

### CHAPTER 3

## CHILD PARIKSHIT AND THE PROPHECY

**A**las! Is he to suffer at last this tragic fate? Is this to be the reward for all the good in store for Him? Can the consequence of years of good living suddenly turn into this calamitous end? It is laid down that those who die drowning, those who are killed by fall from trees, and those who die of snakebite have a bad afterlife. Those are considered ‘inauspicious deaths.’ Those whose deaths are such, become ghosts and have to suffer so, it is said. Why should this child end up like that? Oh, the horror of it. Oh, the injustice of the whole thing!” lamented Yudhishtira, biting his lips to suppress his sorrow.

The Brahmins hastened to console him. “Maharaja,” they interceded. “There is no reason to give way to grief.

Such a great man will never meet with such a tragedy. No. In the horoscope of this child, studying the positions of the planets, we can clearly notice two happy conjunctions, which indicate *Vajra* (thunderbolt) Yoga and *Bhakthi Yoga* (path of dedication to God), both powerful and propitious. Therefore, as soon as he learns of the curse, he will give up his kingdom as well as his wife and children and retire to the bank of the holy Bhagirathi river and surrender himself to the Lord. The great sage Suka, son of Vyasa, will arrive there and initiate him into *Atma Jnana* (Self-knowledge) through the recital of the glories of Lord Krishna and the singing of His praise. Thus, he will spend his last days on the sacred bank of Ganga and breathe his last with the adoration of the Lord. How can such a man meet with any tragedy or calamity? He will not be born again, for, through Bhakthi Yoga, he will attain oneness with the Lord of All, Purushothama. Hearing these words, Yudhishtira gave up grief and became happy. He said, “If so, this is no curse; it is a unique boon!”

At this, everyone rose. The Brahmins were honoured as befitted their learning and austerity. They were given gems and silken clothes and the king arranged to send them home. Yudhishtira and his brothers moved into their palaces, but they spent many hours talking about the happenings of the day and of the fears, luckily removed. They were filled with joy at the turn the predictions had taken.

The baby grew in the lying-in-room, as the moon in the bright half of the month. Since it was born as heir to the

great empire, after a succession of dire dangers, everyone loved it and guarded it like the apple of the eye, as the very breath of their lives. Draupadi who was broken by the loss of her own children, (the Upapandavas), Subhadra who had suffered inconsolable loss in the death of Abhimanyu, and the Pandava Brothers who dreaded that the terrific sorrow of Aswatthama directed against the posthumous child of Abhimanyu, still in the womb of Uttara, might do the worst and destroy forever the Pandava line—all were relieved, nay were overjoyed when they saw the child. They were supremely happy. They spent the days dotting over the little lovely babe, whom they brought from the zenana for the purpose, whenever they felt the urge to see it and hold it in their arms.

The child too was very bright. It seemed to watch the lineaments of everyone who fondled it or came before it. It stared into their faces long and longingly. All were surprised at this strange behaviour. Every person who came to it was subjected to this searching examination by the child who seemed determined to trace someone or something, in the world into which it was born.

Some said, sadly, it is seeking its father, Abhimanyu. Others said, “No, no, the child is searching for Lord Krishna.” Some others opined that it appeared to be trying to discover some Divine Brilliance. The fact remained that the child was examining all for some trait or sign which it knew already, to recognise some Form it had in mind. “*Pariksha*” (finding out) was the word used by everyone

for the “quest” in which the child was engaged; and so, even before the formal Naming Ceremony, everyone both in the palace and outside it, began referring to the child as the Parikshit, “He who is engaged in Pariksha!”

That name, Parikshit, stayed. From the Raja to the *ryot* (farmer), from the scholar to the boor, from the Monarch to the man-in-the-street, everyone addressed the child as Parikshit or referred to him so. The fame of the child grew from day to day. It was on everyone’s lips. One auspicious day, Yudhishtira had the court priest brought before him and he commissioned him to fix a good day for the ceremony of naming the child-prince.

The priest called together his group of scholars and astrologers and after consulting the conjunctions of heavenly bodies, they discovered a day which all of them agreed was a good one for the event. They also settled at what hour the actual naming has to take place. Invitations to attend the ceremony were sent to the rulers of the land and to scholars and pundits as well as prominent citizens. The king sent his emissaries to invite sages and personages full of spiritual wealth. Arjuna went to Lord Krishna and reverentially prayed that He should shower His Grace on the child on the occasion. He succeeded in bringing Krishna along when he returned.

