# AP World History: Modern – Topic 1.3: Developments in South and Southeast Asia (c. 1200–1450)

## Part One:

Belief Systems and Society in South and Southeast Asia

## Learning Objective

Explain how the various belief systems and practices of South and Southeast Asia affected society over time.

## Background Reading: Belief Systems and Societies

Between 1200 and 1450, South and Southeast Asia were regions of extraordinary cultural diversity and exchange. Long-standing traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism were joined by Islam, which spread through both conquest and trade. These belief systems shaped how societies were governed, how art and architecture developed, and how people viewed their place in the world.  
  
South Asia:

* Hinduism remained deeply rooted, supporting the caste system and linking political legitimacy to dharma (righteous duty).
* Buddhism, though less dominant in India, remained influential through art, philosophy, and connections with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.
* Islam spread under the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), introducing Persian administration and new architectural forms.
* These religious interactions created cultural blending, visible in language (Urdu), art, and urban life.

Southeast Asia:

* Religions arrived mainly through trade networks instead of conquest.
* Rulers of Srivijaya (Sumatra) and Majapahit (Java) blended Hindu and Buddhist traditions to strengthen royal authority.
* By the 14th century, Islam reached coastal trade centers like Malacca, combining with local customs to form new hybrid traditions.
* Religion unified diverse peoples and legitimized rule but also helped form distinct cultural identities.

## Map 1: South Asia c. 1200 CE

(Insert map here – Delhi Sultanate in the north; Chola and later Vijayanagara kingdoms in the south)

Map Features:

* Green: Delhi Sultanate (Islamic rule)
* Orange: Hindu kingdoms (Chola, later Vijayanagara)
* Blue: Buddhist centers (Nalanda ruins, Sri Lanka)
* Trade routes: Dotted lines linking Calicut, Cambay, and Colombo

## Map 2: Southeast Asia c. 1300 CE

(Insert map here – Religious centers and maritime trade routes)

Map Features:  
- Yellow: Srivijaya (Buddhist influence)  
- Red: Majapahit (Hindu-Buddhist blend)  
- Purple: Early Islamic sultanates (Aceh, Malacca)  
- Arrows: Indian Ocean trade routes to China, India, and Arabia

### Map Activity

1. Label two cities where Islam was influential in South Asia.  
2. Identify one major trade route connecting India and Southeast Asia.  
3. Describe one similarity and one difference in how religion spread in South vs. Southeast Asia.

Response Space:  
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## Source A – Al-Biruni, Muslim Scholar visiting India (c. 1030 CE)

“Among the Hindus, religion is not a single path but many, like rivers flowing into one sea. They believe the universe proceeds in endless cycles, without a true beginning or end, and that the soul is reborn again and again until it is freed through knowledge and righteous living. The learned men devote themselves to philosophy and mathematics, yet the common people worship many deities, each representing a facet of the divine. To the outsider, it seems as if they worship idols, but to the Hindu, these images are symbols of the unseen truth.”  
  
“Their society is ordered by castes, and each man is bound to his occupation by birth. I observed that they do not permit foreigners to share their food or customs, believing that their purity would be defiled. Yet in their writings there is a deep reverence for wisdom and learning. They honor scholars, and their sciences of astronomy and medicine are advanced. In all this I find a people of great intellect, yet separated from others by their traditions and pride.”

Questions:  
1. What does this reveal about Hindu social and philosophical life?  
2. How might this worldview affect political and social structures?

Response Space:  
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## Source B – Inscription from the Srivijaya Kingdom (8th century CE)

“May the blessings of the Triple Jewel—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—protect our sovereign, who rules the seas and the lands beyond them. The King, enlightened by the teaching of the Blessed One, builds stupas and monasteries so that merit may spread among his people. Merchants from distant lands come safely to our harbors, for the King guards the sea lanes and ensures justice in trade. In this way, both the faith and the kingdom flourish together.”  
  
“Let it be known that to serve the realm is to serve the Buddha’s path. When the King acts with compassion and wisdom, his realm prospers; when the people act with generosity, they gain merit for themselves and their families. Thus, worldly success and spiritual progress are joined. As the Srivijaya Kingdom stands between the great oceans, so it joins the paths of commerce and salvation, making our land a beacon of righteousness.”

Questions:  
1. How does this inscription show the connection between religion and governance?  
2. What does it suggest about the importance of trade in Srivijaya’s culture?

Response Space:  
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## Source C – Ibn Battuta on the Delhi Sultanate (c. 1335 CE)

“The Sultan of Delhi is a mighty ruler whose justice reaches from the mountains to the sea. In the city of Delhi I saw mosques of grand design and colleges filled with scholars from every land. The Sultan honors learning; poets, jurists, and philosophers dine at his table. His officers are many—judges, inspectors, and soldiers—each bound by the law of Islam. Yet in the same markets I saw Hindu merchants trading in jewels and silks, and artisans of every faith working side by side. The Sultan’s tolerance allows the prosperity of all.”  
  
“In his court, the Sultan receives envoys from China, Persia, and Byzantium, and his treasuries overflow with the wealth of trade. But he also commands strict obedience to the law; those who rebel face swift punishment. Though he is a Muslim, he does not force others to convert, for he understands that his power rests on justice. The blending of tongues and customs in Delhi is unlike any city I have known; it is a meeting place of the world.”

Questions:  
1. How does this passage reflect cultural diversity under Islamic rule?  
2. What evidence of cultural blending do you see?

Response Space:  
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## Reflection and Analysis

1. Compare how religion was connected to political authority in South Asia and Southeast Asia.  
2. Explain how interactions among Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam demonstrate continuity and change over time.

Response Space:  
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## Key Vocabulary

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| Term | Definition |
| Dharma | Moral and social duty in Hinduism |
| Karma | The sum of a person’s actions determining rebirth |
| Sultanate | Muslim government ruled by a sultan |
| Stupa | Buddhist shrine for relics or meditation |
| Syncretism | Blending of different cultural or religious traditions |