

Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration
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Lecture – 7
Conversation with Ms. Deepa Kiran
Understanding the Relationship Between
the Art of Storytelling and Human Diversity

Welcome all, good morning. Today, I am going to have a conversation with Deepa Kiran famous storyteller. The idea is to understand the complex relationship between art of storytelling and human diversity. For our purpose we may focus on disability but diversity by and large will be the focus of our discussion. Let me give an informal introduction to Deepa, well that is because she was my junior in Hyderabad University.

I am calling her junior and from those days to now I have got an opportunity to see her grow up to become a world-class storyteller. So, she is a musician, polyglot and many more. I will ask Deepa to introduce herself and then we can go on with the conversation.

Welcome Deepa.

Thank you Hemachandran and it is a delight to once again work together. Yes, our association goes back to the University of Hyderabad while studying as your junior and always looking forward to some guidance, has been very helpful. So here today I am in a space where I narrate stories. I work with children and with teachers. I have worked with over 75,000 teachers on how they could use the art of storytelling as a pedagogical tool and I think more importantly as a tool to connect and build empathy and resilience as I would see. Yeah, now we have a foundation called Story Arts foundation which is 3 years old and we do try and work with the government, teachers and children through that. Yeah, so looking forward to the session today.

Great Deepa. So let me ask a vague question, Everybody is a storyteller, even I heard you say that. Is that because people feel vulnerable and they want to tell stories to each other so that one can care for each other? How does it work Deepa? Why do people tell stories or listen to stories?

My understanding of one aspect of it is it is perhaps you know in our biology to make meaning of our lives through narratives. So yesterday is a story, tomorrow is a story, what is happening at this moment will eventually become a story and it helps in making

meaning of what is within me, what is without and it becomes the bridge between people. It is through stories that we connect with each other. We go into the other person's life without having to rely heavily on the sense of imagination. So, these are reasons I think why we tell and why we listen or why we feel like listening. Neuroscience also tells us that the act of listening to a story generates dopamine and serotonin and oxytocin and all those feel-good hormones. Hormones which make you feel rewarded, make you feel warm. So, intuitively I guess we are oriented towards listening because we know it is going to bring us all these different emotions. So that is from a technical perspective, but otherwise I think stories are a way of making meaning, a way of expressing, a way of connecting with one another.

That is true. And when you connect to children, how do you do that Deepa? I mean obviously there are many ways of beginning a story, I mean connecting to them and you know mothers tell stories to children. If they want any attention at all story is the best way to give them. So as a storyteller, you must have understood many ways of getting them on board, maybe you can demonstrate all. I mean I would like you to go ahead and just give a sample of how do you do things.

Okay. So yes, stories itself, the nature of the transaction of storytelling is such that what you are really telling the child is I want to put aside all my gadgets, I want to put aside all my other assignments, my work and my schedules and I want to sit and talk to you. I want to converse with you. I want to spend time with you so that act of engaging with storytelling itself offers a connect to the child, the child is on board. You know the moment you say I am going to tell a story who wants to listen, it is very rare that you will find a child saying I do not want to listen. Impossible to see that kind of any child. Yeah, so straight away you know there is a lot of ease. Having said that one cannot just assume that each child at that moment in that situation is absolutely ready to listen to me, so the onus is on us as teachers who are storytellers to just offer a little environment that ambience to disconnect from distractions to come into this track and focus.

One of the things that really works is a little bit of music and that is how I like to start. Come, come, listen, listen everybody. Just for you I have a story. Sometimes nice and sometimes scary. Sometimes nice and sometimes scary, just for you I have a story, come,

come, come, come, come, come, come. So once the children are in there begins a story with perhaps a little music.

