



# Epic under Erasure: Demythologizing Bhima in *Randamoozham*

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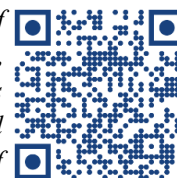
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**Abstract**—This paper reads M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* as a sustained act of demythologization centered on the character of Bhima. Moving away from the canonical Mahabharata, where Bhima appears as a figure of exaggerated strength and secondary prominence, Nair reconstructs him as a reflective, wounded, and historically situated consciousness. The study argues that the novel reconfigures the epic through a dialectical strategy: while retaining the broad civilizational frame of the Purana, it subjects the supernatural plot, divine births, avataric interventions, demonization of the "other," and celestial closure, to rational reinterpretation. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates how Bhima's corporeality replaces mythic excess with physical labour and endurance; how his masculinity is rendered structurally subordinate within fraternal and political hierarchies; and how caste and gender ideologies shape his perception of figures such as Hidimbi, Ghatotkacha, Kunti and Draupadi. Rather than desacralizing the epic, *Randamoozham* restores to it psychological density and ethical ambiguity by granting voice to a figure long instrumentalized within epic memory. In doing so, Nair reclaims Bhima not as caricature of brute force, but as the epic's most compelling witness to the burdens of power, hierarchy, and mortality.



**Keywords**— Counter myth, Demythologization, Narrative Focalization Subaltern Consciousness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the Indian context, the epic does not survive by remaining intact; it survives by being repeatedly re-situated, moved across languages, regions, performative economies and moral climates, until the "same" story begins to carry the pressure of multiple histories. Retelling, therefore, is not a late modern habit of rewriting sacred narratives; it is one of the oldest protocols by which Indian literary culture renews itself. A. K. Ramanujan frames this durability through a striking image: a platter filled with identical rings, each marking a completed incarnation, implying that "for every such Rama there is a *Ramayana*" (24). What appears as singularity in the canonical imagination is, in lived tradition, an archive of tellings - plural, mobile and politically responsive.

Ramanujan avoids the more flattening vocabulary of "versions" and "variants," because such terms quietly install an "original" behind the plurality. Instead, he insists on "tellings," precisely because the older terms "can and typically do imply that there is an invariant, an original or Ur-text - usually Valmiki's Sanskrit *Ramayana*" (Ramanujan 25). This is the crucial corrective for any serious discussion of epic rewriting in India: the retelling is not automatically secondary, nor is it merely derivative. It is a cultural act that renegotiates authority, sometimes by reverence, sometimes by dissent, often by subtle displacement of emphasis. The epic becomes less a fixed scripture than a narrative commons, where communities rehearse and revise their own sense of the world.

The logic of plurality is not only geographical; it is narratological. Ramanujan notes that the tradition

distinguishes between the Rama story (*ramakatha*) and particular authored texts, and he reads this as parallel to a formal distinction between “story and discourse” (Ramanujan 25). In other words, Indian epic culture has long understood, within its own categories, that the *what* and the *how* of narration are not the same terrain. Even when “the structure and sequence of events may be the same,” the retelling transforms meaning through “style, details, tone, and texture - and therefore the import” (Ramanujan 25). Retelling is thus not only a change in content; it is a reconfiguration of narrative optics: who sees, who speaks, what counts as evidence, what is dismissed as noise, what is elevated into truth.

To speak of Indian epic retelling is to speak of a tradition that is simultaneously literary and social. A tradition where narrative plurality is not accidental but constitutive and where meaning is generated in the space between *katha* and its performed, authored, translated and contested embodiments. The “astonishing proliferation of tellings” across centuries and languages (Ramanujan 24) is not a problem to be disciplined back into a single authoritative text; it is the very evidence that epic in India is less an inheritance than a continuously negotiated cultural form, capable of carrying devotion, dissent, regional memory and historical realism without ceasing to be epic.

If epic plurality in the Indian tradition authorizes the shifting of narrative emphasis, *Randamoozham* radicalizes that license by displacing not just the tone of the epic but its centre of gravity. M. T. Vasudevan Nair does not offer an alternative version of the *Mahabharata*; he reorients its narrative optics. By granting first-person authority to Bhima, the Pandava traditionally positioned behind Yudhishtira’s moral aura and Arjuna’s martial glamour, Nair performs what might be termed a focal inversion. The epic’s events remain recognisable, but their moral and emotional weight alters because they are filtered through the consciousness of the one perpetually relegated to the “second turn.”

