

BOOK REIVEW

Title:	<i>Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative</i>
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This review aims to asses *Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative* by Somdev Chatterjee, Assistant Professor (Television Production) Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata. He has also written a large numbers of hours of fiction content for television and directed documentaries for various international television channels. Chatterjee's work is an excellent book that covers every aspect of the stories. Being a student of film making, he has a complete grab over the significance of stories and it is reflected in this piece of creation. The book begins with an interesting quote in the opening chapter itself where it says: "How stories have kept us alive as a species- and how they can kill us."

The writer has elaborately discussed the pros and cons of the stories. In order to intensify his argument, Chatterjee brings references of many researchers' relevant studies. For instance- Dr. Tetsuro Matsuzawa and his colleagues study on the cognitive abilities of chimpanzees for decades. Stories also mirror the path of cognitive development of individuals. This statement is proved in the second chapter of the book. Because in prior to writing a story one does construct in his mind, and if not finds a suitable ending then move onto the next simulation. This trial and error method is very much applicable for survival and this advantage can avail in a story-telling method. Thus, one can go through a hundred of deaths than a one real death. Chatterjee implements a reference of human beings daydreaming tendency that can be related to fantasy and a wish to get something fulfilled in reality. It is an interesting to read the discussion on 'why fictional worlds evoke real emotions' in this book. In connection to this, Chatterjee substantiates, Brian Boyd who proposes focuses on the phylogenetic question in his work *On the Origin of Stories*.

This book consists of mainly four chapters. Each chapter is divided into

many sub-titles. The opening chapter *Tell it like Your Life Depends on it* covers the origin of the story and its history of evolution. Here, a story is projected as a vehicle to transmit knowledge from generation to generation. From the survival stories of the early men from wild animals and to the evolution of stories with the arrival of technology in modern times all are beautifully written in this chapter.

The second chapter, 'Learning to Inhabit Real World' explores the nature of human beings to imitate from nature. This simulation of social interaction relates our ability to see the world from another person's viewpoint. A story or story-telling develops skills of social behavior and appropriate emotional response to a situation. Here, Chatterjee also puts a reference of the proposition of the great English thinker, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The theory of *willing suspension of disbelief* has been mentioned in this chapter. Chatterjee argues that our willingness to attend to narratives something that we know as untrue we get into it just to derive pleasure from them may all link to our capacity for simulation.

The third chapter talks about the characteristics and features of the narratives, like the role of a protagonist and its desire and unpredictable outcomes. Chatterjee argues that the basic form of stories is to mirror the fundamental structure of human experience. This chapter also highlights the fact that we can experience reality in a narrative form as well. The author implies Aristotle's the very idea of catharsis in this chapter. It says that 'if the protagonist is already equipped from the beginning to confront the problem she faces, then there is no struggle, no risk and no reason for the audience to want to hear the story'. So, Chatterjee points out that 'peripeteia' should be inextricably co-exist in a story which may be due to external risk in the life of the protagonist. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* has a lot going against her.

The fourth chapter summarizes the techniques of story-telling and put light on how some of the narratives can excel more than others among the readers or spectators. Chatterjee elaborates using references of the Nobel Prize Dutch ethologist, Nikholas Tinbergen where he talked about 'supernormal stimuli'. Thus, the characters and individual situations of a story provide evidences for these stimuli. According to the author, Nicholas Carr in his work titled *The Shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains* points out that human beings are by instinct information-seekers. Thus, this work of Somdev Chatterjee will enthrall the readers with every aspect of narratives. It critically analyses stories in respect to emotion, society, cognitive, entertainment, evolution and simulation. This work also shows a connection between stories and human experience.

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