



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G68

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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Contents

- 1. A Wedding in Russia**
- 2. Comprehension**
- 3. Grammar Page**

A Wedding in Russia - Modified

By Sudha Murthy

A wedding is a great event in everyone's life, a moment that ties the knot in a tapestry of love and tradition. In India, it's celebrated with all the bells and whistles, steeped in ceremony. In our films, countless stories weave around the pomp and circumstance of weddings.

If you dig into Indian history, you'll see many wars were fought over matters of the heart tied to marriage. People have always poured their hearts and wallets into these events, sparing no expense. In the old days, wedding celebrations dragged on for a week, a real feast for the senses. Over time, they slimmed down to three days, then two, and now it's often just a single day when everyone pulls out all the stops. The money spent can sometimes wipe out a person's life savings, leaving them in dire straits. In my experience, whenever I've spoken to bonded labourers, many have spilled the beans: their debts, a heavy cross to bear, often stem from lavish wedding expenses they couldn't afford.

At a marriage, the couple and their parents are often on pins and needles. Is she looking pretty as a picture? Are the guests being treated like royalty? Will he keep her happy as a clam? Meanwhile, folks like you and me are often licking our chops, eagerly awaiting the wedding feast. It's an occasion where young men and women eye each other like hawks, old-timers swap tales of their aches and pains, and women show off their finest jewels and silk saris, strutting their stuff like peacocks.

Recently, I was in Moscow, Russia, a city that wears its war memorials like badges of honour. Russia has clinched victories in three great wars, each a feather in their cap. They've built towering monuments and statues of the generals who led them to glory. The first was Peter the Great's triumph over Sweden. The second saw Tsar Alexander I send Napoleon packing. The third was the defeat of Hitler in World War II in 1945, a victory that still makes Russians puff out their chests with pride.

In Moscow, there's a sprawling place called Peace Park, a real gem in the city's crown. At its heart stands a grand pillar, etched with the battles Russia fought, complete with dates and places. In summer, the park bursts into a riot of colourful flowers, a sight that's easy on the eyes. At night, it's lit up like a

Christmas tree, and every Russian beams with pride at this spot, a must-see for tourists.

The day I visited was a chilly, drizzly Sunday, though it was summer. I stood under an umbrella, soaking in the beauty, when my eyes landed on a young couple, fresh from tying the knot. The bride, in her mid-twenties, was a vision—slim, with blond hair and eyes as blue as the sky on a clear day. The groom, about the same age, was handsome as all get-out, decked out in a crisp military uniform. She wore a white satin gown, adorned with pearls and delicate lace, so long that two young girls trailed behind, holding it up to keep it from kissing the mud. A boy held an umbrella over them, shielding the couple from getting soaked to the skin. The bride clutched a bouquet, their arms linked like two peas in a pod. It was a sight to warm the cockles of your heart.

I couldn't help but wonder why they'd come to this park in the rain, right after their big day. They could've picked a place with more pizzazz. I watched as they walked hand in hand to the dais by the war memorial, laid down the bouquet, bowed their heads in silence, and then slowly made their way back, as if they had all the time in the world.

Curiosity got the better of me. I couldn't ask the couple—they likely didn't speak English, and I was clueless about Russian. But an old man standing nearby caught my eye, noticed my sari, and asked, "Are you an Indian?"

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"I've seen Raj Kapoor's movies. They were the bee's knees. He visited Russia, you know. I even know a Hindi song, 'Main awara hoon.' Did you know Moscow has statues of three great Indians?"

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, and Indira Gandhi," he said, puffing up with pride.

We were chatting like old friends now, so I seized the day to ask, "How come you speak English so well?"

"Oh, I worked abroad," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

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

“Oh, that’s just how we roll in Russia,” he said. “Weddings usually happen on a Saturday or Sunday. Rain or shine, after signing the register at the marriage office, couples must pay their respects at the nearest national monument. Every young man here serves in the military for a couple of years, no matter his rank. For the wedding, he’s got to wear his uniform, come hell or high water.”

“Why’s that?” I pressed.

“It’s a tip of the hat to our forefathers,” he explained. “They laid down their lives in the wars Russia fought—some we won, some we lost, but always for the motherland. The newlyweds honour them, remembering they’re living in a peaceful, independent Russia because of those sacrifices. They come to ask for their blessings. Love for country trumps wedding hoopla. We elders make sure this tradition stays alive, whether in Moscow, St. Petersburg, or anywhere else in Russia. On their big day, couples visit the nearest war memorial to pay their dues.”

