



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G65

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Lahore is not too far away

By Afzal Ahsan Randhawa

The sadhu sold pakoras and revelled in his own paradise, while the thief stole and enjoyed life with his wife and kids. And so, the sadhu was lost in his own bliss, the thief in his ill-gotten wealth, and time marched on in its own merry way...

“The story’s very premise is nonsense!” Daari the weaver blurted out. “What’s the rest of this tale going to be?”

Baba Bhoj, interrupted mid-story, flared up like a spark on dry straw. He snapped at Daari, “The rest? Whatever your mother says it’ll be! First, you tell me—how’s the premise nonsense?”

Daari didn’t take Baba’s outburst to heart. Grinning, he said, “You always say a thief’s house never has a lit lamp. Now you’re telling us this thief was living it up with his family, and the sadhu, after selling pakoras, still stayed a sadhu?”

The Master, sitting nearby, jumped to Daari’s defense. “Baba, listen to Daari for a second! He’s saying that the shopkeeper and the thief—if they’re not brothers, they’re at least cousins. One robs his customers, the other robs his kin.”

Baba Bhoj, brushing off the Master’s words, shot back, “A lamp never burns in the house of a godforsaken thief like you, who wakes up in the morning, heads to the mosque, and steals its oil to rub on himself before bathing!”

Before Baba could finish, Daari, chuckling, cut in, “Every morning, before dawn, I haul a hundred buckets from the well to fill the mosque’s troughs. If any worshiper ever drew even one bucket, call me a liar! So, if I take a drop of oil from the pot now and then, what’s the sin? If I don’t take it from Allah’s house, where else am I supposed to get it?”

Baba couldn’t help but laugh at Daari’s “where else am I supposed to get it” quip. He said, “Son, if you don’t have the habit of waking up, oiling yourself, and bathing, don’t even look toward the mosque. Go rub oil on yourself daily. Then, to loosen up, draw ten or twenty buckets, fill the trough, and bathe. Won’t that do it?”

“You’ve never had the grace to pray. But mark my words: stealing from Allah’s house? You’ll die a leper, and worms will eat your body.”

The fear of becoming a leper or being eaten by worms made Daari shudder. Defending himself, he said, "I swear on my grandmother! I haven't done that in ages. Just last Thursday, I donated one-and-a-quarter rupees' worth of oil to the mosque."

"Now you don't steal oil from the mosque to rub on yourself," Baba Bhoj retorted, half-accepting Daari's excuse. "Now you just steal fodder!"

Daari, undeterred, launched into his defense. "Come on, Baba! How many animals do I have? I've got one goat-like cow and one cat-like calf. And do I steal fodder every day? Once in a while, I grab some grass or fodder, and maybe, just maybe, I take a small amount—from that stingy Jatt who never gives anything willingly. By morning, he knows Daari took it in the night. He laughs it off, and so do I. Baba, tell me with your faith and honour: if Daari doesn't take fodder from his own village for his cow, where's he supposed to get it? Go into another village and get my neck broken?"

Baba Bhoj burst into laughter. Still chuckling, he said, "You rascal! I've told you a hundred times: if you can't find any elsewhere, take our's. But don't go stealing people's fodder at night. Don't get killed unlawfully like that. Getting killed while stealing fodder—what kind of life is that? A man like that isn't worth a penny."

"I never steal from someone whose fodder is their lifeline," Daari chirped back. "I only take from those who, even if they catch me, would just let it slide." He continued, "Haven't you heard, Baba? A wild thief broke into a sister's hut, but got caught red-handed. What could the sister and her husband say? They fed him bread and water and sent him off. Later, the thief told his buddies about the heist. When they asked, 'What happened when you got caught?' he grinned and said, 'The ones who caught me were my sister and brother-in-law.' And when they asked, 'Then what?' he laughed, 'What else? Seeing me, my sister and brother-in-law were beside themselves with shame.'"

Baba and the Master burst out laughing. Baba Bhoj, with affection, said to Daari, "You're a master of tall tales."

Just then, the old Ustad, coughing and dragging his feet, shuffled into the gathering.

"Come, Ustad!" Baba Bhoj welcomed him, seating him on the cot beside him. "Tell us, how's it going?"

