

The Gulistan of Sa'di

(Sheikh Sa'di)

Sheikh Sa'di was a great storyteller. He speaks to all nations and is perpetually modern, said Emerson. He thought of the Gulistan as one of the bibles of the world, for he found in it the universality of moral law. The Gulistan translated in Latin and English, became love for the people. It is interesting to note that English scholars used Sa'di's translated parables in their divine books till it was discovered to be an English translation of a Latin version of Persian origin. Edwin Arnold has aptly described Gulistan in culinary terms as "an intellectual pilaf, a literary curry; a kebab of a versatile genius". The readers are sure to enjoy these parables as food for thought.

I

Once a king and a Persian slave were sailing in the same boat. The slave had never been at sea, and never experienced any calamity. After sometime the boat was hit by a storm and started tossing. It was very inconvenient for the passengers. All remained quiet except the slave who in fear of being drowned began to cry and tremble, and created inconvenience for the others. The others tried to pacify him by kindness and affection but he didn't hear anybody. When the uneasiness lasted longer the king also became displeased.

In that boat there happened to be a sergeant, who said, "With your permission, may I quieten him."

"It will be a great favour," the king said. The sergeant ordered the slave to be thrown into the water, so that he could have experienced the true danger of life. Two persons threw him in the sea and when he was about to be drowned they pulled him back to the boat, and he clung the stern with both of his hands. Then he sat down and remained quiet. This appeared strange to the king, who could not comprehend the wisdom in the action taken by the sergeant, and he asked for it. The sergeant replied:

"Before he had experienced the danger of being drowned, he knew not about the safety of the boat. A man does not realize the worth of safety from the misfortune until he has tasted it."

II

It is related that while a deer was being roasted for Nushirvan, a king of Persia, famous for his justice, no salt could be found. A boy was sent to a village to bring some salt. The boy brought it and presented it to the king who asked whether he had paid for it.

"No," said the boy.

"Pay for the salt," said the king, "lest it should become a custom and the village be ruined."

Having been asked what harm could arise from such a trifling demand.

"The foundation of oppression was small in the world," said the king.

"Whoever enlarged it, so that it reached its present magnitude, is at fault. If the king eats one apple from the garden of a subject, his slaves will pull down the whole tree. For five eggs, which the king allows to be taken by force, the people belonging to his army will put a thousand fowls on the spit."

A tyrant does not remain in the world, but the curse on him abides for ever!

III

A king fell seriously ill and all hopes of his recovery vanished. The more the disease was cured the more it became painful. At last the physicians agreed that this disease could not be cured except by means of bile of a person endowed with certain qualities. Orders were issued to search for an individual of this kind. A son of a farmer was discovered to possess the qualities mentioned by the doctors. The king summoned the father and mother of the boy, whose consent he got by giving them a huge amount of wealth. The Qazi issued a decree to shed the blood of a person for the health of the king. The boy was brought to the altar and the executioner was directed to slaughter the boy. When all was ready the boy looked toward the sky and smiled.

"Why do you laugh in such a position?", the king asked.

"A son looks to the affection of his parents," said the boy. "If they fail, they are expected to bring the case before the Qazi to seek justice. But in the present case, the parents have agreed to get my blood shed for the trash of this world. The Qazi has issued a decree to kill me. The king thinks he will recover his health only through slaying me and I see no other refuge besides Allah Almighty. To whom shall I complain against your brutality, if I am to seek justice from your hand?"

The king felt disturbed and on hearing these words he could not control his tears and said, "It is better for me to die than to shed the blood of an innocent boy." He kissed the head and eyes of the boy and presented him with a lot of wealth. It is said that the king also recovered within a week.

About the Author

Sheikh Sa'di (1184–1292), like Homer and Shakespeare, was a great storyteller. He belonged to Persia. He travelled from India in the East to Tripoli in the West and wrote *Gulistan*, the great work of all times. The translations of *Gulistan* soon won the admiration of the European scholars.

Theme

The morals and virtues of the kings affect their people a lot. The more unjust the king is, the more troubled his country will be. The prosperity of the people depends upon the virtues of the ruler.

Reading Notes

perpetually	forever
parable	simple story designed to teach
appreciated	admired
culinary	of cooking or of kitchen
versatile	interested in and clever at many different things; having various uses
calamity	great and serious misfortune or disaster
tossing	shaking
inconvenient	causing discomfort, troublesome
pacify	calm and quieten
affection	fondness / attachment
afflicts	causes bodily or mental trouble
trifling	ordinary, small
tyrant	cruel or unjust ruler
brutality	cruelty, savagery

EXERCISES

1. Choose the correct answer.

- i. The slave had never experienced any
 - a) pleasure.
 - b) calamity.
 - c) rule.
 - d) war.
- ii. The boat started tossing means that the boat
 - a) remained peaceful.
 - b) started flying.
 - c) started shaking.
 - d) sank.

