

# Beyond the Human Boundary: Reimagining Indian Mythology in *Kalki 2898 AD* Through the lens of Posthumanism

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## Abstract

Within the philosophical structure of Posthumanism, a critique of anthropocentrism is mounted. It is a framework that raises a fundamental question about the concept of human beings as the central and most significant entities of the universe. Through this perspective, conventional ideas of human exceptionalism are challenged and an exploration is also conducted into the profound interconnectedness that is shared between humans, technology, environment, and “other” non-human species. In a world deeply mediated by technological advancements and ecological entanglement, a redefinition of what it means to be “human” is pursued. This research manuscript will undertake a comprehensive analysis of 2024’s megahit movie, *Kalki 2898 AD*, directed by Nag Ashwin through the lens of Posthumanism and other crucial aspects that are related to it. The paper will also seek to inspect this Indian sci-fi epic’s systematic deconstruction of anthropocentric views and navigate the complex association between humans and technology within its narrative and characters. The present study will further investigate the film’s innovative reinterpretation of mythological concepts of ancient India in a futuristic and holistic dystopian setting. It will also aim to offer a distinctively Indian perspective on the evolving definition of humanity and its place in a technologically mediated world through the examination of the culture, nature, technological inventions and other key posthumanist aspects that are embedded in the movie. A significant contribution to the global discourse on posthuman futures will thereby be made.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Cyborg, *Kalki 2898 AD*, Indian Mythology, Nag Ashwin

## 1. Introduction

The theoretical lens of Posthumanism strongly negates the foundational tenets of humanism that emerged in the period of European Renaissance. Also critically known as Renaissance humanism, this rationalist way of thinking first approves the place of human beings at center of the universe. It also views mankind as the only species who have the power to shape their own lives, are capable of making their own decisions and the most important part of existence. The posthumanist thinkers critique this interpretation of humanism and argue for the displacement of human from the supreme position of the world. They believe human beings share a profound interconnectedness with non-human entities, including technology and the natural world who are equally responsible for shaping and changing the dimensions of the future. As Rosi Braidotti posits in her seminal work *The Posthuman*,

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western so-

cial, political and scientific history (1).

This sentiment resonates deeply with the world of Nag Ashwin's movie *Kalki 2898 AD* where the traditional definition of "human" does not have a stable or universal meaning. This ground-breaking Indian film where the significant presence of a large population of people having the traits of cyborgs, genetically engineered beings and immortals captures several challenges of modern era. In fact, it is a perfect example of technological and philosophical issues discussed today. What makes the movie stand apart from the contemporary landscape of Indian cinema is its meticulous synthesis of Indian mythology within the genre of science fiction. The movie has received a bold and unconventional treatment in the hands of Nag Ashwin who has broken and transcended beyond the traditional method of the art of cinema-making by experimenting with the development of the plot. The film is described in terms of a barren and catastrophic state having the setting of a post-apocalyptic future. It is set in the city of Kashi, the last place of the earth that still holds human life. This atmosphere alone gives a particularly fitting stage on which the ancient Hindu prophecy of Kalki, the final avatar of Vishnu, can be reimagined. This belief is based on the idea of a saviour, who is predicted to appear at the end of a time of darkness to bring back the good that was lost but, in this story, it is a society whose very fabric is composed of the elements of a dystopia marred by oppressive technology and glaring inequality. The mythological aspect of the story is not used only for its stylistic features; however, the film goes quite deep into understanding the characters' faith in fate and the recurring idea of time. It shows a reality where the basic character of human beings is heavily challenged. The societal structure is starkly divided between the elite, who reside within a technologically superior citadel known as "The Complex" and the impoverished masses who are left to fend for themselves in the barren wasteland outside. On this kind of society, the human life is manipulated, exercised and changed with the influence of technology, and the boundary between the organic and the artificial becomes less and less clear as the movie makes its progress. So, a situation is set up, in which the audience is given no rest from the continuous asking of the most fundamental questions that deal with the issue of mankind that is central to Posthumanism. Thus, *Kalki 2898 AD* serves as a powerful and accessible medium for exploration of the posthumanist thought that challenges the traditional anthropocentric worldview that has long dominated both Western and Eastern philosophies.

## 2. Introduction to Posthumanism

Posthumanism is not just an ordinary ebb and flow of the tides that is washed against the shores of present time. It is the shift of the whole ocean into a tsunami that has momentarily changed and reshaped the landscape of intellectual discourse of the world. In his 1977 text, *Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture*, Ihab Hassan coined the term "Posthumanism" (835). Posthumanism is a theoretical practice in continental philosophy that focuses after or beyond the life of human being in order to explore its inherently symbiotic relationship with other living and non-living mechanisms of the world. It dismisses the acceptance of the biological body of an individual in a singular and fixed identity. Rather, it sees the existence of man in a plural, fluid and dynamic state in the reality. It voices for the embracement of the hybrid, instead of the monolithic nature of human. It primarily conceptualizes the fusion of humans with non-humans. It explores what it means to be human in a world where these boundaries are increasingly blurred through technology and environmental changes.

