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CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

When you were younger, your grandparents must have told you stories about kings and queens, magical events, animals and birds and other tales of long ago. Many of these stories are drawn from epics and religious texts like the Ramayana or the Bible, or from collections of stories like the Panchatantra or the Arabian Nights. Through these stories, all of us have absorbed many aspects of our cultural heritage. Culture is communicated through various means- oral, written through music, and nowadays, via film and television too.



OBJECTIVES

- after studying this lesson you will be able to;
- explain how speech writing & printing help cultural communication;
- list some methods of cultural communication;
- describe how music is used to communicate different ideas and
- explain how a variety of cultural forms were used to spread Buddhism.

31.1 HOW CULTURE IS COMMUNICATED

Can you imagine a world without language? Language is a basic characteristic of human society. It is not only a means for people to understand each other, but is also a vehicle for the transmission of cultural ideas. A shared language knits people together, but also distinguishes them from one another. For the people of Punjab are bound together by their common language, Punjabi, but are also differentiated from those whose mother tongue is not Punjabi. Did you know that Punjabi is one of the two most widely spoken languages in Pakistan also?

Another language in the subcontinent which is shared by people of different countries is Bengali.

The spread of language and culture is influenced by geographical factors. People living in near by areas usually speak the same or similar languages. Those who live thousands of miles apart have very different mother tongues. This is because



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communication between far flung areas was difficult before modern means of transport developed. Cultures tended to evolve in relative isolation and ended up being very distinct.

Communication is still difficult in densely forested and mountainous areas. A tribe living on one face of a hill or a valley may not even know of another tribe living on another hillside just a few kilometers away. The language they speak can therefore be very different.

However, in areas like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where vast plains are well connected by rivers, people could travel easily even in ancient times. So similar languages and customs developed due to regular interaction.

Even where one language such as Hindi or Tamil is spoken over a large area, there are variations from district to district. No version is sufficiently different to be called a language, so they are called dialects of a language.

Spoken language was and remain one of the most important means of communication. However the invention of writing widened the scope of communication. Messages could henceforth be sent over long distances and preserved over time.

Writing was known in India over 4000 years ago. This was the Harappan script which has not been deciphered yet. With the decline of the Harappan civilization around 1800 BC, writing was also lost. The knowledge of writing reappeared around the 3rd century BC. This writing called Brahmi is the mother of all modern Indian scripts.

Initially, rulers and wealthy people had important documents engraved on rock surfaces, stone tablets and copper plates. Cloth leather, the bark of the tree called bhojapatra and palm leaf called talapatra were used for writing on.

What kind of books do you think there were in earlier times? There were religious texts which were used by priests. Law books, called Shastras were written for the use of kings and their ministers. Drama and poetry were composed for the enjoyment of the wealthy. It is clear that most books were therefore meant only for a small number of privileged people.

However, there were also epics like the Mahabharata (about which you read in lesson 30), popular stories collected in the Jataka tales, Hitopadesa etc, and numerous mythological legends in the Puranas. Stories from these were transmitted orally by professional story tellers, bards and even local temple priests. In the course of telling stories, many variations occurred over time. So we have today, numerous different versions of popular legends. Books thus touched the lives of many people even though very few could read or write.

Each book had to be copied out by hand. Such handwritten copies are called manuscripts. Manuscript production became, a specialized art in medieval times. Scribes used beautiful handwriting called calligraphy. The pages were often decorated with beautiful illustrations. Copying manuscripts was obviously a laborious process, so very few copies were made.

Printing was introduced in the mid 16th century. Books could now be produced in far greater numbers in lesser time and lower cost. However since few people were literate, the immediate effect was limited. A more dramatic transformation took place in the 19th Century when full use of the press and printing technology was made by nationalists and social reformers.

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The first newspaper in India was published in 1760 in English by an officer of the East India Co. This was followed by many others. These newspapers focused on providing information about Europe to Englishmen in India.

From the early 19th century, many newspapers began to appear in the vernacular languages. They were published by nationalists who had the interests of Indians in mind. News and views were carried across not only to the educated few, but through them to many others as well. Many thinkers saw that British domination of India could be overcome only if the traditional ills of Indian society were first removed. These reformers not only campaigned directly, but also used the press to build public opinion. One such reformer was Raja Rammohan Roy of Bengal.

