



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G71**

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## 1. Forbidden Entry

One morning two young boys were standing by the roadside laying bets on an extremely daring enterprise. They were debating whether it was possible to take some flowers from the *madhavi*-creeper in the temple compound. One of the boys was saying that he would be able to do it, and the other was saying, 'You never will.' To understand why this was easy to talk about but not so easy to do requires a fuller explanation.

Jaykali Devi, widow of the late Madhabchandra Tarkabachaspati, was the guardian of the temple, which was dedicated to the Blessed Lord Krishna. Her husband had been given the title 'Tarkabachaspati' ('Master of Debate') in his capacity as teacher at the village *ṭol* (*Sanskrit Grammar School*), but had never been able to prove to his wife that he deserved it. Some pundits were of the opinion that, because talking and arguing were his wife's preserve, he amply merited the title by virtue of being her 'Master'. Actually, Jaykali did not say very much; she could stop even the mightiest verbal torrents with a couple of words or by saying nothing at all.

Jaykali was a tall, strong, sharp-nosed, tough-minded woman.

Through her husband's mismanagement, property endowed to them for the maintenance of the temple had almost been lost. His widow, by collecting all the arrears, fixing new limits, and recovering claims that had lapsed for many years, had managed to get everything straight again. No one could do her out of a single paisa.

Because this woman had many of the qualities of a man, she had no female friends. Women were terrified of her. Gossip, small talk and tears were all anathema to her. Men were afraid of her too, because she could rebuke the bottomless idleness of the men of the village with a stare so fierce and silently contemptuous that it pierced their fat inertia, cut them to the quick. She had a remarkable capacity for contempt and a remarkable capacity for conveying contempt. Anyone she judged to be at fault, she could blast with her manner and expression, with a word or with no word. She kept close tabs on everything that happened in the village, good or bad. She effortlessly dominated all its affairs. Wherever she went she was in charge: neither she nor anyone doubted it.

She was expert in nursing the sick, but her patients feared her as much as death. If anyone broke the treatment or diet she prescribed, her anger was hotter than the fever itself. Her tall, strict presence hung over the village like

the Judgement of God; no one loved her, yet no one dared to defy her. She knew everyone, yet no one was as isolated as she.

The widow had no children, but she had taken on the upbringing of two orphaned nephews. No one could say that the lack of a male parent had deprived them of discipline, or that they had been spoilt by blind affection from their aunt. The elder of them was now eighteen. From time to time the question of his marriage arose, and the boy was not averse to the bonds of love. But his aunt's mind was shut to that happy prospect. Unlike other women, she did not find the blooming of love in a young married couple particularly pleasing to contemplate. On the contrary, it was to her unpleasantly likely that, like other married men, her nephew would sit about the house, growing fatter by the day as his wife pampered him. No, she said, Pulin had better start earning – then he could bring a wife into the house. Neighbours were shocked by her harsh words.

The temple was Jaykali's most precious possession. She was never remiss in tending, dressing and bathing the deity. The two attendant Brahmins feared her far more than the god himself. Formerly the god had not received his full rations, because there was another object of worship living secretly in the temple, a 'temple-maid' called Nistarini. Offerings of ghee, milk, curds and butter were shared between heaven and hell. But under Jaykali's iron rule, offerings were enjoyed in full by the deity. Lesser gods had to find means of support elsewhere.

The widow made sure that the courtyard of the temple stayed spotlessly clean – not a blade of grass anywhere. On a trellis to one side there was a *madhavi*-creeper: whenever it shed dry leaves, Jaykali removed them. She could not bear the slightest invasion of the sanctity, cleanliness and orderliness of the temple. Previously local boys playing hide-and-seek had hidden inside the courtyard, and sometimes baby goats came and chewed at the bark of the *madhavi*. There was no chance of that now. Except on festival-days, boys were not permitted to enter the courtyard, and hungry little goats, beaten by sticks, had to run bleating to their mothers.

