

Nature as a Portal to the Divine: The Symbolic Role of Environment in 'The Hidden Hindu'

Nayana Das

Research Scholar, MSSV, Nogaon
Email id- nayana221962@gmail.com

Abstract:

Akshat Gupta's *The Hidden Hindu*, provides 'nature' a quiet but powerful role in deepening the story. It can be considered just as a background setting yet it adds a sense of mystery, spirituality, and timelessness to the entire narrative. Places like Gyanganj, the Himalayas, and Lake Mansarovar are portrayed as sacred and hidden, suggesting that true knowledge and self-discovery lie far away from the noise of the modern world. These natural spaces are where important events and revelations happen, often acting like gateways between the physical and spiritual realms. Nature also mirrors what the characters are going through emotionally. When Om is lost or searching for answers, the environment around him often feels harsh, quiet, or otherworldly, almost as if nature itself is responding to his inner state. At times, it even seems to protect sacred knowledge, only revealing its secrets to those who are ready. Through all of this, nature becomes more than just scenery, it becomes a guide, a mirror, and a reminder that the universe is full of hidden truths waiting to be uncovered. The attempt of this paper is to show how the 'environment' or the 'nature', adds mystery, meaning, and spiritual resonance. The attempt is to show a symbolic tool that reflects the themes of the story: rebirth, karma, hidden truths, and the search for self. By anchoring these ideas in powerful natural settings, the novel feels bigger than just one man's journey.

Keywords: nature, spirituality, mystery, sacred, hidden truths

The 'Environment' in literature serves as more than just a backdrop for the story rather it plays an integral role in shaping the narrative. It helps establish the setting, which influences the mood and atmosphere of the work. Through detailed descriptions of landscapes, weather, or urban spaces, authors can reflect character's emotions, mental states, or social conditions. For example- a storm sequence might symbolize internal conflict, while a peaceful countryside may represent freedom or escape. Additionally, the environment can drive the plot forward by creating obstacles or shaping character's choices and development. It also often carries symbolic meaning, reinforcing key themes such as survival, isolation, transformation, or the relationship between humans and nature. In this way, the environment becomes a dynamic and meaningful element of literary storytelling. Moreover, the environment in literature can reflect cultural, historical, or political contexts, offering deeper insight into the world the characters inhabit. In some works, particularly in genres like eco-literature or regional literature, the natural or social environment becomes central to the narrative, emphasizing issues such as environmental degradation, climate change, or the loss of traditional ways of life. Writers use the environment to comment on human behaviour and society's impact on the world, often blurring the line between setting and theme. In this

sense, the environment not only influences characters and plot but also becomes a lens through which readers can explore broader philosophical and moral questions.

“The Hidden Hindu” follows the mysterious journey of Om Shastri, a seemingly ordinary man with an extraordinary past. Set in a world where mythology, science, and history collide, the story begins with Om being captured and interrogated in a secret facility. As the plot unfolds, it reveals that Om is a Saptarishi, an immortal being who has lived through different yugas or the four yugas namely- Satya yuga, Draupa yuga, Treta yuga and Kalyug yuga (ages), and he carries deep knowledge about ancient secrets, forgotten histories, and powerful mythological beings. As Om’s memories resurface, the narrative explores hidden truths from Indian mythology, the lost city of Gyanganj, the concept of rebirth, and the eternal battle between good and evil. The story jumps between timelines, weaving together past lives, ancient prophecies, and a modern quest to uncover truths that could change the future of mankind. With themes of karma, destiny, and spiritual awakening, *The Hidden Hindu* offers a fast-paced, mythological thriller rooted in Indian tradition.

