

## **THE TIGER KING**

**KALKI**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**THE TIGER KING** is a satire. A satire can be described as the literary art of derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. Humour, irony and exaggeration are often used to aid this.

The story ‘The Tiger King’ is a satire on the pride and stubbornness of those in power. The author takes us to the days of autocratic and eccentric kings. These kings lived under the British rule, hence they feared the regime. In most instances, the rulers were not interested in serving the people and working for their welfare; instead they spent their time in foolish pursuits. They flouted all laws and bent them to suit their selfish interests.

The Maharaja of Pratibandapuram tried to belie what was written in his fate. The chief astrologer had predicted that the cause of his death would be a tiger. The King tried his best to belie the prediction. His campaign of tiger-hunting was very successful. All his strategies and wise plans worked till he killed 99 tigers.

But the hundredth tiger eluded him till his death. The irony of fate brings quite an unexpected end of the Maharaja. The hero who killed ninety nine tigers couldn’t kill the only one that was left. The last tiger he thought to be dead survived. The King’s bullet had missed its mark. Ironically, the hundredth tiger which caused his death was not a ferocious beast of blood and flesh. It was a wooden tiger. One of the slivers of wood pierced his right hand and caused infection and a suppurating sore. It ultimately led to his death.

### **THE STORY AS A SATIRE**

A satire employs irony, sarcasm and ridicule 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 purely selfish motives.

1. 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.
2. The grandeur associated with the king’s life proves a mockery. The three surgeons called for got so tied up in technicalities that they declared the operation successful even though the king died.

3. 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.

4. The king's marriage is one of convenience rather than of love. He is less happy for the princess and more for the father-in-law's state which possessed a large number of tigers.

5. 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.

6. Kalki as well criticizes the King's men and subjects who pander to his whims out of fear or like the shopkeeper manipulate and fool him

## **HUMOUR IN THE STORY**

1. The instance of the Stuka bomber

2. The king's offer of mouse hunt.

3. The incoherent blabbering by the Dewan and the Chief Astrologer

4. 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 beshot.

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

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE TITLE "THE TIGER KING"**

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 vowed he would attend to all other matters of the kingdom only after killing the hundred tigers. Even, he marries a princess whose father's kingdom has a sizeable tiger population. He kills one hundred tigers just to fulfill 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.

## **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Why was it celebration time for all the tigers inhabiting Pratibandapuram?

It was a celebration time for all the tigers inhabiting Pratibandapuram because the state banned tiger hunting by anyone except the Maharaja and a proclamation was issued to the effect that if any one dared to fling a stone at a tiger, all his wealth and property would be seized. The royal beasts were ‘happy’ to be killed at royal hands.

What plan did the Maharaja think of to fulfill his vow to kill hundred tigers after the tiger population became extinct in his state?

When the tiger population became extinct in his state the Maharaja planned to marry a girl of royal family of a native state with a large tiger population so that he would kill the remaining thirty tigers in the state of his father-in-law whenever he visited that.

Why did Maharaja order the dewan to double the tax?

The Maharaja called the dewan and ordered him to immediately double the tax of the villagers who had informed him of a tiger in the forest because despite his best efforts he was unable to locate the beast.

How did the tiger king celebrate his victory over the killing of the 100th tiger?

The Maharaja thought that he had killed the hundredth tiger. He was overcome with elation. He ordered the tiger to be brought to the capital in grand procession. The dead tiger was taken in a procession through the town. It was buried and a tomb was erected over it.

How did the hundredth tiger take its revenge upon the Tiger King?

The king decided that a wooden toy-tiger was a perfect gift for his son’s third birthday. One day he was playing with that wooden tiger. One of the slivers pierced the Maharaja’s right hand. Infection spread all over the arm. Three surgeons performed an operation but couldn’t save the King. Thus, the hundredth tiger took its revenge upon the King.

## **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

How did the Maharaja manage to save his throne?

