

## Mann Ki Baat 2.0 Part-16

My dear countrymen, Namaskar. During this ongoing period of Corona, the whole world is going through numerous phases of transformation. Today, when the two yard social distancing has become imperative, this very crises period has also served in fostering bonding among family members, bringing them even closer. But, for such an extended span of time and when you are together, spending time with each other. How do you ensure that every moment is filled with joy? Thus, many a family, faced challenges- and the reason being a lack of our traditions that once used to streamline the course of life through adherence to certain values in the family '*The Sanskar Sarita.*' It seems, there are many families where all this has been lost...and that is why amid the dearth, it became a little difficult for families to spend time in this period of crisis. And what was an important aspect in this? Well, there was a time when in every family, invariably, there used to be an elderly member, a senior person who would tell stories, infusing a new inspiration, a new energy in the household. Surely, we must have realised, how significant the mores and conventions set by our ancestors are.... even today.... how their dearth can be deeply felt! And, as I said, one such form is the art of storytelling. Friends, the history of stories is as ancient as the human civilization itself. 'Where there is a soul, there is a story'. Stories express and bring to the fore, the creative and sensitive facets of human beings. If the power of stories is to be felt, one has to just watch a mother telling a story to her little one either to lull her to sleep or while feeding her a morsel. I spent a major part of my life as a Parivrajak, an ascetic. Wayfaring was my life. Every day it used to be a new place and people, new families. But whenever I went to a family, I would make it a point to speak to the children. At times, I would playfully ask them to tell me a story.....surprisingly, they would reply saying, No Uncle...not a story...We'll tell you a joke! "They would ask me too to tell them a joke; evidently they had no clue of stories. It was jokes that had pervaded their lives, in a major way. In India there has been a rich tradition of storytelling or Qissagoi. We are proud to be denizens of the land that nurtured the tradition of Hitopadesh and Panch Tantra in which, through an imaginary world of animals, birds and fairies woven into stories, lessons on prudence and wisdom could be explained easily. We have a tradition of 'katha' here. This is an ancient form of religious storytelling. 'Kathakalakshepam' has been part of it. Myriad folk tales are prevalent here. In Tamilnadu and Kerala, there is a very interesting style of

storytelling. It is called 'Villu paat'. It comprises a fascinating confluence of story and music. India has had a vibrant tradition of Kathputli, that is puppetry. These days, stories and storytelling based on science and science-fiction are gaining popularity. I am noticing people who are taking commendable initiatives in promoting the art form of Qissagoi. I came to know about the website 'Gathastory.in', run by Amar Vyas, along with other colleagues. Amar Vyas after completing his MBA from IIM Ahmedabad went abroad and later returned. Presently, he lives in Bengaluru and takes time out to pursue an interesting activity such as this, based on storytelling. There are many endeavours that are popularising stories from rural India. People like Vaishali Vyawahare Deshpande are making this form popular in Marathi.

Srividya Veer Raghavan of Chennai is also engaged in popularizing and disseminating stories related to our culture, while two websites named, Kathalaya and The Indian Story Telling Network, are also doing commendable work in this field. Geeta Ramanujan has focussed on stories at kathalaya.org, whereas a network of story tellers from various cities is being created through the Indian Storytelling Network. There is Vikram Sridhar in Bengaluru, who is very enthusiastic about stories related to Bapu. Many more such people must be working in this field. You must share about them on social media.

Today, we are joined by our sister Aparna Athare and other members of the Bengaluru Storytelling Society. Come, let's talk to them and learn about their experience.

Prime Minister: - Hello

Aparna: - Namaskar, Respected Prime Minister! How are you?

Prime Minister: - I'm fine. How are you, Aparna ji?

Aparna: - Very well Sir. First of all, I would like to thank you on behalf of Bangalore Story Telling Society for having invited and speaking to artists like us on this platform.

Prime Minister: - And I heard, that today, perhaps your entire team is also sitting with you.

