



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

D48

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu

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1. Emperor of Aumvati

By Sudha Murty

Sumant was a bright young man who lived in Vidishanagara in ancient India. He had been orphaned when he was very young and had had to fend for himself from a young age. As a result, he was smart and cunning.

One day, he felt very hungry. He went to a sweet shop just in time to hear the shopkeeper tell his son, 'Child, I am very sleepy. Look after the shop while I take a nap. Call me only if something important comes up.' Sumant immediately smelt an opportunity. He hung around outside the shop for some time. Then he went in and announced loudly, 'I am your father's best friend's son. Give me the best sweets in the shop.' The boy, who had never seen Sumant earlier, was suspicious. 'What is your name?' he asked. 'My name is Fly,' said Sumant, helping himself to some delicious jalebis. As he sat eating, the boy ran to his father. 'Father! Fly is eating the sweets. What should I do?'

The sweet-shop owner was in deep sleep. He mumbled, 'How much can a fly eat? Let him be. Now go away.' So saying, he turned over and started snoring loudly. Sumant, meanwhile, had finished the jalebis and had pulled a pile of gulab jamuns towards him. The poor boy could do nothing but watch him demolish them all. Finally Sumant took two boxes of the best sweets in the shop and left without paying a single paisa.

He walked straight to Kanaka Chandra's shop. Kanaka Chandra was the biggest miser of Vidishanagara. Sumant presented the boxes to him and said, 'Here is a present for one of Vidishanagara's greatest men. I am only a poor man. I have nothing more to give you.'

Kanaka Chandra peeped into the boxes and was delighted to see them chock-full of delicious mouth-watering sweets. 'Sir,' said Sumant humbly, 'I have only one request. Can I have these two boxes back, please?' Kanaka was only interested in the sweets, so he said graciously, 'Of course, of course. Please go inside the house and tell my wife to give you two vessels to put these sweets in. Then you can take the empty boxes.'

Sumant walked into the kitchen, where the wife was cooking lunch. 'Your husband has asked you to give the two gold coins,' he announced to the astonished woman. 'What! Are you out of your mind? My husband would

never say such a thing!' said the woman. So Sumant called out at the top of his voice, 'Your wife is refusing to give me what you had asked for.'

Kanaka was in the middle of negotiating a handsome deal with a merchant. Irritated by this disturbance, he called out to his wife, 'Just give him what he wants.' So Sumant walked out, whistling loudly, with the two coins in his pocket. Of course he had left the boxes and the sweets for Kanaka and his wife.

Now he walked to the outskirts of the city and buried one coin under a bush. Then he sat down next to it, a stick in hand.

As soon as he heard the sound of a horse approaching, he started waving his stick around and pretending to examine the nearby bushes. The soldier sitting on the horse watched Sumant behaving in this odd fashion. When he could no longer hold back his curiosity he asked, 'What are you doing?' Sumant, pretending to be very busy, answered, 'My magic cane leads me every day to a hidden treasure buried under a shrub. Today it led me here and I am looking for the treasure.' Saying this, he started digging under the shrub where he had just hidden the coin and pretended to find it with a triumphant yell. The soldier could not believe his eyes and got down from his horse. He examined the coin closely. Then he said, 'Give me your magic stick. You can take my horse in return. It's the best you can get in this kingdom. And that is a fair deal.' Sumant pretended to hesitate. 'No, no. This stick is my life. I cannot part with it.' After much cajoling and threatening, the soldier managed to take the stick from Sumant, who in turn rode off with the magnificent horse.

He rode all day, till he reached a rich farmer's farm. He knocked on the door and said, 'I am a weary traveller. Can you give me and my horse shelter for the night?' The farmer saw the beautiful horse and agreed to shelter them for the night. The horse was given a place in the stables and Sumant a room to sleep in.

The next morning, Sumant woke up early and asked the farmer, 'Can you give me a sieve?' The farmer, though astonished at this strange request, gave him one. Then he told his servant to follow Sumant. Sumant first went to the stable, where he collected some fresh dung from his horse, then he went to his room, and pretending great secrecy, started sieving the dung. He knew all the time that the servant was watching him, and making sure the man could see what he was doing, Sumant produced the other gold coin from the dung.

The servant excitedly reported everything to his master. The farmer immediately made his way to Sumant, who was grooming his horse, as if getting ready to leave.

'Tell me about this horse,' he demanded. 'Tell me only the truth, mind you.' Sumant, pretending to be scared, stammered, 'T-this h-horse has m-magical powers. Once a d-day it produces a g-gold c-coin in its d-dung.' The farmer, who was very greedy, said, 'Give me the horse. I will give you a hundred gold coins in return.' Sumant pretended to hesitate for a while and then, making a show of great reluctance, handed over the reins of the horse to the farmer and trotted off on foot, a bag full of coins jingling in his pocket.

