

The aimless rickshaw ride

spiceoflife

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All three of us sat in a rickshaw. For the eldest, it had been a means of transport for long; for the middle-aged, it was an old-world charm; and for the youngest, it was an object of mystery and wonder. The three generations brought together by an indigenous vehicle that not only survived the Raj but also the onslaughts of modern technology.

It was one of my customary visits to my parents' house. Barely an hour of chit-chat, and my daughter got into a defiant mood of visiting the old market and look for knick-knacks. All my pleas of not having a suitable vehicle fell on deaf ears. She said she was game for any transport that would take her to the old-fashioned bazaar.

With her doting 'nani' firmly on her side, I had no choice but to agree. We came out of the house with my daughter leading the

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way: Only a few yards away, we spotted an old, dilapidated rickshaw safely parked under a tree alongside the by-lane with the rickshaw-wallah deep in slumber.

"Mom, look! A rickshaw..." said my daughter, with a look of interest. "Would you like a ride?" I asked casually. "Can we? It's so small and funny. How can we three fit in?" she wondered. "Let's try. It'll be an experience for you," I said.

We woke up the rickshaw-wallah and asked him whether he was ready to take us to the market. He nodded unwillingly.

"Nani, you sit first," the girl helped her

granny take the unusually high step on to the rickshaw. "Mom, you next." No more room was left after I perched in the narrow seat.

"Where do I sit? Mom," chuckled my daughter.

"Sit, where children sit in this situation...reverse faced, at the back. Thus started our journey on the streets full of potholes.

Three of us in one rickshaw! What a picture we cut, with the blaring honks of speeding vehicles all around and the loud hustle and bustle of a crowded market.

All of a sudden, the rickshaw-puller had to stop and get down as the chain on the wheels had come off. After he put it back, we abandoned the idea of shopping and told him to give us the ride for sometime more before dropping us home. We thoroughly enjoyed our aimless rickshaw journey.

The experience reminded me of a rickshaw I had once seen in the transport museum of Glasgow in Scotland, where it occupies a prominent place as a relic of the past. Well, in India, it still thrives on the busy roads having already appeared in its new avatar of e-rickshaw.

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