



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F54

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. Raja Hardaul

By Premchand

1

In the annals of Bundelkhand, Raja Hardaul is perhaps more popular than Champatrai's immortal Rani Sarandha. There is not a cluster of villages in the region that does not have a memorial in his name. On marriages and other occasions women deck themselves up and visit these memorials, offering flowers and other objects of worship. The rituals of a marriage are not taken to be complete if Hardaul is not offered rice and tamarind for the couple's good luck. Families and communities have their own deities—some offer intoxicating bhang to Lord Shiva, some entreat Lord Mahavira with *malida*, while some slake the thirst of the goddess by sacrificing a goat. But Hardaul extracts his due from each person according to his status. If you go to any *mauza* and ask a child about Hardaul's memorial, he will be able to direct you to the spot.

Now, what did this son of a man do to be so widely remembered with such reverence till this day? He conquered no land, founded no sultanate, wrote no book and invented nothing. He was a crazy fellow, not a mighty king. He fell prey to the suspicions of a credulous brother. He chose to swallow a cup of poison to wipe the stain of unfaithfulness off a woman falsely accused of being unfaithful to her husband. He washed away that stain with his own blood, and it is for this act that, even after three centuries, a halo of purity and reverence surrounds his name. Historical monuments celebrating human victories are built with stones and pebbles and evoke people's admiration. But manly valour evokes spiritual zeal in human beings. The fact is human beings endow someone with the status of a deity only when he performs a great deed, beyond the capability of ordinary people. Conquerors and poets, the wise and the just, find their places in the halls of fame, but a man who gives his life for the sake of his conscience finds a place in people's hearts. Today, Hardaul is revered like a god. The greatest of poets have written poems in his honour and his legend has become an inspiring example for self-respecting people.

Hardaul was the younger brother of Jujhar Singh, the king of Orchha. The mountainous region of Orchha nurtured the Bundelas. It was their nerve centre. Even today, the king of Orchha presides over the assembly of the Bundelas.

Raja Jujhar Singh was a courageous and wise man. During his time, Shah Jahan was the Mughal emperor at Delhi. When Khan-e Jahan Lodhi rebelled against the Mughal emperor, pillaging several areas of his empire, and advanced towards Orchha, it was Jujhar Singh who confronted him valiantly. Shah Jahan was greatly pleased with his display of courage. The emperor was a connoisseur of human beings. He promptly entrusted the king with an important responsibility of the state of Deccan. Orchha broke out in celebration on that day. The emperor's emissary arrived with gifts and titles for the king. Jujhar Singh was now at the cusp of doing great things. Preparations for the king's travels started.

The king sent for Hardaul and said, 'Bhaiya, I have to leave soon. Now, the kingdom is your responsibility. I am attached to my people; you, too, should love them. Justice is a king's most trusted friend. No enemy can penetrate the fortress of justice, even if he combines the might of Ravana's army and Indra's thunderbolt. True justice is validated in the court of the people. Your task is not limited to doing justice but to ensure that the subjects are convinced of it. What more should I say? You are a wise man yourself.' Saying this, he took off his turban and placed it on Hardaul's head.

Hardaul began to cry and fell at the king's feet.

Then the king went to the queen's chamber to bid her farewell. The queen was standing at the doorstep, weeping. She fell at his feet when he arrived. Jujhar Singh pulled her up, took her in his arms and said, 'Sweetheart, this is not the moment to weep. Bundela women never weep on such occasions. We shall meet again soon, by God's grace. Keep your love for me intact. Hardaul will administer the state during my absence. He's still a young boy, unaware of the ways of the world. Do help him with your advice.'

The queen was choked from crying continuously. *He tells me that Bundel women do not cry on such occasions! Probably they do not have hearts or do not feel the ache of love.*

The queen controlled her emotions, joined her hands and looked at the king smilingly. Was it really a smile? Just as a lamp in a dark field accentuates darkness, similarly the queen's smile only indicated her deep sorrow.

3

Hardaul began to rule the state after Jujhar Singh's departure. Within a short time, he won the hearts and minds of his subjects through his just conduct and love for them. People forgot Jujhar Singh. While Jujhar Singh had both friends and enemies, Hardaul's nature made everyone his friend. He was cheerful, handsome and soft-spoken. Anyone who talked to him once became his admirer for life. Everyone had easy access to him. The doors of his durbar remained open to everyone, day and night. Orchha had never had the good fortune to have a king who was so dear to everyone. He was generous, wise and a patron of knowledge and the arts. But the greatest quality he had was courage, of which he was an embodiment. A nation that depends on physical might for its survival, cannot but take pride in the physical courage of its king above everything else.

