Issues in the History of Indian Buddhism
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In December 2011, I was invited by the Ryūkoku University in Kyoto to present Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India, a book of mine that had been published some months before (Verardi 2011b). In the course of the lecture, I first illustrated the contents of the book, and then I focused on a few issues that seemed to me particularly worthy of attention. The assumptions of the discussion are the following:

a) In ancient India there was not a single model of society but, rather, two opposing models of social and economic relations that coexisted for a long time in conflict. Inclusive paradigms should be rejected – in particular, the idea, created by western scholars and Indian historians who felt the need to provide their country with a national ideology, of a unified India where Brahmanism and Buddhism are almost interchangeable.

b) One of these models, Buddhism, kept its initial antinomial character to the end. Only if we understand Buddhism as a system opposing the nómos established by the Brahmanical tradition, we can overcome the difficulty of connecting the Vajrayāna to the earlier traditions. The Vajrayāna recovered, in a changed situation, the most radical antinomian positions of the beginning.

c) The history of ancient India involved a high rate of violence, much of which caused by the imposition of the varṇa state. Violence found a tenuous disguise in myth and iconographies. We still lack a methodology allowing us to use all the un-Rankean sources, though the latter tell us a lot about violence, keeping memory of otherwise forgotten events. Orthodox Brahmans wrote history by resorting to metaphors and allegories,

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1 This is the reason why I prefer to limit the discussion to Buddhism, initially less radical than Jainism, without addressing the complex discourse of the segmented “śramaṇa model”.
refusing to adopt the logic of chronologies and positive data, whose documentary power they knew but which they judged counterproductive to their purposes.

Buddhism is a religious system, interpretable as an antinomial model, that in the historical process was obliged, by ideology and violence, to dramatically and continuously reposition itself. This resulted in being suppressed or being cornered into subaltern positions. For example, a part of the śramaṇas started rather early to organize themselves according to a community model paralleling the Brahmanical priesthood.

Early Buddhism had interpreted the needs of the merchant class and of the urban manufacturing classes that had come to the fore in the third century BC when India came into contact and became part of the Hellenistic world. At first, the Buddhists found support in the anti-establishment, “enlightened” despotism of an Aśoka, and then boomed between the late second century BC and the early third century AD. Later on, when the varṇa state became a fait accompli, Buddhism continued to give voice to the social and ethnic sectors opposing the agricultural, self-referential model of the ārthikas. The idea of state and society that the Buddhists had in mind was compatible with the varied peoples inhabiting the subcontinent, whereas the Brahmanical model implied their forced incorporation into the boundaries of an agrarian society organized according to the rules of varṇāśramadharma. The latter was opposed not only by the trading classes, to which operational freedom was necessary, and by the natives who saw themselves downgraded to the lower peasantry ranks, but also by the Brahmans who had joined Buddhism. There was a dramatic split in the brāhmaṇavarna that was never healed: that a part of the Brahmans opposed the fundamentals of their own varṇa could not be accepted.

1. The Guptas, and the Buddhists in Checkmate

The first question we address is the break represented in Indian history by the Gupta state and that sort of re-nationalization of the Indian world which meant the expulsion of the Buddhists from political power and economic initiative. The Arthaśāstra, now better at-

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2 This may seem a position derived from outdated paradigms that read the history of India through Greco-Roman (more Greek than Roman) glasses. Not so; the fact remains that the opening of ancient India to the outside, with the predictable internal reactions, coincided with, and largely depended on the breakout towards the east first by Alexander and his successors and then by the Roman republic and empire. At a macro-historical level, Toynbee’s view, which includes India in the Hellenized world, is founded, except for matters of detail (see e.g. Toynbee 1967: esp. 114, 178–79, 180–81 and passim).
tributed to the fourth century AD (cf. Willis 2009: 62) helps clarifying the policy followed by the dynasty. The government of the rightful, namely orthodox king is based on dandañītī (policy exercised through coercion) and rājadharma (the king’s duty to preserve the four varṇas). It was in the Gupta period and its aftermath that the “Kali Age literature” was produced, whose targets are the merchants and artisans, responsible for social disorder. The vaiśyas refused to offer sacrifices, depriving the Brahmans of their fees, and whole regions were under the control of the pāsanḍas, the heretics. In connection with this, many Brahmans had apostatized. Some scholars have acknowledged the uprising of the subject castes and the intense hostility between Brahmans and śūdras in this period but have not recognized that these two facts are one and the same thing with the Buddhist hegemony over society and the reaction against the religion of Dharma, respectively. Between the late third and the fifth century, Buddhism was not the only dissident voice, but was held responsible for having exercised hegemony over change and was identified with it.

