

**King Janamejaya and  
Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi – A Comparative Study**

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**Abstract**

**King Parikshit** was the king of the Kurus, who ruled the kingdom of Hastinapur after the Pandavas and ruled it for a long time truthfully. King was popular among his subjects and was a terror to his enemies. **King Janamejaya** was the son of King Parikshit.

**Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** was the first Prime Minister (PM) of independent India. He was the chief framer of domestic and international policies during his term as PM between 1947 and 1964. Smt. Indira Gandhi was the only child of Jawaharlal Nehru.

This paper attempts to draw the similarities between **Mahabharata King Janamejaya episode** and Constitutional scenario of **Indira Gandhi**. Long arguments in the King's court or Court of Law became instrumental to change their perception.

**Keywords:** Veda Vyasa, Sarpa Satra Yagna, Astika, Vaisampayana, Kesavananda Bharathi, Supreme Court of India, Nana Palkivala, S. M. Sikri.

**Introduction**

The **Mahabharatham**<sup>(1-6)</sup> is an ancient Indian epic where the main story revolves around two branches of a family – the **Pandavas and Kauravas**- who, in the **Kuruksheetra War**, battled for the throne of **Hastinapura**. The **Mahabharatham**, that is, the great **Bharata**, is one of the two most important ancient **epics** of **India**. One of the Indian great sages (rishi) named Vyasa is believed to have composed the work. He is also sometimes called **Veda Vyasa** or **Krishna Dwaipayana**. Vyasa is also considered to be one of the

seven [Chiranjivins](#) (long lived, or immortals), who are still in existence according to Hindu belief. The legend states that the Lord [Ganesh](#) wrote the Mahabharata while [Vyasa](#) dictated the same. The epic contains about 110,000 couplets in eighteen sections. Sage Vyasa taught this epic to his son Suka and his students **Vaisampayana** and others. The Pandavas ruled for 36 years, after which they abdicated in favour of **Abhimanyu's son**, Parikshit. Years later, Parikshit's son succeeded his father as King.

**Indira Gandhi**<sup>(11)</sup> was the only child of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India. Indira Gandhi was born on November 19, 1917. A highly intelligent young woman, she attended schools in India, Switzerland and England, including Somerville College, Oxford. Indira Gandhi was India's third Prime Minister, serving from 1966 until 1984 with break in between, when her life ended in assassination.

### **Sarpa Satya Yagna by King Janamejaya**

King Janamejaya, son of Parikshit and Iravati, and the grandson of the heroes (Arjun) of the epic, performed a great “**Sarpa Satya Yagna**”, which is also known as snake-sacrifice (yagna)<sup>(7,8,9)</sup>. Janamejaya had been performing the snake killing ceremony in the grief of his deceased father Parikshit. **Parikshit had been killed due to snake (Takshaka) bite**. It is to be noted that Parikshit was the son of the legendry Abhimanyu. Many great priests and sages were involved in the conduct of this sacrifice. The sacrifice continued for 7 days.

### **King's Yagna to Kill Takshaka**

**Aastika** was the son of a Rishi named **Jaratkaru** who had devoted his entire life to austerities, starting at a very young age<sup>(8,9)</sup>. His mother **Manasa alias Jaratkaru was a Naga** and his father a Rishi known as Jaratkaru. Astika was a brilliant scholar, and was very learned in the Vedas and Scriptures. When he was about sixteen, King Janamejaya performed the great snake-sacrifice with the aim of destroying all the snakes. King Janamejaya had only one aim, to get Takshaka into the fire. Snakes were perishing in the flames in thousands. The sacrifice was nearing completion.

Meanwhile, the great serpent Takshaka tried to hide here and there. But, the power that was pulling him was such that he found it hard to resist. Finally, he rushed to his friend and mentor, Indra. The King of gods offered him refuge in heaven. But Takshaka felt the pull even from heaven drawing him gradually towards the sacrificial fire. In the land of serpents, King Vasuki was in a similar situation. When it was too much for him to bear he rushed to his sister, Jaratkaru (Manasa) and asked her to save Taksha and others.

