Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G19

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1. The Divide

By Rabindernath Tagore

Genealogical investigation would reveal that Banamali and Himangshumali were actually distant cousins: the relationship was complicated, but possible to trace. Their families, however, had been neighbours for a long time, with only a garden dividing them; so however remote their blood-relationship, they knew each other very well.

Banamali was much older than Himangshu. Before Himangshu had cut his teeth or could talk, Banamali would carry him around in the garden to enjoy the morning or evening air; he would play with him, dry his tears, and lull him to sleep. Indeed, he did everything an intelligent grown-up person is supposed to do to entertain a child – shaking his head at him, shrieking with dismay, expressing babyish excitement or fearsome enthusiasm. Banamali had little education. He liked to garden or be with his young cousin. He nurtured him like a rare and precious creeper, which he watered with all his love, and as the creeper grew, pervading the whole of his inner and outer life, Banamali counted himself blessed.

There may not be many, but there are some people who will easily sacrifice themselves completely to a small fancy or a little child or an undeserving friend. Their love may be tiny compared to the vastness of the world, but it is to them a business in which they happily sink all that is vital to them. They will then live contentedly on a pittance, or else one morning sell their remaining property and take to begging in the streets.

As Himangshu grew, he formed a firm friendship with Banamali, despite their difference in age and remoteness of blood-relationship. Age seemed of no consequence. There was a reason for this. Himangshu learned to read and write, and had by nature a strong desire for knowledge. He would sit and read any book that came his way: he would read many worthless books, no doubt, but his mind matured in all directions as a result of his reading. Banamali listened to him with great admiration. He took his advice, discussed every problem with him, small or large, and never ignored him on any subject just because he was a child. Nothing is more cherished in this world than a person whom one has brought up with utmost love, and whose knowledge, intelligence and goodness inspire respect.

Himangshu also loved gardening. But there was a difference here between the two friends. Banamali loved it with his heart; Himangshu with his intelligence. For Banamali, raising plants was an instinctive occupation: they were like children to him, only more so, in their softness and unawareness,

in the way they never asked to be cared for but would grow up like children if given loving care. For Himangshu, plants were a subject of curiosity. The sowing of seeds, the sprouting of seedlings, the buds, the blooms all aroused his attention. He was full of advice about planting, grafting, manuring, watering and so on, and Banamali gladly followed it. Whatever nature or nurture could do, in the combining or separating of plants, was achieved by the two friends in that modest patch of garden.

There was a small cement patio just inside the gate to the garden. At four o'clock Banamali would come there, lightly dressed, with a crimped chadar round his shoulders, and sit in the shade with his hookah. He was quite alone, and had no book or newspaper with him. He would sit and smoke, with a distracted meditative air, glancing with half-closed eyes to right or to left, letting time float by like coils of smoke from the hookah as they slowly drifted and broke and disappeared, leaving no trace.

At last Himangshu returned from school, and after a snack and a wash came into the garden. Banamali immediately dropped the stem of the hookah and stood up. His eagerness made it perfectly plain whom he had been patiently waiting for all this time. Then the two of them strolled in the garden, talking. When it became dark they sat on a bench, while the southern breeze stirred the leaves in the trees. On some days there was no wind: the trees would be as still as a picture, and the sky above would be full of brightly shining stars.

Himangshu talked, and Banamali listened quietly. Even what he did not understand, he enjoyed. Things that would have irritated him greatly coming from anyone else were amusing when spoken by Himangshu.

Himangshu's powers of expression, recollection and imagination gained from having such an admiring, grown-up listener. He sometimes spoke of things he had read, sometimes things he had thought, sometimes whatever came into his head – supplying with his imagination whatever his knowledge lacked. He said much that was correct and much that was not correct, but Banamali listened solemnly. Sometimes he put in a word of his own, but accepted any objections that Himangshu made; and next day, sitting in the shade again, puffing at his hookah, he would ponder over what he had heard, marvelling at it.

Meanwhile a dispute had arisen. Between Banamali's garden and Himangshu's house there was a drainage ditch; at a point along this ditch a lime tree had grown. When the fruits ripened, Banamali's family servant tried to pick them, while Himangshu's family servant stopped him – and they began to argue so fiercely that if the insults they rained on each other had been made of something material, the whole ditch would have been choked

with them. From this, a heated quarrel developed between Banamali's father Harachandra and Himangshu's father Gokulchandra, and they went to court over the ownership of the ditch. A long verbal war began between champion lawyers and barristers fighting on one side or the other. The money that was spent on each side exceeded even the floods that flowed through the ditch during the month of Bhādra.

In the end Harachandra won; it was proved that the ditch was his and no one else had a claim to the fruit of the lime tree. There was an appeal, but the ditch and the lime tree remained with Harachandra.

