

On the Question of Animosity of the Brāhmaṇas and Persecution by Brāhmaṇical Kings Leading to the Decline of Buddhism in India

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Abstract

The decline of Buddhism from the plains of India is one of the most puzzling questions in the history of India. Different scholars have suggested different reasons for this decline. In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine as to whether the animosity of the Brāhmaṇas and persecution of Brāhmaṇical kings could have caused such a decline. The views expressed and examples cited in support of this hypothesis have been examined in detail, especially the background and consequences of the anti-Buddhist campaigns of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Śaśāṅka.

An attempt has also been made in this paper to show that though it cannot be denied that some friction did exist from time to time between the followers of the Buddha and Brāhmaṇas in India and that some actions of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Śaśāṅka can be construed as anti-Buddhist, but it is not possible to visualize Buddhism as having declined as a result thereof. Nor does it appear probable that Buddhism declined in India because of Islamic onslaught, development of corrupt practices and divisions in the Saṃgha, or growth of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. It is proposed here that the issue of decline of Buddhism took place at two different levels i.e., at the laity and the Saṃgha level. The upshot of the paper is that the crucial reason for the decline of Buddhism in India was the laity which at best could be described as fickle-minded and at worst non-existent.

Key words: 1. Brāhmaṇism 2. Buddhism 3. Decline 4. Islamic attacks
5. Persecution 6. Śaśāṅka 7. Puṣyamitra Śuṅga
8. Urbanization 9. Xuanzang

The near disappearance of Buddhism from the plains of India is one of the most puzzling questions in the history of India. In fact, most scholars have shied away from writing on this topic. One major problem related to this topic is that the archaeological and epigraphical material is still insufficient and the indigenous texts are stunningly silent on this issue. The problem of handling this subject is further compounded by the fact that it is almost impossible to give a continuous account of the history of the decline of Buddhism in India. In fact, the process of decline of Buddhism in India was neither uniform in terms of time nor does it appear consistent in the manner of its decline. On the whole, no period can be delimited as marking the commencement of a general decline of Buddhism all over India. While one could see Buddhism flourishing in some parts of India, one could at the same time see clear trends of decline in other parts. For instance, when Buddhism was flourishing under the Pālas in eastern India, it had already met its worst fate in the north-west. But, on the whole, there appears to be some consensus amongst scholars that whatever may have been the cause/causes as well as time of the beginning of the decline, Buddhism collapsed rather quickly and comprehensively towards the end of the twelfth century. However, that does not imply in any way that Buddhism got completely wiped out from India. Not only that Buddhism has continued uninterrupted from the beginning in most of the Himalayas, but also one often gets some stray examples of its survival from different parts of India throughout history. For instance, as late as the fourteenth century, Buddhist monks from India are known to have travelled to Tibet and China¹ and in 1777 the Tashi Lama is said to have sent an embassy to Nālandā.² When Abul Fazal visited Kashmir in the company of king Akbar at the end of the sixteenth century, he met some old men who were followers of Buddhism.³ As per the Census of 1911 as many as 1833 persons in Orissa professed their faith to

¹ A. Waley, *New Light on Buddhism in Medieval India*, Vol. I, Bruxelles: Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, 1931-32.

² C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, Vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co, 1921: 13.

³ H. Blockmann (tr), *The A'in-i Akbari by Abu'l Fazl 'Allami*, Vol. III, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927: 212.

be Buddhism.⁴ Thus, it may not be altogether correct to use expressions such as “disappearance” or “extinction” for ancient Indian Buddhism.

In this paper, we shall make an attempt to examine the hypothesis that animosity of the Brāhmaṇas and persecution by Brāhmaṇical kings led to the decline of Buddhism in India. However, before doing that, it may be in order to examine here some of the other important causes proposed by scholars.

Some scholars have suggested that moral and ethical degeneracy of the members of the Buddhist Saṃgha was the core cause of the decline of Buddhism in India.⁵ Though it cannot be denied that there were also some desperate characters in the Saṃgha including vagrants, thieves, and idlers of all sorts who could not cope with the responsibilities of running a household and thus chose Saṃgha-life *faute de mieux*, yet it would be wrong to say that it had assumed a universal character. It is also important to remember here that alongside the so-called corrupt monks and nuns, we are reminded of the existence of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs who lived bodacious and exemplary lives. Thus, it would be wrong to create an impression as if the Buddhist Saṃgha was 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 followers as it had turned into a corrupt religion. Moreover, as many of the examples of corrupt bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs are from an early period, then the question arises as to how Buddhism managed to survive into early medieval times? Thus, moral and ethical degeneracy cannot be considered as a proper cause of the decline of a religion.

Many years ago, Wassilieff had suggested that bitter discussions within the Saṃgha were responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India.⁶ R.C. Mitra points out that discipline, which had begun to relax with the rise of divergent schools, was gravely endangered when Mahāyāna opened the gates of the Saṃgha

⁴ R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Vishva Bharati, 1954: 101.

⁵ *Ibid*: 2; K.W. Morgan, *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists*, New York: Ronald Press Co., 1956: 48.

⁶ Quoted at R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 145.

wide to vulgar practices and began to admit lay men on equal terms with the monks, thereby undermining its cohesion and probity.⁷ Charles Eliot feels that within “it was to the corruptions of the Mahāyāna rather than that of Hīnayāna that the decay of Buddhism in India was due.”⁸ L.M. Joshi too agrees with Eliot and considers Mahāyāna responsible for qualitative decay.⁹ Further, the Vajrayāna is often blamed for lacking abstemiousness, bringing in risqué practices, and abetting a moral anarchy through practices such as all the 84 Siddhas of Tāntric Buddhism being either married or having yoginīs as their partners. Thus, it has been pointed out that for the decline of Buddhism “the abuses of Vajrayāna perhaps occupy the foremost place.”¹⁰ Thus, sectarianism cannot reasonably be suggested as central to the downfall of Buddhism in India.¹¹ Similarly, Buddhist Tantra does not appear in any observably significant degree to have caused the decline of Buddhism. Though it cannot be denied that the Tantra was sometimes followed in a degenerate form, yet one must look elsewhere for the reasons of Buddhism’s decline in India for the simple fact that the Tantra in its Hindu form has enjoyed great popularity, and apparently has not contributed to the demise of Hinduism in any observable amount.¹²

Some Buddhist sources have suggested that Islamic afrits were primarily responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India.¹³ Muslim tribesmen through

⁷ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 146-147.

