



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G47**

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# 1. The Editor

By Rabindranath Tagore

While my wife was alive I didn't give much thought to Prabha. I was more involved with her mother than with her. I was happy to watch her play and laugh, to listen to her half-formed speech and respond to her affection; I would, whenever I was in the mood, romp around with her; but the moment she started to cry I would return her to her mother's arms and make a speedy escape. I never considered what care and effort were needed to bring up a child.

But with the sudden and untimely death of my wife, Prabha's upbringing passed to me, and I clasped her warmly. I don't quite know whose concern was the stronger: mine to bring up my motherless daughter with double affection, or hers to look after her wifeless father. But from the age of six, she took charge of the house. It was plain to see that this little girl was trying to be her father's sole guardian.

It tickled me to put myself entirely into her hands. I noticed that the more useless and helpless I was, the more she liked it; if I picked up my clothes or umbrella myself, she reacted as if I had infringed her rights. She had never before had a doll as big as her father; she revelled all day in feeding him, dressing him, settling him down to sleep. Only when I took her through her arithmetic book or the first part of her poetry reader did my paternal responsibility come slightly alive.

From time to time I remembered that to marry her to a suitable groom would cost a lot of money – but where was I to get that money? I was educating her as well as I could: it would be awful if she ended up in some nincompoop's hands.

I gave my attention to the need to earn money. I was too old to get a job in a government office, and there was no way I could get into any other office either. After much pondering, I started to write books.

If you punch holes in a hollow bamboo stick, it doesn't become a receptacle; you can't keep oil or water in it; it can't be put to any practical use. But if you blow into it, it makes an excellent cost-free flute. I had the idea that anyone who was unfortunate enough to be useless at any practical work would certainly write good books. Confident of this, I wrote a satirical farce. People said it was good, and it was performed on stage.

The dangerous result of my sudden taste of fame was that I now couldn't stop writing farces. With knotted brow, I spent all day writing them.

Prabha would come and ask, with a loving smile, 'Won't you have your bath, Father?'

'Leave me alone,' I snapped. 'Don't bother me now.'

Probably the girl's face darkened like a lamp suddenly blown out; but I never even noticed her silent, pained withdrawal from the room.

I flared up at the maid, and cuffed the male servant; if a beggar came calling for alms I would drive him away with a stick. If an innocent passer-by spoke through my window to ask the way (my room looked on to the street), I would tell him to go to hell. Why couldn't people understand that I was, at that moment, writing a hilarious farce?

But the money I earned was not at all proportionate either to the hilarity of my farces or to my fame. Nor, at the time, was the money uppermost in my mind. Meanwhile, in unthought-of places, grooms suitable for Prabha were growing up who would set other fathers free from their duty to their daughters, and I failed to notice. Probably only starvation would have brought me to my senses; but now a new opportunity came my way. The zamindar of Jahir village invited me to be the salaried editor of a paper he was starting. I accepted, and within a few days I was writing with such fervour that people used to point me out in the street, and in my own estimation I was as blindingly brilliant as the afternoon sun. Next to Jahir was Ahir village. The zamindars of the two villages were bitter enemies. Previously their quarrels had led to brawls – but now the magistrate had bound them over to keep the peace, and the zamindar of Jahir had engaged poor me in place of his murderous *lāṭhiyāls*.

Everyone told me I discharged my duties most honourably. The Ahir villagers were utterly cowed by my pen. The whole of their history and ancestry was blackened by it.

This was a good time for me. I became quite fat. There was a perpetual smile on my face. I fired devastating verbal sallies at the people of Ahir and their ancestors, and everyone in Jahir split their sides at my wit. I was blissfully happy.

In the end, Ahir village also brought out a paper. They didn't mince their words. They hurled insults with such zeal and in such crude and vulgar language that the very letters on the page seemed to shriek before one's eyes. The people of both villages knew exactly what was intended. But I, as was my custom, attacked my opponents with humour, subtlety and irony, so that neither my friends nor my enemies could understand what I meant. The result was that though I had won the argument everyone thought I had lost. I then

felt compelled to write a sermon on good taste – but I found that this too was a grave mistake, for whereas it is easy to ridicule what is good, it is not so easy to ridicule what is already ridiculous. The sons of Hanu can happily make fun of the sons of Manu, but the sons of Manu can never be so successful at pillorying the sons of Hanu: whose snarls, therefore, drove good taste out of town.

My employer cooled towards me. I was not welcome at public gatherings. When I went out, no one hailed me or spoke to me. People even began to laugh when they saw me. My farces, meanwhile, were completely forgotten. I felt like a spent match; I had flamed for a minute, and then burned out. I was so disheartened that however hard I scratched my head, not a line of writing would come. I began to feel there was no point in living any more.

Prabha was now scared of me. She did not dare approach unless she was invited. She had come to see that a clay doll was a much better companion than a father who wrote satires.

One day it became apparent that the Ahir paper had started to concentrate on me rather than on the zamindar. Vile things were written. My friends each brought me the paper and read it out with great amusement. Some of them said that whatever the content, the language was superb: by which they meant that the slanders it contained were easy to understand. I heard this same opinion throughout the day.

