Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G16

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Contents

1. Profit and Loss

By Rabindranath Tagore

When a daughter was born, after five sons, her parents **dotingly** named her Nirupama. Such a **high-flown** name had never been heard in the family before. Usually names of gods and goddesses were used – Ganesh, Kartik, Parvati and so on.

The question of Nirupama's marriage now arose. Her father Ramsundar Mitra searched and searched without finding a groom he really liked; but in the end he **procured** the only son of a grand Raybahadur. The ancestral wealth of this Raybahadur had diminished considerably, but the family was certainly noble. They asked for a dowry of 10,000 rupees, and many additional gifts. Ramsundar agreed without a thought – such a groom should not be allowed to slip through one's fingers. But no way could he raise all the money. Even after pawning, selling, and using every method he could, he still owed 6,000 or 7,000 rupees; and the day of the wedding was drawing near.

The wedding-day came. Someone had agreed to lend the rest of the money at an extortionate rate of interest, but he failed to turn up on the day. A furious scene broke out in the marriage-room. Ramsundar fell on his knees before the Raybahadur, implored him not to bring bad luck by breaking off the ceremony, he insisted he would pay him in full.

"If you can't hand the money to me, now," replied the Raybahadur, "the bridegroom will not be brought here."

The women of the house wept and wailed at this disastrous upset. The root cause of it sat mutely in her silk wedding-dress and ornaments, her forehead decorated with sandal-paste. It cannot be said that she felt much love or respect for her prospective husband's family.

Suddenly the impasse was resolved. The groom rebelled against his father, saying firmly, "This haggling and bartering means nothing to me. I came here to marry, and marry I shall."

"You see, sir, how young men behave these days," said his father to everyone he turned to.

"It's because they have no training in morality or the Shastras," said some of the oldest there. The Raybahadur sat despondent at seeing the poisonous fruits of modern education in his own son. The marriage was completed in a gloomy, joyless sort of way.

As Nirupama left for her in-laws' house; her father clasped her to his breast and could not hold back his tears.

“Won’t they let me come and visit you, father?” she asked.

“Why shouldn’t they, my love?” said Ramsundar. “I’ll come and fetch you.”

Ramsundar often went to see his daughter, but he had no honour in his son-in-law’s house. Even the servants looked down on him.

Sometimes he saw his daughter for five minutes in a separate outer room of the house; sometimes he was not allowed to see her at all. To be disgraced so in a kinsman’s house was unbearable. He decided that somehow or other the money would have to be paid, but the burden of debt on his shoulders was already hard to control. Expenses dragged at him terribly; he had to resort to all sorts of petty **subterfuges** to avoid running into his creditors.

Meanwhile his daughter was treated **spitefully** at every turn. She shut herself into her room and wept – a daily penance for the insults heaped on her family. Her mother-in-law’s **assaults** were especially **vicious**. If anyone said, “How pretty the girl is – it’s a pleasure to look at her,” she would burst out, “Pretty indeed! Pretty as the family she came from!” Even her food and clothing were neglected. If a kind neighbour expressed concern, her mother-in-law would say, “She has more than enough,” – implying that if the girl’s father had paid full price she would have received full care. Everyone treated her as if she had no rights in the household, and had entered it by deceit.

Naturally news of the contempt and shame his daughter was suffering reached Ramsundar. He decided to sell his house. He did not, however, tell his sons that he was making them houseless: he intended to rent the house back after selling it. By this ploy, his sons would not know the true situation till after his death. But his sons found out. They came and protested vigorously. The three elder boys, particularly, were married and probably had children: their objections were so forceful that the sale was stopped. Ramsundar then started to raise money by taking out small loans from various quarters at high interest – so much so, that he could no longer meet household expenses.

Nirupama understood everything from her father’s expression. The old man’s grey hair, pallid face and permanently **cowering** manner all indicated poverty and worry. When a father lets down his own daughter, he cannot disguise the guilt he feels. Whenever Ramsundar managed to get permission to speak to his daughter for a few moments, it was clear at once even from his smile how heart-broken he was.