## 3. Introduction to the *Kalki* Mythology

According to *Hindu mythology*, Lord Vishnu is depicted with his ten different avatars and Kalki will be

his final incarnation. He will emerge to restore *Dharma* (righteousness) and the balance of the world when the evil force will reach at its peak in this current age – *Kali Yuga*, marked by the decline of morality and spirituality with significant loss of faith in humanity. Kalki will fight with Kali Purusha, the main antagonist of the *Kali Yuga*. He will also make an end of the followers of Kali Asura who will sink deep in evil deeds, corruption and promote *Adharma* (unrighteousness). Thus, he will act as the harbinger of a new golden era of truth – *Satya Yuga* where humanity will be purified and rebloomed.

In *Kalki Purana*, it is mentioned that the birth of Kalki will take place at the house of the Brahmin couple Vishnuyasha and Sumati in the sacred village of Shambhala (Sambhala). He is portrayed as a great formidable warrior who rides his magnificent white horse Devadatta with a powerful flaming sword in his hand, having immense energy, intelligence, and prowess.

#### 4. Introduction to the Plot of *Kalki 2898 AD*

Initially announced with the name “Project K,” the world of Nag Ashwin’s Telugu-language movie entitled *Kalki 2898 AD* is a sprawling dystopian sci-fi epic, which marks the inaugural chapter in an expansive cinematic universe in Indian film-making history. It is set in the bleak year of 2898 AD, where Earth has been ravaged, leaving Kashi as the sole surviving city in the world. There, a tyrannical regime is imposed by Supreme Yaskin (Kamal Haasan) from his impenetrable megastructure “The Complex.” The central narrative is unfolded around SUM-80 (Deepika Padukone), a pregnant woman whose existence is intertwined with “Project K.” This sinister project is initiated by Supreme Yaskin who aims for a life-extending serum to be extracted from artificially conceived pregnancies, where no previous subjects have been endured beyond 150 days except SUM-80. Defying the odds, she makes a daring escape from “The Complex” where she is aided by clandestine rebel operatives, and she is subsequently rechristened as Sumathi.

It is believed that she has God Kalki in her womb. Therefore, a protector emerges in the form of Ashwatthama (Amitabh Bachchan), an immortal warrior burdened as a result of a curse by Krishna in the aftermath of the great war of *Mahabharata* in Kurukshetra, for unleashing the *Brahmastra* upon Uttarā’s unborn child, making an end of the lineage of Pandavas. He has spent centuries in diligent anticipation of this divine avatar’s advent. This divine purpose is countered by Bhairava (Prabhas), a morally ambiguous bounty hunter driven primarily by material gain, or “units.” Yaskin’s ruthless enforcer, Commander Manas (Saswata Chatterjee) offers Bhairava a substantial reward for Sumathi’s capture when he declares that only he can take her in his possession.

Sumathi’s journey towards Shambhala where the Kalki prophecy is devoutly embraced with the assurance of her protection by the resolute Mariam (Shobana) and other inhabitants of it who have secured there a place to stay as the remaining class from different parts of the world. This further results into a series of intense confrontations between Bhairava and raiders of “The Complex” and, Ashwatthama and rebels of Shambhala where the clash between their respective purposes becomes a pivotal force, leading to the climax of the movie.

Ultimately, Sumathi reaches the hidden haven of Shambhala. There, in an interaction with a little rebel girl, Ashwatthama reveals his ancient connection with the great Karna of *Mahabharata* by displaying his bow *Vijaya Dhanussu*. But, at last, a battle of destruction takes place between Bhairava and Ashwatthama, favouring Commander Manas and his army to attack Shambhala and capture Ashwatthama. But, things take a turn when Bhairava unknowingly picks up the bow *Vijaya Dhanussu* that ignites his transformation

to Karna. Though unaware of his incarnation, he somehow understands his duty to save Sumathi from Commander Manas, resulting into the killing of him and other enemies.

As the film ends, it is shown that Supreme Yaskin injects one drop of fatal serum of Sumathi into his body and vows to reshape the world as he transforms to a youthful superhuman. He also picks up the bow of Arjuna of *Mahabharata*, *Gandiva* that is also revealed in the mid-credits scene of the movie to audience where the stage is carefully set for the unfolding sagas within the future of Nag Ashwin's *Kalki Cinematic Universe*.

## 5. Analysis of the Film's Three Worlds: A Posthuman Setting

As Nag Ashwin states in an interview with *The Hindu*: "While walking on this surface, imagine if we begin wondering what if there is an ancient person[s] from another yuga beneath the surface. Everything we were trying to depict about the kali yuga is a flip of the normal." (Dundoo) The film presents three distinct trajectories of what "human" might mean after the collapse of the era in existence: the abject survivalism of Kashi, the sterile transhumanism of "The Complex" and the necessary resistance of Shambhala.

