

7th – The Making Of Regional Cultures I



One of the commonest ways of describing people is in terms of the language they speak. When we refer to a person as a Tamil or an Oriya, this usually means that he or she speaks Tamil or Oriya and lives in Tamil Nadu or Orissa. We also tend to associate each region with distinctive kinds of food, clothes, poetry, dance, music and painting. Sometimes we take these identities for granted and assume that they have existed from time immemorial. However, the frontiers separating regions have evolved over time (and in fact are still changing).

Language And Literature: In the Medieval Period, Sanskrit and Persian were the common language till other languages developed. Many regional languages developed during this time and some great literary works were written in these language.

North India: Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali were the language that developed during this period. The Bhakti saints popularized these languages as they preached in these languages. However, most of the literary work was in Sanskrit.

Literary works:

Somadeva's Katha-Saritsagara is a collection of stores.

Jayadeva composed Gita Govinda which highlights the selfless love between Krishna and Radha.

Kalhana's Rajatarangini is also an important book.

Bilhana's Vikramankadeva-charita is the biography of the chalukeyan king Vikramaditya.

Deccan and South India: Tamil, Telugu and Kannada prospered under the Chola rule. The Alvar and Nayanar saints used Tamil in their teachings and translated many Sanskrit works into Tamil.

Literary Works

Kamban's Ramayana is the translated Tamil version of the Ramayana which was originally written in Sanskrit. Several Telugu poets like Nannaya and Tikkana translated the Mahabharata.

Vista Fact: The writing of Pampa, Ponna and Ranna in Kannada enriched the literature of Kanataka. These three are referred to as the 'three jewels of Kannada literature'. Sanskrit and Telugu were commonly used in Vijayanagar kingdom.

The Delhi Sultanate

During this period, the Turks introduced Persian as the language of administration. The two forms of Hindi, Braj and Awadhi, also become popular during this period. With the course of time, Persian and Hindi merged to give rise to a new language called Urdu.

Literary Works: The great poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote the Padmavat in Hindi. Mirabai wrote her pomes in Braj language. Sant Kabir wrote dohas in Awadhi Braj and Bhojpuri. Guru Nanak'sd hymns were in Punjabi, Namadeva's pomes were in Marathi, and Vidyapati's pomes were in Maithili.

The Mughals

Persia was the official language of the Mughal Empire. All the court proceedings were recorded in Persian. Akbar encouraged Persian literature. He gave Ramayana and Mahabharata translator into Persian.

Literary Works: Abul Fazl wrote Akbar's biography named Akbarnama. Tulsidas write Ramacharitanamas. Surdas wrote Sur Sagar. Ras Khan wrote Prem Vatika and



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Bihari wrote Satsai in Hindi. Abdul Hamid Lahori wrote Padshahnam Dara Shikoh translated the Bhagvad Gita and Upanishads into Persian.

Music: Folk music flourished along with classical music. The Turks brought with them their own form of music and instruments like the sarangi and the rabab.

Amir Khusrau, the most famous musician of the Delhi Sultanate period, fused Hindustani music with Persian and Turkish music to create new style like Qawwali and the Khayal. He is also believed to have invented the tabla and the sitar. Tansen (1506-1586 CE), one of the Navaratnas of Akbar's court, is considered one of the greatest composers and musicians in Hindustani classical music.

He invented several new ragas, like Darbari, Malhar, Deepak, Mand and Todi. It is said that Tansen could bring rain with his Raag Malhar and start fires with his singing of Raag Deepak. Several schools of music or gharanas developed in the different regions.

In Gwalior, Swami Haridas, Tansen's guru, was part of Raja Mansingh Tomar's (1486-1516 CE) court. He specialized in the dhrupad style of singing. Distinct style of music also developed in Lucknow, Benares and Patiala. The Bhakti and sufi saints introduced another form of devotional music called the Kirtan.

Surdas, Chaitanya and Meerabai poured out their devotion to god through their Kirtans. In the south, the Carnatic school of music flourished during the rule of the Vijayanagar Empire. Purandara Dasa was also known as the sangeeta pitamah of Carnatic music. He laid out the basic rules for teaching Carnatic music.

Dance: The earlier form of dance was way of telling stories, especially from mythology and the epics, and was normally held in temples.

When rulers began to patronize the dancers, dance performances moved out the temples to the royal courts. Bharatanatyam evolved in Tamil Nadu, Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, Odissi in Odisha, Kathakali in Kerala, Manipuri in Manipur, and Kathak in North India.

The Cheras and the Development of Malayalam

The Chera kingdom of Mahodayapuram was established in the south-western part of the Peninsula, part of present-day Kerala. Malayalam was spoken in this area. The rulers introduced the Malayalam language and script in their inscriptions. The Cheras also drew upon Sanskritic traditions. The temple theatre of Kerala, which is traced to this period, borrowed stories from the Sanskrit epics.

Rulers and Religious Traditions: The Jagannatha Cult

In other regions, regional cultures grew around religious traditions. The best example of this process is the cult of Jagannatha (literally, lord of the world, a name for Vishnu) at Puri, Orissa. To date, the local tribal people make the wooden image of the deity, which suggests that the deity was originally a local god, who was later identified with Vishnu.

All those who conquered Orissa, such as the Mughals, the Marathas and the English East India Company, attempted to gain control over the temple. They felt that this would make their rule acceptable to the local people.

