

VISTAS

MIND MAP

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The story revolves around the Maharaja of Pratibandapuram, Jilani Jung Jung Bahadur, whose death at the hands of a tiger had been foretold by astrologers when he was born. The story is a satire on the pride and stubbornness of those in power.

Soon after he was born, the astrologers predicted that one day the Tiger King would grow up to be a great warrior but he would have to meet his death. As the astrologers uttered these words, a miracle took place. The ten-day old child said that all those who are born are meant to die someday. He wished to know the cause of his death. The Chief astrologer said that he was born in the hour of the bull. The bull and the tiger are enemies; therefore, his death would come from a tiger.

The crown prince grew taller and stronger with each passing day. He was brought up like an Englishman, under the influence of western culture. At the age of twenty, the State came into his hands.

Soon the Maharaja searched and killed his first tiger to show his superiority and rebellion against fate. Considering this to be his victory over his destined future, he called upon the state astrologer. The latter informed him that he had no life threat from the first ninety-nine of his hunted tigers but it was the hundredth one that he needed to protect himself from. Nevertheless, the Maharaja decided to kill at least hundred tigers as a challenge against this foretold destiny.

The State banned tiger hunting by anyone except the Maharaja. A proclamation was issued stating that if anyone dared to even hurt a tiger, all his property would be confiscated by the State. In keeping with this vow, the Maharaja outrightly denied even a British official, "durai," who desired to hunt down a tiger.

Within ten years, the Maharaja managed to kill seventy tigers. The tiger population became extinct in the forests of Pratibandapuram. The Maharaja called the dewan and expressed his desire to get married to a girl from a royal family belonging to a State with a large tiger population. The dewan followed his orders and the Maharaja got married to such a girl. Jung Jung Bahadur killed five or six tigers each time he visited his father-in-law. In this way, he was able to kill ninety-nine tigers. Now that he had killed ninety-nine tigers, he was more anxious to kill the last one. By this time, the tigers had become extinct even in his father-in-law's kingdom. The Maharaja was eager to kill the hundredth tiger and then he could give up tiger hunting altogether. He was sunk in gloom as the hundredth tiger could not be found. However, one day when he heard that the sheep began to disappear in his own state, hope returned to him. He was so thrilled that he even announced a three-year exemption from all taxes for that village and set out on the hunt. But the hundredth tiger was not easily found. The Maharaja got so furious that many officers lost their jobs. One day, he was so enraged that he ordered the dewan to double the land tax. The dewan figured that if the Maharaja did not find the tiger soon then it would have a bad impact on the kingdom. He was relieved to see the tiger which had been brought from the People's park in Madras and was kept hidden in his house. At midnight, the dewan and his aged wife dragged the tiger to the car and drove it straight to the forest where the Maharaja was hunting. The tiger wandered into the Maharaja's presence and he shot the beast with boundless joy. The tiger fell on the ground. The Maharaja was so ecstatic that he ordered the tiger to be brought to the capital in grand procession.

After the Maharaja left, the hunters found out that the tiger was not dead at all. The Maharaja had missed the target. The tiger had just fainted from the shock of the bullet that was fired at it. However, out of the fear of losing their jobs, everyone decided not to tell the Maharaja about this. Finally one of the hunters shot the tiger dead and they took it in a procession through the town and buried it. A tomb was erected over it.

Maharaja quit hunting forever after this hundredth 'kill'. A few days later, he decided for a grand celebration of his son's third birthday. As a gift, he decided to buy a toy tiger for his son which, unknown to him, was of poor craftsmanship.

While playing with his son one day, a tiny sliver of the rough wooden surface pierced his right hand and he died of infection. Thus, ironically the fateful hundredth tiger, though a wooden one, was the cause of the Maharaja's death and proved the prediction of the astrologers correct.

1. THE TIGER KING

by Ramaswamy Aiyer Krishnamurthy

CHARACTER SKETCH: The King

The Maharaja of Pratibandapuram was called the Tiger King. At his birth, astrologers predicted his death because of a tiger. But the baby had something miraculous about him. He was only of ten days when he challenged the prediction of the astrologers and asked them the manner of death.

The Crown Prince was brought up in an English environment. He grew up tall, sturdy, brave and deserved to be called a Maharaja in every case. He became the king of his state at the age of twenty and was determined to fulfill his pledge. He was strong enough to kill the wild tigers with his bare hands. Being a man of firm determination and self-respect, he stood against a British officer by refusing him permission to hunt in his forest. He was cunning to arrange his marriage with a princess whose father's forest had the maximum number of tigers. Yet he appears to be powerless before fate because this powerful king was finally killed by a sliver from a worthless wooden tiger! His death brought him great shame. His boldness, cunning, strength and bravery failed miserably at the hands of an insignificant wooden tiger. He can also be laughed at for believing the astrologers blindly, for the dereliction of duty as a king, for imposing tax on the villagers out of rage, for forgetting the sanctity and meaning of marriage and for dismissing his officers for no official reason. Thus, it can be said that the king was highly conceited and lacked worldly wisdom.