

CLASS XII

VISTAS: THE TIGER KING

By KALKI

Introduction: Kalki takes his readers to the days of autocratic and eccentric kings. These kings lived under the thumb rule of the British, hence they fear them. In order to make the story mysterious Kalki has added supernatural element in the story. The haughty king disapproved the prophecy made by the astrologer about his death, but his death from the wooden tiger (100th tiger) approved it.

The story 'The Tiger King' is satire on the conceit of those in power. Most of the time the rulers are not interested in serving the people or work for the welfare of the public; instead they spend their time foolish pursuits. Even the coteries who surround these power centres are interested in taking advantage of the proximity for their own welfare. This is a story about transience-of life, of power and reverberates the maxim: "Too many slips between a cup and a lip."

The Title: "The Tiger King" is a very appropriate title for the story for several reasons. First of all, the king is crazy about tiger hunting so much that he marries a princess whose father's kingdom has a sizeable tiger population. He kills one hundred tigers just to fulfil his vow. Secondly, the king with all his frenzy, anger and ruthlessness is as ferocious as a tiger. Thirdly, he dies of a silver prick received from a wooden toy tiger. Finally, the prediction that a tiger would cause the king's death also comes true. Since the story revolves round the king and the hundred tigers that he kills, it could not be better titled than "The Tiger King".

Irony: 'The Tiger King' is replete with irony that reveals the follies of autocratic and wilful rulers who flout all laws and bend them to suit their selfish interests. The dramatic irony in the story is sharp when the Tiger King alone is unaware that his bullet had not killed the hundredth tiger. The other characters and the readers anticipate his doom as he celebrates his triumph over his destiny. We realize how misplaced the King's pride at killing the first tiger was. The astrologers had prophesied, "You may kill ninety nine tigers like this, but your death will be brought on by the hundredth tiger." The King wanted to prove the astrologer wrong and to save his life. Ironically, to avert death he actually invites it. The lofty titles used to introduce the Tiger King, suggesting an invincible ferocity are indeed ironic for he is finally killed by a cheap, crudely made wooden toy tiger which became the tool of Nature's revenge. He had killed a hundred tigers in vain and

must be punished for it. Irony is indeed sharp when the surgeons announce the operation successful and declare the king dead.

Instances of Satire: Satire employs irony, sarcasm, ridicule, etc. in exposing and criticizing follies and vices in men. The story uses humour to criticize self-seeking Kings who wilfully exploit both nature and their subjects for selfish interests.

a) When the Maharaja of Pratibandhpuram was told that he would be killed by a tiger, he could never imagine the twist in fate where a toy tiger could be fatal. Because of his conceit, he was unprepared for such surprises flung by life at him.

b) The grandeur associated with a king's life proves a mockery. The news of the king's ailment invited not one, but three surgeons. They got so tied up in technicalities that they declared the operation successful even though the king died.

c) The story also satirizes the corrupting influence of power. Just because the Tiger King had power, he felt he could browbeat his subjects and even defeat fate. He neglected his responsibility as a ruler. He neglected the welfare of his subjects, his family, increased and reduced taxes at will and sacked his officers. They feared him or else he would have learnt the truth.

d) When we see the king gloating over his bravery after killing the hundredth old, weak tiger, we notice that Kalki is satirizing the notions of cowardice and bravery. There is no heroism in fighting an unequal battle. The King's cowardice was obvious when he justifies that one may kill even a cow in self-defence.

e) Kalki is also criticizing the King's men and subjects who pander to his whims out of fear or like the shopkeeper manipulate and fool him.

Light humour in the Tiger King:-

a) The instance of the Stuka bomber,

b) The king's offer of mouse hunt etc.

c) The incoherent blabbering by the Dewan and the Chief Astrologer,

d) The Dewan procuring an old tiger from people's park and its stubborn refusal to get off the car and the description of its waiting in humble supplication to be shot,

e) The shopkeeper quoting three hundred rupees for a cheap two annas and a quarter toy tiger.

Points for the Textual Long Answer Questions: Introductiontwo sentences...- name of the lesson and author, and the theme.....body (1 - 2 paragraphs)

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?

Irony involves a situation in which the audience shares the knowledge with the author of which the character is innocent- author has made dexterous use of it- having killed the first tiger- King elated- but astrologer warns him of the hundredth tiger- so takes up a mission of killing 100 tigers- believes he has killed the hundredth one- but readers know that it only fainted- basking in the glory that he has disproved the predictions- wooden tiger- kills him by a sliver-author has shown how the king uses his power and does not take a 'no' for an answer- wants to disprove the prediction at the cost of hundred tigers- eccentric in his behaviour.

2. What is the narrator's indirect comment on subjecting innocent animals to the willingness of human beings?

The author wants to tell his readers- man is living in a world that God has created- every creature has a right to live- those who intrude into the lives of other living beings- committing an unpardonable sin- Maharaja kills tigers mercilessly- author also advocates against hunting through this lesson- this may lead to the extinction of a species- the next generation might be deprived of even seeing the species- King finally killed because it seems to be a punitive action for what he did.

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?

Since the Maharaja's existence revolved around killing hundred tigers- his minions were driven by fear- determined to fulfil his mission threatened to confiscate the wealth of anyone who would fling even a stone on a tiger-when tiger population in his country reduced- married a girl from a state with more tiger population- exempted people from taxes when a tiger was reported in a village- doubled the taxes when it was not found- dewan knew that the hundredth tiger had to be found- bought a tiger from the People's Park in Madras- even when the target was missed- people killed it for fear of losing their jobs- so the minions are

not sincere but only feared the King- did not offer genuine advice- sycophants prevent the authorities from seeing the truth- even today autocratic rulers and monopolies have such a system.

Short Answer questions:

1. What is the author's indirect comment on subjecting innocent animals to the wilfulness of human beings?
2. Why do you think, the author goes into detailed identification of the Tiger King through a variety of titles? Does he really mean to humour him?
3. How did the tiger king acquire his name?
4. What do you understand by "threat of a Stuka bomber"?
5. What was the miracle that took place in the royal palace?
6. What predictions did the astrologers make at the birth of the tiger king?
7. What justification did the tiger king give before he started out on tiger hunt?
8. What did the State astrologer say he would do 'if the hundredth tiger were also killed'?
9. What did the high-ranking British officer wish to do? Was his wish fulfilled?
10. How did the Maharaja manage to save his throne?
11. How did the 'duraiani' behave on receiving the gifts?
12. What unforeseen hurdle brought the tiger hunt to a standstill?
13. Why did the Maharaja suddenly decide to marry? Whom did he wish to marry?
14. Why did Maharaja order the dewan to double the tax?
15. Why did the Dewan decide to give up his own tiger to be killed by the Maharaja?
16. What was Dewan's tiger like? How did he take it into the forest?
17. How the 100th tiger was finally found & killed?
18. Why was the Maharaja overcome with elation when he thought he had killed the hundredth tiger?
19. What did the Maharaja buy as a birthday gift for his son?

Long Answer Questions:

1. How did the Tiger King meet his end? What is ironical about his death?
2. "The operation is successful. The maharaja is dead." Comment on the irony of the situation.
3. Discuss the title of the story 'The Tiger King'.
