

DECLINE OF BUDDHISM IN SIND

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In 711 CE, General Muhammed bin-Qasim sent by al-Ḥajjāj began his campaign of Sind by defeating kings Dāhir and Chach.

Majority of the Buddhists, who were merchants and artisans, lived in the urban centres.

Indian lay Buddhists, mostly merchants and artisans, were “fickle-minded”, and lived in urban areas.

Brāhmaṇical-Hindus: mostly lived in the countryside and were farmers.

The Hindus appear to have put up more resistance against bin-Qasim than the Buddhists.

The Buddhists disillusioned with the anti-mercantile policies of Dāhir and Chach, showed a ready willingness to avoid destruction and “their ethics of nonviolence inclined them to welcome the invaders” (N.F. Gier 2006).

Buddhist vihāras, patronized by merchants and artisans:

1. Housed artisans
2. Provided capital loans
3. Offered resting and storage facilities to merchants.

Earlier, interregional trade was the mainstay of mercantile Buddhism in Sind because of Sind's advantageous geographic position that extended over several important trade routes.

But the break-up of the Byzantine empire, and control by Sassanians of the land and maritime Silk Road severely affected Sind whose commerce was specifically dependent on the transit trade.

Though trading was still taking place between India, China, and the West, but it was primarily taking place through the sea via the Strait of Malacca and Sri Lanka. Since the major economic advantage of Sind lay in the location of its riverine system and seaports as the closest maritime transport to the land trade route, the changed situation worked largely to the disadvantage of Sind.

Zoroastrians (*majus*)
ahl al-kitāb and *ahl al-dhimmah*

Guarantee of a certain amount of Muslim non-interference in religious matters in return for certain obligations.

Qasim readily granted the status of *dhimmi* by making a legal contract (*'ahd*) with any city that submitted peacefully by treaty (*ṣulh*). Two-thirds of the Sindī towns submitted peacefully and made treaty agreements.

Such a policy substantially reduced resistance to the Arab conquest of Sind. Strictly adhering to the Islamic law that once granted a contract was inviolable and not retractable; the Arabs were able to win the trust of their new subjects.

On the whole, as long as the non-Muslims submitted and paid the *jizyah*, their religious beliefs and practices were not of much interest to the Arabs.

The *dhimmīs* in Sind

1. Allowed to pray to their own deities and repair their temples.
2. Could patronize their religious mendicants, celebrate religious festivals (*a'yād*) and rituals (*marāsim*).
3. Allowed to retain up to 3% of the principal of the *jizyah* for the priests or monks.
4. Religious mendicants were granted the right to seek donations from householders by going from door to door with a copper bowl.
5. Exemption from both the military service and *zakat*.
6. All adult males were required to pay a graded *jizyah*.

Dhimmīs: Second-class citizens, generally perceived by Muslims as following inferior religions.

While Buddhists and Hindus were free, within limits, to worship as they liked, Muslims were equally free to ridicule their worship. In such an atmosphere, regardless of what Arab policy may have been, some non-Muslims may have perceived conversion as a means to escape the uncertainties let loose by the initial conquest of Sind.

Furthermore, not all local Arab officials were necessarily as tolerant as others. There were occasions when the *dhimmīs* were forced to put on special clothes so that they could be easily identified by the authorities and some harsh officials put a ban on the temple-building activities of these *dhimmīs* who otherwise had the freedom of worship.

Those who attended the Friday prayers at mosques were sometimes given monetary rewards.

If any member of a non-Muslim family converted to Islam, he was given the right to inherit all the property of his family. In such an environment, many Hindus and Buddhists appear to have converted to Islam for social, economic, or political expediency, while internally still holding on to their own faiths. However, the children of such converts, growing up in the external framework of Islam, became much more genuine than their parents in adopting the new religion.

Buddhists: appear to have had no problem in accepting the status of *dhimmī* as second-class, non-Muslim subjects of a state ruled by Arabs.

While some proselytization occurred, conversion to Islam was slow and generally came from among the ranks of Buddhists.

Many Buddhist merchants and artisans in Sind voluntarily converted to Islam as it made better business sense. “The success of Muslims attracted– even sometimes economically necessitated– conversion” (Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995: 106).

With the rise in competition from Muslim quarters, *dhimmī* merchants viewed change of religion as financially beneficial considering that in addition to the poll-tax; they had to pay double duty on all goods.

The primary interest of bin-Qasim was to keep political power intact. He was in desperate need to raise as much money as possible to compensate al-Ḥajjāj for the enormous expenses incurred on the campaigns.

This was accomplished through

1. Jizyah
2. Land revenue
3. Trade taxes
4. Pilgrimage tax
5. War-booty
6. Confiscation of property

While the *Chachnāmah* records a few instances of conversion of stūpas to mosques such as the one at Nīrūn (near present-day Hyderabad), the demolition of temples was forbidden under the adopted Hanafi school of thought that permitted Qasim to treat Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains as *zhimmīs*.

Hindus continued to administer their villages and resolve all disputes in accordance with their own law.

At the most Islamic rule was theocentric, but not theocratic.

Attacks on places of worship largely took place at the cutting edge of the invasion ordered by victorious generals to punish or deter opposition. Generally, acts of vandalism against the Buddhist vihāras were politically, not religiously, motivated.

Primary focus of the Arabs:

To preserve the economic infrastructure of the region.

Conquest with the least number of Arab casualties.

