

# When Silence Learned to Speak



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*By Naramsetti Umamaheswararao*

Charan was three years old. His mother and father both had jobs. Every morning they woke up early, hurried through all the household work, and rushed to their offices. Because of this, they hardly had any time to spend with Charan.

They would make him sit in front of the television. A maid was hired to take care of him. After finishing the household chores, she too would sit in front of the TV. Charan spent the whole day watching the programs on television along with her.

The colours on the TV kept changing. Scenes changed. Cartoon characters jumped around. Strange sounds filled the room. But not a single character on the screen ever asked Charan, “How are you?” The maid was happy just watching the TV and hardly paid attention to him.

Because of this, Charan could not open his mouth and speak. Even though he was three years old, his world stopped at gestures. It had not reached the stage of words.

One day Charan's grandmother and grandfather came from their village. They were surprised to see that the house was filled only with the sound of the television. Charan smiled when he saw them, but he did not greet them.

With the help of the maid, they managed their work. It was already dark when their daughter and son-in-law returned home from work. As soon as they arrived, the grandparents asked about their grandson.

"He still hasn't started speaking. That's why he just smiles," their daughter said.

Grandfather felt a sharp pain in his heart. How could a three-year-old child still not speak? he wondered. Right then he made a decision in his mind: "The television in this house must stop. Instead, we must spend time with our grandson."

Grandfather began to think about how to help Charan start speaking. Soon he came up with a few ideas, and from the very next day he started putting them into action.

Every morning he took Charan to the garden. There he showed him the birds, squirrels, ants, flowers, leaves, and branches, and told him their names.

When a tiny ant was walking by, Grandfather said, "Look, Charan! This little ant is carrying a piece of laddu for her baby. Another ant

is carrying a piece of jaggery. Call them and ask them to stop. Say, ‘Ant, please stop!’”

When a squirrel climbed a tree, he said slowly and clearly, moving his lips so Charan could see, “Look at the squirrel... see how fast it climbs the tree! Call it. Say ‘Squ-ir-rel... squirrel... stop!’”

Then he pointed to a parrot sitting on another tree branch and said, “Look, Charan. Its colour is green. It blends with the leaves of the tree. And see its beak—it’s bright red!”

Charan watched the ants, the squirrel, and the parrot with great interest. For the first time, he tried to stop an ant and made a sound, “Aa... aa...”

Another time a crow was cawing. Grandfather explained, “Look, that’s a crow. See how black it is. Listen... it says ‘Caw... caw...’”

Sometimes he made Charan stand in front of a mirror. “Look, how handsome you are in the mirror! Where is Charan’s nose? Here is Grandfather’s nose. Where is your nose?”

Charan would touch his nose and laugh.

“Say it... no-se...” Grandfather would say slowly, moving his lips clearly.

Watching these movements, Charan slowly began to imitate them.

Grandmother also thought of a clever idea. She would purposely stay in the kitchen and give Charan a small task.

“Oh dear! I forgot to give Grandfather his medicine box. Can you take this to him and say, ‘Take it’ with your mouth?”

Charan carried the box to Grandfather. As he handed it over, and with Grandfather encouraging him, he said his first word: “Ta...k...” (Take it).

Days passed like this.

One evening it began to rain. Charan stood near the window watching the drops fall outside. Until then he had only seen rain on television. Now the cool breeze and the smell of wet earth felt new and exciting.

Standing beside him, Grandmother said, “Charan... it’s raining!”

Then she began to sing a playful rain song, acting it out with her hands.

Holding Grandmother’s hand, Charan pointed to the falling raindrops outside and tried to sing along, saying softly and unclearly, “Rain... rain... come...!”

A few more days passed. One day, Charan clearly called out, “Grandma!”

The moment they heard that word, everyone’s eyes in the house filled with joy. Charan’s parents finally understood something important: compared to the artificial sounds from the television, the first word from a child’s mouth is far sweeter.

Grandfather said thoughtfully, “Children who grow up in a joint family don’t need to be taught how to speak. Words come to them naturally. That’s because everyone around them becomes like a teacher, talking and chatting with them. Mobile phones and televisions may give information, but they cannot teach conversation. That is why Charan started speaking late. Now do you understand where the real problem was? From now on, we must raise Charan without such mistakes and make sure he grows well.”

Charan’s mother realised that Grandfather’s words were true.

From then on, Charan’s parents never left him alone at home. Either his paternal grandparents or maternal grandparents would stay with him while they went to work.

And slowly, Charan forgot about the television.

With his new words, he began to talk, laugh, and fill the house with happiness.



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