⁸ C. Eliot, *Op. Cit.*: 6.

⁹ L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India*, 2nd rev. ed, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977: 309.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 311.

¹¹ P.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.

¹² A. Wayman, “Observations on the History and Influence of the Buddhist Tantra in India and Tibet,” in A.K. Narain (ed), *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1980: 360-361.

¹³ For instance, an eyewitness account given by Dharmasvāmī. See G. Roerich (ed & tr); *Biography of Dharmasvāmin (Chag lo tsaba Chos-rje-dpal): A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim*, Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959: 64-95. Tibetan historian, Tāranātha,

their predatory excursions are known to have destroyed many monastic institutions in the north-west, Sindh and Bengal-Bihar. The modus operandi of these bloody-minded fire-eaters, known by the blanket name of *Turuṣka* or *Turk*, 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, mentions about the invasion of Muhammad on Multan:

“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.”¹⁴

Basing their observations on sources such as these, scholars like V.A. Smith held 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 Brahmins’, 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.

also takes the same position (Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970: 318).

¹⁴ H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, Vol. I, Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, nd: 123.

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 A.D. 1200 the traces of Buddhism in upper India are faint and obscure.”¹⁵

In fact, there is sufficient literary and archaeological evidence to show that some important Buddhist vihāras were attacked and destroyed by Muslim invaders. For instance, the Somapura Mahāvihāra (now in Bangladesh) is said to have been set ablaze by a Muslim army and in the conflagration a monk, called Karuṇaśrīmitra, lost his life.¹⁶ The Odantapurī Mahāvihāra, located a few miles from Nālandā was sacked and razed to the ground in 1199 CE by Khalji soldiers. After killing all the monks, the Turuṣka military commander turned the place into his headquarters.¹⁷ According to the *Tabakat-i-Nāsiri*, the brāhmaṇas with shaven heads were put to death to a man,¹⁸ so that none survived to explain the contents of a large number of books that were found there. Great plunder fell into the hands of the victors. Vikramaśilā was also converted into a fortress¹⁹ and

¹⁵ V.A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India from the Earliest Times to the end of 1911*, London: Clarendon Press, 1928: 221.

¹⁶ EI, Vol. XXI, 1931-32: 98.

¹⁷ See, G. Roerich (ed and tr), *Op. Cit.*: 64-95.

¹⁸ H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II: 306.

¹⁹ Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.*: 318. R.K. Choudhary believes that Vikramaśilā (corresponding to the modern, excavated site of Antichak in Bihar) was not destroyed by the Muslims (“Decline of the University of Vikramasila,” *Journal of Indian History*, 56: 214-35).

Vajrāsana (Bodhagayā) was attacked by the Turuṣka army.²⁰ Palazzo-like mahāvihāras at Vikramaśilā and Nālandā became targets of repeated attacks by roving bands of Muslim soldiers and as a result most of the monks simply deserted them. 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 Muslims. If the archaeological data from here were to be believed, then 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.”²¹

A Tibetan monk, Dharmasvāmī, has given an eyewitness account of one of the several attacks on Nālandā where a nonagenarian monk-teacher, named Rāhula Śrībhadrā was in residence.²² 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 his 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. Dharmasvāmī 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 hiding-hole, 300 Muslim 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. Dharmasvāmī says that the libraries had perished long ago at the hands of the

²⁰ Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.*: 320.

²¹ IA.1908.278.

²² G. Roerich (ed & tr); *Op. Cit.*: 64-95.

Turuṣkas and he could not get a scrap of manuscript to copy.²³

Buddhist monasteries being largely located near urban centres appear to have become easy targets of attacks. Fearing the Muslim 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 Neṣṭal, Tibet and China. Communal life suffered an abrupt dislocation with the collapse of monasteries and dispersal of the monks. Monasteries wore a deserted look and in many cases, monastic lands were confiscated and granted to Muslim occupants. 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 majority were absorbed by Brāhmaṇical-Hindu society.

Though there is irrefutable evidence to show that Buddhist viḥāras were attacked by Muslim invaders and some of them were literally wiped out of existence, yet it must be remembered that the attacks were neither organized nor systematic. Even under such 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 Islamic invaders had overrun the country, sporadic and strictly localized attempts at revival were made. Dharmasvāmī acknowledges that though Nālandā was doomed to death, still teaching and learning was going on here over at last four after-decades.²⁴ However, commenting on Tāranātha's lamentation that with the destruction of Vikramaśīlā and Odantapurī the dye 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."²⁵ The decline of Buddhism in south India is also hard to explain in the light of Islamic attacks. As pointed out by Schalk,²⁶ Islam barely had a presence in that region. Another interesting

²³ *Ibid.*: 90ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 64-95.

²⁵ Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.*: xiii.

²⁶ Peter Schalk (ed.), *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam. Part 2. The Period of the Imperial Colar*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2002.

explanation has been given by a modern scholar 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

“temples 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.”²⁷

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.²⁸ Though it cannot be

²⁷ Richard M. Eaton, “Temple desecration in pre-modern India,” *Frontline*, Vol.17, Issue 25, Dec. 9-22, 2000: 66.

