she saved the royal bloodline. According to him the Holy Grail didn't exist; rather it was Magdalene herself. In "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating The Da Vinci Code," Tammie M.Kennedy says: "In essence, he contests one of the central tenets of Christianity: that Jesus was mortal as well as divine and obliterates one of the most prominent images of Magdalene in public memory- that of repentant whore."⁴ Here he shows the Catholic church as a villain against the representation of women in church. He shows the Christianity male centred only. Harold W. Attridge from Yale School Divinity School writes about *The Da Vinci Code*, "Brown's book exploits the fact that the Last Supper painting includes a figure at Jesus' right who appears more feminine than masculine, thus supporting the claim that Mary Magdalene was romantically attached to Jesus."⁵

His other novel *Angels and Demons* and the present one *The Da Vinci Code* are considered to be controversial due to the portrayal of religion and religious institutions. The plot of *The Da Vinci Code* is focused on the battle between the ancient Christian secret society, The Priory of Sion and Opus Dei for achieving the keystone that can help in the search for the Holy Grail. It is regarded as sacred in Christianity and the Christian world says about it that Jesus had had his last meal in this Grail. But he opposes this notion. He tries to show that there was no 'Holy' Grail. The real Holy grail was Mary Magdalene's womb. And he has shown the Priory of Sion protecting the successors of Jesus. The *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* book was published in 1982. It also supported the thesis of *The Da Vinci Code* that talked about Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene and his child to become a part of the Merovingian Dynasty.

He tries to prove his point about Mary Magdalene with the help of the painting of Jesus's last supper with his apostles made by Leonardo Da Vinci. The last supper is Jesus' final meal which he ate with his apostles in Jerusalem prior to his death by crucifixion. While taking a meal Jesus predicted his betrayal by one of his then present apostles. Italian painter Leonardo Da Vinci made the painting representing The Last Supper of Jesus with his twelve apostles. He asserts that one of the apostles sitting beside him is Mary Magdalene.

Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. it was, without a doubt...female. That's a woman! Sophie exclaimed.⁶

Although in the beginning of the prologue of the novel Brown claims to have depicted all things as facts, it is an interesting thing that the historians related to the study of art say that the figure is not Mary Magdalene. Rather it is the apostle John. He looks faminish just because of Leonardo's love for blurring the lines between the sexes. According to Brown she was a danger for the power of the Catholic Church so they made her role derogatory in the eyes of the world. Dan Brown shows two characters, Sophie Neveu and Teabing in conversation about Mary Magdalene. Sophie asks Teabing if Mary was so powerful that she could destroy

the entity of the Church. She further asks if she was a fallen woman as she was described by people over the centuries. Teabing rejects this question and says that she was not a fallen woman rather she became the victim of the Church conspiracy. Her image was made derogatory by the Church because they were afraid of revealing the fact that she herself was the mythical Holy Grail.

He alleges that the Church authorities were conspiring against Mary Magdalene. According to him, she was bearing the child of Christ in her womb. So, she was the real Holy Grail due to carrying his holy blood. Robert Langdon says about the Holy Grail that it symbolized the long-worshipped goddess that was lost due to the rise of Christianity. He adds one point that Christianity was not strong enough to wipe out all the pagan religions without hardships. According to him all the medieval travels for the search of the Holy Grail were the quests for the Holy womanly power or the sacred feminine. Sophie then says that she wrongly thought the Holy Grail an actual person, then Teabing supports her point saying that it was a woman, the real Holy Grail whose secret could demolish the roots of Christianity.

Some researchers say that *The Da Vinci Code* is an attack on Christianity. The author talks about The Priory of Sion, a secret organisation that was founded in 1099. He declares Victor Hugo, Sandro Botticelli, Sir Isaac Newton and the famous painter and inventor Leonardo Da Vinci as its members. He gives other names also of its members and reveals their position as Grandmasters. He based this argument upon the basis of some documents revealed at Paris bibliotheque Nationale in 1975. These documents were known as *Less Dossiers Secrets*. He claims that the secret ritual and all the events that he represented in the novel, exist in reality. But various scholars have refuted his claim. They rejected his point saying it was historically and factually full of errors. He talks about Opus Dei also which he describes as a Catholic Christian sect.

