

Matka at My Home

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Clang! Jai and Alia banged their plates together at the dining table and giggled.

"Kids!" said Dadi, in an irritated voice, "What are you both doing? Clanging steel utensils like that? Huh, I still don't understand how you manage to live here with everything clanging and banging and making so much noise! It gives me such a headache!"

"Dadi," said Alia calmly, "Do you mean to tell us that you and your five siblings never made so much noise when you were little? I don't believe it!"

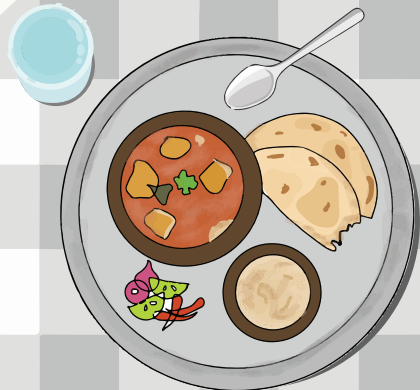
Dadi shook her head indignantly, "Of course not! My siblings and I were very sincere and besides, we didn't have steel utensils to bang against each other."

Jai opened his mouth in astonishment, "You didn't have steel utensils! Then what sort of utensils did you cook and eat in? Plastic?"

Dadi laughed, "Oh, we didn't have plastic either. We used brass, iron and ceramic utensils."

"There wasn't any steel available?" asked Jai.

"Oh, there was," answered Dadi, "but not in abundance. There was barely anything made of steel in those days. We preferred to use brass and iron for cooking and eating food and ceramic for storage. And of course, clay for storing water."



Looking at her grandchildren's confused faces she said: "Well, we didn't have microwaves and refrigerators and water filters back then!"

"Then how did you warm or cool food and water?" asked Jai, genuinely curious.

Dadi smiled, "We heated the food on the gas and ate it while it was warm. The earthen matkas kept the water cool to drink."

"Mamma says that we shouldn't drink cold water. She never lets us refrigerate it!" huffed Alia.

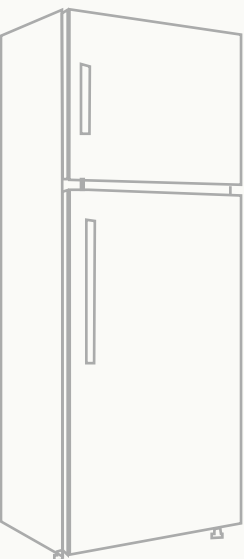
"Your mother is right, Alia. Refrigerated water can cause problems like sinus and throat infections. It may also restrict digestion. But," she said, nodding at Jai's questioning look, "water stored in earthen pots does not cause such problems. It comes from our own soil. It is naturally cooled as a result of the evaporation that continuously takes place through the pores of the pot. It is also very gentle and soothing to the throat."

"If that's so, then we should definitely buy one!" exclaimed Alia.

"But from where?" wondered Jai.

"I had seen a few shops where these pots were available when I was coming here from the railway station. I think the place is near a hotel, I can't recall the name though." said Dadi.

"Let's ask Dad when he comes home. He'll know." Alia decided.



"Dadi, Dadi!" Alia and Jai came rushing towards their grandmother, who was sitting in the balcony, making modaks.

"What is it, my little grandchildren?" chuckled Dadi, "Want my help for another thing?"

"We don't need your help for everything, Dadi! We are not seven-year-olds!" whined Jai.

"You certainly act like one, little brother," teased Alia, before turning back to her grandmother, "Dadi, aren't you excited for Ganesh Chaturthi! This year, we are going to make a murti all by ourselves! It'll be so much fun! You will make it with us, won't you?"

"Of course, my dears", said Dadi, "What are you going to make the murti with, anyway?"

"Clay", Jai said simply.

"And where are you going to immerse the idol during the Visarjan?"

"In a bucket of water."



"Hmm... what about the flowers that are around and on the idol? What are you going to do about those?"

"Immerse those in the water with the idol." Jai said carelessly.

"Well, what's the use of doing that? Just putting flowers in water. How will flowers get dissolved in water just like that?" asked Dadi.

"Then what are we supposed to do with them?" said Alia.

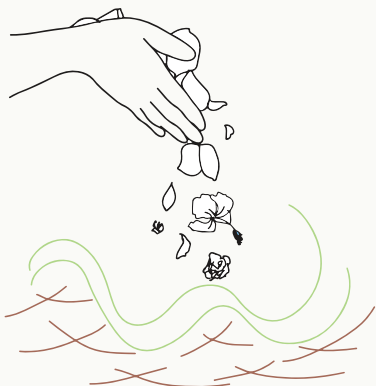
"You have such a big and beautiful garden. Why don't you make manure with the flowers? Have you ever tried that?"

"No, we haven't." Alia shook her head, "We make manure every six months, we'll be doing that in a few weeks. So, we could add the flowers too."

"Ha! That's right!" said Dadi proudly, "We should use these biodegradable materials as manure rather than just dumping them in water."

"And throw the non-biodegradable materials in the dustbin or reuse and recycle them, right Dadi?" said Jai.

"Absolutely!" smiled Dadi.



2 Months Later

Jai and Alia entered the guest room and found their grandmother packing her suitcases. She was placing her clothes in the suitcase in a neat and tidy manner.

"Dadi, why are you going back to the village so soon?" asked Jai, looking extremely sad, "You've barely been here."

"Barely been here?" laughed Dadi, "I've been here for more than two months, child."

"But it just feels like yesterday," said Alia, "that you were telling us about earthen matkas."

"That reminds me," Dadi suddenly recalled, "Remember the story I told you yesterday at night?"



"Of course, we do!" exclaimed Jai, "It was so interesting!"

"So what did you learn from it then?"

"Well", pondered Alia, "You told us how our Dadaji started the rainwater harvesting system in our village because of how dry it used to be the entire year."

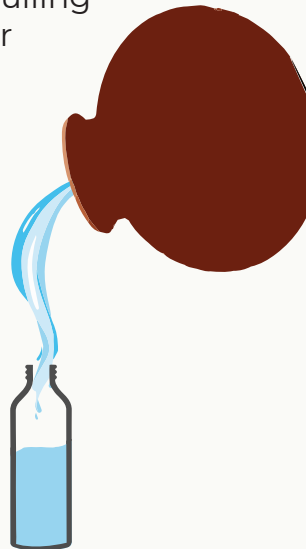
"Once, it rained more than usual and he got enough water to irrigate the fields for a month," continued Jai. "He never irrigated the crops more than how much was necessary. The income he earned increased a lot because of the modern techniques and the old yet useful tools he used."

"And he could afford to send Dad here in the city for further studies," concluded Alia.

Then Jai said, "Dadaji used traditional and modern methods in his farming..."

"Which... then resulted in a balanced and sustainable future!" said Alia, having a moment of epiphany.

"Exactly, my little grandchildren!" smiled Dadi, pulling their cheeks lovingly. "Now help me fill my water bottle from your new matka before I leave", said Dadi as she picked up a bag and headed out.



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