

Kusalacitta's report from the Shakyadhita conference 2019

I recently attended the 16th Sakyadhita conference near Sydney, Australia. Dharmamodini from Adelaide and Tarahridaya and Karunadeepa from Pune in India were also there. Sakyadhita is a Buddhist women's organisation founded in 1987. Sakyadhita means 'daughters of the Buddha', and it aims to promote gender equity for monastic and lay women with a focus on education, health, spiritual practice and equal status and ordination. Its current president is Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.

The conference was inspiring for me as both a woman and a Buddhist. Over 800 women from all branches of Buddhism came together with a common aspiration to support our sisters. Most Sakyadhita members are from Asian countries where gender inequality amongst lay and monastics is the cultural and societal norm. Countries represented at the conference include Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Academic papers and workshops were presented with subjects including a long hard look at sexual exploitation and abuse within Buddhism, Buddhist approaches to peace and reconciliation, Feminine wisdom and LGBTQQI within Buddhism.

Many speakers described their role in projects supporting women and children. Amongst them was Karunadeepa who works in the Bahujan Hitay social project in Pune India which runs health clinics and trains women in skills that will help them to support themselves.

Gender inequality in ordination and opportunities to study and practice the Dharma was an ongoing theme. Many of the nuns at the conference experience this on a daily basis and it is an area of concern and difficulty. I think this is where we as Triratna Dharmacarini's have a lot to offer. I feel privileged to be in an order where women ordain women and my ordination is equal to that of my order brothers. This is unique in the Buddhist world and it would be beneficial for us and them to share our experience of this with women aspiring to the same.

The next Sakyadhita conference is in Sarawak in Malaysia in 2021. It would be great to see more Dharmacarinis there. I certainly plan to go, would you like to join me?

With metta, Kusalacitta