Nair’s intervention extends the logic that Ramanujan identifies between story and discourse. The *what* of the *Mahabharata*, the exile, the dice game, the war, the final ascent, remains structurally intact. What shifts is the *how*: the interior inflection, the pauses of resentment, the bodily fatigue, the unarticulated shame. Ramanujan reminds us that even when “the structure and sequence of events may be the same,” the change in “style, details, tone and texture” transforms the “import” of the narrative (25). *Randamoozham* exemplifies precisely this transformation. By inhabiting Bhima’s consciousness, Nair renders visible the emotional sediment that the canonical narration leaves implicit.

The move is not narratological but epistemological. Bhima’s voice destabilizes epic omniscience. The cosmic assurances of dharma, destiny and the divine will are repeatedly refracted through suspicion and experiential doubt. The grand architecture of providence contracts into lived immediacy: hunger, humiliation, muscular exhaustion and unrequited love. In effect, the epic’s transcendental frame yields to human scale. The *Purana* persists as cultural memory, but its metaphysical aura is thinned by psychological realism. Such re-centering is neither casual nor incidental within the Indian tradition of retelling. It corresponds to the tradition’s long-standing recognition that narrative authority may be redistributed without dissolving epic identity. Ramanujan’s insistence that there is no single invariant text (25) prepares the ground for precisely such relocations of voice. Nair’s Bhima does not contest Vyasa from outside the archive; he speaks from within it, occupying one of its most powerful yet underexamined figures. The effect is less a rejection of epic memory than a re-interpretation of its moral economy. Through this focal shift, *Randamoozham* inaugurates a dialectic that will govern the novel. The epic world remains, but its explanatory grammar changes. What once appeared as divine inevitability begins to resemble political calculation and human frailty.

M T Vasudevan Nair does not dismantle the *Mahabharata*; he interrogates the interpretive mechanisms through which it has been received. The supernatural is not theatrically denied; it is absorbed into the realm of human plausibility. Divine birth becomes socially sanctioned surrogacy; celestial weapons become disciplined techniques of warfare; demonhood becomes the political naming of marginalized tribes. What shifts here is not the event itself but its ontological register. The miraculous ceases to function as theological proof and begins to operate as cultural memory refracted through human imagination.

Demythologization in *Randamoozham* is neither secular reduction nor rationalist triumphalism. It is a hermeneutic deepening. By translating divine causality into social process, Nair restores agency to the human sphere. The Pandavas’ lineage, traditionally authenticated through mantra and celestial visitation, is recast within the framework of *niyoga*, exposing the precariousness of hereditary legitimacy. Martial prowess, once attributed to divine favor, emerges as the consequence of training, discipline, and political grooming. Even Krishna’s omniscience is reinterpreted as strategic foresight, an intelligence sharpened by observation rather than revelation.

By treating the *Purana* as historically and corporeally real while exposing the Plot as mythic accretion, Nair preserves the civilizational memory of the epic even as he subjects its theology to scrutiny. The geography, the dynasties, the rituals, the codes of honor, all remain intact. What recedes is the aura of inevitability. The gods do not command the narrative; human decisions do. In reclaiming the epic from transcendental certainty, *Randamoozham* does not diminish it. Rather, it relocates its grandeur within the precariousness of human existence, where strength coexists with doubt, loyalty with resentment, and heroism with exhaustion.

## II. BHIMA AND THE BURDEN OF THE BODY

If *Randamoozham* treats the *Purana* as embodied reality, that embodiment is most rigorously inscribed upon Bhima's body. In the canonical epic, Bhima's strength functions as spectacle, effortless, excessive, almost divine. In Nair's retelling, strength is neither ornament nor miracle; it is labour. The body ceases to be mythic exaggeration and becomes weight, hunger, muscle strain, and fatigue. Bhima is repeatedly made conscious of how others perceive him. He recalls the subtle hierarchy within his own family, observing that he was valued "for my strength alone" and seldom for thought or judgment (Nair 48). The reduction is internalized. He is treated as a weapon rather than as a mind. The epic tradition celebrates his physical dominance; Nair renders that dominance isolating. To be "all body" is to be denied complexity.