While the court-case was going on, the friendship between Banamali and Himangshu was not affected. Indeed, so anxious was Banamali not to let the dispute cast a shadow over either of them, that he tried to bind Himangshu ever more closely to him, and Himangshu showed not the slightest loss of affection either.

On the day that Harachandra won the case, there was great rejoicing in his house, especially in the women's quarters; but Banamali lay sleepless that night. The next afternoon, when he took his place on the patio in the garden, his face was sad and anxious, as if he alone had suffered an immense defeat that meant nothing to anyone else.

The time when Himangshu usually came elapsed; at six o'clock there was still no sign of him. Banamali sighed heavily and gazed at Himangshu's house. Through the open window he could see his friend's school-clothes hung up on the *ālnā*; many other familiar signs showed that Himangshu was at home. Banamali left his hookah and paced up and down, looking dejectedly towards the window again and again, but Himangshu did not come into the garden.

When the lamps were lit in the evening, Banamali slowly walked up to Himangshu's house. Gokulchandra was cooling himself by an open door. "Who is it?" he said.

Banamali started. He felt like a thief who had been caught. "It's me, Uncle," he said nervously.

"What do you want?" he said. "There's no one at home."

Banamali returned to the garden and sat mutely there. When it was dark, he watched the window-shutters of Himangshu's house being closed for the night one by one. Lamplight inside the house shone through cracks round the doors; later, most of the lamps were extinguished. In the darkness of the night, Banamali felt that the doors of Himangshu's house were totally closed to him, and all he could do was remain alone in the darkness outside.

The next day he went again and sat in the garden, hoping that today Himangshu might come. His friend had come every day for so long that he never imagined that he might not come again. He never supposed that the bond between them could be torn; he had taken it so much for granted, that he had not realized how totally wrapped up in it his life had become. He had learnt now that the bond had indeed been torn, but so sudden a disaster was quite impossible to take in.

Every day that week he went on sitting in the garden at his usual time, in case Himangshu chanced to come. But alas, the meetings that used to occur by agreement failed to recur by chance. On Sunday he wondered if Himangshu would come to his house in the morning for lunch, as he had always done in the past. He did not exactly believe that he would, but he could not stop hoping. Mid-morning came, but Himangshu did not. “He’ll come after lunch,” said Banamali to himself – but he did not come after lunch. So he thought, “Today perhaps he is taking a siesta. He’ll come when he wakes up.” Whatever time Himangshu might have woken from his siesta, he did not come.

Evening fell again, then night; Himangshu’s doors closed one by one, and the lights in his house went out one by one.

When Fate had taken each of the seven days from Monday to Sunday away from Banamali, leaving no day on which to pin his hopes, he turned his tearful eyes towards Himangshu’s shuttered house, appealed to it from the depths of his distress. “Dear God,” he cried, gathering all his life’s pain into the words.

2. Corporal Punishment in Schools

The term, 'corporal punishment' means physical punishment. It is a kind of punishment that affects the human body adversely. It could be in the form of beating, thrashing or even **whipping**. Thus, punishment of this kind is a physical torture to a student and should be condemned and stopped immediately. Moreover, such kind of punishment may sometimes physically **impair** a student for their whole life. Psychologists are of the opinion that such a punishment can affect a student mentally, for a very long period of time.

In India, corporal punishment persists as a common feature in schools. Several shocking incidents of physical assault have been reported in the newspapers. For instance, a student of class XII from a popular school in Udaipur and another from a school run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi died due to the beating they received from their school teachers. In another incident, a class XI student in Ahmedabad accused a teacher of having hit him so hard that he suffered a temporary loss of hearing. Pinching, slapping and making a student kneel down or stand for hours, are all set to be banned under plans to widen the definition of 'corporal punishment' in schools.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has suggested a code of conduct for teachers in schools. The main feature of the code is a total ban on corporal punishment. Some states in India have already banned corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is just another form of physical violence and has no place in an enlightened society.

However, there are numerous instances of milder punishment that go unnoticed. There is enough evidence to suggest that teachers, including those at elite schools, physically and verbally intimidate children, some of whom could be as young as five years old. There is unfortunately no national law banning cruel or unusual punishment in schools. The National Policy on Education merely says that corporal punishment is not permissible.

Discipline is a must for students in schools and colleges. However, enforcing it through corporal punishment is highly objectionable and rather **inhuman**. This kind of punishment was generally practised during the medieval period, and is now outdated. Moreover, this is not the right procedure or technique to discipline a student.

Teachers should realise that children at the school level are of an impressionable age. If they are subjected to such kind of physical torture, they may develop a phobia and may hesitate to approach or meet a teacher, or even attend school. They will never be able to respect and love their teachers which is very essential for the overall development of a student's personality.

This is because a guru or a teacher is a role model for a student. He must set an example for his students through his behaviour and actions. He must deal with his students patiently, advising and guiding them to excel in every sphere of life such as academics, sports, music and various other extra-curricular activities.

