

A Big Loss At This Juncture

The PUCL is bereaved at the untimely demise of one of our finest civil liberties activists and advocates K Balagopal of the Human Rights Forum, AP. For the Human Rights movement the loss of Balagopal at this juncture is very severe, especially when a war is being fought in this country between the Maoists and the various States and the Central Government. His boldness, understanding and interventions were needed most in the present turbulent times.

We share our grief with his wife, son and the large group of friends and admirers that he had.

K G Kannabiran, Pushkar Raj
People's Union For Civil Liberties

His Spirit Will Survive

It came as a bolt out of the blue: Balagopal is no more! It was a life dedicated to civil liberties and democratic rights. As general secretary of APCLC he underwent several ordeals. The police abducted him, blindfolded him, took him to an unknown place and threatened him with death. He braved all and continued to be in the field.

The civil liberties movement in India started in 1936 along with people like Tagore, Nehru and Sarojini Naidu and came to an end in 1946. The second phase began in the early 1970s with the formation of APCLC, APDR and other such organisations. No history of the civil liberties and democratic rights movement will be complete without K Balagopal. We will not see Balagopal again. But his spirit will survive. The CPDR pays tribute to him.

Committee For Protection Of Democratic Rights
(Mumbai)

Stressed On Absolute Honesty

Dr Balagopal's demise is a great loss to the human rights community in India. He will be remembered by all for his simplicity and sincere dedication to the HR cause. He initiated a 'great debate' on the concept of human rights and the ethics to be followed in HR activism while unearthing facts usually obliterated from public view by the establishment, police and the media. While HR organisations express solidarity with various democratic people's movements, Balagopal always pointed out that the rights movement existed essentially in the realm of values and was endowed with a particular task. That of bringing out and placing before society as values the normative principles generated by life-situations and struggles.

He believed that truth must never be concealed even if it was uncomfortable to us. Sincerity and honesty are absolutely necessary if rights organisations were to have credibility, he felt. This was one of the lessons we learnt from the life of Balagopal who was a personal role model to many of us. Our association with him was extremely enriching. We fondly recall several fact-findings we shared both in Tamil Nadu and other States and most recently the excellent speech he delivered at the seminar: "Towards a political solution to the Sri Lankan Tamils issue" which we organised in August this year in Chennai. He set forth a striking analysis of the 13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and HRF colleagues. We shall miss him a lot.

People's Union For Human Rights
(Tamil Nadu)

Proud To Have Been Associated With Him

APDR is stunned to learn of the sudden demise of K. Balagopal. He was one of the few outstanding personalities in post seventies India who shaped and built up a formidable voice and organisation for civil liberties, democratic rights and human rights. His insight into the theory and practice of rights movement and the issues involved was reflected in a large number of incisive and thought provoking articles. These writings contributed enormously in understanding the politics and dynamics of the rights movement and were almost universally appreciated -- even by those who disagreed with his views.

Dr. Balagopal travelled the length and breadth of this huge country --- from the North-East to Jammu & Kashmir, from Tamil Nadu, Orissa and West Bengal to Gujarat on arduous fact finding missions into human rights violations. Often he led a group of activists from various States, speaking different languages, having little or no previous experience in fact-finding. Most such missions were undertaken in unfavorable terrain in the face of a perceptible threat by the machinery of the State and perpetrators of human rights violations. The brilliantly prepared and well documented reports of such fact findings, written mostly by Balagopal were a scathing expose of rights violations and illegalities perpetrated by the State and various undemocratic forces.

As a lawyer, Balagopal argued dozens of cases pertaining to encounter killings by the police. His knowledge of national and international laws, particularly rights related laws and practices was an asset for the entire human rights movement. His arguments before the NHRC in 1997 on behalf of the APCLC opposing the then Solicitor General's views resulted in the historic recommendation of lodging FIRs against and prosecuting all police personnel in encounter killings. One of his last contributions for protection and expansion of the human rights agenda is the report prepared by a team of experts, of which he was a part,

engaged by the Planning Commission titled “Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas”. At this juncture, when the State's arsenal is being lined up for a fight to the finish offensive against the Maoists fashioned as "Operation Green Hunt", the observations and recommendations of the report offer a sharp critique of the State's erroneous policy.

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

Association For Protection Of Democratic Rights
(West Bengal)

Unbearably Shocking

The sudden demise of Balagopal is unbearably shocking to all of us in the democratic rights movement. He was the most visible leader of the ‘rights movement’ in India. OPDR recollects its association with Balagopal since 1983 when he was elected general secretary of APCLC. We recall his dynamism in a number of fact-finding committees and programmes jointly undertaken both in AP and at the all-India level.

