who had drifted away from the Congress during 1984-89, the years when Rajiv was in power.

Had the Janata Dal government's collapse in end-1990 been followed by imme-
diate elections, the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi may have won the 240 plus seats
it needed to claw its way back to office, albeit with a bit of horse-trading. How-
ever, the wounded warrior was not yet trusting of an electorate that had so re-
cently ditched him, and hence propped up the Chandra Shekhar regime, a step that
led to a steady identification of the Con-
gress with the government in office, and
a consequent continuous fall in its popu-
larity. It was perceived by the voters that
the Chandra Shekhar interregnum was
crafted solely in order to enable the Con-
gress to revive itself financially, and
that when it had generated a sufficient war
chest, that party would withdraw support
and force new elections. However, when the 'Young Turk' PM saw to it that his
men had the bigger bite, trouble ensued,
and very quickly friction increased thanks
to a Rajiv Gandhi raging at reports of the
runaway fund collection being done by a
government supported by him. Had Chandra Shekhar agreed to the proposal
to accept Rajiv's minions as ministers in
charge of juicy departments, he may have
been allowed to limp on as prime minister
for a year more. Convinced of his own
popularity, he refused, opting to face a poll
for which both he and Rajiv were com-
pletely unprepared.

Funds were painfully dug out and paid
in two tranches to the candidates. Publicity
material and vehicles were procured. In
Tamil Nadu Jayalalitha had made it clear
that she did not require Rajiv to 'waste'
time on the state, as she herself would
ensure victory. The state government, now
under central rule, warned Rajiv not to
come to Madras, or if he did so, to avoid
the planned meeting at Sripurambudur.
They had been getting reports that trouble
could be expected there. Influential Con-
gress persons in Delhi countered this advice, insisting that Rajiv visit
Sripurambudur, indeed that he spend the
night there at the home of a local business-
man, which latter request at least his
securitymen vetoed. Nine calls were put
through to Tamil Nadu governor Bhimsa
Narain Singh and his advisers from AICC
headquarters and 10 Janpath insisting on
Rajiv going to Sripurambudur. Like his
mother Indira, who had insisted that her
very killers remain on duty close to her,
Rajiv too agreed with the view of his
courtiers that he must go for the meeting,
and that the warnings of danger should not
stand in the way. Finally, the governor's
administration gave up its efforts at per-
suading the former premier from coming
to Sripurambudur. At the site, other mem-
ber of the Congress Party escorted the
LTTE operative Dhanu through the secur-
ity cordon, and positioned her close to the
man who had sent the IPKF into Sri Lanka.
Strangely, the very Justice Jain who spent
years poring over numerous conspiracy
theories skipped over the role of Rajiv's
own party members in getting him to the
danger zone and the human bomber close
enough to him to finish him. These indi-
viduals are even today active in politics,
many close to Sonia Mano Gandhi. At
Sripurambudur, Rajiv looked forward to
wrapping up the meeting quickly and
returning to Madras for some sleep. It was
to be a different sort of sleep from any that
he had had before.

Remembers M N Srinivas

His ethical stance toward thinking and knowing and a basic
fascination with exploring the boundaries of human thought made
M N Srinivas, forever, a child of ideas. His most biting comments
were reserved for ideologues and ideologies, those that refused to
participate in the play and pleasure of new ideas and expressions.

SUNDAR SARUKKA

It is not an accident that the The Re-
membered Village is one of the semi-
inal books by M N Srinivas. This book
stands as a monument to the many beliefs
he cherished: the power of memory and
the importance of remembering, the
need to possess the eye of the novelist in
understanding people and society, the
honesty of the intellect in any intellectual
process, and simplicity of expression
that is itself so complex to achieve. This
book is not just an ethnographic account
of Rampura – it is also about the sensi-
tivity of memory and the ethics of re-
membering. It is this ethics of honesty,
simplicity and integrity that allowed him
to re-member Rampura, an ethics that
marked his approach to intellectual
thought until the end. In our re-collection
of Srinivas, in the texts we create of the
"Remembered Srinivas", it is these quali-
ties of remembrance that we need to hold
and cherish.

Remembrance is not always an act that
we enter into when a person is no longer
with us. Remembrance is primarily about
presence and absence. It is the creation of
a narrative of that which is absent. It is the
quality of the void, of an absence, that
incites the move to remember. This ab-
ence is not marked only by life and death.
We remember the absent and in the process
of remembering construct a presence of
the absent. We remember the living as
much as we do the dead but our stories
and memories of the living are fundamen-
tally different from those of the dead. Our
remembrance of the living is one that is
always potentially open to a response from
the person who is remembered, always
open to the potentiality of acceptance
and rejection. The memory of the dead,
the re-membering of the dead, carries within
it the angst, the acceptance that this re-
ponse can never be had. This remem-
brane is a voice offered to the void and
because of this, those of us who remember
the dead have to invest in ourselves the
ethics of speaking for ourselves as well as
the person who is no more with us. It is
this ethics of remembrance, of speaking
both for oneself and the other, that
Srinivas so elegantly exemplified in his
intellectual life.

