

The Decline of Buddhism in India

It is almost impossible to provide a continuous account of the near disappearance of Buddhism from the plains of India. This is primarily so because of the dearth of archaeological material and the stunning silence of the indigenous literature on this subject. Interestingly, the subject itself has remained one of the most neglected topics in the history of India. In this book apart from the history of the decline of Buddhism in India, various issues relating to this decline have been critically examined. Following this methodology, an attempt has been made at a region-wise survey of the decline in Sind, Kashmir, northwestern India, central India, the Deccan, western India, Bengal, Orissa, and Assam, followed by a detailed analysis of the different hypotheses that propose to explain this decline. This is followed by author's proposed model of decline of Buddhism in India.

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The Decline of Buddhism in India

A Fresh Perspective

K.T.S. Sarao



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Preface

IT IS VERY difficult to provide a continuous account of the near disappearance of Buddhism from the plains of Indian subcontinent primarily because of the dearth of archaeological material and the stunning silence of the indigenous literature on this subject. Interestingly, the subject itself has remained one of the most neglected topics in the history of India. Our own study of the background to the decline of Buddhism in India has left us with an impression similar to what J.B. Pratt wrote in 1921 in the *Journal of Religion* while discussing as to why religions decline: “the most insidious disease germs are not greatly feared, and perhaps not recognized.” In this book an attempt has been made to trace the history of the decline of Buddhism in India and critically examine various issues relating to this decline. Following this methodology, a region-wise survey of the decline in the Madhyadeśa, Sind, Kashmir, Punjab, the northwestern Indian subcontinent, the Deccan, western India, and eastern India (including Bangladesh) has been attempted. Thereafter, the various causes and hypotheses generally proposed in this regard have been critically examined. In the end, a model for the decline has been proposed.

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K.T.S. SARAO

1 March 2011
New Delhi

Abbreviations

<i>A</i>	<i>The Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> , ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols., London: PTS, 1885–1900.
<i>AA</i>	<i>The Manorathapūraṇī: Buddhaghoṣa's Commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> , ed. H. Walleser and H. Kopp, 5 vols., London: PTS, 1956–1973.
<i>ABORI</i>	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</i> , Poona.
<i>Abu'l-Fazl</i>	Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami, <i>A'in-i Akbari</i> , 2 vols., Persian text ed. H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1867–1877; trans. H. Blochmann, 3 vols., 1948–1949 (repr., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1977).
<i>AI</i>	<i>Ancient India</i> , New Delhi.
<i>AMMK</i>	<i>The Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa</i> , ed. and trans. K.P. Jayaswal, <i>The Text of the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa</i> (text and translation with commentary): <i>An Imperial History of India</i> , Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934.
<i>Ap</i>	<i>The Apadāna</i> , ed. M.E. Lilley, 2 vols., London: PTS, 1925–1927.
<i>ARASI</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India</i> , Government of India, New Delhi.

- ASI* *Archaeological Survey of India*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- ASIR* *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- BD* *The Book of the Discipline*, trans. I.B. Horner, 6 vols., London: PTS, 1938–1966.
- Chachnāmāh* *The Chach-Nama: An Ancient History of Sind*, trans. M.K. Fredunbeg, Karachi: Commissioner's Press, 1900 (repr., Delhi, 1979).
- Chau Ju-Kua* *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chi*, trans. F. Hirth and W.W. Rockhill, St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911.
- CII* *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*.
- D* *The Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1890–1911.
- DA* *The Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J.E. Carpenter, and W. Stede, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1886–1971.
- DB* *Dialogues of the Buddha*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 3 vols., London: SBB: 1899, repr., 1910, 1957.
- Dh* *The Dhammapada*, ed. O. von Hinüber and K.R. Norman, Oxford: PTS, 1994.
- DhA* *The Commentary on the Dhammapada*, ed. H.C. Norman, 4 vols., London: PTS, 1906–1915.
- Dharma* *Biography of Dharmasvāmin (Chag lo tsa-ba Chos rje-dpal): A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim*, deciphered and trans. George Roerich, with a historical and critical intro. by A.S. Altekar, Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959.

<i>DPPN</i>	<i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> , ed. G.P. Malalasekera, 2 vols., London: PTS, 1937–1938.
<i>EI</i>	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i> , Calcutta: Government of India.
<i>Faxian</i>	<i>Travels of Fa-Hien and Sung-Yun: Buddhist Pilgrims from China to India (400 AD and 518 AD)</i> , trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1869.
<i>GS</i>	<i>The Book of Gradual Sayings</i> , trans. F.L. Woodward: vols. I, II, and V; E.M. Hare: vols. III and IV, London: PTS, 1955–1970 (repr.).
<i>Hye Ch'o</i>	<i>The Hye Ch'o Diary: Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India</i> , ed. and trans. Yang Hunsung, et al., Berkeley, Asian Humanities Press, 1984.
<i>IA</i>	<i>Indian Antiquary</i> , Calcutta.
<i>IAR</i>	<i>Indian Archaeology: A Review</i> , New Delhi.
<i>IHQ</i>	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i> , Calcutta.
<i>J</i>	<i>The Jātaka</i> , ed. V. Fausböll, 7 vols., London: Trubner & Co: 1977–1897.
<i>JASB</i>	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</i> , Calcutta.
<i>JBORS</i>	<i>Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society</i> , Patna.
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> , London.
<i>JRASB</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal</i> , Calcutta.
<i>KS</i>	<i>The Book of Kindred Saying</i> , trans. C.A.F. Rhys Davids and S.S. Thera, vol. I; C.A.F. Rhys Davids and F.L. Woodward, vol. II; F.L. Woodward, vols. III, IV, V, London: PTS, 1950–1956 (repr.).

<i>M</i>	<i>The Majjhima Nikāya</i> , ed. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1888–1896.
<i>MA</i>	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i> , <i>Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā</i> of <i>Buddhaghosācariya</i> , ed. J.H. Woods, D. Kosambi, and I.B. Horner, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1976–1979.
<i>Marco Polo</i>	<i>The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East</i> , ed. and trans. H. Yule, 3rd rev. edn., vol. I, London: J. Murray, 1903.
<i>MAI</i>	<i>Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India</i> , New Delhi.
<i>Mil</i>	<i>The Milindapañha</i> , ed. Trenckner, London: William and Norgate, 1880.
<i>MLS</i>	<i>The Book of Middle Length Sayings</i> , trans. I.B. Horner, 3 vols, London: PTS, 1954–1959.
<i>Oukong</i>	Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes, “L’Itinéraire D’ou-K’ong (751–790),” <i>Journal Asiatique</i> , Neuvième Série, Tome VI, 1895: 341–408.
<i>PED</i>	<i>Pāli-English Dictionary</i> , ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede, London: PTS, 1921–1925.
<i>PTS</i>	Pāli Text Society.
<i>S</i>	<i>The Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> , ed. M.L. Feer, 5 vols., London: PTS, 1884–1898.
<i>SA</i>	<i>The Sāratthappakāsinī</i> , Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the <i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> , ed. F.L. Woodward, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1977.
<i>SBB</i>	Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Oxford.
<i>SBE</i>	The Sacred Books of the East, Oxford.
<i>Si-Yu-Ki</i>	<i>Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World</i> , trans. S. Beal, 2 vols., London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1884.

- Songyun* Edouard Chavannes, “Voyage de Song Yun dans l’Udyāna et le Gandhāra,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient*, Paris, no. III, July – Sept 1903:379–395.
- Sn* *The Sutta-Nipāta*, ed. V. Fausböll, London: PTS, 1885.
- SnA* *Sutta-Nipāta Commentary being Paramatthajotikā*, II, ed. H. Smith, 3 vols., London: PTS, 1966–1972.
- Tāranātha* *Tāranātha’s History of Buddhism in India*, trans. Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970.
- Th* *The Theragāthā*, ed. K.R. Norman and L. Alsdorf, London: PTS, 1966.
- Thī* *The Therīgāthā*, ed. K.R. Norman and L. Alsdorf, London: PTS, 1966.
- Ud* *The Udānaṃ*, ed. P. Steinthal, London: PTS, 1885.
- VA* *Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa’s Commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka*, ed. J. Takakusu and M. Nagai, 8 vols. (including index by H. Kopp), London: PTS, 1947–1975.
- Vin* *The Vinaya Piṭaka*, ed. H. Oldenberg, 5 vols., London: PTS, 1879–1883.
- Watters* *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India*, trans. T. Watters, 2 vols., London, 1904–1905, 2nd Indian edition, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1973.
- Xiyu Ji* *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, trans. Rongxi Li, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, 1996.

- Xuanzang* *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*, trans. Li Rongxi, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995.
- Yijing* *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695) by I-tsing*, trans. J. Takakusu, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896.
- Yuga Pu* *The Yuga Purāṇa*: Critically edited, with an English translation and a detailed Introduction by John E. Mitchiner, 2nd rev. edn., Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2002.

1

Some Basic Issues

THE NEAR DISAPPEARANCE of Buddhism from the plains of India is one of the most puzzling conundrums in the history of India. Most curiously, thus far the subject of decline has also remained largely neglected by scholars and hence has not been researched in a systematic manner. Other than a very small number of generally unfocussed articles and book-chapters published here and there, just one full-length scholarly monograph dealing directly with the issue of decline has been published so far. This seminal work was prepared in 1947 as a doctoral thesis by R.C. Mitra.¹ Its English translation was published in 1954.² However, since the publication of this book, voluminous new data, directly bearing on the subject, have become available in the form of archaeological, epigraphical, and literary material. New methodological approaches have also made possible now a fresh examination of this subject from different perspectives. We have also been made wiser on the subject as well as issues related to it by the pioneering work of scholars such as A.L. Basham, D.K. Chakrabarti, D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Sukumar Dutt, A. Ghosh, P.S. Jaini,

¹The thesis entitled “Le déclin du bouddhisme dans l’Inde” was presented at the Sorbonne in 1947 and was initially prepared at the suggestion of Louis Renou, Director of the Institute of Indian Civilization of the University of Paris.

²R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954.

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L.M. Joshi, D.D. Kosambi, Étienne Lamotte, A.K. Narain, R.S. Sharma, D.C. Sircar, and Romila Thapar during the last sixty years. A large number of Buddhist texts and their better editions as well as translations have also become easily available now.

One major problem with regard to the decline of Buddhism in India is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to give a continuous account of the history of this decline. In fact, the decline takes place almost imperceptibly. The archaeological and epigraphical material available till date, though quite substantial, is still quite inadequate. Above all, indigenous texts are stunningly silent on this subject. However, the paucity of evidence should not necessarily be taken as a proof of non-survival of Buddhism. Just because votive or donative inscriptions of monks, nuns, merchants, bankers, artisans, or members of the political authority are not available does not necessarily mean that Buddhism had become completely extinct from the plains of India. As a matter of fact, one is startled by the evidence of a stray inscription here or a literary allusion there to the surviving remnants of Buddhism throughout the medieval and early modern history of India.

Another problem that one has to deal with is that whatever information one has on the process of decline of Buddhism in India, it indicates that this process was neither uniform in terms of time nor was it consistent in the manner of its decline. As a consequence, one may be tempted to suggest that in different parts of India different factors may have acted differently at different periods of time to cause the decline of Buddhism. It is not, therefore, surprising that whereas some scholars believe that as “both the rise and decline of Buddhism began almost simultaneously,”³ they see decline as originating congenitally

³U. Mishra, “Influence of the Teachings of the Buddha and Causes of the Decline of Buddhism in India,” *Journal of G.N. Jha Research Institute*, IX, pt. I, 1951: 111–112.

and hence put it at the very beginning,⁴ some others do not see any signs of decline prior to the Gupta period,⁵ while still others do not see such a thing happening earlier than the seventh century CE.⁶ While some scholars perceive the decline of Buddhism as resulting from “just old age, or sheer exhaustion,”⁷ others feel that it was the multiplicity of different causes that “must have been in operation for a pretty long time.”⁸ Some scholars even believe that *en masse* departure of the Buddhist scholars to foreign lands causing a brain drain, led to the decline of Buddhism in India.⁹ This sort of confusion and variance in the understanding

⁴L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India*, 2nd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977: 302.

⁵Y. Krishan, “The Causes of the Decline of Buddhism and Its Disappearance from India: A Reassessment,” *Visvesvaranand Indological Journal*, II, September 1964: 264.

⁶E.g., P.C. Bagchi, “Decline of Buddhism and its Causes,” *Asutosh Mukerjee Silver Jubilee Volumes*, III, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1943: 412. In the opinion of H. Kern, “all things considered, one has to admit that it was in the sixth century that Buddhism had attained the highest degree of its splendour in India.” (*Histoire du bouddhisme dans l’Inde: Traduite du néerlandais par Gédéon Huet*, vol. II, Paris: E. Leroux, 1903: 455.) In sharp contrast to this, Xinru Liu has proposed that “The decline of Buddhism in many parts of India became obvious in the sixth century AD.” (*Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600–1200*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 27.) According to R.C. Mitra, “Viewing this decline as a protracted process and not an abrupt occurrence, we shall not be far from the truth in marking the 7th century as the broader line where commenced or converged the forces of decadence contemplated in the divergent traditions regarding an earlier or later decay” (op. cit., 12). Mitra further points out that as far as Buddhism was concerned, by the seventh century “the days of original thought . . . (were) . . . past” whereas “(t)he arid pedantry and mystic cobweb of Tantric imagination lay ahead.” (Ibid., 13.)

⁷Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism*, Bombay: Chetna, 1960: 86; A. Barth, *Religions of India*, trans. J. Wood, London: Trübner & Co., 1882: 155–157.

⁸P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. V, pt. II; 2nd edn., Government Oriental Series, Class B, no. 6, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, Poona, 1977: 1003.

⁹James Atkins, *The Religions of China*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880: 99.

of the decline of Buddhism has largely been compounded by the fact that historical information about the condition of Buddhism in different parts of India is so scattered, insufficient, and discontinuous that it is nearly impossible to prepare a complete picture of any given period.

However, one bright spot in the mass of lacklustre source material on the history of the decline of Buddhism in India is the information provided by the different Chinese visitors, particularly Faxian (CE 399–414) and Xuanzang (CE 629–644). Apart from furnishing a clear and detailed picture of the condition of Buddhism in India, these pilgrims visited India at a time when Buddhism was entering a crucial phase in its history. Faxian appears before us as the first trustworthy eyewitness to the dwindling fortunes of Buddhism in the form of its derelict monasteries, missing monks, and innumerable number of heretics with their deva-temples¹⁰ throughout the Madhyadeśa the cradle of Buddhism where the Buddha had delivered his sermons in person. When Xuanzang visited India, though some revival of Buddhism appears to have taken place within the kingdom of Harṣavardhana, it still had not been able to displace Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.¹¹ However, apart from within the kingdom of Harṣavardhana, Buddhism was on the whole losing to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, as the adherents of the latter outnumbered the Buddhists in most of the countries.¹² Later, Oukong (CE 751–790) found Buddhism completely extinct at places such as Saṃkāśya and Vaiśālī.¹³

Though first signs of the decline appear in the post-Kuṣāṇa period, on the whole, no period can be delimited as marking the commencement of a general decline in the whole of India. Thus, while Buddhism was flourishing at some places, one could at

¹⁰See, for instance, *Faxian*. 70, 72, 78, 85, 93–94, 96, 113, 120, 137–138, 147.

¹¹*Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911: 72.

¹²See *infra*, the tables in the next chapter (pp. 17–19), on the basis of the information provided by Xuanzang in his *Xiyu Ji*.

¹³*Oukong*. 351, 355.

the same time see it suffering from the aguish of decline at other places. For instance, when some well-endowed Buddhist *vihāras* existed under the Pālas in eastern India, Buddhism had already met its worst fate in Sind and parts of northwestern India. Most interestingly, East Bengal (Bangladesh), northwestern 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. These were the only regions of India where Buddhism truly managed to become a religion of the masses and unlike in the rest of India, it did not play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. However, on the whole, at some stage Buddhism appears to have fallen into a state of complete disarray in the plains of India and there appears to be some consensus among scholars that whatever may have been the cause/causes and the time of the beginning of this disarray, it collapsed rather quickly and comprehensively towards the end of the twelfth century.

Yet, even after the twelfth century traces of the survival of Buddhism could be found in most parts of India. For instance, it continued to exist in a variety of forms of popular worship, rites, and rituals such as Dharma Ṭhākur *pūjā* or the *pūjā* of Jagannātha in Bengal and Orissa. Arthur Waley has comprehensively shown that Buddhism survived till the fourteenth century not only in Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar but also in other parts of India including Kāñcīpura (Tamilnadu), Coḷa kingdom (Coromandal Coast), Dvāravatī (Gujarat), and Jālaṃdhara (the Punjab).¹⁴ At least till the fourteenth century, Buddhist monks from India are known to have travelled to Tibet and China.¹⁵ A Javanese poet mentions Buddhist monks as residing in six *vihāras* in Kāñcīpura

¹⁴A. Waley, "New Light on Buddhism in Medieval India," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, July 1932: 355–376.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 355.

in the year CE 1362.¹⁶ There is at the University of Cambridge a manuscript of the Kālacakra, copied by a Kāyastha of Magadha for two monks in the year CE 1446.¹⁷ When Abul Fazal 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 scholar.¹⁸ In 1777, the Panchen Lama is known to have sent an embassy to Bodhagayā¹⁹ and on its way this embassy is said to have established a Tibetan Buddhist monastery on the banks of the Gaṅgā at Hawrah, Kolkata.²⁰ As per the Census of 1911, as many as 1833 persons in Orissa declared Buddhism to be their faith.²¹ Apart from the districts of Chittagong and the Chittagong hill tracts in southeastern Bangladesh, Buddhism has also continued uninterrupted in the Himalayas. Thus, it is not at all correct to use expressions such as “disappearance” or “extinction” for Indian Buddhism.

In order to get some perspective on the decline of Buddhism in India, it is important to remember that 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

¹⁶See R. Sewell, *Historical Inscriptions of Southern India (Collected till 1923) and Outlines of Political History*, Madras: University of Madras, 1932: 195.

¹⁷See J.P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, London: British Library, 1982: 62.

¹⁸*Abu'l-Fazl*.224.

¹⁹C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co., 1921: 13.

²⁰See G.D. Bysack, “Notes on a Buddhist Monastery at Bhot Bhagan in Howrah,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 59, 1890: 64–99. Indian traders called Purangir and Daljitgir, who were known to the Panchen Lama, assisted Tibetan pilgrims in selling gold dust and musk in Bengal as well as in purchasing a range of Bengali products to return with.

²¹R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 101. According to G.A. Grierson, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. VI, pt. 1: 321, there were 434 Buddhists in Orissa. However, in the Baramba State of Orissa, a caste called *Sarāk* (*Śrāvaka*) with obvious Buddhist connection was in existence in the year 1901 (*ibid.*, 427).

completely Buddhist.²² “We have had Buddhist philosophy, a rich and prolific Buddhist literature of the Avadānas and Jātakas but hardly, if ever, a Buddhist India.”²³ Moreover, India never had anything analogous to a “state religion.” Such a concept appears to have been entirely foreign to the Indian mind.²⁴ Numerically speaking, Buddhism was never a force to be reckoned with in India. Even during the heydays of its glory under king Aśoka, a period which could be called the *ne plus ultra* of Buddhism when it had become a pan-Indian religion, there is no evidence to prove that Buddhism had become the religion of at least a majority of the population. The conversion was not complete in the king’s own household where his son Jalauka was a staunch Śaiva, his grandson Sampati a practising Jaina, and one of his wives a destroyer of the Bodhi Tree. The Sātavāhanas, generous patrons of Buddhism as they were, were orthodox brāhmaṇas. Buddhism received ardent support of the Śakas and the Graeco-Bactrians and was even materially transformed by these foreign influences, but there is no reason to believe that Indians in large numbers became full-time followers of this religion. It is common knowledge that 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. He was followed later by Vāsudeva whose very name indicates his leanings towards Viṣṇuism. The Guptas in spite of their appointment of a Buddhist general, Āmrakārdava and their liberal attitude towards Buddhism, were supporters of a Brāhmaṇical revival. Even king Harṣavardhana in his Madhuvan plate is acknowledged as a *Parama-Maheśvara*, though his brother Rājyavardhana is described as a *Parama-Saugata*. By any reckoning, lay supporters of Buddhism could not have formed more than a tiny portion of the entire population for the simple

²²P.V. Kane, op. cit., vol. V, pt. II: 1006. Similarly, Louis Renou felt that the Indians “as a whole were always Hindus.” (*Religions of Ancient India*, London: University of London, 1953: 100.)

²³R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 2.

²⁴Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962: 27.

reason that these supporters were based in urban settlements where only a very small percentage of India's population lived.

The Buddha had shown a preference to preach in vernacular dialects (commonly known as Prākṛta) because these were what the people spoke and understood. Thus, he had advised the monks not to translate his sermons into Sanskrit (*na bhikkhave buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropetabbaṃ*).²⁵ As pointed out by K.R. Norman, the use of vernacular languages was two-fold-to make the Buddha's teaching available to the general populace and to rebel against the Brāhmaṇical caste and their language.²⁶ However, as the teaching became codified and its language became ossified, and as the vernacular languages continued to develop, a gap arose between the *Buddhavacana* and the language of the people. If, therefore, the teachings of the Buddha were to be propagated in a form which the common people could understand, then monks would have to translate the texts which they had memorised and recited in Pāli into the vernacular languages of the people.²⁷ This problem appears to have been sorted out by the Buddhists by taking resort to translating their texts into Sanskrit rather than the vernacular languages. The result was that none other than the monks themselves could read and understand the scriptures. The consequence of such a development was that "Buddhism started to become an academic study, where only the educated, who had learned Sanskrit, had access to the teachings in their written form. Bhikkhus, studying in their *vihāras*, became more and more remote from the people."²⁸

Besides, it does not appear that the saṃgha in any period of history thrived anywhere merely on royal support and patronage. Not many among the thousands of *vihāras* that existed in different

²⁵*Vin.* ii. 139.

²⁶K.R. Norman, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, 2nd edn. reset with corrections, Lancaster: Pāli Text Society, 2006: 144.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 144.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 145.

parts of India were of royal foundation. Most of the monastery-building must be seen as a work done by the merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, artisans, monks, and nuns. Another important matter that cannot be overlooked is that the concept of central authority or control did not exist in Buddhism, the principle of hegemony or headship having been ruled out by the Buddha himself. There appears to be some truth in W.P. Wassilieff's observation that "Buddhism in India was propagated only temporarily, and locally."²⁹ Socially, the lay associates of Buddhism did not form a homogeneous and distinct group vis-à-vis the various Brāhmaṇical sects. This inherent weakness in the end may have turned out to be its Achilles' heel. In fact, the conversion of lay associates had not been at all either complete or effective.³⁰ Buddhism had neither lay aficionados in sufficient numbers nor was it meant to have any bigoted following.³¹ One does not come across the counterparts of amen corners, bibliolaters or bible-thumpers in Buddhist *viḥāras* nor does one find the equivalents of anti-apostasy altar calls in Buddhism. As pointed out by P.S. Jaini, "The term 'Buddhist' itself generally referred only to those who had actually left the household and taken up the yellow robes of the mendicant. While there certainly existed large numbers of lay people who *supported* Buddhism, there seems to have been no clearly defined set of criteria (vows, social codes, modes of worship, etc.) whereby these individuals could be identified as belonging to a separate and distinct religious community within the larger society. Whereas Jaina clerics were, according to canonical evidence, always closely involved with their lay people, their Buddhist counterparts tended to remain aloof from all non-mendicants. . . . There can be little doubt,

²⁹Quoted at R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 1954: 4.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹For instance, on the basis of well-documented research W.T. de Bary has shown that "Outside the monastic order those who looked on themselves as exclusively Buddhists were at all times probably comparatively few." (*The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, Vintage Books Edition, 1972: 111.)

then, that the sense of religious participation or identification felt by the Buddhist lay community was often weak one at best.”³² Nowhere in India did Buddhism completely supplant the other cults and systems. Lay people who supported Buddhist monks and worshipped at Buddhist shrines, also patronized brāhmaṇas and called for their services in the performance of life-cycle and other household rituals and ceremonies. Buddhism was never wholly cut off from the mainstream of Indian religion. Faxian in the fifth century noted that Buddhists and Hindus joined in the same religious processions, as though Buddhism was looked on as a branch of Hinduism, rather than as an independent religion.³³ Affiliation with Buddhism at the laity-level was individual and generally lapsed after the demise of the individual. Thus, the Buddha created, at best, fickle-minded lay associates, a floating element in the vast population which conformed to the Brāhmaṇical caste system and followed Brāhmaṇical rites in ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death. In other words, there was hardly any *esprit de corps* among the lay supporters of Buddhism. Buddhism “rarely demanded an ‘either/or decision’ from people of non-Buddhist background . . . it usually presented itself more as a ‘supplement’ than as a ‘contestant’ to existing religions and cultures.”³⁴

Interestingly, the theme of an inevitable end of the religion appears to have played an *avant garde* role in the formation of the Buddhist psyche. The prophecy of “decline” is a recurrent

³²P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 84. See also É. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, Louvain-la-Neuve: Insitut Orientaliste: 1988 (originally published as *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: Des origenes à l'ère Śaka*, Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 43, Louvain: 1958): 65.

³³*Faxian*. 106.

³⁴J.M. Kitagawa, “Buddhism and Asian Politics,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 2, no. 5, July 1962: 3. Also cf. W.E. Hocking, “Living Religions and a World Faith,” in A.E. Christy, ed., *The Asian Legacy and American Life*, New York: John Day Co., 1945: 206–207.

theme in Indian Buddhism.³⁵ References are not wanting in Buddhist literature indicating the belief entertained by Buddhists that their faith was neither aeternum nor aeonic and that the impending end to their faith was unavoidable. There appeared to have been a sort of “death-wish” in Indian Buddhism, so to say. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* refers, for instance, to the decline of moral life resulting in the anticipated collapse of the religion.³⁶ The Buddha himself is said to have expressed the view that his religion would last only one thousand years and that the entry of women would further cut its life-span to half.³⁷ It is quite interesting to note that women’s ordination was perceived as a serious and inescapable threat to the very survival of Buddhism.³⁸ Both the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta* and the *Aggañña Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* refer to the idea of imminent decline as part of the cosmic cycle of evolution and devolution spanning vast expanses of time.³⁹ Thus, it is not surprising that such an idea of inevitable decline in Theravāda led to an aggressive conservatism directed at the preservation of the teachings of the Buddha for as long as possible in their “original” form. Within this sort of framework, change of any kind was perceived as a change for the worse. One can clearly discern a sort of depression and despair in the *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* which Xuanzang unmistakably conveys to the mind of his readers. He gives examples of the different legends which were widely current when he visited India. These legends are highly suggestive of the attitude of helpless defeatism that

³⁵See for the different interpretations and responses of various traditions, Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991.

³⁶*Vin.*i.12, 19.

³⁷“If women had not been allowed to go forth from the home to the homeless life, then long would have lasted the godly life; for a thousand years. . . . But now . . . since women have gone forth . . . not for long will the godly life last . . . just for five hundred years.” (*A.iv.278.*)

³⁸Kate Blackstone, “Damming the Dhamma: Problems with Bhikkhunis in the Pāli Vinaya,” a paper presented at the *Twelfth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Lausanne, Switzerland, August 1999.

³⁹*D.*iii., nos. 26 and 27 respectively.

had overtaken the Buddhists at that time. He talks about the prophecy of a holy man who left his garment behind saying that the garment would survive as long as Buddhism itself. This garment had already begun to show signs of decline when Xuanzang visited India, thereby indicating the fulfilment of the prophecy at a not too distant future.⁴⁰ Xuanzang also relates the story of a stūpa. According to this story, the Buddha had prophesied that the stūpa would be burnt seven times and seven times would it be rebuilt and then Buddhism would come to an end.⁴¹ When Xuanzang came to India, it had already been burned down four times.⁴² At Bodhagayā, Xuanzang saw the statue of Avalokiteśvara which was destined to sink completely in the ground with the disappearance of Buddhism. He found it sunk up to the chest and estimated that it would be completely buried in about 150 to 200 years. Again, amidst the bustle and grandeur of Nālandā, Xuanzang was haunted by a prophetic dream. He foresaw the evil days that would follow the death of king Harṣavardhana, when a conflagration would devastate the celebrated centre of Buddhism and the humming halls of Nālandā would be deserted.⁴³ Thus, the Buddhists themselves believed that they were living in the valley of decline and were in fear of an approaching cataclysm. It may be interesting to see if such a mind-set played any role in the decline of Buddhism in India as no effort was made by the Buddhist saṃgha to build a mass-base for itself.

Perhaps the key to the decline of Buddhism in India lies in its nature as it originated in the fifth century BCE. Emergence of urban centres, well-defined trade routes, coinage, and trade and commerce in the days of the Buddha helped create a new and powerful class of merchant-bankers like Anāthapiṇḍika of

⁴⁰*Xiyu Ji*.39.

⁴¹*Xiyu Ji*.74.

⁴²*Ibid*.

⁴³*Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911: 155.

Sāvattthī, one of Buddhism's greatest patrons.⁴⁴ Some scholars have hinted at bourgeoisification of Buddhism in its very origins as it was "a product of the time of urban development, of urban kingship and the city nobles."⁴⁵ D.K. Chakrabarti has pointed to two important aspects of early historic urban centres.⁴⁶ First, excavations at most of the urban centres have yielded art-objects in varying quantities. The donative records also show the city-dwellers contributing to the making of the contemporary Buddhist stūpas which in their engraved scenes reflect adequately the art-tradition of the period which was clearly of urban orientation. This urban element remained a constant, distinct factor of the art-tradition even during the later phase of urbanization. Secondly, most of the early historic urban centres were religious centres in one form or another where religious complexes like stūpas and monasteries have been found either inside or in the vicinity. Buddhism appears to be closely linked with the urban centres and urban occupational groups like merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans. The bodhisatta of at least forty-six Jātaka stories is a merchant, banker, financier, caravan leader, mariner, treasurer, or an artisan.⁴⁷ The location of important Buddhist complexes within easy reach of the urban centres or along the trade-routes frequented by city-merchants amply substantiates this. The urban character of Buddhism is also reflected in the background of the different men and women mentioned in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*, nearly ninety-four percent of whom came from

⁴⁴Anāthapiṇḍika is viewed as a saint in various Buddhist traditions. See, for an interesting study of the close link between patterns of dynamic Buddhist mobility and trans-regional trade networks, Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*, Leiden: K. Brill, 2011.

⁴⁵M. Weber, *The Religion of India*, ed. and trans. H.H. Garth and D. Martindale, Glencoe and Illinois: The Free Press, 1958 (original German edition, Tübingen, 1920): 204.

⁴⁶D.K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995: 260–261.

⁴⁷K.T.S. Sarao, *Origin and Nature of Ancient Indian Buddhism*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1989: App. 4.

urban places.⁴⁸ Buddhism “as a whole . . . was the product not of the underprivileged but of the very positively privileged strata”⁴⁹ which depended on cities and their rich inhabitants in a variety of ways.⁵⁰ In other words, urbanization created Buddhism and was certainly vital for its early popularity and material support. A decline of that urbanization in later days sapped some of the socially vital foundations of the Buddhist movement.⁵¹

Textual sources indicate that by the end of the Kuṣāṇa rule, Buddhism had become localized in fixed and well-endowed *vihāras*, drawing lay mercantile support. Epigraphical sources also carry this impression home and the names of donors to Buddhist establishments prove the solid support of guild leaders, many of whom were not necessarily followers of the Buddha. But with the decline of urbanization, Buddhist *vihāras* seem to have fallen on bad days. A majority of them were abandoned and some survived either through land endowments or on the periphery of the few surviving urban settlements. Though some Brāhmaṇical-Hindu kings may have destroyed a few *vihāras* here and there, their actions do not appear to have been the equivalent of a lethal blow. In fact, the talk of decline as a result of the persecution by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu kings such as Puṣyamitra Śuṅga appears to be more of a myth than reality. Similarly, growth of moral corruption and degeneracy in the Buddhist saṃgha does not appear to have been responsible for the decline as corrupt practices were as widely prevalent in other contemporary faiths as in Buddhism. Though assimilative efforts and conscious work to sabotage institutional Buddhism by the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas definitely merits consideration, they were not openly hostile to Buddhism. Buddhist-brāhmaṇas

⁴⁸Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹Weber, op. cit., 227.

⁵⁰K.T.S. Sarao, “Buddhism and Marxism on Liberty and Equality,” *Buddhist Studies*, Journal of the Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, vol. XI, March 1987: 67–76.

⁵¹B.G. Gokhale, “Early Buddhism and the Urban Revolution,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 5(2), 1982: 19.

may have actually posed more danger to Buddhism through their presence as monks within the saṃgha by working as a corrosive to the unique and independent identity of Buddhism vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Moreover, Aśoka's powerful propaganda of his own brand of dhamma, from which unique features of the Buddha's teachings were missing, may have contributed greatly in secularising Buddhism and further diluting its identity. Furious anti-Buddhist statements by some of the rogue saints of the Bhakti movement in south India appear to be quite an exception. Brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance under the guidance of these saints and shift of political patronage in favour of Viṣṇu and Śiva in place of the Buddha, may have laid bare the inherent vulnerability of Buddhism.

After the decline of urbanization and the onset of feudalism, the surviving Buddhist *vihāras* became owners of property in various forms. As a result, they were able not only to attain self-sufficiency but also managed to exploit with good amount of success their niche for extending power and influence in their respective localities through the ownership of land, villages, pasturage, cattle, etc.⁵² However, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples seem to have got the upper hand with patronage of the chiefs and the kings shifting in their favour as Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, already the more vital tradition at the popular level, began to enjoy increasing court patronage at the expense of the Buddhist institutions. In the end, these *vihāras*, having fulfilled their economic as well as religious functions, disappeared.⁵³ By the time the Turks arrived in the heartland of Buddhism, Buddhism had become completely enervated and its decline a fait accompli.

⁵²P. Niyogi, "Organisation of Buddhist Monasteries in Ancient Bengal and Bihar," *Journal of Indian History*, LI (3), 1973: 539.

⁵³D.D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962: 100.

2

History of the Decline of Buddhism in India

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the background to the decline of Buddhism in India, it may be helpful to examine the history of decline in different regions of the Indian subcontinent. However, as the source material is woefully inadequate, only a rough outline can be built. But in this context, Xuanzang's description of the condition of Buddhism in India during the first-half of the seventh century is of great value. This is so for three reasons. First, considering the paucity of information on the subject, Xuanzang's description of the condition of Buddhism in different regions of the Indian subcontinent is quite unique in terms of its details and objectivity. Even though the numbers given by him are rounded off and can only be taken as approximate, yet their usefulness cannot be ignored. Second, Xuanzang's visit to India took place at a time when Buddhism found itself clearly on the crossroads and after reading the *Xiyu Ji* one is left with no doubt as to where it was headed. Third, the *Xiyu Ji* pre-emptes the communal view that proposes that Islam was responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India. Xuanzang mentions at least seventy-one countries in the territory covered by pre-1947 India. As shown in the different tables below (pp. 17–19), 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 abandoned and derelict monasteries. This indicates that 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 comprehensively declined or was in a strong position, both were evenly spread out in the whole of Indian subcontinent.

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM WAS STILL IN A STRONG POSITION AT
XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Uḍḍiyāna	1,400 (mostly ruined)	< 18,000	> 10	—
Balūra	many hundred	many thousand	—	—
Cīnabhukti	10	—	8	—
Jālamdhara	> 50	> 2,000	3	> 500
Kulūta	> 20	> 1,000	15	—
Mathurā	> 20	> 2,000	5	—
Ahicchatra	> 10	> 1,000	9	> 300
Kanyākubja	> 100	10,000	> 200	many thousand
Ayodhyā	> 100	> 3,000	10	few
Uḍa	> 100	> 10,000	50	—
Kośāla	> 100	< 10,000	> 70	—
Draviḍa	> 100	> 10,000	> 80	—
Sindhu	many hundred	> 10,000	> 30	—

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM WAS STILL HOLDING GROUND AT
XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Kaśmīra	> 100	> 5,000	—	—
Kajāṅgala	6 or 7	> 3,000	10	—
Magadha	> 50	> 10,000	many tens	truly numerous
Bharukacchapa	> 10	> 300	> 10	—
Mālava	many hundred	> 20,000	many hundred	really numerous
Zhizhituo	many tens	few	> 10	> 1,000

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM WAS LOSING GROUND AT XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Rājapura	10	few	1	many
Parvata	> 10	> 1,000	20	—
Brahmaputra	5	few	> 10	—
Īraṇaparvata	> 10	> 4,000	> 20	—
Suratṭha	> 50	> 3,000	> 100	—
Konkanapura	> 100	> 10,000	many hundred	—
Andhra	> 20	> 3,000	> 30	numerous

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM WAS CLEARLY LOSING GROUND AT
XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Matipura	> 10	> 800	> 50	—
Kapitha	4	> 1,000	10	—
Ayamukha	5	> 1,000	> 10	—
Viṣaka	> 20	> 3,000	> 50	great many
Garjanapati	> 10	< 1,000	20	—
Puṇḍravardhana	> 20	> 3,000	100	—
Samataṭa	> 30	> 2,000	100	—
Tāmraliptī	> 10	> 1,000	> 50	—
Karṇasuvarṇa	> 10	> 2,000	> 50	quite numerous
Dhānakaṭaka	> 10	> 1,000	> 100	innumerable
Mahārāṣṭra	> 100	> 5,000	hundreds	quite numerous
Kiṭa	> 10	> 1,000	scores	numerous
Valabhi	> 100	> 6,000	many hundred	quite numerous
Ānandapura	> 10	< 1,000	scores	—
Ujjayani	3 to 5	> 3,000	many tens	—

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM HAD COMPREHENSIVELY DECLINED AT
XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Gandhāra	ruined	—	< 100	various
Takṣaśilā	ruined	few	—	—
Siṃhapura	ruined	—	—	—
Paṇṇotsa	ruined	few	—	—

COUNTRIES WHERE BUDDHISM WAS STILL HOLDING GROUND AT
XUANZANG'S TIME

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Monasteries</i>	<i>Monks</i>	<i>Deva-temples</i>	<i>Heretics</i>
Mūlasthānapura	ruined	few	8	
Śatadru	ruined	few	—	—
Pāriyātra	ruined	few	> 10	> 1000
Kapilavastu	ruined	> 3,000	2	— (deserted country)
Rāmagrāma	—	—	—	— (deserted country)
Kuśīnagara	—	—	—	— (deserted country)
Śrāvastī	ruined	few	100	many
Campā	ruined	> 200	> 20	—
Coḷa	ruined	few	many tens	many
Malakūṭa	very few	few	many hundred	many
Maheśvarapura	—	—	many tens	— (no Buddhism)
Kauśāmbī	ruined	> 300	> 50	numerous
Gūrjara	1	> 100	many tens	—
Uraśā	1	few	—	—
Prayāga	2	few	many hundred	a large number
Goviśāṇa	2	> 100	> 30	—
Vilaśāṇa	2	300	5	—
Sthāneśvara	3	> 700	> 100	numerous
Vaiśālī	3 to 5	few	many tens	—
Śrughana	5	> 1,000	> 100	numerous
Vr̥ji	> 10	< 1,000	many tens	great number (few followers of Buddhism)
Kaliṅga	> 10	> 500	> 100	numerous (few followers of Buddhism)
Ṭakka	10	—	many hundred	—
Bārāṇasī	> 30	> 3,000	> 100	> 10,000 (few followers of Buddhism)
Kāmarūpa	none	none	many hundred	several myriads
Koṅgoda	—	—	> 100	> 10,000 (no Buddhism)

a. *The Madhyadeśa*

The term *Madhyadeśa* (Pāli: *Majjhimadesa*) is used as an important geographical entity in our literary source material. This region, the *karmabhūmi* of the Buddha and cradle of Buddhism, consisted of fourteen of the sixteen *mahājanapadas* (except Kamboja and Gandhāra) during his time. In the present context, we shall take it to roughly represent the territory covered by the present day Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, eastern Haryana, northern Madhya Pradesh, northern Chhattisgarh, northeastern Rajasthan, and the terai region of Nepal.

Generally, the archaeological remains in Haryana, Delhi, and western Uttar Pradesh show either desertion of urban centres after the Kuṣāṇa period or a sharp decline in urbanization in the Gupta period followed by a break in occupation.¹ In eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the disintegration of urbanization in the Gupta phase is almost unprecedented.² In central India urbanization became a spent force by the end of the fourth century CE.³ On the whole, archaeological and literary evidence put together suggests that in the Madhyadeśa, urban settlements with Buddhist connections at Kurukṣetra (Raja-Karan-ka-Qila), Hastināpura, Sāketa/Ayojjhā (Ayodhya), Verañjā (Atranjikhhera), Mathurā, Kapilavastu (Piprahwa-Ganwaria), Rājagṛha (Rajgir), Ukkaveḷā (Sonpur), Bairāt (Bairatnagar), declined in the pre-Gupta period;⁴ Indraprastha (Delhi), Kuśīnagara (Kasia), Sahajāti (Bhita), Macchikāsaṇḍa (Masaon-Dih), Vaiśālī, Pāṭaliputra (Kumrahar, Patna), Śrāvastī (Saheth-Maheth), Vidiṣā (Besnagar), and Sāñcī,

¹R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India c.300–c.1000*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987: 27.

²Ibid., 58.

³Ibid., 83.

⁴*JAR*, 1970–1971: 16; 1971–1972: 23–24; 1972–1973: 12; K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation as Reflected in the Pāli Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas*, Delhi: Vidyanidhi, 1990: 135–136, 142, 147, 149; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 21, 146; B.P. Sinha and B.S. Varma, *Sonpur Excavations: 1956 and 1959–62*, Patna: The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1977: 10–11; *ASIR*, 1935–1936: 86.

declined from the Gupta period onwards;⁵ and Erakaccha (Eran), Vārāṇasī (Rajghat), and Campā (Champanagar) declined during the post-Gupta period.⁶ There is also evidence of derelict and abandoned monasteries in the excavation records of some of these urban settlements indicating that Buddhism suffered its first setback at least in some parts of the Madhyadeśa during the post-Kuṣāṇa period. When during the Gupta period, Faxian (CE 399–414) visited India, he witnessed Buddhism in decline in some parts of the Madhyadeśa. Though the Gupta kings, who were strong supporters of Viṣṇu and Śiva, provided support to Buddhist institutions as well, change in the material milieu had taken place to the extent that traditional support-base of Buddhism was slowly diminishing. By the time of Xuanzang (CE 629–645) Buddhism had become somewhat of a spent force in most parts of the Madhyadeśa.

Talking about the different regions of the Madhyadeśa, Xuanzang mentions that though people esteemed learning and revered Buddhism in the country of Magadha,⁷ it had already begun to decline here. According to him, though in the whole of Magadha there were more than fifty *viḥāras* with over ten thousand monks, there were several tens of deva-temples and “truly numerous heretics.”⁸ Before him, Faxian had seen two *viḥāras*, one Mahāyāna and one Hīnayāna, with six or seven hundred monks in Pāṭaliputra city.⁹ However, Xuanzang saw several hundred *viḥāras* and stūpas lying in ruins here, with only two or three *viḥāras* remaining intact.¹⁰ The famous Kukkuṭārāma

⁵ASIR, 1904–1905: 45; IAR, 1965–1966: 93–94; 1974–1975: 47; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 66, 144; K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 136, 148, 150–151, 158, 160–161.

⁶IAR, 1960–1961: 18; B.P. Singh, *Life in Ancient Varanasi: An Account Based on Archaeological Evidence*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1985: 5, 62; K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanization*, 131–133.

⁷*Xiyu Ji*. 221.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Faxian. 105.

¹⁰Xuanzang. 87.

of Pāṭaliputra had already been “in ruins for a long time, and only the foundations . . . (were) . . . still in existence.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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 height.¹³ Xuanzang found all the several hundred *viḥāras* in ruins in the country of Vaiśālī except three to five which housed few monks.¹⁴ The wall of the city of Vaiśālī had badly collapsed while the palace-city had few inhabitants inside.¹⁵ When Faxian visited, all within the city of Gayā had become “desolate and desert”¹⁶ and only three *viḥāras* with priests remained at Bodhagayā.¹⁷ When Xuanzang arrived, there was just one *viḥāra* at Bodhagayā with fewer than one thousand monks.¹⁸ When Xuanzang visited the country of Campā, he saw over twenty deva-temples and several scores of derelict *viḥāras* with just over two hundred monks.¹⁹ The capital city of the country of Kajaṅgala (Kāñkjol, Bihar) lay in ruins and the six or seven *viḥāras* had over three hundred monks, but the number of deva-temples had gone up to ten.²⁰ Whereas there were more than twenty deva-temples in Īraṇaparvata/Hiraṇyaparvata (Mungher), the number of *viḥāras* was just over ten with over four thousand monks in them.²¹

¹¹*Xiyu Ji*.230.

¹²*Ibid.*, 231.

¹³*Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁶*Faxian*.120.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁸*Xiyu Ji*.258.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 297.

²⁰*Xiyu Ji*.298.

²¹*Ibid.*, 293.

Talking of Kapilavastu, Faxian says that “there [wa]s neither king nor people; it [wa]s like a great desert. There [wa]s simply a congregation of priests and about ten families of lay people.”²² When Xuanzang visited, the country of Kapilavastu had been deserted for a long time and had a sparse population.²³ A few inhabitants and *vihāras* still existed at Kuśinagara at Faxian’s time²⁴ but Xuanzang found not only the city in ruins with very few inhabitants but also other deserted towns and villages in the country of Kuśinagara.²⁵ In Mathurā, whereas Faxian saw twenty *vihāras* with three thousand monks,²⁶ the number of monks had gone down to a little over two thousand at Xuanzang’s time.²⁷ Faxian saw only few inhabitants in Śrāvastī.²⁸ Xuanzang saw the city of Śrāvastī in desolation and of the several hundred *vihāras* in the country of Śrāvastī, most were dilapidated including the famous Jetavana *vihāra*.²⁹ Faxian saw Kauśāmbī’s Ghoṣitārāma in ruins.³⁰ Xuanzang found not only the Ghoṣitārāma in ruins³¹ but also all the other about ten *vihāras* in the country of Kauśāmbī in a dilapidated and deserted condition.³² The country of Prayāga (Allahabad) had just two *vihāras* with few monks at Xuanzang’s time whereas deva-temples amounted to several hundreds with a large number of heretics.³³ At Faxian’s time Sāranātha had two *vihāras* with monks³⁴ and at Xuanzang’s time only one *vihāra* was left with one thousand five hundred monks.³⁵ At Xuanzang’s

²²*Faxian*.85.

²³*Xiyu Ji*.173.

²⁴*Faxian*.94.

²⁵*Xiyu Ji*.185.

²⁶*Faxian*.53.

²⁷*Xiyu Ji*.122.

²⁸*Faxian*.73.

²⁹*Xiyu Ji*.165–166.

³⁰*Faxian*.138.

³¹*Xiyu Ji*.136.

³²*Ibid.*, 159.

³³*Ibid.*, 156.

³⁴*Faxian*.137.

³⁵*Xuanzang*.85.

time, 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.³⁶ According to Xuanzang, only few people venerated the Buddha-dharma in Vārāṇasī, majority of the people believing in heretical theories.³⁷ In the country of Rāmagrāma, towns and villages were in ruins and the population was sparse, there being just one *vihāra* with a few monks under the management of a śrāmaṇera.³⁸ In the country of Vṛji (the Vajjian confederacy which at the Buddha's time included the Śākya state), there were over ten Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna *vihāras* with less than one thousand monks at Xuanzang's time, but only few people followed Buddhism there while there were several tens of deva-temples and majority of the people venerated the heretics.³⁹

At Pāriyātra (Bairāt, Rajasthan), Xuanzang saw eight Buddhist *vihāras* in an extremely ruinous condition with few monks whereas the number of deva-temples was over ten with more than one thousand devotees.⁴⁰ At Xuanzang's time, the country of Sthāneśvara (Thanesar, Haryana) had just three *vihāras* with seven hundred monks whereas the number of deva-temples was over one hundred with numerous heretics.⁴¹ When Xuanzang came, Śrughana (Sugh, Jagadhari) had just five *vihāras* with over one thousand monks and there were over one hundred deva-temples with numerous heretics.⁴² When Faxian visited, he saw about 1600 or 1700 monks and nuns in the country of Saṃkāśya (Sankisa),⁴³ but at Xuanzang's time there were four *vihāras* with over one thousand monks.⁴⁴ Zhizhituo/Jajhoti

³⁶*Xiyu Ji*.195. But the number of monks was 2,000 according to *Xuanzang*.85.

³⁷*Xiyu Ji*.195.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 181.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 124.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 126–127.

⁴³*Faxian*.67, 69.

⁴⁴*Xiyu Ji*.136.

(Jejabhukti, Jhansi) had several tens of *vihāras* but only a few monks in them and there were over ten deva-temples.⁴⁵ Apart from the several tens of ruined *vihāras* in Ujjayanī (Ujjain), Xuanzang saw only three to five intact *vihāras* with over three hundred monks.⁴⁶ However, Buddhism appears to have gained some foothold in Kanyākubja (Kannauj). There were only two *vihāras* here at Faxian's time⁴⁷ and later Songyun (CE 518–521) had found no monks or nuns there,⁴⁸ but Xuanzang found more than one hundred *vihāras* with over ten thousand monks.⁴⁹ When Yijing (CE 676–685) visited Nālandā, he found Buddhism in a very prosperous condition here, with the Nālandā Mahāvihāra having more than 3,000 monks and possessing lands consisting of over 200 villages.⁵⁰

Hye Ch'o (Chinese: Hui Zhao), the Korean traveller who visited India during c. CE 724–727, i.e., about one hundred years after Xuanzang, found Sāranātha and the places around it already burnt.⁵¹ It appears that the Hūṇas had burnt some of the Buddhist monuments during the fifth and sixth centuries of the Common Era and he may have been referring to them. But he saw *vihāras* with monks at Saṃkāśya and Śrāvastī.⁵² However, when Oukong (CE 751–790) came to India, Buddhism was extinct at Saṃkāśya.⁵³ He also could not find anything at Vaiśālī other than the ruins of the *vihāra* of Vimalakīrti.⁵⁴ During the reign of the Pāla king Dharmapāla (c. CE 770–810), a group of Saindhava *śrāvakas* (probably Saṃmitīya Buddhist monks from Sind) had travelled to the Mahābodhi Temple at Bodhagayā and burnt the Tantric scriptures that they found there, and also destroyed the temple's

⁴⁵*Xiyu Ji*.345.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 344.

⁴⁷*Faxian*.70.

⁴⁸*Songyun*.379–395.

⁴⁹*Xuanzang*.72.

⁵⁰*Yijing*.65.

⁵¹*Hye Ch'o*.40.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 42.

⁵³*Oukong*.351.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 355.

silver image of Hevajra.⁵⁵ This may indicate that the suggestion that the different Buddhist sects always lived in harmony with each other may not necessarily be true and they may have acted at variance and held each other in contempt.

Some *vihāras* in Madhyadeśa continued to receive assistance from various quarters and stayed functional into the early medieval period. For instance, during the reign of Rāmapāla (CE 1072–1126), Kyanzittha, the ruler of Bagan (Myanmar), is said to have sent a considerable amount of jewels by ship to Magadha for the purpose of restoring the Buddhist shrines in Bodhagayā.⁵⁶ However, one interesting development that may be witnessed in the source material relating to early medieval period is that the patrons of Buddhism by this time had begun to view it as if it were a sect of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Thus, for instance, the Gāhaḍavāla king Jayaccandradeva (CE 1170–1194), who ruled from Kāśī and was the disciple of a Buddhist monk called Śrīmitra,⁵⁷ is mentioned in a Kamauli plate of Vijayacandra as being initiated “as a worshipper of the god Kṛṣṇa” on the day of his installation as *yuvarāja*.⁵⁸ The significant epithet *paramamāheśvara* adopted by the Gāhaḍavāla kings attests to their devotion of Śiva⁵⁹ and the seals attached to their copper-plate grants have figures of Garuḍa, and a conch-shell.⁶⁰ The utter intertwining that came to prevail between Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Śaivism is further illustrated by the excavation records from Sirpur near Raipur in Chhattisgarh. Here, inside

⁵⁵*Tāranātha*.279.

⁵⁶J. Stargardt, “Burma’s Economic and Diplomatic Relations with India and China from Early Medieval Sources,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 14, no. 1, 1971: 57; H.P. Shastri, “The Nālandā Copper-Plate of Devapāladeva,” *EI*.XVII, 1924: 311–317.

⁵⁷R.L. Mitra, “A Buddhist Inscription from Bodh-gaya of the Reign of Jayaccandradeva, V.S. 124X,” *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1880: 78–80.

⁵⁸*EI*.IV.1896–97: 119.

⁵⁹See, for instance, *EI*.XI.1911–12: 23.

⁶⁰*JASB*.XLII, pt. 1: 314.

the same religious complex, images of the Buddha, Kubera, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Tārā can be seen alongside Śiva-Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa, Durgāmahiṣāsūramardinī, Gaṅgā, and Viṣṇu in his several incarnations.⁶¹

After the overthrow of the Pāla dynasty, the Karnata dynasty (CE 1097–1324) came to power in the Mithilā region (Bihar, north of the Gaṅgā) and towards the end of the twelfth century, Magadha (Bihar, south of the Gaṅgā) came under the sway of the Senas. Despite being Śaivites, the Mithilā rulers continued to patronise Buddhism in the Pāla tradition. As the Mithilā rulers offered strong resistance against the Turuṣkas, the latter focussed their attacks on Magadha in order to further advance towards Bengal. At the citadel-like *mahāvihāras* of Odantapurī and Vikramaśilā, which lay directly in the path of advance of the Turuṣkas, the Sena king established defensive garrisons. Mistaking them for forts, the Turuṣkas destroyed them completely during the last decade of the twelfth century. Considering that Odantapurī was located strategically, the Turuṣka military governors also converted it into a cantonment. They did not, however, demolish every Buddhist institution that fell within their sphere of control. Dharmasvāmin found the Nālandā Mahāvihāra in CE 1235, though mostly deserted and extensively plundered and damaged, yet functioning with seventy students.⁶² For the Turuṣkas to destroy it completely would have required a separate expedition, and this was apparently not their main objective. They focussed on those *vihāras* “that lay on their direct line of advance and which were fortified in the manner of defensive forts.”⁶³ The Turuṣka (Ghurid) campaign in Bihar and beyond under the leadership of Bakhtiyar Khalji was “basically a drive to conquer territory” and “was more likely fanned by prospects

⁶¹See S.L. Katare, “Excavations at Sirpur,” *IHQ*, vol. XXXV, no. 1, 1959: 1–8.

⁶²*Dharma*. 95.

⁶³Alexander Berzin, http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/n.html_1531328490.html. (accessed 22 April 2008).

of booty and power, rather than converts.”⁶⁴ Further, it may be noted that the Turuṣkas had appointed their military commanders as the governors of the conquered regions and ordered them to raise revenues locally for their upkeep. Thus, it would have been against their personal interest to destroy everything that fell in their territories. They followed the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ghaznavid patterns of conquest, viz., looting and inflicting heavy damage on major religious edifices in the initial raids of their takeover and then, once in power, granting *ahl-al-kitāb* (scriptuaries) or *ahl-al-dhimma* (protected subjects) status to their non-Muslim subjects and collecting *jizyah* (poll tax) from them.⁶⁵ Further, it is important to note that as the Buddhist monastic establishments at Odantapurī, Vikramaśilā, and Nālandā had become detached from the laity and having become dependent upon the patronage of local royal authorities, they had become identified with them.⁶⁶ As pointed out by Eaton, acts of temple desecration were nearly invariably carried out by military officers or ruling authorities and they typically occurred on the cutting edge of a moving military frontier.⁶⁷ The Tibetan text *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang* mentions that the temples and *viḥāras* destroyed by the Turuṣkas were repaired once again by a sage named Mudita Bhadra.⁶⁸ Later, one Kukkuṭasiddha, a minister of a king of Magadha, is said to have built a Buddhist temple at Nālandā.⁶⁹ However, according to a tradition mentioned in *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*, the buildings at Nālandā were burnt to ashes by a foolish act of two mendicants. Ridiculed by their young colleagues, these mendicants are said to have propitiated the Sun for twelve years, performed a sacrifice, and then thrown

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶See R.M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000: 108.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸See, S.C. Vidyābhūṣaṇa, *History of the Medieval School of Indian Logic*, repr., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1977: 149.

⁶⁹Ibid.

living embers on the stately structures, thus, reducing them to ashes.⁷⁰ The tradition about the final annihilation of Nālandā by fire may after all be true as during the excavations at the Nālandā-site, heaps of ash and charcoal were unearthed even on the topmost levels after the removal of layers of earth which covered up various sites.⁷¹

It appears that during and as a result of the Turuṣka attacks, some of the monks may have migrated to Southeast Asia (through Burma), Tibet, Nepal, Orissa, and south India.⁷² In any case, some of the *vihāras* are still known to have continued to maintain a precarious existence. For instance, Dharmasvāmin found the Sri Lankan Mahābodhi Vihāra at Vajrāsana (Bodhagayā) functioning with 300 Sri Lankan monks.⁷³ As a matter of fact, one can see stray examples here and there of the vestiges of Buddhism in the Madhyadeśa during the later medieval and early modern period of Indian history. Thus, the Patna Museum Inscription of king Jayasena, son of Buddhasena, dated in the year CE 1283, records the gift of a village in Gayā for the residence of a Sri Lankan monk.⁷⁴ Similarly, the Buddhist inscription of vs 1276 (CE 1219) found at Śrāvastī mentions the establishment of a convent by Vidyādhara, a councillor of the king of Gādhipura.⁷⁵ The Aśoka stūpa at Bodhagayā, which had been repaired twice by kings of Burma, is said to have received their special attention in CE 1298.⁷⁶ At that date, the Burmese king Sinbyuthikhin deputed his preceptor Sirīdhammarājaguru to carry out the repairs *de novo*.

⁷⁰*Pagsamjonzang*, by Sumpakhanpoyeṇpaljor (*sum-pamkhan-poye-ṣesdpal "byor*), edited with a list of contents and analytical index in English by Sarat Chandra Das, pt. I: *History of the Rise, Progress and Downfall of Buddhism in India*, Calcutta: Presidency Jail Press, 1908: Index I.i.

⁷¹See *ARASI*, 1921–1922: 20.

⁷²See R. Sāṅkṛtyāyana in *JBORS*, XXIII, pt. I, 1937: 18.

⁷³*Dharma*. 73.

⁷⁴*IA*. XLV, 1919: 43.

⁷⁵*IA*. XVII, 1888: 61.

⁷⁶T.S. Ko, "Burmese Inscription of Bodh-Gaya," *EI*. XI, 1911–1912: 118–120.

On this occasion, lands, slaves, and cattle were purchased and dedicated to provide for the daily offering during the religious services which must have been continuing there. Then, there are references in Chinese and Korean sources to an Indian monk called Dhyānabhadra (Zhi Kong) who was from the Madhyadeśa and had received his education at Nālandā. He went to Korea via Nepal, Tibet, and China in CE 1326.⁷⁷ Further, there is at the University of Cambridge a manuscript of the Kālacakra, copied by a Kāyastha of Magadha for two monks in the year CE 1446.⁷⁸ The Panchen Lama sent two missions to Bodhagayā in 1771–1772 and 1773–1774 when his envoy, Lobzang Tsering, opened friendly relations with Chait Singh, the ruler of Vārāṇasī, encouraging the latter to send envoys to Tashilhunpo in return. George Bogle also found an emissary from Chait Singh in Tashilhunpo, when he went there.⁷⁹ The Panchen Lama is known to have again sent an embassy to Bodhagayā in 1777.⁸⁰

b. Orissa, Bengal, and Assam

As urbanization declined in Orissa and Bengal by about CE 300,⁸¹ at least some of the Buddhist monasteries must have begun to lose financial support from about the beginning of the fourth century CE. When Xuanzang visited Uḍa (Orissa), he saw fifty

⁷⁷P.C. Bagchi, *India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations*, rev. and ed. H.P. Ray, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008: 211. Heo Hseung-sik, “The Last Light of Nālandā Buddhism Transmitted to Medieval Korea (The Life and Activities of Dhyānabhadra Śūnyadiya),” paper presented at the *International Conference on Korea in Search of a New Global Role: Current Concerns and Past Moorings*, Delhi University, India, 10–11 February 2006.

⁷⁸J.P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, London: British Library, 1982: 62.

⁷⁹L. Petech, “The Missions of Bogle and Turner according to the Tibetan Texts,” *T’oung Pao*, XXXIX, 1949: 335–338.

⁸⁰C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co., 1921: 13.

⁸¹*IAR*, 1954–1955: 20; 1973–1974: 33; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 58.

deva-temples and more than one hundred *vihāras* with over ten thousand monks in them.⁸² Kalinga (SW of Ganjam, Orissa), another kingdom in the neighbourhood of Uḍa, had 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.⁸³ In Koṅgoda (Ganjam) country, where Xuanzang saw over one hundred deva-temples with over ten thousand adherents, people did not believe in Buddhism.⁸⁴ Thus, of the three countries in the Orissa region at Xuanzang's time, Buddhism had almost completely disappeared in two of them. Indrabhūti, the king of Sambala (Sambalpur, northwestern Orissa), in his Vajrayāna Tantric work *Jñānasiddhi* of the eighth century CE refers to Jagannātha as the Buddha.⁸⁵ The Bhaumakaras of Orissa (c. CE 736–950) followed the Pāla lead in adopting Buddhist epithets while supporting a variety of religious institutions. Buddhism definitely appears to have hit the floor in most parts of Orissa from about the Somavaṃśī period (eighth–ninth centuries CE), with some Buddhist *siddhas* staying active in remote areas.⁸⁶ However, after the Turuṣka attacks of Vikramaśilā and Odantapurī, some of the Buddhist monks from these places appear to have moved into Orissa. Here, it seems, they supplemented the undercurrents of Buddhism which survived in Orissa well into the present times. However, as described by Vasu, the kind of Buddhism that survived within Buddhism had become “a kind of crypto-Buddhism,” a synthesis of Tantra, Buddhism, and Vaiṣṇava themes.⁸⁷ Clearly, Buddhistic elements had been overwhelmed by Brāhmaṇic

⁸²*Xiyu Ji*.305.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 307.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 306.

⁸⁵C.B. Patel, “Jagannath: The Eclectic Lord of the Universe,” *Orissa Review*, June–July 2007: 39.

⁸⁶S.S. Tripathy, *Buddhism and Other Religious Cults of South-East India*, Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1988: 241.

