

SEMINAR REPORT

on

National Seminar on Prenatal Education: Ancient Indian Perspectives

Jointly Organised by

Sri Aurobindo Foundation for Indian Culture (SAFIC),
Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

and

Department of Sanskrit and Indian Culture,
Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswathi Vishwa Mahavidyalaya (SCSVMV), Kanchipuram

Dates: April 11-12, 2019 Venue: SCSVMV, Kanchipuram

Report Prepared By

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Introduction

The guiding idea behind this national seminar, in fact, the whole focus area of prenatal education that SAFIC has taken up, is to highlight the deeper spiritual insights on various aspects and topics related to prenatal education. Our work starts with the basic premise that a conscious change in the human birthing itself will be an important and undeniable way to enable the creation of a conscious humanity and bring about an upliftment of consciousness in the human individual and collective.

SAFIC worked closely with the SCSVMV team on all aspects of the planning of this national seminar. SAFIC took lead in creating the initial concept paper, inviting submissions for the seminar, identifying key speakers and panelists, reviewing the submitted abstracts, selecting paper presenters, preparing the seminar schedule, reviewing and editing the submitted papers for the seminar proceedings, and several other key academic tasks related to the seminar.

The Inaugural Ceremony



The inaugural ceremony of the programme began with an invocation and lighting of the lamp, which was followed by the welcome address by Dr. Debajyoti Jena, Head, Department of Sanskrit, SCSVMV.



Prof. Vishnu Potty V.S., Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, SCSVMV presided over the ceremony, and in his presidential address highlighted the significance of the seminar theme for conscious upliftment of the human race. He stated the importance of the topic in the creation of the next generation along with the references of his own experiences and also the role of the literature and traditions that hold a great value in shaping the future generation.



Dr. S. Ramaratnam, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Jagadguru Kripalu University, Orissa gave the keynote address in which he spoke about the significance of ritual traditions of India and the various samskaras with regard to the prenatal and postnatal practices. He also discussed the importance of these rituals in various stage of our lives and how they exclusively form the part of philosophy and mythology. He gave various examples of the child's education inside the womb.



Prof. G. Srinivasu, Registrar, SCSVMVV briefly addressed the group and wished success for the event. Proceedings of the seminar which includes some of the important papers presented at the seminar was also released during the inaugural ceremony.



Prof. S. Ramakrishna Pisipaty, Dean, Faculty of Sanskrit & Indian Culture, SCSVMV spoke about the importance of the topic for the society. He talked about the developments in Medical sciences that are evident in our history and the importance of the samskaras in the pre-natal education over the modern medical solutions. He also expressed his appreciation on the release of all the papers on Day 1.



Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, Director, SAFIC felicitated the gathering and encouraged everyone to actively participate in the deliberations and discussions.

Technical Sessions, Plenary Session and Panel Discussions

The 2-day seminar included several technical sessions which covered a wide range of perspectives and insights on topics such as: conscious conception, conscious pregnancy, antenatal yoga, role of prayer and meditation during pregnancy, significance of samskaras and rituals related to conception, pregnancy and childbirth, Ayurvedic insights on prenatal care, postnatal care, pregnancy, infertility, *rajaswala paricharya*, *garbhini paricharya*, regional variations in *sutika paricharya*, and many others.



Dr. P. Ram Manohar, Research Director at Amrita School of Ayurveda was the special invited speaker for plenary session conducted on Day 1 of the seminar. His talk on the “Spiritual Dimensions of Fertility, Pregnancy and Childbirth – Ayurvedic Perspectives” was highly appreciated by seminar participants.



The two panel discussions organised and moderated by SAFIC team were also much appreciated and made some of the key insights much more accessible to the younger audience present at the seminar. The panel discussion on Day 1, titled “Spiritual Insights on Love and Human Relationships” was moderated by Dr. Beloo Mehra. The second panel discussion, held on Day 2 toward the end of the seminar, titled “Relevance of Ancient Indian Insights on Prenatal Education for Present Generation of Indian Youth” was moderated by Dr. Sampadananda Mishra.

