



315en30B

CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Pots and Pans, paintings, textiles, literature & food amongst other things are part of our culture. In this lesson we will look at how some of these are produced, who produced them and who uses them.



OBJECTIVES

After Studing this lesson, you will be able to;

- what techniques were used in the production of paintings and for whom were these paintings produced;
- the different kinds of textiles and costumes produced in India;
- the rich and varied literature of India which ranges from epics to folk songs and
- the nature of food production and the wide variety of foods in the various parts of India.

30.1 PAINTINGS, PAINTERS & PATRONS

In this section we shall try to understand about our artists and their paintings-what did they paint what did they paint with and for whom did they paint?

In the past arts and crafts were a part of everyday life and what was useful was also beautiful. The pots and pans our ancestors used, the clothes they wore and the homes they lived in had different kinds of designs on them. (Fig 30.1)



Fig 30.1 Harappan Painted Pottery

**Notes**

The most exquisite designs were produced by women on the threshold of their homes with rice flour, turmeric (haldi) and vermilion (kumkum) powders. The Madhubani paintings originated in one such rural tradition in Bihar where scenes from the life of Krishna were reproduced on the walls, on paper or any other medium during the Janmashtami (Lord Krishna's birthday) festival as well as other festive occasions these instances art had a ritual purpose and was considered auspicious.

The earliest paintings which have come down to us are the cave paintings created by hunting and gathering tribes. Some of the best known of these are to be found in the caves and rock shelters of Mirzapur and Banda in Uttar Pradesh, Bhimbetka near Bhopal and Singanpur near Raigarh, in Madhya Pradesh, the Mahadav hills of the Vindhya ranges and Bellary in Karnataka. These paintings are usually hunting scenes which give us an idea of the vegetation and animal life of the area and the nature of tools used by early men and women. These were simple tools like the bow and arrow or axes. We do not know exactly why these paintings were made but it is possible that they had some magical significance and were meant to ensure success in the hunt.

While early men and women made these paintings for their own needs, in later times paintings were usually produced under royal patronage which means that kings paid and sometimes maintained the painter in order to get them made.

The earliest of these are found at the famous caves of Bagh (in Madhya Pradesh) and of Ellora and Ajanta (in Maharashtra). The themes in Ajanta are drawn from the life of the Buddha, especially depictions from the Jataka stories which record the many lives of the Buddha. You will be learning more about Buddhism in the lesson No.31. There are also some scenes from every day life such as the famous depiction from the Ajanta caves of the princess engaged in her makeup. The arts of Ajanta and Ellora were patronized by the Gupta and Vakataka rulers and who belonged roughly to the period from the fourth to sixth centuries. These paintings are remarkable for their unfading colours. It is believed that the Mahabalipuram cave art of the time of the Pallava kings who ruled between the sixth and tenth centuries, were inspired by the artistic techniques employed in the Ajanta and Ellora paintings.

The rock cut temples of Mahabalipuram (located just outside Chennai) belong to the period of Mamallan Narasimha Pallavan who ruled in the seventh century. Here beautiful paintings and sculputres depicting scenes from the Mahabharata, are found in the interior of caves and on rock surfaces.

The origin of paintings as art objects was a development that happened in royal courts and in towns and cities. Among such traditions we can count the Mughal miniatures. The Mughal paintings (produced between the 16th and 18th centuries) were often times a pleasing blend of Safawid and Hindostani traditions. The Mughal and Rajput painters despite their distinctive styles also inspired each other. Book binding and manuscript illustrations were two associated art which sprang up around the same time. The lavishly illustrated Padshahnama is a good example of the skill Persian craftsmen possessed in the art of manuscript illustration. Other famous illustrated manuscripts include the Akbarnama. Both are biographies of kings celebrating their achievements.

Another example is the illustrated Jain manuscripts. These manuscripts begin to appear from the sixth century A.D. onwards. The Jains decided to preserve their



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ancient knowledge by writing it down. In some cases merchants paid artists to prepare the manuscripts. These manuscripts were beautifully illustrated through miniatures. It is believed that the first Tirthankara Rishabhadeva was himself a skilled painter. Among the early illustrated Jain manuscripts is: Ashtasahasrika Prajnana Paramita. The best known miniature paintings on Jain religion and philosophy is the Trilokya Dipika.

