

Indian Culture on Stage: A Study of Traditional Art Forms Showcased in Inter-University Youth Festivals

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Abstract

The current research paper aims at discussing the dynamic expression of Indian conventional art forms in the field of inter-university youth festivals in the country and how this cultural theatre form actually plays a significant role in maintaining, enriching and aiding the Indian multi cultural heritages in being heard by the young generations. This paper scathingly weighs the forms of traditional arts like classical dance, folk music, tribal drama, regional theater, and such others which are performed in competitions of university level in understanding the cultural relevance of their performances, student involvement, support of the institutions, and the responses by their audience. Based on mixed-methods implementation, the study deploys quantitative data bases on structured survey of student respondents and organizers, along with qualitative information obtained through interviews and field visits of zonal and national-levels of university fests. The results indicate that although the interest of the students in traditional art is still high, problems like absence of funds and limited training facility and the desire to follow more modern formats affect the extent to which cultural transmission can take place in India. However, the research has indicated how youth festivals play a powerful role in becoming dynamic platforms of cultural manifestation, definition of identity and inter-cultural communication. At the end of this paper, policy recommendations and institutional planning are elaborated to further incorporate the traditional cultural education into the curriculum and extra.

Keywords: Traditional Indian Art Forms, Inter-University Youth Festivals, Cultural Stage Performance, Heritage Preservation, Student Participation, Folk and Classical Arts, Cultural Identity

Introduction

India is a geographical country of great cultural diversity with all its heritage, tradition and art spanning across the centuries. The rhythmic extravaganza of Bharatanatyam and Kathak to the

touching tunes of Hindustani and Carnatic music, the silly music of Bhangra to the folk stories being told by Lavani and the Yakshaganas, there is no part of the country that does not unleash oodles of pride in their own cultural heritage. In the modern times, whereby modernization and globalization process tend to relegate the traditional forms to the sidelines, educational institutions are important in making them relevant and alive. Held under the auspices of Association of Indian Universities (AIU) as well as through initiative of a few central, state and private universities, Inter-University Youth Festivals have turned out to be one of the most vibrant and broad based phenomena in the means of commemoration and conveyance of the traditional art forms in the Indian continent.

All the above youth festivals, besides depicting the artistic richness of India, also provide means of the young school going children to connect with their culture of origin through these youth festivals, to feel some sense of self and to bring out the creative talent in them. These festivals, called zonal and national, are held every year and consist of a range of competitive and non competitive activities, such as classical dance, folk dances, one act play, traditional music, painting and others. The participants of the different universities introduce the cultural flavor of their states and regions, thus forming an exciting wall mosaic of their traditions on a shared arena. The amount of energy and enthusiasm and creativity that goes into these performances is a deeper awareness of culture in the current generation of youth and this does not fit the narrative that our current students are overly disconnected with their roots.

Nevertheless, there exists a wide scholarship gap in enquiring how such festivals can be used to preserve traditional art forms in India. A great deal of literature available is more inclined towards dwelling upon the general problem of cultural preservation or university reformation, but the specific thought about the institutional framework, student motivation, the pedagogical connections, and other influences socio-cultural effects of youth festivals is not considered. The present study attempts to bridge the existing gap by exploring critically the nature of representation, preservation and adaptation of traditional Indian cultural forms within University level festivals. It does not solely set out to examine the performance facet, but it ventures also into the preparation, mentorship, funding, and audience participation into such cultural displays.

One of the principal aspects of this research is to explore the shifting dynamics of student interest of traditional and contemporary cultures format. As Bollywood, hip-hop, and fusion

are becoming more dominating on the stage in the urban environments, it is interesting to ask how and why students continue to perform such old tradition of dance like Mohiniyattam or musical traditions like Baul singing. Are they determined by the encouragement of the institutions, family tradition, or artistic vocation? Are students being given enough support, training and appreciation about practicing traditional forms of art as compared to modern styles which are trending more? These questions are even more relevant when speaking about the role of youth festivals as the possible sources of cultural education.

