Now, here’s a good story to tell

STORIES have migrated from homes 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 on the drudgery 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 status of Hans Christian Anderson 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 initiatives 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 Nocht Kuppan 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 kike part being conducted. Jenna 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 tales. 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 Jenna rightly says, “Storytelling does go from the womb to the tomb.”

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