²⁸ See, Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, reprint, Vol. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977: 276, 278, 557-558.

denied that peasantry may have felt let down by the fact that Buddhism was an urban religion supported by rich urban laity, Hodgson's hypothesis 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 it cannot be denied that the Muslim conquest was quite ruthless in many ways, yet it cannot be held 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 killed a religion. Secondly, as pointed out above, Buddhism had become a spent force by the time Islamic invaders descended upon the plains of Majjhimadesa. Thirdly and most importantly, there is enough evidence to show that Buddhism actually survived the Muslim conquest, and eked out a rather precarious existence for a few centuries beyond, in Bengal, Orissa, and some corners in the Deccan. Epigraphical evidence suggests that Buddhism survived at places such as Gayā at least till the end of the thirteenth century, i.e., over a century beyond the Muslim conquest. The Bodhagayā stone inscription of Gāhādvāla Jayacandra, who ruled from 1170 CE, records the construction of a cave at Jayapur with images of Tārā, Ugratārā, and Dattatārā.²⁹ The Patna Museum Inscription of king Jayasena, son of Buddhasena, dated in the year 1283 CE, records the gift of a village in Gayā for the residence of a Sri Lankan monk.³⁰ It is beyond doubt that Bodhagayā continued to allure foreign pilgrims long after the Muslim conquest. The Aśoka stūpa, which had been twice repaired by kings of Burma, received their special attention in 1289 CE.³¹ 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 daily offering during the religious services which must have been continuing there. In 1777 the

²⁹ "A Buddhist Inscription from Bodh-Gayā of the Reign of Jayaccandradeva-V.S.124X," *IHQ*, Vol. 5, 1929:14-30.

³⁰ *Indian Antiquary*, 1919.43-48; *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XIX, 1927-28: 118.

³¹ *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XI, 1911-12: 118-120.

Tashi Lama sent an embassy there.³² 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 Kukutasiddha, minister of the king of Magadha, erected a temple at Nālandā.³³ 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 Muslim attack.³⁴ Waley has also shown that Buddhism survived till the fourteenth century at places like Nālandā.³⁵ Thus, the Muslim attacks cannot explain the general trend of decline as the agony columns of Buddhism had begun to appear much prior to these attacks. In other words, the Muslim conquest cannot be held as *raison d'être* for the decline of Buddhism in India. "Persecution might scotch, it could not kill a living religion."³⁶ 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."³⁷ Interestingly, Jainism had faced the same kind of dilemma and came out unscathed at the same time. Thus, the Muslim attacks cannot explain the general trend of decline as the agony columns of Buddhism had begun to appear much prior to these attacks.

It is sometimes alleged that the Brāhmaṇas mostly despised the Buddhists and 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

³² C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, Vol. II, London: Edwin Arnold & Co, 1921: 13.

³³ See, S.C. Vidyabhusana, *History of the Mediaeval School of Indian Logic*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1909: 147.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ A. Waley, *New Light on Buddhism in Medieval India*, Vol. I, Bruxelles: Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, 1931-32.

³⁶ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 148.

³⁷ P.S. Jaini, *Op. Cit.*: 83.

origin.³⁸ Attack on Aṅgulimāla by a frenzied mob, the murders of Moggallāna and Āryadeva, anti-Buddhist crusades of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śaṅkara, 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, are given as important instances in support of this hypothesis. The description of the Buddha in some of the *Purāṇas* as a grand seducer who brought people to their ruin and the view in the *Yajñavalkya* 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. There were also instances of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs being beleaguered or sometimes even murdered. However, the Brāhmaṇical hostility appears to have been altogether at a different level. The malevolence, *uber alles* having an intellectual flavour, 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. They also do not betray any feelings of mutual animosity bordering on aggro between the Buddhist monastics and the Brāhmaṇical followers. The Buddha makes respectful reference to brāhmaṇas, observant of their vows, in contradistinction to those who are mere brāhmaṇas by birth, and he classes the worthy śramaṇas with the brāhmanas.³⁹ “[I]n dozens of *Suttas* meetings of brāhmaṇas and Buddha or his disciples and missionaries are... almost always seem to be marked by courtesy on both sides. No meetings are recorded in the early Pāli texts or brāhmaṇical texts about Śākyaans condemning the tenets of ancient brāhmaṇism or about brāhmaṇas censuring the Bauddha heterodoxy.”⁴⁰

³⁸ See, for instance, T.W. Rhys Davids, “Persecution of Buddhists in India,” *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*, 1896: 87-92.

³⁹ The *Dhamapada* devotes a full chapter entitled *Brāhmaṇavagga* (Dh.383-423) detailing qualities of a brāhmaṇa leaving no doubt that the word *brāhmaṇa* was held in high esteem by the Buddha.

⁴⁰ P.V. Kane; *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. V, Part II: 2nd ed, Government Oriental Series, Class B, No. 6, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, Poona, 1977: 1004.

Stray examples quoted in support of Brāhmaṇical enmity and persecution do not appear to be sufficient enough. The wrangles between followers of the Buddha and followers of different sects of Brāhmaṇism, appear more like internal petty altercations within a system rather than frenzied communal riots. 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 Nāgārājuna, 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.⁴¹ The murder of Moggallāna (supposedly committed at the behest of Niganṭhas), 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.”⁴² 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 fierce hatred in the sources. It was quite typical for holy persons to be surrounded by men and women of various sects.

According to the story related by Xuanzang the brāhmaṇas of Kanauj 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.⁴³ 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.

Religious persecution of a limited and temporary character was not really any

⁴¹ M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, tr. V. Srinivasa Sarma, Vol. 2, reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999: 337.

⁴² R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 139.

⁴³ S. Beal, *Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, London: K. Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1911: 179.

terra incognita, particularly in the south. But Indian history does not bear out the fact of a continued and organized persecution as the state policy of a dynasty, or in a measure sufficient 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 rulers or of reverence to 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 at Sanchi, pronounces the guilt of the slaughter of a cow or a brāhmaṇa on anyone who would disturb it.⁴⁴ This shows that the mental background 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.⁴⁵ Harṣavardhana pays homage to Śiva and the Buddha in his *Ratnāvalī* and *Nāgānanda* respectively. As time went by, the border-line between the Buddhists and the Hindus continued to grow 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*⁴⁶ 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* or other early *Purāṇas*. The *Varāha Purāṇa* also refers to the Buddha as an incarnation in no depreciative sense, but he is adored simply as the god of beauty.⁴⁷ Superior contempt is the distinctively Hindu method of persecution. *Purāṇas* such as the *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, and *Matsya* mention the Buddha as the grand seducer. The *Yajñavalkya* considers the sight of a monk with yellow robes as an execrable augury.⁴⁸ 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 gate-keeper. In statues,

⁴⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. III. 29-43.

⁴⁵ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 133.

⁴⁶ I. 202,

⁴⁷ 39-48.

