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# A Comparative Analysis of Dharmayoddha Kalki: Vishnu's Avatar and Meluha's Immortals

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## Abstract

This article compares and contrasts Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* and Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* in order to examine the issue of mythological appropriation in modern Indian literature. Both books are groundbreaking works of contemporary mythology fiction that humanize Hindu gods for a modern audience. This essay uses literary analysis to look at how each author creates other histories, reinterprets mythological figures, and combines myth with modernity. Their different narrative approaches, ideological foundations, and the sociocultural ramifications of reworking old tales in the twenty-first century are highlighted in the contrast.

**Keywords:** Mythological Fiction, Kevin Missal, Amish Tripathi, Shiva Trilogy, Kalki, Modern Indian Literature, Appropriation, Myth, Retelling.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Indian literature has witnessed a remarkable surge in mytho-fiction—a genre that reimagines ancient myths and epics through the lens of modern storytelling. Two notable works that have significantly contributed to this literary trend are *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* by Kevin Missal and *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi. Both novels draw inspiration from Hindu mythology and reinterpret legendary figures—Kalki, the prophesied final avatar of Vishnu, and Shiva, the revered god of destruction—by placing them in richly imagined fictional worlds that blend myth, fantasy, and philosophy.

While both novels share a mythological foundation, they differ markedly in narrative approach, ideological depth, and character portrayal. Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki* presents a fast-paced, action-oriented retelling that leans heavily on the supernatural and the heroic arc of a destined savior. In contrast, Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* adopts a more philosophical and humanized perspective, transforming Lord Shiva from a god into a mortal who earns divinity through moral strength and personal choices.

This comparative study explores various dimensions of the two novels, including mythological appropriation, narrative structure, representation of protagonists, ideological themes, gender dynamics, language accessibility, and cultural impact. By examining these elements, the analysis seeks to understand how each author navigates the space between ancient tradition and contemporary relevance. Both works

reflect the growing appeal of mythology in popular culture while addressing modern questions of identity, leadership, ethics, and spirituality.

Through this exploration, we can better appreciate how *Dharmayoddha Kalki* and *The Immortals of Meluha* not only revive mythological narratives but also reshape them to resonate with 21st-century readers, thereby contributing to the evolving landscape of Indian English literature.

## 2. Concept of Mythological Appropriation

Mythological appropriation refers to the reinterpretation, recontextualization, or reinvention of ancient myths and deities in contemporary narratives, often to suit modern sensibilities or socio-political discourses. In Indian English fiction, this literary strategy is increasingly popular, particularly in mytho-fiction novels such as *Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* by Kevin Missal and *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi. Both novels are prime examples of how mythology is mined, reimagined, and appropriated to produce engaging narratives that straddle the boundaries between myth, fantasy, and reality.

In *Dharmayoddha Kalki*, Kevin Missal constructs a mythical world that revisits the legend of Kalki, the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu. Missal reappropriates the figure of Kalki not as an abstract eschatological figure of the distant future but as a relatable, flawed, and evolving hero born in the village of Shambala. Through this character, the novel infuses myth with realism—emphasizing personal struggle, ethical

dilemmas, and political conspiracies. Missal appropriates the classical Hindu narrative by borrowing names, events, and theological motifs, but filters them through the lens of a high-fantasy quest reminiscent of Western fantasy tropes, thereby making the epic accessible to a globalized, young readership. In contrast, *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi offers a more radical form of mythological appropriation. Tripathi reimagines the divine figure of Lord Shiva not as a celestial being but as a Tibetan tribal leader whose actions and moral integrity elevate him to godhood. This demythologizing move transforms sacred mythology into historical fiction. The Meluhan society is modeled after Indus Valley civilization, and its philosophical systems are presented as social institutions. Tripathi employs a quasi-scientific, rationalistic framework that appeals to readers seeking logic in myth. By portraying Shiva's rise through human endeavors and choices rather than divine predestination, the novel democratizes the concept of divinity and heroism.