He has dealt with the history of Christianity on a vast level. And his version of the history of religion is quite different from the history of the world knows. He gives shocking references about religion and adds ancient history with it. According to Mark Patrick Haderman Dan Brown has tried to prove one point that "the Catholic Church is perpetrating a major centuries-long conspiracy to hide the 'truth' about Jesus Christ from the public".⁷ He provides a lot of references revealing mysterious knowledge. He says Jesus to be a historical figure not a divine personality. He calls Jesus to be a historical person, having an influential personality. He calls him the most mysterious and influential leader of the world. In the revelations, prophecies were done about him, calling him the leader or the Messiah. Kings bent down before him and millions of people were affected by him. He paved the way for various philosophies. He being the heir of the bloodline of King David and King Solomon, had the authority to claim the throne of the King of Jews. It is clear that a lot of devotees of Jesus wrote down his life.

He further talks about collecting of the verses of the Bible that it was collected by a non-Christian Pagan person. "The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today,

was collected by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great....He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed too weak to protest." (310)

He says that at the time of Constantine the Great, in Rome, the official religion was sun worship. It was called the cult of SOL Invictus. Constantine converted a lot of sun worshipping pagans into Christianity but he also amalgamated pagan rituals, ceremonial dates and symbols into Christianity. He made a combined religion to follow both parties (Pagans and Christians).

Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis nursing her miraculously conceived son Horus became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements the Catholic ritual - the mitre, the altar, the doxology and communion, the act of "God- eating" - were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions. (311)

Brown asserts that it was Constantine who propounded the idea that Christ is a divine power and he is the Son of God so that he might unify the two powers into one (the Vatican and the Roman empire). He preached the unquestionable personality of Jesus by turning him into an all-powerful divine deity. Through this the danger of future pagan confrontation to Christianity was omitted. According to Brown it was Constantine who shaped Christianity into the modern face that the world sees now. Various documents were there that told about Christ's existence as a mortal human being but it was Constantine the Great who omitted those references. He asserts that it was Constantine the Great who was indulged in writing a new Bible. He appointed some people for it and provided them funds too. In this Bible, the gospels that talked about the human attributes of Jesus, were removed. Gospels that talked about his divinity as a God, were added. He declared the old gospels illegal and got them burned.

According to the Gnostics Christ was far more human than the conventional Christian belief. The term Gnosis is called for the knowledge of a person's inner self. Gnosticism is a bunch of thoughts and practices about religion. These ideas were collected by the Jewish and early Christian groups. The time period of starting it is considered the first century AD. The teachings of Gnosticism tell its devotees to follow their inner knowledge above the religious conservative teachings and practices. Dan Brown talks about the Gnostic gospels that were concealed by the then powerful authorities related to religion. It was prohibited to question the verses of the Bible collected by Constantine. People who dared to raise their voice against the authenticity of it, were punished and labelled as heretics. According to his point, the period of Constantine the Great was the time of a great turmoil. No one could challenge the domination of Constantine in the field of religion. He declared everyone a betrayer of Christianity who dared to prefer the so-called prohibited gospels to the gospels of Constantine. So, the word *heretic* came into use when those people were alleged to do heresy. Brown further elaborates his point claiming the word *heresy* to be a Latin word *haereticus*. According to him it means a person's choice. People who selected the real history of Christ were listed as the first heretics of the world. Brown once said that he took some idea to write the *Da Vinci Code* from one of the Gnostic gospels. He was inspired from some lines of the gnostic gospel

of Philip. He tells about finding the surviving gospels in the Twentieth century. He says that Constantine tried to omit some gospels from the Bible but anyhow they survived. He tells about the history of finding them through the reference of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He says that these documents were discovered in a cave not far from Qumran that is situated in a desert area in Israel. It was the middle of the Twentieth century. He now talks about the Coptic Scrolls found in 1945 at a place named Nag Hammadi in Egypt. These documents revealed the original truth about the Holy Grail as well as Jesus' human traits. He asserts that the Vatican Church considered to stop the release of these documents as they stopped in the past. According to him the Bible of today was redacted by a person who had a political motive to encourage the notion that Jesus Christ was not a human being rather a divine figure and due to his influence the power of the Vatican was increased. He uses Bible conspiracy theories to solidify the point that in early Christianity, there were people having a strong political motive to alter the material of the Bible and change the doctrine of the religion. He talks about various Freemasonic symbols that the Freemasons used who were craftsmen and the Freemasonry was considered to be a secret society started around The Thirteenth century for world domination.

The story of the novel focuses on a murder mystery of a person in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Robert Langdon, the protagonist, is summoned there to analyze the symbols related to the works of famous painter Leonardo Da Vinci. While doing his investigation, he reveals shocking secrets about Jesus having a daughter from Mary Magdalene and starting the royal bloodline (Merovingian dynasty).

