

and fell. She breathed her last, with her mind fixed on Krishna.

The Pandavas, too, walked on in staunch discipline and met their separate ends at the times and places in which each had to shed his body. The body became dust, but the soul merged in Krishna. They attained immortality, losing themselves in the immortal essence of Krishna.

From the throne of Imperial Bharatha, Parikshit ruled his dominion adhering to the principles of justice and morality, lovingly fostering his subjects and guarding them from harm with parental care and affection. Whatever may be the task he set his hands upon, Parikshit did not move one step, without calling to mind Krishna and his grandfathers and praying to them to crown him with success. He prayed to them morning and evening to direct him along the correct path of virtue. He felt as if he was the heart of his people and as if they were his body.

Throughout his empire, the very wind was reluctant to displace any article, for fear of being implicated in theft. There was not the slightest fear of thieves. Nor was there any trace of injustice, immorality or ill will. The kingdom gained great fame thereby. At the slightest sign of any such evil, Parikshit overcame it by means of terrific punishment and instituted preventive steps which decidedly scotched it. Since Dharma was thus fostered with love and reverence, even Nature was kind. Rains came in time, crops grew high

CHAPTER 15

THE REIGN OF EMPEROR PARIKSHIT

The Pandavas were journeying along with their eyes fixed straight ahead, awaiting the moment when their bodies will collapse out of sheer exhaustion and death finishes their earthly career. Their hearts were filled with emotions centring around Krishna, His play and pranks, His Grace and Glory. They had no room for any other emotion or thought. Draupadi, their queen, dragged herself along for a considerable distance, but she became too weak to continue. Her lords did not turn back, even when she appealed. She realised, highly intelligent and devoted that she was, that they were engaged in a terrific, uncompromising vow. She decided that the bond that tagged her to them so long had loosened and she had to meet her end. She fainted

and rich. Granaries were filled; people were contented, happy and unafraid.

When Parikshit was on the throne, ruling over the empire with great care, the Ministers and the spiritual Masters who were the guides of the dynasty conferred among themselves and resolved that they must approach the King with a proposal that he should enter the *Grihastha* (householder) stage by taking on a partner by marriage. They submitted their prayer likewise. When they found him agreeable, they asked his maternal uncle, Uttara of the Virata Royal Family, for the hand of his daughter. The Brahmins they sent to Virata returned with the happy news that he was happy over the proposal. The priests fixed an auspicious day and hour and the marriage of Parikshit and Iravathi, daughter of Uttara was celebrated with pomp and splendour.

Queen Iravathi was a great *Sadhvimani* (Gem among virtuous women). She was endowed with a tenacious love for truth. She was devoted to her husband. Whenever she heard that anyone in the empire was in distress, she was pained much, as if she herself had the calamity. She mixed with the women of the capital, and acquainted herself with their aspirations and achievements. She provided them with encouragement and consolation. She fostered the growth of virtue among them, by teaching and example. She established institutions to promote and protect good character. She allowed women of all grades to approach her, for she had no false pride. She treated everyone with reverence. She was an angel of fortitude and charity.

Everyone praised her as Goddess Annapurna (the Bestower of Food) Herself in human form.

During the reign of this King and his queen, men and women lived in peace and happiness, untroubled by want. Parikshit too arranged for the performance of many Vedic sacrifices and rituals, for the prosperity of mankind. He arranged the worship in temples and homes of God in His manifold Forms, with His manifold Names. By these and other means, faith in God and love of man were implanted in the hearts of his subjects. He promoted measures to ensure peace and harmony among the sages and saints who were living as recluses in forest hermitages. He guarded them in their silent retreats from man and beast. He exhorted them to probe into themselves and discover the laws of self-control. He supervised personally the steps taken to ensure their safety and security.

Thus, Parikshit and Iravathi ruled over their empire like Easwara and Parvathi who rule over the Universe with parental love and care. Shortly, news that the queen was in the family way spread among the women and was confirmed. The subjects prayed to God, at home and in public places of worship, that He should bless the Queen with a son who will be endowed with all virtues and strength of character, who will be a staunch and unflinching adherent of Dharma, and who will live the full span of years. In those ages, subjects loved the king so intensely that they renounced their own joys to please him. The king too loved them and guarded them as the apple of his eye.

