

## How Karnataka Culture has Impacted Me?

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Culture is defined as a society's or groups' arts, traditions, customs, language, clothing, and standards of behavior, such as morality and manners. Heritage is the means by which the youth of that culture learns and retains the culture of preceding generations through various means and methods. As documented by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore that, "when a [culture] is lost because all [followers] die, it is understandable. But wiping off of an entire community [due to lack of interest] is really painful." I believe that the youth of Karnataka origin should empower themselves to retain Kannada traditions and customs, learn Kannada, eat food of Karnataka origin, develop a flair for arts and attend classes or social events. Promoting Karnataka culture in school and other non-Kannada groups will result in exposure and appreciation of Karnataka culture within the community. If the Kannada youth follow these steps, pride of Karnataka's culture will radiate from every part of the world.

I, an American born Kannadiga, am proud to be an active participant in many Karnataka cultural activities and feel blessed to live in a community that willingly embraces all aspects of Karnataka culture. I have learned the basic fundamentals of Karnataka culture and heritage at home through my parents' upbringing, which has been passed on to them from their preceding generations. In my community, I also have opportunities to learn about Karnataka's culture and heritage through classes, balaviharas and social gatherings that are conducted at various locations, in less than fifteen miles from my home in Irvine. I am especially proud to be an American born Kannadiga who knows Kannada (speaking, writing, reading and understanding), attends

Kannada Kali (KKI), is a skilled Bharat Natyam dancer, is a frequent participant in Karnataka Cultural Association of Southern California (KCA-SC), and is a member of “Aralumallige” (AM) Kannada Balavihara. I am involved in a medley of these Karnataka related activities because I truly believe in D.V. Gundappa’s statement “ಓಲೆಗೆ ಅರಿವು ಅನಿರೀಕ್ಷಿತವಾಗಿ  
ವಿವಿಧ ಜೀವಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಜಿಜ್ಞಾಸೆ” meaning “Our forefathers’ knowledge and experience combined with new thoughts of youth will definitely be a recipe for success.”

A large part of any culture is its language. The focal language of Karnataka is Kannada. By learning Kannada, I am able to talk to my relatives in Kannada or have casual conversations with my friends. I have learned Kannada from my parents, grandparents and by attending classes (at KKI). As a student of the KKI for more than seven years, I have been able to read, write and communicate in Kannada, speaking it on a daily basis with pride. With every word I utter in Kannada, I feel as though I am helping to retain Karnataka’s culture in the US. Occasionally, my relatives in Bangalore react with shock to the fact that I know Kannada, although I live in the US. Kannada has also helped me with pronunciation of words in Spanish that would be hard to pronounce with only knowing English because of the wide range of sounds in our Kannada language. Without learning Kannada, many opportunities to learn about Karnataka culture would have been shut and a large part of my life would have been missing.

Another important aspect of Karnataka culture that I proudly endorse and enjoy is performing Bharat Natyam. I have learned Bharat Natyam for the past nine years from Smt. Ramya Harishanker, of which two years I have been part of Arpana Dance Company (ADC). I did my Arangetram (dance debut) when I was thirteen years, and

have continued to perform frequently over the past two years at various Indian and non-Indian settings. I have performed at Asia Pacific Aids Intervention Program, Arts Day/ Imagination Celebration, and Mt. San Jacinto College. In the summer of 2007, I had my greatest opportunity when I toured India for one month with a team of fifteen dancers of ADC. I performed for various charities in Madras, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Cochin, Kottayam, and Bangalore. It was a wonderful experience to proudly share my Bharat Natyam talent, with the people of India. Bharat Natyam has helped and leveraged me to find my inner strengths and bring out my hidden talents. It has taught me that with perseverance, discipline and dedication anything is possible.

Another significant aspect that has affected my life is KCA-SC. Since the age of five, I have been actively participating in every KCA-SC Annual Children's Day program. I have volunteered extensively for KCA-SC from serving food to emceeing performances. I also have written numerous articles to our annual magazine - Sangama, which includes topics about my Trips to India, India's Infrastructure, and other thought provoking essay topics. I have used my art and computer graphics skills to design the front cover of Sangama 2007 and 2008. My proudest moment was when I won 2008 KCA-SC Kannada Youth Ambassador Award. This annual honor (a Rolling Trophy and cash prize) awarded by KCA-SC, showcases the local youths' achievements in embracing Karnataka culture. I was proud that all my efforts and work to retain Karnataka culture had been recognized by KCA-SC and I had been honored with this prestigious award that resulted in my self-confidence soar.

I also proudly attend Aralumallige, to promote, retain and spread Karnataka culture, once a month along with my younger brother and my parents. Here, Kannada-

speaking families meet and learn about Karnataka culture, heritage, language, yoga and customs. My association with this group has opened many more opportunities for me to learn, embrace and spread Karnataka culture. We all help each other in various cultural activities and pass on our heritage to our younger siblings. By being involved in Aralumallige, my skills in interacting with younger children have been polished allowing me to develop interpersonal skills with children.

My involvement in various Karnataka cultural organizations such as KKI, KCA-SC, and Aralumallige, combined with Bharat Natyam, has molded my life. From these activities, I have grown by finding my inner strengths, bringing out my hidden talents, improving my interpersonal skills, and learning that with perseverance, discipline and dedication anything is possible. These skills have allowed me to grow and will lead me to be successful in whatever path I take. Without these influences, my life would have been drastically different and I might have not grown in the above areas. I hope to continue surrounding and involving myself in Karnataka's culture even after graduating from High School, because I will always be an American born Kannadiga.