



# Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H22

**Adapted and modified by  
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## **Contents**

### **Adventures of Feluda:**

- 1. Trouble in Gangtok — One.**
- 2. Grammar Page: Adjective + Prepositions (4).**

# Trouble in Gangtok

By Satyajit

## One

Even a little while ago it had been possible to stare out of the window and look at the yellow earth, criss-crossed with rivers that looked like silk ribbons and sweet little villages with tiny little houses in them. But now grey puffs of cloud had blocked out that scene totally. So I turned away from the window and began looking at my co-passengers in the plane.

Next to me sat Feluda, immersed in a book on space travel. He always read a lot, but I had never seen him read two books—one straight after the other—that were written on the same subject. Only yesterday, back at home, he had been reading something about the Takla Makan desert. Before that, he had finished a book on international cuisine, and another of short stories. It was imperative, he'd always maintained, for a detective to gain as much general knowledge as possible. Who knew what might come in handy one day?

There were two men sitting diagonally opposite me. One of them was barely visible. All I could see was his right hand and a portion of his blue trousers. He was beating one of his fingers on his knee. Perhaps he was singing quietly. The other gentleman sitting closer to us had a bright and polished look about him. His greying hair suggested he might be in his mid-forties, but apart from that he seemed pretty well-preserved. He was reading the Statesman with great concentration. Feluda might have been able to guess a lot of things about the man, but I couldn't think of anything at all although I tried very hard.

'What are you gaping at?' Feluda asked under his breath, thereby startling me considerably. Then he cast a sidelong glance at the man and said, 'He's not as flabby as he might have been. After all, he does eat a lot, doesn't he?'

Yes, indeed. Now I remembered having seen him ask the air hostess for two cups of tea in the past hour, with which he had eaten half-a-dozen biscuits.

'What else can you tell me about him?' I asked curiously. 'He's used to travelling by air.'

'How do you know that?'

'Our plane had slipped into an air pocket a few minutes ago, remember?' 'Oh yes. I felt so strange! My stomach began to churn.'

‘Yes, and it wasn’t just you. Many other people around us had grown restless, but that gentleman didn’t even lift his eyes from his paper.’

‘Anything else?’

‘His hair at the back is tousled.’

‘So?’

‘He has not once leant back in his seat in the plane. He’s sat up straight throughout, either reading or having tea. So obviously at Dum Dum—’

‘Oh, I get it! He must have had some time to spare at Dum Dum airport, at least time enough to sit back against a sofa and relax for a while. That’s how his hair got tousled.’

‘Very good. Now you tell me which part of India he comes from.’

‘That’s very difficult, Feluda. He’s wearing a suit and he’s reading an English newspaper. He could be a Bengali, a Punjabi, a Gujarati or a Maharashtrian, anything!’

Feluda clicked his tongue disapprovingly. ‘You’ll never learn to observe properly, will you?’

‘What’s he got on his right hand?’

‘A news—no, no, I see what you mean. He’s wearing a ring.’ ‘And what does the ring say?’

I had to screw up my eyes to peer closely. Then I saw that in the middle of the golden ring was inscribed a single word: ‘Ma’. The man had to be a Bengali.

I wanted to ask Feluda about other passengers, but at this moment there was an announcement to say that we were about to reach Bagdogra. ‘Please fasten your seat-belts and observe the no-smoking sign.’

We were on our way to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. We might have gone to Darjeeling again, where we had been twice already to spend our summer holidays. But at the last minute Feluda suggested a visit to Gangtok, which sounded quite interesting. Baba had to go away to Bangalore on tour, so he couldn’t come with us. ‘You and Felu could go on your own,’ Baba told me. ‘I’m sure Felu could take a couple of weeks off. Don’t waste your holiday in the sweltering heat of Calcutta.’

