Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H37

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu

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1. The Key

By Satyajit Ray

One

Do you know why the sight of trees and plants have such a refreshing effect on our eyes?' asked Feluda. 'The reason is that people, since primitive times, have lived with greenery all around them, so that their eyes have developed a healthy relationship with their environment. Of course, trees in big cities these days have become rather difficult to find. As a result, every time you get away from town, your eyes begin to relax, and so does your mind. It is mostly in cities that you'll notice people with eye disorders. Go to a village or a hill-station, and you'll hardly find anyone wearing glasses.'

Feluda himself had a pair of sharp eyes, didn't wear glasses, and could stare at any object for three minutes and fifteen seconds without blinking even once. I should know, for I had tested him often enough. But he had never lived in a village. I was tempted to point this out to him, but didn't dare. The chances of having my head bitten off if I did were very high.

We were travelling with a man called Monimohan Samaddar. He wore glasses (but then, he lived in a city), was about fifty years old and had sharp features. The hair around his ears had started to turn grey. It was in his Fiat that we were travelling, to a place called Bamungachhi, which was a suburb of Calcutta. We had met Moni Babu only yesterday.

He had turned up quite out of the blue in the afternoon, as Feluda and I sat in our living room, reading. I had been watching Feluda reading a book on numerology, raising his eyebrows occasionally in both amazement and appreciation. It was a book about Dr Matrix. Feluda caught me looking at him, and smiled. 'You'd be astonished to learn the power of numbers, and the role they play in the lives of men like Dr Matrix. Listen to this. It was a discovery Dr Matrix made. You know the names of the two American Presidents who were assassinated, don't you?'

'Yes. Lincoln and Kennedy, right?'

'Right. Now tell me how many letters each name has.'

'L-i-n-c-o-l-n—seven. K-e-n-n-e-d-y—also seven.'

'OK. Now listen, carefully. Lincoln was killed in 1865 and Kennedy died in 1963, a little less than a hundred years later. Both were killed on a Friday, and both had their wives by their side. Lincoln was killed in the Ford Theatre. Kennedy was killed in a car called Lincoln, manufactured by the Ford company. The next

President after Lincoln was called Johnson, Andrew Johnson. Kennedy was succeeded by Lyndon Johnson. The first Johnson was born in 1808, the second in 1908, exactly a hundred years later. Do you know who killed Lincoln?'

'Yes, but I can't remember his name right now.'

'It was John Wilkes Booth. He was born in 1839. And Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald. He was born in 1939! Now count the number of letters in both names.'

'Good heavens, both have fifteen letters!'

Feluda might have told me of a few more startling discoveries by Dr Matrix, but it was at this point that Mr Samaddar arrived, without a prior appointment. He introduced himself, adding, 'I live in Lake Place, which isn't far from here.'

'I see.'

'Er . . . you may have heard of my uncle, Radharaman Samaddar.'

'Oh yes. He died recently, didn't he? I believe he was greatly interested in music?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'I read an obituary in the local newspaper. I hadn't heard about him before that, I'm afraid. He was quite old, wasn't he?'

'Yes, he was eighty-two when he died. I'm not surprised that you hadn't heard of him. When he gave up singing, you must have been a young boy. He retired fifteen years ago, and built a house in Bamungachhi. That is where he lived, almost like a recluse, until his death. He had a heart attack on 18 September, and died the same night.'

'I see.'

Mr Samaddar cleared his throat. After a few seconds of silence, he said a little hesitantly, 'I'm sure you're wondering why I've come to disturb you like this. I just wanted to give you a little background, that's all.'

'Of course. Don't worry, Mr Samaddar, please take your time.' Moni Babu resumed speaking. 'My uncle was different from other men. He was actually a lawyer, and he made a lot of money. But he stopped practising when he was about fifty, and turned wholly to music. He didn't just sing, he could play seven or eight different instruments, both Indian and Western. I myself have seen him play the sitar, the violin, piano, harmonium, flute and the tabla, besides others. He had a passion for collecting instruments. In fact, his house had become a mini-museum of musical instruments.'

‘Which house do you mean?’

‘He had started collecting before he left Calcutta. Then he transferred his collection to his house in Bamungachhi. He used to travel widely, looking for instruments. Once he bought a violin from an Italian in Bombay. Only a few months later, he sold it in Calcutta for thirty thousand rupees.’

Feluda had once told me that three hundred years ago, in Italy there had been a handful of people who had produced violins of such high quality that, today, their value was in excess of a hundred thousand rupees.

Mr Samaddar continued to speak. ‘As you can see, my uncle was gifted. There were a lot of positive qualities in his character that made him different from most people. But, at the same time, there was an overriding negative factor which eventually turned him into a recluse. He was amazingly tight-fisted. The few relatives he had stopped seeing him because of this. He didn’t seem to mind, for he wasn’t particularly interested in staying in touch with them, anyway.’

‘How many relatives did he have?’

‘Not a lot. He had three brothers and two sisters. The sisters and two of his brothers are no more. The third brother left home thirty years ago. No one knows if he’s alive. Radharaman’s wife and only child, a son called Muralidhar, are both dead. Muralidhar’s son, Dharanidhar, is his only grandchild. Radharaman was very fond of him once. But when he left his studies and joined a theatre under a different name, my uncle washed his hands off him. I don’t think he ever saw him again.’

‘How are you related to him?’

‘Oh, my father was one of his elder brothers. He died many years ago.’

‘I see; and is Dharanidhar still alive?’

‘Yes, but I believe he’s moved on to another group, and is now doing a jatra. I tried contacting him when my uncle passed away, but he wasn’t in Calcutta. Someone told me he was off on a tour, travelling through small villages. He’s quite well known now in the theatre world. He was interested in music, too, which was why his grandfather was so fond of him.’

Mr Samaddar stopped. Then he went on, speaking a little absently. ‘It’s not as if I saw my uncle regularly. I used to go and meet him, maybe once every two months or so. Of late, even that had become difficult as my work kept me very busy. I run a printing press in Bhawanipore, called the Eureka Press. We’ve had such frequent power cuts recently that it’s been quite a job clearing all our backlog. Anyway, my uncle’s neighbour, Abani Babu, telephoned me when he

had a heart attack. I left immediately with Chintamoni Bose, the heart specialist. My uncle was unconscious at first, but opened his eyes just before he died, and seemed to recognize me. He even spoke a few words, but then . . . it was all over.'

