



Learn English Through Stories

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Adapted and modified by

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1. The Red Rice Granary

By Sudha Murty

Every year, our country has to face natural disasters in some form. It may be an earthquake in Gujarat, floods in Orissa or a drought in Karnataka. In a poor country, these calamities create havoc.

In the course of my work, I have found that after such calamities, many people like to donate money or materials to relief funds. We assume that most donations come from rich people, but that is not true. On the contrary, people from the middle class and lower middle class, help more. Rarely do rich people participate wholeheartedly.

A few years back, I was invited to a reputed company in Bangalore to deliver a lecture on Corporate Social Responsibility. Giving a speech is easy. But I was not sure how many people in the audience would really understand the speech and change themselves.

After my talk was over, I met many young girls and boys. It was an affluent company and the employees were well-off and well-dressed. They were all very emotional after the lecture.

‘Madam, we buy so many clothes every month. Can we donate our old clothes to those people who are affected by the earthquake? Can you co-ordinate and send them?’

Some of them offered other things.

‘We have grown-up children, we would like to give their old toys and some vessels.’

I was very pleased at the reaction. It reminded me of the incident in Ramayana where during the construction of the bridge between India and Lanka, every squirrel helped Sri Rama by bringing a handful of sand.

‘Please send your bags to my office. I will see that they reach the right persons.’

Within a week, my office was flooded with hundreds of bags. I was proud that my lecture had proven so effective.

One Sunday, along with my assistants, I opened the bags. What we saw left us amazed and shocked.

The bags were brimming over with all kinds of junk! Piles of high-heeled slippers (some of them without the pair), torn undergarments, unwashed

shirts, transparent, cheap saris, toys which had neither shape nor colour, unusable bedsheets, aluminium vessels, broken cassettes were soon piled in front of us like a mountain. There were only a few good shirts, saris and usable materials.

It was apparent that instead of sending the material to a garbage or the kabariwala, these people had transferred them to my office in the name of donation. The men and women I had met that day were bright, well ravelled, well-off people. If educated people like them behaved like this, what would uneducated people do?

But then I was reminded of an incident from my childhood. I was born and brought up in a village in Karnataka's Haveri District, called Shiggaon. My grandfather was a retired schoolteacher and my grandmother Krishtakka never went to school. Both of them hardly travelled and had never stepped out of Karnataka. Yet they were hardworking people, who did their work wholeheartedly without expecting anything from anybody in their life. Their photographs never appeared in any paper, nor did they go up on a stage to receive a prize for the work they did. They lived like flowers with fragrance in the forest, enchanting everyone around them, but hardly noticed by the outside world.

In the village we had paddy fields and we used to store the paddy in granaries. There were two granaries. One was in the front and the other at the back of our house. The better quality rice which was white, was always stored in the front granary and the inferior quality, which was a little thick and red, was stored in the granary at the back.

In those days, there was no communal divide in the village. People from different communities lived together in peace. Many would come to our house to ask for alms. There were Muslim fakirs, Hindu Dasaiahs who roamed the countryside singing devotional songs, Yellamma Jogathis who appeared holding the image of Goddess Yellamma over their heads, poor students and invalid people.

We never had too much cash in the house and the only help my grandfather could give these people was in the form of rice. People who receive help do not talk too much. They would receive the rice, smile and raise their right hand to bless us. Irrespective of their religion, the blessing was always 'May God bless you.' My grandfather always looked happy after giving them alms.

I was a little girl then and not too tall. Since the entrance to the front granary was low, it was difficult for grown-ups to enter. So I would be given a small bucket and sent inside. There I used to fill up the bucket with rice

and give it to them. They would tell me how many measures they wanted.

In the evening, my grandmother used to cook for everybody. That time she would send me to the granary at the back of the house where the red rice was stored. I would again fill up the bucket with as much rice as she wanted and get it for her to cook our dinner.

This went on for many years. When I was a little older, I asked my grandparents a question that had been bothering me for long.

