

Tarahridaya's report from the Shakyadhita conference 2019

I am Dh. Tarahridaya. I recently attended the 16th Shakyadhita Conference in Blue Mountains in Sydney. This was my 2nd Shakyadhita Conference. In 2008 I have attended it in Ulaanbaatar in Magnolia with Dh. Karunamaya.

This time I went to attend it one another Dh. From Pune India, called Karunadeepa. There were two other dhammcharinis from Australia also: Dh. Dhammamodini from Adelaide and Dh. Kusalchitta from Sydney.

Sakyadhita is a Buddhist women's organisation founded long time ago. 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 Tenzin Palmo.

There was a Grand opening ceremony of the conference and in that many different Buddhist groups, who are active in Australia introduced them and welcome all the people in Australia. Our Triratna presence was missing there, I think it was off course because of some good reasons, but I would have appreciated to see our sangha members there.

I was so inspired by the conference to see so many Buddhists together from over 20 countries, mainly from Asian countries like Korea (they were the largest group) Srilanka, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Taiwan Indonesia, Israel and many more, except that there were people from Hawaii, USA, Germany and Australia itself. Now a days they have their branches in 12 countries out of these all countries. There were more than 800 men and women were there, mainly women and some men.

There were many academic papers were presented by many different women and about 70 workshops were conducted on different issues in the world. Many of the papers were presenting about how in many countries and in many traditions full ordination for women is not possible. Most of the presenters have done some sort of PHD or doing it related to the Buddhism. Some of them were about the sexual exploitation of women by the high profile Buddhist teachers in their traditions. Many presenters brought some slides or video clips of their work involves to support women, and many other groups.

Workshops offered there were about many different issues and problems in the world like LGBTQ, Animals and Buddhism, Chi-kung, Tai chi, singing, dancing, Mantra chanting, 21 praises of Tara. About some of the social work people were doing in their areas.

I was due to conduct a workshop on Ambedkarite movement in India, but my name was not there, there was some confusion around it, so in the end I couldn't do it. But Karunadeepa, our other Indian Dh. presented her paper and explained her social work in Pune.

Though this a monastic dominated place (more than 80% attenders were monastic) still it is a very good platform to interact with other Buddhist groups and making some connections with them. I think because in India the political and religious situation is very unpredictable, it is very important for us to have connections with other Buddhist groups from rest of the world.

Their main agenda is equality and full ordination of women, in that term we Triratna women as Dhammcharinis could be exemplification for the conference, because we have our ordinations. And not only have them but women ordained women and men ordain men could be a very big thing to go across. We have many strong and capable women who are in big role and in decision making positions. In that way we can make our very good place in the conference and can set an example for others.

I would like to rejoice the merits of the 16th Shakyadhita Conference for paying my expenses during the conference and I am so grateful to Dh. Padmadakiani and our Australian sangha (Mainly Apada, Dantchitta, Maitrebandha, Kusalchitta, Nagsuri and Sudristi) who made it possible for me to come to Australia and attend this conference. Without their support I was not able to do that. They all looked after us very well.

And I always feel the specialness of our sangha, that it's no matter I where I am going, but if our sangha members are there, they looked after me very well, and felt at home, while I stayed with them. It's so overwhelming but true.

Next conference is in Sarawak in Malaysia in 2021, I would love to go there to keep the continuity, if it is at all possible for me. I would encourage other dh.s to attend it.