



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS - XI
QUESTION BANK – TALE OF MELON CITY
(2023-24)

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 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.

TITLE

The title ‘The Tale of The Melon City’ tells us both about the time and the plot of the poem. The poem is based on the kingdom of the fair and a cool-headed king of ancient times. The king wanted an arch to be built in the city to ‘Edify’ for the people of his kingdom. His idea of improving the morality of the people is based on old and traditional beliefs, which did not have any positive outcomes.

Ministers chose the traditional way of choosing the next king instead of taking a rational and practical decision. They let the person, who passed the arch, become the next king and happily crowned the ‘Melon’ on his suggestion. That is how the city got its name ‘Melon City’.

THEMES

‘The Tale of Melon City’ sums up human nature in a humorous manner. As mentioned in the above sections, the king sacrificed his own life to keep the people of his kingdom happy. To fill his position, the melon was announced as the new king. No one seems to question both the decisions, and they all carried on living their life normally as if nothing had happened at all. Vikram Seth has indicated towards the selfishness, egocentric, ignorant and mob mentality of the people. People don’t care about who rules them, how they rule them as long as it doesn’t interfere with their freedom and peace.

The poet has criticised the dark side of human nature. People living in Melon City do not regard for human life. People cannot hold themselves responsible for their actions. Instead of accepting flaws and finding solutions, society chooses an easy way that is, putting the blame on others. Here in ‘The Tale of Melon City’, accusers passed the blame from one person to another. The king, without thinking, sentenced the chief of builders to be hanged.

Chief of builders passed the blame to the workmen, workmen to mason, and so on. The people of the kingdom were more excited to see the execution. The noose was not hung to

punish the culprit, it was hung to decide a culprit. Here the high noose reflects the king himself and his death, the death of autocracy.

Other important themes of The Tale of The Melon City are ‘Anger’ and ‘loyalty’.

The king, who is called ‘Just’ and ‘Placid’, loses his calm over the design of the arch. It is ironic. His anger and irrational decision of hanging the culprits led to a series of incidents, which in the end, ended with his own life. If the king had acted calmly and asked to make improvements, the situation could have been avoided.

There is an absence of loyalty in the ministers who are responsible for serving the kingdom. They did not guide nor stop the king from taking an irrational step. They accepted the idiot’s decision of crowning a melon without giving it a second thought, which shows they never cared for the king or people of the kingdom.

The Tale of Melon City About the Characters

The King: He has been mockingly portrayed as just and quiet. But in reality, he was not an intelligent person, and did not have any decision taking ability. Because of his foolishness he had to lose his life.

The Architect: He was a smart person who is able to frustrate the king. When his turn came to be hanged, he pointed out something which put the king in a tricky situation and made him angry.

The Wisest Man: He is very old. He can neither walk properly nor see well. He is picked up by the council of ministers to give a wise decision to the king. But unfortunately, the decision given by him was not wise at all.

The Idiot: He is a man of low intelligence and does not act rationally. His advice is asked for choosing the king. Without thinking, he says a melon should be made the king, as he was very fond of melons.

DETAILED SUMMARY

The King Orders an Arch to be Built

This story is about a city whose king was lawful and gentle. He orders an arch (curved structure) to be built which would become a symbol of his triumphs and accomplishments. The arch would be constructed on the main road and it would inspire and motivate the people who would see it. As per the orders of the king, the arch was built. The king rode down the main road to inspire others.

The King Loses his Crown and Gets Angry

The arch was built too low and the king’s crown fell down when it struck the arch. It was a disgrace for him. He ordered that the chief of builders should be hanged for this mistake. The arrangements for the hanging were made. The chief of builders was called.

The Blame Game Begins

The chief of builders pleaded that it was not his mistake; it was rather the workmen's fault. So, the king stopped the hanging of the chief builder. He ordered that all the workmen must be hanged instead. The workmen claimed that the bricks used were not of the right size. So, the masons were called. They were trembling in fear. The masons in turn blamed the architect for a wrong design.

