

the Making of Regional Culture

The medieval period saw the emergence of several regional languages and the associated literature. It is quite common for us to identify a region with its language.

Every region is identified with a certain distinct type of food, clothing, poetry, dance, painting and music.

The Chera empire of Mahodayapuram, which was established in 9th century in the southwestern part of Kerala introduced the Malayalam language.

Rulers and Religious Traditions: The Jagannatha Cult

- In several regions, regional cultures developed around religious traditions.
- The local people made a wooden image of the deity which, originally a local God, came to be identified with Vishnu.
- Temple became the center of pilgrimage.

The Rajputs and Traditions of Heroism

- In the 19th century, the Rajasthan of today was called Rajputana by the British.
- There are many groups who call themselves Rajputs in Northern and Central India.
- Prithviraj Chauhan was one such ruler.
- Women had been given a heroic image since they committed sati or self-immolation.

Beyond Regional Frontiers: The Story of Kathak

- The heroic traditions of various regions also helped in the evolution of dance in several regions.
- One such dance was Kathak, which evolved in Northern India. The Kathaks initially were a caste of story-tellers in North Indian temples.
- The legends of Radha-Krishna were enacted in folk plays known as rasalila.
- It integrated folk dance with the basic gestures of the kathak story-tellers.
- Music also developed into various forms like qawwali and khayal and new instruments like Sitar were invented.

Paintings for Patrons: The Traditions of Miniatures

- During this period, one more tradition which deserves our attention is the miniature painting. Miniatures are small sized paintings done in watercolour on cloth or paper.
- Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan hired highly skilled painters to illustrate their manuscripts in the Kitab Khana containing their accounts and poetry.
- When the Mughal empire started declining, new artistic tastes developed in the regional court of Deccan and Rajput rulers.
- One bold style of miniature painting was called Basohli.
- One of the most popular paintings of the Himalayas region was Bhanudatta's Rasamanjari.
- The Kangra artists by mid-18th century infused a new life into miniature painting.

The Growth of a Regional Language: Bengal

- Regional language is the language which a person speaks in a region.
- It is generally assumed that the Bengali language is spoken by people of Bengal.
- Bengali originated from Sanskrit but later on developed its own identity and literature.
- Early Bengali literature may be divided into two categories—The first includes translations from Sanskrit epics and the
- the second includes Nath literature.

Pirs and Temples

- From the 16th century, people migrated in large numbers from less fertile western Bengal to the forested and marshy of south-eastern Bengal.
- With Mughal control over Bengal, the capital shifted to Dhaka. Officials received land grants. Mosques were set up.
- The early settlers got help from teachers called Pirs. They included saints or Sufis and prominent religious personalities.

Regional cultures today are often the product of complex processes of intermixing of local traditions with ideas from other parts of the subcontinent.

The Chera Kingdom of Mahodayapuram was established in the ninth century in the south-western part of the peninsula, part of present-day Kerala. The rulers introduced the Malayalam language and script in their inscriptions.

The Cheras also drew upon Sanskritic traditions. The temple theatre of Kerala borrowed stories from the Sanskrit epics.

In other regions, regional cultures grew around religious traditions. The best example of this process is the cult of Jagannath at Puri, Orissa. The word Jagannath literally means the lord of the world, a name for Vishnu.

Anantavarman, the ruler of the Ganga dynasty in the 12th century, built a temple for Purushottama Jagannatha at Puri.

The Rajputs contributed a lot to the distinctive culture of Rajasthan. From about the eighth century, most of the present-day state of Rajasthan was ruled by various Rajput families. Prithviraj was one such ruler.

Rajput rulers cherished the ideal of the hero who fought valiantly, often choosing death on the battlefield rather than face defeat.

Stories about Rajput heroes were recorded in poems and songs. Women were also focused on these stories. They are depicted as following their heroic husbands in both life and death. They often chose to become sati on the funeral pyre of their husbands.

Not only heroic traditions are found in different regions in different forms, but dance too. Just take the history of one dance form, Kathak.

