

# **In the Kingdom of Fools**

by

A.K. Ramanujan

## **Presentation**

## **Module - I**



### **A. K. Ramanujan**

Indian poet

Description

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan was an Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature who wrote in both English and Kannada. Ramanujan was a poet, scholar, professor, a philologist, folklorist, translator, and playwright. His academic research ranged across five languages: English, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit.

Born: 16 March 1929, Mysuru

Died: 13 July 1993, Chicago, Illinois, United States

Full name: Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan

Spouse: Molly Daniels-Ramanujan

Awards: Padma Shri, MacArthur Fellowship, Sahitya Akademi Award for English Writers

### Introduction

The story 'In the Kingdom of Fools' by A.K.Ramanujan can be read in two levels- one just as a funny entertainer and the other as an allegory ( a story, poem, novel etc which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning ) on the follies and foibles of the so- called 'great' kings and ministers. Even though the events described in the story take place in the by-gone era when kings were ruling the kingdoms, everything in the story seems to have some relevance and significance in the present socio-political scenario also where we too have many ministers, leaders and bureaucrats who are not much better than the king and minister in the story. When we look at the story from that angle, the story is indeed a fantastic allegory which criticises the waywardness and power thirst ( the king and the minister in the story even ready to die on the stake to retain their power ) of our ministers, political leaders and bureaucrats. The story can also be read as a story that tells us the fact that we must be very cautious and careful when we come into contact with foolish people because foolish people are unpredictable and can be very dangerous. What they may think or may not think or may do or may not do, nobody can say for sure. So even if we may get some short-term benefit from them ( everything available with a single duddu in the story ), it is better to stay away from them. Only the wise, intelligent and diplomatic people like the Guru in the story can deal with them or manage them.

### Synopsis

The events described in the story took place in a kingdom where the king and minister were idiots. Since they wished to rule the kingdom in a different way from other kings, they reversed the order of the day. They ordered everyone to be awake at night and do their respective works while during the day everyone must sleep. Since it was an order from the king, everyone followed this foolish practice.

One day a guru and disciple reached the city. Even though it was broad daylight, no one could be seen anywhere. But after the sunset when it was growing dark, much to their surprise and disbelief, the whole town woke up and went about with their business. When they went to buy some groceries, giving them more surprise, they knew that everything cost only a single duddu there. But after cooking and having their food, the guru realised that it would not be wise and safe to live in a kingdom of such foolish people. Hence he suggested his disciple that they must leave that place as soon as possible. But the disciple, a glutton, was unready to do so as all food items were cheap there. The guru tried to convince him things, but all in vain. At last the guru left the place and the disciple stayed back there. He ate to his fill everyday and grew fat.

One bright day, a thief broke into a rich merchant's house by making a hole on the wall. When he was coming out carrying the loot, the wall collapsed on his head killing him on the spot. His brother rushed to the king and complained that the merchant should be punished for not building a strong wall. The king summoned the merchant. But the merchant explained that he had nothing to do with that accident since the wall had been built during his father's time. But he added that he knew the man who built the wall. The king summoned the man, the bricklayer, an old man now. During his trial he said that a pretty dancing girl was going up and down the street all day with her jingling anklets distracting his concentration from the work. That resulted in the wall being weak. That dancing girl, an old woman now, was brought in. During her trial, she gave the excuse that a lazy goldsmith whom she had given order to make some jewellery made her walk like that by delaying her work. When the goldsmith was brought for the trial, he explained that he had to delay her work since a rich merchant forced him to complete their work first. When the king asked who was that rich merchant who was the root cause of all those problems, it turned out that that rich merchant was none other than the first accused merchant's father. The king then observed that as the son inherited all his riches, so he must inherit the result of all his sins and faults too. Therefore he must be executed was the king's ultimate verdict. When the rich merchant was being taken to be executed, it occurred to the minister that the merchant was too thin to be executed properly on the stake. So the king and minister decided that on behalf of him a fat man could be executed.