Once upon a time in a jungle there lived many animals and trees, birds and beast everyone in harmony and togetherness. Right in the heart of the jungle was a big banyan tree and every afternoon all the animals and the birds and the creepy crawlies and insects and everyone would gather under the cool shade and a little sparrow would go round and round singing a song. **(FL: From 08:26 to 08:37).**

This sparrow would sing and all the animals enjoying the melody and the cool shade would take a little nap and when the sun went down, they all went back to their homes. They lived this beautiful life for a very long time until one terrible day when two creatures that walked on two legs came right into the jungle and these creatures that walked on two legs came in there and they lit a fire. They cooked some food. They played some music and then one of them said to the other. Brother let us go back to the city and these two creatures left. No sooner had they left they had forgotten the fire that they lit, but the wind in the jungle did not. The wind in the jungle quickly picked up the fire and soon there were flames all over small and big on the skin of the animals on their fur everywhere and all of them began running.

The snake was crawling away. The cheetah was leaping as fast as he could. The birds were flying away. Everyone was escaping to save their life in the best place, everyone except the sparrow. The little sparrow was seen hovering over the burning banyan. Somebody noticed and said what are you doing? Go save yourself. How can we leave the banyan tree? Are you stupid? How can we save the banyan tree? Just save yourself, fly away. But the sparrow's heart would not listen. It made her really sad and her heart was heavy. And she thought and thought of something that she could do. She came up with an idea. She went all the way to the edge of the jungle, put her little beak in the pond and came back with a little water. Two drops she dropped on the banyan and went back again to the edge of the jungle. Her beak in the pond and came back with a little water two drops.

She went up and down, her little palms hurting. The burning flames making her belly hot, but she would not stop, two drops each time, she went on and on. The animals did

not know what to tell her. How stupid, what does she think she will do with the two drops, but the sparrow would not stop. Even the banyan tree said you must listen to the animals, go away my friend. That is what I am, your friend, how can I go away? How can I leave you like this when you have given us cool shade every day? And the sparrow went on and on up and down with her little hurting wings, two drops. Now up in the heaven the magical creatures looked down and they saw a burning forest, they saw that all the animals had run away to the edge and they saw the burning banyan and a small sparrow going up and down and up and down trying to save with two drops.

The heavenly magical creatures were so touched that they started to cry and do you know what happens on earth when heavenly creatures cry up in the heavens? Yes of course, yes it will rain. And it rained and rained and the forest fire was doused. The forest was saved and so were all the animals and everybody sang in joy. **(FL: From 13:28 to 13:52)**. So that is a little story. The kind of story that I would tell children and adults.

I wanted to hear more stories. Thank you. Deepa see you started with Tamil, Telugu, Hindi so many languages, music, so many body language, many things are happening. So that means you will also be able to take on board with you different kinds of children. Children are not just a monolithic category. I mean there is so much diversity in them. Would you say something about that Deepa?

As you rightly said, the heterogeneity and the diversity in the spectrum is exhaustive. It could be whether it is a socio-economic class like telling stories at the British school with children of the Maths, telling stories to children in a village in rural Tamil Nadu who are migrant laborers, each of them has a different kind of demand. Telling stories to children who are hearing impaired, who are visually challenged, who has special needs.

Each of them brings a different sensitivity that we have to tap into in ourselves.

Technically, I do not have a training in B. Ed. or in special needs, I do not have qualification, but what I really understood is if we can tap into our basic common sense and our sensitivity. For example, in a library I was doing a session and there were two brothers. The parents had not told me but the younger brother came up to me on day one of the workshop and he said mam my elder brother he cannot hear very well. It was an essential piece of information that I should have been given, so all I ensured was that

from day one that child would be closer to me for the sessions right and any interaction if somebody spoke very softly, I would make sure that I repeated it for him.

These are I think very simple ways right or when we are working with visually challenged a simple thing to keep in mind is whatever stories you are telling ensure that your words are clear, ensure that you are enriching it with the sound scaping, with the music because that is going to be a strong connect and with hearing impaired children, I actually took the help of my friend Neeta Gopalakrishnan who is a sign language interpreter, so we narrated together. We would narrate together where I would tell the story and I know that they cannot verbally follow me, but simultaneously Neeta would be telling the story through sign language. And I also realized that since I use so much of music you know I was wondering what is the point of music when I am telling children who are hearing impaired?

