



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G56

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1. Birth

By Mulk Raj Anand

The Earth seemed to groan as Parvati heaved away from the busti in the hollow of the hills and her throat tightened in the breathless dark. The kikar trees on the road loomed like Jinns before her eyes, while the tremors in her belly drugged her with a dull pain as sweet as the scent of the Queen-of-the Night. Her father-in-law, who had been keeping at a respectable distance from her, was almost lost to view, except that she could hear his short, angry voice, now and then, beckoning her to hurry. And, in order to assure him that she was following, as also to assure herself against the frightening trees, she answered that she was following. But her feet were getting heavier and heavier this morning while her torso, in spite of the bundle on her head, pushed forward like the prow of a stately ship.

As she had started off in the early hours of the morning from the cluster of huts near Karole Bagh towards Ridge Road, where her husband had already gone to work, road mending, she had felt the child stirring in her belly. Perhaps it was turning over to take another, more comfortable position as he had seemed to be doing all night. And she had put her hand on her belly ever so tenderly, as though to reassure the babe. And she had smiled the slightest wisp of a smile to think of what Ramu had done during the night and throughout the middle months of her pregnancy whenever she told him that the baby was stirring in her: he had put his ears on her stomach and listened and, then playfully tapping with his fingers, he would intone a crazy, humorous sing-song:

Patience, son, patience,

You must learn to be patient,

You must learn to cultivate the long-breasted-sense of your ancestors.

Now as she felt another stirring in her belly she superstitiously thought that it was probably Ramu's tricks which were responsible for the disturbance in her womb. For, not only had her husband been teasing her all the way from Ambala in the train, but he had had her until only a month ago in spurts of wild desire while her father-in-law was asleep in the hut.

She paused for a moment, balanced the bundle of food on her head with her left hand, while she stroked her belly with her right hand. The growing life in her swirled from side to side, so that her heart throbbed violently with fear and her head was dizzy with weakness. She gritted her teeth and clenched her hands to avoid fainting and, mercifully, the griping pain passed. She breathed hard and proceeded on her way.

The feeble echo of her father-in-law's voice fell on her ears: 'Oh hurry!'

She lifted her voice and answered back: 'I am following, Baba, I am following.'

And, all of a quiver at the momentary passing of pain, she was now anxious for the old man, sorry to be a burden on him who had really broken under the burden of responsibilities, specially when he had to mortgage his land and buy the fares to Delhi. And yet, throughout, he had been solicitous for her welfare, and that had always moved her. Actually, of course his concern was more for the son's son that she might bear for him than for her. But, nevertheless, his consideration was more touching because he was so child-like in his anxiety and so warm-hearted, in spite of the bad luck that had been pursuing him like a malevolent spirit all these years. For instance, he had refused to believe her mother-in-law when, lingering on her death-bed, she had maliciously attributed the decline of the whole family to the day when, five years ago, she Parvati had come to their house as Ramu's wedded wife. No, he had not believed the old woman and had scoffed at her even when the price of his disbelief in his wife's obsession was a protracted sulking on her part which hastened her death from cancer. And she, Parvati, had felt ever since that she must justify the old man's faith in her and give him a grandson, if only as a compensation for the loss of his wife and as the only happiness that might compensate him for the slow agony of his ruin through the debt and the drought.

Another tremor of pain, and the sickness of bile in the mouth...

But she gritted her teeth again and felt that she must hold out if only for the sake of appearances, because, earthy and natural as the old man was, he might be embarrassed if she gave birth to the child on the way to work. She must wait till her husband was near at hand and could fetch a woman from among the other stone-breakers to deliver her.

She hurried along, the tension in her nerves heightening under the layers of heat that oozed from the shadows of the lingering night. And beads of perspiration covered her nose and her forehead, and she felt as if she were choking for lack of breath. But she did not relax her hold on herself and, keeping her belly uplifted before her even as a drummer keeps a drum, her head held high, she strode along majestically forward.

For moments she could see herself walking along, almost as though she were the spectator of her own acts. Perhaps, it was from the nodal point of a strange apathy, which comes on to a pregnant woman, that she could see her soft advance, proud like that of a she-peacock, feeling upon feeling in her body spending itself into a silence which was somewhat like the death from which all life begins. Over her tendons spread the morasses of inertness, from which came the echoes of pain, dull thuds of the sound of her babe stirring, struggling, reaching out through the sheaths of liquid held up by the trauma of birth. And through this pent-up race between the elements in her belly, the vision of the dull whites of her eyes played havoc with the black points, so that each branch of a tree became the intricate coil of serpents from which hung the skulls of donkeys, stags, lions, elephants, monkeys side by side with the bodies of the damned humans in the orchards of hell.

