

# A Hero's Journey: A study on The Dark Knight Trilogy

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**ABSTRACT--***The media franchise of Batman (comics, films, novels, television, cartoons and television) stands out from any other forms of written or visual texts with its diversity in artists, audience and expression forms. Perception of the various artists, understanding the audience and Batman's effect on them helps understand the changing American trends and culture. This research attempts to comprehend the delineation of the journey of a hero of western concept of The Dark Knight Trilogy directed by Christopher Nolan. Joseph Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' helps in measuring the insights of a hero, where the character undergoes a remarkable cycle of transformation. The study employs the method of qualitative content analysis to understand the complexities and burdens that obscure the hero, his journey of transformation, self-realization and understanding the world they form a part of.*

**Keywords--** *The Dark Knight Trilogy, Hero's journey, Super hero, Batman*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Who unerringly is a hero? We are all heroes by birth. It is a colossal process of transformation that each and every individual go through; from being a microscopic entity living in the balminess of amniotic fluid to a fully grown man; and it is not just all about the physical transformation, but much more than that by being a fully psychologically developed human beings(Rank,1914).

According to Campbell (1949), the term hero epitomizes the notion of misfortune, hardship, tests and trials, deference, esteem, strength and triumph. A hero is any selfless and gallant being who valiantly and altruistically gives away his or her life for any purpose which irrefutably marks to be bigger than one's own life and needs.

The history of a hero's journey can be traced back to Indian Mythology as well. One of the prime instances of a hero's journey from mythology is the transformation of Valmiki, the writer of epic Rama yana. Hero's journey is a conception that has been shaped into different molds. In one such version, Vogler (2007) says that, a hero could be any protagonist who sets off on a journey and detaches oneself from the normal world and voyages to an unknown world where he or she comes across many different snags and finally reinstates peace and poise in the normal world at the end of the journey.

For anyone to become an actual hero, it is important to identify the inner self. The prime motive or purpose of every being's life is to understand the self. The universal word "superhero" can be put under various categories, dividing them into several groups such as a person bestowed with superhuman abilities, costumed vigilantes that

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woe to protect the society, gods, goddesses, robots and aliens (Russell C, 2013). The result of the effective or a hero's successful adventure reveals and releases again the movement of life into the body of the world (Campbell, 1949).

This research work attempts to comprehend the delineation of a hero's journey of Christopher Nolan's Batman series. How does a normal man become super hero in Christopher Nolan's Trilogy? Hero's Journey is never complete without a transformation. Hence this paper also explores the hindrances that are involved in the journey that impedes the path of transformation at different points.

The trilogy of Nolan is unique and can never be outdone. This is because Nolan had taken a hero out of a comic book and placed him in a real world, with problems that are real, interacts with real people. His villains were not silly or campy, they did not have giant lasers or silly minions; they were real human beings. This is exactly why these villains felt real to the audience and why they terrified the audience. Dantzler (2009) clarified that the man with the mask on is Batman. The man in and out of this mask are both identical. However, they are, in the ordinary sense, two extraordinary characters in a single body.

## II. PLOT OF THE MOVIES

The film *Batman Begins* posturizes the backgrounds of the guardian of Gotham City, Batman. Bruce Wayne's parents were killed by someone and he sets out to find out the killer of his parents. He travels the underworld to find methods to fight crimes. Finally, he meets his mentor and Wayne returns to Gotham City. He sets his personality as the Batman, a masked hero who fights injustice with his physical strength, cleverness and advanced weapons (Nolan, 2005). *The Dark Knight* is the continuation of *Batman Begins*, scrutinizing Batman's life and his constant war on crime. The antagonist who wants to put Gotham into the age of anarchy. *The Dark Knight* goes closer, beyond the thin edge between superhero and vigilante (Nolan, 2008). In *The Dark Knight Rises* Batman takes the blame for the death of Harvey Dent and hides himself for eight years. However, the arrival of Cat woman and Bane, two heartless criminals change everything. Bruce is now forced to portray himself as the Batman again to fight with Bane for his survival and to protect Gotham City. (Nolan, 2012).

