

'KAL KE LIYE' :

A Perspective of Climate Change and Sustainability through Indian Mythology, Film and Literature

- Sohom Seal

The recent film "Kalki 2898 AD" brings ancient mythological themes into a contemporary context, offering a compelling narrative that resonates deeply with the current environmental crisis. Set in an imaginary world devoid of fresh air and water, "Kalki" depicts a dystopian future that serves as a stark warning and a call to action. The film introduces us to the town of *Shambhala*, where rebels fight for a better world, embodying the spirit of resistance and hope. This cinematic tale, interwoven with themes of climate change and holistic sustainability, mirrors the environmental challenges relevant to the modern world.

The film takes me back to my *Dada's* (grandfather's) fables from Mahabharata or Ramayana as a celebration of resistance and bravery towards righteousness, even when the odds seem insurmountable. He spoke of moral justice towards every matter on Earth. These stories, filled with vivid descriptions and underlying principles of morality, instilled in me a profound analogy in the movie hall. The stark contrast between these idyllic tales and the grim reality depicted in "Kalki" underscores the urgent need to revisit our ill-actions.

The film "Kalki" offers a powerful narrative that connects ancient mythology with contemporary environmental issues, providing valuable lessons and inspiration. It calls on us to embrace the spirit of Kalki—symbolizing renewal, righteous action, and the restoration of balance for a sustainable tomorrow.

A Dystopian Warning

In "Kalki", the world is on the brink of collapse, with natural resources depleted and ecosystems destroyed. The air is toxic, water is scarce, the environment is hostile to life, and the humans are running selfishly after monetary 'bounties' and the power of 'Supreme'. Though fictional, this setting reflects a potential reality of the present world if not rectified. The film's portrayal of a world devoid

of fresh air and water highlights the dire consequences of unchecked pollution, deforestation, and climate change. This dystopian vision is a reminder that our actions today will shape the world of tomorrow.

The clash of Mahabharata revisited: Development vs. Conservation

A central conflict in "Kalki" is the modern-day warfare between the 'Complex,' driven by the quest for economic gain by the name of 'bounties', and *Shambhala*, representing the beacon of hope and resistance. This clash mirrors the real-world tension between development and conservation. The 'Complex' in the film symbolizes the industrial and economic forces that prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability, often leading to environmental degradation. On the other hand, *Shambhala* embodies the principles of sustainable living and the protection of natural resources.

Traditional Knowledge: The 'Aswathama' for Nature Protection

The film emphasizes a heavenly power embodied in the form of 'Aswathama' as a symbol of ancient wisdom. This concept underscores the value of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern science to develop sustainable solutions. Indigenous communities around the world possess a deep understanding of natural systems and sustainable practices that can act as 'Aswathama': a staunch saviour of biodiversity.

My grandfather often shared stories about herbal medicines, their traditional remedies, and our ancestors' reverence for the natural world. These stories emphasized the importance of living in harmony with nature and respecting its cycles. The knowledge passed down through generations is a treasure trove of sustainable practices that can help us address modern environmental challenges. Embracing this wisdom is akin to harnessing the power of 'Aswathama' in our quest to protect and restore the environment.

Forests as 'Sumathi': The Womb of Rebirth

'Sumathi', as depicted as the source of life and rebirth, aligns with the crucial role forests play in pioneering natural processes and restoring environmental resilience. In the film, the residents of *Shambhala* make all the arrangements to protect 'Sumathi' in the last hope of securing a sustainable future. This reminds me of sacred groves, where nature resonates harmoniously with solace and belief above religious confinements. The concept of 'Sumathi' in "Kalki" resonates with these childhood narratives, reinforcing the idea that forests are vital to the planet's health and our well-being.

