

In The Kingdom of Fools - A.K. Ramanujan

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What are the two strange things the guru and his disciple find in the Kingdom of Fools?

Ans: The two strange things, the guru and his disciple found in the Kingdom of Fools was that the king had ordered to change night into day and day into night. They would all thereby, work at night and sleep during the day. Secondly, everything in the kingdom had a fixed cost, a single duddu.

2. Why does the disciple decide to stay in the Kingdom of Fools? Is it a good idea?

Ans: The disciple did not want to leave the place because the most important thing in life for him was food. And in the Kingdom of Fools, food was very cheap and good. The disciple therefore, stays back in the kingdom, refusing to listen to his guru's advice. It eventually turned out to be a very foolish idea because he eats without a respite and begins to resemble a street-side overfed sacred bull.

3. Name all the people who are tried in the King's court, and give the reasons for their trial.

Ans: The reason for the trial that ensued in the King's court was that, a robber had died when he had got crushed under a weak wall, that had collapsed while he was sneaking in, to pursue his ancient trade. The people who were tried were the merchant whose house was burgled, he blamed the mason/bricklayer who in turn blamed the dancing girl who distracted him. The dancing girl blamed the goldsmith whom she referred to as a lazy scoundrel. The goldsmith blamed the merchant for not finishing the dancing girl's order. The enquiry completed an entire circle and settled on the same merchant at whose house the robber had been crushed by a weak wall. He was summoned again, and in his defense, he claims that it was his dead father who had ordered for the jewellery and not him. He was condemned to death.

4. Who is the real culprit according to the king? Why does he escape punishment?

Ans: The king consulted his minister and concluded that the real culprit was the merchant. Though the merchant asserted that it was his father who had ordered the jewellery, and claimed innocence, the king sentenced him to death. A new stake was ordered to be made. The minister observed that it was too big for the merchant who was very thin. He appealed to the common sense of the king and stalled the execution of the merchant. Thus, the merchant escaped punishment.

5. What are the guru's words of wisdom? When does the disciple remember them?

Ans: The search for a candidate that would be suitable for the new stake was on. The servants spotted the disciple who had fattened himself by feasting on bananas, rice, wheat and ghee. He cried aloud saying that he was an innocent sanyasi, but it was of no avail. The king's servants hauled him towards the stake. It was at this unfortunate moment that he remembered the words of his guru, "This is a city of fools. You don't know what they will do next. He advised his disciple to accompany him out of the foolish kingdom.

6. How does the guru manage to save his disciple's life?

Ans: The guru took advantage of the fact that everybody in the kingdom was foolish. After the mock fight between him and his disciple, on who should go to the gallows first, the guru extracts a promise in secrecy from the king that he should be killed first. He tells the king that the first person who is executed on the new stake which is the God of justice, will be reborn as the king of the country, while the second person will be the minister. The foolish king believed this tale, and convinced his minister that it should be they and not an outsider who should rule the kingdom. Both of them disguise as the sanyasi and the disciple, and get executed. With his wit, sharpness and intelligence, the guru rescues his disciple.

Additional Questions

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. How did the king justify the execution of the merchant?

Ans: The investigation regarding the person, responsible for the death of the robber, concludes with all fingers pointing towards the merchant. He tried to claim innocence, while shifting the blame on to his dead father. Not willing to accept any excuses, the king says that along with the riches and property, he has also inherited the sins of his father. He will therefore, have to die to make amends for his father's sins.

2. Who had gone to the king with a complaint? Explain the irony.

Ans: A thief had broken into a merchant's house, and while he was escaping with the loot, a wall collapsed crushing him under the debris. It was this thief's brother who had gone with a complaint to the king, seeking justice and compensation. It was ironical that the king was trying to avenge a criminal, who claimed that robbery was their ancient trade, instead of punishing or reprimanding him. He did not consider the robbery as a crime. Alternately, he wanted to punish the merchant who was nearly robbed because the robber had died in his house. The death was accidental and not a deliberate murder.

