

Education and Storytelling – Interviews

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The Storytelling Way with Priya Muthukumar

1. How did your start as a facilitator at a school influence you to take up storytelling as a profession?

I have always been 'going with the flow' throughout my professional journey. Time and again, there have been situations which have dislodged me from my comfort zones- situations which have left me restless, I call them as my moments of 'blessed unrest' Storipur was born out of this. The realization that stories need to be narrated more in our various spaces, need to be included in school timetables etc. helped me to pursue my storytelling journey.

2. On your storytelling journey

If I were to sum it, my storytelling journey has been a fulfilling one, filled with explorations and discoveries, with its own share of ups and downs. Irrespective of the genre, I choose stories which appeal to me, which call out to me. When stories lead to discussions, questions and of course, actions, I know that I've struck a chord with my listeners. And it's always a delight to hear students say

that they remember the story which I had narrated few years ago or that they miss such storytelling sessions !

3. When did you first start Storipur? What were the areas you wanted to focus on then?

2013 was when I started Storipur. Since then, Storipur's focus has been environmental & social responsibilities. Culture, heritage, history etc. are also areas we look into. However, 'love for Nature' remains the crux of Storipur. The logic is simple. When you love something, you want to take care of it , right ?

4. How has your work in Tamil translations been?

As a Tamil translator, I have a long way to go. I have translated around 12 children's books. Translations open new doors into another culture, another world. I am definitely looking forward to contributing more through my translations.

5. How has been your work for and experience with Pachyderm Tales?

Recently, I got to collaborate with Pachyderm Tales — one was a workshop on Perfecting Sound & Voice at Bishop Heber Stagecraft festival the other was a panel discussion on translation at the Tamil lit fest- 2022 . Both the sessions were memorable and satisfying. Interacting with youth, reminds me always about the huge canvas of possibilities!

6. What are the themes you focus on in storytelling? And why?

I focus on environment, festivals, culture, concepts, conservation, climate change, art etc.. almost anything and everything which needs to be shared. In my current projects for colleges, I have been working on stories on themes like textiles, crafts, medical history, inventions etc. Being a learner and a jack-of-all-trades, variety and different topics always excite me!

7. Your favourite story that you like to narrate?

The story of Storipur. This is the starfish story — a little girl is walking on the beach, she sees a starfish which has been washed up. She throws it back into the sea. She throws back as many starfishes she can find. A grownup says, "it is not going to make any difference." The child replies, "It made a difference to that starfish." I just want to continue to make a difference with stories.

8. Your experience with running a youtube channel for storytelling?

This is something which was not planned. Earlier, I hardly had a good video collection. They say necessity is the mother of invention. During the lockdown, I received many requests from, parents, teachers, students and schools for storytelling videos. These videos were shared during online classes by various schools across the country. I started enjoying the process of conceptualising, choosing the story, scripting, recording and editing.

Various concepts and themes have been worked on in this channel. One of my favourites being Nature Tales which features unknown stories about the trees and plants we notice in our cities. You'll find stories about Tabebuia, Akash Malligae . Poinsettia and so on here. And there several others which are to be included soon. Right now, I just can't stop admiring the parrot green leaves and the mildly fragrant flowers of the Hongemara (Indian Birch Tree). I am planning to upload a video soon of this humble tree..and would only shoot in the balcony. I loved working on the trees in Bangalore series. Stories on food, Collaborators' Series featuring different stories by various authors, motivational stories, traditional rhymes in different regional languages etc. are some videos which you'd find in my YouTube channel. (Here's the link [\(5\) Priya Muthukumar / Storipur — YouTube](#))

9. Tell us something about your storytelling impact?

Impact is too big a word. I am just sowing the seeds ... through stories. That's my role. Some of them would grow into healthy plants, some might not, some might take longer, some might get washing away in the rains. But, that shouldn't stop anyone from sowing the seeds, right ?

Storytelling-impact again to me, is all about spreading smiles, giving those triggers/ gentle reminders to think and act. And of course, the simple joy of coming together and listening to stories.

10. Anything else you would like to share?

Not all those who wander are lost. Do what makes your heart sing! It's okay to get lost to find oneself. I am grateful to the universe for discovering myself everyday , through this ancient artform of storytelling.

Witnessing Ourselves - Storytelling Interview with Spatica Ramanujam

Your storytelling journey?

I came to storytelling as a performer from theatre. How a narrative structure leads clearly to dramatic envisioning is of interest to me.. I began by performing as a storyteller with Kathalaya. Storytelling is such a pure form because it fulfils a very primal need, to be seen and witnessed.

Storytelling as a primal need?

Our human need to be heard and seen, to witness each other's realities.

Storytelling is a primal need. In Yuval Noah Harare's book, Homo Sapiens, he discusses that language developed through 'gossip'. We tell stories all the time..

Storytelling can be used by people in power to create narratives that can be

harmful. They can be used to break prejudice and challenge held assumptions too.

The tradition of stories

Stories are a way to exist and have been since the beginning of time. This is why stories are associated with tradition, 'legacy', something that has its roots in ancient times and has passed on. For e.g. Mauri and Saura stories . they are a way of getting to know where I came from. Within myself is contained the stories of so many people who came before me. I have been surrounded with archetypes and a shared understanding of reality. This is why the stories we share are so powerful. Images of who we are can be found in the stories we tell.

Storytelling and Identity?

Think about the TED Talk "Danger of a single story" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Stories allow us to define where we are and we tell stories because it defines identities of us and everything else.

Could you share any indigenous stories that you have been influenced by?

At theatre school in London, we students explored storytelling and mythmaking.

I recall one story of the indigenous people of the Arctic (the Inuit People) -

Sedna, Sea Goddess. The myth and the symbolism here is striking. The idea of

feminism, even before we put a word to it, existed. The woman (the Sea

Goddess Sedna) is brutally severed from her parental realm and sinks to the

bottom of the sea only to come into her own full feminine power.

My classmates chose to portray this story as a performance set in a bathroom

with water flowing as the sea is the primary element in the myth. I still have a

strong visceral memory of witnessing this story unfold, and this is the power of

stories, we have no control over what we choose to remember.

I think that's why the responsibility of a storyteller is crucial. The storyteller

holds immense influence over the audience as they transmit subliminal messages.

Any other myth that has influenced you?

I was greatly influenced by the Greek Myth of Demeter and Persephone. ,

the Goddess of fertility and her daughter Perspehone who is captured by Hades

and taken to the underworld. "Travelling with Pomegranates" a book by Sue

Monk Kidd and Anne Kidd Taylor written by a mother and daughter explores their relationship and makes very interesting references to this myth. There are very few myths that have explored this relationship. I think the fact that Demeter actually controlled the seasons, was a powerful symbolism of a woman's agency. Demeter's anger and despair, far from being portrayed in a negative light or shamed is pivotal to the myth and this is refreshing

Can you talk about sound in stories?

In the university where I teach, I collaborated with a colleague who teaches ethnography and on a particular module of Sensory Ethnography and how sounds particularly can give us a way to document a people or a culture. One such striking example is "Coolie Poesis: Plantation Sounds and Labor Heritage on Sri Lanka's Tea Estates" - by Mythri Jegathesan. She begins her talk by introducing us to the sounds of tea picking as a gateway to gain an understanding of the lives of tea picker women in Sri Lanka. She poses an important question to the audience, "when you listen, what do you see?"

'The Encounter', a performance by Simon Mc Bunnery of the theatre company, 'Complicite'. Simon creates a telling dramatisation of the experiences of Loren McIntyre, an National Geographic photographer lost in the Amazon, who lives with the Mayoruma tribe, He creates a powerful 'aural experience' by using a 3d

headphone on stage and puts sound at the centre of how Mc Intyre makes sense of his world in the Amazon where time and space as ways to understand reality, cease to exist.

Through sound we recollect. When I hear the sound of a neighbour's pressure cooker - I am reminded of home. I get a sense of home. Sound is an indicator of how we communicate and how we find meaning.

