

criticisms against the cartoon which was perceived as delay on the part of the Constitution makers (read Ambedkar) Gopal Guru widened the boundary of the criticism and the entire discourse by drawing attention to what he called the compulsions of the Dalit community in a Brahmanical political order. Chief among these is that the Dalits are 'pathologically condemned to being emotional'. In other words they are denied the privilege of being 'equal partners in any deliberative process'. Rational discourse is not their métier. While the feeling of hurt on the part of the Dalits can be assuaged they will always remain at that level and will not get transformed into intellectual interrogations. Guru asserted that the cartoon controversy was actually an insult to the tradition of questioning and debate which was part of the Dalit public sphere. And incidentally this view was endorsed by Prakash Ambedkar who reminded his readers of Ambedkar's immense faith in dialogue and criticism. It is on his insistence that the Constitution incorporated freedom of thought and expression as one of its integral parts. Gopal Guru and Prakash Ambedkar utilised the cartoon controversy to illuminate a larger area of concern and situate the problem in perspective. Throughout his intellectual voyages Guru has attempted to contextualize Ambedkar and his thought and make his contribution relevant to the contemporary mind.

Educated at the Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University as also JNU from where he obtained his doctorate in political science

Professor Guru has taught in Shivaji University Kolhapur, Pune University and JNU. Academic honours, too numerous to list, have come to him principal among them being the Tarakdas Chair at Columbia University New York, Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Philosophy and Humanities, Manipal University and the Ambedkar Chair University of Mysore. Leading publications include an edited Reader on Humiliation, Cracked Mirror: Indian Debate on Theory and Experience, (with Sundar Sarukkai), Atrophy in Indian Politics, apart from scores of papers in academic journals of repute published in India and abroad. He is actively involved with the writing of textbooks for the NCERT and is a member of the editorial board of Lokniti.

Gopal Guru's achievements have rightly and predictably brought to him the Malcolm Adiseshiah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies for which he was unanimously recommended by a jury consisting of Professor T.S.Papola, Professor G.Hargopal and Professor R.Indira.

In keeping with his name he has come to occupy the position of one of the gurus of our times, even though a relatively young one.

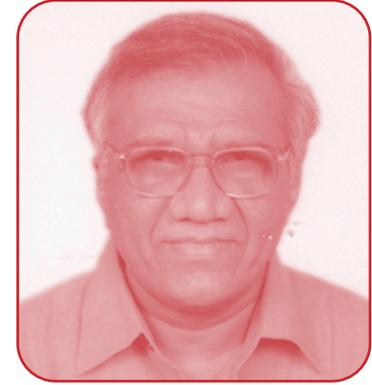


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A Profile

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In the world of social scientists of today Gopal Guru occupies a special place. In substantial part this is due to his methodological distinctiveness. In his own words Guru does not start with an 'a priori epistemological' reference point. He anchors himself on what he terms the 'category of experience' which becomes a vantage point from where one is able to gain insights into social reality. This must surely be regarded as an important addition to analysing the complexity of India's social institutions and the interplay among them with a nuanced perception.

Gopal Guru has always been attracted to interdisciplinary research as being essential to capture the complex interconnected web that is the leading feature of India's social mosaic. In an almost logical progression Guru, starting with his basic discipline, political science, ventured into history, social anthropology and sociology as necessary to provide the required ballast to his explorations. This has made it possible for Guru to build his work around concepts like self-respect, social justice, and dignity. A very special dimension of his work is his incisive analysis of humiliation which, it would be appropriate to suggest, is as crucial to a study of a hierarchical

society such as ours as it is absent from the normal run of analytical frames of research.

Taking off from this methodological anchor Guru points out that while there is rich literature on caste discrimination, especially untouchability, in sociology and anthropology there is far less of it in political science. Further, he argues that 'available descriptions are often inadequate to capture the totality of the meaning that emanates from its dynamism'. One of Guru's original contributions is to direct scholarly attention to the manner in which the untouchable is there to carry the burden of the impurities or the 'moral dirt' of the touchables. Pursuing the point further Guru illustrates it by adding another incisive insight that the 'untouchable is forced to become the repository of the impurities of the touchable'. In a prescient passage Guru argues that the untouchable is a supplementation of the touchable and therefore has a contradictory value. Guru goes further and states with wry irony that were there to be no untouchables the result might well be the 'moral decomposition or atrophy of the touchables' body. To top this line of thought Guru would like us to speculate upon the political implications of the existence of the untouchables since they provide a vocabulary for the expression of the agony and anger of politicians against their opponents. It is here that we find Guru striking out a new path by making us see that there is an organic relationship between untouchability and the world of the touchables and that they are not, as we so often suppose, creatures inhabiting different and unconnected worlds.

As one would expect this line of thinking has taken Guru to a critique of what he describes as 'intellectual hierarchies'. He argues that there has evolved and come to stay in the Indian world of social sciences a graded hierarchy with a full bench in Delhi which brushes aside subaltern objections to 'received wisdom' as "absurd and idiosyncratic at worst and emotional, descriptive-empirical and polemical at best". An unhappy repercussion of this trend is that the Dalits as social scientists get ghettoized into 'inferiorised manual spheres reflecting the closed character of society'. In turn this has resulted in loss of confidence which is vital for developing theoretical excellence in the social sciences. The end result is that we come across a divide between theoretical Brahmins and empirical Shudras.

In a discussion in the columns of the EPW with Sundar Sarukkai Gopal Guru utilises the archaeological method to advance his inquiry into caste, inequality and untouchability. This discussion must rank as one of those rare instances where questions are raised and issues interrogated not to score points but as a common pursuit to arrive at a more complete understanding of complex phenomena such as caste and justice.

he strong thrust towards fairness, objectivity and an almost tireless drive towards the truth manifested itself in a controversy which surfaced some time ago relating to a cartoon which was originally published in Shankar's Weekly years ago, indeed when the Constitution was still being drafted. Reacting to the upsurge of