

# In the Kingdom of Fools

by AK Ramanujan

## Chapter Sketch

'In the Kingdom of Fools' is a story by AK Ramanujan. The story highlights the fact that in a kingdom of fools people's lives can be in danger as the king and his ministers were brainless and did not do things in a normal manner. It is a place where everything is in reverse and justice is not given.

A guru and his disciple visit this place, get involved in some matters. But finally with guru's wisdom king and his ministers get executed by their own orders. Normalcy is restored in the city after their death. The people choose guru as the king and his disciple as minister.

## About the Characters

**The King** The foolish ruler who has executed himself.

**The Minister** The foolish advisor to the king who agrees with everything that the king proposes.

**The Guru** A very resourceful person with magical powers who becomes king through his wisdom.

**The Disciple** A greedy and shortsighted person who remembers his guru in time of need.

## Summary of the Chapter

### Stupid Order Followed in the Kingdom of Fools

The king and his minister in the Kingdom of Fools were stupid. They ordered that night should be treated as day and all the people should work at that time. They should go to bed as soon as the day broke. The orders were followed by the people under the fear of being put to death if not followed. This delighted the king and the minister.

### Guru Visits the Kingdom Alongwith his Disciple

Once a guru and his disciple came to the kingdom during the day, finding it beautiful but totally deserted. Everyone, including the animals, was asleep. They were tired and hungry but could not get anything to eat till the evening, when the whole place woke up and came to life. When the guru and disciple bought some food items, they surprisingly found that everything, whether it was a bunch of bananas or a measure of rice, cost the same, one *duddu*, the local currency.

### Guru Leaves the City But the Disciple Remains in the City

The wise guru realised that they were in a Kingdom of Fools and it would not be safe to stay there. So, he suggested his disciple that they should leave the place at once. But, the disciple was fond of food and found it very cheap to stay on. The guru left. Soon the disciple grew very fat by eating to his fill.

### Incident of Theft in Rich Merchant's House

One day, a thief broke into the house of a rich merchant to steal his valuables by breaking a wall. But, as he was going out with the stolen stuff, the old wall fell on him and killed him. The brother of the thief complained before the king that the owner of the house was to be blamed for the death and demanded justice. The king heard the case and the merchant was found guilty because his house's wall collapsed and killed the thief.



## The Blame Game Continued

The merchant blamed the bricklayer who built the wall, as it was thought that his bad workmanship created a weak wall. But, the bricklayer blamed the dancer who distracted him when he was making the wall by passing in front of him a dozen times during the day, resulting in poor quality of the wall.

The dancer accused the goldsmith who called the dancer time and again to deliver the jewellery she had asked to be made, but did not deliver it, leading to the distraction of the bricklayer.

The goldsmith blamed the merchant's father, as he had been making the urgent jewellery for him, thus delaying the finishing of the dancer's jewellery. As the father was dead, the merchant was finally pronounced guilty, as he had inherited all the wealth as well as the bad deeds of his father.

## Disciple Fell in Trouble and Guru Tricked to Save Him

A new stake was built for the execution but the merchant was too thin to fit the stake. So, the king ordered to search for a fatter man to fit the stake and the disciple was brought for execution. Then, he remembered his guru's words and wished that the guru was there. As the guru had magical powers, he appeared at once and explained a plan quietly to the disciple to escape the execution.

The guru and his disciple started fighting amongst themselves to decide who should be executed first. When the king asked them why they were fighting, the guru explained that the new stake was the stake of the God of Justice and whoever was executed first on it would be reborn as a king. Whoever was executed next on that stake would be reborn as a minister.

## The King and Ministers Die

The puzzled king believing what the guru said, discussed the matter with his minister and decided that if they themselves were executed on that stake first, they would be reborn as king and minister. So they freed the guru and disciple, secretly planning to die on the stake the same night.

## Guru and Disciple Become King and Minister

The dead bodies of king and minister were taken down. The people mourned their deaths and requested the guru and his disciple to become the king and minister of the kingdom. The guru and disciple agreed on the condition that they would change all the laws back to the normal laws of any other kingdom.

