

## Did Brāhmaṇas and Brāhmanical-Hinduism Cause the Decline of Indian Buddhism?

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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.<sup>1</sup> According to L.M. Joshi, “Among the external factors the most important was the Brāhmanical hostility towards Buddhism... This hostile attitude was vigorously sustained till Buddhism was overpowered in India and disappeared from the land of its birth.”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> G. Verardi<sup>4</sup> claims to have found 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 there is sufficient actual or circumstantial evidence available all over India, from Kathmandu to Orissa and the Deccan, in the Brāhmanical 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

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

<sup>2</sup> L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass, 1977: 311.

<sup>3</sup> SogenYamakami, *Systems of Buddhist Thought*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1912: 16.

<sup>4</sup> G. 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: 215-53; “Images of Destruction, An Enquiry into Hindu Icons in their Relations to Buddhism,” in G.Verardi & 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.

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 *KāḷkiPurāṇa*, 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 Śaṅkarācārya, 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 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 *Yajñavalkya* 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 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.”<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars have pointed out that it is not uncommon to find Buddhists being referred to as “outcastes” (*vasalaka*) and “devils/demons” (*daitya*, *dānava*).<sup>6</sup> We are further told that the modern Telugu words *lanjadibbalu*, which refers to mounds of earth containing Buddhist archaeological ruins, literally mean “prostitute hill,” indicate the degree of

<sup>5</sup> A.L. Basham, “The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt and the Decline of Buddhism in India,” in A.T. Embree (edited & revised), *Sources of Indian Tradition: From the Beginning to 1800*, vol. 2, second ed., Penguin Books, 1988: 193.

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

hostility and ridicule which Buddhism elicited in some sections of the medieval Brāhmaṇical-Hindu community.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> S.B. Pillai has pointed out that architecturally several Coḷa period temples were originally Buddhist shrines.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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* there are several examples of brāhmaṇas who spoke of bhikkhunīs as harlots:

Now at that time several nuns, going to Sāvathī 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.<sup>11</sup>

Talking about Śaṅkarācārya, Tāranātha mentions that  
... in all the eastern and southern regions the *ūrthika*-s prospered and the Buddhists were going down... there lived two brothers who were the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Ibid.11.

<sup>9</sup> See S.B. Pillai, *Introduction to the Study of Temple Art*, Thanjavur: Equator & Meridien, 1976.

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

<sup>11</sup> *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, tr. T.W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, reprint, vol. XIII, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982: 275.

*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 (Śaṅkarācārya), 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.<sup>12</sup>

In Bhaṅgala 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 Śaṅkarācārya. In this the Buddhists were defeated and, as a result, everything belonging to the twentyfive centres of the Doctrine was lost to the *tīrthika*-s and the centres were deserted. About five hundred *upāsaka*-s had to enter the path of the *tīrthika*-s.

Similarly, in Oḍiviśa also Śaṅkarācārya'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 (*viḥāra*-slaves)...

In the south, there were leading *tīrthika* debaters, the famous *brāhmaṇa* Kumāralīla and Kaṇadaroru. The latter was a follower of Makhādeva and as 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 *saṅgha* could face them in debate. As a result, there were many incidents of the property and followers

<sup>12</sup> Public 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 (SamitaSinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment*, Calcutta: Sarat Book House, 1993: 1-10, 68, 70).

of the insiders being robbed by the *tīrthikabrāhmaṇa*-s.<sup>13</sup>

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 in China. As opposed to persecution, throughout the history of Buddhism in 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 Piṭakacame* from the brāhmaṇa caste.<sup>14</sup> Thus, stray examples quoted in support of Brāhmaṇical enmity and the resultant persecution are not sufficient at all to show that they caused the decline of Buddhism in India. The wrangles between the followers of the Buddha and the followers of different sects of Brāhmaṇism appear more like internal petty altercations within a broader Indian religious system rather than frenzied communal riots. Moreover, the Brāhmaṇical hostility, if any, never took place in an overtly organized manner. 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 and they certainly do not betray any feelings of mutual animosity bordering on violent aggressive behaviour 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.<sup>15</sup>cc[In 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 Śākyaans

<sup>13</sup> *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, trs. Lama Chimpa and A. Chattopadhyaya, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970:225-226.

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

<sup>15</sup> 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.

condemning the tenets of ancient brāhmaṇism or about brāhmaṇas censuring the Bauddha heterodoxy.”<sup>16</sup> 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 Nāgārajuna, 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> “While isolated instances of actual violence by Hindu zealots doubtless did occur, these were probably not sufficient in number or impact to seriously cripple the groups towards which they were directed.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> Here it may be said that king Harṣavardhana also hardly respected the principles of tolerance and liberty of speech when during the

<sup>16</sup> P.V. Kane; *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. V, Part II: 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, 1977: 1004.

