

Lesson- 2

A Room 10' x 8'

"This room might be 10' x 8' said Mrs Malik pointing to a square in the draft plan lying on the table before them. It was the third time that she had made this suggestion. It seemed it didn't register on either her husband or the architect engaged to design the house.

The Maliks were going to have a house of their own in Delhi. They had purchased a plot in the most fashionable colony of the town sometime ago. Now that they were posted back in Delhi, they thought, they might as well have the house built.

In her heart of hearts Mrs Malik also decided that after completion of the house, she would stay back in Delhi even if her husband was transferred to another station. She was sick of their postings. Every other year they were moved to a new place. Now that the children were grown-up, it was not desirable to shift them from school to school. Mrs Malik said, if he must, Mr Malik could go all alone. She would settle down permanently in Delhi with the children. She would have her mother-in-law for company. Mr Malik had no objection to it.

"This room might be 10' x 8' Mrs Malik repeated. Her husband was attending to a telephone call in the adjacent room.

"But this is a store." The architect explained to Mrs Malik.

"Yes, but I thought it could be my mother-in-law's room and after her it might be used as a storeroom."

The architect didn't seem to understand. He looked puzzled by Mrs Malik's observation.

"I mean..... my mother-in-law could use the room for the present..... As you know she is old and infirm..... She isn't going to be there for..... and after her it could be converted into a storeroom." Mrs Malik explained haltingly.

Mr Malik joined them. It seems while talking on the telephone he had also given thought to the suggestion. He too, was of the opinion that the store should be a little bigger. It is always better to have a commodious storeroom so that one can move about the trunks more freely. Then it is also more convenient to keep it tidy.

It was decided that the room adjacent to the kitchen should be 10' x 8'. The courtyard would be a little narrower but that didn't matter much.

All the rest had already been provided for and the plan was submitted for approval to the corporation. Mrs Malik took an untiring interest in the construction of

the house. She would be seen standing at the site with her umbrella throughout the day. She supervised every detail. At times she would give a hand to the masons and others. She was the first to arrive at the construction site and left after everyone had gone away. She ensured that there was no wastage of material and the labour did not idle about. Before long the house was completed. Mrs Malik insisted that she would have new furniture made for the house; she would not let the old furniture enter the new house, not a piece of it.

They were still in the midst of plans to shift when they learnt that the house had been acquired by the Government. Mrs Malik was furious. But the next moment when Mr Malik mentioned the rent assessed, she quietened down.

While supervising the construction of the house, she had cultivated love for her neighbours and made friends in the colony. She thought of various plans for doing up the house. Everything had to be forgotten.

Then they were transferred from Delhi. Mrs. Malik was happy. She would no more see her house, regret not being able to live in it and then thinking of the substantial rent, feel consoled. Transferred from one place to another, they had to wait for many more years for another term of posting in Delhi. In the meanwhile Mrs Malik's mother-in-law passed away. Their daughter had been married. In a way they were lucky that their house had been rented to the Government. Private tenants are such a headache. There is no end to their complaints and demands.

And then, they are more often than not irregular in the payment of rent. Mrs Malik's house having been requisitioned by the Government, the rent was credited to their bank account every month regularly.

Only their son remained to be married now. Mr Malik thought that they would rather be done with it before he retired.

Their son had been married, Mr Malik had retired from service, but their house had not yet been released by the Government. Mr and Mrs Malik lived with their son and daughter-in-law in a rented house.

Mr Malik was still fighting with the Government for the release of the house when his end came. He passed away without being able to live in his house even for a day.

Now within three months the house was derequisitioned.

Mrs. Malik's daughter-in-law was keener than Mrs. Malik to shift to her own

house. The moment they were restored possession of the house, she had it painted and polished and started shifting. The furniture dealer had been ordered to supply a number of pieces which he did.

They had to shift on Monday morning but as they woke up, they found that it was raining. The downpour was rather heavy. They waited and waited. Then it was time for Mrs. Malik's son to go to the office. It was decided that they would shift in the evening.

It continued to rain throughout the day. It was raining as heavily as ever in the evening also. Monday being an auspicious day, Mrs Malik wanted to shift if they could.

Out of consideration for his mother the son decided to shift even though it continued to rain heavily. They sent for a taxi in addition to their own car and made a formal move. The rest of the luggage could be shifted later.

It was raining incessantly. Sitting in the back seat of the car, Mrs Malik was lost in memories.