Both authors, while engaging in mythological appropriation, differ in their approaches. Missal maintains a closer connection to the religious essence of the myth, embedding supernatural elements and divine intervention, whereas Tripathi humanizes myth, stripping it of divine mystique to highlight ethical and existential inquiries. The act of appropriation in both cases serves to reflect contemporary concerns—be it identity, politics, or morality—through ancient narratives. This engagement with mythology reflects a larger cultural trend: the desire to find relevance and resonance in the inherited stories of the past while negotiating the values and anxieties of the present.

Thus, mythological appropriation in these two novels is not merely a literary device but a cultural negotiation. It allows authors to question, celebrate, and reinterpret traditional narratives for a modern audience, creating a hybrid literary space where the mythic and the modern coexist. In doing so, both *Dharmayoddha Kalki* and *The Immortals of Meluha* contribute to the evolving canon of Indian mytho-fiction, revealing the enduring power and adaptability of myth in contemporary storytelling.

### 3. Narrative Structure and World-Building

In *Dharmayoddha Kalki*, Kevin Missal adopts a multi-perspective narrative structure. The story unfolds through the points of view of several characters, including Kalki, Kali, and Padma, allowing readers to explore diverse motivations and ideologies. This polyphonic approach enriches the moral ambiguity of the plot, blurring the line between good and evil. The novel progresses with episodic pacing, often alternating between action sequences and political intrigue, which lends a cinematic quality to the narrative. The use of suspense, cliffhangers, and internal monologues enhances character development while keeping the reader engaged.

The world-building in *Dharmayoddha Kalki* is rooted in a fantastical reinterpretation of ancient India, divided into various kingdoms such as Shambala, Illavarti, and Mahendragiri. Missal infuses these lands with mythic symbols, divine weapons, mystical creatures, and ancient prophecies, drawing inspiration from the *Puranas* and Hindu eschatology. Yet, the world he constructs is not a direct translation of religious texts but a stylized, action-packed landscape that combines traditional mythology with elements of epic fantasy. This allows the reader to inhabit a world that feels both ancient and alive, steeped in tradition but driven by contemporary storytelling techniques.

In contrast, Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*

employs a more linear, singular narrative structure, primarily following the protagonist Shiva. The story moves in a chronological order, offering a tight, focused exploration of the protagonist's journey from a tribal leader to a revered god. Tripathi's narrative is driven by philosophical dialogues, socio-political conflicts, and internal transformation. His prose is straightforward, reflecting his intent to demystify mythological content and present it as historical fiction.

Tripathi's world-building is perhaps one of the most distinctive features of the *Shiva Trilogy*. Meluha, the central setting, is envisioned as a utopian society with advanced administration, sanitation, and science—all modeled after the Indus Valley Civilization. The mythological elements are rationalized; for instance, the "Somras" (a divine elixir in myths) is reimagined as a scientific invention. This blending of myth with pseudo-science lends a sense of realism to the narrative and allows readers to view mythology through a modern, rational lens.

While both authors create immersive worlds, Missal leans more towards the magical and mythic, embracing the divine and the supernatural. Tripathi, on the other hand, grounds his narrative in realism, focusing on the humanization of divine figures and the socio-political dynamics of ancient civilizations.

Thus, *Dharmayoddha Kalki* and *The Immortals of Meluha* showcase two distinct approaches to narrative structure and world-building in mytho-fiction. One is expansive and mythologically faithful; the other is introspective and historically rationalized. Together, they illustrate the rich potential of myth in crafting compelling modern narratives.

### 4. Representation of Protagonists

Kalki in Missal's novel is portrayed as a prophesied savior—the last avatar of Vishnu—destined to restore dharma in a world plagued by adharma. From the outset, Kalki is aware of his divine lineage, yet he undergoes a journey of self-realization, grappling with moral dilemmas, internal conflicts, and questions about fate and free will. He is a traditional hero in many respects—brave, idealistic, and duty-bound—but also depicted with human vulnerabilities, making him relatable to modern readers. Missal blends divine mystique with emotional depth, portraying Kalki as a chosen figure whose identity is forged through trials.