The early paintings were leisurely works of art while some modern artistic works are done at a fast pace to meet immediate requirements. For example hoardings and posters advertising films are meant to catch the attention of the public and are changed every week. Unlike early paintings these hoardings have a short life since they are frequently replaced.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 30.2

- State whether true or false:
 - Madhubani paintings originated as ritual and religious traditions.
 - Cave paintings enjoyed royal patronage.
 - Mughal miniatures constitute a rural tradition.
 - Akbarnama and Padshahnama are biographies of kings.
- Name some of the places where early cave paintings are to be found.

30.2 INDIAN TEXTILES AND COSTUMES

Geographical and climatic factors have greatly influenced the clothing of the Indian people. While in northern India people use both woolen and cotton clothes, in southern India which has a warm climate people wear only cotton. The clothing of men in the warm regions consists of an upper cloth and a lower cloth of roughly one and a half yards. In northern India men also wear a stitched shirt called kurta and trousers known as pyjama. The women may “either wear a six yard unstitched cloth called sari or may wear stitched garments similar to what the men wear called kurta and salwar. The wearing of the sari depends on the cultural, traditions of different regions. For example the Maharashtrian and Tamilian women wear a nine yard sari with a separator between the legs while the women of Kerala wear a four or five yard sari just up to the ankles.

It is believed that costumes in early India consisted of unstitched cloth. It is difficult to tell when Indians first began to wear stitched clothes but some of the paintings and sculptures dating back to the early Christian era show Kushana guards and soldiers wearing trousers and jackets. This may have been the result of Greek influence. In ancient sculptures such as the ones at Amaravati (in Andhra Pradesh) or Brahadisvaram (in Tamil Nadu), it is only the serving classes and dancing girls who are depicted in stitched garments and not the kings or the gods.

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National Museum depiction of the headless sculpture of Kanishka wearing a coat, from Mathura Museum.

The production of cotton in India goes back to pre-historic times. We have definite evidence for the use of cotton from Mohenjodaro one of the largest cities of the Harappa civilization. Spindals have been found by archaeologists. The earliest literary reference to the loom on “which cloth is woven, comes from the Atharva Veda. Spinning was the work of women especially widows and unmarried women.

Indian textiles reflect culture. Everything is important- the colours chosen, the designs and the occasion it is worn. Red represents fertility and is generally worn by the bride on the occasion of her wedding. Ochre and white represent purity and sacrifice and are usually worn by spiritual persons and also by widows. Black is considered inauspicious although in south India pregnant women wear black perhaps to ward off the evil eye. Colouring was traditionally done with vegetable dyes such as indigo and madder although now most dyers have switched over to cheaper chemical dyes.

The earliest designs on textiles were geometrical. The depiction of certain types of plants and animals on textiles from different regions gives us an idea of what those people were familiar with and also regarded as auspicious. The lotus or the kalka (mango) designs are popular in most parts of India. India produces a rich variety of textiles. The brocaded silks of Varanasi called Jamdani and Jamewar, the gold bordered silks of Kanchipuram and the tassore of Assam, Birigal and Karnataka constitute well known varieties of silk- Cotton textiles can be woven on simple horizontal looms while brocaded silks required more complex looms with multiple pedals. Silks are more expensive than cottons and can be afforded only by a few.

Different types of textiles require different production techniques. The textile called tie and dye’ and known within different cultural traditions as bandhini (Rajasthan and Gujarat), ikat (Orissa) or chungdi (Tamil Nadu) is produced by a process in which the cloth and sometimes the yarn is tied and dyed.

The kalamkari textiles constitute a living tradition in Andhra. Literally the term ‘kalamkari’ means wording (lean) with the pen kalam). The painters were patronized by the Deccani Sultanates (from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries) and the nobility. The themes depicted constitute a blend of Islamic and Hindu motifs. Interestingly, what is sold today as ‘kalamkari’ are machine made, block-printed textiles! In fact much of the cloth that is produced these days is done on the power loom.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 30.1**

1. What do you understand by the bandhini technique and where are bandhins produced?

2. Explain the meaning of the term kalamkari?

3. State whether true or false:
(a) Cotton clothes are worn in warm weather.



- (b) Silks are cheaper than cotton.
- (c) Textiles which are tied dyed are known as jamdani.
- (d) Indigo and madder are vegetable dyes.

30.3 LITERATURE

We shall now look at our rich and varied literatures which range from epics to folk songs, from classical to popular texts.