Hardaul wielded his sword with dexterity and courage. He began to rule over the minds and hearts of his subjects, which was a more difficult feat than to rule over a state and treasury.

A year passed in this way. Meanwhile, Jujhar Singh, through his administrative skill, had been able to put the emperor's rule on firm footing in the Deccan. In Orchha, Hardaul seemed to have charmed his subjects through his magic.

It was the month of Phagun in spring. The earth was resplendent with multiple colours and the songs of the season ignited the fire of love in young hearts. The rabi crop had ripened in the field and looked like gold and the granaries looked like palaces built of gold chaffs. This golden expanse exuded a sense of contentment while peace reigned in the golden palace.

It was at this time that Delhi's famed fencer, Qadir Khan, arrived at Orchha. The veteran fencers of the time recognized his supremacy in the art. From Delhi to Orchha, hundreds of worthy wrestlers had confronted him but none were able to defeat him. Fighting with him was like fighting death. He did not hanker after rewards or bounties. He had a generous temperament just as

he had a courageous heart. On the very day of Holi, he had the following message announced in Orchha accompanied with the beat of a drum: 'Qadir Khan of Delhi, the lion of God, has reached Orchha. Those who feel their lives have become a burden should come forward and have their destiny decided.'

The brave Bundelas of Orchha were offended by this arrogant challenge. The sounds of battle-drums drowned the musical notes of Phaag. Hardaul's fencing ring was the centre for Orchha's wrestlers and fencers. That evening, all the veterans of the city assembled there. Kaldev and Bhaldev, the veterans of many encounters, were the pride of the Bundelas. These two wrestlers were chosen to crush Qadir Khan's pride.

The following day, the entire population of Orchha converged on the huge ground beside the lake in front of the fort. The youngsters had turned out in their finery, wearing colourful turbans on their heads and sandalwood tikas on their faces. With razor-sharp swords slung from their waists they exuded manliness.

The elderly people were also well turned out—with stretched moustaches, turbans tilted and beards tied to their ears. Outwardly they looked old but were very young in their hearts. Their manly energy could put the young to shame. Everyone was talking about the ensuing encounter. While the young were debating whether Orchha's honour would survive that day, the elders reassured them, saying Orchha had never been defeated.

Seeing the enthusiasm of his brave men, Hardaul announced loudly, 'Beware!

Whether the honour of the Bundelas survives or not, their sense of fairness should not be questioned. Should anyone give our adversary a reason to say that the people of Orchha could not fight straight and took recourse to foul play, he should be treated as the enemy of our people.'

The sun had risen. Suddenly, the drums were struck, and hope and anxiety created a tumult in people's minds. Kaldev and Qadir Khan girded their loins and entered the arena like tigers and embraced each other. Then swords were drawn and the encounter commenced. Flashes of lightning began to emanate from two clouds. For three full hours, it seemed as if two fire-spitting pythons were at war. Thousands of people in the arena watched this spectacle in rapt attention and total silence. Only when Kaldev served an adroit stroke or staved off a fatal assault, people craned

their necks to get a better view but no words escaped their lips. Sword clashed with sword within the ring, but for a discerning person, a more interesting spectacle was on display outside the ring, among the spectators. It was a constant struggle for the Bundela spectators to restrain themselves from breaking out into spontaneous outbursts of joy and despair.

Indeed, it was a greater struggle than that was going on inside the ring.

Suddenly, Qadir Khan screamed out, 'Allahu Akbar!' It sounded like a clap of thunder and with it lightning seemed to strike Kaldev's head.

4

The moment Kaldev fell the Bundelas lost all restraint. Their faces reflected rage and injured pride. Thousands of people rushed frantically towards the ring. But Hardaul thundered, 'Beware! No one shall take a step further.'

Hardaul's warnings chained the feet of the Bundelas. When the spectators were restrained, Hardaul entered the ring to check on Kaldev and his eyes filled with tears. The injured lion lay writhing on the ground. His sword, split in two pieces, looked as miserable as his life. The day passed, making way for the night, but sleep eluded the Bundelas. They kept tossing and turning in their beds all night. The Bundelas waited for the break of dawn even more impatiently than a sick man who finds the night interminable. People looked at the sky at frequent intervals and were annoyed with the slow passage of time. Their national pride had been deeply wounded. When the sun rose the next morning, about three lakh Bundelas welcomed Bhaldev near the lake. As he marched towards the arena, their hearts began to pound faster.