She longed to return to her father’s house for a few days to console him. To see his sad face made it awful to be away. One day she said to Ramsundar, “Father, take me home for a while.”

“Very well,” he replied – but he had no power to do so, the natural claims that a father has to his daughter had been pawned in place of a dowry. Even a glimpse of his daughter had to be begged for meekly, and if on any occasion it was not granted he was not in a position to ask a second time. But if his daughter herself wished to come home, how could he not bring her?

It is better not to tell the story of the **indignity**, shame and hurt that Ramsundar had to endure in order to raise the 3,000 rupees that he needed for an approach to his daughter’s father-in-law. Wrapping the banknotes in a handkerchief tied into a corner of his chadar, he went to see him. He began breezily with local news, describing at length a daring theft in Harekrishna’s house. Comparing the abilities and characters of Nabinmadhab and Radhamadhab, he praised Radhamadhab and criticized Nabinmadhab. He gave a hair-raising account of a new illness in town. Finally, putting down the hookah, he said as if in passing, “Yes, yes, brother, there’s still some money owing, I know. Every day I remember, and mean to come along with some of it, but then it slips my mind. I’m getting old, my friend.” At the end of this long preamble, he casually produced the three notes, which were really like three of his ribs. The Raybahadur burst into coarse laughter at the sight of them. “Those are no use to me,” he said, making it plain by using a current proverb that he did not want to make his hands stink for no reason.

After that, to ask to bring Nirupama home seemed out of the question, though Ramsundar wondered what good he was doing to himself by observing polite forms. After sitting in heart-stricken silence for a long time, he did at last softly raise the matter. “Not now,” said the Raybahadur, giving no reason; then he left, to go about his work.

Unable to face his daughter, hands trembling, Ramsundar tied the three banknotes back into the end of his chadar and set off home. He resolved never to return to the Raybahadur’s house until he had paid the money in full; only then could he lay claim to Nirupama confidently.

Many months passed. Nirupama sent messenger after messenger, but her father never appeared. In the end she took offence, and stopped sending. This grieved Ramsundar sorely, but he still would not go to her. The month of Āśvin came. “This year I shall bring Nirupama home for the *pūjā* or *else*!” he said to himself, making a fierce vow.

On the fifth or sixth day of the *pūjā*-fortnight, Ramsundar once again tied a few notes into the end of his chadar and got ready to go out. A five-year-old grandson came and said, “Grandpa, are you going to buy a cart for me?” For weeks he had set his heart on a push-cart to ride in, but there had been no way of meeting his wish. Then a six-year-old granddaughter came and said tearfully

that she had no nice dress to wear for the *pūjā*. Ramsundar knew that well, and had **brooded** over it for a long time as he smoked. He had sighed to think of the women of his household attending the *pūjā* celebrations at the Raybahadur's house like paupers receiving charity, wearing whatever miserable ornaments they had; but his thoughts had no result other than making the old man's lines on his forehead even deeper.

With the cries of his poverty-stricken household ringing in his ears, Ramsundar arrived at the Raybahadur's house. Today there was no hesitation in his manner, no trace of the nervous glances with which he had formerly approached the gatekeeper and servants: it was as if he was entering his own house. He was told that the Raybahadur was out – he would have to wait a while. But he could not hold back his longing to meet his daughter. Tears of joy rolled down his cheeks when he saw her. Father and daughter wept together; neither of them could speak for some moments. Then Ramsundar said, "This time I shall take you, my dear. Nothing can stop me now."

Suddenly Ramsundar's eldest son Haramohan burst into the room with his two small sons. "Father," he cried, "have you really decided to turn us out on the streets?"

Ramsundar flared up. "Should I condemn myself to hell for your sakes? Won't you let me do what is right?" He had sold his house: he had gone to great lengths to conceal the sale from his sons, but to his anger and dismay it appeared that they had found out all the same. His grandson clasped him round his knees and looked up, saying, "Grandpa, haven't you bought me that cart?" When he got no answer from the now crestfallen Ramsundar, the little boy went up to Nirupama and said, "Auntie, will you buy me a cart?"