'What did he say?' Feluda leant forward.

'He said, "In . . . my . . . name." Then he tried to speak, but couldn't. After struggling for sometime, he could get only one word out. "Key . . . key," he said. That was all.'

Feluda stared at Mr Samaddar, a frown on his face. 'Have you any idea what his words might have meant?'

'Well, at first I thought perhaps he was worried about his name, and his reputation. Perhaps he'd realized people called him a miser. But the word "key" seemed to matter to him. I mean, he sounded really concerned about this key. I haven't the slightest idea which key he was referring to. His bedroom has an almirah and a chest. The keys to these were kept in the drawer of a table that stood by the side of his bed. The house only has three rooms, barring a bathroom attached to his bedroom. There is hardly any furniture, and almost nothing that might require a key. The lock he used on the main door to his bedroom was a German combination lock, which didn't work with a key at all.'

'What did he have in the almirah and the chest?'

'Nothing apart from a few clothes and papers. These were in the almirah. The chest was totally empty.'

'Did you find any money?'

'No. In the drawer of the table was some loose change and a few two and five rupee notes, that's all. There was a wallet under his pillow, but even this had very little money in it. Apparently, he kept money for daily use in this wallet. At least, that's what his old servant Anukul told me.'

'What did he do when he finished spending what he had in his wallet or in his table drawer? Surely he had a bigger source to draw on?'

'Yes, that's what one has to assume.'

'Why do you say that? Didn't he have a bank account?'

Mr Samaddar smiled. 'No, he didn't. If he had had one, there would've been nothing unusual about him, would there? To tell you the truth, there was a time when he did keep his money in a bank. But many years ago, that bank went out of business, and he lost all he had put in it. He refused to trust

another bank after that. But—' Mr Samaddar lowered his voice, 'I know he had a lot of money. How else do you suppose he could afford to buy all those rare and expensive instruments? Besides, he didn't mind spending a great deal on himself. He ate well, wore specially tailored clothes, maintained a huge garden, and had even bought a second hand Austin. He used to drive to Calcutta occasionally. So . . .' His voice trailed away.

Feluda lit a Charminar, and offered one to Mr Samaddar. Mr Samaddar took it, and waited until Feluda had lit it for him. 'Now,' he said, inhaling deeply, 'do you understand why I had to come to you? What will the key unlock? Where has all my uncle's money gone? Which key was he talking about, anyway? Shall we find any money or something else? Had he made a will? Who knows? If he had, we must find it. In the absence of a will, his grandson will get everything, but someone has to find out what that consists of. I have heard such a lot about your intelligence and your skill. Will you please help me, Mr Mitter?'

Feluda agreed. It was then decided that Mr Samaddar would pick us up today at 7 a.m. and take us to his uncle's house in Bamungachhi. I could tell Feluda was interested because this was a new type of mystery. Or perhaps it was more a puzzle than a mystery.

That is what I thought at first. Later, I realized it was something far more complex than a mere puzzle.

Two

We drove down Jessore Road, and took a right turn after Barasat. This road led straight to Bamungachhi. Mr Samaddar stopped here at a small tea shop and treated us to a cup of tea and jalebis. This took about fifteen minutes. By the time we reached Radharaman Samaddar's house, it was past eight o'clock.

A bungalow stood in the middle of a huge plot of land (it measured seven acres, we were told later), surrounded by a pink boundary wall and rows of eucalyptus trees. The man who opened the gate for us was probably the mali, for he had a basket in his hand. We drove up to the front door, passing a garage on the way. A black Austin stood in it.

As I was getting out of the car, a sudden noise from the garden made me look up quickly. I found a boy of about ten standing a few yards away, wearing blue shorts and clutching an air gun. He returned my stare gravely.

'Is your father at home?' asked Mr Samaddar. 'Go tell him Moni Babu from Calcutta has come back, and would like to see him, if he doesn't mind.'

The boy left, loading his gun.

'Is that the neighbour's son?' Feluda asked.

'Yes. His father, Abani Sen, is a florist. He has a shop in New Market in Calcutta. He lives right next door. He has his nursery here, you see. Occasionally, he comes and spends a few weeks with his family.'

An old man emerged from the house, looking at us enquiringly. 'This is Anukul,' Mr Samaddar said. 'He had worked for my uncle for over thirty years. He'll stay on until we know what should be done about the house.'

There was a small hall behind the front door. It couldn't really be called a room, all it had was a round table in the middle, and a torn calendar on the wall. There were no light switches on the wall as the whole area did not receive any electricity at all. Beyond this hall was a door. Mr Samaddar walked over to it, and said, 'Look, this is the German lock I told you about. One could buy a lock like this in Calcutta before the Second World War. The combination is eight-two-nine-one.'

It was round in shape, with no provision for a key. There were four grooves instead. Against each groove were written numbers, from one to nine. A tiny object like a hook stuck out of each groove. This hook could be pushed from one end of the groove to the other. It could also be placed next to any of the numbers. It was impossible to open the lock unless one knew exactly which numbers the hooks should be placed against.

Mr Samaddar pushed the four hooks, each to rest against a different number—eight, two, nine and one. With a faint click, the lock opened. It seemed almost as though I was in a magic show. ‘Locking the door is even easier,’ said Mr Samaddar. ‘All you need to do is push any of those hooks away from the right number. Then it locks automatically.’

The door with the German lock opened into Radharaman Samaddar’s bedroom. It was a large room, and it contained all the furniture Radharaman’s nephew had described. What was amazing was the number of instruments the room was packed with. Some of these were kept on shelves, others on a long bench and small tables. Some more hung on the wall.

Feluda stopped in the middle of the room and looked around for a few seconds. Then he opened the almirah and the chest, and went through both. This was followed by a search of the table drawers, a small trunk he discovered under the bed (all it revealed was a pair of old shoes and a few rags) and all the instruments in the room. Feluda picked them up, felt their weight and turned them over to see if any of them was meant to be operated by a key. Then he stripped the bed, turned the mattress over, and began tapping on the floor to see if any part of it sounded hollow. It didn’t. It took him another minute to inspect the attached bathroom. He still found nothing. Finally, he said, ‘Could you please ask the mali to come here for a minute?’ When the mali came, he got him to remove the contents of two flower-pots kept under the window. Both pots were empty. ‘All right, you can put everything back into those pots, and thank you,’ he told the mali.

