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Notice for the PhD Viva Voce Examination

Ms Surya Suresh Kumar, Registration Number: 2290046, PhD Scholar at the Department of English and Cultural Studies, School of Humanities and Performing Arts, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), will defend her PhD thesis at the public viva-voce examination on Friday, 30 October 2026, at 10.30 am in Room No. 044, Ground Floor, R & D Block, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru - 560029, Karnataka, India.

Title of the Thesis	:	**Narratives of the Sacred Divine: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Bhadrakali Worship Culture of Keralam**
Discipline	:	**Cultural Studies**
External Examiner - I	:	**Dr Joseph Koyippally Joseph** Professor Department of English and Comparative Literature Central University of Kerala Tejaswini Hills, Periye Keralam - 671325
External Examiner - II	:	**Dr Binod Mishra** Professor Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee - 247667 Uttarakhand
Supervisor	:	**Dr Vaidyanath Nishant** Assistant Professor Department of English and Cultural Studies School of Humanities and Performing Arts CHRIST (Deemed to be University) Bengaluru - 560029 Karnataka

The members of the Research Advisory Committee of the Scholar, the faculty members of the Department and the School, interested experts, and research scholars of all the branches of research are cordially invited to attend this open viva–voce examination.

Registrar (Academics)

Place: Bengaluru
Date: 12 October 2026

ABSTRACT

The Bhadrakali worship is a lived, co-produced worship culture in Keralam. It is shaped through the interaction of legends, ritual practices, worshipper agency, and temple governance. Moving beyond textual understanding of the goddess, the study focuses on everyday practices, embodied experience, affect and narrative circulation. It reframes the Bhadrakali devotion through an Indic adaptation of the lived religion framework to interpret the process of meaning- making. The study adopts a self-situated cultural analysis that integrates autoethnography and narrative inquiry based on fieldwork conducted at the three major Bhadrakali temples in Keralam- *the Kodungallur Sri Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple* (Thrissur), *the Chottanikkara Bhagavathy Temple* (Ernakulam), and *the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple* (Thiruvananthapuram). It examines how temples, legends and the *Sthala puranas* function as living cultural frameworks that acquire meaning through oral transmission, ritual enactment and devotees experiential engagement. It demonstrates worshippers as active interpretive agents who continuously negotiate and reshape ritual traditions through vows, healing practices, possession and affective participation. The study also analyses the role of temple administration and religious representatives in codifying, regulating and legitimising worship practices. The findings revealed that the Bhadrakali worship culture in Keralam is a negotiated convergence of ancestral authority, hereditary ownership, institutional governance and devotee-oriented ritual agency. The study thus demonstrates that the Bhadrakali worship culture in Keralam is a palimpsestic culture produced through narrative circulation, embodied ritual practice and institutional mediation.

Keywords: *Goddess Bhadrakali, Lived Worship Culture, Autoethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Ritual Embodiment*

Publications:

1. **Sureshkumar, Surya** and Vaidyanath Nishant. "A Reflexive Tool for Studying Indic Worship Culture through Lived Practice and Autoethnography." The Patent Office Journal, no. 14/2026, Government of India Patent Office, Application no. 202641017437 A, 3 Apr. 2026.
2. **Sureshkumar, Surya** and Vaidyanath Nishant. "Unveiling the Mystery of Pranthan Kuriachan: Demystifying the Local Belief System of Mattanchery through the Narratives of the Coonan Cross." Time and Mind, vol 8, 2026, pp. 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/1751696X.2026.2647325.
3. **Sureshkumar, Surya** and Vaidyanath Nishant. "When Cloth Colours Become Markers of Caste Identities: Ritual Performance and Caste Politics in Contemporary Kerala." Asian Ethnicity, vol. 27, no. 3, 2026, pp. 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2026.2675057.