

THE MAHABHARATA

Mahabharata means 'the great tale of the Bharata dynasty', where the term 'Maha' means great. This sacred epic derived its name by combining the Sanskrit word 'Maha' with the Hindi word 'Bharat'. Bharat is the name given to India. Therefore, the name Mahabharata not only signifies a great story of the Bharata Dynasty but also means India being Great.

The Mahabharata is an orally- transmitted story from about the 8th or 9th century BC and its written form was only finalized in about the 4th century AD. The story was compiled by Vyasa who also appears in the story. □ The Mahabharata, also called, The Kurukshetra War is a war described in the Hindu-epic, Mahabharata.

The Previous Generations King Vichitravirya of the Hastinapura Kingdom passed away before having any sons, so Vyasa, who was his stepbrother, was arranged to impregnate the king's two wives and a maid. Thus three sons were born. Dhritarashtra was the son of the first wife, Pandu was the son of the second wife, and Vidur was the son of the maid.

THE BEGINNING The story begins in the age of the ruler Bharata. During his time, the world is full of people following dharma. (individual's duty fulfilled by observance of custom or law) But the most important part of the lineage is the two brothers born one is Dhrtarastra, who would become king were he not born blind, and the other is the younger Pandu, who indeed does become king. Dhrtarastra is born 100 sons by his wife Gandhari, and Pandu is born five sons by a variety of women, each the incarnate of a god: Arjuna, Bhima, Yudhishthira, Nakula, and Sahadeva. A sixth brother, Karna is born in secret and raised by a Suta (Sutas are artists or storytellers of some type.) despite, like his brothers, being born into the Ksatriya caste. Dhrtarastra's son Duryodhana leads the other 99 brothers, and has a seething hatred for the Pandavas, or Pandu's sons. Both Yudhishthira and Duryodhana are granted kingdoms by Dhrtarastra.

Kunti and Madri- Pandu's wives PANDU FIVE SONS

- ☐ Arjuna
- ☐ Bhīma
- ☐ Yudhishthira
- ☐ Nakula
- ☐ Sahadeva

DHRTARASTRA'S SON

- ☐ Duryodhana leads the other 99 brother
- ☐ Gandhari- DHRTARASTRA'S wife

Dhrtarastra's sons are all demons, led by the most wicked one Duryodhana, tries many times to kill Pandu's son and, later, set Pandu's sons' house on fire to kill all five of them at once. Bhīma saves his brothers and mother from the fire, and this marks a shift from playful fighting between the cousins to a more acrimonious, warlike relationship. The five brothers marry the princess Draupadī. □ Dhrtarastra awards kingdoms to both Duryodhana and Yudhishthira.

Book 2: The Hall After Yudhishthira is consecrated as king, Duryodhana schemes to take his kingdom. So, Duryodhana challenges Yudhishthira to a dice game. Duryodhana implores Yudhishthira to participate, and Yudhishthira determines that it's his dharma to play despite being a terrible gambler. He gradually gambles away his entire kingdom and the freedom of his wife, but Dhrtarastra commands Duryodhana to give Yudhishthira one more change. Duryodhana agrees, saying that if Yudhishthira loses he and the other Pandavas must live in exile for 12 years and spend a 13th year in disguise, and if they're recognized, they must spend another 12 years in exile. Yudhishthira loses.

Book 3: The Forest

☐ *The brothers and Draupadī spend the 12 years of exile in the forest,. During this period of time, Arjuna is granted a celestial weapon by the god Indra. Draupadī is kidnapped and brought back.*

Book 4: Virata During their 13th year, the Pandavas take refuge in the king Virata's palace, posing as former subjects of Yudhishthira. Draupadī poses as a maidservant to maintain her independence. It's an eventful year, with a rape attempt on Draupadī that leads to Bhīma

slaughtering all of the aggressor's supporters and Arjuna helping Virata's son win back cattle from thieves. The brothers make it through the 13th year undetected despite these showy adventures

The Perseverance : Yudhisthira returns to take his kingdom back, but learns Duryodhana has no intention of turning it over. Duryodhana clearly wants war, but Krsna advises Yudhisthira to ask for a peaceful transfer of power first. Duryodhana denies this peaceful transfer, clearly desiring war despite being chided by everyone close to him. The two sides prepare for war. Krsna tells the Yudhisthira that even though he will equip Duryodhana with soldiers, he will side with the Pandavas.

