

## ***Kalki 2898 AD: Mythifying Science on Screen***

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### **Abstract**

It is an age when science and technology are growing at a very fast pace and touch upon every aspect of human life and the world. Religion chiefly banks upon tradition, rituals and a set of beliefs, whereas science relies on fact and logic. Although both of them challenge each other on numerous grounds and present contrasting views on many issues, both of them exist together and perennially affect life in general. *Kalki 2898 AD* uniquely blends myth and science by remapping an ancient prophecy of the tenth and the last avatar of Vishnu in a dystopian futuristic framework. This paper investigates the interplay of myth and technology, creating a dialogue between what tradition believes and how science represents. The film projects the myth of Kalki through aesthetically structured symbolic means while simultaneously addressing pressing issues of today, such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and authoritarianism. This study will examine how intertextual references to Hindu mythology and global sci-fi tropes allow *Kalki 2898 AD* to exist as a cultural bridge, establishing a fresh narrative tradition in which the ancient and the futuristic combine.

**Keywords:** *Science, Myth, future vision, myth and science, Autocracy and Corruption, Banaras.*

## Introduction

The intersection of mythology and science has been a fertile ground for storytelling. It allows mythical narratives and religious beliefs to be reinterpreted within contemporary or futuristic frameworks. The film *Kalki 2898 AD* is an ambitious cinematic attempt that blends mythology with modern science fiction that presents the episode of Kalki, the tenth and the last incarnation of Lord Vishnu, from Hindu mythology. This paper presents a study of the film as a futuristic imagination that endeavours to bridge the gap among the past, present and future.

The film *Kalki 2898 AD* is the first instalment of the Kalki Cinematic Universe. It is written and directed by Nag Ashwin and produced by Vyjanthi Movies. In the film, the incarnation of Kalki is associated with different future incarnations of Gods like “Ahura Mazda, Rudra Chakrin, and Second Coming,” (*Kalki* 22:45 – 23:17) etc. who will come on earth to save humanity. The incarnation takes place when “anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Yeats). The film's main plot takes place in 2898 AD, 6000 years after the great war of Kurukshetra. It presents an imaginary world in the future after more than 800 years. Apart from the main plot, the film works out the Kalki myth, the end of the war of the *Mahabharata* in Kurukshetra and a flash of the moral decline of humanity in *Kaliyug*.

The film opens on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and presents Pitamah Bhishma lying on a bed of arrows; the death of Guru Drona; and the use of Brahmastra by Ashwathama to destroy Uttara's womb with the intention to end the Pandavas. Uttara's womb is saved by Lord Krishna, who eventually punishes Ashwathama for such a cruel and inhuman act and curses him of living until His next incarnation as Kalki. Krishna takes his *Shivmani* (shining gem on forehead) out as punishment. Krishna also tells him that the gem itself will search for him when Kalki's arrival is near. Before coming to the main plot, the film presents Ashwathama's wait for Kalki through a song in the background that shows the incidents of human sin and mass destruction, like colonization of the world by European powers, the two World Wars, etc.

The main plot of the film opens on the dried river Ganga. A vehicle is travelling towards Kashi, “the last city of the world ... the first city of the world” (*Kalki* 10:30 – 10:35). Rumi, an

old man, is travelling towards Kashi along with many other adults and children. The world is ruled by Supreme Yaskin, “a two-hundred-year-old monster” (*Kalki* 12:05 – 12:15). Yaskin rules from Complex, a restricted area in Kashi, which is technologically well-equipped with all facilities and gadgets. It is enriched with the things snatched away from the world. There is a big lab within the Complex where scientists are working on a secret Project K. In Project K, they are trying to extract serum from the wombs of pregnant women who are artificially inseminated in the lab by a formula provided by Kalki. They need a pregnancy of a minimum of 150 days, but no woman could survive more than a hundred days with the formula because its DNA is more advanced than human DNA.

A group is fighting against Yaskin and the Complex. They are known as Rebels who operate from a hidden city, Shambhala, led by Mariam. All who believe in God and work for the welfare of humanity, live in Shambhala, fight against the Complex, and are eagerly waiting for Kalki to incarnate. Rumi is a rebel from Shambhala. He reaches Kashi and saves a girl, Raya, who is in a male disguise. Raya travels to Kashi in the same vehicle that brings Rumi there. He goes to meet with other rebels and a pregnant lady named Divya. Rumi has an indicator device which is, actually, Ashwathama’s *Shivmani* (the shining forehead gem). It indicates the mother has Kalki in her womb. He checks Divya for being the Mother, but she is not the one. The soldiers of Complex attack them and capture Rumi and Divya. They are killed by Commander Manas while investigating Shambhala's address.

