

## LETTERS

### **K BALAGOPAL**

K Balagopal was not a civil rights activist of Andhra Pradesh but a crusader against any human rights violation in this part of the globe. His untimely death saddened the whole HR community of this country and abroad. Balagopal died at relatively younger age of 52 due to a cardiac arrest in a hospital in Banjara hills on Thursday night. He is survived by wife and son.

Balagopal was one of the unfaltering civil liberty activist in Andhra Pradesh and a committed human rights advocate of the country, who not even thought twice while breaking away from the organisation, with which he was associated since its inception in 80's; Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC), on the issue of violence perpetrated by the erstwhile CPI-ML (People's War) and APCLC's reluctance to condemn the violence perpetuated by the so-called campaigners of armed struggle.

In this juncture Professor Balagopal felt the need for a committed human rights group and founded the Human Rights Forum (HRF) in A P.

Balagopal unambiguously condemned and protested against any form of terror; the state sponsored killing and terror, extra-judicial killings and tortures, as well as the so-called 'red terror' by a few political protagonists of armed struggle. Balagopal was an ardent campaigner against 'Capital Punishment'.

**Kirity Roy**, Secretary, Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha, (MASUM)

### **LEGACY WILL LIVE FOR EVER**

It's unbelievable that Balagopal is no more. He came to Delhi last month to address an important meeting launching a Citizens' Peace Initiative calling for stopping the cycle of violence and urging for a dialogue between the government and the Maoists. At a time when the government's military campaign against the Maoists has been escalated and the Maoist attacks on the police have also continued unabated bringing enormous sufferings to the common people in the tribal areas Balagopal's leadership was most essential. The democratic rights community of India has lost an invaluable asset and India a rare intellectual who has contributed greatly to the progressive democratic thought of India.

Together with Kannabiran and Haragopal he defined the meaning of human rights challenging mainstream ideas of liberals and Marxists. Civil Liberty above all was rule of law and therefore false encounter killings by security forces had to be exposed. From Andhra Pradesh to Kashmir to Manipur and Nagaland civil liberty groups took up this issue and today there is a significant opinion in the country that opposes false encounter killings. Even though such killings have not ended, but the impunity with which it was going on is today widely challenged. Balagopal's contribution to this campaign for civil liberties will be remembered for ever.

For Balagopal while in APCLC or in HRF civil liberty did not have a narrow meaning, but included common people's right to political, social, cultural and economic freedoms. He took up cases of atrocities against dalits, against women, against minorities and against nationality movements as a part of the civil liberty movement. Andhra society has experienced a great momentum of creative transformation during the past three decades and people like Balagopal have contributed significantly to that process. India's democratic struggles for justice, dignity and peace have benefited enormously from his insights and leadership.

**Manoranjan Mohanty**,  
New Delhi

### **GOODBYE BALAGOPAL**

Ordinary people leading ordinary lives die of heart attacks. And despite the simplicity with which he led his life and interacted with people, every time one met Balagopal or heard him you always knew you were in the presence of someone extraordinary. Whenever he left after any meeting, Balagopal left you a little scared about whether you would ever see him again. As a result of the position that he took- against the violence of the state as well as the violence of the Maoists, you were always left with the lurching fear that any point of time, you would be given the news that Balagopal had been killed in an encounter.

At the same time it is perhaps not surprising that despite living a life which was scripted towards a violent death, it was only appropriate that his death transcended any partisan act of violence. Film maker Deepa Dhanraj captures the essence of Balagopal when she describes him as a 'moral force' whose authority emerged from the integrity with which he led his life and the courage with which he stood by his belief. If Balagopal was a regular anti-violent activist or a pacifist, then there would have been nothing surprising about his stance on violence, and to argue for the importance of non-violence would hardly be an act of courage. But for someone who had spent a better part of his life in struggles, and in battles against the impunity of the state, the commitment to an ethical position on violence becomes a deeply ethical choice of bravery.

In an ironic way Balagopal could be seen as a true inheritor of the Gandhian legacy, of leading a particular kind of life, and through such a life aspiring to change the world around you. In an interview with *Janam Saxi*, Balagopal once stated, “The Indian constitution has had a habit, right from its inception, to destroy democratic values completely in practice without any recourse to laws. This has grown very much recently. The apparatus of the police is the chief machinery for this destruction. The duty to safeguard democratic values from these limitations is a very important duty..... While performing this duty it is of no use to ask the question in this form: is there or is there not at least a bourgeois type of democracy”.

**Siddarth Narrain**

### **IT'S SHOCKING**

Dr Balagopal was one of the few outstanding personalities in post seventy India who shaped and built up a formidable voice and organisation for civil liberties, democratic rights and human rights. His insight in the theory and practice of rights movement and the issues involved was reflected in a large number of incisive and thought provoking articles. These articles contributed enormously in understanding the politics and dynamics of the rights movement and were almost universally appreciated—even by his critiques and those who opposed his views.

His views on some contentious issues involving theory and practices of Human Rights movement are still being debated among the rights movement community. In course of such debates he left, may be, had to leave the APCLC and formed Human Rights Forum (HRF) with like minded activists in 2000 and continued the struggle for Human Rights.

APDR is proud of being associated with such a towering personality for about two decades and will fondly remember his able leadership, his resolute firmness in the face of odds and his care for the fellow activists.

**Amitadyuti Kumar**, Vice-President,  
Association for Protection for  
Democratic Rights (APDR), Kolkata