

talk  
to  
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

# Footprints without Feet <sup>9</sup>

## Bholi

### 1. Summary

In this story, 'Bholi', we are reminded of the strength and triumph of the human spirit. This story is about Sulekha (called Bholi by everyone), daughter of Ramlal and the youngest of seven siblings. Bholi faced many challenges from early in her childhood. Though born fair and pretty, a bad attack of small pox left terrible scars all over her face. She started speaking quite late and then too, with a stammer. Other children often made fun of her and mimicked her. As a result, she talked very little.

When Bholi turned seven, she was sent to the local school and her life started to improve. The lady teacher at the school was very kind and encouraging. Gradually, Bholi gained a lot of self-confidence.

This new confidence and pride came to her rescue as she grew into a young woman. Her parents arranged for her to marry a lame widower, a man as old as her own father, who had grown up children from his first wife. Her parents did not ask her for her views. However, she did not protest because she wanted to protect her parents' 'izzat'.

On the marriage *mandap*, the groom saw Bholi's pockmarked face for the first time. He demanded five thousand rupees from Bholi's father to marry a girl who had so many scars. Bholi revolted and refused to marry a mean, greedy and cowardly man. Her parents, relatives and the villagers were all shocked at her behaviour, but she did not change her mind. The groom returned to his village.

Bholi's school teacher was witness to this wondrous change of Bholi from a shy, awkward and fearful girl, into a fiery, outspoken young woman who could stand up for herself. The teacher was very happy as she was the catalyst in bringing about this transformation.

## 2. Gender Equality



Gender equality is promised by the Indian Constitution. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also gives power to the Government to allow positive discrimination in favour of women to make up for the social, economic, educational and political discrimination against them in the past.

This does not mean that these individuals will automatically be chosen over other candidates. However, if there are two candidates of the same level, the individual from the minority group will be chosen for the job. This will give people a chance to work towards a future with real equality. This has resulted in various laws that favour women and give women the opportunity to succeed and get true equality.

## 3. Vocabulary

1. **Neglected** – not receiving enough care or attention  
The garden had a **neglected** look, with weeds growing everywhere.
2. **Measure up** – to be good enough or as good as someone or something  
I will always try to **measure up** to my brother, who is a famous war hero.

3. **Expectations** – the feeling that good things are going to happen in the future  
He has high **expectations** from his son, and thinks that he will be very successful in future.
4. **Simpleton** – a foolish person easily tricked by others  
The rowdy boys teased the village **simpleton** and threw stones at him.
5. **Numberdar** – an official who collects revenue or tax for the government  
On the revenue collection day, the **Numberdar** arrived early at his office.
6. **Backward** – slow to develop or learn; behind  
Though Gita was a **backward** student, she became a famous Kathak dancer.  
He constantly looked **backward** to make sure that no one was following him.
7. **Permanently** – in a lasting way, for all time  
After the car accident, his foot was **permanently** damaged.
8. **Disfigured** – spoil the appearance of, deface, scar  
The village has been **disfigured** by ugly new buildings.  
Her face has been permanently **disfigured** by burns.
9. **Pock-marks** – pits left on the skin after small pox, chicken pox or acne  
The **pock- marks** on his face will never disappear.
10. **Stammered** – spoke or said something with unusual pauses or repeated sounds, either because of speech problems or because of fear or nervousness  
He **stammered** out an apology and ran out of the room in shame.
11. **Mimicked** – imitated, copied  
She **mimicked** the call of many birds perfectly.
12. **Prosperous** – successful, with plenty of money  
He was a **prosperous** trader and donated a lot of money to charity.
13. **Intelligence** – the ability to learn and understand things quickly and easily  
Her **intelligence** helped her in solving the problem quickly.