India is a land where many languages are spoken. There are as many as 325 languages dialects spoken in India, for eg. While Hindi is the main language in Uttar Pradesh, the people of this state speak in as many as eighty five dialects which are regional variations of Hindi.

Our literature is both religious as well as nonreligious in content, dealing with themes from the life of the people or the court. The Vedas written in Sanskrit form a part of our religious literature while texts like the *Mrichakatika* literally 'The Story of the Toy Can' of Shudraka deal with worldly themes.

A rich range of regional variations exists especially in the re-telling of our major epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is well known that while Valmiki wrote the Ramayana known as the 'Adi Kavya' in Sanskrit, Tulsidas wrote the Hindi version which is popularly known as *Ramcharitmanas*. The court poet of the Cholas called Kamban wrote the Ramayana in Tamil while the popular folk version of the Ramayana in Telugu was written by a peasant woman called Molla.

It is interesting that even the style of writing the text is influenced by the social situation of the writer. For example while Kamban uses the language and imagery of the elite ruling class Molla writes like a peasant woman and in describing the sunset she says that the sun went down the sky like a worker tired after the day's labours.

We shall now briefly look at some of the regional and folk variations of the Mahabharata which is believed to have been authored by the sage Veda Vyasa in Sanskrit. In a Telugu version of the Mahabharata it is said that after the Pandavas led by Yudhishtira lost their Property and freedom in the game of dice to Duryodhana Draupadi exercised her right to participate in the dice game. To show her contempt for her opponent she threw the dice with her foot and began to win back whatever her husbands had lost. Draupadi is worshipped as a deity in many parts of south India.

A Tamil version of the Mahabharata refers to a Pandyan queen called Alirani who hated man and ruled only with the aid of women. It is said that she conquered Arjuna in battle, and later married him. Bhima is the central figure in the Mahabharata stories from the Himalayan region. He and his tribal wife Hidimaba are primary deities in the region of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh. The practice of polyandry still exists following the Mahabharata tradition in which Draupadi is married to the five Pandava brothers. In the Chattisgarh version of the Mahabharata called 'Pandavani', Bhima is again the central character. Many tribal communities of the north-east claim to be directly descended from Bhima and Hidimba. For example the Darrang Kachari of Dimapur describe themselves as 'Bhim-ni-fa', i.e. the children of Bhima¹.

Although many events and characters are identifiable with northern India, the Mahabharata has a rich tradition which spreads across the length and breadth of the

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country. Different communities understand and transmit it in their own ways incorporating various local stories this way, the Mahabharata reflects the different cultures of the people. These range from classical narrations to folk ballads.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 30.2**

1. What kind of literature do the Vedas represent?

2. In which regions of India can you expect to find Bhima and Hidimba being worshipped?

3. Who wrote the Hindi version of the Ramayana and what is it known as?

30.4 THE CULTURE OF FOOD

Let us now take a look at our food habits.. We shall see how widely they differ from region to region and the ways in which, over a period of time, our food habits have changed due to interaction.

The food habits of Indians varies depending on the nature of crops grown in different regions, the cultural practices of different communities and the economic and social status of the consuming class/community or individuals. While wheat is the staple diet of the Indo-Gangetic belt, consumed mainly in the form of rice is the staple food of south Indians because very little wheat is grown in the regions south of the Vindhya mountains.

We know something of the food eaten by our ancestors through the archaeological evidence of food grains. Habitation sites, where people had actually lived, have produced evidence of wheat (for example the new Stone Age site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan) or the evidence of rice, ragi and horsegram especially in the southern sites like Brahmagiri and Hallur in Karnatakas, Piklihal in Andhra Pradesh and Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu. Evidence from Piklihal suggests that the people here were herders who domesticated cattle, sheep and goats.

Pots were used for storing water and grain as well as for cooking. Indian archaeologists have classified ancient cultures on the basis of the pottery they produced such as the Painted Grey Ware, Black Polished pottery etc. Bronze age archaeological sites like Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu have also produced bronze and gold vessels. These, more obviously used by the rich.

Most regions have their own distinctive cuisine. The southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are rice-based cultures. Idli, Dosa and Upma prepared by south Indians have now gained popularity in northern India and the easy availability of the these dishes in north Indian states is a proof of the interaction between different communities. Kerala like West Bengal which also has a coastal culture, is known for its fish preparations.