But when I am singing, I am also playing the instrument, I am also moving right, so the rhythm in my hand, the rhythm in my body is something that hearing impaired are able to see and perceive and connect with the melody which was very interesting connect with the rhythm. So, I think all along I have been learning from the audience. The best thing I could say is if we have our observation really strong out there, then we are going to be able to sense what is the need. Am I able to fill that need, am I not? And keep doing the course correction as we go forward and of course experts like you and Neeta who will help us you know fine-tune and go forward.

I would like to share my experience with my accountancy teacher in 11th standard. So, I was new to this I mean 11th standard is when if you take commerce you will begin with accountancy. So, in the first class, second class it all went debit credit on the blackboard there and then I went to my teacher said sir I cannot see, so I am not able to understand what you write on the blackboard. So can I come for a special tuition. He says, there is no need, I am sorry I did not know about your requirement, from tomorrow I will take care of it. So, the next day whenever he writes something on the blackboard he says left debit, right credit. Then he used to say everything. Suppose there is a balance sheet, then when he writes property then he says I am writing on the right side, liabilities on the left and he is naming it.

After a point maybe a month later I got it so internalized that I never needed him to keep saying left and right. Then at some point I said sir I do not need that extra audio description and I never needed any extra training. All he needed was to make that tiny

accommodation thing and then accountancy became so naturally digestible for me. At this moment I thought I will warmly acknowledge Dharmaraj sir's contribution in my understanding of accessibility at that time. Right now, I am professionally studying it but he intuitively understood what that means to bring on board diversity.

But you were also in the beginning talking about resilience Deepa. Yeah. I want to understand what did you mean by that and as a storyteller you would have worked with a lot of children with trauma, discrimination, stigma, many other developmental challenges and so on. You want to say something.

Yes, two things. One, the content of narratives itself can be powerful. For example, this story itself Hemachandran that I just shared a small sparrow you know a tiny little creature in the jungle written off by everybody. Seemingly insignificant you know. Insignificant and see what she could do you know? So, I have had children just light up simply listening to this story and honestly I never imagined that aspect.

I just shared it because I like the story but a lot of children connect with the tininess of the sparrow you know that is how they are perceived by the world. So, children stand up and say mam I am also small but now I know that I can also do things, right. So sometimes just a simple story can have ripple effects that even we do not imagine. So, this is also in a sense a story of resilience if you see it especially from the perspective of a child.

The child is able to see that there is this world out there, adults who are writing you off who are saying what do you know, I know better, I tell you what to do and still if you have faith in your intent and you keep at it however small two drops, two drops then magic can happen. So, this is one aspect of oral storytelling where the story can offer metaphors, analogies. And of course, a story basically offers a vicarious experience. So, the child is living the life of the sparrow, the child is living all the laughter and the teasing of the other animals. So vicariously you get to experience a journey which is almost as good as really experiencing it. So, it definitely helps build the critical thinking of the child. And at the same time, it is a strong emotional engagement that is why it holds possibilities for building empathy, for resilience. That apart I come back to the other thing which is just the act of telling itself, you know telling and what it does. I

have seen on quite a few occasions that there is an audience that is very quiet. I will take the example.

I am detouring a little and coming back. So, there are parents who say that you know when my child comes back from school and I ask so how was the day? Okay and they do not tell me anything more. So, the question that I ask is so do you tell your child about your day? I mean she is not going to understand, he is not going to understand you know. If you do not talk about your day, you do not talk about your narratives, you do not share them, how do you assume that your child is going to be interested in sharing his or her narratives, right? So just act of sharing a narrative whether it is personal from our own life or even if it is fictional very often triggers the same response from the listener, which implies that you will find that the children start opening up. They start speaking, they start sharing and that is also a journey in resilience where you begin to voice, where you begin to speak up. For example, child abuse is something that I never bothered to understand too much because I always believe it happened somewhere else, right. But with a very close family member the child I know and it deeply affected me that is when I started reading up all of that.

