



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G25

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1. Dara Shikoh's Durbar

Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son, was endowed with many apparent and inherent qualities. Seeing his intelligence and innovative thinking Shah Jahan had practically handed over the management of the realm to him. Unlike other princes, who were employed as rulers in the border provinces of the empire, Dara Shikoh stayed at the capital and carried out his duties with the help of his advisors. He was trained rigorously to make a worthy, experienced ruler but it is regrettable that neither the country nor the community benefitted much from it. Historians believe that if Dara Shikoh had become the emperor in place of Aurangzeb, he would have contributed much more to the glory of the empire. This opinion is debatable, because usually people speak highly of those who are already dead. But it is not too difficult to see that this carries some element of truth too.

Prince Dara Shikoh was a follower of Akbar. He was called Akbar the Second for good reason, because there were many common elements in their respective outlooks. They also adopted similar strategies to manifest their ideas into reality. With his foresighted vision, he could understand that the Mughal rule in India could not be consolidated unless there was an increased mutual and harmonious give-and-take between the Hindus and the Muslims. He knew very well that brute force alone cannot make a lasting impact. To unify an empire, it was necessary that the rulers must win the hearts and minds of the people through universally acknowledged principles and people-friendly laws. This was more important than building stone castles. He believed that rulers should place more faith in strengthening the love of the people than merely fortifying the army. Dara Shikoh had begun to work on these principles. He had written a remarkable book where he propounded the thesis that the consolidation of Muslims depended on the goodwill and friendship of the Hindus. In his eyes, personalities like Baba Kabirdas and Guru Nanak had great importance, because while other prophets accentuated differences and divisions among different groups of people, these gurus spread the message of peace and friendship.

In those days, the communities of Hindus and Muslims were like two infants. Dara Shikoh thought that both these infants should be brought up with great care and affection. For the unity of the nation, Dara Shikoh followed the same policy as Akbar did. That is, these groups were not to be treated as the conquerors and the conquered, the rulers and the vanquished. Rather, every effort ought to be made for the meeting of their hearts. They should meet more frequently, and there should be marriage alliances between them. They should not be merely Hindus or Muslims but Indians in the true sense of the term. There should be no difference between them. He was in fact even more advanced in his thinking than Akbar had been. He had endowed Hindu rajas with honourable titles, had lifted the jeziya tax which the Hindu subjects had to pay. He believed that the custom of getting married to the girls of Hindu royal families was inadequate. According to him, the Mughals should do more to establish and sustain healthy marital relations with them. He knew it very well that the Hindus considered it humiliating to have their daughters married outside the religion, while the Muslims didn't allow their own daughters to be married to the Hindus. True give-and-take could happen only when there was no difference between boys and girls. He felt strongly about it and was waiting for an opportunity to put this custom into practice.

Prince Dara Shikoh was not only a great patriot, he was a man of great learning too. He knew all the established Indian languages, including the beautiful Sanskrit which he loved. He spent hours sitting near the fountain reading the philosophies of Patanjali or Gautama; reflecting deeply upon these treatises, he often felt overwhelmed and wept. Apart from Asian languages, he had command over several European languages. He was conversant with Latin, Greek and Aramaic. He was also not totally unfamiliar with the emerging languages like French, English and German. He could understand ordinary conversations in them and could convey his own thoughts in short sentences. He was truly a multi-faceted genius endowed with the talents to rule a vast empire.

Dara Shikoh did not commit the same mistake as Akbar did. Among Akbar's advisors were either Hindus or Muslims. One inevitable consequence of this was that the two groups were always in a tug of war. Only an emperor like Akbar, endowed with great poise and balance in his temperament, could

control them. It was obvious that their advice was always coloured by their ideology. Members of the two communities advised the emperor according to their ideological and communal leanings. This fear made Prince Dara Shikoh seek advice from Europeans, as they would be free of such communal prejudices. And so he first sought information from each one of his courtiers, and then sought suggestions from his European advisors before arriving at a final decision.