In *The Hidden Hindu* by Akshat Gupta, the ‘environment’ or the ‘nature’ plays a deeply symbolic and mystical role rather than just serving as a backdrop for the story. Much of the novel takes place in places like Gyanganj, a mythical city hidden in the Himalayas, and around sacred locations such as Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar mentioning the Rakshastal, Bhimkund, Gaurikund as such. These environments are not described merely for their beauty or mystery rather they hold spiritual meaning. For example, Gyanganj is only accessible to people with a strong karmic connection, which suggests that the environment itself responds to a person’s inner state. It’s not just a place to be found on a map, but a space of spiritual readiness and destiny. The novel also introduces extinct creatures, like saber-toothed tigers and long-lost plants, as part of this hidden world. This shows that in Gyanganj, time doesn’t flow normally. Instead, it’s a place where different ages exist at once, giving the environment the feeling of being a living museum of forgotten eras. This use of nature reflects Hindu philosophies where time moves in cycles, and nothing truly dies. It is reborn in some form. So, nature here is not just scenery; it represents the endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

In addition to serving as a spiritual landscape, the environment in *The Hidden Hindu* also helps build the atmosphere of mystery, ancient wisdom, and hidden knowledge that defines the tone of the novel. The natural world—especially the mountains, forests, and remote terrains, acts almost like a character in itself. These settings are quiet, secluded, and often untouched by modern civilization, which reflects the novel’s exploration of forgotten truths and lost histories. The remoteness of these places suggests that the answers to life’s biggest questions like who we are, where we come from, and what our purpose is- are not found in the noise of the modern world but in the silence of nature and isolation. Moreover, the environment functions as a bridge between mythology and reality. Many of the events in the book, including the appearances of long-lost beings and the revelation of ancient powers, are only possible because they occur in these mystical settings. The natural world becomes a portal to the past, allowing characters and us the readers, to experience moments from previous yugas (ages). This connection between place and time emphasizes the idea that

certain environments hold energy, secrets, and truths that transcend generations. The physical harshness of the terrain, cold climates, treacherous paths, and unpredictable weather, also mirrors the internal struggles of the protagonist, Om. As he journeys through these environments, he is also navigating the complexities of his identity, his past lives, and his place in a much larger cosmic plan. In this way, nature is both a test and a guide. It challenges Om but also reveals truths when he is ready to receive them. Ultimately, the role of the environment in *The Hidden Hindu* is profound. It is not just scenery; it is rather sacred space, spiritual test, memory-keeper, and a reflection of the deeper themes that drive the story. Nature in this book holds power, mystery, and knowledge, waiting to reveal itself to those who are willing to go beyond the surface and look inward.

In *The Hidden Hindu*, every natural element seems to carry a symbolic purpose tied to the journey of self-discovery and the quest for hidden truths. The forest, for instance, is where characters often break away from the distractions of modern life and step into a realm where time feels ancient and knowledge is timeless. This setting mirrors traditional Indian scriptures, where sages retreated into forests to meditate and connect with higher consciousness. Similarly, the use of caves in the novel is deeply symbolic. Caves represent both physical and spiritual depth where they are dark, hidden, and require one to go inward, just like a seeker diving into the depths of their own soul to uncover buried truths. Important revelations in the story often take place in these cave-like spaces, highlighting their role as sacred, secretive wombs of knowledge.

Water bodies like rivers or lakes also hold deep symbolic weight. In many cultures, especially in Hinduism, rivers are seen as living goddesses flowing with purity, life, and transformation. When characters interact with rivers in the book, it's often a moment of change, reflection, or cleansing, symbolizing a shift in their understanding or spiritual state. Mountains, being high and difficult to reach, symbolize elevation, not just physical but also mental and spiritual. When the story moves into mountainous terrain, it usually means the characters are nearing a higher form of truth or entering the domain of beings beyond ordinary human experience, like the immortals or enlightened sages. Together, these environmental symbols reinforce a major theme in *The Hidden Hindu*: that nature is not just a backdrop, but a living force that holds the keys to ancient, spiritual, and even scientific mysteries. The novel reflects the traditional Indian worldview where nature and divinity are deeply connected, reminding readers that to find the divine, one must often return to the natural world.

