Chapter 2: The Tiger King

Exercise 2.1 — Reading with Insight

Q1 The story is a satire on the conceit of those in power. How does the author employ the literary device of dramatic irony in the story?

SOLUTION

Dramatic irony occurs when the reader perceives a meaning that the character himself does not — and Kalki deploys it throughout the story to expose the Maharaja's absurd self-importance.

The central irony is built into the prophecy itself: the astrologer warns that the Maharaja will die because of a tiger, and the Maharaja spends his entire life hunting tigers in order to cheat that fate. The reader can see from early on that his obsessive effort to disprove the prophecy will only draw him closer to its fulfilment.

A sharper instance of dramatic irony appears when the Maharaja triumphantly declares, 'I have killed the hundredth tiger. My vow has been fulfilled.' He rides off in elation, unaware that his bullet had actually missed the tiger and it was a hunter who delivered the killing shot. The reader knows this; the Maharaja does not, making his pride grotesquely misplaced.

The final and most devastating irony is the manner of his death. The hundredth tiger he believed he had conquered takes its 'final revenge' not through claws or fangs but through a splinter from a cheap two-anna wooden toy tiger — a gift for his son. The Maharaja who survived real tiger hunts is killed by a toy, the very symbol of his conceit. The author thus uses dramatic irony to show that power and pride cannot ultimately outwit fate.

Answer: The Maharaja's death — caused by a splinter from a toy tiger — is the supreme dramatic irony: the reader knows his bullet missed the hundredth tiger, while he dies in triumph, demonstrating that conceited power cannot cheat fate.

Q2 What is the author's indirect comment on subjecting innocent animals to the willfulness of human beings?

SOLUTION

Kalki's satirical treatment of the Maharaja's tiger hunts amounts to a sustained indictment of the way powerful human beings treat wild animals as instruments of their own ego and whim.

The tigers of Pratibandapuram are slaughtered not out of any ecological necessity or genuine self-defence but solely because the Maharaja wishes to disprove an astrologer's prophecy and assert his own authority. The author notes, with sardonic humour, that the state banned all tiger hunting except by the Maharaja, effectively turning the entire tiger population into a private resource for one man's obsession.

The extinction of tigers in Pratibandapuram — described with dark comedy — shows the catastrophic result of such unchecked willfulness. Entire forests are emptied of tigers; the

Maharaja then marries into a state with a larger tiger population to continue the hunt. The animals have no agency, no protection, and no voice. Their deaths serve no purpose beyond satisfying royal vanity.

The dewan's secret import of an aged, docile tiger from the People's Park in Madras underlines the degradation further: this creature, brought and shoved into a car at midnight by an old couple, is barely a wild animal at all. Even this helpless beast the Maharaja misses. The author's comment is clear — the indifference of the powerful toward innocent creatures is absurd, destructive, and ultimately self-defeating.

Answer: The author shows that subjecting animals to human willfulness leads to their extinction and the animals' total loss of dignity, while the powerful human who orchestrates it gains nothing of real value — dying ironically because of a toy tiger.

Q3 How would you describe the behaviour of the Maharaja's minions towards him? Do you find them truly sincere towards him or are they driven by fear when they obey him? Do we find a similarity in today's political order?

SOLUTION

The Maharaja's minions — the dewan, the hunters, the shopkeeper, and the courtiers — are uniformly obsequious and motivated primarily by fear rather than genuine loyalty or sincerity.

The dewan is the clearest example. When the Maharaja cannot find the hundredth tiger, the dewan secretly procures an aged tiger from the People's Park in Madras and smuggles it into the forest at midnight so that the king can 'hunt' it. He does this not out of devotion to his master but because he foresees personal catastrophe if the king's rage continues: officers were losing their jobs, land taxes were being doubled, and the dewan feared the state would become ungovernable. His concern is self-preservation, not loyalty.

The hunters display the same fear-driven behaviour. When the Maharaja's bullet misses the hundredth tiger and the animal merely faints, the hunters quietly shoot it themselves and say nothing. They suppress the truth entirely because, as the text notes, 'they could lose their jobs' if the Maharaja knew he had missed. Their silence is the silence of fear, not respect.

