

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Randamoozham," written by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, is a Malayalam novel that offers a unique retelling of the Indian epic Mahabharata. The story is narrated from the perspective of Bhima, the second Pandava. The title "Randamoozham" translates to "The Second Turn," signifying the alternate viewpoint presented in the novel.

The narrative begins with an older Bhima reminiscing about his life, relationships, and the events leading up to the Kurukshetra War. The novel explores Bhima's emotions, struggles, and his complex relationships with his brothers, especially Yudhishtira, and Draupadi, the shared wife of the Pandavas.

One of the distinctive features of "Randamoozham" is its exploration of the human side of the characters, delving into their vulnerabilities, conflicts, and moral dilemmas. Bhima, traditionally depicted as a symbol of physical strength, is portrayed with depth, showcasing his internal battles and personal growth.

The novel also addresses broader themes such as power dynamics, morality, and the consequences of actions. M.T. Vasudevan Nair challenges conventional interpretations of the Mahabharata, offering readers a fresh perspective on the epic.

"Randamoozham" has received critical acclaim for its narrative richness, character development, and the author's ability to bring a new dimension to a well-known mythological tale. It stands as a significant work in Malayalam literature and has been translated into several languages, contributing to its recognition as a literary masterpiece.

AUTHOR

M. T. Vasudevan Nair, born on August 9, 1933, in Kudallur, Kerala, India, is a renowned Indian author, screenwriter, and filmmaker. He began his literary career with the publication of his short story "Vishuvaghosham" in 1948. Nair gained widespread recognition with his debut

novel, "Naalukettu" (The Legacy), published in 1958, which explored the socio-cultural changes in Kerala during the transition from the feudal system.

Over the years, M. T. Vasudevan Nair has become a prolific writer, contributing significantly to Malayalam literature. His notable works include "Asuravithu," "Manju," and the widely acclaimed "Randamoozham," a reinterpretation of the Mahabharata from the perspective of Bhima.

Apart from his literary achievements, Nair has made significant contributions to Indian cinema as a screenwriter and director. His screenplay for the historical epic "Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha" (1989) received widespread acclaim. He also directed films like "Nirmalyam" (1973) and "Mathilukal" (1990).

M. T. Vasudevan Nair has been honored with numerous awards, including the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary honor, in 1995. His works reflect a deep understanding of human relationships, societal dynamics, and the cultural ethos of Kerala. Nair's multifaceted career has left an indelible mark on the literary and cinematic landscape of India.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair is a script writer and director of Malayalam films. He has directed seven films and written the screenplay for around 54 films. He won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay four times for: Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha (1989), Kadavu (1991), Sadayam (1992), and Parinayam (1994), which is the most by anyone in the screenplay category. He was awarded the highest literary award in India, Jnanpith, in 1995 for his overall contribution to Malayalam literature. In 2005, India's third highest civilian honour Padma Bhushan was awarded to him. He has won numerous other awards and recognition including Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Vayalar Award, Vallathol Award, Ezhuthachan Award, Mathrubhumi Literary Award and O. N. V. Literary Award. He was awarded the J.C. Daniel Award for lifetime achievement in Malayalam cinema for the year 2013. He served as the editor of Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly for several years. In 2022, he was honoured with the maiden Kerala Jyothi Award, the highest civilian award given by the Kerala Government.

- **Early life and family**

Vasudevan was born in 1933 at Kudallur, a small village in Anakkara panchayat in Pattambi Taluk at northwestern tip of Palakkad district, which shares boundary with Malappuram district on three sides. His native place fell under Malabar District in erstwhile Madras Presidency of the British Raj. He was the youngest of four children born to T. Narayanan Nair and Ammalu Amma. His father was in Ceylon and he spent his early days in Kudallur and in his father's house in Punneyurkulam, a village in the present day Thrissur district. He completed his schooling from Malamakkavu Elementary School and Kumaranelloor High School. He had to

break education after high school, and when he joined college in 1949, he was advised to opt for the science stream as it was felt that a degree in science secured a job faster than any other degree. He obtained a degree in chemistry from Victoria College, Palakkad in 1953. He taught mathematics in Pattambi Board High School and Chavakkad Board High School for over a year and worked in M.B. Tutorial College, Palakkad during 1955–56. He also worked as a gramasevakan at a block development office in Taliparamba, Kannur for a few weeks before joining Mathrubhumi Weekly as subeditor in 1957.

MT has been married twice. He married writer and translator Prameela in 1965. They separated after 11 years of marriage. He has a daughter from this marriage, Sithara, who works as a business executive in the United States. In 1977 he married dance artist Kalamandalam Saraswathy[13] with whom he has a daughter, dancer Aswathy Nair. MT resides in Sithara, Kottaram Road, Kozhikode, named after his eldest daughter.