⁸⁷N.N. Basu, “Modern Buddhism and Its Followers in Orissa,” *Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj*, vol. 1, 1982: 12.

ideas.⁸⁸ For instance, in the sixteenth century, Achūtānanda Das in his *Śūnya Saṃhitā* has been described as wandering in the forest in search of the Lord, who tells him to “take refuge in the Buddha, in Mother Ādiśakti as the first primordial energy (i.e., Dharma) and in the Saṃgha... know that the Buddha is none else but Brahman himself.”⁸⁹ As a result of the persecution by Rājā Pratāparudra of Utkala (sixteenth century), Buddhism suffered some set back and some of the Buddhists had to retreat into remote areas of Orissa, yet, as pointed out above, Buddhism was never completely wiped out from Orissa.⁹⁰ Mahima Dharma, a derivative of Buddhism, survived in Orissa at least until the eighteenth century. As per the Census of 1901, not only that 834 persons in Orissa declared Buddhism to be their faith, but also a caste called Sarāk (Śrāvaka), with obvious Buddhist connections, was in existence in the Baramba State of Orissa.⁹¹

In parts of Eastern Bengal (Bangladesh) Buddhism not only did not play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, but also competed with it for space. This was one of the few fringe regions of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism where Buddhism also won supporters at the grassroots level. However, as pointed out above, Buddhism began to lose support in Bengal from the fourth century CE onwards. When Xuanzang arrived in Bengal, the decline of Buddhism was quite visible. The number of *vihāras* in Tāmralipti (Tamluk, Midnapore) had decreased from twenty-four at the time of Faxian⁹² to just over ten when he visited this place.⁹³ Xuanzang also saw three other *vihāras* in

⁸⁸See Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2003: 212.

⁸⁹Vide N.N. Vasu, *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, Calcutta: Hare Press, 1911: 113.

⁹⁰Vasu, op. cit., 22, 37.

⁹¹G.A. Grierson, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. VI, pt. 1: 321, 427.

⁹²*Faxian*.147. Excavation records indicate that the seaport of Tāmralipti (Tamluk) had declined in the pre-Gupta period (*IAR*, 1954–55: 20; 1973–74: 33).

⁹³*Xiyu Ji*.303. Later, Yijing (CE 676–685) saw only five or six monasteries at Tāmralipti (*Yijing*.xxxiii).

Tāmralipti which belonged to Devadatta's sect and where milk-curd was not taken as food.⁹⁴ According to Xuanzang, Samatāṭa [East Bengal (now Bangladesh)] had more than thirty *vihāras* with over two thousand monks in them.⁹⁵ Puṇḍravardhana (Mahāsthāngarh, Bangladesh) had over twenty *vihāras* with more than three thousand monks.⁹⁶ Xuanzang found Karṇa/Karaṇasuvārṇa (Kansona, Murshidabad) as having over ten *vihāras* with more than two thousand monks.⁹⁷ At the time of his visit, the number of deva-temples in Tāmralipti,⁹⁸ Samatāṭa,⁹⁹ Puṇḍravardhana,¹⁰⁰ and Karaṇasuvārṇa¹⁰¹ were over fifty, one hundred, one hundred, and over fifty respectively, indicating that Buddhism in this region was clearly losing ground to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. According to a tradition, a king named Ādisura in c. CE 700 brought five brāhmaṇas from Kanauj who put an end to the Buddhist influence in Bengal and established Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in the country.¹⁰² Though some Bengali dynasties continued to patronize Buddhist institutions but from the seventh century onwards, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, already the more vital tradition at the popular level, began to enjoy increasingly more court patronage. By the eleventh century even the Pālas, earlier enthusiastic patrons of Buddhism, began to favour the cults of Śiva and Viṣṇu, that had emerged as the most important gods in the newly reformed Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.¹⁰³ The artistic records from the eleventh century onwards prominently display

⁹⁴*Xiyu Ji.* 303.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 302.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 298.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 303.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁰²R.K. DasGupta, *Vedanta in Bengal*, Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 2003: 1.

¹⁰³R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1706*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 13.

such shifting trends.¹⁰⁴ R.M. Eaton has proposed that since Buddhists had left life-cycle rites in the hands of brāhmaṇa priests, Buddhist monastic establishments, so central for the religion's institutional survival, became disconnected from the laity and fatally dependent on court patronage for their support.¹⁰⁵ But this was the case of western Bengal only.

Though Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was clearly having an upper hand, yet a few *mahāvihāras* in Bengal managed to survive into the medieval period. For instance, Dharmasvāmin found Jagaddala in northwestern Bengal flourishing and full of monks in CE 1235.¹⁰⁶ Medieval Bengal presents itself as a potpourri of fast shifting beliefs and social allegiances, religious questing, and social and geographical mobility, making it a world of genuine syncretism of belief and conduct perhaps more multifaceted than elsewhere in the subcontinent.¹⁰⁷ In an environment such as this, Buddhism was undergoing an across-the-board transformation to the extent that its place was being taken by either Paurāṇika Hinduism or a bizarre assortment of different kinds of strange syncretic cults and practices emanating out of Buddhism, Śaivism, and Tantrism. Arrival of Islam made the potpourri even more exotic. The Buddhists and Brāhmaṇical-Hindus made offers of sweets at Muslim holy places, kept copies of the *Qur'ān* to keep away evil spirits and for oracles, and participated in Muslim feasts. The Muslims reciprocated equally remarkably. Out of this brotherhood originated the worship of a common deity, worshipped enthusiastically by Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, namely, *Satya Pīr*. The syncretic form of Hinduism practised by the Bāuls of Bengal has a strong influence of Buddhism.

¹⁰⁴S.L. Huntington, *The "Pala-Sena" Schools of Sculpture*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984: 155, 179, 201.

¹⁰⁵R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 13.

¹⁰⁶Alexander Berzin, http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/n.html_1531328490.html. (accessed 22 April 2008).

¹⁰⁷See M.R. Tarafdar, *Hussain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965: 18–19.

Interestingly, arrival of Islam in Bengal acted to the disadvantage of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in two ways. One, the last vestiges of Buddhism and various Buddhistic cults such as Dharma cult which were slowly getting acculturated into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism were now coming increasingly under the influence of Islam. Two, it put a definite check on the further spread of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism among the indigenous people. Rather than the Buddhists, it was brāhmaṇa priests who, despite taboos about residing in “unclean” lands to the east, had initially seized the initiative in settling amidst Bengal’s indigenous peoples from at least the fifth century CE onwards.¹⁰⁸ Now the Turkish tribes began to attract “a considerable number of indigenous people to swell their ranks.”¹⁰⁹ The changed situation in which Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism met its match in Islam appears to have provided some sort of schadenfreude to the followers of the Dharma cult, a modified form of Mahāyānism. A chapter entitled “The Anger of Nirañjana” (*Nirañjaner Rukhm*) (apparently interpolated in the fourteenth century) in their sacred book *Śūnya Purāṇa* (originally written in the eleventh century by Ramai Pandit) talks of an open tussle between the Muslims and the brāhmaṇas at Jājpur.¹¹⁰ According to it, “In Jajpur and Māldah . . . Vedic Brahmins . . . killed the Sat-Dharmīs (Buddhists) who would not pay them religious fees. . . . The followers of Sat-Dharma trembled with fear at the sight thereof, and prayed to Dharma . . . Dharma who resided in Baikunṭha . . . came to the world as a Muhammadan. On his head he wore a black cap . . . and was called Khodā.”¹¹¹ The *Dharma Gājan* and *Bada Jānāni* songs, interspersed with Islamic ideas, are not only full

¹⁰⁸P. Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta: R.K. Maitra, 1967: 4, 19–20.

¹⁰⁹N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 137.

¹¹⁰Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1976: 172.

¹¹¹D.C. Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1911: 36–37.

of malice and resentment against the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas, but are occasionally downright apoplectic and bellicose.¹¹²

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.¹¹³ Interestingly, the tribal territories of Assam remained terra incognita for Buddhist missionaries. Thus, brāhmaṇas had a free hand in this region. Moreover, as pointed out by Eaton, what perhaps made immigrant brāhmaṇas welcome in the “non-Āryan” society was the agricultural knowledge they made available.¹¹⁴ Brāhmaṇa rituals were accompanied by a practical calendar, fair meteorology, and sound-working knowledge of agricultural technique unknown to primitive tribal groups which never went beyond the digging-stock or hoe.¹¹⁵ Basing her observations on an analysis of inscriptions of the fifth to thirteenth centuries from Assam, N. Lahiri has pointed out that in the process of detribalization and inclusion of the tribes in the traditional Brāhmaṇical-Hindu fold, the brāhmaṇas played an extremely significant role in Assam.¹¹⁶

c. *Sindh, the Punjab, and the Northwest*

An examination of the Islamic and Buddhist literary source material as well as archaeological remains indicate that geographically Buddhism in Sind was largely confined to lower Sind with main concentrations in central Indus delta, west bank

¹¹²“Thou art, O Khodā, I know, superior to all others.

How I wish to hear the *Korān* from Thy lips!

Nirañjana transformed to Āllā will confer blessings.

May the enemies of Āmin fall under the wrath of Kutub.” (B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Elements in Hindu Culture*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917: 228.)

¹¹³*Xiyu Ji*.299.

¹¹⁴R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 10.

¹¹⁵D.D. Kosambi, “The Basis of Ancient Indian History,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, pt. 1, 1955: 36.

¹¹⁶Nayanjot Lahiri, “Landholding and Peasantry in the Brahmaputra Valley c.5th-13th centuries AD,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 33, no. 2, 1990: 166.

of the Indus (the region termed *Budhīyah* at the time of the Arab conquest), and an elongated belt extending along the east bank of the Indus from Mīrpur Khās in the southeast to Sirar, just south of Aror (Roruka, capital of Sovīra).¹¹⁷ Overwhelming majority of these Buddhists belonged to the Saṃmitīya sect of the Hīnayāna school¹¹⁸ who had three hundred and fifty of the total four hundred and fifty Buddhist *vihāras*.¹¹⁹ According to Xuanzang, more than ten thousand monks living in these *vihāras* were “mostly indolent people with a corrupt character.”¹²⁰

Interestingly, Islam was most successful in those regions of the Indian subcontinent where Buddhism had been the strongest. When the Arab invasion of Sind took place, majority of the Buddhists, who were merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans, lived in the urban centres. Brāhmaṇical-Hindus at this time were mostly rural farmers. The Silk Road from China to the Sindī ports was studded with Buddhist *vihāras*. Apart from housing artisans, these *vihāras* provided capital loans and resting facilities to merchants, traders, and artisans who were the chief financial patrons of the *vihāras*. Interregional trade was the mainstay of mercantile Buddhism in Sind which due to the fact of Sind’s advantageous geographic position extended over several important trade routes. However, there are indications that the volume and importance of interregional commerce in the Sindī economy had begun to decline in the period immediately before the Arab conquest. This had far reaching consequences for Buddhism. International events, over which Sindī Buddhists had little or no control, negatively affected the transit trade from Central Asia and China, especially the trade in silk. By the sixth century CE, the Sassanians had begun to control almost single-handedly the maritime as well as land trade routes towards the

¹¹⁷See D.N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989: 7.

¹¹⁸*Xiyu Ji*.345; *Yijing*.14.

¹¹⁹See Maclean, op. cit., 8, 154.

¹²⁰*Xiyu Ji*.345–346.

West. As a consequence of this, the ports of Sind and the Red Sea suffered greatly.¹²¹ When sericulture became introduced in the Byzantine Empire, it “drastically reduced whatever remained of the shrunken foreign commerce of North-Western India in Gupta times.”¹²² This 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 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. While this was happening, feudalization of Sind further reduced the importance of interregional trade to the overall Sindī economy.¹²³ Because of its earlier and broader dependence on transit trade, feudalism in Sind, it seems, was far more panoptic than in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. As Buddhist *vihāras* were dependent upon merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans for support, loss of business by the latter must have affected the former. Thus, it is not surprising that Xuanzang witnessed ruins of *vihāras* in Sind.¹²⁴

In CE 711, al-Ḥajjāj bin-Yusuf Sakafi, the governor of the easternmost provinces of the Umayyad Empire, sent his nephew

¹²¹J. Needham (*Science and Civilization in China: Introductory Orientations*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965: 185–187) and S.K. Maity (*Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period*, 2nd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970: 175–181) have noted the impact of Sassanian commerce on Indian and Chinese economies.

¹²²R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. AD 300–1200*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1965: 68.

¹²³For details on Indian feudalism see R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. AD 300–1200*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1965; Lallanji Gopal, *The Economic Life of Northern India, c. AD 700–1200*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965; R. Coulborn, “Feudalism, Brahmanism and the Intrusion of Islam upon Indian History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10, 1967–1968: 356–374.

¹²⁴*Xiyu Ji*.351.

and son-in-law, General Muhammed bin-Qasim, with twenty thousand troops, to invade Sind both from the sea and by land. The initial target was the coastal city of Daybul, near present-day Karachi. After having defeated king Dāhir, the forces of Muhammad bin-Qasim defeated king Chach of Alor in alliance with the Jats and other Buddhist governors. The Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, along with their political and religious leaders, fought the twenty thousand-strong Arab army. The Buddhists, disillusioned with the anti-mercantile policies of Dāhir and Chach, showed a ready willingness to avoid destruction and “their ethics of non-violence inclined them to welcome the invaders.”¹²⁵

The Arabs brought with them to Sind a precedent for dealing with non-Muslims whereby the Zoroastrians (*majūs*) had been included into the category of *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the book or scriptuaries), irrespective of the fact that they neither had any written scripture nor did they belong to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The scriptuaries, after submitting to the Arabs, were granted the status of *ahl al-dhimma* (protected subjects). Such a status guaranteed a certain amount of Muslim non-interference in religious matters in return for carrying out a number of obligations that went with such a status.¹²⁶ Since Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism had their scriptures, it was not conceptually difficult for the Arabs to extend the Zoroastrian precedent to them as *ahl al-kitāb* and *ahl al-dhimma*.¹²⁷ Under such an arrangement, all

¹²⁵N.F. Gier, “From Mongols to Mughals: Religious Violence in India: 9th–18th Centuries,” paper presented at the *Pacific Northwest Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion*, Gonzaga University, May 2006; *Chachnāmāh*.4.

¹²⁶C. Cahen, “Dhimma,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002: 227–231.

¹²⁷It must be noted that the Arabs were familiar with Buddhism before Islam was taken beyond the Arabian Peninsula. For instance, by the time of Arab invasion of Sind, many Indian communities, especially Jats (Arabic: *Zut*) had settled near Bahrain and present-day Basra. Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, is said to have been once treated by a Jat physician. In fact, it has been suggested by a scholar that the Prophet Dhu’l Kifl (The Man from Kifl), mentioned twice in the *Qur’ān* as patient and good, refers to the Buddha. According to this scholar,

adult males were required to pay a graded *jizyah* (poll tax) in either cash or kind. Though the military policy of the Arabs in Sind was to kill all those who put up resistance (*ahl-i-harb*), those who submitted peacefully were readily granted the status of *dhimmī*. Most of the 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. The Arabs guaranteed the *dhimmī* status by making a legal contract (*‘ahd*) with any city that submitted by treaty (*ṣulh*). As two-thirds of the Sindī towns had submitted peacefully and made treaty agreements, with the consent of Governor al-Ḥajjāj, General bin-Qasim gave them the status of protected subjects. 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. This entitled them to exemption from both the military service and *zakāt* (tax levied on Muslim subjects). The *jizyah* enforced was a graded tax, being heaviest on the elite and lightest on the poor. The *dhimmīs* in Sind were permitted to pray to their own deities and rebuild their temples. Besides, they were allowed to patronize their religious mendicants, celebrate religious festivals (*a’yād*) and rituals (*marāsīm*), and were even allowed to retain up to three per cent of

“Kifl” is the Arabic rendition of “Kapilavastu” and the reference in the *Qur’ān* to the fig tree refers to the Buddha who attained enlightenment at the foot of one (H. A. Qadir, *Buddha the Great: His Life and Philosophy* (Arabic: *Budha al-Akbar Hayatoh wa Falsaftoh*). The *Tarikh-i-Tabari* by al-Tabari, a tenth century reconstruction of the early history of Islam, talks of the presence in Arabia of *ahmaras* (Red-Clad People) from Sind. Three of them, who were undoubtedly saffron-robed Buddhist monks, reportedly explained philosophical teachings to the Arabs towards the beginning of the Islamic era. [This information has been gathered from Alexander Berzin, *The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire*, www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/n.html_1531328490.html#historical_interaction (accessed 17 December 2008).]

the principal of the *jizyah* for the priests or monks. Furthermore, religious mendicants were granted the right to seek donations from householders by going from door to door with a copper bowl.¹²⁸

While proselytization occurred, the social dynamics of Sind were similar to other regions where conversion to Islam was slow and generally came from among the ranks of Buddhists.¹²⁹ Many Buddhist merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans in Sind voluntarily converted to Islam as it made better business sense. “The success of Muslims attracted—even sometimes economically necessitated—conversion.”¹³⁰ It must be noted that at least during the initial phase of the Arab empire, the non-Arabs who had become Muslims in large numbers as *mawālīs* (clients) of an Arab lord, enjoyed an inferior racial and socio-economic status compared to the Arab Muslims. But, of course, these *mawālīs* themselves fared much better (as they paid lower taxes) than the non-Muslim subjects, the *ahl al-dhimmah*. Thus, 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. Although General bin-Qasim welcomed conversion, his primary interest 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 his campaigns including those which had previously failed. The Arab General was able to accomplish his aim not only by means of the poll, land, and trade taxes, but also through the pilgrimage tax that the Buddhists and Hindus had to pay for visiting the shrines of their own religions. Interestingly, Buddhist monks of Sind, like their counterparts in Gandhāra, had the perverse custom

¹²⁸Maclean, op. cit., 43, 49.

¹²⁹R. Scott and Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, May 1, 2004: 290–292.

¹³⁰Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995: 106.

of levying entry-fee on pilgrims for worshipping in their own temples. Thus, the Arabs merely took over the income. For the most part, Arabs did not demolish any further Buddhist or Brāhmanical-Hindu temples in Sind since they generated revenue by attracting pilgrims. 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 Hanafī school of thought which permitted Qasim to treat Brāhmanical-Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainas as *dhimmīs*. Under some Islamic rulers *jizyah* was not required, and even when it was, collection was not consistently enforced. There were later Muslim rulers who were far more orthodox than Qasim, but they nevertheless conceded that Brāhmanical-Hindus, Jainas, and Buddhists be allowed to live as *dhimmīs*. These rulers were restrained by the fact that, Hanafī clerics, barring a very few exceptions, were their chief religious advisors.¹³¹ In any case, it would have been impossible for a Muslim ruler to enforce a stricter version of Islamic law on all the subjects whereby enforcing conversion, killing those who resisted, and then ruling over a bitter and suppressed majority. The very fact that Brāhmanical-Hindus continued to administer their villages and resolve all disputes in accordance with their own law, rationally precluding an absolute rule of *shari‘ah* that an Islamic theocracy would have required. Thus, at the most, Islamic rule could be theocentric, but never theocratic. Brāhmanical-Hindus and Buddhists were not only tolerated, but they were recruited into Qasim’s administration as trusted and dependable civil as well as military officials, a policy that would continue under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire.¹³² The Brāhmanical-Hindu Kaksa, the second most powerful person in Qasim’s government, took precedence in the army over all the nobles and commanders. He was not only in-charge of

¹³¹M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967: 58.

¹³²N.F. Gier, op. cit.

revenue collection and the treasury but also assisted Muhammad bin-Qasim in all of his undertakings.¹³³ Destruction of Buddhist *vihāras* in Sind by the Arabs was a rare and initial event in their occupation. In fact, attacks on places of worship largely took place at the cutting edge of the invasion ordered by victorious generals to punish or deter opposition. Of course, it is always possible for individual participants to have their personal agenda in such events, but as a whole, acts of vandalism against the Buddhist *vihāras* were politically, not religiously, motivated.

After having spent three years in Sind, General bin-Qasim returned to al-Ḥajjāj's court and shortly afterwards the local Brāhmaṇical-Hindu rulers regained control of most of their territories. In CE 724, Arab-led forces under the command of General Junaid recaptured Sind but failed to capture Gujarat and the west Punjab. As Governor of Sind, General Junaid continued the previous Arab policy of collecting the *jizyah* as well as pilgrimage tax from both the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and Buddhists. Although the Hindu Pratihāra rulers of the west Punjab had the resources to expel the Arabs from Sind, yet they shied away from such an action. The Arabs had threatened to demolish the major Brāhmaṇical-Hindu places of worship if the Pratihāras attacked Sind. Taking this fact into consideration the latter decided to maintain status quo indicating that the Arabs regarded the demolition of religious places of the non-Muslims primarily as an act of power politics.

The Arab policies towards Sindī non-Muslims were not necessarily non-discriminatory though. The *dhimmīs* were certainly second-class citizens who were generally perceived by Muslims as following inferior religions. While non-Muslims 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

¹³³H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol. I, London: Trübner, 1867: 203.

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. In sharp contrast to this, those who attended the Friday prayers at mosques were sometimes given monetary rewards. Further, 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 Brāhmaṇical-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. In this way, the Islamic population of Sind began to gradually grow in a non-violent manner.

When the Arabs invaded Sind, they primarily focussed on two-pronged agenda. One, they wanted to preserve the economic infrastructure of the region so that it could be exploited to the maximum extent possible. Two, they wanted to achieve the conquest of Sind with the least number of Arab casualties. Hence, when Sindī resistance was intensive or protracted, the Arab response was equally severe. As towns such as Daybul (Dībal/Debal near Karachi), Rāwar (Alwar), Brāhmaṇābād (Maṇṣūrah), Iskalandah (Uch, Bahawalpur), and Multān had to be captured by force (*‘anwatan*) resulting in considerable casualties on both sides, wholesale massacres of the vanquished took place. As compared to this, towns such as Armābīl (Lus Bela, Makran), Nīrūn (Hyderabad), Sīwistān (Sehwān), Budhīyah (Larkana), Bēt (island near Karachi), Sāwandī (Sāwandārī), and Aror (Sukkur) were brought under Arab control through treaty (*ṣulh*) and they did not experience any casualties, either Arab or

Sindī.¹³⁴ In both cases, however, the Arab concern with securing a financially viable Sind impelled them to exempt artisans, merchants, and agriculturalists. On the whole, it may be said that the Arab policy of conquest and settlement focussed on the submission of the Sindīs and not their conversion.¹³⁵ Thus, the simplistic model of coerced conversion cannot be applied to Sind. Whatever conversions took place they can neither be attributed to the overt pressures of a militant conversionist Islam nor can it be said that they took place due to the attractions of a posited principle of equality in Islam.¹³⁶ In fact, there is no indication that the Arabs engaged in active proselytization of any kind, either coercive or peaceful. Geopolitical and economic factors rather than religion primarily motivated these conflicts, despite some military leaders on both sides having often issued calls for holy wars to rally troops. Moreover, sane and responsible rulers far outnumbered fanatical ones among the ranks of the warring parties in shaping policies and events.

As Brāhmanical-Hindus and Buddhists generally adopted diametrically opposite approaches towards the initial Arab conquest, they were affected differently by the invasion and occupation of Sind. Whereas Buddhism disappeared completely as a viable religious system during the Arab period, Brāhmanical-Hinduism continued to survive into modern times. The primary sources show clearly Buddhist communities (as compared to Brāhmanical-Hindus) collaborating with the invading Arabs.¹³⁷ Buddhists tended to collaborate at an early date and more completely than did Brāhmanical-Hindus.¹³⁸ Not only that nine

¹³⁴Maclean, op. cit., 38.

¹³⁵The hypothesis of a holy war proposed by S.N. Dhar ("The Arab Conquest of Sind," *IHQ*, vol. 16, 1940: 597) and others must be outrightly rejected.

¹³⁶Maclean, op. cit., 50.

¹³⁷Scholars like C.V. Vaidya (*History of Mediaeval Hindu India*, vol. I, 173) and R.D. Banerjee (*Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India*, 237) view the Buddhists of Sind as the knaves who were responsible for "India's failure against Muslim invaders."

¹³⁸Maclean, op. cit., 52.

out of the ten Buddhist communities mentioned by name in the primary sources were collaborators, in one case (the Nīrūnī Buddhists) envoys were sent to al-Ḥajjāj requesting a separate peace before the Thaqafite forces had even been dispatched to Sind.¹³⁹ However, it may not be correct to believe as does Friedman that Buddhist collaboration was simply opportunistic which was guided by “the desire to be on the winning side.”¹⁴⁰ It is apparent from the narrative of *Chachnāmāh* that the “Buddhists in Sind were guided not so much by motives of vengeance on the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus as by anxiety for their own safety.”¹⁴¹ If one were to go by the information given in the *Chachnāmāh* then the great majority of cases of Buddhist collaboration (e.g., Nīrūn, Bét, Sākrah, Sīwistān, Budhīyah) took place before there was any indication that the Arab side would be “the winning side”: they had only conquered portions of the Indus Delta, Dāhir and his large army were still intact, and the major and most productive part of Sind remained to be taken, Buddhists went out of their way to aid the Arabs in conditions of considerable personal jeopardy. The Sīwistān Buddhists, for example, not only went over to the Arabs before their town had been conquered, but they were later put in some peril when the loyalist forces of Chand Rāma Hālah retook the town and the Buddhists opted again for the Arabs, closing the gates of the city against Hālah during the ensuing battle.¹⁴²

There is good reason to believe that the 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 inter-regional commerce: the reopening of the overland trade through Central Asia to China,

¹³⁹*Chachnāmāh*. 118–120, 145–146.

¹⁴⁰Y. Friedmann, “A Contribution to the Early History of Islam in India,” in M. Rosen-Avalon, ed., *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1977: 326–327.

¹⁴¹R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 33.

¹⁴²*Chachnāmāh*. 118–120, 145–146.

the regularization of the disrupted maritime commerce (both Indic and Chinese) passing through Sind, and the access to the vital markets of the Middle East. As far as Sind was concerned, the Buddhist envoys from Nīrūn had been informed by al-Ḥajjāj before the conquest that the Arabs intended to invade Sind “up to the border of China.”¹⁴³ With their long history of trade relationships with Central Asia and China, the urban, mercantile Buddhists of Sind must have immediately realized the possibilities inherent for their class in the Arab eastern front and taken them into account in opting for collaboration. That is, urban, mercantile Buddhists may have hoped 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.

However, the calculations of Buddhist merchants of Sind went terribly wrong. Though the inter-regional commerce cycled through Sind did revive during the Arab period, it hardly helped them. The restored trade generally emphasized alternate trade routes, was supported by different institutions, and, most importantly, became the monopoly of a competitive urban, mercantile elite. This had a negative impact on those Sindī Buddhists who accumulated surplus, directly or indirectly, through inter-regional commerce. In addition, internal Buddhist industrial production at *viḥāras* was supplanted by newly-built Arab industrial sectors. The Arabs built special industrial quarters within the Arab areas of Sind, to process material both for local consumption and for export. The ability of Buddhists to process goods of inter-regional trade was affected not only by the decline in their control of this commerce but also by the competition offered by the new Arab facilities. Further, Muslims, who were particularly urban in orientation during this period, displaced Buddhists as the dominant urban, mercantile class in Sind. Apart from settling down in existing

¹⁴³See Maclean, *op. cit.*, 68.

towns or expanding some of them (e.g., Daybul), they also built new towns like Maṇṣūrah and Bayḍā' completely replacing the old ones (e.g., Maṇṣūrah replacing Brahmanābād) or bringing others to a state of decrepitude. Moreover, the pan-Islamic international trade network to which Sind had been linked by conquest was controlled by the Muslim mercantile bourgeoisie. 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. After the Arab conquest, the major merchants of Sind belonged as well to the larger cosmopolitan Muslim bourgeoisie. While ordinary Muslims in Sind dressed like their compatriot non-Muslims, the merchants followed the fashions of Irāq and Fārs. This suggests that they were either drawn from these regions or, as is more likely, accepted the cultural dictates of the larger pan-Islamic mercantile community as their exemplar. They were in Sind, but not really part of it. "To participate in the new inter-regional trade was in many ways to become Arab, and if Arab then necessarily Muslim."¹⁴⁴ As a result of these factors, Sindī Buddhist merchants found it increasingly difficult to compete with Muslim merchants on an equal footing in the revived commerce. And, as their share of the trade declined, so did their share of the accumulation of mercantile surpluses. "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."¹⁴⁵ The urban, mercantile Buddhists had collaborated with the Arabs under the expectation that the conquest would reinvigorate the economy of Sind and hence their

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁵D.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. Also see W.G. Runciman, "Relative Deprivation and the Concept of Reference Group," in K. Thompson and J. Tunstall, eds., *Sociological Perspectives*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971: 304–305.

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.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, as the accumulation of mercantile surpluses by the urban, mercantile Buddhists as well as their ability to allocate resources correspondingly declined, they could readily perceive the deterioration of their socioeconomic position in religious terms. They felt that their precarious condition was caused by the fact that they were non-Muslims whereas their Muslim counterparts were prospering because of 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.”¹⁴⁷ Consequently, they felt that the remedy to their problem lay in adopting the belief system of the urban, mercantile Muslims. In this context, conversion appears to be more of a historical process than simply an event whereby the urban, mercantile Buddhists tended to reorient themselves gradually to the milieu of their more successful class counterparts. It may be noted that the conversion of urban, mercantile Buddhists did not necessarily entail a sudden or dramatic change in the basic structure of their belief system. 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. During all this while, new Arab trade patterns which bypassed the credit and transport facilities of the *vihāras*, must have considerably corroded the solid fiscal base of the Buddhist monastic system in Sind. Added to this, the decline in the Buddhist share of the accumulation of mercantile surpluses must have further aggravated the deterioration of Buddhist institutions. Further, the new rulers not only put a stop to the enjoyment of tax-free lands

¹⁴⁶Maclean, op. cit., 75.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 76.

by *vihāras* belonging to the *kāfirs*, they also would not forego the revenues alienated by the earlier rulers. As a result of this and the reduced capacity of urban lay followers to provide economic assistance, *vihāras* fell into decay. The disintegration of the monastic system must have accelerated as the urban, mercantile Buddhists converted to Islam since continuous monetary support in sufficient quantities was needed to build and maintain the monastic structures and institutions. Some Buddhists may have also been assimilated by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Majority of the Sindī Buddhists belonged to the Saṃmitīya sect, whose emphasis on reality and on the importance of personality, brought them very near the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu doctrine of metempsychosis, and bridging the gulf over in a later period.¹⁴⁸

Buddhism disappeared in Sind during the two hundred years of Arab rule and there is not a single Arabic or Persian reference to Buddhists actually living in Sind subsequent to the initial Thaqafite conquest. Bīrūnī, who visited Sind, was unable to locate any Buddhist informants for his encyclopaedia on Indian religions.¹⁴⁹ None of the surviving Buddhist structures in Sind were built after the Arab conquest or, with the exception of the stūpa at Mīrapur Khās (where Arab coins of an undetermined date have been found), can they be dated with confidence, by way of artifacts and debris, as inhabited beyond the eighth century. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Buddhism died out in Sind during the course of Arab rule; indeed the absence of Arab-period artifacts in Buddhist sites suggests a relatively early date for its institutional deterioration and demise.¹⁵⁰ While some Buddhist monks definitely emigrated from Sind to other parts of India during the Arab occupation, it is extremely unlikely that any large-scale migration took place. It may be said that most

¹⁴⁸R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 33.

¹⁴⁹al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb fi Taḥqīq mā lil-Hind*, trans. E.C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, vol. 1, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1910: 249.

¹⁵⁰Maclean, op. cit., 53. Also see H. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind with Historical Outline*, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, 1925: 87, 93.

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.¹⁵¹

As the archaeological remains from the Punjab and north-western parts of India generally show either desertion of urban centres after the Kuṣāṇa times or a sharp decline in the Gupta period followed by a break in occupation,¹⁵² some of the Buddhist monasteries must have begun to lose support in these areas from the post-Kuṣāṇa period. According to Faxian, in the country of Pi-cha in the Punjab, both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism were prosperous and flourishing.¹⁵³ However, in the country of Śatadru (Sirhind) in the Punjab, Xuanzang saw just ten *viḥāras*—all of which were in desolation and had only few monks.¹⁵⁴

In Mūlasthānīpura (Multan), according to Xuanzang, only few people believed in Buddhism and there were more than ten *viḥāras*, mostly dilapidated, with few monks, who did not belong to any particular school.¹⁵⁵ Hye Ch'o, in the first-quarter of the eighth century, found Buddhism flourishing in Jālaṃdhara where there were many monasteries and monks of both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna schools.¹⁵⁶ He further points out that in Tamasavana (somewhere between the western Punjab and Kashmir), "there is a *stūpa* . . . where the hair and nails of the Buddha are preserved. At present, there are over three hundred monks. The monastery also has, inter alia, the relic tooth and bone of a great Pratyeka Buddha. There are seven or eight other *viḥāras*. Each of these has five to six hundred monks. The monasteries are well managed. They are highly

¹⁵¹Maclean, op. cit., 55–56.

¹⁵²R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 27.

¹⁵³*Faxian*.51.

¹⁵⁴*Xiyu Ji*.121. The site of Sanghol, which is located near Sirhind, had declined in the pre-Gupta period (*IAR*, 1968–1969: 26; 1969–1970: 32; 1970–1971: 30–31).

¹⁵⁵*Xiyu Ji*.347.

¹⁵⁶*Hye Ch'o*.44.

respected by the king and the common people.”¹⁵⁷ According to Faxian, Buddhism was universally honoured in the country of Uḍḍiyāna (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and there were about five hundred *saṃghārāmas* of Hīnayāna.¹⁵⁸ When Xuanzang visited this region, most of the *viḥāras* were in ruins and the number of monks had gradually reduced.¹⁵⁹ A century later, when Hye Ch’o arrived in Uḍḍiyāna, he saw many *viḥāras* and monks for whose support the king had donated many villages and their inhabitants.¹⁶⁰ Hye Ch’o also points out that “there were slightly more monks than laymen in Uḍḍiyāna.”¹⁶¹ Later when Oukong visited Uḍḍiyāna, it still remained a centre of Buddhism.¹⁶² An Indian monk called *Shi hu*, i.e., “Gift Protector” (Dānapāla?), who belonged to Uḍḍiyāna, visited China in CE 980.¹⁶³ This indicates survival of Buddhism in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as late as the tenth century. Buddhism was found in a flourishing condition by Faxian in the country of Swāt.¹⁶⁴ Hye Ch’o points out that the king of Chitral was a follower of Buddhism and there were many monasteries and monks.¹⁶⁵ In the country of Gandhāra, Xuanzang found all of the more than a thousand *viḥāras* dilapidated deserted, and in desolate condition.¹⁶⁶ However, Gandhāra continued to be the centre of Buddhism till Oukong visited it.¹⁶⁷ In the country of Takṣaśilā, Xuanzang found most of the *viḥāras* in ruins with a few monks.¹⁶⁸ Talking about the

¹⁵⁷Hye Ch’o.45.

¹⁵⁸Faxian.26–27.

¹⁵⁹Xiyu Ji.83–84.

¹⁶⁰Hye Ch’o.50.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Oukong.378.

¹⁶³P.C. Bagchi, *India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations*, rev. and ed. H.P. Ray, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008: 207.

¹⁶⁴Faxian.29.

¹⁶⁵Hye Ch’o.50.

¹⁶⁶Xiyu Ji.70.

¹⁶⁷Oukong.378.

¹⁶⁸Xiyu Ji.94. Archaeological records from Taxila indicate that urbanization at this settlement had begun to decline from the Gupta period onwards (See

great stūpa near Puruṣapura, Xuanzang says, “It was predicted by the Tathāgata that when this stupa will have been burned down and rebuilt seven times, the Buddha-dharma will come to an end. Previous sages have recorded that it has been destroyed and reconstructed three times. When I first came to the country, the stupa had just suffered the disaster of conflagration. It is now under repair, and the structure is not yet completed.”¹⁶⁹ In the Ghosrāwā Inscription of the ninth century, mention is made of the Buddhist monk Vīradeva, who later enjoyed the patronage of Devapāla of Bengal. Born in Nagarāhāra (Jalalabad), Vīradeva later went to Kaniṣka Vihāra in Peshawar where he studied under Sarvajña-sānti, and embraced the Buddhist faith.¹⁷⁰ Buddhism appears to have survived in parts of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at least till the eleventh century CE. For instance, the Hindu Śāhi rulers of the Punjab, who ruled from Udanbhāṇḍapura (modern Hund) to the north of Attock (CE 870–1026) though built Brāhmaṇical-Hindu stone temples in the Salt range quite enthusiastically, they are also said to have supported local Buddhist institutions until Bhīmapāla, the last Hindu Śāhi king, who was killed in a battle against the Ghaznavids.¹⁷¹

d. Kashmir

The decline of Buddhism in the valley of Kashmir appears to have begun in the post-Kuṣāṇa period. Mihirakula (c. CE 510–542) who was furiously anti-Buddhist is said to have persecuted Buddhists and withdrawn all state patronage to it. Still, his policies did not result in the extermination of Buddhism from Kashmir as in Kalhaṇa’s *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, we have an almost continuous

J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951: 1–2; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 13.)

¹⁶⁹*Xiyu Ji*. 74.

¹⁷⁰*IA*, vol. XVII, 1888: 309.

¹⁷¹See details in Abdur Rehman, *The Last Two Dynasties of the Śāhis: An Analysis of Their History, Archaeology, Coinage, and Palaeography*, Islamabad: Centre for the Study of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Quaid-i-Azam University, 1979.

record of donations to Buddhist establishments by kings and nobles.¹⁷² However, by the time of the arrival of Xuanzang in India, Buddhism had passed its prime in Kashmir primarily due to the ascendance of Śaivism. For instance, Xuanzang deplors the degraded condition of Buddhism in the country of Tokhāra in Kashmir and points out that in this region of Kashmir “Buddhism [wa]s not much believed in by the people of the country, while deva-temples enjoy[ed] much attention.”¹⁷³ Apart from some *vihāras* in ruins,¹⁷⁴ Xuanzang found over one hundred *vihāras* with more than five thousand monks in Kashmir.¹⁷⁵ Whereas in Parṇotsa (Poonch) Xuanzang saw five *vihāras* in ruins with some monks in one *vihāra*,¹⁷⁶ he saw ten *vihāras* with only a few monks in the kingdom of Rājapuri (Rajouri).¹⁷⁷ Buddhism had not become completely insignificant in Kashmir and it continued to enjoy the benevolent support of successive rulers and members of the royalty. According to Hye Ch’o, who visited India in CE 727, there were not only numerous *vihāras* and monks in Kashmir but various members of the royalty also built *vihāras* and gave endowments of villages for the maintenance of these *vihāras*.¹⁷⁸ It seems that as a consequence of such developments some revival of Buddhism took place. Thus, when Oukong arrived in CE 759, he found three hundred *vihāras* in Kashmir¹⁷⁹ as against the over one hundred mentioned by Xuanzang (CE 633). Śivasvāmī, a Buddhist aficionado who lived in Kashmir during the reign of king Avantīvarman (CE 855–884), uses various Buddhist

¹⁷²*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. I.312–317; III.355; IV.200–203, 259–262.

¹⁷³*Xiyu Ji*.107.

¹⁷⁴*Xiyu Ji*.108. The Jayanendra Vihāra at Urasa, a place of exceptional religious merit and academic brilliance, was found by Xuanzang in disarray (*Xuanzang*.69).

¹⁷⁵*Xiyu Ji*.101.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷⁸*Hye Ch’o*.46–47.

¹⁷⁹*Oukong*.360.

terms and ideas liberally in his poem *Kapphiṇābhyudaya*¹⁸⁰ but towards the end he lauds the Brāhmaṇical ideal of a householder as compared to the Buddhist ideal of monkhood. As suggested by Mitra, this may be an indication of the cultural ascendancy of Brāhmaṇical ideal which as time went by became accelerated.¹⁸¹

The Palola Śāhi kings (c. CE 585–720) of Gilgit are known to have been enthusiastic patrons of Buddhist literature and art and Buddhism appears to have survived in Gilgit at least till the end of the tenth century.¹⁸² During the reign of Nandī Gupta (CE 972–73), Vaiṣṇavite Queen Diddā is known to have built Buddhist *vihāras* apart from Vaiṣṇava temples.¹⁸³ A Kashmiri Buddhist monk, whom the Chinese knew as Tianxi Zai, went from Kashmir to China in CE 980.¹⁸⁴ However, from CE 1028 until the end of the First Lohara Dynasty in CE 1101, Kashmir was faced with economic decline which affected Buddhist monastic institutions. Furthermore, King Kalasa and his notorious grandson Harṣa (r. CE 1089–1101), who was the last king of First Lohara Dynasty, pursued a policy of iconoclastic destruction directed against both Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical-Hindu places of worship. However, during the Second Lohara Dynasty (CE 1101–1171), such a trend was reversed and during the reign of King Jayasimha (r. CE 1128–1149), there is evidence of a Buddhist *vihāra* being erected and the king bestowing an endowment on it and other Buddhist institutions in general.¹⁸⁵ Thus, Buddhism which might have

¹⁸⁰Pandit L. Gauri Shankar, ed., *Kapphiṇābhyudaya Śivasvāmin*, Lahore: Pañcanadiya Viśvavidyālayen Prakāśitam, 1937.

¹⁸¹R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 22.

¹⁸²A Khotanese Śaka account of an itinerary from the Tarim Basin (Xinjiang) to Kashmir via Gilgit refers to the existence of at least eight Buddhist monasteries in Gilgit during the reign of Abhimanyugupta (CE 958–972). (See H.W. Bailey, “An Itinerary in Khotanese Śaka,” *Acta Orientalia*, 14, 1936: 261–262.)

¹⁸³*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. VII.11; VIII.349.

¹⁸⁴P.C. Bagchi, *India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations*, rev. and ed. H.P. Ray, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008: 219.

¹⁸⁵*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. VIII.2402, 2433. Arigoma Sārādā Inscription records the construction of a brick *vihāra* to replace an older one which had been burned down

languished during the reigns of Kṣemagupta, Kalasa, and Harṣa, continued to survive till at least the middle of the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century, at the time of Marco Polo's travels, the Kashmir valley had become predominantly Brāhmaṇical-Hindu with perhaps Buddhism surviving only in small pockets and there being a small number of Muslim converts.¹⁸⁶

The general experience of cultural anthropologists is that when parallel cults and faiths come in contact with each other, the stronger of the two tends to dominate and assimilate the more recessive one. Many affinities exhibited by both Śaivism and Buddhism in Kashmir facilitated closer approximation between the two leading to their merger in the end. Both reject the authority of the Vedas and are equally forceful in their emphasis on individual effort for attaining salvation. Śiva vanquished Kāma and the Buddha defied the seductions of Māra. Śiva is an otherworldly god and the Buddha began his holy life by renouncing the world. Both Śaivism and Buddhism are also based on the acknowledgement of the unknowable nature of ultimate reality or truth. The Śaiva theory of destruction and reproduction bears strong likeness to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). In fact, faint echo of the Śaiva influences on Buddhism can be detected in the legend of Mahādeva who conferred the *pravrajyā* on Mahendra, the first missionary of Buddhism in Kashmir.¹⁸⁷ The growth of Tantricism further blurred the differences between Buddhism and Śaiva Tantrism. Predominance of Tantric Buddhism is indicated by the presence of Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa and other *siddhas* in Kashmir from the period of Avantīvarman onwards.¹⁸⁸

during the reign of King Siṃha whom Sten Konow identifies with Jayasiṃha (*EI*.ix.300). The viḥāra, dedicated to Lokanātha (Avalokiteśvara) in the inscription, is an incontrovertible evidence of the survival of Buddhism in Kashmir in the twelfth century.

¹⁸⁶Marco Polo.175–177.

¹⁸⁷H. Kern, *Manual of Buddhism*, repr., Delhi: Indological Book House, 1968: 117.

¹⁸⁸*Rājataranṅgiṇī*.V.66.

The building art of the classical period (seventh to fourteenth centuries CE) hints at Buddhism being gradually supplanted by orthodox Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. The earlier phase of this period was Buddhist, whereas the later phase was entirely Brāhmaṇical-Hindu.¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, the architectural remains discovered from the site of Avantipura, founded by Avantivarman (CE 855/56–883) of the Utpala Dynasty, who was a staunch follower of Śiva and Viṣṇu, include some images of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and other Brāhmaṇical gods, but no figure of the Buddha or any Bodhisattva.¹⁹⁰ Religious milieu was growing in a manner that both Śaivism and Buddhism were moving towards an ultimate fusion but at the cost of the latter. This process became accelerated with the emergence of the cult of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā with Buddhism borrowing the legends and metaphysical concepts connected to the cult of Śiva and Durgā. However, the available sources do not provide sufficient information to delineate the exact stages through which this fusion of Buddhism with Śaivism finally took place in Kashmir. Moreover, the economic situation of the kingdom as a whole declined even further, continuing through the subsequent succession of rulers. However, by the time of Rinchāna's accession (CE 1320), Buddhism appears to have remained no longer a force to reckon with.

Rinchāna, the son of a Buddhist Ladakhi chief, moved into the Kashmir valley along with his followers and captured the throne of Kashmir towards the end of CE 1320. Rinchāna accepted Islam under the influence of Sharafuddīn, adopted the Muslim name of Sadruddīn, and established a *khānaqāh* with a *laṅgar-khānah* (free kitchen) for the comfort of the travellers and the poor. It has been suggested that Rinchāna's conversion to Islam was neither an isolated case nor was it merely a matter of political

¹⁸⁹Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Hindu and Buddhist*, vol. 1, 3rd edn., Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala, 1956: 185.

¹⁹⁰S.C. Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1970: 147.

expediency.¹⁹¹ A.Q. Rafiqi¹⁹² and S.A.A. Rizvi¹⁹³ attribute Rinchāna's conversion to Islam to his political ambitions and associations with Shah Mir. According to Aziz Ahmad, "The very fact of the conversion of the Buddhist Rinchāna to Islam shows that Buddhism was no longer available as a power-base, possibly not even as the religion of any significant number of households, though it might have stayed on in monasteries, whereas a sizeable converted Muslim nucleus had already grown in urban centres."¹⁹⁴ In any case, Islam does not appear to have received any special favours under Rinchāna and the following kings including Shah Mir (1339–1342), Jamshed (1342–1343), Alāuddīn (1343–1354), Shihābuddīn (1354–1373) so much so that when Shihābuddīn's Brāhmaṇical-Hindu minister, Udayasrī suggested the melting of a grand brass image of the Buddha for coining it into money, it was turned down.¹⁹⁵

Nūru'ddīn (thirteenth century), the son of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu convert, was the founder of an indigenous order of Muslim mystics (R̥ṣi Silsilah) who made the R̥ṣi movement socially important in Kashmir. These R̥ṣis developed their ideas in their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and Buddhist surroundings. The extreme asceticism, self-mortification, long fasts, sexual abstinence, and seclusion, which marked the early life of Nūru'ddīn, and indeed, the lives of his followers, blurred the differences in the minds of common masses between Islam and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism or Buddhism.

¹⁹¹See A.Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: From the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1972: 9–10; S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978: 290; M.I. Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century*, Delhi, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1994: 63.

¹⁹²A.Q. Rafiqi, op. cit., 9–10.

¹⁹³S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978: 290.

¹⁹⁴Aziz Ahmad, "Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir," *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. XXIII, 1–2, 1979: 6.

¹⁹⁵Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, Calcutta: Calcutta Iran Society, 1959: 43–48.

Despite the *vihāras* having become derelict and impoverished, there is evidence of some Buddhist activity still taking place till at least the fourteenth century with Kashmiri Buddhist monks and translators travelling to Tibet from time to time. When towards the end of the sixteenth century Abul Fazal paid a visit to Kashmir in the company of Emperor Akbar, there were still some old persons who owed allegiance to Buddhism, though he could not locate any scholar of Buddhism. He could not ascertain the time of the disappearance of the religion but simply observes that it was long ago.¹⁹⁶ It is worthy of notice that despite the fact that Kashmir had remained rather weak for over three centuries, neither the Arabs nor the Turks sought to conquer it. This is an indication that the Arabs and the Turks were more interested in gaining riches than proselytizing. Thus, if the Buddhist *vihāras* were poor, they were left alone.

e. *Western India and the adjoining region*

Though some urban settlements in Gujarat continued up to the seventh-eighth centuries, in western India urbanization declined quite substantially by about the end of the fourth century CE.¹⁹⁷ Archaeological and literary evidence put together suggests that urban settlements with Buddhist connections such as Kumbhavatī (Nasik) declined in the pre-Gupta period, Mahiṣmatī (Maheshwar) during the Gupta period and Ujjain, Jetuttara (Nagari), Banavāsi, and Bharukaccha (Baruch) during the post-Gupta period.¹⁹⁸ Thus, it seems that some monasteries must have fallen on bad days in the post-Kuṣāṇa period. When Xuanzang visited Gujarat, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples outnumbered Buddhist *vihāras* almost everywhere. For instance,

¹⁹⁶Abu'l-Fazl.III.212.

¹⁹⁷R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 83.

¹⁹⁸Y.D. Sharma, "Remains of Early Historical Cities," A. Ghosh, ed., *Archaeological Remains, Monuments and Museums*, pt. I, New Delhi, 1964: 73; *IAR*, 1956–1957: 27; 1957–1958: 36; 1959–1960: 19; 1962–1963: 19; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 86.

in the country of Bharukaccha (Bharuch) there were over ten *vihāras* with more than three hundred monks and there were also over ten deva-temples.¹⁹⁹ Archaeological evidence shows that Bharukaccha declined during the post-Gupta period.²⁰⁰ The country of Kaccha/Kiṭa (Kutch) had over ten Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna *vihāras* with over one thousand monks and there were also scores of deva-temples.²⁰¹ Vallabhi (modern Vala) had over one hundred Saṃmitiya temples with over six thousand monks and there were also several hundred deva-temples.²⁰² Ānandapura (Vadnagar) had over ten Saṃmitīya *vihāras* with less than one thousand monks and there were also scores of deva-temples at Ānandapura at the time of Xuanzang.²⁰³ Surattṭha (Surat) had over fifty *vihāras* of Mahāyāna and Sthavira sects with three thousand monks and also over one thousand deva-temples.²⁰⁴ The country of Gurjara with its capital at Bhīllamāla (Bārmer) had one Sarvāstivāda *vihāra* with over one hundred monks and there were also several tens of deva-temples.²⁰⁵ In the country of Maheśvarapura people did not believe in the Buddha-dharma.²⁰⁶ In the country of Mālava there were more than one hundred *vihāras* with over twenty thousand monks, the number of deva-temples being several hundred with really numerous heretics.²⁰⁷ The Maitrakas of Vallabhī, who succeeded the Guptas and Hūṇas in Gujarat from the sixth to the eighth centuries and typically referred to themselves as Śaiva (*parama-maheśvaras*), a quarter of their inscriptions record donations to Buddhists, including the Vallabhī Mahāvihāra.²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁹*Xiyu Ji*.338.

²⁰⁰*IAR*, 1959–60: 19.

²⁰¹*Xiyu Ji*.342.

²⁰²*Ibid.*

²⁰³*Ibid.*, 343.

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 344.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 345.

²⁰⁷*Xuanzang*.122. But according to the *Xiyu Ji*.338 the number of *vihāras* was “several hundred.”

²⁰⁸See Neelis, 2011: 179.

Hye Ch'o (c. CE 724–727) found Buddhism flourishing in Sind-Gujarat (or Rājaputānā) towards the beginning of eighth century. According to him, in west India (Vallabhī, Gujarat) Buddhism was highly revered by the king, the chiefs, and the common people and there were many *vihāras* and monks.²⁰⁹ Hye Ch'o also laments that “half the country has been invaded by the Arabs and is already ravaged.”²¹⁰ According to Yijing (CE 676–685), the Saṃmitīya school was the most thriving sect of Buddhism in Lāṭa, though some followers of other sects also could be found.²¹¹ Since the fall of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty (CE 775), these religious institutions besides being without royal patronage had become exceedingly vulnerable. In the early 780s, Saurashtra was invaded by the Abbasid rulers in Sind who demolished the huge complex of Buddhist *vihāras* at Vallabhī including the Duddā *vihāra*.²¹² Chau-Ju-Khua, talking about Gujarat in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mentions that there were four thousand Buddhist temple buildings, in which lived over twenty thousand dancing-girls who sang twice daily while offering food to the Buddha and while offering flowers.²¹³

²⁰⁹Hye Ch'o.43–44.

²¹⁰Ibid., 44.

²¹¹Yijing.14.

²¹²It has been suggested that this vandalism must be viewed within the context of the happenings in Sogdia and the persecution of the Musalemiyya and Manichaeen Shia movements over there. Apart from being a centre of Buddhist studies, Vallabhī was one of the holiest sites of the Śvetāmbara Jains. The Jaina temples were most likely the main military target of the Abbasid soldiers. Almost certainly having misidentified the Śvetāmbara Jains as allies of the white-clad faction of Abu Muslim Musalemiyya rebels, their Orghuz Turk supporters, and the Manichaeen Shiites, the Sindhi Arab leadership viewed them as a threat and thus, it seems, felt the need to do away with them. Once at Vallabhī, they destroyed everything without differentiating the Jaina temples from the Buddhist *vihāras* [Alexander Berzin, “The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire,” http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/e-books/unpublished_manuscripts/historical_interaction/pt2/history_cultures_10.html (accessed 17 December 2008)].

²¹³Chau Ju-Kua.92. However, Hirth and Rockhill have pointed out that the liberal use of the word *Fo* (the Buddha) is used here in the sense of “an image of a god,” not in its literal sense (Chau Ju-Kua.90).

According to Xuanzang, there were over a hundred *vihāras* with over five thousand monks in Maharashtra, the deva-temples numbering hundreds with quite numerous heretics.²¹⁴ The Buddhist establishment at Ajanta had already been abandoned when Xuanzang visited, though the establishments at Ellora and Aurangabad appear to have continued till about the middle of eighth century CE. However, the *saṃghārāma* at Kanheri remained in occupation well into the eleventh century CE. But by the eleventh century only a few scattered monastic communities survived in Maharashtra. Probably the last epigraphic evidence of Buddhism in Maharashtra comes from the time of king Gandarāditya (c. CE 1108–1138) of the Kolhapur branch of the Śīlāhāra Dynasty. This king is known to have built some temples dedicated to Śaṃkara, the Jina, and the Buddha.²¹⁵ There is ample evidence in the source material indicating acculturation and assimilation of Buddhism into an overarching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Some of the excavated Buddhist sites show an evidence of being taken over by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. In the case of derelict and abandoned Buddhist structural edifices, such a change may have been much more facile. These Buddhist monastic communities were largely dependent upon the support of the mercantile community and decline in the fortunes this community appears to have, thus, adversely affected Buddhism. Further, though kings and their ministers were not anti-Buddhist, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the succeeding dynasties increasingly supported Brāhmaṇical-Hindu institutions. For instance, the Daśāvatāra at Ellora is reckoned as the earliest of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu excavated temples and it has been suggested that it was originally a Buddhist edifice taken over by the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas under the patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.²¹⁶ This could only mean that the life of the

²¹⁴*Xiyu Ji*.336.

²¹⁵See *IA*.VI: 102; XIII: 134–135; A.S. Altekar, “The Shilaharas of Western India,” in *Indian Culture*, vol. II, no. 3, 1936: 393ff.; B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism in Maharashtra: A History*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976: 157.

²¹⁶P. Brown, *Indian Architecture—Buddhist and Hindu Periods*, Bombay, 1965: 71.

Buddhist community at Ellora was either coming to an end or had already ended.²¹⁷ The caves at Aurangabad with their very obvious Brāhmaṇical-Hindu influence in architectural and sculptural elements represent the terminal phase of Buddhism in Maharashtra. With the emergence of a reinvigorated Paurāṇika type of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, Buddhist monastic communities appear to have found it more and more difficult to stay afloat. Increasingly, under such circumstances, Buddhism tended to act as if it were a *sect* of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Images of the Buddha were set up along with those of the Jaina Tīrthaṃkaras and Śiva as is shown by the Śilāditya Gandarāditya inscription.²¹⁸ In sharp contrast to Jainism, Buddhism does not appear to have made any attempts to keep its identity intact. As a result, the remaining scattered monastic communities of Buddhism lapsed into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

f. *The Deccan*

Archaeological and literary evidence put together suggests that urban settlements with Buddhist connections at Paṭiṭṭhāna (Paithan), Koṇḍapura, Amarāvātī, and Arikamedu declined in the pre-Gupta period, Takkarā/Tagara (Ter), and Dharaṇīkoṭa from the Gupta period onwards and Banavāsi during the post-Gupta period.²¹⁹ A few settlements such as Kaveripaṭṭinam and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā survived till much later period.²²⁰ On the whole, archaeological evidence indicates that Buddhist influence in peninsular India was confined mainly to the coastal towns and

²¹⁷See B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism in Maharashtra: A History*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976: 117–118.

²¹⁸*CII*.vi.113.

²¹⁹*IAR*, 1962–1963: 1–2; 1965–1966: 29; G. Yazdani “Excavations at Kondapur: An Andhra Town (c. 200 BC to 200 AD),” *ABORI*, XXII: 171–182; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 82, 86, 92; H. Sarkar and S.P. Nainar, *Amaravati*, 16; R.E.M. Wheeler, “Arikamedu: An Indo-Roman Trading-Station on the East Coast of India,” *AI*, no. 2, 1947–1948: 181–310.

²²⁰Though Kaveripaṭṭinam continued to exist in the sixth-eighth centuries, at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā the archaeological records suggest a break in occupation after the fourth century CE (R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 99).

inland urban centres where commercial activities were taking place.²²¹ With the onset of decline of urbanization in south India in the third century CE, at least some of the monasteries must have lost support and fallen on bad days. When Xuanzang arrived in south India, Buddhism was declining in most parts. In the country of Andhra with its capital at Veṅgīpura, according to Xuanzang, there were more than twenty *viḥāras* with over three thousand monks, the number of deva-temples being more than thirty with numerous heretics.²²² In the country of Dhānakaṭaka (Amrāvati), except ten *viḥāras* with over one thousand monks, Xuanzang saw numerous *viḥāras* in ruins, whereas there were over one hundred deva-temples with innumerable heretics.²²³ In the country of Coḷa (Tamilnadu), the *viḥāras* were dilapidated with very few monks but there were several tens of deva-temples with many naked heretics.²²⁴ In the country of Draviḍa with its capital at Kāñcīpura, Xuanzang saw over one hundred *viḥāras* with over ten thousand monks.²²⁵ He also saw over eighty deva-temples.²²⁶ In the country of Malakūṭa (Kerala), Xuanzang saw the ruined foundations of many old *viḥāras*, the existing ones being very few with few monks.²²⁷ But the deva-temples in Malakūṭa numbered several hundred.²²⁸ Xuanzang saw over one hundred *viḥāras* with more than ten thousand monks in Koṅkaṇapura, the number of deva-temples being several hundred.²²⁹ When about a hundred years later, Hye Ch'o arrived in south India, he saw that in the kingdom of the Cālukyas (covering the present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) Buddhism was highly revered

²²¹See, for instance, D. Dayalan, "Digital Documentation of Buddhist Sites in Tamil Nadu," http://ecai.org/activities/2008_vesak/Presentations_abstracts_papers/Dayalan_paper.html (accessed 10 August 2010).

²²²*Xiyu Ji*. 313.

²²³*Ibid.*, 315–316.

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 318.

²²⁵*Ibid.*, 319–320.

²²⁶*Ibid.*

²²⁷*Ibid.*, 321.

²²⁸*Ibid.*

²²⁹*Xuanzang*. 120; *Xiyu Ji*. 334.

and there were many Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna monasteries and monks. But he also saw a large monastery in the mountains which was ruined and had no monks.²³⁰

It is sometimes suggested that the persecution of Buddhism contributed to its decline in south India. In support of this, the example of Kañcī is cited from where “the Buddhists had to flee when the king changed his faith. The *vihāras* were burnt and some of the Buddhist shrines and *vihāras* became Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite.”²³¹ Sufficient evidence of overt persecution of Buddhists in south India is lacking to support such a view. Stray examples such as that of the Pallava (Andhra-Tamilnadu region) kings, Siṃhavarman and Trilocana having built Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples by demolishing some Buddhist stūpas, are not sufficient to support such a hypothesis. It has also been proposed sometimes that the Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkarācārya which is said to have attracted vast populations and his establishment of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu *maṭhas* as counterpoints to the Buddhist *vihāras* quickened the phase of decline of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.²³² His defeat of the Buddhists in a debate at Kāñci is cited as a quintessential example of such a fate that had befallen the Buddhists.²³³ Further, the emergence of the imperial Coḷas with their allegiance to Śaivism is also viewed as having worked to the disadvantage of Buddhism in the Tamil land.²³⁴ However, in reality the ascendance of the agrarian class and its alliance with Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas during the heydays of the Bhakti movement, the former supporting the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇavite

²³⁰Hye Ch'o.43.

²³¹G.V. Saroja, “Buddhism in Tamil Nadu,” in John Samuel et al., eds., *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers*, Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998: 9.

²³²R.S. Murthy, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, xiv – xv; Shu Hikosaka, *Buddhism in Tamilnadu: A New Perspective*, Madras: Institute of Asian Studies, 1989: 201.

²³³R. Champakalakshmi, “Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Patterns of Patronage,” in John Samuel et al., *op. cit.*, 89.

²³⁴R.S. Murthy, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, xv.

faiths and the ruling authorities switching patronage from the Buddha to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu deities, may have tilted the scales against Buddhism which was supported mainly by the mercantile community.²³⁵ Besides, Buddhism had become “interlarded with Śaiva ideas, and with practices of Haṭhayoga in the South and was thus in a state of imperceptible dissolution amidst forms of Tantric Hinduism.”²³⁶

However, remnants of Buddhism survived in nooks and corners of south India until at least the sixteenth century, if not later. Talking about the people of Malabar in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Chau Chu-Kua calls them “extremely devout Buddhists.”²³⁷ Large number of Buddha images ranging from seventh century to fourteenth century have been found in and around Kāñcīpuram.²³⁸ The *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in CE 1582, talks about Śrī Caitanya having discussions with several Buddhists and defeating them in debates along with their guru at Veṅkaṭagiri near Arcot.²³⁹ According to a tradition, Tāranātha became a disciple of the Tantric Buddhist, Buddhagupta, who belonged to Rameswaram in south India.²⁴⁰ Tāranātha mentions that Jñānakaragupta along with one hundred other Buddhist teachers fled from the north and arrived in south India after the fall of Magadha to the Khalji rule.²⁴¹ Archaeological evidence from Nākappattīṇam and its

²³⁵See *ibid.*; Shu Hikosaka, *op. cit.*, 202.

²³⁶R.C. Mitra, *op. cit.*, 122.

²³⁷*Chau Ju-Kua*.88. However, as pointed out earlier, Hirth and Rockhill have suggested that in this context the word *Fo* (the Buddha) has been used in the sense of “an image of a god,” and not in its literal sense (*Chau Ju-Kua*.90).

²³⁸See T.A. Gopinath Rao, “Buddha Vestiges in Kanchipura,” *IA*, vol. XLI, 1915: 127–129.

²³⁹*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī*, with the original Bengali text, Roman transliteration, synonyms, translation and elaborate purports, by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1975: Section 1: v.4.

²⁴⁰*IHQ*, 1931.684.

²⁴¹*Tāranātha*.319.

neighbourhood has yielded as many as 350 Buddhist bronze images ranging from the ninth to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.²⁴² Kalyāṇī inscription of Dhammaceti (king of Pegu) engraved in CE 1476 narrates an interesting anecdote of the travel of some Theravāda Buddhists to Nākaṭṭiṇam and their visit to the site of Padarikārāma *vihāra* for worship.²⁴³ This inscription talks about an image of the Buddha in a cave constructed at the instance of the Mahārājā of Cīnadeśa, on the spot, on the seashore, where the Holy Tooth relic was deposited in the course of its transit to Laṅkādvīpa in the charge of Daṇḍakumāra and his wife Hemamālā.²⁴⁴ Valentyn who visited Nākaṭṭiṇam in CE 1725 also refers to one “China Pagoda” at this place²⁴⁵ later destroyed by the Jesuits in CE 1867.²⁴⁶

²⁴²*EI*.xxii, 1933–1934, 1984: 213–281; *Treasures of Asian Art from the Mr and Mrs D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection*, New York: The Asian Society; T.N. Ramachandran, *The Nāgaṭṭiṇam and other Buddhist Bronzes in the Madras Museum*, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, n.s., General Section), vol. 7, no. 1. Chennai, 1954:14.