<sup>17</sup> M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, tr. V. Srinivasa Sarma, vol 2, repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999: 337.

<sup>18</sup> R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, Santiniketan, Birbhum: Visva-Bharati, 1954: 139.

<sup>19</sup> 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: 83.

<sup>20</sup> *Life of Hieun-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, tr. S. Beal, London: K. Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1911: 179.

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.”<sup>21</sup> 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, the Yoga, the Pañcarātra and the Pāśupata.”<sup>22</sup> In the exposition of his own philosophy, Kumārila admits the validity of the Vijñānavāda doctrine.<sup>23</sup> His respect for the Buddha only stops short of the recognition of the Avatārahood of the Buddha.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> The local tradition ascribes the destruction of this place to Śaṅkarācārya and the adjoining lands are still in the possession of those monks who owe allegiance to the Order of Śaṅkarācārya. However, apropos allegations of anti-Buddhist actions of Śaṅkarācārya, it may, on the whole, be said that spurious scandals are often an inevitable penalty of supreme eminence.<sup>26</sup> When Śaṅkarācārya came north to the intellectual centres there, he borrowed many of the ideas

<sup>21</sup> R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.* 128.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Research Institute, Vol. II, Part II, 1997: 721-22, Vol. III, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1993: 841.

<sup>24</sup> R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.* 129.

<sup>25</sup> B.C. Law, *Buddhistic Antiquities at Nagarjunikonda*, Calcutta: The Indian Research Institute, 1950: 6.

<sup>26</sup> The relationship of Śaṅkarācārya to 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 have been others who have described him as a Buddhist in disguise (see, for an interesting study of Śaṅkarācārya, G.C. Pande, *Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994: 255).

that had been formulated by Buddhist philosophers of the past.<sup>27</sup> In his exposition that the world is an illusion, Śaṅkarācārya borrowed arguments from Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra, though he disagreed with them on some matters.<sup>28</sup> Śaṅkarācārya was the spiritual grandson of Gauḍapāda. Gauḍapāda's ideas were "a synthesis of Vedantism and Buddhism."<sup>29</sup> In fact, Gauḍapāda's thinking often coincides 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 even thinks that since Gauḍapāda flourished after the advent of all the great Buddhist teachers, including Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, Aśaṅga, 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."<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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."<sup>33</sup> There is no doubt that he made efforts to fortify his-kind of Hinduism by enrolling missionaries in its defence and organizing them into corporate monastic schools under the central direction

<sup>27</sup> Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Harvard University Press, 2000: 239-240.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.248.

<sup>29</sup> R.K. DasGupta, *Vedanta in Bengal*, Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 2003: 3.

<sup>30</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. I, 1922: 423.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 429.

<sup>32</sup> Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*, Op. Cit. 225-226.

<sup>33</sup> Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., 1962: 29.



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 the divine character of the Buddha.<sup>34</sup> Called hidden Buddhist (*pracchanabauddha*) 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* Kaṇaguṇa, 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 worshiping the insiders. The five hundred *brāhmaṇa*-s also realized that

<sup>34</sup> *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, vol.xxvi.5.

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

...On the even of the debate between Śaṅkarācārya and Śrī Dharmakīrti, Śaṅkara 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 Śaṅkarācārya repeatedly. At last he was reduced to a position from where there was nothing more to say. When Śaṅkarācārya 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.<sup>35</sup>

In a study, based on the data collected from the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies*,<sup>36</sup> it has been shown that over forty important Buddhist thinkers from the eighth to the first quarter of the thirteenth century lived in India.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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

<sup>35</sup> Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*, Op. Cit.231-233.

<sup>36</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies: Bibliography*, ed. Karl H. Potter, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Daya Krishna, "Was Ācārya Śaṅkara Responsible for the Disappearance of Buddhist Philosophy from India?" *New Perspectives in Indian Philosophy*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001: 166.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

rather focussing on displacing Buddhism from the socio-political pedestal, leaving the path of wisdom (*jñānamārga*) almost entirely to Buddhism. “To have had not more than half a dozen thinkers during a period of almost five hundred years does not speak very highly of Ācārya Śaṅkara’s *Digvijaya*, so loudly proclaimed not only by his disciples but also others, in the Indian tradition.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is difficult to believe that Śaṅkarācārya’s views spread rapidly during his life time (c.800 CE) with his far-flung *mathas* serving as radiation points. For instance, although Alberuni (fl. 1030) studied a mass of Sanskrit literature with access to learned Brāhmaṇa informants, he makes no reference to Śaṅkarācārya.<sup>40</sup> If Śaṅkarācārya’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.<sup>41</sup>

Religious persecution of a limited and temporary character was not really a *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 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 epoque* of Brāhmaṇical revival. Āmrakārdava was a Buddhist general of many victories in the service of Candragupta II and the general in his grant to *anārya-saṅgha* at Kākāṇḍabhoṭa of Sāñcī, pronounces the guilt of the slaughter of a cow or a brāhmaṇa on anyone who would disturb it.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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 continued to grow thinner by the day.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.167.