Aparna: - Yes, yes. Absolutely sir.

Prime Minister: - Then it would be better if you introduce your team. So that the listeners of 'Mann Ki Baat' can get acquainted with what a huge campaign you all are running.

Aparna: - Sir. I am Aparna Athare. I am a mother of two children, the wife of an Air Force Officer and a passionate storyteller sir. Storytelling began 15 years ago when I was working in the software industry. Having gone then for voluntary work for CSR projects, I got a chance to educate thousands of children through the medium of stories. And this story I was referring to... I had heard it from my grandmother. But when I saw the joy on the children's faces while listening to the story, what do I say to you.... such smiles, so much happiness there... and that was the moment I decided that story telling would be a goal of my life sir.

Prime Minister: - Who else is there in your team?

Aparna: - Shailaja Sampath is with me.

Shailaja: - Namaskar sir.

Prime Minister: - Namaste Ji |

Shailaja: - I am Shailaja Sampath speaking. Earlier, I was a teacher. Once my children grew up, I started working in theatre and finally, felt most satisfied in storytelling.

Prime Minister: - Thank you!

Shailaja: - Soumya is with me.

Soumya: - Namaskar Sir!

Prime Minister: - Namaste Ji!

Soumya: - I am Soumya Srinivasan. I am a psychologist. When I work, with children and older people, I try to awaken the Navrasas in human beings through stories and discuss it with them. 'Healing and transformative storytelling' is my goal.

Aparna: - Namaste Sir!

Prime Minister: - Namaste Ji |

Aparna: My name is Aparna Jaishankar. I have had the good fortune of growing up with my maternal grandparents and paternal grandmother in different

parts of the country, so stories from Ramayana, Puranas, Geeta every night, were an inheritance. And then, there is this organization like Bangalore Storytelling Society, so I had to be a storyteller. My fellow Lavanya Prasad is with me.

PP Prime Minister:- Lavanya ji, Namastey!

Lavanya: -Namastey, Sir! I am an Electrical Engineer turned professional storyteller. Sir, I grew up listening to stories from my grandfather. I work with senior citizens. In my special project called 'Roots' where I help them document their life stories for their families.

Prime Minister: - Lavanya ji many congratulations to you. And as you said, once in Mann Ki Baat I too had asked you all that if you have grandfather-grandmother, maternal grandfather-grandmother in your family, ask them of stories of their childhood and tape them, record them, it will be very useful, I had said. But I felt good that the way all of you introduced yourself.... even in that... your art, your communication skills and in very few words, in a very good way you introduced yourself, for that too I congratulate you.

Lavanya: -Thank you sir! Thank you!

Prime Minister: - Now our audience of Mann Ki Baat... they too must be wanting to hear a story. May I request you to narrate a story or two?

Chorus: - For sure, this is our good fortune.

Aparna Jaishankar: - "Come, let us hear the story of a king. The name of the king was Krishna Deva Rai and the name of the kingdom was Vijayanagar. This king of ours had many qualities. If at all there was any weakness, it was his excessive fondness for his minister Tenali Rama and secondly for food. Every day the king would sit for lunch with great hope that today something good must have been cooked and everyday his cook would serve the same insipid vegetables-ridge gourd, bottle gourd, pumpkin, apple gourd. One such day, the king while eating, threw away the plate in anger and ordered the cook to make some tasty vegetable the day after or else he would hang him. The poor cook was frightened. Now where would he go for new vegetables? The cook went running directly to Tenali Rama and told him the entire story. On listening, Tenali Rama gave an idea to the cook. Then next day the king came for lunch and called for the cook. Has something tasty has been cooked today or should I prepare the noose? The frightened cook immediately lay the plate with hot