Students must feel free and be friendly with their teachers so as to ask questions, clarify their doubts, etc. At the same time, they should always respect and obey their teachers. However, this obedience and respect cannot be demanded forcibly through corporal punishment. It can only come spontaneously through deep regard for one's teachers. Such regard develops towards a teacher who mentors and empathises and not for one who metes out corporal punishment.

The Supreme Court states that 'children are not to be subjected to corporal punishment in schools and they should receive education in an environment of freedom and dignity, free from fear.' The National Policy on Education directs the school authorities to take necessary action in the matter, so that this evil practice affecting the physical and mental health of children can be nipped in the bud.

Corporal punishment does not have any corrective effect on an erring student. Instead, it worsens the situation. For instance, a student who is very naughty, or least interested in studies, when subjected to corporal punishment, may retaliate and become more aggressive in behaviour. He may drop out from school and give up studies for good. He may be pushed into juvenile delinquency. Such a development may be **disastrous** for a child's future and for the society. Corporal punishment may even cause permanent physical disorders in a child. For example, hard slapping borne upon the ears can make one totally deaf for the rest of one's life. Harsh whipping and caning on the hands and legs can damage the bones and muscles.

There are some people who would say scolding and verbal intimidation are essential to rein in errant students and hence should not be prohibited. This argument too is flawed. Verbal abuse could be as damaging and humiliating for children, especially the younger ones, as physical punishment. Parents often complain to school authorities against abuse of their children in school. But they are usually **cowed** down to silence, by the school authorities. In such a situation, there is no alternative but to seek the intervention of the state government.

To conclude, it must always be borne in mind that teaching is one of the noblest professions where one imparts knowledge to learners and prepares future citizens. The teacher ought to consider his students as his own children,

and must treat them as lovingly and caringly as possible. They should praise a students' achievements, and help them to overcome their **shortcomings** by motivating them to pursue their interests and hone their skills. A teacher should be there to guide a student to become a responsible, educated and well-groomed citizen of the country. While handling students, it must always be kept in mind that they are like flowers. We need to **nurture** them with great care so as to help them **blossom** and spread their fragrance.

Vocabulary

1. Whipping — beating vigorously with a whip as a punishment
2. Impair — damage or make weak
3. Inhuman — extremely cruel
4. Disastrous — being or causing a disaster
5. Cowed — frightened
6. Shortcomings — defects, faults
7. Motivating — stimulating interest, encouraging
8. Nurture — to care for and encourage the growth of
9. Blossom — produce, grow or develop

3. Grammar Page

Unit 19 Present tenses (**I am doing** / **I do**) for the future

A *Present continuous* (**I am doing**) with a future meaning

This is Ben's diary for next week.

He **is playing** tennis on Monday afternoon.
He **is going** to the dentist on Tuesday morning.
He **is meeting** Kate on Friday.

In all these examples, Ben has already decided and arranged to do these things.

I'm doing something (tomorrow etc.) = I have already decided and arranged to do it:

- A: What **are** you **doing** on Saturday evening? (*not* What do you do)
  B: I'**m going** to the cinema. (*not* I go)
- A: What time **is** Katherine **arriving** tomorrow?
  B: Half past ten. We'**re meeting** her at the station.
- I'**m not working** tomorrow, so we can go out somewhere.
- Steve **isn't playing** football next Saturday. He's hurt his leg.

We do not normally use **will** to talk about what we have arranged to do:

- What **are** you **doing** tonight? (*not* What will you do)
- Alex **is getting** married next month. (*not* will get)

We also use the present continuous for an action *just before you start to do it*. This happens especially with verbs of movement (**go**/**come**/**leave** etc.):

- I'm tired. I'**m going** to bed now. Goodnight. (*not* I go to bed now)
- 'Tina, are you ready yet?' 'Yes, I'**m coming**.' (*not* I come)

B *Present simple* (**I do**) with a future meaning

We use the present simple when we talk about timetables and programmes (for example, transport or cinema times):

- I have to go. My train **leaves** at 11.30.
- What time **does** the film **start** tonight?
- The meeting **is** at nine o'clock tomorrow.

You can use the present simple to talk about people if their plans are fixed like a timetable:

- I **start** my new job on Monday.
- What time **do** you **finish** work tomorrow?

But the continuous is more usual for other personal arrangements:

- What time **are** you **meeting** Kate tomorrow? (*not* do you meet)

Compare:

Present continuous	*Present simple*
What time **are** you **arriving**?	What time **does** the train **arrive**?
I'**m going** to the cinema this evening.	The film **starts** at 8.15.

When you talk about appointments, lessons, exams etc., you can use **I have** or **I've got**:

- **I have** an exam next week. *or* **I've got** an exam next week.