The King Gets Stuck in a Tricky Situation

The architect was called. The king ordered that the architect must be hanged. The architect reminded the king that he himself had changed the original plan of the arch when it was shown to him sometime back. The king realized that the blame had shifted to him. It was a tricky situation. The king withdrew for consulting some wise people. He asked for the wisest man in the country. The wisest man was chosen on the criteria that he should be very old. The person chosen could not walk or see properly and he was carried there by other people. The wisest man said in a shaking voice that the culprit should be punished. He announced that it was the arch which banged against the crown, so it should be hanged.

The Nation Wants a Hanging

The arch was being taken for the hanging when one of the councillors said that the arch actually touched the royal head with respect. The king agreed, but the crowd was getting restless and wanted a hanging. Perceiving the situation, the king ordered that someone must be hanged, guilty or not. A loop of rope was set up quite high and each man was measured to its height. Only one was tall enough to reach it and that was the king himself. So, the king was hanged. The ministers heaved a sigh of relief that someone was hanged or else the crowd might have turned against them.

The Dilemma

The ministers now faced the dilemma that the country had no king. They followed their old custom and sent out messengers to proclaim that the next person who would pass the city gate would choose the next king. After some time, an idiot passed the gate and the guards stopped him. When they asked him to name the king, the idiot said 'a melon'. This was his standard answer to all the questions as he was very fond of melons.

The Melon King

After the answer given by that idiot, a melon was made the king of the city. The ministers respectfully carried the melon to the throne and set it down on the king's throne. This happened long ago. If you now ask the people why their king appears to be a melon, they reply that it is a customary choice. It makes no difference to them if their king is a melon. They are happy because the king doesn't interfere in their lives. They live in peace and harmony.

THE TALE OF MELON CITY CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Once there was a king of a city who pretend to be lawful and gentle.
- The king ordered construction of an arch over the main road in the city to motivate the people.

- Soon the arch was built. When the king rode through it, his crown hit the top of the arch and it fell from his head.
- As it was a disgrace for the king, he lost his temper instantly and ordered the chief of builders to be hanged.
- The chief of builders cried out that he was not guilty and blamed the workmen.
- So, the workmen were brought to be hanged.
- The workmen cried out that it was not their fault. They blamed the masons who made the bricks of the wrong size.
- The masons were brought, but they blamed the architect who had made the plans.
- The architect was smarter. He said that the king himself had made some changes in the plans when they were shown to him.
- Everyone turned to the king. The king realised that he had brought this onto himself. The king said that in this tricky situation he needed some advice from the wisest man in the country.
- People of the kingdom were equally foolish, so, they brought a very old man presuming him to be the wisest man.
- The wise man was of the opinion that the king was not guilty, but the arch was guilty, so the arch should be hanged.
- While the arch was being taken to be hanged, a Councillor remarked that the arch touched the king's crown respectfully, so it should not be hanged.
- The nation wanted a hanging. So, the king asked for the loop of rope to be used for the hanging to be set high and anyone whose head reached it would be hanged.
- One by one all the people were measured but nobody reached its height except the king himself, as he was the tallest. So, as per the royal order, the king himself was hanged.
- Now a new crisis arose: who would be the king?
- The ministers decided that the next man who passed the City Gate would choose the king and then they sent out messengers to tell everyone about this.
- An idiot, who was fond of melons, happened to pass the gate first. The guards asked him about who should be the king to which his answer was, 'A melon'.
- So, a melon was fanned the king and was crowned in a proper ceremony. The people were happy to have a melon as king as long as it left them in peace and at liberty.

LITERARY DEVICES

Following figures of speech/poetic devices have been used in the poem The Tale of Melon City:

1. **Irony:** It is a situation in which there is a contrast between expectation and reality. e.g., in the poem, the king is described as just and placid. But in real, he becomes angry at petty matter. There are many ironical situations in the poem. e.g., the king is hanged over a petty matter. The people choose a melon as their king etc.
2. **Alliteration:** It is the use of the same sound at the beginning of words that are close together. e.g., "long live the king", "the workmen went" etc.
3. **Repetition:** It is the repetition of words and phrases of poetic effect. e.g., "Long live the king".
4. **Inversion:** It is the reversal of the normal order of the words and phrases in a sentence for poetic effect. e.g., "Truly, the arch it was that".

5. **Onomatopoeia:** It is the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named. e.g., “Muttering”, “Quivering” etc.