In 1821, Rammohan began to publish the newspaper 'Samachar Kaumudi' in Bengali, followed by the 'Mierat-ul-akhbar' in Persian in 1822 and the 'Brahmanical Magazine' in English. Through these papers, he advocated education of women and widow remarriage and attacked sati and the ills of the caste system. He also published numerous pamphlets underlining his vision of an ideal society based on the best teachings from major religions of the world. He founded a community called the Brahmo Samaj which was joined by numerous educated and progressive men in Bengal. It was owing to the printing press that Rammohan's ideas could reach such a wide audience. You can estimate the power of the press when you consider that a rival newspaper, 'Chanridka' was published in 1822 to oppose his ideas of social reform.

We see thus that newspapers and magazines do not merely give information about events and occurrences around the world, but also mould our ways of thinking. Ideas and views have of course been exchanged from time immemorial. What however is specific to modern forms of communication is that the transmission of ideas becomes a one-way process. While the owner of a newspaper can influence the views of its readers, the reader cannot exert a similar influence. Can you see the similarity with globalization about which you read in lesson 29.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 31.1**

1. From which script are most modern Indian scripts derived?

2. Name two kinds of books written in earlier times.

3. Why was manuscript production expensive?

4. State whether true or false:
 - (i) Language is not a means of communication.
 - (ii) Hitopadesa is a collection of stories.
 - (iii) Rammohan was the only reformer to use the press in the 19th century.
 - (iv) Writing made long-distance communication possible.



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31.2 MUSIC AS A VEHICLE OF CULTURE

Among the earliest expression of culture are music and dance. Early people clapped hands, or beat the earth with sticks for rhythm to accompany songs and dances. Gradually many kinds of drums and instruments came to be used. Garba Gujarat, Kathakali from Kerala and Gidda, Bhangra from Punjab are examples of folk dance. These were and are still performed to celebrate festive occasions, to mark important ceremonies, to express various sentiments, and sometimes even to serve as a channel of protest.

Folk songs celebrate spring, the coming of rains, or the ripening of corn which are all central to the agricultural cycle. There are also songs of masons and potters. You may have heard construction workers singing while heaving heavy loads as a team listen to them carefully the words are about their work.

There are also numerous songs by and about women-expressing the sorrow of a lover whose beloved has gone away, of a girl leaving her parental home upon her marriage, even about the conflict between mother and daughter-in-law.

Folk music is by its very nature participatory. It evolves along with the people's experiences. Folk art can therefore be said to be 'consumed' by the same people who create it.

Folk culture is not meant for an audience. However, in modern times, the original purpose of this culture is transformed. Thus you may sometimes see folk dances performed on stage while an audience watches!

You read about classical culture in lesson 29. Classical music is a highly developed form of music since it is based on precise rules, it can be called the grammar of music singing or playing it (on an instrument) requires a long period of intensive training. However, anyone can derive great joy from listening to it. In fact, numerous melodies of film and folk songs are based on classical ragas/or simplified forms of classical ragas. Both classical and folk music have interacted closely and enriched each other for centuries, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to draw a sharp dividing line.

Classical music was earlier patronised by kings. The legendary Tansen was one of the nine jewels in the court of the Mughal emperor, Akbar.

Nowadays business houses, and national and international cultural organizations patronize classical music.

Related to both these kinds of music is that used for religious purposes. In fact many folk and classical songs have religious themes.

The earliest example of religious music in India come from the Samaveda. This 3000 year old text comprises Vedic chants set to melody for recitation during the performance of sacrifices.

From medieval times, the compositions of Bhakti and Sufi saints were sung by their followers and by lay worshippers. These songs are familiar to us today as bhajans and qawwalis. The lyrics express devotion and love for a personal god sometimes they request divine help to tide over worldly troubles. Qawwalis and bhajans often have a classical foundation and a popular or folk form.



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Bhajans are sometimes related to the experiences of the common people. The dohas of Kabir for eg., frequently refer to his hereditary profession of weaving.

