



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F44

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## 1. Selfless Benefactor

By Premchand

### 1

It was the month of Savaan. Revati Rani coloured her feet with henna, did her hair and then went up to her mother-in-law saying, 'Ammaji, today I'll also go to see the fair.'

Revati was Pandit Chintamani's wife. When the panditji realized that he was not profiting from worshipping Goddess Saraswati he transferred his devotion to Goddess Lakshmi. He lent money to people but, unlike other moneylenders, thought it improper, except in special circumstances, to charge more than twenty-five per cent interest.

Revati's mother-in-law was sitting on the charpoy with a baby in her arms.

She replied, 'If you get drenched in the rain, the child will catch a cold.'

'No, Amma, I won't take long. I'll return soon.'

Revati had two children—the first was a boy and the second a girl. The girl was still a babe in her arms; the boy, Hiranman, was in his seventh year. Revati dressed the boy in his best clothes and, to protect him from the evil eye, dotted his forehead and cheeks with kajal. She gave him a colourful stick to beat dolls with and set off with her friends for the fair.

**Beating dolls:** *A custom at weddings in which the women of the bridegroom's party are playfully beaten with colourful sticks by women from the bride's side. This symbolizes the traditional tussle in a mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Here it refers to the same custom at a doll's wedding.*

A large number of women had gathered on the banks of the Kirat Sagar. The sky was overcast with clouds. These women, decked in their finery, were enjoying themselves on the lush green expanse of the bank when it started drizzling.

Many swings had been set up on the branches of trees. If some were swinging on them, others were singing songs in raga Malhar. Yet others were sitting near the water and playing with the waves. The cool and pleasant breeze, the

light drizzle, the green hills looking freshly bathed and the rippling waves charmed everyone.

It was the day that the dolls were leaving for their husbands' homes. They were decked in new clothes and jewels. Unmarried girls, with hennaed hands and feet, had come to bid them goodbye. They had decked them up in new clothes and jewels. They set the dolls afloat in the water and sang songs of Savaan. However, as soon as these dolls were out of the protective care of the girls who brought them up with love and affection, they were beaten with sticks.

Revati was witnessing this spectacle while Hiranman, standing on the steps of the lake along with other girls, was busy beating the dolls. The steps were covered with moss. Suddenly he slipped and fell into the water. Revati shrieked, ran to the spot and began beating her head. In a second a big crowd of men and women gathered there but no one thought of jumping into the water to save the child. Won't their carefully done-up hair become untidy or their freshly washed dhotis get wet? Many of the men harboured these manly thoughts! Ten minutes passed, but no one summoned the courage. The wretched Revati was totally distraught by now. Suddenly, a traveller on a horse appeared there. Seeing the crowd he got off the horse and asked one of the spectators, 'Why is there such a crowd?'

The man answered, 'A boy has drowned.'

'Where?'

'Over there, where the woman is weeping.'

The traveller took off his *mirzai*, tucked in his dhoti and jumped into the water. There was silence all around. People were wondering who this man was. The man dived in and surfaced with the boy's cap. He dived in a second time and found his stick. After the third dive, when he came to the surface, the boy was in his arms. The spectators broke out into loud applause. The mother ran and clasped the boy tightly in her arms. In the meantime, several friends of Chintamani arrived at the spot and tried to revive the boy. In half an hour the boy opened his eyes. People breathed a collected sigh of relief.

The doctor remarked, 'If the boy had stayed in the water for even two

more minutes, it would have been impossible to revive him.' But when people started looking for the unknown Samaritan, he was nowhere to be seen. Men were sent in all directions, the entire fair was combed, but he could not be found.

Twenty years passed. Pandit Chintamani's business had over the years flourished. Meanwhile, his mother had visited all the seven pilgrimage sites. A small gate was erected in the temple in her name. Revati had now become a mother-in-law. Hiranman now looked after the transactions and the accounts. He was a tall and hefty young man, of gentle temperament and full of courtesy. At times he would give away money to the needy without his father's knowledge. This infuriated Chintamani who warned Hiranman several times and even threatened to dismiss him from the job.

Once Hiranman had contributed fifty rupees for a Sanskrit school. Panditji was so furious that he didn't eat anything for two days. Such unpleasant occurrences took place almost every day. It is for these reasons that Hiranman didn't share a cordial relationship with his father. But in all these things, he always had the silent support of his mother. When the poor widows of the small town or those oppressed by the zamindars came to Revati and blessed Hiranman from the depths of their hearts, Revati felt that there was no woman in the world more fortunate than her, and there was no man more virtuous than her son.

