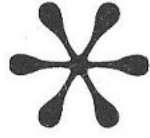


Culture in One's Life

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As Indians, we honestly believe that culture is in our blood and that this gives us an edge over other nationalities. We make statements like: 'They have no culture in their country', 'It's all about money there', 'They don't have roots', 'They don't have values'.

Very rarely do we actually try and define our culture. Is our culture based on our religion? Is it based on our clothes or our behaviour? Is it our movies that determine our culture? What is it?

Old timers would equate culture with our religious or artistic heritage. A young teenager may add 'Bollywood'. A middle-aged person equates it with listening to Mohammed Rafi and watching Satyajit Ray's movies. I remember telling a friend in the U.S. that it's so sad that people there think that Indian culture is all about temples. He looked at me and asked, 'Then what is it?' That was an eye-opener. I realized that everyone holds on to one aspect that is convenient and flaunts it.

We always see culture as an external object or thought process that we need to imbibe or respect. One who has learnt the Koran or the Vedas is said to have gained an understanding of culture. Thus culture is often related to a religion. Therefore when we refer to Hindu culture, Muslim culture and so on, what we are talking about is religious customs and practices. Just because we practice them does it make us culturally rooted? Do any of us know the meaning of these rites or their social contexts? Most of us do not. So what does it really mean?

I am a Carnatic musician and most people believe that there cannot be a better way to be rooted in Indian culture than that. They may have a point, since culture, to some, means being able to practise ancient traditions and rituals