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A superhero is an individual who perceives and executes situations in ways an ordinary individual would not. Real life superheroes take part in social and symbolic activities which epitomize their vision of how society should be. Superheroes and the Hero's Journey model guides to how society associates with the individual, in addition to how the individual connects with society (Flores, 2017). Robertson & Lawrence (2015) used Campbell's "Hero's Journey" as a guide to help clients go up against and react to life's difficulties or challenges since it talks about the significance of identifying oneself with others aiming to oppose the potential issues and change the clients from victims to heroes through the various stages of the hero's own journey.

Allison and Goethals (2017) explains that "the hero's journey completes through three distinct transformations; a transformation of setting, a transformation of self and transformation of society." Hero is a word which was actually derived from the Greek language and literally means 'to shield and aid' (Vogler, 2007).

According to Vogler (2007), a hero is any person who can willingly and selflessly sacrifice his or her desires and deeds for the betterment of others or to safeguard others. As the core essence of the term hero is considered, it is associated with sacrifice of self. As it comes to a story, the hero is the one that leads the audience through it. He or she is the one that gives insights of the story from the very beginning to the spectators. Any spectator who is reading a story or watching a tale in the form of a play or a cinema generally identifies themselves with the character of the hero. The audience melds with him or her and twigs the world or the tale from their standpoint.

A hero reflects the ideals and morals that are upheld by a society or community. He or she hence visions for an idyllic society which enjoys the conscience of humankind (Goldberg, 2009). According to the study of Warm (2012), hero's journey is a mission to attain wisdom and/or knowledge, a journey that helps in self-realization, a journey that makes a mere commoner a hero or a better person and a journey for the betterment of a society. The initiation of the journey might be laid on the foundation of a selfish deed, or an action that is self-centered. However, the result of the journey not just benefits the single person, but it also helps in achieving the common good. Here, there may arise a question, what is the hero's journey is all about.

First one to study Hero's journey after Campbell was David Adams Leeming in 1981, followed by Phil Cousineau in 1990 and finally Christopher Vogler in 2007. Vogler adopted the hero's journey in film narration during the last decades. His 'twelve stages' model of hero's journey resembles the Joseph Campbell model. This story telling method was not much familiar in the Hollywood then. Vogler gives a detailed review of how Campbell's thoughts influenced in putting on a story development in films and reveals how the journey of the hero can be put to use as a trigger that is powerful enough to provoke thoughts that aid in developing a new method of storytelling.

McCullough (2013) explained that Economic depression and popular condemnation are the two vital disorders that Nolan talks against in the movie *The Dark Knight Rises*. The concept of French revolution is depicted in Christopher Nolan's *Batman series* in a simple way. French revolution saw protests of the middle class and lower class people against the illegal aristocracy and spoke against the luxurious lifestyle of the elite people. Likewise, in *The Dark Knight* Trilogy, Bruce Wayne and his friends try to overthrow the rich of Gotham city. In *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne is the symbol of hope. He has one agenda become Batman, the guardian of *Gotham city*. This idea is continued in the trilogy. In *Dark Knight Rises*, the vision of Wayne is fulfilled and he became the savior of the city. The movie portrays the consequences happened in *The Dark Knight*. Batman and Gordon tries to cover up all the crimes done by them through their multiple faces in the second movie, *The Dark Knight* (Knapp, 2012).

The standard path of transformation with respect to Campbell (1949) consists of 3 major steps; Separation or Departure, Initiation and Return. The hero after detaching or departing from the ordinary world, reaches the unknown world which is occupied with enigmatic people, tests and forces. Joseph Campbell (1949) argued that "the presence of a mentor during the initial stage of the hero's journey is fundamentally important in their lives. Mentors help heroes change transform, and later, having succeeded on their journey, these changed or transformed heroes take over the role of mentors for those who are at the early stage of their lives." A mentor is also a hero who improves the lives of others (Kinsella et al., 2015). The encounters scuffled off by the hero, leads him or her to an irrefutable victory who return back to the common world with rewards or boons.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher uses qualitative methodology with content analysis. Content analysis is one of the best and most useful methods to explore the objectives of this research. The theory of Hero's journey. This research work attempts the concept in '*The Dark Knight Trilogy*' directed by Christopher Nolan. This series includes *Batman Begins*(2005), *The Dark Knight*(2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises*(2012). The trilogy is considered by many to be the best of all times. The core objective of the study is to analyse the character's transition from a normal man to a super hero

