

go40 Biographies / Projects

Celebrating Women

The 2nd International Women's Conference in Bangalore, India in June 2007

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Translated into English by Birgit Addou

This Women's Conference indeed celebrated women! Women from all over the world and their most considerable projects. With its cultural events during the day in between talks and especially in the evening when events took place on a huge open air stage this conference, scheduled for three days, turned into a real celebration of women. The beauty of the exquisitely colourful dresses of Indian, Asian and African women even more added to this wonderful atmosphere. There were repeated standing ovations during and after talks and project reports and award ceremonies. The famous Indian pop star Usha Uthup was enthusiastically accepted with her "conference theme song" with women even dancing all over the podium.



All the time I wished that many more women could witness this event and that go40 readers could be there with me. Most women attending this conference came from the Eastern hemisphere: What wonderful energies, beauty, power, fun and joy are created once women come together to share their abundance of willpower, knowledge and action! We won't let anyone disunite us but embrace each other to build tomorrow's world strong of heart and with plenty of energy. Then a window will open to a world into which Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has already brought the vision and message of a society free of stress and violence, opening a whole new realm of inner peace for so many in

144 countries over the past 25 years. By means of ancient and simple Vedic breath and meditation exercises and mantras he showed us ways to connect the inner and outer worlds and take responsibility for ourselves and for the world we live in with all our heart and with the numinous spark inherent in all of us. This initiative - an NGO - is called "Art of Living", originating from India but today active with relief work in Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Sudan, South Africa, Israel and New York, to name just a few. In Germany they also have an initiative at the detention facility for women in Aichach. These projects are like small oases in a desert that will save people from their experiences with stress, anxiety, catastrophes and violence and make them familiar with a fine art, the art of living.

"Human existence is a fact, but living your life is an art," as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar puts it. In his Indian ashram, nestled in rolling hills about 20 km from Bangalore, this art takes form. This oasis hosted about 700 women from more than 50 countries who had come to attend the conference. At every turn you can see thousands of people living peacefully together, working side by side, living on a delicious but simple Ayurvedic diet. During the Women's Conference and owing to a never-ending stream of visitors more than 10,000 people had to be supplied with food each day! People who - just like all the participants of the conference - have come to find their balance and new energy. An Ayurvedic hospital is adjacent to the ashram, as well as an institute where all the Ayurvedic remedies are produced, there are schools, academies, training centers and then there is the Association for Human Values which had invited me to this conference. This is a true work of art that radiates of simplicity, beauty and strength. The fine art of living is celebrated here with a magic smile coming from deep within, prominent on all the faces, an enchantment that is manifested in the layout of the ambience and in the way that people interact. I had a little room with a small bath room and balcony that I was asked to clean by myself, but still I was coddled with fresh, delicious fruits, flowers and incense sticks every day.



The conference itself took place in the most impressive building I have ever seen, fully provided with state of the art equipment and everything needed for an international meeting place. It was organised absolutely professionally. From 5:30 in the morning until 8:30 in the evening there were yoga courses offered and there also was a basic course for the ancient Vedic breathing techniques. All this took place on the 5th

floor and on the roof-deck of this building from where your gaze lingers on the rolling hills. Breakfast was served at 9 o'clock in the vast dining hall that had been decorated very nicely. Each day the conference began at 10 o'clock and ended at 6 o'clock in the evening, only interrupted by lunch. I was very impressed with the meditation lead by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar after dinner and also with the chanting of mantras that took place every night. Everybody staying at the ashram, residents and visitors, met meet outside to sit down together to sing and immerse into their inner realm, their source of energy.

The cultural program was scheduled for later in the evening. Among the performers was the famous Indian dance star Hema Malini who is also a member of the Indian Parliament and who performed together with her daughters. Her daughters have refined the old traditions in their very own way and have entered new worlds with ancient sounds. Those of you who would like to know more about the projects that have been presented at this conference or would like to learn the breathing technique that relieves from trauma and stress or support Art of Living in any way respectively wants to sponsor a deprived child visiting the schooling project within the ashram area, please contract Regina Bönsel (r.boensel@artofliving.de).

Most fascinating for me to witness during the few days that I spent at the Indian ashram of Art of Living was how spirituality and politics intertwine and how natural the inner and outer worlds are integrated into everyday life and I would like to pass this experience on to you as a gift. The art of living no longer is a vision but has become true there.

I would especially like to thank Bhanumathi Narasimhan, who with her contagious, joyful easiness, overwhelming kindness and warm hearted hospitality let us all grow closer together into this wonderful community from the first minute. This turned the hours we spent together into magic moments that will remain unforgettable and continue to glow. Thank you and greetings to all of you. Greta Tüllmann

The key note of the Second International Women's Conference from June 8th - 10th, 2007 was Shakti. Shakti is the Sanskrit word for energy, the source of all creation and is therefore also seen as the maternal aspect of femininity. There are different names for each of the energy forms. The goddess Shakti embodies the active female energy of our universe. Her external forms are the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and ether. Her internal aspects are: iccha-, kriya- and jnana shakti. Shakti stands for the possibility of absoluteness to manifest in this world in all its various forms. There is no difference between God and Shakti as there is no difference between fire and its burning power. Shakti is inherent in God. Just as heat cannot be separated from the fire, Shakti cannot be separated from God.



"A woman teaches you the first step in life. It is a woman who can glue the differences and bring together people of diverse natures because she is an expert even at home. If there are ten members in a family, she knows how to deal with each one of them. This quality is inherent in her. Men can inspire to fight, but a woman can inspire to unite! In today's war-torn world what we need is for women to come to the forefront and take responsibility. It is necessary that they need to bring the finer aspects of society, the feminine, with the transformation ability, the ability to create and make a difference in society." H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Each of the three days of this conference represented one of the Shakti aspects and the speakers paid tribute to this. None of the three Shakti aspects - iccha shakti, kriya shakti and jnana shakti is conceivable to stand out from the other two as an independent value. The aspect of willpower (iccha) results in the urge to act (kriya). Kriya will lead to jnana shakti, the energy of knowledge. Knowledge again will result in stronger willpower, the consecutive action and the process of learning that comes with it will bring further knowledge and so the three shaktis cause each other. The main reason for the actual state of today's world is nescience. Even though there are many experts for any kind of science the knowledge about coherences, the integrative approach, the wisdom, the aspect of jnana is being neglected on an almost criminal scale. Each day you can see people failing to realize their visions and this is obviously due to lack of kriya shakti. Then there are people with a lack of jnana shakti accompanied by an abundance of kriya shakti - a not quite so perfect situation. We should endeavour to balance all the shaktis with full awareness. The whole world is run on these three shaktis.



Just as positive iccha shakti results in positive action there also is a downward spiral if one of the aspects has been labelled with a negative connotation due to an imbalance within us. However, it is then also clear that you can take up any of the three aspects to make a turn to the better.

The first day of the conference was characterized by iccha shakti, the aspect of will power, represented by the goddesses Paravathi and Uma. This day was about what women have already achieved and where they are heading, about what they want for today and for their future. The conference flame was lit and would burn through the next three days, symbolizing the women's commitment. When Bhanumathi Narasimhan had opened the conference, H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar held his personal inaugural address with best wishes for a successful conference.



The first topic of this morning was women's leadership skills and Shranthi Rajapakse, Sri Lanka's First Lady, Sarojni Jugnauth, First Lady of Mauritius as well as Zimbabwe's deputy minister for family affairs and women and S.A.E. Damasane and Hema Malini, Member of the Indian Parliament, among others, were the speakers.

After meditation and lunch the conference dealt with creativity as a source of inspiration for women in leadership positions. Liora Katzenstein from Israel, founder of ISEMI as well as Rita Patel, CEO of the Peepul Foundation in England and Nabila Al Anjar, a business woman from Kuwait, spoke on this subject.

Since many of the participants seemed to be really overwhelmed by all the information, there was a performance of Hema Malini, who - in addition to her political work - is also an actress and performer of the classical bharatanatyam dance. After this first, eventful day full of new ideas and impacts all women met the next morning to start the second conference day with yoga, breathing exercises, Sudarshan Kriya® and meditation.

The 2nd day's motto was Kriya? Shakti, strength in action, action to protect and maintain our environment.

How can we realise the concept of iccha shakti that was shaped on the first day of the Conference? How can we help to protect our environment, especially with regard to a globalisation that urgently needs a humane countenance? The voices of Amy Fernandes, editor in chief of the Indian Femina magazine, mayor Novieen Peterson from Ikopo, South Africa, Dr. Darja Piciga of the Slovenian Ministry for Technology, of Nadine Kreisberger of NBC News, as well as of Senay Özdemir, editor of the Dutch SEN magazine were heard on this subject. In his address, H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar quoted from the Dharma Shastras that "killing a cow is a most heinous sin but the sin committed by killing one scholar is equivalent to killing one hundred cows. Killing one saint is equivalent to killing one hundred scholars. And the killing of a girl child is equivalent to killing one hundred saints." It is only by actual practise of spirituality that we can really bridge the gender gap.