²⁴³*IA*.xxii, 1878: 11–53.

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴⁵Ramachandran, *op. cit.*, 14–20.

²⁴⁶*IA*.vii, 1878: 224–227. Also see S. Ananda, “Bodhi’s Tamil Afterglow,” *Outlook India*, 7 July 2004.

3

Moral and Ethical Degeneracy

IT HAS BEEN sometimes suggested that moral and ethical degeneracy of the members of the Buddhist saṃgha was the core cause of the decline of Buddhism in India.¹ An examination of the sizeable Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist textual material spanning the entire period of the history of Buddhism in India indicates that many members of the saṃgha were men and women who had put on the *kāśāyavattha* under circumstances of compulsion. Many among these were disgruntled and frustrated persons who had left the world in disgust. Quite a few desperate characters including vagrants, thieves, and idlers of all sorts existed in the saṃgha who could not cope with the responsibilities of running a household and thus chose saṃgha-life *faute de mieux*. Such undesirable and irresponsible elements were clearly not expected to live up to the ideals set by the Buddha.

It was perhaps in response to the presence of such undesirable elements in the saṃgha that the Buddha was compelled to enact rules banning their entry. As a result, those who had been highway robbers, jail-breakers, and thieves were declared ineligible for entry into the saṃgha.² Although such rules did not necessarily keep unwanted elements from making way into the saṃgha, yet,

¹R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 2; K.W. Morgan, *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists*, New York: Ronald Press Co., 1956: 48.

²*Vin.i.72–84.*

in order to justify their existence in the saṃgha, such people had to pretend to follow the dhamma. Thus wearing *kāsāya cīvara* and making a show of *sincerity* towards the *Tiratana* was only a façade put up by such persons to retain their membership of the saṃgha. In other words, the saṃgha abounded with people who were not only mere babblers of the dhamma but were also, as it appears from the different references in the *Tipiṭaka*, perversely self-willed and unbearably quarrelsome. Though many of the examples given in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* of pregnant nuns and of monks committing theft and murders may have been imaginary rather than true, it would be impossible to deny that moral and ethical corruption existed in the saṃgha. But at the same time, one must differentiate between instances of corruption as individual and stray instances on the one hand and rampant corruption in an institution affecting it as a whole on the other. Furthermore, it may be pointed out that the so-called period of corruption in Buddhism has not been viewed exactly as such by everybody. For instance, N.N. Bhattacharyya has pointed out that “The period which has been stigmatised by most historians as that of the decline and disappearance of Buddhism was in reality the only period in which it was able to come out of its dry academic shell and renovate all the existing traditional and popular spiritual disciplines by its own spirit.”³

Tibetan texts mention the followers of Devadatta as having manufactured weapons for waging war.⁴ Though well-documented research has shown that Devadatta has been maligned unfairly,⁵ the parting of ways between the Buddha

³N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 161.

⁴W.W. Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha and Early History of His Order*, London: Trübner, 1884: 92.

⁵B. Mukherjee, *Die Überlieferung von Devadatta, dem Widersacher des Buddha, in den kanonischen Schriften*, Munich: 1966; André Bareau, “Étude du bouddhisme,” *Annuaire du Collège de France*, 1988–89: 533–47; R.A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994: 171.

and Devadatta in connection with the five punctilious practices (*dhūtāṅgas*) indicates that all was not well within the saṃgha even at the time of the Buddha.⁶ It has been suggested that the most important reason for the vilification of Devadatta was his strict identification with forest Buddhism as it did not go well with settled monasticism. Devadatta considered settled monasticism “as a form of laxity, a danger for the future of the community and for Buddhism altogether.”⁷ Early texts like the *Theragāthā* lament that bhikkhus “desirous of gain, inactive, devoid of energy; finding their woodland wilderness wearisome, will dwell in villages.”⁸ The same text refers to monks “who once forsook wealth, wives and children, now do evil for the sake of a spoonful of rice,”⁹ are “cheats, frauds, false witnesses, unscrupulous, with many stratagems they enjoy the things of the flesh,”¹⁰ who “accumulate much wealth,”¹¹ “cultivate practices which are not to be done,”¹² and who in the future “will accept silver and gold, fields, property, goats and sheep, male and female servants”¹³ and “will be angry and full of hatred, hypocritical, obstinate, treacherous, envious and with different doctrines.”¹⁴ In the same text, there is a reference to a monk who “is lazy and a glutton, a sleeper who rolls as he lies, like a great hog fed on grain.”¹⁵ The *Theragāthā* also admits that “although lacking virtuous qualities, running affairs of the saṃgha, the incompetent, the garrulous, and those lacking wisdom will be powerful.”¹⁶ The *Jātakas* acknowledge that easy life in the saṃgha began to tempt many undesirable characters

⁶*Vin.*ii.196–198; iii.171.

⁷André Bareau, *op. cit.*, 542.

⁸*Th.*962.

⁹*Th.*934.

¹⁰*Th.*940.

¹¹*Th.*941.

¹²*Th.*934.

¹³*Th.*957.

¹⁴*Th.*952.

¹⁵*Th.*17.

¹⁶*Th.*955.

and that there were certainly some people who entered the saṃgha because they found living easier inside the saṃgha than on the outside. One of the *Jātakas* relates the story of a young man who fervidly declared: “Day and night I am labouring with my own hands at all sorts of tasks, yet never do I taste food so sweet. I must become a Bhikkhu myself.”¹⁷ It cannot be denied that laxity in the saṃgha grew to the point where monks in large numbers were pocketing individual or community wealth and engaging in several other indiscretions.

Different Councils called from time to time also point to the fact that the saṃgha was faced with matters relating to indiscipline and moral turpitude. The frivolous utterances of Subhadda at the news of the demise of the Buddha were quite alarming to say the least. When the First Council was held under the presidentship of Mahākassapa, dissident aged monks like Purāṇa and Gavāmpati chose to remain aloof from the Rehearsal declaring that it did not fully accord with what they had heard from the Buddha. There is sufficient evidence to show that there were monks who did not fully cooperate with the Buddha during his lifetime and with his chief disciples like Mahākassapa, Upāli, and Ānanda after his death. The refusal of the Buddha to appoint any person as his successor and his declaration that after him his dhamma alone would be the instructor of the saṃgha must have given opportunities to centrifugal tendencies for different considerations, thus leading to the formation of different groups. Moreover, the years following the *parinibbāna* were marked by a process of growth with respect to wealth, membership, and complexity of the saṃgha. The aggrandisement in wealth actually appears to have been the main cause of the factious dispute which led to the convening of the Second Council and the first major schism which took place when a large number of Vajjian monks from the eastern regions like Vaiśālī advocated Ten Extravagances (*dasavatthūni*), which, according to orthodox monks, were violations of the rules of the *Vinaya*. In this connection, Bhavya

¹⁷J.i.311.

reports that “the bhikṣus of Vaiśālī said—‘Venerable sirs, enjoy yourselves,’ and they made enjoyment lawful.”¹⁸ The advocates of the Ten Extravagances seceded from the original group called Sthaviravādins or Theravādins and styled themselves as the Mahāsāṃghikas. According to the Sri Lankan chronicles, they convened their own Council and drew up resolutions in keeping with their own views. This council became known under the name of Mahāsāṃgha or Mahāsāṃgīti. On the occasion of the Third Council, Aśoka is said to have expelled 60,000 bogus monks from the saṃgha for practising many things that were a breach of the *Vinaya* rules.¹⁹

Chinese pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing refer to the Buddhist saṃgha owning movable and immovable property in substantial quantities.²⁰ Yijing censures such monks who were avaricious and did not divide the produce of the monastic lands according to rules, and instead grasped the whole share. He observes, “It is unseemly for a monastery to have great wealth, granaries full of rotten corn, many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury without using any of the things, while all the members are suffering from poverty.”²¹ Xuanzang laments that Buddhist monks in Sind were not only ignorant and given to indulgence and debauchery but they also did not study with an aim to excel.²² It had become quite normal

¹⁸W.W. Rockhill, op. cit., 171.

¹⁹*The Mahāvamsa*, ed. W. Geiger, London: Pali Text Society, 1908: chap. V.

²⁰For instance, according to Faxian, “the kings of the various countries and the heads of the Vaiśyas built *vihāras* for the priests and endowed them with fields, houses, gardens, and orchards, along with the resident populations and their cattle.” [*The Travels of Fa-hien (399–414 AD)*, or, *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, trans. J. Legge, re-trans. H. Giles, repr., Westport: Conn. Greenwood Press, 1981: 43.] Same sort of information is available at *Yijing*.193; *Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911: 112–13.

²¹*Yijing*.194.

²²*Xiyu Ji*.345–347.

for Buddhist *vihāras* to own servants, cattle, land, granaries, and villages for the purpose of maintaining their residents. There is evidence to show that some of the prominent *vihāras* had become so influential that they not only began to issue their own seals and coins, but as a result of the possession of property in such proportions they were also in a position to extend their power and influence in their respective localities.²³ Many greedy monks associated with these *vihāras* are stated to have hoarded wealth and invested it like the lay supporters. It is not surprising that the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* talks about monks who had become industrialists (*bhikṣavo bahukarmāntā*).²⁴

The *Sūtra of the Face of Lotus* translated into Chinese towards the close of sixth century CE prophesies about monks who will take pleasure in doing only evil deeds such as “theft, pillage, tending of meadows and cultivation of lands.”²⁵ Similarly, in the *Vibhāṣā* it is lamented that

bhikṣus will have taken up the homeless life in order to acquire advantages and ensure their subsistence. They will lack diligence in reciting the holy texts and will not seek solitude in order to meditate and reflect. During the day, they will gather in order to discuss worldly matters (*lokadharmā*), they will become excited and give confused cries; during the night, tired and lazy, they will prolong their sleep. They will be devoid of reasoning (*vitarka*) and reflection (*upanidhyāna*). Since they will all neglect the true teaching of the Buddha, they will no longer follow the practices.²⁶

²³P. Niyogi, “Organisation of Buddhist Monasteries in Ancient Bengal and Bihar,” *Journal of Indian History*, LI (3): 1973: 531–557. “Endowments in Favour of Early Buddhist Monasteries in Bengal and Bihar,” *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, vol. VI, pts. 1–2, 1972–1973, Calcutta, 1973: 160–165.

²⁴AMMK.235.

²⁵See Sylvain Lévi, “Notes chinoises sur l’Inde.V.Quelques documents sure le bouddhisme Indien dans l’Asie centrale (première partie),” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient*, nos. 3–4, Paris, July–Sept 1905: 298.

²⁶Quoted at É. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans.Sara Webb-Boin, Louvain-la-Neuve: Insitut Orientaliste: 1988 (originally published as *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: Des origenes à l’ère Śaka*, Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 43, 1958): 199.

The *Caturbhāṇī* mentions Buddhist monks frequenting sex-workers and being caught in *flagrante delicto*, nuns acting as procuresses, and both monks and nuns playing the roles as go-betweens (*pīṭhamarda* and *pīṭhamardikā*).²⁷ The *Rāṣṭra-pālaparipṛcchāsūtra* talks about gallivanting monks who “without shame and without virtue, haughty, puffed up and wrathful...intoxicating themselves with alcoholic drinks... possessed of wives, sons and daughters...indisciplined and uncontrolled in eating and sex-play... as unrestrained as elephants without elephant-goad.”²⁸ According to the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa, in the *vihāra* built by king Meghavāhana’s queen Yūkādevī, one-half was assigned to regular monks and the other half to those who deserved blame because they had wives and family.²⁹ In the *Mālatī-mādhava* of Bhavabhūti, an old Buddhist nun called Kāmaṇḍakī and her two associates are used for bringing about a private union of lovers. She even intrigues to stage a mock marriage between Nandana and Makaranda.³⁰ Similarly, in the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍī and the *Mālavikāgnimitra* of Kālidāsa Buddhist nuns are shown acting as “go-betweens.”³¹

Scathing attack on the laxity and luxury of Buddhist monks is made in the *Matta-vilāsa*, a seventh century dramatic work by king Mahendravarman.³² As possibly the worst example of degeneration, the Buddhist monk, in this drama, is found quoting the holy books to justify his being a bibber, a womanizer, and a glutton. It may be worthwhile here to quote this Buddhist monk, Nāgasena, who bore the same name as the celebrated monk of

²⁷*Caturbhāṇī*. 14, 31–35, 157f.

²⁸*Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchāsūtra*. 137–138.

²⁹*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. iii. 11–12.

³⁰*Mālatī-mādhava*, Act I, scenes 1 et seq.

³¹A. A. Macdonell, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, New York: D. Appleton, 1900: 80; *Mālavikāgnimitra of Kālidāsa*, critical edn. K. A. Subramania Iyer, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1978.

³²*Matta-vilāsa: A Farce By Mahendravarman-Varman*, trans. L. D. Barnett, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London), V. 1928–30: 697–717.

the famous *Milindapañha*, but whose lifestyle appears to be in glaring contrast to that of the latter:

Ha! Our supremely gracious Lord the Tathāgata has favoured the congregation of us friars with his instructions ordaining for us lodging in fine buildings, lying on bedsteads with well-made beds, eating in the forenoon, savouring drinks in the afternoon, chewing betel flavoured with the fine kinds of fragrance, and wearing soft robes; but why did he not think of sanctioning possession of women and use of strong drink? No, as he knew everything, how could he fail to see that? It is certain, I think, that those poor-spirited and spiteful-minded Elders from envy of us young men have blotted out sanctions of women and use of strong drink in the books of Scripture.³³

Kavirāja Śaṃkhadhara's *Laṭakamelakam*, written in the first-quarter of the twelfth century, talks about a monk's amatory behaviour who makes advances to a washerwoman.³⁴ There were obviously many monks whose moral standards must have been lower than Bhartṛhari's who "Having desired to embrace the excellent Law he became a homeless priest, but overcome by worldly desires he returned again to the laity. In the same manner he became seven times a priest, and seven times returned to the laity."³⁵ Thus, it is not surprising, as pointed out in the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, that Buddhist monks were disparaged at places such as Ujjayinī and their sight was considered highly inauspicious and avoidable.³⁶

On analyzing the above stated examples, one is tempted to say that corrupt practices had become widely prevalent in the Buddhist saṃgha. However, at the same time it must be said that not all practices could really be called corrupt as such, much less harmful to the health of the saṃgha. For instance, it would be difficult to understand the logic behind ownership of land, servants, granaries, and precious metals by *vihāras* being the cause of the

³³Ibid., 707.

³⁴Quoted at S.C. De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, I, Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 1942: 496f.

³⁵*Yijing*. 179.

³⁶Acts VII and VIII.

decline of a religion even if its founder had advocated otherwise. Interestingly, “it was in the supposed declining period . . . in the eleventh century that Atīśa went to Tibet. Was he a product of decadence?”³⁷ Furthermore, it would be unscholarly to say that corrupt practices in a religion would necessarily lead to its decline. In any case, laxity in discipline of religious life was not Buddhist *sui generis*. It existed in other contemporary religions as well. The Vaiṣṇavas, the Bhāgavatas, the Paurāṇikas, and the Śrotrīyas have also been ridiculed and chastised from time to time.³⁸ Many religious trusts, temples, and shrines are run in the present times like money-grabbing business houses and their managements are not exactly paragons of virtue. But still they continue to thrive. In other words, it is not possible to establish relationship between the decline of a religion and its moral and ethical corruption. Moreover, as pointed out above, though moral laxity did corrupt the Buddhist saṃgha at certain times and places, still it would be manifestly wrong to say that it had assumed a universal character. It is also important to remember here that alongside these corrupt monks and nuns, we are reminded of the existence of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs who lived remarkably clean and exemplary lives. Thus, it would be wrong to create an impression that the Buddhist saṃgha had become corrupt lock, stock, and barrel. The saṃgha had never turned into an institution in disgrace. There is no well-documented evidence to prove that Buddhism was abandoned by its supporters for the reason that it had turned into a corrupt religion. Besides, as many of the examples of corrupt bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs are from an early period, then the question arises as to how did Buddhism manage to keep its presence felt as late as the early medieval times? Clearly, moral and ethical degeneracy cannot be considered as the *causa sine qua non* for the decline of Buddhism in India.

³⁷N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 159–160.

³⁸See, S.C. De, op. cit., 252n.

4

The Issue of Animosity of the Brāhmaṇas

IT IS SOMETIMES alleged that the brāhmaṇas despised the Buddhists and that their animosity, though not persistent and sustained, broke out in a frenzy from time to time till Buddhism was overpowered and wiped out from India.¹ According to L.M. Joshi, “Among the external factors the most important was the Brāhmaṇical hostility towards Buddhism. . . . This hostile attitude was vigorously sustained till Buddhism was overpowered in India and disappeared from the land of its birth.”² Similarly, Yamakami was of the opinion that “there is no reason to doubt that the Sanskrit Tripiṭaka met, at the hands of the Brahmin persecutors of Buddhism, a treatment not dissimilar to that which the Indian Buddhists themselves received.”³ G. Verardi⁴ claims to have found

¹See, for instance, T.W. Rhys Davids, “Persecution of Buddhists in India,” *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*, 1896: 87–92.

²L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India*, 2nd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977: 311.

³Sogen Yamakami, *Systems of Buddhist Thought*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1912: 16.

⁴G. Verardi, *Excavations at Harigaon, Kathmandu: Final Report*, 2 vols., Rome: IsMEO Reports and Memoirs 25, 1992; “Religions, Rituals, and the Heaviness of Indian History,” *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 56, Napoli, 1996: 215–253; “Images of Destruction, An Enquiry into Hindu Icons in their Relations to Buddhism,” in G. Verardi and S. Vita, eds., *Buddhist Asia 1: Papers from the First Conference of Buddhist Studies held in Naples in May 2001*, Kyoto: Italian School of Eastern Asian Studies, Kyoto, 2003: 1–36.

sufficient evidence on the violent end of Indian Buddhism at the hands of brāhmaṇas. He feels that religious tolerance was alien to pre-British India and that there is sufficient actual or circumstantial evidence available all over India, from Kathmandu to Orissa and the Deccan, in the Brāhmaṇical sources (inscriptions, literary works, oral tradition) as well as in the archaeological record, testifying to the destruction of monasteries by the brāhmaṇas and the creation by them of special militias aimed at intimidating the Buddhist monks and the laity. He further points out that the great monasteries of northeastern India like Sāranātha, Nālandā, and Vikramaśilā had been or were being appropriated by the brāhmaṇas at the time of the Turkish conquest. In his opinion, the heretics, identified with the *asuras* of the endless *deva-asura* war, are often depicted as Buddhist princes or monks and in some cases, as in the *Kalki Purāṇa*, the final battle against the Buddhists is overtly described. Traditional doctrinal controversies between learned brāhmaṇas and Buddhist teachers, we are told, turned into ordeals where the latter might be killed or exiled, or obliged to convert. Attack on Aṅgulimāla by a frenzied mob, the murders of Moggallāna and Āryadeva, anti-Buddhist crusades of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śaṃkarācārya, and an attempt by brāhmaṇas not only to burn the pavilion where Xuanzang was to be honoured by king Harṣavardhana but also to kill pro-Buddhist Harṣavardhana himself, are given as important instances in support of such an hypothesis. The description of the Buddha in some of the Purāṇas as a grand seducer who brought the *asuras* to their ruin and the view in the *Yājñavalkya* that a bhikkhu in yellow robes was an ill omen, are further quoted as examples of the contempt in which the Buddhists were held by the brāhmaṇas. According to A.L. Basham “some kings were strongly anti-Buddhist and took active steps to discourage Buddhism. More serious opposition came from certain medieval Hindu philosophers and their disciples. Teachers such as Kumārila and Shankara are said to have traveled far and wide throughout India preaching

their own doctrines and attacking those of their rivals, and Buddhism seems to have been singled out for special attention by those reformers. Anti-Buddhist propaganda of one kind or another may have had a significant influence in the decline of Buddhism.”⁵

Some scholars have pointed out that it is not uncommon to find Buddhists being referred to as “outcastes” (*vasalaka*) and “devils/demons” (*daitya, dānava*).⁶ We are further told that the modern Telugu words *lanja dibbalu*, which refers to mounds of earth containing Buddhist archaeological ruins, literally mean “prostitute hill,” indicate the degree of hostility and ridicule which Buddhism elicited in some sections of the medieval Brāhmaṇical-Hindu community.⁷ It has also been pointed out by some scholars that Brāhmaṇical-Hindu incorporation of Buddhist ideas, what Arnold Toynbee once called “the philosophical plunder of Buddhism” was also in the later period accompanied by “mean-spirited ridicule.”⁸ S.B. Pillai has pointed out that architecturally several Coḷa period temples were originally Buddhist shrines.⁹ In the Coḷa-ruled Kaveri delta areas, several huge Buddha granites have been recovered within or close to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples. Pillai argues that in several Coḷa temples the sculptors’ guilds left clues about the original shrines. Examples are also cited of temples such as the Thiruvadigai temple (Cuddalore district) where apparently during the annual temple festival the temple elephant knocks the Buddha sculpture, kept in one of the corners, thrice with its trunk to symbolise the victory of Śaivism over śramaṇic religions.¹⁰

⁵A.L. Basham, “The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt and the Decline of Buddhism in India,” in, A.T. Embree (ed. and rev.), *Sources of Indian Tradition: From the Beginning to 1800*, vol. 2, sec. edn., Penguin Books, 1988: 193.

⁶J.C. Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004: 10.

⁷Ibid.

⁸See, for instance, in *ibid.*, 11.

⁹See S.B. Pillai, *Introduction to the Study of Temple Art*, Thanjavur: Equator and Meridien, 1976.

¹⁰S. Anand, “The Bodhi’s Afterglow,” *Outlook India*, 7 July 2004.

There is no doubt that there were occasions when Buddhist monks were held in ridicule. There were also instances of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs being beleaguered or sometimes even murdered. In the *Vinaya Piṭaka* there are several examples of brāhmaṇas who spoke of bhikkhunīs as harlots:

Now at that time several nuns, going to Sāvattihī through the Kosalan districts, having arrived at a certain village in the evening, having approached a certain brāhmaṇa family, asked for accommodation. Then that brāhmaṇa woman spoke thus to these nuns: 'Wait, ladies, until the brāhmaṇa comes.' Then that brāhmaṇa having come during the night, spoke thus to that brāhmaṇa woman: 'Who are these?' 'They are nuns, master.' Saying: 'Throw out these shaven-headed strumpets,' he threw them out from the house.¹¹

Talking about Śaṃkarācārya, Tāranātha mentions that

... in all the eastern and southern regions the *tīrthika*-s prospered and the Buddhists were going down... there lived two brothers who were the *acārya*-s of the *tīrthika*-s. One of them was called Datta-trai (Dattātreyā). He was specially in favour of *samādhi*. The second was Saṅgarācārya (Śaṃkarācārya), who propitiated Mahādeva. He chanted spells on a jar placed behind a curtain. From within the jar emerged Mahādeva up to his neck and taught him the art of debate.¹²

In Bhaṃgala he entered into debates. The elders among the *bhikṣu*-s said, 'It is difficult to defeat him. So *acārya* Dharmapāla or Candragomī or Candrakīrti should be invited to contest in debate.' The younger *paṇḍita*-s did not listen to this and said, 'The prestige of the local *paṇḍita*-s will go down if a debater is brought from somewhere else. We are more skilled than they are.'

Inflated with vanity, they entered into debate with Śaṃkarācārya. In this the Buddhists were defeated and, as a result, everything belonging to the twenty-five centres of the Doctrine was lost to the *tīrthika*-s and

¹¹SBB.xiii.275.

¹²Public debates were a constant part of the lives of scholars who engaged in debates not only at their own assemblies but also at the royal courts as well as the *śrāddha* and marriage ceremonies with the debaters receiving parting gifts depending upon each scholar's performance. (Samita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment*, Calcutta: Sarat Book House, 1993: 1–10, 68, 70.)

the centres were deserted. About five hundred *upāsaka*-s had to enter the path of the *tīrthika*-s.

Similarly, in Oḍiśā also Śaṃkarācārya's *brāhmaṇa* disciple Bhaṭṭa Ācārya did the same. The daughter of Brahmā (Sarasvatī) made him an expert in logic. Many debates between the insiders and outsiders took place there.

There lived then an insider *paṇḍita* called Kuliśaśreṣṭha, highly skilled in grammar and logic. As before, he also arrogantly entered the debate by staking the [respective] creeds. The *tīrthika* became victorious and destroyed many temples of the insiders. They robbed in particular the centres for the Doctrine and took away the *deva-dāsa*-s (*vihāra*-slaves). . . .

In the south, there were leading *tīrthika* debaters, the famous *brāhmaṇa* Kumāralīla and Kaṇadaroru. The latter was a follower of Makhādeva and an observer of the *govrata*. In many debates in the south they defeated the disciples of Buddhapālita, Bhavya, Dharmadāsa, Dignāga, and others. Also, none belonging to the Śrāvaka *saṃgha* could face them in debate. As a result, there were many incidents of the property and followers of the insiders being robbed by the *tīrthika brāhmaṇa*-s.¹³

First of all, it may be pointed out that persecution may not necessarily cause the decline of a religion. China is a quintessential example of this. Buddhism came out unscathed despite having been vehemently opposed by both Confucianism and Daoism. As opposed to persecution, in the history of India, there is no dearth of examples of brāhmaṇas extending support in various forms, especially material support, to Buddhist institutions. If some brāhmaṇas were detractors of Buddhism, some of the best supporters of Buddhism were also brāhmaṇas. In fact, over a quarter of the Buddhist monks and nuns mentioned in the *Vinaya* and *Sutta* Piṭakas came from the brāhmaṇa caste.¹⁴ Over forty per cent of the leading monks and nuns mentioned

¹³*Tāranātha*. 225–226.

¹⁴See K.T.S. Sarao, *Origin and Nature of Ancient Indian Buddhism*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1989: 69.

in texts such as the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Theragāthā*, and *Therīgāthā* belonged to the brāhmaṇa caste.¹⁵ Thus, stray examples quoted in support of Brāhmaṇical enmity and the resultant persecution are not enough to show that they caused the violent decline of Buddhism in India. Of course, acquisition of membership of the saṃgha in large numbers by people of brāhmaṇa caste may have steadily subverted institutional Buddhism from within in matters which either went against the interest of brāhmaṇas as a caste or made Buddhism strikingly different from Paurāṇika Brāhmaṇism. The case of the disappearance of the bhikkhunī-saṃgha is one such example. One has only to go through the Pāli canonical literature to see how strong in numbers were the monks of brāhmaṇa castes who rarely gave up their claim to brāhmaṇahood by birth in practice. As we shall see in the following pages, after Buddhism became a pan-Indian religion from Aśoka's period onwards and began to enjoy sufficient socio-political clout, the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas for their own survival began a systematic subversion of institutional Buddhism so that the Buddha could be assimilated into the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu pantheon and lose his cultic veneration. Thus, the conflict of interests cannot be denied.¹⁶ But there are not sufficient examples of overt hostility shown by the brāhmaṇas to label them as communal. In other words, the wrangles between the followers of the Buddha and the followers of different sects of Brāhmaṇism must be seen more as internal petty altercations within a broader Indian religious system rather than frenzied communal riots. Moreover, the Brāhmaṇical malevolence, having an intellectual flavour *uber alles*, appears to have been directed primarily at the monastic movement and to some extent at the comparative opulence of the monasteries. Early Buddhist sources do not refer to any persecution and

¹⁵Ibid., 127; B.G. Gokhale, "The Early Buddhist Elite," *Journal of Indian History* XLIII, pt. II, 1965: 395.

¹⁶Célestin Bouglé, *Essays on the Caste System*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977: 73.

they certainly do not betray any feelings of mutual animosity bordering on violent and aggressive altercations between the Buddhist monastics and the Brāhmaṇical followers. The Buddha made respectful reference to brāhmaṇas who observed their vows in contradistinction to those who were mere brāhmaṇas by birth, and he classed the worthy samaṇas with the brāhmaṇas.¹⁷ “[I]n dozens of Suttas, meetings of brāhmaṇas and Buddha or his disciples and missionaries . . . almost always seem to be marked by courtesy on both sides. No meetings are recorded in the early Pāli texts or brāhmaṇical texts about Śākyans condemning the tenets of ancient brāhmaṇism or about brāhmaṇas censuring the Bauddha heterodoxy.”¹⁸ As far as the Brāhmaṇical followers were concerned, to them Buddhism was a mere sect within the Brāhmaṇical system. According to a tradition, Āryadeva, the pupil of Nāgārjuna, was murdered by one of the fanatical pupils of a teacher whom Āryadeva had defeated in a debate. Āryadeva had asked his disciples to forgive the killer.¹⁹ The murder of Moggallāna (supposedly committed at the behest of Nigaṇṭhas), described only in the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, was an individual act of crime. Similarly, the assault on Aṅgulimāla had no religious motive behind it. As put by R.C. Mitra, “[t]he attitude of the Hindus might have graduated from cold to scorching contempt, but a policy of harrying the Buddhists out with fire and sword sounds like a myth.”²⁰ “While isolated instances of actual violence by Hindu zealots doubtless did occur, these were probably not sufficient in number or impact to seriously

¹⁷The *Dhammapada* devotes a full chapter entitled “Brāhmaṇavagga” (383–423) detailing qualities of a brāhmaṇa leaving no doubt that the word *brāhmaṇa* was held in high esteem by the Buddha.

¹⁸P.V. Kane, op. cit., vol. V, pt. II: 1004.

¹⁹M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, trans. V. Srinivasa Sarma, vol. 2, repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999: 337.

²⁰R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 139.

cripple the groups towards which they were directed.”²¹ Though some aspects of the philosophy of Buddhism, especially its atheism and their dress or shaven-heads, may have often been the subjects of insensitive ridicule, it is not possible to find reliable evidence of any spirit of fanatical fury or fierce hatred in the sources. It was quite typical in India for holy persons to be surrounded by men and women of diverse religious backgrounds.

Xuanzang relates a story of the brāhmaṇas of Kanauja who were so jealous of the unusual prominence and propitiation accorded to Buddhists by Harṣavardhana that they set fire to the pavilion built for the reception of the Chinese pilgrim. According to him, they even made an attempt on the life of the king.²² Here it may be said that king Harṣavardhana also hardly respected the principles of tolerance and liberty of speech when during the debate organized on the following day he threatened to cut off the tongue of anyone who would dare oppose the distinguished guest.

The statement in the *Kerala-Utpatti* that the Buddhists were driven out of Kerala by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa does not appear to be correct. As pointed out by R.C. Mitra, “It appears very probable that the name of Kumārila, like that of the more eminent Śaṅkara after him, was devised by later zealots as a plausible human agency with whom to associate the tradition of a heresy-hunt simply because these authors fashioned the new philosophy in vindication of orthodoxy which seemed to have knocked the bottom out of the Buddhist defence.”²³ The writings of Kumārila do not reflect any anti-Buddhist frenzy. In fact, “he regards the Buddhist system of thought as authoritative...and...allows it the merit of having curbed extreme attachment to sensuous objects. He does not seem to be shocked by its opposition to the Veda, only he puts it in the same category with the Sāṃkhya,

²¹P.S. Jaini, “The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast,” in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 83.

²²*Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911: 179.

²³R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 128.

the Yoga, the Pañcarātra, and the Pāśupata.”²⁴ In the exposition of his own philosophy, Kumārila admits the validity of the Vijñānavāda doctrine.²⁵ His respect for the Buddha only stops short of the recognition of the Avatarhood of the Buddha.²⁶

It cannot be denied that the archaeological records at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā appear to point towards destruction which is hard to explain as the vandalism of treasure seekers.²⁷ The local tradition ascribes the destruction of this place to Śaṃkarācārya and the adjoining lands are still in the possession of those monks who owe allegiance to the Order of Śaṃkarācārya. However, apropos allegations of anti-Buddhist actions of Śaṃkarācārya, it may, on the whole, be said that spurious scandals are often an inevitable penalty of supreme eminence.²⁸ When Śaṃkarācārya came north to the intellectual centres there, he borrowed many of the ideas that had been formulated by Buddhist philosophers of the past.²⁹ In his exposition that the world is an illusion, Śaṃkarācārya borrowed arguments from Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra, though he disagreed with them on some matters.³⁰ Śaṃkarācārya was the spiritual grandson of Gauḍapāda. Gauḍapāda’s ideas were “a synthesis of Vedantism and Buddhism.”³¹ In fact, Gauḍapāda’s thinking often coincides

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵P.V. Kane, op. cit., Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, vol. II, pt. II, 1997: 721–722; vol. III, 3rd edn., 1993: 841.

²⁶R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 129.

²⁷B.C. Law, *Buddhistic Antiquities at Nagarjunikonda*, Calcutta: The Indian Research Institute, 1950: 6.

²⁸The relationship of Śaṃkarācārya with Buddhism has been the subject of considerable debate since ancient times. If some have hailed him as the arch critic of Buddhism and the principal architect of its downfall in India, there are others who have described him as a Buddhist in disguise. (See, for a scholarly study of Śaṃkarācārya, G.C. Pande, *Life and Thought of Śaṃkarācārya*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994: 255.)

²⁹Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Harvard University Press, 2000: 239–240.

³⁰Ibid., 248.

³¹R.K. DasGupta, *Vedanta in Bengal*, Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 2003: 3.

so exactly with some aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy that there are some who believe that he himself was a Buddhist. For instance, S.K. Dasgupta thinks that since Gauḍapāda flourished after the advent of all the great Buddhist teachers, including Aśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, “there is sufficient evidence in his kārikās for thinking that he was possibly himself a Buddhist, and considered that the teachings of the Upanishads tallied with those of Buddha.”³² Dasgupta further points out that “Gauḍapāda assimilated all the Buddhist Śūnyavāda and Vijñānavāda teachings, and thought that these held good of the ultimate truth preached by the Upanishads. It is immaterial whether he was a Hindu or a Buddhist, so long as we are sure that he had the highest respect for the Buddha and for the teachings which he believed to be his.”³³ Śaṅkarācārya is said to have had a thundering voice at whose approach, as says Tāranātha, Buddhist monasteries began to tremble and the monks began to disperse pell-mell.³⁴ However, very little of fact seems to be embodied in such later legends except the invincible progress of his new philosophy and dialectics. “Advaita-Vedanta of Śaṅkara with its colourless Brahman contradicting all the empirical realities is in its turn the culmination of the evolution of the Upanishadic Buddhistic thought.”³⁵ There is no doubt that he made efforts to fortify his-kind of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism by enrolling missionaries in its defence and organizing them into corporate monastic schools under the central direction of the Grand Abbot of Śringerī. But the legend of his having preached and led a bloody crusade against the Buddhists cannot be sustained. In the small poem, *Daśāvatāra-stotra* assigned to Śaṅkarācārya, he is found describing the Buddha in worshipful terms as a Yogī, seated in Padmāsana and thereby recognizing

³²Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. I, 1922: 423.

³³Ibid., 429.

³⁴*Tāranātha*. 225–226.

³⁵Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 2nd rev. edn., 1962: 29.

the divine character of the Buddha.³⁶ Called hidden Buddhist (*pracchana bauddha*) by some, Śaṅkarācārya may not have been exactly an *amicus usque ad aras*, still no special animosity is betrayed against the Buddhists in the writings attributed to him. It is also important to remember that Buddhism was in decline much before Śaṅkarācārya arrived on the scene. Moreover, Śaṅkarācārya refuted not just the Buddhists but also most of the other schools of Indian philosophy. But none of these other schools seems to have suffered any visible damage as a result. In any case, Tāranātha himself points out that both Kumārila and Śaṅkarācārya finally met their match in a Buddhist monk and were routed in the intellectual wrestling that ensued

Dharmakīrti . . . put up a notice . . . ‘Does anybody want a debate?’

The *brāhmaṇa* Kaṇagupta, a follower of Kaṇāda’s view and five hundred experts in the six systems of philosophy assembled there and argued with him for three months. He defeated all the five hundred of them one by one and converted them into the followers of the Buddha’s Law. He led the king to order fifty wealthy *brāhmaṇa*-s among them to establish each a centre for the Doctrine of the insiders.

As he came to know of this, Kumārila [Kumārila] felt furious and himself came to argue accompanied by five hundred *brāhmaṇa*-s. He demanded of the king, ‘Should I be victorious, Dharmakīrti is to be killed. If Dharmakīrti be victorious, I should be killed.

But the *ācārya* said, ‘In case of Kumārila’s victory, the king should himself decide whether to convert me into a *tīrthika* or to kill me or to beat me or to bind me. But in case I win, he should not kill Kumārila. Instead of that he [i.e., Kumārila] should be converted into a follower of the Law of the Buddha.’

Thus he staked the Law and the debate started.

Kumārila had five hundred theses [lit: vows] of his own. He refuted each of these with a hundred arguments. Then even Kumārila started worshipping the insiders. The five hundred *brāhmaṇa*-s also realized that only the Law of the Buddha was correct. Thus they received ordination in the Law of the Buddha. . . .

At that time, Śaṅkarācārya sent a message to Śrī Nalendra announcing that he wanted to have a debate. They [monks of Nālandā] postponed

³⁶*MAI*.xxvi.5.

the debate to the next year and thus took time to invite Dharmakīrti from the south.

... On the eve of the debate between Śaṃkarācārya and Śrī Dharmakīrti, Śaṃkara declared to the people in the presence of the king: 'In case of our victory, we shall decide whether to drown him into the Gaṅgā or to convert him into a *tīrthika*. In case of his victory, I shall kill myself by jumping into the Gaṅgā.

Saying this, he started the debate. Dharmakīrti defeated Śaṃkarācārya repeatedly. At last he was reduced to a position from where there was nothing more to say. When Śaṃkarācārya was about to jump into the Gaṅgā, the *ācārya* tried to stop him. But he did not listen to this... he jumped into the Gaṅgā and died.³⁷

In a study, based on the data collected from the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies*,³⁸ it has been shown that over forty important Buddhist thinkers from the eighth to the first-quarter of the thirteenth century lived in India.³⁹ The century-wise breakup of the list shows that from 700–800 eight, from 800–900 seven, from 900–1000 five, from 1000–1100 fifteen, and from 1100–1200 eleven Buddhist thinkers existed in India.⁴⁰ However, during the same period Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism had just about half a dozen thinkers of comparable repute. It seems that though these five centuries were a sun-set period for Buddhism, yet the few surviving Buddhist *mahāvihāras* due to the particular attention that they paid to academic and intellectual work, succeeded in producing quite a few thinkers of substance. However, compared to this, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism during the same period appears to have been greatly agrarianized by the Bhakti movement and was rather focussing on displacing Buddhism from the socio-political pedestal, leaving the path of

³⁷*Tāranātha*. 231–233.

³⁸*Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies: Bibliography*, ed. Karl H. Potter, 3rd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998.

³⁹Daya Krishna, "Was Ācārya Śaṃkara Responsible for the Disappearance of Buddhist Philosophy from India?," *New Perspectives in Indian Philosophy*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001: 166.

⁴⁰*Ibid*.

wisdom (*jñānamārga*) almost entirely to Buddhism. “To have had not more than half a dozen thinkers during a period of almost five hundred years do not speak very highly of Ācārya Śaṃkara’s *Digvijaya*, so loudly proclaimed not only by his disciples but also others, in the Indian tradition.”⁴¹ Thus, it is difficult to believe that Śaṃkarācārya’s views spread rapidly during his lifetime (c. CE 800) with his far-flung *maṭhas* serving as radiation points. For instance, although Bīrūnī (*fl.* 1030) studied a mass of Sanskrit literature with access to learned Brāhmaṇa informants, he makes no reference to Śaṃkarācārya.⁴² If Śaṃkarācārya’s views had not reached northern India in any strength by the eleventh century, they are, of course, likely to have spread more slowly, so as to obtain wide acceptance some time before the seventeenth century.⁴³

Though religious persecution and conflict of a limited and temporary character was not really a *terra incognita*, in a complex society such as India, particularly in the south “the conflict was limited to specific areas and groups, and was not pan-Indian. There was no sense of holy war- a *jihad* or a crusade. Religious intolerance was less severe when compared to Europe or west Asia, but acute intolerance took a social form, with untouchability constituting the worst form of degradation known to human society.”⁴⁴ Brāhmaṇical-Hindus had no consciousness of belonging to a religious community, and, therefore, their stand against other sects was segmented and episodic.⁴⁵ But Indian history does not bear out the fact of a continued and organized

⁴¹Ibid., 167.

⁴²See Irfan Habib, “Medieval Popular Monotheism and Its Humanism: The Historical Setting,” *Social Scientist*, vol. 21, nos. 3–4, March–April 1996: 78–88.

⁴³Ibid., 79.

⁴⁴Romila Thapar, *Historical Interpretations and the Secularising of Indian Society*, Kappen Memorial Lecture, Bangalore, 1999: 17.

⁴⁵Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992: 74–75.

persecution as the state policy of a dynasty in a measure sufficient to exterminate an established faith. On the other hand, even from purely epigraphical evidence one can make out numerous instances of tolerance of Buddhism by Brāhmaṇical rulers or of reverence to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu deities by Buddhists. A glimpse into the Gupta period may be illuminating as it is generally held as the *belle époque* of Brāhmaṇical revival. Āmrakārdava was a Buddhist general of many victories in the service of Candragupta II and the general in his grant to an *ārya-saṃgha* at Kākāṇḍabhoṭa of Sāñcī, pronounces the guilt of the slaughter of a cow or a brāhmaṇa on anyone who would disturb it.⁴⁶ This shows that the psyche of a Buddhist in the matter of taboos and inhibitions differed very little from that of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and had the same notion of heinous sins.⁴⁷ Harṣavardhana pays homage to Śiva and the Buddha in his *Ratnāvalī* and *Nāgānanda* respectively. As time went by, the borderline between the Buddhists and the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus became thinner and thinner.

Had the Buddha been hated by the Brāhmaṇical society, the same society would not have accepted him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*⁴⁸ invokes the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu for the protection of the world from sinners and not for deluding *asuras* to their ruin as in the *Viṣṇu*, *Agni* or other early Purāṇas. The *Varāha Purāṇa* also refers to the Buddha as an incarnation in no deprecating sense, but he is adored simply as the god of beauty.⁴⁹ Superior contempt is the distinctively Hindu method of persecution. It is true that Purāṇas such as the *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, and *Matsya* mention the Buddha as the grand seducer and the *Yājñavalkya* considers the sight of a monk with yellow robes as an execrable augury.⁵⁰ But this kind of attitude was not always one-

⁴⁶*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III: 29–43.

⁴⁷R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 133.

⁴⁸i.202.

⁴⁹i.39–48.

⁵⁰i.273.

sided and some scholars have gone so far as to say that Buddhism was much more unfriendly towards Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism than the other way round. It is no secret that the Buddhists “criticised severely the doctrines of the Hindus, attacked their caste-system, insulted the Hindu gods and, in fact, did everything that is far from being friendly.”⁵¹ In fact, there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Buddhists tried to show different Brāhmaṇical deities in bad light. For instance, the Siddhas are expected to be served in heaven by Hari as gatekeeper. There are images in which Indra always serves to bear the parasol, and Gaṇeśa is at the feet of Viṣṇu.⁵² Each of the Hindu gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva is stigmatized as Māra or the seducer. In the *Sādhanaṃālā*, Viṣṇu is mentioned in an undignified position of being the *vāhana* of *Harihariharivāhanodbhava*, one of the forms of the all compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.⁵³ Similarly, major Brāhmaṇical gods are shown in a humiliating position of kowtowing to Mārīci. In fact, she is shown as trampling upon some of them. In the Nālandā Inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra, it is stated that Vipulaśrīmitra’s fame “arose in various places as if to deprive Hari of his (*exalted*) position.”⁵⁴ Similarly, in the Maināmatī Copperplate, the fame of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva is shown as spreading in the three worlds in such a way that Indra was brought down to the earth from his own palace:

The sportive acts of that crest-jewel of kings, the glorious *Raṇavaṅkamalla* (a Hero in bends of battle), whereof he was the Groom of the Royal Horse, were also extraordinary, as by reason of his white renown attacking the three worlds here, there and everywhere, the thousand-

⁵¹B. Bhattacharyya, “A Peep into the Later Buddhism,” *ABORI*, vol. 5, pt. III, April 1929: 15.

⁵²B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sādhanaṃālā and Other Cognate Tantric Texts of Rituals*, 2nd rev. and enl. edn., Calcutta: Firma K. Mukhopadhyay, 1958: 162–163.

⁵³*Sādhanaṃālā: Avalokiteśvara Section; Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts*, ed. Ruriko Sakuma, New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2002: chap. 9.

⁵⁴N.G. Majumdar, “Nālandā Inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra,” *EI*, vol. XXI, 1931–1932: 97–101.

eyed god (Indra) even in his own palace came to be brought down to the Earth.⁵⁵

However such examples should not be stressed too far. It cannot be said with certainty that similes such as these smack of any sectarian disdain. They are more reflective of the period's peculiar fondness for grandiloquence and extravagant exaggeration than anything else. The absence of one single truth in Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism created sufficient space for plurality of modes of faith in god and afterlife, including the denial of god's existence. It goes without saying that, the tolerance of divergent views is integral to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

Thus, it may be said that in spite of some stray incidents resulting from the heat of sectarian rivalry here and there, there are no reliable examples of any purposive and sustained persecution much less a crusade. "India has been especially fortunate in having a long tradition of public arguments, with toleration of intellectual heterodoxy."⁵⁶ As pointed out by Murti, "polemic (*parapakṣanirākaraṇa*) is an integral part of each (Indian) system. It is an evidence of the maturity not only of one system, but of several contemporary ones from which it is differentiated. In spite of the heroic language used, polemics does not mean that rival systems are refuted out of existence; they are only differentiated from each other.... Philosophical schools have attained their fullness because of criticism and opposition."⁵⁷ Buddhism had neither been conceived by the Buddha as a proselytizing religion nor had it attained any numerical success to the extent that it may have posed any danger to the survival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism as a religion. The Buddhist challenge to thought was answered primarily on an intellectual plane and

⁵⁵D.C. Bhattacharyya, "The Maināmatī Copper-plate of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikālaśāhadeva (1141 Śaka)," *IHQ*, vol. IX, 1933: 288–289.

⁵⁶Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, London: Penguin Books, 2005: 12.

⁵⁷T.R.V. Murti, "The Rise of Philosophical Schools," in H.G. Coward, ed., *Studies in Indian Thought: Collected Papers of Prof. T.R.V. Murti*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996: 8.

on the whole, it is not easy to find any example of Brāhmaṇical hostility towards Buddhist lay supporters in India. Moreover, Indian Buddhism attempted to seek space within space rather than carving out its own space to the exclusion of others. In this sense, Buddhism did not pose any danger to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. However, Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas as a priestly class did feel threatened by Buddhism from the time of king Aśoka onwards when institutional Buddhism acquired the character of a pan-Indian religion with significant socio-political clout whereby the Buddha rose to the status of the most popular religious figure in the whole of Jambudvīpa. Aśoka's Buddhistic rendition of dharma ostensibly had become, at least for the time being, a matter of implemented public policy.⁵⁸ In response to such a development, the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas, as a priestly class with socio-political vested interest, came up with well-thought out two-pronged agenda for their own survival:

1. They became designedly agreeable and assimilative towards those issues in Buddhist weltanschauung which had become socio-religiously commonsensical.⁵⁹ A trend towards assimilation of Buddhism by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism appears to have begun during the Gupta period. Kane has suggested that the Purāṇic practices and religious rites undermined the power and prestige of Buddhism and weaned away large sections of the supporters from the attractive features of Buddhism by securing to them in the reorientated Hindu faith the same benefits, social and spiritual, as promised by Buddhism.⁶⁰ In his opinion, the Purāṇas played a substantial role in bringing about the decline and disappearance of Buddhism by emphasizing and assimilating some of the

⁵⁸See J.C. Holt, *op. cit.*, 11–12.

⁵⁹Thus, P.V. Kane has indicated that this assimilation of Buddhist ideas was neither a consequence of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tolerance, nor was it indicative of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu propensity for philosophical syncretism (*op. cit.*, vol. V, pt. II, 2nd edn., 1977: 913ff.).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. II, 913–914.

principles and doctrines of the Buddha.⁶¹ Slowly and steadily the Buddha was assimilated into the pantheon of Viṣṇu and the Bhakti movement contributed significantly by providing a congenial environment for such a development.

2. They began to, slowly and steadily, but systematically, subvert institutional Buddhism. As suggested by Ronald Inden, this is clearly visible in the shifting of the theories and political orientation of kingship from Buddhist to Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva rationales.⁶² From the eighth century onwards the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods, Viṣṇu and Śiva, usurped the place of the Buddha as the supreme, imperial deities.⁶³ The Buddha lost his position to both Viṣṇu and Śiva as the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the royalty. In the end, the assimilation of the Buddha into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was so comprehensive that the Buddha lost all cultic veneration.

As the support base of Buddhism became narrower with the decline in urbanization, the saṃgha began to shrink and became confined to fewer and fewer monasteries. In order to meet this challenge, these monasteries began to tune themselves to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu moorings and opened their doors to secular education. Some of them even grew bigger and richer in the process. However, the result of these efforts was no more than a mere flash in the pan. Though these transformed monasteries (some of which grew into universities later) were still Buddhist, the learning that they dispensed was liberal and multifaceted, apart from being available to non-Buddhists. From the Gupta period onwards, building monasteries and providing for their upkeep began to be regarded more as a service rendered to the cause of learning and culture than to the cause

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ronald Inden, "Ritual, Authority, and Cycle Time in Hindu Kingship," in J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 41–91.

⁶³Inden, op. cit., 67. The Pālas were perhaps the only exception.

of Buddhism.⁶⁴ As a consequence of such risqué developments, Buddhism began to make dangerously close calls upon Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, especially when the latter was just beginning to broaden itself to include the Buddha in its pantheon. Such a palsy-walsy trend is clearly visible in the artistic tradition that began during the Gupta period and was largely a combination of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and Buddhist traditions.⁶⁵ Such a development may have in the end turned out to be an important contributory factor towards the ultimate assimilation of Buddhism into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

⁶⁴Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962: 331.

⁶⁵B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, 2nd repr. with correction, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959: 140.

The Question of Persecution by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu Kings

A LARGE NUMBER OF Buddhist texts hold Brāhmaṇical kings like Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Śaśaṅka responsible for following deliberate and systematic policies of persecution against the Buddhists. Withdrawal of royal patronage and persecution by these kings, it has been suggested, removed the ground from under the very feet of Buddhism. For instance, D.P. Chattopadhyaya has pointed out that with the withdrawal or collapse of royal patronage, Buddhism as a religion had to go into pieces.¹ Similarly, Gail Omvedt has proposed that withdrawal of royal patronage “proved decisive in the defeat of Buddhism. . . . Rulers . . . refused state protection to their persons and property—if they did not actively murder and loot them themselves.”² André Wink too feels that “it was the power of kings which was decisive in the restoration of the new brahmanical order.”³

Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (c. 184–148 BCE) is generally regarded as the symbol and leader of the Brāhmaṇical revival that took

¹D.P. Chattopadhyaya, “Preface,” in *Tāranātha*.xiii.

²Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003: 171–172.

³André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1: *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, Seventh to Eleventh Centuries*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990: 230.

place when the dynasty of the Mauryas, the alleged supporters of non-Brāhmaṇical faiths, was brought to an end. Puṣyamitra who was the commander-in-chief of the last Mauryan king, Br̥hadratha, assassinated his master, captured power, and laid foundations of the Śuṅga dynasty.⁴ His extensive empire with its capital at Pāṭaliputra included the cities of Ayodhyā, Vidiśā, and Vidarbha (Berar) and extended in the south up to the river Narmadā. The accounts in the *Aśokāvadāna*, the *Divyāvadāna*, and *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism* also show him as being in control of Jālaṃdhar and Śākala in the Punjab.

It appears that the reign of Puṣyamitra was one of struggle and stress for the new dynasty. The Śuṅgas fought wars with the Andhras, Kalingas, Indo-Greeks (known as Yavanas/Yonas in the Indian sources), and possibly the kingdoms of Pañcāla and Mathurā (which may not have been under Puṣyamitra's rule).⁵ Puṣyamitra himself fought at least three major wars. One of these wars was fought against Yajñasena, the king of Vidarbha, who had remained loyal to the Mauryan dynasty after the *coup d'état*. He fought the other two wars against the Yavanas, in all probability against King Menander (Milinda of the post-Canonical Buddhist text *Milindapañha*). After the toppling of the Mauryan empire by the Śuṅgas, the Greco-Bactrians expanded into India, where they founded the Indo-Greek kingdom. This process was begun by Demetrius I (r. c. 200–180 BCE) who, after capturing portions of northwestern India around 180 BCE, founded the cities of Takṣaśilā (Sirkap)⁶ and Sāgala⁷ in

⁴F.E. Pargiter, *Purāṇa Texts of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, 2nd edn., Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1962: 30–31.

⁵*Yuga Pu.* 47–48. See also A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks: Revisited and Supplemented*, 4th repr. with supplement, Delhi: B.P. Publishing Corporation, 2003:110, 267.

⁶It is generally reckoned that Demetrius ruled from Taxilā (where many of his coins were found in the archaeological site of Sirkap).

⁷Capital of Menander I (King Milinda of the *Milindapañha*).

the Punjab.⁸ Even though the Śuṅgas were in control of some of the important centres of power, they do not appear to have had either the strength or the resources to recover the whole of the Mauryan empire, despite the fact that Puṣyamitra's two Aśvamedha *yajñas* suggest that they tried it.⁹ Under such a state of political affairs it was not surprising that the new power of the Greco-Bactrians should invade and occupy parts of the outlying provinces of the Mauryan empire. Having consolidated their power, the Greco-Bactrians attacked the Panjab and still later, appear to have made occasional incursions deeper into the Gaṅgā valley.¹⁰ On the basis of largely indirect and some speculative evidence, it has been suggested that the Yavanas invaded India to show their support for the Mauryan empire which was based on a long history of dynastic and matrimonial alliances,¹¹ exchange

⁸*Claudius Ptolemy: The Geography*, trans. and edn. E.L. Stevenson, repr., New York: Dover, 1991: VII.1.

⁹A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, 16, 110.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17, 110.

¹¹Talking about the matrimonial alliance of 302 BCE, Strabo says that: "The Indians occupy in part some of the countries situated along the Indus, which formerly belonged to the Persians; Alexander deprived the Ariani of them, and established there settlements of his own. But Seleucus Nicator gave them to Sandrocottus in consequence of a marriage contract, and received in return five hundred elephants" [*The Geography of Strabo*, with an English translation by H.L. Jones, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1924: 15.2.1(9)]. Allan and others on the basis of this remarked that "If the usual oriental practice was followed and if we regard Chandragupta as the victor, then it would mean that a daughter or other female relative of Seleucus was given to the Indian ruler or to one of his sons, so that Aśoka may have had Greek blood in his veins." (J. Allan, H.H. Dodwell, and T.W. Haig, eds., *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943: 33.) Similarly, Marshall pointed out that "The Seleucid and Maurya lines were connected by the marriage of Seleucus' daughter (or niece) either to Chandragupta or his son Bindusara" (J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951: 20). Commenting on this, Tarn points out that "Should this far-reaching suggestion be well founded, it would not only throw light on the good relations between the Seleucid and Maurya dynasties, but would mean that the Maurya dynasty was descended from, or anyhow connected with, Seleucus... when the Maurya line became extinct, he (Demetrius) may well

of gifts¹² and envoys,¹³ religious missions,¹⁴ and regular renewals of friendship¹⁵ with the Yavanas. The Yavanas may have also

have regarded himself, if not as the next heir, at any rate as the heir nearest at hand” (W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*. Chicago: Ares, 1984: 152–153).

¹²Aphrodisiacs of various kinds being sent to Seleucus by Candragupta have been recorded in the classical sources: “Theophrastus says that some contrivances are of wondrous efficacy in such matters as to make people more amorous. And Phylarchus confirms him, by reference to some of the presents which Sandrakottus, the king of the Indians, sent to Seleucus; which were to act like charms in producing a wonderful degree of affection, while some, on the contrary, were to banish love” (*The Deipnosophists or Banquet of the Learned of Athenaeus*, ed. C.D. Yonge, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854, bk. I: 30). Bindusāra is said to have requested Antiochus I to send him some sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist: “But dried figs were so very much sought after by all men (for really, as Aristophanes says, ‘There’s really nothing nicer than dried figs’), that even Amitrochates, the king of the Indians, wrote to Antiochus, entreating him (it is Hegesander who tells this story) to buy and send him some sweet wine, and some dried figs, and a sophist; and that Antiochus wrote to him in answer, “The dry figs and the sweet wine we will send you; but it is not lawful for a sophist to be sold in Greece” (ibid., op. cit., bk. III: 1044). In his Edict no. 2, Aśoka claims to have introduced herbal medicine in the Greek territories, for the welfare of humans and animals.

¹³Megasthenes, Deimakos, and Dionysius are known to have been sent as ambassadors to India.

¹⁴In his edicts, king Aśoka claims to have sent Buddhist emissaries to the Hellenistic west around 250 BCE.

¹⁵Beginning with Candragupta, the Mauryas appear to have maintained diplomatic ties with the Greeks till the end of their rule and they may have been seen as allies by the Greco-Bactrians. When after having made peace with Euthydemus, Antiochos III went to India in 209 BCE, he is said to have renewed his friendly relationship with the Indian king there and received presents from him: “He crossed the Caucasus (Hindu Kush) and descended into India; renewed his friendship with Sophagasenus the king of the Indians; received more elephants, until he had a hundred and fifty altogether; and having once more provisioned his troops, set out again personally with his army: leaving Androstenes of Cyzicus the duty of taking home the treasure which this king had agreed to hand over to him” (*The Histories of Polybius*, with an English translation by W.R. Paton, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1925, vol. IV: bk. XI.39). The historian Diodorus talks about the love for Greeks of the king of Pāṭaliputra, evidently a Mauryan king: “Iambulus, having found his way to a certain village, was then brought by the natives into the presence of the king

been motivated to attack the Śūṅgas in order to protect the Yavana populations in the subcontinent.¹⁶ Kālidāsa recounts in his *Mālavikāgnimitra* that Puṣyamitra appointed his grandson Vasumitra to guard his sacrificial horse, which wandered on the right bank of the Sindhu (Indus) river and was seized by Yavana cavalymen—the latter being thereafter defeated by Vasumitra.¹⁷ We are also told that there may have been the added reason of Yavanas using the *coup d'état* as an opportunity for realizing the unfulfilled dream of Alexander to conquer India. During their campaigns in India, Demetrius and Menander are said to have subdued more tribes than Alexander.¹⁸ Cumulative evidence provided by the Greek and Indian¹⁹ sources indicates

of Palibothra, a city which was distant a journey of many days from the sea. And since the king loved the Greeks ('Philhellenos') and devoted to learning he considered Iambulus worthy of cordial welcome; and at length, upon receiving a permission of safe-conduct, he passed over first of all into Persia and later arrived safe in Greece." *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History*, trans. C.H. Oldfather, vol. II, bks. 2.35–4.58 (Loeb Classical Library no. 303), 1935: ii.60. See also A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, 262.

¹⁶"Obviously, for the Greeks who survived in India and suffered from the oppression of the Sunga (for whom they were aliens and heretics), Demetrios must have appeared as a saviour" (Mario Bussagli, Francine Tissot, Béatrice Arnal, *L'art du Gandhara*. Paris: Librairie générale française, 1996: 101). "To parts of India, perhaps to large parts, they came, not as conquerors, but as friends or 'saviors'; to the Buddhist world in particular they appeared to be its champions." "The people to be 'saved' were in fact usually Buddhists, and the common enmity of Greek and Buddhists, the Sunga king threw them into each other's arms" (W.W. Tarn, op. cit., 175). "Menander was coming to save them from the oppression of the Sunga kings" (ibid., 178).

¹⁷5.15.14–24.

¹⁸*The Geography of Strabo*, with an English trans. H.L. Jones, bks. 6–14, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1924: 11.11.1.

¹⁹Patañjali, a grammarian and commentator on Pāṇini c. 150 BCE, describes in the *Mahābhāṣya*, the invasion in two examples using the imperfect tense of Sanskrit, denoting a recent event: *Aruṇad Yavanaḥ Śāketaṃ* (The Yavana were besieging Śāketa) and *Aruṇad Yavano Madhyamikāṃ* [The Yavana were besieging Madhyamikā (the "Middle country")] (Osmund Boppearachchi, *De l'Indus à l'Oxus, Archéologie de l'Asie Centrale*, Lattes: Association imago-musée de Lattes, 2003:16). The Anuśāsanaparava of the *Mahābhārata*

that, after capturing the Punjab, the Yavanas invaded not only Sāketa, Pañcāla, and Mathurā, but possibly ventured as far as Pāṭaliputra.²⁰ But the campaigns of the Yavanas deeper into India, if at all true, appear to have been short-lived as they were forced to turn back as a result of the coup staged by Eucratides back in Bactria, indicating an occupation period of about eight years.²¹ Alternatively, Menander may merely have joined a raid led by Indian kings (Pañcālas and Mathurās) down the Gaṅgā,²²

affirms that the country of Mathurā was under the joint control of the Yavanas and the Kambojas (12.105.5). Accounts of battles between the Greeks and the Śuṅgas in central India are also found in the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, a play by Kālidāsa which describes a battle between Greek forces and Vasumitra, the grandson of Puṣyamitra, during the latter's reign. (Osmund Bopearachchi, *Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian Coins in the Smithsonian Institution*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1993:16). Also the Brāhmaṇical text, the *Yuga Purāṇa*, which describes Indian historical events in the form of a prophecy, relates that "Then, having approached Sāketa together with the Pañcālas and Māthuras, the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks)—valiant in battle—will reach Kusumadhvaja. Then, once Puṣpapura has been reached [and] its celebrated mud [-walls] cast down, all the realms will be in disorder" (*Yuga Pu.* 47–48). The Hāthīgumphā inscription, written by the king of Kalinga, Khāravela, has been interpreted to describe the presence of the Greek king "Demetrius" with his army in eastern India, possibly as far as Rājagṛha, about 70 km southeast of Pāṭaliputra, but claims that Demetrius eventually withdrew to Mathurā on hearing of Khāravela's military successes further south: "Then in the eighth year, (he) with a large army having sacked Goradhagiri causes pressure on Rājagaha (Rājagṛha). On account of the loud report of this act of valour, the Yavana (Greek) King Dimi[ta] retreated to Mathurā having extricated his demoralized army and transport" (*EI.* xx.1929–30: 87). However, in the end, Puṣyamitra's forces in all likelihood recaptured Mathurā and may have driven the Greco-Bactrians out of the Punjab.

²⁰*Yuga Pu.* 47–48. See also A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, 113, 267.

²¹"Pataliputra fut occupée par les forces coalisées Grecques pendant presque huit ans" (Mario Bussagli, Francine Tissot, and Béatrice Arnal, *L'art du Gandhara*, Paris: Librairie générale française, 1996: 100). Osmund Bopearachchi, *Monnaies Gréco-Bactriennes et Indo-Grecques, Catalogue Raisonné*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1991: 85.