Sounds are an inroad to subliminal spaces like dreams, which is the space that storytelling occupies. It is through dreams that we still remain connected to that place of pure being and insight. By losing the sense of time and space, Mc Intyre begins to inhabit this space of dreams and pure insight.

Knowledge creation, as I see it, emerged from this space for the indigenous people. We are limited by linear time and space, whereas they weren't. Sound is a subliminal experience where our being meets the collective unconsciousness.

Can you talk about language and silence?

At theatre school we worked a lot with the body and discovering expression through mask work. When our face is no longer seen, our body begins to express and silence takes on a different meaning.

Movement cannot exist without stillness. Where there is no pause, there is no speech. Without silence there is no language.

When storytelling emerges from this realm, it allows for the audience to lean in. Storytelling is a suggestive medium. Cinema is a realistic medium. As the writer of Finding Nemo, Andrew Stanton mentions in his Ted Talk, "Clues to a Great Story", "you want the audience to work for their meal..."... meaning not give everything away and give audience the space to engage in almost co-creating the story with the teller. For this silence must form as much a part of the story as narration/language. In stillness you get such a space, a shared space, where the storyteller, the story and audience become one

The experience of storytelling as a transformation of consciousness

Stories bring the unconscious subliminal level to the conscious state.

Sometimes, a week after we have heard a story, its meaning, significance strikes us as our body has processed the experience and brought it to the realm of meaning making.

Storytelling and experiencing

. Storytelling can be powerful as it can be a powerful reflection of the times.

Its dynamic, constantly changing, If storytelling doesn't challenge the status quo it doesn't serve the purpose.

When people take offence for e.g. when they listen to a story or reject a narrative, it reveals something about themselves, their deeply held world views and belief systems. Storytelling is a potent art form.

Is storytelling healing?

Storytelling is very healing. That's why I like the myths of Sedna / Demeter and Persephone. I find that we do live in a very patriarchal society, where women and their experiences are largely invisibilised, to see that they occupy a space in these myths is heartening. Stories encourage and create a shared reality - which all humans experience to be the same and which facilitates healing.

Whether you are someone from Nigeria or Thirunavelli, - this sense of love, loss, compassion, anger is universal. This universality of a shared experience is healing.

In today's world, we are building Artificial Intelligence, Storytelling should be the focus since it can build actual human natural intelligence...?

It is very scary where technology and AI are taking us too. Technology should not replace the human experience. We are in a very scary world. When we realise each others realities as human beings we become more human. But technology is changing all this.

Stories are what make us human. We are forgetting to write also, holding pen to paper. The hand to head connection is important - yet we hardly write on paper these days. If we allow technology to take over like this, it has so much of power over our lives.

On the responsibilities of the storyteller?

Recognising what our responsibilities as a storyteller are is important. We learn about the craft in workshops etc, but I think we need to ask ourselves, what do I want to use it for? We have a responsibility as storytellers, to reflect the world around us. Wanting to become a famous storyteller or gain fame is a limited pursuit, in my opinion. We need to constantly reinvent ourselves and ask what we are trying to do through our stories. Storytelling goes deep and as storytellers we have the responsibility to engage with the form with the same amount of depth.

Becoming the Story - Storytelling Interview - Vikram Sridhar

Your storytelling journey?

I come from a business and academic background. I studied engineering and management and as a result of interest got into the arts space. Due to an interest in theatre, I was creating theatre and watching theatre. I was interested in the wildlife space - in wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and adoption. I used to volunteer in spaces for children, with the differently abled and those with special needs. The human to human touch and human empathy was very important for me. I studied in Padma Sheshadri where I could experience much of art. Through theatre, I could be a part of the system - lightening, sound, ticketing, marketing and prop creation. I worked in several capacities in theatre overtime. The key to storytelling is a cumulative performance where flora and fauna is widely discussed. Storytelling is the best medium to introduce flora and fauna to children and the public. When I was first invited to storytell, I created the story rather than reading one which was in a book. One thing led to another. I specialise in field of storytelling called performance storytelling. There are many types of storytelling - educational storytelling, therapeutic storytelling and performance storytelling.

Could you talk about creating your own stories rather than telling one printed in a book?

I strongly believe that the writer writes and the storyteller creates. The two are totally different. The writer cannot create stories for narration like the storyteller and the storyteller doesn't write - usually. For the storyteller, the stories are oral and spontaneous while being audience driven with a beginning, middle and end. The role of the storyteller is to fill in the masala and the emotions. Storytelling is a space to create stories, it is considered as a folk form - and the same is the strength of the storyteller.

In storytelling, there is the element of the sound and the visual experience - it is very effective to use your hand and fingers and tell stories. The placement hand is an element which depends on the space and the audience. If the exit is towards the right, you will point towards the right. If the audience in the back is losing energy, you use the voice to strengthen the energy there. In writing, language is the crux on which everything stands.

Could you talk about lullabies in storytelling?

I draw my line at the intersection of folklore, lullabies and ecology - the first sound we hear is the lullaby. When a child is born it hears the voice of the family - mother, chitti, chitappa etc., and the mother also learns to articulate the lullabies. When the mother is creating sounds for the first time - it is also time for the parents to relax and relook their identity - that is why the voice of the lullaby is low pitch and soothing. In terms of understanding the story script the child's vocabulary is almost zero. Take this story for instance - the ant appears, it sees rice, it falls into milk, the ant gets caught.

Orru Orrula Chinna arsee le.. so goes the lullaby story. More than the large vocabulary the child comprehending the hand and eyes movements. The child is watching you - looking at your expressions and sounds.

Could you talk about ecology and storytelling?

You can't put it to a framework - we need ecology and nature for storytelling.

We create tales by looking around us. In Indian literature - there is philosophy, bhakti and flora and fauna. In India every species for form of nature is respected - and the respect we give it is through storytelling and the practices we follow. India is a large country, and we hold a lot of flora and fauna compared to the rest of the world. In Bangalore, you have the Arli kattai - you have a 100 year old trees, because they are worshipped with snake stones. With every

indigenous tree in India there is a story that goes around them. Stories stake acre after acre in India even after before they came to be written down and documented. Where there is ecology, where there is flora and fauna - there are connected stories. What if in our lifetime we lose species, that is the question I am connected to.

Can you talk about flora and fauna in Indian Literature?

If you look at the Ramayana and the Mahabharata you can see the deep influence of the flora and fauna, the whole landscape. The kraucha birds are the source of the very first sloka of the Ramayana - it is a dichotomy is a lot of ways. Indic Literature be it the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Natyashastra and the Panchatantra, contains wisdom, wisdom told through the lens of the flora and fauna. The nature element adds another dimension to the story. The Panchatantra is another ocean in this discussion.

Can you talk about what distinguishes the Indian storytelling tradition?

In India, people coming together is a story. Every ritual is a social event. Rituals occur in a social context. We come together in Holi, Ramadan, Pongal, Ugadi and Makarsankranti. Festivals make people's coming together very strong. Festivals are always based on stories in India. There are so many narratives for talking about Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksham in India. In India, everything is storified and everyone talks in stories - temples, churches etc. And that is how we like to remember and how we like to absorb. In India we storify and celebrate. The moment something is storified it is celebrated.

Could you talk about the differences in writing and storytelling?

It is two languages, writing and storytelling, the oral and written. We who speak can tell stories, we who work with language can write them. Every inch of India has a story, every temple has a narrative and a counter narrative and a counter narrative. The story of the Gandaberunda, exists in Indic literature and philosophy. It is a multiple narrative - in some contexts it is a sacred story, in the Panchatantra it is the story of the two headed bird in a secular context. So, there is space for the alternative, the plural in storytelling. While in writing, this becomes sacrosanct.

Could you talk about the power of symbols and symbolism?

There is synchronicity in symbolism. You look at Hanuman, Jambavan, Garuda - they synchronise with the human and narrative is not sacrosanct? It is. Did they live we don't know. But we did believe in them. Ganesha, did he live? There is synchronism between the animal figure and the human body. Now a rat and cat with human body, we don't appreciate this as iconography.

Could you talk about the folk and the importance of folk tales?

