Chapter 15

Islamicate Transculturation and Local Societies: Comparative Perspectives on Thirteenth-Sixteenth Century South Asia and Southeast Asia

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There was a rise of a Islamicate world system, that is, a shared arena of institutions, technologies and values, covering parts of the subcontinent and Malacca straits by the thirteenth century. The Islamicate world system provided laws, customs, vocabularies, technologies of accounting and writing, and so on, which facilitated trade, communication and legitimation of power across diverse societies. However, there were differences in the ways various societies accepted and in turn influenced this system. In other words, Islamicate world system and local social systems accommodated and mutually transformed each other. This can be seen as a process of transculturation, rather than unidirectional acculturation of local societies by the Islamicate world system. It was this process of 'Islamicate transculturation' that enabled forging of linkages among diverse areas and social groups.

Sunil Kumar's chapter depicts the changing relationships between Delhi Sultans and Sufis in thirteenth and fourteenth-century north India through the analysis of the textual compilations of Sufi teachings called *malfuzat*. It is a fascinating and informative research on the conflict, competition and accommodation between Sultans and Sufis. It goes beyond the hitherto assumed idea that Sufis were outside the mundane temporal world in contradistinction to the world of Sultans with military power and worldly riches. Kumar adeptly shows how Sultans who first attempted to gain legitimacy through *shariati* rule increasingly had to seek support from Sufis; and how Sufis, in this case mainly Chishti *tariqa*, gradually succeeded in establishing its powerful influence not only in vernacular Muslim society but also in the Islamic state. The historiography successfully depicts the structural change that goes beyond the contingent interpersonal relationships. It would be interesting to further enquire how Sufis succeeded in gaining such influence on the state. If it is related to the increasing importance of Sufis in the vernacular society, how did Sufis attain popularity thereof? What were the attractions of Sufis and *tariqa*s for the people in local society? Richard

Eaton [1993] has suggested that Islam was related to agricultural productivity in Bengal frontiers. In case of north India of thirteenth to fourteenth century, what kind of social and economic changes was the advent of Islam and *tariqa*s related to? This question is related to how we see the history of sultanates from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.

Kumar, in another recent paper [2014], questions the previous assumption that the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries saw a process of decentralization where there was a shift from Delhi sultanates to regional sultanates and from the dominance of the Persianate to vernacular cultural realms, and suggests instead an increasing sense of social entitlement amongst political and social elites through this period. I agree with him. The period saw the development of Islamicate world system where the Islamicate institutions got firmly embedded in local societies and political formations, which in turn acquired the capacity to more fully utilize human and natural resources of various localities in transregional linkages. Thus the process saw both localization (vernacularization) and Islamicization at the same time. If this is so, the development must have affected not only the political, social and religious elites and intellectuals but also the popular mass in local societies. In this regard, I would like to request Kumar to contextualize his argument on Sufi-Sultan relationships in the larger transformative process of north India between the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.

The chapter by Masashi Hirosue deals with the very interesting relationship between Muslim coastal rulers and people of the hinterland. He looks at how coastal rulers, in need of guaranteeing the collection and cultivation of products at the hinterland, associated their power with agricultural productivity. Here Sufism played a part in legitimating the divine power and thus supporting the rulers' influence over hinterland communities. Hirosue argues that there was a mutually supporting relationship between the development of north Sumatran hinterland cultures and societies and that of trade networks that connected Pasai, Barus, Aceh, and other Muslim coastal principalities with the wider world as Islamic centres. Southeast Asia is ecologically and culturally diverse with various ethnic groups. Islam played an important role in connecting these diverse areas with the common institutions and technologies. The historical explanation of social transformation by Hirosue clearly goes beyond the previous externalist or autonomist historiography of Southeast Asia and locates the changes from an overall point of view, with the coastal rulers and Muslim saints acting as the pivot connecting the external and the autochonous. The interaction and mutual influence between the universal-global and the vernacular-local is important as in the Indian case. However, the place of Islam in Southeast Asia looks somewhat different from the Indian case. Here, contrary to the north Indian case where there was a process of conflict and competition in Sufi-Sultan relationships, the Sufis, instead of attracting support from the local inland people, worked in cooperation with the rulers in Sumatra. The fact that Islam was associated with agricultural productivity finds some resonance with Eaton's Bengal. However,

whereas Bengal society saw the process of conversion of the large agrarian population to Islam, in case of Sumatra, despite the important roles of the Sufis, Hirosue points out that whether inland people became Muslim or not, was of secondary importance to the rulers. The more important thing was to strengthen ties with the hinterland people. If this was the case, the inland people seem as if to have lacked their own agency for the pursuit for their welfare as they were not able to utilize the power of Islam for themselves but had to depend on the authority of the coastal rulers and Sufis. It would be interesting to investigate the world-view of the inland people and how it changed with the development of trans-regional trade in which they were involved. As there must have developed inter-ethnic transactions and penetration of market economy with the socio-economic development, how did the inland people deal with those changes? Did Islam play any role thereof?