There was the slightest whirr of fear at the back of her head as this image of an early legend about the trees in hell crept up behind the film of grit in her eyes. The sight of a white-washed grave, with a green flag on top of it, increased the fear and she shook a little. This caused a rumbling in her belly and sent sparks of shooting pain charging the quagmire of her mind, stirring the memories of terror built up through the talk of her mother. She was in the panic of a confusion and began to run, trying to hold her head erect and her torso suspended before her, as though she were guarding both the beauty of her gait as well as her unborn child against the shadows of the trees, against all the grisly populations which confronted her. The films on her startled eyes became thicker in the blind rush forward and her nostrils dilated like those of a young bay mare pursued by the devil. She opened her mouth to shout for her father-in-law, but though her lips were agape no sound came out of them.

And now she tried to control herself, to banish the fear of the haunting shadows by an extroversion of will. And for a moment, she paused, her breasts heaving, her breath coming and going quickly, and the whole of her body bathed in a sweat. But now a spiral wave of weakness rose to her head and she felt giddy. Through her half-closed eyes, she could see her father-in-law like a speck of dust against the huge boulders of the Birla Temple on Ridge Road, outside which was the pitch where she was to go to break stones. If only she could survive this faint, she could make it and be out of the reach of these graves!... The opiate of heat and fatigue was on her numb body now, however, and, while she clenched her hands in readiness to advance, the pain in her abdomen became a growl like the noisy motion of the wheel on the road-making engine and she receded back into the arms of the doots of hell.

She stamped the earth, as though to beckon it, as Sita had done asking it to open up and swallow her hour of peril. The earth did not open up, but she steadied a little. The pain in her belly was swirling in wild waves, round and round, up and down, the aus stirring in the cauldron of her belly, sizzling and boiling over.

Shaking her head in defiance of the demons both inside and outside her, holding her stomach in her left hand, the corners of her tightly closed mouth twitching in a frenzy of desperation, her face wrinkled, she moved with a deliberate calm towards the hollow ditch which stretched by the road. And lowering the basket off her head, she fell back with a thud on to the hump of the ditch. Fortunately, she had landed on her yielding bottom.

For a while, she lay back and tried to rest herself, hoping that the spell of pain would pass. But as soon as she dosed her eyes she felt the moisture between her loins and knew that her baby had started.

Slow ache of yearning, like the bursting desire for her man, blended with the rich smell of aus, and she felt as though she was in a dragged stupor, involved in a kind of ennui in which the nerves of her body seemed to relax. Her brows knitted into a frown, the corners of her lips tightened and her eyes contracted, there were pinpoints of sweat on her nose and a scowl on her face. She felt afraid that she might evaporate into nothingness, just pass out, a sagging heap of flesh dissolving under the pressure of the child in her belly.

She wanted to harden her mind so that she could save herself, but the mind is the body and the body mind, so that the will to power over her soul only rigidified her flesh; and she lay in a tense, unbending pose.

In moment, however, her ego dissolved under the impact of further waves of pain. And now she was gasping for breath, a helpless, grey bird, smothered by the overwhelming forces that rose from her belly, the powerful music of her distended entrails drowning her resistances through a series of involuntary shrieks.

‘Oh god, oh my god!’ she cried out.

And then, as though the invocation of the Deity had put her in touch with heaven from the drugged stupor of her brain, there arose glimpses of random visions, configurations formed by the specks of cloud on the blue sky. Beyond the haze of delirium in her eyes, there stood the picture of an enormous woman lying down flat. And it seemed to her as though this woman in the clouds was also in the travail of childbirth.

Suppressing her groans, urged by deep curiosity and the superstitious belief that heavenly powers often appear to help human beings in their time of trouble, she stared hard at the hulking form. The image seemed to change and get fixed before her in the shape of the Goddess Kali, recumbent in her benevolent mood by the side of the crouching God, Shiva. And she felt a sudden wave of resentment that her husband was not by her side, seated there, helping her. He had known that she was nearing her time. In fact, he had known it this morning because she had tossed about from side to side restlessly all night. And yet he had rushed off to work, leaving her to bear the pain all alone... Oh, if only, only... if she could touch a sympathetic hand, or limb — oh anything, if only she could clutch a straw to help while the excruciating pain gnawed at her entrails and twisted her from hip to hip...

