I do not see harmony on the horizon

'I do not see harmony immediately on the horizon – in fact, I see the opposite. But, in 20 to 25 years, we will witness the effects of the changes that are taking place...'
The doyen of Indian sociology and Padma Bhushan award winner in 1976, M. N. SRINIVAS, discusses a wide range of social and cultural issues with UTTHAM SEN.

They are now important on the political scene, both at the district level and at the state level. There, there are the Rajputs, who are engaged in the production and sale of indigenous liquor, toddy and arrack. They are numerically strong and are concentrated in the western part of Karnataka. They have seen good days. And then, several other castes, e.g., the Bedas (Hunger), Beitas (fishermen) and others, are powerful in some pockets of Karnataka.

And then, I must also say that the Dalits in Karnataka have their share of power. They are in the Dasa community, which has given them access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.

The struggle for dominance has moved forward from small but ritually high and land-owning castes to the numerically strong, land-owning Vokkaligas, Lingayats, etc. Class which have numerical strength but whose members were either small land-owning or marginal farmers, have, through access to education and political power, begun to challenge the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. All these people also know that the Scheduled Castes (SCs), in particular, enjoy certain concessions and preferences given to them by the Constitution, which enables them to gain access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.

The struggle for dominance has moved forward from small but ritually high and land-owning castes to the numerically strong, land-owning Vokkaligas, Lingayats, etc. Class which have numerical strength but whose members were either small land-owning or marginal farmers, have, through access to education and political power, begun to challenge the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. All these people also know that the Scheduled Castes (SCs), in particular, enjoy certain concessions and preferences given to them by the Constitution, which enables them to gain access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.

Of course, it is the case of the Dalits in Karnataka who have their share of power. They are in the Dasa community, which has given them access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.

The struggle for dominance has moved forward from small but ritually high and land-owning castes to the numerically strong, land-owning Vokkaligas, Lingayats, etc. Class which have numerical strength but whose members were either small land-owning or marginal farmers, have, through access to education and political power, begun to challenge the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. All these people also know that the Scheduled Castes (SCs), in particular, enjoy certain concessions and preferences given to them by the Constitution, which enables them to gain access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.

The struggle for dominance has moved forward from small but ritually high and land-owning castes to the numerically strong, land-owning Vokkaligas, Lingayats, etc. Class which have numerical strength but whose members were either small land-owning or marginal farmers, have, through access to education and political power, begun to challenge the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. All these people also know that the Scheduled Castes (SCs), in particular, enjoy certain concessions and preferences given to them by the Constitution, which enables them to gain access to public power, education, etc. I think the vision is expanding.
Think I am wrong—Mr. Kanshi Ram should have visited Karnataka in 1990. He is about 10 years too late.

Our situation in Karnataka and the south generally is quite different from UP, Bihar, and Rajasthan, which Dr. A. R. Bose (the sociologist) has called the Himmat region. We are not Himrat. We are healthy. We are vigorous. The SCs and STs are being empowered. So, Mr. Kanshi Ram has missed the bus here.

I may be wrong. But let us see. Somebody will take me to place (on this).

Q: The Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, minorities and Dalits have turned the tables on the Congress in the north. Do you see such a thing happening here?

A: This is a very important political question. Because the traditional strength of the Congress was supposed to be the weaker sections—SCs, the tribes and the minorities—and now, in popular political wisdom, they are going over to the other parties, particularly in UP, to the JD (SP). The Congress has lost its base to the other parties, so goes the story.

To me, there are some inherent difficulties in envisaging this alliance on a long-term basis. In the rural areas, land is owned by the dominant castes, including the so-called upper castes, in the intermediate castes, and the STs and STs work as laborers on the land owned by them.

As I see it, since the SCs and STs are landless and are held in large parts of the country, they do not have education, and are boxed into the dominant caste which exploits and ill-treats them, there is a conflict of interests between the two.

They may tactically get together for immediate gains but, as a long-term phenomenon, I can’t see the JDOs and the SCAs forming a political alliance.

As I said earlier, there is a conflict between the dominant castes and the numerically strong castes, which now have access to education and political power at the local level and—through political power—access to education and to positions in the professions.

Don’t allow your emotions to influence your understanding of what is happening on the ground.

I am a sociologist. I try to look at what is happening on the ground and interpret it as honestly as I can...