This tension becomes palpable in the episode of the lacquer house. In Vyasa's narration, the escape reads as providential cunning. In *Randamoozham*, survival depends on Bhima's brute endurance. He recounts carrying his mother and brothers through the forest, moving through darkness and exhaustion while others collapse into sleep. "I carried them one by one," he remembers, describing how their bodies felt like burdens that must not fall (Nair 63). The heroism here lies not in spectacle but in repetitive exertion. The epic's miracle dissolves into manual effort. Even Bhima's physical enormity becomes a source of shame. He notes how his appetite and size draw mockery. His body, which secures victory in battle, alienates him in domestic space. He reflects bitterly that while Arjuna's grace is admired and Yudhishtira's composure revered, he is regarded as coarse and excessive (Nair 51). The body becomes both asset and stigma, indispensable in war, inconvenient in ritual.

The destruction of Dwaraka further underscores this corporeal grounding. Rather than narrating the city's fall as divine curse, Nair describes the sea's relentless erosion. Bhima witnesses the ruins "strewn like lifeless

bodies," an image that collapses architectural grandeur into physical decay (Nair 27). The metaphor of dead flesh reinforces the novel's commitment to material reality. Even cities possess bodies; they age and disintegrate. The war at Kurukshetra intensifies this physical realism. Bhima does not move like an epic hero untouched by exhaustion; he lumbers, sweats, bleeds. He describes the weight of the mace in his hand and the resistance of bone against metal (Nair 211). Combat is not divine choreography; it is the collision of bodies. The battlefield smells of blood and rot rather than sanctity. Most devastating is Bhima's encounter with Ghatotkacha's corpse. In the canonical narrative, the son's death is framed as heroic sacrifice. In Nair's retelling, Bhima sees only the stillness of flesh that once carried his blood. "He lay there, enormous and motionless," Bhima recalls, registering not mythic triumph but paternal rupture (Nair 243). The body, once symbol of tribal prowess, is reduced to lifeless mass. Heroism offers no transcendence.

The burden of the body extends beyond battle and survival; it structures Bhima's very sense of self within the domestic and political sphere. His corporeal presence precedes him, determining how he is addressed and how far he is heard. At one point he confesses with restrained clarity: "I was always behind him - in war, in festivities, in funeral rites" (Nair 51). The sentence is not merely descriptive; it is diagnostic. The repetition of "in" performs the continuity of marginalization. Ritual, celebration, mourning, each domain reproduces the same hierarchy. Bhima's body is summoned for strength but never invited for counsel. He occupies space, but he does not occupy authority. This condition becomes especially acute in his relationship with Yudhishtira. Bhima repeatedly registers the paradox of serving a brother whose adherence to *dharma* he finds rigid and self-serving. When Yudhishtira invokes duty, Bhima's instinct is often resistance; yet he restrains himself. "My hands were tied by obedience," he admits during the recollection of the dice game (Nair 118). The metaphor of tied hands is significant. The warrior renowned for crushing adversaries finds himself immobilized within fraternal hierarchy. The body capable of breaking bones cannot break custom.

The same tension surfaces in Bhima's unrequited love for Draupadi. His devotion is corporeal and immediate, expressed through action rather than rhetoric. After the humiliation in the Kuru court, it is Bhima who vows vengeance with visceral intensity. But Draupadi's emotional allegiance remains elsewhere. Bhima notes with muted resignation that her eyes sought Arjuna even in moments of crisis (Nair 156). His body becomes the executor of her rage, but not the recipient of her intimacy. Strength again functions as utility. The war magnifies this

pattern. Bhima fights relentlessly, but narrative glory often accrues to Arjuna's precision or Krishna's strategy. Bhima recognizes this imbalance. Reflecting on Arjuna's celebrated victories, he observes that much of that brilliance derived from Krishna's counsel (Nair 134). The remark is neither jealous nor petty; it is analytic. Bhima sees the machinery behind acclaim. Yet his own labour remains unadorned. The epic hero, in Nair's reconfiguration, becomes a worker within a structure that distributes recognition unevenly.