His words hit me like a ton of bricks. It got me thinking about what we teach our children in India. Do we tell them about the sacrifices of the 1857 War of Independence, when our ancestors fought tooth and nail for freedom? Do we talk about the 1942 Quit India movement, or urge newlyweds to visit the Andaman Cellular Jail, where thousands languished in solitude or went to the gallows? Do we honour Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Shivaji, Rana Pratap, or Jhansi Lakshmi Bai, who gave their all to keep our country free?

Those heroes never lived to see an independent India. Yet, do we have the decency to tip our hats to them on the most important day of our lives? Instead, we’re caught up in the rat race, shopping for saris, splurging on jewellery, planning lavish menus, and dancing the night away in discos.

My eyes welled up with tears at the thought, and I wished we could take a leaf out of the Russians’ book.

Comprehension

Question 1: What is the main difference the author highlights between Indian and Russian wedding traditions?

Question 2: Why did the Russian couple visit Peace Park after their wedding?

Question 3: What did the old man tell the author about the significance of the groom's military uniform?

Question 4: What historical events does the author mention to highlight Russia's pride in its war victories?

Question 5: What reflection does the author have about Indian traditions after observing the Russian couple?

Answers

Answer 1: In India, weddings are lavish, expensive events often focused on ceremony and feasting, sometimes leading to debt, while in Russia, newlyweds visit war memorials to honour their country's sacrifices, prioritizing patriotism over extravagance.

Answer 2: The couple visited Peace Park to lay a bouquet at the war memorial, paying respects to their forefathers who sacrificed their lives for Russia's peace and independence, as is customary in Russian weddings.

Answer 3: The old man explained that every young Russian man serves in the military, and wearing the uniform during the wedding is a tradition to honour the sacrifices made for the motherland.

Answer 4: The author mentions Peter the Great's victory over Sweden, Tsar Alexander I's defeat of Napoleon, and Russia's triumph over Hitler in World War II in 1945.

Answer 5: The author reflects on how India does not emphasize teaching children about historical sacrifices, like those in the 1857 War of Independence or the 1942 Quit India movement, and wishes Indians would honour their freedom fighters on significant occasions like weddings.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
68

-ing clauses (He hurt his knee **playing** football.)

A Study this example:

Kate is in the kitchen. She's making coffee.

You can say:

- ☐ Kate is in the kitchen **making coffee.**
[-ing clause]

You can use **-ing** in this way when two things happen at the same time:

- ☐ A man ran out of the house **shouting**.
(= he ran out of the house *and* he was shouting)
- ☐ Do something! Don't just stand there **doing nothing!**
- ☐ Be careful **crossing the road**.



We also use **-ing** when one action happens during another action:

- ☐ Joe hurt his knee **playing football**. (= while he was playing)
- ☐ Did you cut yourself **shaving**? (= while you were shaving)

You can also say '**while doing something**' and '**when doing something**':

- ☐ Joe hurt his knee **while playing** football.
- ☐ Be careful **when crossing** the road. (= when you are crossing)

B When one action happens before something else, we use **having (done)** for the first action:

- ☐ **Having found** a hotel, we looked for somewhere to eat.
- ☐ **Having finished** her work, she went home.

You can also say **after** -ing:

- ☐ **After finishing** her work, she went home.

These structures are used more in written English than in spoken English.

When we begin a sentence with '**Having** (done something)' or '**After** (doing something)', we write a comma (,) after this part of the sentence:

- Having finished her work, she went home.

comma

C You can also use **-ing** to explain something, or to say why somebody does something.

The sentence usually begins with **-ing**:

- ☐ **Feeling tired**, I went to bed early. (= because I felt tired)
-ing clause
- ☐ **Being unemployed**, he doesn't have much money. (= because he is unemployed)
- ☐ **Not having** a car, she finds it difficult to get around.
 (= because she doesn't have a car)

We use **having (done)** for something that is complete before something else:

- ☐ **Having seen** the film twice, I didn't want to see it again.
(= because I had seen it twice)

These structures are used more in written English than in spoken English.

When we begin a sentence with **-ing (Feeling tired ... / Not knowing ... / Having seen ... etc.)**, we write a comma (,) after this part of the sentence.

- ☐ **Not knowing what to do**, I called my friend to ask her advice.