

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 2: THE TIGER KING



THE TIGER KING

~Summary~

-by Kalki

The Prophecy and Miracle about the Tiger King

The Maharaja of Pratibandapuram is known by many names but is often called 'Tiger King'. The author says that everybody who reads about the Maharaja is tempted to meet him, but unfortunately cannot, because he is already dead. However, his myth continues to fascinate people.

When he was born, the astrologers foretold that he would grow up to be a warrior of warriors and hero of heroes, but one day he would have to meet his death. At that very moment, a miracle took place. The baby prince, who was only ten-days old, began to speak aloud clearly and started questioning the astrologers. The prince first said that it was a commonly known truth that anyone who took birth in this world had to die one day, and no predictions were needed in the matter.

He only wanted to know the manner of his death. The chief astrologer told him that because he was born in the hour of the bull, the reason of his death would be a tiger. The child was not even scared. In fact, he warned the tigers to be on their guard, and beware of him.

The Prince's Childhood and the Killing of the First Tiger

The crown prince grew taller and stronger day by day. His childhood was uneventful as compared to his birth. Like other princes in India, the prince drank the milk of an English cow, was looked after by an English nanny, tutored in English by an Englishman and saw nothing but English films.

He was crowned the king at the age of twenty. The astrologer's prediction slowly reached his ears. He went on a tiger hunt and killed his first tiger. Elated by his feat, he sent for the state astrologer. The astrologer again warned the king that the prophecy was right. He might kill ninety-nine tigers but the hundredth tiger would prove to be fatal for him. If the king would succeed in killing the hundredth tiger, the astrologer promised to cut off his tuft of hair, burn all his astrology books and become an insurance agent.

The Tiger Hunt Begins

The Maharaja banned tiger hunting in his kingdom. A proclamation was issued that if anyone dared to fling so much as a stone at a tiger, all his wealth and property would be confiscated. The king was adamant to prove the prediction wrong and vowed to attend to all other matters only after killing a hundred tigers.

The Maharaja faced many dangers on his quest; the bullet missed its mark, a tiger leapt upon him and he had to fight a beast with his bare hands etc. Each time, it was the Maharaja who won.

The Maharaja Comes in Danger of Losing his Kingdom, Bribes to Save it

A high ranking British officer visited Pratibandapuram with a wish to hunt tigers. He was very fond of getting his pictures clicked with his victims. The Maharaja was resolute. He refused permission. He felt that if he relented, other British officers too would turn up with the same request.

Now, he stood in danger of losing his kingdom. After many deliberations with his dewan over the issue, they came up with a plan. Fifty diamond rings were sent to the officer's wife. The Maharaja expected that she would choose one or two rings, but the greedy lady kept the whole lot. The bribe cost him three lakh rupees, but his kingdom was saved.

Scheme to kill the remaining Tigers

The Maharaja's tiger hunts were very successful. Within ten years, he was able to kill seventy tigers. As a result, the tiger population became extinct in Pratibandapuram.

The Maharaja devised a scheme for killing the remaining tigers. He called up the dewan and asked him to find a princess of a royal family in any other native state with a large tiger population. The dewan followed the order and found the right girl' for him. The Maharaja killed five or six tigers each time he visited his father-in-law. He managed to kill ninety-nine tigers and then unfortunately the tigers of his father-in-law's kingdom were all dead. Now, only one tiger remained to be killed.

To Escape the Maharaja's Ire, the Dewan Arranges the Hundredth Tiger

The Maharaja was sunk in gloom as he was unable to find the last tiger. Suddenly, there came the news that a tiger had been seen in a hillside village. The Maharaja was so happy at the news that he announced a three year exemption from all taxes for that village and set out on the hunt at once.

The tiger, it seemed, kept himself hidden. The Maharaja's fury and obstinacy mounted alarmingly. He ordered that the land taxes would be doubled. The dewan tried to warn him that such a measure could prove to be catastrophic.

The Maharaja became more outraged and asked the dewan to resign. The dewan, to save himself, decided to give up the old tiger that had been brought from the People's Park in Madras and kept hidden in his house.

The Last Tiger

The dewan and his wife dragged the old and weak tiger to their car and shoved it into the back seat. After much resistance from the tiger, the exhausted dewan was somehow able to leave the tiger in the forest in which the Maharaja had been hunting.

The Maharaja was delighted to see the hundredth tiger. He took careful aim and shot at the beast. The tiger fell in a crumpled heap. The Maharaja was filled with boundless joy at fulfilling his vow. He ordered the tiger to be brought to the capital in a grand procession. After the Maharaja left, the hunters went to take a close look at the tiger. They were shocked to see that the tiger was still alive. The tiger had actually fainted from the shock of the bullet whizzing past him. They decided not to tell the Maharaja that he had missed his target. They feared losing their jobs. One of the hunters then killed the tiger himself.