When the servants searched for a fat man, their eyes fell on the disciple, a bulky fellow now. Though he pleaded that he was an innocent sanyasi, the servants did not listen to him and carried him to the place of execution. When he was face to face with death, he remembered guru's words of wisdom that it was unsafe to live there. Anyway he prayed to his guru to hear his cry. The guru, who had magical powers, knew everything in a vision and rushed to save his disciple. As soon as he arrived, he scolded disciple first and then whispered him something. It was part of a master plan hatched by guru to save his disciple's life. Soon there started a row between them about who would die first on the stake. Seeing this the king was puzzled. He asked the guru why they were competing to die like that. Then the guru told him secretly that the newly made stake was the stake of god of justice and since it was never used, the one who would die first on it would be reborn as a king and the second as a minister in that kingdom. The king was thrown into a deep thought. He discussed the matter with his minister. Since both of them didn't want to lose the power and kingdom in their next birth also, they decided that they would go on the stake and get killed. Thus both of them went to the prison secretly at night, released the guru and disciple, put themselves into their places and promptly got executed.

The people were shocked to know the sudden death of king and minister. They discussed the future of the kingdom and all on a sudden thought of the guru and disciple. They were actually planning to leave the city secretly. The people approached them and requested them to be their new king and minister. After some hesitation the guru agreed to rule

the kingdom on the condition that they would change all the foolish old laws. The night would again be night and the day would again be day and nothing could be bought with a duddu. Thus eventually the kingdom of fools became like any other place.

### Highlights of the first part

The kingdom of fools

In the kingdom of fools the king and the minister were idiots. They ordered all things to be reversed. They decided to change night into day and day into night. They ordered people to do day's work at night and sleep during the day. Anyone not obeying was to be punished with death. So people out of fear did as they were asked to do. This delighted the king and the minister.

A guru and disciple reach the city

Once a guru and his disciple arrived in the city. They found everyone asleep during the day. No activity was observed. It amazed them. They wandered till evening. Then the people woke up. They started doing their nightly businesses. Now the two were hungry. They bought some food items. The price of everything was same, a single duddu. This surprised and delighted them. The guru realized that it was really a kingdom of fools.

Guru leaves the city but disciple stays back

The guru decided to leave the city of fools. He asked his disciple also to leave the place. But the disciple didn't want to do so for cheap food. The guru advised the disciple that nothing could be predicted of fools. But the disciple didn't care. He stayed back. Time passed on. The disciple ate to his fill. As a result he became very fat.

A thief breaks into a rich merchant's house

One day a thief broke into a rich merchant's house. He was taking out the stolen things. Just then the wall of the old house fell on his head. He was killed instantly. The brother of the thief complained to the king about his death. He blamed the owner of the house for his brother's death.



The owner is summoned

The king heard the accused. He accused him of killing the thief. But the owner said that he was innocent. He said that the person who built the wall was responsible. He didn't make the good wall. The king decided to summon the bricklayer.

The king summons the bricklayer

The king asked the bricklayer if he had built the wall. He accused him of killing the thief. Before the king could order his death, the bricklayer pleaded innocence. He told the king that he could not concentrate while building the wall. A dancing girl moved in the street distracting his attention. So she was responsible for it.

The dancing girl is summoned

The king charged the dancing girl of killing the thief. The dancing girl said that the goldsmith was responsible for it. She had given some gold to him. He had to make some jewellery for her. He was lazy. He did not make the jewellery in time. So she had to walk up and down the street. So it was the goldsmith's fault.



### The goldsmith and his plea

The king now ordered to summon the goldsmith. The goldsmith replied that there was a wedding in the rich man's house. He had to make jewellery for him. So he could not finish the jewellery of the dancing girl in time.

### The rich man is again summoned before the king

Since it transpired that the rich merchant who forced the goldsmith to complete their work first was none other than the father of the first accused merchant, the king finally declared the first accused himself to be the murderer. The king asked for a new stake to be made ready for the execution of the rich merchant. But the man was very thin. He could not be executed with a stake. The king was worried about it. Then he ordered to search a man who was fit for the stake. He should be executed on his behalf.

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