⁴⁸ I.273.

Indra always serves to bear the parasol, and Gaṇeśa is at the feet of Vighnāṭaka.⁴⁹ Hindu gods Brāhmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are stigmatized as Māra or the seducer. 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."⁵⁰ Similarly, in the Maināmatī Copper Plate, the fame of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva is shown as spreading in the three worlds in such a way that Indra was dragged from his palace down to the earth:

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 every where, the thousand-eyed God (Indra) even in his own palace came to be brought down to the earth.⁵¹

But here also one cannot be too certain if these similes savour of any sectarian disdain. What seems more probable is that these simply provide examples of a peculiar rhetorical conceit favoured by contemporary love of hyperbole.⁵²

However, it would be interesting to study the forces at play within Buddhism that allowed Brāhmaṇical assimilation to work against it. A trend towards assimilation of Buddhism by Brāhmaṇism seems to have begun during the Gupta period. Though during the Gupta period Buddhist viḥāras grew bigger and richer, yet from the point of view of Buddhist history, this period cannot be described as a flourishing one for Buddhism.⁵³ The reason for this was that reinvigorated and

⁴⁹ B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sādhanaṃālā and Other Cognate Tantric Texts of Rituals*, 2nd rev and enl ed, Calcutta: Firma K. Mukhopadhyay, 1958: 162-63.

⁵⁰ N.G. Majumdar, "Nālandā Inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra," *Epigraphia Indica*, XXI.97-101.

⁵¹ D.C. Bhattacharyya, "The Maināmatī Copper-plate of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva (1141 Śaka)," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, 1933: 288-89.

⁵² R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 139.

⁵³ S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1962, reprint, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1988: 197.

transformed Brāhmaṇism was rising against Buddhism as a power which was finally to engulf and submerge it.⁵⁴ The artistic tradition that began during the Gupta period was a unified one, neither Brāhmaṇical nor Buddhist.⁵⁵ The Brāhmaṇical attitude went on broadening till the Buddha became a deity of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. 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.⁵⁶ Though these vihāras (some of which grew into universities later) were still Buddhist, but the learning that they dispensed was liberal and multi-faceted, besides being available to non-Buddhists. As we shall see, it were the forces behind this sort of metamorphosis of Buddhist monasteries, which seem to have given it a real body blow and turned out to be *raison le plus décisif*.

In spite of some stray incidents resulting from the heat of sectarian rivalry here and there, there are no reliable examples of any crusade. Buddhism had neither been conceived by the Buddha as a proselytizing religion nor had it attained any success to the extent that may 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 Buddhist lay associates. The missionary zeal of Aśoka too had no semblance of bitterness. The Buddhist challenge to thought was answered primarily on an intellectual plane.

A large number of Buddhist texts hold Brāhmaṇical kings like Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Śaśāṅka responsible for following deliberate and systematic policies of persecution against the followers of Śākyamuni Buddha. Withdrawal of royal patronage and persecution by such kings, according to some scholars, removed the ground from under the 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.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, 2nd reprint with correction, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959: 140.

⁵⁶ S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India (Op. Cit)*: 331.

⁵⁷ D.P. Chattopadhyaya, 'Preface,' Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970: xiii.

Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (circa 184-48 BCE) is generally regarded as the symbol and leader of the Brāhmaṇical revival that took place after the Mauryan dynasty, the alleged supporter of non-Brāhmaṇical faiths, was brought to an end. 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 it also lost most of what it had gained as a result of the persecution by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga. For instance, the Vibhāṣā, a Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣika text dated in the second century CE, points out that Puṣyamitra “who detested the Law of the Buddha... set fire to the Sūtras, destroyed Stūpas, razed Saṃghārāmas and massacred Bhikṣus... Gradually, destroying the Law of the Buddha, he reached the Bodhi tree... the deity of that tree... killed him and slew his army.”⁵⁸ According to the *Divyāvadāna*, a text of Sarvāstivādin origin, acting on the advice of his Brāhmaṇa chaplain, “Puṣyamitra slew the monks and destroyed the dwelling of the Saṃgha (at Kukkuṭārama in Pāṭaliputra). Applying these measures progressively as far as the kingdom of Śākala [Sialkot in Pakistan] he published the following edict: ‘Whoever brings me the head of a Śramaṇa will be rewarded with a gold piece.’... Then the king set out and went to the kingdom of Sthūlakoṣṭhaka [in Uḍḍiyāna] with the intention of destroying the Law of the Buddha. Within the territory of that kingdom there was a Yakṣa [Daṃṣṭrānivāsin]... (whose ally... Yakṣa Kṛmiśa seized an enormous mountain and crushed king Puṣyamitra as well as his army.”⁵⁹ This story is also repeated in the *Śāriputraparipṛcchā*, a Mahāsāṃghika text translated into Chinese between 317-420 CE. But the story in this text, besides being much more detailed, shifts the anti-Buddhist operations of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga

⁵⁸ Quoted from E. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, tr. 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): 387.

⁵⁹ P.L. Vaidya (ed), *Divyāvadāna*, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1959: 282. P.C. Bagchi has identified Daṃṣṭrānivāsin and Kṛmiśa with Menander and Euthydemid Demetrious, respectively. (P.C. Bagchi, “Kṛmiśa and Demetrius,” *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XXII, 1946: 81-91).

from northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent to Bihar.⁶⁰ Tāranātha, the celebrated Tibetan Buddhist historian, mentions march of Puṣyamitra from Madhyadeśa to Jalandhara. In the course of his campaigns, Puṣyamitra is reported to have burnt down numerous Buddhist monasteries and killed a number of learned monks, as a result of which, “within five years, the doctrine was extinct in the north.”⁶¹

Many Indologists have expressed scepticism about the veracity of the Buddhist legends regarding the persecution of Buddhism by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga.⁶² 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 so 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 that at that time *dīnār* 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” who had been hitherto worshipped in Jambudvīpa.⁶³ Thus, the theory of a Brāhmaṇical reaction under Puṣyamitra loses much of its *raison d’être*.⁶⁴ 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. Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence to

⁶⁰ See, E. Lamotte, *Op. Cit.* 389-391.

