

Eternal Identity and the Ethics of Immorality: Exploring Values of Om Shastri in the Hidden Hindu

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian Literature is focusing towards mythological fiction. This reinterpretation often tries to touch the ancient beliefs through modern scientific and philosophical perspectives. Such novels captivate and engage the reader which automatically leads to gaining popularity among the present youth. Akshat Gupta's *The Hidden Hindu* also deals with mythological fiction. This paper will explore the mysterious character Mr Om Shastri, appeared too lived across centuries without ageing. The focus is of understanding the truth of existence. It focuses on the evidentiary miracles performed by Om Shastri, protagonist, who was being interrogated in a dome shaped high tech facility, situated at Ross Island. Basically this paper will give us the brief idea about the mixture of modern scientific skepticism and ancient mythological realities which every reader will come across while reading the text. During interrogation of Om Shastri by doctors and scientist, we come across various themes like immortality, identity, human values, ethics etc.

Keywords: Om Shastri, immortality, eternal, interrogate, identity.

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Introduction

Indian Literature has always tried to portray human values or concerns for life, spirituality, death, morals, identity etc. Indian epics such as Mahabharata and the Ramayana talk about dharma, karma, existential questions. In the world of contemporary literature, writers put lots of effort to reinterpret epic characters from a fresh perspective through innovative story telling techniques. The Hidden Hindu by Akshat Gupta narrates the story of Om Shastri, who has different identities across different yugas and historical periods. His abilities challenge scientific reasoning and rational thinking of those who interrogate him in a dome-shaped high-tech facility structure. Through the protagonist, Om Shastri, the novel try to examine the idea of eternal identity and raises ethical questions about immortality. This paper will explore how the the novel presents immortality not merely as a supernatural concept but as a moral and philosophical issues related to human value. Akshat Gupta's *The Hidden Hindu* trilogy, gain him popularity as a best-selling series, this paper focuses specifically on Part 1 of trilogy. Part 1 is consists of 14 chapters, the setting is dome shaped high tech facility where Om is interrogated by the doctor and scientist. Akshat Gupta talks about seven immortals in his book and to make the story engaging Akshat Gupta create two important character one is Om Shastri and other one is Nagendra. Here Om Shastri, protagonist, is important character and story revolves around him. The novel blend mythology, history and science. Roshan Navale says "This book is not just a story; it's a doorway to a world that blends the modern with the mystical, the logical with the spiritual, and the real with the anciently surreal. As someone who has grown up hearing mythological tales of Shiva, Vishnu, and Mahabharata, this book struck a different chord altogether. It didn't feel like fiction – it felt like forgotten truth, rediscovered." The more focus of the paper is on eternity and immortality, which is leading us to connect to our roots dating back our ancient literature and the lifestyle. Here we can study Indian Knowledge system where. The paper argues that Om Shastri's immortality symbolizes not physical eternity but the continuity of moral consciousness across time.

Below are the extract which support my paper:

Om Shastri was silent for a moment and then, without warning, woke up from his narcotic stupor. His sudden return to consciousness shocked the team members, who thought they had ample time to deal with him. Shahista, who was sitting closest to Om Shastri, got alarmed and, while trying to distance herself from him, fell off the chair in surprise. All the others in the room stiffened. Shahista's rational mind argued that this was impossible: It's not been even an hour. How did he get conscious? Never in her experience of over three hundred patients had a man woken up from his hypnotism so abruptly, without any sign of physical disturbance.

Dr Batra was equally stunned and disoriented. His knowledge of medicines told him that the patient could not regain consciousness in less than eight hours of the injection, given the dose.

It had not even been an hour since Om was injected. This defied all the norms ever studied and practised by Dr Batra. LSD was horrified too and was bad at hiding it. None of them had any clue what was going on. Pg 25_26

To reveal the data from Om Shastri, the doctor Shahista hypnotize him and Dr Batra injected him a powerful drug making him stay conscious for 8 hours but Om become conscious within one hour which actually make everyone surprised leading them to think How? As per the experience they were sure that he will remain unconscious and will be able to answer their question making Dr Shashita successful in her work. But unfortunately Om Shastri wake up without any physical disturbance and also without a given stipulated time.