What pains she had taken while the house was under construction! The days when she missed her meals! The days she stood in the scorching heat of the sun supervising the work in progress. The days she was drenched in rain! The architect had prepared a sketch of the house in colour, the way it would look when completed. It had the figure of the lady of the house standing on the verandah with her back towards the marble pillar. Elegant and graceful. An image of contentment. Clad in a maroon saree. Mrs Malik felt that the architect had painted her. But she never wore maroon-coloured sarees. The figure in the sketch, however, was as tall as Mrs Malik. Reclining against the pillar she stood the way Mrs. Malik used to stand. Mrs Malik saw the figure in the sketch and would go and stand before the dressing-table many a time. She thought that she must show that sketch to her daughter-in-law sometime.

Her daughter-in-law was sitting on the front seat with her husband. Moving the rear-view glass of the car towards her, she started repainting her lips. Where was the need to paint the lips when they were going to their own house? At the most they would eat and then go to sleep. Strange are the ways of modern girls! And how the girl talked! She was jabbering incessantly. Why must she talk with her own husband in English?

Mrs. Malik had not picked up English. She had failed in this only. She had accomplished everything else in life. She learnt ball-room dancing.

Suddenly it occurred to Mrs Malik that may be the figure painted by the architect was that of her daughter-in-law. How could that be? She was nowhere on the scene when the plan of the house was prepared. But then, she was wearing a maroon-coloured saree that the figure in the sketch had. Yes, it was maroon colour. Mrs Malik never liked maroon colour. It was too loud for her taste. It was girls like her daughter-in-law who were fond of maroon colour.

"She can wear maroon, surely", said Mrs Malik to herself, "I wish she could also work as hard as I did. I had every brick of the house laid before my eyes. In sun and rain. I stood on the site supervising the construction from early in the morning till late in the night. Many a time I helped the masons with mortar and bricks. Many times I hauled the rubber pipe and sprayed water on the plastered wall".

Then they reached the house. His son drove the car straight to the porch and her daughter-in-law jumped out of it and there she stood reclining against the marble pillar on the verandah. Exactly the way the architect had painted the figure in the sketch. Mrs Malik felt a wrench in her heart. May be the architect had mocked at her.

Standing on the verandah, close to the pillar, trying to cover her elaborate hairdo with the maroon-coloured saree, her daughter-in-law was giving instructions to the servants about the luggage in the taxi following the car.

The luggage had been removed from the taxi. The taxi driver drove away after having been paid. Mrs Malik was still sitting on the back seat of their car. She had a strange sinking sensation.

Then her son and daughter-in-law entered the house. They put on the lights one by one. Every room was lit up. Mrs Malik looked on wide-eyed, still sitting in the back seat of her car. In the excitement nobody seemed to have remembered to open the door for her the way it was done.

Suddenly her son thought of his mother. He ran to the porch and opened the door of the car.

"A drive in the evening always makes me go to sleep," the mother spoke in a whisper. Her daughter-in-law had also come out. Everyone was laughing. Mrs Malik's daughter-in-law was standing against the marble pillar on the verandah again. She was trying to cover her hairdo with her maroon-coloured saree.

"I am not going to eat. I have no appetite," said Mrs Malik, "I would like to sleep." The servants had laid dinner on the table.

"Then you better retire to your room," said the daughter-in-law pointing to room

10 x '8 and her son conducted Mrs Malik to it, holding her hand. She was feeling terribly drowsy.

Mrs Malik shook her head again. But what was wrong with it? Her husband had already gone. She would follow him. One day she must do it.

"I thought it could be my mother-in-law's room and after her it might be converted into a store." These words re-echoed in Mrs Malik's ears.

And then she heard her daughter-in-law comment, "The house is otherwise very well planned. It lacks only a storeroom. I would like to have a big enough store."

Mrs Malik heard it and she felt as if she was sinking deep and deep into a bottomless well.

-K.S. Duggal

About the Lesson:

K.S. Duggal is a renowned Indian writer who writes in English and Punjabi with equal ease. He is versatile and prolific. As an author his output is immense and valuable. He has penned more than 500 short stories, 10 novels, 50 short plays, 7 plays besides several works of literary criticism and two volumes of verse and his autobiography. He is a recipient of several prestigious awards and has also been decorated with Padma Bhushan.

This lesson is based on the theme of generation gap which is emerging as a serious threat to our social fabric. The story highlights how complacency, possessiveness, lack of proper understanding and mutual love and care can widen this gap. The writer voices his grave concern over the growing tendency of ill - treating one's own parents and grandparents by the 'modern fashionable' society. It is a thought-provoking story written in a satirical vein.