### Comparison between King Janamejaya and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

| JANAMEJAYA  | INDIRA GANDHI  |
|---|--|
| He was born to a King, Parishita  | She was born to a Prime Minister, Nehru.   |
| He belongs to Royal Kuru Family   | She belongs to Royal Nehru-Gandhi family.  |
| Brought up in a protected and traditional family.   | Brought up in a Nehru's protected family.  |
| He ascended to the throne of Hastinapura upon the death of his father Parikshita.                   | She could become Prime Minister because she is from Nehru's family.  |
| He performed many yagna for the welfare of the people.  | She inaugurated and developed many Public Sector Companies for the welfare of the people.  |
| King Janmejjaya carried out a massive snake sacrifice (Great Sarpa Satra Yaga) to kill Takshaka.    | She introduced a series of constitutional amendments in Parliament. These amendments gave Parliament uncontrolled power to alter or even abolish any fundamental right.                                |
| Great Sarpa Satra Yaga is valid or not? This yaga is challenged by Astika in King Janamejaya Court. | Whether 24 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> amendments acts 1971 are valid or not? These amendments are challenged by the case of Kesavananda Bharathi in Supreme Court of India. |
| Takshaka and Aastika did not meet and they didn't talk with each other.                             | Kesavananda Bharathi and Lawyer Nana Palkivala did not meet and they didn't talk   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | with each other <sup>(24)</sup> .  |
| Krishna Dwaipayana @ Vedavyasa acted as the Judge for the Dispute.              | 13 Eminent Judges Constitutional Bench heard the case which included S. M. Sikri, CJI. |
| King Janamejaya and Takshaka have had this Conflict.                            | Judiciary and Parliament have had this Conflict.                                       |
| There were heated arguments between Aastika and King Janamejaya.                | There were heated arguments between N. A. Palkhivala and H.M. Seervai.                 |
| Result: Takshaka (Snakes) has a right to life and his entire species was saved. | Result: Basic Feature of our Constitution was saved                                    |

### **Chief Priest Vaisampayana**

King Janamejaya continued his yagna. The priests chanted and offered oblations to the Fire. The king goads the priests and they continued the yagna incessantly. Many serpents were seen crawling and falling into the fire. The king ordered the sacrifice to continue without a break so that the new dawn wakes into a world where there will be no snake. The king was jubilant and declared that the sacrifice had been a success. But the chief priest Vaisampayana reported that **Takshaka and his son were yet** to make their appearance and they were behind Indra. The king was shocked.



**Fig. 1: King Janamejaya's Sarpa Satya Sacrifice (Yagna)**

Courtesy: <http://www.harekrsna.com/sun/features/09-13/features2949.htm>

King Janamejaya told the chief priest to bring the sages who knew the mantras to bring Indra and Takshaka into the Yagna. The chief priest told that the sages who knew the mantras that compel Indra into submission were already on the way.

### **Entry of Aastika to Snake Sacrifice Yagna**

Sage Astika who was in deep meditation in a forest was aroused by the chants. Young sage Aastika had spent years in deep meditation and had developed a glow of divinity around him. Manasa, Vasuki's sister, asked her son to save his uncle. Accordingly, the young sage Aastika shook himself out and was seen walking away.

It was the custom for priests and sages to attend sacrificial rituals like the one performed by Janamejaya. The sage Aastika entered the sacrificial platform. He introduced himself as Aastika and said he was well versed in Vedas and was coming from the land of Gods. Aastika praised the yagna, the manner in which the ritual was performed. He did not omit to give due credit to the priests and sages who performed it so correctly according to the Sastra (science of

rituals) and to the king Janamejaya who arranged it all. King Janamejaya was greatly pleased. He asked the young sage **Aastika** to ask for any gift.

At this time, the chief priest Vaisampayana intervened and said, "O King, the sacrifice is not yet completed. Takshaka, whose destruction you desired, was still alive. Wait till he is falling to the fire, before you begin giving gifts to sage Aastika." <sup>(6)</sup>. Janamejaya persisted with his request saying that he would consider it as an honour to give whatever the Aastika desired most that is within the King's powers to offer. Also, the King expressed his happiness and hoped his presence would help bring the Yagna to a conclusion.