²²A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, 2003: 113; John Keay, *India: A History*, New York: Grove Press, 2001: 108.

as the Yavana territory has only been confirmed from the Kabul valley to the Punjab.

After seizing the throne, Puṣyamitra, who in all likelihood was connected to the well-known brāhmaṇa clan of Bhāradvāja,²³ is alleged to have run the affairs of his kingdom with the help of his contemporary brāhmaṇa scholars such as Manu (the author of the *Manusmṛti*) and Patañjali (the author of the *Mahābhāṣya*) and reestablished the sacrificial ceremonies of Vedic Brāhmaṇism.²⁴ As animal sacrifices and old Vedic rituals were completely discouraged by the Mauryan rulers who were followers of heterodox faiths such as Buddhism and Jainism, his performance of two Aśvamedha *yajñas* is viewed as an anti-Buddhist activity of a king who was a fundamentalist brāhmaṇa.²⁵ Haraprasad Sastri has suggested that actions such as discouraging the animal sacrifices by Aśoka were a direct attack on brāhmaṇas since much of their power and prestige lay in the fact that they alone could perform sacrifices, and thus act as intermediaries between the people and the gods.²⁶ Such an action, it alleged, deprived brāhmaṇas of their long-enjoyed privilege of guiding the religion of the masses. Sastri further maintains that the *dharmma-mahāmattas* employed by Aśoka for the propagation of his policies, destroyed the reputation of the brāhmaṇas and such actions, coming from a śūdra king, were

²³Though Pāṇini connects the Śuṅgas with the well-known brāhmaṇa *gotra* Bhāradvāja (K.L. Hazra, *The Rise and Decline of Buddhism in India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995: 46), the Purāṇas mention Puṣyamitra as a brāhmaṇa of the Śuṅga clan. There is also a reference to his son Agnimitra as being from the Naimbika family of the Kāśyapa lineage in Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* (*Mālavikāgnimitra of Kālidāsa*, critical edn. K.A. Subramania Iyer, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1978: Act I).

²⁴See N.N. Ghosh, "Did Puṣyamitra Śuṅga persecute the Buddhists?," in D.R. Bhandarkar, ed., *B.C. Law Volume I*, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, 1945: 215.

²⁵See K.P. Jayaswal, "An Inscription of the Śuṅga Dynasty," *JBORS*.x. 1924: 203.

²⁶See, for instance, Haraprasad Sastri in *JASB*, 1910: 259–262.

particularly resented by the brāhmaṇas.²⁷ It is further alleged that Aśoka had acted against Brāhmaṇism by ‘showing up the false gods’ who had been till then worshipped in Jambudvīpa. As claimed by U.N. Ghoshal, the propagation of Buddhism during the reign of the Mauryas had disturbed the Brāhmaṇical social and religious Order.²⁸ Thus, the end of the dynasty of the Mauryas at the hands of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga is seen as a victory of anti-Buddhist Brāhmaṇical forces which had been silently at work. In other words, it is generally held that after the end of the Mauryan rule, Buddhism not only lost the royal favours that it had enjoyed under kings such as Aśoka but, as a result of the persecution by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, it is alleged, Buddhism also lost most of what it had gained earlier. Thus, it has been suggested that other than destroying Buddhist monasteries and stūpas and killing Buddhist monks, Puṣyamitra Śuṅga caused greater damage to Buddhism by letting unfavourable forces loose against it. Gargi Chakravartty, for instance, says that even if the atrocities committed by Puṣyamitra as reflected in the *Divyāvadāna* are exaggerated, “the acute hostility and tensions between Puṣyamitra and the monks cannot be denied.”²⁹ Earlier, P.C. Bagchi had also emphatically pointed out that Puṣyamitra’s behaviour was inimical towards the Buddhists and that their persecution took place at his hands.³⁰

In order to critically examine the different textual references that talk of the so-called anti-Buddhist activities of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, it would be worthwhile here to take a firsthand look at the details as given in the various sources. The most important and

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸U.N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1957: 258.

²⁹Gargi Chakravartty, “BJP-RSS and Distortion of History,” in P. Lahiri, ed., *Selected Writings on Communalism*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1994: 166–167.

³⁰P.C. Bagchi, “Decline of Buddhism and its Causes,” *Asutosh Mukerjee Silver Jubilee Volumes*, III: 405–406.

perhaps the earliest reference is from the *Divyāvadāna* (and its constituent the *Aśokāvadāna*). According to this Sarvāstivādin text of the second century CE

Puṣyamitra, having called his ministers, said to them: 'How can I obtain everlasting fame in the world?' They replied: 'In the past your predecessor, King Aśoka had built 84,000 stūpas. So long as the Law of the Buddha remains, his [Aśoka's] fame will prevail. You, O King, should also build 84,000 stūpas.' The king said: 'King Aśoka was an emperor. Is there another way?'

One of the brāhmaṇa priests of the king, who had perverse views [about Buddhism], said: 'Whether one does right or wrong, either way one's fame can last for a long time. So you could just do the opposite [of what Aśoka did].' At this, the king set out for the Kukkuṭārāma [monastery at Pāṭaliputra] with the aim of destroying the Law of the Buddha. Lion's roar was heard at the gate of the monastery. At this, the greatly frightened king retreated into Pāṭaliputra. This happened a second and third time. Thereafter, he summoned the saṃgha and said to the monks: 'I will wipe out the religion of the Buddha. Which one do you prefer (to preserve): the stūpas or the residence of the saṃgha?' The monks chose the stūpas. Thereupon Puṣyamitra slaughtered the monks and destroyed the residence of the saṃgha. Applying such methods (on the way), he arrived in Śākala [Sialkot in the Pakistani Punjab]. (Here) he issued the edict: 'Whoever brings me the head of a śramaṇa, I shall rewarded him with a dīnāra [a gold piece].' There in a great stūpa lived an arhat. He began creating countless number of heads of śramaṇas by means of his supernatural powers and told the inhabitants to carry them to the king. When the king came to know as to what was happening, he wanted to kill the arhat. But then the arhat entered the attainment of cessation but did not cross over to the other side. Thus the king [having failed to kill him] gave up and went away to Koṣṭhaka.

There the Yakṣa Daṃṣṭrānīvāsin [the guardian spirit of Bodhi who lived in this region] thinks: 'He destroys the religion of the Buddha. I have received and I maintain the precepts of the Buddha. It does not behove me to harm anyone.' Earlier, the Yakṣa Kṛmiśa had asked for his daughter's hand. But he refused his request saying, 'You are a sinner.' That daughter was now given to Kṛmiśa by him for the sake of the religion of the Buddha. However, King Puṣyamitra was protected constantly by a very powerful Yakṣa and, because of his power, the king could not be killed. However, the Yakṣa Daṃṣṭrānīvāsin lured the Yakṣa who protected Puṣyamitra beyond the mountains to the Southern

Ocean. Then Yakṣa Kṛmiśa, having seized an enormous mountain, crushed king Puṣyamitra along with his army. . . . Thus, King Puṣyamitra got killed and the Maurya dynasty ended.³¹

The *Vibhāṣā*, a Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣika text dated in the second century CE, points out that Puṣyamitra

a brāhmaṇa king . . . who detested the Law of the Buddha: he set fire to the Sūtras, destroyed Stūpas, razed Saṃghārāmas and massacred Bhikṣus. In the frontier country (*pratyanta-janapada*) of the kingdom of *Chia shê mi lo* (Kaśmīra), he destroyed 500 Saṃghārāmas and, in other places, even more. The wicked Māra cunningly sent him Kumbhaṇḍas, Yakṣas and Asuras to support his power in secret, so much so that nowhere was anyone able to resist him. Gradually destroying the Law of the Buddha, he reached the Bodhi tree. The deity of that tree, named *Ti yū* (Satyavāk) thought: 'Here is this foolish and cruel king who wishes to destroy the place where the Bhagavat Buddhas, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, vanquished Māra the wicked and won marvellous Enlightenment.' Immediately, this divinity manifested, by transformation, a female body of great beauty and prostrated herself before the king. On seeing this, the king was seized with desire, but as soon as the good Law-protecting deity had obtained his favours, she killed him and slew his army as well as the troop of the Asuras.³²

This story is also repeated in the *Śāriputrapariṣcchā*, a Mahāsaṃghika text translated into Chinese between CE 317–420. But the story in this text, being much more detailed, inter alia, shifts the anti-Buddhist operations of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga from northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent to Bihar in the east

³¹*Divyāvadāna*, edn. P.L. Vaidya, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1959: 282. *The Aśokāvadāna*, edn. S. Mukhopadhyaya, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1963: 133–135. P.C. Bagchi has identified Daṃṣṭrānīvāsin and Kṛmiśa with Menander I and Demetrius I respectively ("Kṛmiśa and Demetrius," *IHQ*. xxii.1946: 86–91).

³²Quoted from É. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śāka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste: 1988 (originally published as *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: Des origines à l'ère Śāka*, Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 43, Louvain: 1958): 387.

One day, he [Puṣyamitra] asked his ministers ‘What can I do to make my name live on?’ A Minister said to him: ‘There are only two means: to build 84,000 stupas as did the former king [Aśoka], renounce the assets of the kingdom and present them to the Three Jewels: such is the first means. The second is to do everything to the contrary: destroy the stupas, abolish the Law, persecute and exterminate the fourfold Saṃgha: such is the second means. Thus, good or bad, your name will live on.’ The king said: ‘I have neither the power nor the virtues of the former king; I will therefore adopt the second line of conduct to make a name for myself.’

At the head of four army units, the king attacked the monastery . . . (which) had two stone lions which roared and made the earth quake. Greatly afraid, the king beat a retreat and returned to town. The inhabitants watched him shouting and weeping, and blocked the way. The king’s anger increased and, not daring to return, he forced his officers to slaughter the inhabitants without warning. Then by means of a decree, he summoned the seven assemblies; bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, śrāṃṇeras and śrāṃṇerīs, śikṣamāṇas, śramaṇas and śramaṇīs assembled. The king asked them: ‘Which do you prefer me to destroy, the stupa or the saṃghārāmas?’ They all answered: ‘We would like nothing to be destroyed, but if that is impossible, destroy the saṃghārāma.’ The infuriated king cried: ‘Why should I not do so?’ So, he put them all to death, great and small indiscriminately. Blood flowed in streams. The king destroyed more than eight hundred saṃghārāmas and stūpas.

The lay people prompted by perfect faith raised their voices, uttered loud cries, lamented and became angry. The king seized and imprisoned them and had them whipped. Five hundred Arhats went up to *Nan shan* (Dakṣiṇāgiri) where they took refuge, and since the mountains and valleys [in that place] were deserted and steep, the army could not reach them. That is why the king, fearing that they would not be annihilated, proposed rewards and appealed to all the kingdoms, saying: ‘If I obtain a head [of a religious], I will give three thousand pieces of gold as a reward.’ The Arhat *Chun t’u po t’an* (Kuṇḍopadhānīya) and the people who, through the Buddha’s mission, were responsible for the dissemination [of the Law], produced through transformation innumerable men who brought innumerable heads of bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs and all of them received the [promised] gold, [so that] the king’s coffers were completely empty. The king’s anger increased. Kuṇḍopadhānīya manifested his body and entered the attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*). The king became even more terrible, for the Arhat, protected by the power of the attainment, was invulnerable. The king set fire to ‘Sūtra Towers’ (*sūtrakūṭāgāra*),

but as the fire began to burn and swirling flames were about to reach the sūtras, the bodhisattva Maitreya, by means of his supernatural power (*ṛddhyabhijñā*), secured . . . Sūtra and Vinaya and ascended to the Tuṣita heaven again.

Puṣyamitra then went to the *Ya ch'ih t'a* 'Stūpa of the Tooth' (Daṃṣṭrā-stūpa?). The Yakṣa of that stūpa said: 'There is a Yakṣa *Ch'ung hsing* (Kṛmiśa); formerly he has asked for the hand of my daughter, but I had refused him disdainfully. Today, when I have sworn to protect the Law, I will give him my daughter so that he will become my friend.' The Yakṣa Kṛmiśa rejoiced and, grasping a huge mountain in his hand, crushed the king and his four army units with it, and they all died in an instant. Then the family of the king and his posterity were completely extinguished.³³

The *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, which belongs to the early medieval times, also talks of Puṣyamitra's evil actions against Buddhism:

In the Low Age (*yugādhame*) there will be a king, the chief Gomimukhya,³⁴ destroyer of my religion (*śāsanāntadhāpako mama*). Having seized the east (*prāciṃ diśam*) and the gate of Kaśmīr (*kāśmīre dvāram*), he the fool, the wicked, will destroy *viḥāras* and venerable relics (*dhātuvara*) and kill monks of good conduct. Having turned northwards (*uttarāṃ diśam*), he will die, being killed along with his officers (*sarāṣṭrā*) and his animal family by the fall of a mountain rock. He will be destined to a dreadful suffering in hell. . . After him will come a protector of the earth known as Buddhapakṣa, a Mahāyakṣa, the very charitable one who will be fond of the doctrine of the Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ śāsane rataḥ*) . . . (and) will build in many places *viḥāras*, gardens, caityas, Buddha-images, stepped wells, wells, etc.³⁵

Tāranātha, the celebrated Tibetan Buddhist historian, mentions that

³³Reproduced from É. Lamotte, op. cit., 389–391.

³⁴AMMK mentions Puṣyamitra Śuṅga in abusive terms such as *Gomimukhya* (great proprietor of cattle), *Gomiṣaṇḍa* (Gomin, the Ox), in allusion to the Vedic sacrifices which were revived under the Śuṅgas (See É. Lamotte, op. cit., 391 and K.P. Jayaswal, *An Imperial History of India*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934: 19).

³⁵AMMK.530–541. English translation based on É. Lamotte, op. cit., 391 and K.P. Jayaswal, *An Imperial History of India*, 18–19.

the *brāhmaṇa* king Puṣyamitra, along with other *tīrthika*-s, started war and thus burnt down numerous Buddhist monasteries from the *madhyadeśa* to Jalandhara. They also killed a number of vastly learned monks. As a result, within five years, the doctrine was extinct in the north.³⁶

Apart from the textual evidence, archaeological evidence is also put forward in support of anti-Buddhist actions of Puṣyamitra and other kings of the Śuṅga dynasty. For instance, it has been pointed out that at Takṣaśilā there is evidence of some damage done to the Buddhist establishments about this time.³⁷ John Marshall proposed that the Sāñcī stūpa was vandalized during the second century BCE before it was rebuilt later on a larger scale, suggesting the possibility that the original brick stūpa built by Aśoka was destroyed by Puṣyamitra and then restored by his successor Agnimitra.³⁸ Similarly, it has been pointed out that the gateway of Bhārhut was built not during the reign of Puṣyamitra but his successors who followed a more tolerant policy towards Buddhism as compared to Puṣyamitra who was a leader of Brāhmaṇic reaction.³⁹ The destruction and burning of the great monastery of Ghositārāma at Kauśāmbī in the second century BCE is also attributed to the Śuṅgas.⁴⁰ For instance, G.R. Sharma who was responsible for most of the excavation work at Kauśāmbī was inclined to connect this phenomenon with the persecution of Buddhism by Puṣyamitra.⁴¹ Similarly, the Deorkothar stūpas (geographically located between Sāñcī and Bhārhut) are said to have suffered destruction, also suggesting

³⁶*Tāranātha*. 121.

³⁷J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.

³⁸J.H. Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi*, 3rd edn., Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955: 38.

³⁹N.N. Ghosh, op. cit., 215–217.

⁴⁰*Mālavikāgnimitra of Kālidāsa*, critical edn. K.A. Subramania Iyer, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1978: Act I.

⁴¹See J.S. Negi, *Groundwork of Ancient Indian History*, Allahabad: Allahabad University Press, 1958: 294.

some kind of involvement of Śuṅga rulers. It has been alleged that “Although archaeological evidence is meager in this regard, it seems likely that the Deorkothar stupa was destroyed as a result of Pushyamitra Sunga’s fanaticism. The exposed remains at Deorkothar bear evidence of deliberate destruction datable to his reign. The three-tiered railing is damaged; railing pillars lie broken to smithereens on stone flooring. Twenty pieces of pillar have been recovered, each fragment itself fractured. The site offers no indication of natural destruction.”⁴²

Many Indologists including H.C. Raychaudhury,⁴³ R.C. Mitra,⁴⁴ É. Lamotte,⁴⁵ K.P. Jayaswal,⁴⁶ R.S. Tripathi,⁴⁷ Romila Thapar,⁴⁸ and D. Devahuti,⁴⁹ have expressed scepticism about the truthfulness of the Buddhist legends connected to the persecution of Buddhism by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga.⁵⁰ Raychaudhury,

⁴²P.K. Mishra, “Does Newly Excavated Buddhist Temple Provide A Missing Link?” *Archaeology*, A Publication of the Archaeological Institute of America, April 2001, www.archaeology.org/online/news/deorkothar/ (accessed 15 April 2007).

⁴³H.C. Raychaudhury, *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1923: 354–355.

⁴⁴R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 125.

⁴⁵É. Lamotte, op. cit., 392.

⁴⁶K.P. Jayaswal, “Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire,” *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Patna, vol. IV, pt. III, September 1918: 257–265.

⁴⁷R.S. Tripathi, *History of Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960: 187.

⁴⁸R. Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, rev. edn., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997: 198–201.

⁴⁹D. Devahuti, *Harsha: A Political Study*, third rev. edn., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 48.

⁵⁰K.P. Jayaswal, “Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire,” *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Patna, vol. IV, pt. III, September 1918: 257–265; H.C. Raychaudhury, *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1923: 210; R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 125; R.S. Tripathi, *History*

for instance, points out that the ban on animal sacrifices did not necessarily entail antagonism towards the brāhmaṇas for the simple reason that the Brāhmaṇical literature itself stresses *ahiṃsā*, and mentions the futility of laying great stress on sacrifices alone.⁵¹ Aśoka did not ban only those animals which were sacrificed in *yajñas*, but even others. Thus, the ban was not exactly on those animals which were sacrificed.⁵² It has been suggested that though Śuṅga kings, particularly Puṣyamitra, may have been staunch adherents of orthodox Brāhmaṇism, they do not appear to have been as intolerant as some Buddhist texts have shown them to be. Apropos the śūdra origin of the Mauryas, apart from the fact that the Mauryas are mentioned as kṣatriyas in the *Divyāvadāna*, Raychaudhury has pointed out that the Purāṇa statement that all kings succeeding Mahāpadma Nanda will be of śūdra origin implies that Nanda kings after Mahāpadma were śūdras and not the Mauryas because if it referred to succeeding dynasties, then even the Śuṅgas and Kaṇvas would have to be listed as śūdras.⁵³ In fact, not only that some of the *dhamma-mahāmattas* were concerned specifically with safeguarding the rights and welfare of the brāhmaṇas, but some of the Mauryan kings themselves were also followers of Brāhmaṇism. For instance, as mentioned in the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, Jalauka was not only a zealous Śaiva and an open supporter of Brāhmaṇism but he was also quite unfriendly towards Buddhism.⁵⁴ R.C. Mitra too feels that, “The tales of persecution by Puṣyamitra as recorded in the *Divyāvadāna* and by Tāranātha bear marks of evident absurdity.”⁵⁵ As pointed out by Lamotte, “The only point over which the sources concur

of Ancient India, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960: 187; D. Devahuti, *Harsha: A Political Study*, third rev. edn., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 48.

⁵¹For example, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* points out “*atha yat tapo dānam ārjavam ahiṃsā satya-vacanam iti, tā asya dakṣiṇāḥ*” (iii.17.4).

⁵²For instance, the Major Rock Edict no. 1 at R. Thapar, op. cit., 250.

⁵³H.C. Raychaudhury, op. cit., 354.

⁵⁴*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*.i.108–152. See also H.C. Raychaudhury, op. cit., 354.

⁵⁵R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 125.

is the destruction of the Kukkuṭārāma of Pāṭaliputra ‘in the east.’ If there was an encounter between Puṣyamitra and the Yakṣa Daṃṣṭrānivāsin and Kṛmiśa, it is not known exactly where it took place: at Sthūlakoṣṭhaka in the Swāt valley, at the Dakṣiṇāvihāra on the heights above Rājagṛha or in Avantī at gates of Kaśmīr or in Jālandhar. As for the death of Puṣyamitra, it is in turn located under the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gayā, on the shores of the Southern Ocean or somewhere ‘in the north.’ To judge from the documents, Puṣyamitra must be acquitted through lack of proof.”⁵⁶ Agreeing with Lamotte, D. Devahuti also feels that the account of Puṣyamitra’s sudden destruction with all his army, after his promulgation at Śākala of a law promising *dīnāras* for the heads of Buddhist monks slain by his subjects, “is manifestly false.”⁵⁷ As suggested by Romila Thapar, Sastri’s contention that Aśoka was powerful enough to keep the brāhmaṇas under control, but after him a conflict began between his successors and the brāhmaṇas which only ended when Puṣyamitra assumed power, and that Puṣyamitra’s action was the manifestation of a great Brāhmaṇical revolution, is also indefensible. After all, Aśoka’s frequent exhortations in his edicts for showing due respect to brāhmaṇas and śramaṇas hardly point to his being anti-Brāhmaṇical in outlook.⁵⁸ “Since the Mauryan empire had shrunk considerably and the kings of the later period were hardly in a position to defend themselves, it did not need a revolution to depose Bṛhadratha.”⁵⁹ The fact that he was assassinated while he was reviewing the army does not indicate towards a great revolution. On the contrary, it points rather strongly to a palace *coup d’état* which took place because by this time, the organization of the state had sunk so low that subordinate officials were happy to work under anyone who could give them assurance of a more competent

⁵⁶É. Lamotte, op. cit., 392.

⁵⁷D. Devahuti, op. cit., 48.

⁵⁸R. Thapar, op. cit., 200.

⁵⁹Ibid., 201.

administration.⁶⁰ Moreover, had it been a great Brāhmaṇical revolution, Puṣyamitra would have received the assistance of other neighbouring kings such as the descendants of Subhāgasena from the northwest.⁶¹

The testimony of the Buddhist legends also appears doubtful on various other counts. The earliest of the texts that mention these legends are chronologically far removed from the Śuṅgas. The traditional narrative in the *Dīvyāvadāna*, for instance, can at the earliest be dated to two centuries after Puṣyamitra's death. It is more likely that the *Dīvyāvadāna* legend is a Buddhist version of Puṣyamitra's attack on the Mauryas, and reflects the fact that, with the declining influence of Buddhism at the Śuṅga imperial court, Buddhist monuments and institutions would naturally receive less royal attention. Moreover, the source itself in this instance being Buddhist, it would naturally exaggerate the wickedness of anti-Buddhists.⁶²

Further, *dīnāra* coins (Roman: *denarius* gold coins) were not prevalent at the time of the Śuṅgas. The earliest period during which these coins came into circulation in India was the first century CE. Most interestingly, this legend of persecution in which a *dīnāra* is offered as an award for the head of a monk is first related in the *Aśokāvadāna* in connection with the persecution of the Jainas and the Ājīvikas by Aśoka and most clearly appears to be a fabrication:

In the city of Puṇḍravardhana [north Bengal], a lay follower of Nirgrantha Jñātiputra [Mahāvīra Jaina] drew a picture showing Buddha prostrating himself at the feet of the Nirgrantha. A Buddhist devotee reported this to King Aśoka, who then ordered the man arrested and brought to him immediately. . . . Upon seeing him, Aśoka flew into a fury and proclaimed: 'Put all the Ājīvikas of Puṇḍravardhana to death at once!' And on that very day, eighteen thousand of them were executed.

A little later, another devotee of Nirgrantha drew yet one more picture of the Buddha prostrating before his master. When Aśoka heard

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 200.

of this, he became merciless. He forced the man along with his whole family to enter their home and burnt it to the ground. He then issued a proclamation that whosoever brought him the head of a Nirgrantha would be rewarded with a dīnāra.⁶³

To say that Aśoka, whose devotion to all religious sects is undeniable through his edicts, persecuted the Nirgranthas or the Ājīvikas is simply absurd and so is the story of Puṣyāmītra Śūṅga. Thus, “the carbon-copy allegation against Puṣyāmītra may very reasonably be dismissed as sectarian propaganda.”⁶⁴ Probity of the *Divyāvadāna* is also grievously marred by the fact that Puṣyāmītra Śūṅga is mentioned as a descendent of Aśoka whereas he did not belong to the Mauryan dynasty of non-Brāhmaṇical background. In fact, this very fact flies in the face of the hypothesis that Puṣyāmītra persecuted the Buddhists because he was a brāhmaṇa and represented fundamentalist form of Brāhmaṇism.

There is, in fact, no concrete evidence to show that any of the Mauryan kings discriminated against Brāhmaṇism. Aśoka, the most popular Mauryan king, did not appear to have any vulgar ambition of exalting his own religion “by showing up the false gods” of Brāhmaṇism. Thus, the hypothesis of a Brāhmaṇical persecution under Puṣyāmītra loses much of its *raison d’être*.⁶⁵ The policy of Puṣyāmītra Śūṅga appears to have been tolerant enough for the simple reason that if he were against the Buddhists, he would have dismissed his Buddhist ministers. What is more, the court of Puṣyāmītra’s son was graced by Bhagavatī Kauśikī, a Buddhist nun. In addition to this, there is overwhelming evidence to show that Buddhism actually prospered during the reign of the

⁶³*The Aśokāvadāna*, ed. S. Mukhopadhyaya, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1963: 67–68. English translation is based on John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983: 232.

⁶⁴Koenraad Elst, “Why Pushyāmītra was more ‘secular’ than Ashoka?,” as seen on 20 April 2007 at <http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/print/articles/ayodhya/pushyāmītra>.

⁶⁵H.C. Raychaudhury, op. cit., 349; R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 126.

Śuṅga kings. And it has actually been argued that archaeological evidence casts doubt on the claims made by Buddhist texts that the Śuṅgas persecuted the Buddhists.⁶⁶ An archaeological study of the celebrated stūpa at Sāñcī proves that it was enlarged and encased in its present covering during the Śuṅga period.⁶⁷ The Aśokan pillar near it appears to have been wilfully destroyed, but this event may have occurred at a much later date.⁶⁸ The Bhārhut Buddhist Pillar Inscription of the time of the Śuṅgas actually records some additions to the Buddhist monuments “during the supremacy of the Śuṅgas.”⁶⁹ The Sri Lankan chronicle, *Mahāvamsa* admits the existence of numerous monasteries in Bihar, Avadha, Malwa, and surrounding areas during the reign of King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (c. 101–77 BCE) which is synchronous with the later Śuṅga period.⁷⁰

It may not be possible to deny the fact that Puṣyamitra Śuṅga showed no favour to the Buddhists, but it is not certain that he persecuted them.⁷¹ The only thing that can be said with certainty on the basis of the stories told in the Buddhist texts about Puṣyamitra is that he might have withdrawn royal patronage from the Buddhist institutions. This change of circumstance under his reign might have led to discontent among the Buddhists. It seems that as a consequence of this shifting of patronage from Buddhism to Brāhmaṇism, the Buddhists became politically

⁶⁶See, for instance, R. Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, rev. edn., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997: 200.

⁶⁷*AI*.ix.160.

⁶⁸J.H. Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi*, 3rd edn., Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955: 90.

⁶⁹*Suganaṃ raje . . . dhanabhūtiṇa karitaṃ toranāṃ silā-kaṇṇaṃto ca upamaṇṇa* (D.C. Sircar, ed., *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. 1, 2nd rev. and enl. edn., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965: 87). See also J.H. Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi*, 3rd edn., Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955: 11.

⁷⁰See *The Mahāvamsa*, edn. W. Geiger, London: Pali Text Society, 1908: XXIX.

⁷¹N.N. Ghosh, op. cit., 210–17.

active against him and sided with his enemies, the Indo-Greeks. “The Greek struggle with Puṣyamitra gave the Buddhists the prospect of renewed influence. . . . What may be sensed is that strategic reasons made some Greeks the promoters of Buddhism and some Buddhists supporters of the Greeks.”⁷² This might have incited him to put them down with a heavy hand.⁷³ Thus, if in some parts of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga’s kingdom, a few monasteries were at all pillaged, it must be seen as a political move rather than a religious one. Moreover, in such cases the complicity of the local governors also cannot be ruled out. Jayaswal has referred to another interesting aspect of the declaration made by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga.⁷⁴ It was made at Śākala, the capital and base of Menander, setting a price of hundred *dīnāras* on the head of every Buddhist monk. The fact that such a fervid declaration was made not only at a place which was far removed from the centre of the Śuṅga regime but also in the capital city of his arch-enemies, points to reasons motivated by political considerations. After Aśoka’s lavish sponsorship of Buddhism, it is quite possible that Buddhist institutions fell on somewhat harder times under the Śuṅgas, but persecution is quite another matter. Thus, it would be fair to say that where the Buddhists did not or could not ally themselves with the invading Indo-Greeks, Puṣyamitra did not beleaguer them. In any case, after the end of the Śuṅga dynasty, Buddhism found congenial environment under the Kuṣāṇas and the Śakas and it may be reasonable to assume that Buddhism did not suffer any real setback during the Śuṅga reign even if one could see some neglect or selective persecution of Buddhists. “Far more than the so-called persecution by Puṣyamitra, the

⁷²Erik Seldeslachts, “Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism,” in A. Heirman and S.P. Bumbacher, *The Spread of Buddhism*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007: 141.

⁷³H. Bhattacharyya et al., eds., *Cultural Heritage of India*, 2nd enl. and rev. edn., vol. 2, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1953: 99.

⁷⁴K.P. Jayaswal, “Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire,” 263.

successes of the Viṣṇuīte propaganda during the last two centuries of the ancient era led the Buddhists into danger, and this was all the more serious in that it was long time before its threat was assessed.”⁷⁵

Śaśāṅka (c. CE 603–620) was another ruler who is viewed in Buddhist literature as possibly the worst enemy and persecutor—a sort of *fer-de-lance* and an obdurate oppressor of Buddhism—who apparently did not spare any efforts to snuff life out of Buddhism. He ruled over the kingdom of Gauḍa with its capital at Karṇasuvarṇa⁷⁶ in the first-quarter of the seventh century CE. He was a *bien-pensant* devotee of Śiva and a fierce rival of King Harṣavardhana. The information provided by Bāṇabhaṭṭa and Xuanzang seems to indicate that the kingdom of Gauḍa comprised northwestern Bengal, although for sometime the influence of Śaśāṅka may have extended all the way to the Bay of Bengal. Śaśāṅka was not only the first Bengali monarch to have had the vision for an empire but also the one who nearly succeeded in founding one for himself. But he failed to leave behind an able heir and the kingdom of Gauḍa disappeared soon after his death.

The other king who is blamed for committing atrocities on Buddhists and Buddhist institutions is Śaśāṅka. He was most probably a native of Magadha⁷⁷ where he began his career as a feudatory chief (*mahāsāmanta*).⁷⁸ Slowly, he appears to have established his hold over Magadha before assuming independent status in Gauḍa.⁷⁹ Harṣavardhana’s sister Rājyaśrī was married to the Maukhari king Gṛhavarman of Kanauja. Śaśāṅka, with

⁷⁵É. Lamotte, op. cit., 392–393.

⁷⁶Karṇasuvarṇa has been identified with Rāṅgāmāṭi, six miles south-west of Berhampur in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

⁷⁷See R.G. Basak, “Śaśāṅka, King of Bengal,” *IHQ*.viii.1, 1932: 5–7; D.C. Ganguly, “Śaśāṅka,” *IHQ*.xii.1936: 456–457.

⁷⁸His seal-matrix cut in a rock of the hill-fort of Rohtasgarh, located at a distance of about 39 km from Sasaram in south-west Bihar, refers to him as a *śrī mahāsāmanta śaśāṅkadevasya* (*CII*.iii.78).

⁷⁹Ibid.

the help of Buddharāja, the king of Malwa, defeated and killed king Gṛhavarman of Kanauja and imprisoned Rājyaśrī. Harṣavardhana's elder brother Rājyavardhana, who then ruled Thāneśvara, advanced against Śaśāṅka to avenge his sister's fate. But he was inveigled and killed by Śaśāṅka. After this, Harṣavardhana began to rule over the combined territories of both the kingdoms of Kanauja and Thāneśvara. Harṣavardhana pursued a policy of conquest to consolidate his authority over the whole of north India. On the other hand, after killing his Maukharī overlord, Gṛhavarman, Śaśāṅka appears to have launched himself on an independent career, sacking in the wake of his exploits the Buddhist monasteries in Magadha. Having overrun the greater part of Magadha, taking in his sweep Vārāṇasī, Kuśinagara, Gayā, and Pāṭaliputra,⁸⁰ Śaśāṅka turned towards Gauḍa, which appears to have been an easy prize on account of Gauḍa ruler Jayanāga's timely removal from the scene. After this, Śaśāṅka became a power to be reckoned with. The ambitions of Śaśāṅka, who had the makings of a paramount king, were frustrated by the masterly strategy of Harṣavardhana's alliance with Kāmarūpa. As a result of this, he found himself unable to expand beyond the territories which he had occupied before Harṣavardhana came on the scene. R.C. Majumdar is of the opinion that Śaśāṅka regained possession of Magadha after he had been defeated and confined to Gauḍa by Harṣavardhana.⁸¹ But this does not appear to be correct as Xuanzang clearly places Śaśāṅka's anti-Buddhist activities prior to Harṣavardhana's accession. For instance, Xuanzang points out that the afflatus advice of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to Harṣavardhana was "Since the king of the country of Karṇasuvarṇa destroyed the Buddha-dharma, you should ascend the throne to work for its revival."⁸²

⁸⁰AMMK.715; *Xiyu Ji*.142, 192, 226, 246, 249.

⁸¹R.C. Majumdar, gen. ed., *History and Culture of Indian People*, vol. III, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951: 107.

⁸²*Xiyu Ji*.143.

There are many references to Śaśāṅka in Xuanzang's work that connect him with acts of oppression against Buddhism.⁸³ According to him, "king Śaśāṅka persecuted the Buddhist-dharma and went to the place of the (footprint) stone intending to destroy the holy object. He erased the footprints with a chisel, but they reappeared with the same traces and patterns. Then he threw the stone into the Ganges, but it returned to its original place at once."⁸⁴ Giving an account of Kuśinagara, he states that "when King Śaśāṅka persecuted the Buddhist-dharma, no company of monks came this way for many years."⁸⁵ Further, "King Śaśāṅka, being a heretical believer, denounced the Buddha-dharma out of jealousy, destroyed monasteries, and cut down the Bodhi Tree. When he dug the ground so deep as to have reached spring water and could not get at the ends of the roots, he set fire to burn it and soaked it with sugarcane juice with the intention of making it rotten, so as to prevent it from sprouting."⁸⁶ He also reports that Śaśāṅka made an abortive attempt to have the image (of Lord Buddha at Bodha-Gayā) removed and replaced by one of Śiva:

When King Śaśāṅka felled the Bodhi Tree, he also wished to destroy this image. But when he looked at the compassionate features of this image, he did not have heart to do so. At the time of returning home, he told his attendant minister, 'You had better remove this image of the Buddha and replace it with that of Maheśvara.' Having received the king's edict, the attendant minister was afraid and said with a sigh, 'If I destroy the Buddha's image, I shall suffer disaster for many kalpas, but if I disobey the king's order, I shall not only lose my own life but also incur the extermination of my entire family. What shall I do in this awkward plight?' Then he called some Buddhist believers to be his servants and had a brick wall built horizontally in front of the Buddha's image. As he was ashamed to see the image in utter darkness, he lit a lamp for it. On the front of the brick wall he drew a picture of

⁸³Ibid., 142–143, 192, 226–227, 246, 249.

⁸⁴Ibid., 226–227.

⁸⁵Ibid., 192.

⁸⁶Ibid., 246.

Maheśvara, and when this was done he made a report to the king. Upon hearing the report, the king dreaded the consequences. He suffered from blisters all over his body, and his skin became cracked, and before long he died.⁸⁷

The author of *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* also supports the tradition of Śaśāṅka's hostility to Buddhism and reports that Śaśāṅka, "of wicked intellect, will destroy the beautiful image of the Buddha. He, of wicked intellect, enamoured of the words of the *tīrthikas*, will burn that great bridge of religion (Dharma), (as) prophesied by the former Jinas (Buddhas). Then that angry and greedy evildoer of false notions and bad opinions will fell down all the monasteries, gardens, and chaityas; and rest-houses of the Jainas [Nirgranthas]." ⁸⁸

The evidence for the anti-Buddhist policy of Śaśāṅka has been evaluated by modern scholars quite vigorously. According to G.S. Chatterji, Śaśāṅka was quite clearly one of the rare rulers of ancient India who followed a policy of persecution against the Buddhists.⁸⁹ Similarly, Sogen Yamakami points out that Śaśāṅka was responsible for "commanding the utter extermination of Buddhists from the face of India with the unwholesome alternative of the penalty of death to be inflicted on the executioners themselves in case they neglected to carry out the inhuman order of their king and master."⁹⁰ R.G. Basak too feels that "it will not be justifiable to exculpate Śaśāṅka from his cruel actions."⁹¹ Similarly, J. Allan believes that "it is certain that Śaśāṅka was

⁸⁷*Xiyu Ji*.249.

⁸⁸*AMMK*.715–718. Translation from K.P. Jayaswal, *An Imperial History of India*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934: 49–50.

⁸⁹G.S. Chatterji, *Harṣavardhana* (in Hindi), Allahabad, 1950: 189.

⁹⁰Sogen Yamakami, *Systems of Buddhist Thought*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1912: 16.

⁹¹R.G. Basak, *The History of north-eastern India extending from the foundation of the Gupta Empire to the rise of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal: c. AD 320–760*, 2nd rev. and enl. edn., Calcutta: Sambodhi Publications, 1967: 154–156; idem, "Śaśāṅka, King of Bengal," *IHQ*.viii.1.1932: 18.

a persecutor of Buddhism, although the Chinese pilgrim may credit him with more than he deserves.”⁹²

However, it has been pointed out that to consider Śaśāṅka a persecutor of Buddhism would amount to simplistic understanding of history.⁹³ The stories of persecution of Buddhism by Śaśāṅka cannot really be given credence without an independent testimony, because they rest upon “the sole evidence of Buddhist writers who cannot, by any means, be regarded as unbiased or unprejudiced, at least in any matter which either concerned Śaśāṅka or adversely affected Buddhism.”⁹⁴ It is also pointed out in support of this opinion that Xuanzang himself observed that in Kāṇasuvārṇa there were not only ten Buddhist monasteries but also over 2,000 monks.⁹⁵ Thus, the flourishing condition of Buddhism in the capital city of Śaśāṅka, as described by Xuanzang, is hardly compatible with the view that he was a religious bigot and a cruel persecutor of Buddhism. At the root of Śaśāṅka’s ill-feeling towards Buddhism was probably the fact that the Buddhists of these places in Magadha and elsewhere entered into some sort of conspiracy with Harṣavardhana against him, and therefore he wanted to punish them by such oppressive persecution.⁹⁶ B.P. Sinha has given a very interesting analysis of the background to the anti-Buddhist actions of Śaśāṅka. He points out that it is quite reasonable to assume that the Buddhists were probably the most fully organized “sect” in India who, through their numerous monasteries and seats of learning, exercised

⁹²J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa*, London: British Museum, 1914: lxiii.

⁹³R.C Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, vol. I, Dacca: Dacca University, 1943: 67; B.P. Sinha, *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha (c. 455–1000 AD)*, Bankipore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1954: 259; R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 127; D. Devahuti, *Harsha: A Political Study*, third rev. edn., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 48.

⁹⁴R.C. Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, 67.

⁹⁵Watters.i.191–192.

⁹⁶R.G. Basak, op. cit., 1967: 154–156.

sufficient leverage in the politics of Magadha. “It was probably the expulsion of the pro-Buddhist Maukharis from Magadha by the Brāhmaṇical Gauḍas which made Śaśāṅka unpopular with the powerful Buddhists of Magadha.”⁹⁷ Sinha further points out that “[t]he uprooting of the Bodhi Tree may have been an economic move against the Buddhist hierarchy of Magadha, as presents from all over the Buddhist world were offered at the Bodhi Tree.”⁹⁸ The impressions of a foreign religious scholar like Xuanzang, perceiving in these acts of Śaśāṅka a deliberate policy to destroy Buddhism, are not surprising. Buddhist authors of later times, too, appear to have consciously or unconsciously seen religious fanaticism in the actions of Śaśāṅka. Thus, the motives of Śaśāṅka seem to have been both misunderstood and exaggerated, according to Sinha.⁹⁹ Moreover, as pointed out by Mitra, all of Śaśāṅka’s persecuting acts being confined outside the limits of his own kingdom, it may be argued that his object was not so much to extirpate Buddhist heresy as to take the wind out of the sails of his own Buddhist subjects by destroying the sacred tree at Bodhagayā.¹⁰⁰

Xuanzang’s story has also been questioned by D. Devahuti.¹⁰¹ According to her, the story of Śaśāṅka’s death immediately after the desecration of the Buddha-image is most suspect, because it is just such an episode as Xuanzang would introduce in order to create effect. Moreover, Devahuti suspects that as the legend of Puṣyamitra was almost certainly known to Xuanzang, as it exists in more than one Chinese version, he had Puṣyamitra’s fate in mind when he wrote of a similar curse on Śaśāṅka.¹⁰² A certain measure of proneness to exaggeration may be natural in Xuanzang who had Śaśāṅka’s arch-enemy Harṣavardhana for his patron

⁹⁷B.P. Sinha, *op. cit.*, 259.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 259–60.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰R.C. Mitra, *op. cit.*, 127.

¹⁰¹D. Devahuti, *op. cit.*, 48.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

and he makes no secret of his fierce allergy to non-believers. But making allowance for his natural bias against Śaśāṅka, the whole episode can hardly be dismissed as mere malicious agitprop. But at the same time, whatever might have been the motive and the measure of his persecution, its effect was not disastrous for Buddhism whether inside his kingdom where Xuanzang found Buddhism in a fairly flourishing condition shortly after the death of Śaśāṅka or outside his kingdom.

History also holds records of another devastation on an extensive scale of the *viḥāras* in northern India committed by Hūṇas. For instance, the city of Takṣaśilā (now Taxila in Pakistan), famous for its Buddhist university and the Dharmarājika stūpa, is known to have been totally put to the torch by the invading Hūṇas.¹⁰³ Mihirakula is said to have “exhibited ferocious hostility against the peaceful Buddhist cult, and remorselessly overthrew the *stupas* and monasteries, which he plundered of their treasures.”¹⁰⁴ The Hūṇa onslaught, spread over about a decade under the leadership of Mihirakula towards the beginning of the seventh century, was largely confined to Gandhāra and Kashmir. The persecution by the Hūṇas may have resulted in the destruction of some Buddhist monasteries as well as the killing of some monks, but this could not have given a severe blow to the movement.¹⁰⁵ The persecution of Buddhists by Mihirakula was probably a fact, as it is attested by diverse

¹⁰³*IAR*, 1969–70: 31. However, excavation records of Takṣaśilā show that it ceased to be an urban centre after the fifth century CE when long distance trade contacts were interrupted (see, J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951: 1–2; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India c.300–c.1000*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987: 13). Thus, when Xuanzang visited and stayed at Takṣaśilā, it had already lost its urban character.

¹⁰⁴*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*.I.289–293. V.A. Smith, *The Early History of India: From 600 BC to the Muhammadan Conquest*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924: 337.

¹⁰⁵See P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, vol. III, 3rd edn., 1993: 924–925n1788a.

authorities, native and foreign, but the evil consequences of his tyranny were neutralized by the generosity of his successors. Thus, life went on in the new monasteries that had risen on the ruins of the demolished ones.

Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa, who was a contemporary of king Harṣavardhana, is said to have threatened the monks of Nālandā with a behaviour similar to that of Śaśāṅka, and with the destruction of the whole monastery unless Xuanzang was peremptorily despatched to his court.¹⁰⁶ It is said that it was under this intimidation that Śīlabhadra persuaded his Chinese pupil to proceed to Kāmarūpa. The tension which had been provoked at this time was however a sporadic phenomenon, and was not noticed by Xuanzang elsewhere in India. There is no complaint whatsoever of persecution in Yijing's account, in spite of his somewhat unfriendly indifference towards the Hindus. Likewise, the stories regarding king Sudhanvan of Ujjayinī putting to death anyone who would not kill a Buddhist from the Himalayas to Rameshvaram have been found to be "the freaks of fancy of annalists of a later age."¹⁰⁷

The concept of a 'state religion' being foreign to the Indian mind, it would be unhistorical to assign any perceptible part of the decline to the withdrawal of patronage by rulers. Though the Buddhist communities were not outside the purview and jurisdiction of the state, the saṃgha by virtue of its possession of the *Vinaya* rules was a self-governing body, and traditionally the king's primary and constitutional duty in ancient India was to protect it in that character and keep it from internal and external disruptions. The building of a monastery was an act of individual inclination. It does not appear that in any period of the history of ancient India, the saṃgha thrived anywhere merely on royal patronage or declined just because the patronage was withdrawn.

¹⁰⁶*Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, trans. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911: 171.

¹⁰⁷R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 128.

Most of the monasteries were not only built by wealthy lay devotees, but they had also humble origins and grew in stages. The hypothesis of decline of Buddhism due to withdrawal of royal support is also belied by the fact that Jainism survived under similar conditions and at a time when Buddhism was declining; and later Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism survived during the medieval period of Indian history.

6

Sectarianism and the Rise of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna

THOUGH IT IS difficult to fix the chronology of the origin of various sects in Buddhism, they seem to have become a reality by the second century BCE.¹ Various factors appear to have been responsible for the emergence of differences and divisions within the saṃgha. As the Buddha had permitted the members of the saṃgha to use their own speech for the purpose of preaching, with the spread of Buddhism into different regions of the Indian subcontinent, various sects adopted different languages for their canon.² As this happened, these sects carved out their own geographical regions of influence.³ They

¹P.V. Bapat, in S.K. Chatterji et al., eds., *The Cultural History of India*, vol. 1, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1953: 459. The first epigraphical evidence of the existence of different sects, as pointed out by Bühler, comes from the inscriptions on Mathurā lion-capital (c. 120 BCE) in which the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Sarvāstivādins are mentioned as two rival sects (*EL*.ix.1907–1908: 146).

²Theravāda (also known as Acariyavāda) adopted Pāli as its sacred language. Its most important branch Sarvāstivāda and some of its sub-sects adopted Sanskrit. The Mahāsāṃghikas adopted Prakṛta and the Saṃmitīyas, who are often associated with the Vātsīputrīyas, used Apabhraṃśa which was understood in the Vatsa region. The Sthaviravādins used an “intermediate” dialect.

³Theravāda had its main centres of activity at Ujjayinī and Kauśāmbī. Sarvāstivāda became popular in Mathurā, Gandhāra, and Kaśmīra. The Mahāsāṃghika sect had its early centre at Vaiśālī, and later became more popular in the Andhra region (a fact because of which it also received the

also adopted different texts as more authoritative than others.⁴ Furthermore, these sects began to differ from each other not only in matters of discipline⁵ but also regarding the manner of the Buddha's birth, his relationship with the saṃgha, and above all, interpretation of various aspects of the *Buddhavacana*.⁶

name of Andhaka). The Sautrāntika school of Hīnayāna Buddhism came into existence in Kāśmīra and Gandhāra.

⁴For instance, the Vaibhāṣikas declared the *Vaibhāṣas* or commentaries on *Jñānaprasthānasūtra* as more authoritative than the original *sūtras*. The Sautrāntikas, on the other hand, paid more attention to the *sūtras* rather than their commentaries.

⁵In connection with the First Council, Mahākassapa and Pūraṇa of Dakkhinagiri differed on seven rules which were later incorporated in the Vinayas of the Mahīśāsakas and the Dharmaguptakas. The controversy relating to the Ten Extravagances (*dasavatthūni*) at the Second Council is well-known. A remote cause of the Third Council was also that the monks of different sects refused to hold the Pātimokkha assembly together, as one group of monks was regarded as *apariśuddha* (unclean) according to the disciplinary code of another. Yijing remarks that the Vinaya of the Saṃmitīyas had special rules regulating the use of the undergarments, girdles, medicines, and beds.

⁶The Sarvāstivādins (Vaibhāṣikas) held that a being is composed of five dharmas, sub-divided into seventy-five elements which are permanent in nature. When the Buddha spoke of impermanence, according to them, he meant the composite of elements and not the elements themselves. They accepted the existence of phenomenal objects on direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) and admitted examples as proofs of an hypothesis. The Sautrāntikas regarded the phenomenal objects as only appearances (*prajñapti*) whose existence could only be known by inference (*bāhyārthānumeya*). They admitted the transference of the *skandhamātras* from one existence to another which, however, cease to exist in *nirvāṇa*. The Mahāsāṃghika sect apotheosized the Buddha, asserted that he was supramundane (*lokottara*) so that Gautama Siddhārtha was only an apparition of the *lokottara* Buddha, and that Arhantahood was not the fully emancipated state and, therefore, one should aspire for Buddhahood and not Arhantahood. The Śāilas, the Caityakas and the Vaitulyakas even maintained that the Bodhisattvas are not average beings and are possessed of supramundane qualities and that consciousness (*viññāna*) is pure in origin and becomes impure only on contact with impurities. Whereas according to the Sarvāstivādins *antarabhāva* serves as a link between one existence and another, but the Theravādins, Mahīśāsakas and the Śāila schools deny its existence. The Saṃmitīyas (Vātsīputrīyas) held the doctrine that there is a *pudgala* (a self, a personality) apart from the five elements (*skandhas*) composing a being. This *pudgala* is neither identical with

One does come across some examples of Buddhist intellectuals having a free go at each other. For instance, quite a few verses in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva are devoted to the refutation of Abhidharma systems and Vijñānavāda.⁷ A long section of Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* is devoted to the purpose of demolishing the tenets of the Vātsīputrīyas, and he along with Kamalaśīla declares the Pudgalavādins to be non-Buddhists.⁸ Candrakīrti is well-known for his severe criticism of all the non-Mādhyamika systems of Buddhist thought.⁹ In short, the controversies among the ranks of the Buddhists were as bitter as between the Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

W. Wassilieff was of the opinion that bitter disputes and sectarianism within the saṃgha were responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India.¹⁰ Similarly, S. Lévi found such a tendency as most dangerous as it affected the organization of the saṃgha and revolutionized its doctrines.¹¹ Charles Eliot felt that the decay of Indian Buddhism was caused by “the corruptions of Mahāyāna rather than those of Hīnayāna.”¹² Many other scholars have also held Mahāyāna “responsible for qualitative decay”¹³ as “[t]his modernized form of the Śāsana compromised the existence

nor different from *skandhas*, according to them, and is definable and persists through the several existences of a being till it reaches *nirvāṇa*.

⁷*The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Hindi trans. Śāntibhikṣu Śāstri, Lucknow: Buddha Vihāra, 1955: IX.

⁸*The Tattvasaṃgraha*, trans. Ganganatha Jha, Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. LXXX, vol. 1, Baroda, 1937: 217ff.

⁹*The Catuḥśatakavṛtti* (chaps. VIII–XVI), restored to Sanskrit by V. Bhattacharya, Santiniketan: Visvabharati, 1931: chaps. IX, XI.

¹⁰W.P. Wassilieff, *Bouddhisme*, trans. Comme, Paris, 1865: 71 (originally published as *Der Buddhismus*, St. Petersburg, 1860).

¹¹S. Lévi, *Annuaire de l'École des Hautes Études*, 1, quoted at R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 146.

¹²C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co, 1921: 6.

¹³L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India*, 2nd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977: 309.

of the community.”¹⁴ Taking a somewhat similar line, B.G. Gokhale points out that Buddhism “begins as a unified dogma and discipline, it then splits into sectarian differences and finally grows into an all-enveloping Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna . . . losing itself from the surface of life . . . obscured by the proliferation of mystical chants, rites and ritualistic concepts.”¹⁵ We are told that discipline, which had begun to relax with the rise of divergent schools, was gravely endangered when Mahāyāna opened the gates of the saṃgha wide to vulgar practices and began to admit lay men on equal terms with the monks, thereby undermining its cohesion and probity.¹⁶ Further, Vajrayāna is often blamed for lacking abstemiousness, bringing in risqué practices, and abetting a moral turpitude through practices such as all the eighty-four Siddhas of Tāntric Buddhism being either married or having yoginīs as their partners. Thus, it has been pointed out that the development of Mahāyāna and its further growth into Vajrayāna or Tantrism weakened Buddhism morally to a great extent and caused its degeneration.¹⁷ In fact, among the factors that caused the decline of Buddhism in India, we are told, “the abuses of Vajrayāna perhaps occupy the foremost place.”¹⁸ It has been pointed out that Tantric practices harmonized Buddhism and Brāhmanical-Hinduism so completely that independent existence of the former might have appeared unnecessary.

Though the Buddha himself had visualized schism (*saṃghabhedha/saṃgharāji*) as one of the five deadly sins,¹⁹ sectarian rivalry does not appear to have become bitter enough to cause internal damage to Buddhism as a monastic institution

¹⁴L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme: Etudes et Matériaux, Ādikarma-pradīpa, Bodhicaryāvatāraṇikā*, London: Luzac, 1898: 160.

¹⁵B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism in Maharashtra: A History*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976: 157.

¹⁶R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 146–147.

¹⁷B. Bhattacharyya, “A Peep into the Later Buddhism,” *ABORI*, vol. 5, pt. III, April 1929: 4.

¹⁸L.M. Joshi, op. cit., 311.

¹⁹*Vin.* i.150; ii.180, 203, 339; iv.37; A.ii.239.

and hence sectarian rivalry may not be viewed as indicative of internal languidness. Buddhist sectarianism was largely confined to interpretation of texts; members of all schools more or less accepted the validity of the basic *Tipiṭaka*, shared an almost identical code of conduct, and moved easily among each other's communities.²⁰ Thus, while dealing with a non-centralized movement such as Buddhism, the emergence of numerous sects should probably be seen as "a sign of both intellectual and spiritual vigor."²¹ It is also worthy of notice that through most of the history of Buddhism in India, there were a large number of monasteries that were not exclusive to any particular sect and where monks belonging to different sects lived together, and the overall monastic discipline was uninterrupted. The atmosphere in a typical monastery is best reflected in the views of a modern Buddhist scholar: "A Mahāyānist Bhikṣu is not one who belongs to a Mahāyāna Order in the sense of a separate religious corporation, but simply one who, observing in fundamentals the same monastic discipline as his Hīnayāna brother, devotes himself to the study and practice of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*. Similarly, a Hīnayāna monk is simply one who follows the Hīnayāna *sūtras*."²² Although there were monasteries exclusively occupied by monks owing allegiance to Mahāyāna or Theravāda, or by monks of a particular sect, coexistence of different sects in the Buddhist saṃgha seems to have been a normal practice.²³ In fact, in this context, it may be pointed out here that the divisiveness associated with sectarianism was much more severe among the

²⁰Even Devadatta, who had created the first schism in the saṃgha, accepted in his dying statement that he had no refuge other than the Buddha (*DhA*.i.147; *Mil.*,111).

²¹P.S. Jaini, "The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast," in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 84.

²²B. Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, sixth fully rev. edn., London: Tharpa Publications, 1987: 147–148.

²³Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962: 216.

Jainas but it did not lead to their decline. Thus, sectarianism cannot reasonably be suggested as central to the downfall of Buddhism in India.²⁴

Though sectarian rivalry and development of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna did not weaken Buddhism as such, the damage appears to have taken place entirely in an unexpected manner. The development of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna exposed Buddhism to the subversive encroachments of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism as this virtually wiped out the fragile boundary that had ever existed between the two. There appears to be some justification when it is sometimes pointed out that Indian Buddhism was never able to emerge as a full-fledged religion vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, lack of proper identity being a major issue. This vulnerability was laid bare by the rise of Mahāyāna. With the deification of the Buddha and adoption of Sanskrit language as well as various Brāhmaṇical-Hindu deities, Buddhist identity became dangerously nebulous. The emergence of Vajrayāna, at a time when Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was rediscovering itself, transformed Buddhism into an identical twin of the mass-based Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. At this point in history, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, besides having overwhelmingly more supporters on its side, also had more resources at its disposal. Alliance with the newly emerged early medieval polities and the development of Bhakti movement, which further contributed to the growth and development of a wide, receptive, and over-arching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, accelerated the process of acculturation and assimilation of Buddhism into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

The driving force behind the development of Mahāyāna appears to have been the incorporation of many folk-beliefs in order to meet the emotional demands of lay supporters. Buddhism did not offer any social code to its lay supporters who were allowed to follow their traditional social rules later regularised by the Smṛtis. As a matter of fact, as pointed out above, as far

²⁴P.S. Jaini, *op. cit.*, 1980: 84.

as the Indian lay supporters were concerned, Buddhism tended to remain a *sect* than a religion for them. In other words, the lay-worshippers of Avalokiteśvara or Tārā, the personal deities who bestowed favours like Viṣṇu or Śiva, were otherwise Brāhmaṇical-Hindus. Thus, the Buddhist worship of images of various gods and goddesses, insistence on faith and devotion, the use of Sanskrit in liturgical texts, the acceptance of the essentials of Buddhism by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, and the identification of the Buddha with Viṣṇu through the theory of incarnation provided enough grist to the process of assimilation and acculturation.²⁵ As described in the eighth century *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva, Mahāyāna's emphasis on Bhakti in the form and ceremony of image-worship—bathing the image with scented water, vocal and instrumental music, offering of flowers, food and clothes, burning incense and swinging censers—was practically the same as in Brāhmaṇical-Hindu image-worship.²⁶

When Mahāyāna enlarged its pantheon by adopting principal and attendant deities, male as well as female, Buddhism clearly made a dangerously close call on Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. The development of Mahāyāna gave the religion a congenial form, a sort of family likeness “that made it seem not to belong to another house.”²⁷ This must have further added to the confusion in the minds of its fickle-minded lay supporters. Such an obfuscation and corrosion of its identity obviously worked in favour of the reinvigorated Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism which enjoyed a massive advantage due to its mass base. Thus, it is not surprising that some Buddhist kings preferred to patronize Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods and goddesses. According to the Maināmati plates of Laḍahacandra (c. CE 1000–1020) and Govindacandra (c. CE 1020–1055), Candra kings of southeast Bengal though were called *paramasaugatas*

²⁵See N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 89, 138.

²⁶*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Hindi trans. Śāntibhikṣu Śāstri, Lucknow: Buddha Vihāra, 1955: 8f.

²⁷Sukumar Dutt, op. cit., 195–196.

(aficionados of Buddhism) and used Dharmacakra as the emblem on their seals, yet they made land grants in favour of Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite deities.²⁸ The records of these two kings are replete with references to Hindu mythology, but there are hardly any references to Buddhist legends in their records. For instance, two grants of Laḍahacandra begin with the Vaiṣṇava formula—*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*.²⁹ Interestingly, the Manahali plate of the *paramasaugata* Madanapāla (CE 1144–1161) records a land grant by the king in favour of the brāhmaṇa, Bhaṭṭaputra Vaṭeśvaraśarman, as a fee for reading the *Mahābhārata* to the chief queen (*paṭṭa-mahādevī*) Citramatikā.³⁰ By the early medieval period, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism became interwoven into each other like a tangled skein making Mahāyāna “an extended bastion of Hinduism.”³¹ The blame for this must certainly be laid at the door of the Buddhist writers who “by their very silence . . . seemed to lend tacit support to the Hinduization of their founder.”³²

The universal and adaptational nature of Mahāyāna Buddhism created many meeting grounds between the Upaniṣadic thought and Buddhism. One is not surprised that such an aspect of Buddhism prompted Coomaraswamy to say that “the more profound is one’s study of Hinduism and Buddhism, more difficult it becomes for one to distinguish between the two.”³³ The Buddha began to be perceived as eternal who had no beginning or end and in fact, became the one who was beyond any description whatsoever. Theorizing concerning the body of the Buddha led to the development of the concept of *trikāya*. This was further elaborated with the rise of a regular Mahāyāna

²⁸See, D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971: 253–254.

²⁹Ibid., 254.

³⁰Ibid., 187.

³¹R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 139.

³²P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 85.

³³A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, repr., Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986: 452.

pantheon consisting of the five Dhyāni Buddhas (Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi) originating from the Ādibuddha through contemplation. Each of these five Dhyāni Buddhas was connected to a Bodhisattva and goddess Tārā, the personification of knowledge (*prajñā*). In Mahāyāna every living being was a potential Bodhisattva and was destined to attain *bodhi*, thus becoming a Buddha in the long run. But some of these Bodhisattvas attained distinction to the extent that their exalted status became comparable with Brāhmanical gods. Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Samantabhadra, Ākāśagarbha, and Maitreya could have easily attained Buddhahood due to their greatly advanced spiritual perfection, but postponed doing so till the salvation of all living beings. The cults of Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī became prominent during the Gupta period and survived for hundreds of years. Avalokiteśvara, the embodiment of compassion, had goddess Tārā as his consort. Mañjuśrī, the embodiment of wisdom, was connected to Lakṣmī or Sarasvatī or both. In its later stages, Buddhism came under the complete control of the Tārā cult. As per the Mahāyāna concept, Tārā is the *primaeval* female energy who enables her devotees to overcome all dangers, calamities, and disasters. In fact, a simple prayer to Tārā is certain to take away the eight great dangers (*mahābhaya*s). Besides, Tārā is also known as the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, as a Bodhisattva attains the goal through the realization of this *pāramitā* (perfection). Occasionally she is also conceived as the Supreme Being, “the mother of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.” In other words, Buddhism recognised female deities side by side with the male Buddhas and their emanations. The Buddhas came to be regarded as gods, and their images began to be worshipped along with those of their female consorts, in temples with devotional songs and *pūjā* paraphernalia. During the course of its development, Mahāyāna made compromises with peoples of greatly varying tastes and intellectual capabilities. Such an exercise brought elements of heterogeneous faith and customs into Buddhism. The upshot of such a development was that Buddhism made

“fundamental concessions to . . . [Brāhmaṇical-Hindus] . . . and when a religion does that for too long, it is liable to lose its moral stamina and power of resistance.”³⁴

Ritual eclecticism made boundaries between Buddhists and Brāhmaṇical-Hindus quite porous if not altogether non-existent in some instances. For instance, on the basis of a study of donative inscriptions Leslie Orr has shown that ritual boundaries between Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, Jainas, and Buddhists were unclearly defined as they shared patterns of worship and understandings of the nature of the deity.³⁵ Similarly, the ritual eclecticism seen in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* persisted in later Tantric texts with the result that at least the ritual boundaries between the Buddhists and Brāhmaṇical-Hindus do seem to have been eradicated in at least some cases.³⁶ In the *Tantrasārasaṃgraha* of Nārāyaṇa, a text of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, rituals as boundaries between Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, and Buddhists are completely done away with. For instance, in a single chapter devoted to Durgā, the practitioner is told while worshipping Durgā to bow down to the five Buddhas and eight Bodhisattvas.³⁷

Buddhism turned out to be particularly vulnerable to destructive influences at the doctrinal level. As indicated by P.S. Jaini, the force of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu “sabotage” and the insidious weaning away of lay support through the absorption of heterodox beliefs and cults into the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sphere must not be underestimated.³⁸ As mentioned above, the development of doctrines such as that of the Bodhisattvas clearly turned out to be perilous and carried Buddhism speedily within the assimilative range of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Though the Buddha remained

³⁴I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610–1947)*, The Hague: Mouton, 1962: 42.