In the meantime, Anukul had placed a table and four chairs in the room. He then put four glasses of lemonade on the table, and withdrew. Mr Samaddar handed two glasses to us, and asked, ‘What do you make of all this, Mr Mitter?’ Feluda shook his head. ‘If it wasn’t for those instruments, it would’ve been impossible to believe that a man of means had lived in this room.’

‘Exactly. Why do you suppose I ran to you for help? I’ve never felt so puzzled in my life!’ Mr Samaddar exclaimed, taking a sip from his glass.

I looked at the instruments. I could recognize only a few like the sitar, sarod, tanpura, tabla and a flute. I had never seen any of the others, and I wasn’t sure that Feluda had, either. ‘Do you know what each one of these is called?’ he asked Mr Samaddar. ‘That string instrument that’s hanging from a hook on the wall over there. Can you tell me its name?’

‘No, sir!’ Mr Samaddar laughed. ‘I know nothing of music. I haven’t the slightest idea of what these might be called, or where they came from.’

There were footsteps outside the room. A moment later, the boy with the airgun arrived with a man of about forty. Mr Samaddar did the introductions. The man was Abani Sen, the florist who lived next door. The boy was his son, Sadhan. ‘Mr Pradosh Mitter?’ he said. ‘Of course I’ve heard of you!’ Feluda gave a slight smile, and cleared his throat. Mr Sen took the empty chair and was offered the fourth glass of lemonade. ‘Before I forget, Mr Samaddar,’ he said, picking it up, ‘do you know if your uncle had wanted to sell any of his instruments?’

‘Why, no!’ Mr Samaddar sounded quite taken aback.

‘A gentleman came yesterday. He went to my house since he couldn’t find anyone here. He’s called Surajit Dasgupta. He collects musical instruments, very much like your uncle. He showed me a letter written by Radharaman Babu, and said he’d already been to this house and spoken to Radharaman Babu once. Anukul told me later he had seen him before. The letter had been written shortly before your uncle died. Anyway, I told him to come back today. I had a feeling you might return.’

‘I have seen him, too.’

This came from Sadhan. He was playing with a small instrument that looked a bit like a harmonium, making slight tinkling noises. His father laughed at his words. ‘Sadhan used to spend most of his time in or around this house. In fact, he still does. He and his Dadu were great friends.’

‘How did you like your Dadu?’ Feluda asked him.

‘I liked him a lot,’ Sadhan answered, with his back to us, ‘but sometimes he annoyed me.’

‘How?’

‘He kept asking me to sing the sargam.’

‘And you didn’t want to?’

‘No. But I can sing.’

‘Ah, only songs from Hindi films.’ Mr Sen laughed again.

‘Did your Dadu know you could sing?’

‘Yes.’

‘Had he ever heard you?’

‘No.’

‘Well then, how do you think he knew?’

‘Dadu often used to tell me that those whose names carry a note of melody are bound to have melodious voices.’

This made very little sense to us, so we exchanged puzzled glances. ‘What did he mean by that?’ Feluda asked.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Did you ever hear him sing?’

‘No. But I’ve heard him play.’

‘What!’ Mr Samaddar sounded amazed. ‘Are you sure, Sadhan? I thought he had given up playing altogether. Did he play in front of you?’

‘No, no. I was outside in the garden, killing coconuts with my gun. That’s when I heard him play.’

‘Could it have been someone else?’

‘No, there was no one in the house except Dadu.’

‘Did he play for a long time?’ Feluda wanted to know.

‘No, only for a little while.’

Feluda turned to Mr Samaddar. ‘Could you please ask Anukul to come here?’

Anukul arrived in a few moments. ‘Did you ever hear your master play any of these instruments?’ Feluda asked him.

‘Well . . .’ Anukul replied, speaking hesitantly. ‘My master spent most of his time in this room. He didn’t like being disturbed. So really, sir, I wouldn’t know whether he played or not.’

‘I see. He never played in your presence, did he?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Did you ever hear anything from outside, or any other part of the house?’

‘Well. . . only a few times . . . I think . . . but I can’t hear very well, sir.’

‘Did a stranger come and see him before he died? The same man who came yesterday?’

‘Yes, sir. He spoke to my master in this room.’

‘When did he first come?’

‘The day he died.’

‘What! That same day?’ Mr Samaddar couldn’t hide his surprise. ‘Yes, sir.’ Anukul had tears in his eyes. He wiped them with one end of his chaddar and said in a choked voice, ‘I came in here soon after that gentleman left, to tell my

Babu that the hot water for his bath was ready, but found him asleep. At least, I thought he was sleeping until I found I just couldn't wake him up. Then I went to Sen Babu's house and told him.'

'Yes, that's right,' Mr Sen put in. 'I rang Mr Samaddar immediately, and told him to bring a doctor. But I knew there wasn't much that a doctor could do.'

A car stopped outside. Anukul left to see who it was. A minute later, a man entered the room, and introduced himself as Surajit Dasgupta. He had a long and drooping moustache, broad side-burns and thick, unruly hair. He wore glasses with a very heavy frame. Mr Sen pointed at Mr Samaddar and said, 'You should speak to him, Mr Dasgupta. He's Radharaman Babu's nephew.'

'Oh, I see. Your uncle had written to me. So I came to meet—'

'Can I see that letter?' Mr Samaddar interrupted him.

Surajit Dasgupta took out a postcard from the inside pocket of his jacket and passed it on to Mr Samaddar. Mr Samaddar ran his eyes over it, and gave it to Feluda. I leant across and read what was written on it: 'Please come and meet me between 9 and 10 a.m. on 18 September. All my musical instruments are with me in my house. You can have a look when you come.' Feluda turned it over to take a quick look at the address: Minerva Hotel, Central Avenue, Calcutta 13. Then he glanced at the bottle of blue-black ink kept on the small table next to the bed. The letter did seem to have been written with the same ink.

