Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A cursory glance through the annals of Southeast Asian (Thailand in particular) history would be enough to discern ample instances of Indian cultural diffusion into the region. Religion, language and literature, art and architecture, philosophy, mythology, cosmology, social organization, statecraft, folklore – every aspect of the region underwent a deep metamorphosis under Indian cultural influence. All over Southeast Asia old monuments are a testimony to the immense influence Indian civilization has had on the region. It is also endorsed by Rabindranath Tagore, who opines that:

"To know my country in truth one has to travel to that age, when she realized her soul, and thus transcended her physical boundaries, when she revealed her being in a radiant magnanimity which illumined the eastern horizon, making her recognized as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a great surprise of life.............."\(^1\)

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Head of the Cambodian government between 1954 and 1970, has also greatly acknowledged the Indian cultural diffusion:

"When we refer to thousand year old ties which unite us with India, it is not at all a hyperbole. In fact, it was about two thousand years ago that the first navigators, Indian merchants and Brahmins brought to our ancestors their Gods, their techniques, their organization.............."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Rabindranath Tagore, in the foreword to the first issue of the *Journal of the Greater India Society* (Calcutta). The Greater India Society was founded in 1926 by the early Indian School of Historians like R. C. Majumdar, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, P. N. Bose, P. C. Bagchi, H. B. Sarkar, B. R. Chatterji. The concept of Greater India was referred to those states which existed south of China and Southeast of Modern India beyond Bay of Bengal which met and even absorbed the eastward spread of Indian civilization. The Greater Indian Society was intended to familiarize the people of India with the contribution of their forebears to the history and culture of Southeast Asia.

Sylvain Levi, French Scholar wrote:

_The expansion of Indian culture is “one of the outstanding events in the history of the world, one which has determined the destiny of a good portion of mankind. Mother of wisdom, India, gave her mythology to her neighbours who went to teach it to the whole world. Mother of Law and Philosophy, she gave to three quarters of Asia a god, a religion, a doctrine, an art ………………”^3_

Again, Sylvain Levi, in his _L'inde et le monde_ (Indian and the world), discussed Indian cultural influence among nations. He writes:

_“From Persia to the Chinese sea, from the icy regions of Siberia to the islands of Java and Borneo, from Oceania to Socotra, India has propagated her beliefs, her tales and her civilization. She has left indelible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She has the right to reclaim in universal history the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to hold her place amongst the great nations summarizing and symbolizing the spirit of Humanity.”^4_

The excerpts quoted above provide clues to the widely acknowledged diffusion of the elements of Indian culture in Southeast Asia. The Indian contribution to its Southeastern neighbours has been so enormous that scholars of different hues have frequently called this region Greater India, Further/Farther India, _L'inde Exterieure_, and the Hinduized or Indianized states. There is, however, a need to maintain some caution while referring to Indian cultural impact on Southeast Asia. According to Romila Thapar, the Indian impact is understandable in terms of a more advanced civilization meeting a

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^3 Quoted in G. Coedes, _The Indianized states of Southeast Asia_, Honolulu, 1964, p. xvi.
less advanced one, with the *elite* of the latter moulding themselves on the pattern of the former, but to refer to Southeast Asia as ‘Greater India’ is certainly a misnomer.⁵

It must not be inferred that Southeast Asia was lacking a culture of its own. Indeed, the generally accepted view is that the Indian culture made such an impact on Southeast Asia because it fitted easily with the existing indigenous traditional cultural patterns present among the Southeast Asian People. What India gave, more to be seen as an inspiration to mould existing culture of Southeast Asia so as to absorb developed Indian cultural concepts. And the resulting syntheses are peculiar to Southeast Asia.⁶

A Glimpse into the Worldwide Diffusion of Indian Culture:

The culture of India has been one of the world’s most diffused and acclaimed civilizing forces. Countries of the Far East, including China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia owe much of what is best in their own cultures to the inspiration of ideas imported from India. The west, too, has its own debts. But the members of that circle of civilizations beyond Burma (Modern Myanmar) scattered around the Gulf of Siam (Modern Thailand) and the Southern Sea of the Java shore, virtually owe their very existence to the creative influence of Indian ideas. Religion as one of the cultural components found ally in commerce to carry the Indian way of life outside India. In this Buddhism took the initiative and introduced Indian culture into various parts of Asia. And it was through Buddhism that China and India came closer to each other and developed many contacts.⁷ Moreover, the spread of Buddhism in China helped to reinforce its position in Southeast Asia.⁸ Indian Buddhists went in large numbers to China, to preach. The first record of an Indian Scholar’s visit to China is that of Kashyapa

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⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., p. 192.
Matanga who reached China in 67 A.D. in the reign of the Emperor Ming Ti and probably at his invitation. These Indian Scholars who went to China not only carried many Sanskrit manuscripts with them, which they translated into Chinese, but some of them also wrote original books in the Chinese language.\(^9\)