The day before, when Kaldev had entered the ring, people were upbeat, but the following day, things were different. Fear had replaced hope in their hearts. Whenever Qadir Khan made a fatal thrust, the spectators would miss a heartbeat. As the sun slowly crawled up the sky, their spirits went down. There was no doubt that Bhaldev was more adroit than his brother. He sent Qadir Khan into disarray several times but the veteran wrestler from Delhi managed to pull himself together each time. The combat lasted for three long hours. Then, suddenly, there was a splitting sound and Bhaldev's sword was broken into two. Raja Hardaul was standing beside the ring. He quickly threw a sword to Bhaldev. As he bent down to pick it up, Qadir Khan's sword

came down on his neck. The wound was not fatal, the sword had merely grazed him, but the result of the combat was already decided.

The Bundelas returned home with a heavy heart. Bhaldev was still ready to carry on and the Bundelas found it difficult to accept defeat, but Hardaul advised them, 'Brothers, we lost the battle when our sword broke. Had I been in Qadir Khan's place, I wouldn't have attacked an unarmed man. I wouldn't have raised my sword till my adversary had one in his hand. But Qadir Khan is a stranger to this generosity. Often it happens that while fighting a strong enemy, one has to forget magnanimity. We have demonstrated that we are equal to Qadir Khan in the art of fencing. We now have to prove that our swords, too, are of the same quality.'

After reassuring his people thus, Hardaul went to the queen's quarters.

'Bhaiya, what happened today?' Rani Kulyanta asked.

'The same as yesterday,' Hardaul replied, bowing his head.

'Was Bhaldev killed?'

'No. He wasn't killed, but he was defeated.'

'So, what can we do now?'

'That's what I've been thinking about. Orchha has never been humiliated in this way. We do not have a large kingdom or great wealth, but we are proud of our valour to which the other two things mean nothing. How can we take pride in our valour in the face of what happened today? The pride of Orchha and the Bundelas is at stake.'

'Is there no hope now?'

'There's no one amongst our fighters who can vanquish Qadir Khan. The defeat of Bhaldev has crushed the Bundela spirit. The whole city is in mourning today. Lamps have not been lit and kitchen fires have not been ignited in hundreds of homes. The reputation and honour of our clan are in jeopardy.'

Bhaldev was my teacher. It would be discourteous on my part to enter the combat after his defeat. But, if the Bundelas lose their reputation, then my

life, too, will go with it. Qadir Khan is certainly great at the art of fencing but our Bhaldev is not a lesser fighter. Qadir Khan's victory was due to his razor-sharp sword. If Bhaldev had Qadir Khan's sword, he would have certainly won the day. There is only one sword in Orchha that can match Qadir Khan's sword, and that belongs to my brother. If you wish to preserve Orchha's honour, then give this sword to me. This will be our last-ditch effort. If we fail in this effort, then Orchha's good name will suffer a permanent eclipse.'

Kulyanta was in a fix—unsure of whether she should give him the sword or not. The king had forbidden it when he left. In fact, his command had been that no stranger should come near his sword.

Will he be angry if I were to go against his wish in this situation? No!

Actually, he will be happy when he hears of the critical situation in which I gave the sword. Is there anyone who cares more about the honour of the Bundelas than him? Is there anyone who loves Orchha more than him? At this moment, disobeying his order will really mean obeying it. Following this train of thought, the queen handed over the sword to Hardaul.

5

As soon as dawn broke, word spread that Hardaul was going to challenge Qadir Khan. It was like a battle cry for the people. They stopped whatever they were doing and rushed frantically to the fencing arena. No one wanted Hardaul to take such a fatal risk. However, by the time the people reached the arena, they found that sparks were already flying there. It was difficult to fathom what the Bundelas were feeling in their hearts at that moment.

