

Professor M. N. Srinivas: In Memoriam

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KEY WORDS Hindu caste system *vis-a-vis* ritual idiom; purity-pollution observances; their theo-philosophical semantic and socio-cultural dialectic.

ABSTRACT Done in memoriam and divided into four sections, the present write-up opens, as it ends, with the author's heartfelt homage to late Professor M.N. Srinivas for whatever he owes him. His rigorous heart-searching has laid bare before him "full many a gem of purest ray serene" radiating the brilliance of the head and the warmth of the heart that "MNS" ever was, thereby treating the demise not only as a great loss to both anthropology and sociology but also as his personal loss in that it has created a void in the field of study of Hindu society and religion where "MNS" worked with great understanding and penetrating insight --- the domain which he has enriched with a luxuriant crop of concepts harvested over decades, that domina into which his benign spirit and his monumental work lured a host of his admirers and followers like the author, leading them all a kindly light, enthusing and inspiring them all to do better than ever before. Ritual idiom being the pivotal theme of Hindu theology and social organization which "MNS" studied against the backdrop of the Croogs of South India, his thesis earned him a doctoral degree from the University of Oxford, his rigorous methodological formulations won him universal acclaim and applause while securing him his definite niche in the discipline of his belongings and placing him in the galaxy of many an illustrious scholar across the globe. The third section of the write-up, thus attempts a hurried survey of the theme, starting off from Robertson Smith's and concluding with Henery Orenstein's contributions, while shedding a sharply focussed floodlight on those of several other students of anthropology/sociology of religion over a period of about a century.

Today when Professor M. N. Srinivas is no more with us, I get urgently reminded of what I owe to the departed soul: it forces me to sit in retrospection and highlight the contribution Professor Srinivas has made to our understanding of the Hindu caste system *vis-a-vis* its pivotal theme of ritual idiom. The rich conceptual crop he has harvested, the sound theoretical frame in which he has presented his formulations and the methodological rigour that he has invoked to his aid throughout his writings have rightly earned him the pride of place of a doyen in the discipline where he belonged and which he enriched. Nay,

he stood head and shoulders above many of his contemporaries in the social sciences at large.

Around three decades ago when I completed my doctoral thesis on Hindu Caste System and the Ritual Idiom, I had written about him and the renowned Indologist P. V. Kane in the "Acknowledgement", thus:

"In the course of my initial preparation insofar as the scope of Hindu ritual idiom is concerned, I owe much to Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India and I register here my note of thanks to Professor M. N. Srinivas".

About the latter I had written:

"Mahamahopadhyaya P. V. Kane's History of Dharmasastra (which has stayed with me, I should confess as a constant companion and a Holy Bible) has made it possible for me to tread safely on an otherwise insecure ground. Before tapping the scriptural sources I got acquainted with them through Professor Kane's encyclopaedic work, and I acknowledge my indebtedness to him".

Lest it should generate any misgivings about me, I had better hasten to add the following clarification. Sociological in its approach, my thesis makes a modest attempt wherein the Hindu social organization and its dynamics have been viewed in a historical perspective and within the framework of ritual purity-pollution theme. An humble link in the chain of such scholarly attempts as Hocart's, Srinivas', Stevenson's, Marriott's and Orenstein's, to name a few, my work is different in that it is based on the textual rather than the contextual data. It marks the proverbial black sheep in the horde of the empirically oriented sociological studies. But it also is one of the few scripture-based studies that seeks to evolve a picture of the ideal normative model of heuristic value to the empiricist. Treating the notions of ritual purity and pollution as all-pervasive and all-powerful, the study harps on the

solitary string its idiom are the result of the concurrent structural principle of dichotomization characterized by opposition and arrangement along vertical plane.

It goes further to remind me of what he had written to me when a complimentary copy of my published doctoral thesis was sent to him for his comments. He showed his overtures of kindness by rushing a brief note to me, telling me how much he was delighted to read it and giving me perhaps the greatest compliment ever:

"You have carried the work further beyond where I left it".

