



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G46**

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# 1. The Martyr's Corner

By R K Narayan

Just at that turning between Market Road and the lane leading to the chemist's shop he had his establishment. If anyone doesn't like the word 'establishment', he is welcome to say so, because it was actually something of a vision spun out of air. At eight you would not see him, and again at ten you would see nothing, but between eight and ten he arrived, sold his goods and departed.

Those who saw him remarked thus, 'Lucky fellow! He has hardly an hour's work a day and he pockets ten rupees—what graduates are unable to earn! Three hundred rupees a month!' He felt irritated when he heard such glib remarks and said, 'What these folk do not see is that I sit before the oven practically all day frying all this stuff . . .'

He got up when the cock in the next house crowed; sometimes it had a habit of waking up at three in the morning and letting out a shriek. 'Why has the cock lost its normal sleep?' Rama wondered as he awoke, but it was a signal he could not miss. Whether it was three o'clock or four, it was all the same to him. He had to get up and start his day.

At about 8:15 in the evening he arrived with a load of stuff. He looked as if he had four arms, so many things he carried about him. His equipment was the big tray balanced on his head, with its assortment of edibles, a stool stuck in the crook of his arm, a lamp in another hand, a couple of portable legs for mounting his tray. He lit the lamp, a lantern which consumed six paise worth of kerosene every day, and kept it near at hand, since he did not like to depend only upon electricity, having to guard a lot of loose cash and a variety of miscellaneous articles.

When he set up his tray with the little lamp illuminating his display, even a confirmed dyspeptic could not pass by without throwing a look at it. A heap of *bondas*, which seemed puffed and big but melted in one's mouth; *dosais*, white, round and limp, looking like layers of muslin; *chappatis* so thin that you could lift fifty of them on a little finger; duck's eggs, hard-boiled, resembling a heap of ivory balls; and perpetually boiling coffee on a stove. He had a separate aluminium pot in which he kept chutney, which went gratis with almost every item.

He always arrived in time to catch the cinema crowd coming out after the evening show. A pretender to the throne, a young scraggy fellow, sat on his spot until he arrived and did business, but our friend did not let that bother him unduly. In fact, he felt generous enough to say, 'Let the poor rat do his business when I am not there.' This sentiment was amply respected, and the pretender moved off a minute before the arrival of the prince among caterers.

His customers liked him. They said in admiration, 'Is there another place where you can get coffee for six paise and four *chappatis* for an anna?' They sat around his tray, taking what they wanted. A dozen hands hovered about it every minute, because his customers were entitled to pick up, examine and accept their stuff after proper scrutiny.

Though so many hands were probing the lot, he knew exactly who was taking what: he knew by an extraordinary sense which of the *jutka*-drivers was picking up *chappatis* at a given moment; he could even mention his licence number; he knew that the stained hand nervously coming up was that of the youngster who polished the shoes of passers-by; and he knew exactly at what hour he would see the wrestler's arm searching for the perfect duck's egg, which would be knocked against the tray corner before consumption.

His custom was drawn from the population swarming the pavement: the boot-polish boys, for instance, who wandered to and fro with brush and polish in a bag, endlessly soliciting, 'Polish, sir, polish!' Rama had a soft corner in his heart for the waifs. When he saw some fat customer haggling over the payment to one of these youngsters he felt like shouting, 'Give the poor fellow a little more. Don't grudge it. If you pay an anna more he can have a *dosai* and a *chappati*. As it is, the poor fellow is on half-rations and remains half-starved all day.'

It tore his heart to see their hungry, hollow eyes; it pained him to note the rags they wore; and it made him very unhappy to see the tremendous eagerness with which they came to him, laying aside their brown bags. But what could he do? He could not run a charity show; that was impossible. He measured out their half-glass of coffee correct to the fraction of an inch, but they could cling to the glass as long as they liked.

The blind beggar, who whined for alms all day in front of the big hotel, brought him part of his collection at the end of the day and demanded refreshment . . . and the grass-selling women. He disliked serving women; their shrill, loud voices got on his nerves. These came to him after disposing of head-loads of grass satisfactorily. And that sly fellow with a limp who bought a packet of mixed fare every evening and carried it to a prostitute-like creature standing under a tree on the pavement opposite.

