

BHUTA KOLA THROUGH CAMPBELL'S LENS: AN INDIGENOUS HEROIC JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Bhuta Kola, a ritualistic performance tradition from coastal Karnataka, through the perspective of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth or Hero's Journey framework. The study contends that Bhuta Kola represents a living mythic process where ritual, performance, and spirituality merge to re-enact the archetypal journey of transformation, mediation, and transcendence. By casting the Bhuta (spirit or deity) as a liminal hero bridging the human and the divine, the research interprets Bhuta Kola as a performative representation of the universal mythic structure outlined in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell 1949). Drawing from performance studies, anthropology of religion, and comparative mythology, the paper emphasizes how indigenous oral traditions maintain mythic consciousness in embodied forms that resist Western narrative rigidity. The methodology combines ethnographic accounts, textual analysis, and symbolic interpretation to explore ritual gestures, costume, trance, and orality as elements of mythic signification. Ultimately, this research redefines the heroic paradigm from a cosmic journey of the individual to a collective spiritual performance, highlighting how Bhuta Kola serves as both cultural preservation and mythic renewal. The study concludes that indigenous rituals like Bhuta Kola are not peripheral but central to understanding how myth continues to shape the spiritual imagination of communities over time.

Keywords: Bhuta Kola, Monomyth, Joseph Campbell, Indigenous Ritual, Performance Studies, Spiritual Anthropology, Mythic Structure

Introduction

Myth has always been the narrative heartbeat of human civilization, translating the ineffable truths of existence into stories that guide, comfort, and transform. Among the many

frameworks that decode the mythic imagination, Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, or the Hero's Journey, remains a seminal paradigm for understanding the archetypal structure of transformation. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell proposed that every hero, across cultures, traverses three broad stages- Departure, Initiation, and Return mirroring the psychic journey of death, enlightenment, and rebirth. This universal pattern, drawn from global myths, continues to resonate within diverse cultural and ritual forms. One such compelling embodiment is the Bhuta Kola, an indigenous spirit performance tradition from coastal Karnataka, India.

Bhuta Kola (literally 'spirit worship') is a vibrant fusion of myth, ritual, and performance, manifesting the presence of Bhutas guardian spirits believed to protect the land and its people. Though often categorized within anthropological or religious frameworks, Bhuta Kola transcends ritual boundaries to emerge as a literary and mythic performance, embodying narrative, character, and catharsis in living form. Its mythic foundation, preserved through oral narratives known as Paaddanas, parallels the Monomythic cycle wherein the human agent (the Patri or ritual performer) becomes a vessel for divine transformation. The performance thus dramatizes the Hero's spiritual journey- an ascent from mortality to transcendence, from chaos to cosmic order.

By examining Bhuta Kola through the lens of Campbell's Monomyth, one can see how archetypal themes such as the call to adventure, crossing thresholds, undergoing transformative trials, and returning with newfound wisdom are not just literary concepts but are vividly brought to life through performance. The transformation of the Patri into a divine entity parallels the Hero's journey into the supernatural, while the subsequent restoration of community balance symbolizes the Hero's return with the "boon" (Campbell 1949, p. 212). This paper argues that Bhuta Kola acts as a living representation of mythic awareness, converting Campbell's literary and psychological theories into a performative experience.

By placing Bhuta Kola within the Monomythic framework, the paper repositions indigenous Indian spiritual practices within a global mythopoetic context. Although Campbell's work was heavily influenced by Indo-Asian sources like the Upanishads and Buddhist sutras, Bhuta Kola offers a localized expression of the same cosmic pattern, emphasizing collective spirituality over individual heroism. The performance blurs the lines between performer and deity, actor and audience, myth and ritual, resonating with what Schechner describes as the "twilight zone between theatre and life" (Schechner 1985, p. 48).

The importance of this exploration lies in its literary reinterpretation of ritual: Bhuta Kola is not merely a cultural act but also a narrative text, expressed through movement, rhythm,

and symbolism. Its mythic logic mirrors the literary hero's spiritual journey, yet it transcends textual boundaries to embody myth as living literature. By engaging with Campbell's Monomyth, this paper seeks to highlight how indigenous performances like Bhuta Kola sustain mythic storytelling through the immediacy of the body and the sacredness of communal participation.

