



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G23

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. The Tiger in the Tunnel

Tembu, the boy, opened his eyes in the dark and wondered if his father was ready to leave the hut on his nightly errand. There was no moon that night, and the deathly stillness of the surrounding jungle was broken only occasionally by the shrill cry of a cicada. Sometimes from far off came the hollow hammering of a woodpecker, carried along on the faint breeze. Or the grunt of a wild boar could be heard as he dug up a favourite root. But these sounds were rare, and the silence of the forest always returned to swallow them up.

A cicada

Baldev, the watchman, was awake. He stretched himself, slowly unwinding the heavy shawl that covered him like a shroud. It was close on midnight and the chilly air made him shiver. The station, a small shack backed by heavy jungle, was a station only in name; for trains only stopped there, if at all, for a few seconds before entering the deep cutting that led to the tunnel. Most trains merely slowed down before taking the sharp curve before the cutting.

Baldev was responsible for signalling whether or not the tunnel was clear of obstruction, and his hand-worked signal stood before the entrance. At night, it was his duty to see that the lamp was burning, and that the overland mail passed through safely.

‘Shall I come too, Father?’ asked Tembu sleepily, still lying huddled in a corner of the hut.

‘No, it is cold tonight. Do not get up.’

Tembu, who was twelve, did not always sleep with his father at the station, for he also had to help in the home, where his mother and small sister were usually alone. They lived in a small tribal village on the outskirts of the forest, about three miles from the station. Their small rice fields did not provide them with more than a bare living, and Baldev considered himself lucky to have got the job of khalasi (signalman) at this small wayside signal-stop.

Still drowsy, Baldev groped for his lamp in the darkness, then fumbled about in search of matches. When he had produced a light, he left the hut, closed the door behind him, and set off along the permanent way. Tembu had fallen asleep again.

Baldev wondered whether the lamp on the signal post was still alight. Gathering his shawl closer about him, he stumbled on, sometimes along the rails, sometimes along the ballast. He longed to get back to his warm corner in the hut.

The eeriness of the place was increased by the neighbouring hills, which overhung the main line threateningly. On entering the cutting, with its sheer rock walls towering high above the rails, Baldev could not help thinking about the wild animals he might encounter. He had heard many tales of the famous tunnel tiger, a man-eater who was supposed to frequent this spot; but he hardly believed these stories for, since his arrival at this place a month ago, he had not seen or even heard a tiger.

There had, of course, been panthers, and only a few days previously the villagers had killed one with their spears and axes. Baldev had occasionally heard a panther calling to its mate, but they had not come near the tunnel or shed.

Baldev walked confidently for, being a tribal himself, he was used to the jungle and its ways. Like his forefathers, he carried a small axe, fragile to look at, but deadly when in use. With it, in three or four swift strokes, he could cut down a tree as neatly as if it had been sawn; and he prided himself on his skill in wielding it against wild animals. He had killed a young boar with it once, and the family had feasted on the flesh for three days. The axe-head of pure steel, thin but ringing true like a bell, had been made by his father over a charcoal fire. This axe was a part of himself, and wherever he went, be it to the local market seven miles away, or to a tribal dance, the axe was always in his hand. Occasionally, an official who had come to the station had offered him good money for the weapon; but Baldev had no intention of parting with it.

The cutting curved sharply, and in the darkness, the black entrance to the tunnel loomed up menacingly. The signal light was out. Baldev set to work to haul the lamp down by its chain. If the oil had finished, he would have to return to the hut for more. The mail train was due in five minutes.

Once more he fumbled for his matches. Then suddenly he stood still and listened. The frightened cry of a barking deer, followed by a crashing sound in the undergrowth, made Baldev hurry. There was still a little oil in the lamp, and after an instant's hesitation he lit the lamp again and hoisted it back into position. Having done this, he walked quickly down the tunnel, swinging his own lamp, so that the shadows leapt up and down the soot-stained walls, and having made sure that the line was clear, he returned to the entrance and sat down to wait for the mail train.

The train was late. Sitting huddled up, almost dozing, he soon forgot his surroundings and began to nod off.

Back in the hut, the trembling of the ground told of the approach of the train, and a low, distant rumble woke the boy, who sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

'Father, it's time to light the lamp,' he mumbled, and then, realizing that his father had been gone some time, he lay down again; but he was wide awake now, waiting for the train to pass, waiting for his father's returning footsteps.

A low grunt resounded from the top of the cutting. In a second Baldev was awake, all his senses alert. Only a tiger could emit such a sound.