## » Chapter Highlights

- 1 The king and his minister in the Kingdom of Fools were stupid because they ordered that night should be treated as day and *vice-versa*. Thus, all the people would work at night and sleep during the day.
- 2 Here everything, whether it was a bunch of bananas or a measure of rice, cost the same, one duddu, the local currency.
- 3 Once a guru and his disciple came to the kingdom. When they found what was happening, the wise guru realised that it would not be safe to stay there.
- 4 But the disciple was fond of food and found it very cheap to stay on. The guru left. Soon, the disciple grew very fat by eating to his fill.
- 5 One day, a thief broke into the house of a rich merchant by breaking a wall. But, as the thief was going out with the stolen stuff, the old wall fell on him and killed him.
- 6 The thief's brother complained before the king that the merchant was responsible for the thief's death and so he should be punished.
- 7 The merchant blamed the bricklayer who built the wall, the bricklayer blamed the dancing girl who distracted him, the dancing girl blamed the goldsmith for giving her ornaments late and the goldsmith blamed the merchant's father and finally the blame came back again to the merchant.
- 8 The king asked for the merchant to be executed on the stake but he was found to be too thin for it. So a search was launched (started) for a fat man who would fit the stake.
- 9 The disciple had become fat and so he was selected. Then, he remembered what the guru had told him and wished that the guru was there.
- 10 As the guru had magical powers, he appeared at once and explained a plan quietly to the disciple to escape the execution (hanging).
- 11 The guru and his disciple started fighting among themselves to decide who would be executed first. When the king asked them why they were fighting, the guru explained that whoever was executed first on the new stake would be reborn as a king.
- 12 So the king freed both of them and decided that he himself should be executed first, so that he will be reborn again as the king.
- 13 After the execution, the people requested the guru to become the king and his disciple the minister. They agreed on the condition that they would change all the laws back to the normal laws of any other kingdom.

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# Word Meanings

The given page nos. correspond to the pages in the prescribed textbook.

Word	Meaning
<b>PAGE 19</b>	
kingdom	a country ruled by a king or queen
idiot	fool
business	selling
disobey	to refuse to obey
delight	pleasure
project	plan
disciple	follower
strangers	unknown people
groceries	provisions
astonishment	surprise
realise	come to know
duddu	unit of money
<b>PAGE 20</b>	
wisdom	knowledge and experience
sneak	move secretly
fill	as much as wanted
loot	stolen material
collapsed	fell down
pursuing his ancient trade	doing his traditional work
blame	to charge of
wrongdoer	person responsible for wrong action
compensate	to make good for the losses
injustice	lack of fairness
summoned	called
sacred	holy
<b>PAGE 21</b>	
such and such	(imaginary name)
burgled	robbed
accused	convict
helpless	unable to defend himself
punish	to cause some one suffer for wrong deeds
put up	make
bricklayer	person who puts bricks in making buildings
tied hand and foot	completely
execution	punishment by death
pleaded	argued
mind .... on	concentrate on
anklets	chains worn around the ankles
jingling	light ringing sound
case deepens	matter is complicated
look into	try to understand
distracted	disturbed concentration

Word	Meaning
<b>PAGE 22</b>	
innocent	honest
goldsmith	person who makes gold jewellery
scoundrel	dishonest person
damned	(showing anger)
absolutely	completely
evidence	proof
culprit	person responsible
balliffs	officers enforcing the law
accusation	claim about wrong done
impatient	not willing to wait
made a mess	in trouble
<b>PAGE 23</b>	
consulted	took the advice of
ruled decisively	gave his final decision
inherited	received as an heir
horrible	fearful
stake	a wooden post on which criminals are tied for being executed
final impaling	execution, pierce with a sharpened stake
immediately	at once
fattened	made himself fat
<b>PAGE 24</b>	
sanyasi	religious person
royal	related to kings
decree	command
vision	ability to see the future
scold	to rebuke
scrape	difficult situation
<b>PAGE 25</b>	
clamour	strongly protest
puzzle	something that you can't understand
mystery	secret
earshot	hearing distance
ascetic	free of worldly pleasures
postpone	to delay
secret	unknown
holy men	religious men
executioners	persons who carry out execution
disguised themselves	changed their appearance
<b>PAGE 26</b>	
panicked	became frightened
mourned	felt sad at the death
argument	logic
persuade	to bring around
condition	situation

# NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

## Think About It (Page 27)

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

Or What did the guru and the disciple find in the city of fools?