### **Aastika Demanded to Save the Life of Takshaka**

Then, Aastika spoke. The **only gift** that would make him happy was that the **sacrifice must stop immediately**. By then Takshaka had already appeared in the sky and was about to fall into the fire. Janamejaya was shocked. All his efforts would go as waste. He tried to persuade the sage Aastika to ask for anything else, however might be the unlimited wealth. But, Aastika would not budge from his demand. Aastika told that as per his mother's command he came here to save Takshaka, **not for wealth**. Then there was a heated argument between King Janamejaya and Aastika. King Janamejaya told that Aastika had cheated him. But Aastika replied that the **Vedas say that he can do anything to save somebody's life**. Finally they accepted the intervention of Veda Vyasa as their Judge to solve their disputes.

### **Intervention of Veda Vyasa as Judge**

In front of Veda Vyasa a great debate between Janamejaya and Aastika was held. At last, Vyasa blessed Takshaka that **he has a Right to his Life** and he put an end to this debate. Vyasa also told that he did not find any flaw in Aastika's arguments. Whatever Aastika said was right. So, King Janamejaya must offer Takshaka's life just as he promised and let the Snake-Sacrifice end without completion.

## Indira Gandhi



**Indira Gandhi 1917-1984**

Courtesy: <http://www.culturalindia.net/leaders/indira-gandhi.html>

Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) was the only child of Kamla and Jawaharlal Nehru. She received her college education at Somerville College, Oxford. A famous photograph from her childhood shows her sitting by the bedside of Mahatma Gandhi. She was not actively involved in the freedom struggle, but she came to know the entire Indian political leadership.

In 1964, the year of her father's death, Indira Gandhi was for the first time elected to Parliament, and she was Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the government of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Lal Bahadur Shastri died unexpectedly of a heart attack less than two years after assuming office and Indira Gandhi could become Prime Minister after his death.

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Dr. D. Nagarathinam

King Janamejaya and Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi – A Comparative Study 216

## Iron Lady of India

During her period, India was achieving tangible success through advancements of the **Green Revolution**. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi issued an ordinance and **nationalised the 14 largest commercial banks** with effect from the midnight of 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1969 which is considered as an economic milestone of India. It contributed significantly to regional development and to the expansion of India's industrial and agricultural base. This move proved to be fruitful as it improved the geographical coverage of banks with the number of branches rising from 8200 to 62000. Furthermore, nationalization of banks increased household savings and saw investment in small and medium-sized enterprises and agricultural sector.

Indira Gandhi nationalized Insurance companies, mineral resources, Heavy industries including, coal, steel, copper and refining industries, to safeguard the interests of common people of India. The main aim of this move was to protect employment and secure the interest of the organised labor. She also nationalized oil companies so that air-force and navy need not depend on foreign owned companies. She oversaw the implementation of over three **Five-year plans** - two of which were

successful in meeting the targeted growth. Many **Public Sector Companies (PSU)** were started for the economic development of India and also for the younger generation employment opportunities. This resulted in a good number of Small and medium enterprises as a sub unit of PSU or PSC. She introduced equal pay for equal work for both men and women. She put an end for the Privy Purse given to royalty since 1947 by successfully passing the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1971. She led the country in its darkest time, a time some attribute to her rule controversially. Indira Gandhi's skill with politics is one unsurpassed by most politicians. Because of these she is popularly known as the **Iron Lady of India**.

Indira Gandhi earned a formidable reputation across the globe as a 'statesman'.



## **Indira's Campaign Slogan - Remove Poverty**

Her campaign slogan, **Remove Poverty** (Garibi Hatao), had become the iconic motto of the Indian National Congress. There were several achievements that Indira Gandhi achieved during her Prime Ministership. Those achievements were remarkable in Indian History. To the rural and urban poor, Dalits, minorities and women in India, Indira Gandhi was "**Indira Amma or Mother Indira**".

## **War with Pakistan during 1971**

Indira Gandhi was riding the crest of popularity after India's triumph in the **war of 1971 against Pakistan**, and the explosion of a **nuclear device in 1974** helped enhance her reputation among middle-class Indians as a tough and shrewd political leader. Indira Gandhi was the second longest serving and one of the most popular and powerful Prime Ministers of India.

