UNIT 9: ART AND LITERATURE IN THE SULTANATE PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to–

- explain the developments in the field of architecture, sculpture, fine art and painting during the Sultanate period.
- describe the progress of music, dance and drama during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate
- discuss the development of Sanskrit as well as vernacular literature during this period.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we discussed about the development of literature in the Post Gupta period. In this Unit, we will be discussing the development of Art and Literature in the Sultanate period.The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate towards the beginning of the thirteenth century may be said to mark a new phase in the domain of cultural developments. The rulers of the Delhi Sultanate being Turks not only had a well defined faith in the form of Islam but also had their own ideas on governance, art, architecture,

literature, etc. Their interaction with the people of India facilitated the development of a new and syncretised culture. This interaction not only brought about assimilation of ideas but at the same time left a tremendous impact on cultural developments. The rule of the Delhi Sultanate thus saw the introduction of new forms of art as well as considerable progress in the domain of literature, music, etc.



LET US KNOW

The period of the Delhi Sultanate witnessed the rule of five dynasties – the Slaves or Mamluk, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyids and the Lodis -which ruled from 1206 to 1526 C.E. Ibrahim Lodi, the last Sultan was defeated by Babur who established the Mughal dynasty in India.

9.3 FINE ARTS IN THE SULTANATE PERIOD

- **Architecture**

The reign of the Delhi Sultanate symbolized the arrival of a totally distinct style in the field of art, architecture and painting. Though initially the Turks converted some temples and other existing buildings into mosques, subsequently they started constructing their own buildings. For this purpose, mostly indigenous craftsmen such as stone cutters, masons, etc. were employed. Later, architects came to India from Central Asia. In the field of architecture, the Sultanate period increasingly introduced the use of arches, minarets and domes. While the use of the dome provided a pleasing skyline. The use of the arch and the dome together dispensed the need for a large number of pillars to support the roof. This in the long run enabled the construction of large halls for congregation of people. The Turks moreover used fine quality and light mortar in their buildings so that the arch and the dome could be supported with a strong foundation. Hence, new architectural forms and mortar of a superior kind became widespread in northern India, with the arrival of the Turks.

Of the many buildings belonging to the Sultanate architectural style, the earliest ones were the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque and the Qutb Minar

that were built by Qutbuddin Aibak to commemorate the establishment of his rule in Delhi. This monument demonstrates the way Islamic architecture developed in India in the early days. Another important monument started by Qutbuddin Aibak and later completed by his successor Iltutmish was the Qutb Minar, situated in Mehrauli in Delhi. The height of the Minar which is 71.4 metres is further marked by its tapering character. Originally, it was only four storeys high but Firuz ShahTughlaq added a fifth storey. The continuation of building activities of the Turks after the consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate under Iltutmish can be witnessed in the wide range of buildings belonging to this period. The mosque at Badaun, the lofty gate at Nagaur, the tomb of Iltutmish built near the end of his reign demonstrates a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic architectural traditions. The second half of the thirteenth century saw the coming of artisans from Central Asia. This introduced a new phase in the domain of architecture - of plain arches and a simple tomb. This trend became visible in the tomb of Balban, the successor of Iltutmish.



The Qutub Minar

Source: www.wikepedia.org

The Khalji period brought about a landmark development in Indo-Islamic architecture. The fusion of both Indian and Islamic architectural style became a significant feature during the reign of Alauddin Khalji. The most important example of this style is the Alai Darwaza built by Alauddin Khalji in 1311 CE. This gateway formed the main access through the southern wall to the enlarged Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque. It is the first building to employ Islamic principles of accurate construction and geometric ornamentation. The Alai Darwaza also demonstrates the use of red sandstone and marble. Alauddin Khalji also built his capital at Siri, a few kilometres away from the site of the Qutb Minar. Mosque architecture also developed during this period as shown by the Jamaat Khana mosque at the mausoleum of the Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya.