The shopkeeper, too, inflates the price of a two-anna wooden toy to three hundred rupees rather than name the real price, knowing that quoting a low figure might draw punishment under Emergency rules. Even commerce is distorted by the atmosphere of fear the Maharaja creates.

This pattern has clear parallels in contemporary political life. Advisers tell leaders what they wish to hear; subordinates suppress inconvenient truths; public servants prioritise their own positions over honest counsel. The result, as the story shows, is that the powerful end up surrounded by hollow flattery and dangerous ignorance — conditions that can lead to catastrophic decisions.

Answer: The Maharaja's minions act out of fear, not sincerity — the dewan smuggles a tame tiger, hunters hide his missed shot, the shopkeeper inflates prices. This mirrors a timeless political pattern where subordinates prioritise self-preservation over honest counsel.

Q4 Can you relate instances of game-hunting among the rich and the powerful in the present times that illustrate the callousness of human beings towards wildlife?

SOLUTION

The story's portrayal of the Maharaja hunting tigers purely for self-aggrandisement echoes patterns that continue in the present day, when wealth and political influence still enable the exploitation of wildlife.

Trophy hunting — the practice of paying large sums to shoot big game such as lions, elephants, and leopards — remains legal in parts of Africa and is predominantly patronised by wealthy individuals from developed nations. Critics argue that it treats living animals as trophies for the rich, exactly as the story's Maharaja treats the tigers of Pratibandapuram. High-profile cases of protected or iconic animals being shot by trophy hunters have repeatedly drawn public outrage.

Poaching of endangered species — rhinoceroses for their horn, tigers for their bones and skin, elephants for ivory — is frequently linked to organised networks that cater to wealthy buyers in illegal markets. The demand from the powerful and affluent drives the supply, and the animals pay the price.

In India, several cases of influential individuals hunting protected animals — blackbucks, tigers, chinkara — have attracted legal proceedings. These cases illustrate that even under modern wildlife protection laws, wealth and political connections are sometimes used to circumvent consequences, echoing the Maharaja's ability to exempt himself from all constraints on hunting.

The common thread across all these instances is the callousness the story satirises: animals are treated as objects for human entertainment or status, their lives disposable when they conflict with the desires of the powerful.

Answer: Trophy hunting by wealthy individuals, poaching driven by demand from affluent buyers, and high-profile cases of influential persons hunting protected species in India all illustrate the same callousness the story satirises — animals treated as disposable trophies for human ego.

Q5 We need a new system for the age of ecology — a system which is embedded in the care of all people and also in the care of the Earth and all life upon it. Discuss.

SOLUTION

The story of the Tiger King offers a powerful parable for why such a new system is urgently needed. The old system — one in which power, wealth, and individual whim determined humanity's relationship with nature — led to the extinction of tigers in Pratibandapuram and ultimately to the destruction of the Maharaja himself. The story suggests that any system that

places one individual's ego above the welfare of living creatures contains the seeds of its own ruin.

An ecological system, as the statement proposes, must begin with the recognition that human beings are not separate from nature but a part of it. The Maharaja's fatal error was precisely this: he believed he could dominate nature — tigers, forests, fate — by sheer force of will. A truly ecological worldview replaces domination with stewardship.

Such a system must also be equitable. The story shows how the laws of Pratibandapuram protected the Maharaja's hunting rights while penalising everyone else. A new ecological order must distribute both the benefits of natural resources and the responsibility for protecting them fairly across all people, not just the powerful.

In practical terms, this means robust wildlife protection laws enforced without exception for the rich or politically connected, community-based conservation in which local people are partners rather than bystanders, education that builds ecological awareness from an early age, and international agreements that hold all nations accountable for biodiversity loss.

The age of ecology demands a fundamental shift in values: from seeing the Earth as a resource to be exploited toward understanding it as a commons to be sustained. The Tiger King's story, told with satire, makes the moral plain — those who treat living creatures with callousness will eventually face consequences they cannot escape.

Answer: A new ecological system requires replacing the old model of domination — satirised through the Maharaja's unchecked hunting — with one of stewardship, equity, and shared responsibility for all life, grounded in the recognition that human beings are part of nature, not its masters.