

## A Field Worker's Diary - Part 33

2006, the year the Kalachakra took place in Amravati. Kalachakra is a big ritual followed by practitioners of Buddhism, who come together to form a Kalachakra Mandal and perform special prayers around it for 13 days. They say that Buddha had taught the Kalachakra tantra for the very first time in Amravati only. That's the reason why when the Kalachakra program was being planned in Amravati, the government had assumed that the attendance by Buddhists for the program would be on a large scale. The district administration became alert the second the decision to organise the event in Amravati was taken. With the Dalai Lama himself organising the program for world peace, and with expected attendance of more than 1 lakh Buddhists, the government officials took the management of this Kalachakra as a big challenge.



The project I was working at that time was run under the auspices of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), therefore, even my project staff were also assigned some duties. As the area was not well-equipped to accommodate up to a lakh people for 13 days, temporary accommodation facilities were set up on a war footing to accommodate that number of people.

During those 13 days, the DRDA was responsible for maintaining sanitation and managing stalls by women Self Help Group (SHG) members where the Buddhist monks could purchase whatever items they needed. We had to start preparation work for the event much in advance, so from around 20 days before the event we used to go from Guntur to Amaravathi in the morning and used to come back late in the night.

Two to three days before the start of the Kalachakra, a large number of Buddhist monks from Tibet and other countries started arriving there, so all of the government staff was busy allocating them accommodation and providing them necessary facilities.

Our work was the management of women SHG members' stalls. We had our hands full with so many activities, right from making arrangements for women from various mandals (blocks) to set up stalls, providing them the necessary facilities, finding out the value of the stuff they brought for selling, checking how much of it they managed to sell, calculating the revenue they earned, etc., that we didn't have a moment to spare.

Our SHG women, knowing that I was pregnant at that time and working hard all day, kept feeding me something whenever they caught sight of me. So much so that I used to feel bemused thinking whether these women were selling more of their items or were feeding me more!

That year in July, when my aunt came to the hospital to see my newborn son Rahul, who was born with a beautiful complexion, round face and with only four hairs on his head, my aunt said with a laugh that as I kept seeing Tibetan monks during my pregnancy, my baby also looked like them.

This Kalachakra program provided us with another opportunity as well. Prior to that event, we had started a Nutrition centre at Bellamkonda mandal for pregnant and lactating women, which was being run by SHG members there. To sustain that Centre without shortage of funds, we were searching for income generation activities that the women SHG members could take up. At that time, we came to know of the Kalachakra program and thought why not stitch and rent the mats necessary for the Buddhist monks to spread on the ground and sit.

Our women members immediately got to work and stitched the mats and implemented the first collective activity on behalf of the Mandal Samakhya (Block level SHG federation). They managed to get nice profits as well.

For those 13 days, we had observed a miracle. The Kalachakra Mandala that the Buddhists had drawn was so beautiful. Though we didn't understand one bit of the prayers being recited by the monks sitting around it, it was so mesmerizing and peaceful to see all of them invoking the Kalachakra in one voice.

On the last day, a special meeting with the Dalai Lama was organized for all those officials who did duty there. It was a very happy moment for us to take blessings from him.

We not only got the opportunity to participate in a rare event, but also managed to understand in 13 days how challenging organizing such a big event can be, what sort of problems arise and how much detailed planning was necessary to pull it off.

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