As Shakespeare had ever said that "brevity is the soul of wit", there can perhaps be no brief yet wittier appraisal than this about my doctoral thesis that bases itself on our ancient scriptures, right from the Vedas and down to the Puranas, albeit as a sweeping survey, as compared to Srinivas' masterly exposition of the Hindu ritual idiom that bases itself on a rigorous empirical study.

Ritual idiom is a phrase and a concept that belongs to the realm of religion which universally recognizes the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Belief relating primarily to the supernatural represents such cognitive and affective map as religion offers to explain what Otto logically establishes as the "mysterium - tremendum" (Otto, 1952: 12) or what Wordsworth poetically sums up as "the eternal deep haunted forever by the eternal mind" in his famous poem 'Ode on intimations of Immortality'. Beyond the natural which is relatively known and familiar, lies something as a world of the unfamiliar, the unknown and the mysterious; in short, a different order of reality that often expresses itself through symbolism, myths and rituals.

Many a celebrity in anthropology has written on religion, where each one has approached his subject matter from his chosen angle, where each one has spun his theory or proffered a crop of concepts, where each one has laid his primary emphasis on an aspect thereof that appeared central or pivotal to him. Here is a handful of sample of such conceptual/theoretical attempts and the major thrust areas of their studies drawn from all-too-diverse ethnographic contexts but having a bearing on the ritual idiom.

An eminent anthropologist of the second part of the nineteenth century, Robertson Smith, theologian and Old Testament scholar, was the first to have dwelt on the concept of the holy as the polar opposite of the unholy, thereby echoing the contemporary evolutionary fallacy in his assertion that "to distinguish between the holy and the unclean marks a real advance over savagery" (Douglas, 1966: 11). Frazer, the prolific writer, caught up the germinal idea from Smith (to whom he had dedicated one of the volumes of his encyclopaedic work), and gave it such colour and complexion as his "gold and purple style of writing" (ibid.: 24) could, only with a view to building up his *magnum opus* — The Golden Bough. For, it was in this work that Frazer derived his grand and impressive scheme of transition, "(proceeding) by a kind of Hegelian dialectic, from the stage of magic of that of science with an intermediate stage of religion" (ibid.: 23).

Fustel de Coulanges made the first clearly analytical use of the perspective of the sacred in the interpretation of social organization and institutional change in his book - *The Ancient City*. Emphasizing the casual primacy of the religious whence the family as an atomic sociopolitical unit proceeded, Fustel argued that the tribe and the city-state in Greece and Rome virtually resulted as the necessary corollary of vertical extension of the same structural pattern that yielded family — each unit being organized around and identified with the sacred fire which "ceased to glow upon the altar only when the entire family had perished.... In misfortune man betook himself to his sacred fire, and heaped reproaches on it; in good fortune he returned it thanks.... The sacred fire was the providence of the family" (Nisbet, 1967: 239).

It is interesting to recall how the binary composition of the Roman society into the polar opposites of the Patricians and the Plebeian was also founded on the sacred fire — the former possessed it, the latter were without it. Hence their inequality of status, rights and privileges.

Fustel further singled out the forces of secularization and intellectual revolution as accounting for the disintegration of the city states — a movement from the sacred to the secular — in a vein so very similar to that in which his

academic forerunner in historical jurisprudence, Henry Summer Maine, epitomized the evolution of the legal notions in the oft-quoted passage: "the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from status to contract" (Maine, 1959: 141).