Book 6: Bhishma

At the beginning of the battle Krsna recites the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna, explaining the tenets of dharma and action, and specifically Arjuna's duty to fight in this war with a preordained outcome. After a sustained conflict between Arjuna and Krsna, Arjuna finally kills Bhishma on the 10th day of the war, and Bhishma chooses to lay on a bed of arrows and delay the date of his death.

Book 7: Drona Drona, Arjuna's former military trainer, is appointed the new commander of Duryodhana's army. He is a fearsome fighter, so the Pandavas devise a plan to trick Drona into defying his dharma, making himself ready to die. Yudhisthira tells Drona that Bhima killed Asvatthaman, which is the name of Drona's son. In reality, Bhima killed an elephant named Asvatthaman. Drona flies into a fit of rage and violates his dharma by massacring soldiers he shouldn't kill. When he realizes what has happened, he lays down his arms and accepts his death.

Book 8: Karna Duryodhana begins to grasp that his campaign is doomed, but at Karna's request, he appoints Karna the new commander of his army. Karna and Arjuna meet on the battlefield in a bloody exchange, in which Karna is slowly brutalized and killed.

Book 9: Salva Salva is appointed the next and, ultimately, final commander of Duryodhana's army. He is quickly killed by Yudhisthira.

Duryodhana flees to hide in a lake, knowing the end of the war is imminent, but the Pandavas find him. Bhīma kills him in a match with clubs, using an unfair strike. Despite the protests of observers and Duryodhana himself, Kṛṣṇa ordains the strike, saying it was within Bhīma's dharma and that Duryodhana had acted in adharma by instigating the war.

Book 10: The Night-Raid

□ Among the handful of Kauravas surviving, Asvatthaman sneaks into the Pandavas' camp and massacres everyone in it, some of them in such a way that they do not die a proper warrior's death and can't attain heaven.

Book 11: The Women Yudhisthira visits Dhrtarastra, who is mourning over the death of all of his sons. Likewise, the Kauravas' wives confront Yudhisthira about massacring their husbands. When Dhrtarastra sees Bhīma, he tries to kill him, but Kṛṣṇa tricks Dhrtarastra into attacking an effigy of Bhīma instead. There is a funeral pyre for the Kauravas and then a ritual at the Ganga river. At the Ganga, Yudhisthira learns that Karna was his brother, and plunges into grief.

Book 12: Tranquility Yudhisthira is ambivalent about taking his throne, but agrees to it to honor Dhrtarastra. The Pandavas travel to visit the dying Bhīṣma, who asks for a pillow from Arjuna, but means that he wants more arrows to rest his head on. Bhīṣma begins a philosophical conversation with Yudhisthira on his duties as a king and the nature of dharma.

Book 13: Instruction Bhīṣma's and Yudhisthira's conversation continues, as they talk about how to live well and abide by dharma, as well as about women. Bhīṣma tells DHRTARASTRA'S that he should consider the Pandavas his own sons, and forget about his wicked sons that have gone to hell. Bhīṣma dies and is cremated.

Book 14: The Horse Sacrifice Yudhisthira hesitates to resume ruling, but Kṛṣṇa instructs him to undertake a horse sacrifice ritual to cleanse the world. Arjuna rides the white horse that will be sacrificed around the former sites of battle and fends off various aggressors. After the

journey, the horse and many other animals are sacrificed in a pyre, and the smoke from the horse's burning intestinal sac does the purifying.

Book 16: The Clubs Krsna is himself killed by a hunter named Jara, which is Sanskrit for "old age." He ascends and rejoins the gods. Without Krsna, Arjuna is unable to defend the Vrsni women from a kidnapping by a pack of thieves. He returns to tell his brothers of his defeat.

Book 17: The Great Journey With Krsna dead, Yudhishtira decides it is his time to die as well. He leaves the throne to Pariksit, and he and his brothers set out on a journey to travel the world. In the mountains, the brothers and Draupadi die one by one. When Yudhishtira is met by Indra to be taken in a chariot to heaven, Yudhishtira refuses to leave his dog behind, since it was loyal to him. The dog transforms into the god of dharma and praises Yudhishtira for his virtuousness.

Book 18: The Ascent to Heaven Yudhishtira only finds Duryodhana in heaven and is baffled. He demands to be taken to where his brothers are, so he is taken to hell. There, Yudhishtira says he will stay with his brothers instead of choosing to go to heaven. Indra informs him that this was the final test that he passed, and he and all the Pandavas are sent to heaven, while Duryodhana is condemned to hell.