From this extract we can see that Om's metabolism is so advance that it challenges the modern science putting them in a awful situation. The dose injected to Shahstri, if the same is given to normal human being then it might lead to a death of a person. But the way Om's body react to the medicine is unbelievable, he fights off the foreign chemical. A dose that would kill a normal human or make a person fall asleep forever can put Om Shastri asleep for a short while. He has the ability and strength to overcome from the sedative injection. It shows his resilience to overcome for the drug. Along with this we can also say that his soul is so pure and he has kept his body in such a disciplined that the drug didn't affect his for a longer hour.

Om tried resisting initially and let out a scream. 'I am immune to midazolam, flunitrazepam, barbiturates and amobarbital. This won't help you.' These were Om's last words before losing consciousness again. Dr Batra concealed his astonishment on hearing the names of the drugs that constituted the narcotic mixture and injected him once more. Om started feeling sleepy. Dr Shahista started in the direction of Om Shastri to get on with hypnotizing him. She sat comfortably in front of him and stared him in the eye. Shahista's beautiful eyes had the magic and the power to hypnotize any person. She didn't blink at all and spoke in a soothing voice. When she touched Om Shastri on the shoulder, he felt limp and heavy. Dr Srinivasan registered these odd words in his mind, 'I know who you are'. How, Dr Srinivasan wondered. Pg 27

In the above extract Om Shastri fluently takes the names of all sedatives and amnesiacs that is midazolam, flunitrazepam, barbiturates and amobarbital used in modern science to control the human brain which lead Dr Batra in shock because Om takes all the chemical names of the drug accurately used against him. This shows that Om, being ancient character, is highly knowledgeable then the modern scientist. Here Om also claims that he is immune to above sedative which mean his biological and spiritual discipline is beyond the reach of standard chemical.

We can also see that Dr Batra uses needle, chemical mixture to control Om making him fall asleep and Dr Shahista uses her soothing voice and steady, beautiful eyes to hypnotize him. Though the drugs make om feel limp and heavy but his mind refuses to shut off completely. He even says to Dr Srinivasan that he know who he is which makes reader understand that Om's Inner SELF is still active and aware. It shows that one can have a control over physical body but not the senses and inner self. Also Om has the power to remembers / recalls the past.

'Sanjay! The son of Gavalgan,' said Om Shastri. 'And how do you know him?' Shahista asked. 'Sanjay was the one who guided Dhritarashtra, king of Hastinapur, during the war,' Om replied. 'I met him at that time as I was the prime minister of Hastinapur and my name was Vidur,' he continued. Abhilash at once started pondering over the names and spoke slowly as he did so. 'I've heard this name before.' 'Anyway,' Shahista wanted to proceed. 'You don't get it. He is claiming to be alive during the time of the Mahabharata, Abhilash retorted. 'Do you want me to believe in all his mythological nonsense?' 'This isn't nonsense.. you-' Before Abhilash could complete his statement, Shahista threw another question on Om. 'What other names do you have, Mr Shastri?' 'Sushen,' Om Shastri replied as a smile crossed his face. 'What did you do as him?' Shahista emphasized. Pg 21

