

## CHAPTER 16

### REVERENCE FOR KRISHNA

**W**henever Maharaja Parikshit toured any region, the rulers and kings of that area welcomed him enthusiastically, with appropriate honours, military and civil. They declared that they were ever ready to render him loyal service, whatever the nature of service that he required them to do. Parikshit replied that he had no need of their services and that he expected from them only the promotion of the happiness and prosperity of the people entrusted to their care. He advised them to devote special attention to the protection of Brahmins and women, guarding them against harm. He exhorted them to foster the worship of God throughout their dominions. Those were the only requests he made to those who were his tributary kings.

In some important regions of his empire, the people entertained him with folk-songs, depicting the fame and prowess of his ancestors. They sang of the excellences and exploits of the Pandava brothers. The songs extolled the mercy and grace which Lord Krishna showered on the Pandavas and the devotion and faith with which the Pandavas revered Lord Krishna at all times. They also enacted folk-plays, taking on the roles of Pandavas and Kauravas, with Krishna in their midst, unravelling the story that He had planned with these instruments.

When Parikshit heard these songs and saw these plays, tears rolled down his cheeks, in spite of his efforts to control his emotions. The minstrels and storytellers, the actors and stage men—all discovered that their Emperor was fascinated by plays and songs having these themes only; so, they gave up other fields in their search for material and concentrated their attention on the dynastic history of Parikshit and the overpowering Grace with which Krishna saved it at every turn. The Emperor listened reverentially and sat through with great devotion; his gratefulness was shown in other ways too. He was supremely happy. He confirmed from his ministers and elders that the tales were completely true. At this, his faith and devotion multiplied and he sought these chances more often and enjoyed them even more. He treated the performers and musicians with intense affection and honoured them with lavish prizes.

When news spread that Parikshit delighted in hearing songs about his forefathers, and Krishna, those who had personal experience of these, gathered around him, wherever he went. They were themselves eager to see a ruler who was so full of devotion. One day, while returning from Mathura, an old Brahmin was among these who stood on the side of the road, to catch the imperial eye. The Maharaja did not fail to notice him. He approached him and enquired lovingly about his welfare. The Brahmin said, “Maharaja! Years ago, when your grandfather Dharmaraja performed the horse-sacrifice, in the Divine Presence of Krishna, I officiated as a *Rthwik*, as the chief priest, to conduct the rites. On that occasion Krishna approached me and enquired lovingly about my welfare, with as much affection as you are now showing me. Your words bring those words to my memory.” The rest of the Brahmin’s words were smothered by his sobs and tears. At this, Parikshit exclaimed, “Oh, how fortunate you are! To be spoken to by the Lord in the *Yajnasala* (temple)!” He took off the cloth he had on his shoulders and placing it folded on the floor, he pleaded with the old man to sit upon it comfortably and tell him more about his experiences at the Yajnasala and other places, with the Lord.

Saying feebly, “My heart is torn to pieces because it cannot endure the grief at the error I committed that day,” the old man wept. The Maharaja enquired, “Master! What is the error? If it can be revealed to me, I would like to

know.” He held both the hands of the old man, clasping them together and prayed to him to disclose it to him.

The Brahmin replied: “That day, all of us, who were initiated into the holy order of priests for the Yajna, put on the sacred clothes gifted to us and entered the sanctified enclosure. Then, Lord Krishna, sitting on a golden plankseat, in front of a golden plate, poured water from a golden vessel on—no, I cannot tell further—I do not get words.” The old man wept and sobbed and could not proceed with his narrative.

This sudden stoppage of the story just when it had reached a critical point only heightened the curiosity of the Emperor. He prayed, “What happened, Master! Tell me please.” The Brahmin took courage to comply. “Oh King. What shall I say? We *rthwiks* were asked to place our feet on that gold plate and the Lord washed the feet of each one of us. He dried the feet later, with the cloth on His shoulder; He sprinkled the water from our feet on His Head. Since I was the Chief among them, He was consulting me about all the details of the rites. Lastly, on the day of the Valedictory Offering in the sacrificial Fire, He granted us a Vision of Himself, with *Sankha* (conch) *Chakra* (discus) and *Gada* in His Divine Hands, and that Vision liberated us all from bondage forever. Now, that Merciful Lord is away from us, I feel that seeing you is like tasting a few drops of refreshing water by a poor fellow, dying of thirst in the raging sun of the desert.”

The Brahmin concluded his account and holding the hands of Parikshit, he placed on the king's head a few grains of sanctified rice, which he had with him tied in a knot at the corner of his dhothi. Parikshit acknowledged the blessing and exclaimed, "Master! I am indeed fortunate. Though I could not see Lord Krishna in person, I have today the good luck of meeting the feet that He revered," and so saying, he fell at the old Brahmin's feet. He called the ministers to his side and instructed them to place the Brahmin in a palanquin and take him to his home. He also gave him large quantities of valuable gifts and treasure.