



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F34

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1. This is My Homeland

By Premchand

I returned to my dear homeland after sixty long years. I was a young man when I had left this land, and my fate took me Westwards. Young blood ran in my veins, and my heart was filled with great hopes and eagerness. The cruel hands of an oppressor or the mighty arms of law could not separate me from my beloved India. They could have forced me to do anything else but not leave my homeland. Yet my high hopes and overriding ambitions had pushed me into exile.

I ran a successful business in America and made a great fortune. I led a good life there. Luckily, my wife was exceedingly beautiful and her beauty was famed all over America. She had no thoughts in her heart apart from me. I adored her and she meant everything to me. I had five sons, all of them good looking, strong and obedient. They helped me spread my business. Their innocent kids were sitting on my lap when I decided to have a last glimpse of my homeland. I left behind all my riches, a faithful wife, worthy sons, my adorable grandchildren, just so I could have a last glimpse of Mother India. I have grown very old now.

Ten years more and I will be a hundred.

If at all I have any wish left unfulfilled, it is to be worthy of the sacred soil of my land. It is not today that this has created a tumult in my heart; it was alive even when my wife had won my heart with her sweet words and charming ways. When my young sons greeted me early in the mornings affectionately, I felt a stab in my heart. It reminded me that I was in exile, that this was not my homeland and that I was an alien here.

Here I was blessed with wealth, a wife, sons and immense riches but I don't know why I was always reminded of the dilapidated hut in my own land, my inheritance of a few bighas of land and my childhood friends. I remembered them all even in the midst of happiness and contentment here. How deeply I wished I was in my homeland!

When I disembarked from the ship in Bombay, I ran into men in black coats and trousers and sailors speaking broken English. I saw English shops, trams and motor cars, rubber wheels and cheroot-smoking men. Then I saw the railway station and took the train to my dear village that was situated amidst lush green valleys. My eyes filled with tears. I wept bitterly, for this was not

the beloved homeland for which I was pining in my exile. This was surely some other place. It could have been America or England, but it was certainly not my dear India.

The train ambled through forests, hills, rivers and fields to reach near my village that had once been a paradise with all its foliage and flowers, rivers and streams. When I got down from the train my heart leapt at the thought of seeing my house and meeting my childhood friends. It did not strike me then that I was well over eighty years old. My pace quickened as I drew closer to my village. I felt a kind of indescribable joy in my heart. Every object seemed wondrous to me. Ah! Here was the stream where we swam and bathed our horses. Now, barbed wire fences were erected on both sides and a bungalow stood there. There were a couple of Englishmen there with guns in their hands. Bathing and swimming in the stream were strictly prohibited now. As I entered the village, my eyes were looking for my childhood companions. Alas, they were all long dead. My dilapidated hut, where I grew up and enjoyed the carefree days of childhood, was now reduced to a heap of dust. The place was not entirely uninhabited. I saw many people passing by and talking of court and the collector's office, police and police station. Worry was writ large on their faces. All of them looked exhausted by the daily affairs of the world. No one looked as healthy, cheerful or ruddy as my childhood friends. A ramshackle school stood in place of the *akhada*, the wrestling arena, and the foundation stone for which I had laid with my own hands. Some sickly, emaciated urchins dozed there. No, this can't be my land. I haven't come all the way to see this. This is surely some other place; not my dear homeland.

I ran towards the banyan tree in the shade of which I had spent many springs of my childhood. This is where I played in my childhood and took refuge in my adolescence. The sight of the banyan tree moved me deeply. My heart was overwhelmed by a thousand memories, wistful and sad, and I just sat there shedding tears for hours. We used to climb to the top of the banyan tree, swing from its branches. Its fruits seemed to us sweeter than the tastiest sweets of the world.

While I was growing up here, my friends were inseparable from me. They played with me, fought with me and then we made up. Where have they all gone? Ah! Am I left all alone, a forsaken traveller? Don't I have a single friend left?

Now a police station stood near the banyan tree and someone in a red

turban was sitting in a chair. Near him stood a number of men in red turbans with hands folded. A half-naked and starving man, who had just been whipped, was sobbing nearby. Again, I felt that this could not be my land. This might be Europe or America, but not my adorable India.

Disappointed, I went towards the *chaupal*, the village common, where my father used to smoke the hookah with the elders of the village who would often burst into peals of laughter. Here, we used to jump and somersault on a sack cloth mat. Sometimes, the panchayat was held here with my father as the mediator in village disputes. Next to the chaupal was a cattle shed where all the cows of the village were tethered, and we gambolled with the calves. How awful! This chaupal had simply disappeared from the scene. Now a vaccination centre and a post office stood there. Close by, there had been a pressing machine where sugar cane juice was extracted during the winter. The aroma of jaggery filled my mind. My friends and I would wait for lumps of sugar cane for hours and watch wonderstruck as the labourers deftly chopped the sugar cane. Many a times, I had drunk fresh sugar cane juice mixed with boiled milk here. Women and children from the nearby houses came to fill their jars with this juice. How sad that the old *kolhus* were still there, stuck in the ground, but now a jute processing machine had been set up in its place. A cigarette shop and a paan shop stood on the opposite side. These heart-rending scenes were too painful for me. I turned away from them and appealed to a person who looked like a gentleman. 'Baba! I'm a traveller from a foreign land. Could you help me find a place to spend the night?' The man looked me up and down and said, 'Move on.' I tried again and received the same answer. When I made this request for the fifth time to a gentleman, he put a handful of gram on my palm. The gram fell through my fingers and a flood of tears streamed down my eyes.

