

Mahesh Public School, Jodhpur

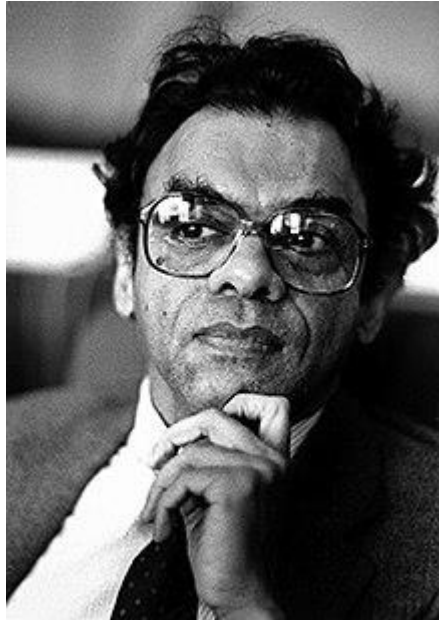
Class- IX English

Chapter – 4 ‘The Kingdom of Fools’[Moments]

A Kannada Folktale from

(A.K. Ramanujan’s Folktales from India)

About the author



Attipate Krishnaswami **Ramanujan** (16 March 1929 – 13 July 1993) popularly known as **A. K. 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.

Born: 16 March 1929, Mysore

Works written: The Collected Poems, Folktales ...

Profession: Poet, Translator, Playwright, Writer

Parents: Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami

Introduction to the lesson

Kannada is a regional language mainly spoken in the state of Karnataka. This story is a Kannada folktale. Folktale is a story which is passed on from one generation to another. It is taken from the book 'Folk Tales from India' written by AK Ramanujan.

First of all let us discuss the title of the story 'In the Kingdom of Fools' which means the state where people are not so wise, they are not intelligent. In this story the king, his ministers and his advisers are fools. That means they are not wise and intelligent. When this kind of people rule the kingdom, then what all happens has been told in this story.

Explanation

Note: Words written in black colour are the contents of the chapter

Words written in red colour are the explanation of the chapter

In the Kingdom of Fools, both the king and the minister were idiots.

Idiots: the people who are not intelligent

In the Kingdom of Fools, the king and his minister - both were unintelligent.

They didn't want to run things like other kings, so they decided to change night into day and day into night.

The king and his minister did not want to run their kingdom like other kings did. So, they decided to do something different. They started treating night as day and day as night.

They ordered that the work which was done at night would be done during the day time and the work which was done during the day time, will be done during night time.

They ordered that everyone should be awake at night, till their fields and run their businesses only after dark, and go to bed as soon as the sun came up. Anyone who disobeyed would be punished with death.

Till: here, to cultivate land for farming

They passed an order that everyone in the kingdom would work at night. Nobody would sleep at night. The farmers would do farming at night and the ones who ran businesses would do business at night. As soon as the sun rose, everyone would go to sleep. If someone would disobey the order, he would be punished with death.

The people did as they were told for fear of death. The king and the minister were delighted at the success of their project.

The people were scared that if they did not obey the king's order they would be sentenced with death penalty, so, they obeyed the order although it was very strange. The king and his minister, both the fools were very happy that all the people in the kingdom were following their order.

One day a guru and his disciple arrived in the city. It was a beautiful city, it was broad daylight, but there was no one about. Everyone was asleep, not a mouse stirring. Even the cattle had been taught to sleep by day.

Stirring: moving around
guru: saint

One day a saint arrived in the kingdom of fools along with one of his disciples. He saw that it was a beautiful city, it was a sunny day but could not find anyone around. They were surprised. Everyone was asleep and the writer says that not a mouse was stirring. (Stirring means moving around). They could not find a single mouse moving around which means that it was so quiet as everyone, even the tiniest creatures, the mice were asleep. The people had taught their cattle to sleep during day time. So everyone- human as well as animals were sleeping.