In the final journey toward the Himalayas, the burden of the body returns with stark inevitability. As Draupadi falls, Yudhishtira interprets her collapse through moral calculus. Bhima, by contrast, perceives physical exhaustion. He recalls how "her breath grew faint in the thin air" (Nair 302). The explanation is biological, not karmic. Even here, the body asserts its sovereignty over myth. Bhima lingers, unwilling to convert collapse into moral allegory. His loyalty is tactile; he cannot detach flesh from feeling. Through these cumulative gestures, Nair reframes heroism as endurance within hierarchy. Bhima's body sustains kingdoms and fulfills vows, yet it also absorbs neglect, silence, and deferred recognition. The "burden" is therefore twofold: the literal weight of flesh and the symbolic weight of being perpetually second. By grounding Bhima's heroism in corporeal labour and emotional marginality, *Randamoozham* dismantles epic invulnerability and restores to the warrior the density of human isolation.

### III. CASTE, DEMONIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF NAMING

The literary landscape of *Randamoozham* bears the weight of heroism as it bears the imprint of caste. Nair's most radical intervention lies in his refusal to accept the epic vocabulary of "Rakshasa" at face value. The so-called demons of the forest are not metaphysical aberrations but communities positioned outside the Vedic order. By reclassifying them as Nishadas, Nair exposes how language itself manufactures monstrosity. Bhima's encounter with Hidimbi is narrated without supernatural embellishment. She is not introduced as a grotesque sorceress but as a woman of the forest whose difference is cultural rather than ontological. Bhima recalls her presence with a clarity that resists epic caricature. What unsettles the Pandavas is not her demonic nature but her tribal identity. Kunti's disapproval is telling; Hidimbi is spoken of as someone beneath their lineage. Bhima senses the violence embedded in this distinction. The label "Rakshasi" becomes a protective fiction—a way of rationalizing exclusion. Demonhood functions as caste translation.

The episode of Baka is equally revealing. In the canonical epic, Bhima slays a cannibal terrorizing the people. In Nair's retelling, Baka's authority resembles that of a tribal chief extracting tribute. The act of killing is stripped of mythic righteousness and re-situated within political economy. Bhima recognizes that he has been deployed in a conflict that is less cosmic battle than territorial enforcement. The rhetoric of protecting Brahmins masks the consolidation of Kshatriya power. What is framed as dharmic heroism begins to resemble caste warfare. This tension culminates in the treatment of Ghatotkacha. Though Bhima acknowledges his son with pride, the larger political structure views him as expendable. When Ghatotkacha is sent into battle against Karna, the decision is strategic rather than sentimental. Bhima watches the aftermath with a father's anguish, yet the discourse around him celebrates sacrifice. The tribal body becomes tactical instrument. The epic's moral economy justifies loss by invoking necessity; Nair exposes the caste arithmetic underlying that necessity.

Even Bhima's own position is not immune to caste hierarchy. Though a Kshatriya by birth, he occupies a marginal rank within fraternal order. His alliances with forest communities and his emotional affinity toward Hidimbi position him ambiguously within the Brahmanical imagination. The novel subtly suggests that proximity to the "other" destabilizes purity. Bhima's empathy renders him suspect, though never explicitly condemned. Through these narrative recalibrations, *Randamoozham* dismantles the metaphysical aura surrounding demonization. "Rakshasa" emerges as a political designation, not an ontological truth. Caste reveals itself as the unspoken grammar organizing epic violence. By demythologizing the supernatural adversary, Nair restores historical density to the forest and ethical complexity to the warrior. What the epic sanctified as divine conquest becomes, in this retelling, a record of exclusion masked as righteousness.

#### Gender, Power and the Recalibration of the Feminine

If caste in *Randamoozham* is exposed as a structural grammar of exclusion, gender operates as its intimate counterpart. Nair does not dismantle myth only at the level of gods and demons; he reworks the epic's feminine archetypes with equal precision. Women in the canonical Mahabharata oscillate between sanctity and suffering as revered mothers, wronged queens and as divine manifestations. In Nair's retelling, they are neither allegories nor abstractions. They are agents within political history, and their agency is neither uniformly virtuous nor uniformly victimized.

Kunti is divested of devotional aura and restored to political calculation. In the epic tradition, her invocation of celestial beings confers divine legitimacy upon her sons.

