

BHIMA, AN EMASCULATED MALE A CLOSE READING OF *SECOND TURN*

M.T.Vasudevan Nair's *Second Turn* (*Randamoozham*) is a re-reading of the Mahabharata which presents Bhima's experience of neglect that leads to seething indignation . Bhima's character in the Second Turn , presents the feelings against an exploitative system or his yearning for revenge. The language used in has a classical gravity . M.T. has brought Bhima and others down from their epic heights and treats them as characters in a familial set up .

Bhima is generally perceived as dull-witted despite his great physical powers and is considered bereft of any emotion and sentiment in the epic. But in the retelling he is recreated as a highly responsive and agile character seething with emotion and indignation . He torments himself in mind and spirit and he is the one who almost always brings victory to the Pandava's . Yet, he is never to have the fruits of his success , as his turn is second, the eldest being the paradigm of virtues , Yudhishtira . The eldest prince's craze for the game of dice and the mute agonies that the other brothers underwent watching him losing to Shakuni Duryiodhana's uncle , are portrayed in a moving manner in this work . The characterization of Droupady in this work is very incisive and it reveals the author's understanding of the female psyche.

Each incident in this work is filtered through the prism of Bhima's biases and prejudices . He occasionally breaks the wall between himself and the reader to de-mythologize some of the stories that have been about Pandava's . Droupady plays a central role and a major issue that has to be grappled with is the question of male authority and woman's sexuality in a truly contemporary fashion . The condition that the entire work revolves round Bhima is very significant one because he is the one character, who is generally perceived as all body and no spirit , in the great epic *Mahabharata* . M.T.Vasudevan Nair considers Bhima , as a central figure in the *Mahabharata* . The characters that control the twist and turns of Bhima's life are Kunti

and Droupady .

The first part of the novel is slightly at variance with the rest of it in as much as the story is narrated by a third person, a sort of witness , probably the author himself as opposed to Bhima who features in the rest of the seven parts. This section sets the stage for the novel to commence in a slightly negative way , which foreshadows the apparent tragedy at the climax. The scene begins with the frame of Dwaraka , which has been eroded by the raging sea and completely devastated , where nothing remains but a crumble of ruins of various parts of the castle. The mental composition and turmoil going through in all of the protagonists are shown here. Krishna , the Yadava prince had died by an arrow of from an unknown hunter and Dwaraka was then under the control of bandits. Even the greatest archer Arjuna could do nothing in the absence of Krishna , It was really Krishna's skills as a charioteer that had helped Arjuna to become a world renowned victor. And now he could not fulfil the last request of the women inmates to save them from their marauders and it was all over . Arjuna thanks silently , his eldest brother , Yudhishtira's wisdom , for his decision , a final march to shed human burdens and take leave of the world .Pandava's last march towards the Himalayan ranges had begun after the disappearance of the victory tower of Dwaraka sunk into the sea. All the Pandava's and Droupady were witness this , but as Bhima recalls,Droupady was not watching , she looked down at her feet and this was usually Droupady's habit to stand still and allowing her mind to wander in the distant lands .

Bhima recollected his days as a visitor to Dwaraka to learn the use of mace from Balarama. But he was very much in fond of Duryiodhana only and Bhima had to return without showing the disappointment for not learning any thing new. Bhima goes into deep contemplation of his reminiscences of the days in Dwaraka and his teacher Balarama's seeming partiality towards his other disciple Duryiodhana.

With a heavy heart, accompanied by a conviction that nothing more remained to be done in life, they set out on their final journey . Yudhishtira on the lead was followed by his brothers in the descending order of their seniority and followed by