food. There was a new dish in the plate. The king was excited and he tasted a little of the dish. Umm, wow! What a dish! Neither tasteless like ridge gourd nor sweet like pumpkin. The cook too had put the spices after roasting and grinding and all had come off well. Licking his fingers, the king called the cook and asked... "What vegetable is it? What is its name?" The cook replied as he was taught. "Maharaj, this is the crown-crested brinjal. Lord, just like you this too is the king of vegetables and that is why the rest of the vegetables have adorned it with a crown." The king was pleased and declared that from today he would eat only this crown crested brinjal. "And not only myself, in my kingdom too, only brinjal will be cooked and no other vegetable will be cooked." Both, the king and the subjects were pleased. Initially, all were happy as they got a new vegetable, but as days passed by the excitement began going down. Mashed brinjal in one house, then fried brinjal in the other. Sambhar with brinjal at one place and brinjal with rice at the other. How many forms could the poor brinjal alone have? Gradually even the king got fed up. Every day the same brinjal! And then the day came when the king called the cook and scolded him a lot. "Who told you that the brinjal is crown crested. Hereafter, no one will eat brinjal in the kingdom. From tomorrow cook any vegetable but the brinjal." "As you order Maharaja," saying this the cook went straight to Tenali Rama. Falling at feet of Tenali Rama, he said, "thank you minister you saved my life. Because of your suggestion now I can serve any vegetable to the king." Tenali Rama laughingly said, "What good is that minister who cannot keep his king pleased." And like this the stories of King Krishnadeva Rai and minister Tenali Rama kept on evolving and people kept listening. Thanks.

Prime Minister: - You had such exactness in narration, you touched upon so many fine details, I understand that children, adults whoever listens to this will remember many things. You narrated in such a nice way and what a special coincidence that nutrition week is going on in the country and your story is connected to food. And, definitely, I urge storytellers like you and other people to find ways to connect the new generation of our country with lives of great men and women through stories; we should also think of ways to publicise the art of storytelling, popularise it in every home specially with good stories for children.... Telling good stories to children should be a part of public life. We should work together in that direction, in creating that atmosphere. But I felt very nice talking to all of you. Best wishes to all of you. Thank you.

Chorus: Thank you sir.

We heard these sisters who carry forward the unending stream of our traditions through the medium of storytelling. When I was talking to them on the phone, it was such a lengthy conversation and then I felt that there is a time limit for 'Mann Ki Baat', so I've decided to upload all the things that we spoke about on my NarendraModiApp—you can definitely listen the entire stories on the app. In this 'Mann Ki Baat', I have presented for you only a tiny excerpt! I would definitely urge you to take out sometime in the family every week for stories, and you can also allot every family member, for a given week, a topic, like, say compassion, sensitivity, valour, sacrifice, bravery – choose any one sentiment to be dwelt upon by all members of the family, that week and everybody will source out a story on the same subject and all of the family members in a group will tell individual tales!

You will see, what a huge treasure will get accrued in the family, how great research work will get carried out and how much delight it will bring to everyone! And a new life, a new energy will be generated in the family - in the same way we can carry out another task. I urge all storytellers that soon we are going to celebrate 75 years of independence, can we propagate in our stories as many inspiring events as there were during the entire period of our enslavement! Especially, from 1857 to 1947, we can introduce every major or minor incident of this period to our new generation through stories. I am sure that you folks will definitely do this work. May this art of storytelling become stronger in the country, become more popularized and easier to imbibe- This is something we must all strive for!

My dear countrymen, come, let us now travel across the seven seas from the world of stories, listen to this voice!

“Namaste, brothers and sisters, my name is Sedu Dembele. I am from Mali, a country in West Africa. I had the opportunity to attend Kumbh Mela, the largest religious festival in India, in February. It is a matter of great pride for me. I felt good on being a part of Kumbh Mela and got to learn a lot about the culture of India by observing. I request that we be given the opportunity to visit India, once again so that we can learn more about India. Namaste.”

