

Bhima

Bhima's story originates in the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is a Hindu epic that emphasizes family conflict between great warriors and lessons are embedded throughout the epic. Bhima was the second of the Pandava brothers and as George Mason William states, "Bhima (the terrible) was the product of his mother's union with Vayu, the wind god. Bhima had a terrible temper but was courageous and a great warrior" (G.M. Williams 84). His appetite was so large that when the Pandavas would have supper he would eat half of the family's food. He was married to Hidimba and the brother's joint wife Drapaudi. Of the five Pandava brothers, he had the most strength and greatest appetite.

In the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, challenged Yudishthira to a game of dice. Yudishthira accepted the challenge and during the game he lost all that he possessed: his lands, his kingdom, his brothers, himself, and eventually even Drapaudi who was dragged out by her hair and nearly stripped naked by Duryodhana, before she invoked Krsna who came to her rescue (D. Williams 31). Bhima had vowed to avenge the humiliation of Drapaudi caused by Duryodhana (G.M Williams 84). Yudishthira then agreed to a final game of dice in which he lost. The Pandavas and Drapaudi were condemned to spend twelve years in exile in the forest and a thirteenth year in an unknown place disguised so that they cannot be recognized (D. Williams 31). Bhima was furious towards Yudishthira for gambling away everything he owned.

During the exile, Bhima saved his family from a burning house and subdued demons to stop them from molesting humankind (G.M. Williams 84). One day in the forest Drapaudi found a thousand-petaled golden lotus and asked Bhima to bring her more of these flowers (Lutgendorf 173). Bhima then climbed the Himalayas in search of the flower and encountered a monkey blocking his path. Bhima yelled at the monkey to move but the monkey continued to lay there and suggested that Bhima lift his tail off the path in order to pass. When he tried to heave the tail off of the ground it would not budge and then the monkey revealed himself as Hanuman, the monkey god and Bhima's half brother. Here Bhima learns a lesson as described by Philip Lutgendorf, "Hanuman warns him against wanton acts of violence, and tells him the secrets of Kubera's Lake" (Lutgendorf 174). While in exile, Bhima defeated the demon Hidimba and married the demon's sister Hidimbi as his second wife. He had a honeymoon for a year with Hidimbi by day and every night he would return to be with the Pandava brothers' joint wife Drapaudi. Then Bhima and Hidimbi had a child, whom they called Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha was a giant and he swore to come to the aid of his father whenever necessary (D. Williams 32).

When the thirteenth year of the Pandavas' exile arrived, they had to disguise themselves and they all found refuge at the court of King Virata. Bhima was known as a great cook and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari comments on Bhima's disguise and skill at cooking, "Bhima decided to become the king's cook, and to please him with mouth-watering new dishes, assuming the name of Vallabha" (Rajagopalachari 68). While the Pandavas were in disguise, a general in King Virata's court became infatuated with Drapaudi

and pursued her through great lengths. David Williams describes how Bhima protected Drapaudi after being threatened by the general, “Drapaudi implores the mighty Bhima to help her; so he goes in her stead to a secret rendezvous, and pulverizes the over-amorous general” (D. Williams 33).

After the thirteen year long exile the Pandavas came out of hiding and a great war was fought between the Pandavas and Kauravas. In this war, Bhima played a large role and killed many men. Ghatotkacha, Bhima’s son, fought alongside his troops of Rakshasas and they destroyed the enemy by the thousands. Duryodhana was angered by this and sent his close friend Karna to kill Ghatotkacha. Karna had trouble killing Ghatotkacha until he used the Shakti, a mighty weapon that could only be used once, and it pierced through the chest of Ghatotkacha. Bhima, who had a terrible temper, was infuriated by his son’s death. Only the soothing words of Yudishthira could calm his rage (Rajagopalachari 118). On the battlefield Duryodhana chose Bhima for a duel which Chakravarti Rajagopalachari described, “Duryodhana rushed at Bhima. The deadly maces clashed and sparks shot out. The duel was equally poised. They fought well and long and other outcome remained uncertain. They both were the masters of the art of mace-fighting” (Rajagopalachari 135). During the fight Krsna hinted to Bhima to strike Duryodhana’s thigh. As George Mason Williams reports, “Bhima had to resort to an unfair blow from his war club, which crushed his cousin’s thigh, and then he kicked his despised foe brutally as he lay wounded” (G.M. Williams 84). This fight demonstrated that Bhima was true to his word in seeking revenge for Drapaudi even if it meant fighting dirty. Balarama, who taught Duryodhana to fight with

a mace, was furious at the cheap shot dealt by Bhima. In his fury he charged at Bhima ready to strike and avenge the death of Duryodhana. Then Krsna rushed in and defended Bhima and said he had just redeemed his pledge made in the presence of Drapaudi (Rajagopalachari 136).

The Pandavas went on to win the war and ruled the kingdom under Yudishthira. Years later, when most of their relatives were dead, the Pandavas entered a yogic state and set out for the north (O'Flaherty 53). When it was Bhima's turn to approach the gates of heaven, he fell and asked King Yudishthira why he has fallen. Wendy Doninger O'Flaherty states Yudishthira's response to Bhima, "You ate too much, and boasted about your vital energy, and despised your enemy. That is why you have fallen to the ground" (O'Flaherty 54).

Bhima was a great warrior; he was loyal to his wives and lived a *dharmic* life aside from striking Duryodhana below the navel. He did not reach heaven because of his large appetite, his overconfident nature and his hatred towards his enemies. As George Mason Williams states, "Despite one episode that tarnished his record, more than a hundred stories made Bhima an example of raw courage and strength, fighting to follow the way of a righteous warrior" (G.M. Williams 84).

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