



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F45

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## 1. A Well-bred Daughter

By Premchand

### 1

The descendant of the landed aristocracy, Thakur Beni Madhav Singh was the headman of Gauripur village. The village's memorial pond and temple were constructed for his affluent forefathers. During the days of his forefathers, as people say, there stood an elephant in front of their door, adding grandeur to the house. The years rolled by and the elephant was replaced by an old and decrepit buffalo. Though reduced to a skeleton, it evidently milked well, for there always stood people queuing up near her with big milking pails.

A substantial chunk of Beni Madhav Singh's property was swallowed up by litigations. And his yearly income was reduced to one thousand rupees. Thakur Sahib had two sons. Sri Kant Singh, the elder one, earned his bachelor's degree in arts after years of hard labour and burning the midnight oil. He had obtained employment in an office. Lal Bihari Singh, the younger son, was a strapping young man with a plump face and broad and muscular shoulders. He gulped down two seers of milk for breakfast. Sri Kant stood in stark contrast to Lal Bihari. He denied himself the pleasure of everything for his BA—two letters of the English alphabet which haunted him, depriving him of broad shoulders, tall stature and bright face. With the passage of time, this gentleman developed an interest in the study of medicine, with a special faith in and fondness for Ayurveda. He devoted his leisure time to it and a constant rhythmic and tuneful sound of the mortar and pestle floated out of his room. Notably, he had been in regular correspondence with the leading vaidyas of Lahore and Calcutta.

Though he had a BA degree in contemporary English education, he never looked at modern codes of ethics and the morals of the West in admiration. On the contrary, he spoke of them in a condemnatory tone. He was, therefore, held in high esteem by the villagers. Choosing to manifest his love for their traditions, he would, on the occasion of Dussehra, partake in the festivities and would play a role in the Ramlila where scenes from the Ramayana were enacted. It had become more possible for people to sustain their interest in this age-old tradition thanks to him, the stalwart champion of their deeply embedded customs and rituals.

He was also an avowed advocate of the extended family system. Since the modern daughters-in-law had already begun to recoil at the thought of the extended family system, he was pained to learn of their beliefs. He thought it to be damaging to both the community and the nation. For his conservative outlook and old-fashioned views, he could scarcely gain acceptance in the circles of the young daughters-in-law of the village. Some of them regarded him to be their bitter enemy. Even his wife would argue with him quite frequently, telling him that she did not agree with his views on the extended family system. She had tiffs with him not because she disliked her husband's mother, father and brother but because she believed if people failed to pull together notwithstanding the sincere spirit of sharing joys and happiness alike, it was much better for them to live separately rather than living together distastefully with mounting frustrations.

Anandi, Sri Kant's wife, came from noble stock. Her father, Bhup Singh, was the owner of a small estate, with an enormous mansion, an elephant, three horses, five uniformed guards, fowls, hounds, hawks, beds and carpets, ornamental glassware, and honorary magistrateship, besides a heavy debt. Genial and generous by disposition, he was also bold and brave. But, as luck would have it, he had no son. He was blessed with seven daughters. All of them were alive and well. It was a matter of humiliation for him, as also quite demeaning to his status to give his daughters in marriage to those people who were somehow just equal to him in social stature or even much higher. He celebrated the marriages of his first three daughters with great pomp and show. But when he discovered that the marriages caused him to run into huge debts of fifteen to twenty thousand rupees he thought to pare down the expenses for the rest of the marriages. Anandi was his fourth daughter, the most beautiful and virtuous of all. She was a great favourite of her father. Perhaps, the attractive child naturally becomes the centre of attraction even for their parents. Bhup Singh was, however, not able to decide as to whom Anandi should be given in marriage. Honestly, he neither wanted to run into a deeper debt nor did he wish his daughter to feel wretched, unlucky and belittled. One day Sri Kant went to Bhup Singh for a donation to some cause. Bhup Singh was highly impressed with his polished manners. And so, after matching the zodiac signs under which they were born, a suitable date was fixed, and in time the marriage was celebrated with traditional pomp and ceremony.

