

Recasting the Hero's Journey: A Monomythical Reading of Kalki in Kevin Missal's Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu

Dr. M. Aravindh¹

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Sona College of Arts and Science, Salem
aravindhmuthusamy@gmail.com

Ms. S. Preethi Shalina²

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Sona College of Arts and Science, Salem
preethimartin.assistprof2017@gmail.com

Abstract

This article analyses Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* (2018) through Joseph Campbell's theory of the Monomyth or the Hero's Journey. The study argues that although Missal's work is a contemporary mythological fantasy, it structurally follows the archetypal pattern of classical heroic narratives, particularly the first phase of the Monomyth—Departure. By situating the novel within Indian puranic traditions and global mythic structures, this research demonstrates how modern Indian mythological fiction sustains archetypal continuity while recontextualising myth for contemporary readership. The article highlights the relevance of archetypal criticism in understanding the persistence of mythic forms in popular literature.

Keywords: Monomyth, Hero's Journey, Archetypal Criticism, Indian Mythology, Kevin Missal, Kalki.

Introduction

Myth occupies a central position in the cultural and ethical formation of societies. In Indian literary tradition, myths preserved through the Vedas, Ithihasas, and Puranas serve not merely as sacred narratives but as repositories of moral and philosophical values. Despite historical and cultural transformations, myth continues to evolve through modern literary adaptations. Contemporary Indian writers reinterpret ancient

mythological frameworks to address present-day concerns while retaining archetypal structures. Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* exemplifies this trend by reimagining the eschatological avatar Kalki within a modern narrative form. This article examines how Missal's novel conforms to Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, thereby affirming the universality of the hero's journey.

Review of Literature

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* remains foundational to archetypal criticism. Critics such as Carl Jung and Northrop Frye further expanded archetypal studies by focusing on collective unconscious and literary modes. Indian scholars like A. Joseph Dorairaj and Devdutt Pattanaik emphasize the ethical and cultural functions of myth. However, limited critical attention has been paid to contemporary Indian mythological fiction using Campbell's framework, creating a research gap.

Theoretical Framework: Joseph Campbell's Monomyth

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* proposes that heroic myths across cultures follow a universal narrative structure termed the Monomyth. According to Campbell, this structure consists of three principal stages: Departure, Initiation, and Return. The hero departs from the ordinary world, undergoes trials in a supernatural realm, and ultimately returns transformed. Campbell describes mythological narratives as "shape-shifting yet marvelously constant," emphasizing their archetypal sameness beneath cultural variation" (Campbell 3). The Monomyth provides an effective analytical lens for examining modern mythological fiction that consciously draws upon ancient narrative traditions.

Kalki as an Archetypal Hero

Joseph Campbell defines the hero as "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations" (Campbell 19). This definition foregrounds inner transformation rather than mere physical prowess, a principle that Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* closely follows. Kalki is introduced not as a fully realised divine figure but as an ordinary young man living in the

secluded village of Shambala. Although he possesses unusual physical strength, he remains unaware of his cosmic identity and purpose. This narrative positioning aligns with Campbell's assertion that the hero initially exists in the "world of common day," unaware of the larger forces that shape his destiny (Campbell 42).

Missal deliberately humanises Kalki by situating him within a social and emotional framework marked by familial attachment, moral uncertainty, and psychological vulnerability. Campbell observes that "the hero's journey is always inward, to depths where obscure resistances are overcome" (Campbell 12). Kalki's struggle is therefore not merely external but profoundly internal. His reluctance to embrace his role as the avatar of Vishnu reflects what Campbell terms the hero's resistance to transcendence, wherein fear and self-doubt delay transformation. This hesitation makes Kalki a psychologically credible figure rather than a distant mythic abstraction.

Kalki's character embodies what Northrop Frye identifies as the "romance hero," who is superior in degree but not in kind to other human beings (Frye 33). Unlike traditional puranic depictions of Kalki as a fully divine warrior, Missal's Kalki suffers loss, grief, and emotional trauma. The death of his father destabilises his sense of self and propels him into existential crisis. Mircea Eliade notes that mythic heroes often experience symbolic suffering to mark their separation from ordinary humanity, stating that "initiation always involves a symbolic death followed by rebirth" (Eliade 36). Kalki's emotional loss thus functions as a preparatory stage for his spiritual rebirth.

