

THE TIGER KING

Theme

The story is a satire on the conceit of those in power. It also makes a very earnest plea for the protection of the tiger. It is an indirect comment on subjecting innocent animals to the willfulness of human beings

About the lesson

This is the story of the Maharaja of Pratibandhapuram, who became known as the Tiger King. According to legend, when he was born, the astrologers proclaimed that having been born under a particular star meant that he would have to die. Hearing this the Royal Prince who was then only ten days old suddenly spoke, much to the astonishment of all those assembled there. The prince said that it was common knowledge that anyone who took birth would have to die and that astrologers then replied that he was born in the hour of the bull and the bull and the tiger are enemies, and his death would be connected with a tiger. It was expected that the infant prince would exhibit some fear but on the contrary the prince growled, warning the tigers to take care.

Moreover, when the prince came of age, and got back his kingdom from the British, he embarked on a mission to destroy the tigers completely in his kingdom. He was thrilled when he shot the first tiger, but the astrologers warned him that though he may be able to destroy ninety-nine tigers in the same way, he must yet be wary of the hundredth one. Tiger shooting was banned to all except the king. Not even a British Officer who was keen to be photographed with a dead tiger was allowed the luxury!

Indeed, when the king was short of thirty tigers to complete the shooting of a hundred tigers that he had vowed to kill, he encountered a strange dilemma. It was discovered that the tiger population of his kingdom had been completely depleted in the span of ten years that he had been shooting. This forced him to marry a princess whose father's kingdom had forests that were the abode of tigers. The king happily continued shooting tigers till he had ninety-nine tigers skin on his walls. Now he had to shoot only one more tiger but not a single tiger could be found! In order to keep the king in a good humor, the king's Dewan decided to place a caged tiger that he had at home in

strategic place. The king was overjoyed to shoot his hundredth tiger- only he did not realize that he has not actually shot it! He had missed his mark. However, the tiger was shot by a hunter and then the dead tiger was taken in procession through the town and buried. A tomb was erected over it. The king having fulfilled his vow now turned this attention to his son who had just turned three. In his search for a very special gift for the child he chanced upon a wooden tiger, which he bought for him. While playing with his son a splinter from this crudely made toy pierced his right hand. Though he removed it with his left hand it developed into a wound and the infection spread to his whole arm. The very best surgeons who were called upon to operate on him could not save him and he died. Thus the prediction of the astrologers came to pass and it was the hundredth tiger that avenged the death of all the tigers that the king had killed in order that he might live and also disprove the prophecy of the astrologers.