The Guptas were aśvamedhin kings, but around AD 400 a crucial readjustment took place. At Udayagiri (Vidisa), the ritual capital of the dynasty, we observe the emergence of Bhāgavatism not only as the state religion but as a theistic system capable of uniting forces with the other major system, Sivaism (as we call it now), while keeping a strategic tie with the Veda. The audacity of the operation is measured by the fact that even lower cults based on magic and black magic, represented by the Atharvaveda, were included into the synthesis: the purohita of the Guptas was a Kāpālik (Willis 2009: 169 ff.). The great Brahmanical myths were created or reshaped in this period as a function of the colonization of lands and the strengthening of the new powers that found representation in the theistic systems. Hence the myth of Tripura, the three towns of the asuras (identified with the Buddhists) destroyed by Śiva; hence King Bali, of Asuric descent, obliged to give all his lands to Viṣṇu-Vāmana, who fools him presenting himself, in the iconographies, as the Buddha (fig. 1); etc.

3 Cf. e.g. Vāyu Purāṇa (I.58, 49; vol. 1, pp. 412–13), where we read that in the Kali age “[t]he Brāhmaṇas do not perform Yaṭaṁś and “perform obeisance to Śūdras” (for the whole passage on the Kali Yuga see I.58. 31–70).
4 Notably R.C. Sharma in his study on the Kali Age literature (Sharma 1982).
5 Some of these myths are analyzed in this perspective in Verardi (2011b: 162 ff., 265 ff. and passim). Regarding the story of Viṣṇu Trivikrama, there is an earlier representation of Vāmana as Buddha in Cave II at
The international crisis of the third century had greatly favoured the agrarian policy of the Brahmans. We observe a rapid decline in Indian urbanization (Sharma 1987) and the replacement of manufacturing and trading towns with ārānas. Rural India was largely colonized by the Pāśupatases, who acted as priests or pujāris, as shown by a very large set of archaeological finds from all over northern India. They unmistakably depict either Śivaite ascetics or Śiva himself, as is shown by their jātas and, in many a case, by the third eye (fig. 2). There were groups of Pāśupatases who identified with Śiva’s bull (van Troy 1990: 7), and clay images of bulls are particularly numerous among the many thousands of small cultic objects that we find throughout the Ganges Valley in the early centuries AD (Verardi 2011b: 145–46).

A few Buddhist sources provide us with some information on the state of the religion in the fourth century. In Asaṅga’s Bodhisattvabhūmi, cruel kings and ministers are mentioned along with the accusation of the property of the saṅgha or a stūpa being taken away; in the fourth-fifth century Sanskrit redaction of the Lotus Śūtra, monks are reported to be expelled from vihāras, to be imprisoned and punished. We also have the story of the Simhala monks Mahānāman and Upasena who reported that, at the time of Samudragupta, in such a large country as Jambudvīpa there was no place for them to live (cf. Law 1967: 29, 97b, 2; p. 15). According to the later testimony of the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, Samudragupta, sacrificing animals and surrounded by bad councilors, greatly committed sin, his kingdom being inundated by “carping logicians, vile Brahmins” (cf. Jayaswal 1937: 48).