The book named *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (1992) by Christopher Volger has discussed the twelve stages of a hero. These twelve units are concealed within three important stages: Departure/ Separation, Initiation and Return. Each of these stages comprise of major rudiments of hero's journey. Departure/ Separation is the first imperative stage where the hero leaves the common world where he resides in. It is the ordinary world where the transformational journey of the hero commences from (Vogler, 2007). There are five vital rudiments in this stage. They are Ordinary world, Call to adventure, Refusal of call, Meeting with the mentor & Crossing the threshold. Ordinary world lets us understand the hero and the world he resides in. It gives a meek introduction and institutes the eminent traits and aspects surrounding the hero. With this stage, the audience start identifying the world surrounding the hero through his/ her eyes. Call to action or adventure is the point where the hero receives his first call for the journey. His world that had been functioning slickly and effortlessly, faces troubles. A disruption turns the whole harmony upside down because of which the hero is left with no choice other than to instigate this journey. But as the fears and uncertainties gear up and haunt the hero, he or she refuses to go on the adventure and backs out. This stage where fear strangles the hero's brain which freezes him from continuing the path of transformation is known as refusal of call. This is point where the hero meets the mentor; a guide who directs the hero through the right path, imparts confidence and insights, obligatory for the expedition. The insights given by the mentor boosts confidence and removes uncertainty and fear from hero's mind with which he resumes the journey and this point is called crossing the threshold.

Second most significant stage is the initiation where the hero undergoes a transformation after he or she reaches the special or supernatural realm. This stage incorporates four major plot points and they are: Tests, allies and enemies, approach the innermost cave, the ordeal and the reward. After crossing of the threshold, hero begins to explore the special world where he has arrived. He learns the rules of the special world, meets people, makes friends, forms a team, meets up with the enemies and undergoes a lot of tests and trials. This part is customarily called tests, allies and enemies.

Next step is the disposition of attacks against the enemies and surmount the purpose for which he has reached the special world, it is called approach the innermost cave. Ordeal is the point where hero comes face to face with his or her shadiest and murkiest fears. The hero goes through a life and death crisis, where he or she experiences the course of death and rebirth. The hero overcomes his fears, survives death and is bestowed with the most precious reward from the special world.

Return is the most important part of the journey where the hero transmutes himself into a completely new, changed man and returns back to the place where all of this began. This step involves three phases and

they are; the road back, resurrection and return with the elixir. The hero eventually returns back to the ordinary world after crossing the threshold and it is called the road back. The hero, after reaching the ordinary world, experiences resurrection or rebirth where he completely overpowers his fears. Leaving all those darkest fears behind, he returns to the ordinary world with elixir of life; the elixir that is to be shared with the society.

## V. ANALYSIS

Batman Begins is all about dread, anxiety, understanding, mastering, handling and the overall power in general. *The Dark Knight* portrays mayhem - how it is reasonable and balancing, how it can turn a city contrary to itself. *The Dark Knight Rises* showcases anguish, not only in its simple physical form, but also in its philosophical and mental state. It gives out the message that pain is a part of life and it is important for the existence of life.

What makes a trilogy genuinely a masterpiece that has the capability to withstand the trial of time is the manner in which it is organized and introduced. A trilogy is basically one film, one story that has been part into three segments. Each section isn't finished without the other two, and every one of those pieces makes a strong story with extraordinary enthusiastic effect. Joseph Campbell has discussed this method of telling stories with clear comprehension. It is his brilliant mind that had taken myths and fantasies, legends, and well-known books to see a typical outline that makes every one of them associate with the viewers. Analyzing Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' outline and contrasting it with Nolan's trilogy, it is astounding to notice that the latter is a big fan of the former's 'Hero's Journey' as Bruce Wayne's adventure fits so pleasantly.

