



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E52

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1. Pret in the House

By Ruskin Bond

It was Grandmother who decided that we must move to another house. And it was all because of a *pret*, a mischievous ghost, who had been making life intolerable for everyone.

In India, *prets* usually live in peepul trees, and that's where our Pret first had his abode – in the branches of an old peepul which had grown through the compound wall and had spread into the garden, on our side, and over the road, on the other side.

For many years, the Pret had lived there quite happily, without bothering anyone in the house. I suppose the traffic on the road had kept him fully occupied. Sometimes, when a *tonga* was passing, he would frighten the pony and, as a result, the little pony- cart would go reeling off the road.

Occasionally he would get into the engine of a car or bus, which would soon afterwards have a breakdown. And he liked to knock the sola- topis off the heads of sahibs, who would curse and wonder how a breeze had sprung up so suddenly, only to die down again just as quickly. Although the Pret could make himself felt, and sometimes heard, he was invisible to the human eye.

At night, people avoided walking beneath the peepul tree. It was said that if you yawned beneath the tree, the Pret would jump down your throat and ruin your digestion. Grandmother's tailor, Jaspal, who never had anything ready on time, blamed the Pret for all his troubles. Once, when yawning, Jaspal had forgotten to snap his fingers in front of his mouth – always mandatory when yawning beneath peepul trees – and the Pret had got in without any difficulty. Since then, Jaspal had always been suffering from tummy upsets.

But it had left our family alone until, one day, the peepul tree had been cut down.

It was nobody's fault except, of course, that Grandfather had given the Public Works Department permission to cut the tree which had been standing on our land. They wanted to widen the road, and the tree and a bit of wall were in the way; so both had to go. In any case, not even a ghost can prevail against the PWD. But hardly a day had passed when we discovered that the Pret, deprived of his tree, had decided to take up residence in the bungalow. And since a good Pret must be bad in order to justify his existence, he was soon up to all sorts of mischief in the house.

He began by hiding Grandmother's spectacles whenever she took

them off. 'I'm sure I put them down on the dressing-table,' she grumbled.

A little later they were found balanced precariously on the snout of a wild boar, whose stuffed and mounted head adorned the veranda wall. Being the only boy in the house, I was at first blamed for this prank; but a day or two later, when the spectacles disappeared again only to be discovered dangling from the wires of the parrot's cage, it was agreed that some other agency was at work.

Grandfather was the next to be troubled. He went into the garden one morning to find all his prized sweet-peas snipped off and lying on the ground.

Uncle Ken was the next to suffer. He was a heavy sleeper, and once he'd gone to bed, he hated being woken up. So when he came to the breakfast table looking bleary-eyed and miserable, we asked him if he wasn't feeling all right.

'I couldn't sleep a wink last night,' he complained. 'Every time I was about to fall asleep, the bedclothes would be pulled off the bed. I had to get up at least a dozen times to pick them off the floor.' He stared balefully at me. 'Where were you sleeping last night, young man?'

I had an alibi. 'In Grandfather's room,' I said.

'That's right,' said Grandfather. 'And I'm a light sleeper. I'd have woken up if he'd been sleep-walking.'

'It's that ghost from the peepul tree,' said Grandmother.

'It has moved into the house. First my spectacles, then the sweet-peas, and now Ken's bedclothes! What will it be up to next? I wonder!'

We did not have to wonder for long. There followed a series of disasters. Vases fell off tables, pictures came down the walls. Parrot feathers turned up in the teapot while the parrot himself let out indignant squawks in the middle of the night. Uncle Ken found a crow's nest in his bed, and on tossing it out of the window was attacked by two crows.

When Aunt Minnie came to stay, things got worse. The Pret seemed to take an immediate dislike to Aunt Minnie. She was a nervous, easily excitable person, just the right sort of prey for a spiteful ghost. Somehow her toothpaste got switched with a tube of Grandfather's shaving-cream, and when she appeared in the sitting-room, foaming at the mouth, we ran for our lives. Uncle Ken was shouting that she'd got rabies.

