

**IGNCA**  
**Nari Samvaad Prakalp**

**Three days National Seminar titled ‘Shakti Worship in India’: A Report**

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A three day national seminar titled ‘Shakti Worship in India’, was organized by Nari Samvaad Prakalp (NSP), Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), in collaboration with Amritha Darshanam, International Centre for Spiritual Studies (ICSS), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (AVV), at Amrithapuri Campus, Kollam, Kerala from 21st September to 23rd September, 2018. The seminar was convened by Dr. Sushma Jatoo, Project Director, Nari Samvaad Prakalp and Brahmachari Prasanth, Assistant Professor, Amritha Vishwa Vidyapeetham. The seminar aimed at having academic discussions on various aspects of Shakti Worship in India including the textual traditions, the rituals, their significance and their continuous observance through ages; the manifestation of Shakti in Indian arts, Shakti temples in Indian sub-continent, etc.

The inaugural session of the seminar was graced by Swami Amritakrupananda Puri and other dignitaries from Amritha University and IGNCA. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Aravind Subrahmanyam, an eminent scholar and Sadhaka of Shaktism. In his speech, Dr. Subrahmanyam deliberated upon the history and origin of Shakti worship along with the textual traditions, the Agamic rituals and the manifestation of the goddess in different and diverse forms in India. Among other dignitaries, the presentations in academic sessions were made by some senior Professors and scholars, like, Prof. C.M. Neelakandhan, former Academic director of Kerala Kalamandalam; Prof. Prafulla Kr. Mishra, Chancellor of Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agriculture University, Bihar; Dr. Bala Krishna Shankar, Dean of AVV; Dr. Anandan, HOD of Amrita Darshanam, Dr. Sadashiv Dwivedi from Banaras Hindu University, Dr. Vijay Shankar Shukla, Regional Director of IGNCA Regional Centre, Varanasi and Dr. Giriratna Mishra, a profound Shakta Tantra scholar, etc. to name a few.

About 35 presentations on the above mentioned diverse themes of the Shakta traditions along with Power Point presentations were made by both senior and young scholars during these days. Some of the titles and subjects presented in the seminar were, the Shakti tradition of Odisha, Female Deities in Vedas, the Cult of Bhagavati and her manifestations in Kerala, Female Deities in Madhvacharya’s Tantra-sangraha, Forms of Shakti and the Philosophy of Shaktism in Devi-Mahatmyam, Adi Shankara and Shakti worship, Shakti worship in Kashmir with special reference to Bhringisha Samhita, Shakta tradition of Kashi, Shakti Worship in Tamilnadu with special reference Mariamman, Science and Spirituality, the Diksha Paddhati in Sangeet and

Tantras etc. There was also a special panel on Southern Brahma-Yamalas and the tradition of Shakti Worship in Kerala with special reference to goddess Bhadrakali. A special paper titled 'the Vision of Shakti in Amma's life and Works', was dedicated to Mata Amrithanandamayi, fondly called 'Amma', the Chancellor of AVV, Amrithapuri, which was presented by Dr. Balakrishan Shankar, Dean AVV. Each paper was followed by lively discussions and important inputs. Pertinent questions were raised regarding the comprehension of Shakta traditions prevalent in different forms throughout India which would paved way for further researches and investigations in this field.

It was also a matter of great honor for the participating scholars and delegates to have a darshan of 'Amma' during the seminar days. 'Amma' emphasized on the importance of Shakti worship and blessed all the delegates and wished the seminar to be successful.

The academic sessions were followed by the cultural performances namely, Kalamezhuthu Pattu and Padayani (literally meaning, the military formations). Kalamezhuthu Pattu is an intricate temple art of drawing large picture (Kalam) on the temple floor as a part of the temple ritual (usually associated with Devi, Nagas or Shasta) in Kerala. The drawings are made by the traditional artists with the help of organic colours and depict the theme of creation, sustenance and dissolution, through the ritual. The entire ritual is accompanied by rhythm of musical instruments.

Padayani is a beautiful ritualistic art and dance form of Kerala associated with the legends related to Bhadrakali, with the blend of music, dance, theatre, satire, facial masks and paintings. It is performed to appease the fierce Bhadrakali after she kills the demon Daruka.

The three days national seminar came to a close with the valedictory session on the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2018, in which Ms. Rao R. Bhavani graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Ms. Rao is currently holding the UNESCO chair of Gender Studies at AVV, and is the Director of AMMACHI Labs and principal investigator for several women empowerment projects funded by the UN Democracy Fund and the MHRD, Government of India. In her valedictory address, Ms. Rao dilated upon the importance of Indian culture that celebrates the woman as a divine power. She simultaneously spoke about the ground reality with compelling need to empower women in the present day Indian society. In this session, two films were also screened, one based on IGNCAs and other on the achievements of AMMACHI Labs and their steps towards empowering women in India. A brief feedback session was also held wherein, the participants expressed their pleasure in attending the seminar and profusely thanked the IGNCAs and AVV for organizing such a thematic and fruitful seminar on 'Shakti Worship'.