And I found that one of the main things that they say about child abuse in particular is that the narratives never come out, the stories told. And I was very thankful that in this instance the child shared with me, in fact the child ended up sharing with me 2 months after the episode happened which is not as bad as 20 years later and somewhere believe that the child felt that comfort or a safety net to share with me because of all the storytelling that I had done with that child.

Correct. So, the act of telling, the act of sharing something which intuitively the child would have associated with shame, with something to be hidden. So, the act of sharing was definitely that one step in resilience in courage finding. So, I think this is what just the act of us telling stories can do. It can offer a space for children to voice their stories, to look at their stories to maybe re-look at their stories.

That made me think about it actually, meaning when do people open up. One of the things I discovered with my disability because I am disabled, I have seen lots of people with vulnerability say such as a rickshaw wala, poor people they open up with me. We have difficulties this is the way you know this world is very cruel you know it better I have heard rickshaw wala say to me. And you know why he does that to me because he

somehow identifies his problems with those that he imagines will be of mine too and because of that warmth he has at that moment 10 or 15 odd minutes that I am sitting on rickshaw he opens up and he keeps telling things which he otherwise will not tell anybody else. I have seen this happening so many times.

So, what I am saying is once you open up by sharing, once children or even the other listener feels that you are being honest, you are not being manipulative and you are willing to share stories they also do that instinctually. This is how I understand, do you agree with that Deepa?

Yes, that is so very true what you are saying that gives reassurance for the children. I guess they feel deeply reassured that it is safe for me and it also sort of is the trigger as you said vulnerable.

I am thinking, even as an artist when you are standing out there you are moving your body, you are making funny faces or you are just putting yourself out there. Correct, so once you do all those things, you let go of the restrictions or judgments. I mean adulthood is a judgmental self. In childhood and adulthood, children have a non-judgmental curious selfhood. More you grow up as an adult more judgmental you become, more rigid one becomes, less curious also they become. Less curious and less imaginative. I think once we let go of that judgmental body posture, they also open up that is how I see it Deepa. Right, that is a very useful insight. Deepa that makes me ask the diversity of storytelling. So far, we concern about diversity of audience, but the diversity of story itself do you think folk traditions are more inclusive than textual, formal, classical storytelling traditions, can I ask you that way? How will you react as an artist? Folk traditions are they more inclusive in one sentence.

See if we talk about folk oral traditions, oral then it gives me space to play around with the story. In that sense it can become hugely immensely inclusive by virtue of being in a certain sense allowing for the individual to play around with it. While at one level folk is a collective. The same story when Hemachandran hears it he can tweak it and say it the way he would like to and Deepa can tweak it and carry it forward the way she would like to. So that is one hope that folk oral traditions give us.

There are the printed texts which are written in stone, canonized which can be that much more tight. Better. That is how I would see it. Having said that there is certain element of folk stories do not really align with the socio-political correctness. I am remembering the

words, I am not quoting verbatim but it is a line from this book called Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels. So it is a very interesting book, Kirin Narayan I think that is her name. So, she talks about Swamiji who says that educated people will think 10 times before passing judgement. They try to be socio-politically correct, but we uneducated folks we will pass judgment and we will go away, we are not doing any analysis anything, you know it is so. In a certain sense I think folk stories can be like that, so at some level you might read it and go whoa. I was mentioning to you the story that I read about three deaf people.

Deepa can you relate that story? So this is actually from a 19th century collection of folk tales from South India and it is the first story and I went wow this is so politically incorrect as of today. So yes, I will share that story.

There was a deaf man and his deaf wife. I am telling the story as it is in the book. Okay, I get that. Right, they have no forms in using whatever words they want in that. There is no visually impaired nothing. The story goes that there is a deaf husband and his deaf wife and they had an interesting arrangement in the house. One day they will make cabbage curry with tamarind in it and then next day they would make cabbage curry without tamarind in it, alternate days. Now one day the wife had made cabbage curry without tamarind, but the husband ate and he felt like I want to eat cabbage curry with tamarind right now. Told his wife so, but the wife did not understand. So, she brought a cabbage curry without the tamarind.