### I. The World of Kashi: The Last Bastion of Humanity

In Hindu scriptures, Kashi is believed to be the first city of the world. Here, Kashi is depicted as a wasteland situated on the last surviving part of the rotting earth with a dried-up Ganga. It represents a post-apocalyptic landscape of futuristic slum area where darkness has engulfed and humanity's *hubris* has led to ecological collapse. It is a place designed with automation and recycled part of what is left on earth to suppress the lower strata of the society and maintain the dictatorial dominance of Supreme Yaskin. The world of Kashi strongly resonates with the opening song of the movie "Keshava Madhava." The background animation that provides us with the history of the ruined condition of the world that run parallel with this song is a prayer of Ashwatthama to invoke "Keshava" or Lord Krishna to come and save the dying life of the ill-world. In this world, human life is cheap, survival is paramount, and the natural environment is severely degraded. This reflects anti-anthropocentric view that Posthumanism always advocates for and the recognition of humanity's interconnectedness with, and often destructive impact on, the non-human world.

Kashi illustrates the consequences of a worldview where humanity believes itself separate from and superior to nature. The scarcity of resources for survival, the struggle for "units" (digital currency), and the continuous misery highlight how human is no longer the undisputed centre of a thriving ecosystem. Instead, it is a struggling species grappling with the repercussions of its past actions of sin and corruption. Therefore, Kashi witnesses the devastating outcome that leads to a world where human flourishing is severely curtailed by environmental degradation.

In Kashi, individuals are not citizens with rights but bodies to be managed, exploited for labour, or discarded. Their existence is precarious, stripped of the dignity and autonomy central to the humanist ideal. This abject survivalism is a form of posthuman existence, not one of an enhanced future, but one of a posthumanist present where the very concept of "humanity" has lost its privileged meaning. Furthermore, the reliance on the "Keshava Madhava" prayer is itself a posthuman gesture; it represents a fundamental admission that humanity, as an autonomous agent, has failed and cannot save itself. It is a desperate appeal to a non-human, divine agency to intervene, thereby dismantling the humanist presumption of self-sufficiency.

The city's very infrastructure, built from recycled part of what is left on earth, literalizes a posthuman assemblage. The inhabitants of Kashi are not just people using recycled tools; they are inseparable from the automated, decaying technologies they must interface with to survive. This creates a cyborg existence born not of enhancement but of necessity – a cyborgism of the scrap-heap. The “units” they struggle for are not just money; they represent the complete quantification of life, where a person's value is reduced to a data point in Yaskin's economic system, their bodies mere nodes in a network of extraction. This enforced anti-anthropocentrism is not a philosophical choice but a material condition: the non-human (the failed ecology, the oppressive AI, the scrap-metal) dictates the terms of human existence, forcing a recognition of human vulnerability that the humanist tradition sought to deny.

## II. The World of “The Complex”: A Utopian Prison

“The Complex” is a technologically advanced utopian place like an inverted pyramid, hovering above the city of Kashi. It is shaped in the form of an upside-down triangle, visually representing its elevated, massive and separate status which contrast with the scarcity and hardship of the world below. This shape resembles the Trishanku's heaven, a realm or sanctuary suspended between heaven and earth as illustrated in Hindu eschatology. “The Complex” represents a form of transhumanism – the idea of defeating human limitations through science and technology. It is a realm of enhanced beings, automation, advanced AI and technological control, where the elite enjoy a kind of “digital citizenship” and artificial abundance. It is a world within world, having its own ecosystem of luxurious lifestyle to be cherished while the majority suffer below.

The song “Ta Takkara” that starts when Bhairava and Roxie secretly enter into the magical realm built inside “The Complex,” perfectly captures the sense of beauty, bliss and spirituality of “The Complex” that the rest of the world lacks. This stark contrast raises critical ethical questions about who gets to be “posthuman” and at what cost. “The Complex” exemplifies this precisely: a select few have achieved a form of posthuman existence, while the rest are left in a pre- or sub-human struggle.

One part of “The Complex” is divided into two sections of women, known as negative and positive who live in its cells. The first class of women who wear black clothes are infertile and the second class of women who wear white clothes are recognized as fertile, having the capacity to be impregnated. Their lives are solely dedicated to the purpose of “Project K.” It is a research experiment of Supreme Yaskin who has built a laboratory with world class scientists from around the world. He wants to extract advance human DNA serum from the pregnant women who can grow the seed of life and survive for a longer period of time, giving him the opportunity to make himself immortal. Once the serum is taken out, the women become infertile and are put to death in a burning furnace. Supreme Yaskin epitomizes a radical life extension and control over his environment.

It is crucial to distinguish the film's portrayal of transhumanism from the critique offered by critical Posthumanism. Transhumanism, as depicted in “The Complex,” is an extension and intensification of liberal humanism; it seeks to perfect the autonomous individual, conquer death, and master nature through technology. Critical Posthumanism, by contrast, questions this very model of the “human.” The film uses the sterile, controlled, and deeply hierarchical world of “The Complex” to critique the transhumanist dream, revealing it as a dystopia built on exclusion, exploitation, and the ultimate instrumentalization of life.

