

## **HIS LIFE AND WORK IS A MEMORY TO BE CHERISHED BY ALL**

South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR)

The human rights community has lost a leading and courageous democratic rights defender with the untimely death of Dr K Balagopal (57yrs) due to cardiac arrest on October 8, 2009. For over three decades K Balagopal gave voice, shape and moral vision to one of the country's most powerful human rights movement in India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh. In the 80s with AP in the throes of an armed revolutionary Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) commonly known as Naxalite movement in the rural and tribal areas of the state. Dr.K Balagopal was in the forefront of the struggle against the state's arbitrary and brutal repression of the Naxalite movement and the culture of impunity that spawned extra judicial killings. As General Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC), Balagopal steadfastly exposed the state's policy of 'encounter' killings, including those of left intellectuals that spoke out for the peoples' socio-economic grievances, and defended civil liberties.

But while Balagopal was unfaltering in his condemnation of state violence and challenging impunity, he did not shy away from recognizing and condemning 'red violence' of the Naxalite groups in the state. His principled moral commitment to policy of defending rights, particularly the the Naxalite policy of kidnapping government officials, led him to break away from APCLC and found "Human Rights Forum" in 1998.

While Balagopal's main work was concentrated on defending the rights of the oppressed in Andhra Pradesh, his intellectual understanding that erosion of democratic rights in one place affects rights in another, especially in Kashmir, led him to focus on injustice and rights violation in the valley.

At a time when state governments from left to the right are intensifying their attack on democracy and human rights, K Balagopal's life and work is a source of strength and inspiration. When Ministers and politicians are accusing 'human rights groups' of pleading 'the Naxalite cause ignoring the violence unleashed by the naxalites on the innocent' and lambasting them for being 'silent' – not only

was Balagopal not silent in his unwavering commitment to defending rights and condemning abuse of force by state and non state forces, but he courageously stood his ground and at great personal risk.

'Praja Bandu', an earlier incarnation of the state's policy of floating quasi criminal outfits like Salwa Judum (Chattisgarh) abducted him and demanded the release of two policemen in Naxalite custody. Balagopal was released only after the abducted policemen were let off.

Balagopal's life is a timely reminder, especially, at a time when 'left leaning intellectuals' are under vicious attack, of the many who have sacrificed brilliant careers to join the struggle against injustice and oppression. Professor Balagopal gave up a promising academic career as a mathematician, withdrew from Kakatiya University where he was teaching and devoted himself to public life, learning the law to fight civil liberties cases. Balagopal's death is a deep blow to the global movement against state repression but his life and work is a memory to be cherished by all who value human rights and values.