

Cultural Consciousness in Ashwin Sanghi's *The Vault of Vishnu***Vikash Pandey**Undergraduate student
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Contact no.: +91-7001379435**Abstract**

Ashwin Sanghi's *The Vault of Vishnu* delivers a rich and intricately woven story that blends mythology, history, geopolitics, and speculative science to create a dialogue about cultural consciousness. By reinterpreting Vishnu's Dashavatara, the novel not only highlights the complexity and vitality of India's mythological heritage but also draws a thoughtful connection to evolutionary theory, illustrated through the progression of avatars from *Matsya* to *Kalki*. By contrasting ancient Indian myths with modern socio-political and scientific landscapes, Sanghi builds a literary setting that explores key themes of identity, heritage, and the shifting significance of cultural memory in a rapidly globalising and technologically advancing world. This study aims to investigate how *The Vault of Vishnu* fosters cultural consciousness by engaging with India's mythological and philosophical backgrounds, its intertextual exchanges with global cultures, and its sustained relevance in shaping contemporary socio-political dialogues. Utilising a textual analysis approach, this paper argues that Sanghi's work serves as both a homage to India's rich cultural and historical legacies and a critical examination of the importance of preserving and reinterpreting these legacies within the context of a changing global landscape. The novel's interplay of past and present, tradition and modernity, and myth and scientific understanding highlights how literature can cultivate a deeper awareness of cultural identity and continuity in an ever-evolving world.

Keywords: Mythology, Globalisation, Identity, Heritage, Cultural Memory**Introduction**

In contemporary Indian English literature, Ashwin Sanghi has established himself as a prominent author of mythological thrillers that intricately weave ancient narratives with modern themes. His works are characterised by an exploration of cultural consciousness, which involves an awareness of one's cultural identity and heritage and their relevance to the present. *The Vault of Vishnu* exemplifies this phenomenon, drawing extensively from India's

mythological and historical legacy to craft a compelling narrative that links ancient wisdom with contemporary scientific and geopolitical issues. This paper aims to analyse how cultural consciousness is portrayed in Sanghi's *The Vault of Vishnu*, concentrating on three primary aspects: the reinterpretation of mythology, the interplay of Indian and Chinese cultural intersections, and the juxtaposition of ancient knowledge with modern technology.

Ashwin Sanghi is often recognised as a pioneer of mythological thrillers in India. He has attracted attention for his talent in blending Indian mythology and history with contemporary storytelling. His novel, *The Vault of Vishnu*, serves as an excellent example of this method, offering a narrative rich in cultural and historical significance. Previous analyses of the novel have highlighted its cultural themes and narrative strategies, placing it within the broader context of contemporary Indian English literature. Research suggests that examining Ashwin Sanghi's work, as he synthesises mythology, history, and modern storytelling, is crucial for fostering cultural awareness. Central themes in *The Vault of Vishnu* include cultural pride, syncretism, and postmodern narrative techniques, which are vital for understanding the novel. This body of work establishes Sanghi as a key figure in contemporary Indian English literature, making significant contributions to ongoing discussions about identity, heritage, and global interconnectedness.

Objectives

This research paper examines how *The Vault of Vishnu* blends Indian and global cultures, highlighting the connections between religion, history, and mythology. It delves into how Hindu mythology is woven into the story and reinterpreted, examining its impact on cultural awareness and understanding. Additionally, the paper evaluates how the novel addresses historical events and figures, assessing the impact on readers' perceptions of Indian heritage and cultural identity.

Methodology

The research paper examines *The Vault of Vishnu* to identify key themes, symbols, and narrative techniques that shape cultural awareness. It emphasises recurring motifs, such as mythology, spirituality, and historical reinterpretation, to explore the novel's commentary on Indian culture. Additionally, it employs cultural studies and postcolonial theory to analyse the text's portrayal of India's cultural heritage and its interaction with global viewpoints.

Textual Discussion

Cultural consciousness refers to the awareness and understanding of one's cultural identity, history, and heritage, as well as its interaction with other cultures. It involves recognising the values, traditions, and beliefs that form a community while appreciating the evolution of these elements over time. This consciousness typically entails a critical engagement with history, mythology, and social dynamics to grasp their importance in contemporary contexts. According to Raymond Williams, culture includes "a whole way of life" and "a body of intellectual and imaginative work" (Williams 87). Cultural

consciousness, thus, connects these two facets, integrating the lived experiences of individuals with their artistic and intellectual creations. It fosters a sense of identity by connecting individuals and societies to their historical and cultural roots. Paulo Freire highlights the transformative function of cultural consciousness in his influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire asserts, “Cultural action for freedom is one of the ways to bring about the critical awakening of consciousness” (Freire 44). This indicates that understanding one’s cultural heritage can empower both individuals and communities to confront oppression and redefine their societal roles.