Moreover, “Project K” is a form of biopolitical governance where female bodies are reduced to mere reproductive utilities, a paradox noted in Feminist Posthumanism where the most technologically “advanced” society reverts to the most archaic instrumentalization of the “natural” female body. These

women are, in effect, cyborgs in reverse; not enhanced, but systematically dehumanized and reduced to biological machines for the sole benefit of the patriarchal, singular will of Supreme Yaskin. His quest for immortality is the ultimate fantasy of the humanist self, seeking to transcend all material limits, but at the cost of countless others. According to the intellectual theorist, Achille Mbembe, this regime can be defined as “necropolitics” – the ultimate expression of sovereignty, which resides in the power to “dictate who may live and who must die” (11). The incinerator where post-fertile women are put to death, once the pregnancy is no longer possible is the mechanism of this necropolitical state. “The Complex” is thus a “Utopian Prison” that can only sustain its “life,” indicating the immortality of Yaskin, the luxury of the elite) through the organized and systematic administration of “death,” implying the women of “Project K.”

Even, there is a lift of a giant human figure, operated with the help of technology and power by Counsellor Vani and used to travel to the top of “The Complex” to meet Supreme Yaskin. Also, a series of figures of the skeletons of human evolution from hominins to homo sapiens are engraved on the walls of the room of Supreme Yaskin. It symbolizes the limitations of human which is now viewed as a thing of past and has no longer in possession of an independent entity. This mural serves as Yaskin’s transhumanist manifesto, visually positioning himself as Nietzsche’s “overman” or *Übermensch* who stands at the end of evolution, the being who has finally overcome the biological constraints of *homo sapiens* (wise-man) and rendered the “human” obsolete (9-24).

### III. The World of Shambhala: A Kingdom of Hope and Rebellion

Derived from Sanskrit, “Shambhala” means “place of silence/peace.” Legends say this hidden Himalayan sanctuary is only for those who achieve the highest spirituality and knowledge. It is regarded as the land of a thousand names because this secret heaven is described in various cultures and religions worldwide. It is the place where Kalki will be born. In the movie, the epitome of Shambhala is represented by the hidden refuge of rebels. It is situated in the suburbs of Kashi, behind the mountains, and is protected by an advanced technologically-driven air defence system that is invisible to the naked eyes. A counter-narrative to the domain of technology of “The Complex” is represented by it. A more Biocentric or Ecocritical posthumanism is embodied by it, where the complex and intricate relationship between humans, non-living entities, and nature is emphasized, thereby shaping the ecological environment. It is a place where humans are re-situated within a broader ecological network, rejecting purely rational humanism for a more holistic understanding of existence (spiritual and natural).

Also, the dry banyan (*Ashwatha* or sacred fig) symbolizes this connection to a living, evolving world. When the old aged surviving tree for centuries is earlier examined, it is found that it is almost dead. But with the arrival of Sumathi, there is seen hope for life in the tree. Even the sky responds with rain. It refers to the symphonic interconnection of the natural world with Sumathi who herself represents a posthuman figure. This further explains that the “other” of the non-human world finds a place to reside actively and grow parallelly within this posthumanist field of the world.

Shambhala’s Posthumanism is thus defined not by transcendence from the body or nature (like “The Complex”), but by a deep entanglement with it. Significantly, Shambhala is not anti-technology; its use of an advanced cloaking field demonstrates a sophisticated scientific understanding. The crucial difference lies in the ethics of its technology. While “The Complex” uses technology for control, extraction, and individual immortality, Shambhala uses technology for defence, concealment, and the preservation of a diverse community. This distinction is crucial. Shambhala’s technological invisibility contrasts directly with the monumental hyper-visibility of “The Complex.” Where Yaskin’s inverted pyramid dominates the

sky as an act of technological and political intimidation, Shambhala's technology integrates, conceals, and protects. It opts for a "minor science", one that works with natural forces, rather than a "royal science" that seeks to dominate and subjugate them (Deleuze and Guattari 351-423).

Sumathi's body becomes the focal point of this entanglement. She is "posthuman" because she is not a closed, autonomous individual. Her body is porous, communicating with the tree and the atmosphere, which respond in kind. This vision of life is not about a singular will imposing itself on a dead material world, but about a "becoming-with" a living, agentic, and interconnected ecology. Shambhala, therefore, represents a Posthumanism of hope, one rooted in symbiosis, community, and ecological responsibility rather than individualist escapism.

## 6. The Posthuman Pantheon: Discussing the Characters of the Film

The characters in *Kalki 2898 AD* are not ordinary caricatures that can be found in any movie based on the background of a post-apocalyptic or futuristic world. They are ancient as well as modern or the fusion of these two but not a simple "human" in a common sense. Their survival, struggle, experience, transformation and association with technology and mythology provide a rich canvas for the painting of a posthumanist picture, making them omnipresent throughout the movie. As Amitabh Bachchan himself in an interview, given on the YouTube channel of Vyjayanthi Network in 2024 has talked that: "we are able to mix mythology with something futuristic. It's so unique and very intelligent." (Vyjayanthi Network)

