

3

The Boy Who Broke The Bank



Sometimes, a mere **rumour** can create a great **dilemma** along with humour. Wit and humour are the spice of life. Without these qualities, life would be dull. Here is the story of a sweeper-boy whose one saying spread like a forest fire about a bank going to fail. Did Nathu, the sweeper-boy really break the bank? Read to find out how the Piplanagar Bank goes **bankrupt** and the real cause behind it.

Nathu **grumbled** to himself as he swept the steps of the Piplanagar Bank owned by Seth Govind Ram. He used the small broom hurriedly and carelessly and the dust, after rising in a cloud above his head settled down again on the steps. As Nathu was banging his pan against a dustbin, Sitaram, the washerman's son, passed by.

Sitaram was on his delivery round. He had a bundle of freshly pressed clothes balanced on his head.

"Don't raise such dust!" he called out to Nathu. "Are you annoyed because they are still refusing to pay you an extra two rupees a month?"

"I don't wish to talk about it," complained the sweeper-boy. "I haven't even received my regular pay, and this is the twentieth of the month. Who would trust a bank that holds up a poor man's salary? As soon as I get my money, I'm off! Not another week would I work in this place." Nathu banged the pan against the dustbin several times, just to emphasise his point and give himself confidence.

"Well, I wish you luck," said Sitaram. "I'll keep a lookout for any jobs that might suit you." He **plodded** barefoot along the road, the big bundle of clothes hiding most of his head and



shoulders. At the fourth home he visited, Sitaram heard the lady of the house mention that she was in need of a sweeper. Tying his bundle together, he said; "I know of a sweeper-boy who is looking for work. He can start from next month. He's with the bank just now but they aren't giving him his pay, and he wants to leave."

"Is that so?" said Mrs Srivastava. "Well, tell him to come and see me tomorrow."

Sitaram was glad that he had been of service to both-a customer and his friend.

Mrs Srivastava had to do some shopping. She set out for the Pipalnagar market place, to make her customary tour of the cloth shops.



A large shady tamarind tree grew at one end of the bazaar, and it was here that Mrs Srivastava found her friend, Mrs Bhushan, sheltering from the heat. Mrs Bhushan showed her a sample of the cloth she was going to buy, and for five minutes they discussed its shade, texture and design. Having **exhausted** this topic, Mrs Srivastava said, "Do you know, my dear, that Seth Govind Ram's bank can't even pay its employees? Only this morning I heard a complaint from their sweeper, who hasn't received his wages for over a month!"

"Shocking!" remarked Mrs Bhushan. "If they can't pay the sweeper they must be in a bad way. None of the others could be getting paid either."

She left Mrs Srivastava at the tamarind tree and went in search of her husband, who was sitting in front of Kamal Kishore's photographic shop, talking with the owner.

"So there you are!" cried Mrs Bhushan. "I've been looking for you for almost an hour. Where did you disappear? I don't know what's happening to Pipalnagar. Even the bank's about to go bankrupt," she informed her husband.

"What's that?" said Kamal Kishore, sitting up suddenly. "Which bank?"

"Why, the Pipalnagar Bank of course. I hear they have stopped paying employees. Don't tell me you have an account there, Mr Kishore?"

"No, but my neighbour has!" he exclaimed; and he called out over the low partition to the keeper of the barber shop next door. "Deep Chand, have you heard the latest news? The Pipalnagar Bank is about to **collapse**. You'd better get your money out as soon as you can!"

Deep Chand, who was cutting the hair of an elderly gentleman, was so **startled** that his hand shook and he **nicked** his customer's right ear. The customer **yelped** with pain and distress: pain

not because of the cut and distress but because of the awful news he had just heard. With one side of his neck still unshaven, he **sped** across the road to the general merchant's store where there was a telephone. He dialed Seth Govind Ram's number. The Seth was not at home. Where was he, then? The Seth was holidaying in Kashmir. Oh, was that so? The elderly gentleman did not believe it. He hurried back to the barber's shop and told Deep Chand. "The bird has flown! Seth Govind Ram has left town. Definitely, it means a collapse." Then he dashed out of the shop, making a **beeline** for his office and cheque book.