When Anandi joined Sri Kant's family as a daughter-in-law, she was shocked to find her new house was entirely different from her maternal house. She was brought up in a house with horses, elephants and so on. Far from a pair of horses and elephants, there wasn't even a two-wheeled oxen-drawn cart in her husband's house. She was in the habit of taking a stroll in her garden every morning and evening. Let alone a garden, the house had no windows, no carpets and no pictures on the walls. It was a simple house, typical of the countryside.

She never used the silk slippers that she had brought from her maternal house. They sat gathering fine dust in the box. However, she adjusted herself marvellously well with the new life, without even tending to display feelings that she once lived in the lap of luxury.

## 2

One day, in the afternoon, Lal Bihari Singh came home with the meat of two wild ducks and asked his *bhabhi* to cook the meat. 'I am extremely hungry,' he added. Anandi, who had been waiting for them to eat their lunch, readily went to the kitchen to cook the meat. She discovered, to her dismay, that the available ghee was not more than 250 grams. Not trained to be economical with the groceries, she liberally used the ghee down to the dregs to cook the meat. When Lal Bihari sat down to take his food, he found that the lentils hadn't been garnished with ghee. He lost his temper.

He asked her sharply, 'Why aren't the lentils garnished with ghee?'

'I used the ghee down to the dregs to cook the meat,' said Anandi.

'It was only day before yesterday that ghee was bought. It has been consumed within two days?' roared Bihari.

'Not more than two hundred and fifty grams of ghee was left in the can,' replied Anandi.

There goes a saying that a hungry man is an angry man. Lal Bihari flew into a rage, his anger flaring up like a dry piece of wood that bursts into flames.

Anandi's curt reply cut him to the quick. He shouted taunts. 'It seems as if your father has a river of ghee flowing.'

Needless to say, women can bear heaps of abuse spouted at them, can readily tolerate kicks and blows but they get awfully impatient when their parents are nitpicked by a member of her in-laws' family. Anandi turned her head to the other side and retorted indignantly, 'A dead elephant is worth a hundred thousand rupees. As for my maternal house, even barbers and watermen consume as much as two hundred and fifty grams of ghee every day.'

Her words stung Bihari. Regarding her comment as an affront to the dignity of his house, he threw the plate on the floor and snarled, 'Hold your tongue. I wish I could pull it out.'

Anandi's face also turned red with rage. 'I wish my husband were here! He would teach you a lesson today,' she snapped.

Lal Bihari, a young, irritable and prickly Thakur, grew reckless. Usually, he would, in a flush of anger, beat his wife—the daughter of a landowner of no renown. So he took one of his wooden sandals and hurled it at Anandi.

'I shall deal with you! Nor will I spare the one on whose support you count so much,' Bihari growled.

Anandi parried the blow, safeguarding her head. But her hand was injured.

Trembling with anger like a leaf fluttering in the wind she retreated to her room, fuming. Women feel confident about and count on their husbands, the source of their power, boldness and prestige. In other words, they take pride in the power and courage of their husbands. Though humiliation was a bitter pill, Anandi had to swallow it.

Sri Kant Singh used to visit his village every Saturday. The quarrel had taken place on Thursday. Anandi went without food for two consecutive days and waited impatiently for her husband. As usual Sri Kant Singh reached home in the evening and sat in the courtyard, chattering about national and current news, pending court cases and so on until ten at night. Though nervously twitchy, Anandi passed these two to three hours restlessly.

It was time for dinner. The crowd started to disperse. When he was about to step inside the house, Lal Bihari said to him, 'Bhaiya, tell Bhabhi to mind her language lest I should be convicted of her murder.' Beni Madhav Singh chimed in, 'It is always prudent for daughters-in-law to avoid bandying words with the menfolk.'

Lal Bihar spoke resentfully, 'If she comes from noble stock, we are not the descendants of some Kurmi and Kahaar.'

Sri Kant thoughtfully asked him, 'Tell me what exactly happened.'

Lal Bihari replied, 'Nothing. She flared up and blew up at me unnecessarily.