Ultimately, the study suggests that Bhuta Kola, when viewed through a literary-mythic perspective, transforms the Monomyth from a tale of personal growth into a ritual of collective transcendence. The Patri's divine possession becomes a metaphorical equivalent of the hero's initiation, where the body becomes text, and the spirit becomes author. This interpretation not only enriches the literary understanding of myth but also affirms the universality of the Hero's Journey as a continuous narrative across different mediums from epic poetry to ritual performance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, Jungian archetypal psychology, and performance theory, all of which converge to interpret Bhuta Kola as a living expression of mythic structure. These theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual tools to decode how a ritual act can mirror the literary Hero's Journey, translating myth into embodiment and spirituality into narrative form.

Joseph Campbell's Monomyth: The Hero with a Thousand Faces

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) organized the mythic journeys of heroes from various cultures into a universal framework: Departure, Initiation, and Return. Each stage represents a transformation from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the temporal to the transcendent. Campbell argued that myth serves as a psychological map for human experience- "a magnified, dreamlike image of the individual's own life" (Campbell 1949, p. 28). The Monomyth, therefore, is not just a narrative formula but a spiritual blueprint.

In Bhuta Kola, the Departure phase involves the Patri undergoing ritual purification and preparation, symbolizing a detachment from worldly identity. The Initiation takes place when the Patri becomes possessed by the Bhuta, entering the sacred realm. The Return is realized when the spirit, through the performer, restores cosmic and social order, resolving conflicts and bestowing blessings. This cyclical process reflects Campbell's model, where the hero experiences death and rebirth to gain enlightenment and bring renewal to society (Campbell 1949, p. 212).

Unlike Western literary heroes like Odysseus or Beowulf, the Patri returns not for personal glory but for communal harmony, redefining heroism as an act of service and mediation. This inversion of Campbell's model highlights a uniquely Indian form of mythic expression, where the hero's ego merges into divine consciousness rather than asserting individuality. Thus, Bhuta Kola transforms the Monomyth from a solitary narrative into a collective spiritual drama, positioning the community itself as the true hero.

Jungian Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

The psychological foundation of Campbell's Monomyth is rooted in Carl Jung's theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung described archetypes as primordial images within the collective psyche of humanity- symbolic motifs recurring across myths, dreams, and art. The Hero, Mentor, Shadow, and Mother are not literary creations but psychic energies that drive cultural expression (Jung 1959, p. 42).

In Bhuta Kola, the Bhuta embodies multiple archetypes at once: the Protector, the Mediator, and the Avenger. The ritual performance externalizes these psychic forces, turning unconscious symbols into visible form through costume, gesture, and trance. The Patri's possession signifies a temporary merging of ego and archetype, echoing Jung's process of individuation—the reconciliation of the personal and collective selves. This dynamic supports Jung's idea of the “mythopoetic function of the unconscious,” where myths act as bridges between psyche and cosmos (Jung 1964, p. 56). The ritual dramatizes this process, making Bhuta Kola a psychological theater where the Hero's journey is both internal (spiritual transformation) and external (communal renewal).

Understanding Ritual Through Performance

To view Bhuta Kola as a literary performance, we must also consider Richard Schechner's performance theory. Schechner's concept of restored behavior suggests that all ritual and theater consist of “twice-behaved behavior”- acts repeated and recontextualized to create meaning (Schechner 1985, p. 35). In Bhuta Kola, this repetition ensures the continuity of mythic consciousness; each performance is both ancient and immediate, re-enacting myth in the present moment.

Victor Turner's ideas of liminality and *communitas* further illuminate the transformative nature of the ritual. Liminality refers to the in-between state where ordinary structures are suspended, and participants exist outside conventional identity (Turner 1969, p. 94). The Patri, in trance, occupies this liminal space- neither human nor divine, neither actor nor spectator. *Communitas* emerges when the audience, through emotional participation,

experiences collective unity. This shared transcendence turns the ritual space into a sacred theater of mythic renewal.

When interpreted in a literary context, Bhuta Kola emerges as an archetypal story brought to life through performance. The transformation of the Patri into the Bhuta parallels the Hero's initiation; the interactive dialogue between the deity and the followers mirrors the narrative resolution of conflict; and the concluding blessings represent the Hero's return with the "boon." Each phase reflects Campbell's Monomyth while simultaneously extending it into a performative continuum.

The Aesthetic Dimension: Rasa and Mythic Experience

Indian performance theory, especially Bharata's *Natyashastra*, adds another layer of interpretation through the concept of *Rasa*- the aesthetic essence experienced by the audience. The feelings of awe (*adbhuta rasa*), devotion (*bhakti rasa*), and fear (*bhaya rasa*) during Bhuta Kola echo the mythic emotions evoked in epic tales. As Abhinavagupta noted, aesthetic experience is inherently spiritual, guiding the spectator toward transcendence (Abhinavagupta 1918, p. 112).