Two days later Aunt Minnie complained that she had been hit on the nose by a grapefruit, which had of its own accord taken a leap from the pantry shelf and hurtled across the room straight at her. A bruised and swollen nose testified to the attack. Aunt Minnie swore that life had been more peaceful in Upper Burma.

‘We’ll have to leave this house,’ declared Grandmother.

‘If we stay here much longer, both Ken and Minnie will have nervous breakdowns.’ ‘I thought Aunt Minnie broke down long ago,’ I said.

‘None of your cheek!’ snapped Aunt Minnie.

‘Anyway, I agree about changing the house,’ I said breezily. ‘I can’t even do my homework. The ink-bottle is always empty.’

‘There was ink in the soup last night.’ That came from Grandfather.

And so, a few days and several disasters later, we began moving to a new house. Two bullock-carts laden with furniture and heavy luggage were sent ahead. The roof of the old car was piled high with bags and kitchen utensils. Everyone squeezed into the car, and Grandfather took the driver’s seat.

We were barely out of the gate when we heard a peculiar sound, as if someone was chuckling and talking to himself on the roof of the car.

‘Is the parrot out there on the luggage-rack?’ the query came from Grandfather.

‘No, he’s in the cage on one of the bullock-carts,’ said Grandmother.

Grandfather stopped the car, got out, and took a look at the roof.

‘Nothing up there,’ he said, getting in again and starting the engine. ‘I’m sure I heard the parrot talking.’

Grandfather had driven some way up the road when the chuckling started again, followed by a squeaky little voice.

We all heard it. It was the Pret talking to itself.

‘Let’s go, let’s go!’ it squeaked gleefully. ‘A new house. I can’t wait to see it. What fun we’re going to have!’

2. Poltergeists in India: A Study of the Unseen

By Grok

The concept of the poltergeist (Pret)—often understood as a noisy, disruptive spirit responsible for unexplained physical disturbances—may seem rooted in Western folklore, but India, with its rich tapestry of spiritual beliefs and supernatural traditions, offers a unique perspective on such phenomena. While the term "poltergeist" itself is of German origin (meaning "noisy ghost"), the essence of restless spirits causing chaos resonates deeply with Indian cultural narratives about ghosts, bhutas (spirits), and preta (restless souls). This essay explores the phenomenon of poltergeists in India, weaving together historical context, cultural beliefs, and notable accounts to examine how these entities are perceived and understood in the subcontinent.

Cultural and Historical Context

India's relationship with the supernatural is ancient and multifaceted, shaped by religious texts, oral traditions, and regional folklore. The Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas speak of various spiritual entities, including yakshas (nature spirits), rakshasas (demons), and pretas—souls unable to find peace after death due to unresolved desires or improper funeral rites. Unlike the Western poltergeist, which is often depicted as a standalone entity tied to a specific location or individual, Indian spirits are typically contextualized within a karmic framework. A preta, for instance, might linger due to unfulfilled obligations, causing disturbances until appeased through rituals like the shradh ceremony, performed to honour the dead.

The poltergeist-like behaviour—objects moving inexplicably, strange noises, or sudden physical phenomena—finds parallels in Indian stories of chudails (witches), bhutas, and pisachas (flesh-eating spirits). These entities are not always malevolent; some are simply restless, seeking attention or resolution. In rural India, tales of haunted havelis (mansions), abandoned wells, and banyan trees hosting spirits are common, often accompanied by accounts of stones falling from nowhere or utensils clattering without cause—hallmarks of poltergeist activity in Western terms.