The Guptas took upon themselves the task to remedy the confusion of castes (i.e. the dynamics of a not exclusively agrarian economy), repeatedly condemned in Brahmanical texts, that had occurred in the previous centuries. The need to compromise under the increasingly strong Brahmanical pressure meant for the Buddhists the acceptance of caste rules, despite the fact that they rejected them in principle and, when possible, in the

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6 A terracotta head which can be identified with that of Śiva was found in the excavations at Sringeripurā (Allahabad District). B.B. Lal has dated it to the first century AD and has described it in the detail (Lal 1993: 111–15).


8 Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Śūtra (12.3–21; pp. 259–61); Nattier (2008: esp. 20 ff.; 2003: esp. 48 ff.) has shown that the Sanskrit text we have is a post-third century redaction. It can arguably be dated to Gupta times.
reality. Faxian has a story set in Pātaliputra regarding the Buddhist master Raivata, a Brahman by caste, who “led a pure and solitary life”. The king of the country revered him as his guru, but whenever he went to visit him, he did not dare to sit beside him. “If the king, from a feeling of love and veneration, grasped his hand … the Brahman would immediately wash it” (Giles 1923: 46). Raivata considered the contact with who was arguably a petty king of lower birth polluting, but the people of his country revered the guru because he “diffuse[d] widely the Faith in Buddha, so that the heretics were unable to persecute the priesthood” (ibidem). They considered Raivata one of them on the basis of his social conduct, not of his ideas (a minor, resorbable factor), leaving the monastic community in peace. A perfect trap, for the Buddhists.

Society could not be controlled without the performance of rituals (the rites of passage, in particular), and a part of the Buddhists realized that they could not leave them in the hands of the orthodox. Rituals could not be celebrated in disagreement with the rules established in the dharmaśāstras, and only Brahmans were entitled to perform them. This is the reason why the early bodhisattvas are said to be born in upper castes and be, quite often, Brahmans. It remains to be determined with accuracy what were the milieus in which this important shift (which does not necessarily mean surrender to the establishment) took place: as already mentioned, the fracture within the first varṇa was very serious and fraught with dramatic consequences.

In the context of the rapid dissolution of the Buddhist hegemony between the late second and the third century, we also observe an emerging polarity between the aranya and grāma monks. The aranya bodhisattvas accused the grāma monks to be involved in agriculture and trade and settle in villages. The Questions of Rāṣtrapāla depicts a situation where not only grāma bodhisattvas but also “corrupt” monks had established themselves on an independent or semi-independent basis. They would not pay homage to the teachers and saints (cf. Rāṣtrapālapariprcchā Sūtra: 99; p. 130), and regarding their functions as performers of rites, they performed services for people in the household “[t]aking up the banner of the Buddha” (ibidem: 179; p. 138). The “corrupt monks” kept cows, horses, asses, livestock, male and female slaves, and did not distinguish between their own property and what belonged to the stūpa and the sangha. Moreover, “they

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9 The reader is referred to Eltschinger (2000) for a close examination of the issue.

10 For the travelogue of Faxian, see now Max Deeg’s edition, translation and comment of the text (for the Raivata episode, Deeg 2005: 548).
would have wives, sons, and daughters just like a householder” (ibidem: 180–81, 183; p. 138). Thus family-based institutions run by Buddhist priests seem to have been already in existence at a rather early age. Many monasteries had been forcibly abandoned, and the guiding capacity of the leading monasteries was severely reduced. There were no councils entitled to impose, at least to an extent, a set of doctrines and social behaviours in line with the country’s re-ruralisation. It is not a question of Hinayāna/Mahāyāna dichotomy. Xuanzang provides us with surprising testimony on the state of the clergy. In Sind, he noted a group of adherents to the Little Vehicle who shaved their heads and wore the *kasāya* robes of the *bhikṣus*, but were engaged in the ordinary affairs of lay life. In the past, they had followed the monastic rules, but the “changed times” had brought them to live as worldly people, “with sons and grandsons” (Beal 1884, II: 273–74). Xuanzang was a staunch supporter of the Mahāyāna, which was a better strategy (*yāna*) to re-assert Buddhist hegemony after that the strategy of earlier Buddhism (Hinayāna, as it was labeled) in countering the comeback of the *turthikas* had failed. To his eyes, the Mahāyāna also meant reasserting the rules of the Vinaya after a long period of decline and compromise.11