“How’s it going?” the Ustad wheezed, still catching his breath from walking ten steps. In a weary voice, he said, “If I lie down, I can’t get up. If I force myself to sit, my legs won’t stand. If I struggle to stand, I can’t walk. And if I risk my life to drag myself from home to your haveli—ten cursed steps—then for a good while, I can’t even catch my breath. Damn this old age.”

At Ustad’s lament, Daari, cheeky as ever, laughed and said, “Ustad, the wise have said it: ‘Youth is a treasure, but old age is a curse.’” Everyone, including Ustad, roared with laughter.

Baba Bhoj and Ustad, both in their seventies or eighties, were old companions, lifelong friends. They’d studied up to the fourth grade in their village school before taking up their trades—Bhoj in farming, Ustad in making pots and hauling loads on donkeys. Bhoj’s fields were now tended by his sons and grandsons, while Ustad’s brother sat at the potter’s wheel all day, crafting pots, firing them in the kiln, and selling them village to village through his nephew. Ustad, though, had neither wife nor child. For some reason, he’d never found a woman to call his own. And perhaps because of this misfortune, the whole village called him “Ustad.” Their group was rounded out by two other friends: the middle-aged Sayyid Master and the young Daari the weaver. As usual, the four were gathered at Baba Bhoj’s haveli, swapping stories into the night.

“Baba, move on with it!” Daari urged.

“We’d moved plenty at our age!” Baba Bhoj teased with a glint in his eye.

“Back in the day, we’d walk to Lahore for court cases—eighty kos! We’d tie some rotis to our waists, chant Allah’s name, and shout:

‘Heavy loads on travellers’ backs, Lahore’s just a few kos away!’

“And off we’d go, reaching Lahore by dawn on the third day. We’d attend court, head back, and leap our way home in two days, laughing and joking. The next day, we’d be out ploughing the fields. And you dare mock us about walking, you who waits half a day at the station for a train to go two kos!”

“Trains have made men useless!” Ustad grumbled. “They’ve robbed the youth of their strength. Back when trains didn’t exist, young men had real stamina.”

The Master, usually quiet, couldn’t hold back. “Trains have made life easier, Baba! Hop on in the morning, attend the court in Lahore, and return to the village by evening. The journey you took six days to make is done in six hours

now. No blisters on your feet, no problems of a side stitch—just sit in the train and sleep if you want.”

Daari, pleading, said, “I told you—move the story along!”

“Which story?” Baba Bhoj asked casually, as if lost in thought. Often, one tale would lead to another, then another, and the original story would get buried in the chaos.

“The one about the pakora-selling sadhu!” the Master reminded him.

“Oh, right!” Baba Bhoj said, glancing at Daari. “Now don’t interrupt, and I’ll tell you a true story.”

At the mention of a “true story,” Ustad perked up. Scratching his scruffy beard, he said, “Truth is a jewel. Slip it into any tale, and the story shines.” Baba Bhoj continued, “The pakora seller had a regular customer who came every day, ate his fill, burped, wiped his moustache, and left without paying a paisa. The shopkeeper never asked for money, and the customer never offered. The shopkeeper thought, ‘Maybe one day this freeloader will feel ashamed and stop this daily deceit.’ But the customer never felt shame, and the shopkeeper never called him out—whether out of weakness or kindness, who knows? And this went on for a year or two.”

Daari couldn’t resist. “The shopkeeper should’ve filed a complaint at the police station. They’d drag that crook away, skin him alive, and take every last coin.”

Baba Bhoj pounced on Daari. “Your father’s police station didn’t exist back then! You had to plead before the ruler. As if a poor pakora seller could get an audience with a hakim!”

“Alright, then what?” Daari asked, eyeing Baba.

“One day, the freeloader swaggered in, twirling his moustache. He saw the pakora shop closed, the wok washed and turned upside down, and the shopkeeper sitting with his head in his hands.”

“What’s wrong, friend? No pakoras today?” the customer asked. “You ate up everything I had over these years,” the shopkeeper said in a trembling voice. “My resources are gone. What am I supposed to make pakoras with now?”

“Alright,” the customer said after a pause. “Open your shop tomorrow. I’ll come at this time.”

The next day, true to his word, the customer arrived. He handed the shopkeeper a bundle, folded his hands, and said, "If you'd told me earlier, your stove would never have gone cold. Run your shop, friend, and when this runs out, whisper in my ear." With that, he left the shopkeeper stunned.