Nair recasts this not as miracle but as strategic survival. The narrative subtly foregrounds the vulnerability of a woman abandoned in youth, dependent on securing lineage for protection. Bhima recognizes that his mother's decisions were rarely innocent. He senses in her an unyielding resolve to see Yudhishtira enthroned, whatever the cost. The famous moment when Draupadi is "shared" among the brothers loses its accidental innocence. Bhima recalls how the command hardened into decree before dissent could surface (Nair 102). What is canonized as maternal oversight becomes political foresight. Kunti's motherhood is inseparable from statecraft.

Draupadi undergoes an even sharper transformation. The epic's tragic heroine becomes, in Nair's narration, a woman conscious of her own charisma and capable of wielding it. Bhima observes that her anger possessed an almost consuming intensity. After the humiliation in the Kuru court, it is not only wounded modesty that animates her, but a desire for retribution. He notes how she would question him repeatedly about the details of slaughter, demanding precision (Nair 158). The request unsettles him. Violence, for Draupadi, becomes a language through which dignity is reclaimed. The novel does not romanticize this; it renders it unsettlingly human. But the author resists reducing Draupadi to vengeance alone. Her emotional economy remains complex. Bhima is painfully aware that her gaze gravitates toward Arjuna. His loyalty to her is immediate - he vows to drink Dushasana's blood; he executes her revenge without hesitation. Still, affection remains unevenly distributed. Draupadi's desire is selective, and Bhima stands at the periphery of her intimacy. Gender thus intersects with hierarchy: devotion does not guarantee reciprocity.

Hidimbi presents a counterpoint to both Kunti and Draupadi. She exists outside the Kshatriya domestic structure. Her love for Bhima is unmediated by ambition or political necessity. When Bhima leaves her and their son, the decision is not framed as heroic renunciation but as capitulation to caste expectation. The abandonment is quiet, almost bureaucratic in its inevitability. Gender here is inseparable from caste: Hidimbi's exclusion is justified by invoking lineage, even as her emotional authenticity surpasses that of the "legitimate" wives. And in demythologizing gender, *Randamoozham* reveals that patriarchy in the epic world is not sustained by male power alone but by intricate negotiations in which women, too, act - sometimes complicitly, sometimes subversively. The novel does not absolve them, nor does it condemn them simplistically. Instead, it restores to them the density of motive that mythic archetypes had flattened. Gender, like caste and heroism, is relocated from allegory to lived complexity.

#### IV. MASCULINITY AND SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

In *Randamoozham*, masculinity is neither monolithic nor securely triumphant. Bhima appears, at first glance, to embody epic hegemonic masculinity - physical dominance, ferocity in battle, unflinching loyalty. Yet Nair systematically fractures that image by revealing how Bhima's masculinity is structurally subordinated within the fraternal and political order. His strength is indispensable, but his authority is deferred.

Bhima articulates this reduction with painful clarity: "They valued my strength, nothing more" (Nair 48). The phrasing is blunt, almost stripped of ornament. The grievance is not that he lacks power, but that his power is interpreted narrowly. Masculinity, in the epic hierarchy, is differentiated. Yudhishtira embodies ethical masculinity; measured, composed, rhetorically dignified. Arjuna embodies aesthetic and strategic masculinity; refined skill amplified by Krishna's guidance. Bhima embodies corporeal masculinity; immediate, forceful, and therefore narratively contained. This containment becomes spatially encoded in his recollection: "I was always behind him - in war, in festivities, in funeral rites" (51). The repetition of domains - war, celebration, mourning - reveals the structural permanence of his secondness. Even in battle, where strength ought to determine precedence, symbolic primacy belongs to others. Masculinity here is not merely about physical dominance but about narrative positioning.

The dice game intensifies this contradiction. Bhima's instinct is resistance; he burns with rage at Yudhishtira's compliance. Yet he confesses, "My anger had no place to go" (119). The sentence captures the paradox of warrior masculinity rendered politically impotent. His body is capable of violence, yet hierarchy disciplines that violence into silence. He must perform obedience to preserve fraternal unity. Masculinity becomes restraint as much as aggression. The war further complicates recognition. Bhima notes, with measured realism, that Arjuna's victories were inseparable from Krishna's strategic direction: "Without Krishna, Arjuna would not have been what the world made him" (134). This observation is not resentment but critical awareness. Masculine fame, Nair suggests, is mediated. Bhima's brute proximity to death is less narratively adorned than Arjuna's archery guided by divine charioteer. The epic distributes glory unevenly.

