

**“Buddhism declined differently in different parts of India.”
Explain on the basis of the information provided by Xuanzang in
his *DaTang Xiyuji*.**

Not correct to use expressions such as >disappearance= or >extinction= for Indian Buddhism.

Not possible to prepare a continuous account of the decline.
Decline appears to have taken place almost imperceptibly.

Indigenous texts are stunningly silent on this subject.

Archaeological and epigraphical material: substantial but inadequate

Stray inscriptions and literary allusions are available throughout the history of India.

The process of decline was neither uniform in terms of time nor was it consistent in the manner of its decline.

Though first signs of decline appear in the post-Kuṣāṇa period, on the whole, no period can be delimited as marking the commencement of a *general* decline of Buddhism all over India. Thus, while Buddhism was flourishing at some places, one could at the same time see it having declined in other parts.

East Bengal (Bangladesh), north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent (northern parts of the Pakistani Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Pakistani occupied Kashmir), and the eastern and western Himalayas, being the fringe areas in terms of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu influence, present before us a completely different historical picture.

Buddhism continued to exist in a variety of forms of popular worship, rites, and rituals such as Dharma Thakur pūjā or the pūjā of Jagannātha in Bengal and Orissa. Bauls of Bengal

At least till the fourteenth century, Buddhist monks from India are known to have travelled to Tibet and China (Waley 1932: 355).

A Javanese poet mentions Buddhist monks as residing in six vihāras in Kāñcīpura in the year 1362 CE (see Waley 1932: 195).

There is at the University of Cambridge a manuscript of the Kālacakra, copied by a Kāyastha of Magadha for two monks in the year 1446 CE (see Losty 1982: 62).

When AbulFazal visited Kashmir in the company of Akbar at the end of the sixteenth century, he mentions having met some old men who professed their faith in Buddhism, though he could not find any Buddhist scholars (Jarrett 1977: III.224).

In 1777, the Panchen Lama is known to have sent an embassy to Bodhagayā (Eliot 1921: 13) and on its way this embassy is said to have established a Tibetan Buddhist monastery on the banks of the Gaṅgā at Hawrah, Kolkata.

As per the Census of 1911 as many as 1833 persons in Odisha declared Buddhism to be their faith (see Mitra 1954: 101). According to Grierson, there were 434 Buddhists in Odisha in 1901 (Gait 1902: vi.i: 321). In the Baramba state of Odisha, a caste called *Sarāṅ* (*Śrāvaka*) with obvious Buddhist connection was in existence in the year 1901 (Gait 1902: vi.i: 157, 427).

Apart from the districts of Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh, Buddhism has also continued uninterrupted in the Himalayas.

PV Kane: India in reality was never a Buddhist country as such. It does not appear that at any time coast-to-coast or even large portions of Indian population were completely Buddhist.

Louis Renou: the Indians “as a whole were always Hindus.”

RC Mitra: “We have had Buddhist philosophy, a rich and prolific Buddhist literature of the Avadānas and Jātakas but hardly, if ever, a Buddhist India.”

NKDutt: Concept of anything analogous to a >state religion= appears to have been entirely foreign to the Indian mind.

Aśoka: his son Jalauka was a staunch Śaiva, his grandson Sampati a practising Jaina, and one of his wives a destroyer of the Bodhi tree.

Sātavāhanas: generous patrons of Buddhism though they were orthodox brāhmaṇas.

Kaniṣka: like most of the Kuṣāṇas, had an eclectic faith. Besides the Buddha, he held Śiva and a variety of Mithraic deities in high esteem.

Harṣavardhana: in his Madhuvanī called a *Parama-Maheśvara* though his brother Rājyavardhana is described as a *Parama-Saugata*.

There is no reason to believe that Indians in large numbers became full-time followers of this religion.

