

## LESSON – 2

# THE TIGER KING

### About the author

**Ramaswamy Aiyer Krishnamurthy: (09-09-1899 to 05-12-1954) Pen name 'Kalki'.** He was a Tamil writer, journalist, poet, critic and Indian Independence activist. He penned 120 short stories, 10 novelettes, 5 novels, 3 historical romances, editorial and political writings and hundreds of film and music reviews.



### **CHARACTERS AND PLACES**

- The Tiger King** : A hero of the story, the Maharaja of Pratibandhpuram, also known 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.
- Crown prince** : A ten-day old baby who later became the Maharaja of Pratibandhpuram.
- Chief astrologer** : A royal foreteller of the state.
- Durai** : Means "chief, leader" in Tamil. A British high ranking officer & his secretary
- Dewan** : A chief administrative office of the Maharaja.
- Duraisani** : The wife of the high ranking British officer, a greedy woman who took all the 50 or so diamond rings for herself.

### **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 (echo)** the **maxim (precept)**: "Too many slips between a cup and a lip."

### **TITLE OF THE LESSON**

"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 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".

### **IRONY**

'The Tiger King' is **replete (filled with)** with irony that reveals the follies of autocratic and **willful (obstinate)** 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.

### THEME OF THE LESSON

Animals and birds are as much part of the nature as human beings. The destruction or haphazard killing of one species may not only lead to its extinction, but it will adversely affect the ecological balance. Those animals which serve as food for the wild animals, will increase in large number, if the beast of prey are wiped out. Each species, howsoever fierce, deadly, ferocious or poisonous has its role in maintaining ecological balance in nature.

### MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

The story tiger king conveys that getting obsessed too much in winning over something and losing the control over oneself leads only to mishappening and upheavals. The tiger king's extreme urge to win over the prophecy lead to his death.

### GIST OF THE LESSON

- The Maharaja Sir Jilani Jung Jung Bhadur was called "Tiger King"
- When he was just 10 days old he asked intelligent questions to the astrologer and was told that he would be killed by a tiger. He uttered "Let tigers beware!"
- No other miracle took place, the child grew like any other Royal child drinking white cow's milk, taught by an English tutor, looked after by an English nanny and watched English films.
- When he was 20, he was crowned as king. It was then the whisper of the prediction of his death by the tiger reached the Maharaja's ear and he in turn to safe guard himself killed a tiger and being thrilled he told the astrologer who replied that he can kill 99 tigers but should be careful with the 100<sup>th</sup>.
- From then he started killing tiger and none was allowed to hunt tigers. A high-ranking British officer visited the state that was fond of hunting tiger and his wish was declined.
- The officer requested for getting a photograph with the tiger killed by Maharaja and this request was rejected.
- So, to please the officer's wife, he sent 50 diamond rings expecting that she would take 1 or 2 instead she kept all the rings costing 3 lakh rupees and sent 'thanks' to the Maharaja. Thus, his state was secured.
- In 10 years he killed 70 tigers and didn't find any in Pratibandapuram. So, he decided to marry a girl from royal state which had more tigers to complete his target. Whenever he visited his in-laws, he killed 5 to 6 tigers. So, he killed 99 tigers and was feverishly anxious to kill the 100<sup>th</sup> but couldn't find true news about the presence of a tiger near a village, proved disappointing.
- Now the Dewan was warned of his danger. So, he visited 'People's Park in Madras' and brought an old tiger, kept it reserved and finally placed it in the forest and informed the Maharaja.
- The Maharaja in excitement took aim and shot the tiger and left the place with great triumph. The bullet missed the target and the weak and old tiger became unconscious hearing the sound of the bullet. Then the hunter killed the tiger and brought it in grand procession.
- It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the Maharaja's son and he wanted to buy a present from the toyshop. He bought a wooden tiger which was poorly carved.
- While the Maharaja was playing with the prince a tiny sliver of the wooden tiger pierced his right hand which later caused his death. Thus the hundredth tiger takes his final revenge upon the "Tiger King". Then **nemesis (curse)** proved right.