She would often remember the day when Hiranman had almost drowned in the Kirat Sagar and the man who had saved the apple of her eye from drowning. The image of that man stood before her and she blessed him from her heart. She felt if she could just meet the man, she would fall at his feet. She was now convinced that he was not a man but a deity. She would sit on the same small charpoy on which her mother-in-law used to sit and feed both her grandsons.

It was Hiranman's twenty-seventh birthday. For Revati, it was the most auspicious day of the year. She would show utmost generosity on this day and this was the only extravagance in which Pandit Chintamani also participated. She would be the happiest that day and cry her heart out. Her heart would again bless the unknown Samaritan and her mind would fill with noble thoughts. 'It's because of him,' she thought, 'that I have lived to see this day and such happiness.'

One day Hiranman came to Revati and said, 'Ma, Sripur is going to be auctioned off. Shall I go and stake a bid?'

Revati asked, 'The entire village?'

Hiranman replied, 'Yes, the entire village. It's a good one—neither too large, nor too small. It is about twenty miles from here. The bidding has gone up to twenty thousand. It will end with another hundred or two.'

'Did you ask your father?'

'Who has the time to argue with him for two hours?'

Hiranman had now become the master of the house and Chintamani had hardly said in anything. That poor fellow now sat on a mattress, wearing his spectacles and coughing endlessly.

The following day, Sripur was auctioned off to Hiranman. From a moneylender, Hiranman became a zamindar. He left for the village with his accounts, clerk and two attendants. The people of Sripur came when they heard of his arrival. It was the first visit by the new zamindar. Preparations began in every home for making him a suitable *nazrana*.

On the fifth day of his journey, Hiranman entered the village in the evening. They put a tilak on his forehead with curd and rice. About three hundred of his tenants stood with folded hands before him till late in the night. In the morning, the manager introduced the tenants to the new zamindar. When they came before him, they laid at his feet offerings of a rupee or two, according to their abilities. By noon, about five-hundred rupees had piled up before the zamindar.

Hiranman tasted for the first time the joy of being a zamindar. He felt the intoxication of wealth and power. Of all addictions, there is none more deadly than wealth. When the line of tenants came to an end, he asked the manager, 'Is there anyone left?'

The manager replied, 'Yes, my lord, there's one left. Takht Singh.'  
'Why didn't he come?'

'He is somewhat eccentric.'

'I'll put an end to all his eccentricities. Send someone to fetch him.'

After a little while, an old man appeared leaning on his stick, touched his feet and squatted on the ground. He had not brought any offering. Seeing his audacity, Hiranman went into a rage. He thundered, 'It seems you haven't dealt with a zamindar before. You'll forget all your arrogance.'

Takht Singh looked closely at Hiranman and said, 'I have seen twenty zamindars come and go, but none threatened me like this.' Saying this, he picked up his stick and returned home.

His wife asked, 'Did you see the zamindar? What kind of man is he?'

Takht Singh replied, 'He is a nice man. I could recognize him.' 'Have you met him earlier?'

'I have known him for twenty years. Don't you remember the incident that occurred during the dolls' fair?'

After that day, Takht Singh never went to Hiranman again.

#### 4

Six months later Revati felt the urge to visit Sripur. She arrived there along with her daughter-in-law and children. All the women of the village came to see her. Takht Singh's aged wife was also with them. Revati was surprised by the way she talked and her decent ways. When she was leaving, Revati said to her, '*Thakurain*, do come and visit me sometime. I was very pleased to meet you.'

In this way, these two women established a bond. Meanwhile, Hiranman, at the instigation of his manager, was conspiring to dispossess Takht Singh of his land.

It was the night of the full moon in the month of Jaishtha. Preparations were afoot for Hiranman's birthday celebrations. Revati was sifting flour when the old *Thakurain* arrived. Revati smiled at her and said, '*Thakurain* you are invited to come here tomorrow.'



Thakurain replied, 'I will certainly come. Which anniversary is this?'  
'The twenty-ninth one.'

Thakurain said, 'God bless you. May you see many such birthdays.'

'Thakurain, thank you for your blessing. I've performed all kinds of rituals and now this day has dawned. He almost died when he was seven years old. We had gone to the dolls' fair and he had fallen into the water. A mahatma saved his life. Hiranman's life is this mahatma's gift. We searched for him everywhere, but in vain. On every birthday, I put away a hundred rupees in the mahatma's name. It has now become a little over two thousand. My son intends to build a temple in Sripur in his name. To tell you the truth, if I could set my eyes on him just once, I would feel that my life has attained its purpose. My longing would be fulfilled.'