Mr Dasgupta sat down on the bed, with an impatient air. Mr Samaddar asked him another question. 'What did you and my uncle discuss that morning?'

'Well, I had come to know about Radharaman Samaddar only after I read an article by him that was published in a magazine for music lovers. So I wrote to him, and came here on the eighteenth as requested. There were two instruments in his collection that I wanted to buy. We discussed their prices, and I made an offer of two thousand rupees for them. He agreed, and I started to write out a cheque at once. But he stopped me and said he'd much rather have cash. I wasn't carrying so much cash with me, so he told me to come back the following Wednesday. On Tuesday, I read in the papers that he had died. Then I had to leave for Dehra Dun. I got back the day before yesterday.'

'How did he seem that morning when you talked to him?' Mr Samaddar asked.

'Why, he seemed all right! But perhaps he had started to think that he wasn't going to live for long. Some of the things he said seemed to suggest that.'

'You didn't, by any chance, have an argument, did you?'

Mr Dasgupta remained silent for a few seconds. Then he said coldly, ‘Are you, holding me responsible for your uncle’s heart attack?’

‘No, I am not suggesting that you did anything deliberately,’ Mr Samaddar returned, just as coolly. ‘But he was taken ill just after you left, so . . .’

‘I see. I can assure you, Mr Samaddar, your uncle was fine when I left him. Anyway, it shouldn’t be difficult for you to make a decision about my offer. I have got the money with me.’ He took out his wallet. ‘Here’s two thousand in cash. It would help if I could take the two instruments away today. I have to return to Dehra Dun tomorrow. That’s where I live, you see. I do research in music’

‘Which two do you mean?’

Mr Dasgupta rose and walked over to one of the instruments hanging on the wall. ‘This is one. It’s called *khamanche*, it’s from Iran. I knew about this one, but hadn’t seen it. It’s quite an old instrument. And the other was—’

Mr Dasgupta moved to the opposite end of the room and stopped before the same instrument Sadhan had been playing with. ‘This is the other instrument I wanted,’ he said. ‘It’s called melochord. It was made in England. It is my belief that the manufacturers released only a few pieces, then stopped production for some reason. I had never seen it before, and since it’s not possible to get it any more, I offered a thousand for it. Your uncle agreed to sell it to me for that amount.’

‘Sorry, Mr Dasgupta, but you cannot have them,’ said Feluda firmly. Mr Dasgupta wheeled around, and cast a sharp look at us all. Then his eyes came to rest on Feluda. ‘Who are you?’ he asked dryly.

‘He is my friend,’ Mr Samaddar replied, ‘and he is right. We cannot let you buy either of these. You must appreciate the reason. After all, there is no evidence, is there, that my uncle had indeed agreed to sell them at the price you mentioned?’

Mr Dasgupta stood still like a statue, without saying a word. Then he strode out of the room as quickly as he could.

Feluda, too, rose to his feet, and walked slowly over to the instrument Mr Dasgupta had described as a *khamanche*. He didn’t seen perturbed at all by Mr Dasgupta’s sudden departure. The instrument looked a little like the small violins that are often sold to children by roadside hawkers, although of course it was much larger in size, and the round portion was beautifully carved. Then he went across to the melochord, and pressed its black and white keyboard.

The sweet notes that rang out sounded like an odd mixture of the piano and the sitar.

‘Is this the instrument you had heard your Dadu play?’

‘Maybe.’

Sadhan seemed a very quiet and serious little boy, which was rather unusual for a boy of his age.

Feluda said nothing more to him, and moved on to open the almirah once more. He took put a sheaf of papers from a drawer, and asked Mr Samaddar, ‘May I take these home? I think I need to go through them at some length.’

‘Oh yes, sure. Is there anything else . . . ?’

‘No, there’s nothing else, thank you.’

When we left the room, I saw Sadhan staring out of the window, humming a strange tune. It was certainly not from a Hindi film.

Three

‘What do you think, Mr Mitter?’ asked Mr Samaddar on our way back from Bamungachhi. ‘Is there any hope of unravelling this mystery?’

‘I need to think, Mr Samaddar. And I need to read these papers I took from your uncle’s room. Maybe that’ll help me understand the man better. Besides, I need to do a bit of reading and research on music and musical instruments. Please give me two days to sort myself out.’

This conversation was taking place in the car when we finally set off on our return journey. Feluda had spent a lot of time in searching the whole house a second time, but even that had yielded nothing.

‘Yes, of course,’ Mr Samaddar replied politely. ‘You will have to help me with some dates.’ ‘Yes?’

‘When did Radharaman’s son Muralidhar die?’ ‘In 1945, twenty-eight years ago.’

‘How old was his son at that time?’ ‘Dharani? He must have been seven or eight.’ ‘Did they always live in Calcutta?’

‘No, Muralidhar used to work in Bihar. His wife came to live with us in Calcutta after Muralidhar died. When she passed away, Dharani was a college student. He was quite bright, but he began to change after his mother died. Very soon, he left college and joined a theatre group. A year later, my uncle moved to Bamungachhi. His house was built in—’

‘—Nineteen fifty-nine. Yes, I saw that written on the main gate.’

Radharaman Samaddar’s papers proved to be a collection of old letters, a few cash memos, two old prescriptions, a catalogue of musical instruments produced by a German company called Spiegler, musical notation written on pages torn out of a notebook, and press reviews of five plays, in which mention of a Sanjay Lahiri had been underlined with a blue pencil.

‘Hm,’ said Feluda, looking at the notation. ‘The handwriting on these is the same as that in Surajit Dasgupta’s letter.’ Then he went through the catalogue and said, ‘There’s no mention of a melochord.’ After reading the reviews, he remarked, ‘Dharanidhar and this Sanjay Lahiri appear to be the same man. As far as I can see, although Radharaman refused to have anything to do with his grandson, he did collect information on him, especially if it was praise of his acting.’

Feluda put all the papers away carefully in a plastic bag, and rang a theatre journal called *Manchalok*, to find out which theatre group Sanjay Lahiri worked

for. It turned out that the group was called the Modern Opera. Apparently, Sanjay Lahiri did all the lead roles. Feluda then rang their office, and was told that the group was currently away in Jalpaiguri. They would be back only after a week.

