

The Invention of Shoes



Rabindranath Tagore was a renowned Indian poet, educator, painter and social reformer. He won the *Nobel Prize in Literature* in 1913 for his beautiful collection of verses, *Gitanjali*. He had a deep interest in children and wrote many poems about them.

Once upon a time, there was a king called Hobu. One morning, he summoned his minister and said, "Listen, Gobu Rai. I stayed up all night thinking—why should the dust dirty my royal feet whenever I step on the ground? All you people, you are only concerned with pocketing your fat salaries. You have no concern for the king or the kingdom or the problems that bother me. You must put an end to this at once. Or else no one shall be spared from my royal **wrath***."

Gobu Rai wondered and worried. He **pondered** and **perspired**. The pundits' faces turned pale. The courtiers' nights turned sleepless. In the kitchen, the cooking stopped. In the castle, the crying started.

Gobu Rai looked far and wide and gathered all the scientists and learned men, all the scholars and mechanics he could find. They pushed their glasses up their noses and sat down to find a solution to the royal problem. After thinking long and deep, they said, "If you **do away with** the soil, how will you grow crops?"

The king replied, "If you cannot figure out how, then of what use are you?"

wrath: anger

pondered: thought (about the problem) deeply

perspired: sweated

do away with: remove; get rid of

***rawth**



So they thought some more, and then they made a purchase of seventeen lakh fifty thousand brooms. Workers were summoned.

The dusting of the kingdom **commenced**. [The dust covered the king's face and chest. No one could open their eyes because of the dust. No one could see the sun. People coughed and choked—the kingdom was almost buried under the dust.]

A2(c)



B1

The king said, "You were supposed to get rid of the dust, not fill the world with it."

Then twenty-one lakh water-carriers set out with bags of water. They ran fast and they ran all over, pouring water wherever they saw a speck of dust. [All the ponds and lakes were soon overflowing with mud. No boat could move on the river. Since there was no water, the water creatures **perished**. The land creatures tried their hand at swimming—they could hardly walk or run on the mud. No bazaar could be set up, so trading stopped. All the king's subjects sneezed and coughed and sniffed and suffered.]

A2(a)

The king said, "What a lot of fools! They got rid of the dust only to replace it with mud."

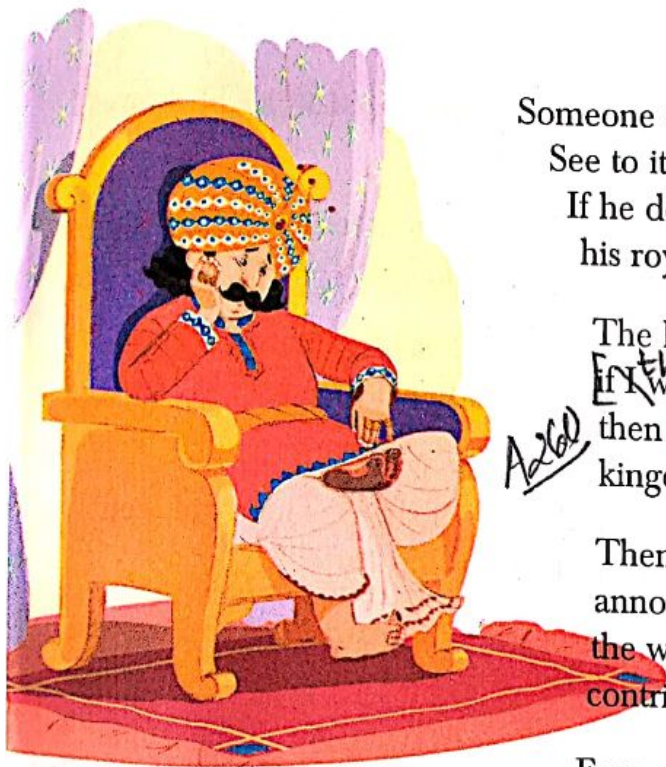
Once again, everyone gathered to solve the royal problem. Once again, the great men and their assistants **racked their great brains**. They thought and then thought harder, but they were baffled and blank. They were at a loss to know how to lose the dust.

commenced: began

perished: died or were killed, suddenly or unexpectedly

racked their brains: tried very hard to think of something

Someone said, "Cover the earth with mats. Rugs and carpets shall stop the dust from touching the royal feet."



Someone else suggested, "Keep the king indoors. See to it that there's no hole or **loophole** anywhere. If he does not step on dust, no dust shall touch his royal feet."