It is not easy to delineate this ethics of
remembering. Although never explicitly
acknowledged as such, The Remembered
Village is an attempt in this direction. In
this book he has already shown us the way
to remember, to go beyond the written
presence of his notes and extract the images
of Rampura which had become a part of
him, become a member of his own self.
By doing this and succeeding in the evo-
cation of it, he has given us an insight into
how presence is so powerfully captured in
absence. He has shown us how to pay
homage to absence by gathering all that
is present – that what is called remem-
bering. Writing about Rampura, reconstruc-

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ing the village from written notes, is very different from writing about it from one’s memory. The legitimisation of ‘truth’ to one’s observations as an ethnographer, anthropologist and sociologist is not the legitimisation accorded to memory without the aid of the written. When Srinivas wrote the book in spite of losing his notes he was writing a monument to the ethics of remembrance. In doing this, he was depriviliging the excessive preoccupation with the ‘objectification’ of writing by replacing the written object with the remembering subject. Accomplishing this with the ethics of honesty and integrity, his book is a testament to the ethics of remembering itself — of creating a presence of the notes that had become ashes, a fate reserved for the bodily presence of many of us.

But honesty and integrity are terms that only imperfectly capture the character of this ethical mode of remembrance. The central ethics of remembrance is already present in the word: re-member. When we are asked to remember a person, we are asked to respond to the dynamics of this hyphenation. The prefix re means again, back, anew. The word ‘member’, as the Webster dictionary has it, is described as “to bear in mind; to keep in the memory; to keep (a person) in mind with some feeling, as of pleasure, gratitude, etc.; to be careful not to forget” and so on. But these descriptions do not make explicit the ethical dimension of remembering. This is made explicit in the membership created in the act of remembering. A membership that binds together the remembered and the rememberer. It is this idea of the ‘member’ that supplies the ethical response in the act of remembrance. (The dictionary describes the word ‘member’ as a “part or organ of a human; a distinct element of a whole; a person belonging to some community, association”.)

To re-member is thus to make the remembered person a member of ourselves, and also to remember that the remembered person is a part, an element of those of us who take upon ourselves to remember. The voice of the remembered is also a part of our own voice. The gift of remembrance is then to cherish the remembered other as part of our own self — whether we are adulatory or critical. It is this engagement with the quality of remembrance that is dominantly found in Srinivas’s reflections from his Remembered Village to his more recent observations on the self-in-the-other. Although quite different from certain philosophical preoccupations on the self and the other, his was an anthropological observation dependent on a larger ethical principle of acknowledging and being sensitive to the other(s) in our self/ selves. It is this awareness and acknowledgement that uniquely characterised his intellectual and personal interactions.

I remember the last five years of his academic life as a colleague of his, much junior to him, at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. And what I recollect most vividly is the ethical responsibility he insisted upon in any academic and intellectual enterprise. He demanded of himself the honesty, clarity and simplicity of expression that he expected of his colleagues. His participation in the lectures in the institute, whatever the subject of the talk or however junior the speaker was, was aimed at instilling these attributes. Because of this, he always responded with innocent enthusiasm to new ideas, whether in sociology, philosophy, literature or lately, even in computers. This ethical stance toward thinking and knowing and a basic fascination with exploring the boundaries of human thought made him, forever, a child of ideas. His most biting comments were reserved for ideologues and frozen ideologies, those that refused to participate in the play and pleasure of new ideas and expressions.

It is this youthful spirit that permeated his view of people and societies. Adding to this spirit was his prodigious memory of names, events, incidents and stories. It was sheer joy listening to his detailed descriptions of people and events, laced with cryptic asides. And when he was speaking you could see the energy and delight in his demeanour — if we were all younger, I would have called it mischievous. It is this age of innocence that marked his approach to academic life, at least those years I shared with him at NIAS. His approach to academics, as far as I understood it, was based on this cardinal principle that no intellectual growth is possible when thought was already based on rigid ideologies. It is also this that made him see the world in a grain of sand, and the society in the gesture of an individual. Thus, every little event and person was worthy of respect and thought but never of judgment.

Srinivas’s contribution over the last many years to our institute, which was in its infant stage, was immense, whether as the chair of the library committee, or helping to formulate policies for the institute. As much as he was an institution builder, he was also a maker of memories, a magician of the spirit. It is only given to a few to have this ability and capacity to create memories for others: whether it was his inexhaustible stories and anecdotes, his care and concern for the ailments of the institute staff, his energetic participation in the many courses (which included playing a cricket match — bowling and batting — with one group of participants, when he was 80), his continued insistence on meticulousness in academic life, childish enthusiasm in his academic, social and personal engagements. It is our remembrance of these memories, a collection of images and texts inhabiting various textures of thought, which contribute to the ‘Remembered Srinivas’.

Remembering Srinivas is to first acknowledge the quality of the person who has gifted us the potential to remember. Our remembrances of him speak eloquently of the afterlife, a term used by Walter Benjamin in another context. Remembering Srinivas is this acknowledgment of his afterlife and pays homage to the gift that he has bestowed on us in catalysing our own capacity to remember.

If there is an epitaph I could write (being well aware that he would have found a sociological story in the inability to write an epitaph for those of us who are not entombed, not written into the ground, but only scattered in the winds like spoken words, making us remember once more the ethics of remembrance when we are without the objectified written), it would only be to say: “He died young.”

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