



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The application of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey to the Sri Lankan Award-Winning Classic film "Purahanda Kaluwara" ("Death on a Full Moon Day")

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ABSTRACT

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This research paper presents the analysis of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework in the doyen classic Sri Lankan film Purahanda Kaluwara (Death on a Full Moon Day) directed by Prasanna Vithanage. The film is about the story of a father who loses his son in the active service around the Sri Lankan civil war. The paper illustrates the journey through the several stages of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey by looking at the plot of the film and the development of its characters with special focus on the character of Wannihami. The treatment offered buries his adventure in the most revered steps of the journeys of a hero as the world knows the works and concepts of Joseph Campbell. At the same time, this paper explores how the stories told transcend the universal structural features of storytelling and leans towards the cultural and emotional specificities of the storyline of Wannihami. This paper illustrates the applicability of Campbell's structure to the analysis of different plots and brings forth the inspiring reincarnation as the reality of the film, overcoming the pain and seeking for the truth. It, too, explores the narrative scope and cultural outreach of Sri Lankan cinema through the example of the Hero's Journey approach applied to a local film. This provides also a means of understanding the growth and change as universal themes.

INTRODUCTION

Long regarded as one of the celebrated approaches to understanding myths, Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, or rather Monomyth in simple words is a structure that all legends experienced by a hero in any normal society can be determined. This was one of the theories put forth by Campbell in his famous book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" looking into the civilizations and their influence on the narratives. The Hero journey has the Call To Adventure, the Refusal, the Meeting with the Mentor among others. After these periods, the hero comes back having acquired new wisdom or strength (Campbell, 2008). This theory has found many application in literary analysis, film studies, and in many other arts which revolves around imagery, aiding in the understanding of people and their experiences through story.

"Puranda Kaluwara" translated as "Death on Full Moon Day", is Sri Lankan based film directed by Prasanna Vithanage, which is about an old, blind father named Wannihami who is mourning the death of his army son. The movie is about loss, customs, and the expectable indifference of bureaucracy during the civil war in Sri Lanka. In this sense, the quest of Wannihami to find out the death of his son Bandara is an interesting example of Campbell's monomyth. Vithanage's film deals with war as a consequence in sociological and psychological context as well. This picture is about the specific consequences of war and more abstract notions like grief, perseverance, and a quest for knowledge which concern the universe.

The Hero's Journey framework can be utilized to some extent to study the layered storyline of "Purahanda Kaluwara." At first, we see the day to day life of the protagonist hero, Wannihami. He is an average man and one day his simple life is upturned by the news of his son's death that pushes him into a very difficult journey that tests his faith and courage. The film's focus is on the protagonist's journey, but it situates the journey within the Sri Lankan culture in the society giving the journey other dimensions. Applying Hero's Journey elements in the analysis of "Purahanda Kaluwara" makes it easier to note the parallels in Wannihami's story and differences around other Sri Lankan cultures. Essential concepts and background culture make the story whole resulting in various journeys for the main character.

This paper aims to explore how the narrative form widely adopted across cultures known as the Hero's Journey will be used to critique "Purahanda Kaluwara." With the exploration, the development of the central character was understood much better and the culture and the major themes in this Sri Lankan story were covered too. The study will also focus on the gendered and cultural specifics that will help the authors deepen their understanding of the character's journey in the film historical context and present the evolution of traditional plot structuring focusing on the Hero's Journey stages. Ines has emphasized the ability to use the Hero's Journey scheme as a workable interpretative and evaluative instrument for the appreciation of the theme and culture of non-Western films.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey (monomyth)

Stage of The Hero's Journey – is a narrative structure also called Monomyth which was developed by Joseph Campbell. As illustrated in myths and literature, it provides a basic framework of the heroic journey found in any culture around the world. Following Campbell's examination, the adventurous voyage can be divided into three major segments: Departure, Initiation and Return. The main character in the beginning usually lives in the real world but then he is called to leave and embark on a perilous endeavor in a strange and dangerous world (Cura, 2019; Ross, 2020). In the Initiation phase, the hero faces a whole series of challenges and tasks which are often helped by some magic, ending in an extremely difficult situation and gaining something of great worth or insight (Hopkins, 2020). The ordinary world is the place where the hero returns after going through series of transformative experiences. This Return stage is the last in the hero's journey when he or she positively incorporates the acquired knowledge or skills in the society to which he or she belongs. One can observe the application of this framework in a wide range of stories from the ancient literary forms to the celluloid forms of the present day, thus showing how relevant and useful it is Liao and Stroud (2001). The monomyth gives principal tension to the transformation of the characters and their interlocutors and provides themes of growth-, struggle- and change- which are found in every culture and society (Bray, 2018; Ambasciano, 2021).

Previous research on the application of the Hero's Journey in cinema

The extant literature focused on the Hero's Journey shows how applicability and popularity of every filmmakers mother monomyth is in every kind of film. Campbell's Hero with a Thousand Faces encapsulated a tripartite structure... departure, initiation and return... which has been used widely in narrating a film. Archetypal storytelling is also known to capture audiences well as a paradigm of Mackey-Kallis (2001) and Perelshtein (2019). For instance, the research done by Monteiro and Mustaro (2012) explains many forms of change one can go through in the process with the help of the dynamic system model. This approach allows portraying the development of the images of the heroes due to the challenges they face. Moreover, Fitch (2016) draws parallels not only between the characters of cinema but also certain mythological personalities, such as Odysseus or St. Paul, whom he emphasizes, in line with individual and ethical evolution, their advancement was also present in them, thus, McKee images. In Kolotaev's (2021) case study, the hero's journey is explained as an inductive narrative strategy in movies designed to present the construction of one's psychological identity. He shows how the conflicts that the protagonist faces during the plot correspond to stages of the development of the efficacy of one's ego. The flexibility of the framework is presented by way of its application in different types of motion pictures including road movies, Westerns,

contemporary dramas, and children's cartoons as evidenced by Sánchez-Escalonilla (2005), Dewi and Yusrina (2023). Therefore, these studies illustrate that besides entertaining, the classic Hero's Journey male structure still remains applicable because of the narrative evolution in movies related to the psychic change and development of characters that take place within him.

Background information on "Purahanda Kaluwara" and its significance in Sri Lankan cinema

"Purahanda Kaluwara" (Death on a Full Moon Day), helmed and produced by Prasanna Vithanage, is a seminal masterpiece in the Sri Lankan film industry. The film was released in 1997 and has Joe Abeywickrama, Priyanka Samaraweera, and Linton Semage as its main cast. The story centres around Wannihami, an elderly man who is blind and steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the death of his military son, Bandara, despite the return of his son's body in a sealed casket. Wannihami's decision not to sign the documents for government compensation highlights his conviction that the war did not result in the death of his kid (Roar Media, 2018; Sinema. SG, 2010).

The importance of the film lies in its fearless condemnation of the Sri Lankan Civil War and its effects on the rural populace. The film illustrates the struggles both emotionally and mentally of people affected by the war. The movie 'Purahanda Kaluwara' created a lot of fuss back in the times and was banned in Sri Lanka at first as it was believed to lower the spirits of the fighters. However, as the years capitalism and globalization advanced, the ban was lifted by the supreme court in 2011, allowing the film to reach a larger audience (Roar Media, 2018).

The video has been widely praised for the story and the performances, which has led to several competitions even at international levels awarding them with various accolades. As a matter of fact, Joe Abeywickrama bagged the Best Actor award during the Singapore international film festival and the film was also awarded during the Amiens international film festival and Fribourg international film festival in the year 1999. The above stated achievements indicate the international recognition and appreciation for the effectiveness of the film's social and political critique (Sinema. SG, 2010; Roar media, 2018).