In the above passage Om Shastri informs that he personally knows Sanjay, the son of Gavalgan. Sanjay played very important role during Mahabharata. He was the guide to Dhritarashtra the king of Hastinapur, during the war. During Mahabharat time Om was playing the role of Vidur, the prime minister of Hastinapur. During this time Om met Sanjay as Vidur. This suggest that Om was alive during Dwapar yug or during the age of Mahabharat and now he is also in Kali yug. Here Abhilash denies and call its mythological nonsense. It represent modern skepticism and rational thought. Further Om also says that he was Sushen, Vaidya, a royal physician. He is one of the seven immortals from Indian mythology and mentioned in the Ramayan. Om also states that when Laxman was wounded critically in the battle that time he was Sushen and suggested Ram to bring Sanjeevani herb to save Laxman. This claim is crucial because it shows that Oms identity has continued across different yugas. His life not only belongs to a particular age but it moves across the ages. It supports the eternity of Om. Sanjeevani is not only a simple herb but it's a life giving medicine. It also has a deeper meaning. The way Sanjeevani gives life to other in the same way Om Shashtri also keeps the ancient knowledge alive in the modern world and using it whenever needed. He represents the survival of old wisdom in a time. Here immortality is not about living forever but preserving the knowledge and values. Immortality is connected with the responsibility. Eternal life without moral values would be dangerous. Though Sushen we learn that immortality serves humanity and follow dharma.

'What other names have you been using lately?' Shahista continued. 'Govindlal Yadav, Bhairav Singh, Suvarna Pratap Reddy, Bankim Chandra Chakraborty, Gursheel Singh Khullar, Vidur, Om Shastri, Hatim Ali Maulvi, Protim Das, Vishnu Gupt, Kabir, Sushen, Jai Shankar Prasad, Madhukar Rao, Adhiraiyan, Om began as if reciting a mugged up poem. His accent, tone, pitch, pronunciation and facial expressions changed with every name he mouthed. 'Bhairav Singh', 'Hatim Ali Maulvi', 'Gursheel Singh Khullar' and 'Suvarna Pratap Reddy' were uttered in a tone that spoke of strength and bravery. 'Bankim Chandra Chakraborty' was spoken in the typical Bengali accent.

'Kabir' and 'Sushen' came with a wave of calmness and serenity. The names seemed unending and continued, with his pitch and tone changing with every uttered name. Everyone in the room was awestruck at his flawless and natural response. Even the best of actors couldn't have pulled this off so brilliantly. Pg 46 -

From above text we can see that Om recalls his past names -'Govindlal Yadav, Bhairav Singh, Suvarna Pratap Reddy, Bankim Chandra Chakraborty, Gursheel Singh Khullar, Vidur, Om Shastri, Hatim Ali Maulvi, Protim Das, Vishnu Gupt, Kabir, Sushen, and many more. Each names portrays different culture, identity, religion and different social and historical background. It shows that Om belongs to different lifetime and identity. The continuous flow of names indicate that he lived across different ages adopting to diff era while retaining an inner identity of self. The awful expression of all the people in room reinforces the authenticity of his immortality. Even renowned skilled actor could not replicate such seamless transition. This details strengthen the argument that the Om's existence refuses the abilities of ordinary human limitation therefore we can say that Om is immortal and eternal and not bound by time, memory and individual identity. Despite this he also speaks Punjabi, Telgu fluently making everyone amazed. His previous knowledge, his actions, past experiences cannot be explained by a common man. This extract suggest that immortality is not static. It involve in to continuous transformation. Here we can see that outer identity changes but the inner core or consciousness remains the same and recalls the fact. Thus immortality is paradox. Om's different names during diff yugas shows that eternal self way beyond the temporary social construct of nationality and social identity. The recurring identities reiterate the concept of rebirth and continuity of consciousness. Unlike ordinary rebirth where memory is erased and child brain is like a tebulu rasa, but Om retains full awareness of his past identities making readers feels that Om shastri is immortal.