Qawwalis are specially associated with dargahs, ie. Shrines of venerated Sufi saints.

In Gurudwaras, the Granth Sahib, the sacred text of the Sikhs is recited in a musical way. The Granth Sahib is a compilation of the sayings of the 10 Sikh gurus as well as numerous Bhakti and Sufi saints.

The person who recites the Granth Sahib undergoes not only religious training but also training in classical music, and is therefore called 'raagi'.

A comparatively new form of music is film music. Initially film music relies very heavily on classical and folk music. Many of the old, popular film songs are based on melodies from both Indian and western classical music. But film music also evolved certain new features. It brought into use the orchestra which originally belong to western classical music in addition to Indian instruments. Nowadays of course, new kinds of fusion music are evolved everyday.

The popular song "Itna na mujh se tu pyar badha" from the film "Chhaya" is based on a symphony by an 18th century Austrian composer, Mozart.

Almost all the songs of "Mughal-e-Azam" are based on classical Hindustani music. The songs "Muhabbat ki jhooti kahani" for eg., is set to raga Darbari Kanada.

Film songs are dependent not only on one of the theme of the film but also on technological considerations. The earliest recording mechanisms at the start of our century could run for only 3½ minutes at a time. So a format evolved where by a song would last between 3 and 3½ minutes. Now with technological advancement, continuous recording is possible for hours together, but film songs retain the established format. Next time you hear a song on the radio, you can time it yourself.

Music like all expression of culture, carries ideas. The Bauls of Bengal have traditionally carried their messages of universal brotherhood and unselfishness through their songs.

Devotional songs express not only the emotions of the worshippers but also draw others into the fold. Today music serves as an important bridge in the global village about which you read in lesson 29. While assimilating new forms, it is important to remember not to lose one's own rich heritage of music.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 31.2

1. What do folk songs and dances celebrate?

2. Fill in the blanks:

(i) _____ requires intense training.



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(ii) The compositions of Bhakti and Sufi saints are called _____ and _____.

(iii) The Bauls of Bengal sing songs about _____ and _____.

3. State whether true or false:

1. Folk dances are meant to be performed only on stage.
2. Classical and folk music have never interacted with one another.
3. Film songs sometimes borrow classical tunes.

Contacts between India and the outside world flourished between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD. Political and commercial interaction led to interchange of ideas and wide ranging social and cultural development. Buddhism was adaptive to the new circumstances and won followers among the Indo Greeks, and Central Asians. Missionary monks traveled with traders and established monasteries in far-flung areas in central Asia, from there, Buddhism spread further to China.

Interaction with the Greeks led to developments in sculpture. Earlier the Buddha was represented in the carvings on stupa gateways only symbolically by a wheel, lotus pipal tree etc. now following the models of Greek gods like Apollo, he was represented in human form.

Parallel to this was the development of a complex mythology. Popular belief in rebirth and reincarnation led to belief in many hundreds of previous lives of the Buddha. These earlier Buddhas birth were called Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas were imagined as compassionate beings entirely concerned with the welfare of fellow beings. Worshippers could pray to them to ease their troubles and help them with their worldly cares.

31.3 CULTURAL FORMS & SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

You have learnt that religion is one of the features of our cultural heritage. Religious ideas may themselves be transmitted through the medium of culture. Let us consider the example of Buddhism.

The Buddha lived in the 6th century BC. He preached that the nature of the world is sorrowful and to free oneself from it, one must overcome desire. He asked his followers to lead simple, virtuous lives and to follow a middle path between extreme austerity and luxury.

The Buddha's message was quickly accepted by the common people because he spoke in the common language, Prakrit. While the Brahmana's used Sanskrit, a language which ordinary people didn't understand.

The Buddhists also adopted and adapted a number of religious and cultural practices. For example, the worship of trees was a popular practice. The Buddhists suggested that tree worship was identical with the worship of the bodhi tree at Bodhi Gaya. According to Buddhist traditions, the Buddha had meditated sitting under the tree and had attained enlightenment here.