Carl Jung's concept of individuation further illuminates Kalki's archetypal role. Jung argues that the hero figure represents the ego's struggle toward self-realisation within the collective unconscious (Jung 110). Kalki's gradual awareness of his divine nature mirrors this psychological process, as he moves from unconscious potential toward conscious responsibility. His journey signifies not only the restoration of cosmic order but also the integration of his fragmented identity.

By portraying Kalki as a reluctant, emotionally complex figure, Missal adapts the archetypal hero to contemporary sensibilities. Campbell reminds us that "myths are

public dreams, dreams are private myths” (Campbell 18). Kalki’s internal conflicts allow modern readers to identify with the mythic narrative on a personal level. Thus, Missal’s Kalki functions as a modern archetypal hero—one who preserves the structural integrity of myth while embodying the psychological realism demanded by present-day audiences.

Departure and the Call to Adventure

In Joseph Campbell’s formulation of the Monomyth, the Departure stage marks the decisive rupture between the hero’s ordinary life and the realm of destiny. Campbell observes that the call to adventure often emerges as “a blunder—apparently the merest chance—which reveals an unsuspected world” (Campbell 46). In *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu*, Kevin Missal employs this archetypal mechanism through the abduction and eventual death of Vishnuyath, Kalki’s father. This traumatic event violently disrupts the hero’s life in Shambala and exposes him to forces far beyond his previous understanding, thereby initiating the mythic journey.

The call to adventure functions not merely as a narrative trigger but as a symbolic summons to transformation. Campbell argues that “destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown” (Campbell 58). Kalki’s removal from the emotional safety of familial protection marks this shift. The loss of Vishnuyath strips Kalki of moral certainty and forces him into confrontation with violence, injustice, and cosmic disorder. The familiar world of Shambala thus becomes untenable, compelling Kalki toward an uncertain future shaped by dharma and conflict.

Kalki’s initial response to this call is hesitation rather than acceptance. Campbell describes this moment as the Refusal of the Call, noting that “refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative” and results in psychological stagnation (Campbell 54). Kalki’s reluctance to embrace his divine identity stems from fear, grief, and disbelief rather than cowardice. His resistance underscores his humanity and deepens the psychological realism of the narrative. Instead of presenting Kalki as a predestined

saviour without agency, Missal allows the hero to question the legitimacy and burden of his role.

The progression from refusal to acceptance is facilitated by the intervention of Kripacharya, who fulfils the archetypal role of Supernatural Aid. According to Campbell, once the hero commits to the journey, “there appears a protective figure... a guide, teacher, or ferryman” who provides spiritual assistance (Campbell 63). Kripacharya’s immortality, divine knowledge, and moral authority position him as this guiding force. He not only reveals Kalki’s true identity but also equips him with the philosophical understanding necessary to confront adharma. Through Kripacharya, Missal reinforces the mythic pattern in which divine wisdom bridges the gap between human limitation and cosmic responsibility.

The call to adventure in *Dharmayoddha Kalki* resonates with Mircea Eliade’s assertion that mythic heroes are often summoned through suffering, as “every heroic initiation implies a trial that separates the individual from profane existence” (Eliade 38). Vishnu’s death thus operates as an initiatory wound, severing Kalki’s attachment to ordinary life and preparing him for transcendence. The Departure stage, therefore, functions not only as a physical movement away from Shambala but as an irreversible psychological and spiritual shift. Through the carefully structured stages of call, refusal, and supernatural aid, Missal’s narrative adheres closely to Campbell’s Monomyth. The Departure in *Dharmayoddha Kalki* establishes the emotional and ethical foundation of the hero’s journey, transforming personal loss into a universal summons to restore cosmic balance.

The Crossing of the First Threshold marks the hero’s definitive transition from the familiar world into a realm governed by unknown and often hostile forces. Joseph Campbell explains that this stage signifies the point at which the hero “passes beyond the veil of the known into a sphere of supernatural wonder” (Campbell 77). In *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu*, this transition occurs when Kalki ventures beyond the protected confines of Shambala into territories dominated by adharma. This

physical movement symbolises a deeper psychological shift, as Kalki abandons the safety of ignorance and enters a world demanding conscious moral responsibility.

The city of Indragarh functions as a classic threshold space within the narrative. Campbell identifies such spaces as being guarded by “threshold guardians,” figures or forces that test the hero’s readiness for transformation (Campbell 78). Indragarh, marked by cruelty, violence, and moral decay, embodies the dangers of the unknown world. Kalki’s confrontation with this environment signifies his first genuine trial, forcing him to act rather than merely react. Northrop Frye notes that romance heroes often enter a “demonic world” that represents chaos opposed to social and moral order (Frye 54). Indragarh thus becomes a symbolic landscape of disorder against which Kalki’s emerging role as a restorer of dharma is defined.