### I. Bhairava: The Mythic Cyborg

Donna Haraway's assertion in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that "...we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" is vividly realized in Bhairava's existence (150). Bhairava is a bounty hunter whose primary motivation is to accumulate one million "units," a criteria for entry into the upper echelon of "The Complex" of Kashi. He was raised by a pilot/captain (Dulquer Salmaan) who taught him the art and skills of survival. He is a product of his environment, a cynical and self-interested individual who has adapted to the harsh realities of his world. His body is a site of technological intervention; he is an augmented human who depends on his advanced vehicle, called "Bujji," which has its own AI personality, and various in-built gadgets that are modified into his body to survive. Bhairava has two symbolic tattoos on his hand. The first one is a kind of chevron symbol of a V-shape, often inverted, or a pair of angled lines that meet at a point. It may refer to a Viking symbol, denoting "create your own reality," which may suggest Bhairava's desire to enter "The Complex" and lead a life of his dreams that he always wanted to come true. The second one is a Valknut tattoo of a Norse symbol. It forms the shape of three interlocked triangles with a subliminal triskelion at its centre. One of its possible meanings is the concept of reincarnation. It may also refer to the past, present, and future, and the eternal life cycle. Both of these interpretations indicate Bhairava's incarnation as Karna – a crucial turning point that takes place toward the end of the movie. When a robotic parrot of a fortune teller picks up a unique tarot card with the digitalized image of a solar eclipse – a symbol that is frequently used throughout the movie in many places in various ways – it highlights the connection of Karna with the Sun, and the eclipse emphasizes how his real purpose in life is hidden as a bounty hunter. These allusions make the audience believe that Bhairava is the one who is bound to surpass the ordinary "human" discourse and remains in a state of flux that is impermanent. The name "Bhairava" embodies Lord Kala Bhairava, who is believed to be the protector of Kashi in Hindu cosmology. This becomes evident when an old man urges Bhairava to protect Kashi from heinous people. His initial interactions with SUM-80 are purely transactional. However, Bhairava's character arc represents a potential for a more ethical Posthumanism. Hence, his

growing empathy for SUM-80 and her unborn child forces him to question the dehumanizing logic of his society.

## II. SUM-80: The Genetically Engineered Mother

The character SUM-80 is central to the storyline because she bridges the movie with the amalgamation of two different worlds. In one sense, she is the result of high technology, navigating the posthuman domain of the film. She is a genetically engineered woman in “The Complex.” While in the other, she is the modern representation of a Hindu legend, serving the Indian mythological sense of the movie. She is the one who will give life to the God Kalki. Here, she has been optimized to play two significant functions for two different worlds of the future. First, she is forced to transcend her bodily limitations with an aim to restore the dying body of Supreme Yaskin and second, she, in this process, becomes the carrier of the child who will bring salvation to the world. Through this, on the basis of her such a single and particular design, it becomes pretty difficult to separate the artifice from the natural parts that make her up. The women who are used as experimental project are excluded from their original identity and labelled with specific number based names. Having the name of SUM-80, she is also part of this category which stands as “Subject Mother-80.” It is done in an order to treat individual persons as objects rather than subjects. This can be alluded to W.H. Auden’s famous poetry, “The Unknown Citizen” where the citizen is termed by an alphanumeric code, “JS/07/M/378” (142). This act of alienation from the self replaces the citizen’s personal identity with a bureaucratic designation. Throughout the movie, she is in a constant struggle to save her child from the threats that kindle the fire in her, a mother feels to protect her child at any cost. It proves the tender and intense emotions for her unborn child is beyond the programmed setting of her body. This sets her apart from the rest of the women of “The Complex” where she refuses to give up. Unlike the others, her true maternal love opposes her scientific creation as it is the complex engineering of her genetic code that does not suppress her feelings but rather strengthens them. The path that she embarks on questions the concept of “human nature” being something that is static and exclusive. Thus, the journey of Sumathi reveals that identity is not fixed but can be influenced by the environment and the individual’s choices. Interestingly enough, she is also the source of immense threat to others as she states that whoever comes in the process to take care of her or tries to help her child, eventually dies. In a way, this is a caution against the dangers of extensive use of technological advancements, which can harm people instead of helping them. This marks a paradoxical point: SUM-80 is a saviour that humanity needs to survive and at the same time, one of the greatest threats to humankind. She deserves protection as she is the medium to save the world from destruction and restore its original balance. Her story is a lesson on the necessity to come up with new inventions that are not only safe but also effective in bringing the positive change we desire in the world.

## III. Ashwatthama: The Agonized Immortal

The character of Ashwatthama in the movie definitely evokes the posthumanist themes of the film. He was cursed with immortality after the Kurukshetra War and the endless life of Ashwatthama has burdened him with the need to see human folly and suffering in a very unstable world. With the rise of the authoritarian Supreme Yaskin and the banning of gods, the Evil pretends to be the Almighty. It drives Ashwatthama into a Shiva temple beneath Kashi, located somewhere in the outskirts of the city. Ashwatthama’s ancient body, which has been supported here curse and also the implied use of technology, therefore, makes him the past and at the same time the living figure of cyclical time. His presence in 2898 AD underscores the enduring consequences of past actions, highlighting that the world’s current conflicts – the lust for power, corruption, vice, and the search for salvation – are not novel. Therefore, the same old

