



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F48

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## 1. Holiday

By Rabindranath Tagore

Phatik Chakrabarti, leader of the gang, suddenly had a bright idea. Lying by the river was a huge *sāl*-tree log, just waiting to be made into a mast. Everyone must help to roll it along! Without giving a thought to the surprise, annoyance and inconvenience that would be caused to the person who needed the log for timber, all the boys fell in with this suggestion. They got down to the task with a will; but just then Phatik's younger brother Makhanlal came and solemnly sat on the log. The boys were rather nonplussed by his haughty, dismissive attitude.

One of them went up to him and nervously tried to push him off, but he refused to budge. Wise beyond his years, he continued to ponder the vanity of all childish games.

'You'll pay for this,' said Phatik, brandishing his fist. 'Clear off.'

But Makhanlal merely adjusted his perch and settled down even more immovably on the log.

In this kind of situation, Phatik ought to have preserved his supremacy over the other boys by delivering immediately a hearty slap on his wayward brother's cheek – but he didn't dare. Instead he assumed a manner implying that he could, had he so wished, have meted out this customary punishment, but he wasn't going to, because a more amusing idea had occurred to him. Why not, he proposed, roll the log over with Makhanlal on it?

Makhan at first saw glory in this; he did not think (nor did anyone else) that like other worldly glories it might carry dangers. The boys rolled up their sleeves and began to push – 'Heave ho! Heave ho! Over we go!' With one spin of the log, Makhan's solemnity, glory and wisdom crashed to the ground.

The other boys were delighted at such an unexpectedly quick outcome, but Phatik was rather embarrassed. Makhan immediately jumped up and threw himself on to him, hitting him with blind rage and scratching his nose and cheeks. Then he made his way home tearfully.

The game having been spoilt, Phatik pulled up a few reeds, and climbing on to the prow of a half-sunk boat sat quietly chewing them. A boat – not a local one – came up to the mooring-place. A middle-aged gentleman with a black moustache but grey hair stepped ashore. 'Where is the Chakrabartis' house?' he asked the boy.

‘Over there,’ replied Phatik, still chewing the reed-stalks. But no one would have been able to understand which direction to take.

‘Where?’ asked the gentleman again.

‘Don’t know,’ said Phatik, and he carried on as before, sucking juice from the stalks. The gentleman had to ask others to help him find the house.

Suddenly Bagha Bagdi (a servant) appeared and said, ‘Phatikdādā, Mother’s calling you.’

‘Shan’t go,’ said Phatik.

He struggled and kicked helplessly as Bagha picked him up bodily and carried him home. His mother shouted furiously when she saw him: ‘You’ve beaten up Makhan again!’

‘I didn’t beat him up.’ ‘How dare you lie to me?’

‘I did *not* beat him up. Ask him.’

When Makhan was questioned he stuck to his earlier accusation, saying, ‘He *did* beat me up.’ Phatik could not stand this any more. He charged at Makhan and thumped him hard, shouting, ‘So who’s lying now?’ His mother, taking Makhan’s part, rushed and slapped Phatik’s back several times heavily. He pushed her away. ‘So you’d lay hands on your own mother?’ she screamed.

At that moment the black-grey gentleman entered the house and said, ‘What’s going on here?’

‘*Dādā!*’ said Phatik’s mother, overwhelmed with surprise and joy. ‘When did you come?’ She bent down and took the dust of his feet.

Many years previously her elder brother had gone to the west of India to work, and in the meantime she had had two children; they had grown, her husband had died – but all this time she had never seen her brother. At long last Bishvambhar Babu had returned home, and had now come to see his sister.

There were celebrations for several days. At length, a couple of days before his departure, Bishvambhar questioned his sister about the schooling and progress of her two sons. In reply, he was given a description of Phatik’s uncontrollable wildness and inattention to study; while Makhan, by contrast, was perfectly behaved and a model student. ‘Phatik drives me mad,’ she said.

Bishvambhar then proposed that he take Phatik to Calcutta, keep him with him and supervise his education. The widow easily agreed to this. ‘Well, Phatik,’ he asked the boy, ‘how would you like to go to Calcutta with your uncle?’ ‘I’d love to,’ said Phatik, jumping up and down.

His mother did not object to seeing her son off, because she always lived in dread that Makhan might be pushed into the river by him or might split his head open in some terrible accident; but she was a little cast down by the eagerness with which Phatik seized the idea of going. He pestered his uncle with 'When are we going? When are we going?' – and couldn't sleep at night for excitement.