Droupady . When they started Yudhistira had told that now they do not have a past. All memories and expectations from mind is to be erased, then mind will be peaceful. They were not to turn back . They walk past the Shatashringa mountain which was their foster mother in their childhood. They walked towards the snow capped mountain peaks towards Mount Meru and Bhima recollected the luster of the eyes of a young girl , the Hidumbi, whom he had married first. As they continued their journey Bhima stood listening to a sigh and suppressed dirge which he could identify in the midst of any uproar . It was Droupady . Bhima spoke loud enough to reach hear Yudhishtira in front that , “stop brother , Droupady has fallen .”(Vasudevan Nair 5) But without slowing down and turning round , Yudhishtira said , “She loved only Arjuna. As she set in the durbar with me , her eyes were fixed on Arjuna . Continue the Journey , without waiting for those who fall down .”(Vasudevan Nair 6). All walked on ,even Shadeva , who had Droupady in his Fifth Turn and to whom she was even like a caring mother . Outraged at by the cold behavior of his brothers , Bhima forgetting all the cardinal laws of the Vanaprastha , turned back went to the place where Droupady had fallen down and took her in his mighty arms.Droupady stirred and tried to sit up with great difficulty . Bhima saw disappointment in her eyes since no one even Arjuna had waited for her . Bhima said , “ I’m here ,” (Vasudevan Nair 6) .Droupady’s lips seemed to move , but he couldn’t make out what she said . Bhima waited there with grief , to see her eyes open once again and to say something . This section is really a deviation from the original . Here the first of the eight parts of the novel ends , where we see the Pandav’s and Droupady retiring and how only the Second Turner Bhima , who had an innocent heart clear of any philosophical intricacies had true love and concern for Droupady even at the climax of their lives . In the rest of the seven parts , the childhood of the Pandava’s leading up to the present are narrated by Bhima the protagonist .

The second section, comprising of six sub-sections , with the title ‘Kodumkattinte Maranam ‘ in Malayalam which means the whistle of an Impending Tornad, depicts the seed of distrust and antagonism between the Kauravas and the

Pandavas , right from when the latter returned to the castle at Hastinapura from the forest following the death of Pandu in the forest . Through the eyes of the protagonist Bhima , Pandavas return from the Shatashringa forest and the Kouravs indifference is presented . Each of the Pandavas were introduced in the Court and then Bhima noticed how indifferent Duryodhana was . Even from the childhood , he behaved as if he hated the Pandavas . Here the story is narrated by Bhima in the first person , who was then five years old, when he notices the splendour of the palace and the royal city, a kind of which he hadn't encountered hitherto.

Bhima often felt uneasy with shame on account of his huge body . To him everyone looked and fondled this wonder kid . In childhood Bhima noticed how Yudhishtira was praised to be the future king and so he was taught every warfare . Arjuna being the son of Indra was predicted that Arjuna would be an expert warrior especially in archery . Bhima being the son of Vayu prayed silently to please his divine father. But he felt everywhere , he was destined to wait for his turn . In his own words , “ My place was behind him (Yudhishtira) in war , festivities or in funeral rites .” (Vasudevan Nair 30) Others at times addressed him as stupid , fool , idiot , block head and Vrikodara . Among all these Vrikodara - the wolf-bellied made him shook with anger . Though both the Kouravs and Pandavas underwent training and education together , Bhima had developed a sense of antagonism towards Kouravas , especially Duriyodhana and once he encountered with him and Dushasana and almost went on the verge of even killing them , thus clearly displaying his barbaric instincts . Later he over powered a racing wild boar which was closing him with its horns directed to him . As a Kshatriya this was his first hunting . Despite the warnings from the elders , he continued the same attitude towards the Kouravas and was even attempted to be murdered by Duryodhana and party by drowning him after getting him drunk , but had a narrow escape,

thanks to his sheer power .

Bhima's narration continues through the third section of the novel namely 'Vanaveedehikal' . Here the Pandavas are enticed to retire to a forest called Varanavatha with sweet words and promises of the charm of a festival that is scheduled to take place there . The evil intention behind sending Pandavas to the forest was to burn them down with the lac castle that was constructed specially with inflammable materials , which was recognized at once by the cunning Kunti and they were later informed about the same by a spy of Vidura . However they escaped in to the forest and they encountered with a tribal woman Hidumbi and later Bhima married her and had a son by her Khadokcha and later on the Pandavas moved off to Ekachakra Brahmin village . It was when the Pandavas were living in the Ekachakra with Brahmins they came to know about Droupady's swayamvara . Disguised as Brhamnins the Pandavas were also present in the Panchala court to take part in the archery contest to win Droupady's hand . There they noticed that each one of the contestants withdrew in defeat . Duryiodhana also tried to lift the bow but after lifting it up to his waist , he abandoned the effort . Next was the turn of Karna but Drishtadyumna , the brother of Droupady said , " Stop , this contest is for Kshatriyas ." (Vasudevan Nair 84) he continued , " My sister will not accept some one of a lower caste than herself . If it is just for a trial of a skill , you may continue." (Vasudevan Nait 84) . On Hearing this Karna became helpless just as he had when in the demonstration of the skills of each prince's after their completion of the studies. Bhima says that he felt sympathy for the enemy Karna for the second time . Now Arjuna held the bow and hit the target and Droupady placed the garland she carried around his neck . On their return to the potter's house , in which they were staying Kunti without opening the door ordered to share and enjoy the alms , which they had on that day , as usual . But on realizing the alms was Droupady , Kunti was shocked . According to Bhima , there should not be any confusion because Arjuna had won her . But