As far as one could see, the wide expanse of the field was teeming with people. But there was absolute silence all round. All eyes were glued to the ring and every heart sent up a prayer for Hardaul. The spectators' heartbeats skipped with each of Qadir Khan's strokes, while a wave of pleasure swept through them when Hardaul's sword made a thrust. If a combat was on between two brave fighters inside the arena, a similar contest was on between hope and despair among the people outside. Eventually, the timekeeper announced the conclusion of the first round when Hardaul's sword fell like lightning on Qadir Khan's head. The Bundelas went wild with joy. They embraced each other, jumped and danced excitedly. Many of them

felt so intoxicated that they wanted to replicate the fight among themselves to show off their heroism. Swords were drawn from their sheaths and spears began to flash. Hundreds of lives were lost in this uncontrolled happiness of victory. But when Hardaul stepped out of the arena and directed a stern look at his people, they restrained themselves instantly. The swords went back into their sheaths. Realization dawned on them—why this uncontrolled happiness, why this chaotic celebration? It was nothing new for the Bundelas. This thought had a sobering effect on them. Hardaul's heroic combat catapulted him to the zenith of regard and affection in people's hearts, a place he could never have made for himself merely on the combined strength of justice and generosity. He was loved by all. Now, he had become a national icon, the loadstar of Bundela bravery.

6

Raja Jujhar Singh similarly demonstrated his capability in the Deccan. He was not only a brave warrior in the field but also an efficient administrator. With his organizational skills, the region began to thrive. After a year there, he took permission from the emperor and set out for Orchha. The thoughts of Orchha always filled his heart with longing.

'O Orchha! When will the auspicious day come that I will see you again?'

When the day came and he proceeded towards Orchha with utmost haste. He had no sense of hunger or thirst. The affection of the people drew him with such force that he reached the forests of Orchha while his men were left behind. It was noon and exceedingly hot. He got off his horse and rested under the shade of a tree.

It was a coincidence that Hardaul, too, had set out on a hunting expedition on the same day to celebrate his victory. Hundreds of Bundela warriors were with him. Intoxicated by the victory they ignored Raja Jujhar Singh who was sitting alone, thinking him to be an ordinary passer-by. Hardaul's eyes were also deceived. He rode up to him with an air of conceit and was about to ask who he was when the eyes of the two brothers met. The moment Hardaul recognized his brother, he jumped off his horse and touched his feet. Jujhar Singh, too, stood up and embraced Hardaul. But, at the moment, there was no brotherly love in Jujhar's heart. It had been replaced by jealousy, only because Hardaul had not come barefoot in his

presence to welcome him and because his horsemen didn't pay their obeisance by lowering their heads from a distance.

The two brothers reached Orchha in the evening. The Raja's homecoming was greeted with cheerful music. The city broke out in celebration and musical soirees were held at places. The entire city was lit up. Rani Kulyanta prepared a feast with her own hands that day.

It must have been about nine in the evening when a female attendant came in and said, 'Maharaja, dinner is ready.'

Both brothers sat down to eat. The raja was to eat from a gold plate and Hardaul from a silver one. Kulyanta, who had cooked the food, also arranged the plates. But, whether due to her over-excitement or mere bad luck, she inadvertently placed the gold plate before Hardaul and the silver one before the raja. Hardaul did not pay any attention as, in the past year, he had become accustomed to eating from the gold plate. But Jujhar Singh was boiling with rage. He didn't utter a word, but his appearance changed and his face turned red. He glared at the queen and began to eat. But each morsel tasted like poison.

After taking a few morsels, he stood up and left.

The queen was stunned by his behaviour. She had prepared the food with great love. She was overjoyed at the auspicious return of her husband after a long time. But his wrathful mien made her blood freeze. When the Raja departed and she finally noticed his plate, her heart skipped a beat and she felt the ground beneath her feet slip away. She reproached herself. 'Oh God, let this night pass peacefully. The omens are not good.'

7

Raja Jujhar Singh retired to his chamber.

The clever female barber adorned the queen and said with a smile, 'I will collect my tips from the raja tomorrow.'

She left but Kulyanta kept sitting there.

She was deep in thought, 'How can I go to him when he is in this mood? The

barber has done my make-up in vain. Will he really be happy to see me with my make-up? I've somehow offended him; I'm guilty. It is not proper that I go before him adorned like this. No, no, I should go before him today in a supplicant's attire. I have to seek his forgiveness. That is what I should do at this hour.'

With these thoughts in her mind, she went and stood before the life-size mirror. She looked like an apsara. She had seen many pictures of beautiful women but at this moment, the one staring at her from the mirror appeared to be the most beautiful.

Beauty and narcissism go hand in hand. The turmeric cannot help but leave its colour. For a while, Kulyanta was absorbed in her own beauty. She stood up straight. People say that beauty has a magic of its own which never loses its charm. People give up their faith, lives and worldly interests for beauty.

