

DC

tale talk

Weaving magic



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DECCAN CHRONICLE

Chennai is becoming a centre of the global storytelling revival movement. Today, almost all Chennai schools, children's activity centres, and summer camps include storytelling. Social changes, such as fewer people living together as extended families enhance the need for a revival of storytelling, for professional storytellers. This revival will involve getting in touch with nature, with communities and with the human being in each of us.

NATURE'S BASKET
As Chennai booms and modernises, the storytelling revival here is an expression of the city's urge to keep its soul. There is a hope that the upcoming development along the coast (Lighthouse to Sinivasapuram) will include: a "Living Museum", which could feature community members explaining sea-fishing-related objects still in everyday use; and weekly sessions of Storytelling by the Sea by community members, professional storytellers, and others.

LEAPING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER
This year, the Chennai Sangamam included storytelling at each of the festival's 14 locations. It would be wonderful if this trend continued to flourish, perhaps even attracting storytellers to Chennai for the week. As people told stories in Tamil, some of the words were projected, translated to English, on a large screen on one side of the stage overcoming the language barrier to some degree.

MUMS TELL THE BEST ONES
Professional



Youngsters strike a pose at the recent Evam's adult storytelling workshop

storytelling can be an ideal part-time occupation for women who have raised children and who are now seeking to enter, or re-enter, the workplace. When professional storytellers go into schools, they often perform for the children — so having at least five or six stories, with interactive activities, in one's repertoire is a must. The storytellers may help the children act out the stories, do story-related crafts (painting, puppets, etc), and make up and perform their own stories.

HECK, STORIES GO HI-TECH
The proliferation in Chennai of production companies and educational institutions involved with 3D animation, cinema special visual effects, and computer-video-Internet games, is related to the excitement about storytelling in Chennai. *Kung Fu Panda* really opened our eyes about how Asian culture can be packaged into an animated worldwide hit movie.

The eagerly awaited 3G wireless telecommunication networks will make mobile videoconferencing a feature of everyday life. Already, the WSI often conducts international storytelling workshops via Skype on personal computers.

The writer is the director of World Storytelling Institute, which is based in Chennai

Storytelling hotspots in namma Chennai

■ Hanne de Bruin, originally from Holland, facilitates a Kattaikuttu School, near Kancheepuram. Numerous international storytellers have come to work with children there, including members of the Vayu Naidu Storytelling Theatre Company (based in London).

■ Dakshin Chitra, Hippocampus, and the Prakriti Foundation, Tulika Publishers and Tara Books regularly organise storytelling events. Storytelling is inevitably part of Bhanumathi's Pavai Centre for Puppetry. For years, Krishna Iyer and her team have presented the annual audience participation Sing Along event.

■ In the last two years, the WSI hosted Chennai visits from American storytellers Robert and Nancy, Diane Wolkstein, and Ruth Stotter. Chennai's Anita Ratnam has developed an interest in storytelling, collaborating with Diane Wolkstein and holding storytelling and movement classes for children.

For grown-ups: Chennai's Koothupattarai Theatre Company has worked with international storytellers. Evam Entertainment has had storytelling workshops for adults and the National Folklore Support Centre has presented programmes about traditional Tamil storytellers. The Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram is an important resource for information about traditional storytellers around the state.



Dancer Anita Ratnam organises storytelling sessions for kids



American storytellers Robert and Nancy at a recent storytelling event by WSI