Yudhishtira The eldest of the Pandava brothers, Yudhishtira is their leader as both king and commander in battle. A bad series of dice games he plays lands him, his wife, and his brothers in exile for 13 years, which precipitates a war between the Pandavas and Duryodhana. Yudhishtira is described as living fully by dharma, and in turn always has the gods on his side. □ *Arjuna* One of the Pandavas brothers, Arjuna is dubbed the "wealth-winner." He is the greatest warrior of all the brothers, having been trained by his future military opponent Drona. Arjuna is a skilled archer and popular with women. □ *Karna* Karna is technically the oldest of the Pandava brothers, but was raised by adoptive parents, and therefore does not consider himself part of the family. He fights alongside Duryodhana, and is ultimately killed by Arjuna. The Pandavas are devastated to later learn that Karna was one of their own. □ *Bhishma* was the elder brother of the grandfather of

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both the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and a prominent statesman of the Kuru Kingdom. He was also the son of Ganga and was an immortal as he had a boon of dying only when he wanted to.

Dhritarashtra The blind king of Hastinapur who believes his blindness is a curse upon him, he gives birth to 100 sons who are demons incarnate. The most powerful of these sons is Duryodhana, who leads the 100 brothers into war against the Pandavas. From early on, Dhritarashtra is well aware that fate is working against Duryodhana, and the blind king pleads with his son over and over to compromise with the Pandavas, lest he violate dharma. □ *Draupadi*, heroic princess of Mahabharata, was the daughter of King Drupada of Panchal, and wife of the Pandavas - the five brothers.

Draupadi The wife of the five Pandava brothers, Draupadi is a celebrated princess who is widely regarded as the most beautiful woman in the world. During their years in exile, Draupadi must pose as a maidservant and suffer a series of indignities, including an attempted rape by one of Duryodhana's brothers. The humiliation she suffers ends up being one of the causes of the great battle that the Mahabharata revolves around. □ *Duryodhana* □ The leader of 100 demon brothers who are all born of the blind king Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana is portrayed as living in flagrant violation of dharma. He is motivated by greed, jealousy, and a desire for retribution, tricking Yudhishthira into a dice game that ultimately robs the Pandavas of their kingdom, and gladly engaging them in war when they return from exile and seek what is rightfully theirs. Duryodhana hides in a lake after all his warriors are killed, and is ultimately killed by Bhīma. In the afterlife, he resides in hell.

Bhīma The strongest of the Pandavas, Bhīma is often the brother who kills the brothers' greatest enemies and protects them from their most skilled aggressors. Bhīma is often described as "wolf-bellied" and is ruthless in acts of violence.

Kṛṣṇa The god who assists the Pandavas throughout the story, Kṛṣṇa helps them understand their dharma as rulers and fighters in the war, and constantly reassures them that any violent act they have trepidation about is mandated by faith. His speech on dharma and action to Arjuna is known as the "Bhagavad Gita," and has been

accepted as central to the Hindu tradition alongside the traditional Vedic texts. □ Drona □ At the time of the story, Drona is an 85-year-old man who fights like a 16-year-old. Even though he fights on behalf of Duryodhana, he shares a close bond with the Pandavas, having trained Arjuna as a warrior. Like many in Duryodhana's army, and unlike Duryodhana himself, Drona is a strict adherent of dharma, and lays down his weapons to accept his death at the Pandava's hand when he violates his dharma on the battlefield.

Vyasa

As depicted in the story, Vyasa is the narrator of the entirety of the Mahabharata epic, dictating the tale to Ganesha. The historical Vyasa is popularly considered to have written the Mahabharata and is considered one of the seven immortal beings in the Hindu tradition.

Gandhari- DHRTARASTRA'S wife

Bhishma,, played an integral role in Mahabharata. He was the supreme commander of the Kaurava forces during the Kurukshetra War mentioned in the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

Dharma The specific role and responsibilities a person is fated to have, exclusive to that person and specific to his caste. It can only be satisfied through action.

Adharma Living in wicked defiance of one's dharma, often choosing instead to live by greed or envy.

Consecration The ritual by which a king takes his throne

□ Caste System

The Hindu class system, determined by birth Here is the Breakdown of the Four Main Castes:

□ Brahmins: The highest and most esteemed caste. These people often hold the job of priest or teacher.

□ Kshatriyas: The second caste. These people are often known traditionally as 'warriors.' They often hold the job of farmer, trader, or merchant.

□ Vaishyas: The third caste. These people often hold the job of farmer, trader, or merchant.

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□ *Shudras: The fourth caste. These people are often those that do manual labour*