



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G26

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1. Dara Shikoh's Durbar – Part 2

Maulbecker said, 'But there are other problems at hand at this moment; the complications of the Deccan have reached a state of immensely difficult resolution, and needless to say that conquering the Deccan is far more important than Kandahar. The distance between India and Kandahar has not reduced even a bit, and the fear of failure looms more than ever because now the ruler of Iran is fully committed towards helping Kandahar.'

Padre Jozret added, 'Well said, but now the current Indian emperor won't let distance or the fear of failure keep him from executing his plans. Earlier, the Indian empire was in its nascent state. Now its splendour knows no bounds. In these times, Lord Christ has bestowed his blessings upon it. He has placed the crown of glory and magnificence on the proud countenance of the Quranic Empire.'

A smile lighted upon Prince Dara Shikoh's lips when he heard such a powerful plea.

Dr. Bernier, who was thoughtful for a couple of minutes, spoke out, 'Dear Sirs! It is necessary for the continuance of the empire that it strikes terror in the enemy's mind. Any reduction of its impact in the eyes of its foes would be fatal. Once its dread settles in the hearts of the adversaries, the empire will be unrivalled, unless internal strife was to lead to its destruction. The Deccan problem is getting more convoluted. The Marathas are bent upon causing riots and discord, and the Jats are also rising in revolt. Hence this moment is very delicate and dangerous for the empire. At such a delicate juncture, ignoring Kandahar will magnify these discordant tones. Had the mighty emperor not granted asylum to Alidah Khan, there would have been no harm in parting ways with this country. But now that the whole world is aware that the emperor of India is bent upon fulfilling his wish to conquer Kandahar, it will be very dangerous to stray from that path. Now India should come to a decision that though we may die fighting, we will not relinquish Kandahar. If we give up Kandahar at this juncture, the Marathas will undoubtedly think that by continuously creating troubles, they too will succeed in becoming independent like Kandahar. The rulers of the Deccan will be able to estimate our power,

while the ruler of Iran, thinking that India is powerless, will reach Kabul via Kandahar; who knows he might even turn towards India, and then the Afghans of Kabul will not be prevented from launching a rebellion of their own. To conclude, it is very dangerous to turn away from the expedition to Kandahar right now.'

Dr. Bernier's counsel and rousing speech had an instant effect on those present in the court. The prince was incensed. He had not spared a thought yet to the possible consequences and obstacles arising out of the distancing from Kandahar. He looked distressed when he heard the numerous dire outcomes listed by Dr. Bernier. Now Henry Buzet's speech brought some comfort to his heart. 'Dear Sirs!' he began 'Dr. Bernier Sahib is mistaken on one account. Perhaps he is not aware that the empire doesn't merely require an army to consolidate its kingdom. The empires which only rely on weapons and artillery do not reign for long; instead, they require moral authority to ensure that no ill- feelings take root in the hearts of the subjects. Every utterance and action of the empire must be borne in the interest of truth. No one should view the empire as covetous or ambitious. As long as the rulers do not keep this highest standard of probity at the fore, its grandeur will not be installed in the hearts of others, nor would the adversarial forces take note of its prowess. I agree that the empire should be spirited and gutsy, so as to foster courage in its subjects. They should learn qualities of superiority and pride from their rulers, but it should be noted that the superiority should not be artificial. After all, false pride is not unlike unchecked greed.'

'Let me explain with the help of an illustration what I mean by valid versus invalid pride. These days, European armies are building ships with great aplomb. The numbers of the army are increasing day by day. They travel to far-off countries on these ships. Alliances are formed with nations. Mercantile relations or settlements are put in place, and this I consider matters of legitimate pride. But when a weak nation is conquered using force and martial prowess, I call this false pride because it hides behind injustice and conspiracy. Now you can yourselves decide whether the Indian empire sending an expedition to Kandahar is legitimate or invalid. I say it is useless, invalid through and through, and it is thoroughly regrettable that the subjects also feel the same, though their voices do not reach your ears. Please notice how the development of this thought is so dangerous, because when other empires note that India is bent upon