One lab subject, SUM80, secretly survived a pregnancy of 150 days. They prepare SUM80 for the serum extraction. At the time of extraction, some abnormality takes place in the lab, and SUM80 is saved by an undercover rebel named Lily with the help of Veeran, Kyra and Ajju. Kyra renames SUM80 as Sumathi.

Everything was not going as usual in Kashi and Complex from the day of extraction. Arjuna’s *Gandeev*, which was found recently, is now activated, and no man or machine can touch it. Raya meets Ashwathama while trying to escape from the soldiers of the complex. Ashwathama gets a signal of Kalki’s birth. He gets his *Shivmani* from Raya. The Rebels plan to bring Sumathi to Shambhala. The soldiers and bounty hunters chased them because the Complex had announced a five-million bounty on Sumathi. A fight takes place. Kyra is killed in the fight,

but Ashwathama intervenes and saves Sumathi and the rebels. Sumathi is ultimately brought to Shambhala. There, she is welcomed by the residents and Mariam.

At the end of the film, Shambhala is attacked by Complex under the leadership of Commander Manas. A great battle takes place, and Manas is about to go back to the Complex, taking Sumathi with him. The story takes a U-turn, and the bounty hunter Bhairava turns out to be an incarnation of Karna when he gets Karna's great bow in his hand. He kills Manas and saves Sumathi, but the next moment, he again turns back into the consciousness of Bhairava, the bounty hunter and kidnaps Sumathi. The film is left without a conclusion for the next part.

### Mythological Foundations of Kalki

The film is mainly based on the Kalki Myth of the Hindu religion. The story of Kalki's birth comes within the incarnations of Lord Vishnu in the Puranas. Kalki is the tenth and the last incarnation of Lord Vishnu who is said to take birth at the end of the *Kaliyuga* "when injustice will be at its peak and darkness will prevail on the earth... When the air will be poisoned and the Ganga will be dry" (*Kalki* 05:55 - 6:24) *Bhagwat Mahapurana* predicts the birth of Kalki. The first reference to Kalki's incarnation in the *Bhagwat Mahapurana* occurs when Sootji is telling about the incarnations of Lord Vishnu in the third chapter of the first section of the *Purana*. While talking about the incarnations, he says that Kalki will incarnate in the home of a Brahmin named Yash. He tells in verse 25, "athāsau yuga-sandhyāyām dasyu-prāyeṣu rājasu, janitā viṣṇu-yaśaso nāmnā kalkir jagat-patiḥ. (*Bhagwat Mahapurana* 171) (Much later, when the end of *Kaliyuga* would be near and kings would mostly become robbers, then the protector of the world, Lord Vishnu, would incarnate in the form of Kalki to a Brahmin named Vishnuyash.) The next reference occurs in the second chapter of section twelve of the *Purana*, where Shukdevji explains *Kaliyuga* to King Parikshit, the Son of Abhimanyu and Uttara. Shukdev Ji explains the decline of humanity and the world at the peak of *Kaliyuga*. He indicates the time and situation of the incarnation of Lord Kalki. He says when, due to the evils of *Kaliyuga*, the bodies of living beings will become small, fragile and diseased, the path of Vedas, which tells about the religion of *Varnas* and *Ashramas*, will be destroyed, hypocrisy will prevail in religion, kings and emperors will become robbers, people will start earning their livelihood by various types of evil deeds like theft, lies and violence, people of all four *Varnas* will be like *Shudras*, cows will

become small like goats and will produce less milk, *vaanaprasthis* and *sanyasis* will also start doing business like the *gruhashtas* after setting up their households, only those with whom one has marital relations will be considered as one's relatives and the plants of grains like paddy, barley, wheat etc. will start becoming meagre, when most of the trees remain small and thorny like plant *shami*, there will be a lot of lightning in the sky, but less rain. The houses of householders will be desolate due to a lack of hospitality to guests. Then, in such a situation, God Himself will take incarnation by adopting the *sattvaguna* to protect Dharma. Shukdevji tells King Parikshit about the strength of Lord Vishnu and the purpose of his reincarnation in the form of Kalki. He says:

*Charācharaguror Viṣṇor Īśvarasyākhilātmanah |*  
*Dharma-trāṇāya sādḥūnām janma karmāpanuttaye || 17 ||*

(Bhagwata)

(Dear Parikshit! The omnipresent Lord Vishnu is omnipotent. Despite being in all forms, He is the true teacher - the Sadguru of the living world. He incarnates to protect the Dharma of sages and gentlemen; to cut the bondage of their karma; to free them from the cycle of birth and death.)

In the next verse, the speaker Shukdevji predicts Sambhala village as the place of the incarnation and the family of the Brahmin Vishnuyash. He says:

*Sambhalagrāma-mukhyasya brāhmaṇasya mahātmanah |*  
*Bhavane Viṣṇuśaṣaḥ Kalkiḥ prādurbhaviṣyati || 18 || (Bhagwata)*

(In those days, there would be a great Brahmin named Vishnuyash in Sambhala village. His heart will be very generous and full of devotion to God. It is in his house that Lord Kalki will incarnate.)