Nirupama had no difficulty in understanding the whole situation. "Father," she said, "if you give a single paisa more to my father-in-law, I swear solemnly you will never see me again."

"What are you saying, child?" said Ramsundar. "If I don't pay the money, the shame will be forever on my head – and it will be your shame too."

"The shame will be greater if you pay the money," said Nirupama. "Do you think I have no honour? Do you think I am just a money-bag, the more money in it the higher my value? No, Father, don't shame me by paying this money. My husband doesn't want it anyway."

"But then they won't let you come and see me," said Ramsundar. "That can't be helped," said Nirupama. "Please don't try to fetch me any more."

Ramsundar tremblingly pulled his chadar – with the money tied into it – back round his shoulders, and left the house like a thief again, avoiding everyone's

stare.

It did not, however, remain a secret that Ramsundar had come with the money and that his daughter had forbidden him to hand it over. An inquisitive servant, a listener at keyholes, passed the information on to Nirupama's mother-in-law, whose malice towards her daughter-in-law now went beyond all limits. The household became a bed of nails for her. Her husband had gone off a few days after their wedding to be Deputy Magistrate in another part of the country. Claiming that Nirupama would be corrupted by contact with her relatives, her in-laws now completely forbade her from seeing them.

She now fell seriously ill. But this was not wholly her mother-in-law's fault. She herself had neglected her health dreadfully. On chilly autumn nights she lay with her head near the open door, and she wore no extra clothes during the winter. She ate irregularly. The servants would sometimes forget to bring her any food: she would not then say anything to remind them. She was forming a fixed belief that she was herself a servant in the household, dependent on the favours of her master and mistress. But her mother-in-law could not stand even this attitude. If Nirupama showed lack of interest in food, she would say, "What a princess she is! A poor household's fare is not to her liking!" Or else she would say, "Look at her. What a beauty! She's more and more like a piece of burnt wood."

When her illness got worse, her mother-in-law said, "It's all put on." Finally one day Nirupama said humbly, "Let me see my father and brothers just once, Mother."

"Nothing but a trick to get to her father's house," said her mother-in- law.

It may seem unbelievable, but the evening when Nirupama's breath began to fail was when the doctor was first called, and it was the last visit that he made too.

The eldest daughter-in-law in the household had died, and the funeral rites were performed with appropriate pomp. The Raychaudhuris were renowned in the district for the lavishness with which they performed the immersion of the deity at the end of *Durgā-pūjā*, but the Raybahadur's family became famous for the way Nirupama was cremated: such a huge sandalwood pyre had never been seen. Only they could have managed such elaborate rites, and it was rumoured that they got rather into debt as a result.

Everyone gave Ramsundar long descriptions of the magnificence of his daughter's death, when they came to condole with him. Meanwhile a letter from the Deputy Magistrate arrived: "I have made all necessary arrangements here, so please send my wife to me quickly." The Raybahadur's wife replied,

“Dear son, we have secured another girl for you, so please take leave soon and come home.”

This time the dowry was 20,000 rupees, cash down.

Vocabulary

1. Dotingly — fondly
2. High-flown — noble
3. Procured — get hold of
4. Subterfuges — ploys or tricks
5. Spitefully — cruelly or nastily
6. Assaults — attacks
7. Vicious — brutal
8. Cowering — trembling
9. Indignity — shame or disgrace
10. Brooded — feel sorry for yourself

2. Nuclear Energy

Nuclear capability gives a status to the country in the community of nations. No nation can afford to make destructive use of nuclear energy without risking a World War. That is why America did not make use of nuclear weapons in the Vietnam War though it had become a matter of prestige for her. Similarly Russia preferred to pull out her missile bases from Cuba instead of coming in direct conflict with a nuclear power, America. But India, since she started adopting nuclear technology, had decided to make only peaceful use of nuclear energy. The fear expressed by Pakistan and the comments made in the Chinese press are more for the sake of propaganda than for the projection of truth.