In addition, the study determines how the universities and cultural organizers can select and coordinate these events. Even cultural clubs have been provided good infrastructural and financial support in certain institutions and there are full-time faculty mentors, rehearsal and workshop facilities. In others, they are engaged in the inadequacy of resources and little administration support. Inequality of such approach to representation is usually a result in uneven representation of the different art forms in the regions so that some universities that take centre stage in the national platforms and are overrepresented and some find underrepresentation in the country. The same imbalance is also an indicator of underlying socio-economic and regional inequalities that the study attempts to examine and resolve based on empirical data and qualitative information.

In this paper, the context of Indian youth festivals has also been placed on the global plane and comparisons made with other instances involving similar activities in other nations, including the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland or university arts festivals in South Korea or in Japan where traditional and modern arts co-exist. The comparisons can offer useful insights on the roles of cultural policy, institutional provision, and student agency in the sustainability of heritage art forms undergoing rapid transformations of the educational environments of learning.

The research, in its turn, will take a mixed-method approach and will include the field visits to the chosen university festivals, questionnaire-ized survey participants and cultural coordinators, and interviews with the art mentors and audience. It also comprises the content analysis of previous festival reports, and performance archives to track patterns and changes in the choice of art forms over the years, the subject of their narrative, and what interested the audience over the years. The main idea is to produce ideas that can be used in an academic discussion and policy formulation of cultural education in India.

Finally, Inter-University Youth Festivals are not mere festive events because they can be considered as cultural laboratories, where the past and the future collide and in which India of all youths is heard in the name of art. Putting together the traditional performances which are organized in these festivals, this work does not only accord due tribute to the cultural wisdom of the past but it also lays out the guiding light to the future of this wisdom in the heart and hands of the youth that comprise India.

Literature Review

The relevance of cultural educations and traditional arts in academic institutions has attracted attention of several scholars around the world especially as a medium of facilitating sustainable development, preserving identity, and involving the youth. The UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education provided the necessity of performing art in intercultural dialogue, continued culture and creative transformation of youth (Buck, 2010). It emphasized that educational establishing in art especially on the stage could have a pedagogical objective of cultural comprehension in different societies as well as cohesion on social groupings.

The concepts of inclusive education and sustainable design have started to change the traditional perception of the art forms in the Indian context as well as contributing to heritage as they become the sources of affordable and accessible education (Hemani & Puneekar, 2015). According to their research, cultural heritage education is revitalised as it is incorporated in the present-day curricular systems in the form of participatory activities such as youth festivals. This is compatible with Leder and Leder (2018), who state that education in India can become more sustainable by inculcating pedagogical processes that are transformative, such as cultural performances and geographic forms of cultural stories. In such strategies, art as a static memory is converted into a living and dynamic form of knowledge students get to digest it.

Herro and Quigley (2016) go further to explain how a model of interdisciplinary form of learning such as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) presents opportunities of engagement with culture, such as in the form of artistic performances. They assert that a significant role in the development of artistic expression and stage performance lies on the professional development of educators since in this way, the festivals and those cultural manifestations may turn into the space of learning by experience. In a similar way Goodale and O Dowd (2015) discuss the role of training and mentorship in the environmental

and cultural education, especially in urban academics. It is confirmed by their work that using a youth-based approach like a cultural festival can magnify indigenous as well as ecological wisdom conveyed in folk and classical art forms.

In a larger curatorial and performance-based context, Scholte (2022) points out that the process of staging site-specific and traditional artworks in the present-day institutional frameworks, i.e., museums and academic festivals, is highly complicated. This is related to the discussion presented by Stigter (2016) that focuses both on conceptual art conservation and on performance staging, providing perspectives on the way in which traditional forms of stage performances could be recorded, stored, and re-presented in scholarly and competing contexts such as youth festivals.

UNESCO (2023) has been promoting the role of the culture and the arts as drivers of sustainability education and insists that artistic expression knows how to teach the students to internalize social values as well as reflect on cultural pluralism. It directs to the significance of interactive and innovative programs that are not only entertaining but educative as well as changing the young fellows into cultural ambassadors.

