

INDIA TODAY

Reimagining cultural education in our schools

Bringing culture into daily classroom learning helps children connect with their roots, build empathy, and grow creatively

By Rakesh Gupta



Think back to school, most of us remember racing through maths problems, cramming grammar rules, or waiting for the bell to ring before PE. But how many of us remember learning about our festivals, traditional music, or regional art forms in the classroom? For the most part, culture only came up around annual day performances or a quick decoration session before Diwali. It rarely got the space it truly deserved.

And yet, culture quietly shapes us every day. It's in the way our grandparents told stories, the recipes passed down without measurements, the songs our parents hummed, and the way we greet each other at the door. These things aren't just sentimental, they carry meaning, memory, and identity.

So it's worth asking: why isn't this richness a core part of our education system?

In a country as diverse as India, where every region holds a world of tradition, language, art, and philosophy, culture shouldn't be on the sidelines. It should be at the centre of how we teach and learn. If we want children to grow up confident in who they are and curious about the world around them, then cultural education needs to become part of their everyday learning, woven in, not tagged on.

Why it matters

Culture isn't just something we perform once a year or talk about in abstract ways. It's how we understand who we are. It's in the lullabies our grandparents sang, the food we cook, the way we celebrate a festival, or even the way we speak. If kids grow up without being exposed to these things, they grow up disconnected, not just from their roots, but sometimes even from each other.

In many schools, especially in rural or low-income areas, children don't get exposure to the richness of Indian arts and traditions. Not because they aren't interested, but because it's just not part of their learning system.

Making It part of the day, not an extra

This is where the mindset needs to shift. Cultural education isn't "nice to have." It should be part of regular school life. That doesn't mean turning classrooms into museums or putting textbooks aside. It means finding small ways to weave in heritage, art, and tradition into lessons.

Imagine a science class where students explore ancient Indian water systems. Or an English lesson that includes folk tales from different states. Or learning maths through kolam patterns. These aren't wild ideas, they're very doable. And they make learning feel richer, more connected.

What can we do about it?

Technology, which often gets blamed for taking kids away from their roots, can actually bring them closer. With internet access and a little support, even a school in a remote village can experience a Kathak performance or listen to a Baul singer. And they don't just watch passively, they ask questions, they get curious, they start seeing culture as something they can relate to.

There's this idea that culture is all about preserving old things. But culture is very much alive. It evolves. Street art, indie music, sustainable fashion inspired by tribal designs, all of this is culture too. If we show kids that culture isn't just what their grandparents did, but something they can shape, they're far more likely to engage with it.

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The bigger picture

Cultural education isn't just about knowing the past. It's about empathy, identity, and connection. A student who understands their roots is more likely to respect someone else's. In a country as diverse as India, that kind of awareness is vital.

And beyond the social value, there's also a personal one. Kids who engage with the arts and heritage tend to be more creative, more expressive, and often, more confident. They're not just learning, they're participating in something bigger than themselves because culture isn't just part of our past. It's something we live, shape, and pass on. And schools can be the best place to make that happen.