- **Literary career**

MT began writing at a very young age, inspired by his elder brothers who wrote time and again in several literary journals and poet Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri who was his senior at high school. He initially wrote poems but soon changed to prose writing. His first published work was an essay on the diamond industry of ancient India, titled "Pracheenabharathathile Vaira Vyavasayam", which appeared in Keralakshemam, a biweekly published by C. G. Nair from Guruvayoor. His first story "Vishuvaghosham" was published in Madras-based Chitrakeralam magazine in 1948. The story which explores the feelings of a boy too poor to have crackers of his own, as he stands listening to the sounds of crackers coming from the houses of the rich celebrating the new year festival of Vishu: an overwhelming sense of loss, the painful realization that this is the way things are and the way they're likely to stay. His first book, Raktham Puranda Manaltharikal was published in 1952.

MT's first literary prize came to him while he was a student at Victoria College, Palakkad - his short story "Valarthumrigangal" (Pet Animals) won first prize in the World Short Story Competition conducted by The New York Herald Tribune, Hindustan Times and Mathrubhumi in 1954. It was a short story delineating the pathetic plight of circus artistes. The numerous stories that followed dealt with themes culled from widely different milieus and contexts but were uniformly successful and popular.

The noted collections of his stories are *Iruttinte Athmavu*, *Olavum Theeravum*, *Bandhanam*, *Varikkuzhi*, *Dare-e-Salam*, *Swargam Thurakkunna Samayam*, *Vaanaprastham* and *Sherlock*. "*Iruttinte Athmavu*" ("*Soul of Darkness*"), one of the most celebrated among his short stories, is the heart wrenching story of a 21-year-old man, regarded as a lunatic by everyone and treated abominably. The story reveals the insanity behind the civilised and supposedly sane world. The story "*Sherlock*" moves between the rural milieu familiar to MT's readers and the sophisticated world of Indian immigrants in the US, highlighting the contrast between them with subtle irony. MT wrote passionately of the cruelty hidden at the heart of a seemingly idyllic rural life ("*Kurukkante Kalyanam*" or "*The Jackal's Wedding*" and "*Shilalikhithangal*" or "*Stone Inscriptions*") and of the privations endured by those dependent on the agricultural cycle ("*Karkitakom*" and "*Pallivalum Kalchilambum*" or "*Sacred Sword and Anklets*"). In the story "*Vanaprastham*", he studies the delicately balanced relationship between a teacher and a student that has miraculously survived the years.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair is of the opinion that short story is a genre in which a writer can achieve near perfection. He, along with T. Padmanabhan, serve as bridges between the early modern short story writers in Malayalam, of the so-called renaissance, and the new short story of the late fifties and sixties.

- **Film career**

M. T. Vasudevan Nair is one of the most distinguished and well accepted script writers and directors in Malayalam cinema. He has directed seven films and written the screenplay for around 54 films. He won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay four times for: *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989), *Kadavu* (1991), *Sadayam* (1992), and *Parinayam* (1994), which is the most by anyone in the screenplay category.

MT wrote his first screenplay, in 1965 for *Murappennu*, at the behest of producer Shobhana Parameswaran Nair. The film was an adaptation of his story "*Snehathinte Mukhangal*". The Hindu described it as "a well-made film with a compelling plot" and as "one of the most significant films in the history of Malayalam cinema".

MT was the first and foremost script writer in Malayalam who wrote screenplays after having learnt cinema as a distinctive visual art which has its own language, grammar and structure. It was only after he began writing screenplays the Malayali viewers began to consider film script as a distinctive genre which has its own genuine features. Also, it was M.T who elevated this medium of writing as a literary form.

MT's screenplays have won social attention for the portrayal of the social and cultural crisis in the contemporary life of Kerala. The disintegration of human values and relationship

which creates identity crisis, sense of loss, dehumanisation, alienation from one's own surroundings, etc. have been presented in its depth by MT more than any other writers. The best examples are Kanyakumari, Varikkuzhi, Vilkkannundu Swapnangal, Sadayam, Asuravithu, Edavazhiyile Poocha Mindappoocha, Aksharangal, Aalkkoottathil Thaniye, Aaroodam etc. A salient aspect of MT's screenplays is the effective presentation of the ecological or geographical factors and elements making use of the visual possibilities of their portrayal. Another unique feature is the language employed in them. Some of his screenplays are known for giving new interpretations to historical characters and historical stories. For instance, he gives the legends woven around the popular story of Perumthachan a new interpretation in his screenplay, based on his own assessment of Perumthachan's character.[29] According to the folklore Vadakkanpattu (Northern Ballads), Chandu is said to have betrayed his cousin because he was jealous of Aaromal's popularity and abilities. But MT's Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha presents an alternative version of the same legend, as it presents the incident from Chandu's perspective, suggesting that grave injustice has been done to Chandu by wrongly accusing him of replacing the rivets.