The speaker further predicts the name of Lord Kalki's horse, which will be known as Devadatta and tells how He will punish all the corrupt people by killing them to establish Dharma again in this world. The speaker says:

*Aśvam āśugam āruhya Devadattam jagatpatih |*  
*Asinā sādḥudamanam aṣṭaiśvarya-guṇānvitah ||19||*

*Vicarann āśunā kṣaṇyām hayenāpratimadyutih |*

*Nṛpalingacchado dasyūn koṭiśo nihaniṣyati ||20|| (Bhagwata)*

(Sri Bhagavan is the only refuge of the eight Siddhis and all the virtues. He is the protector and master of the entire living world. He will ride a fast-moving horse named Devadatta and correct the wicked by killing them with the sword. Rays of incomparable brilliance would be emanating from his every pore. He will travel all over the earth on his swift horse and kill millions of robbers hiding in the guise of kings.)

Ashwathama, a well-known warrior from the great war of Kurukshetra, appears as an important character who became immortal due to the curse of Lord Krishna. In the film, he has been assigned the task of protecting Mother Sumathi and child Kalki. The story of Ashwathama and the curse appears in the Sautik Parva of the *Mahabharata*. It tells the story of the end of the War of the *Mahabharata*. At the end of the war, the Kaurvas were defeated. The Sautik Parva tells the story of Ashwathama and his revenge for his father, Guru Dronacharya's murder. He attacks the camp of the Pandavas in the night and kills many soldiers, including Draupadi's five sons. This makes the Pandavas very sad, and Bhimsen goes to kill Ashwathama to take revenge. Krishna, Arjuna and Yudhisthir follow Bhimsen to support him. To save himself, Ashwathama fired *Brahmastra*, targeting all the Pandavas. Arjuna retaliated to neutralise it. But on the advice of Sage Narad, Arjuna took back his weapon. Ashwathama was not able to return his weapon, so in his humiliation, to take revenge and destroy the lineage of Pandavas, he turned it towards the wombs of the Pandavas. King Virat's daughter Uttara, the widowed wife of late Abhimanyu, was pregnant then. The future king Parikshit was in her womb. The weapon hits her womb, but Lord Krishna saves Parikshit. He says the following words to Ashwathama:

*Amoghaḥ paramāstrasya pātas tasya bhaviṣyati |*

*Sa tu garbho mṛto jāto dīrgham āyur avāpsyati ||8||*

*Tvām tu kāpuruṣaṁ pāpaṁ viduḥ sarve manīṣiṇaḥ |*

*Asakṛt pāpakarmāṇaṁ bālajīvitaḥkṛtakam ||9|| (The Mahabharata)*

(Sri Bhagavan (Lord Krishna) said, Dronakumar (Ashwathama), the attack of that divine weapon will be infallible. Uttara's fetus will be born dead, still, but it will have a long life. But all the wise men consider you a coward, a sinner, a repeat offender and a child killer.)

In this way, the weapon could not harm the child in the womb, but what Ashwathama had done was a heinous crime, and he must be punished for it. Lord Krishna announced punishment for him and took his forehead gem out. He cursed him:

*Tasmāt tvam asya pāpasya karmaṇaḥ phalam āpnuhi |*

*Trīṇi varṣasahasrāṇi carīṣyasi mahīm imām ||10||*

*Aprāpnuvan kvacit kāñcit saṁvidam jātu kenacit |*

*Nirjanān asahāyas tvam deśān pravacariṣyasi ||11||*

*Bhavitri na hi te kṣudra janamadyeṣu saṁsthitih |*

*Pūyaśoṇitagandhī ca durgakāntārasaṁśrayaḥ ||12||*

*Vicariṣyasi pāpātman sarvavyādhisamanvitaḥ ||(The Mahabharata)*

(Therefore, you should bear the consequences of this sinful act. From today, for three thousand years, you will wander on this earth. You will never get the pleasure of talking to anyone anywhere. You will roam alone in deserted places. O wretch! You will not be able to stay in the public. The foul smell of pus and blood will keep coming out of your body; hence, you will have to take shelter in inaccessible places. O, sinful soul. You will wander here and there, suffering from all diseases.)

The city of Shambhala connects the beliefs of Hinduism and Buddhism. The city is related to a spiritual kingdom in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. It is mentioned in the *Kalchakra Tantra* and spelt as ‘Shambhala’, ‘Shambala’ or ‘Shamballa’. In Hindu religious beliefs, the Shambhala village is mentioned as the birthplace of Kalki, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. A Brahmin named Vishnuyash is mentioned as the chief of the village. Kalki is believed to have been born in his home. The city of Shambhala in the film is a hidden city set amid mountains. It works as the headquarters for the rebels under the leadership of Mariam. It presents an intersection of myths and religious beliefs and a mixture of different religions. Along with having its origin in Hinduism and Buddhism, the name of the character called Mariam brings in Christianity also. Many Buddhist monks can be seen in Shambhala waiting for the arrival of Kalki. One Sikh can also be seen during the anthem of Shambhala. There is a sacred tree that is also waiting for Kalki. A new sprout is seen when Sumathi is about to reach Shambhala.