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.

amazed: shocked and surprised

These two strangers to the kingdom of fools were not aware that this kind of order had been passed in the city. So, they were surprised to see that everyone was sleeping during daytime. They kept on wandering around in the whole city and as soon as it was night, everyone woke up and started doing their work. Businessmen were doing business and farmers were farming.

The two men were hungry. Now that the shops were open, they went to buy some groceries. To their astonishment, they found that everything cost the same, a single *duddu* — whether they bought a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas, it cost a *duddu*.

duddu – money in Kannada language

*The guru and his disciple were very hungry. When the shops opened at night, they went to buy groceries. They were surprised to see that whatever they bought from the shop costed one *duddu*. The things were very cheap out there. Weather you buy a big bunch of bananas or you buy a big bag of rice it costed only one *duddu*. Everything was at the same price in the Kingdom of Fools!*

The guru and his disciple were delighted. They had never heard of anything like this. They could buy all the food they wanted for a rupee.

The guru and his disciple were very happy because the food in this kingdom was very cheap. You could buy a lot of food just for a rupee.

When they had cooked and eaten, the guru realized that this was a kingdom of fools and it wouldn't be a good idea for them to stay there.

When the guru and his disciple cooked and ate their food, the guru realized that the kingdom was a kingdom of fools and decided not to stay there any longer because it was unsafe for them.

“This is no place for us. Let's go,” he said to his disciple.

The wise guru told his disciple that the place was not right for them and asked him to leave at once.

But the disciple didn't want to leave the place. Everything was cheap here. All he wanted was good, cheap food.

This disciple was a foodie, he loved to eat and that is why he did not want to leave this place because the food was cheap there.

The guru said, “They are all fools. This won't last very long, and you can't tell what they'll do to you next.”

Guru tried to make his disciple understand and told him that everyone out there was a fool and are was very dangerous. The kingdom would not last for a long time and they could harm them too.

But the disciple wouldn't listen to the guru's wisdom. He wanted to stay.

This disciple is not foresighted like his guru and could not understand what his guru was trying to say. He wanted to live there only and enjoy the cheap food.

The guru finally gave up and said, “Do what you want. I'm going,” and left.

Finally, the guru left alone, leaving the disciple behind.

The disciple stayed on, ate his fill every day — bananas and ghee and rice and wheat, and grew fat like a street-side sacred bull.

The disciple stayed back in the kingdom of fools. Everyday, he ate a lot of food due to which he becameas fat as a huge bull.

One bright day, a thief broke into a rich merchant's house. He had made a hole in the wall and sneaked in, and as he was carrying out his loot, the wall of the old house collapsed on his head and killed him on the spot.

One day, a thief entered a merchant's house. He made a hole in the wall to gain access. When he was about to move out of the house, after looting all the things, the wall broke and fell down on his head and he died there only.

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. This merchant is to blame. He should have built a good, strong wall. You must punish the wrongdoer and compensate the family for this injustice."

pursuing: follow

ancient trade: refers to theft there

The thief's younger brother went to the king and complained that his brother was following his ancient trade (although the ancient trade - robbing is a crime). While he was working, the wall fell on his head and he died. The thief's brother was taking advantage of the king's foolishness. He said that the merchant whose wall had fallen down on his brother was the culprit. He should have made a strong wall. He requested the king to punish the merchant and get compensation for his family.

The king said, "Justice will be done. Don't worry," and at once summoned the owner of the house.

summoned - To call upon someone

The king was so foolish that he did not consider the fact that the dead man was committing theft at the time of his death. He only thought that the man died because the wall fell on him and the owner of the house whose wall fell on him had to be punished. So, he called the merchant.

When the merchant arrived, the king questioned him.

"What's your name?"

"Such and Such, Your Highness."

"Were you at home when the dead man burgled your house?"

"Yes, My Lord. He broke in and the wall was weak. It fell on him."

"The accused pleads guilty. Your wall killed this man's brother. You have murdered a man. We have to punish you."

