

## Annual Day Celebrations - A Brief Report

Balamitra model school celebrated its annual day on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 with great zeal and enthusiasm. Balamitra is a part of Samata, a not-for-profit social justice organisation working for the assertion of Adivasi people's rights and their culture. Through its resource center at Sagar Nagar, it helps adivasi communities in 40 villages across Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts of Andhra Pradesh run their Balamitra Badi's(schools) and ensure that **more than 800 children receive meaningful education**. There is a **residential school** for these children at the resource centre which focuses on developing a contextual education for adivasi children by looking within. The centre also provides research and training facilities. The children and teachers are the primary researchers and resources for documenting their own languages, histories and sciences. The school is also inspired by Steiner education and teachings and works closely with the **teachers and volunteers from the Waldorf community** to develop strong linkages on education for life skills.



**Preparations** for the annual day celebrations started well before a month. Materials required to prepare articles like flower vases, bags, show pieces etc were collected from villages and brought to the main resource centre. These articles were made by children who were guided by teachers and volunteers. Children also made paintings especially for the occasion. Rehearsals for the cultural activities went for nearly one month.

**School Bazar**, which started at 3.00 pm was the major attraction of the day followed by release of books on Tribal culture, and a colourful cultural programme. The Executive Director of Samata **Mr. Ravi Rebbapragada**, who is known for his pioneering work on the issue of Adivasi rights, and **DRO of Visakhapatnam Mr. Reddy**, who was the guest of honour appreciated the

work of children. All the invitees and parents of children who came from the villages, were enthralled to view the articles displayed. Things like mobile pouches, hairbands, bracelets and necklace sets, brooms, pumpkins, carry bags, pen stands, body scrubs and some organic products were available for sale.



At 4.00 pm Mr.Ravi , Mr.Reddy and Mrs. Gunavathi lighted the lamp to mark the inauguration of the celebration. The guests were greeted with a welcome song by the school children. Mr. Ravi gave a brief description about Balamitra schools and Mr. Reddy spoke about education in rural areas. While explaining about Balamitra Tribal education program, Mr. Ravi , mentioned that Balamitra Badis are **Waldorf inspired tribal nature schools**. He also explained how the Adivasi parents impart to their children traditional knowledge and skills that are symbiotic with their ecology as they live in close harmony with nature and have a deep-rooted understanding of earth and its elements. It was amazing to know that science, language, medicine, calculations, geography, philosophy, politics they all are taught orally, spiritually, culturally and experientially to these children by their parents.



**Books on Tribal culture**, were released and distributed. Publishing of these books was one of the parts of the project. The books included Adivasi Glossary, recipes, riddles, proverbs, stories, clay-house building, agriculture, art, plants, etc. Mr. Ravi briefed about the significance of having these books to the audience. Teachers and children of government Juvenile home were also invited to the function and it was interesting to see these children enjoying the programme.

Cultural programme started at 5.00 pm with a Tribal song. Play depicting the life of Freedom fighter and Tribal leader **Alluri Sitaramaraju** was enacted by children. The audience sat spell bound through out and were surprised when the children recited their dialogues clearly in Telugu inspite of the fact that they speak different Tribal languages at home. Volunteers prepared the children with a play named '**Pancake**' and this was beautifully performed by the children.



Children captivated the audience with their songs, dances and activities. These activities were presented by the teachers and volunteers to show how children learn through play. It was seen that the children learn about tables, months, seasons, continents, countries etc through play way method. Children also played songs on the flute taught to them by volunteers. Bamboo dance performed by the children was a very enjoyable.



Some of the guests spoke on issues related to rural education and parents too spoke about the significance of having Balamitra schools. Organic refreshments were served to the audience before presenting vote of thanks. The function ended with the performance of Dhimsa dance by the children, teachers, volunteers and staff and some guests. It was the pleasure of the school to be with the esteemed presence of the invitees.