

The Tale Of The Two Easy Chairs...

They were almost identical chairs, barring minor differences in the colour of the canvas, that were placed strategically in the portico of two neighbouring houses numbered 29 and 31 in one of the salubrious by-lanes of Saharkar nagar, Bangalore. Rajagopalan owned 29 and Murthy owned 31 and both were retired Government officials. One of them had retired from the office of the Auditor General of India and the other from the BSNL. Both had got the plot in the outskirts of then Bangalore at quite a low price. Now the same area was one of the most prestigious localities of Bangalore. But this is not a story of the real estate boom that happened in Bangalore. No, it is the story of those two identical easy chairs that occupied prime position in the household.



Illustration by Pramod Joshi

The two neighbours had not known each other prior to their becoming neighbours. Rajagopalan had built the house first. His father had spent the better part of his mornings and evenings relaxing in the very same chair. This is why Murthy built a similar portico and got himself the 'same'

and daughter-in-law at the time of their deliveries. Even Rajagopalan visited his children, though he returned within a couple of months. After spending seven years in US, Rajagopalan's daughter and son-in-law decided to come back to India. After much toying they decided to take up

Illustration by Pramod Joshi



chair in anticipation of his retirement in not so distant future. His father and father-in-law too were happy with the arrangement till their demise. Rajagopalan too must have planned his retirement with the thought of spending his leisure time relaxing on the easy chair in his portico. Alas! This was not to be. Rajagopalan had a daughter, Nitya and a son, Nitin. He believed in equality of both genders. The only difference was that Nitin left for the US to complete his MS and settled in California, while Nitya completed her B.Tech and got a job in Cognizant India. But after getting married she too moved to the US and joined her husband in Pennsylvania. All things were fine and Rajagopalan's wife made a couple of trips to the US to help both her daughter

a flat close to her parent's house. It was to be a mutually beneficial move. They had their second child, and at around this time, Rajagopalan retired as well. All through his working days, the easy chair in his portico beckoned him and he kept saying to himself that it wouldn't be too long for him to make full use of it, but suddenly he found himself busier than he had been before his retirement. No sooner the morning chores and prayers were done, his daughter or son-in-law on their way to work would drop off the baby and from there on the day was packed. His wife and he hardly had time for themselves as the baby needed much attention. They did try a couple of caretakers but they were never good enough for these two. The chaos doubled as soon as

the elder daughter returned from school. Squealing, squabbling, scampering and screaming were the order of the day at the Rajagolpan's. On the other hand, Murthy's household was as quiet as a meditation hall. The Murthy's indulged in quiet walks, even quieter sojourns in his easy chair with his wife seated in another semi-recliner. Yes, Rajagopalan envied his neighbour to a great extent and often grumbled about the same to his wife.

"Sarala, why can't Nitya's in-laws take care of their grandchildren?"

The ever patient lady answered serenely, "Because they also have their aged mother still alive and living with them."

"Ask Nitya to leave her job and take care of her children. What kind of life is this, a mother coming home at odd hours leaving her children to fend for themselves?" he continued as he helped his wife fold the diapers.

Both the grandparents were against the modernday 'use and throw' diapers and preferred the cloth ones. "Why half the time she spends going on tours too and her husband also does not seem to be helping her?"

"You have insisted on equality between the genders all along, it is a moot point you are making now. Moreover, with so much riding on her it would be professional suicide. We are here to help her and what would we do otherwise; it would be too boring. By the way, Nitya's husband makes the breakfast and packs Ritika's lunchbox too. Unlike some people I know, he knows that every household has a room called a kitchen and also knows to use the same!" she joked gently.

Rajagopalan reddened. It was a standing

joke in their family that he was all thumbs when it comes to trying out anything in the kitchen and avoided the kitchen like plague.

"Okay, okay....I am tired. I am going to sleep in that easy chair." But on his way to the portico, his eyes fell on the unkempt centre table and he sighed on his way to bring some order to the same. The days were full and the evenings fuller and this went on for one full year. His daughter and son-in-law were grateful to the grandparents and tried to display the same by booking them for holiday packages and a few outings. But the easy chair continued to be underutilized.

Very soon, the young Rhea started crawling and scampering. She too was enamoured

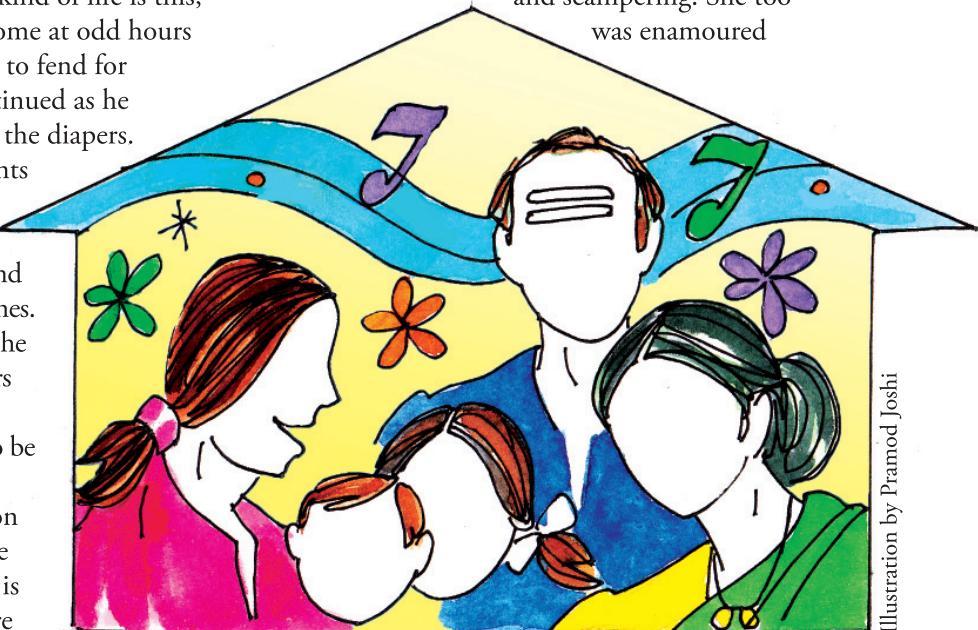


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by the easy chair and very rarely if at all allowed her grandfather to relax on it. Whenever he found time to relax, she was there to cry, leaving behind her toy still her grandfather gave in to her tantrums. It was always a source of mystery to him that a child who is actually engrossed with her toys realizes the moment he plans to occupy the chair for her to stake claim to the same! It was sometimes easier to give in rather than ignore and lose his peace

of mind. She wanted the newspaper he read, the spectacles he used and the glass he drank from. She loved him dearly and tagged along all the time much to his wife's amusement. It was a humbling experience to have someone who just adored him. When his own children were young, he wasn't always there for them as he too had been busy and often went on tours for days at a stretch. Now, he felt the time flying and he always felt cheated that he still could not do what he actually wanted to do. All through this time, Murthy's easy chair and the semi-recliner was well used except for short durations when they went to visit their children.

The months flew by and one day Rajagopalan went quietly towards the easy chair to lie down a bit only to laugh at the sight of his little granddaughter ensconced in the same giving her grandfather her famous toothless grin. It was the first time; she had climbed on to it on her own and this tickled the grandfather no end. He nuzzled the baby's tummy as she gurgled and so it went on for the next few minutes. Sarala watched on not saying much. For she knew, her husband's bark was stronger than his bite. All his grumbling and mumbling was for her ears

only and as soon as their daughter even mooted the topic of any difficulty, his volte face was a sight to behold! Soon the time came when Rhea also started going to playschool.

As for Murthy his afternoon nap was always interrupted by the familiar voice of the grandfather, granddaughter duo as they returned from the playschool... The myriad questions the little mite posed to her grandfather...

"Thatha, why is that butterfly of different colour?"

"Thatha, why can't we bring that dog home?"

"Thatha, can I have water?"

He also heard the impatience seep into the grandfather's reply and Murthy immediately felt sorry for the little girl. If given a chance he would enjoy every minute of his time with his grandchildren he thought as he reclined in his easy chair with his wife sitting next to him on a semi-recliner. There were days when Rajagopalan had to carry his cranky granddaughter all the way home from the school but most days she was happy skipping and hopping beside her grandfather talking nineteen to dozen. This was one of those days. The ten

minute walk back from school took almost double the time as she stopped to inspect, comment and laugh and both Murthy and his wife watched the two each lost in their own thoughts till she voiced her thoughts, "We too would not be spending our days and nights caught in this unending loneliness, watching the world go by from these easy chairs of ours, if only our children or at least one child stayed close to us. How I envy the Rajagopalans!" **N**

-By Chandrika R Krishnan