"Purahanda Kaluwara" is a film made on the subject of war, and explores heavy questions about what war does to humanity and how those who survive its effects are able to endure. It's success and the debates that followed have also contributed to its recognition as a landmark film in Sri Lankan film history.

METHODS

To support this study, the movie in question will be assessed with the help of the Hero's Journey conceived by Joseph Campbell. The Hero's Journey, aka the Monomyth, is a proposition in archetypal literature that gives an outline of an ideal story of a Hero. The main framework contains three acts; initiation, departure and return. There are several phases included in the bifurcation of the two mentioned acts. The phases in question are the following: the Ordinary World, the Call to Adventure, the Refusal, Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the Threshold, Tests, Allies, and Enemies, the Approach to the Inmost Cave, the Ordeal, the Reward, the Road Back, the Resurrection, and finally the Return with the Elixir (Campbell, 1949).

The following steps will be followed to analyze the movie.

1. Finding the Hero: As Joseph Campbell explains, the hero is the core character who goes through all the difficult stages and terminus of the hero's journey.
2. Mapping the Stages: This stage will help map the movie's events with the steps of the hero's journey.
3. Exploring Character Development: This stage will examine the protagonist's psychological and emotional changes throughout the film.
4. Analysing the film's symbolism and themes in relation to the Hero's Journey.
5. Cinematic Techniques: How the other elements of the film support the hero's journey structure will also be assessed.

Analysis of "Purahanda Kaluwara"

Understanding "Purahanda Kaluwara" through Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework makes it easier to interpret the elements of the plot, character arcs as well as major themes. Oppong's voyage is successfully plotted to fit into the stages of the Hero's Journey. This film portrays all the aspects of the Hero's Journey and draws particular attention to the link between the general themes of storytelling and the culturally emotional tenor of Wanihami. This study explores the alterations made to enhance the film's narrative on the hero, his journey, and its setting, Sri Lanka. Using Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey conception of a hero, "Purahanda Kaluwara" has provided analysis of the twelve elements of a hero's journey. The journey of Wannihami is related to the journey of the archetypal hero. First, the phase set in the Ordinary World, that is, the simple life of Wannihami back at his village, up to the phase known as the Call to Adventure which is provoked by the death of his son, and then from Refusal of the Call to Meeting with the Mentor, the different phase I have mapped out connects to the bigger plot. In these examples, the cultural textures enhance the narrative, as Wannihami's internal and external struggles also include grief, perseverance, and quests for deep meaning. This thorough analysis of the twelve-step process will indicate the Hero's Journey of the film and the adaptation of the Sri Lankan customs.

The following is the analysis of each step of the hero's journey of the main character, Wannihami:

The Ordinary World: In the context of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, the very first stage that one comes across is referred to as "The Ordinary World" and introduces us to one, Wannihami, an aged and visually challenged man who lives in a remote village bordering the ancient city of Anuradhapura. He leads a lifestyle that has little in it aside from adhering to age-old principles and traditions. Wannihami has one of his youngest daughters, Sunanda, who is always active in caring for him while his other child, Bandara, goes on to serve in the army thereby instilling some sense of honor and purpose in the family. There exist connections between his mundane way of life and the customs of the people in his region as well as the bonds that he shares with the people of that region. This part of the journey elaborates on the state of addiction and in this case, it is the place of home to Wannihami which has a dichotomy of recovery, the high level of patriarchy sustaining and the elements to cultural ideologies that give rise to expectation of this recovery for the level of disturbance that he has already faced.

The Call to Adventure: Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey defines "The Call to Adventure" as the pivotal moment when the hero is beckoned to leave their familiar world and confront novel trials. Wannihami received the call informing him of the tragic news of his son Bandara's death in a military battle. Delivered by a government official, this news shocks Wannihami's formerly secure life, forcing him to confront a new and distressing reality. The government provides recompense and encourages the family to acknowledge Bandara's death because of his sacrifice officially. This situation is pivotal in which Wannihami's comfortable world is permanently changed, leading him to face significant emotional and societal obstacles. The call to adventure disrupts the protagonist's normal life and propels the story with a greater sense of purpose and urgency.

