



the Story of STORY

Why People Read
Stories?

RAVISH MANI

What People Say About the Author

Ravish Mani is well-known in the blogosphere for his philosophical personality. His writings are inspiration and food for thought. He has acumen for reading in between the lines. If you want your work to be critically appreciated, you would want him to read it.

~ Sunaina Sharma, Literary Critic

You analysed me as minutely as you did my novel. Honored to be reviewed by you. And very highly impressed by your indepth, interlinked, intuitive inroads into innermost recesses of my mind.

~ Dr. Sweety Shinde, Author

I think he has an eerie 6th sense. This is the second time I saw his acumen and was flummoxed. He was infallible. It was as if he was sitting with me when I was thinking about

the story or he had access to a window in my mind! It's eerie and Ravish, you are awesome, to say the least!

~ Rakesh Pandey, Author

I have always found Ravish's analysis quite unique, deep, and incisive.

~Tina Sequeira, Author

If you are looking for a detailed analysis of your manuscript, our friend Ravish Mani is a pro at that. His services make sure that you rethink and polish your concept to the next level.

~ Anupriya Chowdhary, Author

If you are looking for an analysis of your manuscript, together with in-depth feedback, I'd recommend Ravish.

~ Shailaja V, Blogger

This book is dedicated to aspiring authors.

Story is a metaphor for life.
~ Robert McKee

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As I see, morality cannot be forced. It comes from within. For being moral, introspection is needed. No law can make you morally right. It can only instill fear of punishment in you.

The day this fear vanishes, you will go beyond redemption. Transformation happens through love and trust, not from fear and punishment.

I believe in the Law of Giving, which says that the return is directly proportional to the giving when it is unconditional and straight from the heart.

About the Author

Ravish Mani is a life adviser and story consultant. He's known in the blogosphere for his spiritual approach, analytical abilities, multidimensional perspectives, and helping nature.

He is an introvert but always ready for meaningful interaction. He lives a simple life & is fascinated by the human mind.

He believes you don't read a book, you read a mind. He loves reading books, and through books, the mind of their authors.

To know more about him, get in touch with him.

Email: booksasisee@ravishmani.com

Twitter: [@ravishmani](https://twitter.com/@ravishmani)

Instagram: [booksasisee](https://www.instagram.com/booksasisee)

Author's Note

Hi friends,

I wanted to talk about how to make your readers forget the sense of time, even the state of their being, & have blissful satisfaction when they get absorbed in your story.

The idea was to explain every aspect of storytelling in detail and share the ways through which you can have your readers a flow experience while they read your book.

The approach was inspired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on Flow Experience and the Rasa Theory of Indian dramaturgy.

Unfortunately, my laptop crashed two days prior to the submission date of Blogchatter Ebook

Carnival, and I have to change the book at the last moment.

Instead of talking about every aspect of storytelling in detail, I'm trying to present a glimpse of important aspects of storytelling through the present book.

First draft is shit

On the basis of Ernest Hemingway's saying that the first draft of anything is shit, I'm assuming that you may find typographical errors, grammatical mistakes, or structural irregularities in this book, as it's composed on a mobile device in just two days without any round of editing.

Being a story consultant & working in the space of developmental/substantive editing, it's a nightmare coming true for me, but I couldn't do anything about it except feel sorry from bottom

of my heart for not ensuring a quality reading experience with this book of mine.

Substance of any story

A story originates from the rift between what's expected to happen & what actually happens. It's the substance of the story. Many think that language is the substance of the story, but it isn't.

Language is just one of the many media of telling a story. You can tell a story through pictures or music as well. Storytelling is more primitive than language. You'll get to read about it later in the book.

Basic story template

It's often stated from the time when everything is normal in the character's life. Then out of a sudden, for better or worse, an incident throws his life off balance. This incident is called the

Inciting Incident, which launches him on a quest to achieve his objects of desire.

He takes an action thinking that it'll fulfill his desire or at least bring him a bit closer to it, but reality violates his expectations. Instead of getting a helpful reaction from his world, he finds antagonistic forces rise up to block his efforts.

A gap cracks open between what he thinks would happen & what does happen. This unforeseen event knocks him back even farther from his goal.

Now even in greater jeopardy, he chooses a second action that's more difficult & riskier than the first, yet he thinks that doing it will finally get him what he wants.

In short stories his second action causes a climactic reaction that matches his expectations & fulfills his desire. This climax restores his life to balance & ends the story.