### Intersections of Myth and Science and the Futuristic Reimagining



The film *Kalki 2898 AD* is a compelling example of the fusion, blending elements of mythology with futuristic science fiction. By setting the prophesied arrival of Kalki in a dystopian, technologically advanced future, the film bridges the realms of ancient wisdom and speculative futurism. It intersects science and mythology, transforming traditional beliefs into a modern sci-fi epic. The film takes the ancient prophecy of the *Puranas* and transposes it onto a futuristic world, where technological advancements have shaped society. Science can be seen as a double-edged sword from the very beginning of the film, as despite all the advancements in science, the basic needs of human life are not available to the common masses. Science has made the whole world uninhabitable. There is no water in the holy Ganga and the oceans. Science is now only a weapon in the hands of Supreme Yaskin, who can make himself a powerful devil or a superhuman being having enough power to challenge God and the rules of Nature. Yaskin has snatched everything away from the world and made a world of his own known as Complex. He is the god of his Complex, and nothing happens against his will in the Complex. Science is at its peak in the Complex and Shambhala. The Complex has very advanced bioengineering. A big and advanced lab has been established in the Complex to perform the experiments of Project K. Yaskin had made a formula with advanced DNA. The experiment is being performed on thousands of fertile girls. The serum extracted from Project K is so powerful that only a single drop makes Yaskin young and powerful enough to use Arjun's *gandeev*.

The vehicles are very advanced and swift. Most of the vehicles can fly. AI is far advanced and has been used for various purposes. The best example of advanced AI is Bujji, Bhairava's Supercar. The concept of *vimanas* (mythical flying chariots) could be reimagined as spacecraft or futuristic war machines. Robots are working as soldiers, and flying AI cameras are being used for surveillance. Nano-weapons and Nano-bombs are highly effective. The guns are very advanced. Shambhala has developed an advanced security system that makes the city hidden and invisible from the rest of the world. The security system is strong enough and effective that a highly advanced Complex could not search it. When Manas attacks Shambhala, it takes a long time to break the security system.

The myths and legends have been used to present futuristic images in the film. The religious beliefs and legends have been used in the film as raw material, mingling with science



for the creation of the futuristic plot. Although the story outline broadly presents episodes from the texts, there are many digressions that can easily be perceived. According to the *Mahabharata*, Ashwathama was cursed for three thousand years, but the film presents Ashwathama after six thousand years, waiting for the birth of Kalki. Further, though it makes the plot gripping and interesting, it sounds quite silly that Lord Vishnu, the supreme authority of the universe, who is about to take birth as a saviour, needs someone to protect him as God, in all His incarnations, even in his mother's womb, is all powerful who hardly ever needs any external protection. But perhaps, in order to highlight the odds against incarnation and to showcase the prevalent evil conditions, the filmmaker has presented the story that way. The *Puranas* predict Kalki's birth in the home of the Brahmin Vishnuyash in Shambhala village. On the other hand, the film presents Sumathi, the mother of Kalki, as a lab subject, and the child as a result of an experiment seeded with the formula provided by Yaskin. The appearance of Karna is also not logical according to the scriptures because Karna is said to have attained *moksha* (salvation), and rebirth is not possible after *moksha*. Arjuna was gifted the bow *Gandeev* by Varun Dev (the water god). He had returned it to him after the War, but it was found in a dried ocean in the film.

## Conclusion

*Kalki 2898 AD* can be considered as neo-mythological science fiction where mythology and science intersect to create a unique narrative of futuristic imagination. The film presents ancient mythological stories within a futuristic dystopia. It widens the scope for the study, interpretation and analysis of scriptures in the times of science and technology. The popularity of the film has raised curiosity among youth from India and abroad. The film has many weak points in the plot, which fail on logical grounds. For example, the film shows that no man or machine can touch *Gandeev* after the activation of its powers, but the last scene shows *Gandeev* in front of Supreme Yaskin, that he takes up in his hand after being healed by a single drop of the serum extracted from the womb of Sumathi. The character of Bhairava is not serious enough according to his name and later assigned role. The film fully fulfils the purpose of entertainment as a commercial cinema. Despite all other things, the film has started a new discussion over the interpretation of the scriptures and has provided a space for further studies. The boundaries of

Indian cinema are widening, and hybrid narratives like *Kalki 2898 AD* will play a crucial role in shaping future mythological reinterpretations.

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