What Does Machiavelli Have to Say About Precarization of Work? Valorization of Virtue Ethics and Economic Virtuosity among Poor Muslim Traders in Delhi

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In this brief talk, I will be exploring how poor Muslim traders negotiate the normalization of such a secular-hence-brutal “economy,” as traders call it, by celebrating the cultivation of prudent and Islamically virtuous entrepreneurial subjectivities and accompanying skillsets. Anachronic references to Machiavelli’s notion of virtu (as a juxtaposition of virtue and virtuosity) shed a revealing light on how poor traders embrace the necessity of normalizing “the economy” as a secular universe of personal-skill-based precarious-work through ordinary yet forceful forms of moral reasoning. Evoking a Sufi-version of virtue ethics that highlight a more personal and Stoic wisdom of skillfulness, instead of direct application of Islamic injunctions, Muslim traders often argue that only by devoted commitment to perfect one’s self that one can be successful in trade, attain economic stability and cast moral wisdom to know how to apply which injunction, to what extent.

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