In this way, Bhuta Kola merges aesthetic enjoyment with spiritual revelation, embodying what Campbell describes as "the sublime adventure of being alive" (Campbell 2004, p. 45). The ritual's dramatic components- costume, rhythm, dialogue, possession are not mere theatrical decorations but symbolic expressions of mythic truth. Each aesthetic choice, from the fiery dance to the divine voice, enacts the journey from form to essence, from self to spirit.

Synthesising The Framework

By integrating Campbell's Monomyth, Jung's archetypes, and performance theory, we create a composite lens to view Bhuta Kola as a literary-mythic performance. The Monomyth provides the structural framework, Jung offers psychological depth, and Schechner and Turner reveal the performative dynamics. Together, they enable a literary reading of ritual that transcends disciplinary boundaries recognizing that myth, when embodied, becomes both narrative and enactment, both story and revelation.

Through this synthesis, Bhuta Kola emerges as a text without text- a living poem composed in gesture, rhythm, and devotion. It manifests the archetypal cycle of death and rebirth, transforming the human body into the site of mythic expression. The Patri, like Campbell's hero, journeys through darkness into illumination, returning not with words but with blessings. In this convergence of myth, psyche, and performance, the Bhuta Kola affirms

that the Hero's Journey is not confined to literature but eternally re-enacted in the sacred theatre of human imagination.

Bhuta Kola: Mythic Origins and Cultural Context

The cultural landscape of South India, particularly the Tulu Nadu region of coastal Karnataka, is deeply infused with the living presence of myth and ritual. Among its most vibrant traditions, Bhuta Kola stands out as a sacred performance of mythic remembrance- a ritual in which stories, spirits, and communities converge to reaffirm their cosmic relationship. Literally meaning “play of the spirit,” Bhuta Kola (from bhuta, meaning spirit, and kola, meaning play or celebration) represents a synthesis of indigenous mythic consciousness and performative devotion. It is not merely a ritual act of worship but a living narrative, a dramatized retelling of the moral and cosmological order embedded in local myth.

The legendary beginnings of Bhuta Kola are rooted in the ancient Tuluva cosmology, where Bhutas or Daivas are seen as ancestral spirits, demi-gods, or embodiments of divine forces that maintain balance between humans and nature. Each Bhuta, like Panjurli (the boar spirit), Kallurti, Bobbaraya, and Kalkuda, is linked to distinct mythic tales that describe its origin, function, and moral importance. These stories are passed down through Paaddanas- oral epics recited in rhythmic patterns that serve as both mythic texts and ritual guides. The Paaddanas provide the mythopoetic basis, acting as the performative "script" for enacting Bhuta Kola.

As noted by V. Raghavan (1998, p. 112), these oral traditions “constitute the vernacular epics of spirituality,” preserving ancient cosmologies long before they were documented in written form. In Bhuta Kola, these oral epics come to life through music, dance, and possession, turning myth into a performative reality. Each retelling is not merely a repetition but a re-creation of the sacred, where the performer (Patri or Nema) symbolically transforms into the deity.

The performative structure of Bhuta Kola is rich with literary and symbolic meaning. The ritual typically starts with an invocation (Darshana), accompanied by rhythmic drumming and chants that herald the arrival of the Bhuta. The performer, dressed in elaborate costume, mask, and ornaments, enters the sacred space as a liminal being- no longer an individual but a vessel of mythic presence. The performance reaches its peak during the moment of possession,

when the Patri becomes the voice of the spirit, conveying messages, resolving conflicts, and restoring moral balance.

Viewed through a literary-mythic perspective, Bhuta Kola mirrors the structural elements of the Hero's Journey. The Patri's initiation into the role, his ritual purification, and his ultimate embodiment of the Bhuta reflect the Departure, Initiation, and Return stages of Campbell's Monomyth. The Paaddana narratives themselves resemble epic storytelling traditions, where the hero's challenges, divine encounters, and ultimate revelation are woven into collective memory. Just as Campbell's hero "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder" (Campbell 1949, p. 30), the Patri leaves his ordinary state to cross a spiritual threshold, returning not with a personal reward but with the restoration of communal harmony.

Beyond its mythic framework, Bhuta Kola serves as a cultural text expressing the values and concerns of its community. The ritual addresses social hierarchies, environmental ethics, and spiritual justice through mythic allegory. For example, the Panjurli Daiva represents the untamed spirit of nature- his worship signifies respect for the ecological order. Similarly, the myth of Kallurti and Kalkuda- siblings wronged and deified after death- embodies themes of moral restitution and divine justice (Rajyashree 2005, p. 49). Through these myths, the ritual encodes moral philosophy into performative form, transforming ethical dilemmas into sacred narratives.