RHYME SCHEME

The poet Vikram Seth has written a narrative poem of an ancient tale. **It is written in a verse form where every second line rhymes with the first line, as known as rhyming couplets.** This writing style gives the poem the impression of prose in a form of narrative style story-telling.

QUESTION AND ANSWERS

1. What impression is formed of a state where the King was ‘just and placid’?

The words just and placid give the impression of a King who knows how to provide justice and how to stay calm in any given situation. He must have intellect and must know how to make the right decision. This would make a state the greatest of all other states. The scenario in The Tale of Melon City written by Vikram Seth was quite different though. The poet described the Melon City’s King as just and placid but in reality, he was the opposite of it. The poet has used these two words in a satirical sense to mock the judgement of the King. He kept ordering the execution of common people without any reason just to keep his face value. This in reality brought great chaos to the state.

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

The poet here describes a picture that how peace and liberty cannot be maintained. The poet has shown here various instances where the King kept ordering useless executions just for his mere ego. It did not matter to him if his order was justified or not. The poet wanted to suggest through this instance that to have peace and liberty in a state the leader of the state needs to have a fair sense of justice. He also wants to suggest that a leader needs to have a great deal of intelligence, unlike the King of this poem who gets easily manipulated by other people.

3. List a few instances from the poem which highlight humour and irony.

The Tale of the Melon City is completely written in a satirical sense where the author kept using irony to mean the opposite. The poet started his poem by mentioning the King as just and placid. However, later it is realised that he was the exact opposite. His crown fell off his head while he was passing under the arch and he felt embarrassed about that. He simply decided to execute the builder, then the workman, then the architect and finally the arch. An arch is an object, and nobody could execute it, but the way the author used this line created humour.

The next humour that came in the poem was when the King hung himself because of his stupid law. It showed that, although the head of any state needed to have a great deal of intelligence, he was a stupid King. The stupidity of the King got complimented by the stupidity of the man who chose a melon to be the next King. The poet here created the final humour with this incident. He portrayed that it did not matter to the common people who the King was as they crowned the melon as their new King.

4. ‘The Tale of Melon City’ has been narrated in a verse form. This is a unique style which lends extra charm to an ancient tale. Find similar examples.

The poet Vikram Seth has written a narrative poem of an ancient tale by writing The Tale of Melon City. It is written in a verse form where every second line rhymes with the first line, as known as rhyming couplets. This writing style gives the poem the impression of prose in a form of narrative style story-telling. The name of the poem is The Tale of Melon City that in

a literal sense means the story of Melon City. The poet here purposefully used the word tale during its naming to make it similar to the verse-like structure of the poem.

EXTRA QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q1. Why the city was called the melon city?

Ans. An idiot man chose a melon to be the King of the City after their old King's death. The melon became the new king and the city became the melon city.

Q2. What are the two qualities the King actually had?

Ans. The King seemed to have the qualities such as gentle and fair. He was gentle because he thought about the welfare of his people and decided to build the arch. He was fair because he gave the builder, workmen and architects a chance to speak before ordering them to execute.

Q3. Who killed the King?

Ans. The King killed himself due to some bizarre situation. The King could not find who was guilty of his embarrassment and therefore could not decide whom to punish. He, however, was afraid of the rebellion of the people as he ordered them to execute anyone. Nobody could fit in the noose except the King and therefore he hanged himself.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Question 1. How was the King in the poem?

Answer 1: The King in the poem was just and peaceful.

Question 2. What did the King want to build?

Answer 2: The King wanted to build an arch that would stand triumphantly on the main thoroughfare.

Question 3. What do you mean by 'thoroughfare'?

Answer 3: The thoroughfare is the main path of communication in a town or city.

Question 4. What did the wise man suggest?

Answer 4: The wise man suggested hanging the arch that had been constructed.

Question 5. Whom did the King first order to hang?

Answer 5: Once a fair and kind king used to rule over a state. One day as the king rode down the thoroughfare, his crown fell from his head as he got struck by the arch. The arch of the thoroughfare was built too low so it hit the king's crown. The king saw this as a big disgrace to him as his crown fell down. So, he was furious and he ordered that the chief of builders should be hanged.

Question 6. What is *laissez faire*?

