

The Tale of Melon City

Vikram Seth

Idries Shah wrote The Tale of Melon City as a story. He was a thinker, writer and teacher in the Sufi mystical tradition. His writings promote tolerance and cultural understanding.

Vikram Seth re- wrote the story in the form of a narrative poem. The poem, The Tale of Melon City has the charm of folklore. It is a portrayal of a king who is whimsical and has no understanding of governance.

- The counsel of the wise men is sought to solve difficult problems. Who was the wisest man in the poem? Why do you think the king had asked for the wisest man in the country?
- There are different practices and systems of appointing kings. What was the custom of the country in appointing the king?
- In spite of the poem being humorous, it gives the message very subtly. Why is the poem relevant even today?

Let us Read and Write

The following is a story written in the Sufi tradition. Rewrite it in the form of poem.

You can write in verse or blank verse and make use of words and expressions of your choice.

❖ *The message is important in Sufi writings.*

THE WATER-MELON HUNTER

Once upon a time there was a man who wandered all around and once strayed into the world known as the *Land of Fools*.

He saw people working in the field. Some of them were harvesting the crop.

Suddenly they were terrified and started running away from their field. They were shouting that there was a monster in that field. He asked one of them where the monster was and they pointed towards the field. He looked and saw that it was a water-melon.

He was amused and offered to kill the monster for them. He cut the melon from its stalk, cut a piece out of it, and began to eat it. The people became even more terrified when they saw him eating the monster. They started beating him and drove him out the village. They were scared of the man who could eat the monster.

It so happened that after some time another man came to the *Land of Fools*, and again the same incident happened. But he did not offer help to them. He pretended to agree with the villagers that it was a monster. He agreed with them that it must be dangerous. He showed as if he was frightened of the monster. In this way he gained their confidence. He spent a long time with them in their village. Gradually he convinced them that it was not a monster and they should not be scared of it. He also taught them to grow melons.