One afternoon, Prince Dara Shikoh was seated in his Diwan-e Khaas on an ornate throne in the centre. Surrounding him in the court, seated according to their position in the administrative hierarchy, were his advisors dressed in formal attire. The prince's face indicated deep reflection. He had a Farman in his hand. He would look at it frequently with anxious eyes and ponder long and hard over it. On his right was a gem-studded chair, on which sat Henry Buzet. He was the prince's favourite advisor, whose opinion carried much weight. Next to Henry Buzet was Maulbecker, seated on another gem-studded chair. And on the left of the throne was seated Dr François Bernier, a French traveller, lost in thought, while next to him an ambassador from Portugal, Padre Jozret, sat very still. The whole court was steeped in an astounding silence.

The prince finally said, 'Gentlemen! Perhaps you have heard the news about the failure of the expedition to Kandahar.'

This brief statement took the colour off the faces of those present. Everyone was dumbstruck and no one uttered a word for many minutes. Finally Henry Buzet said, 'We are deeply grieved to hear this. We are great admirers of the empire.' Then Padre Jozret said, 'But I can't understand why the expedition failed. The trainers of the canon-wielding army were mostly Europeans, who had the blessings of Lord Christ on them. Their failure cannot be explained.' Saying this, he took out a small image of Christ from his locket and kissed it reverentially.

Now it was the turn of Dr Bernier. He cast a glance at his audience and said, 'Dear Sirs, to tell you the truth, I had my doubts about the success of this expedition from the very beginning. Prince Mohiuddin was not competent enough to lead the charge. Not because he is less experienced, but precisely because he has been unable to suppress his prejudices. I'm sure the reason for this failure was Raja Jagat Singh's parting of ways.'

There was silence for several minutes. Finally, the prince broke the silence by stating, 'Dear Sirs, I don't wish to argue about the true reason for the failure of the expedition. Such an investigation is not possible. You know very well that conducting such an investigation will go against reason and prudence.'

The prince uttered these words haltingly. It seemed as though he was anguished by the thoughts that exercised his mind. His heart was plagued by contradictory impulses. The prince finished his statement and looked at the courtiers meaningfully. What he couldn't say in words was conveyed by his eyes. Padre Jozret replied thus, 'Your majesty, I beg your pardon. This slave holds the view that we should analyse the causes of failure from a certain vantage point. However undesirable it might be, knowing the reasons will help avoid such failures in future. Failures give us an opportunity to correct our mistakes. From this angle, I feel that successes are not as important as failures. Undoubtedly, there cannot be a better teacher of worldly affairs than failures.'

Saying this, the padre threw a proud glance at his audience. It was as though he had done something extraordinary. Of course, it required courage to disagree with the prince. Everyone liked his proposal. The prince agreed with them and said, 'Padre Sahib, whatever you say is correct. There's no doubt that I was in the wrong, but you must have understood from my tone that I often have to commit such errors. I do not have any objection in investigating the causes of the failure of this expedition, but . . . sometimes ignoring a fact becomes more prudent and desirable. This is particularly so when the reputation of a member of the royal family is involved. At this moment, we only want to decide whether it will be better to retreat from Kandahar. So far we have sent two expeditions to Kandahar, but both of them have met with

failure. You are not unaware what a drain these expeditions are on the royal exchequers.'

His European advisors were lost in thought. The issue was extraordinarily grave and its solution required careful reflection. They pondered over this matter for fifteen to twenty minutes, after which the debate began.

Henry Buzet asked, 'Since when has Kandahar been under the Mughal suzerainty?'

Dr Bernier replied, 'From the times of Emperor Babur.'

'And the Mughals couldn't consolidate their power there even after such a long time?'

'The reason is that after Emperor Babur, other emperors became so occupied with the affairs of statecraft in India that they couldn't pay adequate attention to Kandahar. That is why the bond between the two countries became slack.