We went out after lunch. I had never had to go to so many different places, all on the same day! Feluda took me first to the National Museum. He didn't tell me why we were going there, and I didn't ask because he had sunk into silence and was cracking his knuckles. This clearly meant he was thinking hard, and was not to be disturbed. We went straight to the section for musical instruments. To be honest, I didn't even know the museum had such a section. It was packed with all kinds of instruments, going back to the time of the *Mahabharata*. Modern instruments were also displayed, although there was nothing that might have come from the West.

Then we went to two music shops, one in Free School Street, and the other in Lal Bazaar. Neither had heard of anything called melochord. 'Mr Samaddar was an old and valued customer,' said Mr Mondol of Mondol & Co. which had its shop in Lal Bazaar (Feluda had found one of their cash memos among Radharaman's papers yesterday). 'But no, we never sold him the instrument you are talking about. What does it look like? Is it a wind instrument like a clarinet?'

'No. It's more like a harmonium, but much smaller in size. The sound it gives out is a cross between a piano and a sitar.'

'How many octaves does it have?'

I knew the eight notes—sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa—made one octave. The large harmoniums in Mondol's shop had provision for as many as three octaves. When Feluda told him a melochord had only one octave, Mr Mondol shook his head and said, 'No, sir, I don't think we can help you. This instrument might well be only a toy. You may wish to check in the big toy shops in New Market.'

We thanked Mr Mondol and made our way to College Street. Feluda bought three books on music, and then we went off to find the office of *Manchalok*. We found it relatively easily, but it took us a long time to find a photograph of Sanjay Lahiri. Finally, Feluda dug out a crumpled photo from somewhere, and offered to pay for it. 'Oh, I can't ask you to pay for that picture, sir!' laughed the editor of the magazine. 'You are Felu Mitter, aren't you? It's a privilege to be able to help you.'

By the time we returned home after stopping at a café for a glass of lassi, it was 7.30 p.m. The whole area was plunged in darkness because of load shedding. Undaunted, Feluda lit a couple of candles and began leafing through

his books. When the power came back at nine, he said to me, ‘Topshe, could you please pop across to your friend Poltu’s house, and ask him if I might borrow his harmonium just for this evening?’

It took me only a few minutes to bring the harmonium. When I went to bed quite late at night, Feluda was still playing it.

I had a strange dream that night. I saw myself standing before a huge iron door, in the middle of which was a very large hole. It was big enough for me to slip through; but instead of doing that, Feluda, Monimohan Samaddar and I were all trying to fit a massive key into it. And Surajit Dasgupta was dancing around, wearing a long robe, and singing, ‘Eight-two-o-nine-one! Eight-two-o-nineone!’

Four

Mr Samaddar had told us he'd give us a call the following Wednesday. However, he rang us a day earlier, on Tuesday, at 7 a.m. I answered the phone. When I told him to hold on while I went to get Feluda, he said, 'No, there's no need to do that. Just tell your cousin I'm coming over to your house straightaway. Something urgent's cropped up.'

He arrived in fifteen minutes. 'Abani Sen rang from Bamungachhi. Someone broke into my uncle's room last night,' he said.

'Does anyone else know how to operate that German lock?' Feluda asked at once.

'Dharani used to know. I'm not sure about Abani Babu—no, I don't think he knows. But whoever broke in didn't use that door at all. He went in through the small outer door to the bathroom. You know, the one meant for cleaners.'

'But that door was bolted from inside. I saw that myself.'

'Maybe someone opened it after we left. Anyway, the good news is that he couldn't take anything. Anukul came to know almost as soon as he got into the house, and raised an alarm. Look, are you free now? Do you think you could go back to the house with me?'

'Yes, certainly. But tell me something. If you now saw Radharaman's grandson, Dharani, do you think you could recognize him?'

Mr Samaddar frowned. 'Well, I haven't seen him for years, but . . . yes, I think I could.'

Feluda went off to fetch the photo of Sanjay Lahiri. When he handed it over to Mr Samaddar, I saw that he had drawn a long moustache on Sanjay's face, and added a pair of glasses with a heavy frame. Mr Samaddar gave a start. 'Why,' he exclaimed, 'this looks like—!'

'Surajit Dasgupta?'

'Yes! But perhaps the nose is not quite the same. Anyway, there is a resemblance,'

'The photo is of your cousin Muralidhar's son. I only added a couple of things just to make it more interesting.'

'It's amazing. Actually, I did find it strange, when Dasgupta walked in yesterday. In fact, I wanted to ring you last night and tell you, but I got delayed at the press. We were working overtime, you see. But then, I wasn't absolutely sure. I hadn't seen Dharani for fifteen years, not even on the stage. I'm not interested in the theatre at all. If what you're suggesting is true . . .'

Feluda interrupted him, ‘If what I’m suggesting is true, we have to prove two things. One—that Surajit Dasgupta doesn’t exist in real life at all; and two—that Sanjay Lahiri left his group and returned to Calcutta a few days before your uncle’s death. Topshe, get the number of Minerva Hotel, please.’ The hotel informed us that a Surajit Dasgupta had indeed been staying there, but had checked out the day before. There was no point in calling the Modern Opera, for they had already told us Sanjay Lahiri was out of town.

On reaching Bamungachhi, Feluda inspected the house from outside, following the compound wall. Whoever came must have had to come in a car, park it at some distance and walk the rest of the way. Then he must have jumped over the wall. This couldn’t have been very difficult, for there were trees everywhere, their overgrown branches leaning over the compound wall. The ground being totally dry, there were no footprints anywhere.

We then went to find Anukul. He wasn’t feeling well and was resting in his room. What he told us, with some difficulty, was this: mosquitoes and an aching head had kept him awake last night. He could see the window of Radharaman’s bedroom from where he lay. When he suddenly saw a light flickering in the room, he rose quickly and shouted, ‘Who’s there?’ But before he could actually get to the room, he saw a figure slip out of the small side door to the bathroom and disappear in the dark. Anukul spent what was left of the night lying on the floor of his master’s bedroom.

‘I don’t suppose you could recognize the fellow?’ Mr Samaddar asked.

‘No, sir. I’m an old man, sir, and I can’t see all that well. Besides, it was a moonless night.’