victory, or conquering the world, they will also increase their armies to safeguard themselves. It will not be surprising that together they join forces to invade India in turn! *Jahanpanah!* Dr. Bernier Sahib has said that India should decide upon fighting until death instead of giving up Kandahar. These are the very words he uttered, and with your permission, let me add a few more words, that we shall not relinquish Kandahar. The whole world may turn topsy-turvy, we shall not give up Kandahar, never mind if every other empire gets united! We will be wiped off, turned into dust, but we cannot let go of Kandahar. Dear Sirs, please pay attention, this suggestion amounts to endangering the entire great empire for the sake of one small state! I don't suggest that the danger is imminent, but even if the danger was looming overhead, then in Dr. Sahib's words, India should have fought till death. This counsel is not a patriotic one; a patriotic one suggests that the snake should die and the club shouldn't break either. Let's imagine that you sent another powerful expedition to Kandahar. Now imagine that the matter gathered weight and the ruler of Iran joined in with his full force, and then you needed further reinforcements and thus eight months passed. In the ninth month, when it starts to snow, you would be compelled to move away and this opportunity would be fully exploited by the enemy. Now answer this: in such circumstances, what is achieved except humiliation and failure? You would say that we shall invade Kandahar with full force and will be set to rule it within eight months. You went there employing your full force and here, if the Deccan, the Marathas and the Jats—all of whom keep track of our most miniscule transfers and movements—grab the opportunity, finding the coast clear, what will the empire do? Who will fight them—the walls of the forts, the writers, or the merchants! *Jahanpanah!* I do agree with Dr. Sahib that the empire should try to establish its supremacy. Indeed! If it happens so, it would be beneficial. But is it advisable to endanger the entire kingdom for this purpose? If you can establish your clout without causing any damage to the real strength of the empire, then do it by all means, but I shall repeat not once but a hundred times that if doing this makes the country weak, then one must not even harbour the thought! The failure of two expeditions proves that conquering Kandahar is no mean task.

Despite bloodshed lasting half a century, the Deccan is now getting ready for a challenge. It is a clear evidence of their internal strength. I can say this without a trace of doubt that this empire cannot confront both these foes at the same time. It is impossible to win Kandahar *and* the Deccan. We can take one—Kandahar or the Deccan. My advice is to give priority to the Deccan over Kandahar.

'Jahanpanah! In my view, every famous empire of the world declined when it tried to spread itself far beyond its means. Their false pride, lust and greed knew no bounds. Iran, Greece, Italy, Rome—all have tried to spread themselves beyond their means at all times and seasons. They tried to forge their dominion over far-off nations with just martial warfare and the power of the sword, but to what end? In the endeavour to annex more and more nations, they lost their own power. In fact, they not only lost their authority, but also lost their armies and their names were erased from the face of the earth forever. Why should India commit this blunder? Why can't we learn from other kingdoms? The Indian nation is huge. Even if the population of India doubles in another twenty-five years, there will be no complaints for centuries. Conquering Kandahar will only lead to a doubled expenditure on war, because the mountainous tribes there will always keep the flame of enmity and discord alight, and to defeat such conflicts and rebellions, we would have to keep a strong army ready at all times. To my mind, invading and sending more expeditions to Kandahar just as a show of strength of the empire is not advisable.'

Dr. Bernier was drowned in a sea of thoughts and ideas. He had noted a few counterarguments to refute the objections of Henry Buzet, though his face showed no excitement or impatience. All eyes were focused on him, awaiting his response. Finally after many minutes of contemplation, he rose and spoke, 'Dear Sirs! I regret to say that at this moment I have to express some bitter truths, but since truths are rarely sweet, I hope you all will forgive me. My learned connoisseur Henry Buzet Sahib has said that the stability of a regime is dependent on the ethical principles and not on the innate and natural reasons. This begs the question why there are battles for supremacy among powers and why the empire maintains such a huge army of infantry and cavalry. Let them be banished to oblivion! Ask some revered and holy old men to stand in the open and deliver sermons to the people; and the rest will be taken care of in the name of Allah.'

2. Urbanisation

If you live in a rapidly urbanising India, especially in the North, and feel that things are getting from bad to worse as far as civility, sensitivity and respect for the law are concerned, you are not alone.

I go out cycling almost every morning, at the crack of dawn. The total lawlessness that has come to grip society scares me. As early as 5 am, our cycling group notices people huddled around their cars, drinking outside eateries or liquor joints, fighting, arguing loudly, or simply passing lewd comments at the women riders in our group. The comments do not vary from a Mercedes or a Maruti Swift. They are uniformly distasteful. We often see police vehicles at these joints too, and they are certainly not there attending to emergency calls.

Several of you would remember the horrific accident that took place in Gurgaon. Forty-seven-year-old Avinash Shah, driving his small car with his wife and daughter was hit by a businessman test-driving a powerful new Audi. Avinash died instantly and his wife and daughter barely survived.