'I may not be stunningly beautiful, but I'm not ugly either. Doesn't my beauty have the strength to win me a pardon from the raja? When I weave my arms like a garland around his neck, when my eyes look into his with deep longing, won't the fire of his anger be doused?'

However, in a short while, she returned to her senses. 'Oh God, what have I been dreaming of? Why do such thoughts occur in my mind? Good or bad, I'm his. I've committed an offence and I must seek his forgiveness. All this make-up and colourful attire do not suit me at this hour.' Influenced by these thoughts she took off all her jewellery. She put aside the perfumed silk sari. She removed the pearls adorning the parting of her hair, and wept copious tears. This night of union was more painful than the night of separation!

Dressed humbly, she walked towards the raja's chamber hesitantly. She reached the door but could not step inside. Her heart was pounding and her feet were shaking. Raja Jujhar Singh called from inside, 'Is it Kulyanta? Why don't you come in?'

'I daren't come in, great king. You've replaced my image in your heart with anger.'

'Why don't you acknowledge your guilt and try to look me in the eye?'

'I must have committed an offence. But a helpless woman begs forgiveness from you.'

‘You must atone for this.’

‘How?’

‘With the blood of Hardaul.’

Kulyanta trembled from head to toe and said, ‘Is it simply because I mistakenly interchanged the plates during dinner?’

‘No, it is because Hardaul has replaced me in your heart.’

The queen’s face blazed like a red-hot flame. For a minute she felt as though her heart and mind were boiling in fire. But with great effort she calmed herself and simply said, ‘Hardaul is like a child and brother to me.’

The king stood up and said sharply, ‘No! Hardaul is not a child. Actually I have acted like a child in trusting you. Kulyanta, I did not expect this of you. I was proud of you. I believed that the Himalayas might change places, but your heart would never change. Today I realize that I was a fool. It is rightly said that a woman’s love is like flowing water—wherever it encounters a slope, it flows in that direction.’

Even gold melts when heated. Kulyanta began to weep.

Then she calmed down a little, she asked, ‘How can I remove your suspicions?’

‘With the life of Hardaul.’

‘Won’t my life remove them?’

‘That will only confirm my doubts.’

‘Is there no other way out?’

‘No!’

‘Is this your final decision?’

‘Yes, this is my final decision. See, there are paan cones in this box. The test of your chastity is that you must serve them to Hardaul with your own

hands.

My suspicion will be allayed only when I see Hardaul's corpse leaving this house.'

The queen looked at the paan cones with loathing and left the room.

8

The queen began to ponder. *What shall I do? Shall I take Hardaul's life? Shall I prove myself chaste by taking the life of the gentle and kind Hardaul? Shall I stain my hands with the blood of someone who looks up to me as his sister? Who will account for this sin? Won't shedding the blood of the innocent have its consequences? Oh, unfortunate Kulyanta, what a shame that you have to prove your chastity in this dreadful way. No, I cannot commit this sin. If he thinks I'm unfaithful, let him think so. If he has suspicions about my loyalty, so be it. But I cannot commit this sin.*

Why did such a doubt ever enter the king's mind? Is it merely because the plates were interchanged? No, there must be some other reason. He met Hardaul during hunting in the jungle today. He must have seen that sword hanging from Hardaul's waist. It's just possible that Hardaul has offended him in some way. What is my offence? Why am I being accused of such an abominable crime? Just because the plates were mixed up? Oh God, who will listen to my tale of woe? You are my only witness. Whatever happens, I cannot bring myself to commit this sin.

Then, she thought again, *My king, is your heart so mean and petty? You're asking me to take Hardaul's life! If you can't bear to see his growing might and prestige, why don't you clearly say so? Why don't you fight like a man? Why don't you kill him yourself? Why ask me to do something I can't do? If you have grown tired of me or if my presence rankles you, why not banish me to Kashi or Mathura? I'll go without demur. But for God's sake, don't stain my reputation in this way. But then, why should I live? There's no joy left in my life. It is best for me to die. I'll give up my life, but will not commit such a sin.*

Then, her thoughts took another turn. *You, Kulyanta, must commit this sin. Probably, a greater sin has not yet been committed in this world but you shall commit it. Doubts are being cast about your fidelity to your husband*

and you must remove them. There would have been no problem if it were a question of your life. You could have sacrificed your life to save Hardaul. But, at this moment, you're being accused of infidelity. So you must commit this sin. And having committed it, you have to remain happy and cheerful. If your face looks unhappy, or if your face turns even slightly pale, you will fail in removing the suspicions even after committing this grievous sin. Whatever pain you might be going through, you have to commit this sin.

