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Ch: THE MAKING OF REGIONAL CULTURE(NOTES)

Closer Look: Bengal

The Growth of a Regional Language

Tend to identify regions in terms of the language spoken by the people- we assume people in Bengal always spoke Bengali-while Bengali is now recognised as a language derived from Sanskrit-early Sanskrit texts (mid-first millennium BCE) suggest that the people of Bengal did not speak Sanskritic languages. How, then, did the new language emerge? From the 4th-3rdcenturies BCE-commercial ties develop between Bengal and Magadha (South Bihar)- led to the growth. 4th century- Gupta rulers established political control over north Bengal- began to settle Brahmanas in this area-linguistic and cultural influence from the mid-Ganga valley became stronger. In the 7th century- Chinese traveller Xuan Zang observed that languages related to Sanskrit were in use all over Bengal. From the 8th century, Bengal became the centre of a regional kingdom under the Palas. Between the 14th and 16th centuries-Bengal ruled by Sultans independent of the rulers in Delhi. In 1586- Akbar conquered Bengal-formed the nucleus of the Bengal suba-Persian was the language of administration-Bengali developed as a regional language- By the 15th century, the Bengali group of dialects came to be united by a common literary language-based on the spoken language of the western part of the region known as West Bengal-Bengali is derived from Sanskrit-it passed through several stages of evolution-a wide range of non-Sanskrit words, derived from a variety of sources including tribal languages, Persian, and European languages-become part of modern Bengali. Early Bengali literature 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. The second includes Nath literature such as the songs of Mayanmati and Gopichandra, stories concerning the worship of Dharma Thakur, and fairy tales, folk tales and ballads-texts belonging to the first category are easier to date- several manuscripts have been found-they were composed between the late 15th and mid 18th centuries-belonging to the second category circulated orally -can not be precisely dated- were particularly popular in eastern Bengal, where the influence of Brahmanas was relatively weak.

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