It was evening by the time he reached the next village, and he took shelter in the house of an old couple. When he went out into the nearby forest in the morning, he spotted an old woman sitting outside a small hut. Her young granddaughter was washing some clothes nearby. He told the old woman, 'Do as I say, and you'll be rich.' So saying, he went back to the couple with a bottle full of a green liquid in his hand. 'What is this?' asked the old man, when he saw Sumant. 'It is a medicine to make you young. I discovered it during my wanderings in the Himalayas,' answered Sumant. The man asked, 'Do you have any proof of its effects?'

'I'll show the effects to you only if you pay me in gold,' said the wily Sumant, and having struck the deal, led them to the old woman's hut in the forest. The old woman was sweeping her courtyard. Sumant pointed her out to the couple and said, 'I'll give her my medicine. Just wait and see what happens.' Then he marched up to her and, slipping some money into her hand along with the medicine, said, 'Drink this. The woman had the medicine and disappeared into the house. Immediately her granddaughter emerged wearing identical clothes and started sweeping the courtyard, as if nothing had happened.

The couple was impressed. 'Give us the medicine,' they clamoured. Sumant took a hundred coins from the man and gave him some herbs to make him unconscious. Then he told the wife, 'He is sleeping. He is so old, it will be some time before the medicine takes effect. He will be a young man when he wakes up. I will give you your dose tomorrow.' But the old woman would not agree. 'Give me my dose now. If my husband wakes up and sees his wife is an old woman, he will start looking for someone younger.' Sumant, pretending to be very reluctant, gave her a spoonful of the herbs which made her unconscious—only after she had paid him another hundred coins, of course.

Thus many days passed and Sumant made a living by cheating ordinary folk with his smooth talk and tall promises.

The king of Vidishanagara heard about him and ordered his arrest. Sumant walked into the king's trap one day and was produced before him. 'You are a cheat,' said the king. He ordered his soldiers. 'Put him in a bag and when the sun sets, throw him down the mountain cliff.' Sumant into a bag and left him under a tree, waiting for the sun to set. Inside the bag, Sumant's clever brain was ticking away. Suddenly he heard what sounded like the footsteps of an elephant nearby. He started shouting, 'Help! I don't want to be king. Help, someone, please!'

The man riding the elephant heard these strange words coming out of the bag and opened it. Sumant jumped out and said, 'Thank you, sir. Our king has no heir. But this morning, his elephant touched me with its trunk and he decided I should be the king after him. When I said I was just an ordinary man, he tied me in this sack and left me here till I agreed.'

The stranger was tempted. 'I will take your place. You take my elephant,' he said. Sumant happily agreed and rode off on elephant back just before the soldiers arrived. They picked up the bag and threw it down the cliff.

The next day, Sumant came back into the city, seated on the elephant. He marched up to the king's court and in answer to everyone's surprised questions said, 'When I was thrown off the cliff I landed in a beautiful kingdom called Alakavati in the valley. Its streets are paved with gold and everyone has masses of gold and silver scattered all over their houses. But they have no king, and when I landed among them, after being thrown from the mountain, they decided to make me the king. Today is my coronation. Please come with me to Alakavati.'

The king heard the story in silence. Then he said, 'Sumant, you have told many stories in your life. But this one I will not believe. I know that valley well. There is no Alakavati there. Since you are so clever, why don't you use your wits for the betterment of this kingdom and not just for yourself?'

Sumant was silent. No one had praised him or offered him a better life ever before. He accepted the king's offer. He went on to study under the best pundits of the kingdom and one day was known all over the country as the wisest of the king's ministers.

2. Two Thieves

Saranga was a clever minister in the court of King Devaprasanna. Saranga was such a good adviser that none of the neighbouring kings could ever succeed in attacking the kingdom. Naturally, they were very jealous of Devaprasanna and his brilliant minister.

Saranga was also a great patron of the arts. Many artists, writers and thinkers gathered in his house. He gave them shelter and the means to work on their art. One day, two strangers appeared at his doorstep. 'We have been wandering in many places. We heard you are kind to talented people, so we have come to ask you for shelter,' they said.

'What are your talents?' asked Saranga.

'I can bark like a dog,' said one. 'My imitation is so good that even real dogs get confused. And my friend here can crow better than a cock.'

'What have you been doing all this while with these talents?' asked Saranga, amazed.

Now the two friends looked embarrassed. Finally they said, 'We will be honest. We were thieves and used these talents to confuse the owners of the houses we robbed. Now we have decided to mend our ways and do some honest work. That is why we have come to you.'

Saranga decided to let the two stay in his house, even though his other guests protested. He felt they were truly repentant and should be given a chance. So the two stayed with him and became a part of his group.

Now, Himabindu was a wicked old king of a neighbouring kingdom. Several times he had wanted to invade Devaprasanna's kingdom but had failed miserably because Saranga would always foil his plans. He wanted Saranga to become his minister, then he could easily conquer Devaprasanna's kingdom.