We have no value in her eyes as compared to her paternal family.'

After dinner Sri Kant went in to his wife's room where she was sitting tense in silent rage. Sri Kant also felt a little bitter.

'How are you?' asked Anandi.

'I am fine. Why have you been making a fuss at home?' asked Sri Kant.

Obviously annoyed, Anandi frowned and beads of perspiration glistened on her forehead.

She yelled, 'I will mutilate his face, if I come to know the name of the one who has poisoned your ears.'

Sri Kant said calmly, 'Do not lose your temper. Tell me what exactly happened.'

'What shall I say? Had I not been unlucky, the fellow who does not qualify to work even as a peon would not be strutting around after hitting me with a wooden sandal. Had I been at my maternal house I would have let hounds loose on him. Much to my chagrin, you hold me culpable of making a fuss,' she said grudgingly.

Sri Kant said, 'Be more precise. I know nothing.'

Anandi began her account. 'The day before yesterday your dear younger brother came with the meat of two wild ducks and asked me to cook it. The available ghee was approximately two hundred and fifty grams. I used the entire ghee to cook the meat. When he sat down to eat he asked me why the lentils were not garnished with ghee. He flew into a foul temper and spoke ill of my maternal house. I could not restrain myself and said that barbers and watermen ate that much ghee every day at my maternal house. And none of my family members even bother about it. He flared up and hurled the wooden sandal at me. If I had failed to parry it with my hand, it would have badly injured my head.

Ask him if my version is right or wrong.'

Sri Kant's eyes turned red with anger. He said in a fit of rage, 'His behaviour has amounted to serious misconduct. It is quite rowdy and wicked of him.'

Anandi burst into tears, as all women do. And women's tears stoke the flames of wrath within men. So Sri Kant, a man of calm disposition, who had perhaps never flown into a rage before, was deeply affected by Anandi's tears, which acted upon him quickly, like fortified wine. He passed a sleepless night, tossing and turning in his bed.

At the break of dawn, he went up to his father and said, 'Dada, Lal Bihari and I are unable to pull together now.'

Quite frequently, Sri Kant would take his fellow villagers to task for airing the same grievances. He also pulled his friends up and told them that they were henpecked, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

But today he, an avowed advocate of the joint Hindu family system, told his father, 'Dada, Lal Bihari and I are unable to pull together now.' The preacher stops advising the lovesick after he loses his heart to someone. Both patience and steadfastness vanish into thin air.

Beni Madhav Singh got up with a start and stuttered, 'Why?'



Sri Kant replied, 'I too have my self-esteem and prestige. People have started becoming unruly here in the house. Justice is denied to others. Those who should respect their elders have started affronting them. You know my job takes me away. And I do not stay at home all through the week. During my absence wooden sandals are hurled at my wife in a fit of foul temper. I can tolerate harsh and bitter words flung at us. But I can't remain silent if someone rains kicks and blows on me.'

Dumbfounded, Beni Madhav Singh fell silent. Since Sri Kant had always been respectful towards his father, it was a source of astonishment to Beni Madhav Singh to hear his son speak curtly. He said warmly, '*Beta*, you are so intelligent. Why do you talk like this? Do not egg your wife on by lending her an ear.'

Women are the root cause of the disintegration of joint families.'

Sri Kant said, 'I know it. I am no fool. Well, you too are aware of how ardently I advocated the joint family system and how I had been instrumental in saving different extended families from dissolution. But I cannot bear such an atrocious ill-treatment meted out to my wife who needs to be looked after and ensured respect and prestige by me. I took a pledge before God to take care of her and her honour. Believe me, I am exercising great restraint on myself and not laying my hands on Lal Bihari—I should have pulled his ears.'

This annoyed Beni Madhav Singh. He was not ready to listen to any more of his harangues and said, 'Lal Bihari is your brother. Whenever he is in the wrong, pull his ears, but . . .'

Sri Kant said, 'But I no longer regard Lal Bihari as my brother.'  
Beni Madhav Singh asked sharply, 'Because of your wife?'