The news spread through the bazaar with the rapidity of forest fire. From the general merchant's it travelled to the shop, circulated amongst the customers, and then spread with them in various directions, to the betel-seller, the tailor, the tea vendor, the jeweller, the beggar sitting on the pavement.



Old Ganpat the beggar, had a crooked leg. He had been **squatting** on the pavement for years, calling for alms. In the evening someone would come with a **barrow** and take him away. He had never been known to walk. But now, on learning that the bank was about to collapse, Ganpat astonished everyone by leaping to his feet and actually running at top speed in the direction of the bank. It soon became known that he had a thousand rupees in savings!

By noon the small bank had **gone through** all its ready cash, and the harassed manager was in a dilemma. Emergency funds could only be obtained from another bank, some thirty miles distant, and he wasn't sure he could persuade the crowd to wait until then. There was no way of contacting Seth Govind Ram on his houseboat in Kashmir.

People were turned back from the counters and told to return the following day. They did not like the sound of that. So they gathered outside, on the steps of the bank shouting "Give us our money or we'll **break in!**" and "Fetch the Seth, we know he's hiding in a safe deposit locker!"

Mischief makers who didn't have a paisa in the bank, joined the crowd and **aggravated** their mood. The manager stood at the door and tried to **placate** them. He declared that the bank had plenty of money but no immediate means of collecting it; he urged them to go home and come back the next day.

"We want it now!" chanted some of the crowd. "Now, now, now!"

A brick **hurtled** through the air and crashed through the glass window of the Pipalnagar Bank.

Nathu arrived next morning to sweep the steps of the bank. He saw the **refuse** and the broken glass and the stones **cluttering** the step. Raising his hands in a **gesture** of horror and disgust he cried: "**Hooligans!**"! As though it isn't bad enough to be paid late, it seems my work has also to be increased!" He swept the steps with his broom scattering the refuse.

"Good morning, Nathu," said the washerman's boy, getting down from his bicycle. "Are you ready to take up a new job from the first of next month? You'll have to, I suppose, now that the bank is going out of business."

"How's that?" asked Nathu.

"Haven't you heard? Well you'd better wait here until half the population of Pipalnagar arrives to claim their money." He waved cheerfully—he did not have a bank account—and sped away on his cycle.

Nathu went back to sweeping the steps, **muttering** to himself. When he had finished his work, he sat down on the highest step, to await the arrival of the manager. He was determined to get his pay.

"Who would have thought the bank would collapse!" he said to himself, and looked thoughtfully into the distance. "I wonder how it could have happened..."

—Ruskin Bond

Word-Web

- **rumour** : a report passing from one person to another without any known authority for the truth of it.
- **dilemma** : an insoluble problem
- **bankrupt** : not having enough money to pay your debts
- **grumbled** : to utter in a low voice
- **plodded** : walked heavily, trudged
- **collapse** : to break down, to fall
- **nicked** : notched or chipped, cut
- **sped** : second form of speed, ran
- **squat** : to sit in a low or crouching position with legs drawn up closely or in front of the body
- **barrow** : a wheelbarrow
- **break in** : to go in forcibly
- **placate** : to pacify, conciliate
- **refuse** : garbage, rubbish
- **gesture** : motion or action intended to express an idea or feeling
- **hooligans** : violent and aggressive people
- **bang** : to beat noisily
- **exhausted** : to end or finish
- **startled** : greatly surprised, alarmed
- **yelped** : to give a quick, sharp, shrill cry
- **beeline** : to hurry directly to
- **gone through** : gone out of money
- **aggravated** : provoked, to make angry
- **hurtled** : moved rapidly, threw
- **clutter** : confused noise, bustle
- **muttering** : to speak in a low angry voice