And he got so angry that he flung the bowl of curry on the wall and all the curry stuck on the wall. A little bit was left in the bowl and he walked out in anger. Wife simply ate up the remaining cabbage curry in the bowl and she made some more cabbage curry, but this time she made it with the tamarind and she put it aside in the kitchen. Meanwhile the sulking husband had walked away and he reached a point where there were three roads and a little tree. He sat down under the tree.

A cowherd came by. Now the cowherd was also deaf. Cowherd had lost his cow and calf. This man who was actually sulking the cowherd thought he is a jyothishi, an astrologer or seer who tells the future because he had such a serious face and he was under the tree. So, he went up to him and he started telling him please help me find my cow and calf.

Now our deaf husband was very irritated as he wanted to sulk and he did not want to be disturbed by somebody when he is sucking. So, he signaled to that fellow on the road to

the right, get out of my way. The cowherd thought he is telling me that that is where my cow and calf have gone, so let me go and look for my lost cow and calf. He went there and he actually found his lost cow and calf.

And he was so delighted he thought I must gift the calf to this astrologer, to this jyothishi. So, he came back and he wanted to gift the calf to the astrologer. Now calf had a broken tail and as this deaf cowherd was trying to give the calf. Our deaf husband thought that the cowherd is accusing him of breaking the tail of the calf and he started saying I did not break the tail of the calf and would not know who did all this. And another man was saying what, I just want to give you the calf as a gift. So, their fight went on for a while and then the deaf cowherd thought that now I understand this man wants the cow as a gift not the calf. And so he started accusing the deaf husband saying how greedy can you be? I just found my cow and my calf and you want the cow or what? How can this be possible? And they were busy quarrelling and fighting. The deaf husband repeatedly saying no, I did not break the calf's tail and the other guy was saying I cannot give you the cow that is very greedy of you.

Now a passerby came who could hear and he saw the discussion going on and the words in the textbook. The words in the book by the way go like he saw the discussion of these two deaf stupid people and that is how the folk tale is narrated. Okay which of course you know, anyway we will come to that later. So, this intervening man came and he said okay let me make the most of it. So, he quietly went up to the deaf husband and he said listen these cowherds are like this, they really unnecessarily accuse people of different things. Do not worry, I will resolve it, you go home happily and he sent his husband away.

And then he turned to the cowherd and said all these astrologers are very greedy fellows, do not worry I will convince him to take the calf and not the cow, just give it to me I will take care. So, the cowherd was quite delighted. He handed over the calf to this man and he left. That is it. The calf now left as well. The deaf husband went back home and when he tasted the food, he realized that now there was tamarind in the cabbage. He was quite happy with it and slurped it all up. So, this is absolutely politically incorrect story or folk tale and apparently there is even a proverb in Tamil. This is a Tamil story which says **(FL: From 39:15 to 29:18)**. When the situation does not get resolved or guess it you know called it, he who cannot hear each other can hardly come to a conclusion or a profitable conclusion. They will probably come to a conclusion which is quite

meaningless. Meaningless. I think this is the proverb associated with it. So folk talks like this which are left right passing judgment, it is 19th century story and was published back then, so I think they could get away, but I would not ever imagine a story like that getting published today. I think that is a very important point you made.

So because such stories exist, they are also an example of how certain kinds of knowledge gets circulated in our oral traditions informally via grapevine, familial stories, storytelling traditions and hence the free passage of discriminatory stigmatizing practices and how they seep into like rainwater seeping into mud. These folk stories also eventually make our mindset about certain kinds of people, say disabled people, lower caste, gender. So, stereotypes and negative impressions get passed over from generation to generation, maybe this is one example of that. I would agree with that. As you said they get circulated and they gain currency, they gain validity and apparently get the stamp of the word we love to use 'normal'. True, that is true. Yeah, so there is all of this authentication by apparently powers that who decide that yes this is perfectly fine, this is okay.

