

## 7<sup>th</sup> – The Making Of Regional Cultures II



### The Rajputs and Traditions of Heroism

Rajasthan was called Rajputana by the British. This was an area that was inhabited only or mainly by Rajputs. This is only partly true. There were several groups who identify themselves as Rajputs in many areas of northern and central India. However, the Rajputs are often recognized as contributing to the distinctive culture of Rajasthan. These cultural traditions were closely linked with the ideals and aspirations of rulers. Rajasthan was ruled by various Rajputs Families. Prithviraj was one such ruler. These rulers cherished the ideal of the hero who fought valiantly, often choosing death on the battlefield rather than face defeat. Stories about Rajputs heroes were recorded in poems and songs. Women find a place within these stories sometimes, they figure as the “cause” for conflicts, as men fought with one another to either “win” or “protect” women. Women are also depicted as following their heroic husbands in both life and death—there are stories about the practice of Sati or the immolation of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands.

Paintings: India had a fine tradition in the art of painting. The exquisite, beautifully colored paintings at Ajanta and Ellora were created between 600 and 1000ce. The paintings and sculptures are devoted to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. Most of the painting tell ancient tales of courtly life, and depict Buddhist stories from the **Jataka Tales**.

During the period of the Delhi sultans, the art of painting declined as the rulers obeyed the teaching of the Quran, which discouraged the reproduction of the human form through sculpture and paintings. The rule of the Mughals saw the revival of the best in painting. Humayan brought to famous Persian painters with him **Mir Sayyid Ali** and **Abdus Samad**. They introduced the art of miniature painting to India. Miniature painting is small, but highly detailed, painting.

Akbar brought Persian and Indian artists together, and a new style of painting was born—the Indo-Persian School of painting. Jahangir was deeply interested in painting.

Hassan and Ustad Mansur: Shah Jahan’s reign saw the art of painting reach its zenith. Portrait paintings become life-like and graceful during his time. Distinct styles of miniature painting, like the Kangra, the Rajasthani and the Deccani, developed. The main theme of the paintings of the Kangra and the Rajasthani schools was devotional. Several paintings illustrate stories about Radha and Krishna, and Krishna and the gopis. The Deccani paintings focused more on court scenes and scenes of battle. During Shah Jahan’s time, gold was also used in paintings. The Rajputs seem to have preferred the miniature style of painting. They also painted the walls of their palaces and havelis.

In the South, the temples were storehouses of paintings. In the Brihadeshwara temple in Thanjavur, all around the inner walls of the Garbhagriha, various karanas (dance poses) of Bharatanatyam have been painted in vivid colors that have not fared even after 1000 years.

### Beyond Regional Frontiers: the story of Kathak

The term Kathak is derived from Katha, a word used in Sanskrit and other languages for story. The Kathaks were originally a caste of story-tellers in temples of north India, who embellished their performances with gestures and songs. Kathak began evolving into a distinct mode of dance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the spread of the bhakti movement. The legends of Radha-Krishna were enacted in folk plays called rasa Lila, which combined folk dance with the basic gestures of the Kathak story-tellers.

### Painting for Patrons: The Tradition of Miniatures

Miniatures are small sized paintings, generally done in water color on cloth or paper. The earliest miniatures were on palm leaves or wood. The Mughals emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan patronised highly skilled painters who primarily illustrated manuscripts containing historical accounts and poetry. These were generally painted in brilliant colors and portrayed court scenes of battle or hunting, and other aspects of social life.

**A closer Look: Bengal**

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Bengal became the centre of a regional kingdom under the Palas centuries; Bengal was ruled by sultans who were independent of the rulers in Delhi. In 1586, when Akbar conquered Bengal, it formed the nucleus of the Bengal Suba. While Persian was the Language of administration, Bengali developed as a regional language. From the fourth-third centuries BCE, commercial ties began to develop between Bengal and Magadha (south Bihar), which may have led to the growing influence of Sanskrit. During the fourth century the Gupta rulers established political control over north Bengal and began to settle Brahmanas in this area.

In the seventh century the Chinese traveler Xuan Zang observed that languages related to Sanskrit were in use all over Bengal. Bengal became the centre of a regional kingdom under the Palas.

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Bengali is derived from Sanskrit, it passed through several stages of evolution. Also, a wide range of non-Sanskrit words, derived from a variety of sources including tribal languages, Pakistan, and European languages, have become part of modern Bengali. Early Bengali literature may be divided into two categories - one indebted to Sanskrit and the other independent of it.

The first includes translations of the Sanskrit epics, the Mangalakavyas (literally auspicious poems, dealing with local deities) and bhakti literature such as the biographies of Chaitanyadeva, the leader of the Vaishnava bhakti movement. In second includes Nath literature such as the songs of Maynamati and Gopichandra, stories concerning the worship of Dharma Thakur, and fairy tales, folk tales and ballads.

**Pirs and Temples:** With the establishment of Mughals control over Bengal with their capital in the heart of the eastern delta at Dhaka, officials and functionaries received land and often set up mosques that served as centre for religious transformation in these areas. The early settlers sought some order and assurance in the unstable conditions of the new settlements.

These were provided by community leaders, who also functioned as teachers and Adjudicators and were sometimes ascribed with supernatural powers. People referred to them with affection and respect as Pirs. This term included saints or Sufis and other religious personalities, daring colonizers and deified soldiers, various Hindu and Buddhist deities and even animistic spirits. The cult of Pirs became very popular and their shrines can be found everywhere in Bengal.

**Fish as Food:** Traditional food habits are generally based on locally available items of food. Bengal is a riverine plain which produces plenty of rice and fish. Understandably, these two items figure prominently in the menu of even poor Bengalis. Fishing has always been an important occupation and Bengali literature contains several references to fish. Brahmanas were not allowed to eat non-vegetarian food, but the popularity of fish in the local diet made the Brahmanical authorities relax this prohibition for the Bengal Brahmanas and permitted the local Brahmanas to eat certain varieties of fish.