From a literary standpoint, Bhuta Kola can be interpreted as a dynamic oral epic, where spoken words transform into a living text. Stuart Blackburn observes that "South Indian oral epics convert ethical conflicts into performative energy" (Blackburn 1978, p. 52). The Patri's movements, voice, and dance create a rich language through which the myth communicates. Each element- be it the fire, mask, or drum serves as a semiotic symbol, signifying the perpetual conflict between order and chaos, life and transcendence. The ritual thus becomes a platform for enacting the timeless mythic cycle that Campbell identified as fundamental to human awareness.

Additionally, Bhuta Kola exemplifies what Richard Schechner describes as "restored behaviour" a performance that repeats yet reinterprets the past in the present (Schechner 1985, p. 35). Each performance reawakens the mythic time of origin (mythos), temporarily dissolving the boundaries between history and eternity. The audience, far from being mere observers, actively participates in this sacred reenactment; their emotional involvement parallels the catharsis experienced by readers of classical literature. The ritual thus fulfills both the aesthetic and spiritual roles of art, evoking Rasa (emotion) and Bhakti (devotion) equally.

In essence, Bhuta Kola represents the convergence of myth, literature, and performance, where oral storytelling becomes visual poetry, and spirituality takes on a dramatic form. It reaffirms what Joseph Campbell described as the universal role of myth “to bring the individual into accord with the cosmos” (Campbell 1949, p. 37). However, in Bhuta Kola, this harmony extends beyond the individual to encompass the community, transforming everyone into participants in the Hero’s transcendence.

Thus, by examining Bhuta Kola through the literary lens of myth, we reveal a ritual text that not only preserves but continually reinvents mythic consciousness. Its persistence in the modern world signifies not merely the survival of an ancient tradition but the ongoing evolution of mythic imagination- one that turns local ritual into a universal narrative of spiritual return.

The Monomythic Journey within Bhuta Kola

Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) suggests that myths across cultures follow a universal pattern the Monomyth, or Hero’s Journey that reflects the stages of human spiritual growth. The hero’s journey of Departure, Initiation, and Return mirrors a cyclical process of transformation, death, and rebirth. Viewed through this perspective, Bhuta Kola emerges as an embodied form of the Monomyth, where the ritual performer takes on the role of the mythic hero, enacting a journey from the ordinary to the sacred and back.

Unlike the individual hero of Western myths, the hero in Bhuta Kola is collective. The transformation undertaken by the performer (Patri or Nema) symbolizes not only personal transcendence but also the spiritual renewal of the community. This collective heroism sets Bhuta Kola apart from the solitary quests of figures like Achilles, Arjuna, or Odysseus. The hero’s triumph in Bhuta Kola is the restoration of Dharma- cosmic and social harmony within the lived world.

The Call to Adventure: The Patri’s Summons

The initial phase of Campbell's Monomyth, known as the Call to Adventure, represents the interruption of everyday life by the allure of the unknown. In Bhuta Kola, this call manifests when the Patri is selected often through lineage or a divine sign to act as a conduit for the spirit. This call is both hereditary and spiritual, tying him to ancestral obligations while also initiating him into divine service. As Campbell observes, “The call to adventure signifies that destiny has summoned the hero” (Campbell 1949, p. 45).

The preparatory stage of the ritual characterized by fasting, purification, and ritual abstinence symbolizes the threshold of departure. The Patri retreats from social interactions, entering a transitional state between human and divine. This period of seclusion serves as the

hero's symbolic death, similar to the isolation experienced by shamans before initiation. Victor Turner describes such phases as liminality, where the initiate exists "betwixt and between" ordinary categories of existence (Turner 1969, p. 95). The Patri's withdrawal from worldly matters mirrors the hero's readiness to confront the unknown.

Crossing the Threshold: Entry into the Sacred Space

The Crossing of the Threshold takes place when the hero departs from the familiar world and enters the realm of mystery and transformation. In Bhuta Kola, this moment is vividly realized when the performer steps into the sacred arena (Kola Sthala), fully adorned in costume and regalia. The sound of drums (chende), the scent of incense, and the chanting of Paaddanas transform the space into a cosmic theatre.

The act of putting on the mask or face paint is pivotal: it signifies the transformation of the human into the mythic. Schechner (1985, p. 47) refers to this as "restored behavior," where performative repetition invokes archetypal power. The Patri's body becomes the vessel through which myth enters the temporal world. In literary terms, this moment marks the transition from narrative exposition to mythic climax- the hero assumes his role.

