

Pāṇḍavas were the sons of Pāṇḍu and his wives Kuntī and Mādri. Dharmaputra, Bhīma and Arjuna were the sons of Kuntī, and Nakula and Sahadeva of Mādri.¹

Kuntī directed a mantra gifted to her by Durvāsas towards Vāyubhagavān (the wind-god) and the result was the birth of Bhīma. Hence he is called Vāyu-putra (son of the wind-god). At the time of his birth a celestial voice announced that the boy would grow up to be the strongest among the strong. (Ādi Parva, Chapter 122, Verse 14). On the tenth day after birth the child Bhīma fell from his mother's lap on a rock. Bhīma was not injured in any manner by that fall, although it crushed the rock into power. (This story is told in the southern texts of the Mahābhārata in Chapter 132 of Ādi Parva). The naming ceremony of the child was performed by the Mahārṣi, who stayed at Śataśrṅga. Kaśyapa Mahārṣi, family priest of Vasudeva performed the ceremonies like wearing of the sacred thread. Bhīma learned fighting with the gadā (club or mace) from Śuka, the famous Rājarsi.

The Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas spent their childhood in Hastināpura. Droṇācārya taught them fighting with weapons. The Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas often engaged themselves in children's games. In all such games Bhīma used to hurt and defeat the Kauravas, and to this fact the unending hatred of the Kauravas towards Bhīma owed its origin. Once they administered poison to Bhīma who fell down unconscious, and then they threw him into the depths of the Gaṅgā (Ganges). Going deeper and deeper in the waters Bhīma, at last, reached the Nāgaloka, where the nāgas (serpents) bit him which neutralized the effects of the poison in his body. There he got acquainted with a nāga called Āryaka, who introduced him to Vāsuki, king of the nāgas, and Vāsuki presented him with much wealth and other costly gems. But, what use was all this wealth to Bhīma? Then Vāsuki agreed to give him a divine drink, which would give the user of it the strength of thousand elephants. Bhīma drank at one draught eight pot-fulls of that divine drink, and thus became tremendously strong. But, he had to wait in Nāgaloka for eight days so that the drink might be thoroughly assimilated, and on the ninth day the nāgas saw him off in all pomp and splendour. Bhīma returned to his mother and brothers and consoled them, who were terribly anxious at his absence.

When the training of the princes in the use of weapons was over a competition or test was conducted. Duryodhana and Bhīma entered into a 'club-fight', and when Karṇa tried to intervene in the fight his nobility was questioned by Bhīma. Duryodhana then insulted Bhīma. Arjuna agreed to present King Drupada before Droṇācārya as gurudakṣiṇā to him. In the fierce war the Pāṇḍavas fought with Drupada, Bhīma annihilated the elephant division of the latter's army. And, afterwards Bhīma underwent higher training in club-war at the hands of Balabhadrarāma. (Ādi Parva, Chapter 136, Verse 4).

3) *The Pāṇḍavas left Hastināpura.* As enmity between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas began growing stronger and stronger, Duryodhana, with his father's permission, removed the Pāṇḍavas to vāraṇāvata and settled them there. They were put up there in a palace specially

made of lac. The Pāṇḍavas divined the secret of it and escaped from the fire, when the palace was set fire to. Verse 10, Chapter 147 of the Ādi Parva states that it was Bhīma, who set fire to the palace. Escaping thus through a tunnel the Pāṇḍavas travelled a great distance in the forest. Kuntī and four of her sons got tired by the exertions of the travel and were forced to sit down for rest on the way. Bhīma, continued the journey carrying the mother and his four brothers on his shoulders. With their entry into Hiḍim̄ba forest the weakness left them, and they became their former selves.

4) *Hiḍim̄ba killed.* Kuntī devī and four sons slept under the shade of a tree at dusk, and Bhīma kept guard over them. There dwelt in the forest a Rākṣasa called Hiḍim̄ba with his sister, Hiḍimbī. Hiḍim̄ba looked around that particular day from the top of a tree, and detecting Bhīma his mouth watered. He deputed Hiḍimbī to bring Bhīma over to him. Hiḍimbī approached Bhīma, whose fine figure kindled feelings of love in her. She desired to have him as husband. Hiḍimbī having not returned even after a long time Hiḍim̄ba went over to the spot, and there finding Hiḍimbī in love-talks with Bhīma he got terribly angry. He wanted to kill Hiḍimbī. Bhīma, who could not suffer the killing of a woman in his presence rushed against Hiḍim̄ba. The noise of the fight awakened the other Pāṇḍavas from sleep, and at the instance of Arjuna, Bhīma killed Hiḍim̄ba. Thus rendered helpless and forlorn Hiḍimbī again craved Bhīma for love. On the suggestion of Kuntī, whose heart melted at the sight of Hiḍimbī's helplessness Bhīma took her as his wife. But, one condition was stipulated for their enjoying the honey-moon. The condition was that they might enjoy honey-moon, from dawn to dusk in the sky and on mountain tops, Hiḍimbī, who was endowed with magic powers carrying Bhīma with her. And, after dusk Bhīma was to be returned to Kuntī. Accordingly Bhīma and Hiḍimbī spent one year, and to them was born a son called Ghaṭotkaca. Promising that he shall return when wanted, Ghaṭotkaca with his mother went into the forest. The Pāṇḍavas also left for the village called Ekacakrā. (Ādi Parva, Chapters 147-154).

5) *Killing of Baka and the wedding of Pāñcālī.* While at Ekacakrā Bhīma killed the Rākṣasa called Baka and freed the people of the village from their distress. Afterwards the Pāṇḍavas attended the Svayamvara (free choice of the husband by woman) of Pāñcālī, who became their wife. There Bhīma defeated Śalya in fight. And, the Pāṇḍavas duly returned to Hastināpura. (For details see Baka, Pāñcālī and Arjuna).

6) *Again to forest.* On their return to Hastināpura the Pāṇḍavas took their residence in the palace built by Maya. There Maya presented a magnificent club to Bhīma. (Sabhā Parva, Chapter 3, Verse 18). It was Śrī Kṛṣṇa, lord of Dvārakā who served as the right hand of the Pāṇḍavas. Jarāsandha, who was then King of Magadha fought with Kṛṣṇa eighteen times and got defeated. Yet he did not yield, and at last Kṛṣṇa decided to do away with him. Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Bhīma, in disguise, set out for Magadha. They entered Jarāsandha's palace and challenged him to a duel. Bhīma and Jarāsandha clashed, and at the instance of Kṛṣṇa Bhīma rent the latter in two and threw him on the ground. Though Jarāsandha was alive again, Bhīma rent him

¹ The Pāṇḍavas were not in fact direct issues of Pāṇḍu. For details see Kuntī.