

Art and Culture under the Delhi Sultanate: UPSC

Notes for Art and Culture

The Indian subcontinent has faced invaders from Central Asia since the days of the Indus Valley civilization. But what made the Turkic invasions of India unique is that unlike the previous invasions, the Central Asian conquerors retained their Islamic identity and created new legal and administrative systems that challenged and usually in many cases superseded the existing systems of social conduct and ethics, even influencing the non-Muslim rivals and common masses to a large extent.

This led to the rise of a new Indian culture during the reign of the Delhi Sultanate, which was mixed in nature, making it remarkably different from ancient Indian culture. This factor also played an important role in the synthesis of cultures.

The article will analyse some of achievements that came about as a result of such synthesis. The notes gleaned from this article will be useful in the UPSC Exam.

Development of a new Language: Hindustani

Persian influence was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent by rulers of Turkic and Afghan origin, especially with the Delhi Sultanate from the 13th century, and in the 16th to 19th century by the Mughal Empire. In general, from its earliest days, aspects of the culture and language were brought to the Indian subcontinent by various Persianized Central Asian Turkic and Afghan rulers, such as Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi in the 11th century.

Persian was the official language of the Delhi Sultanate, and their successor states, like the Deccan Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. It was also the cultured language of poetry and literature. Many of the Sultans and nobility in the Sultanate period were Persianised Turks from Central Asia who spoke Turkic languages as their mother tongues.

The Hindustani language (A mix of modern-day Hindi and Urdu) began to emerge in the Delhi Sultanate period, developed from the Middle Indo-Aryan apabhramsha vernaculars of North India. Amir Khusro, who lived in the 13th century AD during the Delhi Sultanate period in North India, used a form of Hindustani, which was the lingua franca of the period, in his writings and referred to it as Hindavi.

Architectural Advances

During the Sultanate period, there was a tremendous change in the architectural practices of the subcontinent at large. This period witnessed the growth of Indo-Islamic architecture. This style

of architecture was neither purely Islamic or purely Hindu, rather it combined the best elements from both the cultures.

Several factors contributed towards the synthesis of Indian and Central Asian style. One of those factors was that the Turkic and Afghan rulers employed Indian 'Craftsmen', architects and sculptors, who had applied the Indian style of construction into Central Asian buildings.

Besides, there was a nexus between the two styles with regard to the fact that both the Indian and Islamic art were inherently decorative. The Hindus adorned their buildings with images of different gods and goddesses, whereas the Muslims decorated them with square, triangular, parallel, rectangular lines, teachings of the Korans inscribed in the Persian script. Thus, the Hindu style of architecture greatly influenced Islamic style because of these factors and gave birth to this Indo-Islamic architecture.

Literature under the Delhi Sultanate Period

Turko-Afghan rulers were primarily militaristic in nature, yet some of them took interest in the world of letters and under their patronage some of the best works of literature were produced during this time period. The court of Delhi Sultans were full of writers, poets, scholars, philosophers, logicians, theologians, lawyers and chroniclers of various backgrounds.

The religious reformers and saints wrote, spoke and preached in languages which could be easily understood by the masses. The growth of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Maithili, Punjabi, Gurumukhi and other provincial literatures took place in this age. Ramananda, Kabir, Surdas and Tulsidas preached in Hindi, Mirabai and some other preachers and saints of the Radha-Krishna cult preached in Brij-bhasha.

Relevant Questions for Art and Culture under Delhi Sultanate

Who were some of the famous authors in Hindi Literature under the Delhi Sultanate Period?

Chand Bardai, Gorakhnath and Namadeva were some of the most famous authors of Hindi Literature during the Delhi Sultanate Period.

Name some of famous authors in Hindustani Literature under the Delhi Sultanate Period

Amir Khusrau, Mir Hussan Dehlvi, Badruddin Thaneswari, Quazi Abdul and Amil-ul-Mulk were regarded as some of the finest authors of Hindustani literature of this period.

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