⁶¹ Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.* 121.

⁶² K.P. Jayaswal, “Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire,” *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. IV, Pt. III, Patna, 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, *Op. Cit.*: 125; R.S. Tripathi, *History of Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960: 187; D. Devahuti, *Harsha: A Political Study*, third revised edition, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998: 48.

⁶³ H.C. Raychaudhury, *Op. Cit.*: 349.

⁶⁴ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 125.

show that Buddhism actually prospered during the reign of the Śuṅgas. It cannot be overlooked *uber alles* that the celebrated Buddhist monuments of Sāñcī and Bhārhut came into existence during the Śuṅga period.⁶⁵ The Sri Lankan chronicle, *Mahāvamsa* admits the presence of numerous monasteries in Bihar, Avadha, Malwa, and surrounding areas during the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (circa 101-77 BCE) which is synchronous with the later Śuṅga period. Thus, “The tales of persecution by Puṣyamitra as recorded in the *Divyāvadāna* and by Tāranātha bear marks of evident absurdity”⁶⁶ and the account of Puṣyamitra’s sudden destruction with all his army, after his promulgation at Śākala of a law promising 100 dīnāras for the head of every Buddhist monk slain by his subjects, “is manifestly false.”⁶⁷

Does this mean that Puṣyamitra Śuṅga had nothing to do with the persecution of Buddhists? It may not be possible to deny the fact that he showed no favour to the Buddhists, but it is not certain that he persecuted them.⁶⁸ 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 active against him and sided with his enemies, the Indo-Greeks. This might have incited him to put them down with a heavy hand.⁶⁹ Moreover, in some localities

⁶⁵ For instance, the Bhārhut Buddhist Pillar Inscription of the time of the Śuṅgas actually records some additions to the Buddhist monuments at that place (*Suganaṃ raje... dhanabhūtiṇa karitaṃ toranāṃ silā-kaṇṇaṃto ca upamaṇa*) (D.C. Sircar (ed), *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. 1, 2nd rev and enlarged ed, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965: 87).

⁶⁶ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 125.

⁶⁷ D. Devahuti, *Op. Cit.*: 48.

⁶⁸ N.N. Ghosh, “Did Puṣyamitra Śuṅga persecute the Buddhists,” *B.C. Law Volume I*, Calcutta, 1945: 210-17.

⁶⁹ H. Bhattacharyya et al (eds), *Cultural Heritage of India*, 2nd enlarged and revised ed, Vol. 2, Calcutta: Ramakrishan Mission Institute of Culture, 1953: 99.

of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga's kingdom, monasteries might have been pillaged in which the complicity of the local governors cannot be ruled out. Jayaswal has pointed out another interesting thing about the declaration of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga.⁷⁰ 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. 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 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.

Śaśāṅka was another ruler who is viewed in Buddhist literature as possibly the damndest enemy and persecutor of Buddhism in India. He ruled over the kingdom of Gauḍa with its capital at Karṇasuvarṇa⁷¹ 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 Bāṇa and Xuanzang seems to indicate that the kingdom of Gauḍa comprised north-western Bengal, although for sometime the influence of Śaśāṅka may have extended all the way till Bay of Bengal. Śaśāṅka was not only the first Bengali monarch to have had the vision for an empire but also the one who actually almost 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.

Śaśāṅka was most probably a native of Magadha⁷² where he began his career as a feudatory chief (*mahāsāmanta*).⁷³ Slowly, he appears to have

⁷⁰ K.P. Jayaswal, "Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire," (*Op. Cit.*) 263.

⁷¹ Karṇasuvarṇa has been identified with Rangamati, six miles south-west of Barhampur in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

⁷² D.C. Ganguly, "Śaśāṅka" *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XII, 1936: 456-467.

⁷³ His seal-matrix cut in a rock of the hill-fort of Rohtasgarh in south-west Bihar refers to him as a *mahāsāmanta* (*CII.III.78*).

established his hold over Magadha before assuming independent status in Gauḍa.⁷⁴ Harṣavardhana's sister Rājyaśrī was married to the Maukharī king Gṛhavarman of Kanauj. Śaśāṅka, with the help of the king of Malwa, defeated and killed king Gṛhavarman of Kanauj and imprisoned Rājyaśrī. Harṣavardhana's elder brother Rājyavardhana, who then ruled Thaneśvar, 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 Kanauj and Thaneśvar. Harshavardhana pursued a policy of conquest to consolidate his authority over 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 Banārasa, Kuśīnagara, Gayā, and Pāṭaliputra,⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ 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 according to the afflatus counsel of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Harṣavardhana was to accept the throne, in order to "raise Buddhism from ruin

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ K.P. Jayaswal (ed), *The Text of the Mañju-śrī-mūlakapla*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidas, 1934: verse 715; and S. Beal, (tr), (tr). *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London: K. Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1884., Vol. II: 42, 91, 118.

⁷⁶ R.C. Majumdar, (gen ed). *History and Culture of Indian People*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951-1977. Vol. III: 107.

into which it had been brought by the king of Karṇasuvarṇa.”⁷⁷

There are many references to Śaśāṅka in Xuanzang’s work that connect him with acts of oppression against Buddhism.⁷⁸ According to him, “In recent times king Śaśāṅka having tried in vain to efface the footprints (of Lord Buddha at the old relic tope at Pāṭaliputra) caused the stone to be thrown into the Ganges, but it returned to its original place.”⁷⁹ Giving an account of Kuśinagara, he states that “Śaśāṅka-rājā having destroyed the religion of Buddha, the members of the priesthood were dispersed, and for many years driven away.”⁸⁰ Śaśāṅka-rājā “slandered the religion of the Buddha... destroyed the convents, and cut down the Bodhi tree digging it up to the very springs of the earth; but yet he did not get to the bottom of the roots. Then he burnt it with fire... desiring to destroy it entirely, and not leave a trace of it behind.”⁸¹ 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.”⁸² 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... will burn that great bridge of religion (Dharma)... Then that angry and greedy evil-doer of false notions and bad opinions will fell down all the monasteries, gardens, and chaityas; and rest-houses of the Jainas [Nirgranthas].”⁸³

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

⁷⁷ T. Watters (tr), *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India*, London, 1904-05, 2nd Indian edition, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973: 343.