³⁵Leslie Orr, *Donors, Devotees and Daughters of God: Temple Women in Medieval Tamilnadu*, London: Oxford University Press, 2000: 25.

³⁶P. Granoff, “Other People’s Rituals: Ritual Eclecticism in Early Medieval Indian Religions,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28, 2000: 409.

³⁷See *Ibid.*, 410.

³⁸P.S. Jaini, *op. cit.*, 1980: 1986.

nominally the most hallowed of beings, he lost ground to various Bodhisattvas. As a consequence of this newly arisen situation, most of the popular interest and devotion came to be directed not towards the historical Buddha but Bodhisattvas like Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara.³⁹ As compared to the Buddha, who provided a human model of struggle and attainment, these great Bodhisattvas came to be described as completely supramundane by nature. Actually, they became virtual gods whose powers to grant boons as well as their spiritual grace were not much different from those of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods and goddesses. Thus, as a result of the rise of various Bodhisattvas to pre-eminence, Buddhism exposed itself not only to appropriation and subversive assimilation-through-identification with Brāhmaṇical-Hindu beliefs and practices but it also opened its doors to the countless Śaivite deities, *mantras*, *dhāraṇīs*, and mystical Tantric practices surrounding these supramundane figures.⁴⁰ In the end, the walls dividing Viṣṇu and the Buddha, Śiva and Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā and Pārvatī were blown out of existence. Some of the Māyā figures on the balustrade and gateways at Sāñcī, as pointed out by Marshall, are Buddhist reproductions of Śrī-Lakṣmī and Gaja-Lakṣmī that can be observed in seals of the Gupta period.⁴¹ The identification of the Buddha with Brahmā Prajāpati began at least with the *Saddharma-puṇḍrīka Sūtra*.⁴² The use of the epithet *pitāmaha* for the Buddha merged him into the personality of Brahmā.⁴³ During the tenth-eleventh centuries, there is

³⁹This development is perhaps symbolically shown by the typical iconographic representation of the Buddha as a small inset in the crown of the *bodhisattva*; his position is “highest” (in accordance with doctrine) and yet relatively unimportant in the eyes of the worshipper (P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 90n21).

⁴⁰See P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 86–88.

⁴¹J. Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi*, 3rd edn., Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955: 96n1.

⁴²*Saddharmapuṇḍrīka-sūtra*, reproduced by Lokesh Chandra, New Delhi: Sharada Rani, 1984: II.41; V.1; XV.21 et seq.

⁴³The appellation *pitāmaha* is suggestive of the idea of Ādibuddha who in the Buddhist pantheon occupies a position almost analogous to that of Brahmā. This

evidence of the Buddha and Vāsudeva being invoked together on the occasion of the setting up of a Dharma image by one Manampraśarman in the village of Vajrayoginī in Dhaka district of Bangladesh.⁴⁴ Similarly, a very conspicuous example of the spirit of religious rapprochement is found in a *śloka* written by Dharmadāsa, the commentator of *Candra* grammar as early as the Gupta period. It runs: “Rudra Viśveśvara is the titular deity of our family, while Lord Buddha, the conqueror of Evil, is the ornament of our family.”⁴⁵ Ironically, as remarked by Monier-Williams, “Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas crept up softly to their rival and drew the vitality out of its body by close and friendly embraces.”⁴⁶

It has been suggested that Tantrism was a religious undercurrent flowing from an obscure point of time in the religious history of India and was, thus, neither Buddhist nor Hindu in its origins.⁴⁷ Tantra has been perceived by some scholars as being responsible for the ruination of Buddhism. For instance, Vivekananda believed that “The most hideous ceremonies, the most horrible, the most obscene books that human hands ever wrote or the

term is used for the Buddha (*bhagavato pitāmahasya saṃmyasaṃbuddhasya*) in an inscription of the time of Kaniṣka on the pedestal of a Buddha image from Mathurā (*EI*.xix.1927–1928: 97) and in another Kuṣāṇa inscription also engraved on the pedestal of a Buddha image noticed by Cunningham at Bhītā near Allahabad (*ASIR*.iii.48, pl. XVIII; H. Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, repr., Delhi: Indological Book House, 1968 (originally published 1896: 94).

⁴⁴*JRASB*.1949.101.

⁴⁵Quoted by R.C. Mitra, op. cit.: 56, quoted from S.K. Sen, *Bāṅlā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, I: 58.

⁴⁶M. Monier-Williams, *Buddhism: In its Connexion with Brāhmaṇism and Hindūism, and its Contrast with Christianity*, N. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995: 170.

⁴⁷Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 2nd rev. edn., Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962: 27; N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., 159. However, B. Bhattacharyya (“A Peep into the Later Buddhism,” *ABORI*, 20–21) feels that Hindu Tantra was a baser imitation of the Buddhist Tantra probably incorporated into Hinduism in order to counteract the influence of the Buddhists on the minds of people.

human brain ever conceived, the most bestial forms that ever passed under the name of religion, have all been the creation of degraded Buddhism. . . . Then gradually the corruption known as Vāmācāra (unrestrained mixing with women in the name of religion) crept in and ruined Buddhism. Such diabolical rites are not to be met with in any modern Tantra!”⁴⁸ Though there may be some truth in the allegation that the Tantra both in Buddhism and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was sometimes followed in a degenerate form, yet the so-called degeneration and corruption does not seem to have caused the decline as such. In Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism Tantra has enjoyed great popularity, and apparently has not contributed to its demise in any observable amount.⁴⁹ If the Tantric elements “did not vulgarise other systems surviving in the fold of Hinduism, there is no reason why should they vulgarise Buddhism.”⁵⁰ Adoption of Tantric practices by Buddhism as such does not appear to have caused any significant damage in terms of its decline because if that were the case then it would be difficult to explain the decline of Buddhism in south India where it was largely Theravādin and mostly free of the so-called “corruption” of Vajrayāna.⁵¹ However, appearance of Tantrism was a clear indication of Buddhism and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism drawing closer⁵² leading to the “dilution of the distinctiveness of Buddhism relative to the rising power of Hinduism.”⁵³ It was

⁴⁸Swami Vivekananda, *Conversions and Dialogues II: From the Diary of a Disciple*, <http://www.vivekananda.net/BooksOnSwami/DiaryPart2/2.html> (accessed 2 July 2009).

⁴⁹A. Wayman, “Observations on the History and Influence of the Buddhist Tantra in India and Tibet,” in A.K. Narain, ed., op. cit., 362.

⁵⁰N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., 159.

⁵¹See Peter Schalk, A. Velupillai, and I. Nakacami, eds., *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam: The Period of the Imperial Colar*, pt. 2, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2002.

⁵²Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600–1200*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 28.

⁵³Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 140.

this dilution of distinctiveness aggravated by different factors including the development of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna that may have been at the very bottom of the decline of Buddhism in India.

From the eighth century onwards, Tantric ideas, slowly but effectively, influenced Buddhism to the extent that it became completely metamorphosed and unrecognizable. “While the philosophical teachings of the Buddha received a new interpretation at the hands of the masterminds like Asaṅga, Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Āryadeva and the great logicians like Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, Diṅnāga, and Dharmakīrti were guarding the front doors of Buddhist monasteries, Tantrism steadily made its way into Buddhism through the backdoors.”⁵⁴ When Buddhism came into contact with the new Tantric concepts, different secret rituals, customs, and practices, made their way into Buddhism. According to the Buddhist tradition, various cryptic practices entered Mahāyāna because Ācārya Asaṅga, in order to bring different tribal communities into the Buddhist fold, adopted their demons, goblins, witches, ghouls, evil spirits, and various deities of the mother cult. Moreover, the interest and intellectual capabilities of ordinary folks lay outside the profound philosophical and spiritual minutiae pertaining to concepts such as Śūnyavāda, Vijñānavāda, and Yogācāra and they were rather interested in the power of magic based upon incantations, female ascetics, and *bija* (human seed). As a result, these practices were adopted by the *ācāryas* leading to the emergence of Vajrayāna. According to Nāgārjuna, the cosmos, sorrow, deeds and their outcome are all nothing (*śūnya*), and *nirvāṇa* is the prime consciousness (*vijñāna*) of this nothingness. In Vajrayāna this ultimate knowledge was called *nirātmā* (selflessness), expressed as a female deity. The origin of supreme bliss (*mahāsukha*) was the mind in meditation embracing selflessness and dissolved into it. Meditation was dependent upon a specific condition of the mind in which there was a complete resoluteness to attain

⁵⁴N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., 117.

enlightenment and the meditation of supreme knowledge was the concentric meditation or bliss, in sexual union. The supreme meditation was called the *vajra* (thunderbolt) because as a result of the strict ascetical practices, the forces of sensual desire would become totally subdued leading to steadfastness as the thunderbolt. Thus, when the purified mind attains the calibre of the *vajra*, it achieves supreme knowledge. The methodology of Vajrayāna asceticism was wholly occult, and so was the terminology used to explain it. A guru was indispensable and central to Vajrayāna and other than the votary initiated by the guru, none had access to the secret meanings of the terms and expressions.

A more subtle stage of Vajrayāna esoteric asceticism became known as Sahajayāna. In Sahajayāna, *sūnyatā* was *prakṛti*, *karuṇā* was *puruṣa*; the most blissful state of enlightenment, the *mahāsukha*, lay in the union of *sūnyatā* with *karuṇā*, or *prakṛti* with *puruṣa*, or in the sexual union of male with female. *Mahāsukha* was the ultimate truth on whose realization all the senses dissolved, worldly knowledge disappeared, a desire to separate from self-interest arose, and wrong views were destroyed completely. Yet another form of Vajrayāna asceticism was Kālacakrayāna, which believed that void and the wheel of time were one and inseparable. The perpetually flowing stream of time continues through past, present, and future; it is omniscient and omnipercipient; it is the source of the Ādibuddha as well as of all the succeeding Buddhas. The origination of the Buddhas was accomplished through the supreme understanding of the wheel of time. The aim of Kālacakrayāna was to bring under control the non-stop movement of the wheel of time by raising oneself above its power. In so far as man is concerned, the concept of time was nothing more than the succession of the activities of life, and if those activities of life could be stopped, time could be brought under control. In Kālacakrayāna this could be achieved by bringing the body's pulse, pulse centre, and five vital airs (*pañcavāyu*) under control through yogic practice. No doubt, a prominent scholar was prompted to remark that "Unless

Buddha was mentioned in Kālacakrayāna, one would be inclined not to call it Buddhism at all.”⁵⁵

Vajrayāna, Sahajayāna, and Kālacakrayāna had commonalities between themselves to the extent that one is not surprised to see the same *ācārya* writing on more than one of the paths. Whatever may have been the place of their origin, these three paths certainly found a congenial atmosphere to prosper in Bengal and parts of Assam and Orissa. In fact, they constitute the history of Buddhism in Bengal during the Pāla, Candra, and Kamboja eras. These three paths were founded on Haṭha yoga based on an extremely detailed physiology of the human body. Whereas the practical religious ceremonies declined in Vajrayāna and Kālacakrayāna, occult practices became stronger and more pronounced. Furthermore, Sahajayāna no longer recognized any Buddha, earthly or supernatural. Apart from vituperating and renouncing to some extent the deities of Vajrayāna, Sahajayāna also held in contempt wandering asceticism and submission to the rules of the Vinaya. Bodily discipline and Haṭha yoga based on physical austerities were the only things left now. A parallel development also took place in the Brāhmaṇical Śāktaism of Bengal leading to the emergence of detailed occult methods of sexual practices. “Indeed, there remained no particular distinction..., both having easily come to merge with one another.... [B]y the fourteenth century... Tāntric Buddhism had become totally absorbed into Tāntric Brāhmaṇism and Śāktaism.”⁵⁶ The fusion between Śāktaism and Buddhist mysticism gave rise to Nāthas, Avadhūtas, Sahajiyas, and Bāuls. Instead of focussing on one definite point, the Nāthas attempted to attain *siddhī* by controlling the internal air and manoeuvring it from below the abdomen to the forehead. The Avadhūtas also used Buddhist

⁵⁵H.P. Shastri, “Introduction” in N.N. Vasu, *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, Calcutta: Hare Press, 1911: 8.

⁵⁶N.R. Ray, *History of the Bengali People*, trans. J.W. Hood, Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd, 1994: 435.

practices with an emphasis on an exhaustive cognition of the human physiology. Instead of worshipping gods and goddesses or performing other ceremonies, the Sahajiyas laid stress on the leisurely path of salvation through carnal enjoyments. With the passage of time, Buddhist Sahajayāna became assimilated into Vaiṣṇavism. However, the Bāuls retained the Buddhist tradition more faithfully than the Sahajiyas.

Iconographical evidence from Bengal suggests that majority of the Mahāyānic and Vajrayānic figures were that of Avalokiteśvara-Lokanātha indicating that he was the favourite deity of the Bengali Buddhists. Such iconographical examples appear to be a part of an effort to synthesize the concept of Mahāyāna Avalokiteśvara-Lokanātha with various deities of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu pantheon by taking the form and features of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara, and Sūrya.⁵⁷ For instance, one twelve-armed Avalokiteśvara-Lokanātha figure is presented beneath a spreading snake's hood umbrella, standing in equipoise, and in seven of his hands are the symbols of Garuḍa, the rat, the plough, the conch, the book, the bull, and the pot, each of them placed on a blue lotus; from the figure's neck to its knees hangs a brightly coloured garland of wild flowers. Two other hands, like the armed hands of Viṣṇu, are placed on two other figures, one of whom is the attendant goblin of Avalokiteśvara, Sūcīmukha. Without doubt, this is a noteworthy instance of Avalokiteśvara portrayal, especially in view of the fact that the concept of the Brāhmaṇical god Viṣṇu can be seen clearly in the image. On the basis of such examples, it has been suggested that "there was hardly any conceptual difference between the iconography of the Buddhist pantheon and that of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. Finally, it was not long before the secular society of Buddhism became subdued by the active and vigilant force of Brāhmaṇism."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid., 457; R.D. Banerji, *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, Archaeological Survey of India Memoir, 1933.

⁵⁸N.R. Ray, *History of the Bangali People*, 457.

The Buddhist Caryā songs, earliest specimens of Bengali poetry, have a definite Vedāntic undertone and represent a Tantrism with clear links to the Upaniṣads.⁵⁹ The most important aspect of these songs is that in them *śūnyatā* is replaced with *mahāsukha* which in turn is quite similar to, if not the same as, Vedāntic bliss which is to be accomplished through a monistic experience of the supreme reality. Further, the Siddhācāryas, the composers of this poetry, identified *nirvāṇa* with *mahāsukha* whose accomplishment became the goal of their *sādhana*. Thus, the Buddhist Caryā songs played the role of a halfway house in the long and eventful assimilative journey of Buddhism into Brāhmanical-Hinduism.

As an outgrowth of Tāntric Buddhism, Sahajiyā Buddhism embodies the heterodoxy of Buddhism in general mixed up with the spirit of Tāntrism. In its hostility towards digressive intellect and scholarly eruditeness as well as in its stress on the practical aspect of religion, the spirit of Tantra and Yoga acting mutually on it can be visualized. Again, the influence of Tantra as well as Vedānta is palpable in the view that truth can never be found outside and is to be intuited within. In the highest emphasis laid by the Sahajiyās on Sahaja-realization or self-realization as the *summum bonum* of the religious life, the old Upaniṣadic spirit in the Buddhistic apparel is unmistakably conspicuous. Though Buddhism as a religion began as an inflexible atheistic school, believing neither in God nor soul, it gradually exhibited a theistic inclination during the course of its evolution. Interestingly, “intense mysticism of the Mahāyāna led . . . to the importation into Buddhism of the pantheistic idea of the soul (*ātman*) and yoga or the ecstatic union of the individual with the Universal Spirit—doctrine which had been introduced into Hinduism by Patañjali.”⁶⁰ In other words, notion of the Brahman based on

⁵⁹See R.K. DasGupta, *Vedanta in Bengal*, Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 2003: 2–8 and Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1946 (2nd rev. edn. 1962): 77.

⁶⁰L.A. Waddell, *Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1895: 128.

the lines of the Vedāntic philosophy is integral to the Mahāyāna school. “It would perhaps be more accurate to say that it is a pantheistic doctrine with a theistic tinge; Buddha takes the place of the personified masculine Brahman of the Vedānta.”⁶¹

Overlapping between the Buddhist Mahāsiddha doctrines and Advaita-Vedānta cannot be ignored at the philosophical level too. As time went by, distinctions based on notions of soul and no-soul separating the non-Buddhists from earlier Buddhists became almost unrecognizable. The understanding of the impediment (*kleśas*) enabling one to attain Buddha-nature present in everything is unusually akin to the Advaita thinking that the identity of *jīvātman* and *paramātman* cannot be attained if insight is lacking. Influence of Buddhism on some of the Advaita doctrines cannot be denied. Rāmānuja and Mādhava did not see much difference between Śaṅkarācārya’s doctrine of Brahman and the Buddhist notion of *sūnyatā*. Thus, one is not surprised that Śaṅkarācārya and his guru Gauḍapāda are sometimes called “crypto-Buddhists.” Beginning with the Tathatāvāda of Aśvaghoṣa and the *Vijñaptimātratā* or the *Abhūtaparikalpa* of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, Buddhism was marching slowly but steadily towards the Upaniṣadic view of the Brahman as the Supreme Being. In the conception of the Vajrasattva and the Lord Śrīmahāsukha of the Vajrayānists the monistic view of the Supreme Being is clearly established.⁶² In the conception of the Sahaja or the *svābhāvika-kāya* (the body of the ultimate nature) of the Sahajiyās the same proclivity to conceptualize it in the image of the monistic Supreme Being cannot be ignored. Quite often, the Upaniṣadic portrayal of the Brahman as having hands and legs on all sides, having eyes, heads and faces on all sides, having ears in all the worlds on all sides and as pervading the whole universe, are all applied to this Sahaja.⁶³ And this Sahaja is none but the self, and all the worlds are the transformations of

⁶¹H. Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, repr., Delhi: Indological Book House, 1968 (originally published 1896): 121.

⁶²Shashibhusan Dasgupta, op. cit., 85.

⁶³See *ibid.*

this one Sahaja-self, all the universe is pervaded by the Sahaja-self, and nothing else is to be found anywhere.⁶⁴ All the various phenomena produced by the deeds (*karma*) of the beings are nothing but the modes and modifications of the self-revealed Sahaja; but though they are Sahaja in the ultimate nature, they are created in their varieties through mentation (*bodhanāt*) as the subject and the object.⁶⁵ The Sahaja is all itself the sustainer (*bhartā*), the performer (*kartā*), the king, and the Lord.⁶⁶ It is the life of the sentient, it is the supreme and immutable, it is all-pervading and inhabits all the bodies, it is the great life (the vital process) and the whole universe is imbued with it, all the existent and the non-existent and everything else ensue from it and it alone. It is the Being of the nature of pure consciousness, it is the eternal sovereign personality, it is the *jīva* (the individual personality), it is time, and it is the ego.⁶⁷ The Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā movement of Bengal marks the evolution of the Buddhist Sahajiyā cult as influenced strongly by the love-religion of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. Different religious cults were born as a consequence of the association of the secret yogic practices with various theological systems. The most important of the secret practices is the yogic control of the sex-pleasure for the purpose of transforming it into transcendental bliss, which is all at once conducive to both a healthy mind and body. This yogic practice with its paraphernalia, when linked to the philosophy of Śiva and Śakti, stands at the centre of the network of the Hindu Tāntric systems, and when linked to the speculations on Prajñā and Upāya of later Buddhism, gave birth to the various Tāntric Buddhist cults; and again, when linked to the speculations on Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā conceived as Rasa and Rati in Bengali Vaiṣṇavism, led to the rise of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā movement of Bengal. The

⁶⁴Quoted at *ibid.*, 85 from the *Hevajratāntra*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, MS no. 11317: 23A.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 23B.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 27A.

psycho-physiological yogic processes, often referred to in the lyrical songs of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās and also in the large number of short and long texts, containing the doctrines of the cult, are essentially the same as are found in the Hindu as well as the Buddhist Tantras and the Buddhist songs and *dohās*.⁶⁸ The discrepancies and differences in detail relate rather to terminology and phraseology than to conception. The final state of *mahāsukha* as the state of Sahaja of the Buddhists is also the final state of Sahaja with the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās. It is the ultimate reality inasmuch as it is the non-dual state of the unity of Śiva and Śakti, which are but the two aspects of the absolute reality as conceived in the Hindu Tantras. Again in the Buddhist school it is the non-dual state of unity of Prajñā and Upāya which are also the two aspects of the absolute reality. The principles of Śiva and Śakti or Prajñā and Upāya are represented by man and woman, and it is, therefore, that when through the process of *sādhana* man and woman can realize their pure nature as Śiva and Śakti, or Upāya and Prajñā, the supreme bliss arising out of the union of the two becomes the highest state whereby one can realize the ultimate nature of the absolute reality. While all this was happening, the conception of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā of the Vaiṣṇavas was construed by the Sahajiyās in a way that was similar to the conception of Śiva and Śakti, or Upāya and Prajñā, and all males and females were thought of as physical manifestation of the principles of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. So, the highest state of union of the two, which is the state of supreme love, is the final state of Sahaja. Thus, the theological theorizations focussed around the love-flirtations of Rādhā in generic Vaiṣṇavism could without any difficulty be absorbed by the Sahajiyās into their cult.

The fundamental philosophy of the Hindu Tāntric systems is the philosophy of Śiva and Śakti. All the yogic practices of the Tāntric Buddhists have grown around the fundamental ideology of Prajñā and Upāya, which is essentially the same as that of Śiva and Śakti. The traditional belief of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism

⁶⁸Shashibhusan Dasgupta, op. cit., 116.

is that Śiva is the original instructor of all yoga. The Tāntric Buddhists also believe that the Buddha, or rather Vajrasattva (or Hevajra, or Heruka), who is conceived just as Śiva, is the original instructor of all secret yoga. The traditional belief of the Nāthas is that Ādinātha is the first in the list of the chronology of the Nāthas and that all secrets of yoga originated with him. This Ādinātha is none but Śiva of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, and the Buddha in the form of the Vajrasattva of the Buddhists. In fact, the epithets “Ādinātha” and “Bhūtanātha” are applied to the Vajrasattva or Hevajra in the Buddhist Tantras as frequently as they are applied to Śiva in the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu Tantras. The upshot of this is that “in the Buddhist Tantras a tendency was manifest always to conceive the Supreme Lord in the image of Śiva and the female counterpart of the Lord in the image of Śakti, and these Lord and Lady of the Buddhists were in still later times identified completely with the Śiva and Śakti of the Hindus.”⁶⁹ It is because of the general similarities of this nature that Tāntric Buddhism seems allied to the other yogic sects.⁷⁰ Thus, it is no surprise that “the Tāntric followers of Buddhism mixed with the Brāhmaṇical ascetics to the extent that they almost became one with each other.”⁷¹

Another popular religious cult, known as the Dharma cult, developed in Western Bengal (Rāḍha) out of the admixture of some relics of decaying Buddhism, popular Hindu ideas and practices, and a large number of indigenous beliefs and ceremonies. The stone-images of Dharma Ṭhākura are still found and worshipped in the temples of Dharma in West Bengal.⁷² Archaeological investigations have revealed that ideas and practices similar to those of the Dharma cult are also to be found in some parts

⁶⁹Ibid., 281.

⁷⁰Ibid., 195–196.

⁷¹N.R. Ray, *History of the Bengali People*, trans. J.W. Hood, Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd., 1994: 457.

⁷²Shashibhusan Dasgupta, op. cit., 259. H.P. Śāstrī, *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal*, Calcutta: Hare Press, 1897.

of Orissa, particularly in Mayurbhanj and its vicinities.⁷³ From a comparative study of the thoughts, beliefs, and practices of the crypto-Buddhistic cults⁷⁴ of Orissa and the various forms of Dharma cult found in the southwestern part of Bengal, it will appear that they are essentially the same in so far as all of them represent only a mixture of later Buddhistic ideas and practices with the popular Hindu beliefs and practices including a mass of beliefs and practices of the aboriginal people.⁷⁵ Buddhism in its Tāntric form was gradually assimilated into the cognate religious systems among the Hindus and the Muslims, and the Dharma cult is the outcome of such a popular assimilation.⁷⁶ When Islam arrived in Bengal, it had a palpable influence on Dharma cult as a result of which some of the followers of this cult became assimilated into Islam and many others became very nearly so. “Gradually the three jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha—came to be interpreted in terms of Prajñā, Upāya and the world produced by them . . . [and] . . . some scholars maintain that these transformed forms of the three jewels are still now preserved in the Jagannātha temple of Puri. . . . This theory of the transformation of Buddha, the first jewel of the Buddhists, into Jagannātha (and later on frankly conceived as Kṛṣṇa) has its corroboration in the tradition of the literature of the Dharma cult.”⁷⁷

As time went by, the Hindu and the Buddhist Tantras began to openly behave as kissing cousins and the resemblances between Buddhism and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism which had begun to multiply under the influence of Mahāyāna became alarmingly profuse under the influence of the Tantric customs. These customs blended the two set-ups so comprehensively that the existence of Buddhism as a distinct entity became unfeasible. Ideas and practices, which

⁷³N.N. Vasu, op. cit.

⁷⁴See *ibid.*, 177ff.

⁷⁵Shashibhusan Dasgupta, op. cit., 260.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 264.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 276–278.

were once held contraband, were smuggled into Buddhism with impunity and accepted with alacrity. Charms, magic, augury, portents, erotics, and exorcism *reductio ad absurdum*, nothing was anathema, only if these could masquerade under some mystic canons. The borrowing went on till the last hour when even the characteristic and distinctive symbols of the Buddhists got inextricably woven into a common cobweb with those of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus. Brāhmaṇical-Hindu iconography not only absorbed but also yielded positions of reverence to various Buddhist deities. Tārā (variously known as Ekajaṭā Ugratārā, Mahācīnatārā, Vidyujjvālākārālī, Prasannatārā, and others), conceived as a fearful divinity with legs arranged in the *pratyālīḍha*⁷⁸ attitude, wearing a garland of skulls, having a protruding tongue, fangs, four arms,⁷⁹ and one tuft of hair (*ekajaṭām*), decked in five *mudrās* (*pañcamudrāvibhūṣitām*), bearing the figure of Akṣobhya on her crown (*maulāv-akṣobhya-bhūṣitām*) and having the mantra *Hrīṃs Trīṃ Hūṃ Phat*, was picked directly from the Buddhist pantheon “colour, attribute, parental Buddha Akṣobhya and all. The five miniature figures at the head take the place of the five Dhyāni Buddhas.”⁸⁰ Same is the case of *kartri*-carrying Chinnamastā or Vajrayoginī, who stands in the *pratyālīḍha* attitude holding her own severed head in the left hand with streams of blood oozing forth from the neck and falling into the mouths of the severed head as well as those of the two accompanying *ḍākinīs* standing on either side and carrying *kartris* in their hands. She is also claimed as their own both by the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and the Buddhists. In fact,

⁷⁸The attitudes of *ālīḍha* and *pratyālīḍha* signify the well-known archer’s attitude of standing with one leg stretched forward and the other slightly bent. When the right leg is outstretched and the left bent it is called *ālīḍha*; its opposite is *pratyālīḍha*.

⁷⁹Carrying the flesh-chopping knife (*kartri*) and the skull-cup (*kapāla*) in the two principal hands, and the sword and the blue lotus in the right and left hands respectively.

⁸⁰N.K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Dacca: Rai S.N. Bhadra Bahadur, 1929: 206.

Buddhist deities such as Kālī, Bhadrakālī, and Mañjuśrī were absorbed into the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu pantheon⁸¹ so thoroughly that the ideological incongruities were completely obliterated in the mind of an average worshipper. “Tantric ideals associated with the cult of Śakti changed Buddhism to such a great extent that it ceased to be Buddhism at all.”⁸² “Buddhism of the Tāntric period is much more different from the Mahāyāna Buddhism—so much so, that if the original Buddhism as taught by the Buddha and the later Buddhism of the Tāntric period are placed side by side, one will be surprised to find not even a remote connection between the two.”⁸³ One by one its main planks were being thrown overboard by Buddhism and “it was through the breaches made in its defence by Tantricism that its capitulation to Hindu influences was facilitated.”⁸⁴ Thus, one is not surprised by S. Radhakrishnan’s comments that “The disappearance of Buddhism from India is due to the practical coalescence of the two faiths, especially when both the Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist faiths got mixed up with gross superstitions . . . the flexible, many-sided, synthetic genius of the Indian religious consciousness . . . assimilated the valuable teachings of Buddhism.”⁸⁵ But there were no great surprises, violent revolutions, or holy wars that took place in this almost invisible, painstakingly slow process of acculturation and assimilative sabotage that extended over more than one thousand years. Brāhmaṇical-Hindu embraces were almost friendly but they nevertheless ebbed the lifeblood out of an enervated Buddhism *sotto voce*.

The excellent métier of Buddhism at adaptation had led to its success and spread in foreign lands. However, the same métier

⁸¹B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sādhana-mālā and Other Cognate Tantric Texts of Rituals*, 2nd rev. and enl. edn., Calcutta: Firma K. Mukhopadhyay, 1958: 155.

⁸²N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., 140.

⁸³B. Bhattacharyya, “A Peep into the Later Buddhism,” 2.

⁸⁴R.C. Mitra, op. cit., 162.

⁸⁵S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West: Some Reflections*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1955: 30.

vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇism appears to have become its *bête noire* in India. As a result of this adaptational attitude, Buddhism almost completely surrendered precisely to those beliefs and practices whose rejection the Buddha had himself preached in his original message. The monks were expected to possess neither family nor property and to engage in the practice of austerity, meditation, and philosophical discussions. The Buddha had preached this for the simple reason that he had realized the effeteness of worshipping, making sacrifices or indulging in magical practices to please God or various deities. But the Buddhist saṃgha succumbed to these very beliefs and practices and assumed the form of being an elaborate worship of all sorts of gods and goddesses of the popular pantheon. Thus, for instance, grand centres such as the Vikramaśilā *vihāra* had even the provision for a *bali-ācārya* and a *homa-ācārya*. With the assumption of such a queer form, Buddhism was left with no internal justification to survive as a distinct creed.⁸⁶

⁸⁶D.P. Chattopadhyaya, "Preface," *Tāranātha*.xii–xiii.

Attacks by Arabs and Turks

COMMUNALIZATION AND DISTORTION of Indian history began with the administrator-historians of the British Raj many of whom had a hidden agenda. In order to legitimize their colonial rule and to win the allegiance of the Indians, they tried to show that their policies were more humane than the previous “Muslim” rulers. Working with such an agenda as a guideline, temples in ruins were shown as having been demolished by Muslim fanatics and missing treasures or statues as either having been looted by Muslim raiders or as having been hidden by the Hindus and Buddhists for fear of Muslim raids. Even when a Muslim ruler gave permission for the repair of a temple, it was explained away as having been earlier destroyed by Muslim armies. Confusing military policy with religious policy and brushing aside economic or geopolitical motives, this kind of vulgar historiography propagated the view that all invasions by Muslim armies were motivated by the goal of propagating Islam and converting the Indian *kāfirs* by the sword. Thus, conquest was equated with conversion and any later uprising was shown as an attempt to get rid of Islam. In this way, many colonial historians of the nineteenth century and many aficionados of such a communal history in present-day India, place in one box all the Arabs, Turks, and Mughals and put the label of “Islamic invaders” on this box. Such an *ad hominem* approach totally ignores the fact that these invaders were individual political entities, who not only differed from

each other in many ways but were also often at war with each other. Moreover, it is often completely overlooked that “both Hindu and Muslim states fought among themselves as much as they did against one another.”¹

The view that conversion in India was forced and a direct consequence of the militant nature of Islam was expounded by scholars such as T. Postans, A.K. Warder, H.M. Elliot, H.P. Shastri, and Henry Cousens. Postans, for instance, had pointed out in 1843 that during their conquest of Sind the Arabs exercised “the most unrelenting cruelty and intolerance” whose “fanaticism . . . induce[d] them to make converts.”² According to Warder, Buddhism “was swept out of India . . . because it had no answer to the violence of Islam.”³ “Muslims . . . the ‘*buddha*-smashers’ on their religious campaigns took particular care to seek out and destroy Buddhist institutions.”⁴ In the opinion of H.P. Shastri, “Muhammadans . . . destroyed the Buddhist monasteries of note, appropriated the monastic lands for the use of soldiers and massacred monks by thousands, and burnt libraries wherever found. Mahāyāna was practically stamped out from Bengal.”⁵ Similarly, Elliot viewed Islam “as a religion of terror and devastation, murder and rapine,”⁶ Arab Muslims of Sind as “furious zealots” who undertook the conquest of Sind in pursuit of “plunder and proselytism,”⁷ and enforced their rule through “the rack and the threat of circumcision.”⁸

¹J.E. Schwatzenberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, second impression, with additional material, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992: 195.

²T. Postans, *Personal Observations on Sind*, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843: 152–160.

³A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 3rd rev. edn., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000: 491.

⁴*Ibid.*, 480.

⁵H.P. Shastri, “Introduction” in N.N. Vasu, *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, Calcutta: Hare Press, 1911: 14.

⁶H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol. 1, London: Trübner, 1867: 414.

⁷*Ibid.*, 435.

⁸*Ibid.*, 460.

Other than the straightforward inducement through torture, terror, and circumcision, Elliot also put forward the view that harsh taxation imposed on non-Muslims and the lack of justice to them in the Muslim judicial system caused their conversion in Arab Sind. For instance, he argued that *jizyah* levied on non-Muslims resulted in wholesale conversions not simply due to the distinguishing nature of the tax, but because it was “exacted with vigor and punctuality, and frequently with insult.”⁹ Further, he alleged that the Muslim public tribunals were “only the means of extortion and forcible conversion.”¹⁰ Early archaeologists also viewed incorrectly the treatment meted out by the Muslim authorities to the non-Muslim populace in Arab Sind as heavy-handed, violent, and coercive. For instance, Henry Cousens in 1925 pointed out that the Arabs “full of zeal for the spread of their newly established religion, laid a heavy hand upon the religious buildings of the Hindus and Buddhists.”¹¹ Like Cousens, many other archaeologists, on seeing a Buddhist site in ruins or on uncovering fragments of Buddhist sculpture, drew the conclusion that such a condition was the result of the destruction by the Arab iconoclasts.¹² Furthermore, lack of a relic casket in a stūpa which as a matter of fact most of the stūpas never had,¹³ was viewed as either having been looted by the Muslims or removed by the Buddhist monks for protecting it from being plundered by them.¹⁴ Above all, it was not considered necessary to prove any

⁹Ibid., 476.

¹⁰Ibid., 478.

¹¹H. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind with Historical Outline*, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, 1925: 10.

¹²H.B.E. Frere, “Descriptive Notices of Antiquities in Sind,” *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4, 1854: 356; D.R. Sahni, “Trial Excavations at Sirar,” *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1929–30: 161.

¹³It has been pointed out by Sukumar Dutt that Buddhist stūpas in India rarely possess relics (*Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962: 188).

¹⁴D.R. Bhandarkar, “Buddhist stūpa at Saidpur in Sind,” *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1914–15: 91–92.

of these assertions. Unfortunately, it was taken as a matter of course that the Arab Muslims, being Muslim, had to be fanatically anti-Hindu and anti-Buddhist. In the present times, quintessential example of such a view is Koenraad Elst, who believes that “It is not ‘Brahmanical onslaught’ but Islam that chased Buddhism out of India. . . . The Buddhists drew the wrath of every Muslim *but-shikan* (idol-breaker), even where they hadn’t offered resistance against the Muslim armies because of their doctrine of non-violence.”¹⁵

The Buddhist and Islamic pious histories also present a somewhat distorted picture. The Buddhist pious histories see conversions as occurring only by force. As compared to this, the Islamic pious histories see conversions as a peaceful process which occurred either because of the moral superiority of the Muslim faith or because the Buddhists and low caste Hindus wanted to escape Brāhmanical oppression. Here it is generally assumed that the determining characteristic of Indian despots was their Hindu religion and not their political or economic policies.

A careful look at the conversions to Islam both from Buddhism and Hinduism shows that it was a slow and prolonged process. There is nothing in the primary sources which indicates that the Arab Muslims were particularly abusive or harsh in collecting the *jizyah*. Most of the converts appear to have adopted Islam as a matter of political, social, or economic expediency. Adopting the religion of the victor would have been definitely a strong incentive since such an action offered opportunities of various kinds not available to those who were not Muslims. Such conversions were external where the converts internally continued to maintain belief in their own religions. The children and grandchildren of such converts, however, growing up in the external framework of Islam, became far more sincere than their

¹⁵Koenraad Elst, *Negationism in India: Concealing the Record of Islam*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 2002: 63–64.

parents and grandparents in accepting the new faith. In this way, the Islamic population began to gradually grow in a nonviolent manner.

Some Buddhist sources have suggested that attacks by Arabs and Turks were primarily responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India.¹⁶ These tribesmen through their truculent and predatory excursions are known to have destroyed many monastic institutions in the northwest, Sind, and Bengal-Bihar. We are told that the modus operandi of these invaders, known by the blanket name of *Turuṣka*,¹⁷ was to set ablaze monasteries and commit cold-blooded slaughter of the resident monks. It may not be out of context to quote a contemporary Muslim author here. Al-Biladuri, who lived towards the middle of the ninth century, talking about the invasion of Muhammad on Multan says that

He massacred the men capable of bearing arms, but the children were taken captive, as well as the ministers of the temple, to the number of six thousand. The Musalmans found there much gold in a chamber ten cubits long by eight broad, and there was an aperture above, through which the gold was poured into the chamber. Hence they call Multan 'the Frontier of the House of Gold,' for *farz* means 'a frontier.' The temple (*budd*) of Multan received rich presents and offerings, and to it the people of Sind resorted as a place of pilgrimage. They circumambulated it, and shaved their heads and beards.¹⁸

¹⁶For instance, an eyewitness account given by Dharmasvāmin (see *Dharma*.64–95). Tibetan historian, Tāranātha, also takes the same position (*Tāranātha*.319).

¹⁷*Tājika*, *Gaurī*, *Hammīra/Hambīra*, *Paṭhāna*, *Mudgala*, *Turuti/Turbati*, are the other terms used in the Brāhmaṇical/Buddhist literature for these invaders, though sometimes these terms were also used for non-Muslims. *Musalmāna* is the term sometimes used for all Muslims, though not very commonly in early medieval times. Occasionally, terms such as *Yavana*, *Mleccha*, *Turuṣka* were also used interchangeably (see for details B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (Eighth to Fourteenth Century)*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998: App. 1).

¹⁸Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., vol. I: 123.

Basing their observations on sources such as these, scholars like V.A. Smith held the “Islamic” attacks solely responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India. In the words of Smith:

The Muhammadan historian, indifferent to distinctions among idolators, states that the majority of the inhabitants were ‘clean shaven Brahmans,’ who were all put to the sword. He evidently means Buddhist monks, as he was informed that the whole city and fortress were considered to be a college, which the name Bihar signifies. A great library was scattered. When the victors desired to know what the books might be no man capable of explaining their contents had been left alive. No doubt everything was burnt. The multitude of images used in Medieval Buddhist worship always inflamed the fanaticism of Muslim warriors to such fury that no quarter was given to the idolators. The ashes of the Buddhist sanctuaries at Sarnath near Benares still bear witness to the rage of the image breakers. Many noble monuments of the ancient civilization of India were irretrievably wrecked in the course of the early Muhammadan invasions. Those invasions were fatal to the existence of Buddhism as an organized religion in northern India, where its strength resided chiefly in Bihar and certain adjoining territories. The monks who escaped massacre fled, and were scattered over Nepal, Tibet, and the south. After AD 1200 the traces of Buddhism in upper India are faint and obscure.¹⁹

B.R. Ambedkar also subscribed to the thesis of “sword of Islam”:

...brahmanism beaten and battered by the Muslim invaders could look back to the rulers for support and sustenance and get it. Buddhism beaten and battered by the Muslim invaders had no such hope. It was an uncared for orphan and it withered in the cold blast of the native rulers and was consumed in the fire lit up by the conquerors. . . . This was the greatest disaster that befell the religion of Buddha in India. . . . The sword of Islam fell heavily upon the priestly class. It perished or it fled outside India. Nobody remained to keep the flame of Buddhism burning.²⁰

¹⁹V.A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India from the Earliest Times to the end of 1911*, London: Clarendon Press, 1928: 221.

²⁰B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, comp. by Vasant Moon, vol. 3, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1987: 232–233.

The famous archaeologist, H.D. Sankalia, in his book on the Nālandā University, uses somewhat harsh words against Islam when he says that though internal degeneration had already set in Buddhism, “a death blow was given by the mighty-blood-smeared hand of Islam.”²¹ According to him, “The Moslem sword had so much frightened the people and the damage done, material as well as culture, was so great that... even those monks who survived the Moslem avalanche, would never dare to enter the portals of their once beloved institution.”²² In fact, there is sufficient literary and archaeological evidence to show that some important Buddhist *viḥāras* were attacked and destroyed by invaders who were Muslims by faith. For instance, the Somapura Mahāvihāra (now in Bangladesh) is said to have been set ablaze by an army of Turks and in the conflagration a monk, called Karuṇaśrīmitra, lost his life.²³ The Odantapurī Mahāvihāra, located a few miles from Nālandā, was sacked and razed to the ground in CE 1199 by Khalji soldiers. After killing all the monks, the Turuṣka military commander turned the place into his headquarters.²⁴ According to the *Tabakat-i-Nāsiri*:

Bakhtiyar Khilji went to the gate of the fort of Behar with only two hundred horses, and began the war by taking the enemy unawares.... Muhammad Bakhtiyar with great vigour and audacity rushed in at the gate of the fort and gained possession of the place. Great plunder fell into the hands of the victors. Most of the inhabitants were Brahmins with shaven heads. They were put to death. A large number of books were found there and when the Muhammedans saw them, they called for some persons to explain their contents, but all the men had been killed. It was discovered that the whole fort and city was a place of study. In the Hindu language, the word Behar means a college.²⁵

²¹H.D. Sankalia, *The Nālandā University*, 2nd rev. and enl. edn., Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972: 241.

²²*Ibid.*, 246.

²³*EL*.xxi.1931–1932: 98.

²⁴See *Dharma*.64–95.

²⁵Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., vol. II: 306.

As a result of such raids by the Turks, many ordained monks were massacred,²⁶ both Vikramaśilā and Odantapurī were destroyed.²⁷ Vajrāsana (Bodhagayā) too was attacked by the Turuṣka army.²⁸ Palazzo-like *mahāvihāras* at Vikramaśilā and Nālandā became targets of repeated attacks by roving bands of Turuṣka soldiers forcing the resident monks to simply desert them. According to Tāranātha:

In the country between the Ganges and the Jumna the Turuṣka king appeared and by means of several Bhikṣus who were his messengers, he with other small kings of the Turuṣkas living in Bengal and other parts of the country, invaded and conquered the whole of Magadha, killed many clerics in Odantapura, destroyed this as well as Vikramaśilā, and on the spot of the old vihāra a fortress of the Turuṣkas was erected. . . . *Paṇḍita* Śākyaśrī went to Ja-garṣḍa-la (Jagaddala) in Oḍiśa in the east. He spent three years there and then went to Tibet. The great Rantarakṣita went to Nepal. Some of the great *paṇḍita*-s like the great teacher Jñānākaragupta, along with a hundred minor *paṇḍita*-s went to the south-west of India. The great scholar Buddhaśrīmitra and Daśabala's disciple Vajraśrī, along with minor *paṇḍita*-s, fled far to the south. The sixteen [remaining] *mahanta*-s including the scholar Saṃghamaśrījñāna, Raviśrībhadra, Candrākaragupta, along with two hundred minor *paṇḍita*-s, went far to the east to Pu-khañ, Mu-nañ, Kamboja and other places. Thus the Law became almost extinct in Magadha.²⁹

Different inscriptions discovered at Sāranātha show an unbroken continuity in the series of changes in the written characters and cease with the twelfth century, presumably with the advent of the Turuṣkas. If the archaeological data from there were to be believed, the overthrow was probably a violent and sudden one. Oertel, who directed the excavations here, observes that “the shattered walls, broken columns and mutilated images and the charred roof-timbers and remains of food testify to this.”³⁰

²⁶*Tāranātha*.319.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 316–319.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 320.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 319.

³⁰*IA*, vol. XXXVI, 1908: 278.

A Tibetan monk, Dharmasvāmin, has given an eyewitness account of one of the several attacks on Nālandā where a nonagenarian monk-teacher, named Rāhula Śrībhadrā, was in residence.³¹ Rāhula Śrībhadrā lived on a small allowance for food given by Jayadeva, a brāhmaṇa lay disciple from Odantapurī. Time and again came threats of an impending raid on the Nālandā *mahāvihāra* from the military headquarters at Odantapurī. Jayadeva, who himself had been thrown into military prison at Odantapurī on suspicion of espionage, came to know that a fresh raid on Nālandā was brewing. He immediately managed to transmit a message of warning advising the residents at the Nālandā *mahāvihāra* to flee for their safety. On receiving the message, everyone left Nālandā except the old man and his Tibetan disciple. Not caring for the little remainder of his own life, Rāhula Śrībhadrā urged his pupil to save himself by quick flight from the approaching danger. However, the pupil refused to leave without him and eventually the master agreed. Dharmasvāmin carried Rāhula Śrībhadrā on his back along with a small supply of rice, sugar, and a few books to the temple of Jñānanātha at some distance. The two hid themselves there. While they were in the hidy-hole, 300 Turuṣka soldiers arrived, armed and ready for the assault. The raid came and passed over them. Then the two refugees stole out of their hiding place back again to Nālandā. Dharmasvāmin says that the libraries had perished long ago at the hands of the Turuṣkas and he could not get a scrap of manuscript to copy.³²

Buddhist monasteries being largely located near urban centres appear to have become easy targets of attacks. Fearing the Turuṣka terror, some of the surviving monks dispersed and fled with a few bundles of holy texts concealed under their robes and found security at last in the more hospitable countries such as Nepal, Tibet, and China. Communal life suffered an abrupt dislocation with the collapse of monasteries and dispersal of the

³¹*Dharma*. 64–95.

³²*Ibid.*, 90ff.

monks. Monasteries wore a deserted look and, in many cases, monastic lands were confiscated and granted to the commanders. Buddhists melted away bit by bit amidst the surrounding Hindu influences and social forces which had been suffusing them for a long time with increasing effect. Some were converted to Islam, but the majority were absorbed by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu society.

Though there is irrefutable evidence to show that Buddhist *vihāras* were attacked by Arab and Turkish invaders and some of them were literally wiped out of existence, it must be remembered that the attacks were neither organized nor systematic. The Islamic sources do not talk much about such attacks. Such a silence in these sources does not necessarily emanate from a motive to hide. The reason for this is that such methods of extirpation of the *kāfirs* being considered meritorious acts, the Muslim chroniclers would not have hesitated to mention them. Nevertheless, it was to be expected that such occasions of political uncertainty were habitually accompanied by some amount of massacre and forced conversion. In some cases, there is also evidence to show that these central Asian tribesmen with no knowledge of edifices in their desert homeland, mistook these buildings for military strongholds. In at least some instances, this may partially account for the enormity of the massacres. Another reason must have been the enormous wealth accumulated by these monasteries which proved good baits for the attacks. Opulence of the monasteries had given them the reputation of being some sort of El Dorados and hence, objects of special attention by the plundering hordes.

Even under such unfavourable and perilous conditions, new monasteries were being built and old ones endowed *de novo* to keep up saṃgha life and the monks' ministrations. Thus, even after the Turkish invaders had overrun the country, sporadic and strictly localized attempts at revival were made. Dharmasvāmin acknowledges that though Nālandā was doomed to death, still teaching and learning was going on there over at least four after-

decades.³³ However, commenting on Tāranātha's lamentation that with the destruction of Vikramaśilā and Odantapurī the die for Buddhism in India had been cast, D.P. Chattopadhyaya expresses surprise as to "how can a creed, so long as it possesses any inner vitality, become virtually extinct from such a vast country only with the fall of two centres situated somewhere in Bihar?"³⁴

During the initial stages of contact Islam appears to have seen Buddhism as suffering from the twin evils of idolatry and atheism, apart from Tantric Buddhism, with its explicit visual acceptance of sexuality, appearing to a more austere Islam a little more than decadent corruption.³⁵ Yet there is evidence to suggest that Islam considered both Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and Buddhists as being *ahl-al-kitāb* (People of the Book), to whom a degree of legitimacy could be offered.³⁶ Some scholars have pointed out that invasions and attendant atrocities are attributable to political and economic expediencies. For instance, Mohammad Habib feels that "economic and imperialistic considerations rather than religious zeal" were the "inspiring motive" behind these invasions.³⁷ However, majority of the times the representation of Muslims in Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist sources is stereotype and "formulaic."³⁸ R.M. Eaton has pointed out that of the sixty thousand odd cases of temple demolition by Islamic rulers quoted by present-day Hindutva sources only about eighty instances

³³*Dharma*.95.

³⁴*Tāranātha*.xiii.

³⁵David Scott, "Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons," *Numen*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1995: 144.

³⁶A. Hamid, *Islam: The Natural Way*, London, 1989: 147.

³⁷K.A. Nizami, ed., *Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Mohammad Habib*, vol. 2, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974: Introduction. See also K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, 3rd edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1988: 40–46.

³⁸Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim identities in Pre-Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, 1995: 692–722.

can be identified “whose historicity appears to be reasonably certain.”³⁹ He also clarified that Hindu rulers attacked Hindu states, demolished temples and seized idols; Muslim rulers perpetrated barbarities against Muslims. His conclusion is that almost all cases of violence were invariably political, i.e., to establish symbolic as well as real authority. The decline of Buddhism in south India is also hard to explain in the light of the attacks by Arabs and Turks. As pointed out by Schalk,⁴⁰ Islam barely had a presence in that region. Another interesting explanation has been given by R.M. Eaton for the destruction and desecration of a few chosen temples and religious institutions by various Muslim as well as non-Muslim kings in ancient and medieval India. He points out:

[T]emples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the coming of Muslim Turks to India. Not surprisingly, Turkish invaders, when attempting to plant their own rule in early medieval India, followed and continued established patterns. . . . Undoubtedly some temples were desecrated but the facts in the matter were never recorded, or the facts were recorded but the records themselves no longer survive. Conversely, later Indo-Muslim chroniclers, seeking to glorify the religious zeal of earlier Muslim rulers, sometimes attributed acts of temple desecration to such rulers even when no contemporary evidence supports the claims. . . . First, acts of temple desecration were nearly invariably carried out by military officers or ruling authorities; that is, such acts that we know about were undertaken by the state. Second, the chronology and geography of the data indicate that acts of temple desecration typically occurred on the cutting edge of a moving military frontier. . . . In Bihar, this included the targeting of Buddhist monastic establishments at Odantapuri, Vikramasila, and Nalanda. Detached from a Buddhist laity, these establishments had by this time become dependent on the patronage of local royal authorities, with whom they were identified.⁴¹

³⁹See R.M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000: 128–131.

⁴⁰Peter Schalk, ed., *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, pt. 2. *The Period of the Imperial Colar*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2002.

⁴¹R.M. Eaton, “Temple desecration in pre-modern India,” *Frontline*, vol. 17, Issue 25, Dec 9–22, 2000: 66.

Hodgson has argued that the association of the Buddhists with the wealthy laity had resulted in the alienation of the peasantry and when the Muslims arrived, they usurped the power of these wealthy lay-patrons by feeding the peasants' resentment and inciting civil wars. As a result of this, the patrons of Buddhism perished and so did the Buddhist Order, says Hodgson.⁴² Though it cannot be denied that peasantry may have felt let down by the fact that Buddhism was an urban religion supported by rich urban merchants, bankers, financiers, and artisans, Hodgson's hypothesis is quite spurious and is not supported by historical facts. There are hardly any examples in the history of medieval India of peasant resentment against patrons of Buddhism leading to civil wars. Moreover, well-documented research has shown that Buddhism had already begun to decline by the time Islam arrived in India. Though the empirical reality and ruthlessness in some cases of the Turuṣka conquest cannot be denied, it would be completely unhistorical to hold it as *raison le plus décisif* for the decline of Buddhism in India. First of all, persecutions may suppress but they are not known to have wiped out a religion. Secondly, as pointed out above, Buddhism had become a spent force by the time these invaders descended upon the plains of the Madhyadeśa, the cradle of Buddhism. Thus, Turuṣka actions were not in themselves the cause for Buddhism's disappearance from India.⁴³ Thirdly and most importantly, there is enough evidence to show that Buddhism actually survived the Turuṣka conquest, and eked out a rather precarious existence for many centuries beyond in Bengal, Orissa, and coastal regions of south India. The Bodhagayā Stone Inscription of Gāhaḍavāla Jayacandra, who began his reign in CE 1170, records the construction of a cave

⁴²See Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, repr., vol. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977: 276, 278, 557–558.

⁴³T.O. Ling, *Buddhist Revival in India: Aspects of the Sociology of Religion*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980: Chapter 3. See also David Scott, "Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons." *Numen*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1995: 143.

at Jayapur with images of Tārā, Ugratārā, and Dattatārā.⁴⁴ The Patna Museum Inscription of king Jayasena, son of Buddhasena, dated in the year CE 1283, records the gift of a village in Gayā for the residence of a Sri Lankan monk.⁴⁵ It is beyond doubt that Bodhagayā continued to allure foreign pilgrims long after the Turuṣka conquest. The Aśoka stūpa, which had been repaired twice by the kings of Burma, received their special attention in CE 1289.⁴⁶ At that date, the Burmese king Simbuythikin deputed his preceptor Śrīdharmarājaguru to carry on the repairs *de novo*, and on this occasion, lands, slaves, and cattle were purchased and dedicated to provide for the daily offerings during the religious services which must have been continuing there. In CE 1777, the Tashi Lama sent an embassy there.⁴⁷ According to some Tibetan accounts like *Pag-sam jon-zang*, the temples and *caityas* at Nālandā were repaired by a sage called Mudita Bhadra after the Turuṣka incursions. In the same account, we are told that soon after this, Kukuṭasiddha, a minister of the king of Magadha, erected a temple at Nālandā.⁴⁸ A strange account is rendered of the ultimate ruin of the place in a conflagration produced by two votaries of the Sun-god, who, out of vengeance, threw sparks of live coal on the buildings. The history of Buddhist culture at this famous centre was not believed by the contemporary Tibetan author to have come to a final end with the Turuṣka attack.⁴⁹ Arthur Waley has shown that Buddhism survived till the fourteenth century not only in Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar but also in other parts of India including Kāñcīpura (Tamilnadu), Coḷa kingdom (Coromandal coast), and Jālaṃdhara

⁴⁴"A Buddhist Inscription from Bodh-Gayā of the Reign of Jayaccandradeva, V.S. 124X," *IHQ*.v. 1929: 14–30.

⁴⁵*IA*.xl.viii.1919: 43–48; *EL*.xix.1927–28: 118.

⁴⁶*EL*.xi.1911–12: 118–120.

⁴⁷C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co., 1921: 13.

⁴⁸See, S.C. Vidyābhūṣaṇa, *History of the Mediaeval School of Indian Logic*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1909: 147.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

(Punjab).⁵⁰ Thus, the Turuṣka attacks cannot explain the general trend of decline because the agony columns of Buddhism had begun to appear much prior to these attacks and continued well beyond the end of the same. However, Islam may have been responsible, mostly indirectly, for accelerating the assimilation of the remnants of Buddhism into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. It was also certainly a beneficiary of the hapless condition in which Buddhism found itself at this point of time in history. Since proselytization was not the goal of the Arab and Turkish fortune-seekers and adventurers, their syncretic practices, inevitable concomitants of the process of conversion to Islam, did not bring them in conflict with the local populace. It also appears from the sources that while accommodating a host of indigenous practices, Muslim settlers do not appear to have presented any direct threat as such to Buddhism or for that matter to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

Above all, P.S. Jaini poses a question as to why “the Buddhists were not able to regroup and rebuild after the initial holocaust had come to an end.”⁵¹ Interestingly, the pinnacle of Jaina temple construction activity coincides with the invasions of Gujarat by Mahmud of Ghazni (CE 1024) and Alauddin Khalji (CE 1297) and we do not find Jaina inscriptions in northern India before the eleventh century CE though the Muslims did not show any indulgence towards the Jainas. Unfortunately, Buddhism did not have any roots among the rural masses, and thus, the monks were not in a position to disperse into the countryside where in loose and scattered groups they could have taken refuge to reorganize themselves at an opportune moment. Though Jainism had to face the same kind of dilemma yet it came out unscathed. Thus, the impact of the Turuṣka attacks on Buddhist institutions was certainly not what may be called the decisive moment in the history of the decline of Indian Buddhism.

⁵⁰A. Waley, “New Light on Buddhism in Medieval India,” *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, July 1932: 355–376.

⁵¹P.S. Jaini, *op. cit.*, 1980: 83.

ISLAM'S FIRST CONTACT with Buddhist population on Indian soil took place in CE 711 when the Arabs invaded and annexed Sind to their empire. By this time, two important historical developments had taken place. One, Buddhism had declined to a considerable degree in India. Two, Arabs had already become familiar with Buddhism.¹ Considering that Arab rulers had already granted the status of *dhimmī* to the Zoroastrians in Persia, this status was readily extended by them to the Buddhists, Jainas, and Brāhmaṇical-Hindus of Sind. As discussed in the previous chapters, within about two centuries of the Arab rule,

¹For instance, by the time of Arab invasion of Sind, many Indian communities, especially Jats (Arabic: *Zut*) had settled near Bahrain and present-day Basra. Aisha, the Prophet's wife, is said to have been once treated by a Jat physician. In fact, it has been suggested by a scholar that the Prophet Dhu'l Kifl (The Man from Kifl), mentioned twice in the *Qur'an* as patient and good, refers to the Buddha. According to this scholar, "Kifl" is the Arabic rendition of "Kapilavastu" and the reference in the *Qur'an* to the fig tree refers to the Buddha who attained enlightenment at the foot of one [H.A. Qadir, *Buddha the Great: His Life and Philosophy* (Arabic: *Budha al-Akbar Hayatoh wa Falsaftoh*)]. The *Tarikh-i-Tabarī* by al-Tabarī, a tenth century reconstruction of the early history of Islam, talks of the presence in Arabia of *ahmaras* (Red-Clad People) from Sind. Three of them, who were without doubt saffron-robed Buddhist monks, reportedly explained philosophical teachings to the Arabs in the initial stages of the Islamic era. [This information has been gathered from Alexander Berzin, *The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire*, www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/n.html_1531328490.html#historical_interaction (accessed 17 December 2008).]

almost the entire Buddhist population converted peacefully to Islam in Sind and later in the rest of present day Pakistan, thus, making Islam a religion of the majority of the population. Kashmir and eastern India were two other important regions in India where Islam became the most populous religion. When Islam arrived in the Kashmir valley, Buddhism had already become utterly supine, completely marginalized, and politically entirely insignificant. In fact, whatever remained of Buddhism in Kashmir at this time became gradually assimilated into Islam largely as a result of the activities of the R̥ṣis and Sūfis who, in the minds of common masses, blurred the differences between Islam and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism or Buddhism.

In eastern India, especially territories covered by the present day Bangladesh, Islam arrived at a time when Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism were still in the process of Brāhmaṇizing and Buddhacizing the indigenous populations and competing with each other in a manner that was not exactly very friendly. In fact, the case of eastern India was quite unique as in parts of this region Buddhism appears to have spread at the grassroots level. This was perhaps the only region in India, along with parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and the Himalayas, where Buddhism did not play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. However, Buddhism was influenced grievously by local cults and Tantrism in eastern India and became largely assimilated into Islam as an indirect consequence of the peaceful activities of the Sūfis as well as acculturation and assimilation spread over several generations.

Sūfī mysticism and Buddhism have several commonalities in terms of metaphysical doctrines as well as practical training. Thomas Cleary has identified some of them. According to him, both Buddhism and Sūfī mysticism lay emphasis on the usefulness of meditation for spiritual growth and meditation themes common to both include the powerlessness and nothingness of the self, the inevitability of death, the impermanence of all phenomena, and the inconceivability of truth. In addition to silent meditation,

recitation and incantation of sacred writ, and invocations and litanies, and mnemonic formulae also form common grounds between the two.² The role of the Ṣūfis in proselytization was rather indirect, in the sense that such commonalities and the work as well as life-style of the Ṣūfis went a long way in gaining Indian people's sympathy towards Islam. Otherwise, the Ṣūfis were much happier when they helped one who was already a Muslim to become a better Muslim than when they saw a non-Muslim become a Muslim.³ The most important contribution made by the Ṣūfis was that they furnished Islam's philosophical point of contact with religions of Indic origin.⁴ It was through such contacts, fostered by the simplicity and broad humanism of the Ṣūfis that Islam obtained its largest number of free converts and it is in this sense that they may be considered missionaries.⁵ In India, as pointed out by Trimingham, Islam seems to have been "a holy-man Islam" where the Ṣūfis acquired an aura of holiness. It was this aura of holiness which attracted Indians to the Ṣūfis, rather than formal Islam.⁶ Well-documented research has suggested that a great majority of the Indian Muslims are descendants of converts in whose conversion coercion played no role.⁷

Conversion to Islam in India can be put into three different categories: individual conversion, group conversion, and

²Thomas Cleary, "Buddhism and Islam," *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan*, no. 27, 1982: 37.

³S.M. Ikram, *Ab-i-Kauşar*, Lahore, 1946: 189–190. Quoted at Peter Hardy, "Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature," *JRAS*, 1977: 195.

⁴Particularly interesting is the comment of al-Shahrastānī (c. 1076–1153) that the Buddha's teachings "can be very near to the teachings of the Sufis." (See D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les Bouddhistes dans la tradition Musulmane," *Journal Asiatique*, 267, 1969: 277–278.)

⁵A.B.M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1945: 282; Peter Hardy, op. cit., 90.

⁶J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971: 22.

⁷Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, London: Constable, 1896: 154–93.

assimilation and acculturation. The first category consisted of those individuals—including pious Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical ascetics—who embraced Islam voluntarily as a matter of conviction, for personal benefits, or under the influence and moral persuasions of the *Ṣūfis*. It has been correctly pointed out that Islam was no champion of egalitarianism, or for that matter, of the cause of so-called suppressed people of India. It is manifestly incorrect to say that the people belonging to lower ranks of the caste-hierarchy in Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism embraced Islam for the sake of social justice. It is also patently wrong to say that Buddhists were attracted towards Islam because they saw Islamic egalitarianism as being compatible with the Buddha's views on caste system and other forms of inequality. There is neither any evidence of a direct assault either from the state or the Muslims upon the caste system nor is there any evidence of a revolt from within.⁸ As pointed out by Irfan Habib, there is no sign of commitment to any such equality in the writings of Islamic theologians and scholars of the period. While Brāhmaṇical-Hindus were often denounced as “infidels,” polytheists, and image-worshippers, there is in the entire range of medieval Islamic literature no word of criticism of the caste system, the theory of pollution, and the oppression of untouchables that characterized medieval Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. “Indeed, the sanction for full-fledged slavery in Islamic law should strongly modify any attribution of equality to historical Islam.”⁹ R.M. Eaton has also rejected the “religion of social liberation” theory on the ground that not only the Muslim intellectuals had not stressed the Islamic ideal of social equality as opposed to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu caste but also because the converted Brāhmaṇical-Hindu communities had failed to improve their

⁸Irfan Habib, “Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate—An Essay in Interpretation,” *The Indian Historical Review*, January 1978, vol. 4, no. 2: 297.