PM - Is it not interesting? So this was Sedu Dembele from Mali. Mali is a large and land locked country in West Africa, far from India. Sedu Dembele, is a teacher in a public school in Kita, a town in Mali, and teaches English, Music,

Painting, and drawing. But he also has another identity - people call him Hindustani's Babu, and, he takes great pride in being called so. Every Sunday afternoon, he presents an hour long radio program in Mali entitled 'Indian frequency on Bollywood songs!' He has been presenting it for the last 23 years. During the course of this program, he renders his commentary in French as well as in Mali's lingua franca known as Bombara, and does it in quite a dramatic fashion. He has deep seated love for India. Another reason for his profound association with India is that, he was also born on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Seduji has started another two-hour program now at 9 pm every Sunday, in which he narrates the story of an entire Bollywood film in French and Bombara. Sometimes while relating to an emotional scene, he, along with his listeners, cry together! Seduji's father had introduced him to Indian culture. His father worked in a cinema theatre where Indian films were also exhibited. On this 15<sup>th</sup> August, through a video in Hindi, he greeted the people of India on Independence Day. Today, his children sing the national anthem of India with great ease! You must watch both of these videos and feel their love for India. When Seduji visited Kumbh and at that time he was part of the delegation that I met, his passion for India, affection and love are indeed a matter of pride for all of us.

My dear countrymen, it is said here that the one who is rooted to the ground, is equally firm during the course of the biggest of storms. In this difficult period of Corona, our agricultural sector, our farmers are a living testimony to this. Even in this time of crisis, the agricultural sector of our country has again shown its resilience. Friends, the agricultural sector of the country, our farmers, our villages are the very basis of *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, a self reliant India. If they remain strong then the foundation of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* will remain strong. In the recent past, these areas have liberated themselves from many restrictions and tried to break free from many myths. I get many such letters from farmers, I've had a dialogue with farmer organizations, who inform me about new dimensions being added to the farming sector and the changes it is undergoing. What I have heard from them and whatever I have heard from others, I feel that today in Mann Ki Baat, I must tell you some things about those farmers. One such of our farmer brother lives in Sonipat district of Haryana, his name is Shri Kanwar Chauhan.

He told us how there was a time when he used to face great difficulties in marketing his fruits and vegetables outside the mandi, the market place. If he used to sell his fruits and vegetables outside the mandi, then, many a times his produce and carts would get confiscated. But, in 2014, fruits and vegetables were excluded from the APMC Act, which, greatly benefited him and fellow farmers in the neighborhood. Four years ago, he, along with fellow farmers of his village, formed a Farmer Producer's Organization. Today farmers in the village cultivate sweet corn and baby corn. Their produce is being supplied directly to Azadpur Mandi, Delhi, Big Retail Chains and Five Star Hotels. Today, the farmers of the village are earning rupees two and a half to three lakhs per acre annually by cultivating sweet corn and baby corn. Not only this, more than 60 farmers of this village, through construction of net house and poly house are producing various varieties of tomato, cucumber and capsicum and earning from 10 to 12 lakh rupees per acre every year.

Do you know what is different with these farmers? They have the power to sell their fruits and vegetables, anywhere and to anyone! And this power is the foundation of their progress. Now this power has also been imparted to other farmers of the country not only for marketing of the fruits and vegetables but whatever they are producing or cultivating in their fields, - paddy, wheat, mustard, sugarcane, whatever they are growing they have now got the freedom to sell where they can get a higher price according to their wish.

Friends, about three or four years ago fruits and vegetables were excluded from the purview of APMC in Maharashtra. An example of how this reform changed the state of farmers growing fruits and vegetables in Maharashtra is provided by Sri Swami Samarth Farm Producer Company limited - a Farmer Producer's Organization. Farmers in Pune and Mumbai are themselves running weekly markets. In these markets, the produce of about four and a half thousand farmers, of nearly 70 villages, is sold directly without any middleman! The rural youth are directly involved in the process of farming and selling to this market. This directly benefits the farmers and the youth of the village are gainfully employed.