⁷⁸ S. Beal, (tr), *Op. Cit.*, I: 210-212; II: 42, 91, 118, 121.

⁷⁹ T. Watters (tr), *Op. Cit.*, 92.

⁸⁰ S. Beal (tr), *Op. Cit.*, II: 42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* II.118.

⁸² T. Watters (tr), *Op. Cit.*: 116.

⁸³ Quoted at K.P. Jayaswal, *An Imperial History of India*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934: 49-50.

against the Buddhists.⁸⁴ R.G. Basak also feels that, “it will not be justifiable to exculpate Śaśāṅka from his cruel actions.”⁸⁵ Similarly, J. Allan believes that “it is certain that Śaśāṅka was a persecutor of Buddhism, although the Chinese pilgrim may credit him with more than he deserves.”⁸⁶

However, it has been pointed out that to consider Śaśāṅka a persecutor of Buddhism would amount to simplistic understanding of history.⁸⁷ The stories of persecution of Buddhism by Śaśāṅka cannot really be given credence without an independent testimony, because these 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 Śaśāṅka or adversely affected Buddhism.”⁸⁸ It is also pointed out in support of this opinion that Xuanzang himself observed that in Kārṇasuvārṇa there were not only ten Buddhist monasteries but also over 2000 monks.⁸⁹ 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 conspiracy with Harṣavardhana against him, and therefore he wanted to punish them by such oppressive persecution.⁹⁰ B.P. Sinha has given a very interesting analysis of the background to the anti-Buddhist actions of Śaśāṅka. He

⁸⁴ G.S. Chatterji, *Harṣavardhana* (in Hindi), Allahabad, 1950: 189.

⁸⁵ R.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*, 2nd rev and enl ed, C.A.D. 320-760, Calcutta: Sambodhi Publications, 1967: 154-56.

⁸⁶ J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa*, London: British Museum, 1914: lxiii.

⁸⁷ R.C Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Dacca: Dacca University, 1943: 67; B.P. Sinha, *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha (Cir. 455-1000 A.D.)*, Bankipore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1954: 259; R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 127; D. Devahuti, *Op. Cit.*: 48.

⁸⁸ R.C. Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, *Op. Cit.*: 67.

⁸⁹ T. Watters (tr), *Op. Cit.*: 191-192.

⁹⁰ R.G. Basak, *Op. Cit.*: 154-56.

points out that it is quite reasonable to assume that the Buddhists were probably the most fully organized 'sect' in India. Through their numerous monasteries and seats of learning, they exercised 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."⁹¹ Sinha further points out that "The 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."⁹² 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.⁹³ On the other hand, according to Mitra, as Śaśāṅka's persecuting acts were all 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.⁹⁴

Xuanzang's story is also questioned by D. Devahuti.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ A certain measure of proneness to exaggeration may be natural in Xuanzang who had Śaśāṅka's arch-enemy Harṣavardhana for his patron and he makes no secret of his fierce allergy to non-believers. But making

⁹¹ B.P. Sinha, *Op. Cit.*: 259.

⁹² *Ibid.*: 259-60.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 127.

⁹⁵ D. Devahuti, *Op. Cit.*: 48.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

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 vihāras 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 invading Hūṇa.⁹⁷ The Hūṇa onslaught, spread over about a decade under the leadership of Mihirkula towards the beginning of the seventh century, was largely confined to Gandhara 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.⁹⁸ The persecution of Buddhists by Mihirkula was probably a fact, as it is attested by diverse 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 rose on the ruins of the demolished ones.

Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa, who was a contemporary of king Harṣvardhana, 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 were peremptorily despatched to his court.⁹⁹ It is said that it was under this

⁹⁷ *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, New Delhi, 1969-70: 31. However, excavation records of Takṣaśilā show that it ceased to be an urban centre after the fifth century CE when trade contacts with foreign countries were interrupted (See, J.H. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. 1, Cambridge, 1951: 1-2; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c.300-c.1000)*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987: 13). Thus, when Xuanzang visited and stayed at Takṣaśilā, it had already lost its urban character.

⁹⁸ See, P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, Vol. III, 3rd ed, 1993: 924-25 fn1788a.

⁹⁹ S. Beal, *Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, London: K. Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1911: 171.

intimidation that Śīlabhadra persuaded his Chinese pupil to proceed to Kāmarūpa. The tension which had been provoked at this period was however a sporadic phenomenon, and was not noticed by Xuanzang elsewhere in India. There is no complaint whatsoever of persecution in Ijing'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."¹⁰⁰

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 Saṃghas by virtue of their possession of the Vinaya rules were self-governing bodies, and the king's primary and traditionally constitutional duty in ancient India was to protect them in that character and keep them 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 decline just because patronage was withdrawn. 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 condition at the same time when Buddhism was declining and later Hinduism survived during the medieval period of Indian history.

Absence of true lay aficionados was perhaps Buddhism's Achilles' heel and *raison le plus décisif* which contributed to the decline of Buddhism in India. This weakness was threefold. First, the lay associates were almost entirely urban and thus, Buddhism had no roots in the countryside. When urbanism began to decline, Buddhism began to compromise on its principles so much so that it not only virtually metamorphosed itself into Hinduism but it became concentrated in fewer and fewer monasteries. Here like Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries began to eke out a living through land grants. Moreover, the near absence of following in

¹⁰⁰ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 128.

the countryside proved fatal when during the Muslim attacks the Saṃgha fell to pieces and was left with nowhere to turn for support. As compared to this, Hindu priests were able to disperse into the countryside and reorganize themselves when the tide ebbed. From its earliest days, Buddhism appears to have been popular amongst *crème de la crème* of urban society and this appears to have kept it out of touch with the *hoi polloi*.¹⁰¹ Buddhism may have become a victim of this aspect of its character in decline.¹⁰² As pointed out by Chattopadhyaya, “nothing could be more ruinous for an ideology than to have drawn its sanction only from such patronage.”¹⁰³ As compared to this, Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, not being monolithic, was a religion which drew its sustenance from the village and was fuelled by caste system *uber alles*. A movement which had no roots in rural India could not expect to survive for long. With no committed lay associates, the Saṃgha seems to have continued to make compromises and adjust itself to the moorings of the Hindu society to which its supporters basically belonged.