As soon as the merchant appeared, the king asked his name. Then the king asked him whether he was at home when the dead man, the thief was burgling his house. The merchant replied that he was at home only. The thief made a hole in the wall and entered his house and when he was trying to go out, the wall fell down on him because it was weak. Then the king told the merchant that he was guilty, he did wrong, due to his weak wall, the thief died and now he would be punished.

“Lord,” said the helpless merchant, “I didn’t put up the wall. It’s really the fault of the man who built the wall. He didn’t build it right. You should punish him.”

“Who is that?”

“My Lord, this wall was built in my father’s time. I know the man. He’s an old man now. He lives nearby.”

The merchant pleaded in front of the king, requested that my lord it was not my fault. The wall was weak because the person who made the wall did not construct it properly. Hence, you should punish him. And further he added that the wall was made during his father’s time, the person who built it was very old. He knew him as he lived nearby.

The king sent out messengers to bring in the bricklayer who had built the wall. They brought him, tied hand and foot.

Bricklayer: is a person who lays the bricks and built the walls

So the king sends his soldier to call the bricklayer who built the wall. They tied his hands and feet and brought him in the king’s palace.

“You there, did you build this man’s wall in his father’s time?”

“Yes, My Lord, I did.”

Then king asked him that did he build the wall and he replied that yes he did.

“What kind of a wall is this that you built? It has fallen on a poor man and killed him. You’ve murdered him. We have to punish you by death.”

The king said that the man had built a weak wall. The wall fell on the poor thief’s head and killed him. The bricklayer would be punished for this with death.

Before the king could order the execution, the poor bricklayer pleaded, “Please listen to me before you give your orders. It’s true I built this wall and it was no good. But that was because my mind was not on it. I remember very well a dancing girl who was going up and down that street all day with her anklets jingling, and I couldn’t keep my eyes or my mind on the wall I was building. You must get that dancing girl. I know where she lives.”

Everyone is passing on the blame to another person. When the king was about to pass an order to execute the bricklayer, he requested the king to listen to him. He agreed that he did not make the wall properly. It was because of a girl who was roaming around in the street and her anklets were making a jingling sound. Due to her anklet’s jingle sound, he was not able to concentrate on his work and so, built a weak wall. It was not his mistake, it was the fault of the girl. He

added that he knew where this dancing girl lived. She should be punished instead of him.

“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.”

The king was satisfied with the bricklayer’s explanation. He was convinced with him. He tells that this case is very complicated and will not be able to solve it so easily. He ordered his messenger to get the dancer girl.

The dancing girl, now an old woman, came trembling to the court.

“Did you walk up and down that street many years ago, while this poor man was building a wall? Did you see him?”

“Yes, My Lord, I remember it very well.”

“So you did walk up and down, with your anklets jingling. You were young and you distracted him, so he built a bad wall.

It has fallen on a poor burglar and killed him. You’ve killed an innocent man. You’ll have to be punished.”

The dancing girl had become an old woman and she was trembling as she entered the court. The king asked her that many years ago, was she dancing and roaming around in the lane while the bricklayer was constructing the wall. Her movement distracted him. She confirmed him. He told her that as she was roaming around with her anklets jingling, it distracted the bricklayer. Due to this he could not do his work properly. He built a bad wall which fell on the thief and he was killed. It was because of her that the thief died and she would be punished with death.

She thought for a minute and said, “My Lord, wait. I know now why I was walking up and down that street. I had given some gold to the goldsmith to make some jewellery for me.

He was a lazy scoundrel. He made so many excuses, said he would give it now and he would give it then and so on all day. He made me walk up and down to his house a dozen times.

Goldsmith is a person who makes ornaments out of gold.

scoundrel: a dishonest person

The dancing girl transferred the blame onto another person. She said that she was roaming around in this lane again and again because she had to visit the goldsmith’s shop. She had given some gold to him to make jewellery out of it. He was a dishonest person. He was making excuses for not making her ornaments in time. He kept on asking her to come after some time. Due to this, she had to go to his house at least a dozen times. So, the dancing girl said that it was the fault of the goldsmith.