now Yudhishtira holds on the mother's orders on the pretext of Dharma . Bhima could not admit to this foolish arguments to share Droupady among all the Pandavas . According to Bhima , Yudhishtira tried to recall several instances of polyandry from the scriptures as justification for the concept of sharing Droupady. In Bhima's own words , “ Droupady is for Arjuna . If you insist on polyandry , you may join him . You must determine his views too- he , who has won her through his skill and bravery . Then Droupady , oh , we never bother about the likes and dislikes of women.” (Vasudevan Nair 91). Later Kunti too insisted on sharing Droupady , because , the strength of Pandavas, lies in their unity . It had greater tenacity than a full-fledged army . The mother reminded Bhima that the second turn on Droupady will be his . After all nobody asked Droupady's opinion . She become the common wife of Pandavas . The first turn was Yudhishtira's Droupady would spend a year with each person . It was mother's law and Bhima never doubted whether it was Yudhishtira's or mother's .It also added that no one else should go into the house , during that year and if the law is broken , he had to go on an exile for one year . Once during Yudhishtira's turn Arjuna broke the law by mistake to help some Brahmins and then he started on a pilgrimage . But to Bhima , Arjuna's pilgrimage was unnecessary self-torture . In his opinion it may be the disappointment that he lost his one year with Droupady as he broke the law and so he wanted to be away from the palace . At times Bhima felt that Droupady was very much anxious to gather news about Arjuna and he had seen disappointment in her eyes too . During the year of exile news about Arjuna's marriage with Ulupi , Chithrangada and Subhadra , the sister of Krishna reached the palace . Droupady accepted Subhadra as a sister . Bhima started counting the days of his honeymoon with Droupady . He had made some arrangements to welcome Droupady . But unfortunately Droupady said on her last day with Yudhishtira to eager Bhima , “ Today's sacrifice is to conceive a son . The year that Arjuna lost has been

Added to the young King's time , don't you know ?" (Vasudevan Nair 101)

Thus Bhima even lost his anxious expectation of the second year and he had to wait another one more year before he could approach Droupady .Time went on. There was four months to go before Droupady would be Bhima's . So unable to douse the flames of his carnal fire , he went deep into the forest in search of his former lover Hidumbi or any other lover , and finally ended up in reaching Kashi, where he got married to the princess Balandhara and returned home with her .

Bhima recollects how intelligent and tricky Droupady was

Yudhishtira had planned to perform Rajasuya sacrifice , for which they had to defeat all the neighbouring kings , including the formidable Jarasandha . Then Droupady sent an old woman to summon Bhima . He was really anxious to meet Droupady to see her because he hadn't met her after he got married to Balandhara . But what her request was to prevent Arjuna from engaging in any dangerous movements in relation to coronation ceremony of Yudhishtira .

Yudhishtira had to conquer Jarasandha , the fierce and cruel king . Droupady knew that Arjuna would accept Jarasandha's challenge to a duel at the behest of Krishna . but she knew that Jarasandha was not a man to be trifled with . But at the same time she indirectly claims that Bhima alone could defeat Jarasandha.

Now it is very clear to Bhima . If Bhima defeats him , Yudhishtira would free himself from a war and attain the status of an emperor. Droupady would become the empress. This was Droupady's plan , to save Arjuna and achieve everything . She had also hinted that after four months , it's Bhima's turn as her husband and this will be the reward for the death of Jarasandha . She also had given him a jewel along with the honey coated words . Bhima defeated and killed Jarasandha and entertained Droupadi with the details of the clash , who in turn submitted herself before him . According to Bhima, Droupady was always fond of listening to the duels and ferocious fightings of Bhima . According to Bhima , Droupady went on coaxing him describing his encounter with Jarasandha and how he killed him finally , on the first night of their turn. In Bhima's life, love and war

merge in a fierce dance of the flesh . All his conquests and victories , in both love and war came about as a result of his supreme bodily strength . For eg. As the text says Bhima goes on to describe in great detail how he finished off the supposedly unbeatable Jarasandha . As he winds up this gory account,

“Droupady was gasping her face close to mine, I felt she was half-conscious. Her nails dug in to my skin . She entwined me . Her teeth sank into my neck where was the Droupady who had lain idle and listless ? Her body enveloped me , hurting me in several spots . I did not feel pain , but desire , swooning . I flew through the remaining part of the night as over a mountain peak in the claws of Garuda who who had scooped out the Manthara mountain .” (Vasudevan Nair 115) .