Secondly, the number of lay associates was very small, the urban population itself, from where they came, being only a small proportion of the whole population. The biggest setback in terms of survival appears to be the fact that the Buddha was neither interested in the game of numbers nor did he ever insist on the lay associates having a distinct identity. 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.”¹⁰⁴

Thirdly, these lay associates of Buddhism were basically Hindu surrogate supporters. They were at best fickle-minded and at worst non-existent as far as

¹⁰¹ B.G. Gokhale, “The Early Buddhist Elite,” *Journal of Indian History*, XLIII, Pt. II, 1965: 391-402; K.T.S. Sarao, “Iron, Urbanization and Buddhism,” *Archív Orientální*, No. 2, Volume 58, 1990: 102-124.

¹⁰² B.G. Gokhale, “Early Buddhism and the Urban Revolution,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 5(2): 1982: 7-22.

¹⁰³ Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.*: xiv.

¹⁰⁴ The *Dīgha Nikāya*. (PTS edition). III. 51.

Buddhism was concerned. They did not have any stakes in the survival of Buddhism and thus, it would be wrong to expect such followers to have either had any guilty conscience or shed tears while switching loyalties away from Buddhism. As compared to this, there was better coordination between Jainism and its laity, the latter being much more loyal and steady than its Buddhist counterpart.¹⁰⁵ As a matter of fact, some scholars have pointed out that ancient Indian Buddhism was not a social movement¹⁰⁶ and was, thus, a “social failure”¹⁰⁷ There appears to be some truth in the allegation in the sense that though, when pressed hard, the Buddha spoke his mind about various social issues, his priorities lay elsewhere. It may not be wrong to say that in the ancient Indian context, the term “Buddhist” in itself largely signified those who had actually forsaken household-lives and become monks and nuns.

The lay associates neither voluntarily gave up the existing practices and ceremonies prescribed by the Brāhmaṇa priests nor were they ever exhorted by the Buddhist Saṃgha to do so. While there were undoubtedly people who patronized Buddhism, there were no exclusively stipulated criteria like social codes, modes of worship etc whereby these individuals could be identified as a recognizable religious group *sui generis*. In practice, for all the ten *saṃskāras* associated with birth, marriage, death, etc. they not only followed Brāhmaṇical rites but also frequently conformed to its caste regulations *uber alles*. Thus, the lay associates of Buddhism were, just “the fringes of religious communities.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, 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.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, adherence to the Buddhist faith did not in any way make it obligatory

¹⁰⁵ P.S. Jaini, *Op. Cit.*: 84-85.

¹⁰⁶ N. Dutt, *Buddha Jayanti Souvenir*, Calcutta, 1973: 97.

¹⁰⁷ G.C. Pande, *Bauddha Dharma ke Vikāsa kā Itihāsa* (in Hindi), Lucknow: Hindi Samiti, 1963: 491-492; D.K. Barua, “Buddhism and Lay worshippers,” *Mahabodhi*, LXXIV, Nos. 3-4: 39-44.

¹⁰⁸ A. Scott, *Buddhism and Christianity: a Parallel and a Contrast*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971: 272.

¹⁰⁹ B.G. Gokhale, “The Early Buddhist Elite,” *Journal of Indian History*, XLIII, Pt. II, 1965: 376.

for the lay associate to reject his ancestral beliefs or repudiate the religious practices customarily performed in his community. The lay associate was allowed not only to venerate the deities of his own region, caste or choice, but was also allowed to worship them in the appropriate way. While taking refuge formally in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha, the lay associate did not commit exclusive allegiance to these nor was he expected to perform any regular religious service. To a typical lay associate the Saṃgha was nothing more than a mere “adult education class... with voluntary attendance.”¹¹⁰ The principal aim of the Buddhist monks 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.¹¹¹

It has rightly been remarked that in other religious orders, such as that of the Jainas, the lay followers frequently associated much more closely with the monks than was the case among the Buddhists.¹¹² As compared to this, Indian Buddhism developed primarily as a monastic institution. With the decay of urbanism resulting in the dereliction of most of the monasteries and concentration of monks in a few mahāvihāras, contact with the lay associates became minimal. When monasteries with their lands, servants, and granaries became self-dependent, monks appear to have even stopped going on begging rounds. Life in sequestered monasteries, thus, further alienated the Saṃgha from the general populace. The little contact that existed in the earlier phases through the constant travelling of monks also seems to have become less popular as time went by. Moreover, the Saṃgha had no power to excommunicate an unworthy lay associate who was, so to speak, beyond both its immediate authority and responsibility.

Isolation from and aversion to serve the surrounding rural masses and loss of interest in proselytizing amongst them, must have turned the Buddhist monasteries

¹¹⁰ R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.*: 147-148.

¹¹¹ E. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, tr. Sara Webb-Boin, Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste: 1988 (originally published as *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: Des origines à l'ère Śaka*, Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, Vol. 43, Louvain: 1958): 78.

¹¹² P.S. Jaini, *Op. Cit.*: 84-85.

into islands with uncertain future. Material remains of the urban centres suggest that the decay in urbanization that had set in during the post-Kuṣāna times, became widespread after the sixth century.¹¹³ With this decline becoming widespread, the monasteries lost their support base. To come to terms with this precarious situation, the Saṃgha began an internal tuning by largely imitating Brāhmaṇism. But this was not be. Brāhmaṇism was a religion of the masses and Buddhism was not. Buddhism further opened the doors of its monasteries to secular education. This brought Buddhism only within the fordable range of Hinduism.