‘Why should we eat the red rice always at night when it is not so good, and give those poor people the better quality rice?’

My grandmother Krishtakka smiled and told me something I will never forget in my life.

‘Child, whenever you want to give something to somebody, give the best in you, never the second best. That is what I have learned from life. God is not there in the temple, mosque or church. He is with the people. If you serve them with whatever you have, you have served God.’

My grandfather answered my question in a different way.

‘Our ancestors have taught us in the Vedas that one should,

Donate with kind words.

Donate with happiness.

Donate with sincerity.

Donate only to the needy.

Donate without expectation because it is not a gift. It is a duty.

Donate with your wife’s consent.

Donate to other people without making your dependents helpless.

Donate without caring for caste, creed and religion.

Donate so that the receiver prospers.’

This lesson from my grandparents, told to me when I was just a little girl, has stayed with me ever since. If at all I am helping anyone today, it is because of the teachings by those simple souls. I did not learn them in any school or college.

2. The Real Jewels



The district of South Canara in Karnataka is very different from any other. The literacy rate here is high, people are enterprising and hard working. They have travelled all over the world in search of employment. If you see any Udupi vegetarian restaurant in India or any part of the globe, it is sure to have been started by a person from South Canara.

The Infosys Foundation has a project called 'A Library for Every School'. In this we donate books mainly to government school libraries, so that children have easy access to a variety of books. For this, I travel extensively in rural areas and donate books written in Kannada on various subjects. All the travelling has helped me to understand what children want to read in different places. During my travels, I frequently stay in the houses of people I meet, as often there are no hotels in the small towns and villages I visit. Most of the time I stay with the family of a teacher from the school I am visiting. Sometimes, I stay with people I had never met earlier.

In India, a guest is always treated with a lot of love, affection and respect. An old Sanskrit saying is '*Atithi Devo Bhava*', meaning God comes in the form of a guest.

I have felt this to be so true, especially during my stay in villages. The poorest of the poor have treated me with so much love and affection. They have given me the best hospitality possible without knowing who I am or expecting anything in return.

In 1998, I went to a village in South Canara for a school function. It was the rainy season and the small village was on the coast of the Arabian Sea. It was pouring and there were no hotels in the village. The school teacher was a bachelor and lived in a rented room. He told me, 'Madam, the chairman of this school is a fine gentleman. He has asked me to tell you that you could stay tonight with his family. You cannot travel today because of this rain. Even the bridge has gone under water.'

I did not have much option. I felt a little uncomfortable staying with someone I had never even met.

By that time the chairman Mr. Aithappa came with an umbrella to call me. He had been caught up in some important work and not been able to attend the function.

His house was huge. It was functional without much decoration. There was a big granary room and a storage place for coconuts and vegetables. It had red oxide flooring and was like many traditional houses of South Canara where there was an inside courtyard. Water had to be drawn from a well at the side of the kitchen. There were a few bedrooms on the ground floor and the first floor. There was a cowshed at the back, along with a large vegetable garden. That was all I could see as it was already dark and the raindrops were hitting me like pebbles hard on my feet.

As soon as I entered, the lady of the house came with a warm smile and towels to wipe myself. Her smile put me instantly at ease. Without much ceremony she said, 'Please feel comfortable. Dinner will be ready in half an hour.'

I changed my dress and came to the dining hall. In the huge hall there were only four people including me, the couple and their elderly mother. Plantain leaves were laid on the floor and the cook was serving. There were innumerable food items and I did not know where to start. The old lady of the house was very gracious. She reminded me of my large-hearted grandmother. After dinner I wanted to chat with her. When I told her, she said, 'If you want you can stay in my room so that we can talk.' I preferred that, rather than staying all alone in the first-floor guest room.

I have always wondered why people in South Canara are so much more educated, compared to any other district of Karnataka. I asked Kuttamma, 'Did you study when you were young?'

Kuttamma sighed as if she was in pain.