But how can it be done? Must I be the one to kill Hardaul? The queen was shaken by this thought. No, I can't raise my hand against him. Dear Hardaul, I cannot serve you poison. I know you will gladly swallow that poison for my sake. I know you won't refuse. But I don't think I can commit this grievous sin. If I'm asked to do it a thousand times I won't be able to do it.

9

Hardaul was blissfully unaware of all this. In the middle of the night, a maid went weeping to him and narrated to him in detail the entire account. This maid had accompanied the queen to the bedroom and had overheard the conversation.

Hardaul, too, had surmised that something was rankling the king's mind. The maid's words only confirmed his suspicions. He warned her against divulging this to anyone and prepared himself for death.

Hardaul was the rising sun of Bundelkhand's pride and the embodiment of its self-esteem. Just a glance from him was enough for three lakh Bundelas to get ready to kill and be killed. Orchha was completely sold on him. If Jujhar Singh had challenged him in the open field, he would have suffered a humiliating defeat. Hardaul was a Bundela and Bundelas showed no mercy to their enemies. Killing and being killed was their favourite pastime. But at that moment, a woman needed his blood. His manly courage required that he should accede to this need.

Did my brother suspect that I thirsted for his blood and by killing him wanted to grab the throne? Hardaul thought. *That would not have been objectionable.*

Murder and assassination, treachery and deceit, are all believed to be fair when acquiring kingdoms. But my brother's suspicion can be removed only by my death and nothing else. It is my duty now to give up my life to allay his suspicions. It will be shameless on my part to continue to live after creating this deadly suspicion in his mind about the purest of the pure, Kulyanta. No, there is no point in dithering over this good deed. I shall gladly swallow the poison.

There cannot be a more glorious death for a valiant man. True glory consists of laying down one's life quietly for honour rather than fighting in battle where warriors are incited by drum beats and the lust for fame.

The following morning, Hardaul awoke at dawn and had a bath. He wore his weaponry on his body and appeared before his brother with a smile on his face. The raja had just woken up from sleep and looked drowsily at the silhouette standing before him. There was a gold tray on a marble stool containing the poisoned paan cones. The raja looked at them and the silhouette by turn, as though his thoughts were trying to weave a link between the poisoned cones and Hardaul. His sudden entry into the chamber had startled the king.

Trying to get a grip on the situation he asked, 'Where are you off to at this hour?'

Hardaul's face was cheerful, as human beings are adept at concealing their innermost feelings.

He replied with a smile, 'I'm on a hunting expedition to celebrate your homecoming. God has made you unbeatable. Please give me a paan cone with your own hands as a mark of your victory.'

Saying this Hardaul picked up the tray from the marble stand, placed it before the king and extended his hand to take a cone. Seeing Hardaul's beaming face, the king's jealousy was reignited.

He thought, *Heartless fellow, you've come to rub salt into my wounds. You aren't satisfied even after destroying my pride and trust! You're asking for a cone of victory from me? The victory isn't yours, but mine.*

Jujhar Singh picked up the tray, thought for a moment and then handed a cone to Hardaul with a smile. Hardaul accepted the cone with bowed head and touched it to his head respectfully. Then he cast a wistful glance around

him at the walls and placed the cone in his mouth. A true Rajput thus carried out his moral duty. The poison was a swift killer. As soon as it went down his throat, his face turned deathly pale and his eyes lost focus. He sighed deeply, folded his hands to offer his last salute to Jujhar Singh and crashed on the floor. Beads of cold perspiration formed on his forehead and his breathing quickened. But his face presented a picture of peace and contentment.

Jujhar Singh sat immobile in his place. A cruel smile played on his lips even as his eyes filled with tears. Light and darkness had mingled seamlessly.

2. Honours and Sacrifices

Throughout history, the concepts of honour and sacrifice have been deeply intertwined, shaping the lives of individuals and the destinies of nations.

Honour, often understood as recognition for noble deeds or adherence to a moral code, frequently demands sacrifice—whether it be time, comfort, or even life itself. The two are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, each giving meaning to the other.

