



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XI
QUESTION BANK - THE TALE OF MELON CITY
(2022-23)

INTRODUCTION

The poem “The Tale of a Melon City” narrates how the city found its new King, a melon. The story unfolds as their King orders to have an arch built which turned out to be too low. It hit the King’s head resulting in the falling off of his crown. The King considers it a disgrace and orders for the chief of builders to be hanged. It is then followed by a series of events where they blame each other. Finally, a noose is built to determine the guilty and the only one to fit the noose, is the just and placid King. The new King is then elected by the first person to pass that arch.

SUMMARY

The poem begins with a description about the King who ordered an arch to be built. When he rode down that arch, it hit his head and his crown fell down. It was because it was built too low. The King thought it was dishonorable and thus commanded the chief of builders to be hanged. The chief of builders put the blame on the workmen who in turn, blamed the bricks. The King orders for the execution of the mason who put the blame on the architect. The architect is brought to the Royal Court and indirectly blames the King for the wrongly constructed arch. The placid King now grows angry and demands for the wisest man in the country to be brought to the Royal Court. They brought the wisest man, who was so old that he could neither see nor walk. According to him, the arch must be hanged. When the arch is supposed to be executed, one of the ministers argue that it would be a shame to punish something that had touched their mighty King’s head. Everyone, along with the King, agreed. The crowd grew restless and the King promised them a hanging. Therefore, a noose was set-up and the one to fit it would be hanged. All were measured one by one but the only one to fit was the King. The ministers heaved a sigh of relief upon finding someone to execute. Thus, as a result of the customary choice, the next to pass the City gate would choose the new King and the next to pass it was an idiot who wanted a melon to be their King. The melon was given the throne with due ceremony and the town lived happily ever after without any interruption or interference.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Question 1. What do the words ‘just and placid’ imply?

Ans: The phrase implied that the king was fair and mild. The king, ‘a great believer in justice’ ensured justice was meted out to his subjects. He was also mild mannered and rarely showed any displeasure and even if he did frown, he quickly wiped the frown off his face.

Question 2. Where did the king want the arch constructed? Why?

Ans: The king wanted an arch to be erected which extended over the major main road. He felt, the road would edify the spectators it would improve the morals and knowledge of the onlookers there.

Question 3. What happened to the king as he rode down the road?

Ans: After the arch was built, the king rode through the street. He wanted to edify the spectators there. But as he was crossing below the arch, his crown fell off as the arch was built too low. This angered the king.

Question 4. How did the king react to the architect's accusation? Why did he react that way?

Ans: When the king heard the architect's accusation, he was so angry that he almost lost his ability to reason. Since, he was righteous and tolerant, he admitted that this was a difficult situation. The king solicited advice and called for the wisest man in the country for counsel.

Question 5. What circumstances led to the execution of the king?

Ans: The crowd grew restless, tried to see the offenders escape death, by hanging. The king grew fearful of their agitation and decided that someone must be hanged. All the people were measured, one by one, along the noose, to see who fit it. They found that only the king reached the noose, leading to his execution.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. How did the 'just and placid king' get executed?

Ans: The arch, commissioned by the king, was built low that knocked off the king's crown as he was crossing below the arch. He sentenced the chief of builders to death for causing him the dishonour, who passed on the blame to the workers. The workmen blamed the masons and the masons, in turn, blamed the architect. The architect reminded the king that he had made certain changes in the plans himself when they were shown to him. The king was infuriated to hear that. Being righteous and tolerant, he called for the wisest man in the country, for counsel, who advised the king to hang the arch as it was the real offender who had thrown the crown off. A councillor objected to this ruling and declared it a disgrace to hang something that touched the honourable head. The crowd, gathered for the hanging, became restless. The king apprehended their mood and ruled for someone to be hanged immediately. The noose, hung high, fitted the king alone and he was hung as per the royal ruling.

2. The Tale of Melon city is full of irony. Give any two examples from the poem?

Ans. 'The Tale of Melon City' by Vikram Seth is full of ironical instances. The poem begins with a 'just and placid' king ordering the construction of an arch. After the construction, the king went there and his crown struck the arch. He felt disgraced and ordered death sentence for the person responsible for it. The circumstances took such a turn that he himself got hanged. The second instance is that a chance was given to any person who passed that gate to decide the ruler of the state. The first person who passed that gate was a foolish man and he decided that a melon should be the ruler of the state. Without giving any second thought, a melon was placed on the throne.

3. How does the so called ‘just and placid’ King of Melon City land himself into a difficult situation?

Ans. The King of Melon City proclaimed to construct an arch, spanning the main thoroughfare. Soon, the arch was constructed. One day the King was riding down the thoroughfare. His, Crown struck against the arch and fell off. The King felt dishonoured and decided to hang the chief of builders. The chief of builders put the blame on the labourers. The King decided to hang all the labourers. The labourers found fault with the size of the bricks. The King summoned the masons but they lay the blame on the architect. The King ordered to hang the architect. The architect reminded the King that he had made certain amendments to the plans when they were shown to him. The King found himself in a difficult situation as the architect held him responsible for the mishap. He was utterly confused. Being a just and placid King, he could not deny the charge.