In long forms, his second action also fails, and he adjusts. His next action, too, goes wrong. He adjusts. The stakes escalate until he's at the point of no return. His life will never be the same if he achieves or doesn't achieve his goals.

The logic behind this escalation of conflicts is that success is the result of good judgment. Good judgment is the result of experience, and experience is often the result of bad judgment. He continues to fail & learn until he learns to close the gap between his perceived reality & the actual reality.

Story of this book

The Inciting Incident of my story was the announcement of this season's Blogchatter Ebook Carnival. It invoked a desire in me to provide useful information to aspiring authors by sharing my expertise in the field of storytelling by launching a book through this Carnival.

To fulfill this desire, I began writing the book on aspects of storytelling. I was expecting to complete & submit it on time. But my expectation didn't match the reality. Forces of antagonism rose up to prevent me from fulfilling my desire in the form of nature.

During the final round of editing, two days prior to the last date of submission, lightning struck my house & damaged some of my appliances including my laptop. This pushed me back even

farther from where I started, almost making it impossible for me to fulfill my desire, as I didn't have any other laptop, and I couldn't go to cyber cafes also due to the lockdown situation because of the corona pandemic.

I saw a bleak opportunity to fulfill my desire in the form of my mobile, but I was not sure whether I would come up with another idea for a short book that fast or if come up, whether I would be able to type 5000 words on mobile within two days, as I was the person who preferred calling over text messaging.

Whether I would succeed or fail, the decision I would make at this moment of crisis would define whether I am a quitter or a fighter.

It's said that a good story should have external desire as well as internal desire and both should be related to each other. In my story, the

value at stake in external desire is failure/success & in internal desire quitter/fighter, and the fulfillment of my external desire depends on fulfillment of my internal desire.

Though I won the internal battle & composed the book on my mobile, it's still an ongoing story. The result of the external is still to come. You, as a reader, are going to decide the ending of my story whether I succeed in providing useful insights on storytelling or not.

Final appeal to readers

Hope you excuse me if you find any glaring editing issues in the book & let me know how my story shapes in the end.

Thanks,
Ravish

The Story of STORY

Every story is a story of desire. With desire, two kinds of forces appear: the one that wants the desire to be fulfilled and the other that opposes the fulfillment of the desire. The description of conflicts between these two forces gives you a story.

Object of desire

The story of Story is about the Desire to Survive, and the thing that one needs to survive, i.e., one's Object of Desire is Information—the information about one's surroundings.

Every living thing, whether it's a bacteria or a plant, extracts information from their environment and communicates it to others because evolution favors those who can extract

accurate and relevant information from their environment.

Desire & conflict

Every living thing is in conflict with other living things as well as with physical forces, such as rain, drought, snowfall, etc, in accordance with the doctrine of survival of the fittest.

Many organisms, like dinosaurs, became extinct irrespective of their bigger size & might. The ones who survived evolved their brains for better extraction & processing of information.

The living beings who thrived in information processing with fancy scores were Homo sapiens though it's believed that storytelling started in Homo erectus itself in the form of sharing events through pointing, gesture, posture, movement, facial expression, and

vocal sound; even before the advent of language.

Emergence of protagonist

The protagonists of this story are species of genus Homo, such as Homo erectus, Homo heidelbergensis, Homo neanderthalensis, Homo sapiens, etc, but for sake of easy reference in this book, we are going to refer all of them simply as human.

With the advanced information processing system, the human became conscious of its existence as an individual. This self-awareness of being separate from others brought with it a sharp sense of isolation.

But the advanced information processing system was also telling that to survive the human had to take help from fellow human beings.

Conflict of protagonist

Living in isolation & as a member of a group, at the same time, created conflict in the life of the human. What was good for one was not necessarily good for the other.

If the human gave priority to its benefits, it might hurt the group, and if it gave priority to the benefit of the group, it might cost the human individually. Whatever decision it made at this crucial moment would say a lot about the human.

The human would be considered as selfish if it put its interest over the group. On the other hand, if it put the interest of the group over its personal interest, the human would be considered as selfless or cooperative or trustworthy.

At such moments, the human realized that the fellow human beings were not as they appeared on the surface & could not be taken at their face value.

True character of protagonist

True character of a person is revealed through his choices & actions at crucial moments. His daily activities may present a wrong image of the person.

From the daily activities of Raj of DDLJ, it appears that he's a casanova. He's shown teasing strangers on trains, to the extent of playing with her bra. He's also shown tearing Simran's dress in public. Though when he has the chance to rape an unconscious Simran, he doesn't. His true character is revealed at that moment. It's the moment that changes Simran's perception of him and germinates a soft corner for him in her heart.