The Patri's possession by the spirit is both a literal and symbolic threshold. When the Bhuta descends, the human and divine merge, echoing Campbell's description: "The hero journeys inward to a source of power not his own" (1949, p. 79). The performer's voice alters, his movements become more intense, and his gaze takes on a transpersonal quality. This transformation signifies not a loss of self but a sacred expansion, an entry into what Mircea Eliade (1963, p. 38) calls the *illud tempus*- the sacred time of mythic origin.

Tests, Allies, and Enemies: The Trial of Embodiment

In Campbell's Initiation phase, the hero encounters tests that hone his abilities and affirm his worth. In Bhuta Kola, this trial is embodied in the process of possession and performance. The performer must sustain physical endurance, spiritual focus, and ritual precision throughout hours of dance, dialogue, and oracular pronouncement.

In the performance, each movement transforms into a symbolic trial. The spinning dance embodies the chaos of divine energy, while walking on fire or balancing swords challenges the boundaries of human endurance. The Patri must synchronize body, spirit, and rhythm flawlessly any misstep could compromise the ritual's sanctity. Through this process, the performer experiences inner purification via external challenges, mirroring the legendary trials of heroes like Gilgamesh or Hanuman.

Additionally, the Patri's interactions with devotees during possession unveil moral challenges similar to those encountered by Campbell's hero. The spirit's reactions to community conflicts, ethical issues, and confessions act as tests of divine wisdom. Each trial strengthens the hero's connection to the sacred role. Through his resilience and insight, the Patri evolves into the hero-priest, bridging chaos and order.

The Abyss and Apotheosis: Union with the Divine

The Abyss- the peak of trial is depicted in Bhuta Kola by the intense possession sequence. The Patri's consciousness fades, allowing the divine to fully emerge. This visually stunning and spiritually intense moment aligns with the death-and-rebirth theme central to the Monomyth. Campbell (1949, p. 109) notes that the hero “must die to the flesh and come to birth in the spirit.”

At this point, the Patri stops being an actor and becomes the Bhuta itself. The audience no longer sees him as an individual but as the living representation of the mythic entity. This transformation signifies the Apotheosis, or deification, of the hero. As the Bhuta, he wields authority, conveys divine truths, and restores balance.

In literature, this stage mirrors the epiphany in classical narratives the unveiling of ultimate truth. In performance theory, it signifies the moment of complete embodiment, where performer and role merge into one. According to Eliade, the ritual erases the boundary between profane and sacred time, bringing participants back to the primordial moment of creation (Eliade 1963, p. 43).

The Return: Reentry into the Human World

The final phase of the Monomyth- the Return is often the most intricate. The hero who has encountered the sacred must now reintegrate into the human realm, bringing back the gift of transformation. In Bhuta Kola, this happens as the Patri gradually exits the trance, removing the mask and ritual adornments. The divine presence withdraws, and the performer regains his individuality. However, he returns not as the same person, but as one who has crossed the threshold of divinity.

The concluding rituals- distribution of prasadam, blessings, and final drumming- signal the restoration of cosmic order. The Bhuta's messages are interpreted as divine guidance for the community, addressing social issues, harvest rituals, and ethical behavior. Thus, the hero's return is collective: the entire community partakes in the renewal of spiritual and moral harmony.

As Campbell asserts, “The hero's return is the difficult art of bringing wisdom back into the world” (1949, p. 167). In Bhuta Kola, the wisdom is not inscribed in scripture but enacted through ritual. The Patri's temporary divinity serves as a reminder to the community that transcendence is attainable within their own human experience.

Collective Heroism and Mythic Continuity

While Campbell's Monomyth typically emphasizes personal transcendence, Bhuta Kola shifts the focus to a shared mythology. Here, the hero is not a singular figure but a collective- the performers, the audience, and even the spirits are all part of the ongoing cycle of mythic renewal. The community acts as both observer and co-creator of the sacred story.

From a literary perspective, this collective aspect redefines the notion of the epic hero. In Homeric or Vedic epics, the hero's bravery sets him apart from the community; in Bhuta Kola, the hero's sacrifice restores the community's wholeness. The ritual functions as an oral epic performed over time, fulfilling what Northrop Frye (1957, p. 186) describes as the “ritual basis of all narrative forms.”

Additionally, this collective heroism embodies indigenous ecological and ethical awareness. The Bhuta's influence extends to both natural and social realms protecting forests, punishing dishonesty, and blessing harvests. The mythic journey thus reaffirms the interconnectedness of human, spiritual, and ecological systems, illustrating what Campbell calls “the realization of the unity of all life” (1949, p. 388).

The Monomyth as Literary Archetype in Bhuta Kola

From a literary-critical standpoint, Bhuta Kola demonstrates how indigenous performance reshapes the Monomyth into a postcolonial, pluralistic framework. The Patri's transformation mirrors the archetypal hero's cycle, yet the emphasis shifts from individual enlightenment to communal salvation. The ritual narrative thus transcends Campbell's Western framework, embodying what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 79) refers to as “the re-membering of the dismembered self through cultural performance.”

Moreover, Bhuta Kola challenges linear temporality. Each performance reactivates mythic time, turning the Monomyth into an eternal return rather than a one-time journey. As performance scholar Richard Schechner notes, “Ritual time is cyclical; it renews rather than progresses” (1985, p. 102). Thus, Bhuta Kola transforms the hero's journey into a cosmic rhythm, sustained through recurring embodiment.

The Hero's Journey as Sacred Aesthetic

Finally, Bhuta Kola combines aesthetic rapture (Rasa) with spiritual revelation (Ananda). The performer's grace, rhythm, and voice create a theatrical spectacle that transcends art and becomes worship. Abhinavagupta's theory of Rasa where aesthetic experience leads to transcendence finds living expression here. The audience's emotional response mirrors the hero's transformation, achieving collective catharsis.

Thus, the Monomyth in Bhuta Kola is not merely a structure but a sacred aesthetic, a choreography of myth through body and spirit. The Patri's journey dramatizes humanity's perennial quest for meaning, bridging the gap between literature, ritual, and life itself.

As Campbell concludes, "The hero is the one who comes to know; and in knowing, he redeems" (1949, p. 391). In Bhuta Kola, that redemption is communal, ecological, and spiritual- a reaffirmation of the sacred bond uniting myth and humanity.

Comparative Analysis: Bhuta Kola, Archetype, and Postcolonial Identity

While Joseph Campbell's Monomyth presents a universal pattern of heroic transformation, its Western epistemic framing often privileges the individual hero's journey as the ultimate metaphor for spiritual evolution. However, in indigenous traditions such as Bhuta Kola, heroism transcends the self and becomes an archetype of collective transformation. Through this contrast, Bhuta Kola offers a critical postcolonial reinterpretation of the Monomyth, re-rooting mythic structure within community-centered cosmology rather than individual psychology.

The Archetype Beyond the Individual

Carl Jung's archetype theory highlights mythic symbols like the Hero, the Shadow, the Anima, and the Wise Old Man as expressions of the collective unconscious. Campbell, heavily influenced by Jung, claimed that myths are "spontaneous productions of the human psyche" (Campbell 1949, p. 18). However, the Eurocentric application of Jungian archetypes often overlooks indigenous forms of collective identity, where myths are not dream images but are embodied in rituals.

In Bhuta Kola, archetypes are not internal psychological symbols but are external communal presences. The Bhuta spirits represent archetypal energies such as justice, protection, fertility, and retribution- manifested through ritual participation. The performer acts as the archetypal channel, turning the Jungian inward journey into a public display of mythic truth. As David Shulman (1980, p. 94) notes in his research on South Indian oral epics, "The mythic imagination in India lives through embodiment and voice, not silence and psyche."

Thus, in Bhuta Kola, the archetype is enacted rather than introspected. The ritual replaces Campbell's solitary hero and Jung's private archetype with what can be termed a collective archetypal enactment a blend of myth, memory, and identity expressed through rhythm and embodiment.

Postcolonial Mythopoesis: Reclaiming the Local Hero

Reinterpreting the Monomyth through Bhuta Kola also aligns with postcolonial mythopoesis strategies the creation or revival of myths as acts of cultural resistance. Homi K. Bhabha (1994, p. 37) argues that postcolonial identity is formed in the “in-between” space where cultural translation occurs. Bhuta Kola exists precisely in this hybrid zone between myth and modernity, spirituality and performance, oral history and postcolonial self-expression.

During colonial and missionary encounters, indigenous practices like Bhuta Kola were often dismissed as superstition. However, the postcolonial revival of such rituals reclaims myth as a form of knowledge- a way of understanding and existing. Through the Monomythic framework, Bhuta Kola can be seen as an assertion of mythic agency, where local cosmologies resist the universalizing tendencies of Western narratives.