In literature, cultural consciousness is expressed through an examination of identity and heritage, often via narratives that blend myth, history, and contemporary life. Authors like Ashwin Sanghi in *The Vault of Vishnu* demonstrate how cultural consciousness can be conveyed by reinterpreting mythology to address modern challenges. For example, Sanghi’s narrative uses the Dashavatara to contrast India’s mythological richness with evolutionary theory, emphasising the fluid nature of cultural identity (Sanghi 58). Furthermore, Jhumpa Lahiri’s works explore cultural consciousness by depicting the immigrant experience. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri examines how individuals manage the tension between their ancestral culture and the society they adopt. This highlights the dual aspects of cultural consciousness, where one must reconcile the past with the present (Lahiri 73). Cultural consciousness is vital in a globalised environment where identities often face challenges from homogenisation. Thinkers like Edward Said argue that understanding cultural narratives is essential in countering stereotypes and promoting cross-cultural dialogue. Said states, “Nations themselves are narrations,” underscoring the importance of cultural stories in shaping collective identity (Culture and Imperialism 80).

At the heart of *The Vault of Vishnu* lies a profound and intricate exploration of Indian mythology. The author, Sanghi, crafts a rich narrative that heavily draws on the Dashavatara, the revered ten incarnations of the deity Vishnu. Each of these ancient tales is reimagined and woven into the fabric of the novel, allowing them to resonate with contemporary themes of identity, morality, and the human condition. The metaphorical “vault” serves as a powerful symbol, representing a hidden reservoir filled with India’s vast cultural and mythological heritage, waiting to be uncovered and appreciated by those who delve into its depths. The “vault” and its formula symbolise the hidden wisdom of Bharat that outsiders have always coveted. The quest motif is not just an adventure device; it stands for reclaiming cultural self-esteem. By linking the protagonist’s modern investigation to ancient knowledge systems, Sanghi dramatises India’s ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, central to cultural consciousness.

Sanghi’s invocation of Vishnu’s avatars serves a dual purpose: it reinforces India’s rich mythological heritage while drawing parallels with scientific concepts, such as evolution. Scholars such as Subhash Kak have highlighted how the Dashavatara aligns with evolutionary stages, from aquatic life represented by Matsya to the advanced human consciousness symbolised by Kalki, thereby supporting this interpretation (Kak 2001). The

sequential order of the avatars, from *Matsya* (the fish) to *Kalki* (the future warrior), mirrors the principles of Darwinian evolution. This reinterpretation reflects a cultural consciousness that views mythology not just as old stories but as a sophisticated encoding of ancient wisdom.

The heart of the novel's mystery lies in a legendary artefact intricately connected to Lord Vishnu, one of the principal deities in Hindu mythology. This connection hints at a profound truth: ancient myths may harbour vital insights that can illuminate and guide us through the complexities of modern life. The narrative beautifully illustrates the idea that the past is not merely a collection of outdated stories or forgotten relics; instead, it serves as a dynamic force that actively influences our present circumstances. Through this lens, the author, Sanghi, skillfully emphasises the lasting importance of India's rich mythological heritage, demonstrating its relevance in navigating contemporary challenges and dilemmas we face today.

A noteworthy element of cultural consciousness in *The Vault of Vishnu* lies in its rich exploration of the historical and philosophical dialogues between India and China. Through intricately woven parallel narratives that unfold in both countries, Sanghi emphasises the profound and enduring cultural interactions that have significantly influenced their respective histories. As the story progresses, the remarkable connections and exchanges between the two civilisations come to life, showcasing how their shared legacies have intertwined over the centuries, shaping their identities and worldviews.

Sanghi intricately explores the expansive journey of Buddhism as it travelled from the vibrant cultural landscape of India to the heart of China, shedding light on its transformative effects on Chinese philosophy, art, and culture. Through historical narratives, particularly the remarkable accounts of Xuanzang, a dedicated 7th-century monk who undertook an arduous pilgrimage to India to gather invaluable Buddhist texts, the narrative vividly illustrates the deep and lasting impact of Indian thought on Chinese society (Beal 1884). By weaving in the journeys of ancient scholars like Xuanzang, the work highlights not only the exchange of ideas but also the profound cultural synthesis between these two rich civilisations. This dynamic interplay serves as a poignant reminder of the shared intellectual and spiritual heritage that connects India and China, enriching their histories and deepening their mutual influences.

