

## CULTURE AT THE WEBSITE

# No reason to feel outraged

By ASHOK MITRA

**T**HE death of the don of Indian sociologists, M N Srinivas, has not caused the slightest ripple. The newspapers, most of them, particularly those in the north and the east, completely ignored the report of his passing. They had other priorities to cater to, such as the cussedness of Australian umpires in judging the Indian cricket captain out when, according to patriotic viewers, he was not so, or the shenanigans indulged in by this or that Yadav leader in the backwoods of Bihar or Uttar Pradesh.

## Similar silence

About a year ago, a similar silence had greeted the report of P N Haksar's passing. The Haksars and the Srinivases never cared while alive about the posthumous treatment to be accorded to them by the media. Men of their ilk were responsible for the stature India had reached, in various phases, in the course of the past half century. Since, in the view of the New Testament, those five decades were a huge waste, personalities who defined that period deserved to be treated with, if not contempt, at least indifference.

Unfortunately, though, there is a little bit more to it, to art, the aspect of the progressive spread of illiteracy. The reference here is not to the fifty per cent of the nation who have been carefully left outside the orbit of even primary education, and whose numbers rise every year. The darkness encircling them has been in the nature of a continuum.

Men like Haksar and Srinivas might have tried their best to persuade the political establishment to take certain essential measures so that the darkness that has turned out to be the fate of the nation's majority. Their endeavour added up to a big Zero. The dumb millions were obviously altogether unaware of the altruism of which they were the intended beneficiaries. The free market and

even dissemination of knowledge do not always go together.

Infinitely much more worrying is the superciliousness noticeable amongst the so-called elite sections of society, who could not care less whether the man whose death was reported at the bottom of the seventh column of an inside page had played at some juncture a crucial role in enhancing, through his singular contributions, the nation's global image. This defunct individual, they have satisfied themselves, did not belong to the category that matters, and were not recipients of any imprimatur of approval from international finance capital. The latter would also include the website crowd and those others well versed in the state-of-the-art devices of Information Technology. These devices, installed in affluent houses and bureaus in country after country assist the rich set to indulge in other relaxations.

## More light-heartedness

The accent without question is on light-heartedness and even more light-heartedness. The attraction of classical music, for instance, is on the wane, so too is respect and regard for the grand and timeless themes of scientists and technologists, including those who have been generous enough to have migrated to the United States from their native land, have rendered themselves into slaves of computers.

Theories that are not derivatives of computer manipulations receive the short shrift from today's whiz kids. Some of them of course also train themselves as economists, statisticians and accountants of the first order, ready to further and advance the cause of information technology. They have, at this moment a high market demand and are paid fabulous salaries.

What a tragedy though, they will

not have heard of M N Srinivas's contributions on the theme of 'Sanskritisation' of India's so called inferior castes, nor will they be familiar with reports of scores of young Ph.D aspirants who flocked to the country from American universities in the Fifties and Sixties, nurturing the hope that Professor Srinivas could recommend for them a village in either nearby Karnataka or remote Himachal Pradesh; they would then gather the data, fit in the hypothesis and present professor Srinivas with a pleasant bouquet of scholastic wisdom of which he was the inspirer in the first place. And the phenomenon of hundreds of Indian students trekking from all over the country, not necessarily agreeing with him, many calling him a traditionalist or a reactionary to his face. He, and they, would enjoy the exchange of academic banter.

The silence that has greeted the news of Srinivas's death suggests that such anecdotes will not any longer even pass as respectable ancient history. The website crowd will consider pastimes of this kind a huge waste of time. Old fogeys die, don't they, so what is biting you?

## Two cultures

We have, it seems, entered once more, with appropriate modulations, the realm of two cultures. One of them is constituted by the shrinking arena of learning and exchange of ideas within a small like minded circles in universities and outside. This thin assembly of learned individuals does not carry much social weight.

A numerically vastly superior, supercilious set have taken over the main quadrangle of academia. Discussion on literature concentrates on brittle English writings in India. The native languages are an embarrassment, not to be alluded to in polite society. A fate is

also likely to overtake Indian classical music, painting, art and architecture. The appropriate price\* has to be paid for globalisation.

Be reasonable, the literature in the domestic languages have a limited clientele, they are not a patch on the reach attainable via the global language, English. The state-of-the-art technology that has invaded and is invading the ramparts of music, arts, sculpture and architecture will similarly render the traditional discourses into irrelevance. A bonfire will be made of our heritage. That appears to be the agenda for at least the next fifty years.

## Realm of speculation

What happens beyond that point of time belongs to the realm of pure speculation. National pride may conceivably regroup itself. It is however found to encounter fierce resistance, even from within the country. A transformation of the external circumstances may nonetheless help the process. Once that begins to happen, native born geniuses will not have to migrate to the milieu of an alien culture in order to make a decent sort of living.

What do you know, maybe a young Ph.D aspirant, sitting at his website, in Lucknow or Hyderabad, will come across references to a twentieth century Indian scholar, M N Srinivas, who had done pioneering work in the historiography of sociology. The scholar's interest aroused, he may seek further counsel from a bunch of eminences from the university faculties at Minnesota or Wisconsin. M N Srinivas will receive recognition as a valid historical figure once these probes and searches are completed.

M N Srinivas, if he were around, would have enjoyed the joke. The Sanskritisation of sociology studies courtesy the website: is that not a destiny even the gods will come to adore?