Rajas, subordinate rulers and citizens got ready to receive Him with respectful homage; the Pandava brothers, attired magnificently, waited at the main gate of the Palace

to offer Him welcome. When the chariot of the Lord was sighted drums sounded, trumpets pealed a mighty welcome, and joyful *Jais* (victory to) rose from every throat. Yudhishtira approached the chariot and embraced the Lord as soon as He alighted. He held Him by the hand and led Him into the palace, where a High Throne was specially placed for Him. After the Lord was seated, all else occupied their seats according to their rank and status.

Sahadeva went to the inner apartments and the child was brought on a gold plate, resplendent as the sun, made more charming by magnificent jewels. The priests recited mantras, invoking the Gods to bless the child and confer on him health and happiness.

Sahadeva laid the child down in the centre of the Court Hall. Maids and chamberlains came in long lines towards the place where the prince was, holding in their hand gold plates full of perfumes and flowers, silks and brocades. Behind specially fitted curtains, the queens Rukmini, Draupadi, Subhadra and Uttara were rejoicing at the happy scene, watching the gambols of the child. Sahadeva took the child and placed it on a bed of flowers in the *mantap* (sacrificial enclosure) that was erected for the naming ceremony. But the child rose up on all fours and started crawling bravely on, in spite of the remonstrances of the maids. Apparently, it wanted to proceed somewhere!

The efforts of Sahadeva to stop its journey proved futile. Yudhishtira, who was observing its movements with

interest said with a smile, “Sahadeva, do not stand in the way. Leave him alone. Let us see what he does.” And Sahadeva left his hold. He allowed the child to move wherever he liked. Only, he took care to keep his eye always on him lest he fall or hurt himself. He followed him at every step, vigilantly.

The child, who got freedom of movement, soon made a beeline towards the place where Lord Krishna was seated, as if He was a long acquaintance whom he was seeking to meet. The child grasped the Feet of Krishna and pleaded, by his looks, that he may be taken onto the lap and fondled! The Lord saw his yearning. He laughed aloud. Then, He graciously bent low to lift the child onto His lap.

Sitting on His lap, the prince was staring at the Lord’s face without even a wink. He did not turn his head this way or that or pull at anything with his hands or make any sound. He just sat and stared. Everyone was amazed at this behaviour, so unlike that of a child. Even Krishna shared in the feeling that pervaded the Hall.

Turning to Yudhishtira, Krishna said, “I did not believe when I was told that this child stared at everyone who came before him and examined their lineaments. I thought it was a new explanation given by these priests, to the usual prank and play of children. Now, this is really a wonder. The fellow has started examining even Me! Well, I shall test his behaviour a little Myself.”

Then, the Lord tried to distract the attention of the child from Himself by placing before him a variety of toys, and Himself hiding from view. He expected that the child will soon forget Him. But his attention was not drawn towards any other object. He had fixed his eye inexorably on the Lord Himself, and he was seeking Him and no other. He was trying to move towards the place where he imagined Krishna was. When His attempts to transfer the attention of the child from Himself failed, Krishna declared, “This is no ordinary child. He has won through My tests. So, the name Parikshit is the most appropriate one for him. He lives up to it, already!”

At this, the Pundits recited verses indicating their blessings on the child. The Brahmins recited relevant passages from the Vedas. The music of trumpets rent the air. Women sang auspicious songs. The family preceptor dipped a Nine-gemmed jewel in a golden cup of honey and wrote the Name, on the tongue of the child. On the rice grains spread on a gold plate, the name was written and the rice was then showered on the head of the child, in token of prosperity and happiness. The naming ceremony was thus celebrated in grand style. Men and women who attended were given presents as befitted their rank and they departed. Everyone was talking appreciatively of the wonderful way in which the child sought out the lap of the Lord. Many praised the steady faith that the child had already attained.

Yudhishtira who was puzzled at the unique behaviour of the child approached Vyasa, the great sage, to know

from him the reason for the strange search and learn about the consequences of this attitude. Vyasa said, “Yudhishtira! When this child was in the womb, the deadly arrow that Aswatthama aimed at it in order to destroy it was about to hit its target, Lord Krishna entered the foetal home and made it safe and saved it from destruction. This child therefore has been eager to know who had saved him from within the womb where he lay. He started examining everyone to find out whether he had the same effulgence that he saw, while a foetus in the womb. Today, he saw that Divine Form with all its splendour and so, he moved straight towards Him and prayed to be taken up and seated on the lap. This is the explanation for the strange behaviour about which you are curious to know.”

Hearing these words of Vyasa, Yudhishtira shed tears of joy and thankfulness. Overjoyed at the limitless Grace of the Lord, he paid Him reverential homage.