'Oh no! This could not be my dear homeland, which once was so hospitable and kind to travellers. This is surely some other place.'

I picked up a packet of cigarettes and sat at a lonely spot to reminisce about the bygone days. I was suddenly reminded of the dharamshala that was being built when I had left for foreign shores. I ran towards it, thinking that I would be able to spend the night there. I indeed found the dharamshala but sadly, it had no rooms for poor travellers. It had now become an abode of debauchery and drunkenness. Seeing this, I sighed involuntarily.

I screamed out, 'No, a thousand times, *no!* This can't be my homeland, my beloved India. This is definitely some other place. This could be Europe or

America, but certainly it's not my India.'

The night was dark. Jackals and dogs were making a racket. I sat mournfully by the stream, pondering my future course of action—should I go back to my children in America and die there? Even though I lived in exile for many years, I knew that I had a motherland, the memory of which was alive in my heart. Now I felt like an exile without a homeland. In this state of mind, I sat still for a long while with my head on my knees. I was sleepless through the night. The clock struck three and I heard someone singing. My spirits revived. This was the anthem of my homeland, my motherland's music. I stood up and saw several old and decrepit women wrapped in white dhotis going for a bath, carrying tumblers in their hands. They were singing:

Prabhu mere awgun chit na dharo

God! Forgive my faults.

It is difficult to describe the impact that these heart-touching words had on me. I had heard the most lyrical and melodious voices of female singers in America. I had listened to love songs there, far sweeter than the sweetest of songs . . . the lisp of children and the chirping of birds . . . But I had never experienced before the delight and bliss that the old women's song gave me. I, too, began to sing along with them:

Prabhu mere awagun, Prabhu mere awagun chit na dharo . . .

I was in a state of trance when I heard some people talking amongst themselves. Then I saw some people holding brass *kamandals* and chanting:

Shiv Shiv, Har Har, Gange Gange, Narayan Narayan

My heart leapt. This is the chant of my dearly loved homeland. My heart brimmed with pleasure. I joined these men. After trekking through several miles of hilly path we reached the bank of a river, known to the Hindus as sacred.

Every Hindu would love to take a dip in the river and die on its banks. The sacred Ganga flowed six or seven miles away from my village. There was a time when I used to ride a horse and go for a darshan of mother Ganga early in the mornings. I had always cherished the desire to pay my respects to this river. I saw thousands of men taking a dip in its chilly water. Some people were sitting on the sand and chanting the *Gayatri Mantra* while some others

were performing the havan ceremony or applying tika on their forehead. Still others were reciting mantras from the Vedas in mellifluous voices.

My heart leapt once again and I spoke out loudly, 'Yes, this indeed is my land, my dear motherland, my India. I had cherished the desire to visit it, now I long to be interred in its soil.'

I was in a state of supreme ecstasy. I took off my old jacket and trousers and threw myself into the lap of mother Ganga like a child who runs to his mother's arms in the evening, having spent the entire day in the company of strangers.

Yes, I'm in my own motherland now. This is my beloved homeland. The people around are my brothers and the Ganga is my mother.

I've now had a small hut erected on the banks of the Ganga. I have no other work now except chanting the name of Lord Rama. I bathe in the holy Ganga every morning and evening. I wish to breathe my last here and my bones immersed in its waters.

My sons and my wife keep asking me to return to America. I cannot do so now leaving behind this dear land and the banks of mother Ganga. I would like my ashes to be surrendered to her. No worldly temptations or desire can now lure me away from here, my dear homeland. The only desire I have now is to die in my own land.

-The End-

2. Grammar Page - Tenses

The Present Perfect Continuous Tense:

We use the present perfect continuous tense to show that something started in the past and has continued up until now.

1. Manreet has been teaching in this school for three years.
2. They have been talking for the last hour.
3. What have you been doing for the last 30 minutes?
4. Anil has been working on this project since May.
5. We have been waiting here for over two hours.
6. She has been chatting on the phone for the last half hour.
7. The police have been searching for the kidnapper for two weeks.
8. How long has the bus been stopping at the bus park?
9. Why has Nina not been attending the class for the last two weeks?
10. I have been watching this movie for two hours.
11. Shinda has been asking for you.
12. Inder has been dancing all day.
13. Joti and Shaji have been planning to go to Hyderabad next week.
14. Have you been looking for this bag?
15. I have not been working out for two months now.
16. Cherina has been working on this essay for a week.
17. Hasn't he been trying to get into Jawaharlal Nehru University? Is there any progress?
18. Manu has been thinking of sending in his resignation letter.