So, naturally, aids, violence against women and female foeticide were also addressed on this second day. Among the speakers were Dr. Vinoda Kochupilla, former head of the cancer unit of the Indian Medical Institute, Dr. Marcela Losardo, Argentina's deputy Minister of Justice as well as Urmila Bendre, who is a consultant with the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund).

This second day draw to a close with another performance, this time by Usha Uthup, a popular Indian pop singer who is also an international star. She captured everybody with her powerful voice and was a really



inspiring picture of kriya? shakti. The third and regrettably also last day of this conference was about jnana shakti, representing the essence of the goddess Saraswathi: strength in knowledge. The participants were shown ways how to introduce more awareness and values to our modern society. Dr. Greta Tüllmann, editor of the German go40 magazine spoke on this subject and also Prof. Pamela Naidoo, director of the psychological faculty of the University of Western Cape, South Africa, was heard. This morning was closed with a dancing performance on "Parashakti", the highest of the shaktis. Award-winning Rashmi Gopi Hegde, who had given guest performances in several cities in Germany earlier in May, entertained an enthusiastic audience with her outstanding talent. The afternoon was spent

searching for ways how to preserve peace. Many possibilities and perspectives were discussed and the subject was debated by Vijaylakshmi Thimmaya, an Indian social worker, E. Banda, responsible for the reintegration of convicts in Zimbabwe and Dr. Mala Singh who works for the police of South Africa.

The Conference was closed with a prayer for peace. All women will certainly carry the spirit of cooperation and joint responsibility that predominated this Conference to all five continents and help heal our society on all levels. Bhanumathi Narasimhan and all participants rounded this Conference off with a promise:

"Let us pledge to always keep alive the strength of our intention and passion to work towards resolving women's issues and challenges. Let us pledge to build networks globally and locally to search for relevant information on these issues and educate ourselves with tools to resolve them. Let us pledge to be committed to take concrete steps towards fulfilling our action plans." The German delegation embarked inspired and with plans for a women's conference in Germany in the spring of 2008. Info: Regina Bönsel, E-Mail: r.boensel@artofliving.de Tel.: 069/ 78 988 388 Mobil: 0171/ 69 55 020

Jai Guru Dev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and my dear Sisters: I welcome all of you here today. It is indeed a wonderful day for women. I am proud to share that women from almost 50 countries from diverse backgrounds; from the rural and the urban worlds; from the East and the West have come together here. I feel the strength of 50 nations behind me; that itself gives me a feeling of strength and empowerment. This strength is the essence of the 2nd International Women's Conference. This conference will explore the three strengths within each one of us: Icha Shakti, Kriya Shakti, Jnana Shakti, i.e. Strength in Will, Strength in Action and Strength in Knowledge.

Time seems to have flown by since the last conference two years ago, and yet I still feel the same warmth, enthusiasm and love which filled the hall then - right here, right now. We instituted the conference with a vision to create a platform for women of different backgrounds to come together. Our network of women from the First International Women's Conference has helped us grow - in confidence and strength.

We are here to celebrate the successes of women; in both the outer world - in terms of material success; and in the inner world - bringing confidence, inner strength and a dynamic radiance. It is this unique combination of a woman's outer and inner strength that we seek to promote. As empowered women, we have a major responsibility to create a more harmonious world around us. In the First Conference Sri Sri noted that "men can inspire to fight, but women can inspire to unite." It is this spirit of unity and teamwork that has brought about this conference. The sunflower is the symbol of this conference. Just as the sunflower turns its face towards the sun; if all human beings turn towards the light of wisdom, we will bring joy and service to this planet. Yellow is the colour of cheerfulness, strength auspiciousness and keen intellect.

The need of the hour is spiritual values. I now call upon all the women leaders gathered here today to instill these human values in their spheres of influence - in their families, communities, at the local, national and global levels.

Most importantly, we must protect our Mother Earth as One Family. This is not a time to sit back and brood about the past. This is the hour to unite people with wisdom to end illiteracy, poverty, hunger, fanaticism, terrorism, violence, environmental damage and AIDS. Female foeticide is one of the major issues today and it is time to educate all cultures that the girl child is a boon; a gift. I am confident that the discussions over the next three days will help us to craft solutions to overcome these challenges.

We as women can make the difference, I believe we already are doing so and that is why we are here. I urge all my sisters present here to make use of this forum and bring about the transformation in society that people have been talking about for ages.

Let us bring together our strengths in this forum, let us multiply our capabilities and form a network of women leaders committed to creating a more harmonious society. Let us use our inner strengths to transform the world around us.

Thank you.

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