



Director of World Storytelling Institute Dr Eric Miller with his daughter

Pix: D Sempath Kumar & A Raja Chidambaram

Now, here's a good story to tell



A storytelling session at Central Park, New York

Courtesy: The Hans Christian Andersen Storytelling Center, Inc.

STORIES have migrated from *thinna*s to activity centres, schools and summer camps; professional storytellers have replaced grandmothers and mothers. Nevertheless, the storytelling tradition is still being kept alive, thanks to a bunch of active storytellers.

An interaction with Dr Eric Miller, Director of World Storytelling Institute, is enlightening as he has explored the crevices of this craft and is taking efforts to promote it among Chennaiites. "There is a need for storytelling today as it is a way of compensating for the loss of extended family. It is an ideal way of reconnecting with tradition, nature, families and with oneself," emphasises Eric. He feels that even though the city is becoming modern by the day, Chennaiites want to hold on to tradition. Contrasting the scene in Chennai to that in New York, he says, "In New York, storytelling happens in public libraries and parks. There is a statue of Hans Christian Andersen in Central Park, where children and storytellers gather every Saturday to share stories. Chennai has just woken up to storytelling. There are many centres that are promoting this art. However, the government has to take initiative in order to introduce storytelling as a routine in public libraries."

Eric has interacted with a wide range of people from fishermen to corporates, and has conducted storytelling sessions at Nochi Kuppam and in commercial centres. "As far as storytelling for adults in Chennai goes, it is tough to carve out a place to share tales. In New York, people gather in coffee shops and take part

in autobiographical storytelling sessions. We need to bring in something like that here," he says. Storytelling is a form of therapy, too. "Some traumatic incidents can be relived through the characters, while listening to a story," says Eric.

Jeeva Raghunath, a professional storyteller, feels that Chennaiites are now beginning to respect storytelling as an art form and that there is a tangible rise in the number of storytelling sessions

Storytelling is also being promoted in Chennai by Hanne de Bruin's Kattai Koothu school near Kanchsheepuram, Dakshin Chitra, Hippocampus, Prakriti Foundation, Bhanumathi's Pava Centre for Puppetry, Vishakha Hari's Harikatha Kalakshabam, Koothupattarai, Evam Entertainment, National Folklore Support Centre, Tamil Nadu Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram and Geetha Ramanujam of Kathalaya.

being conducted. Jeeva feels that storytellers in Chennai have to deliver their goods right and that they should tell stories from the heart. "There needs to be a professional touch, while recounting a tale. One shouldn't dilute the story and should deliver the right dose in the right way," she says.

With the proper utilisation of resources and people, Chennai can easily become the centre of the storytelling revival movement in India. As Jeeva rightly says, "Storytelling does go from the womb to the tomb."

THE YARN

The storytelling scene in the city is getting a fillip as storytellers get actively involved in the revival of the art, finds out **Nithya Sivashankar**



Jeeva Raghunath at a storytelling session

“ Today, storytelling is a way of compensating for the loss of extended family. It helps reconnect with tradition, nature, families and with oneself