themes are only reinterpreted in the new environment of technology. He is unable to adapt himself to this futuristic world and its workings as he stumbles upon each and every layer of modernism but he still reluctantly attempts to learn and ready to adjust himself accordingly with the fast changing times because he is determined and assigned with the task to protect Sumathi and her unborn child at any cost. This alludes to the inevitable future of Posthumanism with technogenesis, which has become an inescapable part of humanity's culture. Ashwatthama's tiredness has gone beyond just his own exhaustion. It is a deep lack of faith in human exceptionalism that is expressed here. He thus epitomizes the vivid consciousness of the fact that the situations and conflicts that trouble the humanity are not new, but rather the same issues resurfacing and reverberating all the way through the history to finally end up in this dystopian reality. It refers to the philosophy of Existential Posthumanism that strongly supports the existential idea of the search of the meaning of "self" as well as "human" through the practical application of the posthumanist features. This essentially describes Ashwatthama's suffering which is not merely personal but so deeply connected with all the people. He has become a kind of an eternal witness that is fated to be burdened with all the wrongdoings of the mankind and their continuous influence.

#### IV. Supreme Yaskin: The Transhumanist Tyrant

In the movie, Supreme Yaskin emerges as a ruler who embodies a more cautionary, darker and negative vision of Posthumanism. He has been cybernetically enhanced and achieved the power to remain alive ages after ages with the assistance of technology. Although it is not a state of immortality, he is mad after achieving it with his newly invented formula, leading to the ultimate chaos in the story. A desire to be in control is what his vision is highly driven by, and the rejection of the human body is his only way of expressing rebellion against its natural limitations. A grotesque fusion of decaying flesh and advanced machinery is his physical form, representing a pictorial metaphor of his corrupted ideology. The room where he lives is suspended in mid-air, and a surface full of water is on it. He is on life support, and the energy to live on is received through the extracted serum from fertile women. Five bionic orbs, which act as his hands and hover in the air behind his back, are possessed by him. The *Pancha Mahabhuta*, or five elements of nature essential for creation and existence – earth, water, fire, air, and space (or ether) – are denoted by them. A drop of serum, which is extracted from the womb of SUM-80, is injected into his body, and his decomposing physique is rejuvenated. This further hints at his resemblance to Kali Asura, who is destined to be fought by God Kalki. Hence, Yaskin's philosophy can be regarded as a form of transhumanism, a concept that highly emphasizes the usage of technology for the improvement of human capacity to overcome aging, disease, and other biological limitations. However, in Yaskin's case, a tyrannical regime has been led to by this pursuit, where the lives of ordinary people are sacrificed for his own aggrandizement. Humanity is seen by him as a resource to be exploited, a raw material for his own perpetual existence. In describing his character, it was noted by Kamal Haasan that Yaskin is "almost like a sage in the film with a bad idea," a figure who has pursued a logical, yet ultimately monstrous, path. (Vyjayanthi Network) Yaskin's dictatorship is a really strong sign that is coming across as a warning against a Posthumanism scenario without moral principles, and a posthuman time that is only for the conquering of nature instead of living together with it.

#### V. Kalki: The Posthuman Avatar

In one of the scenes of the movie, we see that after capturing Rumi, a rebel of Shambhala Commander Manas confronts him when he refuses to bow down to Supreme Yaskin. Seeing his indomitable spirit, he asks Rumi a question about who will save humankind finally. He replies by taking certain names like "Ahura Mazda, Rudra Chakrin, Second Coming." This clearly refers to different divine figures who are

related to Kalki avatar. They have been named differently in various cultures and religions. But they have always been depicted with only one and ultimate goal of purifying the malevolent impurities of the world. Nonetheless, the movie *Kalki 2898 AD* radically redefines the very concept of this figure. Kalki is not shown as a god who comes from a heavenly place where God lives, to save the world. Rather, it is conveyed that a new scenario of Kalki that is a complex combination of an ancient prophecy and modern technology has evolved. On one hand, the process of pregnancy of SUM-80 for the birth of her unborn child who is assumed to be Kalki is the depiction of a method of genetic engineering. On the other hand, this individual is both human and non-human, he is shown as one who crosses the bounds of the traditional human definition. This is one of the most radical ways in which the film reworks the figure of Kalki and is perhaps the major divergence of the film from the original myths. Additionally, it marks the place where the film most deeply interacts with posthumanist thought. In traditional Hindu eschatology, the divine interventions of Vishnu's avatars are understood as moments when a physical form rises as a supreme being to restore balance to the world. In *Kalki 2898 AD*, however, the figure of the saviour is not a pre-existing deity but rather a future creation of humanity. This saviour is not a transcendental force descending upon the world, but an immanent one, born from the very techno-scientific matrix that also produced the dystopia. There is also a sense that no confirmation of an easy resolution or a utopian future is provided to any significant degree. Kalki's birth is not intended as an end in itself, but rather as a profound beginning – a new and important chapter in the ongoing story of humanity and the larger emergence of a posthuman evolution. The film seems to suggest that our salvation, if it is to come at all, will not be a singular event but instead a continuous process of becoming, of adapting, and of redefining what it truly means to be human in a world where old certainties about life and existence no longer apply.