India needs nuclear energy in order to meet her power shortage. She has been depending upon hydroelectric power which is unpredictable because of the uncertainty of rainfall. Good quality of coal which is another source of energy cannot be extracted commercially because it lies very deep and the cost of extraction is very high. India is not producing much of oil, rather she has to import nearly 74 per cent of her total consumption. So the only alternative with India is to have a cheaper and more dependable source of energy. The known reserves of thorium in India are sufficient to last many hundred years. That is why India has already commissioned two nuclear power stations, one at Tarapur and the other at Rana Pratap Sagar. Each one has the installed capacity of producing 420 M.W. of electricity. Two other stations, one at Narora and the other at Kalpakkam, are operational. This energy will be able to meet the power shortage throughout the country. If industries work at their full capacity, production will be higher and so per capita income will increase and inflation will be neutralized.

With the help of controlled nuclear explosions, artificial dams can be made. In fact for building a dam there should be two huge mountain walls enclosing a deep valley just near the course of a river. These conditions are not available at all the places. So with the help of controlled nuclear explosions mountains can be blown up. This can also help in laying roads in the mountainous areas. In fact, some of the borders of India have mountainous terrain and the movement of the army is quite difficult. So even for the sake of national security it is necessary to have roads in those areas.

With the help of radiation the shelf life of vegetables and fruits can be increased. In tropical countries like India, it is necessary that the perishable fruit stuffs are preserved for a long time. Radiation can check the sprouting of onions and potatoes which are much in demand in foreign countries. Similarly fruits like bananas and mangoes which have much export potential can be preserved for a very long time. The texture and taste of the fruit do not undergo any change. Nuclear technology can also be harnessed for medical purposes. It is said that radioactive iodine is used for detecting the disease of the thyroid glands. Similarly, India has been able to prepare, with the help of U.N. experts, radiated vaccine which can immunize sheep from lungworm disease, which used to take a heavy toll on sheep every year.

Properly processed nuclear fuel is also used for artificial satellites in space. Weather satellites can predict cyclones and rainfall with extreme accuracy. Communication satellites can help in conveying messages to very long distances. In a huge country like India, communication satellites are necessary.

3. Grammar Page

Unit 16 Past perfect continuous (I had been doing)

A Study this example situation:

yesterday morning

Yesterday morning I got up and looked out of the window. The sun was shining, but the ground was very wet.

It **had been raining**.

It was *not* raining when I looked out of the window. The sun was shining. But it **had been raining** before.

had been -ing is the *past perfect continuous*:

I/we/you/they he/she/it	**had**	(= I'**d** etc.) (= he'**d** etc.)	**been**	doing working playing etc.

Some more examples:

- My hands were dirty because I'**d been repairing** my bike.
- Tom was tired when he got home. He'**d been working** hard all day.
- I went to Madrid a few years ago and stayed with a friend of mine. **She hadn't been living** there very long, but she knew the city very well.

You can say that something **had been happening** before something else happened:

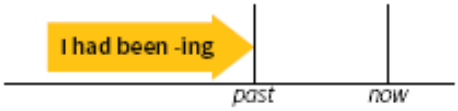
- We'**d been playing** tennis for about half an hour when it **started** to rain heavily.

B Compare **have been -ing** (*present perfect continuous*) and **had been -ing** (*past perfect continuous*):

Present perfect continuous

- I hope the bus comes soon. I'**ve been waiting** for 20 minutes. (*before now*)
- James **is** out of breath. He'**s been running**. (= he **has** been . . .)

Past perfect continuous



- At last the bus came. I'**d been waiting** for 20 minutes. (*before the bus came*)
- James **was** out of breath. He'**d been running**. (= he **had** been . . .)

C Compare **was -ing** (*past continuous*) and **had been -ing**:

- It **wasn't raining** when we went out. The sun **was shining**. But it **had been raining**, so the ground was wet.
- Katherine **was lying** on the sofa. She was tired because she'**d been working** hard.

D Some verbs (for example, **know**) are not normally used in *continuous* forms (**be + -ing**):

- We were good friends. We **had known** each other for years. (*not* had been knowing)
- A few years ago Lisa cut her hair really short. I was surprised because she'**d** always **had** long hair. (*not* she'd been having)

For a list of these verbs, see **Unit 4A**. For **have**, see **Unit 17**