When performers and community singers, simplify an artwork, it doesn't come to us as folktale - it is simply a tale then. There is no more folk in it. It is folk when "I am involved". We need folk and the lore must be connected to the teller to be folklore, otherwise it is just another story. Folktales collected and read from a book are lost in language, lost in translation. Emotion is important. For the teller telling a folktale from Kashmir, or an African folktale about a Giraffe - you have to add your personal lore too. We are now losing this dynamic element and stories are becoming static. As a teller, if you are able to tell stories that have elements of personal lived experience - that's important. I don't do stories not connected to me - as it's not my lived memory.

Could you elaborate on the lived memory and storytelling?

A teller and writer are different. The teller has by himself his own repertoire of stories - as the medium is very different. The art should be true to mind, body, thought and speech. Even a story about an animal - a porcupine or a mongoose - have we witnessed these animals when tell their stories. The characters in stories - the emotions they have - have we felt them, lived them? How can I become the truth - to become the story is a lifelong story. What I am, who I am when not telling the story, that is the authenticity of the person.

Could you talk about truth and authenticity in storytelling?

Truth, I don't know about. Authentic I can be. My truth may change, but I can be authentic at all times and to everything I do. At this minute I need to be authentic to the story. At this moment am I authentic to what I am telling in the story? Where are the resources coming for the story? Is it coming from a book, from someone telling their original life experiences - then there is no original story. I watching a papaya plant tell the story of papaya - that's where the authenticity comes from. Unlike other art forms - storytelling is not a Parampara as yet but there is a community coming together. A common unity is created.

Could you talk about Mindfulness and Storytelling?

Sometimes tellers use the wrong gender when they are telling the story. You have to be on your feet, you have to adapt. You must understand the space, the audience. The same story can be told to a LKG child and a 100 year old person. But you need to cut down a lot of things and adapt. A 6 year old doesn't understand the language. You have to adapt to spaces, and also do the homework.

I have a lot of improv elements in my telling, body dependent, space dependent and text dependent. Improv to the extent I don't know what stories I will tell.

Can you talk about becoming the story?

The Bauls talk about spirituality through their songs. Parvathy Baul says you can become the song. Am I living that life? The life that is becoming the story? These are the questions. There is no duality between Tyagaraja who is talking and who is singing. Am I a living the story?

Can you talk about the need for storytelling and human intelligence in the age of technology?

There will human bound technology and machine bound technology. The manuscript is technology, the stone is technology. We are drinking coconut out of a tetra pack but the coconut also exists. Humans have a lot more to understand.

Can you talk about the magic of storytelling and how it transforms the whole being, the whole person?

I can talk about sound, nada, of how a lot of singing intonation introverts the mind through storytelling. In storytelling voice is being offered. It is like an offering - I am offering my audience aura, psyche, lullabies, much above text and vocabulary. In most of the sounds, the human voice, introverts the mind. That is what we use in therapy, mental health, healing. There are communities in different parts of India that offer to tell a story over 3-4 days if you are not well. It feels wonderful. It is nada yoga.

Exploring unpredictability - Interview with Akhshay Gandhi

Your storytelling journey?

Kavad is the project that brought me to storytelling circle. Before that everything was theatre. Theatre is the profession and primary work.

Storytelling has been an interest. My grandmother used to tell me a lot of stories. She told stories of all kinds. While doing a particular exploration that I don't have a background in the arts, I realised that was not true. My grandmother used to tell me stories and my storytelling journey starts with her.

Theatre is the place where my storytelling project started. In theatre we have lot of what we call devising. In devising, you have the idea and the content. Then you build the material around this. You build the story this way, you explore what is the story you are telling. Using multiple narratives to tell the story means you are reaching to the audience in the way they perceive the story. In devising theatre there are multiple stories. In devising a performance, we ask questions like 'what do you want to say', 'how we are saying what we are saying', 'what affects us', and 'what the material means to us.' In devising a performance, the search is to create meaning through the search.

Can you talk about the stories told by your grandmother?

In the past, I have avoided mythologies. I have avoided existing stories and mythologies. I am now open to exploring existing stories. We are Jains and all

the stories my grandmother told me had a touch of Jainism in them. There is this story of Krishna. The gods are very jealous of Krishna because he would goodness in everything. He finds beauty and goodness in everything, and even the gods can't do that. Indra turns into a saint to test Krishna. Varuna becomes a dog, whose skin is torn apart, the dog is bleeding profusely. Indra as the saint and Krishna see the dog which is on the path. Indra, as the saint, is wailing, "Look at this dog? What kind of Karam does this dog have, that its body is so fractured, his entire being is in so much pain?"

Krishna responds, "That's true that he is damaged but look at his feet, they are so beautiful, they are shaped like a God's." Indra impressed, takes his own form now, "I saw the dog's blood and wounds and still you saw the dog's divinity. You can find goodness in everything.

My grandmother would tell me lot of stories about Krishna, not so much with magic as him as a human being. She would also tell me lots of stories about Ram and the Tirthankaras.

Where do you find the material to develop further and work on?

I love existing stories. I love to read them, listen to them. Existing stories come in oral and written form. As an artist, I don't feel the need to invest time and energy in working on these existing stories though they remain an influence. It

goes back to my beginnings in devising theatre, it comes from generating material that comes to you. What thoughts and narratives, come to you?

Devising is the process of going deeper into your own self consciousness and the material that emerges in you. In the beginning, I invested two three years in devising. When I look at performing stories, I let the story emerge from me - it is the initial desire to dig deeper. You can be influenced by a piece of painting. It comes from a lot of places.

Of the main influences I have is the existing stories I have heard. I find that the mind includes many stories. How they mix and churn within me. I embrace influences - taking interesting symbols, characters etc. The symbolism of the golden deer - in our story, the woman and the deer are friends. The reference of the golden deer is of course from the Ramayana, but I play on the symbol and have my own take on it. This gives deeper meaning into myself and lets stories emerge. I am open to working on existing stories. The story of Aravan - why not take this story and see how I would like to take the finely churned material forward.

Could you talk about the symbol of Churning and also your recent work Manthan?

Since Covid, I have not built a full-length piece except *Manthan*. In the storytelling world, you can take a story and extend it. In theatre, it is different, in theatre time is a big thing and you can't take time. What is packed in one minute in theatre, can take 20 minutes in storytelling. In theatre, a full-length piece is above one hour. In theatre, when you create a full-length piece - you take time for philosophy, you take time for relationship, you are not just taking time for narrative.

We didn't know that we will call it *manthan* (churning). I felt I was devising again, what I had been doing 5 years ago. The mohiniattam dancer said, "We don't device."

We agreed to bring research material and play with it. We put ideas on chart, we put ideas on chart, we arrived at what is Mohiniattam itself. We studied stories of Mohini and were interested in maintaining the idea of churning - and that to us seemed like a concept of *Manthan*. After every rehearsal, we knew very little of how the final production will be like. We ourselves didn't know what the final piece will be like - *manthan* was a crucial part of the structure.

Churning is not like a factory output, where you input something and something will churn out. Here, nothing may come out of it. If you are churning the ocean of milk - things which you may not want will emerge, things which do want will also emerge, finally things which you don't expect will emerge - the examples

being both poison and amrita emerge from the ocean. Because anything can emerge from a manthan you need to be open and explore unpredictability. I liked to not know where I am heading. All my processes are uncertain.

Through the process, the process we followed for manthana, I met musicians and other artists. One of the artists I met was a third generation art from Kalamandal - he would wake up with people playing percussion, drums, flute etc. I realised there has to be story about this manthan and I created a story about a dancer that came out of the conversation with this artist. Churning is a process of accepting and embracing what I am receiving.

Can you talk about your interest in koans?

I finished writing a theatre piece called, "It is what it is." The whole piece is a text spoken through the person. There is no narrative at all. A lot of writing is paradoxical. There are lines like "Kuch kadam bahut lagte hai". There were a lot of lines which were paradoxical in this piece - that's why in the play I have natural inclination toward the koan. I want to keep it unanswerable. There is a reason in the way I compose material. There are lot of influences I really like paradoxes.