When Revati stopped she saw tears streaming down the Thakurain's eyes.

On the following day, two events were taking place simultaneously—the celebration of Hiranman's birthday and the auctioning of Takht Singh's fields.

The Thakurain said, 'I'm going to Revati Rani to seek her mercy.'

'Not as long as I'm alive,' Takht Singh stopped her.

## 5

The month of Asarh came. The rain God was very generous. The peasants of Sripur started cultivating their fields. Takht Singh's eyes followed them wistfully.

Takht Singh had a cow. He grazed her all day long. This was the only support he had in his life. He eked out a living by selling milk and cow dung cakes. He had to starve at times but never approached Hiranman for help. Hiranman had tried to humiliate him before others, but the reverse had happened. His apparent victory was in fact his defeat. He could not bend the old man with his obdurate arrogance.

One day Revati said, 'Son, you've harassed a poor man. That's not good.'

Hiranman lost his temper and replied, 'He's not a poor man. I will smash his arrogance.'

Intoxicated by wealth, the zamindar was trying to smash something that did not exist. He was like an unthinking child fighting his own shadow.

## 6

Takht Singh somehow managed to survive for a year. The rainy season came once again. The thatched roof on his house was not repaired. It rained continuously for a couple of days and a part of his house caved in. The cow was tethered there and it died under the debris. Takht Singh was badly wounded. He began to run a fever from that day. There was no one to bring him medicine; his only means of livelihood was also lost. The ruthless calamity totally crushed him. His house was flooded with water. There was not a grain in the house. He was groaning in pain in the dark when Revati arrived there. Takht Singh opened his eyes and asked, 'Who is it?'

The Thakurain replied, 'It is Revati Rani.'

Takht Singh said, 'I thank my stars—you're so kind to me.'

Revati replied in an embarrassed tone, 'Thakurain, God knows I'm surprised by my son's behaviour. Tell me about your difficulties. You have fallen on such evil times and yet you didn't even inform me.'

Saying this, Revati placed a small pouch containing money before the Thakurain.

Hearing the jingle of money, Takht Singh got up and said, 'Lady, we don't hanker for money. Don't make us sin in my last days.'

The following day, Hiranman also appeared there along with his cronies. He smiled at the sight of the dilapidated house. 'In the end, I smashed his pride,' he thought to himself. He went inside the house and asked, 'Thakur, how are you now?'

The Thakur replied feebly, 'All's well, by God's grace. How did you happen to come here?'

Hiranman felt worsted once again. He had expected that Takht Singh would prostrate before him. But this desire of his remained unfulfilled. That night

the poor, independent and honest Takht Singh departed from this world.

## 7

The old Thakurain was left alone in the world. There was no one to share her grief or mourn her death. Poverty had sharpened the intensity of sorrow.

Material possessions may not compensate for the loss of a dear departed but they certainly can lessen the pain.

Worry for one's daily bread is a great curse. The Thakurain would now scour for cow dung in fields and pastures to make and sell cakes. It was a pitiable sight to see her going to the field with her walking stick and returning with a basket of cow dung on her head, panting for breath. Even Hiranman felt pity for her. One day, he had some wheat, pulses and rice sent to her. Revati herself carried the platters to her house. But the old woman said with tearful eyes, 'Revati, as long as I can see with my eyes and use my limbs, don't make me and my dead husband sinners.' After that day, Hiranman never dared to show sympathy to her.

One day Revati bought cow dung cakes from the Thakurain. The going rate was thirty cakes per paisa. Revati, however, wanted to take only twenty cakes from her. From that day, the Thakurain stopped selling cow dung cakes to her.

Such virtuous women were indeed rare in the world. The Thakurain knew that if she revealed but one secret, all her troubles would come to an end. But that would mean claiming reward for a good deed. As the proverb goes—do a good deed and forget about it. Probably it never occurred to the Thakurain that she had done Revati a favour.

This self-respecting and honourable woman lived for three years after her husband's death. She spent this period of her life in extreme distress. Sometimes she had to starve for days. Sometimes she could not find any cow dung, sometimes her cow dung cakes were stolen. It was all God's will—

some families have so much and no one to eat, while some others spend their lives begging and weeping.