- iii. The slave began to cry and tremble
- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| a) in joy of getting a reward. | b) in fear of being drowned. |
| c) by seeing others crying. | d) by the punishment inflicted by the king. |
- iv. The slave was thrown into water
- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| a) to catch a fish. | b) to drink water. |
| c) to experience the true danger of life. | d) to swim. |
- v. Who was Nushirvan?
- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| a) a slave | b) a sergeant |
| c) an accountant | d) a king of Persia |
- vi. The king was famous for his
- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| a) cruelty. | b) justice. |
| c) injustice. | d) wickedness. |
- vii. "The foundation of oppression was small in the world" means
- | |
|--|
| a) the condition of being ruled unjustly was found in the world. |
| b) the foundation of the building was small. |
| c) the oppression was not deep rooted. |
| d) there was little cruelty in the world. |
- viii. The king fell seriously ill and all hopes of his recovery
- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| a) enlightened. | b) went out of existence. |
| c) were expected. | d) faded. |
- ix. For what purpose did the parents give consent to kill their son?
- | |
|--|
| a) for reputation |
| b) for money |
| c) to get rid of the naughty boy |
| d) to escape the duty of bringing up the boy |
- x. On hearing the words of the boy the king could not control his
- | | |
|----------|------------|
| a) army. | b) people. |
| c) rule. | d) tears. |
- xi. The boy saved his life by praying to
- | | |
|-------------|--------------------|
| a) Qazi. | b) king. |
| c) parents. | d) Allah Almighty. |

2. Mark the sentences true or false.

- i. A Persian slave was not sailing in a king's boat.

- ii. The slave was used to voyaging.
- iii. All the passengers remained quiet except the slave.
- iv. He was pacified by the sergeant.
- v. The king punished the sergeant for throwing the slave into the water.
- vi. The king of Persia was famous for his justice.
- vii. The boy paid the price of salt.
- viii. The king got the consent of the parents by giving them a huge amount of wealth.
- ix. The boy looked towards the king and smiled.
- x. The king shed the blood of the innocent boy.

3. Answer the following questions.

- i. What was the advice given by Nushirvan to his people?
- ii. What was the remedy suggested by the physicians for the disease of the king?
- iii. Why did the boy look towards the sky and smile?
- iv. What should be the role of a Qazi?
- v. Why did the king weep?
- vi. How did the king recover?

4. Answer the following questions in 50 - 100 words.

- i. Write a note on the character of Nushirvan.
- ii. What should be the role of a king?
- iii. Can an unjust king flourish?
- iv. What moral lesson do you get from the second tale?
- v. Compare and contrast the three tales.
- vi. Describe an event in which the trouble of one person affects the others.

5. Fill in the blanks from the words given below.

(by, of, at, to, in, more, through, for)

- i. The slave had never been _____ sea.
- ii. The others tried to pacify him _____ kindness.
- iii. A man does not realize the worth _____ safety.
- iv. A boy was sent to a village _____ bring salt.
- v. The foundation of oppression was small _____ the world.
- vi. The more the disease cured the _____ it became painful.
- vii. Why do you laugh _____ such a position?

- viii. The parents have agreed to get my bloodshed _____ the trash of this world.
 ix. He will recover his health only _____ slaying me.
 x. The king presented a lot _____ wealth.

6. Use the following words in your sentences.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| a) calamity | b) inconvenience |
| c) permission | d) drowned |
| e) enlarge | f) executioner |

7. Use the following phrasal verbs in your sentences.

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| a) hit by | b) hit upon |
| c) ask for | d) ask after |

8. Punctuate the following lines.

if they fail they are expected to bring the case before the qazi to seek justice but in the present case the parents have agreed to get my bloodshed for the trash of this world

9. Read the passage and answer the questions given at the end.

A king fell seriously ill and all hopes of his recovery vanished. The more the disease was cured the more it became painful. At last the physicians agreed that this disease cannot be cured except by means of bile of a person endued with certain qualities. Orders were issued to search for an individual of this kind. A son of a farmer was discovered to possess the qualities mentioned by the doctors. The King summoned the father and mother of the boy, whose consent he got by giving them a huge amount of wealth. The Qazi issued a decree to shed the blood of a person for the health of the king. The boy was brought to the altar and the executioner was directed to slaughter the boy. When all was ready the boy looked toward the sky and smiled.

1. What was the cure suggested by the physicians for the ailment of the king?
2. How did the king get the consent of the parents of the boy?
3. Why did the Qazi issue a decree to shed the blood of a boy?
4. Why did the boy look toward the sky?
5. Give the main idea of the passage.