In early historic times, urban élites vied with each other in constructing stūpas and providing material support to Buddhist monasteries. With the decay or complete disappearance of the urban centres situation became somewhat precarious for Buddhism.¹¹⁴ Buddhism had received its sustenance ab initio from urban centres where its patrons lived. But with the decline in urbanization and dispersal of artisans and merchants monasteries found it tough to survive. Due to lack of support majority of the small monasteries, which formally existed in the vicinity of towns, became mostly derelict.¹¹⁵ However, a few monasteries got totally metamorphosed and adopted new roles for themselves as a consequence of the huge chunks of land granted to them for religious purposes by kings and chiefs. For instance, the Nālandā Mahāvihāra is said to have got grants of hundreds of villages.¹¹⁶ This phenomenon helped these mahāvihāras to survive independently of urban centres. Some support may still have accrued to some Buddhist

¹¹³ R.S. Sharma, *Op. Cit.*: 27, 58, 83, 92, 99.

¹¹⁴ Of the 173 urban centres mentioned in the Pāli *Vinaya* and *Sutta Piṭaka*, over 90 have been identified (See, K.T.S. Sarao, *Op. Cit.*). Interestingly, most of these centres had either decayed or completely disappeared by the end of the sixth century CE.

¹¹⁵ R.S. Sharma, *Op. Cit.*: 162.

¹¹⁶ According to Xuanzang Nālandā Mahāvihāra enjoyed the grant of as many as one hundred villages (S. Beal (tr), *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, II: 118) whereas I-jing puts this figure at more than two hundred (J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671-695 by I-tsing*, reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966: 65, 154).

monasteries from a few surviving towns here and there, but, by and large, big establishments practised self-supporting economies based on land grants.¹¹⁷ But as the newly sprung mahāvihāras had to manage huge chunks of land and all the paraphernalia associated with it, the character of Buddhist monastic institutions underwent a revolutionary change. A major share of the land grants to Buddhist institutions came from Hindus who approached Buddhist deities as if they were their own.¹¹⁸ This naturally further blurred the line of demarcation between Hinduism and Buddhism as two distinct religions.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the roles of Buddhist monasteries could not compete with Hindu temples in the race to survive on the basis of land grants. A 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 familial rituals of a householder. As with the passage of time, Brāhmaṇical Hinduism transformed itself from a sacrificial cult to a gift-receiving sect¹²⁰ and the brāhmaṇical temples obtained an advantage over Buddhist mahāvihāras due to their better knowledge of agriculture (especially rice cultivation) and seasons,¹²¹ their ingenuity in constructing origin myths and enormous capacity for legitimation, and thus wider socio-political functions.¹²² This advantage was manifested in the shift of royal patronage from

¹¹⁷ R.S. Sharma, *Op. Cit.*: 165.

¹¹⁸ For instance, in an eleventh-twelfth century CE Kalacuri stone inscription discovered at Kasia (ancient Kuśīnagara) by A.C.L. Carlleyle, the donor king confesses his faith in the Buddha and Tārā, but worships Śiva as well (*Epigraphia Indica*.I.XVIII.1925-26:130-131).

¹¹⁹ Amit Jha, "Patronage and Authority: Buddhist Monasteries in Early Medieval India" *Teaching South Asia, Internet Journal of Pedagogy*, Volume II, No. 1, Spring 2003 (www.mssc.edu/projectsouthasia/TSA/VIIN1/Jha.htm).

¹²⁰ Ronald 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.

¹²¹ Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1706*, Berkeley, 1993: 3-21.

¹²² Amit Jha, *Op. Cit.*

Buddhism to Brāhmaṇical sects, which became more visible by the end of the eleventh century. It is this development that became the waterloo of monastic Buddhism. The shift in patronage from Buddhism to Hinduism is especially evident in the artistic record of the period.¹²³ While trying to come to terms with loss of patronage and revitalized Hinduism, Buddhism began not only to liberalize learning and admit non-Buddhists and laity alike into its mahāvihāras. It also unwittingly began to tune itself to the moorings of the Brāhmaṇical society. In the process it not only wiped out its Bhikṣuṇī-Saṃgha but also by metamorphosing into Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna made dangerously close calls upon Hinduism.¹²⁴ Further, Hinduism removed the ground from under the very feet of Buddhism through its Bhakti movement. However, Hinduism does not appear to have had any hidden agenda as such. The embraces appear almost friendly but they ebbed the lifeblood out of an enervated Buddhism *sotto voce*. By the time Muslims arrived, it was not only Rāhula Śrībhadrā of Nālandā Mahāvihāra, but the whole religion that had become incapacitated. Thus, Muslims invaders were actually just on time to put the *hic jacet* in its place.

¹²³ Susan L. Huntington, *The Pala-Senas School of Sculpture*, Leiden: Studies in South Asian Culture, 1984: 179-201.

¹²⁴ For instance, grand centres such as the Vikramaśīla-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. (D.P. Chattopadhyaya, 'Preface,' Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, (trs), *Op. Cit.*: xii-xiii).

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婆羅門教的迫害導致印度佛教衰敗之辯

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提要

在印度歷史中，佛教為何於印度衰敗是最令人困惑的問題之一，學者們往往各有其解釋，且其理由又都互相迥異。本論文試圖探究佛教衰敗的原因，是否真的是因為婆羅門對佛教的仇視與信奉婆羅門教的印度王對佛教的迫害所引起的。本文詳細檢驗支持此假說之看法和例證，並特別說明薰迦王朝（Śuṅga）弗沙蜜多羅王（Puṣyamitra）和設賞迦王（Śaśāṅka）反佛的背景和結果。

本論文亦試圖呈現雖然在印度，婆羅門教徒與佛教徒儘管時有摩擦，薰迦王朝弗沙蜜多羅王和設賞迦王也確有反佛之舉，但是，卻不可能就因此視佛教之衰敗是上述情況所導致的結果，佛教衰敗亦非因為伊斯蘭教入侵、佛教僧團之腐敗與分裂或佛教大乘和密教之興起。本文主張佛教之衰敗發生於二種團體中：佛教在家團體與僧團，本文之結論為佛教衰敗之關鍵因素在於佛教在家團體，而此處所稱的佛教在家團體，其成員是善變不定的，或者，甚至可以說根本稱不上是一個團體。

關鍵詞： 1.婆羅門教 2.佛教 3.衰敗 4.伊斯蘭教入侵 5.迫害 6.設賞迦王
7.薰迦王朝弗沙蜜多羅王 8.都市化 9.玄奘

（中文提要由黃繹勳譯）