The Prophecy Proves to be True

The dead tiger was taken in procession through the town and buried. A tomb was erected over it.

After achieving the feat, the Maharaja turned his attention to his child. It was his third birthday and he wished to give him something special. He went for shopping but couldn't find anything worthy enough. Finally, he spotted a wooden tiger and brought it for his son.

The wooden tiger was carved by an unskilled carpenter. Tiny slivers of wood stood up like quills all over it. One of the slivers pierced the Maharaja's right hand while he was playing with his son. He didn't mind it and pulled it out. The next day, infection spread in his hand. In four days, it developed into a festering sore which spread all over his arm. Three surgeons from Madras operated on him but were unable to save his life. Thus, the hundredth tiger took its revenge.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 17)

(Reading with Insight)

Question 1. The story is a satire on the conceit of those in power. How does the author employ the literary device of dramatic irony in the story?

Answer: The story “The Tiger King” is a satire on the self-admiration of those in power. It is also the best instance of dramatic irony in a situation where the entire significance of a character’s talks is transparent to the readers but is not known to the characters present in it. The Maharaja, because of the prediction that he would meet his death from the hundredth tiger that he killed, screamed a warning to all the tigers. He explained the act of killing tigers as ‘self-defence’. The state banned the hunting of tigers by anyone in the state except the Maharaja. The Maharaja tried his utmost best to distort the prediction of the astrologers since his kingdom astrologer had foretold the Maharaja’s death by a tiger. He was to beware and be more careful from the hundredth tiger. Instead, the courtiers spent their time, living luxuriously and comfortably off the taxes of the people and in foolish pursuits. Even the courtiers took extreme advantage of their power. The story is full of situations of irony that expose the foolishness of dictatorial rulers who neglected nature and bent laws to suit their selfish wishes. The author manipulates dramatic irony in the story by a twist of fortune when the bullet of the Maharaja failed to kill the hundredth tiger and he remains unaware of it. The irony lies in the point that the tiger which caused the death of the Tiger King was a wooden tiger. One of its tiny slivers pierced into the right hand of the king. Infection flared and a suppurating sore spread all over the arm. In vain struggles to prove the astrologer wrong, the Maharaja had killed 100 tigers but by failing to kill the last tiger and celebrating his ‘triumph’ over his fate, Maharaja had invited death as he was ironically killed by a little wooden toy tiger.

Question 2. What is the author’s indirect comment on subjecting innocent animals to the willfulness of human beings?

Answer: Through this satirical story, the author incorporated some humour in the story and also explained how humans kill innocent creatures or animals just to show their supremacy and desires to fulfill their whims and fancies. The Maharaja’s wild killing of 99 tigers had led to their destruction in many forests, but he was unaware of the severe results his foolish actions would lead to. To save his life and lead a satisfactory one, the Maharaja mercilessly killed helpless animals to extinction just to show his power and legacy and to prove the astrologer wrong. He wished to show his superiority as a human being, strength over nature and his destiny and exercised his power to kill hundred luckless tigers.

Question 3. How would you describe the behaviour of the Maharaja's minions towards him? Do you find them truly sincere towards him or are they driven by fear when they obey him? Do we find a similarity in today's political order?

Answer: The Maharaja's minions or his servants were remarkably subservient and loyal to his every order and command. Most of them were terrified of the Maharaja and decided to keep him in good humour by following his rules and orders. They did not dare to resist him as his anger could mean the loss of their jobs or even the loss of their lives. The astrologer was afraid of predicting his death but Maharaja had asked him to talk without any fear. Dewan, who was his close advisor could not stop him from killing tigers, fearing his anger, and he arranged Maharaja's marriage to a princess as per his wishes. Since he was scared of losing his post, he even planted an old tiger to pacify the King's anger and please him. Likewise, the hunters chose not to notify him of the survival of the 100th tiger and instead killed it themselves fearing that they might lose their jobs. Finally, the shopkeeper, who sold the wooden tiger to the King, quoted a higher price to avoid a penalty. So it is obvious that the king's servants were driven by fear rather than by any feelings of justice towards their king.

Yes, today's political order is very similar to that of the Maharaja's story. It means there's no difference. Most of the people these days are occupying various positions of political power based individually on their influence and power.

Question 4. Can you relate instances of game-hunting among the rich and the powerful in the present times that illustrate the callousness of human beings towards wildlife?

Answer: Even in the present time, one can see that game-hunting is as popular as it was in the past among the rich and powerful people across the world. India banned and condemned poaching, hunting, and selling animal body parts across the country. But these laws are not executed properly so hunters and poachers hunt illegally, and trade animal parts across the border to get crores of cash. As a consequence, many species have become extinct and others are endangered. Strict penalties and punishment must be set on the offenders of the laws passed to preserve wildlife. We must join hands to protect those animals and also should spread awareness of crimes inflicted on helpless animals.