So, I am not saying this is the only folk tale. I am sure there are many different kinds of stories, I was just giving an example that there are such you know which the relation of which gives currency, gives validity to certain stories to an extent that one normalizes. I think the normalizing is what is problematic, is dangerous, because immediately we are seeing the other, immediately our definition becomes that they are the other which means we are the, right. There is an assumption, the other is there. The other is there.

So, you were talking about your visit to a special school Deepa as a storyteller. Can you share because that can be a good counter to this kind of circulations, the story narrative circulations that we heard.

That school that space is beautiful in so many ways, so many learnings. So, this is a school called Puvudham which is in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu. So, I had visited the school I think 2 years ago with my sons. It is a school run by a lady called Meenakshi and her entire team and they basically work with the children of the migrant laborers in the villages in and around Dharmapuri. It is a residential school. There are about 140 children who live there who do organic farming, who cook their own food, who take care of themselves.

Their buildings are constructed from the local materials and I actually did not see plastic wrappers anything anywhere in the premises. There is a lot of learning at many levels

that one can go there for. So for me when I went, I remember emailing saying that see I know Tamil, it is my mother tongue and I tell stories, so I will be happy to share stories with the children when I come there.

So, by the time I reached, I had breakfast, I was told children are waiting for you Deepa, so you can go and tell stories to them. So, I went and I had the youngest class. They do not have very clear differentiation of class, you know that is an alternative school. So approximately they were the youngest lot anywhere between 5 to 9 let us say. There were children in that age group.

I told them a story and of course they had opened up and they bonded well. They wanted some games. So I thought let me introduce Simon Says that is a game that they were not familiar with, which is where you give instructions and only if it is preceded by the word Simon, of course I changed it to Ram or something, so we said preceded by Ram Says. Rama Says then you should do it. So if I tell them stand, they do not stand. If I say Rama Says stand then you stand. If I say jump, keep jumping, stop you are not supposed to stop only if I say Rama Says stop you have to stop. So a little fun game and they thoroughly enjoyed it and all of us are playing and you know there is a little elimination. So those who do not do it right get eliminated.

So, I was continuing the game and I noticed from the corner of my eye there was this one girl who right from the start was getting it all wrong. Okay. We do not know why, and after a while I turned to her and I said **(FL: From 45:35 to 45:38)** I was just telling her of the rule that you remember right that you should follow the instruction only if it is preceded by Rama Says. The moment I said that four five of her classmates just went and put their shoulders around her and they turned to me and said **(FL: From 45:55 to 45:59)**. They were so protective about her and basically they were telling me in Tamil that you know she does not quite understand and that is when I noticed, what I really should have noticed when I entered the class.

This girl, this one child was much older than the other children. She was also taller, bigger, so obviously she was a child with some developmental issues. She was not able, probably her biological age is much higher and her developmental age is a lot different and that is why she was with the younger children. I was amazed by the sensitivity of those children right and they were 5 or 6 something like that immediately jumping to be protective. And so I said **(FL: From 46:48 to 46:50)** and then we continued the game and I was a little easy on her. And the children realized that I was being easy on this girl

and it just so happened that eventually she won the game and everybody was quite happy about it. You know the entire class and it just set me thinking if this is not education then what it is, what else is.

So, there is some link between storytelling and caregiving which you may have to carefully think through to achieve the purpose of formal education. Will you agree with that Deepa?

Absolutely and I just realized that I never thought of it exactly in that manner connect caregiving with storytelling. When you say it, it just seems absolutely that is how it is. Maybe that is why children intuitively ask for stories. My daughter is 16, she can read for herself, she can read the really big fat novels and still she asks me to tell a story maybe that is the reason, maybe this really is the reason because it is not just literature passing on, it is care giving and seeking that caregiving just like seeking a hug, yeah because I think with an over emphasis on say monolingualism. With an emphasis on rote learning and also competition among children, we end up producing children who are good at certain skill sets but not necessarily rounded personalities who can respect diversity, respect different human capabilities and so on. Absolutely and if that learning can be offered along with caregiving rather when both are happening together if you want to build their empathy, their understanding of diversity.