Poltergeist Phenomena in Indian Accounts

While India lacks a formal catalog of "poltergeist cases" as seen in Western paranormal research, anecdotal evidence abounds. One notable example is the phenomenon of "stone-throwing spirits" reported in various parts of the country. In 2016, a village in Uttar Pradesh gained attention when residents claimed stones were mysteriously hurled at homes, with no visible culprit. Local explanations ranged from a disgruntled bhuta to a curse, and priests were called to perform cleansing rituals. Such incidents echo poltergeist tales elsewhere, where physical disturbances defy rational explanation.

Another intriguing case comes from Kolkata, where a family in the 1980s reported furniture moving on its own and eerie knocking sounds in their ancestral home. The disturbances ceased after a tantric ritual was conducted, suggesting a belief that the entity—whether a preta or bhuta—required spiritual intervention. These stories, though not scientifically verified, highlight a recurring theme: in India, poltergeist-like events are rarely seen as random but are instead tied to a narrative of unrest or retribution.

Psychological and Social Interpretations

Beyond the supernatural, poltergeist phenomena in India can also be viewed through a psychological lens. In many documented cases worldwide, poltergeist activity is linked to stress, repressed emotions, or adolescent energy—often termed the "agent" in parapsychology. In India, where family structures are tight-knit and societal expectations can be intense, such disturbances might reflect underlying tensions. For instance, a young woman in a restrictive household might unknowingly become the focal point of unexplained events, with the "poltergeist" serving as a cultural outlet for her turmoil. This aligns with global theories but is flavoured by India's unique socio-spiritual context, where the line between the psychological and the supernatural is often blurred.

Socially, poltergeist-like incidents can reinforce community bonds. When a village faces a "haunting," collective rituals—be it a puja, havan, or exorcism—bring people together, reaffirming shared beliefs. This contrasts with the often individualistic focus of Western poltergeist narratives, where the phenomenon isolates the affected.

Poltergeists in Popular Culture

Indian cinema and literature have also embraced poltergeist-like themes, blending them with local ghostlore. Films like *Bhoot* (2003) and *Stree* (2018) depict spirits that disrupt the living, often with a mix of horror and humour. While these are fictional, they draw on real cultural anxieties about the dead intruding into the world of the living. In literature, Ruskin Bond's ghost stories, such as those set in the haunted hills of Mussoorie, often feature restless spirits causing mischief, echoing poltergeist traits.

Conclusion

Poltergeists in India, though not labelled as such in traditional discourse, are a fascinating intersection of global paranormal phenomena and local spiritual heritage. Whether interpreted as bhutas seeking closure, pretas trapped by karma, or projections of human unrest, these entities reflect India's complex relationship with the unseen. Unlike their Western counterparts, Indian poltergeists are rarely just spectral nuisances; they carry stories—of loss, duty, or vengeance—that demand resolution. As India continues to modernize, the persistence of such tales suggests that the poltergeist, in its many forms, remains a timeless echo of the human experience, bridging the tangible and the ethereal in a land steeped in mystery.

3. Grammar Page

Adverbs of Frequency

Some adverbs and adverb phrases answer the question “how often?” They are called **adverbs of frequency**.

Katy practices the piano **regularly**.

The children **always** go to school on the bus.

I'll **never** make that mistake again.

Have you **ever** been to Japan?

We've been to Disneyland **twice**.

The shops are **often** very busy.

The newspaper is delivered **daily**.

We walk home from school **every day**.

I clean my bedroom **every week**.

Have you forgotten my name? I've told you **three times** already.

Dad polishes his shoes **twice a week**.

You should go to the dentist **once every six months**.



Adverbs of Duration

Some adverbs and adverb phrases answer the question “how long?” They are called **adverbs of duration**.

The library is **temporarily** closed.

We're staying in a hotel **overnight**.

The teacher left the classroom **briefly**.

The snow lasted **for three days**.

Mom was away **a very long time**.

Stand still **for a moment** while I comb your hair.

He talked to his girlfriend **for over an hour**.

We waited **for ages** for a bus.

I haven't seen my cousins **for two years**.

We stayed up **all night** talking.

