

## Remembering Balagopal: A Fearless People's Advocate

By Mahtab Alam

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On 4th August 09, when I met Prof. K Balagopal for the first time in New Delhi, I had no clue that- I will be not able to meet him again. In fact, it's still unbelievable for me that, he is no more amongst us. His ever smiling face is still in front of me. His untimely death left most of us bewildered. It is a great loss for not only human, democratic and civil rights' movements in India but for the entire world.

Prof. K. Balagopal, who was at the forefront of the human, civil and democratic rights' movements throughout the country especially Andhra Pradesh for over a quarter of a century left this world on 8th October late night following a heart attack. Prof. Balagopal is survived by his wife, Vasanta Lakshmi, a journalist, and son, Prabhata, an Intermediate student.

He was one of the most visible civil rights' activists in the State (Andhra Pradesh), taking up variety issues, from the 'encounters' and the arrest of villagers on the pretext that they are helping Maoists, to the plight of those displaced by Special Economic Zones(SEZ), Communal witch-hunt, etc. A teacher turned in to lawyer and whole time human rights' activist, K. Balagopal with another well-known civil libertarian, KG Kannabiran, led the AP State Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) for many years. Later, he floated the Human Rights Forum (HRF) in 2000.

Balagopal was arrested several times and was once even kidnapped by Green Tigers, a self-styled outfit supported by the State during his long struggle as a civil rights' activist. He travelled almost every part of the country from North-East to Jammu & Kashmir, from his home state Andhra to Gujarat on arduous and painstaking mission of fact finding missions relating to Human, Civil and Democratic Rights' Violation. His fact finding reports proved to be most contemptuous exposure of the violation of human rights and the illegal activities of the state and non-state perpetrators.

It was Prof. Balagopal's arguments before the NHRC in 1997 on behalf of the APCLC opposing the then Solicitor General's views resulted in a historic recommendations of lodging FIRs against and prosecuting all police officials claiming to have killed a person in an 'encounter'. Moreover, his arguments before AP High Court in the case pertaining to 'encounter' killings resulted in the historic judgment saying- each incident of encounter killing; a case should be registered against the police, in which it will have to face trial in a court, which was later stayed by Supreme Court last year. One of his last contributions for the protection and advancement of Human, Civil and Democratic Rights is the report prepared by a team of experts engaged by the Planning Commission titled Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas.

He was selfless intellectual, tireless human rights' defender, fearless People's advocate and a great human being. It is a harsh reality that- Prof. Balagopal is no more amongst us but his legacy in terms of works and brave struggles will continue to inspire us to keep our struggle for the establishment of just and equitable world.

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