During the Tughlaq period, Indo-Islamic architecture underwent a distinct change. Monuments were now characterized by simplicity in contrast to the lavish and elaborate ornamentation of the earlier period. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the city of Tughlaqabad was established at Delhi by Ghiyasuddin and Muhammad Tughlaq. Tughlaq architecture was marked by the use of sloping walls. The Tughlaqs moreover used greystone in their buildings instead of the expensive red sandstone. The Sayyids and the Lodis who succeeded the Tughlaqs introduced new features in the domain of architecture such as the double dome. Moreover, the Lodis placed their buildings, especially tombs, on a high platform. Some of the tombs were also placed amidst gardens such as the Lodi gardens in Delhi where we find the tomb of Sikandar Lodi.



The Alai Darwaza



Tomb of Firuz ShahTughlaq

Source: www.asi.nic.in

•Sculpture and Painting

The trend of carving sculptures lost its importance due to the loss of state patronage. This was due to the prejudice against the representation of human and animal figures in Islam. On the contrary, only Arabic calligraphy, geometrical and floral motifs carved on stone now adorned the structures of the Sultanate period. However, in the regions that were outside the jurisdiction of the Delhi Sultanate, local Hindu rulers continued to build temples and adorn them with beautiful sculptures as can be witnessed in Orissa and Assam.

Moreover, despite Islamic injunctions against depiction of human figures, the rulers of the Delhi sultanate patronized Indo-Persian style of painting that drew inspiration from schools in Iran as well as from Jain paintings. The features of the paintings include representation of groups of people in rows with identical poses, narrow bands of decoration running across the width of the painting as well as the use of bright colours. The paintings of the Delhi Sultanate paved the way for the development of Mughal and Rajput schools of painting at a later period.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Fill in the blanks :

a. The Sultanate period increasingly introduced the use of _____, _____ and _____in architecture.

b. The use of _____ served the purpose of decoration of buildings under the Delhi sultanate.

9.4 PROGRESS OF MUSIC, DANCE AND DRAMA

The Sultanate period brought integration not only in the field of religious beliefs and architecture but also in the domain of fine arts, especially music. When the Turks came to India, they were the inheritors of the rich Arab tradition of music which flourished in Iran and Central Asia. The arrival of the Turks also introduced the use of new musical instruments such as the *rabab* and *sarangi*. The greatest among the Persian poets during the

Sultanate period was Amir Khusrau who made important contributions in the field of music. He was given the title of *nayak* and he introduced many Perso-Arabic ragas. The *qawwali* is also believed to have originated with him. The process of integration in the field of music continued under the Tughlaqs especially during the reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq. The Indian classical work *Ragadarpan* was translated into Persian during his reign. In the domain of music, the influence of the Sufis also became a marked feature. Sultan Husain Sharqi, the ruler of Jaunpur was a great patron of music. The sufi saint, Pir Bodhan was a renowned musician of his age. In Assam the Sufi saint Ajan Fakir and in Bengal Lalan Fakir popularised their unique compositions amongst the people of different communities. Their songs are popular even today in the twenty-first century.

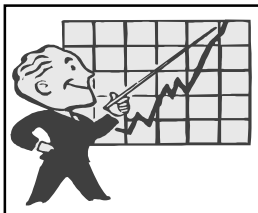
In the field of dance we find references to women artists in the account of Barani. However it cannot be ascertained whether these women artists followed the Iranian or Indian traditions of song and dance. In the *Tarikh- i-Firuzshahi* Barani mentions about young girls being trained by Indian courtesans in Persian and Indian music in the late thirteenth century C.E.

