

Featured!



MUSIC AND SECULARISM

WITH a trend towards holistic education in India, I am seeing more importance being given to subjects like music, dance, theatre, and art as part of school curriculum. Artistic expression is slowly being recognised as a critical part of developing a child's identity.

When we teach music in schools, our focus has always been on Indian and global music – many languages, many cultures, and representation of as many styles as possible. I sometimes get asked if our programme is secular, and my response is that we are what we define as representatively secular. (Side note: I'm not here to argue the issue of secularism, I think that's best left to people more erudite than I)

Representative secularism means that our curriculum does contain spiritual or religious music, but it doesn't preach any religion. We respect and acknowledge that many artists from Bach to Thyagaraja have offered their art

TUNING IN

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in the service of the divine, and church and temple have traditionally been places that have offered patronage to the arts and artists themselves. The bot-

The bottom line is when you take religion away from traditional art, there is sometimes very little left. I maintain that religious art can be appreciated without having to share the same religious beliefs as the creator. Just as people from all faiths line up to see Michelangelo's masterful fresco in the Sistine Chapel, we should be able to appreciate music without being tied to the beliefs of its creator.

Pre-primary children sing *Parvati Nandana*, and *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* without having to worry about Judaism, Hinduism or Christianity. It's just beautiful music. I know of instances where well-intentioned adults have changed the lyrics of a song – from one God to another or removed the word God and inserted something less offensive. Making Pie Jesu into Pie <<something else>> might make things easier for some, but it also becomes a derivative work, and something from the original is lost.

To take it a step further than religion, music shouldn't shy away from reality, and is a powerful way to introduce children to difficult scenarios and conversations. *Bella Ciao* has a catchy beat but was also a song of political protest. *We Shall Overcome* is an example of how music was used for social change.

I think the point I'm trying to make here is this - when our children understand each other's perspectives, they don't lose their identities. Being more open minded, tolerant, and understanding just makes them better people, and who doesn't want that?