**Answer the following questions in 30 – 40 words.**

**1. Who is the Tiger King? Why does he get that name?**

**Ans.** The Maharaja of Pratibandpuram is called the Tiger king. As soon as the boy was born, the astrologer predicted that the royal infant would be killed one day by a tiger. Hearing these words, the ten-day old prince spoke "Let tigers beware"! After becoming a king, he went on a tiger hunt and started killing tiger one after another. Thus he came to be known as the Tiger King.

**2. What did the royal infant grow up to be?**

**Ans.** The royal infant grew taller and stronger day by day. He grew up to become the warriors of warriors, hero of heroes, champion of champions. He grew up to be a tiger king. He started killing tigers fearlessly.

**3. How was the Tiger king brought up?**

**Ans.** As a child the tiger king was brought up like all other princes of that time. He drank milk of an English cow. He was looked after by an English nurse. An English teacher taught him. He watched English movie only.

**4. Even though the Maharaja lost Rs.3 lakhs, he was still happy. Why?**

**Ans.** Though the tiger king had lost three lakh rupees he was happy because he felt that he had succeeded in saving his kingdom. He spent 3 lakh rupees to pay the bill of various rings that he had sent as gift to the wife of the British officer to prevent tiger killing. To the tiger king each tiger was very important as he needed to kill one hundred tigers.

**5. How did the Tiger king feel after killing the hundredth tiger?**

**Ans.** The tiger king felt on top of the world. He was elated and his happiness kept no bounds. He had proved the astrologer's prediction wrong. He ordered his men to bring the tiger to capital in a grand procession. A tomb was erected over it.

**6. How did the state astrologer react to the comment "If the hundredth tiger were also killed"?**

**Ans.** The state astrologer was dead sure of his prediction. He, with conviction, announced that he would cut off his ceremonial tuft, crop his hair short and become an insurance agent if his prediction would prove wrong. These words had so much impact that it appeared that the hundredth tiger would definitely kill the king.

**7. How will the Maharaja prepare himself for the hundredth tiger which was supposed to decide his fate?**

**Ans.** The Maharaja thought that he had to be extremely careful with the last tiger. It seemed easier to find tiger's milk than alive tiger. He announced a three-year exemption from all taxes for that village in which hundredth tiger was seen and set out on the hunt at once with extreme care.

**8. How did the Dewan try to help the Maharaja achieve his mission?**

**Ans.** The Dewan made advance arrangements for a tiger from People's Park in Madras. One night he and his wife dragged the tiger to their car, shoved it into the seat and took it straight to the forest. There he hauled the beast out of the car and pushed him to the ground near Maharaja's camp.

**9. Why did the Dewan decide to give up his own tiger to be killed by the Maharaja?**

**Ans.** The Dewan decided to give up his own tiger to be killed by the Maharaja because he was warned by the Maharaja to produce a tiger to complete his vow of killing 100 tigers. He feared that if Maharaja did not get a tiger to hunt, he would be angry and the result would be catastrophic and he might lose his job.

**10. What was the Dewan's tiger like? How did he take it into the forest?**

**Ans.** The Dewan had brought an old tiger from the People's Park in Madras and hid it at home. It was a weak and senile tiger. He and his aged wife dragged the tiger to the car and shoved it into the seat. He drove the car to the forest. There he hauled the beast out of the car and pushed him to the ground near Maharaja's camp.

**11. Why did the Maharaja decide to marry?**

**Ans.** The Maharaja had killed all the tigers of Pratibandpur. So he decided to marry a girl from royal family in whose estate had a lot of tigers which would help him to fulfill his aim.

**Answer the following questions in 100 words.**

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

**Ans.** Dramatic irony is a situation wherein the author as well as the reader is aware of the situation, but the character is completely ignorant of the same. The character behaves in the most inappropriate manner or expects the opposite of what fate holds in store for him. Kalki has very skillfully employed dramatic irony in this story. After killing the first tiger, the haughty king shows off the dead tiger to the astrologer. He wants to prove that he is more powerful than the tiger and also that he was a king and could do anything he desired. Once he kills the hundredth tiger, which actually does not die, he feels elated for having proved the prediction wrong. Ironically a mere sliver on a wooden tiger leads to the death of the king.

Through the dramatic irony the author drives home the point that people in power behave in a conceited and ruthless manner. They refuse to respect the words of elders and finally are defeated. As readers we are able to foresee the doom of the king. But he is so drunk in power that he mindlessly continues his act of killing the tigers.