## **Most Powerful Woman of 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Indira Gandhi is admired globally as the most **charismatic political leader** of India. She was the first woman elected to lead a democracy and the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister from 1966 to 1984 with break, when she was assassinated. She had remarkable endurance and ambition whilst building a formidable international reputation. Thus, she was listed as one of the "**Most Powerful Women of the Century**". Her **20 Points Programme** was a bold way to bring prosperity to the poor. She was a woman of vision, courage and foresight. She was the worthy daughter of the worthy parents, who made history to perform her duty. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi enacted and successfully brought out many **Amendments in the Constitution in India** in order to help the poor and the middle class people. She **declared that she was for the people** of India and the people were for her. Major amendments to the Constitution of India (the 24th, 25th, 26th and 29th) had been enacted by Indira Gandhi's Government through Parliament in 1971. In the Landmark case, **Kesavananda Bharati Vs State of Kerala**<sup>(16-20)</sup> the validity of 24th, 25th and 29th amendments to the Constitution of India were challenged.

## Indian Constitutional Law

The **Constitution of India** is the supreme law of [India](#)<sup>(16,17,18)</sup>. A Constitution of a Country may be Unitary or Federal. Unitary Constitution gives all the powers to Central Government. E.g., British Constitution. In Federal Constitution the powers are distributed between central and state governments. E.g. American constitution. The **Constitution of India** is neither purely federal nor purely unitary but it is a combination of both. The Constitution of India lays down the framework defining fundamental political principles, establishes the structure, procedures, powers and duties of government institutions and sets out fundamental rights, [directive principles](#) and the duties of citizens. It is the longest written constitution of any sovereign country in the world. [B. R. Ambedkar](#), the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, is widely considered to be its chief architect.

## His Holiness Keshvananda Bharati Vs State of Kerala

The case is called in the annals of Indian judicial history, got its name from Keshvananda Bharati a Pontiff of the mutt. On **24 April, 1973** the case was decided, which has been playing a great role between Judiciary and Parliament from then till today. The *Kesavananda Bharati* case was the culmination of a serious conflict between the judiciary and the government, then headed by Mrs Indira Gandhi. **The story begins with Golaknath Case, 1967** <sup>(21)</sup>, in which the petitioner challenged the **7th** Constitutional Amendment Act, 1964 under Article 32 for violation of his fundamental rights. The Apex Court ruled, “Parliament cannot take away or abridge and amend any of the fundamental rights, even cannot touch, because these are sacrosanct in nature”. Parliament passed the **24th** and **25th** Amendments Act in **1971** and overruled the verdict of Golaknath Case, and expressed that, “we, the Parliament can Amend Anything in the Constitution, and Judiciary have no power to review”. Between the conflicts, Supreme Court got an opportunity to review the Amendment Acts in 1973, when the famous case of [Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala](#) came before the Apex Court, where the petitioner challenged these Amendments. First Time in the Indian Judiciary, 13 judges gathered to hear this case, and on 24

April, 1973, a very divided Judgement was passed by the majority of seven judges, including Chief Justice S.M. Sikiri, and was decided by a thin margin of 7–6<sup>(16-20)</sup>. In this case Justice H.R. KHANNA laid down the Principle of Basic Feature and Structure of Doctrine for the Constitution, which cannot be altered or destroyed by any of the Constitutional Amendments Acts passed by the Parliament.



**Photo of Kesavananda Bharati in 2013: Courtesy *The Hindu***

In Kesavananda case, Majority of judges held, “Government can Amend the fundamental rights of the Constitution by **Article 368**, but without changing the Basic Feature, Structure and Nature of the Constitution .” And the Court further held that, “ Preamble is the Integral Part of the Constitution<sup>(23)</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Vyasa declared that Takshaka has Right to Life. The life of Takshaka was saved and he had given direction to King Janamejaya to stop the Snake Sacrifice Yagna. In Kesavananda Bharati case, one main question in the Supreme Court of India was: Is the power of Parliament to amend the Constitution of India unlimited? The 13-Judges Bench gave the verdict that

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Dr. D. Nagarathinam

King Janamejaya and Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi – A Comparative Study 220

**The Principle of Basic Structure Doctrine for the Constitution** could not be altered or destroyed by any of the Constitutional amendments acts passed by the Parliament. It was declared all around that the Indian Democracy was saved by the Kesavananda Bharati case.

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