But she turned her face away from the clouds in the sky and cursed herself for thinking ill of her husband, the lord and master whom her parents had married her off to and whom they expected her to worship. And then she thought of the joy she had had when he had come to her on the night that she conceived his child.

Senses emerging from indifference and the fatigue of the day's work like a rich perfume drugging her body into excitement. Aroused vitals urging her strong buttocks against the pressure of his body. Surging of warmth in her belly and under her breasts, even as there was this heat inside her now, melting of mouth to mouth... And then the soporific faintness in the head, not unlike the giddiness that possessed her in this childbirth. Sighing, eyes half closed, limbs taut, enraptured at the swirling of his maddening strokes, smothered...

She could recall the feelings of those moments with a strange clarity on the curve of her present pleasure and pain, she could sense in the spell of writings in her haunches the swelling and unswelling of passion. Only, the pain was gradually reducing her to pulp till her eyes were closing against her will and she was shrieking...

'Oh mother! Oh my mother!' she cried, panting for breath as though she was suspended between life and death. And, for a moment she lay back exhausted as though she could not go on with it.

Then, with clenched teeth and a deliberate intent to control the spreading panic in her limbs, she raised her head and set up in a crouching position.

Draggers of shooting pain seemed to plunge into her sides as though each nerve had sharpened into steel. Crushing weight of centuries of anguish seemed to press on her belly. And there was the endless grain-grind of churning of the oceans inside her, the crushing of worlds over her head and the struggle of random elements, each shooting pain emerging out of the source of energy in her belly into a storm tossed outer universe. Perspiration simply poured down her face now and blended with the pressure of the elements that dug pinpoints of heat into her flesh.

'Oh, come, come, child come,' she cried out aloud almost like an incantation. 'Come, come, my babe,' she whispered even as she has breathed love words on the night that the seed was sown.

And she hardened her body so that the tenderness in her could be released, whipping her buttocks with her hands, striking the sides of waist, swaying to and fro, gritting her teeth and hissing till she felt her haunches sagging and her bones twisting, till she could see her frame being pulled by elemental forces which

seemed to have come and taken possession of her, the opposite tensions arising from nothingness and swaying like a strange and heavy rhythm of the earth's primitive energies.

With a smile on her face, a grim smile, she held her head in her hands and lay back in the position in which she had first fallen. And, beckoning all the resources of her will, collecting the tension of her nerves in her clenched fists, she strained and heaved in a series of protracted efforts. The heavy smell of an extraordinary drowsiness sustained her as involuntary tears rolled down her cheeks and as she groaned. The twistings and turnings of her waist contorted her body into a strange amorphous shape. And, above the protuberance of her churning' stomach, her heart beat like the echo of all the throbbings of previous months...

At last after an hour of torment as she lay drenched in a pool of blood and aus, she felt a boundless surging overwhelm her.

And, with a twitch of horror which faded into a mute triumph, the child came with a thin little cry, a dark bundle of tender, wrinkled flesh, a boy breathing softly but tingling with warm life.

Clutching him with eager, deft hands, she performed the services of the midwife on herself with the cool, assured touch which only the old dai, Kesari, in her native village, was known to bring to her task. And, what was most surprising, even to her, was the fact that having cut the naval strings which united her child to her with the rough end of the silver hansli round her neck, she emptied the basket in which she carried the food, donated the roti to the birds as a gift-offering, put her baby in it and strode forth towards the Ridge to go and break stones.

The darkness of the twilight sky was crumbling and the early morning sun had brightened the sky. But, as Parvati approached the pitch where she worked, the other stone breakers could not recognise her, because she looked different with the basket in her arms rather than on her head as she usually carried it. When, however, she came and laid the whining child at their feet, they were breathless with wonder. 'A witch this Parvati!' an old woman said. 'to be sure, a demon!' a man remarked.

‘To be sure!’ added Ramu, her husband coming towards the basket to have a look at his child.

‘The Goddess helped me in my travail,’ whispered Parvati. ‘I saw her in the clouds...’

The women left their work and rushed towards her, some open mouthed, some with prayers and incantations on her lips.

‘Stop all this *cain cain*, woman!’ shouted her father-in-law as he came up from where he had been tarring the road to look at his grandchild. ‘Get away’, he said with a bluff of rudeness.

‘It is no wonder that she had the little one all by herself. She is a peasant woman with strong loins like many other peasant woman of our parts, who have given birth to sons all by themselves, so that our race can be’ perpetuated and our land tilled for grain...’ And he picked up the whining baby from the basket like a practised hand and put the little shrieking one to his shoulder, saying with a gruff tenderness: ‘Come, come, my lion, my stalwart, don’t weep... come, it won’t be so bad. Come, my son, perhaps with your coming, our luck will turn...’