Parikshit saw and heard the enthusiasm of the subjects at the auspicious prospect of the advent of a child to continue the dynasty. He shed tears of joy, when he realised how deeply his people were attached to him. He felt that the affection was the contribution of his grandfathers and the gift of Lord Krishna's Grace.

Parikshit did not deviate from his resolve to serve the best interests of his people. He gave up his own likes and dislikes for this great task. He looked upon his subjects as his own children. The bond that brought the king and people together in such close and loving relationship was indeed of a high holy order. Therefore, his people used to say that they would prefer his kingdom to heaven itself.

Meanwhile, on an auspicious day, the son was born and the whole land was filled with inexpressible joy. Sages, scholars and statesmen sent blessings and good wishes to the King. They declared that new light had dawned on the state. Astrologers consulted their books and calculating fortunes of the child from them, they announced that he will enhance the glory of the dynasty, bring added reputation on his father's name, and win the esteem and love of his people.

Parikshit invited the family Preceptor to the Palace and consulted also the Brahmin priests, in order to fix a day for the Naming Ceremony of the child. Accordingly, during an elaborately arranged festival rite, the child was named Janamejaya. The Brahmins who were present were given costly gifts, on the suggestion of Kripacharya, the doyen

among the Brahmin advisers of the King. Cows with golden ornaments on horns and hoofs were given away in large numbers. All were fed sumptuously for days on end. When Dharmaraja set out upon his final journey he had entrusted the little boy on the throne to Kripacharya and as a true trustee Kripa was advising the boy-king and training him in statecraft. As he grew up, this dependence became more fruitful; the king seldom strayed from his advice; he sought it always and followed it with reverential faith. Hence, the sages and recluses of the kingdom prayed for his health and long life and extolled the people's happiness and the ruler's solicitude for their welfare.

Parikshit was the overlord of the kings of the earth, for, he had the blessings of the great, the counsel of the wise and the grace of God. After his long campaign of conquest, he encamped on the bank of the Ganges and celebrated as a mark of his victory, three Horse Sacrifices with all the prescribed rituals. His fame spread not only over the length and breadth of India but even far beyond its borders. He was acclaimed by every tongue as the Great Jewel of the Bharatha Royal Family. There was no state that had not bent under his yoke. There was no ruler who set his command at naught. He had no need to march at the head of his army to subdue any people or ruler. All were only too willing to pay him homage. He was master of all lands and all peoples.

The spirit of wickedness and vice known as Kali had already come in, with the end of the Krishna Era; so, it was

raising its poisonous hood, off and on; but Parikshit was vigilant. He adopted measures to counterfoil its stratagems and machinations. He sought to discover the footprints of his grandfathers throughout his realm, in the reforms they introduced and the institutions they established. He reminded his people whenever occasion arose, of their nobility and aspirations. He told them of Krishna, His Grace and Mercy. He shed tears of joy and gratitude whenever he related to them these stories. He was sincerely pining for the chance he had lost, to have the Pandavas and Krishna by his side.

He knew that Kali had entered his kingdom and was endeavouring to fix its hold on the minds of men. When he became cognisant of its activities, he investigated into the conditions favourable for its spread and with the active co-operation of his Teachers and the Elders, he enacted special laws to counteract the tendencies Kali aroused. When the elders advised him that such precautions need be taken only when wickedness emerges as crimes, Parikshit did not support that opinion. He was for alertness. He wanted to give the lead to his people. “*Yatha raja, thatha praja*” (As the ruler, so the ruled) is the proverb, he said. He declared that Kali or wickedness can have sway only through the incompetence of the ruler, the loss of self-reliance among the people, the decline in the earning of Grace. These three are the factors that promote the plans of Kali. Without them, man cannot fall a prey to his wiles. Aware of this, Parikshit went round his kingdom and sought, day and night, to drive Kali out of his haunts. That is to say, he attempted to give

no room to injustice, force, evil character, untruth and violence; his preventive plans were effective. He had so much quiet in his kingdom that he campaigned in the Bhadraswa, Kethumala, Uttarakura and Kimpurusha regions.