

Chapter 15. The Reign of Emperor Parikshith

From the throne of imperial Bharatha, Parikshith 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 the task, Parikshith didn't move a 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, Parikshith overcame it by means of terrific punishment and instituted preventive steps that decidedly scotched it. Since *dharma* was thus fostered with love and reverence, even nature was kind —rains came in time, crops grew high and rich, granaries were filled, and people were contented, happy, and unafraid.

Parikshith marries Iravathi

When Parikshith was on the throne, ruling over the empire with great care, the ministers and spiritual masters who were the guides of the dynasty discussed among themselves and resolved to approach the king with a proposal that he enter the householder (*grihastha*) stage by taking a partner by marriage. They submitted their request to him. 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 Parikshith and Iravathi, daughter of Uttara, was celebrated with pomp and splendour.

Queen Iravathi was a great gem among virtuous women. She was endowed with a tenacious love for truth and was devoted to her husband. Whenever she heard that anyone in the empire was in distress, she was much pained, 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 the Goddess Durga, bestower of food (*anna-purna*), herself in human form.

During the reign of this king and queen, men and women lived in peace and happiness, untroubled by want. Parikshith also 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.

A son is born to Parikshith and Iravathi

Thus, Parikshith and Iravathi ruled over their empire like Iswara 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, to bless the queen with a son who would be endowed with all virtues and strength of character, who would be a staunch and unflinching adherent of *dharmā*, and who would 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.

Parikshith 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.

Parikshith didn't deviate from his resolve to serve the best interests of his people, and 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, and his people used to say that they would prefer his kingdom to heaven itself.

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

Parikshith invited the family preceptor to the palace and also consulted *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* 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.

Parikshith's dharmic reign keeps the Kali age at bay

When Dharmaraja had set out on his final journey, he had entrusted the little boy Parikshith 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, and 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.

Parikshith 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 a long campaign of conquest, he encamped on the bank of the Ganga 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 Bharath (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 on and off, but Parikshith 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 told them these stories. He was sincerely pining for the chance he had lost to have the Pandavas and Krishna by his side.

As the ruler, so the ruled

He knew that wickedness (*kali*) had entered his kingdom and was endeavouring to fix its hold on the minds of people. When he became cognisant of its activities, he investigated the conditions favourable for its spread, and, with the active cooperation of his teachers and 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 emerged as crimes, Parikshith didn't support that opinion. He was for alertness. He wanted to give the lead to his people.

As the ruler, so the ruled

Yatha raja, thatha praja

is the proverb, he said. He declared that wickedness (*kali*) can have sway only through the incompetence of the ruler, the loss of self reliance among the people, and 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, Parikshith 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 victoriously in the regions of Badraswa, Kethumala, Uttarakuru, and Kimpurusha.