'In short, you mean to say that Kandahar was not considered as profitable as any other Indian province, to give it adequate attention. If they had done so, the situation in Kandahar would not have got out of hand.

'Indeed, the Mughal emperors spent most of their time in subjugating Hindu kings and settling disputes between different provinces. The previous emperor had certainly wanted to send an expedition to Kandahar but had to give up the idea because of many hurdles. It can't be said with certainty why the Mughal emperors remained indifferent to Kandahar. The distance could be one reason; fear of failure could be another, a third reason could be the lack of adequate resources.'

2. Panic in a Tunnel

Rishi and his family were travelling by the newly constructed parallel underground metro along the Konkan railway line. A part of the Konkan railway route, consists of the Karbude Tunnel which is the second longest railway tunnel in India, along the Konkan Coast near Ratnagiri. It extends up to 6.5 kilometres and falls between Ukshi and Bhoke stations.

We were eager to experience the journey through the tunnel. Unfortunately, the power failed midway, complete darkness set in, and the train came to an abrupt halt. There was panic, people were trying, in vain, to open the automatic doors.

There was mayhem everywhere. Parents tried to pacify children by shining the flashlights of their handsets. We were yearning desperately for the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

All the passengers folded their hands in prayer. Suddenly from nowhere, an old man knocked at the door of our compartment, it opened and he got in. Miraculously, the lights came on, and the train began moving. Everyone began looking around for him to thank him for being their saviour. He was not to be seen anywhere. We were in a state of wonder. Did we actually see the good Lord, our Saviour?

3. Grammar Page

Unit
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when I do and when I've done if and when

A Study this example:

Amy is on a train. She's calling a friend.

I'll call you again later when I arrive.



'I'll call you again later when I arrive' is a sentence with two parts:

the main part: I'll call you again later
and **when** ...: when I arrive

The time is *future* ('later'), but Amy says:

... **when I arrive** (*not* when I will arrive)

We say

when I do something (*not* will do)

when something **happens** (*not* will happen)

Some more examples:

- We'll go out **when it stops** raining. (*not* when it will stop)
- When you are** here again, you must come and see us. (*not* When you will be)
- Don't forget to lock the door **when you go** out. (*not* will go)

The same thing happens after **while** / **before** / **after** / **as soon as** / **until**:

- What are you going to do **while** I'm away? (*not* while I will be)
- Before** you go, there's something I want to ask you.
- Wait here **until** I come back or ... **till** I come back.

B You can also use the *present perfect* (**have done**) after **when** / **after** / **until** / **as soon as**:

- Can I have the newspaper **when you've finished** with it?
- Don't say anything while Ian is here. Wait **until he has gone**.

We use the present perfect to show that one thing is complete *before* the other. The two things do *not* happen together:

- When I've phoned** Kate, we can go out.
(= first I'll phone Kate and *after that* we can go out)

Do not use the present perfect if the two things happen together:

- When I phone** Kate, I'll ask her about the party. (*not* when I've phoned)

It is often possible to use either the present simple or the present perfect:

- I'll come **as soon as I finish**. or I'll come **as soon as I've finished**.
- You'll feel better **after you have** something to eat. or You'll feel better **after you've had** something to eat.

C **if and when**

After **if**, we normally use the present (**if I do** / **if I see** etc.) for the future:

- I'll be angry **if it happens** again. (*not* if it will happen)
- Hurry up! **if we don't** hurry, we'll be late.

We use **if** (*not* when) for things that will *possibly* happen (or not happen):

- if** it is raining this evening, I won't go out. (*not* when it is raining)
- Don't worry **if** I'm late tonight. (*not* when I'm late)
- if** they don't come soon, I'm not going to wait for them.

We use **when** for things which are *sure* to happen. Compare:

- I might go out later. (*it's possible*) **if** I go out, I'll get some bread.
- I'm going out later. (*for sure*) **when** I go out, I'll get some bread.