## 7. Exploration of Technological Inventions in the Film

Beyond the plot, characters and setting of the movie, the unique technological advancements in *Kalki 2898 AD* serve as potent sites for posthumanist inquiry, revealing how technology fundamentally reshapes society, ethics, and the very meaning of life.

### I. “Project K”: The Biopolitics of Bare Life

“Project K” is the secret initiative from which the film derives its working title at first. The real meaning of it is not elaborated openly throughout the movie. The “K” in it may refer to Kurukshetra, Karna, God Kalki or Kali Asura. It is a mystery yet to be solved in a large scale that also hints at the upcoming sequel of the movie where its actual true meaning and purpose may be disclosed properly. Nevertheless, a feeling of it permeates the whole movie. It can be assumed that the narrative helps to understand its significance to some extent. The storyline unfolds it as a project that discusses the creation of artificial pregnancies in women who are coming to Kashi to stay from the rest of the world and are therefore vulnerable. Among them, the positive tested women are taken to “The Complex” as slaves to make and extract a life-extending serum for Supreme Yaskin. This systematic exploitation is definitely the ultimate example of the commodification of the human life and the organic reproduction system of them. It is a perfect illustration of what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has termed the reduction of human beings to *zoe*, signifying “bare, anonymous life” of all living things, including humans (73). The women who are used as laboratory subjects in “The Complex” are stripped of their politically personal identity and “qualified life,” possessing *bios* (73). They exist only as biological organisms to be managed by the state for its own benefit. In Agamben's framework, they are *homo sacer* – beings who can be killed or in this case, exploited with impunity because they exist outside the protection of the law (12). “The Complex” itself functions as

a “camp,” which according to the definition of Agamben is the ultimate biopolitical space of the modern era: a “space of exception” where the normal rules of society are suspended and sovereign power operates directly and absolutely on the bare life of its inmates (97-103). The women in “The Complex” are not just slaves; they are clinical labourers, where the biological process of them are harnessed as a form of alienated labour. Their bodies are no different from a field to be harvested or a mine to be excavated. The project thus serves as a dark prophesy of a posthuman future where the very definition of “human” is contingent upon one’s utility within a system of biological extraction.

## II. Bujji: The Relational Ontology of a Non-Human Actant

Bujji is the automated vehicle of Bhairava. But it is not only any ordinary car with the assistance of artificial intelligence rather, it is a sentient and sarcastic partner of him. They share a more nuanced yet complex vision of the human-machine relationship. Their inseparable association allows posthumanist thinkers to question human nature and the line that borders the world of humans and AI. They have together grown-up with a lot of experiences and has a witty bond with each other. This dynamic undoubtedly argues for a “relational turn” in posthumanist ethics, as brought out by philosopher of technology, Mark Coeckelbergh. Coeckelbergh suggests that we should define the moral status of entities like AI not by their internal, essential properties (such as “consciousness” or “sentience”) but by the social relationships they form with us (3-4). From this perspective, the question “Is Bujji really a person?” is irrelevant. Bhairava relates to Bujji as a person, and Bujji responds in kind. This social bond creates a mutual, lived reality where Bujji’s personhood is an emergent property of their interaction, not a pre-programmed feature. Even, when Bujji fall short in its performance and is destroyed, Bhairava purchases various expensive parts with his remaining “units” and modifies it to the fullest to boost and accelerate its performance, suggesting that Bujji really matters to him the most than any other human being. This is also proved to be true as Bhairava was the one to take care of Bujji when it was discarded from “The Complex.” This dynamic explores the potential for real emotional connection in a future with cyborgs. This deep bond can also be understood through Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT proposes that we should not see a rigid divide between human “subjects” and non-human “objects.” Instead, reality is composed of “actor-networks” containing both human and non-human “actants” that mutually co-constitute each other (63-86). Bhairava and Bujji form such a network. Bhairava is not a bounty hunter using a tool; his very identity as a bounty hunter is enabled and defined by his partnership with Bujji. Their agency is distributed across the network: Bhairava provides the goals, Bujji provides the mobility, firepower, and sarcastic commentary. When Bujji is destroyed, Bhairava is not just sad about losing a friend; he is functionally diminished as an actant, compelling him to rebuild his partner and, by extension, himself. This moves beyond a simple “man and his car” trope into a profound posthuman statement that “selfhood” is not an isolated, biological fact but a distributed, hybrid assemblage.

## III. Cloning and Holograms: The Simulacra of a Hyperreal World

The use of cloning technology and holographic projections in the movie represents another dimension in a posthumanist thought. The film’s use of cloning as evidenced by the sabretooth tiger of Commander Manas treats life as an informational code (DNA) that can be separated from its original host. This reflects the posthumanist shift from valuing physical presence to valuing reproducible patterns. Again, the association of various characters of the movie with Indian mythology, particularly the epic *Mahabharata* echoes cloning as one of the central revolving factors, alluding to the cyclical reproduction of ancient conflicts in new technological forms. The tiger, a perfect copy of an extinct species, is a prime example of what philosopher Jean Baudrillard has come up with the idea of a “simulacrum,” referring a copy without