3. On what condition did the guru agree to be the king?

Ans: The people of the kingdom were shocked and worried when they realised that their king and minister had been executed. While mourning and discussing the future, some people thought that they should ask the guru to be their king. They went to him with their request, and after a lot of persuasion, he agrees to be their king. He consents only on the condition that they would agree to change their lifestyle, and all the existing laws. He added that the cost of things should vary according to their value and will not be fixed at one duddu. The people accepted his terms and he became the king and his disciple, the minister.

4. Why were the people confused on the day after the execution?

Ans: The people were confused on the day after the execution, when they were preparing to throw the bodies for the crows and vultures to feed on. To their utter surprise, they noticed that it was their king and minister who had been executed instead of the guru and his disciple. The entire city was in a state of panic and confusion.

5. Explain the drama enacted by the guru and his disciple, in front of the foolish king.

Ans: The guru who has an extraordinary and divine vision, reaches the kingdom as soon as his disciple's life was in danger. He calls his disciple aside and briefs him about the act they were to perform. They ask the king who is greater, the guru or the disciple. Taking advantage of the king's reply that it was definitely the guru, he requested to be killed first. Both of them now began clamouring for being sent to stake first. The king was surprised as the drama unfolded, and asked the wise guru to explain the mystery. The wise guru, under the oath of secrecy, tells the foolish king that the person who gets executed first at the new and unblemished stake, that is the God of Justice, would be reborn as the king of the kingdom. And he reiterates that he should be killed first. The drama changed the history of the foolish king and his kingdom.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. How important is it to take sensible decisions, and seek the help of wise people while doing so? Explain with reference to the disciple.

Ans: In the lesson, "In The Kingdom of Fools, the author is highlighting the need to 'look before you leap'. A guru and his disciple, during their sojourn, reach a particular kingdom, where the people had altered the normal and universally accepted pattern of human life. They slept during the day and worked at night. And every living being, both humans and their domesticated animals, had to abide by this lifestyle, as it was the order of the king. Any purchase made would cost only "a duddu. This meant that food was very cheap. The guru did not want to remain with the mad people, and advised his disciple also to leave the kingdom alongwith him. However, the latter decided to stay back and enjoyed the cheap and good food. This was his undoing. He had no

understanding of the priorities of life, and made an irrational decision that nearly cost him his life. He ate to his heart's content and became as fat as a street side cow. He was selected to be one who would be sacrificed at the new stake, that was made to redress the harm done to a family of robbers. One of whom had lost his life in an unfortunate accident. The disciple regretted his decision.

2. Give a character sketch of the king.

Ans: A king is generally expected to be responsible for the overall welfare of his entire kingdom. He has to be fair, just, sensible, brave, and should work towards the development of his people. The king of "The Foolish Kingdom, justified the adjective that qualified his country. He had no idea of governance, and he foolishly changed the lifestyle of all his people, threatening them with death in case of default, thereby, disturbing the bio-rhythm of all the living beings in his kingdom. The management of the economic affairs was even more deplorable. He did not feel the need to sell different products according to their value, but made everything available for "a duddu. This would possibly have been an attempt to be popular among his people. He displayed his foolishness once again while trying to give justice to the brother of a robber who had lost his life. With every action and decision he had taken in this case, he was successful in exhibiting his incompetence. The final and noteworthy decree passed by the foolish king was the order given to the executioners to kill him and his minister. He foolishly believed the wise guru's story of rebirth and life after. However, his ultimate act of foolishness was a blessing in disguise for his people who secured for themselves a sensible king.

Self- Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. How did the dancer shift the blame on to the goldsmith?
2. Was the king justified in accepting the minister's suggestion of finding another person to fit the new stake?
3. Was the guru's technique of saving his disciple ethical? Justify.
4. How would you have saved the disciple from what seemed imminent death?
5. How did the merchant defend himself?

Long Answer Questions

1. As the disciple, write a letter to your guru, requesting him to save you from the gallows, and also seeking pardon for your greed and disobedience.

2. 'Prayers and miracles' a myth or a reality? Write an article for your school magazine, using inputs from the lesson, "In The Kingdom of Fools.
3. You are the merchant who has been sentenced to death. Make a diary entry, expressing your sorrow, innocence and helplessness.