When resistance was intensive or protracted, the Arab response was equally severe.

Wholesale massacres in: Daybul, Rāwar, Brāhmanābād, Iskalandah, and Multān as they had to be captured by force (*‘anwatan*).

Armābīl, Nīrūn, Sīwistān, Budhīyah, Bét, Sāwandī, and Aror were brought under Arab control through treaty (*ṣulḥ*) and they did not experience any casualties on either side.

However, the Arab concern with securing a financially viable Sind impelled them to exempt artisans, merchants, and agriculturalists (André Wink. 2002. *Al-Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol.1, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers: 205).

On the whole: the Arab policy of conquest and settlement focussed on the submission of the Sindīs and not their conversion.

Thus, the simplistic model of coerced conversion or holy war cannot be applied to Sind.

Conversions in Sind cannot be attributed to

1. Pressures of a militant conversionist Islam.
2. Attractions of a posited principle of equality in Islam.
3. Active proselytization.

Though some military leaders may have issued calls for jihad to rally troops, geopolitical and economic factors rather than religion primarily motivated the conflicts.

Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism: generally adopted diametrically opposite approaches.

Thus, the two were affected differently.

Whereas Buddhism disappeared completely as a viable religious system during the Arab period, Hinduism continued to survive into modern times. (Was Hindu caste system helpful here?)

Buddhist communities (as compared to Hindus) tended to collaborate readily and more completely with the invading Arabs.

9 out of the 10 Buddhist communities were collaborators
Nīrūnī Buddhists sent envoys in advance to al-Ḥajjāj requesting a separate peace.

Buddhist collaboration may not have been simply opportunistic or guided by “the desire to be on the winning side.”

“Buddhists in Sind were guided not so much by motives of vengeance on the Hindus as by anxiety for their own safety” (R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 33).

Urban, mercantile Buddhists of Sind were not satisfied with their socioeconomic situation. The incorporation of Sind into the Arab empire, a rapidly expanding trade empire, held out certain advantages to a mercantile people involved in interregional commerce.

These urban, mercantile Buddhists appear to have opted for collaboration with the Arabs hoping that the Arab conquest would reopen interregional trade routes, both maritime and overland, and hence benefit their class and, indirectly, their religion. Thus, they had good reason to perceive that their mercantile interests would be better served under an Arab trade empire.

Calculations of Buddhist merchants went terribly wrong.

The restored interregional commerce generally emphasized alternate trade routes, was supported by different institutions, and, above all, became the monopoly of a competitive Muslim mercantile bourgeoisie.

Internal Buddhist industrial production at vihāras was supplanted by newly-built Arab industrial sectors processing material both for local consumption and for export.

Besides settling down in existing towns or expanding some of them (e.g., Daybul), they also build new towns like Maṣṣūrah and Bayḍāh completely replacing the old ones (e.g., Maṣṣūrah replacing Brāhmanābād) or bringing others to a state of decrepitude.

Discriminatory customs regulations considerably reduced the capacity of the Buddhist merchants of Sind to compete at par with Muslims in large-scale inter-regional commerce.

Sindī Buddhist merchants found it increasingly difficult to compete with Muslim merchants on an equal footing in the revived commerce:

1. More taxes.
2. New Arab trade patterns which bypassed the credit and transport facilities of the vihāras.
3. The new rulers not only put a stop to the enjoyment of tax-free lands by vihāras belonging to the *kāfirs*.

Reduced capacity of urban lay followers to provide economic assistance adversely affected the vihāras.

“Where an individual or a group has a particular expectation and furthermore where this expectation is considered to be a proper state of affairs, and where something less than that expectation is fulfilled, we may speak of **relative deprivation**” (D.F. Aberle, “A Note on Relative Deprivation Theory as Applied to Millenarian and Other Cult Movements,” in S.L. Thrupp (ed.), *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements*, New York: Schocken Books, 1970: 209).

The urban, mercantile Buddhists had collaborated with the Arabs under the expectation that the conquest would reinvigorate the economy of Sind and hence their share of the accumulation of capital. However, their share of the accumulation of capital decreased while commercial capital passing through Sind increased. The urban, mercantile Buddhists of Sind experienced relative deprivation and lost control of certain economic resources and capital which had previously belonged to them.

They felt that their precarious condition was caused by the fact that they were non-Muslims whereas their Muslim counterparts were prospering for the simple fact that they were Muslims. Thus, it is no surprise that “the religious solution of converting to Islam would have been a plausible option among those urban, mercantile Buddhists experiencing relative deprivation in Arab Sind” (Mclean: 76).

“To participate in the new inter-regional trade was in many ways to become Arab, and if Arab then necessarily Muslim” (D.N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989: 74).

The Islamization of the Buddhist converts occurred gradually by way of such Muslim institutions as the mosque, the school system, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Buddhism disappeared in Sind during the two hundred years of Arab rule.

Al-Bīrūnī was unable to locate any Buddhist informants for his encyclopedia on Indian religions in 1030.

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Buddhism died out in Sind during the course of Arab rule; indeed the absence of Arab-period artefacts in Buddhist sites (except the stūpa at Mīrapur Khās) suggests a relatively early date for its institutional deterioration and demise.

Most of the Buddhists in Sind converted to Islam and towns, known to have been predominantly Buddhist at the time of the Arab conquest, were definitely Muslim by the tenth century (Maclean 1989: 53).