There was, however, two-way traffic between India and China as many Chinese Scholars also came here. Among the best known who have left records of their journeys are Fa Hsien, Sung Yun, Hsuan-Tsang and I-Tsing. Such travels criss-crossed the Buddhist world. From the fifth century, the desire of Chinese Buddhists to refresh and purify their scriptural tradition led them to make the hazardous journey to India. At the beginning of the fifth century, Fa- Hsien gained fame by the account he left of his journey to India. On his way back he took the sea route via Sri Lanka and arrived back in China after an adventurous journey; he suffered shipwreck and was obliged to stay in (probably Western) Java for five months waiting for another ship to finish his journey.\(^10\) Hsuan-Tsang’s visit to India also paved the way for the establishment of cultural contacts between the two countries. Hsuan-Tsang returned from India the way he came, via central Asia, carrying a large number of manuscripts with him. From his account one gathers a vivid impression of the wide sway of Buddhism in Khorasan, Iraq, and right up to the frontiers of Syria.\(^11\) At the end of the seventh century, I-Tsing went to India by sea and spent several years in Southeast Asia, notably in Srivijaya at or near present Palembang in South Sumatra. His accounts are of great value, especially for the data they contain about the distribution of Buddhist schools and sects in different countries. He compiled short biographies of about sixty monks, who had set off for India in their quest

\(^{9}\) Ibid, p.193.
\(^{11}\)Jawaharlal Nehru, op.cit., p.194.
for Buddhist teachings and among whom some of them died en route. Due to this interaction between India and China, a number of Indian elements were introduced into Chinese culture. I-Tsing, himself a fine Scholar in Sanskrit, praises the Sanskrit language and says it is respected in far countries in the north and south. ‘How much more then should people of the divine land (China), as well as the celestial store house (India), teach the real rules of the language!’

Perhaps the most obvious element of Indian culture introduced in China was the use of Indian techniques in sculpture and painting. Cave temples, widely used in central Asia, became the tradition in China as well, and at first Indian artists were invited to decorate the walls with frescoes and to sculpt Buddhist images. Gradually the work was taken up by Chinese artists, but the Indian impress remained for a considerable time. However, unlike Southeast Asia, China did not assimilate Indian ideas in every aspect of its culture, but the whole of the Far East is in India’s debt for Buddhism, which helped to mould the distinctive civilizations of China, Korea, Japan and Tibet.

Today, China has one of the richest collections of Buddhist arts and heritage in the world. UNESCO world heritage sites such as the Mogao caves near Dunhuang in Gansu province, the Longmen Grottoes near Luoyang in Henan province, the Yungang Grottoes near Datong in Shanxi province, and the Dazu stone carvings near Chongqing are among the most important and renowned Buddhist sculptural sites. Buddhism also found support in Central Asia. The Indian script had been adopted and orthodox Buddhist rules were strictly observed here. Excavations have revealed Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and inscriptions and manuscripts written in Indian languages at several places in

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13 This extract has been taken from J. Takakusu’s translation of I-Tsing: A Record of the Buddhist Religions as Practiced in India and Malay Archipelago, Oxford, 1896, pp.73-78.
14 Romila Thapar, op. cit., p.164.
15 A.L. Basham, The Wonder That was India, New Delhi, 1954, p.487.
central Asia. In central Asia Buddhism continued to be a dominant religious force until it was replaced around the end of seventh century A.D. by Islam. Afghanistan also continued to be allied with India culturally, as is confirmed by the evidence from the site of Bamiyan. Bamiyan (Afghanistan) had the distinction of possessing the tallest Buddha statues sculptured out of rock in the early centuries of the Christian era, which were recently destroyed by the Taliban regime of Afghanistan. Buddhism continued to hold ground in Afghanistan until the seventh century A.D. when it was supplanted by Islam.

The traits of Indian cultural diffusion are evident in Japan as well. A considerable portion of the cosmological and mythological literature of Japan bears traces of Indian influence. Japanese literature is also replete with instances of the influence of Indian theory of karma and the transmigration of soul. According to Zen Scholar, D. Suzuki, the study of Japanese thought is the study of Indian thought. Moreover, Charles Elliot states that Zen is the Japanese equivalent of Sanskrit Dhyana (Meditation). Buddhism came to Japan via the mainland of China from the seventh century onwards. Being geographically at the end of the Silk Route, Japan was able to preserve many aspects of Buddhism at the very time it was disappearing in India, and being suppressed in Central Asia and China. Although Buddhist deities predominate Japanese literature, Hindu gods are also quite well known. Ganesha is worshipped as Sho-ten or shoden (literally, holy god) in many Buddhist temples and is believed to confer happiness upon his devotees. The divine architect mentioned in Rig Veda, Vishvakarma, who designed and constructed the world, was regarded in ancient Japan as the god of Carpenters, Bishukatsuma. Shintoism (literally, the way of the gods) has been designated by some scholars as the Japanese version of Hinduism. The adoption of Hindu deities into the Buddhist and

16 Ibid, p.163
Shintoist pantheons of Japan indicate the influence of India on Japanese religions. The 47 letters of the Japanese alphabet are said to have been devised by the Japanese Buddhist saint, Kobo Daishi, after the Sanskrit alphabet. Buddhism continues to remain active in Japan to this day. Around eighty thousands Buddhists temples are preserved and regularly restored. All these details reveal the immense contribution of Indian theology to the Japanese Buddhism as well as to Japanese literature. Thus, in the words of M. Rene Grousset, French art historian, it can be stated that; “In the high plateau of eastern Iran, in the oases of Serindia, in the arid wastes of Tibet, Mongolia and Manchuria, in the ancient civilized lands of China and Japan, in the lands of the primitive Mons and Khmers and other tribes in Indo-China, in the countries of the Malay – Polynesians, in Indonesia and Malay, India left the Inedible impress of her high culture, not only upon religion, but also upon art, and literature, in a word all the higher things of spirit”.

`'Cultural Diffusion': meaning and context`

Before going into the details about the meaning and context of cultural diffusion, it would be prudent to discuss the term ‘culture’ first. Scholars of different hues have been discussing and debating definitions of culture since the origin of the discipline in the nineteenth century. In 1952 two prominent American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, published an entire volume cataloging different definitions of culture. A useful summary of that discussion, grouping their one hundred sixty different definitions into eight categories, is provided by John Bodley in his *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, states and the Global System*. Culture, Bodley suggests, is made up of at least three components: what people think, what they do, and what the material

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products they produce. Besides these components, culture has several properties: to quote Bodley, it is “shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generational, adaptive, and integrated”. For example, there is common agreement in a culture on what things mean. Members of a culture share specific symbolic meanings, including (but not limited to) language.

An early definition coined by E.B. Taylor that has been used by anthropologists and folklorists for more than a century is as follows:

\textit{Culture, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.}\footnote{Edward Burnett Taylor, \textit{Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom}, London, 1871.}

A more recent definition in an American anthropology textbook states

\textit{“………… Culture refers to the enormous whole of learned, socially influenced behavior that has characterized mankind during the entire course of its history”}\footnote{Zdenek Salzmann, \textit{Anthropology}, New York, 1973, p. 16}.

However, this definition of culture lacks a specific reference to time. The reference to “behavior that has characterized mankind during the entire course of its history” could infer that culture is the sum total of all behavior of mankind and is somehow “static”, unchanging.

Whereas a 2002 document from the United Nations agency, UNESCO states that culture is

\textit{“the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and}
literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".  

A.L. Kroeber, Philip Bagby, and Fernand Braudel also insist that culture encompasses all aspects of social life, the material along with the mental and spiritual. According to Myron J. Aronoff, a historian, “focus on culture provides an important new paradigm, a more synthetic approach to understanding the relationship between religions and politics”. For Samuel Huntington, ‘culture’ refers to the purported enduring values harbored by ‘highly integrated civilizations’- also sometimes confusingly termed ‘cultures’. Thus, we see that different definitions of culture reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity. Anthropologists most commonly use the term culture to refer to the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically. Today, some anthropologists see culture as a complex web of shifting patterns that link people in different locals and that link social formation of different scales. According to this view, any group can construct its own cultural identity.

So, what exactly does culture mean? Is it something material we can touch? Or is it immaterial, such as values and beliefs? Or is it our customs and traditions, our festivals and celebrations? While anthropologists have vacillated between material and non-material definitions of culture, today many would agree with a more inclusive definition of culture: the thoughts, behaviors, languages, customs, the things we produce and the

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methods we use to produce them. It is the human ability to create and transmit culture that differentiates humans from the rest of the animal world. The essential feature of culture, that it is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next, rests on the human capacity to think symbolically. Language, perhaps the most important feature, is a symbolic form of communication. Without language, culture could not be transmitted, people could not have learnt from one another across generations, and there would not have been any cultural continuity. Simply because culture is transmitted through symbols whose meanings remain more or less constant doesn't mean that cultures are static and don't change. On the contrary, cultures are never truly static. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to distinguish culture from religion. Religion, however, is not the same as culture; it can overlap either. Technically, religion is defined as a set of beliefs. Like language, religion is another cultural component. Other cultural components are art and architecture, music, dance, etiquette, courtship etc.

Thus, culture is the total way of life that characterizes a group of people. Culture consists of transmitted behaviour patterns, beliefs, language, religion, aesthetic choices or any idea or knowledge we gain from our communities and use it to define who we are. Culture is also acquired by diffusion thorough various sources because the culture of a particular group of people does not evolve always of its own accord. The more the histories of the growth of the present day nations are traced out, the more we hear of the intermingling of the cultures of different ethnic groups. From a holistic view this is the phenomenon of interface and synergy. Moreover, because culture differentiates human beings and the lands they occupy, it is one of the most important things that geographers study. Accordingly, there is an entire sub field of academic geography devoted to the study of culture: cultural geography. The key concepts of cultural geography are culture
region, cultural landscape, cultural diffusion, cultural ecology, and cultural interaction. Each offer insights to understand culture from a geographical point of view. However, in this thesis, an endeavor would be made to delineate cultural diffusion only.

The term diffusion used in this study refers to the spread of cultural attributes – such as ideas, religions, art and architecture, music and dance, values, etiquettes, courtships, technologies, languages, etc. – from one culture, either one by one or altogether, to another, through contact with different cultural groups. Diffusion across cultures is a well-attested and uncontroversial phenomenon. Today, worldwide cultural diffusion is a fundamental trend and has strongly influenced human history. Diffusion is observable and appears so inevitable that it may be viewed as a fundamental principle in culture.

Originally, the term diffusion came from physics, which means a movement of molecules from a region of high concentration to a region of low concentration, so that the molecules become equally distributed throughout the system. But in human society, diffusion is a ubiquitous process, which always refers to any cultural change and adoption. As mentioned above, diffusion in physics has no resistance because of the movement of molecules from a region of high concentration to a region of low concentration, but in human society, it cannot be mentioned in the same pace. In human society, sometimes diffusion is encouraged, and sometimes not. In some areas the pace of diffusion is gradual, whereas in others it is rapid. In some area the scope of diffusion is partial, in others complete. Thus, the pace of diffusion depends on the requirements of integration of social system. This statement is also buttressed by Hugill and Dickson, who opine that the nature of adoption by the social environment is central to the diffusion

28 Details of this concepts are found in Jordan – Bychkov et al, The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Culture Geography, 10th edn., New York, 2006.
29 Clark Wissler, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, New York, 1929, p. 357.
process in human society.\textsuperscript{30} Does diffusion process necessarily lead to culture adoption? Are there some factors ultimately affecting culture adoption? We will answer that in the following discussions.

The rational and classic definition of diffusion in terms of adoption is: acceptance over time of some specific item, idea, or practice by individuals, groups, or other adopting units, in a social structure and in a given system of value or culture.\textsuperscript{31} Evidently, diffusion with adaptation forms the process of adoption. Diffusion without adaptation cannot bring real “adoption”, which means an integrated item to the system. In reality, people in changing society feel a pressure from both diffused culture and traditional culture. On one side, they have to adjust themselves in order to survive in the new circumstances, which in sociology are being called as resocialization. On the other side, the impact of diffused culture varies among different people. This creates a remarkable social phenomenon, in which different social groups, particular in different age groups reveals their different approach towards adaptation with diffused life-style and values. In general, there are five stages of adoption, which could be named as awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. Each stage is further influenced by the inherent characteristics of the individual’s ideas and values.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, the attitudes toward diffusing culture are essentially grounded on people’s values orientation. Functional anthropologists have also appreciated the importance of adaptation in cultural diffusion and interpreted culture simply as adaptive.\textsuperscript{33} Functionalists like Ernest Schucky and Patrick Culbert argued that diffusion or minor borrowing accounted for most of the

\textsuperscript{30} Peter Hugill and D. Bruce Dickson, \textit{The Transfer and Transformation of Ideas and Material culture}, New York, 1988, p.23.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
similarities within an area, because with in an area must show some common adaptation.\textsuperscript{34}

The determination of the role of diffusion in cultural change remains a central importance in a human society.\textsuperscript{35} Since the components of diffusion i.e. artifacts diffusion (products, goods and any thing in terms of material culture transferring form place to place), institutional system diffusion (diffusing the way of management and any thing to institutional cultural), and values diffusion (diffusing people's values, believe and any thing belonging to non-material culture) cover entire cultural concept, its seems that diffusion play a crucial role in social change. As diffusion leads to cultural change, alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system. When new ideas are diffused, and are adopted or rejected, leading to certain social consequences, social change occurs.\textsuperscript{36} In fact, the more a society can adopt from other societies, the more advanced culture the society has. Tracing back to pre-historical period, within an isolated community or tribal group, interactions among group members may be only limited to simple sharing. However, when we consider culture on a global basis, this sharing is interrelated among many separate human groups, for example, races and nations, who borrow and adopt other's cultural elements and incorporate them into their own system. As a matter of fact, the important factors which paved the way for worldwide cultural diffusion are advanced transportation and communication technology.

**Mechanisms and barrier effects involved with inter-cultural diffusion:**

Inter-cultural diffusion can happen in many ways. When migrating populations move, they take their "cultural baggage" with them. There are uncountable instances, past and present, in which the arrival of migrants has resulted in the appearance of new

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Peter Hugill and D. Bruce Dickson, op. cit., p.12.

\textsuperscript{36} Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, New York, 1983.
cultural traits which were not previously present. Ideas can be carried by trans-cultural visitors, such as merchants, explorers, soldiers, diplomats, slaves and hired artisans. For example, the appearance and prevalence of Indian religions in Southeast Asia is a form of cultural diffusion. Trans-cultural marriages between two neighboring or interspersed cultures also facilitate the process of inter-cultural diffusion. Among literate societies, diffusion can happen through letters or books (and, in modern times, through other media as well).

The many models that have been proposed for inter-cultural diffusion are

- **Heliocentric diffusionism** - the theory that all cultures originated from one culture.

- **Classical diffusionism** – classical form of diffusionism, was described by Malinowski as the belief “that culture can be contracted only by contagion and that man is an imitative animal”. In other words, cultural change does not arise autonomously in most human communities: it comes from without, via diffusion. But diffusion itself must have a source and classical diffusionism postulated that some places are permanent, natural centres of creativity and invention. Innovations spread by diffusion to the traditional areas, the folk societies, the backward regions and so forth.

- **Modern diffusionism** – it is a theoretical model in which diffusion from developed countries to third world countries are depicted in such a way as to demonstrate scientifically, that diffusion is the only possible road to

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38 Ibid., p. 112.
development, to "modernization". Diffusion, therefore, is normal, natural, inevitable and moral. Modern diffusionism tends to assert that diffusion proceeds "from person to person, rather than from community to community or from culture to culture", reducing cultural process to the level of individuals, who are thought to be adopting new ideas freely as a reflection mainly of cognitive processes and interpersonal communication.

- **Evolutionary diffusionism** – the theory that societies are influenced by others and that all humans share psychological traits that make them equally likely to innovate, resulting in development of similar innovations in isolation.

However, because diffusion occurs over time as well as over space, there may be a time lag between the origin of a trait and its appearance. And when a cultural item diffuses, it typically does not keep spreading and spreading forever. Instead it tends to diffuse outward from its place of origin, encounter one or more barrier effects—things that inhibit cultural diffusion—and stop spreading. Barrier effects can assume physical or social forms. *Physical barrier effects* consist of characteristics of the natural (physical) environment that inhibit the spread of culture. The classic examples are oceans, deserts, mountain ranges, dense forests, and frigid climates. For example, the Atlantic Ocean was a physical barrier that prevented the westward spread of European culture for many centuries. *Social barrier effects* consist of characteristics that differentiate human groups and potentially limit interaction between them, thus inhibiting the spread of culture. Examples include language, religion, race and ethnicity, and a history of conflict between specific cultural communities. Islam, for instance, nowadays acts as a social barrier in many Middle Eastern countries by discouraging adoption of certain styles of western
dress and music. For much of human history, therefore, barrier effects tended to isolate cultural communities from each other, inhibiting their ability to share cultural characteristics. Today, however, traditional barrier effects are being overwhelmed by modern means of communication.

Thus, from the above mentioned models for inter-cultural diffusion, it is quite lucid that diffusion accounts for nearly all significant cultural change and encourages cultural sharing and interaction between peoples. Major contributors to inter-cultural diffusion research and theory are Franz Boas, Leo Frobenious, A. L. Kroeber, Freidrich Ratzel, Everett Rogers, Grafton Elliot Smitn, William Graham Summer, E.B.Tylor, Clark Wissler etc. The term ‘diffusionist’ was first used in 1893 to denote a scholar who believed that most folklore was borrowed from an old world center of high culture, such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, or India. However, while the concept of diffusion is well accepted in general, conjectures about the existence or the extent of diffusion in some specific contexts have been hotly disputed. Those disputed are fueled in part by the overuse of cultural diffusion, starting in the late nineteenth century, as a blanket explanation for all similarities between widely dispersed cultures. The most famous proponent of this theory was William Graham Summer, who argued that civilization first formed in Ancient Egypt and then diffused to other places. Another criticism that has been leveled at many diffusionist proposals is the failure to explain why certain items were not diffused. For example, attempts to “explain” the New World Civilizations by diffusion from Europe or Egypt should also explain why basic concepts like wheeled vehicles or the potter’s wheel did not cross the ocean, while writing and stone pyramids did. In the case of Indian cultural diffusion in Southeast Asia also, fundamental features

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of Indian culture and society were not adopted. The caste system of India did not, for instance, accompany the practice of Hinduism in Southeast Asia, however many of the early Southeast Asian kings did feel the need to model themselves on Indian rulers and thus made use of caste terminology to describe themselves and their courts. Thus, diffusion theories suffer from being inherently speculative. Though some modern anthropologists have largely moved away from the diffusion theory of culture, seeing most cultural traits in disparate areas as having developed independently and criticizing the diffusionists for extracting cultural artifacts for their context, at the same time, the abundant historical evidences reconfirm the centrifugal movement of Indian cultural elements toward Southeast Asia in general and Thailand in particular.

Role of Trade:

By the early centuries of the Christian era, many parts of Southeast Asia and India were part of the world-trading network. Though this period was marked by the domination of Indian Ocean by Roman trade, it also witnessed the establishment of trade relations between India and Southeast Asia. And, it was though trade that Indian culture was introduced to Southeast Asia for the first time. Trade routes linked India with Southern Burma, Central and Southern Siam, lower Cambodia, Southern Vietnam, the straits of Malacca, and Java, which in turn culminated into the establishment of many coastal settlements there. The Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Islands lay on the direct trade route between China and India, Persia, Arabia, and the Mediterranean. Apart from their geographical importance these countries contained valuable minerals, metals, spices, and timber. Trade with Southeast Asia, gained importance due to the Roman

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41 Romila Thapar, op. cit., p. 120.
demand for spices which led Indian merchants to venture as middlemen to Malay, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, and Borneo, the sources of spices. By this process of interaction, Indian and Malayan culture impinged at many points, paving the way for Indian cultural diffusion into Malayan states. Having once discovered the potentialities of Southeast Asia, Indian traders developed this trade on large scale, even after the decline of their commerce with Roman empire. The earliest voyages were along the east coast of India – Kalinga (Orissa), Bengal, Burma and then down the Malay Peninsula. Later the direct sea routes from East and South India were developed.

It is quite significant to discuss the trade relations between the two regions that brought about interaction and consequent influences. K.R. Hall has presented four reasons behind growth of this trade. First, historians have theorized that gold became difficult to acquire during the early centuries of Christian era due to internal disturbances in the central Asian steppe region and slowing down of flow of Roman gold coins. As a consequence Indian merchants ventured into Southeast Asia looking for the mythical wealth of the “Islands of Gold”. Second, it was due to advancement in boat construction and navigation techniques, which increased the sizes of the ships and sailing efficiency. Third, the adequate ideological support provided by Buddhism played a great role as evident in the distribution of outstanding Dipankara statues of Buddha throughout Southeast Asia. Fourth, it was the Chinese interest. Much of the interaction between India and maritime Southeast Asian economies were driven by the trade interest in the South China Sea and the eastern seas of Indonesia. The Southeast Asian trade was entirely dependent upon the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Juxtaposed to this, the Indian

\[42\] An account of Indian cultural diffusion in Malay culture is found in R.O. Winstedt, The Malays: A Cultural History, London, 1961, pp. 18-33, 63-90, 139-52.

\[43\] Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., p. 203

\[44\] Kenneth R. Hall, Maritime Trade and State development in early Southeast Asia, Honolulu, 1985, pp. 103-104.
trade was also dependent on the Indian Ocean because it acted as a way to the marts of the most part of world throughout history. The evidence of the Indian trade interest in the eastern coast of the Indian Ocean is reflected in inscriptions in Tamil script found in Southeast Asia, mainly in Sumatra and peninsular Thailand. These texts arose directly from trade links between South India and certain parts of Southeast Asia. Several of these overseas Tamil inscriptions mention well-known medieval Indian merchants associations (Banigramas). Javanese inscriptions are particularly rich in information about overseas trade connections.

Both Greek and Arab accounts also show that there was regular maritime intercourse between India and the Far East. A guide book for navigation, *Silsilat – ae – Tawarikh*, written in the year 851 A.D. by an Arab Traveller, Soleiman, has been of great use in reconstructing the history of this region. After *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, this is the second guide book for navigation in the Indian Ocean. The growth of large Hindu kingdoms and empires in Champa, Siam, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra and other areas in Indonesia and their full-fledged and constantly renovated Hindu and Buddhist culture existed for at least seven hundred years from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries, demonstrating beyond doubt the close relations between the mother country (India) and the colonies (Indianized kingdoms in Southeast Asia) based on uninterrupted sea traffic. The sea ports on the east coast of India maintained regular shipping services and is

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45 The peninsular character of India with its extensive and open coast line, and with a littoral which is extremely fertile and rich in resources, makes India dependent on the Indian Ocean.
49 Ibid.,p.31.
mentioned frequently by references to such travels in the *Katha Sarit Sagara* and other works and also in the records of the Chinese travellers.\(^{50}\)