Or What things were different in the Kingdom of Fools?

Or What was so strange about the Kingdom of Fools?

Or Which two things amazed the guru and his disciple when they arrived in the Kingdom of Fools?

**Ans.** The first strange thing observed by the guru and his disciple in the Kingdom of Fools is that people slept throughout the day and even animals didn't venture (a risky journey) out during daytime. All work was done during night only. The second strange thing observed by them was that everything cost one *duddu*, the local currency. Whether it was gold or a bunch of bananas, everything had the same value.

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

Or Why does the disciple not want to leave the Kingdom of Fools?

Or Why was the disciple not interested in leaving the Kingdom of Fools?

Or Why didn't the disciple want to leave the Kingdom of Fools?

**Ans.** The disciple thinks of the easy life in the Kingdom of Fools. He thinks that he could afford all the pleasure of life without worrying about his budget. He dreams of relishing (enjoying) every rich food available as everything cost one *duddu* in the kingdom. However, it is not a good idea as later events prove. Fools may behave unpredictably (that can not be foretold) and anyone can be in danger anytime.

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

**Ans.** The merchant whose house was being burgled was the first accused because his house's wall collapsed and killed the thief. The next person tried was the bricklayer who built the wall as it was thought that his bad workmanship created a weak wall.

Next, the dancer was accused of distracting the bricklayer by passing in front of him a dozen times during the day, resulting in poor quality of the wall. The next accused was the goldsmith who called the dancer time and again to deliver the jewellery she had asked to be made but did not deliver it, leading to the distraction of the bricklayer.

The goldsmith blamed the merchant's father as he had been making the urgent jewellery for him, thus delaying the finishing of the dancer's jewellery. As the father was dead, the merchant was finally pronounced guilty.

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

**Ans.** The king applied his weird (strange) logic to come to the conclusion that as the merchant inherited everything from his father, he should take the share of his father's sin as well. So, according to the king, the merchant was the real culprit. However, as the merchant was too thin to fit on the new execution stake, he escaped execution. The king concluded that a man fat enough to fit the stake will serve the purpose.

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

**Ans.** The guru had told his disciple that you never know what these foolish people would do to you next. When the disciple's life was at stake, he remembered his guru's words of wisdom. During good times, we tend to forget the good teachings of our teachers and well wishers. It is only when the going gets tough that we remember them.



6 How does the guru manage to save his disciple?

Or How did the guru make the king change his mind about the execution?

Or What did the guru do to save his disciple's life? Was he successful in doing so?

*Ans.* The guru tries to confuse the king by expressing his desire to be executed first. Then, to further confuse the king, he tells the story that whoever is executed first will become the king in the next incarnation (birth or life).

The king believes him and later on offers himself to be executed first so that he may remain king in the next incarnation. So, the guru was successful in saving his disciple's life.

**Talk About It** (Page 27)

1 In Shakespeare's plays the fool is not really foolish. If you have read or seen Shakespeare's plays such as King Lear, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, you may talk about the role of the fool.

Do you know any stories in your language about wise fools, such as Tenali Rama or Gopal Bhar? You can also read about them in Ramanujan's collection of folk tales.

*Ans.* Appearing in most of Shakespeare's dramas, the clown or fool figure remains one of the most intriguing stage characters. Into this category, critics place Shakespeare's intellectual or 'wise-fools,' notably Touchstone of As You Like It, Feste of Twelfth Night and King Lear's unnamed fool.

Shakespeare's 'fools' are usually clever peasants or commoners that use their wits to outdo people of higher social standing. In this sense, they are very similar to the real fools and jesters of the time but their characteristics are greatly heightened for theatrical effect.

The tales of Tenali Rama (actually Tenali Ramakrishna) are full of his wit and wisdom. He lived during the 16th century. In those days, court jesters were appointed to crack jokes and amuse kings. Among these jesters, the most famous was Tenali Ramakrishna.

In any situation, he had the right word and the right action to provoke the king and his courtiers to laughter. He became so famous that, if we want to praise any man's sense of humour, we call him a Tenali Ramakrishna. Gopal Bhar or Gopal Bhand was a court jester in Bengal. He was in the court of Raja Krishnachandra (1710-1783), the king of Nadia in the 18th century. The king considered Gopal as a Navaratna of his court.

# Exam Practice

## Extract Based Questions

[4 Marks each]

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1 The two strangers were amazed by what they saw around them and wandered around town till evening, when suddenly the whole town woke up and went about its nightly business.

- (i) Who are the 'two strangers' in the above extract?  
(a) The king and the minister  
(b) The guru and the disciple  
(c) The king and his friend  
(d) The guru and his friend
- (ii) What is the 'nightly business' referred to above?  
(a) The hobby of the king  
(b) The hobby of the minister  
(c) The occupation of the disciple  
(d) The normal occupation of the people
- (iii) What word in the extract is a synonym of 'surprised'?  
(a) Shocked (b) Amazed  
(c) Suddenly (d) Nightly
- (iv) The word 'nightly' in the extract is a .....  
(a) Verb (b) Adjective  
(c) Adverb (d) Conjunction

- Ans. (i) (b) The guru and the disciple  
(ii) (d) The normal occupation of the people  
(iii) (b) Amazed  
(iv) (c) Adverb

- 2 "They are all fools. This won't last very long, and you can't tell what they'll do to you next."

- (i) Who spoke these words and to whom in the above extract?  
(a) The guru to his disciple  
(b) The disciple to the guru  
(c) The king to his minister  
(d) The minister to the king
- (ii) What 'won't last very long'?  
(a) The luxury items (b) The costly things  
(c) The utility items (d) The cheap things
- (iii) Find a word in the extract which is a synonym of 'predict'.  
(a) Tell (b) Say  
(c) Guess (d) Last

- (iv) What part of speech is 'next' in the extract?  
(a) Adjective (b) Verb  
(c) Adverb (d) Preposition

- Ans. (i) (a) The guru to his disciple  
(ii) (d) The cheap things  
(iii) (a) Tell  
(iv) (c) Adverb

- 3 His brother ran to the king and complained, "Your Highness, when my brother was pursuing his ancient trade, a wall fell on him and killed him."

- (i) Who is referred to as 'my brother' in the above extract?  
(a) The thief  
(b) The minister  
(c) The guru  
(d) The disciple
- (ii) What is the 'ancient trade' referred to in the extract?  
(a) Decorating people's houses  
(b) Robbing people's houses  
(c) Whitewashing people's houses  
(d) Cleaning people's houses
- (iii) Find a word in the extract which is a synonym of 'profession'.  
(a) Job (b) Career  
(c) Vocation (d) Trade
- (iv) What does 'pursuing' mean here?  
(a) Cleaning (b) Navigating  
(c) Doing (d) Showing

- Ans. (i) (a) The thief  
(ii) (b) Robbing people's houses  
(iii) (d) Trade  
(iv) (c) Doing

- 4 "You're right. The case deepens. We must look into it. It is not easy to judge such complicated cases. Let's get that dancer, wherever she is."

- (a) Who is speaking the words and to whom in the above extract?  
(a) The bricklayer to the king  
(b) The king to the bricklayer  
(c) The guru to the bricklayer  
(d) The bricklayer to the disciple



- (b) What does the speaker mean by 'The case deepens'?
- (a) The matter is more complicated than it was thought earlier
- (b) The matter is less complicated than it was thought earlier
- (c) The matter is very easy
- (d) The matter is not at all complicated
- (c) The word 'that' in the extract is a .....
- (a) Adjective (b) Adverb
- (c) Pronoun (d) Noun

- (d) What is the opposite of 'complicated'?
- (a) Complex
- (b) Tough
- (c) Moderate
- (d) Easy

- Ans.** (i) (b) The king to the bricklayer
- (ii) (a) The matter is more complicated than it was thought earlier
- (iii) (a) Adjective
- (iv) (d) Easy

### Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

1 Why did the guru decide to leave the Kingdom of Fools?

Or Why did the guru not want to stay in the Kingdom of Fools?

**Ans.** The guru decided to leave the Kingdom of Fools because he realised that it was dangerous to live there as the people were all fools and anything could happen at any time. He was not sure about them and felt that they could also harm the guru and his disciple.

2 Why did the king order for the execution to be postponed?

Or Why did the king decide to postpone the execution of the guru and his disciple?

**Ans.** The guru made a fool of the king by telling him that the new stake belonged to the God of Justice and the first person executed on it would be the king in his next birth and the second person executed would be the minister in the next birth. As the king did not want to lose his kingdom even in his next birth, he postponed the execution so that he had time to think and take the advice of his minister.

3 Why were the guru and his disciple delighted?

Or Why were the two men surprised as well as delighted when they went to buy grocery?

**Ans.** The guru and his disciple were surprised and delighted when they went to buy grocery in the Kingdom of Fools because they found that everything cost the same – a single *duddu* whether it was a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas. Thus, everything was very cheap.

4 What magical powers did the guru have?

**Ans.** The guru saw everything in a vision; he could see far, he could see the future just as the present and

the past. Further, he could appear anywhere at any time as happened when the disciple remembered him and he appeared to save him from the stake.

5 Why was the dancing girl walking up and down that street?

**Ans.** The dancing girl was walking up and down that street because she had given gold to the goldsmith to make some jewellery. But, the goldsmith was busy with other work and kept on promising her to give it soon, thus making her walk up and down to his house a dozen times.

6 What did the king and the minister do to change night into day and day into night?

**Ans.** To change night into day and day into night, the king and the minister ordered that everyone should awake at night and work as before and go to bed as soon as the sun rose.

7 What was foolish about the king's trial of the merchant?

Or Why did the king want to punish the merchant?

**Ans.** A thief, who had broken the wall of the merchant's house was killed due to wall of the merchant's house collapsing on his head. So, the king ordered that the merchant should be punished for the thief's death. This was a foolish judgement. One, who is a victim, should get judgement not punishment.

8 What reason did the guru give to the king for dying first?

**Ans.** The guru told the king that the stake was of the God of justice and whoever died first on that stake would be reborn as the king of the country. Whoever died next would be reborn as the minister of the country. That is why, the guru wanted to die first.



- 9 How do we know that, in the Kingdom of Fools, both the king and the minister were idiots?

**Ans.** In the Kingdom of Fools, both the king and the minister were idiots because they ordered that everyone should remain awake at night, plough their fields and run their businesses only after dark and go to bed as soon as the sun rose. Anyone, who disobeyed, would be put to death. This was an idiotic order.

- 10 Who became the king and the minister of the kingdom?

**Ans.** As the kingdom was without a king, the people requested the guru to become the king and his disciple to become the minister. The guru agreed on the condition that they could change the earlier laws. That happened after the death of the king.

- 11 What is the guru's wisdom? When does the disciple realise this?

**Ans.** The guru's wisdom is that there is no justice in the Kingdom of Fools, as the people's behaviour is unpredictable.

The disciple remembers these words and realises this when the king decided that the disciple was a suitable person for execution because of his fatness and not because of his guilt.

- 12 What advice did the guru give to the disciple before going out of the city?

**Ans.** The advice that the guru gave to the disciple before going out of the city was that it was dangerous to stay in a Kingdom of Fools as their behaviour is unpredictable and there would be no justice there. You must leave this city and do not greed for food. But, the disciple didn't pay any attention to it.

### Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

[8 Marks each]

- 1 What reasons did the guru give to be executed with his disciple on the stake in the chapter 'In the Kingdom of Fools'?

**Ans.** The guru was very much wise and he knew it well how to deal with the idiot king and the minister. The guru whispered a few words in the ear of the disciple and then he acted accordingly. This made the scene there very interesting and the king was puzzled (surprised) at the way the two were fighting there.

