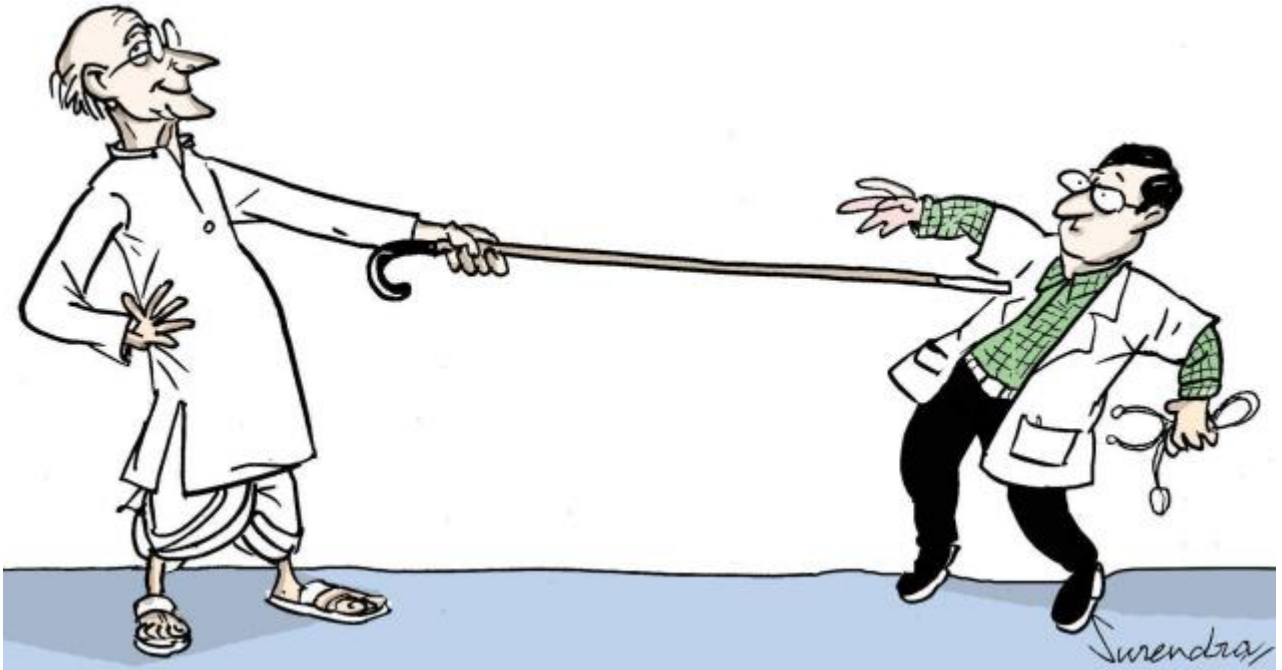


Walking Stick

Stick to this friend... and keep troubles at bay

C. L. N. Moorthy



Thank you, my dear old friend!

Today, I am strong enough to stand on my own legs because of you. Whenever I see others in wheelchairs or walk holding other's hands, I feel pity for them, and I feel confident and courageous because you are always with me. Unfortunately, nowadays, people look down upon you and feel ashamed to take you in hand. But they indeed are the losers, and not you.

Thank you once again, my dear walking stick!

A certain romance exists between a person and his walking stick. A small child leading the Father of the Nation by holding a long walking stick is a famous picture etched in the memory of one and all in India. So also is

the walking stick of the Dandi march giving the needed pace for the realisation of India's independence.

Multipurpose weapon

Walking sticks became famous in the hands of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaji and in the sketches of R.K. Laxman. Many a time walking sticks represent their holders. What the ancients prayed for in different hymns with the rhyme — "Lend me, O God, thy helping hand in support" "*mama dehi karavalambam*" — is indeed true with the walking stick. It is a multipurpose instrument, or can we call it a weapon? It makes you keep your head high looking ahead, instead of stooping low in the eyes of others; it comes to help when you slip and saves you from the unpardonable fracture; definitely, it drives away unwanted people, including stray dogs. Indeed barking dogs keep a safe distance if you brandish a stick. Moreover, the walking stick gives you an added respect and dignity that must usually come with the advancing age. It must not be forgotten that the stick is certainly useful in looting flowers and fruits from others' trees!

Alas! Where is the poor walking stick now? The other day I stepped into a super bazaar that boasts an encyclopaedic variety of things wanted or, more so, unwanted. There are walkers, wheelchairs of all sorts, umbrellas of all colours and sizes, but not a single walking stick. In my childhood, the stick was omnipresent, be it the agriculture field, temple, market yard or school. Close and thick friends may be separated from each other but not from their walking sticks. Couples who walked together for decades might be missing their life partners after some years but not the unflinching walking stick.

Conspiracy theory

It seems there is a conspiracy hatched by interested people for the disappearance of the walking stick, and for the rise of fractures and booming orthopaedic surgeries. Don't we see everywhere plaster of Paris bandages, slings, crutches and wheelchairs? Probably, the percentage of falls (caused by not carrying walking sticks) may put to shame the statistics on accidents.

Maybe, my friend who just returned from the front is correct when he divulged that people dying of falls are greater than the soldiers who lay down their lives on the battlefield. Maybe, the nation is unwisely spending millions of rupees on avoidable falls and fractures. The government can save a great amount of public and private money by presenting every citizen a walking stick and compelling him to carry it around all the time.

Meanwhile, I have decided to donate my walking stick along with my harvestable organs after I take leave of this world!

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