In this context, the Patri becomes the postcolonial hero, embodying both subjugation and transcendence. His possession signifies liberation from imposed epistemologies. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 87) states, “The act of storytelling is itself an act of reclaiming the world.” Bhuta Kola transforms storytelling into story-living, rewriting the hero's journey from the margins.

Myth and Identity: The Politics of the Sacred

Identity in Bhuta Kola is fluid, shifting between the divine and the human, the past and the present. The performer's temporary possession redefines the relationship between the individual and society, self and cosmos. This fluidity challenges colonial binaries of sacred/profane, civilized/primitive, or text/orality. In performance, these dichotomies dissolve into mythic simultaneity.

From a literary perspective, this dynamic aligns with what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, p. 271) describes as the “subaltern's speech through ritual”- a way for marginalized voices to express agency beyond textual colonization. The Bhuta's pronouncements on justice, morality, and environmental ethics form a sacred discourse, reaffirming indigenous

epistemologies. The hero's journey here is not about escapism but a return to rootedness—a mythic reaffirmation of cultural continuity.

Furthermore, Bhuta Kola portrays identity as something performed rather than owned. The transformation of the Patri illustrates what Richard Schechner (1985, p. 82) describes as the "twice-behaved behavior" of ritual actions that are repeated yet refresh identity with each enactment. Each performance becomes a re-engraving of collective identity, resonating with Frantz Fanon's (1963, p. 223) idea of "the reawakening of the people's memory through action."

Comparative Mythic Models: From Campbell to Indian Aesthetics

While Campbell's Monomyth remains a valuable framework, Bhuta Kola naturally aligns with Indian aesthetic theories of Rasa and Ananda. In the *Natya Shastra*, Bharata Muni explains performance as the "manifestation of universal emotion through bodily expression." In this context, the hero's journey is not a straight path but a cyclical one, moving toward the experience of transcendental bliss.

Bhuta Kola embodies this concept by transforming mythic narratives into aesthetic transcendence. The spectators' rasa- particularly bhakti (devotion) and *adbhuta* (wonder) culminate in ananda (spiritual bliss), reflecting the hero's apotheosis in Campbell's model. However, unlike the Western archetype where the hero "returns with the boon," here the boon is shared immediately, resulting in a communal catharsis.

Thus, Bhuta Kola reinterprets the Monomyth through Indic poetics, translating Campbell's heroic archetype into a Rasa-based phenomenology. The hero's journey is not about conquering chaos but restoring harmony. As V. Raghavan (1998, p. 115) notes, "In Indian aesthetics, the hero does not triumph over evil; he reconciles opposites into unity."

The Textual and the Performative: Myth as Living Literature

Literary criticism often prioritizes the written word, yet Bhuta Kola blurs the line between literature and performance. The *Paaddanas*—oral narratives of spirits and heroes—form the textual basis of the ritual. When performed, they become living literature, merging author, actor, and audience into a single narrative continuum.

In this sense, Bhuta Kola exemplifies what Walter Ong (1982, p. 123) refers to as the "oral residue of thought"—a storytelling mode that preserves cultural memory through repetition and embodiment. The Monomyth, which Campbell traced across textual myths, finds its performative realization here the myth is not read but lived.

This living textuality also presents a decolonial literary model: instead of the printed book, the human body becomes the manuscript; the ritual space, the page. Through each performance, Bhuta Kola rewrites the Monomyth into a vernacular epic of the present. The Patri's body becomes both pen and parchment, inscribing myth upon time itself.

Synthesis: The Archetype as Cultural Rebirth

Ultimately, Bhuta Kola illustrates how the Monomyth, when localized, transforms from a psychological model into a cultural cosmogram. The hero archetype becomes one of community resilience- the mythic memory that sustains cultural identity amid colonial erasure and global homogenization.

As Campbell himself acknowledged, "The hero's journey must always be read anew in the idiom of each culture" (1949, p. 390). Bhuta Kola fulfills this vision not as imitation but as reinterpretation. It demonstrates that the Monomyth is not static but dialectical, redefined through every ritual retelling.

The enduring presence of the ritual in contemporary Karnataka, despite urbanization and cultural shifts, underscores the enduring influence of myth- its capacity to continually reshape identity. In Bhuta Kola, literature, myth, and life merge into a self-sustaining poetics of existence, serving as a reminder that the hero's journey fundamentally represents humanity's perpetual return to its essence.

Conclusion

As Joseph Campbell suggests, myth is "the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human manifestation" (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1949, p. 3). By examining Bhuta Kola through the literary framework of the Monomyth, this paper demonstrates how indigenous performance can embody the same archetypal structure found in the world's great epics. The transformation of the Patri within the ritual mirrors the hero's journey from the ordinary world to the sacred realm and back, illustrating how the human body becomes a site for mythic enactment.

