

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KING JANAMEJAYA, KANNAGI AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI IN COURT OF LAW

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Abstract:

King Parikshit was the king of the Kurus, ruled the kingdom of Hastinapur after the Pandavas and ruled 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.

Kannagi, was the heroine of the epic Silappathikaram. This epic was written by Ilango Adigal between 200 and 300 AD, is considered on par with the Ramayana and Mahabharata as the most important epic in the South India. Kannagi was the daughter of a wealthy 'Maanaigan' merchant of pearls and diamonds in 'Poombukar' a harbour city in Tamilnadu. Kovalan, the son of a wealthy merchant in Kaveripattinam, married Kannagi, a young woman of legendary beauty. 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, Silapathikaram Kannagai arguments with Pandian King and Constitutional scenario of Indira Gandhi. With long arguments in the Kings' court and the Supreme Court became instrumental to change their perception.

Key words: Veda Vyasa, Sarpa Satra Yagna, Astika, Vaisampayana, Kannagi, Anklet, Rubies, Pearls, Kesavananda Bharathi, Supreme Court of India, Nana Palkivala, S.M.Sikri.

Introduction:

The Mahabharatham⁽¹⁻⁶⁾ is an ancient Indian epic where the main story revolves around two branches of a family – the Pandavas and Kauravas- who, in the Kurukshetra War, battle 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 Chiranjivis (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.

Silappathikaram^(11,12,13) is a long heroic story in which 'Kannagi' the protagonist represents the Tamil people of 2nd century. She follows a Tamil community, especially in Tamilnadu where three kings ('Chera', 'Chola', and 'Pandiya') ruled. It is written with songs and dances blended with prose. We find in this epic prose, music and drama-It is called in Tamil as 'Iyal, 'Isai' and 'Nadagam'. It is written in Lyrics intercepted with prose and Lyrics. The story of Kannagi plays an important role in the history of Madurai. There lived a merchant by name "Maasathuvaan" in Kaveripoompattinam. He had a son called "Kovalan". He was married to "Kannagi" who was the beautiful daughter of a merchant by name "Maanaikkan". The *Silappadikaram* republished as The Tale of an Anklet is one of The Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature according to later Tamil literary tradition. It contains three chapters, and a total of 5270 lines of poetry. The epic revolves around Kannagi, who having lost her husband to a miscarriage of justice at the Court of the Pandyan Dynasty, wreaks her revenge on his kingdom.

Indira Gandhi⁽²⁰⁾ was the only child of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, Indira Gandhi was born on November 19, 1917. A stubborn and 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, when her life ended in assassination. She was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister.

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)^(7,8,9). 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 legendary 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^(8,9). His mother Manasa was Jaratkaru's wife 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.

Chief Priest Vaisampayana:

King Janamejaya continued his yagna. The priests chant and offer oblations to the Fire. The king goes the priests were continued 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 no strife. 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.

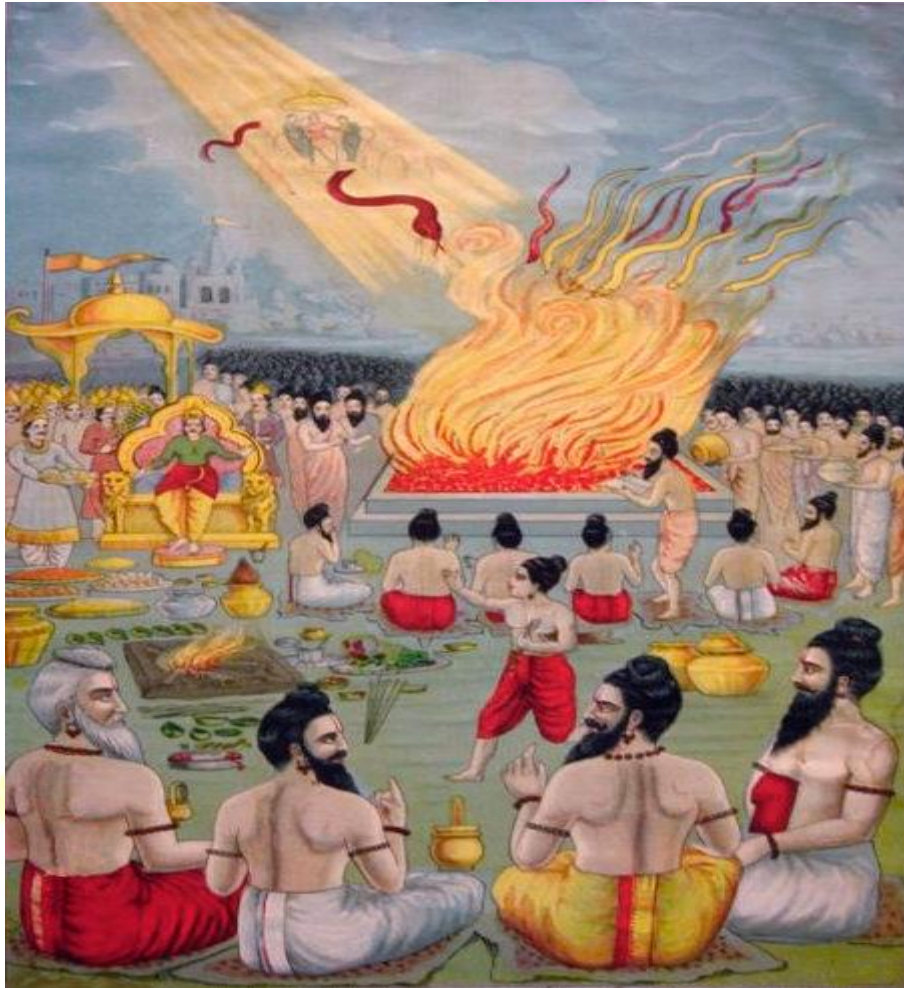


Fig. 1 :King Janamejaya's Sarpa Satya Sacrifice (Yagna)

King Janamejaya told the chief priest to bring the sages who know the mantras to bring Indra and Takshaka into the Yagna. The chief priest told that the sages who know 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 is 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 is 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, is still alive. Wait till he is falling to the fire, before you begin giving gifts to asge Aastika." ⁽⁶⁾. 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 hopes his presence would help bring the Yagna to a conclusion.

Aastika Demand 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. Astika told that as per his mother's command he came here to save Takshaka not for wealth. Then there was a heated arguments between King Janamejaya and Aastika. King Janamejaya told that Aastikan has 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 Astika'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.

Kovalan's Infatuation Love with Dancer Madhavi:

Kovalan, the son of a wealthy merchant in Kaveripattinam, married Kannagi, a young woman of legendary beauty. For some time they lived together happily in the city of Kaveripattinam until at a festival at the royal court, Kovalan met the dancer Madhavi (another character).

Kovalan falls in love with Madhavi. Her arresting beauty and scintillating dance and captivating singing of Madhavi have arrested the attention of Kovalan. His unquenched thirst of aesthetic sense was well fed by Madhavi. He becomes an iron piece near the powerful magnet 'Madhavi'. In his infatuation, he forgot his wedded wife Kannagi. He becomes an estranged husband. He departs from Kannagi not because Kannagi was less beautiful than Madhavi but because, he finds extra sensual pleasures with Madhavi which Kannagi could not feed the aesthetic sense of Kovalan. He was lost in the extra-marital- life with Madhavi. He loses all the fortunes and jewels of Kannagi for the petty pleasures. Kannagi becomes a grass-widow.

Separation from Madhavi:

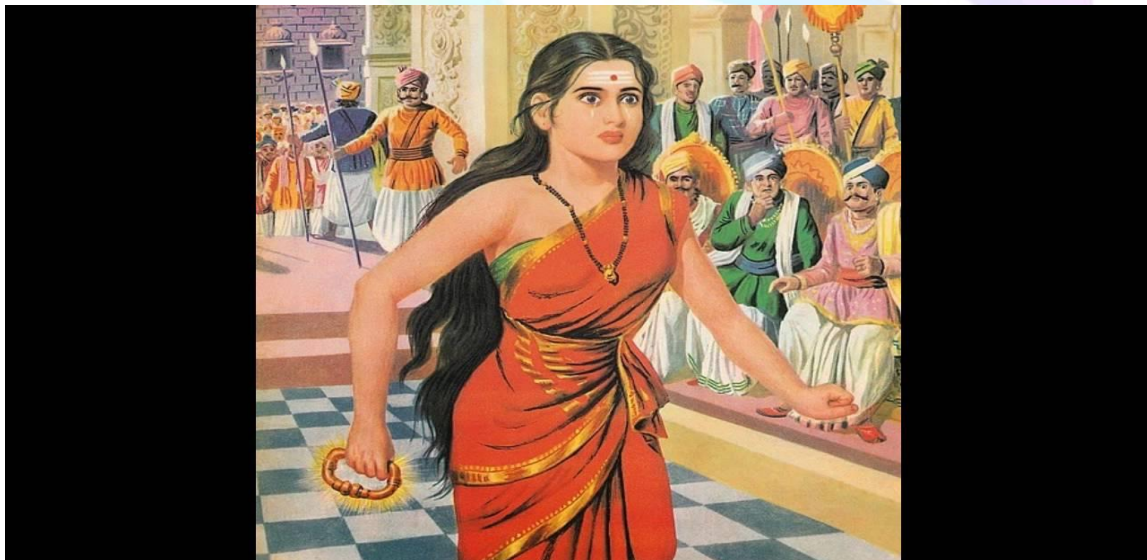
Once Kovalan developed a quibble over a song sung by Madhavi. The song was misunderstood by Kovalan. He suspected the infidelity of Madhavi and came back home to have the reunion of his lawful and devoted wife Kannagi. Their only asset was a precious pair of anklets (Chilambu - hence the name of the epic), filled with rubies gem, which she gave to him willingly. With these as their Capital they went to the city of Madurai, where Kovalan hoped to recoup his fortunes by trade.