Central to this phase is Kalki’s confrontation with Kali, which precipitates the loss of his companions and initiates profound psychological suffering. This moment corresponds to what Campbell terms the “Belly of the Whale,” a stage that signifies symbolic death and rebirth. Campbell describes this phase as one in which “the hero goes inward, to be born again,” emphasizing dissolution before transformation (Campbell 91). The loss endured by Kalki strips him of emotional attachments and illusions, forcing an inward reckoning with fear, guilt, and responsibility. This symbolic death marks the end of his former self and prepares him for rebirth as a conscious bearer of dharma.

Mircea Eliade asserts that initiation through suffering is a universal feature of mythic narratives, stating that “to cross the threshold is to leave behind profane existence and enter sacred time” (Eliade 65). Kalki’s suffering elevates his journey from personal revenge to cosmic purpose. His trials are no longer motivated by grief alone but by an emerging awareness of moral duty. Carl Jung’s theory of individuation further illuminates this transformation, as the hero’s descent into darkness represents confrontation with the unconscious (Jung 120). Kalki’s ordeal thus functions as an inward journey toward self-integration and ethical clarity.

Throughout this process, Kripacharya remains a stabilising force, fulfilling the archetypal role of the supernatural guide. Campbell describes this figure as “the benign, protecting power of destiny” who provides the hero with amulets, wisdom, or instruction necessary for survival (Campbell 63). Kripacharya’s guidance extends beyond physical training to philosophical instruction, reinforcing the moral dimension of Kalki’s mission. His presence ensures that Kalki’s transformation is not accidental but structured within a larger cosmic order.

Through the stages of threshold crossing, symbolic death, and guided rebirth, *Dharmayoddha Kalki* closely adheres to the Monomythic pattern. Kalki emerges from this phase no longer as a reluctant participant but as a conscious agent of dharma, prepared for the greater trials of Initiation. The transformation underscores Campbell’s assertion that mythic journeys ultimately lead to “a new horizon of understanding” (Campbell 99), reaffirming the enduring power of archetypal narrative in contemporary mythological fiction.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Kevin Missal’s *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* closely follows the Departure phase of Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth, reaffirming the enduring relevance of archetypal narrative structures in contemporary literature. By mapping Kalki’s journey onto the stages of call, refusal, supernatural aid, threshold crossing, and symbolic rebirth, the analysis confirms Campbell’s assertion that myths are “essentially the same everywhere” despite cultural and temporal variations (Campbell 54). Missal’s narrative illustrates how ancient mythic patterns remain adaptable, capable of addressing modern psychological and ethical concerns without losing their structural integrity. Although the novel adopts a contemporary idiom and fictional innovation, its reliance on archetypal form underscores what Campbell describes as the “secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (Campbell 3). Kalki’s transformation from an ordinary individual into a conscious bearer of dharma exemplifies the universal process of inner

awakening that defines heroic mythology. This process resonates with modern readers precisely because it mirrors what Carl Jung identifies as the individuation of the self, wherein the hero becomes a symbolic representative of collective human struggle (Jung 122).

The persistence of Monomythic structure in *Dharmayoddha Kalki* highlights the continuity between classical Indian mythology and contemporary mythological fiction. Mircea Eliade's claim that myth enables humans to re-enter "sacred time" finds renewed relevance in Missal's retelling, which reactivates puranic values within a modern narrative framework (Eliade 68). The novel thus functions not merely as popular fantasy but as a cultural text that sustains ethical discourse through mythic symbolism. By employing archetypal criticism, this article affirms that modern Indian mythological fiction does not abandon tradition but reinterprets it for present-day audiences. The enduring significance of the hero's journey lies in its ability to translate personal loss, moral conflict, and spiritual awakening into a universal narrative language. In this sense, Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki* exemplifies how myth continues to shape literary imagination, reinforcing the hero's journey as a timeless model of human transformation.

Works Cited

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton UP, 2004.
- Dorairaj, A. Joseph. *Myth and Literature*. Folklore Resources and Research Centre, 2003.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. Harper & Row, 1963.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton UP, 1957.
- Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton UP, 1968.
- Kirk, G. S. *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions*. Cambridge UP, 1970.
- Missal, Kevin. *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu*. Fingerprint!, 2018.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Pashu: Animal Tales from Hindu Mythology*. Puffin, 2014.