The 'gentleman' who rammed the big Audi into the small car is out on bail. According to eye-witnesses, soon after ramming into Avinash's car, this gentleman got out, made a few phone calls using his mobile, and got picked up by his own driver in his car and vanished. The police said they did not have his address for two days despite knowing that he was on a test drive and had deposited his driving licence at the car showroom before taking the car out. Two days later, this gentleman reappeared, with a lawyer in toe and surrendered, only to be bailed out in a jiffy.

Why is it that things are reaching such a pass? Sudden wealth, easy availability of 'good things' in life, a general feeling that money can buy anything, or what else? Is it just a North Indian phenomenon or nationwide? Why is it that uncouth, uncivil and insensitive behaviour is all pervasive? Why is society so willing to circumvent, indeed buy, law at will? Do you think the media is responsible for having abdicated its responsibilities by concentrating on flashy things alone while bypassing the real issues that would positively impact society?

Whatever the answer to those questions is, the solution lies with us alone. We need to stop accepting being pushed around. An individual cannot take on those who mock our law, but together we can do wonders. The choice is ours, whether to stare down the barrel of the gun as lawlessness gains ground faster than these guys drive their fast cars, or start coming together to challenge the

perpetrators of these crimes. I have often heard the argument that our economy is growing rapidly and this is just a brief side effect of such growth. I would rather have a slower growth rate of economy, but a saner, civilised society to live in.

It has been observed that urbanisation has promoted insensitivity, arrogance and selfishness. The narrator feels disturbed to see the youngsters consuming alcohol and passing indecent comments. The horrible accident that took place in Gurgaon is the pinnacle of absurdity and injustice. Avinash Shah was killed by a businessman test-driving a new car. His wife and daughter barely survived. The culprit was not arrested. He was arrested after two days so that the law can be manipulated. Who is responsible for such mishaps? Media, police or; the system? The reply may be any. But we need to fight against such malpractices together. The slower growth rate of an economy is preferred to an insane and uncivilised society.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
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can, could and (be) able to

A We use **can** to say that something is possible or allowed, or that somebody has the ability to do something. We use **can + infinitive (can do / can see etc.)**:

- We **can see** the lake from our hotel.
- 'I don't have a pen.' 'You **can use** mine.'
- Can you speak** any foreign languages?
- I **can come** and see you tomorrow if you like.
- The word 'dream' **can be** a noun or a verb.

The negative is **can't (= cannot)**:

- I'm afraid I **can't come** to the party on Friday.

B You can say that somebody **is able to** do something, but **can** is more usual:

- We **are able to see** the lake from our hotel.

But **can** has only two forms: **can (present)** and **could (past)**. So sometimes it is necessary to use **(be) able to**. Compare:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can't sleep. | <input type="checkbox"/> I haven't been able to sleep recently. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tom can come tomorrow. | <input type="checkbox"/> Tom might be able to come tomorrow. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maria can speak French, Spanish and English. | <input type="checkbox"/> Applicants for the job must be able to speak two foreign languages. |

C Sometimes **could** is the past of **can**. We use **could** especially with:

see hear smell taste feel remember understand

- We had a lovely room in the hotel. We **could see** the lake.
- As soon as I walked into the room, I **could smell** gas.
- I was sitting at the back of the theatre and **couldn't hear** very well.

We also use **could** to say that somebody had the ability to do something, or was allowed to do something:

- My grandfather **could speak** five languages.
- We were totally free. We **could do** what we wanted. (= we were allowed to do)

D **could** and **was able to**

We use **could** for *general* ability and with **see, hear** etc. :

- My grandfather **could speak** five languages.
- I **could see** them, but not very clearly.

But to say that somebody succeeded in doing something in a specific situation, we normally use **was/were able to** or **managed to (not could)**:

- The fire spread quickly, but everybody **was able to escape**. (*not could escape*)
- I didn't know where Max was, but I **managed to find** him in the end. (*not could find*)

Compare:

- Jack was an excellent tennis player when he was younger. He **could beat** anybody. (= he was good enough to beat anybody, he had the ability)

but Jack and Andy played a match yesterday. Andy played well, but Jack **managed to beat** him. (= he succeeded in beating him this time)

The negative **couldn't (could not)** is possible in all situations:

- My grandfather **couldn't swim**.
- I looked for Max everywhere, but I **couldn't find** him.
- Andy played well, but he **couldn't beat** Jack.