1. Ordinary world It is the ordinary world that allows us to understand the hero and his surroundings. It gives insight towards his characteristic features and attributes (Vogler, 2007).	In <i>Batman Begins</i> , we are shown a Gotham city hit with poverty and overwhelmed by criminals and corrupt people.
2. Call to adventure Call to adventure is the reason for the hero, to take up a venture of transformation. There arise many circumstances that put the hero in a dilemma to gear up for the most important journey of life (Vogler, 2007).	At the point when Bruce doesn't prevail with regards to murdering his parent's killer, he is on a hunt for Falcone who explains him precisely how weak he is truly.
3. Refusal of the call The fears inside the hero vanquish him and try to obstruct him from taking the journey (Campbell, 1949). His will to take risks are blown away in air as a bunch of insecurities and emotions take over him (Vogler, 2007).	The hero wouldn't like to take up the hero-image. He doesn't want to be tied down to any obligation for what lies ahead scares him.

<p>4. Meeting the mentor</p> <p>Mentor is an important person in the journey. Because it is the mentor, who guides the hero through the journey. Since fears and insecurities take him over, he becomes hesitant to continue the journey (Campbell, 1949). It is the duty of the mentor to guide the hero through the right track (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>Bruce is lost and in jail until Henri Ducard stops by and takes him in to teach him to be a hero.</p>
<p>5. Crossing the threshold</p> <p>This acts as a significant stage in the transformational ride, as with this stage the hero truly perpetrates to the expedition of changing life (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>The hero admits that he should leave his normal world where he lived. He should enter another world or a new world_and become another being</p>
<p>6. Tests, Allies, Enemies</p> <p>After crossing the threshold, hero reaches a completely new realm where he faces many tests, comes across different people who becomes his pals and some others who ends up becoming his enemies (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>The last fight for Gotham toward the resolution of <i>Batman Begins</i> powers Bruce to battle his own mentor and the battle itself dreads him_</p>
<p>7. Approach to innermost cave</p> <p>This is the phase where often attacks are planned to achieve the ultimate goal of the journey (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>The best case of this is to pursue in the downtown of Gotham_when every one of the three men cooperate to get the Joker.</p>
<p>8. Ordeal</p> <p>Ordeal is the crisis of life and death that the hero faces in his journey. He is endangered by death (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>Batman and Bruce are genuinely broken and should manage Rachel's passing and can't discover the solidarity to continue.</p>
<p>9. Reward</p> <p>In this segment the hero subsists death and comes back to life. He overpowers his fears and finally earns the ultimate recompense or achieve the goal at this stage (Vogler, 2007).</p>	<p>Bruce has to sacrifice himself in order to save the city he loves_ He should turn into the villain so there can be genuine harmony in Gotham.</p>

10. The road back Returning back is the vital part of the journey where the hero has transmuted himself to a changed man (Vogler, 2007).	Bruce at last arrives at the highest point of the divider and goes back to his home, where he unites with Blake and Selina.
11. Resurrection Resurrection can also be called as rebirth. This is the phase where hero has beaten the death to be reborn again (Vogler, 2007).	Batman and Bruce return and power the city to reclaim control, he should fight against time and the ultimate force capable enough to be destructive.
12. Return with elixir What is the ultimate goal of a hero? After traveling back from the special world, being a completely transformed man, he has to give back something good to the society (Vogler, 2007).	Batman is not the villain that Gotham City needed in the end of <i>The Dark Knight</i> , anymore. He has transformed finally into the ultimate martyr for justice. He became a true hero.