Even in his vow to Draupadi, Bhima's masculinity operates as bodily enactment. He swears to tear open Dushasana's chest, and when he fulfills that

vow, he describes the moment with stark physicality: “The blood was warm” (214). The detail is visceral. It strips vengeance of abstraction. Masculinity is not metaphor but contact. Yet this performance of loyalty does not guarantee emotional centrality. Bhima remains aware that Draupadi’s gaze turns instinctively toward Arjuna (156). His masculinity secures justice; it does not secure intimacy. The death of Ghatotkacha marks the deepest rupture. Bhima looks upon his son and observes, “He lay there, enormous and still” (243). The echo of bodily magnitude - “enormous” - returns, but now drained of vitality. Strength, tribal prowess, heroic ferocity, all culminate in stillness. Krishna may interpret the death strategically, but Bhima registers it corporeally. Masculinity here is not triumph but grief.

Bhima is neither emasculated nor dethroned; he is instrumentalized. His body is mobilized for survival, vengeance, and war, yet discursive supremacy remains elsewhere. Subaltern consciousness thus emerges not from social invisibility alone but from narrative marginalization within power. The “lone warrior” is not alone because he lacks strength; he is alone because strength does not translate into centrality. By granting Bhima retrospective speech, Nair destabilizes epic masculinity from within. The warrior speaks, not as invincible icon, but as man aware of how history arranges its heroes.

## V. MORTALITY WITHOUT MYTH

The Mahaprasthana in the canonical epic culminates in transcendence, one by one the Pandavas fall, their deaths interpreted as moral allegories and Yudhishtira alone ascends heavenward. In *Randamoozham*, Nair strips this ascent of its metaphysical assurance. The final journey is neither symbolic purification nor celestial trial; it is an aging body confronting altitude, cold, and depletion. The Himalayas do not judge, they exhaust.

Bhima’s narration refuses allegorical consolation. When Draupadi collapses, there is no cosmic explanation offered to him. He does not interpret her fall as karmic reckoning; he observes her body failing. He notes that “her breath grew faint in the thin air” (Nair 302). The phrasing is physiological, not moral. Breath, not sin, determines collapse. The epic’s ethical calculus dissolves into respiratory fragility. Yudhishtira’s response is equally demystified. In the traditional telling, his refusal to turn back is framed as spiritual resolve. In Nair’s version, the detachment appears as weary acceptance. Bhima senses in him not divine clarity but fatigue hardened into doctrine. The journey has reduced them all. The language of righteousness sounds increasingly hollow against the grinding reality of terrain.

Bhima himself continues, though the ascent weighs upon him. His strength, once celebrated, is now burden. He admits, with rare vulnerability, that “my limbs were heavy, yet I walked on” (304). There is no suggestion of imminent heaven, no divine escort waiting beyond the ridge. The epic promise of ascent is replaced by the inevitability of bodily decline. The absence of miracle is decisive. No celestial chariot arrives to vindicate virtue. No divine revelation reframes suffering. The journey concludes not in spectacle but in stillness. Mortality remains unredeemed by myth. The body that once carried brothers through forests now struggles to carry itself.

In rendering the final ascent as physical ordeal rather than spiritual drama, Nair completes his demythologizing arc. The epic closes not with cosmic affirmation but with human finitude. Bhima remains what he has been throughout the novel, a witness shaped by loyalty, grief and endurance. The “lone warrior” does not rise into legend; he confronts the silence beyond effort. Closure resides not in apotheosis but in the acceptance that even heroes succumb to breath and bone.

### Postmodern Mythopoesis and Subaltern Reclamation

In the contemporary literary moment, the epic no longer functions as sacred monument immune to interrogation; it becomes a contested archive. *Randamoozham* participates in this postmodern mythopoesis by entering the epic from within and unsettling its certainties without dismantling its structure. Nair does not discard the Mahabharata; he provincializes its Brahmanical center by re-narrating it through a consciousness historically subordinated within its own framework.