The paper by Kanji Nishio discusses state formation in pre-seventeenth-century Malay Islamic states, using a Malay court history on Melaka sultanate. His interests lie in explicating pre-Islamic elements (either indigenous or Hindu elements) and their relations with Islamic factors. This is a very interesting and important question indeed. His conclusion is that the main axis of state formation of Melaka before the seventeenth century lay in the Malay political contract between rulers and their people. However, Nishio also points out that the contract and the conception regarding supernatural powers were based on the Islamic framework, and pre-Islamic (native, Indian) elements remained merely as a sub-system. Here, it would be necessary to further clarify whether the main structure of ruler-people relationships rested on the indigenous framework with Islam working just as a plain facade or on the Islamic framework where previous elements were contained in a subsidiary manner. Nishio also points out that the Islamic norm became a more substantial guiding principle defining how a just ruler should be in the Malay Islamic states after the seventeenth century. The interesting question here is how this transformation occurred and how that change was related to the history of Islami(ci)zation from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.

The seventeenth-century transformation can partly be explained by external factors such as the increase of European traders. However, that alone does not explain the overall transformation that involved people at large. There must have been a gradual acceptance of Islam as socio-political norm by the people from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries or otherwise the transformation in the seventeenth century cannot be explained as a natural development. Both Hirosue and Nishio underplay the role of Islam for the people and emphasize the importance of the ruler-people relationships based on the indigenous style where the rulers had more to say. But if the people played increasingly important roles in 'the age of commerce' [Reid 1988, 1993] and there was increasing need for them to secure fair deals from rulers and merchants, it is unlikely that the people just let rulers define the politico-economic terms. We may expect some change in moral economy involving the ruler, merchants and the people

during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries as the hinterland became connected with the wider world via port cities. In this connection, it would be interesting to think about to what extent the start of the fifteenth century —the post-Tamerlane watershed for the whole Eurasia and the beginning of the age of commerce for Southeast Asia— may be considered an important historical mark for port city states in Southeast Asia. What was the role of Islam and Islamicate civilization thereof?

The chapter by Wagoner discusses the interaction between the Persianate and Sanskritic political cultures in the Deccan between 1350 and 1650. He argues that the relations between Bahmani and Vijayanagara states should not be seen as two essentialized and mutually hostile religious systems, but rather, in terms of the interaction between two parallel cultures of rulership—a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' and a 'Persian cosmopolis'. The idea of Persian cosmopolis is a fascinating one and these conceptualizations allow us to put into focus not only the interaction between the universal and the vernacular or the great and little traditions but also interaction between two universals or the two great traditions. Unlike the idea of 'the clash of civilizations' [Huntington 1993], Wagoner looks at how two civilizations or the cosmopolis can accommodate and influence each other. South Asia has given birth to Indo-Islamic civilization as a result of interaction between two civilizations. This is a remarkable achievement in human history as we do not see other major examples of two civilizations mingling together to form another amalgamate civilization.

The example of the gold coin Wagoner has looked at is especially interesting as the coins were minted by the state and represented the state's authority, but they also must have catered to the people's needs and preferences. Here instead of looking at only interactions between the states which is often taken by statist political history or just socio-cultural interaction in the field of art, architecture and music, his perspective on the currency system allows us to look at the complicated process of interaction between a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' and a 'Persian cosmopolis' taking into account not only the role of the state with its politico-economic and religio-ideological functions but also diverse agents and social groups in society and market. Wagoner points out that *shroff*s (bankers and money changers) melted down the Bahmani coins and remade them into Vijayanagara coins in response to the needs and preferences of their customers. Non-elites needed smaller denominations with the guarantee made by the emblems of Hindu deities and the Sanskritic names and titles of an issuing authority. Further, the Malliabad inscription of 1513 records that whereas the revenue payment due from oil sellers and part-time weavers, and the annual tax on land were expressed in Bahmani silver *tanka*s and copper *jital*s, the rates for cultivators, grocers, and full-time weavers were expressed in Vijayanagara *hūn*s and *partāb*s. So there was coexistence of two currency systems that was recognized and accepted by the state. Here we witness that the rural cultivators and artisans played an important role in affecting the course of currency system.