## VI. DEPARTURE - BATMAN BEGINS

The Ordinary World – Here we see the man's journey to become the hero. There is an issue that is simply asking for an answer. In *Batman Begins* we see a Gotham City under perils due to poverty and overwhelmed with corruption and criminals. This is where Bruce Wayne had lived his childhood years. It is in this atmosphere that he had lost his parents. Gotham City is desperate to be fixed; yet it is also very beyond the limits of accomplishment that it appears impossible to even conceive the idea of fixing Gotham. Bruce is headed to act on his impulses to avenge his parents' death. He does not go about as a hero, but amid a crowd that might shoot a man and leaves with no care of the results. He lacks any emotion to the world.

The Call to Adventure – Something in the story changes so definitely that it calls for a hero without hesitation. Bruce wants to become some different from a normal man. He reaches a point where he doesn't prevail as a man seeking revenge on his parents' executioner. He goes on to find Falcone who shows him exactly how weak he truly is. Bruce, at this point, joins the crew of the criminals, a step that is a little too advanced to move towards fighting and justice.

Refusal of the Call – The hero wouldn't like to be a hero, doesn't need the obligation, what lies ahead fears him. Bruce ends up in jail, avoiding the world and hides himself. He does not have any desire to assume on any responsibility anymore. He prefers to "work on" fighting people who are as of now bolted up.

Meeting of the Mentor - The hero meets somebody helps him embark on his journey from an ordinary man to a superhero. To put it plainly, he finds his mentor. The man teaches Bruce more about himself than he ever knew at any point. Bruce is lost in the jail till Henri Ducard stops by and takes him in. He teaches Bruce to face his dreads, master his destiny and shows him the way to become the man that he constantly aimed to be. Bruce becomes fearless with the support of his mentor.

The Crossing of the First Threshold – The hero, in this stage, accepts that he has to leave the ordinary world that he lived in till then. He understands that he is devoid of any other choice but to be a part of a new world where

he has to become a new being. Bruce puts on his cowl and goes after the mob. He finally returns to Gotham City to rid his dear city of all evil that exist.

Tests, Allies, and Enemies – The hero, in this stage, has reached his stature. He is in the battle with his enemies, not just physically, but truly, emotionally, spiritually and genuinely as well. The final fight for Gotham City. Towards the conclusion of *Batman Begins*, we find Bruce desperate to be powerful enough to battle his mentor - a battle that dread itself. Here, the edit technique used is fast moving and the camera angle gives away the importance of the scene.

## VII. INITIATION - THE DARK KNIGHT

The hero, despite everything, fights for his principles. We find Batman at his stature. He is amid the attempt to take out the crowd. He even goes over the oceans to get hold of Lau. He is yet to meet the Joker. But he feels the Joker's power and impact of influence.

Approach to the Innermost Cave – This is the point at which the hero gets together allies and gets ready for a last fight, the fight that will make a huge difference. The hero's transformation from Bruce Wayne to Batman is now complete. Batman, realizing that he is not powerful enough to save Gotham all alone, reaches out to Gordon and Den as he sees that they might be the key approach to pull his Gotham back to the glory that it previously enjoyed. The best case here is the pursue of downtown Gotham where each of the three men cooperate to find the Joker.

The Ordeal – The story reaches climax when the hero is forced to face his biggest dread, which is more often than not death, and find out that from death emerges a new life. This starts in the scene of cross examination when Batman loses both his temper and his mind on finding out that his affection has been taken advantage of and that he should save Rachel at any cost. However, it fails miserably. Batman and Bruce are truly broken and should somehow manage Rachel's passing. He cannot discover in himself the will to continue.

The Reward – The hero, having faced death, has gotten something beyond a man, he can able to fight more than ever and is rewarded, regularly by exaltation. It is here that Nolan plays with the audience a bit. It is not the superhero in Batman who is sacred or gets rewarded; it is Harvey. Bruce is forced to sacrifice himself to save the city he treasures. He has to turn himself into the villain to bring genuine harmony to Gotham.

## VIII. RETURN – THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

On arriving at his goal and saving his people, the hero sees no need to return to his ordinary life and agony. At this point, *The Dark Knight Rises* commences. Bruce is presently in a state of recluse, hidden in his estate owing to a wellspring of stories tailored around him - stories of him that are deformed and haggard. Bruce would not like to rejoin the world as he believes that he has done what he should have for Gotham. He does not see anything that is negative with the city. Everything turned out well.