Many issues that Balagopal posed to the ‘rights’ fora should be seriously and openly debated and his absence in this context is a huge loss. His simple living and dedication to whichever task he undertook is really difficult for anyone else in the ‘rights movement’ to emulate.

C Bhaskar Rao (General Secretary)
Organisation For Protection Of Democratic Rights

A Remarkable Intellectual

The CLMC expresses grief and sorrow at the sudden demise of eminent human rights leader Dr. K. Balagopal. His death is an unbearable and irreplaceable loss for the whole civil liberties and human rights movement and the vacuum cannot be filled. It is a great loss for mass movements as he was a powerful voice on behalf of the oppressed. He advocated hundreds of cases in court for the poor and dispossessed and opposed unflinchingly all kinds of atrocities and State-sponsored terrorism. His passing away has saddened all those concerned with democracy, civil liberties, human rights and above all, humanism. A person like Balagopal comes only once in many centuries.

Over the years, Balagopal was targetted several times for his activism. RSS goons attacked him in Jagityal in 1985, he was abducted in 1989 by one 'Praja Bandhu', an outfit floated by the police, beaten up badly in Kothagudem in 1991, implicated in false cases under various undemocratic laws and incarcerated but he never faltered and continued to work tirelessly for the welfare of the marginalised.

Balagopal was a remarkable intellectual. He spoke with rare conviction and wrote many incisive and well argued essays against the politics of the Sangh Parivar, neo-liberalism, State terrorism and destructive development. He travelled far and wide visiting conflict areas like Jammu and Kashmir, the North-East, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand and spoke out against violence on democratic struggles. The people of the troubled State of Jammu and Kashmir always looked forward to his visits.

Dr. Balagopal took the lead in exposing the false propaganda of Hyderabad police in connection with the Mecca Masjid blasts. We recall the joint press conference the CLMC then had with HRF. He filed bail petition for Dr Ibrahim Ali Juniad in the A.P. High Court and obtained a release order. This opened the gates for the process of release of Muslim youth who were detained during the second police action on Muslims in 2007. Our last

joint fact finding with him was into the fake encounter killing of two Hyderabad youth of Old City, who were branded dacoits and killed by the police in Karimnagar.

The pamphlet Balagopal wrote for the HRF's 3rd State conference in Anantapur and his last speech on that occasion, just 6 days before he passed away, are highly inspiring for all rights activists. While deeply mourning his loss, we pledge to continue the struggle for civil liberties and human rights.

Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee (Hyderabad)

A Truly Committed Fighter

The sudden and untimely passing away of Balagopal is a tragic loss for all of us in PUDR and to the civil liberties and democratic rights movement in India. We are still stunned and shocked at the news and unable to find proper words to communicate our grief and sadness or indeed to speak of Balagopal in the past tense.

We had got to know Balagopal as the truly committed and tireless fighter for civil rights who, even in the midst of acute repression, never lost his compassion, humaneness, and sense of humour. His passing is a deep personal and political loss for us. At a time when a new and terrible phase of repression has been launched by the State, when basic democratic space and rights that we all have been fighting for are under such severe attack, Balagopal's death is going to leave an unfathomable void in our movement. It is a loss we will feel every day in these dark times.

From all of us in PUDR on this sad day, we would like to extend our deepest condolences to all HRF friends, to Balagopal's family, and all other friends in AP and elsewhere.

People's Union For Democratic Rights (Delhi)

Profound Scholarship

The CNDP pays its heartfelt condolences at the sudden and untimely passing away of K Balagopal. He was known across the nation for his profound scholarship and fearless activism in the arena of human rights. He was personally associated with the process of formation of the CNDP in 2000. He would later become an inspiration and great support for the movement against uranium project, (AP) - a constituent of the CNDP - spearheading successful popular resistance against the proposed uranium mining /milling project in Nalgonda. The CNDP pays the richest tribute to his memory.

Coalition For Nuclear Disarmament And Peace

Outstanding Theoretician

AFDR is shocked at the sudden demise of Balagopal, one of the greatest theoreticians in the arena of democratic rights in India. He was instrumental in shaping and building a formidable rights movement in India. He had penetrating insight into the theory and practice of rights movements and the issues involved therein. He was respected even by his critics for his commitment and acute understanding.