The city of Madurai was ruled by the Pandya King Nedunjeliam. Kovalan's objective was to sell kannagi's anklets in this kingdom so that he and his wife would be able to start their lives

over. Unfortunately, around the time he set out to sell the anklets, But the queen of Nedunjeliam, had just been robbed of a similar anklet by a wicked court jeweler. The only difference was that Kannagi's were filled with rubies and the queen's filled with pearls, but this was not a visible fact. The jeweler happened to see Kovalan with Kannagi's anklet, and immediately seized it and informed the king. Guards were sent to apprehend Kovalan, who was then killed on the king's orders. When Kannagi was informed that her husband was sentenced to death by the Pandiyam King's order, she became furious and set out to prove her husband's innocence to the King. Like a raging inferno, Kannagi brushed past the security into the royal court and dared the King, who asked: "Who are you with tears and why did you come before me?"

Kannagi's Rage:

"Oh, Unenlightened King," retorted Kannagi, " I do have a complaint. I hail from the famous Pukar, where we have a tradition of justice; in the name of fair play one of our Kings appeased a pigeon (by giving his own flesh) to the amazement of everyone; in order to uphold justice to a grieving cow who rang the enquiry bell thunderously, another King ordered the chariot run over his only son, who earlier killed her calf by negligently running his chariot over it



Kannagi Entering Into The Pandiyam King's Court Courtesy: Youtube

From the same city comes Kovalan, son of an affluent, accomplished and highly respected grain merchant, Maasattuvan, who also had an impeccable character. To overcome his cruel fate, Oh King, Kovalan who came to this city to sell my own personal anklets and rebuild our lives, got killed by you unjustly. I am Kovalan's wife, Kannagi". Oh, Injustice King. The Pandiyan King ordered to bring the anklet which was seized from Kovalan and gave it to Kannagi. Kannagi thrown the anklet on the floor, the anklet was broken into pieces and the rubies fell on the face of the Pandian King whereas the Queen's contained only pearls. The Pandiyan king realised that Kannagi's husband was innocent. Ashamed of their decision, the king and the queen died together to straighten the bent scepter which was the symbol of the fairest justice for Tamil kings.

Indira Gandhi:

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, 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. He died unexpectedly of a heart attack less than two years after assuming office and Indira Gandhi could become Prime Minister after his death.

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 19th July, 1969 which is considered as Economic milestone of our country. 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.

Comparison Between King Janamejaya of Mahabharatham, Kannagi of Silapathigaram and Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi :

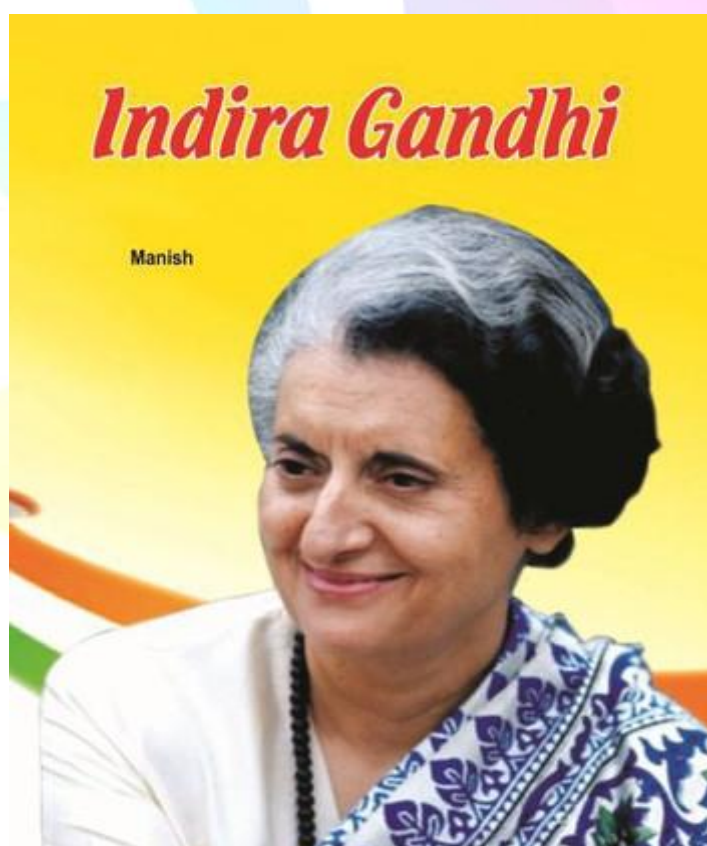
JANAMEJAYA	KANNAGI	INDIRA GANDHI
He was born to a King Parishita	She was born to a wealthy 'Maanaigan'	She was born to a Prime Minister Nehru.
He belongs to Royal Kuru Family	She belongs to Royal Merchant Family	She belongs to Royal Nehru-Gandhi family.
Brought up in a protected and traditional family.	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 parts with her fortunes to her husband	She could become Prime Minister because she is from Nehru's family.
He performed many yagna for the welfare of the people.	She could lead her life as a house-wife.	She inaugurated and developed many Public Sector Company for the welfare of the people.
King Janmejaya carried out a massive snake sacrifice (Great Sarpa Satra Yaga) to kill Takshaka.	king Pandian Nedunchezhiyan passes an order without any proper enquiry to kill the Kovalan and recover the lost anklet of the queen. The innocent Kovalan was unfortunately killed	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.	The husband of Kannagi, Kovalan was killed by the Pandian King by assuming that Kovalan was a thief. It was by Kannagi challenged in King's court.	Whether 24 th , 25 th and 29 th amendment act 1971 is valid? These amendments are challenged by the case of Kesavananda Bharathi in Supreme Court of India.

Takshaka and Aastika did not meet and they did n't talk with each other.	Kovalan was killed by Pandian King. She fights for justice defying the powerful king	Kesavananda Bharathi and Lawyer Nana Palkivala did not meet and they did n't talk with each other ⁽²⁴⁾ .
Krishna Dwaipayana @ Vedavyasa acted as the Judge for the Dispute.	Pandian King Nedunchezhiyan himself acted as a Judge.	13-Eminent Judges Constitutional Bench heard the case including S.M.Sikri , CJI.
King Janamejaya and Takshaka have had this Conflict.	Pandian King and Kannagi 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 Kannagi and Pandian King.	There were heated arguments between N.A.Palkhivala and H.M Seervai.
Result: Takshaka (Snakes) has right to life and his entire Clan was saved.	Pandian King realised his mistake by telling that I did Injustice to Kovalan and he died on the Spot. The Justice was saved.	Result: Basic Feature of our Constitution was saved

She 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. More number of Public Sector Companies (PSU) were started for the economic development of India and also for the younger generation employment opportunities. This result 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 passed the 26th 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”

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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, untouchables, minorities and women in India, Indira Gandhi was "Indira Amma or Mother Indira".

War with Pakistan During 1971:

She 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 to 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 20th 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 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 point 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 did 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 for 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*⁽²⁵⁻²⁹⁾ 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,^(25,26, 27). 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. 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 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⁽³⁰⁾, 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 Amendment 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 petitioner challenged these Amendments. First Time in the Indian Judiciary, 13 judges forgathered to hear this case, 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⁽²⁵⁻²⁹⁾. 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 Court further held that, “ Preamble is the Integral Part of the Constitution⁽³³⁾.

Conclusion:

Vyasa declared that Takshaka has Right to Life ^(34,35). The life of Takshaka was saved and he had given direction to King Janamejaya to stop the Snake Sacrifice Yagna. It is noted that Kannagi is viewed as a brave woman who could demand Justice directly from the King and even dare to call him “Unenlightened King”. She stood up for her rights when injustice was done. Kannagi took revenge on the King of Madurai, for a mistaken death penalty imposed on her husband Kovalan. Kesavananda Bharati case efforts one main question in the Supreme Court of India, was the power of Parliament to amend the Constitution of India unlimited? 13-Judges Bench gave verdiction, that 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 is declared that The Preamble is an Integral part of the Constitution.

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