Another example is from then district of Tamil Nadu, here the Tamil Nadu Banana farmer produce company; This Farmer Produce Company is a company just in name; in reality, these farmers together have formed a collective. It has

a very flexible system, and that too has evolved five-six years ago. This Farmer Collective purchased hundreds of metric tons of vegetables, fruits and Bananas from nearby villages during the lockdown, and supplied a vegetable combo kit to the city of Chennai.

You just think, how many youth did they employed, and the interesting fact is that, due to absence of middlemen, not only the farmer profited but the consumer also benefited. One such group of farmers hails from Lucknow. They named themselves the **Iraada**; Farmer Producer and they too during the lockdown, procured fruits and vegetables directly from the cultivators' fields, and sold directly in the markets of Lucknow, free from the middlemen, and got whatever price they demanded. Friends, Ismail Bhai is a farmer in Rampura village of Banaskantha in Gujarat. His story is also very interesting. Ismail Bhai wanted to do farming, but, now, as is these general attitude towards farming, his family raised eyebrows on the thoughts of Ismail Bhai! Ismail Bhai's father was into farming, but in that, he often incurred losses. Hence the father dissuaded...yet despite family members discouraging, Ismail Bhai decided that he would certainly take up farming. Ismail Bhai had resolved that he would dispel the notion of farming being a loss making activity and change the situation as well. He started farming, albeit using new methods and innovative techniques. Using drip irrigation he cultivated potatoes.... and today his potatoes are his hallmark. He is growing potatoes that are of very high quality. Ismail Bhai directly sells these potatoes to large companies, the middle men are just out of the question. And the result - he is earning handsome profits. He now has repaid all the debts of his father. And do you know the most significant fact? Today, Ismail Bhai is helping hundreds of farmers in his region. He is changing their lives too.

Friends, in present-times, the more modern alternatives we offer for agriculture, the more it will progress with newer innovations and techniques. Bijay Shanti of Manipur is in the news for her new innovation. She launched a start-up to develop thread from the Lotus stem. Today, her efforts and innovations have opened new avenues in the fields of lotus farming and textile.

My dear countrymen, I want to transport you to a period from our past. It is a

tale of 101 years ago. The year was 1919. The British rulers had slaughtered innocent civilians at Jallianwala Bagh. Post the massacre, a 12 year old boy visited the spot. A happy and agile boy but what he saw at Jallianwala Bagh was beyond his imagination. He was left stunned at how one could be so merciless. This innocent boy had started to burn in the fire of anger. At Jallianwala Bagh, he took a vow to fight the British rule. Did you come to know who am I referring to? Yes! I am speaking about Shahid Veer Bhagat Singh. Tomorrow, the 28th of September, we will celebrate the birth anniversary of Shahid Veer Bhagat Singh. I join my fellow countrymen in bowing before the paragon of courage and bravery, Shaheed Veer Bhagat Singh. Can you imagine that an Empire, which ruled over a huge chunk of the world, it was often said that the Sun never sets on this empire - such a powerful empire was terrified of this 23 year old. Shaheed Bhagat Singh was as much a fighter as he was a scholar, a thinker. Bhagat Singh along with his revolutionary friends, without caring for their own selves, carried out such daring acts, which had a huge bearing in the country attaining Freedom. Another appealing aspect of Shahid Veer Bhagat Singh's life is that he appreciated the importance of teamwork. Be it his devotion towards Lala Lajpat Rai or his camaraderie with fellow revolutionaries as ChandraShekhar Azad, Sukhdev, Rajguru amongst others, personal accolades were of no importance to him. He had a single mission for as long as he lived and he sacrificed his life for that mission - That mission was to free India of injustice and the British rule. I read a comment by Ajay SG from Hyderabad on the NaMo app. Ajay ji writes - How can today's youth strive to be like Bhagat Singh? Well see ; We may or may not be able to become like Bhagat Singh, but the love Bhagat Singh had for his country, the drive and motivation he had to do something for his country certainly resides in all our hearts. That would be our biggest tribute to Shahid Bhagat Singh. Four years ago, around this time, the world witnessed the courage, bravery and valiance of our soldiers during the Surgical Strike. Our brave soldiers had just one mission and one goal - To protect at all costs, the glory and honour of Mother India. They did not care a bit for their own selves. They marched forward on their path of duty and we all witnessed how they came out victorious. They enhanced Mother India's pride.