Irreverent persons, even if they were close relatives, were not allowed to enter the temple yard. Her brother-in-law, who liked eating chicken meat cooked by Muslims, had come to the village once to see his relations, and had wanted to visit the temple; Jaykali objected so violently, there had nearly been a complete rift between her and her elder sister. The excessive zeal with which the widow watched over the temple seemed quite crazy to ordinary people.

Whereas in other spheres Jaykali was harsh and haughty and independent, in her care of the temple she surrendered herself completely. To the image

inside it she was mother, wife and slave: she treated it with watchfulness, tenderness, grace and humility. The stone temple with its stone image was the only thing that brought out her femininity. It was her husband and son: her entire world.

Readers will now appreciate what limitless courage was required to steal *madhavi*-blossoms from the temple courtyard. The boy concerned was Nalin, the younger of her nephews. He knew what his aunt was like, but discipline had not tamed him. He was drawn to anything risky, and was always eager to break restrictions. It was said that in childhood his aunt had been like that too.

Jaykali was, at the time, sitting on her verandah telling her rosary, gazing with motherly love and devotion at the image of the deity. The boy crept up from behind and stood underneath the *madhavi*. He found that the flowers on the lower branches had all been used for *pūjā*. So he gingerly started to climb the trellis. Seeing some buds on a high branch, he stretched with the whole length of his body and arm to pick them; but the strain on the frail trellis was too great, and it noisily collapsed. Boy and creeper fell sprawling on the ground together.

This glorious feat brought Jaykali running: she grabbed him by the arms and wrenched him up from the ground. He had been knocked badly by his fall, but one could not call this a punishment, because it had not come from a living thing. So now Jaykali's living punishment rained down on the boy's bruised body. He suffered it in silence, without a single tear. His aunt then dragged him into a room and bolted the door. He was given no food that afternoon. Hearing this, the servant-girl Mokshada begged – tearfully and with trembling voice – that the boy be forgiven. Jaykali would not be moved. No one in the house dared give food to the hungry boy behind Jaykali's back.

The widow sent for men to repair the trellis, and once again took her seat on the verandah with her rosary in hand. A little later Mokshada came up to her and said timorously, '*Thākur mā*, the young master is weeping with hunger: shall I give him some milk?'

'No,' said Jaykali with her face set. Mokshada withdrew again. From the room in the hut near by Nalin's plaintive whimpering gradually swelled into wails of anger – until, much later, he was too exhausted to go on, and only an occasional panting sob reached the ears of his aunt as she sat telling her rosary.

Nalin's distress had subsided into exhausted near-silence when the sounds of another unhappy creature – mixed with the distant noise of people running and shouting – loudly disturbed the road outside the temple. Suddenly

footsteps were heard in the temple yard. Jaykali turned and saw something heaving under the creeper. 'Nalin!' she shouted furiously. No one replied. She thought that Nalin must have somehow escaped from his prison and was trying to enrage her again. She stepped down into the yard, with her lips grimly clenched. 'Nalin!' she shouted again as she neared the creeper. There was still no answer. Lifting up a branch, she saw an extremely dirty and frightened pig lurking in the thick foliage.

The creeper that was a modest substitute, in this brick-built courtyard, for the groves of Vrindavan, the scent of whose blossoms recalled the fragrant breath of the *gopīs* and evoked a gorgeous dream of dalliance along the banks of the Yamuna – to think that the sacredness of it, tended by the widow with total devotion, had been suddenly desecrated by this sordid event! An attendant Brahmin came with a stick to drive out the pig, but Jaykali rushed to stop him, and bolted the gate of the temple from inside.

A short while later a crowd of drunken Doms arrived at the temple gate and began to clamour for the animal they intended to sacrifice. 'Clear off, you scum,' shouted Jaykali from behind the closed gate. 'Don't you dare besmirch my temple.'

The crowd dispersed. Even though they had as good as seen it with their own eyes, it was beyond belief that *Mā* Jaykali had given asylum to an unclean animal inside her Krishna temple.

