

The Tiger King — Detailed Summary

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Introduction

The story The Tiger King by Kalki is a satirical tale about power, arrogance, superstition, and fate. It narrates the life and death of the Maharaja of Pratibandapuram, famously nicknamed The Tiger King. The story unfolds in a humorous yet ironic tone, showing how the king's obsession with avoiding a prophecy ironically leads him to fulfill it.

Part 1 — Birth of the Tiger King and the Prophecy

When the Maharaja was born, astrologers predicted that he would one day die. This is nothing unusual — everyone dies — but the chief astrologer added something more: the prince would meet his death because of a tiger.

A miraculous and comical event happened — the ten-day-old infant spoke in a clear voice, addressing the astrologers. He said:

- Everyone knows death is inevitable.
- What would be interesting is if they could tell him how he would die.

When told it would be because of a tiger, the infant confidently declared: "Let tigers beware!"

This strange event became a rumor in the kingdom, but over time, it was forgotten as the boy grew up.

Part 2 — Education and Ascension

The prince, named Jilani Jung Jung Bahadur, grew up like most royal children of that era:

- Raised by an English nanny
- Educated by an English tutor
- Fed on milk from an English cow
- Watched English films

At the age of 20, he took control of the state from the Court of Wards. But the astrologer's prophecy about the tiger reached his ears again.

Part 3 — The First Tiger Hunt

The kingdom of Pratibandapuram had many forests with tigers. The Maharaja decided the best way to defeat the prophecy was to kill tigers himself.

He began hunting and successfully killed his first tiger. Proudly, he called the chief

astrologer and asked if the prophecy still stood. The astrologer replied:

- The king may kill 99 tigers without harm.
- But he should be extremely cautious with the 100th tiger — that one would decide his fate.

Part 4 — Exclusive Hunting Rights

From that day, the king issued an order:

- Only he could hunt tigers.
- Anyone else attempting to harm a tiger would have all property confiscated.

The Maharaja took his mission seriously and postponed all other state matters until his tiger hunt was complete. He faced dangerous moments — sometimes bullets missed, and he fought tigers barehanded — but always emerged victorious.

Part 5 — Clash with a British Officer

One day, a high-ranking British officer visited the state. He loved hunting tigers, but the king refused to allow him. The officer then requested only to be photographed with a dead tiger, even if the king killed it — but the Maharaja refused this too, fearing it would set a bad precedent.

The king risked losing his throne over this insult to British prestige. After discussions with his dewan (chief minister), the Maharaja sent 50 diamond rings to the officer's wife. The king expected her to return most of them, but she kept them all. The bill was ₹3 lakh — but the Maharaja considered it a fair price for keeping his throne.

Part 6 — Shortage of Tigers

Over the next 10 years, the Maharaja killed 70 tigers. But then a problem arose — tigers disappeared from the kingdom. It was joked that they had run away to avoid him, or wanted to be killed by British hunters instead.

Desperate, the Maharaja ordered his dewan to find him a bride from a royal family with many tigers in their territory. The dewan succeeded, and the Maharaja married the princess. Whenever he visited his in-laws, he would kill 5–6 tigers there. Eventually, his count reached 99.

Part 7 — The Final Tiger

Now only one tiger remained to complete the prophecy. The Maharaja became obsessed, dreaming and thinking only about the last kill. Unfortunately, tigers became scarce even in his father-in-law's kingdom.

Then news came from a village in his state — sheep were disappearing, possibly due to a tiger. The Maharaja rushed there, promising the villagers a three-year tax exemption.

However, the tiger proved elusive. Furious, the king threatened to double land taxes if the

tiger wasn't found. Afraid of political unrest, the dewan secretly obtained a tiger from the People's Park in Madras and smuggled it into the forest.

Part 8 — The Missed Shot

The next day, the tiger appeared before the king. The Maharaja took careful aim, fired, and the tiger fell — apparently dead. The king declared victory, certain he had defeated fate, and left.

But when the hunting party inspected the animal, they discovered the bullet had missed. The tiger had only fainted from shock. Fearing the king's wrath, one hunter shot the tiger from close range, killing it for real. The tiger was carried back in a grand procession and buried.

Part 9 — The Real Hundredth Tiger

Soon after, the king's son's third birthday arrived. For the first time, the king turned his attention to his child. Searching for a gift, he found a wooden toy tiger in a shop. Though badly made, the shopkeeper charged ₹300, knowing it was for the king.

While playing with his son, a rough wooden splinter from the toy pierced the Maharaja's right hand. He pulled it out, but infection set in, leading to a dangerous sore that spread to his arm.

Three famous surgeons from Madras operated on him. They announced: "The operation was successful. The Maharaja is dead."

Thus, the prophecy came true — the hundredth tiger that killed the king was not a living animal, but the wooden toy tiger.

Themes and Messages

1. Satire on Arrogance and Power — The Maharaja believed he could challenge fate using his royal power, but his pride blinded him to reality.
2. Dramatic Irony — Readers know from the beginning that he will die — the suspense lies in how it happens.
3. Superstition vs. Rationality — The king's actions are driven by fear of a prophecy, showing how superstition can influence even educated rulers.
4. Cruelty to Animals — The mass killing of tigers for personal safety and ego highlights human selfishness.
5. Fate and Destiny — The story reinforces the idea that destiny cannot be escaped, no matter how hard one tries.

Conclusion

The Tiger King's life is a humorous yet tragic example of human vanity and the futility of trying to outsmart fate. His obsession with killing tigers, his political maneuvering, and his

eventual downfall due to a mere wooden splinter illustrate Kalki's mastery of satire. The story leaves readers amused, yet reflective about arrogance, superstition, and the unpredictable twists of destiny.