⁹Irfan Habib, “Medieval Popular Monotheism and Its Humanism: The Historical Setting,” *Social Scientist*, vol. 21, nos. 3–4, March–April 1996: 80.

status in the social hierarchy and that, on the contrary, “they singly carried over into Muslim society the same practice of birth-ascribed rank that they had in Hindu society.”¹⁰ But nevertheless the lower castes did not have much to lose by switching over to Islam, if nothing else than simply for various opportunities that this label of being a Muslim may have offered to them, especially the opportunities that were particularly getting diminished within the Brāhmanical-Hindu environment. The pursuit of patronage is one of the most cited incentives to religio-cultural conversion. A person directly dependent on the state for a living might see it beneficial to join the cultural group. Thus, converting to Islam enhanced one’s chances of advancement in the job. Muslim control of commercial activity also created favourable conditions for Islamization. A businessman could feel that being a Muslim would not only lead to better contacts and cooperation with other Muslim businessmen both within the country and overseas, but he would also enjoy the benefits of Islamic laws that regulated commerce and also the amiable conditions extended by Muslim officials to their co-religionists.

In the second category may be included those people or groups of people who embraced Islam nominally in the light of their leaders’ conversion. Such a commitment to Islam may also have been made possible by economic and political considerations. The third category consisted of a large majority of commoners who experienced the gradual impact of Islamic acculturation on their social life through their contact with Muslim settlers or the Šūfīs. Syncretism appears as a crucial stage rather than as the culmination of the process vis-à-vis Islam.¹¹ Islamization

¹⁰R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1706*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 117–118. See also Imtiaz Ahmad, *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1973.

¹¹M.I. Khan, “Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir: A Revaluation of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani’s Historical Role,” in Aparna Rao, ed., *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture?*, Delhi: Manohar Book Services, 2008: 154n15.

took place most profoundly (and irrevocably) in the succeeding generation, since the convert's children in principle were raised within the father's new community, instead of his original one.¹²

The most crucial hurdle in conversion from Indic religions to religions based in Judeo-Christian tradition appears to be social rather than spiritual—the opposition of the prospective converts' brethren and the hesitation in giving up kinship ties and caste-based affiliations.¹³ Moreover, most of the converts were initially at least, ill-grounded in Islamic religious precepts, practices, and traditions, and remained attached to and rooted in their pre-existing non-Muslim traditions. The change from one religious tradition to the other was a slow and prolonged one taking many bypaths and extending over several generations.¹⁴ Such a gradual process of acculturation and gravitation began as a loosening of old religious and social ties rather than forsaking these ties right away by adopting the new religious tradition.¹⁵ Thus, as far as Islam was concerned, the process of Islamization at the social level was a process of Islamic acculturation in which individuals

¹²See Richard Bulliet, "Conversion to Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Society in Iran," in Nehemia Levtzion, ed., *Conversion to Islam*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979: 30–51.

¹³See Peter Hardy, "Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature," *JRAS*, 1977: 195–196.

¹⁴A quintessential example of such a phenomenon is the present day case of the Mehrat, Kathat, and Cheeta communities of central Rajasthan. These 'in-betweeners' adopted the three Islamic practices of *dafan*, *khatna*, and *zabīḥah* (burial, circumcision, and eating *halāl*) towards the end of the fourteenth century. However, the rest of the lifestyle of many members of these communities—names, marriage rituals, dressing styles—still continues to be that of the Hindus (Namita Kohli, "Muslims, and Hindus as Well," *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi edition, 28 June 2009: 13; Jyotsna Singh, "Islam and Hinduism's Blurred Lines," BBC website http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7473019.stm (accessed 30 June 2009).

¹⁵See I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610–1947)*, 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1962: 75–78.

and groups gradually broke ties with their traditional beliefs following a road that eventually ended with their adherence to the *sharī'ah*-bound structure of Islam. Such a hypothesis is supported by R.M. Eaton,¹⁶ who has argued that the singing of Ṣūfī folk songs by women at their household tasks suffused non-Muslim family life with Ṣūfī values. By taking human psychology into account, the Ṣūfīs established their *khānaqāhs* (hospices) and *dargāhs* (shrines) at places which had acquired a reputation for sanctity prior to the arrival of Islam in India.¹⁷

Another interesting feature about the spread of Islam was that those regions of eastern India where Islam gained heavily were considerably free of Brāhmaṇical influence. In fact, the case of early medieval Bengal appears to be exceptional within the Indian subcontinent. This region presented itself as a world of shifting beliefs and social allegiances, religious questing, and social and geographical mobility, making it a domain of bona fide syncretism of belief and conduct which was more multifaceted than any other part of the Indian subcontinent.¹⁸ In a material milieu such as this, the reverence towards *pīrs* extended far beyond the reach of saints and holy men and, as a matter of fact, there existed a complete pantheon consisting of apotheosized warriors, pioneering settlers on reclaimed wastelands, metamorphosed Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and Buddhist deities, and anthropomorphized animistic spirits and beliefs.¹⁹

East Bengal (roughly the territory represented by the present day Muslim country of Bangladesh) located far from centres of

¹⁶R.M. Eaton, "Sufi folk literature and the expansion of Indian Islam," *History of Religions*, XIV, 2, November 1974: 117–127.

¹⁷I.H. Qureshi, op. cit., 74.

¹⁸M.R. Tarafdar, *Hussain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965: 18–19.

¹⁹See A. Roy, "The Pir Tradition: A Case Study in Islamic Syncretism in Traditional Bengal," in Fred W. Clothey, ed., *Images of Man: Religious and Historical Process in South Asia*, Madras: New Era Publications, 1982: 112–141.

Islamic power, came to have the highest concentration of Muslim population in the Indian subcontinent. The credit for this goes to the success of *Śūfī* missions.²⁰ After the Mongol invasions of Islamic lands across Central Asia, many *Śūfīs* moved into eastern India where their previous familiarity with converting Buddhists had far reaching consequences. The activities of these *Śūfīs*, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism's revival movements such as Advaita, and the rise of the syncretic Śakti movement, contributed significantly to the realignment of beliefs. In such an environment Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism to a smaller extent and Turkish tribes to a greater extent drew not only the indigenous masses to swell their ranks²¹ but also prospered at the cost of Buddhism which had totally fallen to pieces by this time. Islam essentially had an urban character till it reached Bengal where it moved into the countryside. This may also explain its spread among the tribal people and rural communities in Bengal. But at the same time, one must not ignore "the temper of Hinduism, which finds it easier than Islam to bring new sects and doctrines within its spiritual hegemony."²² Upper caste Hindus due to conceited pride in the purity and hence superiority of their religion were more likely to resist conversion to a religion based in the Judeo-Christian tradition in sharp contrast to lower caste Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, Buddhists, and tribal people who were less likely to put any mechanism in place against the winds of Islamic acculturation. In fact, it has been suggested that some elements among these segments of the Bengali society looked rather agreeably towards the successes of the Turks in Bengal. For instance, giving an account of conversion to Islam in

²⁰Nicholas F. Gier, "From Mongols to Mughals: Religious Violence in India (9th-18th Centuries)," paper presented at the Pacific Northwest Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Gonzaga University, May 2006: 2.

²¹N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 137.

²²S.M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964: 127.

Bengal, I.H. Qureshi has pointed out that the *Śūnya Purāṇa*, a sacred book of the Dharma cult of Mahāyāna Buddhism, has interpolations, inserted after the conquests by Turkish tribes in Bengal, suggesting that Buddhists in Bengal regarded Muslims as their well-wishers vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇical-Hindus. According to him, the *Dharma Gājan* rituals include “sentiments of respect and admiration for Islam and a faith in its ultimate destiny.... Such sentiments themselves constitute almost a halfway house towards the acceptance of Islam.”²³

The pantheistic mysticism of the Upaniṣads and the devotional mysticism of the Bhakti and Sahajiyā movements based in Vaiṣṇavism presented Śūfism with a golden opportunity for rapid growth and dissemination in India.²⁴ Moreover, after its transformation in India, Śūfism took on the role of a bridge-builder between Arabic and Turkic notions of polity, culture, and religion on the one side and their Indic counterparts on the other. Such an attitude must have further helped Śūfī ideas to gain wide popularity by capturing the attention of both the masses and elites. Such ideas, thus introduced, got soon assimilated with the prevalent Sahajiyā ideas and the result of this amalgamation was the Bāuls of Bengal. *Murshidā*-songs of the Bāuls are a good example of the commingling of the Indian spirit with the spirit of Śūfism. The heterodox spirit of the Bāuls, Sahajiyāna, and Śūfism was another meeting point between them. The religious contents of Śūfism were in no way foreign to the mass-mind of India; it is for this reason that Śūfism became easily acceptable to the masses. Indian ascetics travelling in pairs and staying not more than three days at one place were directly known to the Muslim adepts, who took from them their fourfold vows of cleanliness, purity, truth, and poverty and Śūfī features such as the monastic strain, use of rosaries, the attainment of *karāmāt*

²³I.H. Qureshi, op. cit., 74.

²⁴See Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Sects*, sec. rev. edn., Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962: 163.

or *mu'jizah* (miraculous powers), *ṣulūk* or *ṭarīqah* (spiritual path), *murāqabah/marāqabah* (meditation), the doctrine of *fanā* (*nirvāṇa*), and the system of *maqāmāt* (stages) on road to being an *al-insānul-kāmil* (perfect man) indicate influence of Buddhism.²⁵

In the long run, the *dargāhs* and *khānaqāhs* played an important role in proselytization as their appeal went far beyond the divisive walls of caste and creed. They acted as an effective syncretic force integrating the non-Muslims into the Islamic community in a land that was characterized by multifariousness in terms of religion, belief, and custom.²⁶ Besides, as pointed out by E.A. Mann, the *dargāhs* owned, and their administration controlled, considerable economic resources in the form of property, land, and cash income. They became a symbol of power both spiritual and secular—spiritual in the sense of association with God and fulfilment of earthly desires through acceptance of prayer (*du'ā*), secular in the sense that economic wealth and social status could be transmitted to the individuals concerned with their administration.²⁷ *Khānaqāh* was the humble rest house where wandering Śūfis could lead a devotional life under the tutelage of some masters. The village *khānaqāhs*, howsoever humble they might have been, offered lodgings and refreshments to travellers and helped the more religious villagers to sharpen

²⁵See H.C. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India (Early Medieval Period)*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1931: 24; Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1976: 53.

²⁶Davis Gilmartin, "Shrines, Succession, and Sources of Authority," in Barbara D. Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, California: University of California Press, 1984: 221–240; R.M. Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid in Pakpattan, Punjab" in Barbara D. Metcalf, op. cit., 333–356; R.M. Eaton, *The Sufis of Bijapur, 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978; Peter Hardy, *Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

²⁷E.A. Mann, "Religion, Money, and Status: Competition for Resources at the Shrine of Shah Jamal, Aligarh," in Christian W. Troll, ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989: 169–170.

their spiritual awareness through *zikr* (invocation of God through recitation, singing, instrumental music, dance, costumes, incense, meditation, ecstasy, and trance). The *khānaqāhs* also provided both Muslim and non-Muslim villagers with amulets, talismans, and charms designed to prevent sickness, disease, misfortune, damage to crops by natural calamities, and other catastrophes. The mutual interpenetration of Ṣūfī ethics and the non-Muslim way of life took place more intensely in the *khānaqāhs* of villages and small towns than in large urban centres, where Muslim and non-Muslim communal groups led a more self-centred and exclusive life, coming into contact with each other mainly because of their mutual economic and political needs.

Ṣūfīs, who within the framework of Islam attempted to achieve direct communion with God, were the natural religious guides of the people whom men and women from cross-sections of the society solicited for spiritual guidance and worldly advice. Their miraculous powers and social values attracted non-Muslims towards them. Interestingly, social interaction between the Ṣūfīs and the local population worked towards slow and steady conversion to Islam in the framework of different Ṣūfī Orders as this kind of interaction intended to break down social and communal barriers. Many of the Ṣūfī saints and poets for their poetical compositions derived and acquired images and similes from daily life. Their ample and appropriate use made it further convenient even for the unlettered people to understand their content and grasp their meanings easily. Emphasizing equality of the Muslims and non-Muslims and refuting the concepts of *kuffār* so far as it applied to dealing with people of other faiths became a common theme for many Ṣūfī poets. The Ṣūfī mystics played an extremely important role in reaching past the inhibitions and prejudices and building bridges of communication and understanding between conflicting faiths. The anti-particularist, anti-clerical, and anti-ritualistic thrust of the teachings of the Ṣūfī poets laid the foundations of bringing non-Muslims into the Islamic fold.

The rate of conversion was indeed very low in those places of northern India which were the strongholds of Muslim power. In the south too, it was minimal. But in Bengal, especially in its inaccessible eastern parts, it was very high. Some forced conversions did happen, but census data prove that most of these converts must have lapsed. The most famous examples of reconversion were the brothers Harihara and Bukka, founders of the great Hindu empire Vijayanagara (1336–1565), who were forced to convert to Islam by Muhammad Tughlaq in 1327. The most striking example of mass reconversion happened in Karnataka where Tipu Sultan (1750–1799) required that all his citizens convert to Islam. The ineffectiveness of royal proselytism may be measured by the fact that today only five percent of the population in the region ruled by Tipu is Muslim, while the adjoining Malabar Coast has thirty percent Muslims,²⁸ primarily because they settled in this area as peaceful traders in the eighth century. With regard to voluntary conversion, one would expect a direct correlation between areas controlled by the Delhi sultāns and the Mughal emperors and highest Muslim population. But census data does not support this. Thus, voluntary conversions and conversions as a result of royal proselytism seem to have been only insignificant contributory factors. Moreover, the Muslims, who settled on the western borders or on the Malabar Coast from the eighth century onwards, came in small communities and did not produce any large disturbance in the settled populations. The fluid mass of thought and religion had therefore time to settle.

When Xuanzang visited Kashmir in the seventh century, Buddhism had passed its prime and Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects had been gaining ground at its cost. However, there is evidence of its survival in Kashmir till at least the twelfth century during which period it continued to enjoy the patronage of some nobles and rulers. But, by the time of Marco Polo's travels in the

²⁸S.M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, 1964: 123–124.

thirteenth century, the valley of Kashmir appears to have become almost entirely Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. At this time Buddhism survived only in small pockets and there was a small number of Muslim converts.²⁹ Thereafter, Kashmir's transition to Islam took place gradually over a period of nearly five centuries. During this period, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu population and the last vestiges of Buddhism adopted Islam through a gradual process of acculturation at the centre of which were the Ṣūfis and Ṛṣis. Thus, as far as Buddhism was concerned, it may be said with certainty that the decline of Buddhism had begun long before king Rinchāna, the son of a Buddhist Ladakhi chief, laid the foundations of first Muslim dynasty in Kashmir in CE 1320. After having moved into the valley, Rinchāna, a soldier of fortune, captured the throne of Kashmir and embraced Islam. His establishment of a *khānaqāh*, the first of its kind in Srinagar, may be seen as an indicator of his keen interest in the diffusion of Islamic culture in Kashmir. The Buddhist followers of Rinchāna who had accompanied him from Ladakh to Kashmir also appear to have adopted Islam after Rinchāna's assumption of political power and subsequent conversion.³⁰ It has been suggested that Rinchāna's conversion to Islam was neither an isolated case nor was it merely a matter of political expediency.³¹ In fact, this event is seen as an indicator of the fact that though Buddhism may have still remained in monasteries, it was no longer available as a power-base, possibly not even as the religion of any significant number of households, whereas a sizeable converted Muslim nucleus had already appeared in the urban centres of

²⁹Marco Polo.175–177.

³⁰M.I. Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1994: 63. Rāvanacandra, Rinchāna's brother-in-law, for instance, accepted Islam immediately after the king's conversion (ibid.).

³¹Ibid., 63; A.Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: From the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1972: 9–10; S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978: 290.

Kashmir.³² Moreover, Rinchāna may have taken into consideration the possible political and economic benefits of being a Muslim king at a time when kings with Islamic affiliations were ruling in the plains of northern India.

Though Kashmir had been the abode of Ṛṣis long before the advent of Islam, Nūruddīn, the son of a Hindu convert, gave a special direction to the role of Ṛṣis in the Kashmiri society. He was able to accomplish this through his social behaviour which was more in consonance with local practices than those of scholars, jurists or Śūfī missionaries. Nūruddīn, who is known as the founding father of an indigenous Order of Muslim mystics (Ṛṣi Silsilah), is credited with making the Ṛṣi movement socially significant in Kashmir. It may be pointed out that some scholars consider the Ṛṣi movement as only “marginally Muslim” and equate it with the Bhakti movement³³ said to have been founded in Kashmir by Lal Ded, the Śaivite mystic of the fourteenth century.³⁴ The thinking of these Ṛṣis was nurtured in their Hindu and Buddhist environment which appears to have played an important role in helping the main configuration of pre-existing Kashmiri popular religion to adapt itself to the wider Islamic framework. Even during Nūruddīn’s time and long after his death when the Ṛṣi movement was strong, Brāhmaṇical ascetics had a large following among the illiterate masses of Kashmir. Such people were drawn into the fold of Nūruddīn and other Muslim Ṛṣis since they did not see much difference between the goals espoused by the Muslim Ṛṣis and their own. Thus the Ṛṣi

³²Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. XXIII, 1–2, 1979: 6.

³³Bruce Lawrence, “Lectures on Sufism,” *Studies in Islam*, vol. XVIII, nos. 3–4, July–October 1981: 139; A.Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: From the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1972: xvii–xviii.

³⁴For a detailed analysis of Lal Ded’s historical role, see M.I. Khan, “The Impact of Islam on Kashmir in the Sultanate Period, 1320–1586,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 2, April–June 1986: 187–205.

movement, apart from being largely characterized by elements of social protest, became a haven for the surviving vestiges of Brāhmaṇical ascetic tradition to exist in Islam. It is interesting to note that asceticism of the Brāhmaṇical saints converted to Islam was particularly suited to provide a framework for the survival of such residues and the assimilation and reinterpretation of elements as were not totally incompatible with the esoteric dimension of Islam.³⁵ Nūruddīn and his followers shared with the Hindu-Buddhist ascetics such traits as wandering in the forests, not taking meat, avoidance of onions and green vegetables, fasting, sexual abstinence, austerities, celibacy, self-deprecation, relative seclusion, altruism, deep meditative exercises, supererogatory prayers and above all, non-injury even to plants, birds, animals, insects, etc. Such practices of the Ṛṣis “must have weakened the contrast in the common mind between Islam and Hinduism or Buddhism thereby paving the way for the acceptance of the values of an alien system.”³⁶ The Ṛṣi concept of “peace with all” was borrowed from Mahāyāna Buddhism which flourished in the Kashmir valley.³⁷

While the role of the Ṛṣis and immigrant Ṣūfis from Central Asia and Persia cannot be denied in conversions, it would be wrong to attribute the so-called ‘dramatic mass conversions’ of Kashmir to their miraculous exploits. Their activities leading to certain individual conversions might have been followed by group conversions in a social milieu characterized by the powerful belief in the spirituality of saints. As elsewhere in India, many people appear to have accepted Islam in Kashmir nominally in the wake of their leader’s conversion or due to political and economic motives. Initially, this process generally consisted of the converts’ passive adherence to Islam, but in the

³⁵M.I. Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam*, 38.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 179.

³⁷M.I. Khan, “The Mystical Career and Poetry of Nuruddin Rishi Kashmiri: Socio-Historical Dimensions,” *Studies in Islam*, vol. XIX, nos. 1–2, January–April 1982: 113–117.

end progressed into harmony with the *sharī'ah*. Such a process is also visible in the religious career of Nūruddīn, whose efforts to bring about reconciliation between Muslim and Brāhmaṇical-Hindu/Buddhist practices opened the doors to the gradual acculturation of the Kashmiri masses into Islamic identity. The survival of pre-Islamic names among the Ṛṣis and continued existence of the pre-Islamic customs and beliefs is also a clear indication of Kashmiris experiencing a gradual cultural and religious shift. Like in East Bengal, as a result of this prolonged and gradual acculturation, extending over a period of at least five centuries, a considerable part of the Kashmiri population either became Muslim or was understood to be so.

On the whole, the role of the Ṣūfis in the conversion of Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and tribal communities to Islam in India was, though quite important, largely an indirect one. Prolonged and slow acculturation and assimilation spread over a long period of time must be seen as the force behind these conversions. The Ṣūfis basically contributed towards doing away with the distances between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. As far as Buddhism was concerned, except for parts of eastern India, the Ṣūfis did not play any significant role. The reason for this was that Buddhism had become a spent force in India by the time the Ṣūfis began their work. Thus, only remnants of Buddhism were assimilated into Islam as an indirect result of their activities. In eastern India, Islam was able to get a large number of converts through Ṣūfi-assisted assimilation and acculturation from a population which followed different kinds of strange syncretic cults and practices emanating out of Buddhism, Śaivism, and Tantrism.

9

Revival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and the Rise of Bhakti Movement

THOUGH NUMERICALLY SPEAKING, Buddhism remained a small religion in India even during its halcyon days, institutional Buddhism came to acquire the character of a pan-Indian and politically significant religion from the time of king Aśoka. Apart from this, Aśoka's Buddhistic rendition of dharma ostensibly had become, at least for the time being, a matter of implemented public policy.¹ Under such circumstances, the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas were left with no choice but to deal with the situation for their own survival. Their response was the formulation of a well-thought out two-pronged agenda. One, to be designedly agreeable and assimilative towards those issues in Buddhist weltanschauung which had become socio-religiously commonsensical.² Two, to slowly and steadily, but systematically, subvert institutional Buddhism. This is clearly visible in the shifting of the theories and political orientation of kingship from Buddhist to Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva rationales. With reference to the shifting of political orientation of kingship Ronald Inden has proposed an interesting

¹See J.C. Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004: 11 – 12.

²Thus, P.V. Kane has indicated that this assimilation of Buddhist ideas was neither a consequence of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tolerance, nor was it indicative of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu propensity for philosophical syncretism (*History of the Dharmasāstra*, vol. V, pt. II, 2nd edn., 1977: 913f.).

hypothesis.³ According to him, before the eighth century, the Buddha was accorded the position of a universal deity and the ceremonies by which a king attained status were elaborate donative ceremonies entailing gifts to Buddhist monks and the setting up of a symbolic Buddha in a stūpa.⁴ However, this pattern, says Inden, changed in the eighth century when generally the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu God Viṣṇu, but sometimes Śiva and Sūrya (the Sun) as well, usurped the place of the Buddha as the supreme imperial deities.⁵

The incorporation and subordination of the Buddha within the Brāhmaṇical cult of Viṣṇu as well as his replacement as the Cosmic Man within the mythic ideology of Indian kingship occurred at about the same time.⁶ That is, before the eighth century, the Buddha and Buddhism enjoyed a socio-political status that the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas simply could not ignore. While Buddhism continued to maintain an existence in different parts of India for several hundred years after the eighth century, “royal proclivities for the cults of Viṣṇu and Śiva weakened its position within the sociopolitical context and helped to make possible its eventual eclipse and absorption by the priestly Brāhmaṇical community.”⁷ Inden has offered an historical analysis of the particular nature and putative significance of this shift that began to take place from the eighth century onwards and was marked

³Ronald Inden, “Ritual, Authority, and Cycle Time in Hindu Kingship,” in J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 41–91.

⁴This was so even for imperial dynasties that had strong associations with the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods Viṣṇu and Śiva. For instance, the largest monumental structures erected or excavated by the Guptas (at Sāranātha, Bodhgayā, and Nālandā), the Vākātakas, and the early Cālukyas (both at Ajantā) between CE 300 and 700 were evidently dedicated to the *pūjā* of the Buddha (See Ghulam Yazdani, *The Early History of the Deccan*, vol. 2, London: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1982: 730–731; R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Vākātakas-Gupta Age*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967: 456–459).

⁵See Inden, op. cit., 67. The Pālas were perhaps the only exception.

⁶Holt, op. cit., 12.

⁷Ibid.

by the building of the first monumental Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples. According to him, the first imperial dynasties that elevated Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Sūrya to the status of supreme deities (*parameśvara*, *maheśvara*), equivalent to the Cosmic Man, and relegated the Buddha to a secondary position, were the short-lived Kārakoṭa dynasty of Kashmir and the Gurjara-Pratihāra at Kānyakubja in northern India, the Rāṣtrakūṭas in the Deccan, and the Pallavas in south India.⁸ Previously the Buddha had been offered imperial-style worship (*pūjā*). Now as the Buddha was replaced by one of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods at the imperial centre and top of the cosmo-political system, the image or symbol of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu god came to be housed in a monumental temple and accorded increasingly elaborate imperial-style *pūjā*.⁹ The composition of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and other Purāṇas such as the *Matsya*, synchronized with this change and provided the imperial cults of Viṣṇu and the other Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods with rules for erecting large temples and performing temple liturgies with imperial pomp and glory. The Brāhmaṇical-Hindu king of kings, the earthly pivot of the cosmos, is equipped by the Purāṇas with the new corpus of royal rituals appropriate to his new imperial role, including, of course, a new installation ceremony. The *abhiṣeka* of the king as paramount ruler closely paralleled the even more elegant and complex series of baths by which the image of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu god, styled as the cosmic sovereign, was installed by his devoted servant, the paramount king.¹⁰

Inden points out that in its Vaiṣṇava dress, the developing ideology of Indian theories of kingship was undergoing a

⁸Inden, op. cit., 55.

⁹J.C. Heesterman, "The Conundrum of the King's Authority," in J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 12.

¹⁰For the *devatā-pratiṣṭhā* or "establishment of the god's image," see *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*: Translated into English from Original Sanskrit, ed. Priyabala Shah, vol. III, Delhi: Primal Publications, 2002: 149–197. This text was compiled somewhere between CE 700–800 in northern India.

decisive turn which also generated a major change in the manner in which the Buddha and Buddhism came to be regarded from within a newly regenerated Brāhmaṇical and Bhakti framework. According to him, within this reinvigorated Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tradition dominated by the Bhakti cults of Viṣṇu (and in some cases Śiva), the king was considered a “partial descent” (*aṃśa*) of the great god Viṣṇu, the preserver of dharma, the natural and moral order, and himself a form of the Cosmic Overlord.¹¹ Viṣṇu’s wife, Lakṣmī or Śrī, the goddess of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune, who worshipfully accompanies her husband in different forms when he descends to earth in one of his various forms, was also considered the consort of the king parallel to and obviously closely connected with the land.¹² Like the king, the Buddha was also accorded the status of an *avatāra* within this developing Brāhmaṇical-Hindu ideological scheme. Inden describes how the new Brāhmaṇical-Hindu consecration ceremony, the *abhiṣeka*, transformed the king into a this-worldly Viṣṇu, an ideal human being of cosmic significance:

The golden water jar, anthropomorphically adorned and dressed, honored and empowered, has itself been made into a microcosmic, immanent image of the Cosmic Man. The waters it contains have in them, by virtue of this act of transubstantiation, the powers of all the gods, beings, and substances that exist in the cosmos. All of these have been generated out of the body of the Cosmic Overlord at the beginning of the present cycle of creation. Now, these have all been reconverged and concentrated themselves in the ‘body’ of the water jar, in symbolic reality the microcosm of the Cosmic Man. By transferring its waters, the symbolic ‘blood’ of the Cosmic Man—or, more precisely, the radiant energy (*tejas*) of Viṣṇu—to the head and body of the king from the jar, the sovereign Viṣṇu, through the agency of the royal astrologer, transmits the ‘kingship over kings’ to the king and transforms him into the microcosmic and immanent form of the macrocosmic and transcendent Puruṣa. The ritual enactment of Puruṣa’s creation of the kind by drawing together portions of the gods is now completed. The

¹¹J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966: 92.

¹²Ibid., 92–93. Also see Inden, op. cit., 46.

recipient had earlier been made into an independent, regional king by the *vaidika* segment of the rite, the *rājasūya*; here he has been made into an imperial, universal king, a replica of Viṣṇu, the Cosmic Man of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. Transformed by the *abhiṣeka* into an image of this Cosmic Sovereign, the king-elect is now ready to be installed (as is the image of a deity in a temple) in his actual kingdom. As a partial *avatāra* or ‘descent’ of Viṣṇu, he is ready to descend from the transcendent plane to the immanent world of his kingdom, to take his place as the microcosmic *Puruṣa*, the *axis mundi* of his domain.¹³

This ritual making-of-a-king offers a very good description of not only the nascent “god-king” construction, but also how an *avatāra* was viewed in connection with the primordial cosmic being (Viṣṇu). Vaiṣṇava *avatāra* profile of the Buddha was sculpted largely in the same manner. A number of such structural and substantive similarities between the mythic profiles of Viṣṇu and the Buddha have been noted by J.R. Haldar which appear to have abetted the assimilation and subordination of the Buddha as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu Purāṇas.¹⁴ Whatever the origins of these shared attributes, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu ambivalence towards the Buddha and Buddhism is no

¹³Inden, op. cit., 71.

¹⁴For instance, noting the *Paramatthamañjūsā* and the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* as classic Theravādin sources of cosmogony and cosmology, J.R. Haldar has pointed out that “the Buddha covered the distance of 6,800,000 *yojanas* in three strides, from the earth to the *Tāvatiṃsa Devaloka*, and reached there (*Tāvatiṃsa*), setting his right foot down on the top of the Yugandhara and his left one on Sineru” (J.R. Haldar, *Early Buddhist Mythology*, New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970: 2–3). He has noted how reminiscent this is of the three strides by which Viṣṇu, in the *Ṛg Veda*, marks off the cosmic spheres. Another significant similarity, he notes, may be seen in the fact that Buddhas seem never to be born in the early phases of a *kalpa*, but only after a critical period of decline has set in and there is a need for dharma to be known among humankind. Haldar sees this as an indication of why “the Buddha may be regarded as an *avatāra*” (ibid., 129) insofar as he functions in the same way as Viṣṇu—appearing in a period of decline in order to uphold dharma. It would be difficult, in fact, to establish the origins of these shared attributes found within both of the mythic profiles of the Buddha and Viṣṇu, whether they have evolved from a common source or have their origins exclusively in one tradition or the other. (See also Holt, op. cit., 14.)

more clearly seen than in the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu assimilation and subordination of the Buddha. By the time of the eighth century CE, when the political transformations from Buddhist to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu ideology were taking place as many as four Purāṇas had declared the Buddha as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.¹⁵ Similarly, evidence of the ten *avatāras*, including the Buddha as the ninth one, is available by this time in the epigraphical and iconographical source material.¹⁶

In the present context, the doctrine of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* has two salient characteristics. One characteristic is Viṣṇu's highly transcendent and abstract nature. In fact, Viṣṇu's profile in the Purāṇas as creator and transcendent saviour god par excellence is so utterly abstract that the device of *avatāra* abets the process of concretizing his presence and thus rendering him approachable to human prayers as a personal lord. Further, the *avatāra* device lends itself quite readily to a religio-cultural

¹⁵*Agni Purāṇa*.16.1–4 and 49.8; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.x.40.22; *Matsya Purāṇa*.285.6–7; *Varāha Purāṇa*.4.2. The Purāṇas, undoubtedly, played a substantial role in removing the ground from under the very feet of Buddhism “by emphasizing and assimilating some of the principles and doctrines of Buddha such as *ahiṃsā*, by accepting Buddha himself as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, by adopting vegetarianism as a high form of austerity, by making use of monasteries and asceticism as stated in such *smṛtis* as those of Manu and Yājñavalkya” (P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. V, pt. II, 2nd edn., Government Oriental Series, Class B, no. 6, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, Poona, 1977: 913–1914). F.E. Pargiter also thinks that it was largely through the Paurāṇika literature that Hinduism secured its revival and the downfall of Buddhism. In fact, Pargiter goes to the extent of saying that it was largely through the Purāṇic literature that Brāhmaṇism reestablished itself over the people and secured the revival of Hinduism and downfall of Buddhism (*Purāṇa Texts of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, 2nd edn., Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1962: xviiiin2).

¹⁶For instance, inscriptions from places such as Mahābalipuram in southern India which by this time had begun to declare the Buddha as the ninth of Viṣṇu's ten incarnations (Krishna Sastri, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 26, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1945: 5ff.) Similarly, sculpted images of Viṣṇu's ten *avatāras*, including the Buddha, could be seen in Viṣṇu temples in south India such as Tiruchirappalli's famous Sri Ranganam (Viṣṇu) temple (Inden, op. cit., 15).

process of assimilation, since it so obviously implies that Viṣṇu may take on any number of forms to make his power efficacious in the human world. The second characteristic is this very amenability to assimilation. The reification of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, masks a historical process of assimilation in which indigenous religious cults have been brought into the Brāhmaṇical Vaiṣṇava tradition and thereby subordinating them under a Brāhmaṇical Vaiṣṇava umbrella. In this way, the *avatāra* device of Viṣṇu provided a convenient means of assimilating, subordinating, and legitimating other deities.¹⁷ Thus, the device of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* was an ingenious and convenient means used to assimilate and then to subordinate the figure of the Buddha and put him in his Brāhmaṇical place thereby undermining his historicity by making him an appendage of the Vaiṣṇava mythic hierarchy.¹⁸

Though Buddhism became a pan-Indian religion at Aśoka's time, through his own brand of *dhamma*, Aśoka, besides putting Buddhism at odds with the Brāhmaṇical priestly class, unwittingly secularized Buddhism to the extent that its consequent assimilation into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism became only a matter of time. As pointed out by Romila Thapar, Aśoka's *dhamma* embodied principles of secularism to such an extent that these principles "would have been acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect."¹⁹ None of the profound ideas and fundamental theories of Buddhism can be seen in the edicts of Aśoka. He does not anywhere mention the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Eightfold Path*, the *Doctrine of Dependent*

¹⁷Holt, op. cit., 17.

¹⁸Such a development also played an important role in assuring the traditionally-minded Brāhmaṇa that the *Buddhāvatāra* was merely a device used by Viṣṇu to further misguide heretics, here the Buddhists in particular (Holt, op. cit., 18). Interestingly, when one looks into how and to what extent was the Buddha ritually included within the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tradition, there is not much to find. "Indeed, cultic veneration of the Buddha within Hinduism is virtually absent" (ibid.).

¹⁹Romila Thapar, *Early India From the Origins to AD 1300*, London: Penguin, 2002: 201–202.

Origination, and the Buddha's supernatural qualities. One also fails to see a direct reference to either the *Concept of Nibbāna* or the *Doctrine of Rebirth* in Aśoka's edicts. By constantly using the name of the Buddha and at the same time referring to the commonsensical aspects of *buddhavacana*,²⁰ Aśoka stimulated those forces which ultimately succeeded in bringing Buddhism into the assimilative embrace of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas, the intellectual monopolists of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, were the progenitors of three differing paths to liberation in ancient northern India, viz., the path of philosophical awareness (*jñānamārga*), the path of unquestioning dharma-based activity (*karmamārga*), and the path of unquestioning faith and capitulation (*bhaktimārga*). *Bhaktimārga* implied "personal faith in a personal God, love for him as for a human being, the dedication of everything to his service, and the attainment of 'mokṣa' by this means rather than by knowledge, or sacrifice, or works."²¹ This path, though especially meant for the uncommon persons across all groups who sought emancipation from social restrictions, was suited to the psychology of the lower rungs in a caste-based society. Though theoretically the three paths were assumed to be equal, the path of Bhakti was perceived as being not only boorish, crude, and simplistic but also comparatively easier to practice. It was viewed as well-suited to the socially and educationally challenged people who were condemned to take up menial work but needed an aspiration for some sort of escape. In Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the earliest written text of the school of Bhakti, has all the ingredients of a religion of devotion, a personal God, divine

²⁰Aśoka constantly harps upon commonsensical aspects of the teachings of the Buddha such as abstention from slaughter of living creatures; truthfulness; respectfulness towards superiors, parents, elders, proper behavior towards and firm devotion to friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, teachers, mendicants, slaves, and servants; charity to brāhmaṇas and śramaṇas; and respectfulness towards the beliefs of others.

²¹L.J. Sedgwick, "Bhakti," *JBBRAS*, 23, 1910: 126–127(109–134).

grace, self-dedication and the love of the devotee, the mystical union, and the promise of liberation to all, irrespective of caste and sect.²² The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* adds another feature, that is, devotion for the teacher (*guru*) as for God.²³ According to the *Pañcarātra Saṃhitā*, *bhakti* means “taking refuge in the praying thought: I am receptacle of sins, naught, helpless, do Thou become my remedy (*upāya*)” and the act of taking refuge implies “austerities, pilgrimages, sacrifices, charities and self-sacrifice than which nothing is higher.”²⁴

The doctrines of threefold body (*trikāya*), twofold truth (*paramārtha-satya* and *samvṛti-satya*), and threefold vehicle (*yānatraya*) were firmly rooted in a profound metaphysics that transformed the original atheistic religion of Hīnayāna into a powerful theological religion, accompanied by all the necessary elements of faith, devotion, prayer, worship, surrender, and the consequent salvation by grace. Mahāyāna *bhakti* centred around the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, particularly around Amitābha who is conceived as the eternal God living in Sukhāvaṭī (paradise), where the devotees go by His grace and by the help of holy saints. Amitābha is regarded as a saviour, and invocation of his name is considered adequate to secure redemption. The goal of the devotees of Amitābha is not *nirvāṇa* but admission into His

²²In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa points out that it is by steadfast devotion to God alone that He is reached (VIII.22), Who accepts all that is offered to Him with devotion, be it a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water (IX.26); and devotion implies the dedication of all actions to Him (IX.27), for the devotees live and have their being in God (IX.29). Kṛṣṇa further points out that it is alone by devotion that God may be beheld, known, and entered (XI.54) for God is the father (IX.17), the mother (IX.17), the husband (IX.18), and the friend (IX.18) to each of His devotees. Above all, in the sight of God all devotees are equal irrespective of caste or sect (IX.32) and He extends His ineffable grace to all His devotees, including the sinful ones, provided they worship with undivided heart (IX.30).

²³*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, SBE, vol. 15, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1884, VI.23.229–267.

²⁴F.O. Schrader, *Introduction to the Pañcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, Adyar: Madras Adyar Library, 1916: chap. 37.

presence in His heaven. Their devotion is buttressed by acts of worship of stūpas and maṇḍalas, by fasts and pilgrimages, by litanies and formulas for effacing sins, by reading the *sūtras* and repeating the Buddha's name, and so on. In fact, a passionate devotion, sincere prayer, and dedicated worship began to be viewed as superior to mere meditation (*samādhi*). The historical Buddha was fully metamorphosed into a savior God who is the eternal and immutable Lord of beings, unborn Creator of the world and bestower of fortune on all beings. In the words of the *Saddharmapuṇḍrika*, the famous Mahāyāna work, the Buddha becomes "the Self-born, Father of the World, Lord of all beings and Remover of ills."²⁵

The adoption of Buddhist concepts of spiritual merit consisting of egalitarianism, love, and self-sacrifice by *bhakti* brought Buddhism within the striking range of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and as a result, Bhakti movement was able to supervene upon Buddhism to a great degree. The Buddhist deities were worshipped by the non-Buddhists despite obligations to their own sectarian cults. Lack of clear identity, if it had to avoid being swamped and assimilated by overarching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, was a major drawback of Buddhism and it was certainly made worse by the development and growth of Bhakti. Thus, it has been pointed out that "when the *bhakti* element became full-grown and well-settled in the two traditions, theological and devotional ideas and even names came to be used almost indistinguishably in the two traditions. Avalokiteśvara of the Mahāyāna, for example, is depicted with lotus in his hand, just as is Viṣṇu and the name '*Padma-pāṇi*' (lotus-handed) was used for Viṣṇu and Avalokiteśvara alike."²⁶ In other words, as pointed out by N.N. Bhattacharyya, the

²⁵*yam eva ham lokāpitā svayaṃbhūḥ cikitsakaḥ sarvaprajān nāthaḥ* (XV.21).

²⁶K.N. Upadhyaya, "The Impact of the Bhakti Movement on the Development of Mahāyāna Buddhism," in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 356.

elaborate growth of Mahāyānism in Buddhism was a triumph of the Bhakti cult.²⁷

Both Buddhism and Jainism faced an intense challenge from Bhakti movement from about the sixth century onwards and the Buddhists must be viewed as having committed an “error by failing to respond meaningfully to the threat posed by the waves of *bhakti* that swept across India.”²⁸ This created a very precarious situation for the urban-based Buddhism “the *bhakti* ideal itself emanating in an urban context of conflict for socio-political dominance.”²⁹ Further, with its association with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the Bhakti cult achieved tremendous popularity and weaned away the fickle-minded lay supporters of the flatfooted Buddhists. The precarious situation of Buddhism became further aggravated with the depiction of the Buddha, in the *Mahābhārata*,³⁰ certain Purāṇas,³¹ and Jayadeva’s *Gītagovinda*,³² as nothing more than another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Buddhist monks were not perhaps conscious of the grave danger that this development posed because “not a single extant text shows any attempt either to assimilate the popular Hindu deities into Buddhist mythology or to refute any notion of the Buddha as an *avatāra*.”³³ The Jainas responded to these very pressures in a remarkably different manner and were able to successfully blunt the Brāhmaṇical onslaught. They responded to Brāhmaṇical insinuations (such

²⁷N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 2nd rev. edn., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996: 88.

²⁸P.S. Jaini, “The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast,” in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 85.

²⁹R. Champakalakshmi, “Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Patterns of Patronage,” in John Samuel et al., eds., *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers*, Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998: 89.

³⁰*dānavāmstu vasekṛtvā punarbuddhatvam āgataḥ/ sargasya rakṣaṇārthāya tasmai Buddhātmane namaḥ* [*Mbh.*xii.47, 67 (borrowed from P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 89n15)].

³¹*Matsyapurāṇa*.47, 247.

³²*Gītagovinda*.I.1,9.

³³P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 85.

as those which survive in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*)³⁴ that Rṣabha, their first Tīrthaṅkara, had been an incarnation of Viṣṇu by sniping at the “divine” status of Viṣṇu himself, particularly by criticizing the immoral behaviour of the *avatāras*.³⁵ Many translations of canonical texts as well as their commentaries were made into vernacular languages and not Sanskrit. Above all, they produced entire alternate versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*³⁶ and the *Mahābhārata*,³⁷ wherein Rāma and Kṛṣṇa were portrayed as worldly Jaina heroes subject to the retribution of Jaina ethical laws.³⁸ Rāma, for instance, does not kill Rāvaṇa in the Jaina rendition of the story; this deed is instead performed by his brother Lakṣmaṇa, and Rāma is reborn in heaven for his strict adherence to *ahiṃsā*. Such a transformation was not possible for Kṛṣṇa, whose deeds of violence and treachery were too numerous to cover up; thus, he is shown as going to hell for a long period after his earthly existence. The point here is that “the Jainas sought to outflank the *bhakti* movement by taking its

³⁴*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.v.iii–viii. P.S. Jaini, “Jina Rṣabha as an avatāra of Viṣṇu,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*.xl.2, 1977: 321–337. P.S. Jaini, “The Jain Purāṇas: A Purāṇic Countertradition,” paper read at the *Conference on the Purāṇas*, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin, 1985.

³⁵This criticism appears in the *śrāvakācāras* under the description of “false gods, scriptures and *gurus*” whose worship is forbidden to the Jaina laity (see for details, Robert Williams, *Jaina Yoga: A Survey of the Medieval Śrāvakācāras*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

³⁶At least sixteen Jaina *Rāmāyaṇas* are known to exist (ten in Sanskrit, five in Prākṛta, one in Apabhraṃśa). For a complete list, see V.M. Kulkarni’s Introduction to the *Paumacariu*, trans. S.M. Vora, 2nd rev. edn. by Punya Vijayaji, vol. I, Varanasi: Prakrit Text Series, 1962: 106. As compared to this vast collection, just one such story, the *Dasarathajātaka* (*Jātaka* no. 461), exists in the Buddhist tradition. Cf. Kamil Bulcke, *Rāmakathā: Utpatti aur Vikāsa*, Prayaga: Hindi Parishad Prakashan, 1950: 56ff.

³⁷For the Jaina versions of the life of Kṛṣṇa, see *Jinasena’s Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, edn. Panna Lal Jain, Varanasi: Bharatiya Gyan Peeth Prakashan, 1944 and *Hemacandra’s Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, trans. Helen M. Johnson, bk. VIII, Gaekwad’s Oriental Series no. 139, Baroda, 1962. No comparable Buddhist texts have come down to us.

³⁸P.S. Jaini, op. cit., 1980: 85.

main cult-figures as their own, while placing these figures in a uniquely Jaina context.”³⁹

The threat faced by the Buddhists and the Jains came largely from the Bhakti ideology of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints who had become harbingers of the temple movement rooted in land-based feudal economy.⁴⁰ The way in which the temple-centered *bhakti* brought about the metamorphosis of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in the north was repeated even more vigorously and systematically in the south. Both the Nāyaṇār and Ālvār saints popularized their creeds not only by taking recourse to legends, myths, and miracles but also through the introduction of innovations in literary style. The new Bhakti literature through its simple but powerful choice of words, musical phraseology, and romantic imagery, took over the imagination of the south Indian masses. The origin and growth of Bhakti movement in south India coincided with the growth and consolidation of new brāhmaṇa-based feudal monarchies first under the Pallavas, and then under the Pāṇṭyas, Ceras, and Coḷas of the post-Saṅgam period. Such a development was also accompanied by the growth of the early temple movement particularly through the mushrooming of rock-cut and structural temples of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava deities. The temple complexes included sizable landed-properties with non-brāhmaṇa tenants. These landed-properties were administered by brāhmaṇa trustees based in settlements located around the temples. The evolving material milieu witnessed the eruption of somewhat acrimonious disputes between the already established non-Vedic creeds and the emerging Brāhmaṇical-Hindu movement. With the growing strength of Śaivism, kings turned away from the non-Vedic creeds. The hagiographical works are a veritable witness to the royalty switching its patronage from Buddhism and Jainism to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, especially in the Pallava and Pāṇṭiya kingdoms. The whole struggle drew to a close with the relegation

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰K.M. Shrimali, “Reflections on Recent Perceptions of Early Medieval India,” *Social Scientist*, vol. 21, no. 12, December 1993: 35.

of Buddhism and Jainism into the background and triumphal establishment of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and supremacy of its priestly class, the brāhmaṇas.⁴¹

Royal patronage seems to have intensified the tempo of the Bhakti movement with a temple building spree which spread from the Pallava-Coḷa territory to the Pāṇṭiya and finally, the Cera territories. Hundreds of inscriptions from the seventh to the tenth centuries bear testimony to a brisk activity of temple construction.⁴² Those kings and chieftains who actively participated in this activity and supported Brāhmaṇical-Hindu groups became more powerful than those who did not. When the Bhakti movement had become popular, the kings patronized it for making use of it to enhance their own prestige and power. Thus, Bhakti may have helped the rulers to consolidate the power of monarchy as an institution.⁴³ Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas successfully mobilized the indigenous people as tenants and temple servants, grading them into castes and sub-castes with infinite variations of economic and ritual status. Under the leadership of the brāhmaṇa priests not only were fertile river valleys and forest lands brought under cultivation but also a communication system was built that linked the marketplaces of the south with other parts of India. Consequently, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism with its institutional base in the temple-centred agrarian settlements grew into a dynamic and progressive force whereas Buddhism still continued to be urban and elitistic. In time, being a member of the movement of Bhakti whether one was a king or an ordinary person, ensured a special status through proximity to gods and “gods of the earth.” One’s status arose in proportion to one’s readiness to submit to the brāhmaṇa oligarchy. In this way, if kings derived greater socio-political power,

⁴¹M.G.S. Narayanan and V. Kesavan, “Bhakti Movement in South India,” in S.C. Malik, ed., *Studies in Indian and Asian Civilizations*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1978: 38. R. Champakalakshmi, op. cit., 89.

⁴²See T.N. Subrahmanyam, *South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, 4 vols., Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1954.

⁴³Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 45.

Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas themselves acquired not only better protection but also popularity through this alliance of the *janeu* (sacred-thread) and the throne. The mechanism of social power worked in promoting simultaneously the power of Hindu kings and the prosperity of brāhmaṇa settlements. In fact, the ideology of Bhakti acted as a unifying force by bringing together kings, brāhmaṇa priests, and the common masses to the disadvantage of the non-Vedic religions. Of course, the intoxication of Bhakti could enable the lowly to forget their misery, thus, providing an illusion of equality while retaining the stubborn walls of inequality in the feudal material milieu.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that most saints came either from the precincts of or got affiliated to great Brāhmaṇical temples like those at Venkatam, Kanchi, Srirangam, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, etc., thus indicating that elements of temple propaganda and Brāhmaṇical assimilative enthusiasm were inseparable components of the movement. Bhakti not only started from the temple, but it connected one temple with another through pilgrimages paving way for the further proliferation of temples.⁴⁵ These temples owing large estates as *devasvam* and *brahmasvam* property with Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas as their trustees inspired the movement. The devotees often undertook tours of all the important centres of pilgrimage, by dancing and singing with large groups of followers across fields and forests. The Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints received royal patronage, performed miracles, healed the sick, clashed with Jainas and Buddhists in open debates and defeated them.⁴⁶ The devotees moved from temple to temple in

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵The songs of various saints eulogising the temple cult are presented as an example of this. See for the cult of sacred places George W. Spencer, "The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Hymns," *Numen* 17, December 1970: 232–244 and Kamil V. Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, Leiden: Brill, 1973: 198–199.

⁴⁶The hyperbole used in such debates sometimes gives the impression of severe acrimony. For instance, the *Periyapurāṇam* (also known as *Tiruttontarapurāṇam*), a Tamil poetic account depicting the legendary lives of

a cross-country religious campaign receiving food and support all along their route from a large class of temple servants and tenants not only in the major centres but even in a network of temples in the countryside. It is these anonymous masses swelling the ranks of *bhaktas* who provided strong popular base for the movement. The *Periyapurāṇam* is replete with accounts of joint pilgrimages undertaken by Appar and Campantar in the early phase and Ceraman Perumal Nāyaṇār and Sundara in the later phase of the Bhakti movement.⁴⁷ Processions and pilgrimages along with temple festivals which linked the temple cult to Bhakti movement had far reaching consequences. Festivals such as the Vaiṣṇava festival of Śrāvaṇa/Onam were, over a period of time, transformed through royal and Brāhmanical patronage into national festivals. Such developments, particularly festivals, observed in specific temples or in a general way, had a major share in reforming the sectarian creed of Brāhmanism and developing it into the popular Hindu religion.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note that though guilds of traders flourished in south India, yet merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans were conspicuous by their absence in playing any prominent role in the Bhakti movement. This may be explained by the fact that whereas Bhakti movement had an agrarian-feudal bias, Buddhism had its supporters primarily among the ranks of the business community based in urban centres; this community being close to the ruling aristocracy both in material prosperity and social supremacy. The increasing circumnavigation as well as inland trade indirectly helped the growth of Buddhism. But there came the emergence of the agricultural community. In the

the sixty-three Nāyaṇārs, the canonical poets of Tamil Śaivism and compiled during the twelfth century by Sekkizhar, minces no words in claiming that “The ways of Sāmaṇas and Buddhists that know neither good nor wisdom, are evil,” http://www.shaivism.org/english/sen_th12_sambandhar.htm (accessed 15 May 2009).

⁴⁷*Periyapurāṇam: The Lives of the Śaiva Saints*, edn. K. Subrahmanyam, trans. J.M.N. Pillai, Madras: Rajan, 1924, Srivaikuntham: 54–55.

⁴⁸Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 47.

place of circumnavigation, cultivation of the inland areas was given much more attention. Consequently, the agrarian clans became rich and powerful and were supported by the mighty Coḷa kings. The growth of Śaivism was so rapid that the kings became its patrons and occasionally even went to the extent of openly indulging in anti-Buddhist activities. Thus, brāhmaṇism returned with a renewed vigour, along with its institutional base in the temples that were supported by agrarian settlements. These emerged as a dynamic force whereby new areas were brought under cultivation. In the initial phases at least, because of its ideology, Bhakti movement brought kings, brāhmaṇa priests, and the common masses together in a harmonious manner at religious gatherings, ceremonies, and festivals. The stronghold of its followers was not in the guilds of merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans (who continued to be the supporters of Jainism and Buddhism) but in the rural agrarian settlements. These people embraced mainly Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, the religion of their rulers. Thus, it is not improbable that the rivalry between the non-Vedic creeds and the Bhakti movement reflects, at least implicitly, the conflict for socio-political dominance between the landowning classes and the trading classes.⁴⁹ Bhakti movement successfully adopted the media of song and dance to invoke popular enthusiasm. The cult of the temple with its pilgrimage centres and associated settlements and tenants played an *avant garde* role in helping Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism temporarily assume a relatively egalitarian and democratic approach unlike the rigid brāhmaṇical discipline. The upshot of this is that in the end “the Bhakti movement overtook Jainism and Buddhism not so much because of royal patronage, but more because it adopted several media that evoked popular enthusiasm, such as song and dance, and also because it had an egalitarian and democratic approach that was different to the rigidity of the classical Brāhmaṇical

⁴⁹Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 47. S.C. Malik, “Introduction,” in S.C. Malik, ed., *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1978: 5–8.

discipline.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Jaina-Buddhist challenge, which had extended to south India, produced this new form of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu response. Ultimately the success of the Bhakti movement signified the victory of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism against the non-Vedic creeds of Jainism and Buddhism.⁵¹

In the first phase, Bhakti movement was clearly unfriendly towards Buddhism.⁵² Some of the Āḷvār and Nāyaṇār hymns gave vent to their animosity in unequivocal terms and openly incited devotees to chop off the “heads” of the Buddhists as their doctrines were “false.” Campantar is known to have called the Buddhists as “worthless, wily rogues, scantily clad, wicked.” Some saints went so far as to declare that those kings who had been seduced by the “stinking ignorant” Buddhist monks be rescued and brought back to the fold of the true religion.⁵³ But, such rogue saints of south India must be seen as an exception. This kind of venomous attack on Buddhism is rather rare in the overall pluralistic and tolerant religious environment of pre-modern India. However, as pointed out above, in the early

⁵⁰Ibid., 5–8.

⁵¹Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 49.

⁵²Cākkiya, Campantar, Māṇikkavācakar, Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, and Tirumaṅkai decry the Buddhist religion and use language that is often derogatory and abusive. Tirumaṅkai is said to have robbed the Nākappaṭṭiṇam *vihāra* of its golden Buddhist images for building the fourth *prākāra* at the Śrīraṅgam temple. Nāṇa Campantar condemns the Buddhists systematically in every tenth verse of his *patikams* and so does Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi. Cākkiya Nāyaṇār, who was first a Buddhist and later adopted Śaivism after a visit to Kāñcīpuram, was also not very friendly towards Buddhism (see K.A.N. Sastri, *The Coḷas*, 2nd rev. edn., Madras: University of Madras, 1975: 656–657; Shu Hikosaka, *Buddhism in Tamilnadu: A New Perspective*, Madras: Institute of Asian Studies, 1989: 201; R. Champakalakshmi, op. cit., 90; idem, “From Devotion and Dissent to Protest: The Bhakti of the Tamil Āḷvārs and Nāyaṇārs” in D.N. Lorenzen, ed., *Religious Movements in South Asia 600–1800*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004: 60–61).

⁵³See R. Champakalakshmi, “From Devotion and Dissent to Protest: The Bhakti of the Tamil Āḷvārs and Nāyaṇārs,” in D.N. Lorenzen, ed., *Religious Movements in South Asia 600–1800*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004: 72.

medieval south Indian feudal society, Bhakti-inspired Brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance appears to have succeeded in forming the basis of socio-political power⁵⁴ to the complete disadvantage of Buddhism. During this phase, the Bhakti movement deviated a great deal from the orthodox philosophy of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism rejecting abstract metaphysics as well as caste regulations. This could be seen in the fact that untouchables and outcastes were admitted as saints. However, by the middle of the ninth century, when the popularity of Buddhism and Jainism had diminished and the Bhakti movement had achieved maturity, such an attitude became more realistic. The *maṭhas* headed by the brāhmaṇa *ācāryas* became champions of the *varṇāśrama* dharma and in the field of religion even the Tamil language was replaced by Sanskrit.⁵⁵ The castelessness of first phase is followed by a second phase of conformity to caste rules. Moreover, by now Buddhism had lost the battle in south India, as it had already elsewhere. After this victory over the non-Vedic religions, the movement appears to have closed its ranks and consolidated its position whereby the openness and flexibility of the movement gradually disappeared, i.e., it became a part of the establishment. The agrarian feudal order supported by a graded system of hierarchy in caste was re-established and a new sense of discipline took the place of spirit of egalitarianism, generosity, and cosmopolitanism which had initially welcomed devotees from the lowest rungs of the society. A new emphasis is put on the attitude of subservience to brāhmaṇas and temples in the hymns of Śaiva saints such as Ceraman Perumal Nāyaṇār and Sundaramūrti Nāyaṇār and Vaiṣṇava saints such as Kulashekhara Ālvār and Nammālvār. Thus, it appears that the propensity of Bhakti during its first phase towards reform which included bypassing the caste rules had been necessitated at least in part by the strength of the

⁵⁴See Indira V. Peterson, *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991: 44; Burton Stein, *Peasant, State, and Society in Medieval South India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁵⁵See S.C. Malik, "Introduction," op. cit., 5–8.

tenets of non-Vedic creeds. However, “it was a very short-lived phenomenon, a moment of aberration or lapse from which Hindu society recovered as soon as the point of danger had passed.”⁵⁶ Thus, with the threat of non-Vedic religions passing and with the accomplishment of social harmony, the forward push of the Bhakti movement came to an abrupt halt.

The growth and development of Bhakti movement in south India is generally viewed as being the primary cause of the decline of Buddhism.⁵⁷ The Bhakti movement took over from Buddhism its devotionalism, its sense of the transitoriness of the world, its conceptions of human worthlessness, its suppression of desires and asceticism as also its ritual, the worship of idols and stūpas or *liṅgams*, temples, pilgrimages, fasts and monastic rules, love and compassion for animals, and its idea of the spiritual equality of all castes. The assimilation and appropriation of these ideas into Paurāṇika theology and the pervasion of the whole with warm human feeling was the achievement of the saintly hymn-makers of Tamil land, the celebrated Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints, who flourished between the seventh and the twelfth centuries. These devotees of Śiva and Viṣṇu developed the cult of Bhakti, and their works are looked upon as those of the highest authority by the followers of the two creeds. Nāṇa Campantar, apart from being an inveterate elocutionary enemy of the Buddhists, also entered into disputes with the Vaiṣṇava saint Tirumaṅkai and in every way he was so stout a champion of Śaivism that the revival of the faith is mainly ascribed to him; he holds the foremost place among the great Śaiva preceptors and is actually regarded as an incarnation of Śiva. Māṇikkavācakar, the greatest among Śaiva

⁵⁶Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 51.

⁵⁷See, for instance, R.S. Murthy, “Introduction,” in G. John Samuel et al., eds., *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers*, Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998: xiv–xv; Shu Hikosaka, op. cit., 201; Narayanan and Kesavan, op. cit., 33–38. R. Champakalakshmi, “Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Patterns of Patronage,” 89; idem, “From Devotion and Dissent to Protest: The Bhakti of the Tamil Āḷvārs and Nāyanārs,” 60–61, 70; Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1976: 67–104.

saints in the ninth century CE, attended an assembly of Buddhist priests which was gathered together by the King of Sri Lanka and attended by the Cera King. In debate he defeated the Sri Lankan Buddhists and consequently, the King of Sri Lanka along with his daughter became converted to Śaivism. Periyālvār, a brāhmaṇa saint, is also said to have won a religious debate in the court of Srimara Srivallabha. During the seventh and eighth centuries the Cālukyas and Pallavas, two dominant powers of the Deccan, took interest in the revival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.⁵⁸ Some of the kings belonging to these dynasties appear to have ordered the burning and/or conversion of some of the Buddhist shrines and *vihāras* into Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite temples.⁵⁹ The situation being unfriendly, some Buddhist monks may have even left south India and taken refuge in the neighbouring countries. But it cannot be ignored that it was not Buddhism alone that was targeted by the ruling authorities. Moreover, Jainism, Buddhism, Śaivism, and Vaiṣṇavism—all targeted one another. For instance, Campantar is known to have entered into acrimonious disputes with the Vaiṣṇava saint Tirumaṅkai. Māṇikkavācakar is known for his intense dislike of the Vaiṣṇavites so much so that in one of his hymns he declares Viṣṇu to be the vehicle of Śiva.⁶⁰ It must also be remembered that though the agrarian world came gradually under the complete control of the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas and their temples, in some of the coastal towns and ports,⁶¹ association

⁵⁸K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, Madras: The Modern Printing Press, bks. II and III.

⁵⁹G.V. Saroja, "Buddhism in Tamil Nadu," in John Samuel et al., eds., *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers*, Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998: 9.

⁶⁰"He who for bull has Viṣṇu, and in Perundurai dwells, O light supreme, in Brāhmaṇa guise has cast on me strange spells" (F. Kingsbury and G.E. Phillips, *Hymns of the Tamil Śaivite Saints*, Calcutta: Calcutta Association Press, 1921: 121).

⁶¹For instance, at Nākappaṭṭiṇam Buddhism persevered for quite some time due to the trade relationship of Southeast Asian countries with the South Coromandel Coast.

of monastic Buddhism with port towns and maritime trade continued to prosper and even provided an important instrument of legitimizing trade ventures under royal patronage beyond the end of the Coḷa period in the thirteenth century CE.⁶²

In northern India, remnants of Buddhism can be seen in the egalitarianism of the medieval Bhakti movements.⁶³ For instance, the style of Kabīra's teachings, in terms of the verse forms and imagery show compatibility with *mahāsiddha*'s teachings. The *sant* tradition in a sense was an inheritor of the Buddhist tradition. Kabīra and the other *sants* used *dohās* (couplet forms), and *padas* (verse forms) similar to the *mahāsiddhas*. In fact, not just the styles, imagery and teachings were interrelated but even entire songs were the same.⁶⁴ There were also various aspects of the traditions of the followers of Kabīra which resemble Buddhist traditions. For instance, they were organized into monastic orders with a system of monasteries which contained not only shrines to Kabīra but also the *samādhis* of former abbots of the monasteries. These *samādhis* are a kind of funerary memorials and resemble funerary stūpas. Their anti-caste attitude also reminds one of Buddhist influence. In particular, the anti-caste sentiments can be found in the works of *sants* Kabīra, Raidāsa, and Nānak whose fundamental argument against the caste system was that it is not a natural system. Everybody is created equally from a mixture of blood (the vehicle of the ova) and semen which are not particularly pure things in Indian thought.

⁶²See R. Champakalakshmi, "Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Patterns of Patronage," 81–82, 91.

⁶³Linda Hess has suggested Buddhist connections of Kabir (see Linda Hess, "Essays and Notes" in *Bijak of Kabir*, trans. Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986). However, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi had proposed that the *julāhā* weaver community of Banaras, to which Kabir belonged, were probably Nāthapanthis who had converted en masse to Islam (H.P. Dwivedi, *Kabir*, repr., New Delhi: Raj Kamal Prakashan, 2000: 25). Gail Omvedt believes Tukaram was a Buddhist too (*Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2003: 213).