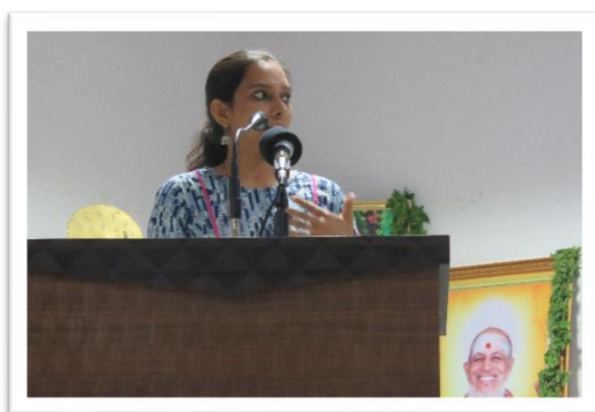


Other Highlights

Another important contribution made by SAFIC was organising a special workshop for the girl students and women faculty of the SCSVMV on the topic of “Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Creating Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity.” This was conducted by Dr. N. Kalyani, who is one of the SAFIC resource persons for Prenatal Education.



Several research scholars and faculty members from SCSVMV were also presenters at the seminar. While a few of them were included as speakers in the main sessions, a couple of parallel sessions were also organised for these presenters.



Another highlight of the seminar was an open sharing session organised on the evening of Day 1. Seminar participants were invited to share inspiring songs, poems, stories about any of the themes related to love, relationships, life, parenting, motherhood, pregnancy and childbirth rituals, cultural practices, etc. This session became an organic, free-flowing experience involving a few moving songs, some elevating mantra recitation, some poetry, as well as much free-spirited exchange and laughter.



The seminar was able to create an enriching experience for all as they were reminded of the great knowledge hidden in our Indian traditions – spiritual, cultural, medical – though this distinction is somewhat arbitrary and meaningless when we speak of the Indian traditions which are integral in their essence – with regard to the potential to transform the essence of the human population. Through a variety of sessions and discussions, the session was able to highlight the need to have a deeper understanding of the entire process of conscious creation of a being – from pre-conception to pregnancy, from prenatal education to childbirth, and also from postnatal care to conscious parenting.



The Valedictory Session

The final valedictory session began with an invocation, followed by a welcome address by Dr. Debajyoti Jena of SCSVMV. After the honouring of the dignitaries, Dr. Beloo Mehra from SAFIC gave a brief report of the seminar highlighting the key learnings and the work ahead.



Dr. S. Swaminathan, Dean and HOD, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Ayurveda College & Hospital, who presided over the ceremony shared brief remarks about the significance of such deliberations on the theme of prenatal education from Indian perspectives.



Two members from the audience also gave important feedback on what they felt were the highlights of the seminar and shared suggestions for facilitating greater audience participation, particularly from the students.

Shri Arya Muni from Shanti Dham, Kanakapura, Karnataka delivered his valedictory address in which he highlighted the deep significance of prenatal education for the future evolution of humanity. Referring to Sri Aurobindo's vision of the new race, he stressed how important it is for individuals to constantly strive for elevating in one's consciousness and thereby make active contribution to the conscious upliftment of the collective and humanity as a whole.



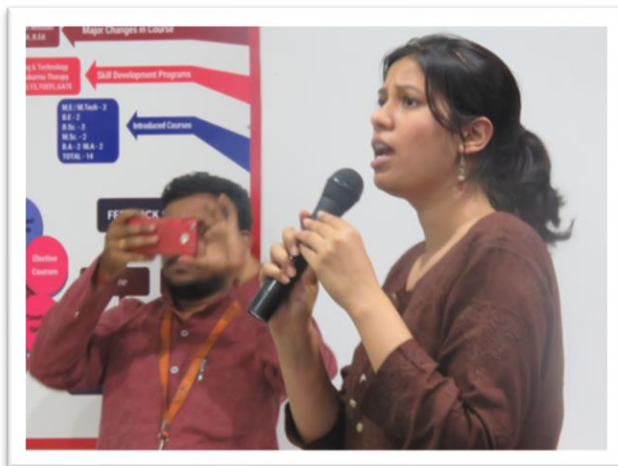
Dr. Sampadananda Mishra gave brief felicitation remarks and thanked the participants for making the seminar a grand success. Dr. N. Sridhar, Assistant Professor in Sanskrit, SCSVMV gave the final vote of thanks and concluded the ceremony with a shanti-pāth.