Radharaman’s bedroom appeared quite unharmed. Nothing seemed to have been touched. Even so, Feluda’s face looked grim. ‘Moni Babu,’ he said, ‘you’ll have to inform the police. This house must be guarded from tonight. The intruder may well come back. Even if Surajit Dasgupta is not Sanjay Lahiri, he is our prime suspect. Some collectors are strangely determined. They’ll do anything to get what they want.’

‘I’ll ring the police from next door. I happen to know the OC,’ said Mr Samaddar and went out of the room busily.

Feluda picked up the melochord and began inspecting it closely. It was a sturdy little instrument. There were two panels on it, both beautifully engraved. Feluda turned it over and discovered an old and faded label. ‘Spiegler,’ he said. ‘Made in Germany, not England.’ Then he began playing it. Although he was no expert, the sound that filled the room was sweet and soothing. ‘I wish I could break it open and see what’s inside,’ he said, putting it back on the table, ‘and

obviously I can't do that. The chances are that I'd find nothing, and the instrument would be totally destroyed. Dasgupta was prepared to pay a thousand rupees for it, imagine!'

Despite his splitting headache, Anukul got up and brought us some lemonade again. Feluda thanked him and took a few sips from his glass. Mr Samaddar returned at this moment. 'The police have been informed,' he told us. 'Two constables will be posted here from tonight. Abani Babu wasn't home. He and Sadhan have gone to Calcutta for the day.'

'I see. Well, tell me, Moni Babu, who—apart from yourself—knew about Radharaman's habit of hiding all his money?'

'Frankly, Mr Mitter, I realized the money was hidden only after his death. Abani Babu next door is aware that we're looking for my uncle's money, but I'm sure he hasn't any idea about the amount involved. If it was Dharani who came here disguised as Dasgupta, he may have learnt something that morning before my uncle died. In fact, I'm convinced Dharani had come only to ask for money. Then they must have had a row, and—' Mr Samaddar broke off.

Feluda looked at him steadily and said, '—And as a result of this row, your uncle had a heart attack. But that didn't stop Dharani. He searched the room before he left. Isn't that what you're thinking?'

'Yes. But I know he didn't find any money.'

'If he had, he wouldn't have returned posing as Surajit Dasgupta, right?'

'Right. Perhaps something made him think the money was hidden in one of those two instruments.'

'The melochord.'

Mr Samaddar gave Feluda a sharp glance. 'Do you really think so?'

'That's what my instincts are telling me. But I don't like taking shots in the dark. Besides, I can't forget your uncle's last words. He did use the word "key", didn't he? You are certain about that?'

Mr Samaddar began to look unsure. 'I don't know . . . that's what it sounded like,' he faltered, rubbing his hands in embarrassment. 'Or it could be that my uncle was talking pure nonsense. It could have been delirium, couldn't it? Maybe the word "key" has no significance at all.'

I felt a sudden stab of disappointment at these words. But Feluda remained unruffled. 'Delirium or not, there is money in this room,' he said. 'I can smell it. Finding a key is not really important. We've got to find the money.'

'How? What do you propose to do?'

‘Just at this moment, I’d like to go back home. Please tell Anukul not to worry, I don’t think anyone will try to break in during the day. All he needs to do is not let any stranger into the house. There will be those police constables at night. I must go back and think very hard. I can see a glimmer of light, but unless that grows brighter, there’s nothing much I can do. May I please spend the night here?’

Mr Samaddar looked faintly surprised at this question. But he said immediately, ‘Yes, of course, if that’s what you want. Shall I come and collect you at 8 p.m.?’

‘All right. Thank you, Moni Babu.’

‘First of all, my boy, write down the name of the dead man.’

Feluda was back in his room, sitting on his bed. I was sitting in a chair next to him, a notebook on my lap and a pen in my hand.

‘Radharaman Samaddar,’ I wrote. ‘What’s his grandson called?’ ‘Dharanidhar Samaddar.’

‘And the name he uses on the stage?’ ‘Sanjay Lahiri.’

‘What’s the name of the collector of musical instruments who lives in Dehra Dun?’ ‘Surajit Dasgupta.’

‘Who’s Radharaman’s neighbour?’

‘Abani Sen.’ ‘And his son?’ ‘Sadhan.’

‘What were Radharaman’s last words?’ ‘In my name . . . key . . . key.’

‘What are the eight notes in the sargam?’ ‘Sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa.’

‘Very well. Now go away and don’t disturb me. Shut the door as you go. I am going to work now.’

I went to the living room and picked up one of my favourite books to read. An hour later, I heard Feluda dialling a number on the telephone extension in his room. Unable to contain myself, I tiptoed to the door of his room and eavesdropped shamelessly. ‘Hello? Can I speak to Dr Chintamoni Bose, please?’

Feluda was calling the heart specialist who had accompanied Mr Samaddar the day Radharaman died. I returned to the living room, my curiosity satisfied. Ten minutes later, there was the sound of dialling again. I rose once more and listened at the door.

‘Eureka Press? Who’s speaking?’

This time, Feluda was calling Mr Samaddar’s press. I didn’t need to hear any more, so I went back to my book.

When our cook Srinath came in with the tea at four, Feluda was still in his room. By the time I had finished my tea and read a few more pages of my book, it was 4.35. I was now feeling more mystified than ever. What on earth could Feluda be doing, puzzling over those few words I had scribbled in a notebook? After all, there wasn't anything in them he didn't know already. Before I could think any further, Feluda opened his door and came out with a half-finished Charminar in his hand. 'My head's reeling, Topshe!' he exclaimed, a note of suppressed excitement in his voice. 'Who knew it would take me so long to work out the meaning of a few words spoken by a very old man at his deathbed?'

In reply, I could only stare dumbly at Feluda. What he had just said made no sense to me, but I could see that his face looked different, which could simply mean that the light he had seen earlier was now much stronger than a glimmer.

'Sa dha ni sa ni . . . notes from the sargam. Does that tell you anything?'

'No, Feluda. I've no idea what you're talking about.'

'Good. If you could catch my drift, one would have had to assume your level of intelligence was as high as Felu Mitter's.'

I was glad of the difference. I was perfectly happy being Feluda's satellite, and no more.