In the midst of celebrating rich historical connections, the novel intricately weaves in the contemporary geopolitical tensions that exist between India and China. The modern-day plot unfolds through a gripping narrative filled with espionage and military confrontations, skillfully mirroring the intricate and often fraught dynamics of their relationship in today's world. By juxtaposing the deep-rooted cultural camaraderie of ancient times with the present-day rivalry, Sanghi masterfully invites readers to ponder the role of cultural consciousness as a potential bridge, illuminating pathways to navigate the complexities of current conflicts. This exploration not only heightens the stakes of the story but also encourages a deeper

reflection on how shared cultural legacies can inform and perhaps mitigate contemporary discord.

In *The Vault of Vishnu*, a prominent theme is the compelling juxtaposition of ancient Indian wisdom alongside contemporary scientific and technological advancements. This intricate intersection not only highlights the richness of traditional knowledge but also emphasises its relevance in the modern world. Through this lens, Sanghi portrays cultural consciousness as a vibrant and dynamic interplay, where tradition and innovation engage in a transformative dialogue, ultimately enriching both realms and offering a deeper understanding of their coexistence.

Sanghi's narrative intricately intertwines myth and science, suggesting that the wisdom contained in ancient Indian texts may offer profound insights that modern science is just beginning to grasp. Take, for example, the Rigveda, which features descriptions of cosmological concepts that some scholars argue resonate with contemporary astronomical principles. Similarly, the Ayurvedic texts allude to foundational ideas that have since been formalised in modern biomedical science (Frawley 1994). In the novel, these references to Vedic cosmology and Ayurveda are compellingly linked to groundbreaking scientific advancements, such as genetic engineering and nanotechnology. This thematic approach not only honours India's rich intellectual heritage but also highlights its significance and applicability in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

At the heart of the narrative lies a mythical artefact, which serves as a powerful symbol encapsulating the fusion of ancient wisdom and futuristic possibilities. The journey of discovering and interpreting this enigmatic object becomes a profound metaphor for reclaiming cultural identity in an era increasingly defined by technological advancements. Sanghi vividly portrays the artefact as a vital link connecting the rich tapestry of the past with the boundless horizons of the future. This representation strikes a deep chord within a cultural consciousness that values both continuity and innovation, highlighting the importance of honouring tradition while embracing change.

Sanghi's work intricately explores the complex dynamics between national identity and the forces of globalisation. In *The Vault of Vishnu*, he pays homage to India's rich cultural heritage, vividly illustrating its traditions, history, and values. However, he does more than celebrate this heritage; he expertly situates it within a broader global framework, highlighting the profound interconnectedness of contemporary societies. Through this lens, the narrative invites readers to reflect on how local identities are shaped and transformed by global influences, creating a multi-layered discourse on the essence of culture in a rapidly changing world.

In the novel, the protagonists often draw strength and inspiration from India's rich tapestry of cultural and spiritual traditions. This focus on resilience not only underscores the importance of cultural consciousness but also emphasises how it nurtures a profound sense of national pride and identity among the characters. Sanghi vividly illustrates India as a nation that, time and again, taps into its historical roots to rise above adversity. This portrayal serves

as a poignant reminder of the enduring significance of cultural heritage in shaping and strengthening the nation's spirit.

The novel crafts a compelling geopolitical narrative that highlights the vital need to harmonise local identities with broader global responsibilities. Through a nuanced exploration of India's rich cultural heritage, the author illustrates how this legacy serves not only as a source of profound national pride but also as a strategic tool for engaging with the world at large. By positioning Indian traditions, values, and histories as invaluable assets, Sanghi effectively navigates the intricate challenges posed by globalisation, emphasising the potential for local identities to enrich and inform international dialogues and interactions.

Conclusion

Ashwin Sanghi's *The Vault of Vishnu* stands as a compelling tribute to the profound and enduring influence of cultural consciousness. Through meticulous critical analyses, such as Roy's exploration of mythological fiction in modern India, it becomes clear that Sanghi employs a narrative strategy that revitalises age-old motifs, seamlessly engaging contemporary readers (Roy 2020). The novel intricately weaves together the threads of mythology, history, and modernity, creating a rich tapestry that not only celebrates India's vibrant cultural heritage but also explores its relevance in today's world. By reimagining timeless myths and highlighting intercultural connections, Sanghi juxtaposes ancient wisdom with cutting-edge technology, offering a layered and nuanced portrayal of cultural identity. This identity is depicted not merely as a static collection of traditions but as a dynamic force that evolves and resonates within the modern landscape. In a world increasingly shaped by globalisation, which often threatens to dilute local identities, *The Vault of Vishnu* emerges as a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural consciousness. The narrative encourages readers to embark on a journey of reflection, urging them to explore their own heritage, recognise its place within a global context, and draw inspiration from it as they confront the multifaceted challenges of both the present and future. Ultimately, Sanghi's work powerfully stresses that cultural consciousness goes beyond simply preserving the past; it is a vital way of understanding how this legacy can help shape a brighter, more informed tomorrow.

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