14. **Tehsildar** – a tax officer in charge of obtaining taxes from a tehsil  
A **Tehsildar** is an important person in the tehsil.
15. **Ceremony** – a set of acts performed at a formal social or religious occasion  
The wedding **ceremony** took place in the garden.
16. **Revenue official** – a person who is responsible for collecting the tax or income that the government receives from the public  
The district **revenue official** was corrupt and stole a part of the money that he collected.
17. **Representative** – typical of a class, group, or body of opinion  
The ambassador appointed to a foreign country is a **representative** of the government.
18. **Consulted** – took the advice of, discussed, talked things over  
He **consulted** many doctors but no one was able to cure his diabetes.
19. **Courage** – bravery, fearlessness  
Always have the **courage** to be honest and to tell the truth.
20. **Disobey** – fail to obey rules, defy, go against  
He wanted to **disobey** his father and go out, but was scared of being punished.
21. **Terror** – extreme fear, dread, fright  
The **terror** of the recent bomb attack is still fresh in our minds.
22. **Grip** – to hold tight and hard  
His **grip** is so strong that my hand hurt after the handshake.
23. **Mend** – repair  
Please **mend** the tear in your dress.
24. **Shrunk** – became smaller  
The sweater **shrunk** because it was been washed in hot water.
25. **Matted** – knotted, tangled  
My mother took pity on the beggar with the **matted** hair and torn clothes.

26. **Fear-laden** – full of fear  
Rakesh looked at his father with **fear-laden** eyes when he showed him his report card.
27. **Squatted** – sat on their heels  
He **squatted** on the ground to clean the floor.
28. **Fascinated** – extremely interested  
We watched **fascinated**, as the potter made a beautiful vase out of a lump of clay.
29. **Orchard** – land planted with fruit trees  
Children often come to the mango **orchard** near our house to pluck mangoes.
30. **Helpless** – without power, feeble, unable to do anything  
I feel **helpless** without the support of my parents.
31. **Daring** – brave, ability to take risks, bold in action and thoughts  
The rescue of the passengers from the burning train was an act of **daring** and heroism.
32. **Scurried** – ran or moved hurriedly  
The players **scurried** to the shelter as it started raining heavily.
33. **Sobbing** – crying noisily, taking in deep breaths  
I could hear the child **sobbing** her heart out, inside the house.
34. **Soothing** – having a gentle calming effect, reducing pain or discomfort  
My grandmother plays **soothing** bhajans in the morning.
35. **Command** – an order  
When the General gives a **command**, you must obey.
36. **Suggestion** – an idea, plan or action that is suggested  
She made a **suggestion** that we should all go for a walk in the park in the evening.
37. **Disgrace** – shame, dishonor, discredit, loss of respect  
It would be a **disgrace** to Indian cricket if we lose the series.
38. **Encouraged** – helped and supported someone to do something, or to give advice to someone to do something  
The teacher **encouraged** all the students to read storybooks.

39. **Relieved** – thankful, glad, no longer anxious, reassured  
We were **relieved** to hear that the medical report was normal.
40. **Achievement** – something very good and difficult that you have succeeded in doing  
She felt a sense of **achievement** when she passed the exam with good marks.
41. **Affectionately** – in a way showing liking or love  
The old man **affectionately** patted Ram's shoulder to thank him for the gift.
42. **Astonished** – greatly surprised, shocked  
I was **astonished** when my parents gave me a new laptop for my birthday.
43. **Slightest** – not at all  
He had not studied at all for the exam, but that did not worry him in the **slightest**.
44. **Blossomed** – to grow or to develop good, attractive, or successful qualities, to produce flowers  
She has **blossomed** into an attractive young lady.  
When the rose plant **blossomed**, its fragrance spread all over the garden.
45. **Throbbing** – pain felt as a series of regular beats, a strong regular beat  
His head was **throbbing** and his body ached as the fever rose.
46. **Tin shed** – a small store built of tin  
The manure for the farm is kept in the **tin shed** at the back of the house.
47. **Cotton ginning mill** – a mill where raw cotton is separated from the seeds  
Most of the workers of the **cotton ginning mill** come from the nearby village.
48. **Proposal** – a formal plan or suggestion, scheme, plan  
The **proposal** to build a new school building was passed at the last committee meeting.

49. **Well-to-do** – rich  
He belonged to a **well-to-do** family and got a lot of pocket money each month.
50. **Dowry** – money, gifts or property that a woman's parents give to the man she marries  
Giving or receiving **dowry** is not legal in India.
51. **Limps** – walks slowly and with difficulty because of having an injured or painful leg or foot  
He hurt his ankle while playing football, so he **limps** when he walks.
52. **Witless** – stupid  
She had to take care of her **witless** younger brother while her mother worked.
53. **Dumb cow** – as simple or stupid as a cow  
She was called a **dumb cow** as she did not speak very much in class.
54. **Muttered** – say something in a low sound, murmur, mumble  
The old woman **muttered** to herself as she walked down the hill.
55. **Courtyard** – an area of flat ground outside a building, that is partly or completely surrounded by walls  
During summer, we all sleep in the **courtyard** of our house.
56. **Whispered** – spoke very quietly, using the breath but not the voice, so that only the person close to you could hear you  
The captain of the cricket team came over and **whispered** something in the bowler's ear.
57. **Conversation** – talk between two or more people  
I had a long **conversation** with the manager of the restaurant about the menu for the party.
58. **Headed** – at the top part or beginning of something; going in a particular direction or to a particular place  
The line of teachers, **headed** by the Principal of the school, walked onto the stage of the assembly hall.  
We are **headed** for Goa.



59. **Procession** – a line of people who are all walking or travelling in the same direction, especially in a formal way, as part of a religious ceremony or public celebration  
The wedding **procession** blocked all traffic on the road.
60. **Decorated** – made attractive, adorned  
They **decorated** the house on Diwali with lamps and flowers.
61. **Overjoyed** – extremely happy, thrilled  
I was **overjoyed** to see my sister again.
62. **Pomp and splendour** – grand display, magnificence, glory  
The **pomp and splendour** of the Republic Day celebrations cheers the hearts of millions of Indians.
63. **Envious** – wanting something another person has  
Rita was **envious** of her friend, Asha, because she wore such expensive clothes.
64. **Auspicious** – suggesting a positive and successful future  
The team made an **auspicious** start by winning the first match of the competition.
65. **Sacred** – considered to be holy and deserving respect, especially because of a connection with a god  
The Ganga is a **sacred** river for the Hindus.
66. **Prompted** – made someone do or say something  
The teacher **prompted** the child to recite the poem in front of the whole school.
67. **Veil** – a piece of thin material worn by women to cover the face or head  
Some Rajasthani women still cover their faces with **veils** when they come out in public.
68. **Glance** – take a brief or hurried look, peep  
A quick **glance** at her watch told her that she was very late for the meeting.
69. **Poised** – still, but ready to do something or move at any moment  
The army was **poised** for an attack on the border.

70. **Turban** – a head covering for a man, worn especially by Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus, made from a long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the top of the head many times  
The Prime Minister wore a colourful **turban** on Independence Day.
71. **Humiliate** – shame, embarrass, injure someone's pride or dignity  
If you do not perform well in the competition, you will **humiliate** the whole school.
72. **Considerate** – kind, thoughtful, concerned, respectful to others  
The **considerate** boss is missed by all the workers.
73. **Streaming** – falling continuously; music or video played continuously  
Tears were **streaming** down her face when her mother scolded her.  
All the TV channels were live **streaming** the Republic Day Parade.
74. **Triumphant** – victorious, having won a battle or contest  
The **triumphant** football team was greeted with loud cheers.
75. **Gambled** – placed a bet, took a chance  
He **gambled** away all his hard earned money in one night.
76. **Announced** – declared, reported, notified  
The Principal **announced** the schedule of exams at the school assembly.
77. **Downcast** – looking downwards  
The bride walked, with her eyes **downcast**, to the marriage mandap.
78. **Prospective** – possible, probable in the future  
The **prospective** groom brought gifts for the entire family.
79. **Contempt** – disliking and having no respect for someone or something  
He looked with **contempt** at all the villagers who were shouting and cursing him.
80. **Streak of lightning** – in a flash, extremely fast  
The chain snatcher grabbed the chain and ran away like a **streak of lightning**.
81. **Flung** – thrown  
He tore the letter into bits and **flung** them into the dustbin.
82. **Startled** – sudden surprise, shock or alarm  
The phone rang in the middle of the night and **startled** him.

83. **Thunderstruck** – extremely shocked or surprised  
The political party was **thunderstruck** when half its members quit the party overnight.
84. **Shameless** – not ashamed, especially about something generally considered unacceptable  
She was **shameless**, and continued to lie to her teacher.
85. **Crazy** – mad, out of one's mind, insane  
It is a **crazy** idea to camp outdoors in this hot weather.
86. **Contemptible** – deserving contempt, hateful, disgraceful, shameful  
His **contemptible** behavior was noticed by his superior.
87. **Coward** – a person without courage, or fearful of doing risky things  
The children called him a **coward** because he refused to fight.
88. **Violently** – using physical force to hurt, damage or kill someone or something  
He kicked the door so **violently** that it came off the hinges.
89. **Dumb-driven cow** – a person who is like a stupid cow and has to be told what to do, cannot do anything on their own  
She stopped acting like a **dumb-driven cow** and refused to follow her father's orders.
90. **Heartless** – unkind, cruel, uncaring  
It was **heartless** of them to throw the poor, orphaned boy out of the house in the cold weather.
91. **Creature** – any large or small living thing that can move independently  
Every **creature** has the right to live a happy life.
92. **Confused** – unable to think clearly or to understand something  
My grandfather was **confused** and did not know where he was.
93. **Rooted to the ground** – so shocked or surprised that you cannot move  
Sanjay stood **rooted to the ground** when the robber pulled out his gun.
94. **Grief** – very great sadness, especially at the death of someone  
Her **grief** at her mother's death was terrible.

95. **Steady** – not moving or changing suddenly  
I will hold the ladder **steady** while you climb up to change the light bulb.
96. **Satisfaction** – a pleasant feeling that you get when you receive something you wanted, or when you have done something you wanted to do  
She looked at the finished painting with great **satisfaction**.
97. **Contemplating** – looking thoughtfully at for a long time, considering, planning  
I am **contemplating** a change of job.
98. **Completion** – the act of finishing something that you are doing or making  
The road repair is nearing **completion**.
99. **Masterpiece** – an extremely good work of art, workmanship or writing  
The painter refused to sell his **masterpiece**.

#### 4. Questions

##### Read and Find Out

1. **Why is Bholi's father worried about her?**
2. **For what unusual reasons is Bholi sent to school?**
3. **Does Bholi enjoy her first day at school?**
4. **Does she find her teacher different from the people at home?**
5. **Why do Bholi's parents accept Bishamber's marriage proposal?**
6. **Why does the marriage not take place?**
7. **Why Sulekha was called Bholi- 'the simpleton' from childhood?**
8. **Why did other children make fun of Bholi? What effect did that have on her?**

### Think about it

1. Bholi had many apprehensions about going to school. What made her feel that she was going to a better place than her home?
2. How did Bholi's teacher play an important role in changing the course of her life?
3. Why did Bholi at first agree to an unequal match? Why did she later reject the marriage? What does this tell us about her?
4. Bholi's real name is Sulekha. We are told this right at the beginning. But only in the last but one paragraph of the story is Bholi called Sulekha again. Why do you think she is called Sulekha at that point in the story?

### Talk about it

1. Bholi's teacher helped her overcome social barriers by encouraging and motivating her. How do you think you can contribute towards changing the social attitudes illustrated in this story?
  2. Should girls be aware of their rights, and assert them? Should girls and boys have the same rights, duties and privileges? What are some of the ways in which society treats them differently? When we speak of 'human rights', do we differentiate between girls' rights and boys' rights?
  3. Do you think the characters in the story were speaking to each other in English? If not, in which language were they speaking? (You can get clues from the names of the persons and the non-English words used in the story.)
4. Suggested reading
- 'The Brass Gong' by Qazi Abdul Sattar
  - 'Old Man at the Bridge' by Ernest Hemingway
  - 'Gandhiji the Teacher' by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur