

# M.N. Srinivas: the quintessential Bangalorean

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BANGALORE: Eighty-three-year old — but the fire still burnt bright. Academic, intellectual, celebrated social anthropologist and yet so down-to-earth.

M.N. Srinivas called *The Times of India* office, Bangalore, a couple of weeks ago. "The Bangalore City Corporation is using granite to pave the sidewalks. This is a tragedy. They are quarrying all those wonderful rock formations on the outskirts, ruining the aesthetics of this city and causing great harm to the environment. Please write an article that will put pressure on the BCC to stop this vandalism."

Three months earlier he was on the phone, "Why are they allowing these huge trucks and lorries to hurtle through residential areas? Are the police blind?"

Srinivas always poked fun at himself in the presence of younger people. "I'm becoming a relic in this hi-tech city," he said. "All you fellas use computers, but I still write long-hand. It's difficult for me to sit before a PC."

He kept track of global news, environmental movements, the conspicuous consumption of urban India, the rise of communalism. But he never became cynical. "This country has an infinite capacity to reinvent itself"

Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas had made it his life work studying the country's castes and sub-castes and their mind-boggling insidious-



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ness, first as a student, then as a teacher. "We have been chasing caste instead of poverty for far too long. How I wish we could change that," he had remarked.

There was about this good professor not just the warmth of a gentleman but the dignity of a guru

who had been a beacon of light to thousands of students of sociology in India and elsewhere.

And it's his classic *The Remembered Village* that we will always treasure. "I had written about my experiences working in a village called Rampura near Mysore as a

research student and was all set to get it printed. As a fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study in the Behavioural Sciences at Stanford, I had found the right atmosphere to articulate my findings. The Vietnam protest movement was on and some arsonists set fire to the build-

ing. My office and my papers were gutted. I was shattered. One day a colleague — Prof Sol Tax suggested that I write the book from memory, hence the title."

In the foreword to the book Sol Tax remarks, "Prof Srinivas's monograph, based on the human mind's extraordinary capacity to bring forth significant details of the past, is a major ethnographic portrait woven from the warp of immersion in the sea of original data and the weft of purposeful seeking after a description of a village in its own terms. Its success will suggest not that we should all destroy our field-notes, but that we need not let them destroy our art!"

Srinivas returned to India and after working in various institutions made his home in Bangalore where with VKRV Rao he founded the Institute of Social and Economic Change.

He authored many books including *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* and *Social Change in Modern India*. His essays on various subjects in newspapers and magazines that had been published in book form was in its third reprint.

"One day, hopefully in the near future, our people will have access to education, pure water, clean air, a better way of life," he had said.

May be that wish will come true. Because Srinivas believed in the intrinsic worth of this country. A banyan tree has fallen. It'll take a long while for another to fill its place.