In contrast, Amish Tripathi's Shiva begins as an ordinary tribal leader, unaware of his destiny. He earns the title of a god through his actions, choices, and moral reasoning rather than divine birthright. Tripathi emphasizes human potential and ethical leadership, presenting Shiva as a rational, introspective hero who questions established norms. His godhood is symbolic—a recognition of virtue, not divinity. This humanization allows readers to see the divine in the everyday, shifting the focus from fate to character-driven transformation.

Thus, while Kalki represents the mythological ideal of a divine redeemer, Shiva embodies the philosophical ideal of a self-made god. Both protagonists, though rooted in Indian myth, are reshaped to resonate with contemporary themes—identity, morality, and heroism—offering readers powerful and thought-provoking reinterpretations of ancient legends.

### 5. Ideological Themes

In *Dharmayoddha Kalki*, the central ideological theme revolves around the eternal battle between dharma (righteousness) and adharma (unrighteousness). Kalki, as Vishnu's final avatar, embodies divine justice and the

restoration of cosmic balance. The novel presents dharma not as a static, unquestionable truth but as a complex, evolving principle that must be interpreted in the context of political corruption, personal sacrifice, and ethical ambiguity. Themes of destiny, divine intervention, and moral absolutism dominate the narrative, reflecting a more traditional, theocentric worldview.

In contrast, *The Immortals of Meluha* promotes a more humanistic and philosophical ideology. Tripathi challenges deterministic notions of divinity by presenting Shiva as a mortal who becomes godlike through conscious action and moral choice. The novel emphasizes free will, rationality, and the responsibility of individuals to shape their own fate. It questions rigid definitions of good and evil, advocating instead for a relativist approach where moral decisions are contextual. The ideology of Meluha as a utopia also critiques the dangers of rigid perfection, blind obedience, and dogma.

While *Kalki* leans toward a mythic idealism anchored in divine prophecy, *Meluha* offers a rational, philosophical reinterpretation of ancient values. Both texts, however, reflect a broader contemporary Indian discourse—where tradition meets modernity, and mythology becomes a lens through which to examine leadership, justice, and ethical complexity in a rapidly changing world.

## 6. Gender Representation

In *Dharmayoddha Kalki*, female characters such as Padma and Lakshmi are portrayed with strength, intelligence, and emotional depth, yet their roles are often tied to traditional archetypes. Padma, for instance, serves as both a political figure and a love interest, navigating palace intrigues and personal loyalties. While she exhibits agency, her narrative arc often revolves around supporting Kalki's journey. Similarly, other female figures are positioned within patriarchal frameworks, where their significance is often measured by their relationships to male protagonists or divine destiny. Despite these limitations, Missal attempts to provide them with inner conflicts and decision-making power, suggesting a partial shift toward nuanced female representation.

In contrast, *The Immortals of Meluha* presents stronger feminist undertones, particularly through the character of Sati. Sati is depicted as a warrior, a thinker, and a moral compass—equal to Shiva in courage and conviction. Her refusal to be defined by societal stigma (as a Vikarma, or untouchable) and her martial prowess challenge patriarchal norms. Tripathi's narrative gives Sati a well-rounded identity, highlighting gender equality as a central ideological thread in Meluhan society. Women in Meluha occupy significant roles in governance, warfare, and spirituality, reflecting a more progressive vision of gender roles.

While both novels acknowledge the power and presence of women, *Meluha* offers a more radical reimagining of gender dynamics, positioning its female characters as active agents of change. In contrast, *Kalki* takes a more traditional route, though it makes space for evolving gender roles within a mythic framework.

## 7. Language and Accessibility

Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki* employs a fast-paced, action-driven prose style. The language is simple, direct, and cinematic, mirroring the structure of commercial thrillers. Dialogues are modern, and the narrative often relies on high-tension scenes, cliffhangers, and descriptive battle sequences. This makes the novel highly accessible to young readers and

fans of fantasy fiction. However, at times, the informal tone and lack of linguistic depth can affect the richness of the mythological setting, making the text feel more like a fantasy adventure than an epic rooted in ancient tradition.

