The Ebb of Empire:
Local Society and the State in Medieval Ma’bar

Dr Daud Ali

Precolonial Indian history has typically been narrated as the succession of more or less powerful dynastic states or empires. Historians have become accustomed to linking periods and centuries with these polities, which gradually came to form self-evident entities that parsed and measured historical time. Yet even as such periods became the chronological building blocks of South Asian history, historians began to question the early state as a durable, centralized structure -- arguing for feudal, segmentary or integrative polities in lieu of earlier formulations. Moreover, numerous and often substantial interstitial periods of political collapse, recession, and disarticulation have remained not only unaccounted for in these narratives, but have largely been ‘lost’ to historical view under unexamined concepts like ‘decline’ or ‘political chaos’. This paper represents an interim report on a research project concerned with the effects on local society of state recession and collapse during a period of notorious ‘political instability’ in medieval South India between c. AD 1285-1500.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Daud Ali is Associate Professor in the Department of South Asian Studies, and Department of History, at the University of Pennsylvania. He is author of Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India (Cambridge 2004), co-author (with Ronald Inden and Jonathan Walters) of Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practice in South Asia (Oxford 2000), and editor of several other volumes. He taught history for many years at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Dr Ali’s research has focused on mentalities and everyday practices in South and Southeast Asia before 1500. He has published essays on monastic discipline, mercantile networks, historical writing and inscriptions, but most extensively on the culture of aristocratic society in early medieval India.

DATE: Wednesday, 16 April 2014
TIME: 3.00pm to 4.30pm
VENUE: Seminar Room B, AS7 #01-17, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS

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