

A Report

ICCS Conference on Spirituality in Indigenous Cultures and Religious Traditions

A conference, hosted and organized by ICCS (International Center for Cultural Studies), was held at the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple on the 24th and 25th of October, 2009. These two days provided an opportunity for several interested individuals to present their research papers, thoughts, and interpretations of their concepts of Spirituality and Religion. Amongst the presenters were distinguished representatives of various ethnic and traditional groups from around the globe, notable students pursuing cultural studies, and eminent authors of books on mysticism. Close to 80 people participated in this event and had a chance to reflect upon the ideas of spirituality, the role of rituals in indigenous cultures, influences of modernity on them, and the challenges faced by some of the ancient traditions of the world that have managed to survive to this day in spite of several odds against them.

The opening ceremonies included the lighting of the lamp by some of the attending dignitaries and a melodious devotional song by Kusum Shukla. Soon after, Dr. Radheyshyam Dwivedi, President of ICCS, welcomed everyone with his opening remarks. Following this, Swami Aksharananda, delivered the keynote address to set the tone of the day. Swamiji is the founder and Principal of Saraswati Vidya Niketan High School in Guyana and also guides Sangh Pariwar activities there. He spoke quite eloquently about how the origin of most indigenous cultures and beliefs lay in the peoples' reverence of nature and her powers. These cultures have existed since the first existence of human beings who depended on their environment to sustain themselves. He also reminded us that the source of these cultures is not attributed to any particular person or deity but to sheer worship of nature the ancient people were in such close proximity with.

Illustrious orators spoke at length about their views on Spirituality in indigenous cultures and enlightened us with their worthy observations.

A panel discussion followed and many of the guests shared their comments and suggestions regarding future plans for ICCS. Of the most outstanding, a suggestion was made to bind all the research papers presented at this conference and publish the collection as a book. Some others gave ideas to update the ICCS website. All points were duly recorded for further action.

The conference ended by giving thanks to the temple for providing us with a venue and delicious meals, as well as to all the participants and organizers who made this event a success.