One day, he sent a letter to Devaprasanna: 'I want to honour your minister Saranga. I want him to come to my kingdom and give my ministers some lessons in statecraft. Please send Saranga to my kingdom and allow him to stay here for a few days.'

Saranga was suspicious when the king informed him about the letter. But Devaprasanna wanted to be on good terms with his neighbours, so he said, 'Why don't you go? If you suspect something is wrong, just come back.'

Saranga now had no choice but to go to Himabindu's court. He took his group of artists and writers with him, as well as the two ex-thieves.

Himabindu welcomed Saranga with great respect. Saranga too had come with many gifts for the king, among them a beautiful, rare shawl. Finally, the king sat down to talk to him. 'Saranga, I know you are the brain behind Devaprasanna's success as a king. You have served him for many years. Why don't you work for me now? I will make you richer than ever. You will be my chief minister.'

Saranga, who had suspected all along that something like this would happen, had his answer ready. 'My family has served King Devaprasanna for many generations. I cannot leave his service. I am sorry.' As soon as the words had left his mouth, Himabindu flew into a rage and ordered that Saranga be thrown into prison.

When his friends, who were waiting in another room, heard about this, they were shocked. How could they save their beloved Saranga now? They came up with many plans, none of which could be carried out by a bunch of artists. Finally, one said, 'Queen Sanmohini is the king's favourite queen. She is beautiful and intelligent. She loves rare art objects, especially shawls.'

'But we came with only one shawl, and Saranga Presented it to the king. If only we could get it back . . .

The two former thieves listened to the discussion in silence. After some time, they walked out quietly. They went to the royal chamber where the gifts were piled up. A ferocious-looking guard stood at the door and frowned at them. Quickly, they slipped behind a tree, and one of them began barking like a dog. The guard was startled. How could a dog enter the royal palace? Surely, if the king heard the noise it was making, the guard would be out of a job!

He rushed off to find the dog while the other friend went inside and found the shawl. Then they quickly made their way back to the group of friends, who were still deep in discussion. 'Here is the shawl,' they said, giving it to the oldest and wisest person in the group. 'Now you can present it to the queen.'

The man took the shawl to the queen. She was delighted with the shawl. 'What a beautiful design! Such soft wool! How much do you want for this?'

Saranga's friend bowed low and said, 'Your Highness, I don't want any money for this. But please request the king to free our dear friend Saranga.'

The queen agreed. That night, when Himabindu came to have dinner with his favourite queen, she served him the most delicious dishes. He was delighted, and after tucking into a huge dinner, leaned back happily and asked, 'What is it, my dear? You look worried. Is there anything you desire?'

Quickly the queen said, 'I have heard that a clever minister called Saranga has been imprisoned by you. He is said to be a wise man. Should we treat him like this? Why don't you free him? Just for me...'

The king, already sleepy after his enormous dinner, said, 'Yes, yes,' and ordered Saranga's release.

Saranga was greeted by his friends with great delight. Then someone said, 'We should leave the kingdom before the king discovers we stole his shawl and gave it to the queen.'

Everyone agreed and, quietly, the group packed their bags and left the palace. But there was a problem when they reached the city walls. The huge gates were locked! The soldier guarding them said, 'That is the law. I cannot open them till it is dawn.'

Saranga and his friends sat down to wait. As the hours passed, they grew more and more nervous. What if the king got to know about the theft before they could escape? Finally, one of the two former thieves got up. He climbed a tree near the soldiers guarding the gates and crowed loudly like a cock. The soldiers jumped up and, thinking it was morning already, rushed to open the gates. Saranga and his group were ready. They left as quickly as they could and reached their own kingdom by early morning.

In the meantime, King Himabindu woke up after a long refreshing sleep and saw his queen dressed in a beautiful sari with an even more exquisite shawl around her shoulders. But why did the shawl look familiar?

When he quizzed her, she told him the story of the man who gave it to her as a present and asked for Saranga's release in return.

The king now ordered his men to bring him the shawl presented by Saranga, but it was nowhere to be found! Finally he understood what had happened. He could only smile at the cleverness of Saranga and his friends. It was better to have such clever people as friends than enemies, he decided, and from that day the two kingdoms became friendly neighbours.

3. Grammar page

Regular and Irregular Verbs

The simple past tense of most verbs ends in **-ed**. These verbs are called **regular verbs**.

Spelling File

Base Form

aim
bake
open
happen
pull
push
scold
shout
visit
wait
walk
work

Simple Past

aimed
baked
opened
happened
pulled
pushed
scolded
shouted
visited
waited
walked
worked



Who **closed** all the windows?



It **snowed** last night.

Mom **opened** the door for us.

Sally **petted** the dog.

That event **happened** long ago.

We **visited** our uncle last week.

They **walked** to school together yesterday.

They **worked** until twelve last night.

Dad **tried** to fix the light.

William Tell **aimed** at the apple on his son's head.