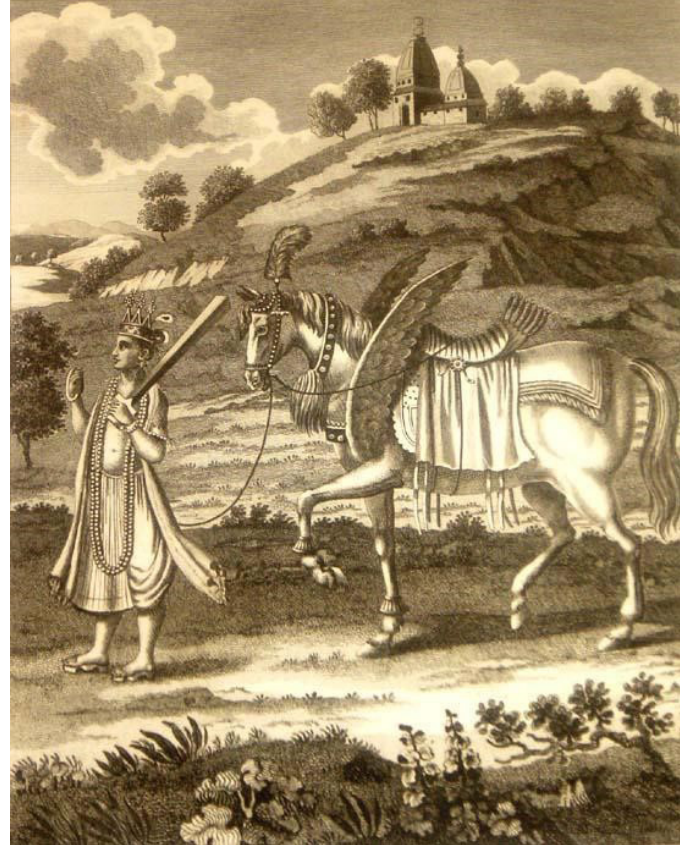
Connecting to Modern Day's Environmental Scenario

The modern world faces significant environmental and climate challenges, including air pollution, water scarcity, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Major cities often struggle with poor air quality, and many regions experience severe water shortages. Deforestation and habitat destruction threaten the Earth's rich biodiversity. The imaginary world of "Kalki" serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to take immediate and decisive action to address these issues.

Climate change exacerbates these challenges, leading to more frequent and severe heat waves, altered rainfall patterns, and increased vulnerability to natural disasters. The urgency of the situation calls for robust policies, innovative solutions, and widespread public engagement to mitigate the impacts and adapt to new realities. The lessons from "Kalki" and the wisdom of past generations highlight the importance of protecting our natural heritage for future generations.

Optimism for future

As my grandfather used to conclude his narrative of different *Yugas*, my instant question was, "*Dada, Kolijug-er por ki?* (What is beyond Kalyug?)". He used to smile and reply, "*Kalki asbe, Satya jug shuru hobe.* (Kalki will come to reestablish the ultimate truth)". Hence, this inspires us with a sense of hope and possibility to build a future where nature and humanity coexist in harmony.



'Kal ke liye: for a better tomorrow'

As we reflect on the imaginary world of "Kalki", let us draw strength and inspiration from the rebels of *Shambhala* and the resilience of *Aswathama* and strive to protect the Sumathi. Together, we can create a sustainable and prosperous future for India and the world. The deep-rooted culture of Indian mythology, coupled with modern scientific innovations, provides a roadmap for overcoming today's environmental challenges and securing a green and blue tomorrow for a peaceful rebirth.

এসেছে নতুন শিশু, তাকে ছেড়ে দিতে হবে স্থান :
জীর্ণ পৃথিবীতে ব্যর্থ, মৃত আর ধ্বংসস্তূপ-পিঠে
চ'লে যেতে হবে আমাদের ।
চ'লে যাবো—তবু আজ যতক্ষণ দেহে আছে প্রাণ
প্রাণপণে পৃথিবীর সরাবো জঞ্জাল,
এ বিশ্বকে এ-শিশুর বাসযোগ্য ক'রে যাবো আমি—
নবজাতকের কাছে এ আমার দৃঢ় অঙ্গীকার ।

Verses from "Chharpotro" (The Passport) by Sukanta Bhattacharya, first published in 1951, translated as:

"...
A child has arrived; it's time to give him/her a
place:
From this dilapidated world, with the failed, dead,
and decaying remnants-
we must leave.
I'll depart—but till I breathe the last
I'll do everything to clean this Earth of all debris,
I'll make this world liveable for this child—
This is my solemn pledge to the newborn.
..."

About the Author:

Sohom Seal is a PhD scholar in Wildlife Institute of India, trying to weave stories of conservation through technology. He joined the institute in 2019 in the Dugong Recovery Program and is currently working on criticality mapping of dugong habitats as a UGC-Senior Research Fellow.

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