The sociological slant that Fustel added to the concept of the sacred, was invested with a full sociological load at the hands of his disciple, Emile Durkheim, in his classic work — *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The former harped on the string of the sacred and its casual primacy in relation to the Graeco-Roman urban matrix; the latter made more rigorous effort to define the nature and significance of the sacred, drawing on a richer body of ethnographic literature and working on a larger canvas but with an all-too-sharp focus. For, describing the religion phenomena as "naturally arranged in two fundamental categories — beliefs and rites wherein the first are states of opinion, and consist in representations and are the determined modes of action", Durkheim has referred to the process of dichotomization of beliefs — a process which is universal and which presupposes "a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct forms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred (profane, scare)" (Durkheim, 1964: 36).

Spelling out the syndrome of general characteristics of "(the) religious phenomena (as) a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable, into two classes which embrace all that exists (and) which radically exclude each other" (ibid.: 40), he has also referred to

- a. "the hierarchy of things (wherein the sacred objects) are naturally considered superior in dignity and power to profane things" (ibid.: 37);
- b. "the existence of sacred things of every degree" (ibid.: 32);
- c. the reciprocity of dependence between gods and men (ibid.: 38);
- d. the universality of contrast between the "two worlds (of the sacred and the profane) between which there is nothing in common" (ibid.: 38-9);
- e. the two worlds "not only conceived of as separate, but as even hostile and jealous ri-

vals of each other (insofar as) the sacred thing is par excellence that which the profane should not touch with impunity" (ibid.: 40);

- f. "the two classes (of objects that) cannot even approach each other and keep their own nature at the same time" (ibid.: 40).

Dwelling upon the rites as "the visible manifestations of the communion of spirits, of the consensus of ideas and faiths" (ibid.: 41) Durkheim discusses their four types:

- a. "the sacrificial rites (which) through some mode of transubstantiation..... bridge the gap between profane and sacred in symbolic way";
- b. "the imitative rites (which) by focusing upon an ideal situation, be it totem or god..... supply the means whereby men may emulate and thus be lifted up spiritually and morally";
- c. "the representative rites (which have) for their primary function the commemorating of the group's continuity with past and future, thus representing, through sacred observances, the links that each living member has with both ancestors and posterity"; and
- d. "the particular rites in which the spirit of unease, of latent pessimism, of apprehension, is present" (ibid.: 249-50).

Durkheim took up the religio-sacred as a sociological category; Rudolf Otto took it up with a view to probing into the deeper psychic realms whence emerged the feeling of the holy. For, the widely travelled German professor of theology who was a blend of the theological scholarship of the Orient and the Occident, and who was "much more a religious philosopher than a dogmatic theologian" (Otto, 1952: xi), devoted himself to the sacred-profane dichotomy in his extensively read and acclaimed book — *The Idea of the Holy*. Christening the sacred as the numinous (which coinage of his "has been widely received as a happy contribution to the theological vocabulary" (ibid.: xvi) that represents both a category of value and a state of mind, Otto treated it as "objective and outside the self" (ibid.: 11) while equating the profane with the "non-religious mood of everyday experience" (ibid.: 12).

Epitomizing the feeling of the numinous into a frozen metaphor as the *mysterium tremendum*, Otto held that "conceptually *mysterium* denotes

merely that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar" (ibid.: 13): "it is the 'wholly other' (*alium*) which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar.... filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment" (ibid.: 26) and attended with a triad of emotional elements: "the element of awfulness which seizes upon a man with paralysing effect" (ibid.: 14); the element of overpoweringness (*majestas*) "in relation to (which) the creature-consciousness (dawns) as a shadow or subjective reflection of it" (ibid.: 31) and the element of energy or urgency "which is particularly vividly perceptible in the.... wrath, and which everywhere clothes itself in symbolic expressions vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, activity, impetus" (ibid.), "along with the element of fascination so that these two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness (are) at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomena in the whole history of religion" (ibid.: 31).