The great god of all mortal creatures was delighted at this odd little episode, even if the petty god of mean and narrow social custom was mightily outraged.

## 2. Comprehension

Question 1: Why was it considered daring for the boys to plan to take flowers from the madhavi-creeper in the temple compound?

Question 2: How did Jaykali Devi manage the temple's resources after her husband's mismanagement?

Question 3: What was Jaykali's attitude toward her nephew Pulin's potential marriage?

Question 4: How did Jaykali react when she caught Nalin attempting to steal flowers from the madhavi-creeper?

Question 5: Why did Jaykali protect the pig that entered the temple courtyard, despite her strict standards of purity?

### Answers

Answer 1: It was daring because Jaykali Devi, the strict and formidable guardian of the temple, maintained tight control over the temple's sanctity, cleanliness, and orderliness, and she fiercely prohibited unauthorized entry or interference with the temple, including the madhavi-creeper.

Answer 2: Jaykali collected all arrears, fixed new limits, and recovered lapsed claims to restore the temple's endowed property, ensuring its financial stability.

Answer 3: Jaykali was opposed to Pulin's marriage, believing he should first start earning a living rather than becoming idle and pampered like other married men.

Answer 4: Jaykali grabbed Nalin, punished him physically, dragged him into a room, locked him in without food, and ignored pleas for leniency from the servant-girl Mokshada.

Answer 5: Jaykali protected the pig to prevent the drunken Doms from entering and desecrating her temple further, prioritizing the temple's sanctity over social customs that deemed the pig unclean.

## 3. Grammar Page

Unit  
71

### Countable nouns with **a/an** and **some**

**A** Countable nouns can be *singular or plural*:

a <b>dog</b>	a <b>child</b>	the <b>evening</b>	this <b>party</b>	an <b>umbrella</b>
<b>dogs</b>	some <b>children</b>	the <b>evenings</b>	these <b>parties</b>	two <b>umbrellas</b>

Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

- Bye! Have **a nice evening**.
- Do you need **an umbrella**?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- She never wears **a hat**. (*not wears hat*)
- Be careful of **the dog**.
- What **a beautiful day**!
- Did you hurt **your leg**?

**B** We use **a/an** ... to say what kind of thing something is, or what kind of person somebody is:

- That's a **nice table**.

In the plural we use the noun alone (*not some* ...):

- Those are **nice chairs**. (*not some nice chairs*)

Compare singular and plural:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> A dog is <b>an animal</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm <b>an optimist</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> My father is <b>a doctor</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Jane is <b>a really nice person</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What <b>a lovely dress</b>!</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Dogs are <b>animals</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> We're <b>optimists</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> My parents are both <b>doctors</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Jane and Ben are <b>really nice people</b>.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What <b>awful shoes</b>!</li></ul> |
|--|--|

We say that somebody has **a long nose** / **a nice face** / **blue eyes** / **long fingers** etc. :

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Jack has a long <b>nose</b>. (<i>not the long nose</i>)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Jack has <b>blue eyes</b>. (<i>not the blue eyes</i>)</li></ul> |
|--|--|

We use **a/an** when we say what somebody's job is:

- Sandra is **a nurse**. (*not Sandra is nurse*)
- Would you like to be **an English teacher**?

**C** You can use **some** with plural countable nouns. We use **some** in two ways.

(1) **some** = a number (of) / a few (of) / a pair (of):

- I've seen **some** good **movies** recently. (*not I've seen good movies*)
- Some** **friends** of mine are coming to stay at the weekend.
- I need **some** new **sunglasses**. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Often you can say the same thing with or without **some**. For example:

- I need **(some) new clothes**.
- The room was empty apart from a table and **(some) chairs**.

Do not use **some** when you are talking about things in general (see Unit 75):

- I love **bananas**. (*not some bananas*)
- My aunt is a writer. She writes **books**. (*not some books*)

(2) **some** = some but not all:

- Some** **children** learn very quickly. (*but not all children*)
- Tomorrow there will be rain in **some** **places**, but most of the country will be dry.