Answer 6: *Laissez faire* is a French word which means ‘allow to do’. It also indicates a government system that allows minimal governmental control over the economic and social lives of the common people.

Question 7. Why did the king want to hang the chief of builders?

Answer 7: The king wanted to construct an arch on the thoroughfare to inform the spectators about their cultural heritage. But the arch was so low that it touched the king’s head, and his crown fell on the ground. That made the king angry, and he wanted to hang the chief of builders who made the arch low.

Question 8. How did the chief of builders and the workmen escape the king punishment?

Answer 8: The chief of builders stated that it was the workers’ fault. So, the real culprits were the workmen, not him. Then, the king ordered the workmen to be hanged. The workmen begged for their lives, saying the arch became low because the bricks were made of the wrong size. Hence, the king forgave them and ordered to hang the masons.

Question 9. What happened after summoning the architect?

Answer 9: The masons stated that it was the architect’s fault. So, the king released them and summoned the architect. The architect reminded the King that he had made some changes to the plan of the arch. Thus, it was the king’s fault for building the low arch. Then, if anyone had to be punished, it had to be the king. Thus, the architect turned the tables, and the king became culpable.

Question 10. What happened after the architect blamed the King?

Answer 10: The architect’s statement made it clear that the king was responsible for the lower height of the arch. According to his last proclamation, he almost lost his head because he would be hanged. So, he asked for some counsel. He ordered them to bring the wisest man in his state. The wisest man was brought to him. He stated that the arch should be hanged because it was the main culprit.

Question 11. How, according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?

Answer 11: An effective government system can maintain peace and liberty in a state. The common and powerful people should not be given too much importance in maintaining a balanced system. People should have the right to vote, so their voices are heard. At the same time, the ministers must take decisions after properly analysing the situation.

Question 12. Why was the king hanged?

Answer 12: Being afraid of the rage of the general population, the king ordered that any person who would be tall enough for the noose would be hanged. All the men were measured. None of them, except the King himself, was fitted for the rope. So, it was decided to hang the king.

Question 13. Describe how the melon became the future King.

Answer 13: The ministers decided that the person who would pass the arch the next day would be the future king. The next day, it was an idiot who passed the arch, and when asked who should be the next king, he replied, “a melon. According to the decision, a melon was carried by the ministers and set on the throne. Thus, the melon became the next king.

Question 14. What is the role of the ministers in the poem?

Answer 14: The ministers follow the king’s orders. At the same time, they are responsible for running the administration. They also fear people’s power and act according to their will. Though the king is the head of the city, ministers carry on the administrative work in reality. Hence, the melon can be chosen as the king, and the ministers carry on their work under it.

Question 15. How did the city get its name ‘Melon City’?

Answer 15: “The Tale of Melon City” is a poem by Vikram Seth that sarcastically criticises the government system. The poem describes Melon City, which had a just and calm king. He ordered the building of an arch on the city’s main road. After the construction of the arch, he visited it. But the arch was so low that it touched the king’s head, and his crown fell on the ground. He took it disrespectfully and ordered the hanging of the chief of builders. The chief of builders stated that it was the workmen’s fault, and the workmen blamed the masons. The masons, in turn, accused the architect, and the architect revealed that the King himself had made changes to the plan. Thus, the king becomes guilty. To save himself, he called the wisest man. The wisest man suggested that the arch had to be hanged, but the people demanded to hang a person. So, the king proclaimed that anyone who would be tall enough to reach the noose would be hanged. Ironically, none other than the King himself was perfectly positioned for the rope. Hence, he was hanged after a royal decree. The ministers declared that anyone who would pass through the arch the next day would select the future king. The next day, it was an idiot, and he said the melon should be the next king. So, a melon was carried and sat on the throne as the King. Thus, the city got its name, “melon city.”

Question 16. Describe how the poet has expressed the irony of the justice system in the poem.