My dear countrymen, in the coming days, we countrymen will remember many great personalities who have made an indelible contribution in the making of India. 2<sup>nd</sup> of October is an auspicious and inspirational day for all of us. This day, we remember two great sons of Ma Bharati - Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Revered Babu's thoughts and ideals are more relevant now than earlier. The economic principles of Mahatma Gandhi, if we would have been able to understand their spirit, grasp it and practically implement them, then the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan* would not have been needed today. Gandhiji's economic vision understood the pulse of the country and had the fragrance of India in them. Revered Babu's life reminds us to ensure that all our actions should be such that it leads to the well being of the poor and deprived. Likewise, Shastriji's life imparts to us the message of humility and simplicity. 11<sup>th</sup> of October is also a special day for us. This day, we remember Bharat Ratna Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan ji on his birth anniversary. JP played a pioneering role in safeguarding our Democratic values. We also remember Bharat Ratna Nanaji Deshmukh, whose birth anniversary is also on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Nanaji Deshmukh was a close companion of Jayaprakash Narayan ji. When JP was fighting the crusade against corruption, a potentially fatal attack was carried out on him in Patna. It was Nanaji Deshmukh then, who took the blow onto himself. Nanaji Deshmukh was grievously injured in this attack but he managed to successfully save the life of JP. This 12<sup>th</sup> of October is the birth anniversary of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia ji too - She had dedicated her entire life in the service of the people. She was from a royal family and had no dearth of wealth, power and other resources. Even then, she spent her whole life in public service, just like a mother would with the same devotion with Vatsalya Bhava. She had a very generous heart. This October 12<sup>th</sup> will mark the conclusion of her birth centenary year celebrations and today when I speak about Rajmata ji, I am reminded of an emotional incident. I have had the opportunity to have worked with her for many years, there are many incidents to recall. However, I feel like sharing one particular incident. We were on the 'Ekta Yatra', spanning Kanyakumari to Kashmir. The yatra was moving under the leadership of Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi ji. It was harsh winters, months of December-January. Past midnight, around 12 or 1, we reached Shivpuri, near Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh. At the place where we would stay, since we would all be tired from the day's travels, we would freshen up and sleep and prepare for the morning as well. It was around 2, when I, after having showered and freshened up was preparing to sleep, when I heard a knock on the door. I opened the door and it was Rajmata Sahab who was standing in front of me. I was astounded to see Rajmata Sahab, that too on such a cold winter night. I offered my pranaam and said - 'Mother, you at this midnight hour?' She said 'No son, here...Modi ji, you have this warm milk and sleep thereafter'. She had herself brought turmeric milk. However, when I looked to the other side, it was not just me! The entire travelling establishment of the Yatra, around 30-40 people including our drivers and other workers....She visited each room and

herself ensured that all of us had milk at 2 in the night! I can never forget this incident as it taught me about the love of a mother and motherly affections. It is our good fortune that such great personalities have reared the soil of India with their sacrifice and their tapasya. Come, let us all strive together to build such an India, on which these great personalities would pride themselves. Their dreams should be our motivation!

My dear countrymen, in this Corona time-period, I would once again remind you - Always wear a mask and do not venture out without a face shield. 'Do Gaz ki doori', social distancing will protect you and your family. These few rules are the weapons in our fight against Corona, a powerful resource to save the life of every citizen. And let us not forget, till the time we have any vaccine, we will not let up in our efforts. You stay healthy, your family stays healthy, with these wishes, I thank you all!

Namaskar!