The guru told the king that the stake was of the God of Justice and whoever died first on that stake would be reborn as the king of the country. Whoever was executed next would be reborn as minister of the country.

These are the reasons given by the guru for him to be executed with his disciple on the stake in the chapter 'In the Kingdom of Fools'. However, this was only informed by the guru to trap the king into ordering his own execution.

- 2 How do the foolish king and his minister make sure that they would become the king and the minister in the next life also?

**Ans.** When the people are fools then it is difficult to please them but it is quite easy to trick them. That is what the guru did to the king and the minister. The guru and the disciple started the trick very well and the king as well as the minister fell to it.

They were in no mood to lose their loved kingdom and that is what made them trapped in the trick of

the guru. The foolish king and his minister didn't want to lose their kingdom to anybody, particularly the guru and the disciple as the guru had told them that if he was executed on the stake, he would be reborn as the king.

So, to ensure that he became the king again, the foolish king decided to die at the stake first. He instructed the executioners to execute the first two people who came to them. The king freed the guru and disciple and he and his minister were executed in their place.

- 3 Give examples to prove that the king and the minister both were idiots.

**Ans.** The king and the minister both were idiots because:

- (i) they ordered that the night be treated as day and day as night, so that everybody slept during the day and worked at night.
- (ii) they called for the disciple to be executed even though he was not involved in the case being tried. Actually the thief himself was to blame but the king and minister foolishly did not understand this.
- (iii) both the king and the minister did not understand the guru's plan to save his disciple from execution, foolishly accepting his argument.

- 4 How was the Kingdom of Fools different from other places?

**Or** In the Kingdom of Fools, life was different. How was it different from common life? Explain.



**Ans.** The Kingdom of Fools was different from other places because everyone was awake at night, ploughing their fields and running their businesses on the orders of the king. Anybody who disobeyed this order would be executed.

They would go to bed as soon as the sun rose.

Besides this, the price of everything was the same, one *duddu*, the local currency. So, whether it was a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas, they all cost the same. Thus, everything was very cheap. There was no justice to be seen in the kingdom. One may be tried for the deeds that one has not done actually. The king and minister both were foolish and they don't understand what does the justice mean for the proper running of a state. There was nothing but chaos all round in the state.

**5** The guru was a wise man. How does the story "In the Kingdom of Fools" reflect it?

**Ans.** The story "In the Kingdom of Fools" reflects the guru's wisdom because he had advised his disciple not to stay in that kingdom as the future is uncertain in a place full of fools.

This is exactly what happened when the disciple was to be executed by the orders of the king for no fault of his. This wisdom is further reflected (shown) in the story when the guru convinces the king by pretending to quarrel with his disciple to order his own execution. Also, the guru had the magical powers and he could see very well that the future of such a state is next to nothing. Also, he was a good planner for he planned very well how to bring the things in right and ordered manner. He not only saved his disciple but the people of state too.

**6** How did the guru and his disciple become the king and the minister of the kingdom?

**Ans.** The guru had realised that the king and his minister were fools. So, he told the king that the first person to be executed on the new stake would become the king in his next life and the second to be executed would become the king's minister. The foolish king and his minister, believing the guru, got themselves executed. As the kingdom was without a king, the people requested the guru to become the king and his disciple to become the minister. They agreed on the condition that they could change the earlier laws.

**7** You are the disciple in the story, "In the Kingdom of Fools". You are in trouble as you are about to be hanged. You decide to write a letter to your guru regretting your decision to stay in the Kingdom of Fools and requesting him to help you. Write the letter in 80 words.

**Ans.** Dear Guruji,

Hope you are quite well and sound but I am not. I am such a fool to ignore the words of wisdom from you. That was one of the biggest mistakes that I should not have committed. I feel very sorry to have not heeded (paid attention to) your advice to leave the Kingdom of Fools as their behaviour is unpredictable and they may harm us. The prospects of eating tasty food at very cheap prices tempted me. Now, I am trapped. I am about to be executed for no fault of mine. As it is a Kingdom of Fools, it is futile to reason with them. I regret very much my staying on here. None but you can save my life. Please forgive me and help.

Your disciple