All the coppers that men and women of this part of the universe earned through their miscellaneous jobs ultimately came to him at the end of the day. He put all this money into a little cloth bag dangling from his neck under his shirt, and carried it home, soon after the night show had started at the theatre.

He lived in the second lane behind the market. His wife opened the door, throwing into the night air the scent of burnt oil which perpetually hung about their home. She snatched from his hands all his encumbrances, put her hand under his shirt to pull out his cloth bag and counted the cash immediately. They gloated over it. 'Five rupees invested in the morning has brought us another five . . .' They ruminated on the exquisite mystery of this multiplication. She put back into his cloth bag the capital for further investment for the next day, and carefully separated the gains and put them away in a little wooden box that she had brought from her parents' house years before.

After dinner, he tucked a betel leaf and tobacco in his cheek and slept on the *pyol* of his house, and had dreams of traffic constables bullying him to move on and health inspectors saying that he was spreading all kinds of disease and depopulating the city. But fortunately in actual life no one bothered him very seriously. He gave an occasional packet of his stuff to the traffic constable going off duty or to the health-department menial who might pass that way. The health officer no doubt came and said, 'You must put all this under a glass lid, otherwise I shall destroy it all someday . . . Take care!' But he was a kindly man who did not pursue any matter but wondered in private, 'How his customers survive his food, I can't understand! I suppose people build up a sort of immunity to such poisons, with all that dust blowing on it and the gutter behind . . .' Rama no doubt violated all the well-accepted canons of cleanliness and sanitation, but still his customers not only survived his fare but seemed actually to flourish on it, having consumed it for years without showing signs of being any the worse for it.

Rama's life could probably be considered a most satisfactory one, without agitation or heartburn of any kind. Why could it not go on forever, endlessly, till the universe itself cooled off and perished, when by any standard he could be proved to have led a life of pure effort? No one was hurt by his activity and money-making, and not many people could be said to have died of taking his stuff; there were no more casualties through his catering than, say, through the indifferent municipal administration.

But such security is unattainable in human existence. The gods grow jealous of too much contentment anywhere, and they show their displeasure all of a sudden. One night, when he arrived as usual at his spot, he found a babbling crowd at the corner where he normally sat. He said authoritatively, 'Leave way, please.' But no one cared. It was the young shop-boy of the stationer's that plucked his sleeve and said, 'They have been fighting over something since the evening . . .'

'Over what?' asked Rama.

'Over something . . .' the boy said. 'People say someone was stabbed near the Sales Tax Office when he was distributing notices about some votes or something. It may be a private quarrel. But who cares? Let them fight who want a fight.'

Someone said, 'How dare you speak like that about us?'

Everyone turned to look at this man sourly. Someone in that crowd remarked, 'Can't a man speak . . . ?'

His neighbour slapped him for it. Rama stood there with his load about him, looking on helplessly. This one slap was enough to set off a fuse. Another man hit another man, and then another hit another, and someone started a cry, 'Down with . . .'

'Ah, it is as we suspected, preplanned and organized to crush us,' another section cried.

People shouted, soda-water bottles were used as missiles. Everyone hit everyone else. A set of persons suddenly entered all the shops and demanded that these be closed. 'Why?' asked the shop-men.

'How can you have the heart to do business when . . . ?'

The restraints of civilized existence were suddenly abandoned. Everyone seemed to be angry with everyone else. Within an hour the whole scene looked like a battlefield. Of course the police came to the spot presently, but this made matters worse, since it provided another side to the fight. The police had a threefold task: of maintaining law and order and also maintaining themselves intact and protecting some party whom they believed to be injured. Shops that were not closed were looted.

The cinema house suddenly emptied itself of its crowd, which rushed out to enter the fray at various points. People with knives ran about, people with bloodstains groaned and shouted, ambulance vans moved here and there. The police used *lathis* and tear gas, and finally opened fire.

Many people died. The public said that the casualties were three thousand, but the official communiqué maintained that only five were injured and four and a quarter killed in the police firing. At midnight Rama emerged from his hiding place under a culvert and went home.

The next day Rama told his wife, 'I won't take out the usual quantity. I doubt if there will be anyone there. God knows what devil has seized all those folk! They are ready to kill each other for some votes . . .' His instinct was right. There were more policemen than public on Market Road and his corner was strongly guarded. He had to set up his shop on a farther spot indicated by a police officer.