9.5 DEVELOPMENT OF SANSKRIT AND VERNACULAR LITERATURE

There was marked progress in literature during this period. The majority of the literature composed under the patronage of the Delhi Sultanate was in Arabic. But the Turks who came to India were deeply influenced by the Persian language which had become the literary and administrative language of Central Asia and Iran from the tenth century onwards. Apart from literary works in Persian, the period under review saw literary growth in Sanskrit and vernacular languages as well. In the domain of Sanskrit literature, mention may be made about works in the field of *kavya* or poetical narrative, *nataka* or drama, medicine, astronomy, music etc. A large number of commentaries on Hindu law like the *Dharmashastras* were composed during this period. *Mitakshara*, the commentary of Vijnanesvara, a major authority of Hindu law was compiled and given a written form around 1200 CE. Majority of the Sanskrit works were composed in South India, followed by Bengal, Mithila, and Western India, under the patronage of Hindu rulers.

The Jains too contributed to the growth of Sanskrit literature. Hemchandra Suri was the most eminent among them. Little attempt was however made to translate Islamic literature into Sanskrit.

The development of vernacular literature also continued simultaneously. In Assam and Bengal in particular, the growth of vernacular literature took the form of Vaisnava songs being composed, offering glimpses of a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic ideas. Hindi as a language also made considerable progress during this period, a notable writer being Chand Bardoi, the author of *Prithviraj Raso*. The Bhakti Movement was an important factor in facilitating the development of vernacular languages. The Bhakti saints popularized the message of *bhakti* or devotion through vernacular songs which were composed in vernacular languages. The *bhakti* poems in Hindi moreover were also used by the Sufi saints in their musical gatherings. In Assam Madhav Kandali composed the *Ramayana* in the Assamese language. Tulsidas composed his *Ramcharitamanas* in the Hindi language. Some of the rulers also patronised these languages. For instance, Nusrat Shah of Bengal had the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* translated into Bengali. The development of vernacular literature during this period also included the composition of the two Epics in the Dravidian languages. Kamban composed the *Ramayana* in Tamil in the eleventh century followed by similar translations in Kannada and Telugu. Tamil literature received a great impetus in the 13th and 14th century due to the popularity of the Saivite saints. The rulers of the Vijaynagara Empire also patronised literature in Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, etc. Moreover, the growth of regional languages also brought about the introduction of new dialects such as Braj- Bhasa, which provided the base for the growth of Hindi literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2. Fill in the blanks:

a. _____ was given the title of *nayak* in the Sultanate period.

b. The author of the book *Prithviraj Raso* is _____.

c. In the region of _____ and _____ vernacular literature was primarily in the form of Vaishnava songs.



9.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt about–

- the emergence of new architectural styles under the Delhi Sultanate.
- the nature of building activities under the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate.
- the patronage extended by the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate to fine arts, music as well as the development of Sanskrit and Vernacular literature.



9.7 FURTHER READING

1) Chandra, Satish. (2010). *Medieval India from Sultanate to the Mughals (Part One) Delhi Sultanate (1206- 1526)*. New Delhi, India. Har Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd.

2) Habib, Irfan. (2007). *Medieval India- The study of a civilization*. New Delhi, India. National Book Trust:

3) Farooqui, Salma Ahmed. (2011). *A Comprehensive History of Medieval India- From the Twelfth to the Mid- Eighteenth Century*. New Delhi, India. Pearson Publication.



9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1:

a. Arches, minarets and Domes

b. Calligraphy, geometrical and floral motifs.

Ans to Q No. 2:

a. Amir Khusrau

b. Chand Bardoi

c. Assam and Bengal



9.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each within 50 words)

1. What were the new features in the architecture of the Delhi Sultanate?
2. Which were the earliest buildings constructed during the early phase of the Delhi Sultanate?
3. What was the importance of the Bhakti Movement in popularising the vernacular languages?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question within 500 words)

1. Throw light on the development of painting under the Delhi Sultanate.
2. Assess the importance growth of Sanskrit literature during the Sultanate period.

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 500 words)

1. Analyse the contributions of the Sultanate rulers in the field of music.
2. Discuss the nature of Indo- Islamic architecture during the Sultanate period.

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