In 1973, M. T. Vasudevan Nair made his directorial debut with Nirmalyam which won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film. The film is about a village oracle whose services are no longer needed by the community and whose family begins to fall apart. MT scripted and directed many more films including the award-winning Bandhanam, Kadavu and Oru Cheru Punchiri. Kadavu won awards at the Singapore International Film Festival and Tokyo International Film Festival. His cinema work also includes three documentaries and one TV series. He has written songs for the 1981 film Valarthumrugangal which were set to tune by M. B. Sreenivasan.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair was the chairman of Indian Panorama of the 46th National Film Awards (1998). He has also been a member of Film Finance Corporation, National Film Development Corporation and Film Censoring Committee. He has also served as a faculty in the Film and Television Institute, Pune.

- **Literary style and themes**

MT was born and brought up in a sylvan village on the banks of Nila. The writer has so often acknowledged his indebtedness to the ethos of his village and to Nila which has ever been the mainspring of his creative inspiration. Nila occurs and re-occurs in MT's fiction, as a presence and as a symbol, endorsing this view. The staple locale of his fiction is the Valluvanadan village. The landscape and ethos of the Valluvanad region and the transformations undergone by them in the course of the century, involving relics of the tarawad

and the communal tensions provide a challenging theme for the highly evocative style of Vasudevan Nair's narrative art. The temporal milieu of MT's fiction stretches over the second half of the twentieth century, a period of tremendous social, cultural and economic changes.

It was in the sixties that MT rose to prominence as a writer. The phase of social realism had come to an end. In his opinion, class-war the ideal which had inspired the writers belonging to the preceding generation had almost lost its relevance by the time he entered the literary career. The prominent Malayalam writers of the pre-independence phase—Thakazhi, Vallathol and Kesavadev—were all stimulated by the progressive leftist ideals. They focussed their attention on social conflict as the theme for their writings—Conflict between capital and labour, between the landlord and the tenant, between the oppressor and the oppressed. MT felt that this theme of conflict was an outdated phenomenon in the context of present Kerala. The protagonists of MT are men out of society and at war with themselves, a sharp contrast to the heroes of Kesavadev or Thakazhi who fight a losing war against the hostile forces in the society. MT, in spite of his broad and deep sympathy for the marginalized, doesn't identify himself with any particular political ideology or movement.

- **Awards and honours**

1989: Best Screenplay – Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha

1991: Best Screenplay – Kadavu

1991: Best Feature Film in Malayalam – Kadavu

1992: Best Screenplay – Sadayam

1994: Best Screenplay – Parinayam

2000: Best Film on Environment Conservation/Preservation – Oru Cheru Punchiri

Kerala State Film Awards

1970: Best Screenplay – Olavum Theeravum

1973: Best Film – Nirmalayam

1973: Best Director – Nirmalayam

1973: Best Screenplay – Nirmalayam

1978: Best Film – Bandhanam

1980: Best Story – Oppol

1981: Best Screenplay – Thrishna, Valarthu Mrigangal

1983: Best Story – Aaroodam

1985: Best Story – Anubandham

1986: Best Screenplay – Panchagni, Nakhakshathangal

1987: Best Screenplay – Amrutham Gamaya

1989: Best Screenplay – Oru Vadakkan Veeragadha

1990: Best Screenplay – Perumthachan

1991: Best Film – Kadavu

1991: Best Director – Kadavu

1991: Best Screenplay – Kadavu

1994: Best Story – Sukrutham

1994: Best Screenplay – Parinayam

1998: Best Screenplay – Daya

2000: Best Director – Oru Cheru Punchiri

2009: Best Screenplay – Pazhassi Raja

Kerala Film Critics Association Awards

1978: Best Screenplay – Bandhanam

1980: Best Screenplay – Vilkanundu Swapnangal

1981: Best Story – Valarthumrugangal

1982: Best Story – Vaarikuzhi

1984: Best Screenplay – Aalkkoottathil Thaniye

1985: Best Screenplay – Anubandham

1985: Best Story – Anubandham

1994: Best Screenplay – Sukrutham

1997: Best Screenplay – Ennu Swantham Janakikutty

Other film awards

1991: Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award – South

1992: Singapore International Film Festival - Special Jury Award – Kadavu

1992: Tokyo International Film Festival - Asia Future Prize – Kadavu

1996: Kerala State Television Award – Naalukettu

2003: Asianet Film Awards – Lifetime Achievement Award

2016: Asianet Film Awards – Lifetime Achievement Award

2013: J. C. Daniel Award by the Government of Kerala