Feluda had suggested Gangtok possibly because he had recently read a lot about Tibet (I, too, had read a travelogue by Sven Hedin). Sikkim had a strong Tibetan influence. The King of Sikkim was a Tibetan, Tibetan monks were often seen in the gumphas in Sikkim, many Tibetan refugees lived in Sikkimese villages. Besides, many aspects of Tibetan culture—their music, dances, costumes and food—were all in evidence in Sikkim. I jumped at the chance to go to Gangtok. But then, I would have gone anywhere on earth, quite happily, if I could be with Feluda.

Our plane landed at Bagdogra at 7.30 a.m. Baba had arranged a jeep to meet us here. But before climbing into it, we went to the restaurant at the airport to have breakfast. It would take us at least six hours to reach Gangtok. If the roads were bad, it might take even longer. However, since it was only mid-April, hopefully heavy rains hadn't yet started. So the roads ought to be in good shape.

I had finished an omelette and just started on a fish-fry, when I saw the same gentleman from the plane rise from the next table and walk over to ours, grinning broadly. 'Are you Kang, or Dang, or Gang?' he asked, wiping his mouth with a handkerchief.

I stared, holding a piece of fish-fry a few inches from my mouth. What on earth did this man mean?

What language was he speaking in? Or was it some sort of a code?

But Feluda smiled in return and replied immediately, 'We're Gang.'

'Oh good. Do you have a jeep? I mean, if you do, can I come with you? I'll pay my share, naturally.'

'You're welcome,' said Feluda, and it finally dawned on me that Kang meant Kalimpong, Dang was Darjeeling, and Gang was Gangtok. I found myself laughing, too.

'Thank you,' said the man. 'My name is Sasadhar Bose.'

'Pleased to meet you, Mr Bose. I am Pradosh Mitter and this is my cousin, Tapesh.' 'Hello, Tapesh. Are you both here on holiday?'

'Yes.'

'I love Gangtok. Have you been there before?'

‘No.’

‘Where will you be staying?’

‘We’re booked somewhere, I think the hotel is called Snow View,’ Feluda replied, signalling at the waiter for our bill, and offering a Charminar to Mr Bose. Then he lit one himself.

‘I know Gangtok very well,’ Mr Bose told us. ‘In fact, I’ve travelled all over Sikkim—Lachen, Lachung, Namche, Nathula, just name it! It’s really beautiful. The scenery is just out of this world, and it’s all so peaceful. There are mountains and rivers and flowers—you get orchids here, you know— and bright sunshine and rain and mist . . . nature in all her glory. The only thing that stops this place from being a complete paradise is its roads. You see, some of the mountains here are still growing. I mean, they are still relatively young, and therefore restless. You know what youngsters are like, don’t you . . . ha ha ha!’

‘You mean these mountains cause landslides?’

‘Yes, and it can really be a nuisance. Halfway through your journey you may suddenly find the road completely blocked. That then means blasting your way through rocks, rebuilding the road, clearing up the mess . . . endless problems. But the army here is always on the alert and it’s very efficient. Besides, it hasn’t yet started to rain, so I don’t think we’ll have any problem today. Anyway, I’ll be very glad of your company. I hate travelling alone.’

‘Are you here on holiday as well?’

‘Oh no,’ Mr Bose laughed, ‘I am here on business. But my job is rather a peculiar one. I have to look for aromatic plants.’

‘Do you run a perfumery?’

‘Yes, that’s right. Mine’s a chemical firm. Among other things, we extract essences from plants. Some of the plants we need grow in Sikkim. I’ve come to collect them. My business partner is already here. He arrived a week ago. He’s got a degree in Botany and knows about plants. I was supposed to travel with him, but a nephew’s wedding came up. So I had to go to Ghatshila to attend it. I returned to Calcutta only last night.’

Feluda paid the bill. We picked up our luggage and began walking towards our jeep with Mr Bose. ‘Where are you based?’ Feluda asked.

'Bombay. This company is now twenty years old. I joined it seven years ago. S. S. Chemicals.

Shivkumar Shelvankar. The company is in his name.'

