

Chapter – 7: The Making of Regional Cultures

- Common way – describing people – language they speak
- Person – Tamil or Oriya – means – speaks Tamil or Oriya – OR – live in Tamil Nadu or Orissa
- Each region – different foods, clothes, poetry, dance, music, painting
- Sometimes – we believe – these identities – existed forever
- Border regions – changed so much – still changing
- Regional cultures today – product of complex intermixing of local traditions with ideas from other parts
- Some – specific to a region – some – common in all regions – some – taken from one area and changes to another form in a new area

The Cheras and the Development of Malayalam

- 9th century – south-western part of India – present day Kerala – Chera kingdom of Mahodayapuram – established
- Malayalam – spoken in this area – rulers – introduced Malayalam in inscriptions
- This example – earliest use of local language in official records
- Same time – Cheras also started – Sanskrit traditions
- Temple theatre of Kerala – borrowed stories – Sanskrit epics
- 1st literature works in Malayalam – dated to 12th century – influenced from Sanskrit
- 14th century text – *Lilatilakam* – deals with – grammar and poetics – composed in Manipravalam – diamonds and corals – refer to 2 languages – Sanskrit and local language

Rulers and Religious Traditions – The Jagannatha Cult

- Other regions – regional culture – established around religion
- Best example – cult (religious group) of Jagannatha (lord of the world) at Puri, Orissa
- Even today – local tribes – make wooden forms of deity – suggests – deity – local god – later known as Vishnu
- 12th century – most imp. ruler of Ganga dynasty – Anantavarman – decided – make temple of Purushottama Jagannatha at Puri
- 1230 – king Anangabhimha III – gifted his kingdom to god – declared himself as deputy (assistant) of god
- Temple gained more importance – centre of pilgrimage – authority – social and political matters – increased
- All the rulers – conquered Orissa – Mughals, Marathas, English East India Company – tried controlling the temple – believed – rule acceptable to common people

The Rajputs and Traditions of Heroism

- 19th century – region – present day Rajasthan – known as Rajputana by British
- This suggests – this area – only or mainly Rajputs lived here – BUT – not entirely true
- Several groups – identify themselves as Rajputs – many areas of North and Central India

- Several other people – live in Rajasthan – BUT – Rajputs – known as contributors to the culture of Rajasthan
- Culture – closely connected to ideals of rulers
- From 8th century – present day Rajasthan – ruled by Rajput families
- One such ruler – Prithviraj
- These rulers – followed the heroes – fought bravely – choosing death over defeat
- Stories of Rajput heroes – recorded in poems and songs – recited by specially trained people
- These poems – preserved the memories of heroes – inspire others
- Ordinary people – attracted by these stories – lots of emotions – loyalty, friendship, love, valour, anger, etc
- Sometimes – women – shown as following their husbands – stories of *sati* – widows who jumped into the funeral pyre (*chita*) of their husband

Beyond Regional Frontiers – The Story of *Kathak*

- Heroic traditions – different in different regions – same for dance
- *Kathak* – derived (taken) from *katha* – meaning ‘story’ in Sanskrit and other languages
- *Kathaks* – originally – caste of story tellers – north Indian temples – performed with gestures (hand expressions) and songs
- 15th-16th century – spread of bhakti movement – kathak changed into a unique mode of dance
- Stories of Radha-Krishna – shown in folk plays – *rasa lila* – combined folk dance with *kathak*
- During Mughal empire – kathak – performed in courts – obtained current form – unique style of dance
- Developed in 2 traditions or *gharanas* – one in Rajasthan (Jaipur) – other in Lucknow
- Guidance of Wajid Ali Shah – last Nawab of Awadh – kathak grew into art form
- 3rd quarter of 19th century – established as dance form – not only in these 2 regions – BUT – also in – Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh
- Main focus – detailed footwork, costumes, enactment (drama) of stories
- Kathak – like many other cultures – not accepted by British – 19th-20th century
- Even then – continued to be performed – known as one of the ‘six’ classical forms of dance – after independence

Painting for Patrons – The Tradition of Miniatures

- Another tradition – developed in different ways – miniature paintings – small-sized paintings – water colour on cloth or paper
- Earliest miniature – palm leaves or wood
- Most beautiful – found in Western India – demonstrated Jaina texts
- Mughal emperors – Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan – liked – skilled painters – demonstrated manuscripts – historical accounts and poetry
- These paintings – bright colours – displayed – court scenes, battles, hunting, etc
- Paintings – exchanged with gifts – viewed by only few people – emperor and his close people
- Mughal empire – finished – painters – moved to courts of new regional states
- Result – Mughal taste – influenced – regional courts, Deccan – Rajput courts, Rajasthan
- Same time – their unique characters – kept with them