'No, unfortunately I did not go to school. When I was young we were extremely poor and I was a coolie in the garden of a school teacher. I always felt education is essential. If you can read and write you can secure a better job. In my case it was not possible. So I was determined that my only son Aithappa should study as much as he could and I would work hard for that. My husband also felt the same way, but he was killed by a snake-bite when my son was only five years old. It was my promise to him that I would educate my son.'

I tried to imagine life six decades back—the social pressures, the great poverty, and no help from the government. I have met many women of that age group who have told me more or less the same story. Kuttamma

continued.

‘My son did not disappoint me. He went to Bombay as a hotel boy. He cleaned the plates in the morning, and in the evenings went to Moghaveera night school and studied there.’

‘Yes, I know this school. It is in Worli and is the oldest Kannada school in Bombay. Many children have studied there.’

‘Once he finished his schooling he became a clerk at the counter of a hotel and went to night college. He got his degree and started his own hotel in Bombay. He became very successful.’

‘Then why is he here now?’

Kuttamma smiled. I could see she was proud.

‘He started many hotels in Bombay but I remained in my village. I never felt comfortable in Bombay in spite of all the money he had because nobody spoke my language there and I love this village.’

‘Yes, I know there is a saying in Sanskrit:

Janani Janmabhoomischa

Swargadapi gariyasi

It means your motherland is always a heaven.’

‘You are a learned lady so you can recite all this in Sanskrit but my intuition told me to stay here and do something for our own people. My son became very wealthy and handed over his business to his son. He is now sixty-five years old and ten years back he returned to his village.’

‘How does he spend his time?’

I could understand the old lady not wanting to move out of her home but I was unable to understand how a busy successful person like Aithappa could retire to this godforsaken sleepy village.

‘When he became rich, my son asked me, “Amma, I have earned so much wealth. I want to know what you want. I remember you sold all your jewellery for my fees in college, you had only one meal so that I could have two. Now I want to buy lots of jewellery for you.”’

‘What did you answer?’

‘I told my son that in life, the real jewellery is education. The school teacher for whom I worked when I was young used to tell everything will perish over a period of time—flowers, beauty, food. No person looks beautiful forever. But education brings confidence to your face and that is the real beauty. I have

crossed the age to wear jewelleryes. If you respect my wishes, build as many free schools as possible in as many villages in South Canara. My son understood my feelings. He himself shifted to this village and has, till today, built ten such schools. He remains very busy managing these schools.'

Now I understood the reason behind the high literacy rate of the area. Women like Kuttamma had not studied but they had understood the importance of good education. They had insisted their children go to school. It is certainly true that if one man studies, only one person is educated whereas if one lady studies, the entire family is educated.

3. Donation and Charity

By GROK

Donation and charity are simple acts of kindness that can make a big difference in the world. Donation means giving something, like money, food, or clothes, to help others who need it. Charity is when people or groups work to support those who are poor, sick, or facing hard times.

Helping others through donation and charity is a good thing. It shows care and love for people we may not even know. For example, giving money to a hospital can help sick people get better. Sharing food with the hungry can give them strength and hope. Even small donations, like old clothes or books, can bring joy to someone's life.

Charity also makes the giver happy. When we help others, we feel good inside. It builds a sense of community where everyone looks out for each other. Many people donate because they want to share what they have and make the world a better place.

In short, donation and charity are easy ways to help people in need. They spread kindness and show that we care. No matter how big or small, every act of giving can change someone's life for the better.

4. Grammar page



Use **shall** or **will** with **I** and **we**.

Use **will** with **you, he, she, it** and **they**.

Here is a table to help you remember the rules:

	Singular	Plural
First person	I shall I will	we shall we will
Second person	you will	you will
Third person	he will she will it will	they will they will they will

Learn these contractions:

I shall = I'll

I will = I'll

you will = you'll

he will = he'll

she will = she'll

it will = it'll

we shall = we'll

we will = we'll

they will = they'll

shall not = shan't

will not = won't