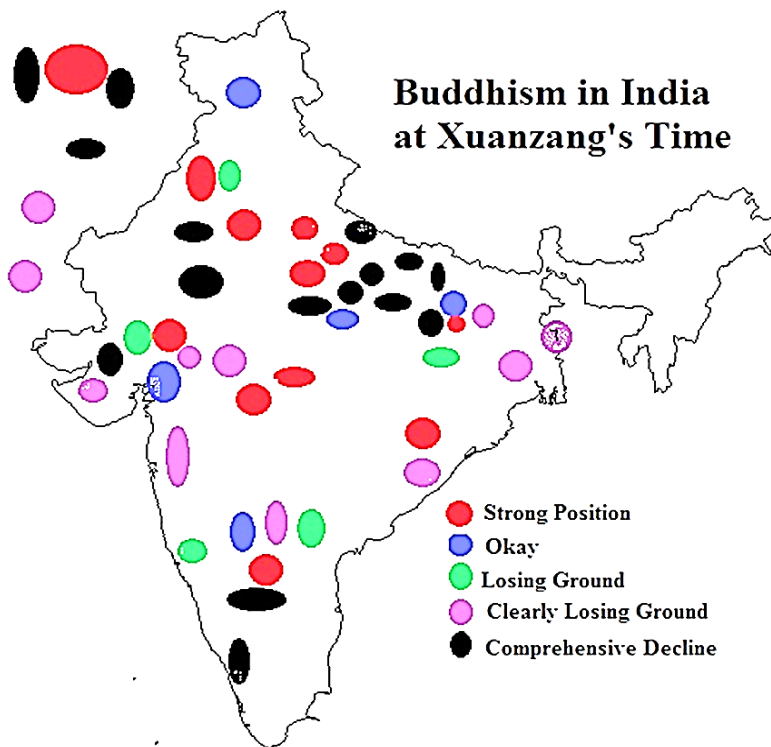
Xuanzang mentions at least **seventy-one** countries in the territory covered by pre-1947 India.

Buddhism had either comprehensively declined or was losing ground in **fifty-two** of these countries.

It remained in a strong position just in **thirteen** countries and even in these countries, Xuanzang saw some derelict monasteries.

If one were to go by Xuanzang=s testimony then in about three-quarters of India=s territory Buddhism had already fallen on bad days.

Interestingly, the countries where Buddhism had either declined comprehensively or was in a strong position were evenly spread out in the whole of Indian subcontinent.



(a). The Madhyadeśa

Xuanzang (629-645 CE): Buddhism had become somewhat of a spent force in most parts of the Madhyadeśa.

Though people esteemed learning and revered Buddhism in the country of Magadha it had already begun to decline here.

Magadha: More than fifty vihāras with over ten thousand monks and several tens of deva-temples and “truly numerous heretics.”

Pāṭaliputta: The famous Kukkuṭārāma of Pāṭaliputra had already been “in ruins for a long time, and only the foundations... (were)... still in existence” (Li 1996:230). Talking of the monks of Pāṭaliputra, Xuanzang points out that having lost in debate, they withdrew in disgrace as “[t]he heretical teachers were highly talented scholars of good learning, and although the monks were numerous, their arguments were shallow and superficial” (Li 1996: 231).

Rājagṛha: The outer walls of the city of Rājagṛha were already gone when Xuanzang visited and the inner walls, though ruined, still had foundations of some heights (Li 1996: 279).

Vaiśālī: All the several hundred vihāras were in ruins in the country of Vaiśālī except three to five which housed few monks. The wall of the city of Vaiśālī had badly collapsed while the palace city had few inhabitants inside.

Gayā: Just one vihāra at Bodhagayā with fewer than one thousand monks.

Campā: Over twenty deva temples and several scores of derelict vihāras with just over two hundred monks.

Kapilavastu: The country of Kapilavastu had been deserted for a long time and had a sparse population.

Kuśinagara: The city was in ruins with very few inhabitants.

Śrāvastī: City of Śrāvastī in desolation and of the several hundred vihāras in the country of Śrāvastī, most were dilapidated including the famous Jetavana vihāra.