As both a taxonomic device and a fundamental cultural value determining the normative and behavioural patterns, the theme of ritual purity and pollution has provided an overall ideological base to the Hindu philosophy, theology, liturgy and ethics. The epic-long history of Hindu social organization, too, appears to be rooted in this theme which has been often given cultural re-definitions from time to time. For, basically firmly resting on some universalistic absolute premises, the theme has been so all-pervasive that zealous and scrupulous efforts have been continuously made by both the Hindu codes and the commentators therein towards defining with precision the import of purity and pollution, stressing the nature and origin of pollution as well as the ingenious modes of its removal in order that attainment of purity may be possible.

A study based on the scriptural and historical sources, Ketkar's book – *The History of Caste in India* – stands out as a landmark in the Indological research on the origin, nature and growth of the Hindu caste system. It represents a trend marked by a blend of sociological bias in the treatment of scriptural/historical data. Defining caste as "a social group having two charac-

teristics: (a) membership confined to those born of members and (including) all persons so born; (b) the members.... forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the social group" (Ketkar, 1909: 13), he further adds: "The caste system was supported not only by theological doctrines like *karma* and the transmigration of soul, but also by ideas like those regarding purity and pollution which had a practical bearing on life" (ibid.: 116).

Ketkar has defined at length the nature of the Hindu theory of purity and pollution which dichotomizes "various articles, hours, conditions, and places, almost everything that can be imagined" (ibid.: 122) into the polar realms of the pure and the impure as well as the complementary notions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness respectively, and which emphasises scrupulous observance of dietary injunctions. Ketkar has, thus, regarded the theme of purity and pollution as "the chief principle on which the entire (caste) system turns" (ibid.: 121) and concluded it by observing: "To sum up, in short, the caste system sought justification in the theories of *karma* and transmigration of souls. The various gradations were simply a natural result of wild and monstrous ideas regarding purity and pollution" (ibid.: 123).

The Oxford-educated anthropologist, classical scholar and archaeologist, Arthur Maurice Hocart, treated "religion and social organization (as) but two aspects of the same thing" (Hocart, 1950: 1) and harped on his solitary string (not much unlike a Fustel de Coulanges) that the institution of the sacred fire and rituals around it account for the Hindu social organization as much as they explain it, after surveying the caste-like phenomena and fitting them in a well-nigh global perspective, in Persia, Greece and so forth (ibid.: 69f). In his book – *Caste: A Comparative Study*, Hocart examines the Hindu scriptural sources, especially the "Rgveda X. 90 (which, according to him) expresses this theory by making caste proceed from the sacrifice", (and argues with vehemence that) "it is curious that this formulation should have been treated as fantastic theology, when Manu has told us very clearly in what sense the castes are born of the ritual" (ibid.: 21). The initial fourfold Varnas (according to Hocart) sprang up from division of labour, each

with its specialization centring on the ritual of sacrifice: the Brahmanas as the priestly class performing sacrifices; the Ksatriyas as the royalty offering sacrifices; the Vaisyas as the providers to feed the sacrifice from their lands and cattle; and the Sudras as the low castes serving the first three orders (ibid.: 40).

Proceeding as they do from and for the ritual, all the castes performed their allotted role to make up the ritual. The four primal varnas apart, each occupationally specialized caste played its role and became a priestly caste, as it were, because of its association with the ritual. On the basis of the responses from his Tamil informants of Ceylon, Hocart rushes to the conclusion: "... the drummers are a kind of priests, and that is why they form a caste...." (ibid.: 10) and "priest, washerman and drummer are treated alike; for they are all priests; only the Brahmana is a higher kind of priest and so munificently rewarded" (ibid.: 44).

Toeing the line with Durkheim and building up his general theory of the social function of rites and ceremonies in his empirical study - *The Andaman Islanders*, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown championed the Durkheimian view, while at the same time reconciling, unlike Durkheim, the evolutionist and diffusionist approaches and, thereby, opening up an effective dialogue between British social anthropology and French sociology (Hays, 1958: 313).

Radcliffe-Brown viewed social system as a system of values — moral, aesthetic, economic, ritual and so forth. While discussing, in the course of his Frazer Lecture, the oft-debated Polynesian word "taboo" (which, according to Hoebel, carries "the overtones of the French *defence de toucher*" (Hoebel, 1958: 536), he proposed the alternative terms like "ritual avoidance" or "ritual prohibition", and proceeded to define a ritual prohibition as "a rule of behaviour which is associated with a belief that an infraction will result in an *undesirable change in the ritual status of the person who fails to keep to the rule*" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1964: 135-36). He cited, among many other illustrations, those relating to the ritual prohibitions from the fifth chapter of Leviticus — an Old Testament scripture of the Hebrews which contains "general liturgical laws governing worship, sacrifice, and purification (as well as) rules

regarding individual conduct" (ibid.) only to indicate how the notion of sin, uncleanness and/or guilt attends on the infraction of a ritual commandment or prohibition.

Rites mean to him "the regulated symbolic expressions of certain sentiments" (ibid.: 170) associated with ritual commandments and prohibitions. Ritual value invariably gets linked to a rite. Hence, "the Andamanes taboos relating to the animals and plants used for food are means of affixing a definite social value to food, based on its social importance" (ibid.: 151). In other words, he struck a correlation between commensality and cooperation as governed by ritual and taboo.

One of the many illustrious students of Radcliffe-Brown was M. N. Srinivas who produced a thoroughgoing empirical study - *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* - a work which is often hailed as a classic, "strictly sociological (and) the first monograph of an Indian caste group containing an analysis and not simply a description", and in which, only at the behest of his teacher, Srinivas "started applying some of (Radcliffe-Brown's) ideas regarding the interrelation of religion and society" (Srinivas, 1952: xi).

Presenting a detailed account of the varied manifestations of *pole* (pollution) and *madi* (purity) from amongst the Coorgs, Srinivas proceeds to divide the external world into the polar opposites as the sacred and non-sacred where "the term 'sacred' is used in its wider sense as inclusive of 'good-sacredness' (as including) *all forms of ritually desirable states and conditions like auspiciousness and purity* (and) 'bad-sacredness' (as signifying) *all forms of ritually undesirable states and conditions such as inauspiciousness and impurity*" (ibid.).

While defining the complexes of good-sacredness and bad-sacredness, Srinivas has not only picked up Radcliffe-Brown's but also Durkheim's phraseology. For, Durkheim also talks about "two sorts of sacredness, the propitious and the non-propitious" (Durkheim, *op cit.*: 411). Moreover, Srinivas' idea of normal ritual status as "the status which a person enjoys most of the time" (Srinivas, *op cit.*: 106) appears to be an ingenious coinage from out of such phrases of Radcliffe-Brown's as "ritual status of the person"

or "former ritual status" or "undesirable change of ritual status" (Radcliffe-Brown, *op cit.*: 135).

In his qualitative definition, by listing the characterological indices of good-sacred and bad-sacred, Srinivas appears to derive that auspiciousness and ritual purity go hand in hand as the constituents of ritually desirable states and conditions whereas inauspiciousness and ritual impurity go together as those of the ritually undesirable states and conditions. That, in the Hindu complex of values, *ritual purity is neither always nor necessarily accompanied by auspiciousness as much as ritual pollution is neither always nor necessarily associated with inauspiciousness* is amply illustrated in the Hindu way of life, especially their rites de passage.

Srinivas has further proposed a conceptual framework as explaining upward social mobility within the Hindu caste system. It is the process of sanskritization. According to him:

"The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden" (Alyappan & Balaratnam, 1960: 114).

So has Narmadeshwar Prasad offered a parallel concept - kulinization - as explaining "the efforts made by the low castes to go up in the social hierarchy" (Prasad, 1957: 243).