Matters returned to normal in about ten days, when all the papers clamoured for a full public inquiry into this or that: whether the firing was justified and what precautions were taken by the police to prevent this flare-up and so on. Rama watched the unfolding of contemporary history through the shouts of newsboys, and in due course tried to return to his corner. The moment he set up his tray and took his seat, a couple of young men wearing badges came to him and said, 'You can't have your shop here.'

'Why not, sir?'

'This is a holy spot on which our leader fell that day. The police aimed their guns at his heart. We are erecting a monument here. This is our place; the Municipality have handed this corner to us.'

Very soon this spot was cordoned off, with some congregation or the other always there. Money-boxes jingled for collections and people dropped coins. Rama knew better than anyone else how good the place was for attracting money. They collected enough to set up a memorial stone and, with an ornamental fencing and flower pots, entirely transformed the spot.

Austere, serious-looking persons arrived there and spoke among themselves. Rama had to move nearly two hundred yards away, far into the lane. It meant that he went out of the range of vision of his customers. He fell on their blind spot. The cinema crowd emerging from the theatre poured away from him; the *jutka*-drivers who generally left their vehicles on the roadside for a moment while the traffic constable showed indulgence and snatched a mouthful found it inconvenient to come so far; the boot-boys patronized a fellow on the opposite footpath, the scraggy pretender, whose fortunes seemed to be rising.

Nowadays Rama prepared a limited quantity of snacks for sale, but even then he had to carry back remnants; he consumed some of it himself, and the rest, on his wife's advice, he warmed up and brought out for sale again next day.

One or two who tasted the stuff reacted badly and spread the rumour that Rama's quality was not what it used to be. One night, when he went home with just two annas in his bag, he sat up on the *pyol* and announced to his wife, 'I believe our business is finished. Let us not think of it anymore.'

He put away his pans and trays and his lamp, and prepared himself for a life of retirement. When all his savings were exhausted he went to one Restaurant Kohinoor, from which loudspeakers shrieked all day, and queued up for a job. For twenty rupees a month he waited eight hours a day on the tables. People came and went, the radio music frayed his nerves, but he stuck on; he had to. When some customer ordered him about too rudely, he said, 'Gently, brother. I was once a hotel-owner myself.' And with that piece of reminiscence he attained great satisfaction.



## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
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### have something done

**A** Study this example situation:



The roof of Lisa's house was damaged. So she called a builder, and yesterday he came and repaired it.

Lisa **had** the roof **repaired** yesterday.

This means: Lisa arranged for somebody else to repair the roof. She didn't repair it herself.

If you **have something done**, you arrange for somebody to do it for you.

Compare:

- ☐ Lisa **repaired** the roof. (= she repaired it herself)
- Lisa **had** the roof **repaired**. (= she arranged for somebody else to repair it)
- ☐ A: Did you **make** those curtains yourself?
- B: Yes, I like making things.
- A: Did you **have** those curtains **made**?
- B: No, I made them myself.

**B** Study the word order:

have	object	past participle
Lisa <b>had</b>	the roof	<b>repaired.</b>
Where did you <b>have</b>	your hair	<b>cut?</b>
We are <b>having</b>	the house	<b>painted.</b>
I think you should <b>have</b>	that coat	<b>cleaned.</b>
I don't like <b>having</b>	my picture	<b>taken.</b>

We say:

- ☐ How often do you **have your car serviced?** (*not have serviced your car*)
- ☐ Our neighbour is **having a garage built.** (*not having built a garage*)
- ☐ Your hair looks nice. Did you **have it cut?**

**C** **get something done**

You can say '**get something done**' instead of '**have something done**':

- ☐ When are you going to **get the roof repaired?** (= have the roof repaired)
- ☐ I think you should **get your hair cut** really short.

**D** We also use **have something done** with a different meaning. For example:

- ☐ Paul and Karen **had their bags stolen** while they were travelling.

This does not mean that they arranged for somebody to steal their bags. '**They had their bags stolen**' means only: 'Their bags were stolen'.

With this meaning, we use **have something done** to say that something happens to somebody or their belongings:

- ☐ Gary **had** his nose **broken** in a fight. (= his nose was broken)
- ☐ Have you ever **had** your bike **stolen**?