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With the coming of the Mughals, ‘Mughlai’ dishes like the tandoori chicken and seekh kababs along with fruits like the water melon, became a part of Indian cuisine. Awadhi (Awadh refers to the region of eastern UP) cuisine today is reflective of Mughal Nawabi culture. In the sixteenth century the Europeans, especially the Portuguese introduced potatoes, tomatoes and green chillies into Indian food which is now an indispensable part of our cooking. French beans *also became* a part of Indian cuisine during this period. Thus, cultural interaction has led to changes in our food habits.

An ordinary meal in a family may consist of rice or roti, dal i.e. lentils and a vegetable preparation. While the daily meals are usually prepared by women at home cooking on a large scale is generally done by men. There are many poor people in India who can only afford to eat gruel. The rich may eat a variety of foods consisting of both vegetarian and meat dishes, meat being much more expensive than vegetables. On special occasions like marriages all communities prepare a feast of a number of dishes having the distinct flavour of their region.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 30.3

1. What are the staple crops of India and how do they shape on food habits?

2. Name some popular dishes of south India.

3. Match the Following:

Roti	Kerala
Upma	Portuguese
Seekh kabab	Tamil Nadu
Chillies	N. India
Fish	Mughalai food



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

We have looked at forms of cultural production and the regional variations as well as the nature of cultural interaction in terms of our clothing or food habits. We have seen that our early ancestors produced objects such as pottery which were useful as well as beautiful. However in later times art objects like paintings began to be produced under royal patronage.

We also noticed that people wore clothing according to climatic requirements and that costumes varied from region to region. We have learnt about textile varieties, designs and some special types like the kalamkari and the chungdi. In the section on literature we saw that the wide range of Indian languages has contributed to the richness of our literature. Here we have noted some of the regional and folk variations of the

**Notes**

Mahabharata. Finally we have studied the food habits of the different regions in India and the changes brought about through constant cultural interaction.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. What do you know of the arts of Ajanta and Ellora?
2. How are today's film hoardings different from the paintings in illustrated manuscripts?
3. Explain the significance of colours in traditional Indian textiles?
4. Briefly discuss some of the regional variations of the Mahabharata epic?
5. Describe the nature and variety of the regional cuisines in India?

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

Paintings:

1. a = t, b = f, c = f and d = t.
2. Early cave paintings are to be found in the caves at Mirzapur and Banda in Uttar Pradesh, Bhimbetka and Singanpur in Madhya Pradesh the Mahadev hills of the Vindhya ranges and at Bellary in Karnataka.

Textiles and Costumes

1. Bandhini involves a process in which a yarn and sometimes cloth is tied and dyed.

Bandhini is produced in Gujarat and Rajasthan, ikat in Orissa and Chungdi in Madurai.

2. The term 'kalamkari' literally means working i.e. 'kari' with a pen, i.e. 'kalam'.
3. a = t, b = f, c = f and d = t.

1. The Vedas written in Sanskrit form a part of our religious literature.

2. Bhima and Hidimba are worshipped in the region of Mandi and in Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh.

3. Tulsidas wrote the Hindi version of the Ramayan and it is known as the Ramcharitamanas.

The Culture of Food

1. The staple crops of India are rice and wheat. Rice is the predominant crop in south India and therefore south Indians are basically rice eaters. Since a lot of wheat is grown in north India wheat constitutes the staple food of the north.
2. Idli, dosa and upma are some popular dishes of the south Indian cuisine.
3. Answers to Match the following:



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Roti	N. India
Upma	Tamil Nadu
Seekh Kabab	Mughlai
Chillies	Portuguese
Fish	Kerala

HINTS TO TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Refer Para 30.1
2. Refer Para 30.1
3. Refer Para 30.2
4. Refer Para 30.3
5. Refer Para 30.4

GLOSSARY

Brocade	:	The weaving of patterns usually with golden thread on silk cloth.
Cuisine	:	A style or method of cooking.
Elite	:	A select group or class of persons.
Fired clay	:	Clay which is fired or baked in a furnace used for making pottery or as building material.

Hindustani

Indigo	:	A blue colour obtained from the indigo plant.
Madden	:	A red colour extracted from the root of a climber called Madder.
Miniatures	:	A painting on a very small scale.
Polyandry	:	A system of marriage in which a woman has more than one husband.
Safawid	:	A dynasty of Persia the term is usually used to denote Persian influence in Indian art and architecture.