There is something that undermines the reward that the hero has picked up through his journey; something takes steps to reclaim everything that made the harmony, normally a magical being or god. Bruce is pressured to come back to the world by Blake and others who see something coming, something that takes steps to cut down Gotham. Bruce realizes that Batman should return. He meets a man who is extremely solid, incredible and a little



too much for this old hero to deal with. Batman breaks down profoundly and genuinely when Bane is sent to a jail. This draws a parallel to the very beginning of the hero's journey.

The Road Back – The hero needs assistance getting back, he should battle his way back, and regularly a pursuit scene is included. Through the whole division where Bruce is locked up in the jail, he is left with no choice but to watch his Gotham City burn. He understands that he should fight his way back through retouching not only his body, but also his soul by finding the dread that drove him from the first starting point. He is assisted by individual prisoners who convey to him that a man is never free from pain and dread. He has to grasp it as that is what makes life worth living. Bruce reaches the highest point of the divider in the end and starts his journey back home, where he unites with Blake and Selina.

Resurrection – The highest peak of the story is when the hero tries to save the city for one final time. This is not exactly similar to the other battles he had fought previously, for the final battle pushes him as far as possible. It makes him utilize all information that he had ever collected and all the knowledge he has gained throughout the years. The hero is changed at last. In the final battle to save Gotham, Batman and Bruce return to the city, reclaiming the power he should battle against time and the ultimate force of destruction.

Return with Elixir - Not only should Batman face his most terrifying opponent in Bane, but he also has to deal with betrayal of Talia until his final sacrifice of himself to save his city. Batman is not a villain that Gotham City was desperate for towards the end of *The Dark Knight* anymore. His final transformation into the ultimate martyr for justice is now complete. He is now a true hero.

The hero of The Dark Knight Trilogy isn't Batman, it the story of a man with flesh and blood who goes over himself to save his city. Bruce is imperfect, scarred and harmed. He ends up an excess of a man through his journey. However, what we must always remember is that he is as flesh and blood as any of us are. He journeys through the ordinary imperfect world, to a completely extraordinary world until he reaches back to his home and take care of the more serious issues. A hero does not consider himself significant at any level. A hero understands that the world is of higher prominence and not himself. The world merits those beyond the ordinary man; it needs a hero.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The journey of transformation of Bruce Wayne in *The Dark Knight Trilogy* wasn't a piece of cake. He lost his parents and faced lot of circumstances throughout his journey. He tried to practice a lot of things to become the guardian of Gotham City. He got Ras Al Ghul as a mentor and with his right guidance, became Batman, from where he gained knowledge about self and returned back to the ordinary world as a completely new man. Bruce Wayne's journey was about knowing and understanding himself. Batman protected the lives of people in Gotham City and he became a guardian of the city. In this journey of transformation of self, Bruce Wayne faced several obstacles mainly because of certain social evils and the evil thoughts that laid within himself from attaining the transformation. From the starting of the story he was a fearful man and later got completely transformed into a fearless one. The man wanted nothing other than revenge on losing his family. He wanted to kill everyone responsible for his family's death. His vulnerable mind was well molded by the members of the suicide squad and he was ready to kill anyone and everyone. He was not worried of him dying from this revenge. But from that man, he changed into the guardian of the city and a

fearless person ever. His transformation in the journey is remarkable. The confusing conclusion of *The Dark Knight Rises*, especially with the revelation that Detective John Blake's was Robin, Bruce Wayne relocates to Florence. Robin's discovery of the secret of Batman is an underground lair that suggests that a person can fulfill Batman's role by fighting society's accepted ideals and thereby the established order. Indeed, Nolan admits, "The open-ended nature of the film is simply a very important thematic idea that we wanted to get into the movie, in which the Batman is a symbol."

Hence, the selected three movies; *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) completely underwent the 12 stages depicted in the cycle of transformation according to Christopher Vogler's Hero's journey.

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