That was when this bricklayer saw me. It's not my fault, My Lord, it's the damned goldsmith's fault."

Further this dancing girl says that when the bricklayer saw her and got distracted, it was the fault of the goldsmith because of whom she was roaming in the lane again and again.

"Poor thing, she's absolutely right," thought the king, weighing the evidence. "We've got the real culprit at last. Get the goldsmith, wherever he is hiding. At once!"

Now the king says that the poor dancing girl was totally right. He thought a lot and finally said that now they knew who the real culprit was. He ordered to bring the goldsmith.

The king's bailiffs searched for the goldsmith, who was hiding in a corner of his shop. When he heard the accusation against him, he had his own story to tell.

accusation: to blame someone

bailiffs: a law officer who makes sure that the decisions of a court are obeyed.

The bailiffs in the king's court went in search of the goldsmith and brought him to the court. The goldsmith was hiding inside his shop as he feared being arrested. When he was brought in front of the king, he told his side of the story.

"My Lord," he said, "I'm a poor goldsmith. It's true I made this dancer come many times to my door. I gave her excuses because I couldn't finish making her jewellery before I finished the rich merchant's orders. They had a wedding coming, and they wouldn't wait. You know how impatient rich men are!"

He said that the dancing girl was right. He made many excuses and made her visit his shop again and again. But it was not his fault. He had an order from a rich merchant and they had a wedding at their place and were in a hurry to get their order and that is why the dancing girl's work was getting delayed.

"Who is this rich merchant who kept you from finishing this poor woman's jewellery, made her walk up and down, which distracted this bricklayer, which made a mess of his wall, which has now fallen on an innocent man and killed him? Can you name him?"

Then king asked the goldsmith to name the rich merchant.

The goldsmith named the merchant, and he was none other than the original owner of the house whose wall had fallen. Now justice had come full circle, thought the king, back to the merchant. When he was rudely summoned back to the court, he arrived crying, "It wasn't me but my father who ordered the jewellery! He's dead! I'm innocent!"

The goldsmith said that the merchant was the same merchant whose house wall had fallen down. Justice has come full circle means that the story ended at the same person from whom it had started. The thief died under the wall of the same merchant whose jewellery this goldsmith was making. Once again the merchant was called. He was crying and he knew that the king was foolish and he would give him death sentence. He said that it was not he who had ordered the jewellery, but it was his father. His father was dead and it was none of his fault.

But the king consulted his minister and ruled decisively: "It's true your father is the true murderer. He's dead, but somebody must be punished in his place. You've inherited everything from that criminal father of yours, his riches as well as his sins. I knew at once, even when I first set eyes on you, that you were at the root of this horrible crime. You must die."

The king consulted his minister and gave the decision that the merchant's father was the murderer. The thief died because of him. As the merchant's father was not alive and someone had to be punished for the crime, so he said that the merchant's son who had inherited everything from his father, would have to take the punishment for his wrong doing as well. He added that when he had seen the merchant for the first time, at that moment, he had a feeling that he was the culprit. The king announced that now the merchant would have to die.

And he ordered a new stake to be made ready for the execution.

As the servants sharpened the stake and got it ready for the final impaling of the criminal, it occurred to the minister that the rich merchant was somehow too thin to be properly executed on the stake. He appealed to the king's common sense. The king too worried about it.

stake: a post with a sharp, pointed end used to pierce through something

execution: an official killing of someone

impaling: to push a sharp pointed post through something

When this new weapon was getting ready, the minister felt that the merchant was very thin and he could not be executed in this way. He told this to the king and king got worried.

"What shall we do?" he said, when suddenly it struck him that all they needed to do was to find a man fat enough to fit the stake.

The king got an idea that they should catch hold of a man who was fat enough to be executed with the stake. The merchant would not be put to death because he was too thin to be executed with a stake. They thought of punishing another person instead of the merchant - one who was fat enough to be executed with a stake.

The servants were immediately sent all over the town looking for a man who would fit the stake, and their eyes fell on the disciple who had fattened himself for months on bananas and rice and wheat and ghee.