The king said, "Very true. But I am worried—
~~If I were to stay~~ ^{For the king} shut up indoors every day, all day, then **the royal machinery** shall come to a stop—^{his} ~~my~~ kingdom ^{would} ~~shall~~ be ruined."

Then, taking matters into his own hands, the king announced, "Call the **tanners**, all of them. Wrap the whole land in leather. This shall be my great contribution—a mighty blanket for the dusty earth."

Everyone bowed to the king. "What a brilliant idea, your royal highness," they said. "It is only a question of finding a tanner good enough."

The royal **emissaries** set off in every which way. Everyone stopped what they were doing and rushed out to look for a tanner good enough. Where could they find such a tanner, and where could they find so much leather? At last, the chief tanner of the kingdom presented himself at the royal court. He was an old man. He bowed to the king, smiled a little and said, "If your royal highness permits, I have a suggestion to make. It might fulfil your wish in a simple yet **effective** way."

loophole: a narrow escape route

the royal machinery: the system and procedures of the kingdom

tanners: people who make leather

emissaries: messengers or representatives

effective: in a way that works well; something effective gets the job done

lost their sleep over it: been extremely worried about it

"You may make your suggestion," said the king.

"Cover your royal feet, your royal highness," said the old tanner. "Then you shall not have to cover the whole earth."

"If it was all that easy to solve the problem," said the king, "would everyone in the kingdom have **lost their sleep over it?**"

"Arrest the fellow," said Gobu Rai, "and throw him into jail."

But already the old tanner was deep at work. Sitting down at the king's feet, he had been measuring and cutting, stitching and fitting. Before the king could decide whether to throw him

snug: well-protected and comfortable

into jail or to forgive him, he had finished a neat pair of shoes and presented it to his royal highness.

King Hobu put on the shoes. They fit him perfectly. His royal feet felt warm and **snug** and—most importantly—clean.

The minister spared the old tanner. He said, “I had the same idea myself. Some way or the other, the fellow must have got hold of my idea.”

And so, from that day, began the use of shoes. The royal feet were saved. So was Gobu. And so was the earth.

*Adapted from 'Juta Abishkar' by Rabindranath Tagore
Translated by Kamalika Mitra*



* We learn from this that one should not make any problem too big & should try to find a solution with a calm mind. to be able to find a practical & logical solution.

Understanding the Text

- A. 1. What was King Hobu worried about? *the dust dirtying his royal feet everytime he stepped on the ground.*
2. The people in the kingdom came up with many solutions for the king's problems. Place these solutions in the correct order. Then, tick (✓) the solution that worked and cross out (✗) the solution that did not work. Give reasons for both.
2. a. They tried to wash off all the dust with water. Pg 2
4. b. ✓ The tanner suggested that the king could cover his feet with leather. *That was a logical solution & they would not have to cover the whole earth.*
1. c. They tried to sweep all of the dust from the kingdom with brooms. Pg 2
3. d. They wanted the king to stay at home. Pg 3
3. What is the difference between the solution given by the tanner and the others in the king's court? Can we learn anything from it? *The other solutions were impractical & ill-logical whereas, the tanner's solution was practical, logical & easily applicable.**

- B. 1. "You were supposed to get rid of the dust, not fill the world with it." *No.* Did the entire world really get filled with dust? Why does the king say so? → Pg 2.
2. "...they made a purchase of seventeen lakh fifty thousand brooms..."
 "...twenty-one lakh water-carriers set out with bags of water..."
- Why do you think the author gives us these numbers? What picture does it create in your mind? *The author gives the number to show that the problem was for no reason made so big & everyone got involved in solving the king's problem. They had left their own work. The image create in our minds is that the whole kingdom/everyone with water bags & brooms and water & dust everywhere. everyone out of their houses.*
- * * * "The royal feet were saved. So was Gobbu. And so was the earth." How was the earth saved?

Appreciating the Text

1. Do you think *The Invention of Shoes* is a funny story? Underline the sentences that make you smile or laugh. Give reasons. *It all must be utter chaos.*
2. "I had the same idea myself. Some way or the other, the fellow must have got hold of my idea."
- Who says this? Do you think this is the truth? What do these lines make you think of the speaker?



Grammar and Usage

• direct objects and indirect objects

Read these sentences.

- The water-carriers set out with bags of water.
- The tanner presented to the King, a pair of shoes.

We have learnt that a complete sentence has a **subject** and a **predicate**. The subject is the person or thing we describe or say something about. The subject usually does something. The predicate is the rest of the sentence that gives us more information about the subject and always includes the verb.

* * The tanner gave a logical solution of covering the king's feet instead of the whole earth.