LSD said, 'Already done, sir, here they are. 'She promptly handed over the page to Dr Srinivasan, who passed it on to Veerbhadra. Veerbhadra left the room with the paper instantly. He knew what to do with it. Dr Srinivasan carefully unlocked a vault in his desk and took out a few photographs and some documents. He handed all of this to Dr Shahista, who in turn circulated them among the others, after having a look at them one by one. All the photographs captured Om Shastri in different appearances and outfits. Each snapshot contained the year and the place where it was taken. Shahista read them one by one: 1874 in Banaras, 1882 in Haryana, 1888 in Madras, 1895 in Maharashtra, 1902 in Kerala, 1916 in Lucknow, 1930 at the Salt Satyagraha (a request for truth, the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi for complete independence), 1944 in the Forward Bloc of Subhash Chandra Bose's army, 1947 in Delhi in the crowd at the flag hoisting, 1964 at Jawaharlal Nehru's funeral, 1984 at Indira Gandhi's funeral, 1991 at Rajiv Gandhi's funeral, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 ... Dr Srinivasan carefully studied their faces and said, 'These are the death certificates and other government records proving the deaths of all those names carried by Om, but once he is dead somewhere, he appears alive somewhere else. Remarkably, he has the same age in each photograph, neither younger nor older. Approximately forty years.' Dr Srinivasan paused so they could all grasp the information and when he spoke again, his voice was intense.. Pg 65-66

This passage represent the Om shastris' different identities and the proof that LSD hands over to Dr Srinivasan. Here we can see that Om was alive from 1874- 2025 but with different identities, and diff outfit from different places. The official documents and photographs reveals his presences across different historical periods i.e from 1874- 2015 in India. Those photographs shows his presence at important events of history like Salt Styagraha, gathering connected with Subhash Chandra Bose, presence at Jawaharlal Nehru's funeral, Rajiv Gandhi funeral. But the noticeable thing in the each given image, Om appears to be of the same age approximately forty years- neither younger nor older. showing no sign of ageing inspite of the gap of more than a century. Further investigation disclose that all names he used in past has the official records of death certificate. Which mean that officially the names he used are no more in the world. But Om continues to exist in the present, physically unchanged. This create a strong contradiction between the official records and the presence of Om with same face. This passage positively support the theme of immortality by presenting om as a being who transcand biological ageing, social identity and historical time. Death, in this context becomes merely the end of a name, not the end of existence.

As the guard did the needful, Om turned and said, "One more thing. I'm a vegetarian. I don't like cabbage. Potatoes and pulses will work. Green chilli and salt separately, please,' Om laid out his eating style. Shahista didn't understand him, but nodded nevertheless. She then left the laboratory and as she reached the dining room and saw the menu, she freaked out. She saw non-vegetarian food being served along with two vegetables: potato and cabbage. She got a hold of herself and said, 'Do not send non-vegetarian for Om, nor cabbage. He doesn't eat that.' 'How do you know?' LSD was baffled. 'He told me himself,' Shahista replied. 'What?' LSD inquired 'That he is a vegetarian and he dislikes cabbage. And that he wants green chillies and salt separately.' Everyone looked at each other in shock while Shahista started having her food. LSD racked her brains and spoke slowly, 'How could he make out that potatoes and cabbage were on the menu for lunch? Moreover, if he stated that he was a vegetarian, how did he even know that non-vegetarian food has been cooked?' Shahista stopped midway at that and began to ponder. Pg 70

In the above extract, Om clearly states his preferences towards his diet. He mentions Shahista that he is purely vegetarian and didn't like cabbage. He would prefer potatoes and pulses along with green chili and salt separately. When Om mentioned his diet Dr Shashista didn't realize why he is mentioning it. However when doctor and other scientist reaches the dining room to have their lunch. They all were shocked by looking at the menu available. She realizes that food listed by Om exactly matches his preference. Again the theme of immortality and eternity reflects in the above extract. Om's awareness of future events suggests that he has knowledge beyond the normal human limits. It shows that he is far beyond and his consciousness is not only restricted to present moment. His continuity of existence and memory, connects him to eternal life. Om is beyond the ordinary understanding.

Through this crucial incident, the text gives us an idea that Om is not an ordinary human being but someone whose existence goes beyond time, memory, and normal human experience.

