

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 8: THE TALE OF MELON CITY



THE TALE OF MELON CITY

~Summary~

-by Vikram Seth

The King Orders an Arch to be Built

This story is about a city whose king was lawful and gentle. He orders an arch (curved structure) to be built which would become a symbol of his triumphs and accomplishments. The arch would be constructed on the main road and it would inspire and motivate the people who would see it. As per the orders of the king, the arch was built. The king rode down the main road to inspire others.

The King Loses his Crown and Gets Angry

The arch was built too low and the king's crown fell down when it struck the arch. It was a disgrace for him. He ordered that the chief of builders should be hanged for this mistake. The arrangements for the hanging were made. The chief of builders was called.

The Blame Game Begins

The chief of builders pleaded that it was not his mistake; it was rather the workmen's fault. So the king stopped the hanging of the chief builder. He ordered that all the workmen must be hanged instead. The workmen claimed that the bricks used were not of the right size. So the masons were called. They were trembling in fear. The masons in turn blamed the architect for a wrong design.

The King Gets Stuck in a Tricky Situation

The architect was called. The king ordered that the architect must be hanged. The architect reminded the king that he himself had changed the original plan of the arch when it was shown to him sometime back.

The king realised that the blame had shifted to him. It was a tricky situation. The king withdrew for consulting some wise people. He asked for the wisest man in the country. The wisest man was chosen on the criteria that he should be very old.

The person chosen could not walk or see properly and he was carried there by other people. The wisest man said in a shaking voice that the culprit should be punished. He announced that it was the arch which banged against the crown, so it should be hanged.

The Nation Wants a Hanging

The arch was being taken for the hanging when one of the councillors said that the arch actually touched the royal head with respect. The king agreed, but the crowd was getting restless and wanted a hanging. Perceiving the situation, the king ordered that someone must be hanged, guilty or not.

A loop of rope was set up quite high and each man was measured to its height. Only one was tall enough to reach it and that was the king himself. So the king was hanged. The ministers heaved a sigh of relief that someone was hanged or else the crowd might have turned against them.

The Dilemma

The ministers now faced the dilemma that the country had no king. They followed their old custom and sent out messengers to proclaim that the next person who would pass the city gate would choose the next king. After some time, an idiot passed the gate and the guards stopped him.

When they asked him to name the king, the idiot said 'a melon'. This was his standard answer to all the questions as he was very fond of melons.

The Melon King

After the answer given by that idiot, a melon was made the king of the city. The ministers respectfully carried the melon to the throne and set it down on the king's throne.

This happened long ago. If you now ask the people why their king appears to be a melon, they reply that it is a customary choice. It makes no difference to them if their king is a melon. They are happy because the king doesn't interfere in their lives. They live in peace and harmony.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 76)

(Reading with Insight)

Question 1. Narrate 'The Tale of Melon City' in your own words.

Answer: Once upon a time, there reigned a calm king. He once wanted to build an arch that would eddy the people. The king's wish was quickly fulfilled, and a beautiful arch was built.

When the king rode down the thoroughfare, his crown fell from his head and was struck by the arch, which was built too low. The king thought it was a disgrace to him and wanted to hang the perpetrator.

He commanded the chief of the builders to be hanged. The chief then stated that it was the builders' fault. The king then shifted the blame to the builders. The builders then cried that because the bricks were larger, the architect should be hanged. As a result, the architect was finally punished. The architect reminded the king that the king had made some changes to the design he had shown him. It had finally turned to face the king.

He paused for a moment before ordering the soldiers to bring the wisest man in the country. They brought an old man who could barely see or hear, as the king had ordered. He proposed that the arch be hanged because it was the source of such disgrace, which was immediately implemented. Then one of the ministers disagreed, asking how they could shamelessly hang an arch. The king then reversed his decision and decided to deal with it his way.

They said the nation wanted someone hanged right away, so every man was measured, and only one man was tall enough to get trapped in the arch, and that man was the king. As a result, he was eventually hanged.

The country's people then desired a new king. They asked the first person to pass through the city gate, as is their custom. Regrettably, the individual was insane. When the soldiers questioned him about who should be the next king, he said, "Who should be the next king?" He said melon because he liked them the best. So a melon was finally crowned and placed on the throne.

Question 2. What impression would you form of a state where the King was 'just and placid'?

Answer: A state in which the king is just and peaceful will not be secure. It is the same in the state described in this poem. The king was so stupid that he convicted himself to death for no

reason. He felt insecure in the actions he took and kept changing them. In such a state, no right decision can be made and no situation can be handled properly.

Question 3. How, according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?

Answer: I believe that in a state, peace, and liberty can be maintained

- By enforcing rules and making decisions that benefit the people. However, no law can be enacted that benefits everyone because what appears to be correct to one person may not be correct to another. As a result, laws should be drafted in such a way that they benefit the vast majority of people.
- By disseminating a sense of unity among the people through all available means.

Question 4. Suggest a few instances in the poem which highlight humour and irony

Answer: There are a few instances in the poem where humour and irony are highlighted. They are:

- The king, who changed his mind after hearing each person he suspected of being a criminal.
- The wise man's advice to hang the arch.
- Finally, the madman's suggestion that they make a melon as their king.

Question 5. 'The Tale of Melon City' has been narrated in a verse form. This is a unique style which lends extra charm to an ancient tale. Find similar examples in your language. Share them in the class.

Answer: Write your own answer.