



GREETINGS TO THE VIRTUAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE!

from Geeta Ramanujam

Once upon a time in 1996 One of the visions of Kathalaya in 1996 was the revival of ancient storytelling forms, especially to revive those in the villages and small towns. India is an unequal society and whether it was the digital era or post-Covid, the sufferers would be the folk from our little towns and villages. However, in order to sustain the Kathalaya trust (which was funded for its programs), I along with 3 other friends and a Board of Trustees, founded a parallel stream: Kathalaya's INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF STORYTELLING, which has completed over 131 Courses so far. One mission of this Academy is to help train people be independent in their little hamlets. Along the way, we have set up a number of learning centers in the tribal areas of the North East. Being one of the pioneers of the Revival of Storytelling in India, I like to believe that I have helped with the growth of some people here.

2020. 24 years later ... Once again we need to re-invent Storytelling performance and training, this time to suit the digital online media. Less than 28% of the people in India have access to digital world -- computers, or any online facilities. So we are only talking of the one side of our unequal society: the urban milieu – the CREAM OF THE CAKE, AND NOT THE CAKE .

WHAT WE GAINED through workshops and training offline, both urban and rural:

1. RESPECT AND REVERENCE TOWARDS EACH OTHER THE TELLER AND LISTENER
2. RELATIONSHIP -- EMOTIONAL HUMAN CONNECT
3. RESPONSIBILITY TO CARRY FORWARD THE PRACTICE AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE ORAL TRADITION. We have a treasure box of tales buried in every state and village of India.

THE DIGITAL WORLD WOULD ONLY TO A CERTAIN EXTENT BE ABLE TO ESTABLISH THIS.

What we can do is aim to help people to use Storytelling forms and styles to

REGISTER, RESPOND, AND REMEMBER. (To listen is to remember.)

(Continued)

Develop the right STORY (content), STYLE, AND STRUCTURE, for each moment.

Of course electronic communication cannot equal the emotional transaction and human connect of physically-present communication. But we must do the best we can with a combination of the things we have.

SUSTAINING THE STORYTELLER.

- Many of us who would be attending this Conference are not in the "Poverty" category, because we are well-sustained in our families and careers, and Storytelling is not the only means of income. However one model that worked for me is the Ashoka fellowship module. It gave me a stipend of INR 10000 a month for 3 years, thanks to Bill Drayton, to stand up and become a storyteller. The only condition was that what I would do needed to be replicable and to reach out to all sections of society.
- We need to pool resources and fundraise so we can also, as a storytelling family, reach out to the deserving and offer scholarships to those whose main sustenance is through Storytelling.
- Once I began to earn through my Academy courses, I ploughed back into Ashoka more than double the amount of money I originally received, so they could further assist deserving people.
- My contributions have helped 20 deserving folklorist groups in India. I have also set up 220 learning centres in the North East with the help of Aus aid funds and Plan international.
- Corporate offices like Bosch and Dell are now using storytellers in many of their events, and are sustaining them to continue to keep the oral tradition alive.
- We could be a part of schools that are now offering lessons online and be paid for our services as Storytelling educators.

Yours in Storytelling,

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