⁶⁴There is a song by Kabīra which is almost identical to a song by the *Mahāsiddha* Dheṇḍena (Shashibhusan Dasgupta, op. cit., 413–415).

This basic argument against caste by birth is clearly found in the works of the *mahāsiddhas* in a similar form. There is also an affinity with the anti-caste sentiments expressed in early Buddhist literature that it is action rather than birth that makes a man truly a brāhmaṇa. The *sants* held the same view. There is a famous Kabīra song in which, alluding to the Vedic myth of their birth from the mouth of the primordial being, he asks if brāhmaṇas were really different from others would they not be born from a different orifice? Finally, the *mahāsiddhas* and the *sants* resemble each other through their shared set of key terms in their teachings such as *sahaja*. The continued importance of the concept of *sahaja* in teachings of the *sants* points to their closeness to the *mahāsiddhas*.

Though there were negligible direct attacks by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism on Buddhism and on the whole, ancient and medieval Indian society was free of religious persecution, socio-political situation, with the passage of time, turned unfavourable to Buddhism. Revived and reinvigorated Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism slowly and steadily, but systematically, succeeded in subverting institutional Buddhism. Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism also appears to have been designedly agreeable and assimilative towards those issues in Buddhist worldview which had become socio-religiously commonsensical. As a part of this agenda, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism not only overarched Buddhism but also adopted the Buddha as one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu pushing him to a situation whereby he lost cultic veneration completely. In this success-story, Bhakti movement must be given major share in the credit for having forged peasant-brāhmaṇa alliance to the complete disadvantage of Buddhism.

Samgha-Laity Relationship, Decline of Urbanization, and Evolving Material Milieu

THE METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED by scholars to study the decline of Buddhism generally overlooks the nature of the relationship between the Buddhist samgha and its lay supporters. In fact, the complicated issue of the decline may be understood better if the lower segment of Buddhism, i.e., its lay supporters,¹ is treated separately from its upper segment, the samgha, i.e., institutional Buddhism.² There was hardly any complementarity between the two. Together they did not constitute an organic whole vis-à-vis other faiths in the Indian context. Apart from being at odds, the two segments were hardly mindful of each other's need for long-term survival. The Buddha and the members of the samgha always accepted material support without ever considering the sectarian affiliations or the motives of their benefactors. They also accepted invitations for meals from any well-wisher. They would walk into any household to beg for food even at the risk of being

¹Consisting of *upāsakā* (male lay supporters) and *upāsikā* (female lay supporters).

²Consisting of both *bhikkhu* (male renunciants) and *bhikkhunī* (female renunciants). These renunciants were also variously known as *sāvaka/sāvikā*, *ariyasāvaka/ariyasāvikā*, *aggasāvaka/aggasāvikā*, *mahāsāvaka/mahāsāvikā*, and *sāvakasamgha*.

refused.³ Clearly such a practice was not suitable for the purpose of maintaining a separate and distinct identity and hence long-term survival. It would be impossible to call the lay supporters as “Buddhist laity” in the technical sense of the term because the support offered by them was merely provisional. A religion, whose clerical order and lay supporters were not fully committed to each other, could not be expected to live perpetually.

Jacobi has pointed out that in Buddhism laymen were regarded as outsiders, friends, and patrons of the saṃgha, whereas in Jainism there was close camaraderie between the laity and monks enabling Jainism “to avoid fundamental changes within and to resist dangers from without for more than two thousand years.”⁴ This difference in the relationship between the laity and the monk order accounted for the disappearance of the one and the continuation of the other in India.⁵ Thus, “relations with the laity were always precarious and there at its base was the *Achilles’ heel* of the whole soaring edifice.”⁶ Jainism, which had to face identical circumstances in India, offers a picture of itself in complete contrast to Buddhism. The two segments complemented each other and formed parts of the Jaina saṃgha as one organic whole. It seems that this distinction in the nature

³The story of Kaśī Bhāradvāja is a quintessential example of such an outlook. The Buddha visited him in the eleventh year after the Enlightenment and stood near the place where food was being distributed to a large number of people. The brāhmaṇa seeing the Buddha begging for alms, shouted at him for coming without having been invited and suggested that the Buddha should work for his living. (*Sn*.12ff.; *SnA*.131f.; *S.i*.188f.) *The Sūtrālaṅkāra*, however, says that the brāhmaṇa threw water on the Buddha in order to drive him away (Sylvain Levy, “Aṣṭvagoṣa, le Sūtrālaṅkāra et ses sources,” *Journal Asiatique*, Dixième Série, tome XII, 1908: 99). Similar is the story of several nuns who, in a Kosalan village, entered the house of a brāhmaṇa to stay for the night. When the brāhmaṇa came home, he simply kicked them out calling them shaven-headed strumpets (SBB.xii.275).

⁴*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vols. VII: 470; VIII: 804.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism*, Bombay: Chetna, 1960: 25.

of these two religions may have in the end made the crucial difference whereby one managed to survive and the other failed to maintain an independent existence. This inherent weakness in the very nature of Buddhism, a hidden tragedy waiting to unfold, was laid bare by the urban crisis when its supporters largely vanished and the religion fell to pieces. Thus, it must be accepted that the lack of lay aficionados was a major drawback of Buddhism. As a matter of fact, Buddhism in India never made an attempt to create a community of lay supporters who could exclusively be called followers of the Buddha and no one else. They were no more than mere unattached well-wishers. Thus, in the Indian context, the term “Buddhist” did not, on the whole, include lay people and actually signified only those who had given up the lives of householders and become monks and nuns. In the long run, this congenital weakness of not having nurtured a loyal laity made Buddhism a potentially failed religion, a religion which was doomed to pale into oblivion in the land of its origin. In this sense, it may be said that the decline of Buddhism lay hidden in its very nature. Thus, it is not surprising that some scholars have viewed ancient Indian Buddhism either as asocial⁷ or simply a “social failure.”⁸ There appears to be some truth in such observations in the sense that though, when pressed hard, the Buddha spoke his mind on various social issues, his priorities lay elsewhere. He was not interested in cultivating a community of lay followers for whom his monks and nuns would have to act as priests and hence, preside over their various social ceremonies.

The peculiar character of the Buddhist lay supporters and the nature of their relationship with Buddhism appears to have acted against the latter’s long-term survival in four ways. Firstly, the lay supporters were almost entirely urban and Buddhism did not have

⁷Nalinaksha Dutt, *Buddha Jayanti Souvenir*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973: 97.

⁸G.C. Pande, *Bauddha Dharma ke Vikāśa kā Itihāsa* (in Hindi), Lucknow: Hindi Samiti, 1963: 491–492; D.K. Barua, “Buddhism and Lay Worshipers,” *Mahābodhi*.lxxiv.3–4: 39–44.

much support in the countryside. When a crisis in urbanization set in, support for Buddhism also started dwindling and the number of lay supporters and sympathisers became abysmally low. Monasteries with commercial linkages suffered the worst fate when the Silk Road got disrupted and the seas around India came under the control of the Arabs. Many monasteries became either derelict or were abandoned altogether. Consequently, the saṃgha became concentrated in fewer and fewer monasteries. When the Arab and Turkish invasions took place during the early medieval times, the enervated saṃgha, particularly in eastern India, was left with nowhere to turn for support. As compared to this, Jaina and Brāhmaṇical-Hindu priests were able to disperse into the countryside where they enjoyed support. Later when the tide ebbed they were able to reorganize themselves.

Secondly, the number of Buddhist lay supporters was very small, perhaps only a tiny portion of the Indian population. Buddhism was not able to wholly supplant the other cults and systems in the Indian subcontinent except some fringe regions. Theistic Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism continued to develop even during the period when Buddhism was strongest, as did the six orthodox philosophical systems.⁹ The supporters of Buddhism being confined mainly to urban settlements and the urban population itself being just a small proportion of the total Indian population, Buddhism could never become a major religion in India. Thus, Buddhist support was flawed as it lacked mass-base and was confined only to elite urbanites—a crippling weakness which Buddhism inherited at birth and lived with so long as it survived in India.

Thirdly, the lay supporters' allegiance was mostly towards individual monks and nuns rather than towards Buddhism as such. This meant that the affiliation with Buddhism came to an end when a particular monk/nun died or moved away. One often comes across references to personal followers of different

⁹W.T. de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, Vintage Books Edition, 1972: 110.

monks and nuns.¹⁰ It is hard to find single-minded allegiance towards Buddhism either running through a family for several generations or for that matter all the members of a family owing allegiance to Buddhism collectively. Thus, it is not surprising to see different members of a typical ancient Indian urban family appreciating and/or following different gods/religious leaders, the Buddha being just one of them.¹¹

Fourthly, the conversion of lay supporters was never complete. One can see in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka* not only lay supporters who did not adopt new names after becoming “Buddhists” but also most of the monks and nuns continued to be known by their old names and perhaps never adopted any dhamma names.¹² The Buddhist lay supporters were fickle-minded at the best of times and invisible at the worst of times.¹³ These lay supporters, some of whom were undeniably quite rich and powerful,

¹⁰Thus, monks such as Devadatta (*Vin.*ii.199; iii.174; iv.66; *J.*i.186, 508; ii.434); Ānanda (*S.*ii.219; *J.*i.382); and Sāriputta (*SA.*iii.177) had their own “spheres of influence” as well as supporters not only among the laity but also within the saṃgha.

¹¹The Mauryas offer a quintessential example of this. Whereas Candragupta Maurya was a Jaina, his son Bindusāra was a follower of the Ājīvikas, and grandson Aśoka was a Buddhist. Aśoka’s son Jalauka was a Śaiva and his grandson Sampati a Jaina. Though kings like Bimbisāra and Aśoka were supporters of Buddhism, some of their own wives are known to have been totally unsupportive of Buddhism.

¹²For instance many prominent and senior monks and nuns such as Caṇḍikāputta Thera, Dabba-Mallaputta Thera, Devadatta Godhiputta, Hatthārohaputta Thera, Khandadeviyāputta Thera, Kuṭumbiyaputta-Tissa Thera, Mālunkyāputta Thera, Mātāṅgaputta Thera, Moggaliputta Thera, Nanda Kumāraputta Thera, Puṇṇa-Mantānīputta Thera, Sāriputta, Sigālamātā Therī, Soṇa-Poṭṭiriyaputta Thera, Vajjiputta Thera, Vaddhamātā Therī, and Yasa Kākaṇḍakaputta are mentioned by their lay names and do not seem to have been given any dhamma names.

¹³“[T]he upāsaka, whose religious instruction leaves much to be desired, will rarely break away from the popular circle into which his roots are plunged and establish a kind of compromise between the Buddhist Dharma and the superstitions of paganism. This was the main cause of the absorption of Buddhism into the ambient Hinduism” (É. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, Louvain-la-Neuve: Insitut Orientaliste: 1988: 69).

were basically Brāhmaṇical supporters with polychotomous loyalties. It would be manifestly wrong to see them as more than mere sympathetic donors. It would also not be a correct understanding of history to imagine that Buddhism could have prospered in perpetuity with the financial and material backing of these supporters whose commitment was neither one-sided nor continuous. Majority of them did not have particularly much at stake in the survival of Buddhism and thus, one would not have expected such followers to either shed tears when Buddhism fell on bad days or to have a guilty conscience while switching loyalties away from it. In sharp contrast to this, there was better coordination between Jainism and its lay supporters, the latter being far more committed, loyal, and steady than their Buddhist counterparts. Whereas both male and female laity of Jainism formed an integral part of the Jaina saṃgha, Indian Buddhism did not consider its lay supporters as worthy of the membership of its saṃgha.¹⁴

While, undoubtedly, there were people in urban settlements who patronized Buddhism, there were no exclusively stipulated criteria such as social codes, modes of worship, etc. on the basis of which these individuals could be identified *sui generis* as a distinct and recognizable religious group of Buddhist lay-followers. In practice, for all the life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāras*)¹⁵

¹⁴See Lamotte, op. cit., 65.

¹⁵Apart from the *aṃtim saṃskāra* (ritual performed on a dead body), the twelve *saṃskāras* enjoined on the twice-born classes which “purify” one from the taint of sin contracted in the womb and lead to regeneration are: (1) *Garbhādhāna* (the nuptial ritual); (2) *Pūṃsavana* (child-bearing); (3) *Śimantonnayana* (“the parting of the hair”—the ritual observed by women in the fourth, sixth, or eighth month of pregnancy); (4) *Jātakarman* (a birth ritual consisting in touching a newly-born child’s tongue thrice with ghee after appropriate prayers); (5) *Nāmakaraṇa* (the ritual of naming a child); (6) *Niṣkramaṇa* (having the child out of the house for the first time to see the sun); (7) *Annaprāśana* (first feeding of the child); (8) *Cūḍākaraṇa* (the tonsure ceremony); (9) *Upanayana* (investing of the sacred thread); (10) *Keśanta* (cutting off the hair finally at age 16); (11) *Samāvartana* (return home after completing education); and (12) *Vivāha* (the wedding ceremony).

associated with birth, wedding, death, etc. they not only followed Brāhmanical rites but also frequently conformed to Brāhmanical-Hindu caste regulations *uber alles*. In fact, the lay supporters of Buddhism were simply “the fringes of religious communities.”¹⁶ In other words, the sense of religious identification felt by the Buddhist lay supporters was indeed a weak one. Thus, when a person, say a brāhmaṇa, became a lay-devotee of the Buddha, it only indicated that he expressed his respect to the Buddha as a “holy” man.¹⁷ There is no evidence to prove that such brāhmaṇas, after having adopted Buddhism, ceased to hold the *brahmadēya* lands or gave up being *purohitas*. In fact, just like before, they continued to devote themselves to the Vedic learning and train their disciples in it. For instance, in the case of Sunīdha and Vassakāra, there is no concrete evidence to show that they had ever formally declared themselves to be *upāsakas*. Nor is it necessary to presume that their *conversion* signified any spectacular transformation in their traditional beliefs and social status.¹⁸ “Buddhism was never wholly cut off from the main stream of Indian religion.”¹⁹ Even becoming *upāsakā/upāsikā* did not in any way signify for the lay supporters giving up their old “caste” status. Moreover, adherence to the Buddhist faith did not make it obligatory for the lay supporters to reject their ancestral beliefs or repudiate those religious practices which were customarily performed in their communities. The lay supporters were allowed not only to venerate the deities of their own regions, castes, and choices, but they were also allowed to worship the deities in the appropriate way. While taking refuge formally in the Buddha, the dhamma, and the samgha, the lay supporters neither committed exclusive allegiance to the Tīratana nor were they expected to perform any regular religious service.

¹⁶A. Scott, *Buddhism and Christianity: A Parallel and a Contrast*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971: 272.

¹⁷B.G. Gokhale, “The Early Buddhist Elite,” *Journal of Indian History*, XLIII, pt. II, 1965: 376.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹W.T. de Bary, op. cit., 111.

As rightly pointed out by Mitra, to a typical lay supporter the saṃgha was no more than a mere adult education class with voluntary attendance.²⁰ The principal aim of the Buddhist saṃgha was not to tear the Indian population away from its ancestral beliefs and superstitious practices, but to secure for the saṃgha dedicated sympathizers and generous donors.²¹ Thus, it is not surprising that the votive inscriptions from Sāñcī and Bhārhut contain evidence of gifts to Buddhist *vihāras* by persons who do not seem to have been any more than unaffiliated donors. Hence, it may not be far from the truth to say that the *conversion* of a follower of Brāhmaṇism to Buddhism did not mean anything more than showing respect to the Buddha, his dhamma, and the saṃgha and making donations to the saṃgha in the form of food, clothes, and money. Typical Buddhist lay supporters visited Buddhist monasteries from time to time, expressed their faith in the Triple Gem, but at the same time continued to enjoy the services of Brāhmaṇical priests in their household ceremonies. “It remains nonetheless true that the *upāsaka*, whose religious instruction leaves much to be desired, will rarely break away from the popular circle into which his roots are plunged and establish a kind of compromise between the Buddhist Dharma and the superstitions of paganism.”²² Thus, Buddhism failed *ab initio* to establish an organized group of lay-followers who, on their *conversion*, would regard themselves, other than in their frequent or periodical visits and donations to Buddhist shrines, as socially different from the rest of the community. In other words, Indian Buddhism had the inherent mentality of a sect within the broad-based Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and could never really pull itself out of this psychological mind-set. Thus, it is not surprising that some scholars have viewed Buddhism as remaining merely

²⁰R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 147–148.

²¹Lamotte, *op. cit.*, 78.

²²*Ibid.*, 69.

a *sampradāya* among the lay population²³ or for that matter the Buddha himself dying as a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu.²⁴

Buddhism not only continued to adore the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sprites, fairies, nāgas, garuḍas, and yakḥhas but also the favourite haunts of their devas continued to prevail upon the imagination of Buddhism.²⁵ Even the great Vedic and Brāhmaṇic devas and asuras such as Brahmā, Māra, Yama, Indra (Inda/Sakka), and others had a wide-ranging presence in Buddhism from its earliest days.²⁶ Neither did the advent of Buddhism lead to the decline in importance of such gods nor did the Śākyamuni Buddha ever oppose the deities of *pagan* Brāhmaṇism. Even though the Buddha was fully aware of the shortcomings of these gods yet, at the same time, he avoided shaking the traditional beliefs of householders in the gods they worshipped. He accepted that “revered and honoured by man, the divinities in turn revere

²³See, for instance, B.G. Gokhale, “The Early Buddhist Élite,” *Journal of Indian History*, XLIII, pt. II, 1965: 376. Similarly, Panikkar feels that the Buddha himself was looked upon in his lifetime and afterwards as a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu saint and avatāra and his followers were but another sect in the great Āryan tradition (K.M. Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, 4th edn., Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977: 33–34).

²⁴See, for instance, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism, Being a Sketch of the Life and Teachings of Gautama, the Buddha*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1912: 83.

²⁵As in Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, Uttarakuru, various heavens and hells, Himavā, Mount Meru, Mount Kelāsa (abode of Lord Śiva), Anotatta (Mānasarovara) are important places in Pāli Buddhist mythology. Thus, like the famous Brāhmaṇical-Hindu warriors, heros, and gods, who regularly visited Kelāsa, the Buddha too came here to defeat and convert the notorious *yakkha* called Ālavaka (*SnA*.i.217–239). Other than the Buddha, various Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, *devas*, goddesses, monks, and ascetics come to the crystal clear Anotatta to take bath (*Vin*.i.28; *Ap*.i.299; *DhA*.iii.222; *SnA*.ii.407, 437–439; *MA*.ii.585f.; *AA*.ii.759–760). Similarly, obtaining water from Anotatta is considered, in Pāli Buddhism, the complete attainment of *iddhi*-power (*J*.v.320f.; *DhA*.iv.134ff.).

²⁶The Great War between the *devas* and *asuras*, with Sakka (Inda) bearing the thunderbolt in his hand is also a familiar sight in earliest Buddhism (*S*.i.216ff.; *J*.i.202–204; *DhA*.i.272–80; *SnA*.484–485). Śiva (*S*.i.56) and worship of Śivaliṅga (*VA*.iii.626) also do not escape the attention of Pāli Buddhism.

and honour him . . . (and) are gracious to him as a mother to her own, her only son.”²⁷ He stayed away from castigating the pagan customs as a whole, bloody sacrifices which led to the death of living beings were deprecated, but peaceful offerings which did not involve cruelty were recommended.²⁸ The universal non-sectarian character of the Buddha’s teachings becomes quite apparent from the various legends associated with him. He was anxious to see his followers embrace the truth as their sole refuge, a truth he himself had seen and presented in his dhamma. He never agreed to recognize the saṃgha as a circumscribed body. He not only declined to declare himself as the head of the saṃgha but also refused to limit it to sectarian bondage through a system of rules. Besides, the saṃgha had no power to excommunicate an unworthy lay supporter who was, so to speak, not only beyond its immediate authority but also outside its responsibility. This became a serious drawback in terms of long-term survival because as a consequence of such an attitude not only that the importance of numerical strength was ignored but also not having hereditary followers certainly meant an uncertain future. As a matter of fact, the Buddha was neither interested in numbers nor did he ever take any interest in providing a distinct identity to his lay supporters. As pointed out in the *Udumbrika Sihanāda Suttanta*, his declaration to Nigrodha makes it amply clear: “Maybe, Nigrodha, you will think: the Samaṇa Gotama said this (i.e., preached his dhamma) from a desire to get disciples. But you are not to explain my words thus. Let him who is your teacher (*satthā*), be your teacher still.”²⁹ The Buddha’s commitment was to the higher ideals of self-denial. Thus, those who adopted a life of homelessness by giving up family life, were held in higher esteem than those who remained in the world and led mundane lives. It has rightly been remarked that in other religious orders such as Jainism, the lay followers frequently associated

²⁷*Vin.* i. 229–30; *D.* ii. 88; *Ud.* 89.

²⁸*A.* ii. 42f.; *S.* i. 76; *Dh.* 141; *Sn.* 249.

²⁹*D.* iii. 51.

much more closely with the monks than was the case among the Buddhists.³⁰ In fact, Indian Buddhism was almost entirely centred on its monasticism and saw householders largely as spiritually and morally challenged. Thus, the contact was kept at bare minimum. Even this little contact that Buddhism maintained with the masses during its earlier phases, especially through the constant travelling of monks and nuns, came to an end when the samgha became sedentary and its members became confined to their monasteries. Further, with the urban crisis resulting in the dereliction of most of the monasteries and concentration of monks in a few *mahāvihāras*, contact with the lay supporters became minimal. When monasteries with their lands, servants, and granaries became self-dependent, the monks appear to have even stopped going on begging rounds. Consequently, life in sequestered monasteries further alienated the samgha from the people. It is this weakness of Indian Buddhism that may have made the crucial difference in the end.

Buddhism does not appear to have become a dominant religion in India at any time. From the earliest days, it seems to have been popular among *crème de la crème* of urban society which consisted of merchants, financiers, bankers, artisans, members of the royalty, and bureaucrats. A statistical study of the frequency of urban and rural settlements mentioned in the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta* Piṭakas show that over ninety-five percent of these were urban.³¹ More than eighty-four percent of the human Bodhisattas mentioned in the *Jātakas* were directly connected with urbanised élite families, many of them being either merchants, financiers, or bankers themselves or coming from such families.³² An interactive support system

³⁰P.S. Jaini, "The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast," in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 84–85.

³¹K.T.S. Sarao, *Origin and Nature of Ancient Indian Buddhism*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1989: 44.

³²K.T.S. Sarao, "Background to the Origin of Earliest Buddhism," *Indologica Taurinensia*, vols. XV–XVI, 1989–90: 317.

existed between the emergence of Buddhism and the expansion of trading network that constantly evolved and adapted itself between 300 BCE and CE 300.³³ A large number of lay donors whose occupational backgrounds are indicated by specific titles in donative inscriptions belong to mercantile communities and their families. Epigraphic attestations of donations by merchants and archaeological distribution of stūpas and monasteries near junctions of trade routes through passes of the Western Ghats, at maritime seaports on the Indian Ocean, and urban centres such as Mathurā, Takkaśilā, and Peshawar that functioned as administrative, commercial, and religious nodes amply demonstrate a strong nexus between Buddhist institutions and economic networks.³⁴ The Buddhist monasteries were mercantile in nature and provided capital loans and facilities for mercantile communities involved in inter-regional commerce in the Indian subcontinent.³⁵ In spite of the physical isolation of majority of the Buddhist monastic establishments, by the early centuries of the Common Era, the saṃgha had become a major holder of land

³³H.P. Ray, *The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994: 122. As pointed out by D.D. Kosambi, Buddhism provided the ideological superstructure of the growing urbanization and depended increasingly upon it for its own sustenance and growth (*The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Bombay: Vikas Publications, 1965: 100–104).

³⁴Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*, Leiden: K. Brill, 2011: 316.

³⁵See D.D. Kosambi, “Dhenukakata,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, XXX, 1955: 50–71; idem, *Myth and Reality*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962: 100–114. However, the hypothesis of direct involvement of monastic institutions in an economic activity on such a scale has not been universally accepted. It has been suggested that “the location of the Buddhist monastic sites at a distance from the arenas of economic and political activity made their direct participation in such activity inefficient. There is, furthermore, no artifactual or structural evidence pointing to military, storage, or industrial functions within monasteries” (J. Heitzmann, “Early Buddhism, Trade and Empire,” in K.A.R. Kennedy and D.L. Possehl, eds., *Studies in the Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology of South Asia*, New Delhi: 1984: 132).

and property.³⁶ There is overwhelming evidence indicating that Buddhist *viḥāras* actively participated in commercial activities such as banking and financing. *Vinaya* rules setting conditions for travelling with and seeking donations from merchant caravans and narratives about monks who participated in trade missions and traders who visited monasteries along their routes reflect deep connections between mobile monastic and merchant communities.³⁷ At sites such as Bharhut and Sāñcī, the largest single group of donors were monks and nuns, who evidently owned personal property despite *Vinaya* rules to the contrary.³⁸ As the prosperity of the urbanite merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans increased, they vied with each other in constructing stūpas and providing material support to Buddhist monasteries. However, the dependence of the samgha solely upon urban mercantile communities was a serious drawback as “nothing could be more ruinous for an ideology than to have drawn its sanction only from such patronage.”³⁹ Urban orientation of the Buddhist monasteries and their dependence upon urban mercantile communities alienated the rural communities from Buddhism. As time went by, due to isolation from and aversion to serve the rural communities and lack of interest in winning supporters among them, Buddhist monasteries turned into some sort of islands with uncertain future.

Material remains of the urban centres suggest that the urban crisis that had set in during the post-Kuṣāṇa period became widespread after the sixth century CE. The Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang, speak of the decline of most of the urban centres which they visited in the fifth and seventh centuries respectively. Generally the archaeological remains

³⁶H.P. Ray, op. cit., 150.

³⁷Neelis, op. cit., 316–317.

³⁸See Lamotte, op. cit., 414; Gregory Schopen, “What is in a Name? The Religious Function of the Early Donative Inscriptions,” in Vidya Dehejia, ed., *Unseen Presence: The Buddha and Sanchi*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1996: 58–73.

³⁹D.P. Chattopadhyaya, “Preface,” in *Tāranātha*.xiv.

in northwestern Indian subcontinent, the Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and western Uttar Pradesh show either desertion of urban centres after the Kuṣāṇa times or a sharp decline in the Gupta period followed by a break in occupation.⁴⁰ In eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the disintegration of urbanization in the Gupta phase is almost unprecedented.⁴¹ Excavated sites in Orissa and West Bengal show the end of urbanization around CE 300.⁴² In central and western India, urbanization became a spent force by the end of the fourth century CE, though some urban settlements in Gujarat continued up to the seventh-eighth centuries.⁴³ With the exception of a few settlements like Nāgārjunakoṇḍā,⁴⁴ majority of the urban centres in peninsular India disintegrated and disappeared in the third century CE.⁴⁵

On the whole, archaeological and literary evidence put together suggests that urban settlements with Buddhist connections at Sanghol,⁴⁶ Kurukhetta/Kurukṣetra (Raja-Karnaka-Qila),⁴⁷ Hastināpura/Hatthipura/Hastinīpura (Hastinapur),⁴⁸ Sāketa/Ayojjhā (Ayodhya),⁴⁹ Verañjā/Verañji (Atranjikhhera),⁵⁰ Madhurā/Uttaramadhurā (Mathura),⁵¹ Kapilavastu/Kapilavatthu/

⁴⁰R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 27.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 58.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁴A few urban settlements like Kāverīpattinam continued to exist in the sixth-eighth centuries, but urbanization was clearly on the decline in peninsular India. Even at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā the archaeological records suggest a break in occupation after the fourth century CE (R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 99).

⁴⁵R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 92.

⁴⁶*IAR*, 1968–1969: 26; 1969–1970: 32; 1970–1971: 30–31.

⁴⁷*IAR*, 1970–1971: 16; 1971–1972: 23–24; 1972–1973: 12.

⁴⁸K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation as Reflected in the Pāli Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas*, Delhi: Vidyanidhi, 1990: 135–136.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁰R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 21.

⁵¹K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 142.

Kapilanagara (Piprahwa-Ganwaria),⁵² Rājagṛha/Rājagaha/Giribbaja (Rajgir),⁵³ Ukkācelā/Ukkaveḷā (Sonpur),⁵⁴ Tāmralipti/Tāmalitti (Tamluk),⁵⁵ Bairāṭ (Bairatnagar),⁵⁶ Kumbhavatī (Nasik),⁵⁷ Patitṭhāna (Paithan),⁵⁸ Kondapur,⁵⁹ Amarāvati,⁶⁰ and Arikamedu⁶¹ declined in the pre-Gupta period. Takṣaśilā/Takkasilā (Taxila),⁶² Indraprastha/Indapatta/Indapattha/Indapattana (Delhi),⁶³ Kuśīnagara/Kusinārā (Kasia),⁶⁴ Sahajāti/Sahajāta (Bhita),⁶⁵ Macchikāsaṇḍa (Masaoon-Dih),⁶⁶ Vaiśālī/Vesālī (Vaishali)⁶⁷ Pāṭaliputra/Pāṭaliputta/Kusumpura

⁵²Ibid., 146. Faxian found the city of Kapilavastu like a great desert with about ten families living there (*Si-Yu-Ki*.i.xliv). Later, Xuanzang too found it in ruins (*Xuanzang*.82). According to Hye Ch'o, "The Aśoka tree is still there but the city is already ruined. There is a *stūpa* but no monks or inhabitants" (*Hye Ch'o*.42).

⁵³K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 147.

⁵⁴B.P. Sinha and B.S. Varma, *Sonpur Excavations: 1956 and 1959–62*, Patna: The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1977: 10–11.

⁵⁵*IAR*, 1954–1955: 20; 1973–1974: 33.

⁵⁶*ASIR*, 1935–1936: 86.

⁵⁷R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 66.

⁵⁸*IAR*, 1965–1966: 29.

⁵⁹G. Yazdani "Excavations at Kondapur: an Andhra Town (circa 200 BC to 200 AD)," *ABORI*.xxii.171–182; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 92.

⁶⁰H. Sarkar and S.P. Nainar, *Amaravati*, 16.

⁶¹R.E.M. Wheeler, "Arikamedu: An Indo-Roman Trading-Station on the east Coast of India," *AI*, no. 2, 1947–1948: 181–310.

⁶²See, J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951: 1–2; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 13.

⁶³K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 136.

⁶⁴*ASIR*, 1904–1905: 45. When Xuanzang visited this place, it was in complete ruins (*Xiyu Ji*.185.). Visiting a century later, the Korean monk Hye Ch'o too found the city desolate and the *stūpa* isolated where no people went (*Hye Ch'o*. 39).

⁶⁵K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 148.

⁶⁶*IAR*, 1965–1966: 93–94; 1974–1975: 47.

⁶⁷K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 160–161. Xuanzang saw the city in ruins with very few inhabitants (*Xuanzang*.86). A hundred years later, Hye Ch'o saw "the monastery . . . deserted and ruined with no monks" (*Hye Ch'o*.42).

(Kumrahar, Patna),⁶⁸ Bodhagayā (Taradih),⁶⁹ Śrāvastī/Sāvatthī (Saheth-Maheth),⁷⁰ Vidiṣā/Vedisā (Besnagar),⁷¹ Mahiṣmatī/Māhisattī (Maheshwar),⁷² Sāñcī,⁷³ Takkarā/Tagara (Ter),⁷⁴ and Dharaṇīkoṭa⁷⁵ declined from the Gupta period onwards. Settlements at Erakaccha (Eran),⁷⁶ Ujjain/Ujjenī (Ujjain),⁷⁷ Vārāṇasī/Bārāṇasī (Rajghat),⁷⁸ Campā (Champanagar),⁷⁹ Jetuttara (Nagari),⁸⁰ Banavasi,⁸¹ and Bharukaccha/ Bharunagara (Baruch)⁸² declined during the post-Gupta period.

⁶⁸Ibid., 144. Xuanzang found the city of Pāṭaliputra deserted though the walls were still standing (*Xuanzang*.87).

⁶⁹Faxian found this city deserted and desolate (*Si-Yu-Ki*.I.lix).

⁷⁰K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 150–151. Faxian saw only few inhabitants in Śrāvastī (*Faxian*.73). Xuanzang saw the city of Śrāvastī in desolation and of the several hundred *viḥāras* in the country of Śrāvastī, most were dilapidated including the famous Jetavana viḥāra (*Xiyu Ji*.165–166).

In CE 1130 it was granted six villages for maintenance of the monks (*ASIR*, 1907–1908: 39).

⁷¹K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 158.

⁷²Y.D. Sharma, “Remains of Early Historical Cities,” A. Ghosh, ed., *Archaeological Remains, Monuments and Museums*, pt. I, New Delhi, 1964: 73.

⁷³Decline of the city in the fourth century seems to have led to the abandonment of the famous monastery known as the Devīviḥāra (R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 66).

⁷⁴R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 82.

⁷⁵*IAR*, 1962–1963: 1–2.

⁷⁶*IAR*, 1960–1961: 18.

⁷⁷*IAR*, 1956–1957: 27; 1957–1958: 36. Xuanzang found Buddhist institutions in ruins in the region around Ujjain (*Xiyu Ji*.344).

⁷⁸B.P. Singh, *Life in Ancient Varanasi: An Account Based on Archaeological Evidence*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1985: 5, 62; K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 131–132.

⁷⁹K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*, 133. Though Faxian saw resident priests at Campā (*Si-Yu-Ki*.I.lxxi), Xuanzang found there numerous *saṃghārāmas*, mostly in ruins, with about 200 priests (*ibid.*, II.192). He also noticed that there were about twenty Brāhmaṇical temples frequented by people (*ibid.*).

⁸⁰*IAR*, 1962–1963: 19. In CE 729, Hye Ch’o found the country of Vārāṇasī as desolate with no king (*Hye Ch’o*.39).

⁸¹R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 86.

⁸²*IAR*, 1959–1960: 19.

With the onset of urban crisis, the situation developed completely to the disadvantage of Buddhism.⁸³ Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples developed under the Guptas in the north and the Ikṣvākus in the Deccan. Buddhist monasteries were no longer attracting generous donations and political patronage on the same scale as before and the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sects were certainly on the ascendant.⁸⁴ Between CE 300–600 Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples emerged as the focus of social and economic activity and the first land-grants were made to them.⁸⁵ They began to attract more and more land-grants and played an important role in the consolidation and expansion of agrarian settlements. The dispersal of merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans sapped the socially and economically vital foundations of the samgha. The loss of traditional lay supporters as well as material support led to the dwindling in numbers of those who aspired to adopt renunciation in the Buddhist samgha. In such a newly emerged situation, the existence of the samgha became very precarious indeed. One direct consequence was that majority of the small monasteries, which formally existed in the vicinity of urban settlements, became mostly derelict.⁸⁶ Thereafter, the samgha became concentrated in fewer and fewer monasteries. As time went by and as more and more urban settlements decayed, the number of Buddhist monasteries became reduced significantly. Interestingly, in the Gupta and post-Gupta

⁸³In the opinion of B.G. Gokhale, Buddhism become the victim of declining urbanization. [See B.G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhism and the Urban Revolution," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 5 (2): 1982: 7–22.] Of the 173 urban centres mentioned in the Pāli *Vinaya* and *Sutta Piṭaka*, over 90 have been identified. Archaeological and literary data put together indicate that most of these centres either declined or completely disappeared by the end of the sixth century CE (see, K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation*).

⁸⁴H.P. Ray, op. cit., 161.

⁸⁵Vidya Dehejia, *Early Buddhist Rock Temples (Study in Ancient Art and Archaeology)*, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986: 45; R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980: chap. I.

⁸⁶R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 162.

periods, when most of the urban settlements either declined or were deserted, some new settlements with urban features also emerged. However, these newly emerged urban settlements were different in nature from their predecessors. Whereas the early historical urban settlements were directly linked up with centres of authority with supra-regional loci, the early medieval urban settlements were more rooted in their regional contexts acting as nodal points in local exchange networks, corresponding to different ties of regional power.⁸⁷ Though some support may still have accrued here and there from the few surviving or newly emerged urban settlements to an insignificant number of Buddhist monasteries, the number of traditional supporters of Buddhism became grievously small.

The phase from sixth-seventh centuries till twelfth-thirteenth centuries CE was distinctive in the history of Indian Buddhism. During this phase, in order to survive in a situation of dwindling traditional support and the rising tide of rejuvenated Brāhmanical-Hinduism, the few surviving Buddhist monasteries began to tune themselves to the emerging feudal situation by adopting new roles for themselves through the practice of self-supporting economies based on land grants.⁸⁸ Further, the saṃgha liberalized learning and opened the doors of its monasteries to secular education so as to make it more effective in debates and disputations.⁸⁹ Thus, from the fifth century onwards a number of monasteries began to grow out of their conventional character into centres of laicized academic learning and scholarship. Here, the learning was not confined to saṃgha members alone, but was made available to all seekers of knowledge, Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists. As a consequence of such a *laissez-aller* development, the

⁸⁷Sheena Panja, book-review of R.S. Sharma's *Urban Decay in India* (c. 300 – c. 1000), Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, *Antiquity*, vol. 64, no. 243, June 1990: 442 – 443.

⁸⁸See R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 165.

⁸⁹Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962: 29.

Buddhist, samgha began to tune itself to the moorings of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu society. Like their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu counterparts, the Buddhist monasteries, as pointed out above, also began to accept donations of arable land for religious purposes from the kings and the chiefs.⁹⁰ Consequently, some of them at places such as Nālandā, Pahārpura, and Vallabhī became metamorphosed into reputed centres of Buddhist learning and developed into fully-grown universities (*mahāvihāras*). In the new scenario, they had to manage not only large landed estates but also a whole lot of other things associated with such estates. Monastic landlordism naturally led to revolutionary changes in the very character of these newly sprung *mahāvihāras*. This phenomenon helped these few *mahāvihāras* to survive and even prosper for a while, independently of their traditional supporters.

Interestingly, from the Gupta period onwards, building monasteries and providing for their upkeep began to be regarded more as a service rendered to the cause of learning and culture than to the cause of Buddhism.⁹¹ A major share of the land grants to Buddhist institutions came from their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu patrons. In an eleventh–twelfth centuries CE Kalacuri stone inscription discovered at Kasia (Kuśīnagara) by A.C.L. Carlleyle, the donor king confesses his faith in the Buddha and Tārā, but worships Śiva as well.⁹² Similarly, his contemporary, Ballālasena, the king of Bengal, worshipped the Buddha in the initial stages of his reign but turned to Śiva towards the end.⁹³ Most of the donors appear to have approached Buddhist deities as if they were Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. One consequence of such an attitude was that it contributed towards smudging the boundaries that existed between Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and

⁹⁰For instance, according to Yijing, Nālandā Mahāvihāra enjoyed the grant of more than two hundred villages (*Yijing*.65).

⁹¹Sukumar Dutt, op. cit., 331.

⁹²*EI*.xviii, 1925–1926: 130–131.

⁹³N.N. Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, repr., Calcutta: Hare Press, 1911: 21.

Buddhism as two distinct religions.⁹⁴ Besides, these *mahāvihāras* turned out to be poor competitors to their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu counterparts. For instance, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples had a clear advantage over *mahāvihāras* in the management of landed estates. The *mahāvihāras* and Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples differed greatly from each other in terms of their nature as well as interaction with the lay society. Not being monolithic, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was a religion which drew its sustenance from the village. As compared to this, Buddhism not only tried to keep its core area of interest outside of mundane matters, but it was also led by intellectuals who always remained wary of those who lacked sophistication and affluence.⁹⁵ Its intellectual snobbery had kept the Buddhist saṃgha out of touch with the *hoi polloi*. A Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temple invariably ministered to the religious needs of a large village or a populous quarter of a town. In sharp contrast to this, a Buddhist monastery had almost nothing to do with the familial rituals of a householder and only served as a centre of intellectual and spiritual inspiration for anyone who wanted it. “Ritual remained a monopoly of the Brahman. Moreover, the Brahman at that time was a pioneer who could stimulate production, for he had a good working calendar

⁹⁴Amit Jha, “Patronage and Authority: Buddhist Monasteries in Early Medieval India,” *Teaching South Asia, Internet Journal of Pedagogy*, vol. II, no. 1, Spring 2003, www.mssc.edu/projectsouthasia/TSA/VIIN1/Jha.htm (accessed 14 October 2007).

⁹⁵Though, of course, the Buddhist saṃgha opened its doors to all without any reference to caste or creed, common masses including rural folks, śūdras, caṇḍālas, people with meagre resources, and those with little or no education, found it generally very hard to gain entrance to the core of Buddhism. Interestingly, most of the sermons recorded in the *Nikāyas* were delivered in large cities such as Sāvattihī, Rājagaha, and Kosambi. Whereas Pāli literature sees the *nāgarika* (city-dweller) as *urbane* and *polite* (DA.i.282), it registers an unmistakable disdain for *gāma* (village) and things rural. For instance, the word *gāma* forms part of a large number of disdainful compound words and expressions, found in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its commentaries, such as *gāmakūṭa* (sycophant—S.ii.258); *gāmadhamma* (vile conduct—D.i.4); *gāma-vāsīnaṇḍhamma* (vile conduct—DA.i.72); *gāmadārakā* (street urchins—J.ii.78, 176, iii.275).

for predicting the times of ploughing, sowing, harvesting. He knew something of new crops and trade possibilities. He was not a drain upon production as had been his sacrificing ancestors, or the large Buddhist monasteries.⁹⁶ Thus, the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples, due to their better knowledge of agriculture (especially rice cultivation) and seasons,⁹⁷ and their ingenuity in constructing origin myths and enormous capacity for legitimation, and thus wider socio-political functions,⁹⁸ obtained an advantage over Buddhist *mahāvihāras*. This advantage was manifested in the shift of royal patronage from Buddhism to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sects, which became more visible by the end of the eleventh century and is quite evident in the artistic record of the period.⁹⁹ Ronald Inden attributes this to the better adaptability and resilience of the brāhmaṇas to the situation in terms of their transformation from a sacrificial cult to a gift-receiving sect.¹⁰⁰ Copperplate inscriptions dating from the tenth through the twelfth centuries show such a transformation having taken place among the Pālas, Candras, Senas, and Vermans. For instance, along with the Buddhist images, one can find figures of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Sarasvatī in substantial numbers during the reign of the Pāla Buddhist kings.¹⁰¹ With the exception of Samatāṭa (Trans-Meghana region controlled by the Buddhist Candras),¹⁰²

⁹⁶D.D. Kosambi, *Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Methods*, Poona: People's Book House, 1957: 66.

⁹⁷R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1706*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 3–21.

⁹⁸Amit Jha, op. cit.

⁹⁹Susan L. Huntington, *The Pala-Sena Schools of Sculpture*, Leiden: Studies in South Asian Culture, 1984: 179–201.

¹⁰⁰R.B. Inden, "The Ceremony of the Great Gift (Mahādāna): Structure and Historical Context in Indian Ritual and Society," in Marc Gaborieau and Alice Thorner, eds., *Asie du sud: Traditions et changements*, Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1979: 131–136.

¹⁰¹See K. Chaitanya, *Arts of India*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1987: 38–39.

¹⁰²Candras (c. CE 825–1035), the rulers in Samatāṭa, were linked with Indian Ocean commerce through their control of the southeastern delta's

recipients of these grants were brāhmaṇas who received land not only for performing domestic rituals, as had been the case in earlier periods, but also for performing courtly rituals.¹⁰³ It has been suggested that Buddhism had encouraged a “withdrawal from the political” at a “spiritual-psychological level”—in contrast to the “code of governance” presumably given in the dharma of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the *śāstras* allowed the brāhmaṇas, who studied them and commanded “a considerable body of knowledge on state administration and political economy” to become political specialists and work as priests, councillors, administrators, and clerks.¹⁰⁵ By the time of the Turuṣka conquest, monumental state temples with royally patronized brāhmaṇa priests had emerged as the basic components of religious and political ideology.

most active seaports (R.M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 11). Pālas, the more powerful neighbours of the Candras, used cowrie shells for settling commercial transactions, whereas the Candras maintained a silver coinage that was more conducive for participation in international trade (see B. Lahiri, “A Survey of the Pre-Muhammadan Coins of Bengal,” *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum* 7, 1981–1982: 77–84; A.H. Dani, “Coins of the Chandra Kings of East Bengal,” *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* 24, 1962: 141). But, the limited success of Buddhism in the Trans-Meghana area was nullified by the Šūfis when the Buddhists began to regard Muslims as their saviours [see I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610–1947)*, S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1962: 74].

¹⁰³B.M. Morrison, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970: 108.

¹⁰⁴C. Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Ancient India*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1962: 294–300.

¹⁰⁵Hermann Kulke, *The State in India: 1000–1700*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997: 237.

Conclusions and a Model for Decline

INDOLOGISTS HAVE LARGELY ignored the subject of the decline of Buddhism in India. Thus, one is not surprised that till date it continues to be one of the most puzzling conundrums in the history of India. It is almost impossible to provide a continuous account of the decline primarily because of the dearth of archaeological material and the stunning silence of the indigenous literature on this subject. But the lack of evidence does not necessarily mean that Buddhism had completely disappeared from the plains of India. One often comes across stray instances here and there that indicate towards the uninterrupted, though low key, survival of Buddhism into modern times.

Whatever information we have on the subject indicates that the process of the decline of Buddhism in India was neither uniform in terms of time nor was it consistent in the manner of its decline. Moreover, while appearing global the decline had distinctive regional features. However, historical information about the condition of Buddhism in different regions of India happens to be so scattered and discontinuous that it is almost impossible to prepare a complete picture of any given period in a particular region. Hence no period can be delimited as marking the commencement of a general decline of Buddhism all over India. While one comes across Buddhism flourishing at one place, at the same time one can see it in decline at another place. For instance, when some well-endowed Buddhist monasteries

existed under the Pālas in eastern India, Buddhism had already met its worst fate in Sind. However, wherever it survived, it seems to have fallen into a state of complete disarray and collapsed rather quickly and comprehensively towards the end of the twelfth century.

The first symptoms of crisis in monastic Buddhism appear to have made their appearance during the post-Kuṣāṇa period. Archaeological evidence from this period hints at the decay of some urban centres with Buddhist connections. One can also see some derelict monasteries in or near these decaying urban centres. A region-wise look at the condition of Buddhism appears to indicate that the signs of decline had become quite pronounced when Faxian (CE 399–414) paid a visit to India. The decay and desertion of urban centres, which had become quite pronounced during the Gupta period, reached its climax towards the end of the sixth century CE by which time only a small number of urban centres, mostly in the coastal regions of southern India, survived. Some new urban settlements also emerged in the meanwhile but they were somewhat different in nature from their predecessors and Buddhism does not appear to have benefited much from them. Thus, when Xuanzang (CE 629–645) visited India, Buddhism had become somewhat of a spent force in most parts of India. In his memoirs Xuanzang mentions at least seventy-one countries covered by the territory of pre-1947 British India. Buddhism had either comprehensively declined or was losing ground to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in fifty-two of these countries and was in a strong position only in thirteen countries. Interestingly, the countries where Buddhism had either comprehensively declined or was in a strong position, were evenly spread out in the whole of India.

Region-wise survey shows that Buddhism in parts of the Madhyadeśa, the native land of Buddhism, appears to have begun to decline in the post-Kuṣāṇa period. Generally the archaeological remains in the western Madhyadeśa (Haryana, Delhi, and western Uttar Pradesh) show either desertion of urban centres after the Kuṣāṇa period or a sharp decline during the

Gupta period followed by a break in occupation. In the eastern Madhyadeśa (eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) the disintegration of urbanization in the Gupta phase is almost unprecedented. In the southern Madhyadeśa (central India) urbanization appears to have run out of steam by the end of the fourth century CE. Both Faxian and Xuanzang mention different places and countries within the Madhyadeśa where Buddhism was in decline. Xuanzang also refers to the kingdom of Harṣavardhana within the Madhyadeśa where Buddhism had revived but yet had not been able to replace Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Later, Hye Ch'o (CE 724–727) and Oukong (CE 751–790) mention various places within this region where Buddhism was completely extinct. But some *vihāras* in the Madhyadeśa continued to receive support from the remnants of their traditional supporters. Some of the *vihāras* also began accepting endowments and land-grants and stayed functional into the early medieval period. In fact, some *vihāras* at Odantapurī, Vikramaśilā, and Nālandā saw their most glorious phase during the medieval period when Buddhism had clearly declined in most of the Madhyadeśa. But, one interesting development that one witnesses in the source material relating to early medieval period is that the patrons of Buddhism had begun to view it as if it were a sect of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Thus, one could now see in a typical Buddhist *vihāra* the images of the Buddha, Kubera, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Tārā alongside Śiva-Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa, and Viṣṇu in his several incarnations. One can see instances of the low key survival of Buddhism in some parts of the Madhyadeśa till as late as the eighteenth century. The Vajrāsana, for instance, continued to attract pilgrims from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Tibet throughout the medieval and early modern period, latest being an embassy sent by the Panchen Lama to Bodhagayā in the year CE 1777.

The tribal lands of Kāmarūpa (Assam) remained outside the area of interest of Buddhist missionaries and, as pointed out by Xuanzang, the people of this region did not believe in Buddhism and no *vihāra* had been built here to invite Buddhist monks. Assam was left by the Buddhist missionaries entirely to the

brāhmaṇas for its detribalization. As archaeological records of excavated sites in Bengal show urbanization declining from the post-Kuṣāṇa period, Buddhism must have begun its downhill journey in Bengal from this period onwards. When Xuanzang visited Bengal, Buddhism was already in decline there. Though some Bengali dynasties continued to patronize Buddhist institutions but from the seventh century onwards, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, already the more vital tradition at the popular level, began to enjoy increasingly more court patronage. The decline continued slowly but steadily till the eleventh century, by which time, even the Pālas, who had earlier patronized Buddhism enthusiastically, began to favour the cults of Śiva and Viṣṇu. The pantheons of Śiva and Viṣṇu became the most predominant phenomenon in the religious milieu of Bengal in the newly reformed Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and the artistic records from the eleventh century onwards prominently display such shifting trends. Despite Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism having a clear upper hand, a few *mahāvihāras* managed to survive well into the medieval period. For instance, Dharmasvāmin found Jagaddala in northwestern Bengal flourishing and full of monks in CE 1235. When Islam arrived in Bengal, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism were still in the process of detribalizing the indigenous populations through their Brāhmaṇization and Buddhacization in the eastern parts (territories covered by the present day Bangladesh) and were competing with each other in a manner that was not exactly very friendly. In fact, the case of eastern India appears to be a unique one in the sense that this was one of the few fringe regions of India where Buddhism did not play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. The most unique feature of medieval Bengal was that it presented itself as a potpourri of fast shifting beliefs and social allegiances, religious questing, and social and geographical mobility. The syncretism that took place as a result of these trends was the most multifaceted and profound than elsewhere in India. In an environment such as this, Buddhism was undergoing an across-

the-board transformation to the extent that its place was either being usurped by Purāṇa-based Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism or a bizarre assortment of different kinds of strange syncretic cults and practices emanating out of Buddhism, Śaivism, and Tantrism. Arrival of Islam made the socio-religious potpourri even more exotic. The Buddhists and Brāhmaṇical-Hindus made offers of sweets at Muslim holy places, kept copies of the *Qur'ān* to keep away evil spirits and for oracles, and participated in Muslim feasts. The Muslims reciprocated equally remarkably. Out of this brotherhood originated the worship of a common deity, worshipped enthusiastically by Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, namely, *Satya Pīr*. The syncretic form of Hinduism still practised by the Bāuls of Bengal has a strong influence of Buddhism. Interestingly, after Islam arrived in Bengal, the last vestiges of Buddhism and various Buddhistic cults such as Dharma cult which were slowly getting acculturated and assimilated into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, were now coming increasingly under the influence of Islam. Occasionally, the changed situation in which Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Islam competed with each other for space, appears to have provided a sort of schadenfreude to the followers of the Dharma cult, a modified form of Mahāyānism. Thus, one is not surprised that the *Dharma Gājan* and *Bada Jānāni* songs, interspersed with Islamic ideas, are not only full of malice and resentment against the Brāhmaṇas, but are also occasionally downright apoplectic and bellicose in the expression of such sentiments. In most of Bengal the prolonged assimilation and acculturation of Buddhism into both Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Islam took place over many centuries. There is also evidence of the existence of small communities of Theravāda Buddhists in the area of Chittagong hill tracts among the indigenous Chakma people of Bangladesh and Tripura which have maintained an uninterrupted existence up to the present times.

Buddhism may have begun to decline in Orissa from the fourth century CE onwards as the excavated sites here indicate

the decline of urbanization from about CE 300. When Xuanzang visited Orissa, of the three countries here, in one (Uḍa), Buddhism was in a strong position and in the second (Kaliṅga), very few people followed Buddhism. But in the third country (Koṅgoda), according to Xuanzang, people did not believe in Buddhism at all. Buddhism appears to have declined in most parts of Orissa by about the Somavaṃśī period (eighth-ninth centuries CE), with some Buddhist *siddhas* staying active in remote areas. However, after the Turuṣka attacks of Vikramaśilā and Odantapurī, some of the Buddhist monks from there appear to have moved into Orissa and, it seems, they supplemented the undercurrents of Buddhism which Vasu calls “a kind of crypto-Buddhism,” a synthesis of Tantra, Buddhism, and Vaiṣṇava themes. This form of Buddhism, though clearly overwhelmed by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu ideas, was never completely wiped out from Orissa. Mahima Dharma, a derivative of Buddhism, survived in Orissa at least until the eighteenth century. Interestingly, as per the 1901 census records of India, apart from the existence of 434 Buddhists in Orissa, there existed in Baramba state, a caste called Sarāk (*śrāvaka*) with obvious Buddhist connection.

Buddhism was already declining in Sind when Xuanzang arrived in this region. But, the occupation of Sind by the Arabs in CE 711 spelled a total doom for Buddhism. Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and Buddhists generally adopted diametrically opposite approaches towards the initial Arab conquest and thus, were affected differently by the invasion and occupation of Sind. Whereas Buddhism disappeared completely as a viable religious system during the Arab period, Hinduism continued to survive into modern times. The urban, mercantile Buddhists, believing that the Arab conquest would reopen inter-regional trade routes, both maritime and overland, and hence benefit their class and, indirectly, their religion, collaborated with the Arabs and helped them in their conquest of Sind. However, their calculations went terribly wrong as their place was simply usurped by the Arab traders. Buddhism disappeared in Sind during the two

hundred years of Arab rule and one does not come across a single Arabic or Persian reference to Buddhists actually living in Sind subsequent to the initial Thaqafite conquest. Most of the Buddhists in Sind converted to Islam and the towns which were predominantly Buddhist at the time of the Arab conquest, were definitely Muslim by the tenth century.

The archaeological remains in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show either desertion of urban centres after the Kuṣāṇa times or a sharp decline in the Gupta period followed by a break in occupation. According to Faxian, in the countries of Pi-cha (the Punjab), Swāt, and Uḍḍiyāna (both in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) Buddhism was prosperous and flourishing. However, Xuanzang found Buddhism in clear decline in the countries of Śatadru (Sirhind in the Punjab), Mūlasthānīpura (Multan in the Punjab), Gandhāra, and Takṣaśīlā (both in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Hye Ch'o found Buddhism flourishing in Jālaṃdhara (the Punjab), Chitral (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Uḍḍiyāna towards the beginning of the eighth century. Later when Oukong visited Uḍḍiyāna and Gandhāra, they still remained centres of Buddhism. Monks from Uḍḍiyāna are known to have visited China till the end of the tenth century. There are indications that Buddhism survived in the Swāt valley at least till the fifteenth century.

Though the decline of Buddhism in Kashmir appears to have begun in the post-Kuṣāṇa period, by the time of the arrival of Xuanzang, Buddhism had passed its prime in the valley of Kashmir primarily due to the ascendancy of Śaivism. However, in Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, we have an almost continuous record of donations to Buddhist establishments by kings and nobles. Hye Ch'o (CE 727) saw numerous *viḥāras* and monks in Kashmir and he refers to various members of the royalty as building *viḥāras* and making endowments of villages for the maintenance of these *viḥāras*. It seems that as a consequence of such developments, some revival of Buddhism did take place in Kashmir. Thus, when Oukong arrived in CE 759, he found three hundred

vihāras in Kashmir as against the over one hundred mentioned by Xuanzang (CE 633). During the reign of Nandī Gupta (CE 972–973), Vaiṣṇavite Queen Diddā is known to have built Buddhist *vihāras* apart from Vaiṣṇava temples. King Jayasiṃha (r. CE 1128–1149) is said to have built a Buddhist *vihāra* and made an endowment for its maintenance. However, the cultural ascendancy of Brāhmaṇical ideal from the eighth century onwards appears to have become accelerated. In the thirteenth century, at the time of Marco Polo's travels, the Kashmir valley appears to have become predominantly Brāhmaṇical-Hindu with perhaps Buddhism surviving only in small pockets. By this time, a small number of Muslim converts had also made their presence felt in the valley. A survey of the building art of the classical period (seventh to fourteenth centuries CE) also indicates Buddhism being gradually supplanted by orthodox Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism as the earlier phase of this period was Buddhist, while the later phase was entirely Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. From the early medieval period, religious milieu appears to have grown in the valley in a manner that both Śaivism and Buddhism were moving towards an ultimate fusion but at the cost of the latter. This process became accelerated with the emergence of the cult of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā with Buddhism borrowing the legends and metaphysical concepts connected to the cult of Śiva and Durgā. However, the available sources do not provide sufficient information to delineate the exact stages through which this fusion of Buddhism with Śaivism finally took place in Kashmir.

From the thirteenth century onwards, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu population and the remnants of Buddhism began to adopt Islam through a gradual process of acculturation and assimilation in the Kashmir valley. At the centre of this Islamization were the Šūfīs and R̥ṣis. Nūru'ddīn, the founder of an indigenous order of Muslim mystics (R̥ṣi Silsilah) was largely instrumental in making the R̥ṣi movement socially important in Kashmir. These R̥ṣis developed their ideas in their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and Buddhist surroundings. The extreme

asceticism, self-mortification, long fasts, sexual abstinence, and seclusion, which marked the early life of Nūru'ddīn, and indeed, the lives of his followers, blurred the differences in the minds of common masses between Islam and Hinduism or Buddhism. The Ṛṣi concept of “peace with all” was borrowed from Mahāyāna Buddhism which flourished in the Kashmir valley. While the role of the Ṛṣis and immigrant Ṣūfis from Central Asia and Persia cannot be denied in conversions, it would be wrong to attribute the so-called “dramatic mass conversions” of Kashmir to their miraculous exploits. Their activities leading to certain individual conversions might have been followed by group conversions in a social milieu characterized by the powerful belief in the spirituality of saints. As a result of this prolonged and gradual acculturation and assimilation, extending over a period of at least five centuries, a considerable part of the Kashmiri population either became Muslim or was understood to be Muslim. Till at least the fourteenth century Kashmiri Buddhist monks and translators are known to have travelled to Tibet. There is also evidence indicating the survival of Buddhism in Gilgit and Baltistan until at least the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century king Zain-ul-Abidin (CE 1419–1470) had a Buddhist minister. When towards the end of the sixteenth century Abul Fazal visited Kashmir, he came across some old persons who still owed allegiance to Buddhism, though he could not locate any scholars of Buddhism. Of course, in the Ladakh region, adjacent to the Kashmir valley, Tibetan form of Buddhism survives to this day.

In western India, urbanization became a spent force by the end of the fourth century CE, though some urban settlements in Gujarat continued up to the seventh-eighth centuries. When Xuanzang visited Gujarat and the surrounding region, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples outnumbered Buddhist *vihāras* in the countries of Bharukaccha (Bharuch), Kaccha/Kiṭa (Kutch), Vallabhī (modern Vala), Ānandapura (Vadnagar), Suratṭha (Surat), Gūrjara (with its capital at Bhillamāla, i.e., Bārmer), Maheśvarapura, and Mālava. According to Yijing

(CE 676–685), the Saṃmitīya school was the most thriving sect of Buddhism in Lāṭa, though some followers of other sects could also be found. Hye Ch'o found Buddhism flourishing in Sind-Gujarat (or Rajaputana) and Vallabhī. However, he found “half the country . . . invaded by the Arabs and . . . already ravaged.” In the early 780s, Saurashtra was invaded by the Abbasid rulers in Sindh who demolished the huge complex of Buddhist *viḥāras* at Vallabhī including the Duddā *viḥāra*.

When Xuanzang visited Maharashtra, he found Buddhism in decline there. Ajanṭā had already become derelict, though the establishments at Ellorā and Aurangābād appear to have continued till about the middle of eighth century. However, the *saṃghārāma* at Kanheri remained in occupation well into the eleventh century CE by which time only a few scattered monastic communities were left in Maharashtra. These Buddhist monastic communities were largely dependent upon the support of the mercantile communities. When trade came increasingly under the control of the Arabs, particularly from the eighth century onwards, the fortunes of the Indian mercantile communities were severely affected which in turn adversely affected Buddhism. While this was happening, acculturation and assimilation of Buddhism into an overarching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was also going on. As evidenced in the Śīlāditya Gaṇḍarāditya inscription, images of the Buddha were being set up along with those of the Jaina Tīrthaṃkaras and Śīva. The remnants of the scattered monastic communities were slowly and steadily lapsing into reinvigorated Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and the derelict Buddhist structural edifices were being taken over by the Brāhmaṇas. At Ellorā, the Daśāvatāra is reckoned as the earliest of the Brāhmaṇical excavated temples and it has been suggested that it was originally a Buddhist edifice taken over by the Brāhmaṇists under the patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. This could only mean that the life of the Buddhist community at Ellorā was either coming to an end or had already ended. The caves at Aurangābād with their very obvious Brāhmaṇical-Hindu influence in architectural and

sculptural elements represent the terminal phase of Buddhism in Maharashtra. Probably the last epigraphical evidence of the survival of Buddhism in Maharashtra comes from the time of king Gaṇḍarāditya (c. CE 1108–1138) of the Kolhapur branch of the Śīlāhāra dynasty.

Archaeological evidence indicates that Buddhist influence in the Deccan was confined mainly to the coastal towns and inland urban centres where commercial activities were taking place. With the exception of a few settlements like Nāgārjunakoṇḍā, urban settlements with Buddhist connections at Paṭiṭṭhāna (Paithan), Koṇḍapura, Amarāvati, and Arikamedu began to decline in the pre-Gupta period and with them Buddhism. When Xuanzang arrived in south India, Buddhism was declining in the countries of Andhra (with capital at Veṅgīpura), Dhānakaṭaka (Amrāvati), Coḷa (Tamilnadu), Draviḍa (with capital at Kāñcīpura), Malakūṭa (Kerala), and Konkaṇapura (Karnataka). When about a hundred years later, Hye Ch'o arrived in south India, he saw that in the kingdom of the Cālukyas (covering the present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) Buddhism was highly revered and there were many Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna monasteries as well as monks. But he also saw a large ruined monastery in the mountains which had no monks. On the whole, from about the seventh century onwards, the Bhakti movement rooted in land-based feudal economy began to steadily overrun emaciated Buddhism which was becoming interlarded with Tantric practices. Though guilds of traders flourished in south India, yet merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans generally felt shy in playing any prominent role in the Bhakti movement. In some of the coastal towns and ports, Buddhist monastic associations with port towns and maritime trade continued to exist well beyond the end of the Coḷa period in the thirteenth century CE. For instance, a large number of Buddha images ranging from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries have been found in and around Kāñcīpuram. Similarly, archaeological evidence from Nākappaṭṭiṇam and its neighbourhood has yielded as many as 350 Buddhist bronze

images dated between the ninth and the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. The *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in CE 1582, talks about Śrī Caitanya having discussions with several Buddhists and defeating them in debates along with their guru at Venkaṭagiri near Arcot. A monastery called China Pagoda at Nākappaṭṭiṇam is said to have been destroyed by the Jesuits in CE 1867.

