

# T.H.P Chentharassery Memorial Lecture

09th January 2025 (Thursday) 3:00 pm  
TNG Hall, Press Club, Thiruvananthapuram

## Annihilation of What: Caste or its Discourse?

**Speaker**  
**Professor Gopal Guru**

Editor, Economic and Political Weekly  
Former Professor, Centre for Political Studies, JNU


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## T.H.P. Chentharassery

Thiruvan Heera Prasad Chentharassery (1928–2018), popularly known as T.H.P. Chentharassery, was born in Othera near Thiruvalla in the Pathanamthitta District of Kerala. His family was deeply involved in the Sadhujanaparipaalana Sangam, a movement dedicated to the upliftment of marginalized communities. A prominent historian from Kerala, Chentharassery is renowned for his extensive studies on the caste system in India, offering critical insights into the region's social structure. He completed his education at St. Berchmans College, Changanassery, Mar Ivanios College, and Mahatma Gandhi College, Thiruvananthapuram. Afterward, he worked for many years in the Accountant General's Office in Thiruvananthapuram. During this time, he became increasingly aware of the limitations of the historical narratives he had been taught. This realization sparked his passion for historical research, leading him to explore and document the often-overlooked or distorted aspects of Kerala's past. Chentharassery made significant contributions to the study of Kerala's social history. He is particularly credited with introducing Ayyankali, the pioneering social reformer who revolutionized the Dalit movement in Kerala, to the wider public. His influential work helped shed light on Ayyankali's legacy and its transformative impact on the state's social fabric.

Among his notable achievements, Chentharassery was awarded the Dr. Ambedkar National Award for his book *History of the Indigenous Indians*. His other well-known works include *Ambedkar on Indian History*, *Ayyankali: The First Dalit Leader*, *Chaturvarnyam and Ambedkarism*, *Bhaaratharatnam Ambedkar*, and *Keralacharithrathile Avaganikkappetta Edukal*.



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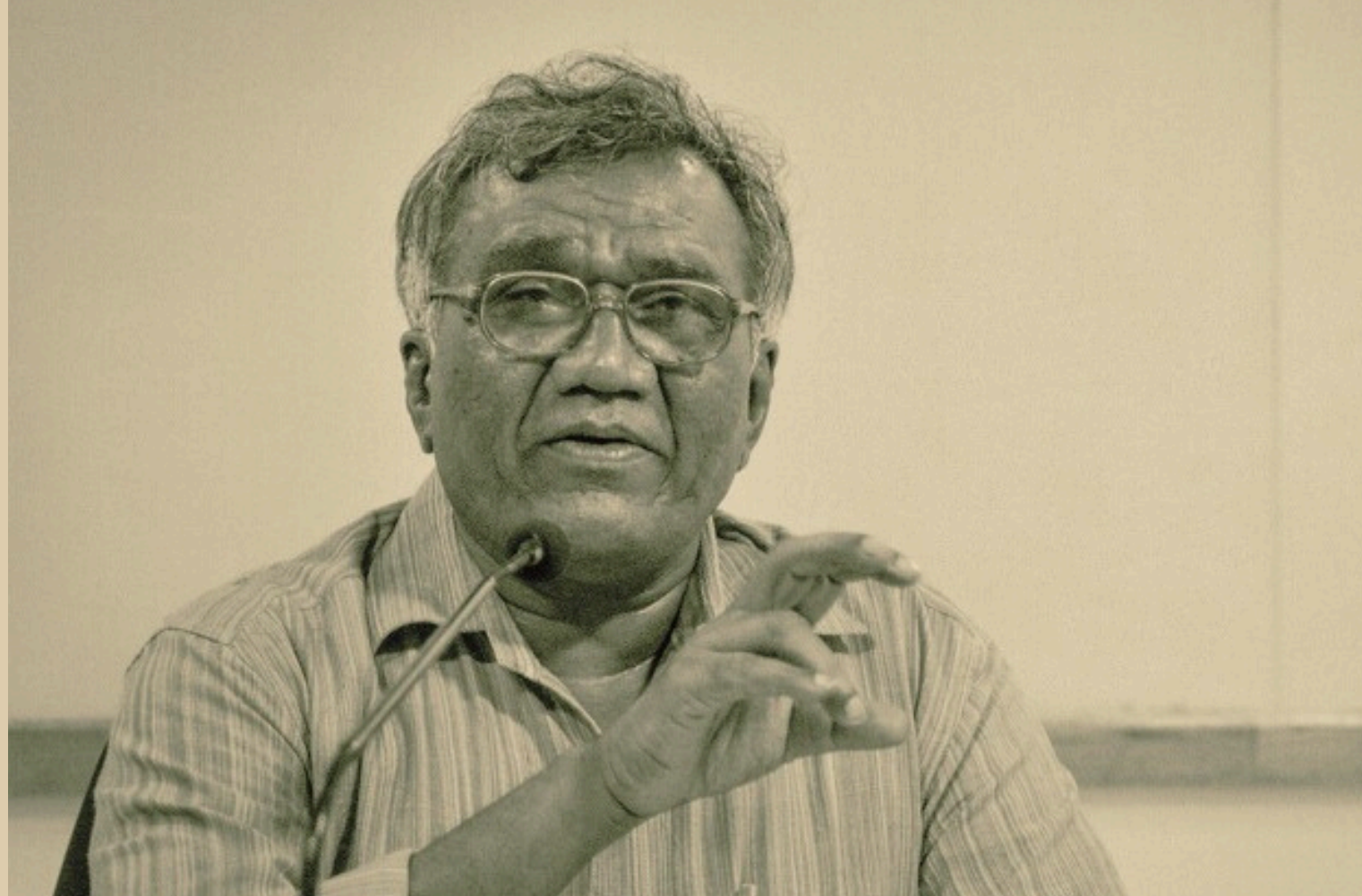
# Annihilation of What: Caste or its Discourse?