It was only from the mid-fifth century that the Buddhists started regaining part of their lost power. At Mathura and Sarnath new images of the Buddha started being again produced (see e.g. Gottfried Williams 1982: figs. 60 ff., 85 ff.), after that image making had come to a halt or had been severely reduced in the fourth century; the *saṃgha* reorganized itself at Ajanta in the second half of the fifth century,12 etc. The Gupta dynasty was near its end, and new perspectives opened for the Buddhists in northern India even though the Hūnas, entering in the subcontinent, espoused the religious policy of the Gup-

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11 This, I now believe, is the correct view. Previously it had seemed to me, influenced as I was by the decades-long debate about the origins of the Mahāyāna, that within the latter two trends could be distinguished: the subaltern and compromising one and the rigorist one (à la Xuanzang). Now I prefer to think that the Mahāyāna reacted as a whole to what were considered the inadequacies and degenerations of the ancient *yāna*, unable to meet the challenges of the time and often ready to compromise.

12 Walter Spink has devoted a number of works on the Buddhist revival at Ajanta in the second half of the fifth century (cf. especially Spink 2005–7), maintaining that it was due to the patronage of the Vākāṭaka king Hariśena. But Hariśena, like the other rulers of the dynasty, was an orthodox, *aśvamedhin* king who, if that was the case, might have acted by proxy through his wives to protect Buddhism, according to a well-documented procedure. Spink’s construction of Ajanta as a royal Vākāṭaka site has been questioned, for different reasons, by Bakker (1997: 37 ff.).
The true heirs of the latter were, however, in the Deccan: the southern kingdoms established themselves along the lines laid down in the fourth century, and it was from them that a slow but steady comeback towards north would start. The role played by South India in the history of the country is generally underestimated, mainly because of the difficulty for scholars to access the written sources, numerous though they are.

2. Politics and Doctrinal Debates

Xuanzang must have praised the Mahāyāna also because it had developed a dialectical system able to withstand the offensive of the tīrthikas. In the Xiyouji there are frequent references to the public debates held between Buddhists and tīrthikas, such as those held at Śrughna, Prayāga, Pātaliputra, in Karṇaṣuvarṇa, etc. (Beal 1884, I: 186–87; II: 230–31, 96–97, 202–4): the saṃghas would spring up again (with the building of new monasteries, the resumption of economic activities of the laity, etc.) as a result of the victory of the Buddhist vādins. Yi Jing reports that Buddhist controversialists, after studying at Nālandā or Valabhi could “discuss possible and impossible doctrines”, acquiring confidence in themselves. Thus they could “proceed to the king’s court to lay down before it the sharp weapon (of their abilities)” and show their political talent, “seeking to be appointed in the practical government” (Takakusu 1896: 177). An authority such as Nāgarjuna already had the role to propitiate kings and persuade people to accept Buddhism and discard the Vedic faith (Scherrer-Schaub 2007: 762–63). The stakes of doctrinal debates was political power since at least Gupta times. In the Benares subjected to Gupta rule, the complete reorganization of the educational and academic life became possible when the Bhāgavatas won in a crucial debate over the Viśiṃavāda logicians. The Yogacārins had to abandon their establishment in Bhadainī, where their monastery was arguably dismantled and a kuṇḍa, the Lolārka Kuṇḍa, which is still there, was realized on the site (Agrawala 1983: 5–6).

