



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E16

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1. 'Amma, What Is Your Duty?'

By Sudha Murty

At that time, my daughter, Akshata, was a teenager. By nature she was very sensitive. On her own, she started reading for blind children at Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind at Bangalore. She was a scribe too. She used to come home and tell me about the world of blind people. Later she wrote an essay on them, called "I Saw the World through the Blind Eyes of Mary". Mary was a student at the academy who was about to appear for the pre-university exam. Once, Akshata took Mary to Lalbagh for a change. The conversation between them was quite unusual.

"Mary, there are different types of red roses in this park," Akshata told her. Mary was surprised. "Akshata, what do you mean by red?"

Akshata did not know how to explain what was red. She took a rose and a jasmine, and gave them to Mary.

"Mary, smell these two flowers in your hand. They have different smells. The first one is a rose. It is red in colour. The second one is jasmine. It is white.

Mary, it is difficult to explain what is red and what is white. But I can tell you that in this world there are many colours, which can be seen and differentiated only through the eyes and not by touch. I am sorry."

After that incident Akshata told me, "Amma, never talk about colours when you talk to blind people. They feel frustrated. I felt so helpless when I was trying to explain to Mary. Now I always describe the world to them by describing smells and sounds which they understand easily."

Akshata also used to help a blind boy called Anand Sharma at this school. He was the only child of a schoolteacher from Bihar. He was bright and jolly. He was about to appear for his second pre-university exam.

One day, I was heading for an examination committee meeting. At that time, I was head of the department of computer science at a local college. It was almost the end of February. Winter was slowly ending and there was a trace of summer setting in. Bangalore is blessed with beautiful weather. The many trees lining the roads were flowering and the city was swathed in different shades of violet, yellow and red.

I was busy getting ready to attend the meeting, hence I was collecting old syllabi, question papers and reference books. Akshata came upstairs to my room. She looked worried and tired. She was then studying in class ten. I thought she was tired preparing for her exams. As a mother, I have never insisted my children study too much. My parents never did that. They always believed the child has to be responsible. A responsible child will sit down to study on his or her own.

I told Akshata, "Don't worry about the exams. Trying is in your hands. The results are not with you." She was annoyed and irritated by my advice. "Amma, I didn't talk about any examination. Why are you reminding me of that?"

I was surprised at her irritation. But I was also busy gathering old question papers so I did not say anything. Absently, I looked at her face. Was there a trace of sadness on it? Or was it my imagination?

"Amma, you know Anand Sharma. He came to our house once. He is a bright boy. I am confident that he will do very well in his final examination. He is also confident about it. He wants to study further."

She stopped. By this time I had found the old question papers I had been looking for, but not the syllabus. My search was on. Akshata stood facing me and continued, "Amma, he wants to study at St Stephen's in Delhi. He does not have anybody. He is poor. It is an expensive place. What should he do? Who will support him? I am worried."

It was getting late for my meeting so I casually remarked, "Akshata, why don't you support him?"

"Amma, where do I have the money to support a boy in a Delhi hostel?" My search was still on.

"You can forfeit your birthday party and save money and sponsor him."

At home, even now both our children do not get pocket money. Whenever they want to buy anything they ask me and I give the money. We don't have big birthday parties. Akshata's birthday party would mean calling a few of her friends to the house and ordering food from the nearby fast-food joint, Shanthi Sagar.

"Amma, when an educated person like you, well-travelled, well read and without love for money does not help poor people, then don't expect anyone else to do. Is it not your duty to give back to those unfortunate people? What are you looking for in life? Are you looking for glamour or fame? You are the daughter of a doctor, granddaughter of a schoolteacher and come from a distinguished teaching family.

If you cannot help poor people then don't expect anyone else to do it."

Her words made me abandon my search. I turned around and looked at my daughter. I saw a sensitive young girl pleading for the future of a poor blind boy. Or was she someone reminding me of my duty towards society? I had received so much from that society and country but in what way was I giving back? For a minute I was frozen. Then I realized I was holding the syllabus I was looking for in my hand and it was getting late for the meeting.

Akshata went away with anger and sadness in her eyes. I too left for college in a confused state of mind.

When I reached, I saw that as usual the meeting was delayed. Now I was all alone. I settled down in my chair in one of the lofty rooms of the college. There is a difference between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is boring, whereas in solitude you can inspect and examine your deeds and your thoughts.

I sat and recollected what had happened that afternoon. Akshata's words were still ringing in my mind.

I was forty-five years old. What was my duty at this age? What was I looking for in life?

I did not start out in life with a lot of money. A great deal of hard work had been put in to get to where we were today. What had I learnt from the hard journey that was my life? Did I work for money, fame or glamour? No, I did not work for those; they came accidentally to me. Initially I worked for myself, excelling in studies. After that I was devoted to Infosys and my family. Should not the remaining part of my life be used to help those people who were suffering for no fault of theirs? Was that not my duty? Suddenly I remembered JRD's parting advice to me: "Give back to society."

I decided that was what I was going to do for the rest of my life. I felt relieved and years younger.

I firmly believe no decision should be taken emotionally. It should be taken with a cool mind and when you are aware of the consequences. After a week, I wrote my resignation letter as head of the department and opted only for a teacher's post.

I am ever grateful to Akshata for helping to bring this happiness and satisfaction to my work and life. It means more to me than the good ranks I got in school, and my wealth.

When I see hope in the eyes of a destitute person, see the warm smile on the faces of once helpless people, I feel so satisfied. They tell me that I am making a difference.

I joined the Infosys Foundation as a founder trustee. The foundation took up a number of philanthropic projects for the benefit of the poor in different states of India.