Need for cooperation

The revelation of dual personality of fellow human beings escalated the degree of conflict involved. Now the human knew that it could not trust the fellow human beings but it had to live with them in a group if it had to survive individually.

Despite the risk of betrayal, living in the group was a better option from the survival point of view, as it was living in pretty harsh conditions with lots of life threatening factors around.

No doubt, the epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest surviving story engraved on ancient Babylonian tablets 4,000 years ago, teaches about how to cooperate.

In a recent study, it's found that some of the most beloved British novels from the 19th and

early 20th Centuries have the theme of cooperation.

In another study, when asked a panel of readers to rate the principal characters in more than 200 novels, ranging from Jane Austen to EM Forster, it's revealed that the antagonists' major flaw was most often a quest for social dominance at the expense of others or an abuse of their existing power, while the protagonists appeared to be less individualistic and ambitious.

Internal desire of protagonist

An engaging story always escalates the degree of conflict as the story progresses. In a good story, a protagonist doesn't have only external desire but internal desire as well, and the conflicts around the internal desire also contribute to the overall escalation of conflicts in the story.

The awareness of 'I exist' also made the human ponder, 'I may not exist.' This realization that its existence would cease at some point of time questioned its identity & purpose of existence.

The certainty of death, not knowing its identity, and uncertainty & chaos in the surrounding made him insecure. This insecurity & misery launched the human on the quest of finding meaning of life.

Cause as a revolutionary concept

Now the human was not only interested in knowing what was happening but also why that was happening. The urge to know the cause was the first step towards finding the meaning.

It revealed to human that knowledge of cause was bringing order by lessening the chaos & uncertainty around itself. Its insecurities were

subsiding. This revolutionary insight of 'cause brings order' inspired the human to plant cause in the previous births.

Karma Theory

The concept of rebirths solved both the major problems of human: death & chaos, and compelled it to come up with the theory of Karma, which proposed that nothing happened without a cause, and cause could be present in past lives also.

So, the external desire of the human was to survive & its object of external desire was information, and the internal desire of the human was to seek the meaning of its existence & the object of its internal desire was insight.

Understanding of why

For insight, the human's mind began to establish relationships between different kinds of information. As it would detect patterns in the visual forms such as in faces or figures, it started detecting patterns in information and sorting them into pleasurable & painful because all decisions are based on these two factors.

Everything one does either to avoid pain or to gain pleasure. Also, for most, the fear of loss is much greater than the desire for gain. There are many levels of pain and pleasure. Humiliation, anguish, dread, anxiety, terror, grief, malaise, misery, stress, remorse, inconvenience, boredom, etc. are painful states but of different intensities. In the same way, joy, love, happiness, rapture, fun, ecstasy, thrill, bliss & comfort are pleasurable states of different intensities.

Pleasure & pain

Pleasure & pain are not absolute but relative. They are subjective & subject to change. The same experience may be pleasurable at one point of time & may be painful at some other time. For example, the sight or company of your beloved will be pleasurable when you're in love but the sight or company of the same person once you loved after break-up will become painful.

This assigning of pleasure & pain to events could be the basis of conflict in a story.

In the movie *Chalte Chalte*, Raj & Priya always fight with each other over small things. Because of this, they separate but can't live separately for more than three months. Their problem is that they can't stop fighting & can't leave each other. Their life is miserable because they

consider fighting as painful. To make their life happy in the end, they associate pleasure with fighting by considering it as an expression of love.

Interpretation of events

Pain & pleasure are not the properties of events but of humans. It's not the events but how you interpret those events—which event you link with pleasure & which event you link with pain—will determine how you think about yourselves and how you will act in the future.

Any time when you're in an intense emotional state, anything meaningful that occurs at that time is associated with that particular emotional state & is ultimately evaluated in terms of pleasure & pain to decide future behavior in similar situations.

In an experiment, the experimenter asked the volunteer to briefly hold his cup of coffee, as he was struggling with an armful of folders. As the key experimental manipulation, the coffee was either hot or iced. The volunteers had no idea that holding the cup of coffee was a part of the experiment. For them, the experiment began when they were asked to read a description of some individual & rate it. Those who had held the warmer cup tended to rate the individual as having a warmer personality, with no change in ratings of other attributes.

Arousal of emotion in readers

This is how authors arouse emotion in the empathetic readers. Empathy is mandatory to experience the emotions suggested in a well designed story. To empathize, a reader has to identify with the protagonist & his desires like its own.