## Abstract

In post-independent India, particularly in the most contemporary times, the discourse of caste is 'fated' or tagged in fate with the discourse that surrounds the year 1936, where Ambedkar's speech on caste could not be delivered by him. Arguably the free public articulation of caste has become difficult if not impossible in contemporary times. He in protests against the stipulation of the organizers preferred to back out. However, during the pre-independence period, there were some attempts to talk sometimes openly but mostly obliquely about not annihilation but bringing some minor and mild changes in the caste practices. Arguably, the nationalist thought was not romantic as it was not bereft of its reality of untouchability and caste. Social reformers were at least ready to listen and discuss the issue of caste. Thanks to the efforts that were notably made by Phule, Mahatma Aayankali, Narayan Guru, and Ambedkar who seem to have forced dialogue on those who found it difficult to avoid participating in the discussion on the caste question. Annihilation of caste, inversely, sets the ground on which other thinkers particularly Gandhi find limits not only in nationalist thinking but in his self as well. Even today, publicly talking about caste is being undermined and discussion on caste does not find easy ground either institutional or even political. The speech is divided into two parts. In the first part, Guru delineates the liberal conditions that allowed the public articulation of caste, both through institutions and in the public sphere. In the second part, the shrinking of the liberal sphere, particularly during the last decade, has led to the silencing of discourses on caste, in which he discusses the modalities of this silence.

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Professor Gopal Guru, retired from the Centre for Political Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, is currently the Editor of Economic and Political Weekly. His scholarly engagement with caste as an analytical category has profoundly transformed social science writing and theorizing. Recognized as one of the foremost thinkers and theorists of Indian political processes, Professor Guru has authored several influential books and specializes in political theory and philosophy. His research spans key areas of Indian political processes and the politics of multiculturalism. Caste and Dalit politics have remained central to his academic pursuits throughout his distinguished career. One of his earlier edited volumes, *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, redefined the concept of 'experience' and made a significant contribution to the discipline. This theme was further developed in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, a set of essays co-authored with Sundar Sarukkai, in which the two scholars engage in a debate on the role of Dalit experience as a critical category for developing new theoretical frameworks within Indian social sciences.



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## **Programme Schedule**

### **Welcome Address**

**Professor Dinesan V. Director, KCHR**

### **Chair**

**Professor K.N. Ganesh, Chairperson, KCHR**

### **Speaker**

**Professor Gopal Guru, Editor, Economic and Political Weekly**

**Former Professor, Centre for Political Studies, JNU**

### **Vote of Thanks**

**Dr. Fashiya P.S , Academic Coordinator, KCHR**

**Zoom Link for the program <https://zoom.us/j/95959476026>**

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