Another popular practice was the erection of circular mounds over the remains of the dead as a kind of memorial. The relatives and associates of the dead offered worship at such mounds. The Buddha's followers adopted this practice and erected stupas or



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mounds which often contained relics of the Buddha such as his teeth or objects he was supposed to have used.



Fig31.1 Buddha

As Buddhism spread, Buddhists came into contact with the Indo-Greeks who had settled in the north west of the subcontinent. The Greeks had an old tradition of representing their gods in human form. The Buddhist adopted this tradition as well, depicting the Buddha in an identical fashion. (Fig. 31.1)

Here is a little Jataka story known as the Bidala Kukuta Jataka (the Jataka of the cat and the cock). The story runs as follows:

The cat tells the cock that she wants to marry him. Her plan is to get the cock down from the tree and eat him. However, the cock is wise and refuses to get “married”. The Buddhist preachers identified the wise cock with the Buddha in a previous birth. Look at the lively sculptural representation of the story from Bharhut (central India).

The Buddhists also adopted hundreds of popular folk stories. In the Buddhist tradition they were known as Jatakas or birth stories of the Buddha. These were regarded as stories about the previous births and lives of the Buddha. Many of these stories were also depicted in sculpture.

Stories from the Jatakas were also depicted in paintings on the cave walls at Ajanta as well as on the railing surrounding the Sanchi stupa (MP). Men and women who visited these places and saw these works of art would be reminded of stories they knew. At the same time, they would be taught about Buddhism through these stories.

Buddhist teachers were not the only ones to use a variety of cultural means to spread their message. If we look at any of our major religious traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Jainism, we will find that they owe their long lived success to the many ways in which their message has been transmitted-through



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music, painting, story telling, and through the use of a variety of architectural styles to build centres of worship.

Ancient and popular fertility cults centering around worship of mother goddesses were also incorporated in the growing religious mythology of Buddhism. Each Bodhisattva was associated with a female divinity called Tara. The Bodhisattvas were believed to act through these goddesses. This pairing of male and female powers is a characteristic feature of numerous fertility cults. The adoption of such cultural motifs of folk beliefs and practices made acceptance of Buddhism very easy.

While these developments led to the growing popularity of Buddhism the original simple teachings of the Buddha were almost forgotten. The Buddha had firmly refused to perform miracles and opposed any attempt to be worshipped. However, he was now considered a deity, and stories of miracles performed by the Bodhisattvas became the basis of the faith.

Buddhism gradually died out in the country of its origin not only because it lost the original, simple teaching. The monks lost touch with the ordinary people as patronage from rulers and merchants made the monasteries wealthy. The newer Buddhist texts were composed in Sanskrit which was not understood by the common people.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 31.3

1. What language did the Buddha preach in?
2. Which contacts led to the sculptural representations of the Buddha in human form?
3. What are the Jataka tales?

Fill in the blanks:

1. In the stupa carvings, the Buddha was symbolically represented as _____, _____, _____ etc.
2. Taras were female divinities associated with the _____.
3. _____ were circular mounds covering relics of the Buddha or important monks.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

Language is a vehicle for transmission of cultural ideas, spread of culture is influenced by factors like geographical, spoken & written form of language, inscriptions printing, newspaper, magazines.

Along with language Music & Dance are also expression of Culture, Music has universal appeal its Folk & Clerical forms both have enriched the culture as they also disseminate ideas.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. What are the various means of communication of culture ?
2. Assess the importance of speech writing and printing in culture communication.
3. What is the importance of musicians communicating different ideas ?
4. How did different culture forms help the spread of Buddhism ?

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTION****31.1**

1. Brahmi
2. Religious texts and shastras
3. They were handwritten
4. (i) F (ii) T (iii) F (iv) T

31.2

1. events of natural change and life's pleasure & sorrows
2. (i) classical music
(ii) Bhajans ; Qawwalis
(iii) Universal brotherhood ; unselfishness
3. (i) F (ii) F (iii) T

31.3

1. Prakrit
2. Greek
3. Birth stories of Buddha
4. (i) Gods in human form, birth & lives of Buddha
(ii) Bodhi Sattva as fertility cult
(iii) Stupa

**Notes**