



Short Communication

Spirituality and Culture: Themes and Identity

Shweta Dubey

Department of Basic Science, Baba Sahab Dr. B.R Ambedkar Agriculture, Engineering and Technology College of Etawah, Chandra Shekhar Azad Agriculture and Technology University, Kanpur, UP, India
dubeyshweta.dr@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 30th December 2025, revised 6th February 2026, accepted 6th March 2026

Abstract

The intersection between spirituality and culture highlights one of the more significant areas of inquiry when exploring identity construction. Rather than simply being a subset of institutionalized religion, especially as a realm of experience, spirituality encompasses personal journeys for meaning, experience of transcendence, and ethical value. Culture represents the collective containers through which spiritual manifestations are expressed in traditions, rituals, symbols, and art forms. This paper illustrates how spirituality and culture intersect to construct identity (for individuals and groups), relating these findings to topics such as connectedness, pluralism, and the negotiation of values in multicultural societies. By situating spirituality in cultural discourse, this study outlines how belief systems can affect social capital, intercultural dialogue, and moral and ethical commitments. The study emphasizes the dynamic and evolving understanding of cultural identity as a result of spiritual narratives. The relationship between spirituality and culture is important for promoting tolerance and holistic development in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Spirituality, Culture, Identity, Belief systems, Diversity, Social cohesion, Interconnectedness.

Introduction

Culture and spirituality are two powerful forces that shape how people see themselves and the world around them. Culture includes the shared customs, values, languages, and artistic expressions that give a community its identity. Spirituality, on the other hand, is more personal—it reflects an individual's search for meaning, connection, and inner peace. Although these two ideas are different, they constantly influence each other and help individuals and societies understand their place in the world.

In today's era of globalization, migration, and increasing cultural diversity, the relationship between culture and spirituality has become more dynamic. Neither personal nor collective identity remains fixed. Instead, identities evolve through ongoing encounters with new traditions and perspectives. Understanding how spiritual beliefs shape cultural practices—and how culture shapes spiritual expression—offers important insights for fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and political science. This paper explores these connections and their impact on identity formation in contemporary society.

Conceptualizing spirituality

Even though the term spirituality is widely used, it does not have one clear definition. It is often compared with religion, but spirituality is usually seen as more personal and inward-focused.

Religion is typically organized, rooted in shared doctrines, and practiced through communal rituals. Spirituality is more about individual transformation, meaning, and direct experience of the sacred.

Pargament¹ describes spirituality as a “search for the sacred,” which involves both belief and practice. Emmons² emphasizes its psychological benefits, noting that spirituality can build resilience, purpose, and moral clarity. Although spiritual experience begins within the individual, it is always shaped by culture. Practices such as meditation, chanting, prayer, and pilgrimage develop meaning through cultural symbols and traditions. In this sense, spirituality cannot be separated from the cultural environment in which it exists.

Culture as a framework for identity

Culture can be understood as a shared system of ideas, values, symbols, and customs that gives meaning to daily life. Geertz³ famously called culture a “web of significance” woven over generations. Culture is not static; it evolves as communities learn, interact, and reinterpret their traditions.

Culture forms the backdrop against which individuals construct their identity. Festivals, rituals, languages, stories, and artistic expressions help people understand their roots and their place within a community. Identity formation is, therefore, a negotiation between inherited traditions and present realities. Spirituality often plays a central role in this process because

many cultural practices—songs, myths, dances, meditative techniques—are built on spiritual worldviews that strengthen collective identity.

Intersections of spirituality and culture

Rituals and Traditions: Rituals highlight the deep connection between spiritual beliefs and cultural customs. Life events such as births, weddings, and funerals carry spiritual meaning expressed through culturally specific practices. These rituals not only mark important moments but also preserve identity and continuity across generations.

Artistic and Philosophical Expression: Art, literature, architecture, and philosophy often reflect spiritual themes. Sacred music, classical dance, religious iconography, and devotional poetry communicate spiritual values through cultural forms. These expressions keep collective memories alive and connect individuals to their cultural heritage.

Community Life and Social Cohesion: Spirituality frequently brings communities together. Festivals like Diwali, Christmas, Ramzan, or Vaisakhi unite people in shared celebration. Such events strengthen social bonds, promote a sense of belonging, and contribute to harmony within society.

Emerging themes from the interplay

Interconnectedness: Many spiritual traditions emphasize unity among people, nature, and the divine, and this worldview often appears in cultural practices.

Pluralism and Tolerance: As societies become more diverse, interfaith dialogues and cultural exchange promote openness and acceptance.

Negotiation of Values: Communities constantly balance traditional spiritual values with modern lifestyles, leading to evolving identities.

Globalization and Hybrid Identities: The global spread of practices like yoga and mindfulness creates blended cultural identities and raises questions about authenticity and ownership.

Identity formation in contemporary contexts

Personal Identity: Spirituality helps individuals make sense of life, manage challenges, and reflect ethically. Practices like meditation and prayer deepen self-awareness and emotional strength. Culture gives these experiences meaning and provides the language and symbols through which they are understood.

Collective Identity: Communities often ground their shared identity in spiritual stories and traditions. These collective narratives promote unity and cultural continuity, though they may sometimes create boundaries between groups. In many places, dominant spiritual traditions shape national culture and public life.

Belonging and Cultural Preservation: Spirituality plays a key role in fostering belonging. For migrants and diaspora communities, maintaining spiritual and cultural rituals helps preserve identity in new social environments.

Contemporary relevance

Modern societies continually balance secular governance with spiritual heritage. Interreligious dialogue has become essential for maintaining peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. Spiritual principles such as compassion, forgiveness, and nonviolence offer valuable guidance for ethical decision-making and conflict resolution. In a world shaped by digital communication, global movement, and interconnected economies, these elements help build inclusive, resilient communities.

Conclusion

The relationship between spirituality and culture is complex and deeply influential in shaping identity. Spirituality offers personal meaning, grounding, and ethical direction, while culture expresses these values through rituals, symbols, and shared practices. Together, they shape how individuals grow and how communities hold together. In today's globalized world, identities are fluid and constantly evolving through exposure to diverse traditions and modern realities. Understanding the interdependence of spirituality and culture can help cultivate inclusive identities that respect diversity and promote moral development. Future research may focus on how digital media, global crises, and migration continue to reshape these interconnected aspects of human life.

References

1. Pargament, K. I. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. *The international journal for the psychology of religion*, 9(1), 3-16.
2. Emmons, R. A. (2000). Is spirituality an intelligence? Motivation, cognition, and the psychology of ultimate concern. *The International Journal for the psychology of Religion*, 10(1), 3-26.
3. Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures.