

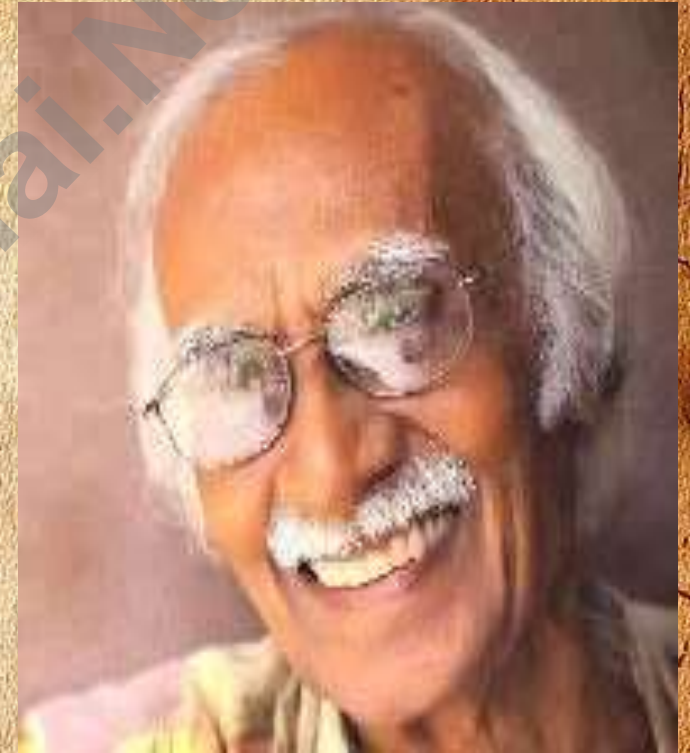


THE CHAIR

BY

KI. RAJANARAYANAN

Ki. Rajanarayanan, popularly known by Tamil initials as Ki. Ra., is a Tamil folklorist and a prolific author. The short story 'The chair' is written in 1969 and its original title is '**Naarkaali**'. The novels **Gopalla Grammam** and its sequel **Gopallapurathu Makkal** are among his most acclaimed; he won the Sahitya Akademi award for the latter in 1991. As a folklorist, Ki. Ra. spent decades collecting folktales from the **karisal kaadu** and publishing them in popular magazines. In 2007, the Thanjavur based publishing house Annam compiled these folktales into a 944-page book, the **Nattuppura Kadhai Kalanjiyam** (Collection of Country Tales). As of 2009, he has published around 30 books. A selection of these were translated into English by **Pritham K. Chakravarthy** and published in 2009 as *Where Are You Going, You Monkeys? – Folktales from Tamil Nadu*.



A house without a chair?

Suddenly everyone in our house began to feel this way. That was it: it was put on the family “agenda” and discussions began.



What led to the discussions ?

Let us hear in the words of the narrator



The day before, a family friend had paid us a visit. He was a sub-judge. Couldn't he have come like one of us, in a veshti and shirt? No, he arrived in "suit-boot" and all.



There was only a three-legged stool in our house. It measured a mere three-fourth foot; to churn curd, Paati, our grandmother, would sit only on it.



The sub-judge was a little portly. Since we didn't possess any other furniture, we brought that for him.

Poor thing—just as we were about to caution the sub-judge, he fell down with a thud and rolled over



Me, my brother and my
littlest sister couldn't
contain our giggles, so
we ran to the back
garden.



After this incident, it was decided that a chair would be made for our home.



The one practical difficulty in getting it made was that there wasn't a single chair in our village to show as a model. Besides, there wasn't a single carpenter either who knew how to make one.



Let us buy
one from the
town



No, it
would not
be sturdy



There is a skilled
carpenter ; Even the
Governor has praised
him



As if she
has seen



Teak will be
the best



**At that moment, our
maternal uncle,
Maamanaar, walked in.**





As soon as mamananar sat down in his usual place, amma went inside the kitchen and came back with a glass of butter milk for her brother

The aroma of the buttermilk and the asafoetida made us want to drink it right away. We believed that Maamanaar visited us mainly to drink buttermilk.

we thought that our uncle was the stingiest person in the village. We firmly believed he never gave away anything to anyone.



Mamanaar himself had gone to Kannaavaram to buy this famed black-tongued milchcow for his sister.



My younger brother and sister doted on its calf. My little siblings always had the big fear that once the milk dried up, the cow would be taken away to his house, along with the calf.



Mamanaar also wanted to have one chair and we too are happy to have a partner in our enterprise





At last two chairs arrived. They looked alike. They were like Rama and Lakshmana. We kept one for ourselves and sent another to Mamanaar

One by one, we took turns to sit on the chair. Never felt like getting up from it. But had to because others too had to be given a chance.



Everyone in the village
Visited our house to have a
Look at the chair.



A few days passed by. One night, someone knocked on the door. Pedanna, who was sleeping in the inner pial, opened the door. They said that an important person had just died in the village and that they needed the chair to keep the dead body



When the “occasion” in that household was over, they left the chair in our front yard. The children of the house were scared even to look at the chair.



We had the servant take it to the well and give it a good, hard scrub with hay, and wash it down with fifteen big buckets of water. Even after several days, no one had the guts to sit on it. We didn't know how to bring it back into use.



Fortuitously, a guest visited our house one day. We were afraid that he would sit on the floor. The whole family persuaded him to sit on the chair.



The next day a local elder dropped by and chose to sit on the chair on his own, bringing us even more relief.



He is
rehearsing
now itself



Suganthi, from the neighbouring street, came by and put her baby brother on the chair. It was only from then on that the children of our house sat on the chair without fear.



Again, one night someone died and they took away the chair. This happened ever so often. We sent away the chair with sadness.



We were irritated that our sleep was being thus disturbed. Akka remarked one day, "God knows why these wretched people have to go and die at such unearthly hours!" Anna said exasperatedly, "Good chair we made. For the corpses of our village to sit on. Tchai!"



Amma sent me on an errand to Maamanaar's house one day. When I entered his house, there he was, sitting in splendour on his chair and popping betel leaves into his mouth. Mamanaar managed the chair with utmost care.



It was an interesting pastime in itself to see him prepare and chew the betel leaves. He would handle the betel box carefully with utmost gentleness.



If he found a coarse leaf, he would strip the veins off. Which always made us think of the old riddle-chant about betel leaves:

*Catch hold of Muthappan, strip off his spine,
Smear him with fresh butter...*



He would sniff the broken arecanut. Sniffing was supposed to ward off 'intoxication'. Then he would blow on the nut to get rid of invisible arecanut worms.



Maamanaar was unmatched in tidiness. Even the excess lime-paste on his finger wasn't wiped off unnecessarily on other objects. You could press his lime-paste dabba to your eyes with reverence.



His Eveready torch, bought fifteen years ago, was still in use, bright and spanking new, as if bought just now. The one bought by our family at the same time had sprung a leak. Dented, yellowing and pitiable, it looked like a chronic patient about to die.



No one but him could use the chair in his house. Had it to be shifted, he himself carried it and put it down carefully, as if placing down gently a mud pot brimming with water.



At an ungodly hour in the night,
there was a knock on the door.
Everyone at home was fast
asleep. I woke up Pedanna.



A few people from a house of bereavement stood outside for the chair. Pedanna took them into the street. I too followed.





Oh! Chair ?. It
is in
mamaanar's
house





After many days, when I visited Maamanaar, he was sitting on the floor preparing betel leaves. He greeted me with his usual smile and banter.

"I asked them to keep the chair for that purpose alone. Anyway, you need one for that too, no?"



"What is this? You're sitting on the floor! Where is the chair?"





I didn't know what to say. I hurried home to convey this news to Pedanna. But gradually, my steps slowed to an ordinary gait.

GLOSSARY

Portly	-	stocky
Spluttered	-	cackled ,make a series of short sounds.
Impudent	-	disrespectful
Expounded	-	explained
Languorously	-	lethargically.
Hordes	-	crowd, masses
Exasperatedly	-	annoyingly
Splendour	-	magnificence
Paraphernalia	-	things, stuffs
Bereavement	-	mourning, grief
Gait	-	pace

SYNONYMS

Subsided	-----	diminished
Sturdy	-----	Strong
Impudent	-----	disrespectful
Seasoned	-----	mixed
Bereavement	-----	grief
Portly	-----	fat
Giggles	-----	silly laugh
Expounded	-----	explained
Hordes	-----	large numbers
Scared	-----	afraid
Splendour	-----	majesty
Chronic	-----	longstanding

ANTONYMS

Anticipation	X	ignorance
Fortuitously	X	unfortunately
Splendour	X	simplicity
Unmatched	X	inferior
Banter	X	flattery
Stingiest	X	liberal
Increased	X	decreased
Persuaded	X	dissuaded
Sturdy	X	frail
Loosen	X	tighten
Ridicule	X	respect
Relished	X	disliked
Arrival	X	departure

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

- **Describe the stool that the narrator family had?**

The narrator's family had a three legged stool measuring three fourth feet. If the weight of a person didn't place exactly above the legs, the stool will topple over the person.

- **Who visited the family?**

Oneday a sub Judge visited a family.

- ***What happened to the visitor when he sat on the stool?***

Oneday a Sub Judge visited the family and he sat on the stool, not knowing about the wretched things. He fell down with a thud and rolled over.

- **What was put on the family agenda?**

After the visit of the subJudge, " a house without a chair" was put on the family agenda and discussion began on it.

. Why did the family find it difficult to make a chair?

The family decided to make a chair for their home. They find it to difficult to how a model of chair as there was not a single chair in the village. Besides there was not a single carpenter to make it.

. What was Pethanna's suggestion to his father?

The narrator's brother Pethanna suggested to buy a chair from the town.

. What was grandmother's suggestion of wood? Why?

The grandmother suggested to use the teak wood. Because it will be light to lift and carry and also will be strong.

. What was offered to mamanan by their mother?

Amma offered mamanan a tumbler of buttermilk seasoned with asafoetida.

- **Why were the two chairs compared to Rama – Lakshmana?**

The family made two chairs, one for the family and the other for the mamanar. As the two chairs looked alike, they were compared as to Rama- Lakshmana.

- **How was the chair made and how did the villagers react to it?**

The news of the arrival of the chair spread around the village. People , adult and the children crowded to see the chair. One of the villagers lifted the chair and commented that the chair was heavy and the carpenter had made it strong.

- **When did the children shy away from the chair?**

Later, the villagers got the chair for placing the corpse and returned after the funeral occasion. After that the children shy away from the chair. No one had the guts to sit on it

9. When did the children get over the fear of sitting on the chair?

When Suganthi from neighbouring street came by and put her baby brother on the chair, the children got over the fear of sitting on the chair.

10. How did mamanan handle the chair?

The mamanan was a person noted for his tidy. Every morning he wiped off the chair. He carried the chair by himself and put it down carefully as placing down gently mud pot brimming with water.

11. Why did Mammanar handover the chair to the villagers to retain it?

After many days, the narrator went to maamanan's house for their chair. But he replied that he handed over the chair forever to villager for funeral purpose and even the narrator too needed the chair for that.

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