Another point to be evaluated is the relation of the characters mentioned in the book, with 'nature'. One of the most symbolic characters is Prithvi, the active narrator of the story whose name itself means "Earth" in Sanskrit. His mysterious identity and resilience can be interpreted as a representation of nature, wounded yet powerful, forgotten yet essential. Similarly, Om Shastri, a time-traveling Aghori, acts as a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern science. His spiritual understanding of balance, karma, and cosmic order reflects traditional ecological values that respect nature's cycles. Other characters also contribute to this theme in indirect but meaningful ways. Dwarka Shastri, Om's father, represents the guardian of sacred, ancient knowledge that includes harmony with nature. Bhairavi, a fierce and divine feminine force, symbolizes the dual nature of the environment, nurturing when

respected, but destructive when harmed. Trijat, an immortal, reminds readers of the dangers of trying to conquer death and natural limits, reflecting how human attempts to control nature often lead to imbalance. The novel's scientific side is represented by Punarvasu and the Tridev Organisation, who conduct secret experiments to achieve immortality. Their pursuit of unnatural power mirrors real-world issues like genetic engineering and ecological exploitation, where the consequences of human interference often outweigh the benefits.

In *The Hidden Hindu*, the significance of nature is profound and intricately tied to the characters' spiritual journeys. The narrative unfolds primarily in untamed forests and lofty mountains, where the characters uncover ancient temples and concealed truths that illuminate ancient Hindu wisdom. For instance, as they venture into the thick woods, the atmosphere feels both enigmatic and sacred, as if nature itself safeguards these revelations. The rivers depicted in the story act as sanctified sites where characters seek solace and rejuvenate their spirits. In the narrative, rivers are depicted as sacred spaces where individuals seek solace and rejuvenate their souls. The natural world also presents challenges through storms, difficult terrain, and wild creatures, putting their courage and resolve to the test. Occasionally, animals appear to assist or lead the characters, illustrating that nature supports those who honour it. In summary, nature within the story serves not merely as a backdrop but as a vibrant entity that imparts wisdom, upholds traditions, and links the characters to their spiritual heritage.

In *The Hidden Hindu*, the environment serves as more than just a backdrop; it represents the profound relationship between humanity and the divine. Woodlands, waterways, and mountains are portrayed as sacred sites where deities or ancient sages once resided, transforming nature into a pathway to spiritual understanding. The characters gain significant insights from the natural world as they encounter obstacles such as severe weather and wild creatures that challenge their bravery and patience. The narrative also illustrates how numerous Hindu customs are intertwined with nature, such as the reverence for rivers and trees, and how honouring nature contributes to the preservation of these age-old beliefs. As the characters navigate through caves, woods, and secluded temples, they unearth forgotten wisdom regarding their heritage and history. The book teaches that living in harmony with nature is very important, warning that if people disrespect the environment, they may lose spiritual wisdom and face danger. Overall, nature in the story is a powerful teacher, protector, and guide on the character's journey.

In *The Hidden Hindu*, the environment breathes with the weight of mythology, carrying echoes of the Puranas and epics in every leaf and stone. The rivers that wind through the narrative often recall the sanctity of the Ganga as an eternal purifier descending from the heavens, symbolizing liberation and the washing away of karmic burdens. Mountains rise not merely as geographical features but as embodiments of divinity, mirroring the Himalayas, the eternal seat of Lord Shiva, where ascetics seek both silence and revelation. Here, the forests echo with the resonance of 'tapasya', recalling the Dandakaranya of the 'Ramayana' and the hermitages where sages performed penance, turning wilderness into crucibles of wisdom. Even the deserts and barren landscapes whisper of trials, like the Pandavas' exile, where nature itself became a testing ground for endurance and faith. Hidden laboratories and ashrams, cloaked in remote wilderness, reflect this continuity between myth and modernity,

just as ancient ‘rishis’ sought solitude in caves to unlock cosmic truths, the story’s seekers retreat into nature’s folds to wrestle with immortality. Storms and elemental upheavals become metaphors for the churning of the cosmic ocean i.e. the ‘Samudra manthan’, where both nectar and poison arise, reminding us that the environment itself participates in the eternal struggle between creation and destruction. Thus, the natural world in *The Hidden Hindu* is never incidental; it is sacred space, alive with the pulse of Hindu mythology. Every river carries the voice of the divine; every forest shelters echoes of tapasya, and every mountain points to the eternal, turning the environment into both scripture and stage for the unfolding drama of destiny.

References

1. Gupta, Akshat. *The Hidden Hindu*. Penguin Random House India, 2022.
2. Gupta, Akshat. *The Hidden Hindu* 2. Penguin Random House India, 2022.
3. Gupta, Akshat. *The Hidden Hindu* 3. Penguin Random House India, 2023.