

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the seventeenth part of the serial article, continuation from Dec 2024 edition.

Bhima reached in and grabbed the demon, lifted him off the ground and got a good grip on him with his hands. With a flex of his muscles and a twist of wrists he crushed Hidimba to death. No *rākṣasa* ever thought that a human could do such a thing. Hidimbi was all admiration for her potential husband, “This guy is not only so beautiful, he is very powerful.” Hidimbi was an intelligent beast, and she knew just what she needed to do. She gave up Bhima; she did not talk to him at all. She talked to his mother, “You are a woman. You know very well what I am feeling. I want to marry your Bhima.” Then Hidimbi turned to Yudhisthira and asked him not to destroy her chance for life. Hidimbi had heard Bhima say that Yudhisthira was like a god to him, and she thought it was a good idea to appeal to Bhima’s older brother. Like an arranged marriage, you know. The family members were amused, but Kunti was also moved by the lovely girl.

Kunti asked Bhima, “This girl seems very sincere, very genuine. Why should you not marry her?” Bhima did not answer anything – that meant Bhima wanted to marry her. But Yudhisthira, the elder son, was still a bachelor; Bhima should not marry before his older brother. Kunti said, “Bhima does not seem to be averse to this marriage. Let him marry.”

Yudhisthira looked at the other brothers and asked them what they thought. “Yes, why not,” they chimed. Arjuna and Nakula and Sahadeva said why not. Then they looked at Bhima. Bhima looked elsewhere. He kicked the stones at his feet.

“I think our brother wants to get married, “ said Arjuna. Everybody was for it. It was settled, and Bhima and Hidimbi married. Hidimbi knew well the whole forest, and she set up a lovely cottage where they all lived for some time. Vyasa, the guiding force, would show up occasionally, and he came to the forest and

talked to Yudhisthira.

“Good days are ahead for you, Yudhisthira,” said Vyasa, “You will perform *rājasūya* and *Ashvamedha yāga*, and you will rule this kingdom. In-between there will be some problems, but the end will work out well for you. Stay here for the time being, for Bhima will bear a son here. After that it will be time for you all to leave this place and go to Ekachakra.”

In time the boy Ghatotkaca was born to Bhima and Hidimbi. Even as a baby, as a child, Ghatotkaca had great strength. He was destined to be a force and very useful. He could and would appear whenever Bhima thought of him. He had all the powers of a *rākṣasa*; we will see him in the war to come. He was a major force to reckon with. We also get to see how Hidimbi took and showed Bhima all the wonders of the forest she lived in. She made Bhima’s life very happy, but the day came when the Pandavas had to leave. Vyasa had said that they would have to go on. Accounts had to be settled, and the Kaurava cousins had to be punished. Bhima broke the news to Hidimbi that he was going to leave her and the boy behind. He consoled her and assured her that he would ask for them to come and join him in good time.

The news had traveled to Hastinapura that the Pandavas were all dead. It was also said that Purocana had died in the wax-house fire. This was not bad news for Duryodhana because now there was no way Purocana could reveal their secret. The remains of what looked like seven burnt bodies had been found in the ashes. Dhrtarashtra escalated his grief, crying and moaning about the cruel fate of his beloved brother’s sons and their mother. He wondered out loud why Lord Shiva, whom the Pandavas prayed to, had not protected the Pandavas. Didn’t Shiva have enough *vibhūti*? Dhrtarashtra’s lamenting went on and on. Dhrtarashtra carefully had the rites performed at Ganga, and he distributed alms and made sure that the rituals were followed. Krpa was sincerely unhappy, and Bhishma was beside himself. It was very difficult to console Bhishma, and Vidura took him aside at the Ganges and told him there was no need to ritually offer anything to

his grandsons.

“Why not,” asked Bhishma.

“Because the Pandavas are not dead. They are alive,” said Vidura. Vidura shared the whole plan hatched by Dhrtarashtra and Duryodhana and Shakuni. “I have done what had to be done to make the family safe,” assured Vidura. Bhishma was very happy, and he praised Vidura’s foresight - having the Pandava survival remain undisclosed. The false knowledge that they were dead was a good idea. Not knowing any better, Duryodhana and his one hundred brothers were all very happy that the Pandavas had been taken care of. Now nothing seemed to stand in their way.

The five Pandava brothers and their mother made their way to the village Ekachakra and were taken in by a Brahmana. The Brahmana mother of two children was very kind to the Pandavas, but she was also very unhappy. The woman was preparing an massive quantity of food when Kunti asked, “Are you preparing food for a feast? Why is there so much?”

“No, no, no,” said the Brahmana lady, “this food is to be sent away. There is one *rākṣasa*, a demon named Bakasura, who lives on the outskirts, in the forest near the village. He eats human flesh; he insists on eating human flesh. He used to come and attack and kill recklessly. Everyone in town agreed that we would cook a cartful of food and send it to the demon every month. We would offer the *rākṣasa* the food along with the fellow who drove the cart. The families in town select the cart driver in turn. The turn has come to our house, and one of us has to be sent as an offering with the prepared food. My husband said he would go. I said I would go. Our children said they should be sent, but there is no way a child would satisfy this demon. The childrens’ father decided he had to go so that the village would again be spared.”

Kunti, seeing the distressed family, in her compassion said to the Brahmana woman, “I have five sons. I will send one of them. You don’t worry. In fact, I have

a son who is enormously strong; you might have seen him. This boy, my son, may just do something to that *rākṣasa*. He may get rid of the problem for good. Therefore I will send him. Even if he gets killed, I don't mind because I cannot bear to see you so sad. I have five children, and I will do this for you." Of course Kunti knew that Bhima could very well take care of any *rākṣasa*, even this Bakasura.

When Bhima heard about his assignment, all he could think of was the cart-load of fresh food. "When, when, when?" asked Bhima. Tomorrow, he was told. "Why not today?" he wanted to know. Bhima had to wait all night; he could not sleep. In the meantime Yudhisthira came to know what Kunti had asked Bhima to do. Yudhisthira was afraid that Bhima could get killed - there are *rākṣasas* and there are *rākṣasas*. For the first time Yudhisthira was angry with his mother.

"How can you promise this?" demanded Yudhisthira, "Do you think I can live without Bhima? Bhima and Arjuna are our hope. Without them how can we get back at Duryodhana? Bhima is the most affectionate person; you cannot afford to sacrifice him. How can you send Bhima?"

Kunti said, "There is no other way. We have been given shelter here. We should free this village from its problem. These people need to be saved from this horror. You must know what Bhima can do. I know what he can do. You need not be worried. He will take care of the whole thing."

Bhima was confident, "So what about one *rākṣasa*. This is a good chance for me. Let me go after him." The next day the cart was ready, and Bhima was ready. He had been up since early morning, and he took off with the cart toward the pond where he was supposed to meet the demon. Above, on a hill, the *rākṣasa* would be watching to see that the cart had come. Bhima released the bullocks from the cart, and they began grazing nearby. Bhima eyed the cart and, of course, decided he was hungry and began eating the whole thing.

To be continued...