Vārāṇasī: The city of Vārāṇasī had over thirty vihāras with more than three thousand monks and more than one hundred deva-temples with over ten thousand heretical followers.

Sthāneśvara (Thanesar): just three vihāras with seven hundred monks whereas the number of deva-temples was over one hundred with numerous heretics (Li 1996: 124).

Ujjainī: Several tens of ruined vihāras in Ujjayanī (Ujjain) only three to five intact vihāras with over three hundred monks (Li 1996: 344).

Kanyakubja: Buddhism appears to have gained some foothold in Kanyākubja (Kannauj). Xuanzang found more than one hundred vihāras with over ten thousand monks.

Nālandā: Nālandā Mahāvihāra had more than 3,000 monks and possessing lands consisting of over 200 villages.

(b). Odisha, Bengal, and Assam

Odisha

Uḍa: fifty deva-temples and more than one hundred vihāras with over ten thousand monks here (Li 1996: 305).

Kaliṅga (SW of Ganjam, Odisha): more than ten vihāras with over five hundred monks and there were also one hundred deva-temples. According to Xuanzang, only a few of the people here were Buddhists and the majority followed the heretics (Li 1996:307).

Koṅgoda (Ganjam): over one hundred deva-temples with over ten thousand adherents, people did not believe in Buddhism.

Bengal: the number of deva-temples in Tāmraliptī, Samatāṭa, Puṇḍravardhana, and Karaṇasuvārṇa was over fifty, one hundred, one hundred, and over fifty respectively indicating that Buddhism in this region was clearly losing ground to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

Assam: According to Xuanzang, in the country of Kāmarūpa (Assam) people did not believe in Buddhism and up to the time of his visit no vihāra had been built there to invite Buddhist monks (Li 1996:299).

Sindh, the Punjab, and the Northwest

Sindh: When Xuanzang travelled through Sind, he saw that more than 10,000 Buddhist monks living in the *vihāras* were “mostly indolent people with a corrupt character.”

Mūlasthānipura (Multan): only few people believed in Buddhism and there were more than ten vihāras, mostly dilapidated, with few monks, who did not belong to any particular school.

Uḍḍiyāna (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa): most of the vihāras were in ruins and the number of monks had gradually reduced.

Takṣaśilā: vihāras in ruins with a few monks.

(d). Kashmir

By the time of the arrival of Xuanzang in India, Buddhism had passed its prime in Kashmir primarily due to the ascendance of Śaivism. Apart from some vihāras in ruins, Xuanzang found over one hundred vihāras with more than five thousand monks in Kashmir.

Western India and the adjoining region:

Gujarat: Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples outnumbered Buddhist vihāras almost everywhere.

Maharashtra: According to Xuanzang, there were over a hundred vihāras with over five thousand monks in Mahārāṣṭra, the deva-temples numbering hundreds with quite numerous heretics. The Buddhist establishment at Ajanta had already become derelict when Xuanzang visited, though the establishments at Ellora and Aurangabad appear to have continued till about the middle of eighth century CE.

The Deccan

Andhra with its capital at Veṅgīpura: there were more than twenty vihāras with over three thousand monks, the number of deva-temples being more than thirty with numerous heretics.

Dhānakaṭaka (Amrāvātī): except ten vihāras with over one thousand monks, Xuanzang saw numerous vihāras in ruins, whereas there were over one hundred deva-temples with innumerable heretics.

Coḷa(Tamilnadu): the vihāras were dilapidated with very few monks but there were several tens of deva-temples with many naked heretics.

Draviḍa with its capital at Kāñcīpura : over one hundred vihāras with over ten thousand monks. He also saw over eighty deva-temples here.

Malakūṭa (Kerala): Xuanzang saw the ruined foundations of many

old vihāras, the existing ones being very few with few monks. But the deva-temples in Malakūṭa numbered several hundred.

Konkaṇapura: over one hundred vihāras with more than ten thousand monks in Konkaṇapura, the number of deva-temples being several hundred.