Authors present the references that remind the readers of that particular emotion. Though every reader has its own references associated with that particular emotional state, some general references are also there that are valid in almost all cases.

Authors use such general references associated with a particular emotional state to awaken that particular emotion in the empathetic readers.

In the aforementioned experiment, the cup of hot coffee serves as a stimulant to present the individual in the description as having a warm personality. This is why people wear perfumes on special occasions to get associated with the pleasant fragrance in the mind of others.

Delivery of climactic emotion

It's necessary to render the precise experience necessary to cause an emotion, then take the audience through that experience. The causes don't need to be immediate & present in that scene only. They could be present in any or entire previous scenes. In fact, the cause of the emotion of the climax must be reflected in many previous scenes.

The impact of the climactic emotion of the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* is mostly contributed by the depiction of the snobbish nature of Miranda Priestley throughout the story.

In the climax of the movie, Andy goes to *The New York Mirror* for an interview. Greg Hill, the interviewer, admires her work & informs her that when he asked for reference from her previous

company, Runaway, he got a fax from Miranda Priestley, the boss, herself.

This surprises Andy & somewhere tells her that it's not good news, as she left Miranda when she needed her the most & Miranda's impression is not of a kind lady. Also, the boss, especially like Miranda, never directly faxes someone just for reference of an ex-employee. It's a low level job. So, when Miranda sends a fax herself, something is fishy.

When Greg tells Andy that the fax was saying that of all the assistance Miranda ever had, she was by far her biggest disappointment, Andy's suspicion comes true & a sadness floats on her face, but she is prepared for it & somehow predicted it beforehand.

Greg continues saying that the fax said if he didn't hire Andy, he's an idiot. Now this is a big

surprise for anyone who knows Miranda, and Andy was her private secretary. Her eyes well with tears, not with tears of sadness but of happiness. Greg's voice also changes in both tone & volume. He says that Andy must have done something right. Andy comes out of Greg's office with teary eyes.

This scene works because Miranda's kindness doesn't come out of blue. The scriptwriter hinted about her kindness subtly in earlier scenes, which went unnoticed the first time but flashes in mind at the execution of the climactic scene.

Meaning in story

Stories are recognizable patterns, and in those patterns we find meaning. A story in its simplest form is a connection of cause and effect. And that is exactly how humans think. So powerful is human's impulse to find meaning that it sees them even when they're not there.

In the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, John Nash is shown discovering conspiracy against his country, by making stories from materials of newspaper columns. What he's doing actually is looking for hidden patterns in magazines and newspapers to support his theory of conspiracy. This is how people form beliefs, which shape every action, every thought, every feeling that they experience, & even define their identities.

Belief formation

Belief is the solidification of an idea, backed by many experiences acting as references in support of the idea. The more the number of supporting reference evidence for the idea, the stronger the belief. The stronger the attachment of emotion with the reference experiences, the greater its effect on the belief.

What drives your behavior is instinctive reaction to pain and pleasure, not intellectual calculation. Your emotion is the driving factor. Your intellect only justifies the decision after it's made through emotional evaluation. But both are necessary to make it believable.

Beliefs are the stories about what could lead to pain & pleasure, formed by the identification of similar patterns on the basis of interpretations of past painful and pleasurable experiences.

Limiting beliefs

It's not actual pain that drives your decision, but your fear that something will lead to pain, and it's not actual pleasure that drives your action but your belief that somehow taking a certain action will lead to pleasure. It's not the actual reality but your perception of reality that decides your action.

Unfortunately, formation of patterns in more complex areas of lives oversimplify and sometimes create limiting beliefs. The best example of a story weaved around limiting belief is *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry.

Story & language

We use stories to make sense of our world & to share that understanding with others. Some sections of the evolutionists even believed that it's the urge to share stories that led to the development of language.

The reason being given is that they had understood that, to survive they had to cooperate, live together, & share their experiences with each other, as there's no point in reinventing the wheel. The only way to get more information in a limited time is through the exchange of information.

The ancient paintings found in the walls of caves serve as the proof in support of the argument that the story is more primitive than the language.

Advent of fiction

For the decision-making the experiences that have already occurred were not enough. The human realised that it needed more experiences. It had understood that the more the number of experiences, the better the judgement.

So, it started to imagine situations to fine-tune its sense of judgement. This led to the advent of fiction in human's life & emphasized its importance very strongly.

The human had understood that it didn't matter whether the events actually happened in someone's life or were imagined; the only thing

that mattered was whether something could be learned from them or not that would help in better decision-making.