There was a small plot of garden in front of my house. One evening I was pacing there alone, utterly sick at heart. As the birds returned to their nests and stopped their singing, freely consigning themselves to the peace of the evening, I was taken with the thought that there are no satirists' cliques among birds, no arguments about good taste. But I was still preoccupied with how I could best reply to my slanderers. One of the drawbacks of refinement is that not every sort of person understands it. Boorish language is relatively commonplace, so I decided I would write a reply in appropriately boorish style. I would not give in! At that moment I heard a small, familiar voice in the darkness of the evening, and next I felt a tender, hot hand touch mine. I was so worried and distracted that even though the voice and touch were known to me, they did not sink in. But a moment later the voice was gently sounding in my ears, and the delicate touch was intensifying. A little girl was beside me, and was softly calling, 'Father.' When she got no answer she lifted my right hand and pressed it lightly against her cheek; then she slowly went indoors.

Prabha had not called me like this for a long time – had not, of her own accord, come and showed that sort of affection. So her tender touch this evening went straight to my heart.

A little later I returned to the house and saw Prabha lying on the bed.

She looked worn out, and her eyes were slightly closed; she lay like a flower, shed at the end of the day. I felt her brow: it was very warm; her breath was hot too; the veins in her temple were throbbing. I realized now that the girl, distressed by the onset of illness, had gone to her father longing with all her heart for his care and affection; and her father had at the time been engrossed in thinking up a scorching reply for the Jahir paper to print.

I sat down next to her. Saying nothing, she pulled my hand into the feverishly warm palms of her hands and, placing her cheek on it, lay quietly.

I made a bonfire of all the Jahir and Ahir papers. I never wrote my riposte. And giving up like that gave me greater happiness than I had ever known.

When her mother died, I held Prabha in my lap. Now, after cremating her stepmother – my writing – I lifted her into my arms again and carried her indoors.

## 2. Child Development

While parents obviously play a major role in the way that their child develops as they get older, many people believe that social factors outside of the family now influence children much more. This essay will examine both sides of the argument.

There is no doubt that there are factors external to the family that significantly impact on a child's development. For example, there is television and the internet. Children these days have access to these much more than they used to in the past, and they will pick up language and see things that will teach them about life. Friends also have an important influence as a child will often copy peers that they admire and respect. This could be positive behaviour but it could also be negative, such as smoking or taking drugs.

Ultimately, however, it is family who have the most important impact. Children spend nearly all of their time with their family, especially in their early years. They develop their confidence, socialisation skills, morals, values and views on life through their interaction with them. Proof of the importance of this can be seen in the differences between some children. Those that grow up in a dysfunctional home often eventually have problems themselves, whilst those that are brought up in a warm and close environment end up more confident and secure in adult life.

To conclude, it is the family that can provide a supportive, secure, and nurturing environment, which is crucial to the way in which a child becomes an adult. Although it is clear that social factors play a part, I would argue that it is the former that is the most important.

## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
47

### Reported speech 1 (he said that ...)

**A** Study this example situation:



You saw Paul yesterday and you want to tell somebody what he said.

There are two ways of doing this:

You can repeat Paul's words (direct speech):  
Paul said, 'I'm feeling ill.'

Or you can use reported speech:  
Paul said **that he was feeling ill**.

Compare:

direct	Paul said, 'I am feeling ill.'	In writing we use these quotation marks to show direct speech.
reported	Paul said that he was feeling ill.	

**B** When we use reported speech, the main verb of the sentence is usually past (Paul **said** that ... / I **told** her that ... etc.). The rest of the sentence is usually past too:

- ☐ Paul **said** that he **was** feeling ill.
- ☐ I **told** Lisa that I **didn't** have any money.

You can leave out **that**. So you can say:

- ☐ Paul **said** **that** he was feeling ill. or Paul **said** he was feeling ill.

In general, the *present* in direct speech changes to the *past* in reported speech:

am/is → <b>was</b>	do/does → <b>did</b>	will → <b>would</b>
are → <b>were</b>	have/has → <b>had</b>	can → <b>could</b>
want/like/know/go etc. → <b>wanted/liked/knew/went</b> etc.		

See also Unit 48A.

Compare direct and reported speech:

You met Anna. Here are some of the things she said in *direct* speech:

I've lost my phone.  
I **want** to buy a car.  
I **can't** come to the party on Friday.  
I **don't** have much free time.  
My parents **are** fine.  
I'm going away for a few days.  
I'll phone you when I **get** back.



Later you tell somebody what Anna said.  
You use *reported* speech:

- ☐ Anna said that she **had** lost her phone.
- ☐ She said that she **wanted** to buy a car.
- ☐ She said that she **couldn't** come to the party on Friday.
- ☐ She said that she **didn't** have much free time.
- ☐ She said that her parents **were** fine.
- ☐ She said that she **was** going away for a few days and **would** phone me when she **got** back.

**C** The *past simple* (**did/saw/knew** etc.) can stay the same in reported speech, or you can change it to the *past perfect* (**had done / had seen / had known** etc.):

- ☐ *direct* Paul said: 'I **woke** up feeling ill, so I **didn't** go to work.'
- ☐ *reported* Paul said (that) he **woke** up feeling ill, so he **didn't** go to work. or  
Paul said (that) he **had woken** up feeling ill, so he **hadn't** gone to work.