Balagopal organised several fact-finding missions on human rights violations under trying circumstances. Our memory goes back to 2003 when we accompanied him to J&K on a fact-finding trip. At one stage we were held up by the Indian Army in Kupwara region. His impeccable and well reasoned argument and logic on the occasion were absolutely superb. We brought out a report to the people of India titled: “*Kashmir: An enquiry into the healing touch*”. It was authored by him. AFDR expresses its deep condolences and sympathies to HRF activists and his family. We resolve to carry forward his legacy.

Association For Democratic Rights

(Punjab)

Simplicity, Dedication Highly Inspiring

Balagopal's sudden death has come as a shock to all human rights activists in South Karnataka. A few of us had the opportunity to interact with him when he visited Mangalore with an all-India fact-finding team to probe attacks on Muslims and more recently churches in 2008. These visits helped us gain strength to carry on with our work.

Balagopal's simplicity and total dedication to the human rights cause was highly inspiring. The report “*From Kandhamal to Karavali: The Ugly Face of Sangh Parivar*”, authored by him, will remain an invaluable historical document like his other great work on Jammu and Kashmir. In our opinion, Dr Balagopal was a born team leader and an activist par excellence. It is an irony that we had planned to release the Kannada translation of both these reports on October 9 in the course of a protest rally seeking compensation and justice to local victims of Sangh Parivar violence. A public condolence was offered to this noble human rights warrior during the rally.

We, on behalf of PUCL Mangalore and the Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum express sympathies to his family, friends and HRF activists. We take a pledge that we will work with increased vigour for the cause that was dear to him.

PUCL
(South Kannada)

A Human Rights Colossus

Mathematicians, knowledgeable people say, have a sharp mind. They rarely take things to heart. But Balagopal was a different kind of a mathematician. Realising his favourite subject was not doing justice either to his conscience or the common people who are in distress, he opted for serving society. He disagreed resolutely with the way the State treated its citizens who were seeking enforcement of their hard-won rights.

Balagopal did not confine himself to Andhra Pradesh or its neighbouring States. The quest for justice brought him to Kashmir where he stated emphatically: “Paradise on earth is under undeclared martial law”. He would rush to a remote Andhra village to wipe the tears of a victim but did not forget a half-widow in Jammu & Kashmir's Doda district. He ensured his presence there when it was needed most. Addressing Kashmir's civil society actors during his 2007 tour to the Valley, he said: “Do not lose heart. Keep on fighting.” But last week his heart, which was as deep as an ocean, lost its beat. India lost a veteran human rights defender and Kashmir has lost a great friend. Balagopal is no more but he shall remain a source of inspiration for all those who believe in justice.

Balagopal first visited Kashmir in 1990 when he was a member of APCLC. Our association with him dates back to those very turbulent times. Clad in a white cotton shirt and grey trousers, we could see his thoughtful eyes behind a thick frame of old fashioned spectacles. The clarity with which he held forth on issues was very striking. When he spoke about the right to self determination for Kashmiris while addressing the media in a local hotel, all those present were impressed with his clear-sighted courage. That was the time when government sponsored gunmen were on the prowl.

He was possessed of steely resolve and a remarkable pen. His brilliant writings in various journals as well as meticulously documented human rights reports, which he wrote on the Kashmir

situation were marked by rare sensitivity, courage and empathy. Who can forget his path-breaking and incisive article in the *EPW* in 1996 where he wrote: “*Kashmiris tirelessly ask every human rights activist they meet whether only getting killed in a staged cross-fire is a human rights violation; and whether the denial of the right of self-determination is not in itself an act of human rights violation. The response from much of democratic public opinion in India is a stony silence*”.

During the 2002 elections he was here to monitor elections with JK Coalition of Civil Society teams. His visit the next year was to study the “healing touch” Kashmiris were being promised. He was in Srinagar again to monitor the 2004 elections. At the time, we were all in deep shock and grief following the loss of Aasiya Jeelani. Our dear friend Gautam Navlakha was in tears. Many other friends rushed from Delhi to console us. But, it was Balagopal who pulled us together once again.

Balagopal visited Kashmir in May 2007 along with HRF colleagues to co-found the Asian Human Rights Defenders Network. AHRDN was formed essentially to share concerns and respond to issues related to human rights defenders who are at risk.

We feel that Balagopal's death is a great loss for the struggling people of Jammu and Kashmir. The last few decades of experience has proven that not many people in India have had the honesty and conviction in supporting the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people and the courage to squarely and unambiguously condemn brutalities that the Indian State is, time and again, inflicting upon us. This human rights colossus was a rare exception.

We will miss you Balagopal.

Jammu And Kashmir Coalition Of Civil Society