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13 Suffice here to mention Dhanyakśu’s Boar inscription at the Bhāgavata site of Eran, which opens mentioning the great fame and lustre of Toramāṇa who rules the earth, and the Gwalior inscription of Mihirakula, where the king declares himself to be a worshipper of Paśupati (Sircar 1965: no. 55, pp. 420–22; no. 57, pp. 424–26).
After the Guptas, inter-religious controversies\textsuperscript{14} acquired an even greater importance. The development of Indian logic may be construed as a function of the political need of finding support at court, on pain of loss of patronage, expulsion from a given territory, and the risk, which became more and more concrete, of a death sentence, already attested to in the \textit{Xiyuji} (Beal 1984, II, 97–99, 262–64). \textit{Ānvīkṣikī}, the science of inferential reasoning, central to doctrinal controversies, was not connected to philosophy, but pertained to the domain of nītīśāstra and rājadharma, and was thus strictly related to kingship (Hakker 1958: 64–67). Debates were regarded as judicial procedures, as appears from the strict rules that had to be followed and by the fact that they occurred only in the courts of kings and judges appointed by the king. The legal dimension of Indian debates eludes us, but we can say that the judiciary passed under the control of the theistic movements, in parallel to what was happening in the Mediterranean, where, after Theodosius, the disputations with those who now were considered heretics were no longer theological debates but legal trials (Humfress 2007: 248 ff.).\textsuperscript{15} It further appears that in India debates increasingly acquired the nature of ordeals.

When the Bhāgavatas replaced the Sivaites in Kanchipuram, we would see the Buddhists impaled after being sentenced to death by the Pallava king Nandivarman II (\textit{c. AD 730–95}), a resolute persecutor of śramaṇas. The temple of Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ with the attached gallery decorated with panels illustrating the deeds of the sovereign was built in the second half of the eighth century in accord with the prescriptions of the \textit{Pāṇcarātra Āgama} (Hudson 2002: 134). The king is shown seated in a pavilion where he has delivered judgement, arguably after a doctrinal debate (fig. 3). One of the early three Āḻvārs is depicted in the adjacent panel, and we know that the Āḻvārs, particularly Tirumānukai and Toṇṭaraṭippotoṭi, went very far in their anxiety to condition the policy of the ruler and get rid of the śramaṇas. In one of his hymns, Toṇṭaraṭippotoṭi, a contemporary of king Nandivarman, upholds that it is his duty to chop off the heads of the śramaṇas. All this was functional to the distribution of lands after the clearing of all per-

\textsuperscript{14} It goes without saying that I find unacceptable to speak of “inter-sectarian” debates and struggles when Buddhism or a form of Buddhism are included in the pile: with “sects” we mean a part of a single, momentarily fragmented but re-unifiable system.

\textsuperscript{15} Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity state religion in AD 380; hence, also a different attitude towards positions that had coexisted, though in conflict, in the early Church but were now considered heretical.
sons whose observances were not in accordance to dharma (the dharma of the orthodox). 16

A number of sources, mostly un-Rankean, attest that the losing party in a debate was obliged to leave a given territory. This happened to the Buddhists with increased frequency after the death of Harṣavardhana (AD 647), when Buddhism risked collapse. In the hagiographic material, both Brahmanical and Jain, as well as in Tārānātha, we also have several examples of the necessity of capturing the skill of argumentation of the opponents by breaking into a Buddhist monastery or, conversely, into a Brahmanical māṭha in disguise. 17 The stories mentioning mutilation or the death penalty inflicted to the Buddhists have been dismissed as apocryphal or as belonging to a much later time (the thirteenth century, mainly), but if we consider the evidence from the “data base” (archaeology, epigraphy, iconography), we realize that violent means to silence one own opponents have a long story behind them. A few examples will suffice to make the point clear.