The sketchy outlines of the decline of Buddhism in different regions of India, as given above, indicate that Buddhism showed first signs of decline during the post-Kuṣāṇa period. This decline picked up pace during the post-Gupta period and by the twelfth century it had fallen into complete disarray. However, this decline was not uniform and had its regional variations. Above all, Buddhism did not completely disappear from the plains of India and one comes across stray examples of its survival into late medieval and early modern times in most parts of India.

The following causes are often cited as being responsible, individually or collectively, for the decline of Buddhism in India:

1. Moral and Ethical Degeneracy in the Saṃgha
2. Animosity of the Brāhmaṇas
3. Persecution by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu Kings and Withdrawal of Royal Patronage
4. Sectarianism and the Rise of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna
5. Attacks by Arabs and Turks
6. Role of Śūfism
7. Rise of Bhakti Movement and Revival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism
8. Saṃgha-Laity Relationship, Decline of Urbanization, and Evolving Material Milieu

1. *Moral and Ethical Degeneracy in the Saṃgha*

R.C. Mitra and others have suggested that corruption and moral decay in the saṃgha was the root cause of the decline of

Buddhism. An examination of the vast Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist textual material spanning the entire period of the history of Indian Buddhism indicates that there were indeed many men and women who had joined the saṃgha under circumstances of compulsion. The saṃgha is said to have abounded with people who were perversely self-willed and unbearably quarrelsome. There is sufficient evidence to show that there were monks who did not fully cooperate with the Buddha during his lifetime, and with his chief disciples like Mahākassapa, Upāli, and Ānanda, after his death. The *Theragāthā* speaks of monks who were cheats, frauds, false witnesses, and unscrupulous. The *Jātakas* acknowledge that many undesirable characters put on the robes of a monk because they found living easier inside the saṃgha than on the outside. Such undesirable and irresponsible elements were clearly not expected to live up to the ideals set by the Buddha. It was perhaps in response to the existence of such undesirable elements in the saṃgha that the Buddha was compelled to enact rules banning their entry. But such rules did not necessarily keep unwanted elements from making way into the saṃgha. Laxity in the saṃgha seems to have grown to the extent that monks in large numbers were pocketing individual or community wealth and engaging in several other indiscretions. Chinese pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing refer to the Buddhist saṃgha not only owning movable and immovable property in substantial quantities but also the prevalence of various corrupt practices in it. In fact, it had become quite normal for Buddhist *vihāras* to own servants, cattle, land, granaries, and villages for the purpose of maintaining their residents. There is evidence to show that some of the prominent *vihāras* in early medieval period had become so influential that they began to issue their own seals and coins.

Though it cannot be denied that many corrupt practices had become widely prevalent in the Buddhist saṃgha, it is highly unlikely that these practices led to its decline. As a matter of fact, corrupt practices in a religion do not appear to affect its well-being. Thus, it would be difficult to explain as to how the

ownership of land, servants, granaries, and precious metals by monasteries could have caused the decline of Buddhism even if the Buddha had advocated otherwise. Moreover, laxity in discipline of religious life was not unique to Buddhism alone. It also existed in the other contemporary religious communities. Many religious trusts, temples, and shrines of today are not exactly paragons of virtue. But they continue to thrive. Besides, moral laxity may have corrupted the Buddhist saṃgha at certain times and places, still it would be manifestly wrong to say that it had assumed a universal character. Alongside the corrupt monks and nuns, we are reminded of the existence of others who lived exemplary lives. The saṃgha had never turned into an institution in disgrace and there is no well-documented evidence to prove that Buddhism was abandoned by its followers just because it had become a corrupt religion. Moreover, if moral and ethical degeneracy were the cause of the decline of Buddhism, it would not have survived as long as it did because many of the examples cited of corrupt bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs are from an early period.

2. *The Issue of Animosity of the Brāhmaṇas*

It has been claimed by G. Verardi, L.M. Joshi, Sogen Yamakami, and others that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the brāhmaṇas mostly despised the Buddhists and that their animosity, though not persistent and sustained, broke out in a frenzy from time to time till Buddhism was overpowered and wiped out from the land of its origin. Verardi has even pointed out that religious tolerance was alien to pre-British India and that brāhmaṇas had destroyed not only monasteries but had also created special militias aimed at intimidating the Buddhist monks and the laity. Attack on Aṅgulimāla by a frenzied mob, the murders of Moggallāna and Āryadeva, anti-Buddhist crusades of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śaṃkarācārya, and an attempt by brāhmaṇas not only to burn the pavilion where Xuanzang was to be honoured by king Harṣavardhana but also to kill pro-Buddhist Harṣavardhana

himself, are cited as important examples in support of such an hypothesis. The description of the Buddha in some of the Purāṇas as a grand seducer who brought the *asuras* to their ruin and the view in the *Yājñavalkya* that a bhikkhu in yellow robes was an ill omen, are further quoted as examples of the contempt in which the brāhmaṇas held the Buddhists.

There is no doubt that there were occasions when Buddhist monks were held in ridicule. But stray examples quoted in support of Brāhmaṇical enmity and persecution certainly do not warrant that Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism had turned itself on Buddhism lock, stock, and barrel. Most of the evidence presented in support of such arguments must be seen as questionable, *ad hominem*, and meretricious besides being downright communal. The wrangles between the followers of the Buddha and the followers of various sects of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism appear more like internal petty altercations within a religious system rather than frenzied communal riots. The Brāhmaṇical hostility appears to have been altogether at a different level. The malevolence, having an intellectual flavour *uber alles*, appears to have been directed primarily at the monastic movement and to some extent at the comparative opulence of the monasteries. Early Buddhist sources do not refer to any persecution nor do they betray any feelings of mutual animosity contiguous to a holy war. The Buddha made respectful reference to brāhmaṇas who observed their vows. He was critical of only sham brāhmaṇas, i.e., those brāhmaṇas who claimed to be brāhmaṇas merely on the basis of birth. In fact, he classed the worthy *śramaṇas* with the brāhmaṇas. To the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu followers Buddhism was a mere sect within their religious system and, from their point of view, the bickering between the two must be seen as an internal affair. The murder of Moggallāna was an individual act of crime. Similarly, the assault on Aṅgulimāla had no religious motive behind it. Śaṃkarācārya may not have been exactly a friend of Buddhism to the last extremity, still no special animosity is betrayed against the Buddhists in the writings attributed to him. Though some

aspects of the philosophy of Buddhism, especially its atheism and their dress or shaven-heads, may have often been the subjects of bitter ridicule, it is not possible to find reliable evidence of any spirit of fanatical fury or hatred in the sources.

Indian history does not bear out the fact of a continued and organized persecution as the state policy of any ruling dynasty so as to exterminate an established religion. On the other hand, even from purely epigraphical evidence one can make out numerous instances of tolerance of Buddhism by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu rulers or of reverence to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu deities by Buddhists. A glimpse into the Gupta period may be illuminating as it is generally held as the *belle époque* of Brāhmaṇical revival. Āmrakārdava, a Buddhist general of many victories in the service of Candragupta II, in his grant to an Ārya-saṃgha at Kākaṇāḍaboṭa of Sāñcī, pronounces the guilt of the slaughter of a cow or a brāhmaṇa on anyone who would disturb it. This shows that the mental background of a Buddhist in the matter of taboos, inhibitions, and sins did not differ much from that of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. Harṣavardhana, who is sometimes criticised for following a policy of discrimination in favour of Buddhism, pays homage to Śiva in his own book *Ratnāvalī*.

Had the Buddha been hated by the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu society, the same society would not have accepted him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* invokes the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu for the protection of the world from sinners and not for deluding people to their ruin as in the *Viṣṇu*, *Agni*, and *Matsya Purāṇas*. The *Varāha Purāṇa* also does not refer to the Buddha in any deprecating sense, but he is adored simply as the god of beauty. It cannot be denied that some Purāṇas mention the Buddha as the grand seducer and the *Yājñavalkya* considers the sight of a monk with yellow robes as an execrable augury, but this kind of attitude was not always one-sided. The Buddhists too tried to show different Brāhmaṇical deities in bad light. For instance, the Siddhas are expected to be served in heaven by Hari as their gatekeeper. Each of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva

is stigmatized as Māra or the seducer in Buddhist literature. But even in such cases it cannot be said with certainty that similes such as these smack of any sectarian disdain. They are more reflective of the period's peculiar fondness for grandiloquence and extravagant exaggeration than anything else. In spite of some stray incidents resulting from the heat of sectarian rivalry here and there, there are no reliable examples of any crusades or holy wars. Buddhism had neither been conceived by the Buddha as a proselytizing religion nor had it attained any such success in India that it might have posed any danger to the very survival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. On the whole, it is not easy to find any example of Brāhmaṇical hostility towards supporters of Buddhism. The missionary zeal of Aśoka too had no semblance of bitterness. The Buddhist challenge to thought was answered primarily on an intellectual plane and the buck seems to have stopped there.

3. *The Question of Persecution by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu Kings and Withdrawal of Royal Patronage*

Some scholars like D.P. Chattopadhyaya, on the basis of information provided by Xuanzang, Tāranātha, and Buddhist texts such as the *Vibhāṣā*, the *Divyāvadāna*, and the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, have proposed that the decline of Buddhism took place because of the withdrawal of patronage and systematic policies of persecution by Brāhmaṇical kings such as Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Śaśāṅka. Thus, it has been pointed out, for instance, that after the end of the Mauryan rule, Buddhism lost not only the royal patronage that it had enjoyed under kings such as Aśoka, but as a result of the persecution by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (c. 184–48 BCE) it also lost most of what it had gained earlier. According to the *Divyāvadāna* and the Tibetan historian Tāranātha, Buddhism became extinct in the north as a result of the campaigns of Puṣyamitra during the course of which he is reported to have burnt down numerous Buddhist monasteries and ordered the killing of a number of learned monks. His declaration to award anybody with one hundred *dīnāras* who would bring

him the head of a *śramaṇa* is particularly cited by some scholars as an example of the degree of hatred with which he treated Buddhism. Another king, Śaśāṅka (seventh century CE), the king of Gauḍa, is viewed in Buddhist literature as possibly the worst persecutor and enemy of Buddhism who apparently spared no efforts to snuff life out of Buddhism. In this regard, Xuanzang is often quoted: “Śaśāṅka-rājā having destroyed the religion of Buddha, the members of the priesthood were dispersed, and for many years driven away.”

Many Indologists have expressed scepticism about the veracity of the Buddhist legends relating to the persecution of Buddhism by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga. It has been suggested that though Śuṅgas, particularly Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, may have been staunch adherents of orthodox Brāhmaṇism, they do not appear to have been as intolerant as some Buddhist texts have shown them to be. The testimony of the *Divyāvadāna* appears doubtful not only because it is chronologically far removed from the Śuṅgas but also because at that time *dīnāra* coins were not prevalent. There is no evidence to show that any of the Mauryan kings discriminated against Brāhmaṇism. Aśoka, the most popular Mauryan king, did not appear to have any vulgar ambition of exalting his own religion “by showing up the false gods” that had been hitherto worshipped in Jambudvīpa. Thus, the hypothesis of a Brāhmaṇical reaction under Puṣyamitra loses much of its *raison d’être*. The policy of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga appears to have been tolerant enough for the simple reason that if he were against the Buddhists, he would have dismissed his Buddhist ministers. Besides, there is overwhelming evidence to show that Buddhism actually prospered during the reign of the Śuṅgas. On the whole, it cannot be overlooked that the well-known Buddhist monuments of Sāñcī and Bhārhut came into existence during the Śuṅga period. Further, the Sri Lankan chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa* admits the existence of numerous monasteries in Bīhar, Avadha, Malwa, and surrounding areas during the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (c. 101 – 77 BCE) which is synchronous with the later Śuṅga period. Thus, allegations made in the *Divyāvadāna*

and by Tāranātha do not appear to be substantiated by ground realities.

It may not be possible to deny the fact that Puṣyamitra showed no favour to the Buddhists, but it is not certain that he persecuted them. The only thing that can be said with certainty on the basis of the stories told in the Buddhist texts about him is that he may have withdrawn royal patronage from the Buddhist institutions. This change of circumstance under his reign might have led to discontent among the Buddhists. It seems that as a consequence of this shifting of patronage from Buddhism to Brāhmanical-Hinduism, the Buddhists became politically active against him and sided with his enemies, the Indo-Greeks. This might have incited him to put them down with a heavy hand. Moreover, in some localities of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga's kingdom, monasteries may have been pillaged in which the complicity of the local governors cannot be ruled out. K.P. Jayaswal has referred to another interesting aspect of the declaration of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga which was made at Śākala, the capital and base of Menander. The fact that such a fervid declaration was made not only at a place which was far removed from the centre of the Śuṅga regime but also in the capital city of his arch enemies, points to reasons motivated by political considerations. Thus, it would be fair to say that wherever the Buddhists did not or could not ally themselves with the invading Indo-Greeks, Puṣyamitra did not beleaguer them. In any case, after the end of the Śuṅga dynasty, Buddhism found congenial environment under the Kuṣāṇas and Śakas and it may be reasonable to assume that it did not suffer any real setback during the Śuṅga reign even if one could see some neglect or selective persecution of Buddhists.

In the case of Śaśāṅka, it has been pointed out that to consider him a persecutor of Buddhism would amount to simplistic understanding of history. A certain measure of proneness to exaggeration may be natural in Xuanzang who not only makes no secret of his fierce allergy to non-believers but also had Śaśāṅka's arch enemy Harṣavardhana for his patron. The Buddhist stories cannot really be given credence without any

independent testimony. The reason for this, as pointed out by R.C. Mitra, is that such stories rest upon “the sole evidence of Buddhist writers who cannot, by any means, be regarded as unbiased or unprejudiced, at least in any matter which either concerned Śāśāṅka or adversely affected Buddhism.” Moreover, Xuanzang’s own observation that in Kāṇasuvārṇa, the capital city of Śāśāṅka, there were ten Buddhist monasteries with over 2,000 monks, contradicts the fact that he was a bigot and persecutor of Buddhism. In all probability, his ill-feeling towards Buddhism arose out of the fact that the Buddhists of some places, especially Magadha, who enjoyed considerable political clout, may have helped Harṣavardhana against him. As a consequence of this, he may have felt the need to punish them in such an oppressive manner. Thus, as pointed out by B.P. Sinha, the expulsion of the pro-Buddhist Maukharis from Magadha by the Brāhmaṇical Gauḍas seems to have made Śāśāṅka unpopular with the powerful Buddhists of Magadha, and “the uprooting of the Bodhi Tree may have been an economic move against the Buddhist hierarchy of Magadha,” as the Bodhi Tree was by now attracting hugely lucrative presents from all over the Buddhist world. But a foreign religious scholar such as Xuanzang believing, consciously or unconsciously, the actions of Śāśāṅka to be religious fanaticism is understandable. As Śāśāṅka’s acts of persecution were all committed away from his own kingdom, it may be argued that his object was not so much to extirpate Buddhism as to make a political statement before his own Buddhist subjects. Still, making allowance for Xuanzang’s natural bias against Śāśāṅka, the whole episode can hardly be dismissed as mere malicious agitprop. However, at the same time, it cannot be denied that whatever might have been the motive and the measure of his persecution, its effect was not disastrous for Buddhism whether inside his kingdom or outside it. On the whole, tolerant pluralism of the populace and neutrality of the state towards different religions worked quite well during the ancient and medieval period of Indian history.

There being no concept of a “state religion” in India, it would be difficult to assign any perceptible damage occurring to any religion as a consequence of the withdrawal of patronage by the rulers. Moreover, it does not appear that in any period of the history of ancient India, the saṃgha thrived anywhere merely on royal patronage or declined just because such patronage was withdrawn. Most of the Buddhist monasteries had not only humble origins but were also built in stages. They were mostly built by wealthy lay supporters. The fact that Jainism survived under identical circumstances and at a time when Buddhism was declining, also proves that withdrawal of royal patronage could not have resulted in the decline of Buddhism.

4. Sectarianism and the Rise of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna

W.P. Wassilieff was of the opinion that bitter discussions within the saṃgha were responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India. It was pointed out by Charles Eliot, L. de la Vallée Poussin, Sylvain Lévi, and R.C. Mitra that discipline, which had begun to relax with the rise of divergent schools, was gravely endangered when Mahāyāna opened the gates of the saṃgha to vulgar practices and began to admit lay men on equal terms with the monks. L.M. Joshi also believed that Mahāyāna was responsible for qualitative decay and according to him, “the abuses of Vajrayāna perhaps occupy the foremost place.” However, internal bickering as well as sectarian divisions and rivalries do not appear to have caused any damage to Buddhism. On the contrary, Buddhism being non-centralized, the emergence of numerous sects should actually be seen as an indication of both intellectual and spiritual vigour. Buddhist sectarianism was largely confined to interpretation of texts. All schools more or less accepted the validity of the basic Tipiṭaka, shared an almost identical code of conduct, and moved easily among each other’s communities. Although there were many monasteries exclusively occupied by the monks of Mahāyāna or Theravāda, or by monks of a particular sect, coexistence of different sects within the

Buddhist saṃgha seems to have been a normal practice. Then there were also a large number of monasteries which were not exclusive to any particular sect and where monks belonging to different sects lived together. It may also be pointed out here that the divisiveness associated with sectarianism was much more severe among the Jainas but did not lead to their decline.

Though it cannot be denied that Tantra was sometimes followed in a degenerate form in Buddhism, adoption of Tantric practices does not appear to have caused any damage for the simple fact that Tantra in its Brāhmaṇical-Hindu form has enjoyed great popularity and apparently has not contributed to the demise of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in any observable way. Though the development of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna did not weaken Buddhism as such, damage appears to have been done at another level. It ripped those walls apart which had kept Buddhism and Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism apart. As the cohabitation between the two began, an elitist, collapsible, emaciated, and diminutive Buddhism was hardly a match to the mass-based, overarching, reinvigorated, and multifaceted Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

5. *Attacks by Arabs and Turks*

V.A. Smith, H.P. Shastri, H.M. Elliot, Henry Cousens, B.R. Ambedkar, and Koenraad Elst have suggested that “Islamic” attacks were primarily responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India. In fact, there is sufficient literary and archaeological evidence to show that some important Buddhist *viḥāras* were attacked and destroyed by Arab and Turkish invaders, known by the blanket name of Turuṣka or Turk. For instance, the monasteries at Sāranātha, Somapura, Odantapurī, Vikramaśīlā, and Nālandā suffered massive onslaughts at the hands of these marauders. A Tibetan monk, Dharmasvāmin, who paid a visit to Nālandā towards the end of the twelfth century, has given a graphic eyewitness account of one such attack. According to him, the libraries had perished and he could not get a scrap of manuscript to copy. According to the *Tabakat-i-Nāsirī*, the

“brāhmaṇas with shaven heads” were slaughtered to a man, so that none survived to explain the contents of a large number of books that were found at the Odantapurī *mahāvihāra*. Buddhist monasteries being largely located in the vicinity of urban centres appear to have become easy targets of attacks. Fearing the Turkish terror, many of the surviving monks dispersed and fled with a few bundles of holy texts concealed under their robes and found security in the more hospitable countries such as Nepal, Tibet, and China. Of the remaining monks, some converted to Islam, and others tried to manage with whatever remained. In many cases, monastic lands were confiscated and granted to Turkish occupants.

At least, some of these examples of heavy-handed treatment by the Arab and Turkish invaders cannot be denied. Some of the *viḥāras* appear to have been literally wiped out of existence by these invaders. However, calling these invaders Muslim amounts to communalizing the issue. They were simply invaders of Arabic and Turkish backgrounds and religion did not have anything to do with their attacks. Moreover, it needs to be remembered that the attacks were neither organized nor systematic. Interestingly, the Islamic sources do not talk much about such attacks and such a silence does not necessarily emanate from a motive to hide. The reason for this is that, such methods of extirpation of the *kāfirs* being considered meritorious acts, the Muslim chroniclers would not have hesitated to mention them. Nevertheless, it was to be expected that such occasions of political uncertainty were accompanied, as a matter of routine, by some amount of slaughter and forced conversions. In some cases, there is also evidence to show that these Central Asian tribesmen being ignorant of edifices in their desert homelands, mistook the Buddhist *viḥāras* for military strongholds. At least in some cases, this may partially account for the enormity of the massacres. Another reason for attacks by the plundering hordes was the enormous wealth accumulated by these monasteries. Moreover, according to R.M. Eaton, temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority and Turkish invaders, while attempting to plant

their own rule in early medieval India, were basically following and continuing the established patterns already followed by both Muslim and non-Muslim rulers in India. More importantly, according to him, acts of temple desecration typically occurred on the cutting edge of a moving military frontier. Enforcement of Islam through the use of state machinery does not appear to have happened in India. Furthermore, as Islam had hardly any presence in south India, it is difficult to explain the decline of Buddhism happening over there as a consequence of the "Islamic" attacks.

There is sufficient evidence to show that Buddhism actually survived the Turkish conquest and existed rather precariously for a few centuries afterwards in parts of eastern and southern India. A few sporadic and strictly localized attempts at revival of Buddhism also seem to have been made here and there. Some new monasteries are also known to have been built and a few old ones repaired. Evidence is also available of a few new endowments having been made to some of these monasteries where some teaching and learning had been taking place. But, as suggested by D.P. Chattopadhyaya, the million-dollar question arises as to how a creed, so long as it possessed any inner vitality, could become nearly extinct from such a vast country only with the fall of a few monasteries situated somewhere in Bihar. Similarly, P.S. Jaini expresses surprise as to why the Buddhists, like the Jainas and the Brāhmanical-Hindus, were not able to regroup and rebuild once things had settled down after the initial disruption. Thus, though it cannot be denied that the Arab and Turkish attacks were quite ruthless in some ways, those attacks cannot be held as *raison le plus décisif* of the decline of Buddhism in India. The harsh truth is that by the time the Turkish invaders descended upon the plains of the Madhyadeśa, Buddhism had gone past its glory. Moreover, as Buddhism did not have any roots among the rural masses, the monks were not in a position to disperse in the countryside and take refuge in loose and scattered groups among the rural masses. If this could be possible, like the Jainas, they could have been able to reorganize themselves later at a suitable

time. Thus, the impact of the Arab and Turkish onslaught on Buddhist institutions may have worked at the most only as a *coup de grâce* in some parts of India.

6. Role of *Şūfism*

It has been sometimes suggested that *Şūfism* played a key role in the conversion of Indian Buddhists to Islam. Well-documented research suggests that a great majority of the Indian Muslims are descendants of converts in whose conversion *Şūfī* saints played an important role, though largely an indirect one. But these conversions were from among the tribal populations and the Brāhmaṇical-Hindus. Buddhism had become completely marginalized and insignificant in most parts of India when the *Şūfis* began their activities. Most of the conversions to Islam in the Indian subcontinent took place in Pakistan, Kashmir, and Bangladesh. The conversions of Buddhists to Islam in Sind and the rest of Pakistan took place before the *Şūfis* began their work in India. In Kashmir, majority of the Buddhists had already been assimilated into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism when the *Ṛṣis* and *Şūfis* began their five centuries-long activities. In eastern India, especially territories covered by the present day Bangladesh, when Islam arrived Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism were still in the process of detribalizing the indigenous populations through their Brāhmaṇization and Buddhacization and were competing with each other in a manner that was not exactly very friendly. In fact, the case of eastern India appears to be a unique one in the sense that this was perhaps the only region in India where Buddhism did not play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. However, Buddhism was influenced grievously by local cults and Tantrism and was largely assimilated into Islam as an indirect consequence of the peaceful activities of the *Şūfis* as well as through acculturation and assimilation spread over several generations.

Several commonalities in terms of both metaphysical doctrines and practical training provided common grounds to

Şūfī mysticism and the remnants of Buddhism. However, as pointed out above, the role of the Şūfīs in proselytization was rather indirect in the sense that such commonalities and the work as well as life-style of the Şūfīs went a long way in gaining Indian people's sympathy towards Islam. Otherwise, the Şūfīs were much happier when they helped one who was already a Muslim to become a better Muslim than when they saw a non-Muslim become a Muslim. The most original contribution made by the Şūfīs was that they furnished Islam's philosophical point of contact with religions of Indic origin. It was through such contacts, fostered by the simplicity and broad humanism of the Şūfīs that Islam obtained its largest number of free converts and it is in this sense that they may be considered missionaries. In India, as pointed out by Trimingham, Islam was "a holy-man Islam" where the Şūfīs acquired an aura of holiness. It was this aura of holiness which attracted Indians to the Şūfīs, rather than formal Islam. It is not correct to say that Islam was a champion of egalitarianism, or for that matter, of the cause of so-called suppressed people of India. Nor is it correct to say Buddhists were attracted towards Islam because they saw Islamic egalitarianism as being compatible with the Buddha's views on caste system and other forms of inequality. There is neither any evidence of a direct assault either from the state or the Muslims upon the caste system nor is there any evidence of a revolt from within. Irfan Habib and R.M. Eaton have rejected the "religion of social liberation" theory on the ground that not only the Muslim intellectuals had not stressed the Islamic ideal of social equality but also because the converted communities had failed to improve their status in the social hierarchy. However, the label of being a Muslim may have offered to some people the opportunities that were particularly getting diminished within the non-Muslim environment. The pursuit of patronage is one of the most cited incentives to religio-cultural conversion. A person directly dependent on the state for a living might see it beneficial to join the cultural group. Thus, converting to Islam enhanced one's chances of advancement in the job. Muslim control of

commercial activity also resulted in Islamization. A businessman could feel that being a Muslim would not only lead to better contacts and cooperation with other Muslim businessmen both within the country and overseas, but he would also enjoy the benefits of Islamic laws that regulated commerce and also the amiable conditions extended by Muslim officials to their co-religionists. However, majority consisted of commoners who experienced the gradual impact of Islamic acculturation on their social life through their contact with Muslim settlers or the *Şūfis*. Syncretism appears as a crucial stage rather than as the culmination of the process vis-à-vis Islam. Islamization took place most profoundly (and irrevocably) among the succeeding generation, since the convert's children in principle were raised within the father's new community, instead of his original one.

An interesting feature about the spread of Islam in India was that those regions of eastern India where Islam gained heavily were considerably free of Brāhmaṇical influence. The activities of the *Şūfis*, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism's revival movements such as Advaita, and the rise of the syncretic Śakti movement, contributed significantly to the realignment of beliefs in Bengal. In such an environment Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism to a small extent and Turkish tribes to a greater extent drew not only the indigenous masses to swell their ranks but also prospered at the cost of Buddhism which had totally fallen to pieces by this time. Islam essentially had an urban character till it reached Bengal where it moved into the countryside. This may also explain its spread among the tribal people and rural communities in Bengal. Also it is noteworthy that the upper caste Hindus due to conceited pride in the purity and hence superiority of their religion were more likely to resist conversion to a religion based in the Judeo-Christian tradition in sharp contrast to low caste Brāhmaṇical-Hindus, Buddhists, and tribal people who were less likely to put any mechanism in place against the winds of Islamic acculturation. It has been suggested that some elements among these segments of the

Bengali society looked rather agreeably towards the successes of the Turks in Bengal. In fact, there is sufficient evidence to show that Buddhists in Bengal regarded Muslims as their well-wishers vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇical-Hindus and as pointed out by I.H. Qureshi “Such sentiments themselves constitute almost a halfway house towards the acceptance of Islam.”

The pantheistic mysticism of the Upaniṣads and the devotional mysticism of the Bhakti and Sahajiyā movements based in Vaiṣṇavism presented Ṣūfism with a golden opportunity for rapid growth and dissemination in India. Moreover, Ṣūfism, as transformed in India, took on the role of a bridge-builder between Arabic and Turkic notions of polity, culture, and religion on the one side and their Indic counterparts on the other. Such an attitude must have further helped Ṣūfī ideas to gain wide popularity by capturing the attention of both the masses and elites. Such ideas, thus introduced, got soon assimilated with the prevalent Sahajiyā ideas and the result of this amalgamation was the Bāuls of Bengal. *Murshidā*-songs of the Bāuls are a good example of the commingling of the Indian spirit with the spirit of Ṣūfism. The religious contents of Ṣūfism were in no way foreign to the mass-mind of India; it is for this reason that Ṣūfism became easily acceptable to the masses. In the long run, the *dargāhs* and *khānaqāhs* played a seminal role in proselytization as their appeal went far beyond the divisive walls of caste and creed. They acted as an effective syncretic force integrating the non-Muslims into the Islamic community in a land that was characterized by multifariousness in terms of religion, belief, and custom. Ṣūfīs were the natural religious guides of the people whom men and women from cross-sections of the society solicited for spiritual guidance and worldly advice. Their miraculous powers and social values attracted non-Muslims towards them. The Ṣūfī mystics played an extremely seminal role in reaching past the inhibitions and prejudices and building bridges of communication and understanding between conflicting faiths. The anti-particularist, anti-clerical, and anti-ritualistic thrust of the teachings of the Ṣūfī poets laid the foundations of bringing non-Muslims into the

Islamic fold. In this way, social interaction between the Šūfis and the local population worked towards slow and steady conversion to Islam.

7. *Revival of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Rise of Bhakti Movement*

From the time of king Aśoka onwards institutional Buddhism came to acquire the character of a pan-Indian and politically significant religion. Consequently, the Buddha and Buddhism came to enjoy a socio-political status that the Brāhmaṇical community simply could not ignore and its response was the formulation of a well-thought out two-pronged agenda. One, to be purposely friendly and assimilative towards those ideas of Buddhist thought which had become socio-religiously common-sensical, and two, to slowly and steadily, but systematically, subvert institutional Buddhism. This can be seen in the shifting of the theories and political orientation of kingship from Buddhist to Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva rationales from the eighth century CE onwards. As suggested by R.B. Inden, before the eighth century, the Buddha was accorded the position of a universal deity and the ceremonies by which a king attained status were elaborate donative ceremonies entailing gifts to Buddhist monks and the setting up of a symbolic Buddha in a stūpa. This was so even for imperial dynasties that had strong associations with the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods Viṣṇu and Śiva. However, this pattern changed in the eighth century when one of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods usurped the place of the Buddha as the supreme, imperial deity. The change was marked by the building of the first monumental Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples and the elevation of either Viṣṇu or Śiva (or Sūrya, the Sun) to the status of supreme deity (*parameśvara*, *maheśvara*), equivalent to the Cosmic Man by relegating the Buddha to a secondary position. Now as the Buddha was replaced by one of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods at the imperial centre and top of the cosmo-political system, the image or symbol of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu god came to be housed in a monumental temple and accorded increasingly elaborate imperial

-style *pūjā*. R.B. Inden points out that in its Vaiṣṇava garb, the developing ideology of Indian theories of kingship was undergoing a decisive turn which also generated a major change in the manner in which the Buddha and Buddhism came to be regarded from within a newly regenerated Brāhmaṇical and Bhakti framework. According to him, within this reinvigorated Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tradition dominated by the Bhakti cults of Viṣṇu (and in some cases Śiva), the king was considered partially descended from the great God Viṣṇu, the preserver of dharma, the natural and moral order, and himself a form of the Cosmic Overlord. Like the king, the Buddha was also accorded the status of an *avatāra* within this developing Brāhmaṇical ideological scheme. This *avatāra* device of Viṣṇu was an ingenious and convenient means used to assimilate and then to subordinate the figure of the Buddha and put him in his Brāhmaṇical place thereby undermining his historicity by making him an appendage of the Vaiṣṇava mythic hierarchy. Interestingly, when one looks into how and to what extent was the Buddha ritually included within the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tradition, there is not much to find. Cultic veneration of the Buddha within Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism is virtually missing.

The growth of Mahāyāna and devotionalistic elements in Buddhism completely transformed the original atheistic Buddhism into a powerful theological religion. As a consequence of this development, Mahāyāna devotionalism came to embrace a paraphernalia consisting of faith, devotion, prayer, worship, surrender, and the consequent salvation by grace. It was centred around the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, especially around Amitābha, the eternal God of Sukhāvatī paradise where the devotees could go through his blessings and through the help of holy saints. Now, the historical Buddha became fully metamorphosed into a saviour God, the eternal and immutable Lord of beings, unborn creator of the world, and the one who bestows good luck and fortune on all beings. At the same time, the Bhakti movement imbibed from Buddhism its devotionalism, its sense of the transitoriness of the world, its conceptions of human

worthlessness, its suppression of desires and asceticism as also its ritual, the worship of idols and stūpas or *lingams*, temples, pilgrimages, fasts and monastic rules, love and compassion for animals, and its idea of the spiritual equality of all castes. Such developments brought Buddhism within the striking range of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and as a result, Bhakti movement was able to supervene upon Buddhism to a great degree. The Buddhist deities were worshipped by the non-Buddhists despite obligations to their own sectarian cults. As lack of clear institutional identity vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism was a major drawback of Buddhism in terms of its long term survival, this problem was further aggravated by the development and growth of Bhakti movement. Thus, with the fully grown and well-settled Bhakti element in the two traditions, theological and devotional ideas and even names came to be used almost indistinguishably. This clearly marked an ultimate triumph of the Bhakti cult over Buddhism. Thus, in this sense, it may be said that the Bhakti movement gave the finishing touches to the ultimate assimilation of the remnants of Buddhism into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

It is worth noting that though both Buddhism and Jainism faced an intense challenge from Bhakti movement from about the sixth century onwards, Jainism came out almost unscathed. But, as observed by P.S. Jaini, the Buddhists must be held responsible for having failed “to respond meaningfully to the threat posed by the waves of *bhakti* that swept across India.” As pointed out by R. Champakalakshmi, the *bhakti* ideal had emanated in an urban context of conflict for socio-political dominance. This appears to have taken away a large chunk of the socio-political sheen of the urban-based Buddhism. The Bhakti cult achieved tremendous popularity through its association with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, weaning away some of the lay supporters and nearly all the patrons of the flatfooted Buddhists. In fact, with the depiction of the Buddha in the *Mahābhārata*, certain Purāṇas, and Jayadeva’s *Gītagovinda* as just another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, Buddhism had already been brought within the reach of overarching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. The Buddhists were not

perhaps conscious of the grave danger that this development posed because they did not make any attempt to either assimilate the popular Brāhmaṇical-Hindu deities into Buddhist mythology or to refute any notion of the Buddha as an *avatāra*. However, the Jainas responded to these very pressures in a remarkably different manner and successfully repulsed the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu advances. They rebuffed the Brāhmaṇical insinuations that Ṛṣabha, their first Tīrthaṅkara, was an incarnation of Viṣṇu by questioning the very “divine” status of Viṣṇu himself, by taking resort to censuring the unethical deeds of the *avatāras* in particular. To top it all, they created full-length alternate versions of both the epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, depicting Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in them as worldly Jaina heroes subject to the retribution of Jaina ethical laws. Thus, the Rāma of the Jainas does not slaughter Rāvaṇa. This immoral job is assigned to his brother Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma is reborn in heaven for strictly adhering to the principle of *ahiṃsā*. However, the Jainas send Kṛṣṇa to hell as his misdeeds of violence and treachery were unforgivable as per Jaina ethics. In other words, the Jainas managed to outdo the Bhakti movement by adopting its main cult-figures in a uniquely Jaina context as their own. Failure of Indian Buddhism to meet the challenge perhaps can be seen in its inherent “death-wish” syndrome and the lack of the psychology of survival. The prophecy of “decline” is a recurrent theme in Indian Buddhism. Many incidental references in Buddhist literature indicate towards the belief entertained by the Buddhists that the impending end to their faith was unavoidable. The Buddha himself is said to have expressed the view that his religion would last only for one thousand years and that the entry of women would further cut its life-span to half. The idea of imminent decline as part of the cosmic cycle of evolution and devolution is referred to in the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta* and the *Aggañña Suttanta*. Many legends, which were widely current among the Buddhists when Xuanzang visited India, are highly suggestive of the attitude of

helpless defeatism that had overtaken the Buddhists at that time. For instance, he talks about the prophecy of a holy man who left his garment behind saying that the garment would survive as long as Buddhism itself. This garment had already begun to show signs of decay when Xuanzang visited India, thereby indicating the fulfilment of the prophecy at a not too distant future. With a mind-set such as this, no serious effort seems to have been made by the Buddhist saṃgha to either build a mass-base for itself or respond comprehensibly and assiduously to the challenges thrown by over-arching Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

The manner in which the temple-centred Bhakti brought about the metamorphosis of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism in the north was repeated even more vigorously and systematically in the south. Some of the Āḷvār and Nāyanār saints of south India appear to have openly incited their devotees against the Buddhists and their “false” doctrines. Though the hyperbolic language of such rogue saints must be rather seen as an exception in the overall pluralistic and tolerant religious environment of pre-modern India, the Bhakti inspired brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance certainly appears to have succeeded in forming the basis of socio-political power to the complete disadvantage of Buddhism. Royal patronage appears to have accelerated the pace of the Bhakti movement with a temple building spree first under the Pallavas, and then under the Pāṇṭyas, Ceras, and Coḷas of the post-Śaṅgam period. Those kings and chieftains who actively participated in this endeavour and supported Brāhmaṇical-Hindu groups became more powerful than those who did not. Thus, Bhakti helped the rulers to consolidate the power of monarchy as an institution. Under the leadership of the brāhmaṇa priests, not only were fertile river valleys and forest lands brought under cultivation through the successful mobilization of indigenous people as tenants and temple servants but also a communication system with the marketplaces that linked south with other parts of India was developed. Consequently, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism with its institutional base in the temple-centred agrarian

settlements grew into a dynamic and progressive force whereas Buddhism still continued to be urban and elitistic. In time, being a member of the Bhakti movement whether one was a king or an ordinary person, ensured a special status through proximity to gods and “gods of the earth.” One’s status arose in proportion to one’s readiness to submit to the brāhmaṇa oligarchy. In this way, if kings derived greater socio-political power, brāhmaṇas themselves acquired not only better protection but popularity through this alliance of the sacred-thread and the throne. The mechanism of social power worked in promoting simultaneously the power of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu kings and the prosperity of Brāhmaṇa settlements. In fact, the ideology of Bhakti acted as a unifying force by bringing together kings, brāhmaṇa priests, and the common masses to the disadvantage of the non-Vedic religions. The Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints received royal patronage, performed miracles, healed the sick, clashed with Jainas and Buddhists in open debates and defeated them. The hyperbole used in such debates sometimes gives the impression of severe acrimony.

It is interesting to note that though guilds of traders flourished in south India, yet merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans are conspicuous by their absence in playing any prominent role in the Bhakti movement. This may be explained by the fact that whereas Bhakti movement had an agrarian-feudal bias, Buddhism had its supporters primarily among the mercantile community based in urban centres. Thus, it is not improbable that the rivalry between the non-Vedic creeds and the Bhakti movement reflects, at least implicitly, the conflict for socio-political dominance between the landowning classes and the trading classes. Notably, in some of the coastal towns and ports, Buddhism survived and even worked as an *avant garde* instrument of legitimizing trade ventures under royal patronage till the end of the Coḷa period in the thirteenth century CE.

8. Saṃgha-Laity Relationship, Decline of Urbanization, and Evolving Material Milieu

It has been pointed out by scholars such as Jacobi and Conze that Buddhism regarded the laity basically as outsiders and the precarious relationship between the laity and the monk order accounted for the disappearance of Buddhism. It is true that the Buddha was not interested in cultivating a community of lay followers for whom his monks and nuns would have to act as priests and preside over their various life-cycle rituals. In fact, Buddhism in India never made an attempt to create a community of lay supporters who could exclusively be called followers of the Buddha and none else. They were no more than mere unattached well-wishers. Thus, it must be accepted that the lack of lay aficionados was a major drawback of Buddhism.

As Buddhism originated and prospered in an urban milieu, with the onset of crisis in urbanization during the post-Kuṣāṇa period, the situation developed completely to the disadvantage of Buddhism. Buddhist monasteries were no longer attracting generous donations and political patronage on the same scale as before and between CE 300–600 Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples emerged as the focus of social and economic activity and the first land-grants were made to them. They began to attract more and more land grants and played an important role in the consolidation and expansion of agrarian settlements. Loss of support due to the dispersal of merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans led to the dwindling in the numbers of Buddhist monasteries as well as those who aspired to adopt renunciation in the Buddhist saṃgha. In such a newly emerged situation, the saṃgha became concentrated in fewer and fewer monasteries. As time went by and as more and more urban settlements decayed, the number of Buddhist monasteries became reduced significantly. Though some support may still have accrued here and there from the few surviving or newly emerged urban settlements to a small number of Buddhist

monasteries, the number of traditional supporters of Buddhism became grievously small. In order to survive in a situation of dwindling traditional support and the rising tide of rejuvenated Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, the few surviving Buddhist monasteries began to tune themselves to the emerging feudal situation by adopting new roles for themselves through the practice of self-supporting economies based on land-grants. Further, the saṃgha liberalized learning and opened the doors of its monasteries to secular education so as to make it more effective in debates and disputations. Thus, from the fifth century onwards a number of monasteries began to grow out of their conventional character into fully-grown universities (*mahāvihāras*) of laicized academic learning and scholarship. A major share of the land-grants to these *mahāvihāras* came from their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu patrons who appear to have approached Buddhist deities as if they were Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. One consequence of such a development was that it greatly contributed towards making breaches in the wall that existed between Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples had a clear advantage over *mahāvihāras* in the management of landed estates due to their better knowledge of agriculture (especially rice cultivation) and seasons, and their ingenuity in constructing origin myths and enormous capacity for legitimation, and thus wider socio-political functions. This advantage was manifested in the shift of royal patronage from Buddhism to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sects. Inden attributes this to the better adaptability and resilience of the brāhmaṇas to the situation in terms of their transformation from a sacrificial cult to a gift-receiving sect. Moreover, as pointed out by Hermann Kulke, the *śāstras* allowed the brāhmaṇas, who studied them and commanded “a considerable body of knowledge on state administration and political economy” to become political specialists and work as priests, councillors, administrators, and clerks.

A MODEL FOR DECLINE

Now we move to our million-dollar question. Why did Buddhism decline in India?

The following factors, mostly inherent weaknesses of Indian Buddhism, appear to have collectively caused its decline:

1. Urban character, lack of mass-base, and anti-Buddhist brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance.
2. Inalienable affiliation with and dependence upon mercantile communities for material support.
3. Intellectual snobbery, social aloofness, and lack of interest in cultivating loyal supporters.
4. Death-wish mentality.
5. Overwhelming presence of brāhmaṇical elements in the saṃgha and unwittingly playing second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

1. *Urban Character, Lack of Mass-base, and Anti-Buddhist Brāhmaṇa-Peasant Alliance*

Various studies conducted on the nature of Indian Buddhism overwhelmingly indicate that it was the creation of an urban milieu which found favour only with an urban society and lay supporters of Buddhism were almost entirely urban consisting of merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, artisans, and members of the ruling authority. The inclination of the Buddhist monasteries to be elitistic rather than mass-based had kept the rural masses alienated from Buddhism resulting in negligible support in the countryside. As time went by, isolation from and aversion to serve the rural communities and lack of interest in winning supporters among them, turned the Buddhist monasteries into some sort of islands. Moreover, considering that only a tiny portion of the Indian society was urban and the fact that supporters and sympathisers of Buddhism were confined

to urban settlements, in numerical terms this support-base was indeed very small. However, when urbanization began to decline in India, Buddhism found its support-base further diminished. Material remains of the urban centres suggest that the decline in urbanization that began during the post-Kuṣāṇa period, became wide spread after the sixth century CE. Consequently, dispersal of urban occupational groups, such as the merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans, leading to loss of material support made the existence of the saṃgha very precarious. This also led to the dwindling in numbers of those who aspired to adopt renunciation in the Buddhist order. Not only that the number of lay supporters of Buddhism became abysmally low but also during times of crises (e.g., during the Turuṣka invasions) the Buddhist monks were left with nowhere to turn for support but run to the neighbouring countries with whatever they could carry on their backs or under their robes. In similar situations, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu and Jaina priests were able to disperse into the countryside where they enjoyed support and were later able to reorganize themselves when the tide ebbed. As a result of the emergent situation, majority of the small monasteries, which formally existed inside or within the vicinity of urban settlements, became either derelict or were abandoned altogether. As the decline of urbanization became widespread, the number of Buddhist monasteries became dangerously low. The few monasteries which managed to survive did so either by receiving land endowments or eked out an existence within or on the periphery of the surviving urban settlements, especially in the coastal regions of peninsular India.

In order to survive in a situation of dwindling traditional support, the monasteries began to tune themselves to the emerging feudal situation giving rise to early medieval monastic landlordism. These began to accept grants of land for religious purposes from the ruling authorities. To sustain support and compete with Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples, Buddhism liberalized learning and opened the doors of its monasteries to secular

education. Consequently, from the fifth century onwards these monasteries began to grow out of their conventional character into centres of laicized academic scholarship whereby learning was made available to all seekers of knowledge, irrespective of religious or sectarian affiliations. One consequence of such a development was that now Buddhism began to make dangerously close calls upon Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. After receiving land-grants some of these monasteries became metamorphosed into *mahāvihāras* and managed not only to attain self-sufficiency but were also able to successfully exploit their niche for extending their power and influence in their respective localities through the ownership of villages, land, cattle, etc. Monasteries such as the Nālandā *mahāvihāra* are said to have got grants of hundreds of villages. As these newly sprung *mahāvihāras* had to manage large pieces of land and a whole lot of the associated paraphernalia, the character of Buddhist monastic institutions underwent a revolutionary change. This phenomenon helped these few *mahāvihāras* to survive and even prosper for a while. However, ultimately they turned out to be poor competitors to their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu counterparts as the latter had many advantages over Buddhist *mahāvihāras* in the management of landed estates. A Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temple ministered to the religious needs of a large village or a populous quarter of a town. As compared to this, a Buddhist monastery had almost nothing to do with the life-cycle rituals of a householder and only served as a centre of intellectual and spiritual inspiration for anyone who wanted it without any reference to caste or creed. Systematically and steadily, the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples, through their better knowledge of agriculture (especially rice cultivation) and seasons, and their ingenuity in constructing origin myths and enormous capacity for legitimation, and thus wider socio-political functions, obtained an advantage over Buddhist *mahāvihāras*. R.B. Inden attributes this to the better adaptability and resilience of the brāhmaṇas to the situation in terms of their transformation from a sacrificial cult to a gift-receiving sect.

Consequently, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism with its institutional base in the temple-centred agrarian settlements grew into a dynamic and progressive force. In other words, the ascendance of the agrarian class and its alliance with Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas during the heydays of the Bhakti movement appears to have tilted the scales against Buddhism. From the eighth century onwards, this advantage of the Bhakti inspired brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance resulting in massive brāhmaṇical-Hindu temple-building can be viewed as manifested in the Buddha being elbowed out either by Viṣṇu or Śiva as the supreme imperial deity.

2. Inalienable Affiliation with and Dependence upon Mercantile Communities for Material Support

Archaeological, epigraphical, and literary evidence indicates unmistakably towards a link between Buddhist *vihāras* and long-distance trade networks of the Northern Highway (*uttarāpatha*) and the Southern Highway (*dakṣiṇāpatha*) which incorporated regional and local micro-networks of individual regions and were connected to overland and maritime routes. The spirit of commerce which cut across social boundaries, dissolved social distinctions, and created new social realities, found its supreme ideological expression in Buddhism and hence facilitated both its spread and sustenance. Thus, it is no surprise that Buddhism retained an enduring appeal to merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans. Symbiotic relationship that existed between Buddhist monastic institutions and trade networks is proved by the fact that these monasteries worked not only as rest-houses for the merchants and traders but also participated in commercial activities including banking, manufacture of goods and their storage. In other words, monastic establishments which were central to the survival of Indian Buddhism, remained inalienably dependent on the highly organized mercantile communities which not only constructed most of the stūpas and provided material support to Buddhist monasteries but also contributed

towards accumulation of wealth in the monasteries. In complete contrast to this, the stronghold of the followers of the Bhakti movement, which had an agrarian-feudal bias, remained in the rural agrarian settlements. The mercantile communities are quite conspicuous by their absence in playing any prominent role in the Bhakti movement. Thus, it is not improbable that the rivalry between the non-Vedic creeds and the Bhakti movement reflects, at least implicitly, the scramble for socio-political dominance between the landowning classes and the mercantile communities. With the decline in trade and the onset of feudalism, agrarian communities which had no sympathy for Buddhism, gained in socio-political importance. Such a development dealt a severe blow to Buddhism.

3. *Intellectual Snobbery, Social Aloofness, and Lack of Interest in Cultivating Loyal Supporters*

Indian Buddhism was merely a monastic religion and the term “Buddhist” did not, on the whole, include lay people and it actually signified only those who had become monks and nuns by renouncing the lives of householders. It is almost impossible to see any complementarity between the Buddhist saṃgha and its lay supporters. As the latter did not form part of the former, the two did not show concern for mutual need to the extent one would have expected from a religious order and its laity. In fact, within the territories covered by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, the conversion of the lay supporters of Buddhism was never either complete or effective. Thus, when a person, say a brāhmaṇa, became a lay-devotee of the Buddha, it only indicated that he expressed his respect to him as a holy man. Remarkably, there is no evidence to prove that such brāhmaṇas, after having adopted Buddhism, ceased to hold the *brahmadeya* lands or gave up being *purohitas*. Similarly, there was absolutely nothing in Buddhism that ever barred its supporters from extending financial or other support to non-Buddhist religious orders or for that matter from

paying respect to the holy persons of those religious orders which from time to time competed with Buddhism for space. A religion, whose clerical order and lay supporters were not fully committed to each other, was bound to remain vulnerable to loss of support and hence, the prospects of an uncertain future.

Adherence to the Buddhist faith did not make it obligatory for the lay supporters to reject their ancestral beliefs or repudiate those religious practices that were customarily performed in their communities. The lay supporters were allowed not only to venerate the deities of their own regions, castes, and choices, but they were also allowed to worship the deities in a manner that they considered appropriate. While formally taking refuge in the Buddha, the dhamma, and the saṃgha, the lay supporters neither committed exclusive allegiance to the three jewels nor were they expected to perform any regular religious service. As correctly pointed out by R.C. Mitra, to a typical lay supporter, the saṃgha was nothing more than a mere adult education class with voluntary attendance. Thus, it would be incorrect to see the so-called *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* as “Buddhist laity” in the technical and practical sense of the term. They were just unattached well-wishers and the support offered by them was merely provisional.

The principal aim of the Buddhist saṃgha was not to tear the Indian population away from its ancestral beliefs and superstitious practices, but to secure for the saṃgha sympathizers and generous donors. The Buddha and his saṃgha always accepted material support without ever considering the sectarian affiliation or motive of the benefactors. They also accepted invitations for meals from any well-wisher or walked into any household to beg for food. The Buddha was not interested in cultivating a community of lay-followers for whom his monks and nuns would have to act as priests and preside over their various life-cycle ceremonies. Thus, Buddhism had neither any aficionados nor was it meant to have any bigoted following. There were no bibliolaters or bible-thumpers in Buddhism. What Buddhism

had created, at best, were fickle-minded lay supporters, a floating element in the vast population which conformed to the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu caste system and followed Brāhmaṇical rites in ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death. Clearly, such an approach was not going to be very helpful to Buddhism in terms of its institutional distinctiveness and perpetual survival. In the long run, this congenital weakness of not having nurtured a loyal laity made Indian Buddhism a potentially failed religion.

For the mere fact that Indian Buddhism was an urban religion, by any reckoning, Buddhist lay supporters could not have formed more than a tiny portion of the entire Indian population. On the basis of the donative inscriptions at places such as Sāñcī, it has been sometimes suggested that Buddhism had a massive following in India. This is totally misleading and there is no such evidence in the donative inscriptions. There is certainly no reason to believe that Indian Buddhism was ever able to find supporters outside the community of urban elites consisting of mercantile and ruling classes. Moreover, lay supporters' allegiance was more often than not towards individual monks and nuns rather than Buddhism as such. This meant that an affiliation with Buddhism came to an end when a particular monk/nun died or moved away. It is hard to find single-minded allegiance towards Buddhism either running through a family over several generations or the whole family owing allegiance collectively. The lay supporters of Buddhism did not have particularly much at stake in its survival and thus, such followers did not suffer from any guilty conscience while switching loyalties in favour of one of the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sects.

4. *Death-wish Mentality*

The theme of an inevitable end of the dharma appears to have played an *avant garde* role in the formation of the Buddhist psyche. References are not wanting in Buddhist literature indicating the belief entertained by Buddhists that their faith was neither aeternum nor aeonic and that the impending end to

their faith was unavoidable. In fact, the prophecy of “decline” forms a recurrent theme in Indian Buddhism and there appeared to have been a sort of death-wish, so to say. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* refers, for instance, to the decline of moral life resulting in the anticipated collapse of the religion. The Buddha himself is said to have expressed the view that his religion would last only one thousand years and that the entry of women would further cut its life-span to half. Both the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta* and the *Aggañña Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* refer to the idea of imminent decline as part of the cosmic cycle of evolution and devolution spanning vast expanses of time. One can discern a clear sense of despair in Xuanzang’s *Da Tang Xiyu Ji*, which he unmistakably conveys to the mind of his readers. He gives examples of the different legends which were widely current when he visited India. These legends are highly suggestive of the attitude of helpless defeatism that had overtaken the psyche of Indian Buddhism at that time. He talks about the prophecy of a holy man who left his garment behind saying that the garment would survive as long as Buddhism itself. This garment had already begun to show signs of decay when Xuanzang visited India, thereby indicating the fulfilment of the prophecy at a not too distant future. Xuanzang also relates the story of a stūpa. According to this story, the Buddha had prophesied that the stūpa would be burnt seven times and seven times would it be rebuilt and then Buddhism would come to an end. When Xuanzang came to India, it had already been burned down four times. At Bodhagayā, Xuanzang saw the statue of Avalokiteśvara which was destined to sink completely in the ground with the disappearance of Buddhism. He found it sunk up to the chest and estimated that it would be completely buried in about 150 to 200 years. Again, amidst the bustle and grandeur of Nālandā, Xuanzang was haunted by a prophetic dream. He foresaw the evil days that would follow the death of king Harṣavardhana, when a conflagration would devastate the celebrated centre of Buddhism and the humming halls of

Nālandā would be deserted. Thus, the Indian Buddhists themselves believed that they were living in the valley of decline and were in fear of an approaching cataclysm. Such a mind-set must have contributed towards the saṃgha not thinking or acting in terms of working towards a perennial survival of the Dhamma.

5. *Overwhelming Presence of Brāhmaṇical Elements in the Saṃgha and Unwittingly Playing Second Fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism*

Though Buddhism had opened its doors to all irrespective of caste, creed, or gender, it would be wrong to call it a religion of those who were either empty-headed or had empty pockets. The fact that the sūdras and the caṇḍālas had very little or no access to either education or property, they were in practice not welcome in the Buddhist saṃgha. Thus, highly educated brāhmaṇas and rich merchants remained the most favoured candidates, the former for membership of the saṃgha and the latter as providers of material support. Nearly half of all the senior Buddhist monks and nuns mentioned in the Pāli Tipiṭaka came from Brāhmaṇa families and carried with them Brāhmaṇical-notions into the very core of Buddhism. The infiltration in huge numbers of such elements, most of whom were never fully converted to the ideals set forth by the Buddha, contributed greatly towards sabotaging the saṃgha from within. Control of the saṃgha by monks of Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas background immediately after the death of the Buddha and the events at the First Council are clear indicators of what was to happen in the days to come. Control of this Council by Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas monks such as Kaśyapa, humiliation of Ānanda, and non-participatory remarks by monks such as Purāṇa, must be seen as matters of grave concern in this regard. Vilification of Devadatta and other relatives of the Buddha, including the entire community of Vajjian monks, also appears to fall within this agenda to create confusion and sabotage leading to ultimate Brāhmaṇization and

assimilation of Buddhism. Though Aśoka deserves credit for making Buddhism a pan-Indian religion, his *dhamma* policy also appears to have put Buddhism on the road to disaster in India. Firstly, he put the Brāhmaṇical priestly class at odds with Buddhism. Secondly and more importantly, through his own brand of *dhamma*, Aśoka unwittingly sowed seeds of the secularisation of Buddhism and hence its consequent assimilation into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. As pointed out by Romila Thapar, Aśoka's *dhamma* embodied principles of secularism to such an extent that these principles would have been acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect. None of the profound ideas and fundamental theories of Buddhism can be seen in the edicts of Aśoka. He does not anywhere mention the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Eightfold Path*, the *Doctrine of Dependent Origination*, and the Buddha's supernatural qualities. One also fails to see a direct reference to either the *Concept of Nibbāna* or the *Doctrine of Rebirth* in Aśoka's edicts. By constantly using the name of the Buddha and at the same time referring to the commonsensical aspects of *buddhavacana*, Aśoka set in motion those forces which put Buddhism on the road to becoming a kissing cousin of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. From the time of king Aśoka, when institutional Buddhism became politically significant and acquired the character of a pan-Indian religion, brāhmaṇical elements inside the saṃgha must have proved very helpful to the Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas in their efforts to systematically and consciously subvert institutional Buddhism. Assimilation of Buddhist ideas, which was part of this subversion, points out P.V. Kane, was neither a consequence of Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tolerance, nor was it indicative of a Brāhmaṇical-Hindu propensity for philosophical syncretism. This subversion of institutional Buddhism becomes clearly visible in the shifting of the theories and political orientation of kingship when Viṣṇu usurped the place of the Buddha as the supreme, imperial deity. In this way, the device of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* weakened the position of Buddhism within the socio-political context and helped to make possible its

eventual eclipse and absorption by Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Such a development tragically undermined the Buddha's historicity by making him an appendage of the Vaiṣṇava mythic hierarchy. Interestingly, when one looks into how and to what extent the Buddha was ritually included within the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu tradition, there is not much to find. As pointed out by J.C. Holt, cultic veneration of the Buddha within Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism is virtually absent.

The Buddha had advised monks and nuns to stay away from performing the life-cycle rituals of householders which were left entirely to the brāhmaṇas as their sole privilege. In fact, the Buddha's own funeral was presided over by a brāhmaṇa. Thus, even the most regular supporters of Buddhism followed not only Brāhmaṇical rites but also frequently conformed to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu caste regulations. Moreover, Brāhmaṇical-Hindu declaration of the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu was allowed to go uncontested unlike the Jainas who countered every move of Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. Buddhism simply had no mechanism in place to thwart Brāhmaṇical assimilative onslaught. On the contrary, Buddhism continued to play second fiddle to Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and went on making appeasing accommodations on a regular basis. Adoption of Sanskrit must also be seen as a step taken in this direction. It brought Buddhism not only nearer to the Brāhmaṇical embrace, but it also turned Buddhism into a religion for academic study. Adoption of Sanskrit made Buddhism completely inaccessible to the common man who did not understand it. Mutual exchange and adoption of different deities with Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism should also be seen as part of the wider scheme of things whereby Buddhism succumbed to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu strategy of ultimately bringing the Buddha home as a minor player. The rise of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna in Buddhism and the growing strength of Bhakti movement in Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, brought down any of the remaining walls that had kept Buddhism apart from Brāhmaṇical-Buddhism. Mahāyānic form of image-worship—bathing the

image with scented water, vocal and instrumental music, offering of flowers, food and clothes, burning incense and swinging censers—was practically the same as in Brāhmaṇical-Hindu image-worship. Further, Mahāyāna enlarged its pantheon by adopting male and female as well as principal and attendant deities from Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. With the development of doctrines such as that of the Bodhisattvas, most of the popular interest and devotion came to be directed not towards the historical Buddha but the Bodhisattvas like Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara. In this way, Buddhism exposed itself to subversive synthesis with Brāhmaṇical-Hindu beliefs and practices. In the end, distinctions between Viṣṇu and the Buddha, Śiva and Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā and Pāravatī were wiped out. Hence, it is no surprise that majority of the land grants to Buddhist institutions came from their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu patrons who approached the Buddhist deities as if they were Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. Further, with the assumption of a queer form whereby it had turned into an arcane and kabbalistic cult controlled by nāthas and yogis, it was left with no internal justification to survive as a distinct creed. The growing strength of Bhakti movement in Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism also worked as a major contributory factor in such a development. Through Bhakti, Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism became a more intelligible and satisfying road to faith for ordinary worshippers than it had been earlier because it now included not only an appeal to a personal god, but also came to include an emotional facet through the devotional hymns. The excellent métier of Buddhism at adaptation that led to its success and spread in foreign lands, became its *bête noire* in India. Thus, one is not surprised at the ironical statement of Monier-Williams that “Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas crept up softly to their rival and drew the vitality out of its body by close and friendly embraces.”

Despite being a smaller player than Buddhism in the socio-political arena and facing an identical situation, Jainism managed to survive in India. The lay followers of Jainism formed an integral part of the saṃgha, the monastics and the laity fully

complementing each other. Hence, the Jaina laity were far more committed, loyal, and steady than their Buddhist counterparts. Indian Buddhism did not consider its lay supporters as worthy of the membership of its *saṃgha*. The Buddha was anxious to see his followers embrace the truth as their sole refuge, a truth that he himself had seen and presented in his *dhamma*. He refused to recognize the *saṃgha* as a circumscribed body. Not only did he decline to declare himself as the head of the *saṃgha* but he also refused to limit it to sectarian bondage through a system of rules. Besides, the *saṃgha* had no power to excommunicate an unworthy lay supporter who was, so to speak, beyond both its immediate authority and responsibility. This became a serious drawback in terms of long-term survival. Moreover, the Buddha was never interested in the advantages of the numerical strength of his admirers, associates, or followers. His commitment was to the higher ideals of self-denial. Thus, those who adopted a life-style of homelessness by giving up the lives of householders were held in higher esteem than those who remained in the world and led the lives of householders. In other words, Buddhism maintained minimum possible contact with its supporters. Even this little contact that Buddhism maintained with public during its earlier phases through the constant travelling of monks and nuns came to an end when over a period of time members of the *saṃgha* simply turned sedentary and became confined to their monasteries. This type of aloofness made Buddhism further vulnerable.

Interestingly, Buddhism remained in place in the adjoining regions of the Indian plains—the Himalayas, Myanmar, Tibet, and above all, Sri Lanka—contact with which remained regular throughout the period of decline. The weaknesses that brought about its decline in India were largely shaken off by Buddhism after the Third Buddhist Council when it began to move beyond the Brāhmanical-Hindu belt into the terra incognito—the rural and tribal areas.. Within the territories covered by Brāhmanical-Hinduism, Buddhism was never able to get itself rid of the mentality of a sect, thus, being always vulnerable to the possibility

of its assimilation and acculturation into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism. However, outside the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu territories, it took on the character of a full-fledged religion, its clergy began to perform life-cycle rituals, it built a support base among the masses, largely gave up its intellectual snobbery and aloofness, and above all, there were no Brāhmaṇical-brāhmaṇas to sabotage it either from within or without.

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