We set off in a few minutes. From Bagdogra we had to go to Siliguri, to find Sewak Road. This road wound its way through the hills, going up and down. It would finally take us to a place called Rongpo, where West Bengal ended, and the border of Sikkim began.

On our way to Rongpo, we had to cross a huge bridge over the river Tista. On the other side was a market called Tista Bazaar. We stopped here for a rest. By this time the sun had come up, and we were all feeling a little hot.

'Would you like a Coca-Cola?' asked Mr Bose. Feluda and I both said yes, and got out of the jeep. Two years ago, said Mr Bose, this whole area had been wiped out in a devastating flood. All the buildings and other structures, including the bridge, were new.

By the time I finished my own bottle of Coca-Cola, Mr Bose had emptied two. When we went to return the bottles, we noticed a jeep parked near the stall selling cold drinks. A few men were standing near it, talking excitedly. The jeep had come from the other side, and was probably going to Siliguri. Suddenly, all of us caught the word 'accident', and went across to ask them what had happened. What they told us was this: it had rained heavily in Gangtok a week ago. Although there had been 'no major landslide, somehow a heavy-boulder had rolled off a mountain and fallen on a passing jeep, killing its passenger. The jeep had fallen into a ravine, five hundred feet below. It was totally destroyed. None of these men knew who the dead man was.

'Fate,' said Feluda. 'What else can you call this? The man was destined to die, or else why should just a single boulder slip off a mountain and land on his jeep? Such accidents are extremely rare.'

'One chance in a million,' said Mr Bose. As we got back into the jeep, he added, 'Keep an eye on the mountains, sir. One can't be too careful.' However, the scenery became so incredibly beautiful soon after we crossed Tista that I forgot all about the accident. There was a brief shower as we were passing through Rongpo. As we climbed up to three thousand feet, a mist rose from the valley just below, making us shiver in the cold. We stopped shortly to pull

out our woollens from our suitcase. I saw Mr Bose dig out a blue pullover from an Air India bag and slip it on.

Slowly, through the mist, I began to notice vague outlines of houses among the hills. Most houses appeared to be Chinese in style. 'Here we are,' said Mr Bose. 'It took us less than five hours. We're very lucky.'

The city of Gangtok lay before us. Our jeep made its way carefully through its streets, past a military camp, sweet little houses with wooden balconies and flower-pots, groups of men and women in colourful clothes, and finally drew up before Snow View Hotel. The people in the streets, I knew, were not from Sikkim alone. Many of them were from Nepal, Bhutan or Tibet.

Mr Bose said he was staying at the dak bungalow. 'I'll make my own way there, don't worry,' he said. 'Thank you so much. No doubt we shall meet again. In a small place like this, it is virtually impossible to avoid bumping into one another every day.'

'Well, since we don't know anyone in Gangtok except you, I don't think we'd find that a problem. If you don't mind, I'll visit your dak bungalow this evening,' said Feluda.

'Very well. I'll look forward to it. Goodbye.'

With a wave of his hand, Mr Bose disappeared into the mist.



## 2. Grammar Page

### Adjective + Prepositions (4)

adjective + at / to / from / in / on / with / for

good / bad / brilliant / better / hopeless etc. **AT...**

I'm not very **good at** repairing things. He's **hopeless at** football.

married / engaged **TO ...**

Banta is married to an American girl. Neelu was **engaged to** some guy in the army. Your handwriting is **similar to** mine.

different **FROM** or different **TO ...**

The film was **different from** what I'd expected. The film was **different to** what I'd expected.

interested **IN ...**

Are you **interested in** art? He is very **involved in** volunteer work. She was highly **skilled in** physics and chemistry.

keen **ON ...**

We stayed at home. Reeta wasn't **keen on** going out. I don't want to be **dependent on** anybody.

crowded **WITH** (people etc.)

The streets were **crowded with** tourists. I wasn't **satisfied with** the customer service at the bank.

responsible **FOR...**

Who was **responsible for** all that noise last night? The Italian city of Florence is **famous for** its art treasures. Playing memory games is **excellent for** improving your brain function.