4. What do think makes ‘The Tale of Melon City’ interesting and edifying?

Ans. According to the title, the poem tells a story about Melon City—a city named after its ruler. It is quite interesting and edifying to learn how the country got a melon as its ruler. In short it was on account of customary choice. The people relate the story of a just and placid King who was hanged by his own Royal Decree. What the King did for the people and how he held the trials of the accused both are quite amusing. The clever arguments of the accused to save their lives are equally interesting. The King feels the pulse of the people who want to see a hanging. He knows how mischievous an angry mob can be and hence orders that someone must be hanged immediately. The irony of the situation is that the King is tall enough to fit the noose. The practical minded ministers resort to the age old custom of choosing the next ruler. The idiot’s idiotic choice is approved of in the name of custom. The people are indifferent to the fact that their ruler is a Melon not a man. The behaviour of pragmatic ministers and equally selfish, foolish and mean people seems quite funny and interesting. It is instructive too. A wise man should avoid the company of fools.

5. “Mockery is found in the process of fair trial and proper judgement”. Comment.

Ans. In the poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’ mockery is seen in the age-old custom of delivering justice by word of mouth of the Kings. There was a time when the King’s word was considered divine and whatever he uttered was law. A just and placid King was expected to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. However, the process of trial and the over-changing judgements mocks at the whole process of fair trials and considered awards. This is proved from the statements of the accused who try to save their lives by holding others responsible for the guilt. The King’s capriciousness and inability to see through the thin veil of their arguments make him an object of ridicule rather than a dispenser of divine justice.

6. Justify the title of the poem, “The Tale of Melon City”.

Ans. The poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’ has a quite significant ending. It has a direct bearing on the title. The end reveals that the incidents took place, long ago. It throws light on the old custom of the state to choose their ruler. Confronted with the dilemma, the ministers took the easy way out. The person who passed the City Gate was to name the next King. It was a chance for an idiot who gave the standard answer ‘a melon’ to every question. Therefore, the melon was crowned the King, carried to the throne and respectfully set down there. The people are not at all ashamed to have a melon as their

King. They say that if he rejoices in being a melon, that's all right with them. They find no fault with him as long as he leaves them to enjoy their peace, freedom and free trade. The capital city is called Melon City after the King.

7. How did the accused try to shift the blame on others? How far did they succeed?

Ans: The chief of builders was the first one to be held guilty. He shifted the blame on the workmen. The workmen were surprised but did not lose their reasoning power. They told the king he had forgotten the fact that the bricks were made of the wrong size. Swayed by their rational argument, the masons were summoned. They trembled with fear, but shifted the blame on the architect who was responsible for planning and erecting the arch. The king ordered the architect to be hanged. The clever architect reminded the king that he had forgotten one small thing. He had made certain amendments to plans when the former had shown them to the latter. This clearly meant that he held the king responsible for the mishap. The king became very angry and lost his capacity of clear judgement. He called it a tricky thing and sought the advice of the wisest man in the country. Thus each accused succeeded in shifting the blame on others.

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

1. What impression would you form of a state where the king was just and placid?

Ans: The State where the king was just and placid seems to be a backward region full of ignorant fools and ruled by a whimsical king. The king considers himself to be the custodian of people and gets an arch erected for their spiritual upliftment. The king's word is a command and unwritten law. The whole process of changing judgement on the appeals of the victims appears as a mock-trial. The Ministers and Councillors seem to be selfish. They advise the king to serve their own ends, though they appear to flatter the king and seem dedicated to the state. The common people are uneducated and ignorant fools. They need mental as well as spiritual upliftment. They are fun loving. In their quest for fun, they can cross all limits. If deprived of fun, the unruly mob can rebel against the crown. They do not bother whether the king is a man or a melon. They want their personal freedom, free business and peaceful lives.

2. How according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?

Ans: Various people advocate various means of maintaining peace and liberty in a state. Some are in favour of dictatorship while others favour democracy. I think the best course lies in good governance. Whatever is well-administered is most fruitful for the citizens as well as the rulers. It ensures peace and liberty to the common man. A strong state, in itself, is safe against any external threat. Dedicated rulers, enlightened citizens and proper law enforcing agencies can establish peace and harmony in the state. Narrow considerations based on region, religion, caste etc. should be discouraged because these are potent threat to internal security as they fuel dissensions among the people. Free expression of opinions must be allowed but respect for law and order be observed. People should be conscious of their privileges and rights as well as duties and responsibilities. This is the only way to maintain peace and liberty.