

Back to basics: An anthropologist who probed roots

In a society where it is fashionable to be pessimistic, M.N. Srinivas managed not only to rise above cynicism, but enthuse his peers to rise with him, according to close associate and friend Prof. Roddam Narashimha, director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies here. Srinivas, 83, Oxford-educated and "typical Mysorean" died after a brief illness in the city on Tuesday morning. Srinivas was J.R.D. Tata visiting professor at the same institute.

His friends, peers and associates use a single word to describe the man — who is arguably one of the finest social anthropologists India has produced — class. "His intel-

lectual class set him apart. It's not often that one chances to associate with people like Srinivas," director of the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Studies, Prof. C.N.R. Rao, a close associate and another "typical Mysorean," said. Prof. Rao had known Srinivas for a few decades and recalls that "he always wanted me to become famous."

Though the two pursued different disciplines, with Prof. Rao carving himself a niche in solid state physics, and Srinivas demonstrating an uncanny grasp of the Indian society in books like *The Remem-*

bered Village and *Caste: Its 20th Century Avatar Through Personal writings*, Srinivas' analytical abilities formed the bridge between the two.

"He was very clear-headed and able to encourage and advise me on various matters. It was a plea-

sure knowing him and it is great personal loss to me," Prof. Rao says.

This intellectual ambidexterity immediately impressed Prof. Narashimha when he worked with him. "Srinivas was the most

remarkable man I ever met. His grasp of issues relating to the complex dynamics of castes and sub-castes in India was just as tenacious as his understanding of information technology," Prof. Narashimha said. This deep understanding of issues not only brought

him the Padma Bhushan and a string

of fellowships at institutions like the Royal Anthropological Institute and American Academy of Arts and Sciences, but also saw the professor play a key role in fashioning India's bid to achieve IT-greatness.

"He was one of the key people involved in framing the Bangalore declaration of IT, a document outlining the future of IT in the country adopted in November 1998," recalls Prof. Narashimha.

"His fertile mind could generate ideas relating to religion as efficiently as solutions to science and technology problems. It has been a pleasure being associated with him," he said. "Not only did he understand the strength that lay in Indian society, he drew inspiration from it to emerge as one of India's finest minds and an exemplary human being," he said.

Srinivas is survived by his wife and two daughters.

OBITUARY / M.N. SRINIVAS (1916-1999)

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