Unlike the solitary heroes of Western mythology, the Bhuta Kola hero represents a collective consciousness- a fusion of the divine, the ancestral, and the communal. The performer's possession is not an act of personal transcendence but of spiritual mediation: he becomes the channel through which the gods communicate, the ancestors return, and justice is

restored. The Monomythic cycle of Departure–Initiation–Return unfolds not in narrative text but in embodied ritual, turning myth into a living, participatory experience.

This study aims to reinterpret Campbell’s Monomyth within a literary yet indigenized framework, showing how Bhuta Kola aligns with and surpasses Western mythic models. The ritual, as a literary performance, unites the aesthetic and the spiritual, transforming oral narrative (Paaddanas) into performative mythopoesis. Each performance re-enacts the eternal return of the hero’s journey, where the sacred and the profane, the text and the body, the myth and the moment converge.

By interpreting Bhuta Kola as literary myth, the paper also challenges the colonial and anthropological perspective that often reduces indigenous performances to “folk ritual” or “ethnographic curiosity.” Instead, Bhuta Kola emerges as a literary cosmology in action- a dramatic retelling of humanity’s quest for balance and meaning. In doing so, it reclaims its place within the broader canon of world mythology and performance literature. As Schechner (1985, p. 52) notes, “Ritual is restored behaviour- it remembers through doing.” The Bhuta Kola, through its repetitive yet renewing structure, thus becomes a literary form of remembrance, preserving myth not on parchment but in lived human experience.

Furthermore, the Bhuta Kola broadens the Monomyth’s scope by replacing individual salvation with collective harmony. The hero’s return is not to personal enlightenment but to community reconciliation. The ritual resolves social conflicts, reaffirms ethical codes, and re-establishes the unity of human and natural orders. It transforms Campbell’s psychological narrative into a moral and ecological restoration, making the performance an act of both storytelling and world-healing.

The comparative aspect of this research highlights the importance of perceiving Campbell’s Monomyth not as a fixed Western template but as a dynamic global framework of myth that can adapt locally. In Bhuta Kola, Campbell’s stages are reshaped through Indic aesthetics such as Rasa and Ananda, oral traditions, and postcolonial identity. The hero’s elevation corresponds with bhakti (devotion) and shanti (peace), while his return represents dharma (cosmic balance). This blended interpretation encourages a decolonized perspective of myth, where universal archetypes are grounded in regional knowledge systems.

As a literary phenomenon, Bhuta Kola challenges critics to broaden the concept of textuality. It represents literature without writing, an oral manuscript that is revitalized with each performance. The Patri’s body serves as the page, his dance as the punctuation, and his possession as the act of authorship. Every gesture, rhythm, and utterance contribute to an unwritten epic of the sacred, where art, spirituality, and community merge into one. This

challenges the logocentric idea of literature as a fixed text, instead affirming what Walter Ong (1982, p. 132) describes as “the permanence of oral creativity.”

In this context, Bhuta Kola redefines the connection between myth and modernity. In a rapidly globalizing world, where ancient narratives face the threat of erasure, the ritual endures as a cultural palimpsest- reinscribing myth onto the modern psyche. It not only preserves tradition but also continually reinterprets it, ensuring that the Monomyth remains a dynamic and evolving structure. Thus, the Patri’s journey is both timeless and timely, resonating with humanity’s ongoing quest for meaning amid change.

Ultimately, the study concludes that Bhuta Kola functions as a living Monomyth- a continuous re-enactment of the hero’s journey through the medium of performance. It supports Campbell’s claim that myth “serves as a metaphor for the experience of being alive” (1949, p. 4). However, it also expands his framework by emphasizing communal transcendence over individual ascension. The hero’s body, voice, and spirit become vessels for the collective soul of the people.

By integrating the aesthetic, the sacred, and the social, Bhuta Kola illustrates that the literary imagination is not limited to the written word. Instead, it thrives through ritual, movement, and sound- the performative language of myth itself. In every possession, every chant, and every rhythmic gesture, the hero’s journey continues, not in the pages of epic poetry, but in the living hearts of those who remember, perform, and believe.

In this manner, Bhuta Kola transforms Campbell’s Monomyth into a ritual of cultural resilience, demonstrating that myth is not a relic of the past but an ongoing act of creation. The ritual thus affirms that humanity’s greatest story- the journey from ignorance to enlightenment, from fragmentation to unity remains eternally unfinished, awaiting renewal in each generation that dares to perform it anew.

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