It's been a while, came the flat and rude reply from Veerbhadra. Om inhaled deeply and started smiling. "What do you smile at?" Veerbhadra asked, irritated. "It's going to rain soon. And I love the smell and the sound of it," replied Om Shastri, his gaze set upon the minimal sky visible through the ventilator. "Rain? Now? It's summer! Have you lost it?" Veerbhadra responded. Pg 38

Veerbhadra was in a dilemma about whether or not to reveal the thing that was bothering him. He remained silent for a few seconds, contemplating, but the urge to know was far more intense than everything else. And so he asked, "You are seated in a chamber. How could you possibly have known that it would rain, and that too, hours before the weather built up? Moreover, you calculated the wind speed, smelt the wet soil, felt the altering temperature. There was no wind in the room. How can your senses be that strong? How did you do that?" Veerbhadra looked around in disbelief. Om Shastri smiled a bit. Pg 59

From the above extract we can see that Om can sense that it will rain soon but Veerbhadra denies it stating it's summer. But he sticks to his statements that he loves the smell and sound of rain and it will rain soon by looking at the sky from a gap of ventilator. Om predicts it before the weather builds up. After some time Veerbhadra reports back and asks Om how he could predict it will rain. And the reason for being so confident, being inside a closed room, he could predict about the rain. So Om explains him that he could sense it through smell and sound coming through ventilator and change in temperature. This passage supports the theme of eternity and immortality by indicating Om's extraordinary sensory perception and deep awareness. It also suggests that his senses are developed fully through long practice and experience. It is not the magic but it's a knowledge that he retains with him after the vast experience he gained through different identities. He is above the normal human being and deeply connected to nature, time and able to experience and sense subtle changes that others or normal human beings can't detect.

'As a matter of fact, I am also aware that I am sitting in an island off the southern coast of India. And I just make all this out with the help of my senses,' Om said as if skills like these were an insignificant part of him. Veerbhadra was shocked. 'You can't know that! You were unconscious and blindfolded in the chopper when you were brought here!' 'Well, but I do know all of it. It just needs experience and practice. Even you can do that. Anyone can,' Om shrugged in a matter-of-fact way. 'How?' Veerbhadra was unable to take in any of this. 'As you can easily differentiate between numerous colours with your eyes, just focus and smell the air in layers. Likewise, you can see an aeroplane vanishing in the sky after it takes off and an eagle transforms into a dot as it moves higher. The same way, you can smell things coming close, and going farther away,' Om explained, betraying all the logic and the reasoning Veerbhadra had ever learnt. Veerbhadra had much to resolve, and so, not waiting for his brain to comprehend what he had just been told, he put forth another question. 'You are not south Indian. How do you speak such fluent and flawless Telugu?' Pg 59-60.

Here is another incident briefing us Om's eternity and immortality. Om reveals Veerbhadra that being blindfolded and unconscious, he is aware that he is on the isolated island off the southern coast of India. And can experience it through his senses. According to him it's a matter of logical thinking and awareness. Om's highly developed senses and confidence suggests that he has gained this experience through long years of existence. This extract suggests that immortality is not physically living forever but acquiring deep wisdom and perception over time.

Conclusion

Om Shastri, the protagonist, represents the idea of eternity and immortality through the unchanging physical appearance, highly developed senses, extraordinary memory, different identities and names across different historical events, his prediction of rain, knowledge about surrounding, conflict between modern thought and ancient concept - together makes him a person who transcends ordinary human boundaries. His identity challenges the traditional ideas of time, memory, existence, death, ageing and his identity. While official records say the past identities are dead, Om continues to live, suggesting that death in the narrative is only the end of a name, not the end of existence. Through his character, the text highlights immortality as a state of constant transformation within permanence. This novel redefines immortality not as fantasy, but a profound exploration of timeless existence. Devdutt Pattnaik, a writer, mentions in *Myth=Mithya*, myths represent subjective truth shaped by cultural belief rather than objective historical fact. Through this angle we can state that Om Shastri's immortality is a symbolic representation of the eternal self within Hindu cosmology. Om Shastri stands as a symbol of eternal life and immortality offering a lens of existence that goes beyond birth and death. It is continuous, transformative yet permanent existence.

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Conflicts of interest

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