Comprehension

» Multi-Menu

Multiple Choice Questions

A. Tick against the correct answers.

- Nathu was not paid even his regular pay by the _____ of the month.
(a) eighteenth (b) nineteenth (c) twentieth
- Nathu was unhappy and not ready to work with _____ .
(a) Sitaram (b) the bank (c) Mrs Srivastava
- The Pipalnagar Bank was a private bank of _____ .
(a) Mrs Bhushan (b) Seth Govind Ram (c) Kamal Kishore
- Deep Chand was startled and he nicked _____ right ear.
(a) Govind Ram's (b) Sitaram's (c) the customer's
- Old Ganpat, the beggar, had a _____ leg.
(a) crooked (b) paralysed (c) hooked

» Pick and Fill

B. Fill in the blanks of these sentences with correct words from the box.

forest fire muttering holidaying placate barefoot

- Sitaram walked rapidly _____ along the road with a big bundle of clothes.
- Seth Govind Ram was _____ in Kashmir.
- The news spread through the bazar with the rapidity of _____.
- The manager stood at the door and tried to _____ the crowd.
- Nathu went back to sweeping the steps _____ to himself.

C. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements.

- Nathu was the sweeper boy employed in the Pipalnagar Bank.
- Sitaram was the washerman who ironed clothes of people.
- Mrs Srivastava was in a need of a washerman for work.
- Mrs Bhushan, a friend of Mrs Srivastava met her in the market.
- Deep Chand, the barber had an account in the Pipalnagar Bank.
- Old Ganpat, the baggar had a thousand rupees in savings in the bank.

» Matching-Mania

D. Match the persons in Column A with their professions in Column B.

Column A

1. Nathu •
2. Sitaram •
3. Deep Chand •
4. Ganpat •
5. Seth Govind Ram •
6. Kamal Kishore •

Column B

- (a) photographer
- (b) the beggar
- (c) the banker
- (d) sweeperboy
- (e) washerman boy
- (f) the barber



» Question-Queue (Short)

E. Answer each of the followings questions in one or two sentences.

1. Who was Nathu and where did he work?
2. How did the news of the bankrupt bank reach Ganpat?
3. What did Ganpat do as soon as he heard the news?
4. Why did people gather on the steps of the bank and what did they shout?
5. What dilemma was being faced by the manager of the bank?
6. Why was Sitaram glad after talking to Mrs Srivastava?

» Question-Queue (Long)

F. Answer each of the following questions in detail.

1. What happened when Deep Chand heard about the news?
2. "The news spread through the bazar with the rapidity of forest fire." Describe how the news spread in the bazar?
3. What was Nathu's reaction when he saw the broken glass in the bank the next day?
4. What do you mean by the saying, "The bird has flown" in the context of this story?
5. Who actually caused the confusion and chaos in the story? Do you think he ever realised what he had done? Give examples.
6. What are rumours? How do they spread? Can they cause harm? Explain in the context of the story.



Vocabulary

▶ Pick from the story opposites of the following words.

- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| 1. attentively | _____ | 2. doubt | _____ |
| 3. yesterday | _____ | 4. special | _____ |
| 5. unknown | _____ | 6. departed | _____ |
| 7. desuade | _____ | 8. pacified | _____ |
| 9. inside | _____ | 10. decreased | _____ |

▶ Make sentences using the following words.

- emphasise : _____
- plodded : _____
- customary : _____
- texture : _____
- bankrupt : _____



Think-n-Thrive

- Was it Nathu who really broke the bank? How can you say that it was because of him that caused confusion and chaos in the story?



Grammar-Grip

» Adverb of Manner

An adverb of manner answers the question 'how' or 'in what manner' an action is performed. For example: sweetly, quietly, gladly, etc.

▶ Fill in the blanks with the words given in the box.

longingly, promptly, joyfully, carefully, brightly, actually, exactly, quickly

- John _____ dug holes in the earth and sowed the apple seeds.
- John thought that the apple was _____ God's blessings.
- Ramesh cut the apple with a knife _____ in the middle.
- The beggar looked at the food _____.
- She _____ put the chocolate into her mouth.
- We all watched the movie _____.
- He put the money _____ into his purse.
- The sun was shining _____ in the sky.