Feluda threw his cigarette away, and picked up the telephone once again.

'Hello? Mr Samaddar? Can you come over at once? Yes, yes, we have to go to Bamungachhi as soon as we can . . . I think I've finally got the answer . . . yes, melochord . . . that's the important thing to remember.'

Then he replaced the receiver and said seriously, 'There is a risk involved, Topshe. But I've got to take it, there is no other choice.'

Five

Mr Samaddar's driver was old, but that didn't stop him from driving at eighty-five kilometres per hour when we reached VIP Road. Feluda sat fidgeting, as though he would have liked to have driven faster. Soon, we had to reduce our speed as the road got narrower and more congested. However, only a little while later, it shot up to sixty, despite the fact that the road wasn't particularly good and it had started to get dark.

There was no one at the main gate of Radharaman's house. 'Perhaps it's not yet time for those police constables to have arrived,' Feluda remarked.

We found Sadhan in the garden with his airgun.

'Why, Sadhan Babu, what are you killing in the dark?' Feluda asked him, getting out of the car.

'Bats,' Sadhan replied promptly. There were a number of bats hanging from the branches of a peepul tree just outside the compound.

The sound of our car had brought Anukul to the front door. Mr Samaddar told him to light a lantern and began unlocking the German lock. 'I'm dying to learn how you solved the mystery,' he said. I could understand his feelings, for Feluda hadn't uttered a single word in the car. I, too, was bursting with curiosity.

Feluda refused to break his silence. Without a word, he stepped into the room and switched on a powerful torch, It shone first on the wall, then fell on the melochord, still resting peacefully on the small table. My heart began to beat faster. The white keys of the instrument gleamed in the light, making it seem as though it was grinning from ear to ear. Feluda did not move his arm. ,'Keys . . .' he said softly. 'Look at those keys. Radharaman didn't mean a lock and a key at all. He meant the keys of an instrument, like a piano, or—'

He couldn't finish speaking. What followed a split second later took my breath away. Even now, as I write about it, my hand trembles.

At Feluda's words, Mr Samaddar suddenly sprang in the air and pounced upon the melochord like a hungry tiger on its prey. Then he picked it up, struck at Feluda's head with it, knocked me over and ran out of the door.

Feluda had managed to raise his arms in the nick of time to protect his head. As a result, his arms took the blow, making him drop the torch and fall on the bed in pain. As I scrambled to my feet, I heard Mr Samaddar locking the door behind him. Even so, I rushed forward, to try and push it with my shoulder. Then I heard Feluda whisper, 'Bathroom.' I picked up the torch quickly, and we both sped out of the small bathroom door.

There was the sound of a car starting, followed by a bang. A confused babble greeted us as we emerged. I could hear Anukul shouting in dismay, and Abani Sen speaking to his son very crossly. By the time we reached the front door, the car had gone, but there was someone sitting on the driveway.

'What have you done, Sadhan?' Mr Sen was still scolding his son furiously. 'Why did do you that? It was wrong, utterly wrong—!'

Sadhan made a spirited reply in his thin childish voice, 'What could I do? He was trying to run away with Dadu's instrument!'

'He's quite right, Mr Sen,' Feluda said, panting a little. 'He's done us a big favour by injuring the culprit, though in the future he must learn to use his airgun more carefully. Please go back home and inform the police. The driver of that car must not be allowed to get away. Tell them its number is WMA 6164.'

Then he walked over to the figure sitting on the driveway and, together with Anukul, helped him to his feet. Mr Samaddar allowed himself to be half pushed and half dragged back into the house, without making any protest. A pellet from Sadhan's airgun had hit one corner of his forehead. The wound was still bleeding.

The melochord was still lying where it had fallen on the cobbled path. I picked it up carefully and took it back to the house.

Feluda, Mr Sen, Inspector Dinesh Guin from the Barasat police station and I were sitting in Radharaman's bedroom, drinking tea. A man—possibly a constable—stood at the door. Another sat huddled in a chair. This was our culprit, Monimohan Samaddar. The wound on his forehead was now dressed. Sadhan was also in the room, standing at the window and staring out. On a table in front of us was the melochord.

Feluda cleared his throat. He was now going to tell us how he had learnt the truth. His watch was broken, and one of his arms was badly scraped. He had found a bottle of Dettol in the bathroom, and dabbed his arm with it. Then he had tied a handkerchief around his arm. If he was still in pain, he did not show it.

He put his cup down and began speaking. 'I started to suspect Monimohan Samaddar only from this afternoon. But I had nothing to prove that my suspicions weren't baseless. So, unless he made a false move, I could not catch him. Fortunately, he lost his head in the end and played right into my hands. He could never have got away, but Sadhan helped me in catching him immediately . . . Something he told me about working late on Monday first made me suspicious, not at the time, but later. He said he got very late on

Monday evening because he had to work overtime. This was odd since a friend of mine lives in the same area where his press is, and I have often heard him complain that they have long power cuts, always starting in the evening and lasting until quite late at night. So I rang the Eureka Press, and was told that no work had been done on Monday evening because of prolonged load shedding. Moni Babu himself had left the press in the afternoon, and no one had seen him return. This made me wonder if a man who had told me one lie hadn't also told me another. What if Radharaman's last words were different from what I had been led to believe? I remembered he wasn't the only one present at the time of his death. I rang Dr Chintamoni Bose, and learnt that what Radharaman had really said was, "Dharani . . . in my name . . . key . . . key." It was Dharani's name that Moni Babu had failed to mention. Dharani was, after all, Radharaman's only grandchild. He was still fond of him. If there were good reviews of his performance, Radharaman kept those press cuttings. So it was only natural that he should try to tell his grandson—and not his nephew—the secret about his money. I don't think he had even recognized his nephew. Nevertheless, it was his nephew who heard his last words. He could make out that Radharaman was talking about his hidden money. But he couldn't find a key anywhere, so he decided to come to me, the idea being that I would find out where the key was, and Moni Babu would grab all the money. Nobody knew if there was a will. If a will could not be found, everything Radharaman possessed would have gone directly to Dharani. In any case, I doubt very much if Radharaman would have considered leaving anything to his nephew. It is my belief that he wasn't particularly fond of Moni Babu.'