I don't want the actor to give me everything when I am directing shows. I don't find many actors who want to do that - just walk and sit, and let the audience

figure it out. We need to let the audience figure it out. I have written some koans in this piece. It is about a person talking to a reflection and the reflection. I am not using it. This is the tenth draft and two years of working on it. I would write non judgementally the material and I would write and write. I started at 80 pages and now its at 30 pages. I have cut it down. I edit a lot.

Could you talk about writing nonjudgementally?

In devising the simple principle is to say yes. Don't worry. A lot of my training is just doing movement. When you are doing movement, you have to be spontaneous, if you a judgemental you can't do movement.

We spend a lot of time in training. The material in the room, often only the people in the room see it and experience it. The audience may never see it. That is Improvisation. You don't know where it is coming from. All sources are good sources. My core practices are Suzuki method and viewpoints.

In viewpoints, there is this idea of the horizontal. You bring everything back to the horizontal. You are bringing everything back to the horizontal.

I have been very fortunate to have good teachers. They don't tell you anything, they help you find material and they support you with articulation of material.

Could you talk about the power of symbols?

I have just joined a whatsapp group - where the question has been asked - is there Indian word for mythology? Words are so symbolic that someone feels that the mythological is not symbolic enough - they drive so many deep deep thoughts. What is the symbol? That is the question.

In the Indian subcontinent, I feel the sun and moon symbolised Indian material. The duality. Which in this landscape in the world has nurtured generation, after generation.

I am interested in symbols.

About postmodernism in your work?

My theatre is massively influenced by postmodernism. I don't spend time in narratives in theatre work. In some postmodern storytelling performances - the narrative is given the same pedestal as symbolism, references, commentary, philosophy and poetry. This is important rather than how the narrative is doing.

I agree with postmodernists - that you don't need a grand narrative. I come from a background where you don't need to worry about following one story line. In the technology opinionated world, everyone is trying to catch everyone else's

attention. Life is becoming fragmented. I am recognising the value of linearity - of how making sense is also a part of our lives.

I agree there is a need for finding some cohesive thread - any narrative handholding which will help make sense. My previous work including the Kavaad is not linear. The world is so fragmented today with social media. It doesn't follow a single narrative. Maybe having something to hold, giving a boat in mathan may help. In the grand narrative, I remove the grandness and give an interpersonal connection of connection rather than hierarchy. I like the ideas from the postmodern and I am seeing need for stories - that's why I am open to telling existing stories.

Rare music for rarer narration - Interview with Deepa Kiran,
International Storyteller

About your background?

My background in education is a Masters in English Literature. Before that I did a Bachelors in Nutrition. Since 2000, I have been in the field of English

Language Teaching. I have been teaching English in different schools. And I started using stories and storytelling for English Language Teaching. My background to storytelling is that I am trained in Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and in Rabinder Sangeet. I have worked in the All India Radio. I was a part of an oration club in Secunderabad. I learnt the flute and the violin. My parents put me in Chinmaya Mission at an early age and here I learnt to chant the Bhagvat Geeta. There was an environment and culture of stories, music and dance here. Formally I started telling stories to my students in 2000.

I grew up living in 13 states in the country. Everyone in my family speaks 4 to 5 languages, extended family included. I have had a multilingual and multicultural upbringing.

On your journey as a storyteller?

I loved telling stories. In 2000, as an English teacher I realised that narrating stories was very useful for schools and children. I had done stories before in the All India Radio. I had recorded Alice in Wonderland as a series there. But this was chosen by my boss. But in 2000, I chose to tell stories in the classroom because I thought it was beneficial. Children could relate to the stories better, be more enthusiastic about the language, talk in English and turn in homework. In 2005, I studied teaching English in the English and Foreign Languages University. I could connect the dots back. I could see what I was doing with

storytelling in the classroom was working. And I could connect the dots forward.

What I did at EFLU I could use as a teller and in the classroom.

Another milestone was, in 2010 I started singing songs in my stories. In 2011, I got a project for Dasaavatram for children of NRI. I sat with my Kuchipudi teacher and composed the story in English and also with Sanskrit and in other Indian languages. The performance included narrating the story with music and dance - a style I continued since then.

In 2017, I founded the Story Arts Foundation as a trust to work with the Government and NGOs. Starting 2016, I started travelling internationally for my work to do stories from the Indian culture and perform them for a global audience. My focus has been on stories found in the Indian culture.

Your favourite story?

This was one that my father told me. He was my first storyteller at home. He would often narrate the story of Yellaam Nanmaikku. There was King and he had a trusted minister and he would keep saying Yellaam Nanmaikku Yellaam Nanmaikku. The king would find this irritating some times to hear Yellaam Nanmaikku - everything was good. One day the King ate a lot of Brinjal and got a little ill. Physicians were called in. And still all the Minister could say was 'Yellaam Nanmaikku'. The King was furious and threw the Minister in jail. Still all the Minister could say was 'Yellaam Nanmaikku'. The next day the King and his

troop went on a trip to the jungle. A thorn pierced the King's hand and he ended up with a bandage. Meanwhile, without the minister, the King and his band got lost in the jungle. They reach a place where there are jungle dwellers who are going to make a sacrifice. The King realised he was going to be sacrificed. The drum rolls started for the sacrificial ceremony. But the sacrificers soon realised that the King was an imperfect sacrifice as his hand was bandaged. The king was released and he and his troop reach the palace safely and realised that Yellaam Nanmaikku, all was good. The King had his minister released. The Minister was still in a cheerful state of mind. The King asked how come the Minister said Yellaam Nanmaikku to being thrown in jail. The minister said, 'They didn't sacrifice you because your hand was bandaged but if I had joint the troop and they would see I have no bandage and sacrificed me. The King agreed - Yellaam Nanmaikku.

I had heard this story from my father and narrated it frequently to my children. Once when I was disappointed with something my younger son said Yellaam Nanmaikku. So, the story came back to me. My father, me, my children and from my child to me - that's how the story travelled.

Your favourite Indian story collection?

Stories from the folklore of India and our Itihasa Puranas. I feel deeply connected to stories of our land. It has something to do with my style of

narration - which is very Indian. I like narrating stories from the Ramayana for children. For myself, i like reading the Upanishadic stories.

Any world geographies, whose stories you enjoy?

I enjoy listening to all narratives - Norwegian stories, African Stories, Australian Aboriginal stories. I find that stories from Africa have a lot of music and are extremely lyrical. They have a special quality of language and orality in them. When I had been invited by the University of South Africa to visit six schools in the municipality I realised that reciting African poetry was a part of the African culture and tradition. This was apparent as child after child recited African poetry in a particular manner. They have a tradition of oral poetry recitation. Even if you don't understand the language, you will feel the power of the cadence.

How would describe your connection to storytelling?

Just like some people like cooking and specifically cooking for others. Storytelling for me is like that. I like to cook a story and share it with others. With storytelling, we sit down, share a story and listen to it together.

You use a lot of rare musical instruments in your narrations, could you talk about these?

I look for instruments whenever I travel. They are not new in my life. I started playing a palm sized piano when I was 10 years old. I learnt the flute for one year. I learnt musical instruments at Bal Vihar and Bal Vikas, the majeeram, harmonium, cynabal are all used in Indian bhajans. I have a very interesting musical collection. Many of my musical instruments are from distant and far off places. This bird made from clay is hollow inside. You have to fill this water inside. With the water, the bird will make a chirping sound. I got the Xutuli from Assam.

From the Haridasus, who are Harikatha performers in the state of Andhra Pradesh, i got this musical instrument the Alandu. My friend came from Australia and was attending a Haridasu performance and got this for me from them. These are not available commercially in shops.

I got the Dapu from Malayasia, it is made from monitor lizard skin. I soundscape my stories. I am a storyteller and not a musician. While narrating stories my focus is on the storytelling not a musical or dance performance.