**2. The author through the story 'The Tiger King' is trying to comment on man's ill-treatment of animals. Justify.**

**OR**

**What is the indirect comment of the author on subjecting innocent animals to the willfulness of human beings?**

**Ans.** The author wants to tell his readers that man is living in a world created by God and every creature in this world has an equal right to live his life. God wishes that all living beings should live in harmony with each other. There is no need to interfere in the existence of other living beings. Those who intrude into the privacy of others or kill fellow human beings, birds, trees or beasts for pleasure are guilty of committing the gravest and most unpardonable sin. Through this story the author is trying to comment on the way man is treating animals. The tiger king symbolizes the cruel, insensitive, foolish man who for his own gains, kills the tigers. This act of the king is against the divine. We all are expected to lead a normal life. All creatures and animals also have the right to live a respectful life. Thus the author exposes the folly, cruelty and heartlessness of human beings with regard to their behavior towards innocent animals. And then there is the case of British officers also. He wants to have a tiger killed simply because he wants himself photographed holding the gun and standing over the dead tiger. Thus the author wants to convey a message 'Live and let others live.'

**3. The astrologer's prediction about the death of the Tiger King came to be true. Do you agree with this statement? Explain why and why not?**

**Ans.** Yes, I agree that the astrologer's prediction about the death of the tiger king came to be true. The astrologer at the birth of the Tiger King predicted that the death would come to the king from the tiger. He told the Maharaja that he might kill 99 tigers but he must be cautious with the hundredth tiger.

When the king came to know that he was destined to be killed by a tiger someday, he hit upon a campaign of tiger hunting. When tigers became extinct in his kingdom, he married a girl of a state which had a large tiger population. Thus he was able to kill ninety-nine tigers.

The Maharaja felt elated when the hundredth tiger was killed. But the destiny had something else in store for Maharaja. The Maharaja's bullet had missed its target and the tiger had only fainted and not died. One of the hunters killed the tiger as they feared losing their jobs.

The Maharaja presented a wooden tiger to his son on his third birthday. While playing with his son, a tiny sliver of the toy pierced his right hand which caused infection in the arm. He was operated upon and died on the operation table. Thus, he was killed by the hundredth tiger and the astrologer's prophesy came to be true.

**4. Do you think the Maharaja's minions were sincere and loyal to him or are they driven by fear when they obey him? Do you find a similarity in today's political order?**

**Ans.** The Tiger King was an eccentric, whimsical and foolish character. He never saw reason. When he is told about the presence of a tiger, he immediately announces tax exemption for the villagers. But when the tiger is not traced he doubles the taxes. He throws officers out of their job.

Under such circumstances one can't expect officers and minions to be loyal to the king. They obey him not because they respect him but because they are afraid of losing their jobs. They bow before him to avoid his anger. The Dewan brings an old tiger for the king to hunt, in order to save his job. The hunters also do not inform him that the hundredth tiger was not dead. They fear his anger and keep quiet. Even the state astrologer is afraid of speaking the truth in front of him. They only pretend to be loyal to him but in reality have no respect for him.

The situation today is virtually the same. Everybody in the ruling and serving class is busy serving his own end. Nobody dare bring out the truth in front of the powerful one.

**5. How did the Tiger King meet his end? What is ironical about his death?**

**Ans.** It was the third birthday of the Maharaja's son. He had purchased a wooden toy tiger for his son's birthday gift. But it had been made by unskilled carpenter. It had tiny slivers all over its surface. One of these pierced the Maharaja's right hand while playing with his son with the toy. Although the king pulled it out but infection developed in the king's hand. In four days, it developed all over the arm. The king died while being operated upon.

The king's death is ironical. He was happy to think that he had killed the hundredth tiger. He was fulfilled his vow and disproved the prediction of the royal astrologer. He ordered to bring the tiger to the capital in grand possession. But he didn't know that the hundredth tiger was not killed by him but by other hunters. That is indeed quite ironical. It is also ironical that this brave and fearless king dies of a mere 'silver' on the body of a wooden tiger. Thus nemesis overtakes the king ultimately and ironically death does come to him from a tiger.