an original or a copy that replaces the original entirely (6). In a world where “natural” tigers are exterminated and wiped out to extinction, the cloned ones are created to address the shortfall. Hence, they are not “fake” in a traditional sense; instead they are the only kind of truth that exists in the reality. It is a “third-order simulacrum,” a perfect, reproducible model that no longer needs to refer back to any “real” referent. This technology demonstrates a world that has fully embraced simulation. Holograms are ubiquitous in the film. They serve a critical posthumanist function: the dissolution of the “real” in favour of the “hyperreal” – a simulation that becomes more real than reality itself (1). Nevertheless, the use of hologram technology in *Kalki 2898 AD* is deliberate and functional replacements for people and objects. It is set up for control, communication, and deception. The entire city of Kashi, with its promise of a “New World,” functions as a giant hologram where people are trapped in enjoying the pleasure of artificial activities in their day-to-day life. Such as when they lack the opportunity to access authentic reality, they escape and find alternative synthetic satisfaction in the forms of VR (Virtual Reality). It is a seductive simulation of paradise that masks the “desert of the real” – the grim reality of “The Complex” and the exploitation it runs on (Baudrillard 1). The hologram of Supreme Yaskin, projected to his followers, is not a mere image of the leader; for all intents and purposes, it is his power and presence. It represents a world where the model has replaced the original, and the map has not only preceded the territory but has created it. In this hyperreal world, the line between truth and deception is not just blurred; it is structurally irrelevant.

#### IV. Combat Tech: Technogenesis and the Extended Self

At last, the movie uses modern combat instruments, advanced weapons, high-tech flying vehicles, and custom-built gadgets, highlighting the tech-savvy nature of its characters. This, consequently, becomes the visual representation of the powerful and continuously changing human borders that Posthumanism always holds in high estimation. These technologies are not merely neutral tools that humans use; they are active mediators that fundamentally shape human experience, action, and cognition. According to Bernard Stiegler, this co-evolution of the human and the technical is known as “technogenesis.” He is of the opinion that the “human” did not simply invent technology; the “human” and the “technical” reciprocally invented each other. We are defined by our “originary technicity” (134-179). The high-tech combat suits and weapons in the film demonstrates a futuristic expression of this idea. They not only armour the body; instead, they become a new, integrated body, changing the wearer’s relationship with violence, vulnerability, and the physical world. Similarly, the flying vehicles are not just simple mode of transportation to travel from one place to another. The post-phenomenologist Peter-Paul Verbeek claims that automobiles “mediate” the perception of the characters, regarding space and time that make the vertical, multi-levelled dystopia a navigable “lived world” (123-128). Furthermore, the heavy reliance of the characters of the movie on technological inventions has similarities with the concept of the “extended mind” of Andy Clark and David Chalmers. They deem that human cognitive processes is not confined to the brain only but can actively extend into the tools we use (7-8). Bhairava’s brain itself has no limit as it stretches to all his gadgets, his heads-up display and most importantly, his advanced smart car, Bujji. His “self” is a hybrid and cyborgian consciousness. He is not just disarmed but is cognitively diminished whenever his tech fails, crashes or declines in the movie. This technological enmeshment conveys the film’s ultimate posthuman message that the humans has lost their “pure” forms in the corruption of technology. Besides, human is, and always has been, a technological being. The only question that remains is what kind of techno-human awaits in the future to be created.

## 8. Conclusion

As a landmark film in the history of Indian cinema, *Kalki 2898 AD* is an opulent piece of creation in not only its technical accomplishments and ambitious plot but also its reckoning with difficult, challenging and complex philosophical ideas. The visionary plan of Nag Ashwin actualizes the impossible task of coalescing two opposite agents seamlessly: one is mythology and the other is technology. This extraordinary composition is mastered with excellence to delve deep into the exploration of significant themes like the blending of human and machine boundaries, body malleability and the criticism of anthropocentrism, making the film culturally specific yet universally relevant. The success of the film indicates the surge of an unquenched thirst among the native as well as the global audiences who are enthusiastically ready to accept movies like *Kalki 2898 AD* where the storytelling is knitted in the form of a hybrid genre that attempt to understand the deepest effects of technological application to the life of the planet, particularly “human” within the ancient and mythological roots of India. It also hints that the posthumanist concepts which frequently influence the contemporary academic discourse, can spread their seed and germinate in India’s rich, diversified and culturally fertile landscape. The film uses myth not as an arrangement of nostalgic look back but as a dynamic and innovative tradition. It reinterprets and reimagines ancient stories, allowing them to journey through the challenges of the past, present and future. In the end, *Kalki 2898 AD* does not claim to have definitive answers and single responses to the dichotomous questions it puts forward. It presents a balanced and intricate view of a world in transition without resorting to either a utopian or a purely dystopian posthuman future. Therefore, the movie posits a reality where the former and common meaning of “human” is not presented in a constant and fixed state anymore. In the true spirit of Posthumanism, the film challenges us to think beyond ourselves, to recognize our deep entanglement with the non-human world, and to imagine new possibilities for what we might yet become. As Donna Haraway reminds us, “The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity” (150). And *Kalki 2898 AD* is a powerful cinematic exploration of this fragmented and profoundly interconnected posthuman reality.

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