And as a teacher I am able to offer empathy, I am able to offer compassion, love and then the chances are higher that they are going to reciprocate or that they are going to be receptive to what I have to share. This is reminding me of one episode, Hemachandran.

In Bhuvneshwar the government supported an international storytelling festival and we were very lucky to be able to convince the officials that let us have an inaugural session as a storytelling session for the hearing impaired.

So, children from hearing impaired schools came. They were the primary audience and others, it was a public space, it was a public park. There were others who were sitting around, adults and children who could hear, but we told them in the very beginning that we are catering to the children who cannot hear and you are most welcome to listen as well. So as the story kept progressing and you know the children enjoyed something they would clap out. So, of course the deaf clap is where you pick up your hands and you just you know shake them in the air because obviously you cannot hear so that has no meaning for the hearing impaired. So, people are giving the deaf clap, Neeta introduced

to the rest of the hearing audience that this is how you do a deaf clap. She told them that this is how you do a deaf clap.

So, slowly we found that by the time we finished the story everyone in the audience was doing the deaf clap and so finally when the story ended it was a silent applause that we got from the audience. And the most beautiful part was late in the evening, this session happened in the morning alright, late in the evening because of the sessions all through the day Neeta called me see Deepa look at that boy he was there in our morning session. And now at 8 o'clock in the evening there was a music performance and when it got over, he liked it very much he did the deaf clap. We were just so excited seeing that, I guess as you are saying that we need to offer them a space to explore and to experience and understand diversity and empathy. And if that comes from a space of caregiving, then nothing like it. Otherwise, it is going to be seen as something imposed, something else which is saying that you do not care for me, you want me to care for someone else right.

That is right. So Deepa you have told stories in different continents, western context, Indian, African that means you also translate yourself, translate and also, well I said translate yourself but it is also involving working with different idioms and expectations of storytelling, how it works Deepa?

It is very interesting I am reminded of two particular episodes when you ask this. One was in South Africa where the entire project was just rural municipality government schools. We had finished with, we would literally do 3 schools every day, you know we had to just whiz one school to the other, one school to the other and in one of the schools we were supposed to finish by lunchtime.

All the other tellers finished from Swaziland and South Africa and all of them were done and lunch was done and they did not have time for my storytelling. So, I thought okay, it is fine, in the school I do not narrate but the school was very keen that they wanted an Indian storyteller to tell a story. So they got the (FL) back after lunch and they were all preschoolers. It was so sweet plus I realized they do not follow English much and the school was very keen that I tell. So, I quickly asked what is the word for monkey, what is the word for cap and what is the word for cap seller and tree okay. These 4 words in I think Swahili was the language in that particular town. I learnt those words, so that is one plus point I have, I pick up spoken forms of language very fast.

So, I immediately learnt those words. So, I told my story mostly in mime, I chose the monkey and the cap seller because I said I thought this is a story which is just can be done with a lot of mime with very little text required and maybe work for these little children and only those words for monkey, I do not remember them now, but that time I had learnt monkey, cap seller, tree, cap and those were enough.

The rest of it I was miming and I was showing and the children were in splits, completely in splits with that story. So that was a way that I try to work around with those children. Another experience was where in a school in a library they insisted that the children know English, they follow English, they know, but I noticed that when two other storytellers before me spoke in English the children were sort of lost. And you know they were just staring and I said I do not think this is going to work. I immediately asked them listen is there anyone here who is very fluent in the local language and in English. They said yes we have a local storyteller, superb. So as I went on the days I simply called him up and it was very supportive of him he came right up immediately and I said you know what we are going to tell the story together.