He presents a vast description of his own version of the history of Christian religion and myths about it. He includes various conspiracy theories also about Jesus bloodline, secret societies like Priory of Sion, Freemasons-a fraternal brotherhood, Masonic architecture, Priory of Sion and its mythical history, another secret society: Opus Dei and the works of its members for guarding the royal bloodline, the Knights Templars and the history behind their rise and corruption prevalent in them. Their protection of the ruins of Christian holy lands (crusades)and their conflicts with the Church. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is full of riddles with biblical references and religious symbols, depiction of architecture, artistic history, religious history and secret societies. The work is in the thriller genre and it gives the full pleasure of reading a suspense laden novel.

He uses symbols in this novel that are related to Christianity and its sects, architectural codes, riddles, masonic symbols, legends about Christ's Last Supper and of Holy Grail quest. He uses Numerology and various Christian symbols like the five-pointed Pentagram in a circle, the upward pointing triangle (referred to as the chalice) symbol of the womb and the triangle moving upward (symbol of male force). According to Kabbalah if both are combined, they make the Star of David the symbol of wholeness. It is also considered the seal of king Solomon. He talks about one eye symbolism using one eye that is called the all-seeing eye or the Eye of Horus. He gives information about it by using the most powerful and dangerous secret society

The Illuminati. He has given the references of this secret society in his previous novel *Angels and Demons* and made it his main tool to develop the plot of the novel. He claims that the knights Templars and the Freemasons have connections and architecture of various buildings including the Rosslyn Temple taking help from Masonic symbolism.

Every surface in the chapel had been carved with symbols- Christian cruciforms, Jewish stars, Masonic seals, Templar crosses, cornucopias, pyramids, astrological signs, plants, vegetables, pentacles and roses. The Knights Templar had been master stonemasons, erecting Templar churches all over Europe. (565)

He uses various historical facts for proving his point in the novel. His style is really strange. He starts the story with the murder mystery of a person named Jacques Sauniere near in the museum. Then the protagonist Robert Langdon starts solving all the riddles and codes and while solving the mystery, reveals various conspiracies and concealed cover ups in the history.

In the novel *Angels and Demons* he made The Illuminati the chief villain and a great conflict between science and Religion was shown there in the novel while in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, the villain is the male centred Catholic Church and a secret society the Priory of Sion is in the role of the saviour of the feminine. Brown makes his work a great amalgamation of fact, fiction, religion, myth, history and pseudo history. Although he uses chronological evidence to prove his point, they are having a lot of errors. He has claimed to reveal the real things in his work.

The novel has its focus on just one thing, that is the description of secret societies and how they have influenced the catholic Church. He opposes the belief of Christians that Jesus was God or he had divine powers and he came on earth as a human being. Dan Brown is successful in continually establishing the connection of his readers with the plot of the novel. The story starts with one mystery and afterwards another mystery starts. The reader cannot help being involved in the adventurous events going on in the story. The theme is really suitable according to the present world as everyone wants to learn one's own roots and to probe deep into the history. The novel *The Da Vinci Code* has been a burning issue of debate at various platforms and it has been criticized a lot by the Church authority and media. Also a great approach was started in the Christian world. At various places people protested against it and copies of this novel were burnt by them. When the movie *The Da Vinci Code* was released in 2006, the protestors went against it and burned the posters of the movie. Because the prime target of its questioning was the Vatican. The novel *The Da Vinci Code* is supposed to be a tool to encourage the readers to question their religious beliefs and not to blindly follow any maxim or notion.

Due to Dan Brown's fascination with themes related to culture, religion and history, he makes the settings of his novels full of historical places that tell the readers noteworthy historical facts about religion and culture. He marvellously describes the ideal renaissance man

Leonardo Da Vinci's cryptology. He talks about the encryption technique of Da Vinci. First of it was a hollow cylindrical shape having dial shoulder letters encrypted with password.

Dan brown has raised the voice of feminism through his thesis in the novel. He has used the Mary Magdalene conspiracy theory to raise the issue of the marginalization of women by the male centred society and the orthodox religious institutions. It probes deep into the history of Christianity and unfolds its layer with the help of the character of an Oxford professor of symbology, Robert Langdon. He unfolds the practice of goddess worship in ancient times through the description of the Holy Grail quest. It is a mixture of bizarre facts including fictional accounts, of his characters, history, myths and theology.

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