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Ch: THE. MAKING OF REGIONAL CULTURE (NOTES)

Pirs and Temples

16th century-people migrated in large numbers-from the less fertile western Bengal to the forested and marshy areas of south-eastern Bengal- moved eastwards- cleared forests and brought the land under rice cultivation-local communities of fisherfolk and shifting cultivators, often tribals merged with the new communities of peasants-coincided with the establishment of Mughal control over Bengal – their capital in the heart of the eastern delta at Dhaka-Officials and functionaries received land-set up mosques that served as centres for religious transformation in these areas-early settlers sought some order and assurance in the unstable conditions of the new settlements-were provided by community leaders- functioned as teachers and adjudicators -were sometimes ascribed with supernatural powers-referred with affection and respect as pirs- term included saints or Sufis-other religious personalities-daring colonisers and deified soldiers, various Hindu and Buddhist deities and even animistic spirits-cult of pirs became very popular- their shrines found everywhere in Bengal-also witnessed a temple-building spree from the late 15th century – culminated in the 19th century. Temples and other religious structures were often built by individuals or groups who were becoming powerful – to both demonstrate their power and proclaim their piety- several modest brick and terracotta temples in Bengal were built – with support of several “low” social groups- the Kolu (oil pressers) and the Kansari (bell metal workers)-European trading companies created new economic opportunities- families belonging to these social groups availed of these-social and economic position improved-proclaimed their status through the construction of temples-local deities, once worshipped in thatched huts in villages-gained the recognition of the Brahmanas- their images began to be housed in temples. The temples began to copy the double-roofed (dochala) or four-ro chauchala ofed () structure of the thatched huts-led to the evolution of the typical Bengali style in temple architecture-four triangular roofs placed on the four walls move up to converge on a curved line or a point-Temples built on a square platform-interior was relatively plain- outer walls of many temples decorated with paintings, ornamental tiles or terracotta tablets- in Vishnupur in the Bankura district of West Bengal-decorations reached a high degree of excellence.

Fish as Food

Traditional food habits generally based on locally available items of food-Bengal is a riverine plain-produces plenty of rice and fish-these two items figure prominently in the menu of even poor Bengalis-Fishing has always been an important occupation-Bengali literature contains several references to fish-terracotta plaques on the walls of temples and viharas (Buddhist monasteries) depict scenes of fish being dressed

and taken to the market in baskets-Brahmanas not allowed to eat nonvegetarian food-popularity of fish in the local diet made the Brahmanical authorities relax this prohibition for the Bengal Brahmanas-Brihaddharma Purana, a 13th century Sanskrit text from Bengal-permitted the local Brahmanas to eat certain varieties of fish.

SUBJECT TEACHER'S MUKESH KUMAR