In sum, the literature found on the topic proves the idea that inter-university youth festivals are critical in maintaining the traditional cultural heritage of India. Since these festivals create a much-needed gap between the generational knowledge system and current academic systems. But, the research gap in assessing the institutional setting, the motivation of students and the pedagogical worth of such performances towards developing cultural literacy and national identity in the youth of India is still not available.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify the types of traditional Indian art forms showcased in inter-university youth festivals.
2. To examine the institutional support and organization of cultural programming in universities.
3. To analyze student participation and perception regarding traditional cultural performances.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant level of institutional support and organization for cultural programming in universities.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant level of institutional support and organization for cultural programming in universities.

Research methodology

The current study will use the mixed study method of research or a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of research to help draw an all rounded idea of the role and the effect of traditional Indian forms of art presented at inter university cultural youth festivals. The study will be descriptive and exploratory in nature aiming at examining institutional support networks, student participation and the cultural depth of the entire performance. It carried out a structured questionnaire by the 5 point Likert scale covering purposive sample of students, faculty coordinators, and cultural organizers of different Indian Universities that constituted an active presence in youth festivals. Universities that are located in different regions: in the north, south, east, west, and central India are involved in the sample to guarantee representativeness. The number of responded were 250 collected to provide quantitative analysis. Furthermore, 20 cultural coordinators and performance mentors were also interviewed through semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative input regarding the issues and the sources of support as well as practices in organizations. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution) and inferential analysis (t-test and ANOVA) where hypotheses were tested based on institutional difference. The analysis of the qualitative data was carried out through the theme analysis in order to detect the widespread patterns and individual stories connected to the spread of the Indian cultural heritage. The ethical rules were adhered to, and informed consent has been obtained in a confidential way of all the participants.

Descriptive Statistics Table

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Availability of cultural infrastructure	120	4.25	0.65	3.00	5.00
Presence of designated cultural coordinators	120	4.18	0.71	2.00	5.00
Financial incentives for cultural activities	120	3.74	0.89	2.00	5.00

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Academic flexibility for students in cultural programs	120	3.81	0.84	2.00	5.00
Frequency of cultural events organized annually	120	4.07	0.76	2.00	5.00
Overall institutional commitment to cultural programming	120	4.12	0.68	3.00	5.00

The descriptive statistics review shows that there is a rather positive image of institutional support and support in organizing cultures programming within universities. The average available cultural infrastructure score is 4.25, it shows that majority of the universities offer well developed physical structures including auditoriums, open air stages and rehearsing rooms in which to exercise cultural activities. Availability of appointed cultural coordinators was also ranked high with a mean of 4.18 implying the appointment of specific personnel who undertake the role of coordinating and marketing cultural programming of institutions.

The number of the cultural events held annually has an average of 4.07 which shows frequent participation in cultural events such as performances and inter-university competition in terms of cultural activities. Additionally, the general institutional support of cultural programming is evaluated as being high, with an average value of 4.12, which underlines the image of cultural progress engraved in the university concerns.

Although there was a bit lower mean score of 3.74 in the financial rewards available in cultural activities, it had an extension of moderate to high financial support of financing student-initiated cultural activities and functions. Equally, academic flexibility to students who enrolled in cultural programs achieved a mean of 3.81, which shows that despite the fact that the institution accommodates such students, there is more room to be improved in terms of integrating cultural activities with educational planning.

In general, standard deviations (0.65 to 0.89) show that the answers responded by the individual respondents were in great agreement. These observations indicate that there is a systematic and systematic format of approach in these sampled universities in its cultural programming

support or organization, which confirms the emphasis on holistic student developments that are considered through arts.

One-Sample Statistics

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
120	3.68	0.74	0.067

Table: One-Sample T-Test for Institutional Support and Organization of Cultural Programming

(Test Value = 3)

One-Sample Test

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Institutional Support & Organization	10.15	119	0.000	0.68	0.55 to 0.81

Analysis of Hypothesis Testing

The one sample t -test was done to evaluate the existence of significant amount of institutional support and organization of cultural programming in universities. The experiment also used a test of 3, which is a neutral or moderate of institutional support using a Likert-type scale (the classical scales are 1-5). The t analysis produced t-value as 10.15 and degree of freedom as 119 with the p-value being 0.000 representing the statistically significant with a value of 0.05. The fact that the mean difference is 0.68 with the 95% confidence interval of between 0.55 and 0.81 shows that the level of institutional support that actually occurs is much higher compared than what was assumed in the hypothesis which is the neutral level.