Moreover, trade between India and Southeast Asia was information maximizing as it carried substantial informations and ideas along with material commodities. Indians who voyaged overseas to Southeast naturally brought with them the ideas and practices of Hinduism and Buddhism.\(^{51}\) From India those who went to Southeast Asia also provided the key concept of cultural stimulation to the people of Southeast Asia by introducing the art of writing, the classical Sanskrit language and literature. Besides, codes of law, Hindu conception of monarchy, religious philosophy and Indian art and architecture were also introduced. For example, the art of writing went to the Philippines from India. The earliest specimen of the Indian art of writing in Southeast Asia is provided by the Vo-Canh inscription of Funan, which has been written in the late Brahmi Scripts.\(^{52}\) R.C. Majumdar has stated that the oldest Sanskrit inscription of Indo-China, i.e., the Vo-Canh inscription, is derived from the writing of the Kusana inscriptions prevalent in the central parts of northern India.\(^{53}\) The view of R.C. Majumdar is in consonance with historical facts. The Lao script and language is also stated to be derived from Sanskrit and Pali.\(^{54}\) In Cambodia the alphabet is derived from South India and numerous Sanskrit words have been taken over with minor variations. The civil and criminal law is based on the Laws of Manu, and this has been codified, with variations due to Buddhist influence, in modern

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Brian Harrison, op. cit., p.12.

\(^{52}\) H.B. Sarkar, *Cultural Relations between India and Southeast Asian Countries*, New Delhi, 1985, p.168.


Cambodian legislation. Thus, through trade connections and commercial settlements, Indian influence strongly grew in Southeast Asia.

**Brahmana as a propagator:**

Apart from lucrative trade relations, it is not clear what exactly prompted the Indian expansion especially considering that crossing the seas and being in contact with the barbarians was thought of as being polluted, particularly for Brahmans. The Hindu law-makers objected to travelling to distant lands because it meant contamination with the *mlechchha* (impure) and non-caste people. Nonetheless, over time Brahman advisers came to hold enormous sway over the local royal rulers in their courts. According to Cambodian legend, the origin of their people is attributed to the union of an Indian Brahman named Kaundinya who married a local mythical Cambodian princess, thereby establishing the foundation for the first Indianized state of Funan and thus of the classical Cambodian civilization. Kaundinya is remembered for having introduced Indian culture to Cambodia. In the foundation of the Indianized states in Southeast Asia, the Brahmanas, particularly those of the Kaundinya clan, played a big role. The arrival of persons belonging to the priestly class, who were adepts in the magico-ritualistic rites, specially impressed the native people through the utterance of their mantras and writings. They arose to become royal chaplains, who in return gratefully awarded the rulers with royal pedigrees from solar and lunar dynasties of India or from sages connected with them. Traces of this phenomenon are noticeable in inscriptions as well. In the Mi-son

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56 Romila Thapar, op. cit., p.150.
57 The Thai Court at Bangkok employs, to this day, Brahmans from India for all court ceremonies, and the Brahmans are maintained in comfort at Bangkok. Yet the state religion of Thailand is Buddhism.
58 Romila Thapar, op. cit., p.121.
inscription, it has been stated that “Kaundinya, the greatest of the Brahmanas, planted a javelin which he had received from Asvatthaman, the son of Drona, to mark off his future capital”. The Brahmans were scholars as well as priests. They were knowledgeable enough to advise the rulers on conducting relations with the neighbouring states. Their scholarship extended to astronomy, astrology and architecture. The temples in Southeast Asia, not only were in accordance with the demands of the building technology but were constructed so in terms of religious symbolism and astronomical observations. In this way, the arrival of Brahmans in Southeast Asia provided the grand architectural landscape, the presence of which exists in all its splendour even today.

**Indian Religions in Southeast Asia:**

The speed and ease with which the Indian immigrants propagated their more advanced culture was no doubt due to common underlying features which already existed. In the first and second centuries of the Christian era, as archaeological and Chinese evidence show that wherever recognizable states existed in the Southeast Asian region, the rulers and their courts gradually came under the influence of ‘imported’ religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and became its followers and patrons. The impact of Hinduism and Buddhism were the most important features of cultural developments in Southeast Asian region over many centuries, beginning early in the Christian era. A broad agreement exists about certain features of the Indianisation process, as discussed in the next chapter. The relations between India and Southeast Asia date back to prehistoric times, but it was from the period when Indianized kingdoms were first founded on the

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60 Ibid., p.138.
Indo-Chinese peninsula and in the island of Indonesia that the term ‘Indianization’ really applies.