In contrast, Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* blends contemporary English with philosophical musings and moral reflections. The prose is clear and straightforward, yet occasionally elevated through spiritual and ideological dialogues. Tripathi includes Sanskrit terms, rituals, and philosophical concepts with contextual explanations, which educates readers while maintaining engagement. This approach enhances cultural immersion without alienating a global audience. The language is crafted to reflect both the ancient ethos and modern relatability, making the text more layered and intellectually engaging.

Both novels succeed in making mythology accessible to modern audiences, but with different outcomes: *Kalki* prioritizes speed and entertainment, while *Meluha* balances accessibility with depth and reflection. Ultimately, Missal's style appeals to readers seeking a quick, action-packed mythic retelling, whereas Tripathi's prose invites contemplation and cultural introspection alongside an engaging narrative.

## 8. Cultural and Popular Impact

Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* was a pathbreaking novel that redefined Indian publishing. As the first book in the *Shiva Trilogy*, it became a national bestseller and introduced a new genre of mythological reinterpretation rooted in rationalism and humanism. Its success inspired a wave of mytho-fiction novels and established Tripathi as a literary icon. The book sparked debates on faith, history, and identity while attracting a broad readership, including those unfamiliar with Indian mythology. Its adaptation rights were acquired for films, and the character of Shiva became a popular symbol of moral complexity and divine humanity. The trilogy's popularity even influenced mainstream culture, with Tripathi being invited to national and international forums on mythology and literature.

In contrast, Kevin Missal's *Dharmayoddha Kalki* emerged as part of the post-*Meluha* mytho-fiction boom. While it didn't create the same cultural stir, it achieved notable commercial success and built a loyal fanbase. Missal's portrayal of Kalki as a superhero-like figure appealed to younger readers, and the series continues to grow with multiple sequels. Though less philosophically intense than Tripathi's work, *Kalki* has contributed to popularizing lesser-known mythological narratives, particularly the story of Vishnu's final avatar, which is rarely explored in mainstream media.

Thus, *The Immortals of Meluha* had a transformative cultural impact, setting a benchmark for mytho-fiction in India, while *Dharmayoddha Kalki* reinforced and expanded the genre's popularity, particularly among action-fantasy enthusiasts and young adult readers.

## 9. Conclusion

*Dharmayoddha Kalki: Avatar of Vishnu* by Kevin Missal and *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi represent two distinct yet complementary approaches to modern mythological fiction in India. Both novels successfully reinterpret ancient mythological figures—Kalki and Shiva—through contemporary literary frameworks, making age-old stories relevant and engaging for modern readers.

Missal's *Kalki* is action-driven and rooted in a traditional worldview, where divine intervention and prophecy shape the protagonist's journey. It appeals to readers who enjoy myth

blended with high fantasy, martial valor, and epic battles. In contrast, Tripathi's *Meluha* presents a more grounded, philosophical narrative where divinity is earned through human effort and moral decisions. Shiva's journey emphasizes introspection, ethical leadership, and the questioning of societal norms, making it particularly resonant in today's rational and reflective world.

From narrative structure to gender representation, and from ideological depth to language and accessibility, the two novels illustrate the diversity of the mytho-fiction genre. *Kalki* thrives on pace and spectacle, while *Meluha* invites contemplation and ideological engagement. Both authors contribute to reshaping Indian mythological literature—Missal by reviving lesser-known narratives like the Kalki Purana, and Tripathi by demystifying gods and embedding them in historical settings.

In terms of cultural impact, *The Immortals of Meluha* had a transformative effect, setting the benchmark for mytho-fiction and influencing a new generation of writers. *Dharmayoddha Kalki*, though more recent, has carved out its own space and continues to grow in popularity, especially among younger audiences.

Ultimately, both works underscore the enduring relevance of Indian mythology and its adaptability to contemporary forms of storytelling. Together, they enrich the literary landscape by blending the sacred with the secular, the mythical with the modern.

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