

C Balakrishna

A short biographical note on Com C Balakrishna, AITUC, interviewed in Bangalore on September 28, 2004

C Balakrishna was born in Kananoor (Kerala) on January 15, 1940. His parents had studied in a school run by the family of Com AK Gopalan as there was hardly any scope for educating lower caste children.

Balakrishna's grandmother had taken active part in the movement launched by lower caste leaders in 1904-'5 against the tradition that forbade the covering of upper parts of the body for women. Finally the feudal king issued an order that Muslim and Christian women could cover their upper parts but not the Hindu women. Against such an order, one of the friends of his grandma cut her breasts in front of the king and offered it to the nobility to satisfy their lust. She became a martyr and symbol of struggle against injustice. The gauntlet was picked up by the communists in the later period in the state when Balakrishna grew up.

He started working for the Communist party since student days and the party membership card was given to him by AK Gopalan who belonged to the area and was a famous communist leader and parliamentarian. Balakrishna was also influenced by Com N E Balaram, one of the tallest communist leaders Kerala ever had.

It was a post Keyyur struggle period when peasant revolt was common, primary school teachers had launched their agitation. People were dying of malnutrition, cholera and small pox and government refused to extend any help.

It was at this time when communists came to power in Kerala though only to be displaced in 1959. Balakrishna resumed his studies only in 1960 and graduated in 1964 when communist party was divided. In his village at least 90 percent went with the CPIM. His own family worshipped EMS Namboodiripad and AK Gopalan and Balakrishna was alone to support the CPI in the area.

As his physical security was threatened, Balakrishna left the region. He started working among the beedi workers. The workers were fond of reading and a comrade used to be exempted from work to read from newspapers and books and discuss. Whenever an agitation was launched, people's committees came up spontaneously to supply food grains, money etc to the striking workers families.

Balakrishna's father was a fruit vendor and it was increasingly getting difficult for him to sustain the family any more. Balakrishna appeared in the test for employment in Life Insurance company and passed. He got an appointment in Bangalore.

In Bangalore, Balakrishna started his trade union work and became state secretary of the AITUC (Karnataka) from 1981 to 1989.

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I was born in Kananoor (Kerala) on January 15, 1940. My parents had studied in a school run by the family of Com AK Gopalan, one of the tallest communist leaders in the state, as there was hardly any scope for educating lower caste children.

My grandmother had taken active part in the movement launched by lower caste leaders in 1904-'5 against the tradition that forbade the covering of upper parts of the body for women. Finally the feudal king issued an order that Muslim and Christian women could cover their upper parts but not the Hindu women. Against such an order, one of the friends of my grandma cut her breasts in front of the king and offered it to the nobility to satisfy their lust. She became a martyr and symbol of struggle against injustice. The gauntlet was picked up by the communists in the later period in the state when I was growing up.

I started working for the Communist party since student days and the party membership card was given to me by AK Gopalan who belonged to the area and was a famous communist leader and parliamentarian. Another influence on me was that of Com N E Balaram, one of the most brilliant communist leaders Kerala ever had.

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It was at this time when communists came to power in Kerala though only to be displaced in 1959. I could resume my studies only in 1960 and graduated in 1964 when communist party was divided. In my village at least 90 percent went with the CPIM. My own family worshipped EMS Namboodiripad and AK Gopalan and I was alone to support the CPI in the area.

As my physical security was threatened, I had to leave the region. I started working among the beedi workers. The workers were fond of reading and a comrade used to be exempted from work to read from newspapers and books and discuss. Whenever an agitation was launched, people's committees came up spontaneously to supply food grains, money etc to the striking workers families.

My father was a fruit vendor and it was increasingly getting difficult for him to sustain the family any more. I appeared in the test for employment in Life Insurance company and got selected. I was appointed in Bangalore where I started my trade union work and became state secretary of the AITUC (Karnataka) from 1981 to 1989.