I used a rattle in the Banyan and the Sparrow story. Rattles are common for children and are available everywhere. My focus is in getting the right music for the storytelling. I have the damaru. It is played with the rope, not the hand or the stick. I got this Shaker from Pondicherry. It is made of dried seeds. All cultures have such musical instruments. I got cymbals from Dharmashala with

typical Tibetan patterns embossed on them. From Bengal, I got the Duitara - which has two strings. Baul storytellers use this instrument. I got this from Baul singers when I was attending a children's writing residency in Bholpur, Shantineketan. In Nepal I got a meditation bowl that has a nice resonance. In Kolkata, I got the ocean drum, which creates sounds of water. From Northeast Thailand, I got the flute. I was visiting a music department of University where I had been invited. The flute has to be rotated to create the sound - a sense of sadness or happiness depending on what you want for the story.

Founding the storytelling movement in India - Storytelling Interview - Geeta Ramanujam

Your experiences as the Founder of the Storytelling Movement in India and in many parts internationally too?

This is my feeling and thought that there is nothing new in what I am doing. It is like reinventing the wheel. Storytelling is as ancient as human time itself. We have always said at Kathalaya that the world is made up of stories not just atoms. Right from the time the first atom appeared, stories appeared. Human beings are social animals from the very beginning, sitting around the fire, where

they shared food and along with the food stories. We must thank fire. All around the world, people have been moving in 18th and 19th centuries with the beginning of industrialization from small towns and villages to big cities.

Historically in India, approximately from 1945 to 1990 there was nothing happening with storytelling - all due to nuclear families, the search of jobs, the moving away from traditional roots, Macaulayan education, there was no time to listen to stories! There were no grandmothers being heard as they narrated stories, no time for community gatherings. The only way children listened to a story was by reading them. Originally in India, we had listening, retelling of stories along with a discussion on them - that was the guruvul. All this got converted to reading and writing. When I was growing up, it was a mixture of tales that is a mixture of heard and read stories - my parents were from the old times from villages in Tanjore and Nagercoil - I both listened to stories and read them. There was both the oriental input and the western input. Curiosity is very important for learning, for growing up, if you didn't wonder, if you are not curious you can't learn. Stories became a diet and this diet was very nourishing for my soul. I became a teacher and a librarian - wherein I found that 45 minutes was all that was allotted to each class, it was all very divided. I figured out that the best way to teach concepts was through a story. I didn't know I was starting a movement, it was like climbing a ladder quickly - teachers called, NGOs called - storytelling was tool that could be used everywhere. Teachers

called to get help with concepts, NGOs on how to use stories for special education and for teaching the deaf mute. This waterbody of stories had many tributaries. And at that time, there was no competition as people did not know 'what was storytelling?'. People didn't challenge us much because they thought storytelling was not a 'real business'. I wanted to give storytelling a genuine pedestal by professionalising it. I wanted it to have goodwill. It was the right time and the right thing happened - to be able to do all this without obstacles and to be able to build the whole universe of storytelling. I was one of the facilitators to make storytelling happen.

You used the symbol of the fire, could you elaborate on this key Indian metaphor?

What we call learning is rooted in our civilisation and its fondness for storytelling. Gypsies had it. So, did bards. This culture of learning through stories. If you look at the ancient Egyptian, Chinese and Indian civilisation, they were very ahead of modern western education and societies. Much of the learning was integrated with healing and therapy based. Of the therapy based traditions, India has strong storytelling roots. One of the earliest art based civilisations was the Indus valley or Harappan Civilisation. So many things we were doing ahead of its time. Our rishis were true seers and had the power of

foresight. The Chinese, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, civilisations were all gifted with seers. The seers in the Indian civilisation were the rishis. These Rishis foresaw the universal values, that is the basis of all storytelling. They also heard sounds from the cosmos, its vibratory patterns, these were converted to chants.

The elements - eternal and universal, have a way of syncing up with and helping human beings. In times of old, people wandered around and sat around trees waiting for ideas. One day, while sitting under a tree, early man heard a voice - this voice informed him that by bringing out the fire from the stone he will prosper. In those days early man used to eat raw meat. Once early man became a settler, he heard the sound from the stone and fire came out. Now he could cook his food.

There are these stories of Nachiketus in the Upanishads, who as a littleboy, who questioned whatever his father offered as sacrifice. His father, when a cow became old, would offer that as the danam. As a consequence of an altercation with his father, Nachiketus goes looking for Yama. The god of Death, Yama, is fascinated by the questions the boy has for him. Yama tells the boy the secrets of death and gives fire the name the Nachiketa Yagna. This is also known as the agni vidya. It is through the vidyas that people learn and the vidyas had stories behind them. Fire helped man settle down. Fire and flames

were powerful in that they let man know that everything can't be conquered.

Water and fire became very important. Pranayama is done for wind. That's why in human life the elements are so important. The rishis could perceive the elements - they could see the tree in the seed.

How would you describe the potency of storytelling as a form?

The power of storytelling lies in that you sit near a person, when you listen to a story. The west has been very good with documentation. In storytelling, everything had to be told from the heart. It has to be felt and told. It comes from the heart. There had not been too much reasoning. Storytelling as a form looked like it was a very rote process and retentions helped. Because of retentions it helped in rethinking the story. Today, the same thing is converted to a digital form. When you see an animation the effect is not the same as person telling the story. In a telling, the energy of the person reaches the student.

In India the tradition we have come into is that the purpose of living was to live in service of others for the rishis. In the world this can be seen as well - In Egypt's desert areas there were learned fakirs and Sufi ascetics, in China there was Confucious and then there was influence of the Buddha. They were role models and seers for who life had to be lived.

On storytelling in Adivasi communities?

In the Adivasi communication they have a lot more oral traditions, lots of music and a lot of folklore. They will sing the story so beautifully. Santali tribals don't have a written script. They still tell stories to impart knowledge to children, stories to impart knowledge to children - the stories of the first Diwali, the story of how a woman married a peacock, the story of why the lizard's tail keep growing back. There is humour in the stories, music and songs. In Mangalore, there is a story for why two types of fish are not cooked together.

Could you talk about your experiences in setting up storytelling internationally?

I was asked to build a culture of storytelling. In Sweden, they had their culture and their teachers. They wanted to bring storytelling as a concept of learning. Before this storytelling was for performance and entertainment. They did not know that storytelling could be integrated with the classroom to set up a cultural curriculum. I helped them integrate storytelling with lifeskills and values. I trained them in the art of communication through storytelling. In Scotland, Sweden, Brazil - storytelling was all about building the bridge.

Interview with Educator and Storyteller Jayalakshmi Unnikrishnan

Your career journey?

I started working as a pre-primary teacher. I worked in pre-primary for 33 years. I worked as a coordinator for the pre-primary sector. That is when I thought that storytelling is an important aspect for pre-primary sector. I contacted Kathalaya and invited Geeta Ma'am for a workshop. At that time, I thought that when I quit my job and retire, I will be a storyteller. This was the inspiration I had that day to be a storyteller.

After I quit my job, I took storytelling as a profession. That is when I called Deiva and she asked if I could do storytelling through schools. I started working on storytelling for schools through Kathalaya. I have also done the diploma in storytelling through Kathalaya.

Could you talk about the certifications in storytelling you completed at Kathalaya?

I did an online beginner's course during Covid. Since I had decided I work as a storyteller, it worked well. After that I did my diploma at fireflies. The Kathalaya beginner's course covered how a story should be told. With the diploma we covered the deeper nuances of storytelling - the importance of voice, voice modulation, movements, body language, and the role puppets play in storytelling. For the diploma we interviewed a few folktale tellers and made a booklet with fairytales, folktales etc. We documented all this.

Could you talk about your interest in using puppets for storytelling?

When you do the diploma in storytelling, you know who your audience is. Mine is storytelling for pre-primary children. For others it has been storytelling for adults, storytelling for senior citizens, storytelling for special children etc. Since I am interested in doing storytelling for pre-primary children or smaller children I knew that puppets will be relevant. I make my own colorful and attractive puppets. I make hand puppets and stick puppets. I have a whole box of puppets.

Could you talk about the role of sounds and voice modulation in storytelling?

When we are enacting animals, each has a characteristic sound. We use a different voice for each animal. For instance, the lion has a gruffer voice, and the mouse has a softer voice.