There was no shelter for Baldev, but he grasped his axe firmly and tensed his body, trying to make out the direction from which the animal was approaching. For some time there was only silence, even the usual jungle noises seemed to have ceased altogether. Then a thump and the rattle of small stones announced that the tiger had sprung into the cutting.

Baldev, listening as he had never listened before, wondered if it was making for the tunnel or the opposite direction—the direction of the hut, in which Tembu would be lying unprotected. He did not have to wonder for long. Before a minute had passed, he made out the huge body of the tiger trotting steadily towards him. Its eyes shone a brilliant green in the light from the signal lamp. Flight was useless, for in the dark, the tiger would be more sure-footed than Baldev and would soon be upon him from behind. Baldev stood with his back to the signal post, motionless, staring at the great brute moving rapidly towards him. The tiger, used to the ways of men, for it had been preying on them for years, came on fearlessly, and with a quick run and a snarl struck out with its right paw, expecting to bowl over this puny man who dared stand in the way.

Baldev, however, was ready. With a marvellously agile leap he avoided the paw and brought his axe down on the animal's shoulder. The tiger gave a roar and attempted to close in. Again Baldev drove his axe with true aim; but, to his horror, the beast swerved, and the axe caught the tiger on the shoulder, almost severing the leg. To make matters worse, the axe remained stuck in the bone, and Baldev was left without a weapon.

The tiger, roaring with pain, now sprang upon Baldev, bringing him down and then tearing at his broken body. It was all over in a few minutes. Baldev was conscious only of a searing pain down his back, and then there was blackness and the night closed in on him forever.

The tiger drew off and sat down licking his wounded leg, roaring every now and then with agony. He did not notice the faint rumble that shook the earth, followed by the distant puffing of an engine steadily climbing. The overland mail was approaching. Through the trees beyond the cutting, as the train advanced, the glow of the furnace could be seen; and showers of sparks fell like Diwali lights over the forest. As the train entered the cutting, the engine whistled once, loud and piercingly.

The tiger raised his head, then slowly got to his feet. He found himself trapped like the man. Flight along the cutting was impossible. He entered the tunnel, running as fast as his wounded leg would carry him. And then, with a roar and a shower of sparks, the train entered the yawning tunnel. The noise in the confined space was deafening; but, when the train came out into the open, on the other side, silence returned once more to the forest and the tunnel.

At the next station, the driver slowed down and stopped his train to water the engine. He got down to stretch his legs and decided to examine the head-lamps. He received the surprise of his life; for, just above the cowcatcher lay the major portion of the tiger, cut in half by the engine.

There was considerable excitement and conjecture at the station, but back at the cutting there was no sound except for the sobs of the boy as he sat beside the body of his father. He sat there a long time, unafraid of the darkness, guarding the body from jackals and hyenas, until the first faint light of dawn brought with it the arrival of the relief watchman.

Tembu and his sister and mother were plunged in grief for two whole days; but life had to go on, and a living had to be made, and all the responsibility now fell on Tembu. Three nights later, he was at the cutting, lighting the signal lamp for the overland mail.

He sat down in the darkness to wait for the train, and sang softly to himself. There was nothing to be afraid of—his father had killed the tiger, the forest gods were pleased; and besides, he had the axe with him, his father's axe, and he knew how to use it.

2. Should Mobile Phones Be Allowed In Schools?

Mobile phones today are much more than just communication devices. They provide access to countless educational resources and applications that can aid learning. Students can conveniently access ebooks, educational videos and many more educational resources. And also, it is always great fun for youngsters to use new electronic gadgets. The most common among them is the mobile phone. Some decades ago, it was hard to imagine contacting another person while one was walking on the road, shopping in the market, doing exercise in a gymnasium, travelling in a bus, car, train, etc. But with the help of mobile phones, this has become a common sight. About ten years back, the prices of mobile phones were so high that middle class people could not even think of owning them. But today, they have become cheap and affordable. Now mobile phones are being used by everyone from a corporate honcho to a vegetable vendor or a house helper, for that matter. In many families, each member has a personal mobile phone.

Even school-going children are using them. But, this widespread usage of mobile phones by school-going children is a matter of concern for some people.

In India, some state governments took a major step and put a ban on the use of mobile phones in schools and colleges. It was felt by them that the use of mobile phones led to certain very undesirable activities that could have serious socio-psychological consequences. Today, whether mobile phones should be allowed in schools or not has become a moot topic.

Generally, parents are much concerned about the safety and security of their children. They feel that they should, if they can, be in constant touch with their children to be assured of their general well-being, instead of seething with anxiety, and mobile phones prove to be the best means to serve this purpose.