<sup>40</sup> See Irfan Habib, “Medieval Popular Monotheism and Its Humanism: The Historical Setting,” *Social Scientist*, Vol. 21, Nos. 3-4, March-April 1996: 78-88.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>42</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III: 29-43.

<sup>43</sup> R.C. Mitra, *Op. Cit.* 133.

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*<sup>44</sup> invokes the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu for the protection of the world from sinners and not for deluding *asurasto* 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.<sup>45</sup> Superior contempt is the distinctively Hindu method of persecution. Purāṇas such as the *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, and *Matsya* mention the Buddha as the grand seducer. But this kind of attitude was not always one-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.”<sup>46</sup> 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 Vighnāṭaka.<sup>47</sup> Each of the Hindu gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva is stigmatized as Māra or the seducer. In the *Sādhanamālā*, Viṣṇu is mentioned in an undignified position of being the *vāhana* of *Hariharivarivāhanodbhava*, one of the forms of the all compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, major Brāhmaṇical gods are shown in a humiliating position of kowtowing to Mārici. 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.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in the

<sup>44</sup> *The Garuḍa Purāṇa*, ed. J.L. Shastri, vol. 1, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978-79: 202.

<sup>45</sup> *The Varāha Purāṇa*, ed. J.L. Shastri, vol. 1, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985: 39-48.

<sup>46</sup> B. Bhattacharyya, “A Peep into the Later Buddhism,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Poona, Vol.5, part III, April 1929: 15.

<sup>47</sup> B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sādhanamālā and Other Cognate Tantric Texts of Rituals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. and enl. ed., Calcutta: Firma K. Mukhopadhyay, 1958: 162-63.

<sup>48</sup> *Sādhanamālā: Avalokiteśvara Section: Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts*, ed. Ruriko Sakuma, New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2002: Chapter 9.

<sup>49</sup> N.G. Majumdar, “Nālandā Inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra,” *Epigraphia Indica*, Calcutta:

Maināmatī Copper Plate, 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-eyed god (Indra) even in his own palace came to be brought down to the Earth.<sup>50</sup>

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. Thus, 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."<sup>51</sup> As pointed out by Klostermaier "polemic (*parapakṣanirākarana*) 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."<sup>52</sup> 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. The Buddhist challenge to thought was answered primarily on an intellectual

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Government of India, vol. XXI, 1931-32: 97-101.

<sup>50</sup> D.C. Bhattacharyya, "The Maināmatī Copper-plate of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva (1141 Śaka)," *IHQ*, vol. IX, 1933: 288-89.

<sup>51</sup> Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, London: Penguin Books, 2005: 12.

<sup>52</sup> T.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.

plane and 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 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.<sup>53</sup> 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 its own survival:

(1) Brāhmaṇical brāhmaṇas became designedly agreeable and assimilative towards those issues in Buddhist weltanschauung which had become socio-religiously commonsensical.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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 principles and doctrines of the Buddha.<sup>56</sup> 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). Brāhmaṇical brāhmaṇas began to, slowly and steadily, but

<sup>53</sup> See J.C. Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004: 11-12.

<sup>54</sup> Thus, 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, Part II, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1977: 913ff).

<sup>55</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of the Dharmasāstra*, vol. 5, part ii, 913-14.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

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.<sup>57</sup> From the eighth century onwards the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu gods, Viṣṇu and Śiva, usurped the place of the Buddha as the supreme, imperial deities.<sup>58</sup> 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 saṅgha 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, but 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 of Buddhism.<sup>59</sup> As a consequence of such risquā 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.<sup>60</sup> Such a development may have ultimately turned out to be an important contributory factor towards the ultimate assimilation of Buddhism into Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism.

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<sup>57</sup> Ronald 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.

<sup>58</sup> Inden, *Op. Cit.* 67. The Pālas were perhaps the only exception.

<sup>59</sup> SukumarDutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen &Unwin, 1962: 331.

<sup>60</sup> B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> repr. with correction, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959: 140.

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