I would like to ask Wagoner about the social structure in Bahmani and Vijayanagara. The logic of the story goes well if we can assume that the elites in Bahmani are mostly Muslim and those in Vijayanagara are Hindus, and that the non-elite population were mostly Hindus. However, there must have been Hindu elites in Bahmani and also, increasingly, there must have been an increased number of non-elite converts to Islam in the Deccan. How did they respond and influence the currency system?

My second question is about the concepts of a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' and a 'Persian cosmopolis', and the appropriateness of explicating the circulation of Vijayanagara coins in terms of 'Sanskritizing the Persian cosmopolis'. While these concepts offer useful alternative to such terms as Hindu state and Islamic state, they do not seem to point to the real historical agents which led to the circulation of Vijayanagara coins: namely, the non-elite cultivators and artisans whose demand for small currency in the traditional form gave a decisive turn to the currency system. In my mind, it was not the Sanskrit cosmopolis *perce* in the sense of cultures of rulership or the ideas of rule, that gave Sanskritizing influence to Bahmani currency system based on Persianate cosmopolis. Rather, the nature of currency system suggests that there was a process of vernacularization or the process of catering to the everyday needs of the ordinary people. It is perhaps necessary to conceptualize the complex process of vernacularization and re-universalization of the culture of rulership so that the process of interaction between Sanskrit and Persianate cosmopolis can be grasped in a more comprehensive manner. This is a humble suggestion as I think Wagoner's wide perspective allows us to look at the complicated inter-cosmopolis process taking into account not only the role of the state but also the diverse agents and social groups in the society and the market.

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To conclude this discussion, I would like to attempt to provide some general observations about the historical changes in thirteenth to sixteenth-century South Asia and Southeast Asia.

First, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the increasing connection of various regions. The deeds of Zhingis Khan and Tamerlane of course had wide ranging impacts [Darwin 2009]. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be seen as a formative period of Islamicate world system in Southeast Asia and the further establishment of Islamicate or Persianate cosmopolis in South Asia. The fifteenth-sixteenth centuries may be seen as the period of the deepening of Islamicate world system and its vernacularization in both areas. It was through the penetration of the Islamicate technologies and institutions of governance and market into the local society in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that made possible the fuller utilization

of human and natural resources and the transregional trade of the products. In other words, it may be argued that it was the simultaneous process of Islamicization and vernacularization that made connection of various localities with diverse ecology and society possible without the existence of formal empire.

Second, I would like to discuss the different forms of Islamicate system that developed in South Asia and Southeast Asia. The form of social structure differed between the two regions and it affected the course of transculturation. In case of South Asia, the caste system in the sense of division of labour and allotment of shares based on hereditary entitlements played an important role [Tanabe 2005]. This kind of system was suitable for managing diverse populations living together in tightly knit complementary relationships in agrarian society. In the case of India, Islamicization had to adapt to the existence of vast and strong vernacular agrarian society. Here, we can see history of Islamicization as a process of transformation of the vernacular agrarian society through Sufis and *tarika*s and Islam as the provider of power for agrarian fertility, and also as a set of institutions and technologies that provided the means to administer localities and commercially connect them. In the case of Southeast Asia, we note that the portcities and the coastal rulers acted as a hub that connected the external forces and indigenous vernacular societies. It seems Islamicization was vital in establishing trade networks, but the politico-ritual mechanism of ruler-people relationship or inland social structure do not seem to have been affected either by Islamicization or earlier Indianization. In other words, there seems to be a clear division between the inland vernacular societies and inter-port city networks. Is there really no dynamic interaction between the two? I have questioned this to Hirosue and Nishio, but comparatively speaking, probably they are right that there is a continuity of autochtomous world view at the level of vernacular society till the sixteenth century. In other words, the vernacular society only changed very gradually with Islamicization. We might see the process of Islamicization not simply as conversion but as a gradual process of adopting a civilization and making it compatible with the vernacular society.

Third and lastly, I would like to pay attention to the difference between Hinduism and Islam in relation to the sacred geography and the ways in which they integrate diversities. Hinduism is based on 'diversity in unity', that is complementarity and cooperation of diverse social groups which are placed in relative proximity. Islam is based on 'unity in diversity'. If you accept the six articles of faith and five duties, you are a Muslim. You don't have to work with or under other people. Hinduism is perhaps better suited to agrarian sedentary society. The source of generative power and divine blessings come from fixed geography such as rivers, mountains and forests. Islam is capable of connecting distant social groups otherwise disparate by providing common features and institutions. The source of power and blessings (*barakat*) can move with Muslim saints and hence is mobile. These religious features may partly explain why the Hindu system as a whole did not go much beyond South

Asia whereas Islam spread widely with the mobile network, and covered maritime Southeast Asia.

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