During storytelling sessions, voice modulations for different animals is done.

Is there a need to research ecology for storytelling?

A lot of study is needed while preparing for a storytelling session. We need to read a lot of information on nature, plants, animals, birds etc. For instance, if you are working on a story on hornbill, then you need to know if the bird migrates, if it can fly etc. You need a lot of information and facts to tell the story of an animal or bird.

Can you talk about your experience as a story narrator?

Every platform, I perform in is a different experience. Even storytelling in one school to another school is a different experience. The storytelling experience varies from when your audience has only children or when it has less children.

Could you talk about spontaneity in storytelling?

The same story can be told to a two-year-old and to a ten-year-old. You can elaborate on different points of the same story to help different audiences connect. The way you tell a story to younger children requires much more voice modulation than a story told to older children.

Could you talk about movement in storytelling?

I start my story with an icebreaker with movement. Movement helps the audience connect to the story and the teller. Through getting the audience to enact movements during the story they are able to pay better attention to the story.

How has storytelling positively impacted you?

Once I got into the profession of storytelling and stopped working in schools my perception towards life itself changed. I was able to read more. I have been meeting different types of people. My knowledge has increased. It has changed my perspective of life.

On your plans as a storyteller?

I would like to reach out to more schools, more children and do more storytelling.

The favourite story you like telling?

The story of the lion and mosquito.

Once there was a lion. The lion thought that he was the King of Jungle. He really thought that.

The lion growled.

The mosquito was trying to sleep. The lion was making so much noise that the mosquito could not sleep.

The mosquito asked the lion to be quiet.

The lion said, "I am the King of the Jungle and can do anything I want."

The mosquito said, "I don't think you are the King of the Jungle."

The lion said, "I am the King of the Jungle."

The mosquito said, "I don't think you are the King of the Jungle."

Then the mosquito, entered the lion' nose.

The lion cried, "Leave me please."

The mosquito bit the lion hard.

The lion said, "Leave me alone."

The mosquito asked the lion, "Who is the King of the Jungle?"

The mosquito then said, "Now, I am the King of the Jungle."

And that is how the mosquito became the King of the Jungle.

Could you talk about the use of dialogues in the story?

The more you talk in dialogues during a narration the more the children will be able to assimilate. Their language also improves. I use Kannada and associate it with English. I do storytelling at the Sharadha Mutt and I do it in Kannada and English.

Could you talk about other influences to your storytelling?

I am a trained dancer. I have been training since the age of five and have been performing till the time of marriage. This has helped in storytelling with expressions and voice modulation. I am trained in Bharatnatyam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali.

Could you talk about how Kathalaya has impacted you?

After I left school I told Geeta Maam, about joining as a storyteller and she knew what my strengths were. She knew I had been associated with schools. She suggested I do storytelling for schools for Kathalaya. We are also working on building a story curriculum.

The science of teaching in a technology driven world - Interview with
Chitkala Shanker

You have won many awards for teaching could you talk about these?

I was awarded the "Best District Teacher" award by the Olympiad foundation for the year 2014-15. I have won the "Shiksha Gaurav" - "National Teachers Award" 2018 from CED Foundation New Delhi. I have won the top performing school educator award and the progressive school educator award 2019 from

the CED Foundation. I have won the Asian Educational Award 2020 virtually on September 5th 2020 for contribution to Educational Community.

Can you take us through your teaching career?

I started as a Lecturer in Stella Maris College in 1988. I was a Teacher in G. D. Matriculation School, Coimbatore from 1992-1996. I worked in Euro-Kids international pre-school, Chennai from August 2004 to April 2006. I then worked in Vales Billabong High International School, Chennai from June 2006 to 2008 and 2009- 2011. I worked at Dr. C.L. Metha Sishya Omr School from 2011 as senior teacher handling Physics, chemistry, Biology and EVS for grades 6, 7, 8 and 9. I handled Chemistry from grades 6 to 10 at DR.C.L. Mehta Sishya OMR School. I was the School Olympiad Co-ordinator for NSO, NCO, IMO, and IEO Examinations at Sishya Omr School from 2011. I worked in Dr. C.L. Metha Sishya Omr School from June 2011 to September 7th 2016. Worked as senior co-ordinator and Head of the Department of Chemistry. I worked as the Centre Head at Babaji Vidhyashram OMR managing the Kindergarten section and acting vice principal taking care of academics and teacher related matters and documentation from November 14th 2016 to March 2018. I was in charge of managing teacher observations, checking teacher lesson plans and teacher comments from grade 1 to grade 10. I was in charge of the Academic

Documentation for the affiliation process. I was organising all the events of kindergarten and also reviewing all the major events of grade 1 to grade I worked as "Primary Head" at AKG Public School from June 2018 to December 2018. I was in charge of checking question papers, comments of teachers in report cards, teacher observations, reviewing school events, conducting PTMs, whole school general administration. Joined VELS International School from February 2019 as Admin in charge and Science Subject Matrix Expert of the R and D division of VELS Group of Schools. I have enriched the Primary Science Curriculum based on the learning outcomes of Cambridge which is currently followed by kindle kids' international school at Singapore. I am currently working as content developer for Science at TVS Educational Society from December 13th 2021.

Would you tell us about other career highlights?

I participated in the "Teachers Conference" 2013 conducted by Jane Good all International network and U.S. consulate General, Chennai on teacher's involvement for Biodiversity conservation awareness. I participated and submitted a project in the workshop "I Can Make a Difference" conducted by Kuruvilla Jacob Foundation for promoting excellence in education in 2016. It was a proud moment when out of the 12 students sent from Dr. C. L. Metha Sishya

OMR School for ICSE board examination in the year 2016 four of my students secured A grade in Chemistry.

Could you talk about your own education?

I hold a B.Ed. and Cambridge International diploma for teachers and trainers.

[CIDTT]. I have a M.Phil. in Bio-Chemistry from the University of Madras. I also hold an M.Sc. in Bio-Chemistry from the University of Madras and a B.Sc. in Chemistry from Stella Maris College, Madras.

Could you talk about your teaching journey?

I have worked as a teacher for 23 years with the last three years in curriculum development. It has been very enriching for me to work as a teacher. It has been a very exciting journey. It has been very refreshing. I have been surrounded by youngsters full of enthusiasm and fresh, novel ideas. I typically research a lot for my teaching. I find it very refreshing to talk to the young with fresh and varied ideas. I had a lot of students who would come with a lot of interesting questions. This has helped improve my personal knowledge. It has helped me evolve into a better person.

Could you talk about the importance of keeping yourself up to date as a teacher through continuous reading?

Newspaper reading is very important for teaching. I am a science teacher. I teach biology and chemistry, also physics and environmental sciences. My basic degree is in biochemistry. The newspapers carry a lot of articles on fresh developments in the sciences. Google searches also yield a lot of science related articles. For a teacher today it is very important to stay upto date with newspaper and internet reading.

Could you talk about the technologies you use in the classroom?

The development of technology has helped the teachers. For instance, in the classroom when I talk of diverse organisms, I find it useful to show videos and PPTs on the subject to enhance the learning of students. How we use technology depends on the subject in concern. For Chemistry we need to work in the lab, for EVS you need local projects and case studies. In India, dissection is banned and I use a virtual lab to show students the internal structure of organisms. Technology is very useful in this instance.

How do you ensure students are not burdened by the information overload that the internet has become?

I first teach and explain the basic concept to the student. Then, I use technology to reinforce what I have already taught. At this second level I show students examples of the concept through videos, PPTs and give references of articles to read. I essentially use technology to recapitulate the concept I have already taught. For me the use and power of technology aids to teaching is that they help in recapitulating that which has been taught in the classroom.

As I explain a complex concept, I show an appropriate video side by side. This helps instil the concept in the class.

How do you locate videos to show to students?

I look for videos in biology and chemistry sites. I look for videos based on the grade level and also the concept I am teaching. The videos may not exactly correspond to the grade level and may have higher level information. But since I use science videos to supplement the information that I have already taught, even if the videos contain a little additional information it only stimulates the imagination of the child. Students learn more this way and the additional information fascinates them.