Answer 16: “The Tale of Melon City’ may seem like a light-hearted poem, but it bears some significant thoughts. The poem sarcastically criticises the judicial system. The city’s king is just and fair and represents the justice system’s head. His orders are the last words. He, himself, is even bound to follow those words. At first, he ignores investigating the whole matter and orders arbitrarily to hang the builders’ chief. But in a series of incidents, it is revealed that the king is guilty. He falls into the trap of his own words because, according to his order, he has to be hanged. So, he again tries to hang an innocent person. He orders them to set up the noose, and anyone tall enough for the noose will be hanged. But ironically, no one other than the king becomes the perfect fit. So, after a royal decree, the King is hanged. Thus, the king gives his life in the name of justice. The poem describes the justice system as an erratic system that fails to punish the actual culprit and sometimes fails to give proper judgement.

Question 17. What impression would you form of a state where the King was ‘just and placid’?

Answer 17: In the ‘Tale of the Melon City’, we learn about a city where the king is just and placid. It suggests that the common people live there peacefully because no wrong deed goes

unpunished in the city. At the same time, they enjoy liberty and have immense power in their hands. Though they are bound to follow the king's orders, if they get angry, they can make the king afraid too. For instance, when the wisest man said to hang the arch, they protested and asked to hang a person. So, the king had to choose a person who was tall enough for the noose, and it was none other than the king himself. Thus, the king had to die to establish justice in the city and among the people. At the same time, a melon was chosen by an idiot as the next king, and people had no problem with it. It clearly shows how the people enjoy the real power in their hands and can take any decision about the king.

Question 18. What role do the common people play in the poem?

Answer 18: The common people play a significant role in the poem. When the king is on his throne, they don't have any right to say anything. They have to obey his orders blindly. At the same time, they have immense power in their hands. For example, when the king ordered to hang the chief of builders, or later the workmen and other professions, the common people didn't protest at all. But, as time passed and no one got hanged, they became enraged and demanded to hang a person. They even made the king afraid. At the last moment, the king was hanged for keeping the royal proclamation. At the same time, the general people selected the king. The ministers stated that anyone who would pass through the arch the next day would select the next king. The next day, an idiot passed the gate and selected a melon as the next king. The people didn't protest it and made the melon their next king. Thus, it reflects that the presence of a king is not compulsory. The will and liberty of the general people play the most important role here.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS-

1. What was the purpose of the construction ordered by the King?

- A. To continue a legacy
- B. To solidify the King's rule
- C. To improve viewers morally**
- D. To carry out a ritual

2. Why did the King's crown fall?

- A. Because the arch was built too low**
- B. Because he lost his balance
- C. Because the crown was heavy
- D. Because he was attacked

3. "This is a disgrace." What was a disgrace?

- A. Poorly built arch
- B. Unenthusiastic crowd
- C. Crown being stroked**
- D. Poor, unenthusiastic crowd

4. Listening about his own hanging, who did the King call for?

- A. The oldest man in the country
- B. The wisest man in the country**
- C. The wisest minister in the country
- D. The oldest minister in the country

5. Who according to the counsel was the culprit that was brought before the King?

- A. The King
- B. The crown
- C. The arch**
- D. The chief

6. After all the considerations and discussions, the crowd was getting_____.

- A. restless**
- B. amused
- C. horrified
- D. bored

7. What was the public demand that the King sought to fulfill?

- A. They wanted no one to be hanged
- B. They wanted a hanging**
- C. They wanted the arch to be demolished
- D. They wanted a new king

8. What sort of principles seem to thrive in the state?

- A. Democratic
- B. Laissez faire**
- C. Authoritative
- D. Communistic

9. After reading “The Tale of the Melon City”, what opinion do you form of the King?

- A. He was a just King
- B. He was a rule abiding King
- C. He was a foolish King**
- D. He was a wise King

10. Do you think that the King took his ‘notion of justice’ too far?

- A. No, he did what a just King would do
- B. Maybe

C. Yes, he lost his life in the process

D. Can not determine

11. What impression do you form of the crowd of the state?

A. They were of no good

B. They were supportive of their King

C. They were indifferent of who was throned

D. Both (A) and (C)

12. The ministers were foolish to ask an idiot about their next King. Do you agree?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Partially

D. Not clear from the poem

13. What is the genre of “The Tale of the Melon City”?

A. Thriller

B. Humorous

C. Ironic

D. Both (B) and (C)

14. What sort of perception does the public hold for their chosen King after so many years?

A. They don't like him

B. They are enraged

C. They like him very much

D. They have no problem whatsoever