These findings give empirical evidence on the alternative hypothesis (H1) which is presence of a strong level of institutional support and organization of cultural programming in universities. The big t- and small p-value proves that the null hypothesis is rejected, so universities are indeed not only passively but actively sponsoring cultural activities. This implies that universities have realized the place and importance of cultural programming in the comprehensive development of students, inter-cultural learning and campus vitality. In general,

the hypothesis testing confirms the existence of strong institutional processes that support the cultural engagement within the institutions of higher learning.

Discussion

The results of the present research demonstrate the importance of universities as a means of assisting cultural programming by providing institutional endorsement as well as organization in the form of a program. The findings of the descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing demonstrate the fact that cultural initiatives do not exist on fringes but actually on the very core of the educational experience at most universities. The one- sample t-test has a high mean score with statistically significant results, which means that on the average, universities support almost certainly the cultural activities like inter-university youth festivals, performing arts shows, heritage weeks, and other activities, which are culturally enriching events.

Such institutional commitment can be attributable to the fact that cultural programming is becoming increasingly appreciated as a way of not only improving student creativity and mode of expression but also interdisciplinary learning, social integration and civic participation among learners. Colleges practicing this programming tend to experience increased student satisfaction and development of identity, as well as vitality on the campus. Furthermore, cultural events tend to become a vehicle which facilitates diversity, inclusion, and commemoration of traditional art forms.

These findings can also be backed by comparative references of the former literature. As an example, the article by Herro and Quigley (2016) singled out the role of arts in education development as a game-changer, whereas Buck (2010) mentioned arts education as the means of international cultural diplomacy. Similarly, the UNESCO (2023) framework emphasizes adding cultural expression to any educational system that will propel sustainability and social well-being.

Nevertheless, in most situations, institutional support is high, but on individual basis, depending on the region, the availability of funds, and the priorities of administration, the levels can change. Even in the case of developing nations (Bharat, or India), the cultural policy structures and programs including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, include direct outcry in support of the incorporation of art and culture into the formal educational system. Conversely, there is a possibility that western institutions could lay stronger emphasis on

modern or digital forms of art leaving the future of traditional expressions of culture in question.

The research also gives insights on the necessity of capacity-building programmes to make faculty, student leaders as well as cultural coordinators appropriately equipped to run up, publicize, and assess these programming hitch-free. Furthermore, the felicitous institutional processes of financing, infrastructural, policy, and interdepartmental coordination are needed to perpetuate and expand cultural projects.

Overall Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that the alternative hypothesis is true and to the extent that the presence of a high degree of institutional support and organization of cultural programming in universities cannot be ignored. These results which have been proved by the descriptive type of statistical measurement and even by the hypothesis analysis (One-Sample T-Test) indicate that universities that represent various geographical areas of the world such as Bharat (India), China, America, Russia, Korea, and England are actively involved with the process of planning and promotion of the cultural activities. Such programs help students to screen out classical and modern forms of arts, but they are also valuable to the sphere of holistic education, self-identification, and intercultural communication.

An institutional support is observed through the ability to resource such initiatives, establish cultural committees, incorporate arts in academic programs and encourage inter-university cultural festivals. This support is a tactical vision of universities on how to foster creativity, inclusiveness, and appreciation of heritage in students. As well, the existence of formal cultural programming acts as an agent of preserving the indigenous culture alongside stimulating cross-cultural exchangeability and innovativeness.

Although the scope and the specifics of such support may differ, there is a general tendency of a positive and deliberate intentionality regarding the promotion of cultural literacy at the higher education setting. The research confirms that cultural programming is not some kind of extracurricular activity but its significant role is becoming increasingly accepted as part of the core aspect of student development and institutional mission.

The implication of these findings relates to policy makers, education administrators, and cultural practitioners, which denotes that more investment should be focused on the cultural infrastructure, training, and policies that make all people welcome. Additional studies would be needed to continue researching the effect of cultural engagement on students and the role of the digital platform in increasing access to culture.

Essentially, this paper brings into sharp focus, the way the stage turns into a classroom, in which the Indian and the global cultural stories are not merely presented but also have been maintained, challenged and feted in the academic landscape.

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