Sri Kant retorted, 'Not at all. Due to his insolent and unruly behaviour.'  
Both Beni Madhav Singh and Sri Kant were silent for some time. Thakur

Sahib wanted to calm Sri Kant down, but without having to admit that Lal Bihari was in the wrong.

Meanwhile, a number of villagers gathered in Thakur Sahib's outer courtyard to take a puff of the communal hookah. When the women, inimical to Sri Kant, learnt of him bandying words with his father, they were exultant and keenly anticipated both parties airing their grievances and engaging in combat. Of course, some men were also consumed by jealousy to see the harmonious relations among the members of Thakur Sahib's family. They too felt happy, expecting a rift in the family.

People interested in seeing the ruin of the family expressed their opinions freely. Some thought that Sri Kant was firmly under his father's thumb; that's why blame was unjustly heaped upon him. They muttered under their breath that he worked hard to receive a higher education but then he earned no respect in the family. Others felt that Beni Madhav Singh should not be blamed for showering his love on the elder son and not doing anything without seeking Sri Kant's opinion. Everybody was entertained by the family's discomfiture.

Many more people poured in, someone on the pretext of taking a drag on the hookah and others on the pretext of showing their receipts of the land rent paid. Beni Madhav Singh, a seasoned old man, saw through it. He felt that they were happy at the discomfiture of the family. He mused to himself and decided not to let them be successful in their evil intent of reducing the family to a laughing stock. To everyone's dismay, he swallowed his anger and spoke to his son rather softly, 'Beta, I see your point. The boy has misbehaved. You can deal with him strictly—or the way you like.'

Though a graduate from Allahabad, Sri Kant failed to understand the spirit of his father's conciliatory move. Adept in the art of debating, he had learnt how to stick to his guns, but he was not proficient at understanding the intricate practical issues of life.

He said, 'Now I can't live with Lal Bihari.' Beni Madhav Singh continued, 'Beta, you are wise and the wise do not engage in combat with a fool. Lal Bihari is still young and green. You are a grown-up wise young man. Forgive him for his unruly offence.'

Sri Kant said, 'I can never forgive him. Either he or I will live here in the house. It is my final decision. If you love him more than me, I will take leave of you. I will shoulder my responsibilities. If you wish me to live here, ask him to go wherever he likes.'

Standing silently near the door, Lal Bihari heard everything that transpired between his father and brother. He respected his brother more than his father. He would never dare sit on the cot before his brother, let alone take a drag on the hookah or chew paan. Sri Kant also loved him dearly. Far from pulling his ears, he did not even speak angrily with him. Whenever he came from Allahabad, he brought him gifts. Bihari's wooden dumbbells had also been gifted to him by Sri Kant. He had given him a tight hug when at the last village wrestling match, held on the occasion of Nag Panchami, Lal Bihari had defeated a wrestler much heavier than he. Sri Kant had celebrated the victory by tossing five rupees in coins of different denominations.

Lal Bihari, therefore, felt dejected and forlorn to have heard such harsh sentences from his brother. Instead of feeling angry, he burst into tears. He felt penitent and was assailed by a mounting sense of repentance. After he had thrown the wooden sandal at his bhabhi, he waited for his brother, with a vague feeling tormenting him. He wanted to see how he would react to the wrong done to his bhabhi. His heart pained to think how he would face his brother. He had expected that his brother would call him, rebuke him and would forgive him with a warning. Contrary to his expectation, he found that he had a deep aversion for his face. Lal Bihari was uneducated but he knew that his brother was being unjust and unkind towards him. He would not have taken it ill if he had been slapped for his unruly misdemeanour at a lonely place. But he could not bear his elder brother saying that he hated the sight of Bihari.

He went inside the house in a flood of tears. Rushing into his room, he changed his clothes. Then, gulping back his tears, he wiped his face and eyes and went to Anandi Devi. He did not want her to know that he had been weeping. He said to her, 'Bhabhi, now Bhaiya does not want to live with me. Since he has a deep aversion for my face, I am taking leave of you all. I will never come back here. I have come to you to seek your pardon.'