The state banned tiger hunting by anyone except the king. Once, a high ranking British officer visited Pratibandapuram. He was fond of hunting tigers and fonder of being photographed with the tigers he had shot. However, the Maharaja was firm in his resolve and so refused him permission. He was even ready to organise any other hunt. The officer could go on a boar hunt but the tiger hunt was impossible. The British officer's secretary sent word through the dewan. The Maharaja could do the actual killing. The officer only wanted to be photographed holding the gun and standing over the tiger's carcass. The Maharaja didn't relent. He prevented a British officer from fulfilling his desire and so stood in danger of losing his kingdom itself.

He held deliberations over the issue with the dewan. Samples of expensive diamond rings were ordered. A famous British company of jewellers in Calcutta sent fifty rings. The Maharaja sent the whole lot to the British officer's good lady. She was expected to choose one or two rings and return the rest. However, she kept all the rings with her and sent her thanks to the Maharaja for the gifts. The Maharaja was very happy. Though he had lost three lakh of rupees, he had managed to retain his kingdom.

What impression do you form about the Tiger King after reading the story?

1. The Maharaja of Pratibandapuram, Sir Jilani Jung Jung Bahadur, had many titles and names – he may be identified as His Highness Jamedar-General, Khiledar-Major, Sata Vyaghra Samhari, Maharajadhiraja Visva Bhuvana Samrat, Sir Jilani Jung Jung Bahadur, M.A.D., A.C.T.C., or C.R.C.K. But he was popular as the Tiger King.
2. The chief astrologer predicted that his death would come from a tiger and this prompted the ten-day old prince to caution tigers.
3. Crown prince Jung Jung Bahadur grew taller and stronger day by day. When he grew to twenty he took the reign in his hands.
4. The Maharaja continued his campaign of tiger-hunting with rare single mindedness. Within a span of ten years he killed 70 tigers. It was his master strategy to marry a girl of a state which had a large tiger population. So he was able to kill 99 tigers in all.
5. The Tiger King could pay any price to maintain his kingdom. He had to give a bribe worth three lakh rupees to a high ranking British official's wife to retain his kingdom.
6. The Maharaja knew how to take work from his minions. He used the dewan to find out the suitable girl for his marriage.
7. He could be hot-headed and doubled the tax on the people. He also threatened the dewan to dismiss him from his service.
8. It is ironical that the King met his death by a wooden tiger. At last, the hundredth tiger took revenge upon him.

How did his campaign of tiger hunting continue? How was he avenged by the hundredth tiger?

The Maharaja was forced to start the campaign of killing a hundred tigers in self-defence. The chief astrologer had predicted that his death would be caused by a tiger. Particularly, he was advised to be careful with the hundredth tiger. The Maharaja's campaign was a great success. He could kill seventy tigers in ten years. Then an unseen obstacle brought his campaign to a halt. The tiger population in the forests of Pratibandapuram became extinct. The Maharaja adopted a new strategy. He married a girl from a state with a large tiger population. Very soon his tally reached 99, just one short of the required hundred.

He 'killed' the last tiger after much difficulty but the animal he thought to be dead survived. The King's bullet had missed its mark.

Ironically, the Tiger King's death came from the hundredth tiger. It was a toy tiger made of wood. He had presented a wooden tiger to his son on his third birthday. One of the slivers pierced the Maharaja's right hand. Infection spread all over the arm. Three surgeons operated on him but couldn't save him from dying. At last the astrologer's prediction came true. The hundredth tiger took its revenge upon the king.

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?

Maharaja's minions were subservient and sycophantic. Most of them were scared of Maharaja and tried to keep him in good humour by obeying his orders. They did not dare to disobey him as his displeasure could mean loss of their job or even loss of their lives.

1. The astrologer was afraid of predicting his death, till Maharaja told him to 'speak without fear'.
2. Dewan who should have advised the king not to kill the tigers did not dare to go against his wishes and even aided his marriage to a princess whose father's kingdom possessed a large number of tigers. Being afraid of losing his job, he presented an old tiger to satisfy the whims of his Maharaja.
3. Likewise, the hunters chose not to inform him of the survival of the 100<sup>th</sup> tiger and instead killed it themselves fearing that they might lose their jobs.
4. Even the shopkeeper, who sold the king a cheap wooden toy tiger, quoted a higher price lest he should be punished under the rules of emergency.

So, it is evident that the king's minions were driven by fear rather than any feelings of sincerity towards their ruler.