

SOCIETY

At this storytelling festival, listen to tales from Scotland, US, Canada, China and India



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From weavers' tales to stories that are sung, this festival brings storytelling traditions from different lands together

A chance meeting at the Tehran Storytelling Festival a few years ago was the beginning of a new friendship for Scottish and Indian storytellers, Marion Kenny and Deepa Kiran. It was based on Kenny and Deepa Kiran. It was based on a mutual love for weaving. Having hosted Deepa in Scotland for a session of storytelling, Marion is now in India to do

MORE-IN

the same.

METROPLUS

Sitting at Amethyst, ahead of the seventh **Chennai** Storytelling Festival, Marion and fellow storyteller from California, US, Ruth Stotter, discuss their upcoming performances at the festival organised by Eric Miller, director, World Storytelling Institute. Marion will be giving two performances: the first will be a joint one with Hyderabad-based Deepa, on weavers' folklore and anecdotes. "I come from a family of weavers. My father was one himself, brought up in Donegal, Ireland, known for its tweed-weaving communities," says Marion.

Her stories bring alive memories of houses nestled in mountains, weaving looms in each shed, along with sheep. "I want to tell both historical anecdotes and folktales of kings wearing tartans and fairies working on looms together, whereas Deepa will be telling the stories that she has grown up listening to," she says. Her second performance will be a solo, celebrating stories of strong women from Irish folklore, such as Skiach, the warrior, and Deirdre, the titular character of the John Millington Synge play, Deirdre of the Sorrows.



A cultural exchange

Ruth, on the other hand, will be telling stories about storytelling itself. Primarily an academic who also trains future teachers in this art form, Ruth has headed a programme at a college in California for 15 years, analysing fairytales. “I’ll tell tales of storytellers who move from place to place with their stories, and how they collect new ones from wherever they go,” she says. Stressing on the importance of keeping a story true to its roots, she adds, “I don’t like making changes. We have to respect the different motifs in the story, that make it a part of the culture where it originated from. Even if we do make changes, we must reveal that to the audience,” she insists.

Marion has been researching the art of storytelling in India. With the help of Eric, she visited hamlets in Nagercoil. “I met a woman there, Rajamal. The way she told stories... she reminded me so much of my Irish family! She alternates between speaking and singing, so it is very musical, just like how it is with the Irish,” she says. Marion recalls how she played the flute for them, and how Rajamal and she sang lullabies together.

India has had a rich history of storytelling. Sitting in courtyards with coffee tumblers on relaxed afternoons and swapping stories is an image not difficult to conjure for Indians. And that’s something we share with the Scots and the Irish. “As a nation, we love telling stories. Be it funny ones over whisky at a pub in the evening, or the tradition of cèilidh, in which people go from house-to-house, exchanging stories and singing,” she explains.

Not only is Eric quite eager to strengthen these links, he also believes storytelling should be used as a tool for educating children, just as it is in Scotland. “Stories are about tangible things and characters that children can relate to, they are not abstract.”

For this festival, he is also organising open mics for adults, and workshops for students. “In a few of the sessions, I will get storytellers from across the world on one digital platform, through a video conference, to perform together as a virtual storytelling club. “People think technology is the enemy of storytelling, but that’s not true. It can also bring us all together,” he says.

Marion and Deepa’s joint performance will be held at British Council, Anna Salai on January 31 from 5.30 pm, as part of the Chennai Storytelling Festival which extends from January 31 to February 10 across a host of venues. Call 9840394282, or visit www.storytellinginstitute.org.