Finally, the king sent his servants around the kingdom to look for a man who was fat enough to be executed with the stake. They found the guru's disciple who had become very fat because of over eating.

“What have I done wrong? I’m innocent. I’m a sanyasi!” he cried.

“That may be true. But it’s the royal decree that we should find a man fat enough to fit the stake,” they said, and carried him to the place of execution.

decree: order

The disciple said that he was a sanyasi, he had not done anything wrong, he was innocent, then why were they taking him. The king's servants said that he was innocent, but they were ordered to catch hold of a fat man who could be executed with the stake and he was fit for it and that is why they were taking him along.

He remembered his wise guru’s words: “This is a city of fools. You don’t know what they will do next.”

The disciple is reminded of his guru. Guru ji who was a wise man had told him that it was a city of fools and they could harm him. Now they were taking him along to execute him.

While he was waiting for death, he prayed to his guru in his heart, asking him to hear his cry wherever he was. The guru saw everything in a vision; he had magic powers, he could see far, and he could see the future as he could see the present and the past.

The helpless disciple prayed to his guru and asked him to come to his rescue. The Guru could visualize the disciple's message due to his magical power. He could see everything. He could see the future, the present and the past, he could see everything in the vision.

He arrived at once to save his disciple, who had got himself into such a scrape through love of food.

scrape: a difficult situation that one has got into

The guru arrived there to save his disciple. The disciple was trapped in a difficult and serious situation. They were about to execute him although he had not done anything wrong. So the guru came to rescue him from this situation.

As soon as he arrived, he scolded the disciple and told him something in a whisper.

As the guru met his disciple, he scolded him because he did not obey him and stayed back. He whispered something in his ears.

Then he went to the king and addressed him, “O wisest of kings, who is greater? The guru or the disciple?”

“Of course, the guru. No doubt about it. Why do you ask?”

“Then put me to the stake first. Put my disciple to death after me.”

The guru tried to trap the king in his words. He asked him who was greater between a guru and his disciple. The king replied that of course the guru was greater. The guru said that for this reason the king must execute him before executing his disciple.

When the disciple heard this, he understood and began to clamour, “Me first! You brought me here first! Put me to death first, not him!”

clamour: to Insist on something

When disciple heard his guru's words, he started shouting that he wanted to die first.



The guru and the disciple now got into a fight about who should go first. The king was puzzled by this behaviour. He asked the guru, “Why do you want to die? We chose him because we needed a fat man for the stake.”

When the guru and disciple started arguing that who would die first, the king got confused. He asked the guru that why did he want to die. They had caught the disciple because he was fat and they wanted a fat man who could be executed with the stake.

“You shouldn’t ask me such questions. Put me to death first,” replied the guru.

The guru refused to reply. He said that he wanted to die before his disciple died.

“Why? There’s some mystery here. As a wise man you must make me understand.”

The king felt that there was some mystery behind it. The guru wanted to die before his disciple and was so eager to die. There must be some reason behind it.

“Will you promise to put me to death if I tell you?” asked the guru.

The guru asked the king to promise him that he would execute him first if he told him the secret about why he wanted to be executed first.

The king gave him his solemn word. The guru took him aside, out of the servants’ earshot, and whispered to him, “Do you know why we want to die right now, the two of us? We’ve been all over the world but we’ve never found a city like this or a king like you. That stake is the stake of the god of justice. It’s new, it has never had a criminal on it.

The king promised that he would execute him first. Then the guru took the king aside and slowly told him that they had roamed around the whole world but had not seen a city and a king like him. He added that the stake which they would use to kill the disciple was the stake of justice. As it was new, it had not killed any criminal.

Whoever dies on it first will be reborn as the king of this country.

Further he said that the one who would die first on this stake would be reborn as the king of the kingdom. (By telling all this, he is trying to trap the king.)

And whoever goes next will be the future minister of this country. We’re sick of our ascetic life. It would be nice to enjoy ourselves as king and minister for a while. Now keep your word, My Lord, and put us to death. Me first, remember?”