So, I will tell one line in English and you will tell one line in the local language that is what we did you know. I would tell a line, he would tell, me he, me he, and the children just connected completely with it. It was a requirement you know, in that situation it was a requirement. So depending on, yeah depending on the context I have really tried to play around and see what work and how best.

I think the final intent is connection or the other make that connection with them, either by myself or take support or take help whatever but make the connection. I think Rumi the poet said somewhere connect by heart and not language. Yeah and they sense you when you connect that way. There is plenty of things happening there. So maybe we are at the fag-end of our conversation when I would like to ask. Should we have some kind of emphasis on inclusive aesthetic education instead of one that focuses primarily on cerebral attunement, cerebral education, does that make sense Deepa?

Absolutely yes, I so wish. In fact, the cerebral will anyway happen, I think the cerebral. Yeah that is true. So why do something ending there? Let it be continuing, no? Sorry. Why to start and end there in cerebral but let it be part of the travel. Yeah and really it is the art, it is the heart, it is the beauty that moves us, moves us deeply any of us whether it is a 2-year-old or a 92-year-old, right. So why not invest in that? Why not harvest all

the fantastic pedagogical, developmental, emotional, you name it all kinds of possibilities that art, art-based learning, learning which is spaces I would rather say, not just education, Hemachandran.

And that only we were speaking yesterday and we were speaking about how until you actually experience the other story so art of course has to come in. Also, the opportunities for diverse individuals by which I mean the children also for them to interact, for them to experience each other right. I quickly want to share a story that there is one of the KFCs in Hyderabad which is opposite L V Prasad and the Cinemax multiplex. In that building it is entirely run by a hearing impaired and my sons and I had gone there. We stood in the queue and it is very easy to order because you know the whole menu is listed and you are supposed to point out at it and then they take your order. So that was done. It was very easy to interact, but then when we went and sat down to eat after a while the children said mama we want more sauce and more tissues. I said go back to the counter and ask, now they knew that the people at the counter cannot hear. So, they asked me that what do we do they cannot hear. So, I said you figure out what do you want to do, you know that they cannot hear. So, they both looked at each other and the sauce packet that was already on the table and the tissue that was already used they picked those up and they walk up to the counter and pointed out right and immediately they were given. But for that they had to experience that story. That is right.

I think demanding that empathy purely from a sense of imagination can also be quite challenging. So, I think what we really need is of course inclusive spaces, but not theoretically inclusive learning, opportunities okay. You may not have an institution that has altogether that is maybe an ideal that we are seeing far away. But at least let us have events which are open to all where they get to meet, where they get to interact, where they get to understand other kinds of normal and not see that as the other or worse, not even see, not even know the existence of. So yeah it would be beautiful, in fact maybe if art could be the space where they come together, art and sport and all of these. If they could offer opportunities where 3-4 times in the year, there are diverse individuals from diverse spaces meeting and interacting and just knowing each other's stories, knowing each other's world, creating something beautiful, experiencing some art, experiencing beauty together. It would really contribute a lot I think to, I believe and I trust, yeah. Well maybe across the divides also because we will also assume that certain divides are not conquerable.

I am going to refer our audience to these famous experiments by Daniel Barenboim a great pianist. He purposefully brings people together across the divides and then ((0)) **(01:01:46)** how it works. How music can build bridges that is his lifelong preoccupation, beautiful, and so is yours. Thanks Deepa, I mean it is such a pleasure talking to you and particularly for this course. Thank you so much.

Same here, thank you. Hemachandran, I do want to mention one thing as we finish, it is this interaction between the diverse individuals I think what it also offers is one awareness of that story, second moving away from sympathy to actually noticing and realizing the possibility and the potential in that other person as just another individual which is very beautiful. Which happens when we allow for the direct interaction rather than leave them in their bubbles. That is right rather than the other person happens to be an analytical category of some kind, they are full in themselves and that is how we should recognize.

Right, that is right. So, thank you so much. It was lovely. As always so many insights, so many new learnings interacting with you, yes thank you. Thank you.