The Key Learnings and the Work Ahead

1. An important learning that emerged from the deliberations at the seminar is that it is very important for the younger generations to reflect on some of the themes and issues discussed at the seminar, especially as they get ready to leave the stage of adolescence and enter into young adulthood, ready to enter the next phase of their lives which will involve experiencing new relationships, new realities and challenges.
2. Whether this has to do with love, human relationships, sexuality, marriage, menstrual health, reproductive health, becoming ready to conceive a child and start a family, motherhood, fatherhood, gender consciousness and gender equality at the deep, fundamental level etc – all of these things which are often left out of normal conversations that happen in our contemporary families – must be discussed openly, with a deep cultural sensitivity, and most importantly, from the deeper perspective of Indian cultural and spiritual traditions.
3. The seminar was highly effective in highlighting that our ancient seers and thinkers never considered any topic that had anything to do with the human experience a taboo subject, rather they thought every topic as a fit subject for deep examination and study.
4. It was also highlighted that all that examination and study was done keeping in front the deeper, spiritual truths of existence. All that vast and rich intellectual knowledge was always guided by the light of the spirit, that is why the essence or the core of that ancient knowledge still holds true to this day and will hold true for all times to come.

That is how we have inherited shastras and elaborate commentaries on these shastras covering almost all aspects of life and living that we can think of.

5. That holistic, all-encompassing view of life that was given to us by our rishis and acharyas of the yore was represented visually through our various arts, *sthapatya kala*, *murti-kala*, *chitrakala* and performed through gesture, music and movement in our natya, nritya and sangeet. Glimpses of this were seen through the various sessions and discussions over the two-day seminar.
6. The participants of the seminar – professionals, researchers, educators, students and scholars – were encouraged to continue their exploration into these areas of study – not only as an intellectual quest but also as a personal journey to understand their own lives, relationships, experiences better and deeply.
7. They were also encouraged to contribute toward a wider dissemination of this wealth of knowledge for the purposes of educating and inspiring the larger community – in various forms – from blogs to writing articles or academic papers, through participating in and organising more of such forums where these topics can be explored and discussed, from our open and honest conversations with our family members, friends or relatives in our own capacity as individuals.



Some Feedback from the Participants

1. “I was gravitated towards the presentations made by practitioners who apply this ancient wisdom in their daily practice.... their citing of case histories and real-life examples helped me connect and also see the direct application of the knowledge in the present-day scenario.”
2. “The session by Dr. Ram Manohar on the ayurvedic perspective through the lens of spirituality...will stay with me for a long time.”
3. “The panel discussion on ‘spiritual insights on love and human relationships’ brought out a lot of relevant points of discussion and as a person sitting in the audience, I could sense the authenticity and sincerity of the speakers and their sharing reflected their experience.”
4. “The panel discussion on how to make this knowledge relevant to youth brought out some relevant points to ponder upon.”

5. "It has been a holistic learning experience. I would like to explore more in detail the perspectives shared from Shiva Gita, Yogasutras and Upanishads."
6. "Spiritual insights on fertility and pregnancy, Insights on Citta-parikarma from Yogasutras and Role of Prayer and Meditation were very significant sessions for me."
7. "This seminar has covered all the relevant topics."
8. "Maybe in the future seminars there could be greater linkages explored between ancient knowledge and modern practices."
9. "Stories from scriptures and examples from current times could also be somehow incorporated in some sessions."
10. "I am inspired to do further research on Ayurvedic perspectives that were shared by some of the presenters."
11. "We are already an overpopulated country. So, it is very critical that we become more conscious of real relevance of pregnancy, motherhood etc."
12. "Please add some more sessions on actionable and practical points that can be taken up."
13. "Sessions were thought-provoking, informative and stimulating."

Report by Beloo Mehra, SAFIC. Photos by Upasika Ghosh, SAFIC