- Mythology and poetry – displayed in paintings – Mewar, Jodhpur, Bundi, Kota, Kishangarh
- Another region – attracted miniature paintings – Himalayan foothills – modern day Himachal Pradesh
- Late 17th century – this region – developed unique style of painting – Basohli
- Most popular painting – Bhanudatta's *Rasamanjari*
- Nadir Shah's invasion – conquest of Delhi – 1739 – Mughal artists – moved to hills – escape from the problems in the plains
- Here – founded the Kangra school of paintings
- Mid-18th century – Kangra artists – developed new style of miniature paintings
- Source of inspiration – Vaishnavite traditions
- Soft colours – cool blues, greens – uniqueness of Kangra paintings
- Ordinary men and women – painted too – on pots, walls, floors, cloth – did not survive – BUT – miniature paintings – carefully preserved in palaces

A Closer Look – Bengal

The growth of a regional language

- Sometimes – we identify regions from language spoken – we assume – people in Bengal speak Bengali
- Now a days – Bengali – known as – derived from Sanskrit – BUT – early Sanskrit texts – suggests – people of Bengal did not speak Sanskritic languages
- 4th-3rd centuries BCE – Bengal and Magadha (south Bihar) – commercial ties developed – influence of Sanskrit grew
- 4th century CE – Gupta rulers – political control over north Bengal – settled Brahmanas here
- Linguistic and cultural influence – mid-Ganga valley – grew stronger
- 7th century – Chinese traveler Xuan Zang – observed – languages related to Sanskrit – used in Bengal
- 8th century – Bengal – centre of regional kingdom – Palas rulers
- 14th-16th century – Bengal ruled by Sultans – independent of rulers in Delhi
- 1586 – Akbar conquered Bengal – became centre of the Bengal *suba* – Persian language of administration – BUT – Bengali – developed as regional language
- 15th century – Bengali dialects – united by common language – based on spoken language of Western part – West Bengal
- Bengali – derived from Sanskrit – BUT – it passed through various developments
- Lots of non-Sanskrit words – taken from variety of languages – tribal, Persian, European – became part of modern Bengali
- Early Bengali literature – divided into 2 groups – one – dependent on Sanskrit – other – independent of Sanskrit
- 1st category –
 - Translations of Sanskrit epics – the Mangalakavyas (auspicious poems)
 - Bhakti literature – biographies of Chaitanyadeva – leader – Vaishnav bhakti movement
 - Texts – easier to date – several manuscripts – mention – these were composed – late-15th to mid-18th century
- 2nd category –
 - Nath literature – songs of Maynamati and Gopichandra
 - Stories – worship of Dharma Thakur

- Fairy tales, folk tales, ballads
- These circulated orally – cannot be dated
- More popular in eastern Bengal – influence of Brahmanas – very weak

Pirs and Temples

- 16th century – people started migrating – less fertile western Bengal to forested and marshy south-eastern Bengal
- Moved eastwards – cleared forests – started rice cultivation
- Gradually (slowly) – local communities – fisherfolk, shifting cultivators (tribals) – merged with new communities of peasants
- Same time – Mughal controlled Bengal – capital – centre of eastern delta – Dhaka
- Official – received lands – set up mosques – served as centres – religious transformation
- New settlements – unstable conditions – early settlers – found some stability
- Stability – provided by community leaders – worked as teachers and judges – referred to them as *pirs*
- This term included – saints, Sufis, other religious persons, soldiers (died in battle), various Hindu and Buddhists deities, animistic people (believed – every natural thing has soul)
- Group of *pirs* – very popular – their shrines – found everywhere in Bengal
- Bengal – lots of temple built – late 15th century to 19th century
- Temples and other religious structures – built by powerful people – demonstrate power and wealth
- Many simple brick and terracotta temple – built with support of ‘low’ caste people – Kolu (oil workers) and Kansari (bell metal workers)
- European trading companies – created economic opportunities – many families from lower groups – took advantage
- Their social and economic position – improved – claimed their status – building temples
- Local deities – worshipped in small villages – recognized by Brahmanas – their images – started being kept in temples
- Temples – copied the styles of huts – double-roofed (*dochala*) or four-roofed (*chauchala*) – unique Bengali style developed
- Four-roofed structure – 4 triangular roofs – placed on 4 walls – converge (join) on curved line or point
- Temples – built on square platform – interior – very plain – BUT – outer walls – decorated with paintings, ornamental tiles, etc
- Some temples – specially in Vishnupur, Bankura district, West Bengal – these decorations – too much excellence

Fish as Food

- Traditional food habits – based on – local items
- Bengal – river plain – lots of rice and fish – included in menu of most Bengalis (even poor ones)
- Fishing – imp. occupation for all times – Bengali literature – also provides reference to fish
- Terracotta tiles – walls of temples and *viharas* – show – fish being dressed and taken to markets
- Brahmanas – not allowed – eat non-veg – BUT – popularity of fish – local diet – Brahmanical authorities – relax this rule for Bengal Brahmanas
- *Brihaddharma Purana* – 13th century Sanskrit text from Bengal – allowed local Brahmanas – eat some varieties of fish