Refusal of the Call: Within the framework of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, "Refusal of the Call" is the phase where the hero declines the adventure most often due to fear, doubt, or feelings of inadequacy. For Wannihami, the primary motive of course was to officially declare his son dead and seek due compensation from the state. However, Wannihami is in complete denial over Bandara's death until she views her son's corpse – for she believes there's still hope in finding Bandara alive, and is convinced solidly that the government's narrative is misleading. Although there is social pressure on Sunanda to embrace the financial settlement, she does not deviate from supporting her father's decision. As such, Wannihami's denial reveals the extent of his love for his son and shows the extreme unacceptability of a loss that has not been verified, complicating their quest further, and adding more emotional stakes to the plot.

Meeting the Mentor: In Joseph Campbell's monomyth, the part entitled "Meeting the Mentor" involves the hero receiving mentorship and support from a mentor. There is no concrete or naively visible mentor in the narrative of Wannihami. Instead, his firm determination and strong belief that his son is alive are his two

compass points. These natural attributes balance him and serve as a personal guide in his actions and decisions. Additionally, trustable and dependable, Punchirala also provides emotional and moral support to Wannihami. It is Punchirala's encouragement that strengthens Wannihami's resolve, creating a sense of togetherness and fortitude in these trying times. This alternative way of looking at "Meeting the Mentor" shows that one's own beliefs and the presence of a trustworthy friend are also valuable sources of mentoring during the course of the hero's journey.

Crossing the Threshold: In Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, "Crossing the Threshold" refers to the point of no return, at which the hero has made up her mind to take the plunge and venture into the unknown rather than stay in her comfort zone. Wannihami arrives at a certain juncture where he opts, instead, to refuse the compensation offered by the government and vows to find the truth about his son. Wannihami's resolution is evidence of his commitment to the cause even when it entails hardships in the quest for Bandara regardless of the challenges. In appreciation of her father's support, Sunanda helps her father to pursue his quest despite her motherly instincts urging her to be cautious. Together, they leave the safety of their society and instead enter an unpredictable and dangerous zone motivated by their strong belief and determination to find the truth. This crucial phase signals the beginning of their transformative journey.

Tests, Allies and Enemies: The component of the Hero's Journey as emphasized by Joseph Campbell how the protagonist faces challenges and create relevant relationships is referred to as Tests, Allies and Enemies. In the case of Wannihami, this stage entails a series of hurdles and struggles. There are certain challenges he encounters such societal pressure and skepticism from the local people like Mudalali who cannot comprehend why he has chosen not to grieve over his lost son as well as the state's monetary compensation for the same. The quest for justice is hampered by red tape and working procedures entrenched by state agencies. Moreover, the fact that Wannihami is an old man with eye problems serves to further complicate his quest.

Wannihami is however not alone when it comes to withstanding these challenges. There is Punchirala, who remains an emotional anchor, and daughter Sunanda, who has his back at every point in time. With that backing and the commitment of Wannihami's supporters, Wannihami's perseverance is reinforced and this enables him to overcome the obstacles and hardships presented by the quest. This phase demonstrates the hero's capacity to bounce back from setbacks and the role of the comrades in fighting the myriad of difficulties and enemies on the path.

Approach to the Inmost Cave: Aspects of this stage have been identified as the 'deepest recesses of the cave' in terms of Joseph Campbell's general theory of hero's adventure, hence it is the stage where the hero prepares to bear the greatest challenge, which almost always involves entering a dangerous transformative zone. However, the region that creates an onward movement towards his quest is conflict in the land and expectations of the government and society which – at this point – Wannihami decides to fight head on. Undaunted by obstacles, he resolutely seeks the truth over the whereabouts of his son and heads off on a challenging expedition to the city. This is his entrance to the 'innermost sanctuary' where he has to deal with the difficult task of dealing with harrowing layers of interference, in this case, bureaucratic, in nature. The bustling city with its cold and complicated 'red tape' is a stark contrast to his village life and hence complicates his mission further. Not nevertheless the many numerous and tough challenges he faces, Wannihami's determination remains strong, a testament to the depth of his commitment to knowing the truth and solving the enigma concerning his son.

The Ordeal: "The Ordeal" in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey is the highest test and crisis of the hero. Once again, reconstructing the situation, Wannihami encounters a serious predicament while in the process of searching for the truth about his son, finds out the heartbreaking reality of Bandara's death and the bureaucracy that crowns it. He encounters the callousness of public officials, who do not care about his personal suffering, and the pressure of the society, which urges him to take the money and move on. At this point, the protagonist Wannihami suffers the extreme of his journey, where he showcases his deepest fears and anxieties. This overwhelming sense of despair and irritation presents a difficulty that is nonetheless

significant because it encourages Wanihami to confront and accept the harsh truth, thereby testing his resilience and resolve to the utmost limits.

The Reward: The Second Half of the Journey in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey is known as The Reward. Appropriately, 'The Reward' in this context comes after the hero's trial and signals the fulfillment, enlightenment or growth of the hero. For Wanihami, it is not enough to just find his son alive. He also wants to understand fully the events that led to Bandara's fate. Even though the more painful and awkward the truth is, the more difficult it is to embrace it without finally embracing it, Wanihami undermines the official narrative and receives closure instead. There is another discomfiting feeling, yet peace is found when the truth is finally accepted. The unchanging humanity of Sunanda and Punchirala is of great importance to him in this painful undertaking, infusing him with the courage to confront the past and move on, refreshed and determined to find that inner peace once again.

The Road Back: In the Hero's Journey, developed by Joseph Campbell, 'The Road Back' represents the return of the hero to the mundane world after the mission is completed or new knowledge is gained. An example of this would be when the character Wanihami adopts this stage, for he goes back to his village after experiencing the harsh reality of his son's death. He now possesses the necessary instruments to deal with, and as it were overcome, the present situation and articulate the ways forward. Sunanda and Punchirala remain in close proximity and even working closely with him to provide him with moral strength necessary for socialization. This move is a major departure from dealing with anguish and folly that characterized his trip, to a more quiet relinquishment. He is able to as well, pick up the pieces of his life with more understanding and resilience in the face of difficulties.

The Resurrection: In Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, 'The Resurrection' is the last phase in which the hero changes and is brought back to life, most commonly as a result of the final challenge or a major change in attitude. While interpreting the narrative of Bandara's death, Wanihami goes through a dramatic change for he manages to come to terms with the death of his son without bowing down to the regime's orders or narrative. It is through this realization, that the truth can sometimes be a burden, that gives independence of mind and clarity of purpose to Wanihami. In contrast, Wanihami manages to change the course of a battle in himself, accepting Bandara's destiny, but only on his own terms, which gives him peace amidst the grief. Sunanda, with notable signs of change, firmly believes that she will support her father's decisions, thus demonstrating her growth and strength. This phase encapsulates the journey undertaken by that individual and stresses the fact that Wanihami has turned into someone else, someone who is now ready to embrace the next stage of life with renewed strength.

Return with the Elixir: In Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, the stage called 'Return with the Elixir' embodies the rejoining of the hero to the normal world, equipped with some useful object or knowledge for the benefit of the society. For Wanihami, it is more inner peace which he comes in terms with the so-called 'elixir' – the truth about how his son died. Therefore, with this knowledge, it is easier for Wanihami to find ways to commemorate effectively and more fittingly Bandara free from external forces dictating how he ought to behave. The journey undergone and the solution portrayed by its character Sunanda extends important lessons to their society, making citizens respect and understand why he thinks and acts the way he does. This acceptance encourages feeling of belonging and mutual respect where we see the changes in Wanihami and the truth he discovered not just in himself but in others around him as well.