The bundle was stuffed with gold coins, gems, diamonds, and pearls—wealth the pakora seller had never even dreamed of.

Seven or eight days later, a proclamation echoed through the city: a notorious thief was to be hanged. He'd broken into a sardar's mansion but refused to confess or return the loot. The execution was set for the city's main square, and the whole city turned out to watch, including the pakora seller. At the gallows, bound in chains, stood his daily customer. In a flash, the shopkeeper understood everything. "If I return the stolen goods, maybe the thief's life can be spared," he thought, pushing through the crowd toward the scaffold. As he drew closer, he raised his hand to speak. But at that moment, their eyes met. The thief read his intention, smiled, and called out loudly, as if addressing the entire crowd: "Even if the stolen goods are returned, they'll hang me anyway. So, whoever has my loot, keep it. If he doesn't want it all, let him take what I owe him and use the rest to dig wells and build inns for tourists of this city."

"And the thief was hanged..." Baba Bhoj paused, catching his breath. Daari, laughing, jumped in, "And then the shopkeeper built the wells and inns, right? Or did he just gobble up everything?"

"No, brother!" Baba Bhoj said. "Back then, people still had a shred of honesty. The shopkeeper kept what he needed and used the rest of the wealth to dig ten wells and build an inn for travellers in the city. For centuries, the people of Lahore and travellers from afar drank from that thief's wells and blessed him."

"Centuries?" the Master asked, astonished.

"Yes," Baba Bhoj said, looking into the Master's eyes. "This story is some four centuries old, but it's true. That's why it's still alive today."

"Truth never grows old," Ustad declared, resting his hands on his knees as he stood. "Truth never ages. Truth never dies."

2. Grammar Page

Unit
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Adjective + **to** ...

A hard to understand, interesting to talk to etc.

Compare sentences (a) and (b):

- ☐ James doesn't speak clearly. { (a) It is hard to **understand him**.
(b) **He** is hard to **understand**.

Sentences (a) and (b) have the same meaning. Note that we say:

- ☐ He is hard **to understand**. (*not* He is hard to understand him)

We use other adjectives in the same way. For example:

easy	nice	safe	cheap	exciting	impossible
difficult	good	dangerous	expensive	interesting	

- ☐ Do you think it is **safe to drink this water**?
Do you think this water is **safe to drink**? (*not* to drink it)
- ☐ The exam questions were very hard. It was **impossible to answer them**.
The exam questions were very hard. They were **impossible to answer**.
(*not* to answer them)
- ☐ Nicola has lots of interesting ideas. It's **interesting to talk to** her.
Nicola is **interesting to talk to**. (*not* to talk to her)

We also use this structure with *adjective + noun*:

- ☐ This is a **difficult question to answer**. (*not* to answer it)

B nice of (you) to ...

We say 'It's **nice of** somebody **to** ...':

- ☐ It was **nice of** you **to take** me to the airport. Thank you very much.

We use other adjectives in the same way. For example:

kind **generous** **careless** **silly** **stupid** **inconsiderate** **unfair** **typical**

- ☐ It's **silly of** Ruth **to give up** her job when she needs the money.
- ☐ I think it was **unfair of** him **to criticise** me.

C sorry to ... / surprised to ... etc.

You can use *adjective + to* ... to say how somebody reacts to something:

- ☐ I'm **sorry to hear** that your mother isn't well.

We use other adjectives in the same way. For example:

glad **pleased** **relieved** **surprised** **amazed** **sad** **disappointed**

- ☐ Was Julia **surprised to see** you?
- ☐ It was a long and tiring journey. We were **glad to get** home.

D You can use **to** ... after **the next** / **the last** / **the only** / **the first** / **the second** (etc.):

- ☐ **The next** train **to arrive** at platform 4 will be the 10.50 to Liverpool.
- ☐ Everybody was late except me. I was **the only** one **to arrive** on time.
- ☐ If I have any more news, you will be **the first to know**. (= the first person to know.)

E You can say that something is **sure/likely/bound to** happen:

- ☐ Carla is a very good student. She's **bound to pass** the exam. (= she is sure to pass)
- ☐ It's possible I'll win the lottery one day, but it's not **likely to happen**. (= it's not probable)