



# Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E56

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# 1. A Wedding in Russia

By Sudha Murthy

A wedding is a great event in everyone's life. In India, it is done with a great deal of ceremony. In our films, a large number of stories are based upon weddings.

If you look at Indian history, you will see many wars have been fought for the sake of a marriage. People have always spent a lot of money and effort on these. In olden days the wedding celebrations used to carry on for a week. Later it came down to three days, then two days and now it is for a day. The amount of money spent sometimes constitutes the entire life's savings of a person. At times people take such huge loans for this celebration that they have to go on repaying throughout their lives. In my experience, whenever I have talked to bonded labourers, I have found that a majority of them have got into that state because of the wedding expenses they had incurred.

In a marriage, the couple and their parents are worried about various things. Is she looking pretty? Are the guests being looked after? Will he keep her happy? People like you and me are worried about the wedding lunch. It is an occasion where young boys get to meet young girls, old people talk about their ailments and women exhibit their finest jewellery and silk saris.

Recently I was in Moscow, Russia. Moscow city has many war memorials. Russia has won three great wars in its history, which are a source of pride for them. They have built war memorials and erected many statues of the Generals who were responsible for the victories. The first war was between Peter the Great and Sweden. The second was between Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon of France. The third one was against Hitler in the World War II in 1945.

There is a huge park in Moscow, known as Peace Park. In the middle of this Peace Park there is a large monument. There is a pillar, and on the pillar the different battles fought by Russia have been mentioned along with dates and places. The park has beautiful fountains. In the summer, flowers of many colours bloom and the place is a feast to the eyes. In the night it is decorated with lights. Every Russian is proud of this park and it is a spot visited by all tourists.

The day I went to the park was Sunday. It was drizzling and cold, though it was summer. I was standing under an umbrella and enjoying the beauty.

Suddenly, my eyes fell on a young couple. It was apparent that they had just got married. The girl was in her mid-twenties, slim with blond hair and blue eyes. She was very beautiful. The boy was almost of the same age and very handsome. He was in a military uniform. The bride was wearing a white satin dress, decorated with pearls and pretty laces. It was very long so two young girls were standing behind her holding up the ends of the gown, so it should not be dirtied. One young boy was holding an umbrella over their heads so that they should not get drenched. The girl was holding a bouquet and the two were standing with their arms linked. It was a beautiful sight. I started wondering why they had come to this park in this rain soon after getting married. They could have surely gone to a merrier place. I watched as they walked together to the dais near the memorial, kept the bouquet, bowed their heads in silence and slowly walked back.

By now I was very curious to know what was going on. I could not ask the couple because they probably could not speak English and I didn't know the Russian language. There was an old man standing with them. He looked at me, my sari and asked, 'Are you an Indian?'

I replied, 'Yes, I am an Indian.'

'I have seen Raj Kapoor's movies. They were great. Raj Kapoor had visited Russia. I know one Hindi song '*Main awara hoon*'. Do you know Moscow city has statues of three great Indians?'

'Who are they?'

'Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi.'

Since we were chatting quite amicably now, I decided to use the opportunity to ask some questions. 'How come you know English?'

'Oh, I worked abroad.'

'Will you tell me why that young couple visited the war memorial on their wedding day?'

'Oh, that is the custom in Russia. The wedding takes place normally on a Saturday or a Sunday.'

Irrespective of the season, after signing the register at the marriage office, married couples must visit the important national monuments nearby. Every boy in this country has to serve in the military for a couple of years at least. Regardless of his position, he must wear his service uniform for the wedding.'

'Why is that?'

‘This is a mark of gratitude. Our forefathers have given their lives in the various wars Russia has fought. Some of them we won, and some we lost, but their sacrifice was always for the country. The newly married couple needs to remember they are living in a peaceful, independent Russia because of their ancestors’ sacrifices. They must ask for their blessings. Love for country is more important than wedding celebrations. We elders insist on continuing with this tradition whether it be in Moscow, St. Petersburg or any other part of Russia. On the wedding day they have to visit the nearest war memorial.’

This set me wondering about what we teach our children. Do we tell them about the sacrifices of the 1857 War of Independence? Do we talk about the 1942 Quit India movement, or ask newly-weds to visit the Andaman Cellular Jail where thousands lived in solitude and were sent to the gallows? Do we remember Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Shivaji, Rana Pratap, Jhansi Lakshmi Bai who gave their lives to save our country?

These men and women never lived to see an independent India. But do we have the courtesy to remember them on the most important day of our lives? We are busy shopping for saris, buying jewellery and preparing elaborate menus and partying in discos.

My eyes filled with tears at the thought and I wished we could learn a lesson from the Russians.

## 2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: What is the significance of the war memorials in Moscow, as described in the story?

Question 2: Why did the newly married couple visit the Peace Park war memorial on their wedding day?

Question 3: What details describe the appearance of the bride and groom in the story?

Question 4: What did the old man tell the narrator about the Russian custom of wearing a military uniform at weddings?

Question 5: What reflection does the narrator have about Indian weddings compared to the Russian custom?

## **Answers**

Answer 1: War memorials in Moscow commemorate Russia's victories in three major wars: against Sweden under Peter the Great, against Napoleon under Tsar Alexander I, and against Hitler in World War II. They are a source of national pride.

Answer 2: It is a Russian custom for newlyweds to visit a war memorial after their marriage to honour the sacrifices of their ancestors who fought for a peaceful, independent Russia.

Answer 3: The bride was in her mid-twenties, slim, with blond hair and blue eyes, wearing a white satin dress with pearls and lace. The groom, also in his mid-twenties, was handsome and wore a military uniform.

Answer 4: The old man explained that every Russian boy must serve in the military, and wearing the service uniform during the wedding is a mark of gratitude for their ancestors' sacrifices.

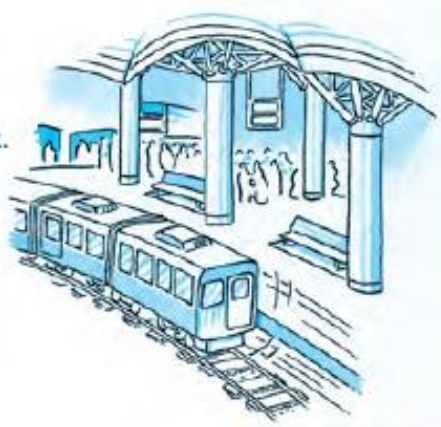
Answer 5: The narrator reflects that Indian weddings focus on material aspects like saris, jewellery, and lavish celebrations, while Russians emphasize honouring ancestors' sacrifices, prompting her to wish Indians would remember historical sacrifices on such occasions.

### 3. Grammar Page

#### Prepositions of Direction

Some prepositions show **where** something is going. They are called prepositions of direction.

The boys chased **after** each other.  
The football rolled **down** the hill.  
A man was walking his dog **along** the riverbank.  
The freeway goes right **through** the city.  
We were travelling **towards** Miami.  
A girl went **past** them on a bike.  
This road leads **away from** the stadium.  
They watched the train pull **out of** the station.



#### Prepositions with Special Uses

Many prepositions are used in other ways. Here are some of them.

**of**

I bought a bag **of** rice and a quart **of** milk.  
Would you like a glass **of** orange juice?  
Kathleen is a member **of** the chess club.  
I need three pieces **of** paper.  
Most **of** the children in my class like school.  
There are several ways **of** cooking meat.



**for**

I made this bookmark **for** Mom.  
Is there room **for** me on this seat?  
I'd like a new computer **for** Christmas.  
We're going downtown **for** a meeting.  
What's this bag **for**?  
This word is too difficult **for** me to spell.