How do you keep abreast of new technologies?

When I completed my studies there was no computer. As I was completing my Mphil the first computer entered India. I took a MS office course to learn computers. I learnt PPT for use in the classroom. In the pandemic time, use of zoom meetings became imperative. When I was designing the curriculum for a Singapore based school, I learnt to design google forms. I had used google forms extensively for this project.

What educational theories do you find useful?

Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism and Humanism are some theories I use in the classroom. Connectivism is the theory of our times, the 21st century theory. It teaches us to use technology effectively to do our research and to teach. I do believe in student led learning and self-learning. The LAAN theory or Learning As A Network Theory is useful in teaching about knowledge management with technology enabled learning, with learner centric knowledge involvement. Learning theories can be an effective way to get through to the learner.

How do you learn new educational theories?

Going in for professional development is the best way to pick up learning theories. I have completed the Cambridge CIDTT where I learnt the latest educational theories. The schools I have worked in have conducted various workshops which cover new educational theories. Once you get an understanding of the educational theories at courses and workshops you can take them to the classroom to see what works.

Your message for other teachers?

Reading is very essential for teachers and google has made accessing knowledge very easy. It is imperative for teachers to do research on their subject.

Anthony J. D'Angelo has said, "Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow."

Enter the classroom with E cubed - Energy, enthusiasm, and engagement with learners. It helps the students learn, and teaching helps keep the process of learning alive. Never think of teaching as a chore. It is important to learn, unlearn and relearn.

J Krishnamurti has said, "There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning."

Storytelling and the Self - Interview with Vikram Sridhar

Your storytelling journey?

Storytelling for me, has been an amalgamation of three different intents -

1. Theatre, drama and the performing arts
2. Working with communities - children and different people
3. The world of nature

Looking back, these three intents developed during my school and college. I studied in the Padma Seshadri school at Chennai which had an art culture. There were group-based art activities, a chance to volunteer with children and also volunteer for dogs. My interests formed thus. In college I used to volunteer for animal rescue organisations. I used to watch a lot of lot of plays and performance. Given the Indian academic based system and also not being from an arts based family (though my brother was a sportsman). So, all this started as a passion. But after spending several years in the corporate world I settled

on this form called storytelling which is so widely used and widespread.

Storytelling became the connecting point for the above three intents.

It became a singular journey which connected the three worlds of mine. With storytelling everything came together.

Storytelling also spans across 1. Folklore 2. Heritage and 3. Mythology

Could you talk about folklore, mythology, and heritage?

In a country like India - we have a lot of ways of looking at the world around.

The set of folklore, mythology and heritage gave me a way to consume the stories around me.

Heritage is that which was given from the past to me and I need to give it to the future. Someone's history is my heritage. Someone's heritage is my history. Heritage can be felt with the senses. Heritage can be experienced with the heart.

Our mythology is our itihasas, puranas and beautiful stories that span bhakti, evolution and science. The gamut of mythology we have is at once spiritual and philosophical.

Folklore is the flora and fauna of storytelling as well as about the flora and fauna of our land.

In mythology, the spiritual is the ultimate path. In folklore, is a journey into the natural world, emotions, and psychology. Heritage is a cultural journey.

About India's ancient tradition of storytelling and sharing stories?

India's boundary is large. It is very organic. Stories are about what happened to other persons and us. There is this story of the origin of the Panchatantra - a person from Iran comes to India in search of Rasayana - the magical life extending substance. He is told that the Rasayana is not a medicinal herb but a collection of stories called the Panchatantra. The power of stories - not physical sheets of paper. Nothing to Nothing to Something.

It is given in a bowl. Once you consume the bowl the content is empty.

Storytelling is carrying something, a bit like electricity. Each story has different versions. We question, we think - in a story it is shared. Stories are shared. They are in each of us.

Ancient India used the mythology, folklore and heritage streams. Education systems have changed - in libraries we don't just stock books - these are spaces for humans. Stories are a way of conversation. Stories are a way to agree to disagree.

Storytelling has always been there in this country. We have tremendous faith in oral words. Trust, belief are very important in storytelling. If we don't believe in the other person - why do we listen to the other person - trust is what the teller shares with the audience.

Stories always have local references. Stories from Tamil Nadu refer the palm leaf. Those from Rajasthan - the camel. Those from Kerala - the Banana leaf.

Storytelling is not one sided. Storytelling is both sides. The teller is one who is transformed before the next session. This is the power of traditional storytelling.

Could you talk about the idea of the antagonist in Indian stories?

In the western world there is more of an emphasis on a physical villain, which is not true in the Indian context. I define the antagonist as someone who gives you conflict. The question is where is the conflict? If there is no conflict, there is no story. There is war and peace here. Peace is also a conflict. War is also important to cleanse and unbaggage ourself. When there is a conflict the question is how does the conflict get resolved?

Which Indian story collections do you like to work with?

I like working with regional stories that reference local ecology. Stories have reference to local flora and fauna. The Panchatantra in Gujrat is not same as the Panchatantra in Assam.

I like animal tales as we can give them to children and adult audiences. I like tales which can be told to anyone - any agegroup, something for everybody.

These are the tales I love doing - Panchatantra and moral stories - these can be told to a spectrum of people.

Could you talk about the wisdom in the Panchatantra stories?

Panchatantra is the most translated collection of fables across the world. The stories span psychology, wellness and therapy. The first section mitra bheda is all about Remove, Remove, Remove. Similar to the message in the Bhagvad Geeta. The Panchatantra through simple characters appeals to various people. It appeals to me. Only when we work to remove things, we have the space to add things. There is a war and peace that is going on.

We tend to be hasty in our response to things and that affects future outcomes. We are still discovering how the five segments of the Panchatantra can be discovered in therapeutic processes. The Panchatantra can serve many purposes. People have not changed. Psychology has not changed. Because of this Indian stories still work. We as people are still the same. The Panchatantra is still useful in its philosophy to children, corporate people, and parents. It still appeals to everyone.

It helps us remove action. Removal is somewhere there in all of us.

Could you talk more about removal or the Sanskrit concept of Vairagya or detachment? A story perhaps?

There is a story I heard from Cho Swaminathan in 2000. Once upon a time there was someone who went to a learned person and asked him "how should I become detached?"

Kuppuswamy was a miser. He possessed a very old cap. This cap became his identity. He was known as Topiswamy, topi being cap in Tamil. Everyone knew Topiswamy and his friends offered to buy him a new cap. He would say, "I don't want another cap. This is the only cap I want."

His job was to sell old bottles. Once, in an auction he got a huge bottle of perfume. He filled a little perfume in all his bottles and kept them by the window.

That very day, a companion came and suggested, "Let's take bath in a lake." Same day, a judge was taking bath in the same lake. The judge had also been wearing a cap which he had left on a stick by the lake. Now by mistake Topiswamy mistook the judge's cap for his own and took it back. His own cap was left in the lake. Someone recognised his cap and they came to home looking for the judge's cap. He was fined 1000 rupees and his own cap was returned to him.

Finally, he thought it was time to get rid of the old cap which had caused so much trouble. He threw the cap out of the window and a man on the street caught it and threw it back. All the bottles of freshly packed perfume broke in the process.

Next, he threw the cap in the watertank and it caused a blockage. He was fined Rs 2500 for causing sewage blockage.

Next, he tried to douse the cap with a fire. Soon, the fire bridge rushed to his street!! But this time, as luck would finally have it this time the cap was done for. Because of this Kuppuswamy finally got rid of the hat. This teaches about the importance of not being attached to things. The moment we attach our emotions to things - there will be opportunities that leave us. Like Kuppuswamy,

we are all attached to some cap in our life. It becomes our identity. And it should be thrown away.

How do stories lead to inculcating inner strength and imagination?

Storytelling is a process; it is a journey. There is no output in an artistic process. No imagination is imagination. It leaves you on a journey. The best story leaves you in a place you can go to in any direction. You can go north, south, east, west. Till you stop and then the transformation begins. Storytelling is at once a basic and eco-friendly and organic way of sharing.