Feluda stopped. No one spoke. After a brief pause, he continued, 'Now, the question was, why did Moni Babu lie to me about working late on Monday? Was it because he spent Monday evening indulging in some criminal activity, which meant that he needed an alibi? Radharaman's room was broken into that same evening. Could the intruder have been Moni Babu himself? The more I thought about it, the more likely did it seem. He was the only one who could use the combination lock, go into the room, unbolt the bathroom door, then come out again and lock the main door to the bedroom. That small bathroom door was most definitely bolted from inside when I saw it during the day. No cleaner could have come in after we left since it's not being used at all. I suspect Moni Babu had worked out what his uncle had meant by the word "key", so he'd come back in the middle of the night to steal the melochord. Am I right?'

All of us turned to look at Mr Samaddar. He nodded without lifting his head. Feluda went on, 'Even if Moni Babu could get away with stealing the melochord, I am positive he could never have decoded the rest of

Radharaman's message. I stumbled on the answer only this evening, and for that, too, I have to thank little Sadhan.'

We looked at Sadhan in surprise. He turned his head and stared at Feluda solemnly. 'Sadhan,' Feluda said, 'tell us once again what your Dadu said about music and people's names.'

'Those who have melody in their names,' Sadhan whispered, 'are bound to have melody in their voices.'

'Thank you. This is merely an example of Radharaman's extraordinary intelligence. "Those who have melody in their names," he said. All right, let's take a name. Take Sadhan, for instance. Sadhan Sen. If you take away some of the vowels, you get notes from the sargam—sa dha ni sa ni. When I realized this, a new idea struck me. His last words were "in my name . . . key". Could he have meant the keys on the melochord that corresponded with his own name? Radharaman—re dha re ma ni. Samaddar—sa ma dha dha re. Dharanidhar was a singer, too; and he had melody in his name as well —dha re ni dha re. What a very clever idea it was, simple yet ingenious. Radharaman was obviously interested in mechanical gadgets. That German combination lock is an example. The melochord was also made in Germany, by a company called Spiegler. It was made to order, possibly based on specifications supplied by Radharaman himself. It acted as his bank. Thank goodness Surajit Dasgupta hadn't walked away with it, although I'm sure Radharaman would have emptied its contents before handing it over. Maybe he didn't feel the need for a bank any more. Maybe he knew he didn't have long to live . . . I learnt two other things. Surajit Dasgupta is a genuine musician, absolutely passionate about music and instruments. The few books on music I have read in the last two days mentioned his name. I was quite mistaken in thinking it was Dharani in disguise. Dharani is truly away in Jalpaiguri, he hasn't the slightest idea of what's going on. What we have to do now is see if there is anything left for him to inherit. He wants to form his own group, according to an interview published in Manchalok. So I'm sure a windfall would be most welcome. Topshe, bring that lantern here.'

I picked up the lantern and brought it closer to the melochord. Feluda placed it on his lap. 'It's had to put up with some rough handling today,' he said, 'but it was designed so well that I don't think it was damaged in any way. Now let's see what Radharaman's brain and German craftsmanship has produced.' Feluda began pressing the keys that made up Radharaman's full name—re dha re ma ni sa ma dha dha re. A sweet note rang out with the pressing of every key. As Feluda pressed the last one, the right panel slid open silently. We leant over the instrument eagerly, to find that there was a deep compartment

behind this panel, lined with red velvet, and packed with bundles of hundred rupee notes.

Sheer amazement turned us into statues for a few moments. Then Feluda began pulling out the bundles gently. ‘I think we have at least fifty thousand here,’ he said. ‘Come on, Mr Sen, help me count it.’

A bemused Abani Sen rose to his feet and stepped forward. The light from the lantern fell on Feluda’s face and caught the glint in his eye. I knew it wasn’t greed, but the pure joy of being able to use his razor-sharp brain once more, and solve another mystery.

2. Grammar Page

Unit **144**

Phrasal verbs 8 **up** (2)

A

bring up a topic etc. = *introduce it in a conversation*
- I don't want to hear any more about this. Please don't **bring** it **up** again.

come up = *be introduced in a conversation*
- Some interesting things **came up** in our discussion yesterday.

come up with an idea, a suggestion etc. = *produce an idea*
- Sarah is very creative. She's always **coming up with** new ideas.

make something **up** = *invent something that is not true*
- What Kevin told you about himself wasn't true. He **made** it all **up**.

B

cheer up = *be happier*, **cheer** somebody **up** = *make somebody feel happier*
- You look so sad! **Cheer up**!
- Helen is depressed. What can we do to **cheer** her **up**?

save up for something / to do something = *save money to buy something*
- Dan is **saving up** for a trip to New Zealand.

clear up = *become bright (for weather)*
- It was raining when I got up, but it **cleared up** later.

C

blow up = *explode*, **blow** something **up** = *destroy it with a bomb etc.*
- The engine caught fire and **blew up**.
- The bridge was **blown up** during the war.

tear something **up** = *tear it into pieces*
- I didn't read the letter. I just **tore** it **up** and threw it away.

beat somebody **up** = *hit someone repeatedly so that they are badly hurt*
- A friend of mine was attacked and **beaten up**. He had to go to hospital.

D

break up, **split up** (**with** somebody) = *separate*
- I'm surprised to hear that Kate and Paul have **split up**. They seemed very happy together.

do up a coat, a shoelace, buttons etc. = *fasten, tie etc.*
- It's quite cold. **Do up** your coat before you go out.

do up a building, a room etc. = *repair and improve it*
- The kitchen looks great now that it has been **done up**.

look something **up** in a dictionary/encyclopaedia etc.
- If you don't know the meaning of a word, you can **look** it **up** (in a dictionary).

put up with something = *tolerate a difficult situation or person*
- We live on a busy road, so we have to **put up with** a lot of noise from the traffic.

hold up a person, a plan etc. = *delay*
- Don't wait for me. I don't want to **hold** you **up**.
- Plans to build a new factory have been **held up** because of financial problems.

mix up people/things, **get** people/things **mixed up** = *you think one is the other*
- The two brothers look very similar. People often **mix** them **up**.
  or . . . People often **get** them **mixed up**.