Sacrifices are the silent pillars upon which honours are built. Consider the soldier who lays down their life on the battlefield, not for personal gain, but for the safety of others. Their sacrifice is honoured through medals, memorials, and the gratitude of those they protected. Similarly, a parent who works tirelessly, forgoing personal ambitions to provide for their children, may never receive a formal accolade, yet their honour lies in the quiet resilience of their love. These acts, grand or humble, reveal a universal truth: true honour is rarely achieved without cost.

Yet, the relationship between the two is not always straightforward. Sacrifices can go unrecognized, and honours can sometimes be bestowed without merit. A society that fails to acknowledge genuine sacrifice risks hollowing out the value of its praise, while individuals who chase honour for its own sake may lose sight of the deeper purpose behind their actions. Balance is key—honour should reflect sacrifice, and sacrifice should be driven by a sense of duty or conviction, not the promise of reward.

In the end, honours and sacrifices remind us of our shared humanity. They highlight our capacity for selflessness and our yearning for meaning. Whether etched in history books or lived quietly in everyday struggles, this duality continues to define what it means to strive for something greater than ourselves.

3. Grammar Page



GRAMMAR STUDY: Prepositions Used in Idioms and Phrases

At

not at all: *not in any way*
at any rate: *whatever happens*
at a distance: *not near*
at first: *at the beginning*
at hand: *near; readily available*
at a loss: *uncertain what to do or say*
at the moment: *now*
at present: *now*
at risk: *threatened by danger or loss*

In

in addition to: *as well as*
be in agreement with: *have the same opinion as*
in brief: *in a few words*
be in charge of: *have responsibility for*
in common: *shared by all members of a group*
in control: *having the power to direct something*
in danger: *likely to be harmed*
in demand: *desired by many people*
in detail: *(explain something) thoroughly*
in earnest: *seriously; in a determined way*
in fact: *in reality; really*
in favour of: *supporting (an idea)*
in a flash: *very quickly; suddenly*
in general: *usually; as a whole*
in a hurry: *trying to accomplish something quickly*
in kind: *(payment) in goods rather than in money*
in the long term: *looking ahead to the distant future*
in a moment: *soon; quickly*
in order to: *for the purpose of*
in power: *(of a political party) holding office*
in public: *openly; not in private*
in a second: *soon; quickly*
in stock: *(of goods at a store) present and available*
be in time: *not be late*

On

on account of: *because of*
on behalf of: *for; in the interests of*
on business: *as part of one's work*
on demand: *when asked for*
on duty: *engaged in one's regular work*
to go on foot: *to walk*
on no account: *absolutely not*
on the other hand: *in contrast*
on sale: *being sold at a lower price than usual*
on the whole: *taking everything into consideration*

By

by accident: *not deliberately*
bit by bit: *gradually*
by courtesy of: *with the help or permission of*
by hand: *without the use of machinery*
little by little: *gradually*
by mistake: *accidentally*
one by one: *one at a time*
side by side: *beside one another*

at all times: *always*
at close quarters: *very near*
at fault: *causing something wrong*
see at a glance: *see immediately*
at last: *finally, after some delay*
at the mercy of: *without defense against*
at once: *immediately*
at rest: *not moving*
at this point: *at this place; at this moment*

in advance: *before*
in any case: *whatever happens*
in bulk: *in large amounts*
once in a while: *occasionally*
in vain: *without success*
in the course of: *during*
in debt: *owing money*
in depth: *(investigate something) thoroughly*
in doubt: *uncertain*
in effect: *(of rules) operating*
in fashion: *fashionable*
in flames: *burning, with visible flames*
in full: *without omitting anything*
hand in hand: *occurring together*
in a minute: *soon*
in no time: *very soon; very quickly*
in the long run: *in the end; eventually*
in order of: *arranged according to*
in particular: *especially*
in private: *not in front of other people*
in reality: *really*
in sight: *able to be seen*
in that case: *if that is true*
in tune: *at the correct pitch*

on the average: *usually; normally*
on board: *on a ship or airplane*
on condition that: *only if; provided that*
on display: *being exhibited*
on fire: *burning*
get on one's nerves: *annoy; irritate*
on order: *requested but not yet delivered*
on purpose: *deliberately*
on time: *at the correct time*
on the verge of: *very close to; about to*

by all means: *by any possible method*
by chance: *by accident; without planning*
by degrees: *gradually*
by heart: *from memory*
by means of: *by using*
by no means: *not at all*
by oneself: *alone*
by the way: *incidentally*