2. Poverty and Hardship in India

By GROK

Poverty and hardship remain persistent challenges in India, a country marked by stark contrasts between economic growth and widespread deprivation. Despite being one of the world's fastest-growing economies, India is home to millions living below the poverty line. According to recent estimates, a significant portion of the population struggles to access basic necessities like food, clean water, healthcare, and education. Rural areas, where nearly two-thirds of Indians reside, bear the brunt of this hardship, with limited infrastructure, unreliable electricity, and dependence on unpredictable agriculture amplifying the crisis.

Several factors contribute to this enduring issue. Unemployment and underemployment plague both urban and rural regions, with many trapped in low-paying, informal jobs that offer no security or benefits. Illiteracy and lack of skill development further hinder economic mobility, perpetuating a cycle of poverty across generations. Gender inequality exacerbates the problem, as women—especially in marginalized communities—face restricted access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, India's caste system, though officially abolished, continues to influence social and economic disparities, leaving lower castes and tribal groups disproportionately impoverished.

Hardship in India is not just economic but also tied to environmental and health challenges. Frequent droughts, floods, and other climate-related disasters devastate livelihoods, particularly for farmers. Malnutrition remains a silent epidemic, with millions of children stunted due to inadequate diets. Access to affordable healthcare is limited, and diseases like tuberculosis and malaria still claim lives, especially in underserved regions.

Government initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and food subsidy programs aim to alleviate these struggles, but implementation often falters due to corruption, inefficiency, or lack of awareness. Urbanization offers some hope, drawing people to cities for better prospects, yet it also strains resources, leading to sprawling slums where poverty takes a different but equally harsh form.

India's fight against poverty and hardship is a complex battle, requiring not just economic reforms but also social transformation. While progress is visible—

literacy rates are rising, and technology is reaching remote areas—the road ahead remains long. Bridging the gap between India's potential and its reality demands sustained effort, innovative solutions, and a collective will to uplift the most vulnerable.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
56

Verb + **-ing** or **to ...** 1 (remember, regret etc.)

A

Some verbs are followed by **-ing** and some are followed by **to ...**

Verbs that you can use with **-ing** (*not to ...*):

admit	fancy	postpone
avoid	finish	risk
consider	imagine	stop
deny	keep (on)	suggest
enjoy	mind	

For examples, see Unit 53.

Verbs that you can use with **to ...**:

afford	fail	offer
agree	forget	plan
arrange	hope	promise
decide	learn	refuse
deserve	manage	tend

For examples, see Unit 54.

B

Some verbs can be followed by **-ing** or **to ...** with a difference of meaning:

remember

I **remember doing** something = I did it and now I remember this.

You **remember doing** something *after* you have done it.

- ☐ I know I locked the door. I clearly **remember locking** it.
(= I locked it, and now I remember this)
- ☐ He could **remember driving** along the road just before the accident, but he couldn't remember the accident itself.

I **remembered to do** something =

I remembered that I had to do it, so I did it.

You **remember to do** something *before* you do it.

- ☐ I **remembered to lock** the door, but I forgot to shut the windows.
(= I remembered that I had to lock it, and so I locked it)
- ☐ **Remember to buy** some bananas.
(= Don't forget to buy them)

regret

I **regret doing** something = I did it and now I am sorry about it:

- ☐ I now **regret saying** what I said. I shouldn't have said it.
- ☐ Do you **regret not** going to college?

I **regret to say / to tell you / to inform** you = I am sorry that I have to say:

- ☐ (*from a formal letter*) I **regret to say** that we are unable to accept your offer.

go on

go on doing something = continue doing the same thing:

- ☐ The president paused for a moment and then **went on talking**.
- ☐ We need to change. We can't **go on living** like this.

go on to do something = do or say something new:

- ☐ After discussing the economy, the president **went on to talk** about foreign policy.

C

We use the following verbs with **-ing** or **to ...** with no difference of meaning:

begin start continue intend bother

So you can say:

- ☐ It **started raining**. or It **started to rain**.
- ☐ Andy **intends buying** a house. or Andy **intends to buy** ...
- ☐ Don't **bother locking** the door. or Don't **bother to lock** ...

Normally we do not use **-ing** after **-ing**:

- ☐ It's **starting to rain**. (*not usually* It's starting raining)