As the story continues we may get the description of the Rajasooya Yanja by Yudhishtira . Duryiodhana came there stunned at the sight of the courthall built by Mayan’s expertise and it outrivaled those of Gods . When Duryiodhana hiding his envy came to see the hall along with his friends He had found it difficult to distinguish pools from the floor . The onlookers got an opportunity to laugh in derision and among them there was Droupady too . Bhima doubted that Duryiodhana was waiting for an opportunity to humiliate Droupady. Of course they got an opportunity , when Yudhishtira was invited for a game of dice at Hastinapur which a king can not deny . As he played and lost everything , including Droupady . Droupady was publicly insulted by Duryiodhana , Dushasana and Karna , both physically and mentally . Unable to tolerate Bhima pledged to kill all the Kouravas. In this novel there is not any such reference of stripping of Droupady or the divine help by Krishna . Droupady who fell at the feet of Dhritharashtra along with her husbands were freed , fearing the destruction of the entire Kuru clan by Droupady . But later Yudhishtira was again invited for a game of dice which he accepts and fails . Now they had to go on an exile for twelve years in the forest and one year in

their own land un-identified by others .Bhima was really burning with anger all the while , but being only second to Yudhishtira , he had no power to voice his objection .

The next part of the novel ‘ Panchavarnapookkal ‘ portrays how Pandavas along with Droupady , as per the terms of the gamble , went to forest for exile , where she occasionally points out her misfortune despite having been born to the king of such a prosperous kingdom and having five strong husbands as the Pandavas , thus intimidating them to avow vengeance . Krishna and Balarama occasionally visited them in the Dwaithavana . All the Pandavas except Yudhishtira were ready to fight against the Kouravas at that time itself but Yudhishtira would not allow them on the pretext of Dharma and patience . But Droupady exploded one day . She said , “ Five heroic husbands . A brother who equals a thousand warriors . A father with a great army . And yet , look at my plight ! .” (Vasudevan Nair 134). Yudhishtira replied , “ Time will punish those who have forsaken the moral path . Be patient , taking everything as divine dispensation .” (Vasudevan Nair 134). To this Droupady replied , “ Prosperity for those who dragged me into the royal assembly and tried to disrobe me . Exile in the forest for the wife of the Pandavas . If that is divine dispensation , then I detest those Gods . The God that ordained that is cruel , unjust and blind .” (Vasudevan Nair 134) .

Bhima was always at Droupady’s disposal . His purity of character is evident in several occasions in his relations with Droupady . Bhima once sets out on to Droupady’s plea to fetch the rare ‘Sougandhika ‘ flower she fancied shows him successful in plucking the bloom from Kubera’s garden after several adventures . But later Droupady seems to had forgotten about the flower and his elder brother admonishes him for his recklessness , when he started himself for that flower , he had guessed that this might be a journey in search of a woman’s mad dream and now Bhima got disappointed.

As the war progress , Bhima went on bravely rushing through the ranks , thus venting his anger and vengeance with which he had been occupied with all these years . He gave a tough time to formidable foes like Bheeshama , Drona , Duryiodhana and Karna . He was even victorious enough to fight with at least ten soldiers at the same time . As days passed , the number of army on both sides went on diminishing. Bheeshma was felled by Shikhandi , Drona by Dhrishtadyumna , Karna by Arjuna and all the Kourava brothers except

Duryiodhana had died at the hands of Bhima . On the eighteenth day , with nine surviving from both the camps put together , Duryiodhana set out to his final clash with Bhima . Bhima tried his level best to defeat Dryiodhana , who with extraordinary skills in mace-fighting put up a stiff resistance . But finally he was felled by Bhima with a false move violating the norms of the war .

Thus the legendary Kurukshetra war fought between the brothers themselves drew close , with eight people remaining . The five Pandavas and Aswathama , Kripa and Krithavarma were all who remained . Everyone else including all the sons of Pandavaas born to their all wives , killed .