GLOSSARY:

draft(n)	- an outline plan or an initial version of a letter, book, speech or drawing of something
register(v)	- to express or show feelings about something, make an impression on a person's mind
engage(v)	- hire someone or his services
adjacent(adj)	- situated near or next to each other
infirm(adj.)	- physically weak through old age
commodious (adj.)	- spacious or roomy, very large

to quieten down (v)	- to calm down or become less noisy
cultivate (v)	- behave politely and decently
requisitioned(v)	- demanded the use of
incessantly (adv)	- continually, ceaselessly
drenched (adj)	- thoroughly wet
contentment(n)	- satisfaction
jabbering(v)	- talk enthusiastically and quickly
accomplished (v & adj)	- achieved, clever or skilled
ball room dancing(n)	- dancing in a very big hall in pairs
haul(v)	- to carry something heavy from one spot to another with great effort
feeling a wrench in heart(ph)	- feeling excessively sad
appetite(n)	- a natural craving for food
drowsy(adj)	- sleepy
echo(v)	- resound

ACTIVITY-1 : COMPREHENSION :

A. State whether the following statements are True or False: Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false.

1. The Malik's had a plot in a very fashionable locality of Delhi.
2. Mr. Malik was frequently transferred during his service tenure.
3. Mrs. Malik was the only family member who actively supervised the construction work of their house.
4. The Malik's did not want to rent out their new house to the Government at first.
5. Mrs. Malik cared a lot for her old mother-in-law.
6. There was a good understanding between Mrs Malik and her daughter-in-law.
7. Mrs Malik's daughter-in-law was a modern, fashionable girl.

B. Answer the following questions in about 25-30 words each:

1. Who were engaged in the discussion of the draft plan of the new house?
2. What did Mrs. Malik seem to insist upon?
3. What were Mr. Malik's views regarding a store room?
4. Why did Mrs Malik decide to settle down in Delhi permanently?
5. What was the attitude of Mrs. Malik towards her mother-in-law?
6. What were Mrs Malik's plans regarding the furniture for the new house?
7. "Everything had to be forgotten" What does the word "everything" here refer to?
8. What reasons does Mrs Malik have to be happy and consoled on being transferred from Delhi after the acquisition of their new house by the Government?

9. Who suggested the room size 10'x8' and to whom?
10. Why was the architect perplexed?
11. In what manner was Mrs Malik's daughter-in-law similar to the figure in the sketch?
12. Why could the Maliks not shift to their new house on Monday morning? When did they do so and why?
13. What did Mrs. Malik not like about her daughter-in-law?

C. Answer the following questions in about 60-80 words each:

1. What memories of the construction period of the house came crowding to Mrs Malik's mind while sitting in the back seat of the car?
2. Explain how Mrs Malik took keen interest in getting her house built and furnished.
3. Why do the Maliks consider the Government as a better tenant than the private ones?
4. What changes had come about in the Malik family by the time Mr. Malik retired?
5. What important details were highlighted in the sketch map of the house?
6. Why did Mrs. Malik think of showing that sketch to her daughter-in-law sometime in future?
7. What did Mrs Malik think about the figure of the lady in the draft plan of the house?
8. How does Mrs Malik view her daughter-in-law?
9. What does the end of 'A Room 10'x8' suggest to you?
10. Give an assessment of Mrs. Malik as a person and a mother-in-law.
11. Why could not Mr. and Mrs. Malik move into their new house during Mr. Malik's life time?

ACTIVITY -2: VOCABULARY:

(a) Make verbs from the following words and use them in sentences of your own:

approval, wastage, complaints, payment, possession, desirable, posting, objections, excitement, observation, suggestion

(b) The following phrasal verbs have figured in the lesson: use these to frame new sentences:

stay back, grow-up, settle down, move about, pick up, drive away, done with, do-up, send for, pass away, look in, lie down, look on

(c) Use the following expressions in your own sentences:

heart of hearts, give thought to, give a hand, before long, make friends with, take pains, felt a wrench, occur to, make a move, too loud for one's taste, to be sick of

ACTIVITY-3-SPEECH ACTIVITY:

Organise a speech contest in your school on 'Parents and Teachers deserve to be treated with great Respect'.

ACTIVITY-4-COMPOSITION:

1. Draft an invitation to celebrate the 100th Birth Anniversary of your grandmother.
2. Draft an invitation for the stepping in ceremony of your new house.
3. Write a letter to the Municipal Commissioner of your city complaining about choked drains and piles of garbage in your locality posing threat to public health.