Lal Bihari was too choked with emotions to speak.

Lal Bihari stood near the door with Anandi, his head hung low. Sri Kant walked past him with his eyes flaming red with anger. As the sight of Bihari repelled him, Sri Kant averted his eyes from him.

Consumed by guilt, Anandi regretted having made the complaint against Lal Bihari. Essentially kind-hearted, she had never imagined that the matter would assume such a serious proportion. She was becoming increasingly exasperated with her husband's behaviour. She wondered why he was beside himself and why he lost his calm. She looked pale and drawn with the fear that he might ask her to go to Allahabad. She did not know how to respond to her husband's proposal. It ate away at her.

So when she heard Lal Bihari say, 'I am taking leave of you all. Forgive me for my wrong doings,' she was touched, her eyes brimmed with tears and her anger dissipated. Shedding tears is the best way to sink differences.

She saw Sri Kant and said to him, 'Lala is standing outside and is in a flood of tears.'

Sri Kant retorted, 'What shall I do then?'

Anandi entreated, 'Call him in. May my tongue perish! Why did I complain against him?'

Sri Kant said, 'No, I am not going to call him in.'

Anandi responded, 'If you do not call him, you will regret it afterwards. He has repented a lot. Call him in lest he leave the house.'

Sri Kant was adamant. He did not budge. Then Lal Bihari said sadly, 'Bhabhi, convey my regards to Bhaiya. I can't face him because he detests the sight of me.'

Saying this, Lal Bihari retraced his steps and moved towards the outer door. Unexpectedly, Anandi came out and caught hold of him. Lal Bihari turned to look back and said amid tears, 'Let me go.'

'Where will you go?'

'I will go where none of my relations is able to see my face.' 'I will not let you go.'

'I am not worthy of living here in the house with you.'

'Promise me, you won't move even a step ahead.'

Lal Bihari said, 'I am not going to live in this house unless I am assured that my brother has no animus towards me.'

'I swear by God, I have no grievance against you.'

Sri Kant's heart melted. He came out and leapt forward to embrace Lal Bihari.

Both of them burst into tears. Lal Bihari requested his brother amid sobs, 'Bhaiya, you can give me any sort of punishment you like, but never say that you detest the sight of me.'

Sri Kant's voice trembled when he said to him, 'Lallu, let us sink this into oblivion. God willing, such problems will never crop up again.'

Beni Madhav Singh emerged from nowhere. The sight of his sons embracing each other gladdened his heart.

He remarked, 'Such are the daughters of noble families—they guard the families against disintegration.'

Those who learnt of the commendable qualities of Anandi, who had repaired the relationship, spoke up involuntarily, 'Such are the daughters of noble families.'

## 2. Grammar Page

# Conditional

Read the sentences in the speech bubbles:

What do you get if you mix red and blue?



If I mix red and blue, I get purple.



What happens if you heat ice?

If we heat ice, it melts.

What would you do if you won the lottery?



If I won the lottery, I would travel abroad.



What happens if nobody comes to the party?



If nobody comes to the party, we'll give all the food to the orphanage.



What would have happened if Aman had got a job in Kathmandu?



If Aman had got a job in Kathmandu, he wouldn't have come to Pokhara. He would have settled in Kathmandu. He didn't get a job and he is not in Kathmandu now, he is in Pokhara.



→ Sentences containing conditional clauses like *if*, *unless* and *provided that* are called conditional sentences. They express four types of conditions and each type has different structures and meanings.

| Types  | Meanings  | Examples  |
|--------|---|---|
| Zero   | <i>always real and possible</i>   | If I mix red and blue, I get purple.<br>If we heat ice, it melts.       |
| First  | <i>possible situations in the present or future</i>                     | If nobody comes to the party, we'll give all the food to the orphanage. |
| Second | <i>unlikely but possible situations in the present or in the future</i> | If I won the lottery, I would travel abroad.                            |
| Third  | <i>unreal situations in the past</i>                                    | If Aman had got a job in Kathmandu, he wouldn't have come to Pokhara.   |