The story "Purahanda Kaluwara" employs the methodology devised by Joseph Campbell in the construction of the Hero's Journey to develop the features of local culture and emotional richness in the plot. As with all protagonists, Wanihami is seen as a hero, but he has additional components that are peculiar to the Sri Lankan experience, quests, and Civil Warfare. This critical essay discusses Campbell's theory and its application in the case of the Indian cinema. Above all, it draws attention to the striking images of tenacity and quest for justice amidst unbearable grief.



Figure 1 Hero's Journey Mindmap

DISCUSSION

Among various ways, the film 'Purahanda Kaluwara' does adhere to the Hero's journey and its elements showing how universal this framework is even in the non-Western narrative. The film progresses steadily along the continuity of the Hero's Journey, starting from the lonely village life led by Wannihami, the call to adventure immediately after hearing the news of his son's death, and lastly, the refusal to dwell on this brutal reality. Wann's overcoming of different obstacles in the course of his mission and the eventual disclosure of his son captures Campbell's definition of a hero's journey which comprises of departure, initiation and return. The significance of the positioning of the film indicates the skill in storytelling and the ability to captivate the viewers with a structure that is familiar and central to the narrative. The film 'Purahanda Kaluwara' resides within the confines of the Hero's Journey framework. Nevertheless, it has its own elements which are away from the conventional West style of telling a story. One impressive great deviation is absence of the normal presence of a mentor figure. Wannihami is a leader who is defined by his faith and his will. This Elder's influence draws the attention away from the external facets and places it on the internal and more cultural aspects. The conclusion of the film, which is personal resolution and inner peace instead of some external reward, amplifies the emotion and the culture difference that enhances the epic quest of the hero, which is the traditional story. The appreciation of the Hero's Journey in "Purahanda Kaluwara" is greatly influenced by the cultural context. The chronological background of the film is the Sri Lankan Civil War. It touches on the emotions of melancholy, custom, and the lazy enforcement of laws, all of which are copiously connected with the country's history and culture. The character of Wannihami in addition to pursuing personal aspirations faces larger structural impediments. In this case, the traditional perspective on family values and respect to the dead shapes the actions and decisions of the protagonist thereby creating a well-developed hero's journey that appeals to Sri Lankans quite well. The cultural specificity of the film also augments its emotive appeal and shows how Campbell's structure is flexible enough to accommodate various narrative traditions.

CONCLUSION

Applying Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey to "Purahanda Kaluwara" demonstrates this narrative form's universal and adaptable nature. Although the film follows the fundamental phases of the Hero's Journey, it also incorporates distinctive features that mirror its cultural backdrop and enhance its emotional impact. Wannihami's expedition, propelled by his own religious conviction and cultural principles, highlights the film's profound thematic depth and compelling examination of the consequences of the Sri Lankan Civil War on individuals and communities.

Implications for comprehending the Hero's Journey in films from non-Western cultures

The review of "Purahanda kaluwara" affirms that it is feasible to employ Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework in the representation of films that are non Western, providing an outline within which the development and changes in relation to themes that are, in a way, cross culturally distinct would be looked into. This model explains why such structures are important in understanding narratives in films across countries and cultures that embrace the journey of a hero, though in different ways.

Suggestions for Further Research

More non-Western films may be evaluated in relation to using The Hero's Journey to explore how narrative structures and themes are affected by culture. It is important to note that comparison of the Hero's Journey as portrayed in films from different cultural orientations has its own merit especially in informing on the nature of this form of art as global or localized. In addition, rival models focusing on what intrudes and what does not around the idea of internal and external mentoring in different cultures may bring more insights on how heroes are trained and accompanied throughout their quests.

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