Today, we have all the reason to feel good. But we have forgotten to imagine.

How does storytelling help inner strength? Storytelling is a journey. It is invisible. It is visible at the most vulnerable times. It helps you find a door to an inner world. We are all living more and more in the outer world. Strength becomes an output when we try to measure. To give an example when we pour water into the soil - the soil becomes fit and ready for cultivation.

Could you talk about storytelling and the self?

In storytelling the goal is to sing the song and become the story. To find the self, the authentic self. Storytelling embraces the world and the self. What we

do when we are not telling - beyond the story between the story and after the story. To become ready for any art form - it happens outside the place. It is not in telling the story. It is how I become the story.

In the Gita and Puranas, it is the self which is described.

It is a process, it is a long process - how the self reacts is how we respond. The self has emotion, we can't hide it. Let the self flow, let it go with the story.

Can you talk about your experience of Indian enlightenment traditions?

It will take 1 million janmas to experience Indian enlightenment traditions.

What is hidden in the Indian system - in our kolam, in our warli, in the way we walk, in the way we address people. The whole Indian focus around Ahimsa. India has a tradition of embracing nature, of not hurting nature. Everything goes back to the soil. The tradition makes it going back to nature, easy and possible. All this is a part of our culture. We see in every region of India - from Gujrat to Assam. We see this eco-friendliness in the architecture and buildings. We see it in our ancient technologies - like that of burning coal instead of using electricity.

Have you been influenced by ancient Indian knowledge systems?

In ancient Indian knowledge systems everything was rooted in psychology. Our artistic practices were in themselves a therapeutic practice. The whole Indian practice was based on accept the self, accept the community, and accept other species.

It was a system that worked on goodwill. We are all fragile emotionally. It is different for both men and women. Ancient had developed a set of psychologically evolved processes to help people live their life better. They accepted that emotions changed as the seasons changed, as moon changed and as life changes. It was accepted we are prone to damage.

People were encouraged to do nothing. The theory went - don't need to react, need to take a pause. The ancient Indians believed that there was a force that was beyond the human realm. This force is hard to describe in human conditioning and vocabulary. What you realise is the realisation. There is no one single path to explore. There are many paths for everybody to follow. Every spiritual path is rooted in the larger something for everybody. Once you evolve, there are so many problems, so you move on.

Could you talk about the Indian cultural traditions that have influenced you?

I am, for instance, interested in how the Mahabharata is enacted, depicted, performed by people in different regions. There is on single version that is cited as the 'only tradition'.

In every traditional space in India there is a legend, a myth (that cant be verified), folklore which is rooted in real happenings. So many snake shrines have been turned into temples. In the Panchamukha Anjaneyar temple was built in a place where a monkey had been buried.

Could you talk about your work on heritage?

It became a question for me - how do folktales work as heritage? We all, in India, know of the Ganga and Jamuna, but do we know of the Adyar river in Chennai. The question that often arises is, "do I know things in my own culture?" Another question is, "How do you look at heritage beyond history?" and "How can you storify it?"

For instance, there is this story behind the Bombay Vada Pav. I look for such information, storify them and perform them.

This is a constant journey. What is the story behind a statue? The constant question is "What can I storify?" Heritage is a part of the cultural journey - it gives a sense of ownership. In history we don't have this sense of ownership.

These stories can be shared with children and they teach a lot about kindness and general values.

Personal narratives and therapy - Interview with Lavanya Srinivas, Storyteller,
Founder Katha Kamamishu

Can you take us through your story?

First a bit of my story and then my storytelling journey. In my childhood I listened to stories from my grandmother and read story books and magazines as I grew up. As a teenager, I watched movies, plays and cricket matches. In college, it was debates, drama and cultural events. This shaped me as a person. After college my tryst with poetry and performance began. Then it was Radio, Television and Print Media. Thus, my professional life began! Then marriage happened. Lot of changes, a new story began. Somewhere along the way the storyteller was born.

Do you think personal narratives heal?

Yes of course! My life took a back seat once I had others in my life, my husband, inlaws and kids. Got too preoccupied with my roles as a wife, mother and a daughter in law! Then started Teaching and moved to Training. I was friendly with a lot of women in the neighbourhood, spoke and listened to many parents too. We all shared our feelings, fears and anxieties, joys and success too. We bonded and felt stronger. Listening to each other's stories gave us a confidence that we were not alone and if others could navigate similar situations we could too. We felt we could share anything and we would not be judged. A safe place was created where there was empathy and compassion and care. That was so

healing...whatever we faced with our children, their education, health or teenage tantrums.

I started practising yoga. And then came walks and jogs and marathons! The common

thread running through my life was the power of stories. I wore the story hat and this finally took over my life. We have all heard stories. No one took storytelling seriously - treating it neither like an art or a profession. I realised I must give a structure to storytelling. We all wear our story hats. I chanced upon and discovered the science of storytelling. It was a personal discovery for me. This is the context for personal narratives.

How do you think personal narratives help in healing?

Personal narratives and storytelling help in healing in a specific way with the story arc

process. The structure of the story has given me the opportunity to employ stories for

personal healing and community development. The story arc basically consists of several Cs. First you have the context. The time, space, country etc the story is

set in. Then you have the character. Who are the main characters? Then you have the conflict. What is the struggle in the story? You have rising action and falling action. At this point you have creative thinking. We then have the climax. We usually leave the story open ended and give it many possibilities to conclude.

This story arc becomes therapeutic when you replace the given context with your context, when you replace the given character with yourself, and you replace the given conflict with your conflict. This way you become a part of the story and an immersion happens. This sort of immersive storytelling can be very therapeutic.

During the pandemic we are facing aloneness and loneliness - aloneness is a physical

condition and loneliness is mental condition. We make sense of the world around us through stories. There is a structure to stories called the story arc - I discovered that working with this framework helps in understanding our own stories. We are the authors who are in control of our life story, we can change or tweak the situations and emotions to create positive and stronger version of ourselves. So, whether its physical, mental or emotional stories help us to transform, from illness to wellness!

Do you think stories can work as therapy?

Absolutely, Stories have the power to transform people. I started this project called storyquilt during the pandemic... That time our community grew by leaps and bounds, far and wide. I asked people if they have read, listened to stories or died into the story power ever to gather confidence and courage. People, especially women, came forward and expressed interest in sharing their experiences and personal stories. This exercise of speaking about it, in itself unburdened them and gave them the satisfaction that they are able to help others who did not or could not share theirs but who were just there, soaking in the warmth and comfort, heard their stories

Quilts are symbolic...they are soft and cosy... they warm our hearts with the thought of the people and memories that are associated with that quilt. My grandmother and aunts would stitch together lovely quilts out of old saris for the children and grand children in the family.

Like those quilts, we weave our own story quilt of personal narratives. We give ourselves a comfortable and therapeutic feeling. Storytelling gives you a safe space. We started working with open mics - creating a safe space to share a story. Women need a safe space to hear and tell stories. Sharing a story has a

healing feeling. There is a quote which goes, "An untold story is a burden." In today's parlance - Upload your story and emotions and unbox your emotions.

Storytelling gives you the feeling you are not alone. That hope, that confidence, that courage - that is the power of stories. I believe in storytelling as a therapy.

Personal Narratives help us in bringing about change. We can change our attitude and be aware of new perspectives. With this we can create new behavioural patterns.

What is the beginning, middle and end of a story. The time and space of an event or memory form the context and the people present and or involved are the characters. Then comes the problem, the conflict in the story. What is the struggle that the protagonist goes through?

You have a rising action, falling actioning and resolution. At this point you have to think

creatively. And then comes the climax. We usually leave the story open ended and explore many possibilities to give a positive solution before concluding the story. We also pause in between to ask questions of how they felt, what

emotions they went through and what elements they would like to change and why.

This intentional and conscious process is converted into a mindful and meaningful exercise. Replace the given context with your particular context, the given character with your own self and you replace the given conflict with your very struggle...This way you are a part of the story and become the character and then the immersion happens. This sort of immersive storytelling experience can be very therapeutic and therefore the person is transformed!