When at last the day to leave came, he was moved to a joyous display of generosity. He bestowed on Makhan his fishing-rod, kite and reel, with permanent right of inheritance.

When he arrived at his uncle's house in Calcutta, he first had to be introduced to his aunt. I cannot say she was over-pleased at this unnecessary addition to her family. She was used to looking after her house and three children as they were, and suddenly to loose into their midst an unknown, uneducated country boy would probably be most disruptive. If only Bishvambhar had insight commensurate with his years! Moreover, there is no greater nuisance in the world than a boy of thirteen or fourteen. There is no beauty in him, and he does nothing useful either. He arouses no affection; nor is his company welcome. If he speaks modestly he sounds false; if he speaks sense he sounds arrogant; if he speaks at all he is felt to be intrusive. He suddenly shoots up in height so that his clothes no longer fit him – which is an ugly affront to other people. His childish grace and sweetness of voice suddenly disappear, and people find it impossible not to blame him for this. Many faults can be forgiven in a child or a young man, but at this age even natural and unavoidable faults are felt to be unbearable.

He himself is fully aware that he does not fit properly into the world; so he is perpetually ashamed of his existence and seeks forgiveness for it. Yet this is the age at which a rather greater longing for affection develops in him. If he gets at this time love and companionship from some sympathetic person, he will do anything in return. But no one dares show affection, in case others condemn this as pampering. So he looks and behaves like a stray street-dog.

To leave home and mother and go to a strange place is hell for a boy of this age. To live with loveless indifference all around is like walking on thorns. This is the age when normally a conception forms of women as wonderful, heavenly creatures; to be cold-shouldered by them is terribly hard to bear. It was therefore especially painful to Phatik that his aunt saw him as an evil star. If she happened to ask him to do a job for her and – meaning well – he did more than was strictly necessary, his aunt would stamp on his enthusiasm, saying, 'That's quite enough, quite enough. I don't want you meddling any more.'

Go and get on with your own work. Do some studying.’ His aunt’s excessive concern for his mental improvement would then seem terribly cruel and unjust.

He so lacked love in this household, and it seemed he could breathe freely nowhere. Stuck behind its walls, he thought constantly of his home village. The fields where he would let his ‘monster-kite’ fly and flap in the wind; the river-bank where he wandered aimlessly, singing a *rāga* of his own invention at the top of his voice; the small stream in which he would jump and swim now and then in the heat of the day; his gang of followers; the mischief they would get up to; the freedom; above all his harsh, impetuous mother; all this tugged continually at his helpless heart. A kind of instinctive love, like an animal’s; a blind longing to be near; an unspoken distress at being far; a heartfelt, anguished cry of ‘*Mā, Mā*’ like a motherless calf at dusk; such feelings perpetually afflicted this gawky, nervous, thin, lanky, ungainly boy.

At school there was no one more stupid and inattentive than he. If asked a question he would just stare back vacantly. If the teacher cuffed him, he would silently bear it like a laden, exhausted ass. At break-time, he would stand at the window staring at the roofs of distant houses, while his classmates played outside. If a child or two appeared for a moment on one of the roofs, in the midday sunshine, playing some game, his misery intensified.

One day he plucked up courage to ask his uncle, ‘Uncle, when will I be going home to see Mother?’

‘When the school holiday comes,’ said his uncle. The *pūjā*-holiday in the month of Kartik – that was a long way off!

One day Phatik lost his school-books. He never found it easy to prepare his lessons, and now, with his books lost, he was completely helpless. The teacher started to beat and humiliate him every day. His standing in school sank so low that his cousins were ashamed to admit their connection with him. Whenever he was punished, they showed even greater glee than the other boys. It became too much to bear, and one day he went to his aunt and confessed like a criminal that he had lost his school-books. ‘Well, well,’ said his aunt, lines of annoyance curling round her lips, ‘and do you suppose I can buy you new books five times a month?’ He said no more. That he should have wasted *someone else’s* money made him feel even more hurt and rejected by his mother. His misery and sense of inferiority dragged him down to the very earth.

That night, when he returned from school, he had a pain in his head and was shivering. He could tell he was getting a fever. He also knew that his aunt would not take kindly to his being ill. He had a clear sense of what an unnecessary, unjustifiable nuisance it would be to her. He felt he had no right to expect that an odd, useless, stupid boy such as he should be nursed by anyone other than his mother.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. He was searched for in all the neighbours' houses round about, but there was no trace of him. In the evening torrential rain began, so in searching for him many people got soaked to the skin – to no avail. In the end, finding him nowhere, Bishvambhar Babu informed the police.

A whole day later, in the evening, a carriage drew up outside Bishvambhar's house. Rain was still thudding down relentlessly, and the street was flooded to a knee's depth. Two policemen bundled Phatik out of the carriage and put him down in front of Bishvambhar. He was soaked from head to foot, covered with mud, his eyes and cheeks were flushed, he was trembling violently. Bishvambhar virtually had to carry him into the house.

'You see what happens,' snapped his wife, 'when you take in someone else's child. You must send him home.' But in fact the whole of that day she had hardly been able to eat for worry, and had been unreasonably tetchy with her own children.

'I was going to go to my mother,' said Phatik, weeping, 'but they brought me back.'

The boy's fever climbed alarmingly. He was delirious all night. Bishvambhar fetched the doctor. Opening his bloodshot eyes for a moment and staring blankly at the ceiling joists, Phatik said, 'Uncle, has my holiday-time come?' Bishvambhar, dabbing his own eyes with a handkerchief, tenderly took Phatik's thin, hot hand in his and sat down beside him. He spoke again, mumbling incoherently: 'Mother, don't beat me, Mother. I didn't do anything wrong, honest!'

The next day, during the short time when he was conscious, Phatik kept looking bewilderedly round the room, as if expecting someone. When no one came, he turned and lay mutely with his face towards the wall. Understanding what was on his mind, Bishvambhar bent down and said softly in his ear, 'Phatik, I've sent for your mother.'

Another day passed. The doctor, looking solemn and gloomy, pronounced the boy's condition to be critical. Bishvambhar sat at the bedside in the dim lamplight, waiting minute by minute for Phatik's mother's arrival. Phatik started to shout out, like a boatman, 'More than one fathom deep, more than two fathoms deep!' To come to Calcutta they had had to travel some of the way by steamer. The boatmen had lowered the hawser into the stream and bellowed out its depth. In his delirium, Phatik was imitating them, calling out the depth in pathetic tones; except that the endless sea he was about to cross had no bottom that his measuring-rope could touch.

It was then that his mother stormed into the room, bursting into loud wails of grief. When, with difficulty, Bishvambhar managed to calm her down, she threw herself on to the bed and sobbed, 'Phatik, my darling, my treasure.'

'Yes?' said Phatik, seemingly quite relaxed. 'Phatik, darling boy,' cried his mother again.

Turning slowly on to his side, and looking at no one, Phatik said softly, 'Mother, my holiday has come now. I'm going home.'



## 2. Grammar Page

# Prepositions

### Read the text:

FIFA stands **for** Federation International de Football Association. It was founded **in** Paris **on** May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1904. The FIFA World Cup is the world's largest single-sport event. Except **in** 1942 and 1946, because **of** World War II, the World Cup event has taken place every four years **since** 1930.

The first World Cup was held **in** Uruguay in 1930. Jules Rimet, the third president **of** FIFA, takes the credit **for** the idea **of** gathering the world's best national football teams **to** decide the world champions.

The first World Cup trophy was designed **by** the French sculptor Abel Lafleur, who created Jules Rimet statuette **with** gold **in** a base of semi-precious stones. Jules Rimet Cup was awarded to Brazil after its third World Cup triumph **in** Mexico **in** 1970. **In** 1983 Jules Rimet Cup was stolen **in** Brazil and could not be recovered. The second official World Cup trophy has been **in** use **since** 1974. Nowadays the winners **of** the World Cup are awarded a replica of the trophy.

**Of** the 18 tournaments held, seven nations have won the title. Brazil are the only team that have played **in** every tournament and have won the World Cup five times. Both Germany and Italy have won four titles so far but Germany are the current champions. The other former champions are Uruguay, winners **of** the inaugural tournament, and Argentina, **with** two titles each, and England, Spain and France **with** one title each.

The most recent FIFA World Cup was held **in** Brazil **in** 2014. The next World Cup will be held **in** Russia, **in** 2018, and the 2022 World Cup will be held **in** Qatar.



*The words **at, in, of, on, to,** etc are examples of prepositions. A preposition shows the relationship of the idea expressed in the prepositional phrase to the ideas expressed in the rest of the sentence. Here is the list of frequently used prepositions:*

aboard	about	above	across	after	against	along
amid	among	around	at	before	behind	below
beneath	beside	besides	between	beyond	by	down
during	except	for	from	in	inside	into
near	of	off	on	onto	opposite	outside
over	past	per	round	since	through	to
toward	towards	under	underneath	until	up	upon
via	with	within	without			