Ascetic life is the life of a sanyasi, a strict life, life of discipline

The one who would die next would be reborn as the minister of the kingdom. The guru added that he was tired of the life of a sanyasi. He and his disciple wanted to live the life of a king and a minister. So he says that the king execute him first so that he is reborn as a king and after him, his disciple be executed so that he is reborn as a minister.

The king was now thrown into deep thought. He didn't want to lose the kingdom to someone else in the next round of life. He needed time. So he ordered the execution postponed to the next day and talked in secret with his minister.

postpone: to put off something for a later time

After listening to the guru, the king was in deep thought. He did not want that in the next life, his kingdom be snatched away from him. He discussed this with his minister.

“It's not right for us to give over the kingdom to others in the next life. Let's go on the stake ourselves and we'll be reborn as king and minister again. Holy men do not tell lies,” he said, and the minister agreed.

The king told his minister that he did not want that in the next life his kingdom be taken away. He added that the person was a holy man and holy men did not speak lies. He says that they should die first so that they are reborn as king and minister of the kingdom.

So he told the executioners, “We'll send the criminals tonight. When the first man comes to you, put him to death first. Then do the same to the second man. Those are my orders. Don't make any mistake.”

The king told his executioners that he would send the criminals at night. Firstly, they should execute the person who came first and then execute the second person. They should be careful and not make any mistake.



That night, the king and his minister went secretly to the prison, released the guru and the disciple, disguised themselves as the two, and as arranged beforehand with loyal servants, were taken to the stake and promptly executed.

disguised: a different appearance in order to hide one's identity

At night, the king and his minister went to the prison where the guru and his disciple were kept. They wore the clothes of the guru and his disciple so that they resembled them. As it was told to the servants, they came and took them along and put them into the stake for execution. In this way, with his intelligence, the guru was able to execute his foolish king and his foolish minister.

When the bodies were taken down to be thrown to crows and vultures the people panicked.

panic: fright

When the dead bodies of then king and his minster were taken away, to be thrown, the people trembled to see the dead bodies of their king and his minister.

They saw before them the dead bodies of the king and the minister. The city was in confusion.

Everyone was trembling because the dead bodies were not of the guru and his disciple, instead they were the bodies of the king and his minister.

All night they mourned and discussed the future of the kingdom. Some people suddenly thought of the guru and the disciple and caught up with them as they were preparing to leave town unnoticed.

Everyone in the kingdom was mourning the death of their king and his minister. In the morning, some people thought of the guru and his disciple and felt that they should go to them. As the guru and his disciple were planning to leave the kingdom, the people stopped them.

“We people need a king and a minister,” said someone. Others agreed. They begged the guru and the disciple to be their king and their minister.

The people of the kingdom thought that they needed a king and a minister and so, they requested the guru and his disciple to be the new king and minister of the kingdom.

It didn't take many arguments to persuade the disciple, but it took longer to persuade the guru.

persuade: convince

The disciple agreed quickly but it took some time to make the guru agree upon this.

They finally agreed to rule the kingdom of the foolish king and the silly minister, on the condition that they could change all the old laws. From then on, night would again be night and day would again be day, and you could get nothing for a *duddu*. It became like any other place.

*So the guru agreed to be the king of the kingdom but on the condition that from then, everyone would work in the day and sleep at night. Also, the cost of things would vary and not be one *duddu* for anything as was the system earlier. It would be like any other place where everything had different rates. Finally, the guru converted the kingdom of fools into a normal kingdom.*

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the two strange things the guru and his disciple find in the Kingdom of Fools?
2. Why does the disciple decide to stay in the Kingdom of Fools? Is it a good idea?
3. Name all the people who are tried in the king's court, and give the reasons for their trial.

4. Who is the real culprit according to the king? Why does he escape punishment?
5. What are the Guru's words of wisdom? When does the disciple remember them?
6. How does the guru manage to save his disciple's life?