The term kathak is derived from Katha, a word used in Sanskrit and other languages for a story.

The Kathaks was originally a caste of story-tellers in temples of north India, who beautified their performances with gestures and songs.

Kathak began evolving into a distinct mode of dance in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Under the Mughals, it developed in two traditions or gharanas—one in the courts of Rajasthan (Jaipur) and the other in Lucknow. Slowly and steadily it took root in Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir etc.

Kathak was recognised as one of six classical forms of dance in the country after independence. Other classical dances are—Bharatnatyam (Tamil Nadu), Kathakali (Kerala), Odissi (Orissa), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh) and Manipuri (Manipur).

The tradition of miniature painting is also noteworthy. Miniatures are small-sized paintings, generally done in watercolour on cloth or paper. The earliest miniatures were on palm leaves or wood.

The Mughal emperors patronised highly skilled painters.

With the decline of the Mughal Empire, many painters moved out to the courts of the emerging regional states.

By the late 17th century a bold and intense style of miniature painting called Basohli got developed in the Himalayan foothills around the modern-day state of Himachal Pradesh. Here, the Mughal artists founded the Kangra school of painting.

Soft colours, including cool blues and greens, and lyrical treatment of themes distinguished Kangra painting.

Now we will see how Bengali, a regional language, grew in the course of time.

From the eighth century, Bengal became the centre of a regional kingdom under the Palas. Between the 14th and 16th centuries, Bengal was ruled by Sultans. In 1586, Akbar conquered Bengal while Persian was the language of administration, Bengali developed as a regional language.

Although Bengali is derived from Sanskrit, it passed through several stages of evolution.

Early Bengali literature may be divided into two categories. The first includes translations of the Sanskrit epics, the Mangala Kavyas and Bhakti literature such as biographies of Chaitanyadeva, the second includes Nath literature such as songs of Maynamati and Gopichand, stories concerning the worship of Dharma Thakur and fairy tales, folk tales and ballads.

The cult of p̄tr (a spiritual guide) became popular in Bengal and their shrines can be found there.

A number of temples got constructed in Bengal. Now local deities began to be worshipped in temples.

Bengal, being in a riverine plain, produces abundant rice and fish. These two items are important foods of the Bengalis. The Bengal Brahmanas too eat fish.

Fishing has been a major occupation of the Bengalis.

Bengali literature contains several references to fish.

Lilatilakam: A fourteenth-century text of Sanskrit that deals with grammar and poetics.

Rajputana: The region that constitutes most of present-day Rajasthan was called Rajputana by the British during the 19th century.

Sati: The immolation of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands.

Kathak: The term is derived from Katha, a word used in Sanskrit and other languages for the story.

Rasa Lila: The legends of Radha-Krishna were enacted in folk plays known as rasa Lila.

Gharana: Tradition of classical dance, music.

Classical: Old and memorable having permanent value.

Miniature: It is small-sized painting, usually done in watercolour on cloth or paper.

Basohli: It refers to the bold and intense style of miniature painting.

Per: It is a Persian word that means a spiritual guide.

Animism: Attribution of living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena.

Kolu: Oil pressures.

Kansari: Bell metal workers.

Dochala: Double-roofed structure.

About 12th Century – First Literary works in Malayalam.

14th Century Lilatilakam – a text dealing with grammar and poetics combining two languages Sanskrit and regional languages was published.

12th Century – Anantavarman, a ruler of Ganga dynasty decided to erect a temple for Purushottam Jagannatha at Puri.

1230 AD – King Anangabhima III dedicated his kingdom to the deity and proclaimed himself as the 'deputy' of the God.

19th Century – The region of Rajputana constituted by the British.

3rd quarter of the 19th Century – 'Kathak' was firmly entrenched as a dance form in many regions.

1739 AD – Nadar Shah invaded and conquered Delhi.

Mid-18th Century – Kangra artists developed a style of miniature painting for their survival.