Catching up the idea of ritual avoidance, again from Radcliffe-Brown, in relation to the "Hindu pollution concept (as) rooted in the Sanskrit scriptures (and) as current throughout India" (Stevenson, 1954: 49-50) as well as drawing liberally on empirical/scriptural sources, Stevenson has presented in his "Curt Bequest Prize Essay" the syndrome of characters that go to serve as the scale for status evaluation in the Hindu caste system. From physical touch to commensality

and connubium, ritual pollution notions seem to govern the interactional patterns on the three levels: endogamous group, exogamous group and the individual. Threefold rules relating to dietary preferences and prejudices go to determine the purity or otherwise of the food:

- a. "the cooking and carrying vessels, as also *hookahs* (as) carriers or conductors (a concept first introduced by Francis Day) of pollution;
- b. the intrinsic purity or pollution of certain kinds of food; and
- c. the methods of handling and cooking (as affecting) the degree of pollution transmissible" (ibid.: 54-5).

Stevenson goes further to stress how "internal pollution appears to be regarded as of a different order to, and much more dangerous than, external pollution" (ibid.: 57), and adduces evidence in support of his contention. Finally, he derives some "tentative hypotheses" which, to sum up, are:

- a. secular and ritual statuses owe to different sources, the latter being rooted in mystical beliefs;
- b. there is a difference between the unalterable, group-derived natal ritual status, ensured by faithful conformity to group norms, and the alterable personal ritual status;
- c. pollution of natal ritual status is rooted in the occupational association with objects having intrinsic pollution;
- d. whether temporary or permanent, voluntary or involuntary, external or internal, pollution entails purificatory media;
- e. lack of fixed hierarchy of caste give rise to variability and relativity of group ritual status;
- f. change of group ritual status is possible only by generations of conformation to behavioural patterns which avoid pollution;
- g. different ritual statuses obtain in relation to different structural levels; and
- h. behavioural patterns rather than ritual constitute the main criterion of status evaluation.

Where Stevenson left the purity-pollution theme, McKim Marriot took it up the theme, in his thought-provoking paper on "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking", for further study as an index of status evaluation, emphasizing "some evident inadequacies of (Stevenson's) *attributional theory* (which is

based on the assumption that) highness or lowness — purity and impurity of attributes — are said to be measured by certain criteria which constitute or imply a scale of Hindu ritual values" (Marriott, 1959: 92).

Pointing out to the difficulty regarding "the presumed hierarchy of values in matters of diet, occupations, and so forth (which) does not correlate well with the observed order of caste standing" (ibid.: 94) and led by the conviction that "castes are ranked according to the structure of interaction among them" (ibid.: 96), Marriott has proposed the alternative scale as constructed in terms of the interactional theory, by holding that "emphasis in this (interactional) system of ranking is not on qualities, but on transactions; not on purity, but on purification" (ibid.: 97). For he regards that "pollution in an interactional hierarchy is not innate, but always social, always a matter of giving and taking, of adding and subtracting" (ibid.: 98).

While generally surveying the major theoretical advances that seek to "relate beliefs about pollution to caste behaviour", Bailey has very succinctly summed up Marriott's position, thus:

"Firstly, the presumed values of customary behaviour do not correlate well with actual caste ranking; for example, vegetarian castes are sometimes ranked below meat-eaters.

Secondly, many of the customs said to be a source of group pollution and therefore an index of low rank are in fact common to all castes: a woman, for example, of whatever caste, sweeps out her own household or may wash her own or her family's clothes.

Thirdly, there are no criterion by which the several forms of impure activity can be ranked: for example, in itself hair-cutting is not deemed necessarily more or less impure than washing clothes or butchering meat.

Fourthly, there are many discrimination in rank between castes which ought, on a purely attributional theory, to be ranked equally.

McKim Marriott notes that the attributional theory works better at the extremes of the caste hierarchy the

Brahmin at the top and the untouchable at the bottom than it does in the middle ranges of the caste system" (Bailey, 1964: 609).