It is true that mobile phones are a great communication and safety tool. Students can summon help if they happen to be stranded or facing any emergency. Especially the girl students, when equipped with a mobile phone, stand a better chance of safety. However, mobile phones, particularly the smart phones loaded with numerous enabling features and applications, are prone to abuse by immature adolescents and many negative side-effects have come to the fore so far.

There have been instances where mobile phones were used to cheat in the examinations. Students have been caught playing funny ringtones to distract the class and even engaging in clicking pictures and playing games while the class was on. Youngsters communicate all kinds of emotions using text

messages, and the result is a serious distortion of language. Students get so used to writing in short forms that they are not able to spell even simple words correctly, when required.

Mobile phones have reportedly been used for defaming, creating pornographic content, or organising criminal activities. Built-in digital cameras facilitate the misdeed, adding a new dimension to the problem. There are cases of students using a mobile phone camera to take picture of classmates in personal situations, such as in the toilet, and distributing these pictures instantly via MMS to settle a score. When traditional bullying occurs in a school, teachers are often able to control it, but cyber bullying is difficult to detect or control. Giving mobile phones with such advanced features to youngsters can be very detrimental to the moral fabric of the society.

Misuse of mobile phones not only tends to degrade children morally and psychologically but also causes a number of physical problems. Newspapers are full of reports on disorders and dysfunctions that may be caused by mobile phone abuse. Excessive use of mobile phones may affect the sense of hearing. Doctors have come across a number of youngsters with RSI (Repetitive Stress Injury). Studies have found that text messaging regularly, over a long period of time, could cause repetition strain which may lead to both short and long term injuries to the brain.

In spite of having such negative outcomes of cell phone use in school, we cannot overlook the concern of parents for the security and safety of their children. Their worry and concern can be justified in the light of the reports of abduction, molestation and other security lapses. But the extent to which children misuse mobile phones, outstrips any safety consideration. A balanced approach is, therefore, needed. As classrooms are meant for study, there is no logic for allowing phones in classrooms. The senior students, if allowed to carry mobile phones, must keep their cell phones switched off during classes. Hence, a partial ban would be the right course.

Vocabulary

1. Gadgets — small mechanical devices or tools
2. Decades — period of ten years
3. Honcho — a person in charge
4. Consequences — something that happens as a result of a particular action
5. Moot — debatable
6. Summon — call
7. Instances — examples

8. Distract — to draw somebody's attention away from something
9. Distortion — to change something so that it is no longer true
10. Detrimental — harmful
11. Abduction — to take somebody away illegally, kidnapping

2. Grammar Page

Unit
23

I will and I'm going to

A

Future actions

Compare **will** and **(be) going to**:

Sarah is talking to Helen:

Let's have a party.



SARAH

That's a great idea.
We'll invite lots of people.



HELEN

will (We'll invite ...)

We use **will** (We'll invite ...) to announce a new decision. The party is a new idea.



Later that day, Helen meets Max:

Sarah and I have decided to have a party.
We're going to invite lots of people.



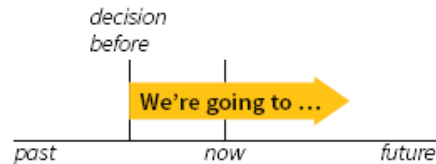
HELEN



MAX

(be) going to (We're going to invite ...)

We use **(be) going to** when we have *already decided* to do something. Helen had already decided to invite lots of people *before* she spoke to Max.



Compare:

- 'Gary has been trying to contact you.' 'Has he? OK, I'll **call** him.'
- 'Gary has been trying to contact you.' 'Yes, I know. I'm **going to call** him.'
- 'Anna is in hospital.' 'Really? I didn't know. I'll **go** and visit her.'
- 'Anna is in hospital.' 'Yes, I know. I'm **going to visit** her this evening.'

B

Future happenings and situations (predicting the future)

We use both **will** and **going to** for future happenings and situations. So you can say:

- I think the weather **will be** nice later. *or*
I think the weather **is going to be** nice later.
- Those shoes are well-made. They'**ll last** a long time. *or*
Those shoes are well-made. They'**re going to last** a long time.

When we say something **is going to** happen, we believe this because of the situation *now*. What is happening *now* shows that something **is going to** happen in the future. For example:

- Look at those black clouds. It's **going to rain**. (*not* it will rain)
(we can see that it **is going to rain** – the black clouds are in the sky *now*)

Compare:

- We'**re going to be** late. The meeting starts in five minutes and it takes 15 minutes to get there.
(it is clear *now* that we don't have enough time to get there)
- Jane **will be** late for the meeting. She's always late.
(I believe this because I know what Jane is like)