Bhima’s narration operates as metadiegesis, a story emerging from inside the victorious camp, yet quietly resistant to its authority. He repeatedly acknowledges the gap between lived experience and epic memory. “The world saw only what it wished to see,” he remarks (Nair 134), suggesting that history is curated rather than neutral. Glory is distributed selectively; silence is institutional. By foregrounding this selective visibility, the novel exposes the mechanisms through which canonical authority is produced.

The demythologization of Krishna into strategist and of Rakshasas into forest tribes is not merely narrative innovation; it is ideological critique. When Bhima reflects that Arjuna’s renown depended upon Krishna’s presence “Without Krishna, Arjuna would not have been what the world made him” (134), the remark destabilizes the divine aura surrounding victory. Heroism is mediated, and mediation is political. Similarly, the so-called demons cease to be ontological threats and emerge as communities

rendered monstrous by naming. In revisiting Hidimbi and Baka without supernatural distortion, Nair reveals how myth naturalizes exclusion.

Power, rather than divine inevitability, structures events. The dice game unfolds not as cosmic design but as calculated manipulation. Bhima recognizes that what followed was not fate but consequence. The war that ensues is not ordained; it is engineered through pride, ambition, and strategic blindness. Even the climactic Mahaprasthanā is divested of transcendental closure. Draupadi's collapse is described in physiological terms "her breath grew faint in the thin air" (302), erasing moral allegory. Mortality replaces mythic ascent. The epic's teleology fractures; human finitude prevails. In converting gods into tacticians and demons into marginalized subjects, Nair performs reclamation rather than erasure. The counter-epic does not reject the Mahabharata; it restores to it the density of lived consequence. Bhima, once instrumental presence, becomes remembering subject. His voice reclaims narrative space from canonical abstraction.

The permanence of the epic lies not in immutability but in reinterpretation. *Randamoozham* demonstrates that myth survives precisely because it can be re-entered, questioned and revoiced. Through Bhima's retrospective consciousness, the epic reveals its own fault lines. What had been celebrated as divine orchestration emerges as human arrangement; contingent, political, and ethically unstable. In granting speech to the marginal within the monumental, Nair transforms epic inheritance into dialogic terrain.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*Randamoozham* does not dismantle the Mahabharata; it repositions it. What had long functioned as cosmic allegory becomes, in Nair's hands, a chronicle of embodied lives negotiating power, kinship and survival. The dialectic that structures the novel - Purana as lived, historical reality and plot as ideological accretion - allows the epic to be read not as transcendental revelation but as sedimented memory. The gods recede; the consequences remain.

By relocating narrative authority to Bhima, Nair alters not only perspective but ontology. The warrior once celebrated for brute strength acquires interiority. "They valued my strength, nothing more" (Nair 48) becomes emblematic of a larger reclamation: the reduction of Bhima in canonical memory is reversed through reflective speech. He is no longer spectacle; he is witness. His body carries forests, wars, and vows; his mind registers

humiliation, desire, and grief. Strength, in this retelling, coexists with vulnerability. The epic's supernatural scaffolding is methodically humanized. Krishna's foresight becomes strategy; demonhood becomes political labeling; ascension becomes exhaustion. Draupadi's fall is marked not by karmic calculus but by breath thinning in mountain air (302). The dice game is not fate unfolding but pride misjudged. Even Ghatotkacha's death, stripped of sacrificial grandeur, reveals a father confronting still flesh "enormous and still" (243). These moments do not desacralize the epic; they relocate sanctity within experience.

In demythologizing the narrative, Nair does not reduce its magnitude. Rather, he deepens it. By exposing the ideological constructions that have encased the Mahabharata, he reveals the epic's enduring vitality: its capacity to bear reinterpretation without disintegration. The celestial ornamentation that once shielded its characters from scrutiny gives way to psychological density. What remains is not diminished but clarified. The epic survives not because miracles validate it, but because it continues to mirror the contradictions of human life; ambition entwined with loyalty, strength shadowed by insecurity and love intersecting with hierarchy. In restoring Bhima's voice, *Randamoozham* restores to the Mahabharata its most radical possibility: that beneath divine rhetoric lies the drama of mortal beings striving, erring, enduring. The human, once obscured by myth, becomes the epic's most persistent truth.

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