



KathaVana 2019

Theme: Rejuvenating Children's Literature in Kannada

Azim Premji University and Bengaluru District Institute (Azim Premji Foundation), and Big Little Book Awards, Parag (Tata Trusts)

Dates and Locations:

1. **Tuesday 10 December 2019**, GHPS Hosahalli (Vijayanagara), South-2 Block.
Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/ZQZB2wZyWsV2ng4a8>
2. **Wednesday 11 December 2019**, Yediyur Government Primary School, 7th Block, Jayanagar, South-3 Block. Location:
<https://goo.gl/maps/BXBwofSUjNFJf9zG9>
3. **Friday 13 December 2019**, Hebbagodi Government School, Electronic City, Anekal Block. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/HDWhfC5z16LvFFFx6>

About KathaVana

Recent decades have seen increasing interest in children's literature in India. But children's literature still does not find a vital place in our classrooms and libraries. Also, much more can be done with how literature is taught. Since 2012, KathaVana has engaged with the following questions:

- Can young children be introduced in interesting and meaningful ways to literature?
- Can teachers be introduced to – and convinced about – the power and relevance of literature in the lives of their students?

This bilingual (Kannada-English) festival is hosted annually by two arms of the Azim Premji Foundation: the Bengaluru District Institute and Azim Premji University. The festival brings together children, parents, teachers, librarians, authors, translators, illustrators, storytellers, publishers, and booksellers – that is, almost everyone involved in the world of children's literature.

Each year, a theme is selected around which various events are organized. Themes in previous years have included *Children's Voices in Literature*; *Creating Spaces for Literature*; *Teachers as Readers*; *Understanding Writing for Children*; and *Teachers as Writers*. This year's theme is *Rejuvenating Children's Literature in Kannada*.

As a literature festival, KathaVana is unique in several respects. First, in keeping with the broad vision of Azim Premji Foundation, it focuses on government schools, inviting teachers and students from these schools to participate in most of its events. Second, the festival is bilingual – with a dual focus on Kannada and English. Since many of the participants of KathaVana teach and learn in Kannada-medium schools, the festival tilts towards Kannada. Third, in addition to providing a forum for children to enjoy a literature festival, KathaVana also conducts intensive workshops for teacher professional development. Fourth, the festival provides forums for those involved with the world of

children's literature to meet and share information about the state of children's literature in various Indian contexts. The idea is that it is only through interventions at various levels that the domain of children's literature in India can become vitalized and robust.

About Big Little Book Award (BLBA)

This year, KathaVana collaborates with BLBA, instituted in 2015 by Parag, an initiative of Tata Trusts. BLBA is a first-of-its-kind award to recognize and honour significant contributions of authors and illustrators to children's literature in Indian languages. The award is given for a body of work under two categories: author and illustrator. The author-award is given in a chosen Indian language each year: Marathi (2016), Bengali (2017), and Kannada (2018). The illustrator-award cuts across literature produced in all Indian languages. Further, selected works of the winner and shortlisted authors are translated and published in other Indian languages. Thus, BLBA ensures that more published works for children are available in Indian languages; and also that the literature and cultural worlds of one language are shared with others.

Three Melas

As the "Dates and Locations" information above indicates, in 2019, the KathaVana mela, will in fact be *three* melas! Previous years' experience indicates that in a mega-city like Bengaluru, a single mela is simply not enough – far too many children are not able to participate. Having a mela in three Blocks means that many more children from the surrounding schools will be able to experience the festival. Further, the festival will complement and support the work that the Foundation is doing in those Blocks. More details available on our website:

<https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/SitePages/events-kathavana.aspx>. Stay tuned!

Rejuvenating Children's Literature in Kannada

This year's KathaVana theme is "Rejuvenating Children's Literature in Kannada". To this end, we propose to:

- create forums for diverse stakeholders to brainstorm and consult with each other on the issue at hand.
- encourage established writers for children in Kannada to experiment, innovate and interact with relatively little used genres for children's literature.
- encourage established writers for children in Kannada to mentor and work with younger or less-experienced writers.
- bring established writers for adults in Kannada into the dialogic space, and to encourage them to write for children.
- bring both local and pan-Indian publishers and translators into the conversations.
- bring literary critics and media into this space, in order to provide wider reporting about children's literature, while at the same time, holding it to higher standards of literary quality.
- include the voices teachers, librarians, parents and children in this process.

A comprehensive approach such as this is needed for multiple reasons. These reasons are relevant to regional language children's literature in India in general.

- Books for younger children are rare, since traditionally this was a space for oral storytelling and only older children were expected to "read" books.
- With the migration of the elite and the middle-classes to English, innovation in Kannada writing for children is apathetic or even absent.
- Innovations in children's literature in the West – spawning a variety of genres, from picture books, to creatively produced non-fiction books, books for young adults, and so on – have not taken organic root in our languages, leaving a wide-open space.
- This space has been partially and inadequately filled by translations of uneven quality by publishers who specialize in the pan-Indian publishing of children's books. Many of these books are created in other languages, often English, and then translated into Kannada.

- While translations are desirable, they cannot take the place of original writing in a given language.

Azim Premji Foundation and the University are hosted in Karnataka, and work with the education system here, thereby making the flourishing of Kannada of utmost significance. From BLBA's perspective too, Kannada was the language selected for the 2018 award. Thus, while the Azim Premji Foundation's various arms are organizing the festival itself, the quantity and quality of children's literature in Kannada is of interest to all of us.

KathaVana 2019 is thus the beginning of a long and exciting collective journey of rejuvenating children's literature.