The old woman bore all this but never sought any help.

## 8

It was HIRAMAN'S thirtieth birthday. One could hear the drum beats. On one side, puris were being fried in ghee, on the other, in oil. Those fried in ghee were for the fat and honourable Brahmins; those in oil were for the starving wretches.

Suddenly, a woman came to Revati and said, 'Something's wrong with the Thakurain. She has sent for you.'

Revati said in her heart, 'God, may this day pass without mishap. Let not the old woman die today.'

Thinking this, she didn't go to the old woman. When HIRAMAN saw that his mother was not willing to go, he went there himself. For the past few days he had felt pity for the woman. But Revati came to the door to restrain him from leaving. This was the kind-hearted, good tempered and decent Revati.

When HIRAMAN reached the Thakurain's house, he found it completely desolate. The Thakurain's face had gone pale and she was in the throes of death.

HIRAMAN said loudly, 'Thakurain, it's me—HIRAMAN.'

The Thakurain opened her eyes and beckoned him to come close. Then she said haltingly, 'In the basket near my head are the Thakur's ashes. There's also the sindoor I had worn on my wedding day. Please send both to Prayagraj.'

Saying this, she closed her eyes. Hiranman opened the basket to find both the objects kept neatly in it. There was also a ten-rupee note in an envelope. This was probably kept there to cover the expenses of the last rites.

At night, the Thakurain was released from her sufferings forever. That very night Revati had a dream—it was the Savaan fair, the sky was overcast, and she was on the bank of the Kirat Sagar. Right at that moment Hiranman slipped into the water. She began to cry and beat her chest. Suddenly, an old man jumped into the water and brought Hiranman back. Revati fell at his feet and said, 'Who are you?'

The man said, 'I live in Sripur. My name is Takht Singh.'

Sripur is still in Hiranman's possession. But now it has been transformed. From a distance one can see the golden orb at the top of the Shiva temple. This temple has been built at the very spot where Takht Singh lived. Right in front of it, there is a paved well and a dharamshala. Travellers stay there and remember Takht Singh. The Shiva temple and the dharamshala are named after him.

## 2. Grammar Page

### Present continuous/simple future/going to

⇒ We use 'going to' when we have the intention to do something before we speak or we have already made a decision before speaking.

I have won a lottery. I am going to buy a new TV.

We're not going to see my mother tomorrow.

When are you going to go on holiday?

⇒ We often use 'going to' to make a prediction about the future. Our prediction is based on evidence. We are saying what seems sure to happen. Here are some examples:

The sky is very black. It is going to rain.

It's 8.30! You're going to miss the train!

I crashed the company car. My boss isn't going to be very happy!

⇒ The present continuous is used for future arrangements and future certainties.

I've just finished making the travel arrangements! I'm meeting Aryan at the bus stop at five o'clock and we're leaving on the 5:30 bus.

I'm seeing the dentist tomorrow sharp at six. I have already made an appointment.

⇒ Simple future is used for promises, spontaneous decisions and future uncertainties.

I shall buy you a nice dress next month. It's my promise.

I think I'll go to Pokhara by bus.

Maybe they will arrive here tomorrow.



**Grammar Practice:** Supply the correct tense of the verbs given in the brackets.

- I will ask him about his plans when he ..... back. (come)
- I'll wait here until he ..... up. (wake)
- As soon as they ..... in, lock the door. (get)
- I'm going to clean the room after I ..... my bike. (wash)
- I'm sure he ..... here soon. (be)
- She wants to know when you ..... her books. (return)
- They ..... (bath), ..... (dress) and ..... (feed) the baby. Then it was sick!
- The film ..... (begin) before they ..... (arrive).
- When she ..... (arrive) at the airport, the plane ..... (go) so she ..... (have to) sleep in the departure lounge.
- Her hair ..... (grow) too long so the hairdresser ..... (have to) cut it.
- She ..... (be) a famous model but then she ..... (become) an actress.
- The musicians ..... (practise) the concert for 5 days before they ..... (be) ready to play.
- John and Jane ..... (not see) each other for years when they ..... (meet) by chance in the street.
- The patient ..... (be) ill for years before the doctors ..... (discover) the cure.
- We ..... in Delhi 5 months ago. (arrive)
- They ..... in Pokhara for five days now. (stay)
- We have ..... each other for ages. (not see)
- The tour group ..... (travel) different parts of India. They're in Dubai now.
- I ..... (work) in this school for 15 years. I know everyone.