PREFACE

I became interested in Sociology when I read Peter Berger’s highly fascinating book Invitation to Sociology. I decided to take up sociology in M.A. During those years (and I suppose still so) J.N.U. was the place to be in if somebody wanted to pursue his/her interests in higher education.

The conducive academic environment at J.N.U. enabled me to reflect on what was happening around and this gradually led to the crystallization of my interest on the spectacular instances of ethnic assertions both in the developing and also the so-called modern and developed world. One could hardly visualise any part of the globe which was immune to the different articulations of ethnicity, sometimes and at some places peaceful and some other times and at some other places aggressive and violent. When I wanted to understand this, I examined the dominant theoretical perspectives in sociology (of Marx, Durkheim, Weber etc.). My discomfiture only grew over their formulations.

Though they did not look at the relationship between modernisation and ethnicity, to the best of my understanding, in a direct way, the implications that emerge from their perspectives on ethnicity in the context of development and modernisation are clear. Ethnicity would have to give way to class consciousness (as Marx would argue), a concomitant feature of capitalist modernisation. The processes of secularisation and rationalization, which are supposed to be modern processes, would dissolve ‘traditional’
identities (as Max Weber would argue). According to Durkheim, the growth of division of labour (understood in social rather than economic terms) would privilege individual conscience over collective conscience and by implication ethnic and communitarian identities.

But one notices the continued assertion of ethnic/communitarian identities, which are a reflection of a heightened sense of ethnic consciousness, even in the context of modernity. Modernity does not seem to have an impact on ethnic consciousness. Only the articulations of ethnic consciousness could change depending upon the context. Sometimes the articulations could be structured in democratic and liberal terms. Sometimes they assume violent and aggressive character. But, fundamentally, as one can see that there is a persistence and in fact resurgence of ethnicity not only in traditional and developing societies but also in the so called ‘modern’ and developed societies.

Thus the schism between dominant theoretical perspectives and the empirical reality, as I saw it, became startlingly clear to me.

I felt a compelling need to explore this. The present work is a product of the desire to understand and appreciate the inexorable journey that ethnicity has made and continues to make. When modernity appeared on the scene, it was celebrated. It privileged knowledge over ignorance, optimism over pessimism, reason over faith. It was expected to free us from all kinds of shackles of tradition, ignorance and irrationality. Ethnicity was supposed
to be one of such shackles, being the embodiment of 'irrationality,'
Apparently, it has not happened.

This is what motivates us to take an empirical look at the relationship
to the context of Telugus in
Bangalore. More precisely, our attempt would be to examine whether those
who demonstrate attributes of modern consciousness also demonstrate
attributes of ethnic consciousness. If people who think along modern lines
also think along ethnic lines, it would mean that modernisation has not led to
the disappearance of ethnic consciousness. This is how we propose to
examine the relationship between modernisation and ethnicity.

One thing needs to be made absolutely clear. The fact that we are
studying the Telugu community in Bangalore should not be taken to mean
that there are ethnic assertions and/or ethnic conflicts between the Telugu
community and other communities in Bangalore. We are only trying to
explore the possibility of the existence of ethnic consciousness or the
absence of it. Ethnic consciousness could exist even in the absence of ethnic
assertiveness or ethnic conflicts. When and how ethnic consciousness
transforms itself into ethnic assertions or ethnic conflicts would depend upon
historical and contextual factors. Absence of ethnic conflicts should not be
construed as the absence of ethnic consciousness. One need not wait for an
ethnic conflict to take place to explore whether ethnic consciousness is
present or not, Just as one need not wait for a communal conflict to take
place to examine the possibility of the existence of communal consciousness.

We have tried to combine both quantitative (questionnaire) and the qualitative techniques (case study) to explore the relationship between modernisation and ethnicity. We believe that only making a judicious combination of both modes of analyses that one can arrive at an appropriate understanding of the social reality. Though I read something about the case study method in text-books, the real realisation of its importance dawned on me only when I actually used it. There were a number of insights and views which I was able to gain access to, which I would not have been able to do so if I depended only on the quantitative technique. Though initially it was difficult to make people talk in a free and frank manner, they came out openly once they developed the confidence in the researcher.

On the whole, it has been a rewarding experience. We have found that an empirical exploration of the relationship between modernisation and ethnicity is a meaningful exercise. However, logically sound the theoretical arguments may be, without the empirical evidence, they may become unsustainable.

As we see it, the essential importance of this work lies in the fact that it would tell us whether modernisation and ethnicity have reconciled themselves to each other and thereby co-exist or, as viewed by some of the
classical sociologists, modernity has succeeded in supplanting ethnic consciousness.

It will be highly satisfying if this work can motivate others who are more competent to take up similar empirical work on the relationship between modernisation and ethnicity.