I received many awards on various occasions. One of them was the Economic Times Award given to the Infosys Foundation. As a trustee I was invited to receive this award. At that time I remembered my guru. Now she was a student in the US. I told her, "At least for one day you must come for this award ceremony in Mumbai. If you had not woken me up at the right time, I would not have been receiving it today. I want you to be present."

I will remain indebted to Akshata forever for the way she made me change my life and the lesson she taught me.

2. The Supermen

By Sudha Murty

The men of Suvarnanagari were very lazy. They only liked to gossip and tell each other tall tales. As soon as the sun rose, the men would tuck into a hearty breakfast and start gathering in groups. Then they would spend the rest of the day telling each other impossible stories. They came back home only at lunch and dinner time.

Suvarnanagari had fertile land all around it, and if the men had spent even a little time in the fields, they would have reaped wonderful crops. But as they did nothing, all responsibilities ended up on the shoulders of the women, who had to slave the whole day. They cooked, cleaned, sent the children to school, worked in the fields, took the crops to the market—in short, they did everything. One day, the tired women got together and decided the men needed to be taught a lesson. Someone suggested writing to the king, who was known to be just and kind, about their problem. So a letter was written and sent off. The women went back to their work, but kept a sharp lookout to see if the king would send any help. But many days passed, and slowly the women began to lose hope. After all, why would the king of such a vast empire be concerned about the plight of a few women in a tiny village like theirs?

A month passed by and soon it was a full-moon night. The men ate their dinners and, because it was so beautiful and well-lit outside, they gathered again to chat and boast. That night, they were trying to prove to one another that they were capable of performing the most impossible tasks. As they sat talking, and the stories flew around, a tall and handsome stranger joined them. Seeing his noble features and intelligent eyes, each man wanted to prove himself better than the others and impress him.

One said, “I knew the map of our kingdom even before I left my mother’s womb. As soon as I was born, I ran to the capital and met the king. My mother had such trouble bringing me back home!”

Everyone was impressed with this story. But not to be outdone, a second man said, “So what is so great about that? When I was just a day old, I could ride a horse. I sat on a big horse and rode all the way to the king’s palace. He received me with a lot of love and we had the most delicious breakfast together.” At the thought of food, everyone got dreamy-eyed and the story was greeted with a round of applause.

Now a third man said, “Huh! That’s nothing. I sat on an elephant when I was a week old and had lunch with the king in his palace.”

Before the admiring murmurs could die down, a fourth one said, "I was a month old when I flew like a bird and landed in the king's garden. He picked me up lovingly and even let me sit with him on his throne."

While everyone seemed to be awed by these stories, the stranger spoke up. "Do you four men know the king very well?"

"Of course we do!" they replied together. "Our king knows and loves us. In fact, he is proud to have supernatural beings like us in his kingdom."

The stranger looked thoughtful. "That makes my task so much easier... You see, I work in the king's court. Some time back, the king had called four supermen to the city in order to repair a large hole in the city walls. As you know, we use the largest, toughest stones for building these walls, and they could be lifted and put in place only by these supermen. The four asked to be paid in gold bars and the king gave them the money. But that night itself they disappeared from the palace. I have been wandering the kingdom ever since, looking for them. The king has ordered me to find the four men and bring them back to the capital to finish the work. They will also have to return the gold they ran away with. It looks like my search has finally ended. I will take you four to the king, along with the gold you stole from him... And I shall be the rich one now." By the time the stranger finished telling this amazing story, the men's faces had turned ashen. What trouble had their lies landed them in? Together they dived at the stranger's feet.

"Save us!" they wailed. "Those were all lies. We are just a bunch of lazy men. If you forget our stories, we promise to stop telling lies and do some honest work." The stranger smiled. "So be it. I will tell the king there are no supermen in this village. Only hard-working, ordinary men and women."

That night itself he left the village, and the women were sure they saw a happy twinkle in his eyes as he rode away on a handsome, white horse, fit to belong to the king's stables!

3. Jokes

First Day at School

The little boy had just started school. When he returned home the first day, his mother asked,

“Bunty, what did you learn today?”

“I learned to write,” said Bunty proudly.

“Oh, what did you write? asked Mother excitedly.

“I didn’t know. I haven’t learned to read yet,” said Bunty smiling from ear to ear.

The Job

A woman was being interviewed for a job.

“You understand that before we can offer you a position, you must take a short test.” said the recruiter.

“Of course,” she answered.

“Well, how much is two plus two?” said he.

“Four,” said she.

A second applicant entered the room.

After a short interview, the recruiter asked, “Are you ready for the test?”

“Yes,” said the applicant.

“Well, how much is two plus two?” said he.

The applicant answered, “Whatever the boss says it is.”

The second applicant got the job.

4. Grammar Page

Demonstrative Determiners

The words **this**, **that**, **these** and **those** are also special pronouns called determiners. They are used to point out which thing or person you mean. They are called **demonstrative determiners**.

Use **this** and **these** to talk about things and people that are **near** you.

Use this with singular nouns.

Who lives in this house?

This car belongs to my mom.

Does this key fit the lock?

This book is my favorite.

Who gave you this money?

This cheese tastes funny.

Use these with plural nouns

These trousers are too short.

I don't like these comics.

These biscuits don't taste very good.

I bought these apples for lunch.

Is there an adult with these children?

Use **that** and **those** to talk about things that are **farther away** from you.

Use that with singular nouns

This chair is mine and that chair is yours.

That animal is making a funny noise.

Would you pass me that book, please?

Who is that man talking to Dad?

How much is that dress?

Use those with plural nouns

I gave my sandwiches to those boys.

Those children go to a different school.

These shoes are mine and those shoes are yours.

These apples look fresh but those apples look rotten.

Those people are from Africa.