The words 'history' & 'story' both are derived from the Latin word 'historia' which means 'to learn' or 'to inquire.' On looking further, it appears that they are derived from the Proto-Indo-European root 'weyd' whose meaning is 'to see.' The Sanskrit words 'Veda' & 'Vidya' share the same root.

Homo fictus

In the light of awareness that fiction could be used in decision-making, the human found that selecting & sorting real world events and finding meaning from them was quite difficult because of their complex nature. It was rather easy to select relatively less complex fictional events & find meaning from them.

It was realized to the human that the people in the real world were complex & to understand their motives & the events in their life that contributed them was a herculean task.

It would be easier to understand a simple character whose actions were governed by only 2 to 3 beliefs, and with a limited number of events in fiction, it would also be easier to find the events that actually contributed to the formation of those beliefs. This is the reason that characters in a story are not Homo sapiens but Homo fictus, a relatively simple & more perfect version of Homo sapiens.

Impact of storytelling

The story is a metaphor for life & its character is a metaphor for the decision-making system, which is dominated by one's beliefs.

Beliefs are formed when an idea is presented consistently under intense emotional state. It's not possible in the real world to always have sufficient information to develop an idea & enough emotional intensity to transform that idea into a belief.

But it's possible in fiction to provide both with careful plotting of the story. When a reader forms beliefs through the events of a carefully designed fiction, it doesn't appear forced to him. It feels like his own understanding of the events. This planting of belief through story in the reader's mind led Plato to urge Athenian leaders to exile poets and Storytellers.

Miscellaneous Topics

Show don't tell

For interpreting information, only language processing parts of the brain get activated, which decode the literal meaning of words. That's it.

But for the interpretation of the story, not only the language processing parts get activated, but other parts of the brain also get activated while experiencing the events of the story.

The mention of objects of senses lights up the sensory cortex, and description of motion activates the motor cortex. This is what is meant by "Show, do not tell."

Telling only activates language processing of the brain while showing can put all the brain to work.

Showing means describing something as if it were happening before the reader's eyes. On the other hand, telling simply means that you tell the reader about something that has happened, but you do not let him be a witness.

Telling is a legitimate device, as too much showing will be doubly negative for a quality reading experience. First, it will slow the pace of the story, and second, it will exhaust the mind with so many experiences.

Always show important events, as it arouses emotion in the readers. The key events need to be shown while less important materials should be told.

Metaphor

We learn new things by associating it with the things that we already know. This is how metaphor works.

Metaphor connects what the authors want to tell with the things that readers already know. It makes the task easier for the readers, and using sensory or motor references enhance the overall experience of the story.

Metaphor helps in showing instead of telling. The human mind interprets the sentences “He has leathery hands” and “He has strong hands” differently. The first one rouses the sensory cortex, while the second one is interpreted in literal sense only.

In a self-published novella, I encountered this: "She's seriously so hot. My eyes need burnol

just for looking at her." This metaphor won't work because no one put burnol in his eyes. It's simply a play of words, which will only activate the language processing part of the brain.

This metaphor "Her lips are like ripe tomatoes" will work, but the comparison sounds ridiculous because of wrong connotations.

So, here are some cautions on using metaphors:

- While selecting a comparison, consider not only the exact attribute you want to feature but also the connotations that will be raised in the reader's mind.
- Do not use too many metaphors in a paragraph, as it would explode the reader's brain. It'd be like showing too many pictures too fast.
- Avoid two metaphors for describing the same thing.

Body Language

You don't focus on someone's face with the conscious intention to observe that someone's lower eyelids are tightened, eyebrows look flat & tense, lip corners go sideways and hence conclude that the person is in fear.

You look at someone's face & instantly make a guess about his emotion. Whether your guess is correct or not is altogether a different thing.

On most occasions, the description of facial expressions in terms of body language would fail to invoke the desired emotion in the readers because most of the readers have not associated these descriptions with emotions in their mind. The chances are that their brain would only interpret them literally.

It's been also observed that certain words & phrases have lost their power of activating other parts of the brain and activates only language processing part because of their excessive use & familiarity.

Difference between a writer & an author

So, avoid clichés. Knowledge of and insight into the world of your story is fundamental to the achievement of originality and excellence.

Cliché is at the root of reader's dissatisfaction. Clichés are because the writer does not know the world of his story. And this is the basic difference between a writer & an author.

The author has authority. He knows the ins & outs of his world. He is the God of his created world. No bird can flutter its wings in his world without his knowledge.

Services Offered by Ravish

- Story Consultancy
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