As a cultural category, the Hindu ritual purity-pollution theme has claimed continuing and engrossing interest of sociologists and anthropologists — something amply born out by such theoretical formulations as Henry Orenstein's in his perceptive and rigorously analytical essay on "The Structure of Hindu Caste Values: A Preliminary Study of Hierarchy and Ritual Defilement". He has formulated paradigms reduced to well-nigh mathematical axioms or propositions in order to conceptualize pollution into intransitive and transitive, dividing the latter form into two kinds — internal and external (Orenstein, 1965: 3-10).

In Orenstein's schema, "intransitive pollution calls for no object of action (and) comes about as a result of a birth or death in Ego's kin group (whereas) transitive pollution, on the other hand, involves some kind of interaction, usually with biological phenomena" (ibid.: 4); "Internal transitive pollution relates to situations "in which Ego, as subject, acts upon an object (and which) is incurred largely through inflicting injury on living things, especially destroying life" (ibid.) whereas external transitive pollution refers to situations "in which ego is the object (and which) usually (involves) impure stains and foul smells (as well as) such matters as the eating of impure substances" (ibid.).

Orenstein's paradigm for each of these categories of pollution is as follows:

- a. The extent of intransitive pollution is inversely proportionate to *varna* rank, i.e. the higher the rank the less the pollution;
- b. The extent of transitive pollution — or rather.... the amount of pollution that must be removed is proportionate to *varna* rank;
- c. The extent of internal pollution is proportionate to the purity of the *varna* harmed;
- d. The extent of external pollution is proportionate to the defilement of the *varna* contacted (ibid.: 10).

The foregoing resume of some major studies — empirical and/or scriptural — has been attempted with a twofold objective in mind: (a) to present the theme of the religio-sacred in a larger

sociological/philosophical perspective wherein it has been treated as a sociological category by some, an ethnographic category by others; and (b) to spotlight the place Srinivas occupies in the midst of other scholars and their contributions.

Our hurried survey goes to drive home the truism that Srinivas' *magnum opus* has carved its definite and distinct niche to fame and posterity in the tradition of ethnography which is nomothetic rather than ideographic in character. Insofar as its central theme or thrust is concerned, it toes the line with several eminent social scientists who have studied the Hindu society and its religion. Where Srinivas has parted others' company, it is in regard to the universe of his study which he has confined to the Indian ethnographic context, especially the Hindu caste system and its ritual scenario. However, an additional point needs to be mentioned in the context of his monograph on the Coorgs. And that is his concept of spread that works out the fourfold extensions of Hinduism — a heuristic attempt that veritably marks a distinct advance in the direction of classification of Hinduism in its trans-subcontinental context.

Much water has flown down the Ganges ever since I first acknowledged him in 1970. Today, when I sit to reflect on what I had then written, I painfully realize how it was so worded that it sounds not a whit better than a ritual recitation of thanksgiving. When I recall, afresh and anew, my overall indebtedness to him, I acknowledge "How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, / Stolen on his wing my (three decades)", mellowing me down to such soberer frame of mind in which I again question unto myself: "How much do I owe him, indeed?" And my spontaneity feeds me the answer from within: Whatever I have written about the Hindu ritual idiom all these three long decades, it is so suffused with the benign spirit that "MNS" ever was. For, although I have never had the good fortune of being his student there in his class rooms, I have always held him in the same place in which Ekalavya had ever held his mentor Dronacarya. My mentor by proxy is no more in our midst; but it appears to me as if.

"The soul of (M. N. Srinivas), like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the eternal are!"

We mourn the loss and feel sad about the void that has been created by his demise; but, when we reflect on his solid contributions, we get filled with the sense of national pride that Srinivas stands matchless and peerless among many of his predecessors and contemporaries in India and abroad, radiating his intellectual brilliance all the brighter evermore and making us sing the following note in his loving memory — the lines P. B. Shelley had ever composed in his invocation "To a Skylark":

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

We look before and after,

And pine for what is not:

Our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought!"

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