The history of religion in Indianized parts of Southeast Asia reveals an important feature which emphasizes the fact that it flourished freely due to the conducive environment of the region. Throughout Southeast Asia in general, Brahmanism and Buddhism continued to exist side by side in mutual tolerance. From time to time there was a change of emphasis, when one or the other would become temporarily prominent; but in the Indianized states of Southeast Asia they continued to be regarded as two aspects of a single Indian civilization. Even in Dvaravati, the first historical kingdom of Siam (Modern Thailand), it is seen that while Buddhism was the dominant religion of the Dvaravati people, there were Hindu elements in Dvaravati religion. At U-Thong, a stone Mukhalinga in the Pre-Angkorian style of the seventh-eighth century was unearthed to the South of the city. The existence of Saivism at U-Thong is indicated by a mid-seventh century copper-plate inscription which mentions gifts of a parasol and a musical instruments to the Amratakesvara (a form of linga or phallus) by Sri Harsvarman, grandson of king Sri Isanavarman. Not only Saivism, but traces of Vaisnavism are also evident in two steles (stone slabs) with rough figures of Visnu in high relief, probably in Pallava style, kept in the U-Thong San-Chao or spirit shrine. In contemporary Thailand, even though Buddhism is the principal religion with a majority of people following it, it has a royal priest, the Ratchakhru (the Rajaguru) who is one among the Brahmans. He occupies an important place in the Royal Palace and has a distinctive role to play in the

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62 Brian Harrison, op. cit., p.16.
64 Ibid.
coronation and other ceremonies and in deciding about the dates of important events.\textsuperscript{65} Trilok Chandra Majupuria confirms that ‘Hinduism and Buddhism flourished side by side so much so that in many cases, the same person could be indistinguishably the follower of both these pantheons’.\textsuperscript{66} Being a predominantly Buddhist country, it is natural for Thailand to abound in Buddhist Wats, the monasteries but it has some old Hindu temples as well. These temples carry on them stone scenes from the \textit{Ramayana}, the \textit{Mahabharata} and the \textit{Puranas}. At the very entrance to Prasad Panom Rung (Prasad is a Thai word for a temple, the same as in Sanskrit) there is a huge figure of Nataraja in dancing posture. In another temple, Wat Phra Kona at the top portion of the main gate is depicted the scence of Narayana with deities around him and with Lakshmi pressing his feet.\textsuperscript{67} In Myanmar also, Buddhism and Hinduism did co-exist peacefully.\textsuperscript{68}

In Java, a large number of ruined temple structures, with the images of Brahmanical gods and a large collection of gold, silver and bronze images of Buddha, leave no doubt that Buddha-Shiva (Buddhism-Hinduism) belief was surviving here. The fourteenth century of the Majapahit Java witnessed the building of many religious edifices, dedicated to the syncretic cult of the Buddha-Shiva, noted for their bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the epic \textit{Ramayana} and \textit{Mahabharata}. In Bali, Buddha-Shiva concept blossomed. The coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism could be seen during the occasion of the important ceremonial feasts. At the cremation of royalty, the consecrated water brought by a Saiva priest was mingled with that brought by a Buddhist. This broad

\textsuperscript{67} Satya Vrat Shastri, op.cit.,p.54.
based living culture (Hinduism-Buddhism) blossomed into a new formula *Ya Siva, Ya Buddha* (He who is Siva is Buddha) which motivated all Balinese to pursue the notion of expressing love for all religions. The cults of Buddha-Siva came to play a significant part in Indonesian beliefs and practices, which exist even today.\(^{69}\)

In Champa, it is a notable fact that Sanctuaries of Siva and Buddha and monasteries of these two sects were often erected side by side by the same donor. The reciprocal influence of these two religious sects is also indicated by the fact that Buddha was called *Damaresvara*, the lord of *Damaras* or *Bhatas*, an epithet originally belonging to Siva. It is also noteworthy fact that figures of Siva decorated the famous Buddhist temples of Dong Duong in the Quang Nam province of Southern Vietnam.\(^{70}\) Generally we find an echo of the pomp and grandeur of Buddhism in the magnificent temples erected to Visnu, Siva and the hosts of gods associated with them.\(^{71}\) In Laos, towards the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century A.D., Brahmanism had declined. And, Buddhism became the religion of the people, but a few Brahminical rituals in public ceremonies, customs and festivities of Laos are still there. Buddha-Siva culture is thus still influential.

Thus, a characteristic feature of the Indian religious development in Southeast Asia is the spirit of mutual toleration between Hinduism and Buddhism that marked it from beginning to this day. Although sectarianism prevailed, and Hinduism flourished side by side with Buddhism, we hear of no animosity in the realm of Indian religion in Southeast Asia. Swami Vivekananda has rightly expounded the relevance of religion,

\(^{70}\) R.C. Majumdar, *Champa*, New Delhi, 1985, pp.210-211.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., p.169.
spirituality and transcendentalism for peace at the primary level (inner peace) leading ultimately to the inter-personnel, inter-religious and international peace.\textsuperscript{72}