The last chapter of the novel namely Paithrukam or parentage reveals many secrets . The war was over and the Pandavas set to conduct the Pujas and ceremonies for the deceased . As they were doing it , Kunti came and to the shock of the Pandavas , revealed that Karna , whom they had seen all the while as an enemy , and condemned as Sutha puthra , was their own elder brother after all. She had Karna born before her marriage and fearing public contempt , she abandoned him in the flowing river . Bhima was utterly speechless at this revelation.

Kunti's revelation made Bhima suspicious about his own identity and started questioning himself , who was he . Yudhishtira alarmed at the calamity and having had the fate of getting his own elder brother Karna killed

decided to vacate the throne and hand over the scepter to Bhima , the second Pandava . Bhima became apparently appeared to be amused at that prospect and all other brothers supported him though it was short lived .

It was Droupady who reacted first of all . She scornfully mocked him and lamented that she never had the fortune to become the queen because if Bhima assumes the throne then Balandhara would be the queen and Droupady would be at her mercy . Kunti too later doused the desire of Bhima by commanding him sternly that he wasn't fit to sit in the throne and rule , as he had no knowledge of the disciplines that a king should know. Hearing this Bhima was more eager to know his own identity . So he pestered his mother again and again until she finally confessed and revealed that Karna was the son of the charioteer of King Kuntibhoja , who gave her a little solace when she was tired of serving the sage Durvasa. She also said that since she wanted a son of wisdom , she approached Vidura , as the wives were wombs to accept the seed of the progeny to continue the race in Kuru clan . Finally to have a strong son to conquer everything , she sought a powerful muscular man . A Kattala (a tribal) from the forest came like a storm and fathered Bhima . At this final revelation , Bhima was really in a dilemma , a situation of enlightenment leading to a tragedy .

Randamoozham as is evident now and repeated by others shows Bhima's life with plot and sequence slightly modified to suit the intent of the author . It is a very widely appreciated work , with literary quality and the innovative narration . The novel features all the important characters in the epic , some characters are more important and so specially highlighted . The portrayal of four prime characters of Mahabharata namely , Kunti , Droupady , Yudhishtira and Bhima are at variance with the original epic and so the 'Second Turn' stands out being more than just a retelling of *the Mahabharata*.

Bhima , the protagonist of this novel really unfolds his perspective. He is described as a mischievous character in the classic and this is highly inflated by M.T. . He is shown to be innocent , instinctive , barbaric and extremely powerfull . The causes for these qualities were obvious towards the close of the novel . In his attack and murder of Hidumba , the savageness of a tribal is shown . His brutality is evident in his dealing with Dushasana in the battle where the latter's chest was ripped open and drunk his blood .He even takes a handful of blood to apply to the hair of Droupady , in order to appease her . His inability to control his carnal instincts and his becoming violent at its refusal brings out the specialty of his personality . He is unable to wait for his second turn and so decides to go in to the forest in search of a lover . But in spite of all these peculiarities and savageness , he is innocent and loving husband , who did not keep any hatred within himself. . He is portrayed as a very loving husband , caring for all the desires of Droupady , who in turn saw him as a tool to address her cravings . He was second to the throne after Yudhishtira , second in his claim over Drapady and finally second as the recipient of her love and always be destined to be a ‘ Second Turner ‘ . Finally his enlightenment regarding his biological father , as suggested by Kunti is a barbarian from the forest , is the climax of his tragedy.

The novel ‘ Second Turn ‘ explores the emotional side of Bhima and the soft nature he posses along with his love for Droupady . Almost every thing he does is only for Droupady and he enjoys doing it also . Second Turn alludes to the fact that Bhima takes second turn in his marriage with Droupady after Yudhishtira and comes out hating it in this novel . Every one in the novel are presented as human devoid of divinity and even Krishna becomes mortal . Droupady is pictured as a person havin an interesting taste in having sex with Bhima and in all the instances have wild sex with blood dripping from Bhima's

body .

Really the novel shatters many age-old myths with which we Indians are familiar with . The main storyline is not much tampered with and M.T. tried to understand the pregnant silences that Vyasa had left behind without explicit explanation . Bhima the more ridiculed and unsung among the Pandavas receives a heroic shade to his character in this book . Its through his eyes that each character is presented . The characters are humanized a lot more , they become ordinary mortals , shedding the supernatural shades that are attached to them in the stories , that the Indians have grown up hearing . The main thread which binds the story together is Bhima and his relationship with the main lady characters .

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