

Chapter 16. Reverence for Krishna

Whenever *Maharaja* Parikshith 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 of them. Parikshith 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 that 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, unraveling the story that He had planned with these instruments.

When Parikshith 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, the stage men—all discovered that their emperor was fascinated by plays and songs with these themes only. So, they gave up other fields in their search for material and concentrated their attention on the dynastic history of Parikshith 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 and got 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 Parikshith delighted in hearing songs about his forefathers and Krishna, those with personal experience of these gathered around him wherever he went. They were eager to see a ruler who was so full of devotion.

Krishna gives divine vision of Himself

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* didn't fail to notice him. He approached the *brahmin* and asked 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 priest, as the chief priest, to conduct the rites. On that occasion Krishna approached me and asked 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.

Parikshith exclaimed, "O, how fortunate you are! To be spoken to by the Lord in the sacrificial hall!" He took off the cloth he had on his shoulders and, placing it folded on the floor, pleaded with the old man to sit on it

comfortably and tell him more about his experiences at the sacrificial hall and other places with the Lord.

“My heart is torn to pieces because it can’t endure the grief at the error I committed that day,” the old man wept.

The *Maharaja* asked, “Master! What is the error? If it can be revealed to me, I would like to know.” He held both of the old man’s hands, clasping them together, and prayed to him to disclose it to him.

The *brahmin* replied, “That day, all of us who had been initiated into the holy order of priests for the sacrifice (*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 can’t tell further, I don’t get words.” The old man wept and sobbed and couldn’t continue 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. “O King. What shall I say? We priests were asked to place our feet on that gold plate, and the Lord washed the feet of each one of us. Later, He dried our feet with the cloth on His shoulder and sprinkled the water from our feet on His head. Since I was the chief among them, He consulted 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 conch, wheel, and mace in His divine hands, and that vision liberated us all from bondage for ever. 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. Holding Parikshith’s hands, he placed a few grains of sanctified rice that he had with him tied in a knot at the corner of his *dhoti*, on the king’s head.

Parikshith 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.” 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.