In Kerala, king Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ, who initially favoured Buddhism, was persuaded by the Brahmans to organize a public debate with the aim of overcoming the Buddhists: the tongues of the losers should be cut out. The dispute ended favourably to the Brahmans, and the tongues of the Buddhists were cut out and they were banished the country. The Perumāḷs were a local lineage of kings who were given kṣatriya status by the Brahmans and became supporters of orthodoxy. The king of the story is probably the eighth-century Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ of Makōtai (modern Kodungallur) in the Čēra country (Zvelebil 1975: 142–43), and the debate, with the resulting distribution of lands to the Brahmans, took place at Trikkariyur (Verardi 2011b: 25–26, 219). 18 Control over society was exercised through a network of temples, the rulers being often figureheads with little

16 The reader is referred to Minakshi (1938: 171–72) for the identification of the impaled as Buddhists, the role of the Āḷvārs and the political-religious significance of the king’s actions.
17 See e.g. Tārānātha’s account of Dharmakīrti disguising himself as a servant in order “to learn the secret teachings of the tīrthika systems” (Tārānātha: 89A; p. 230) or the story of the Jain guru Haribhadra, two disciples of whom went to study logic at Bodhgayā in disguise and were killed when they were discovered. On the different versions of the latter story, see Granoff (1989; I do not think that these stories are just “legends”), and see Verardi (2011b: 210 ff.) for an attempt at contextualizing historically the various strategies for success.
18 The story is reported in the Kēralōḷpattī and in a number of local purāṇas and other medieval texts (see e.g. Taylor 1838: 183). See now Veluthat (2006) on the use of such sources as the Kēralōḷpattī for historical purposes.
real power outside of what was ceded to them by the temple priests. A bold and visible Brahman oligarchy was often thinly disguised as a monarchy (Narayanan 2002: 116). In the case of king Cēramāṇī, none of our sources is “positive”, and iconographic evidence is also lacking, and yet it is possible to reconstruct the picture.

The same can be said – we are in Tamil Nadu – of certain stories pertaining to the earlier (Sivaite) wave of theistic reaction against the śramaṇas. The great saint Campantar [Sambandar], one of the early Nāyaṇār who lived in the second half of the seventh century and a Brahman by caste, caused the head of the vādin Buddhnanandi to roll on the ground by the potency of a song during a debate at Butamankalam in the middle Kaveri plain.19 Despite the death of their elder, the Buddhists insisted on another debate to be held, centred on mokṣa. It ended with the victory of Campantar and with the conversion of the Buddhists to the Sivaite faith. Going through the story, we understand that the Sivaite crowd that welcomed Campantar on his arrival in town created the conditions to cause the death of the Buddhist elder. Intimidations and preventive acts were meant to avoid major clashes. The story is told at length in the Periya Purāṇam,20 through which, as has been observed, we are inevitably led to read all the earlier evidence (Gros 1984): it is difficult, however, to imagine a community of Buddhists being cleared away from the main settlement of a fertile area such as Butamankalam in twelfth-century Cōḷamaṇṭalam: the story cannot but refer to an earlier period. There is ampler evidence on the anti-śramaṇa operations carried out by the Sivaites in the late seventh–early eighth century (see below). They came as a consequence of the speeding-up of the Brahmanical settlement policy, thanks to which the most fertile, generally riverine regions, were firstly colonized, and then, step by step, the less productive and even the marginal areas. Debates, legitimation of power and occupation of lands are aspects of a coordinated process. We would better understand the unwinding of Indian medieval history by putting aside the idea of an India forced in the cage of a “feudal” phase. Indian Marxist historians have done a great service to the development of the discipline, but I do not think that the category “feudalism”, which is the object of reconsideration even in Europe (Reynolds 2004), is of great help for us to understand medieval India, of which it is

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19 It is identified with present Budalur near Tirukkattupalli in Thanjavur district, and, tentatively, with the native place of the fifth-century thera Buddhadatta (Dikshitar 1931: 689, n. 1).

probably not a structural component. The tīrthikas did hold power and lands, very often usurping the function of the kṣatriyas. For all the possible parallels in the ownership and management of lands and estates, even Karl Marx was looking for an “Asiatic” mode of production. Inexistent as the latter is, this suggests that it is more appropriate to look for the operative mechanisms of a system within it.

3. Level of Confrontation

There are many examples of the escalating level of violence against Buddhist institutions in the eighth century and later. Besides the intervention of kings, militias were formed in Śivaite mathas and in Bhāgavata circles as well to knock down the power of the śramaṇas (Verardi 2011b: 231ff.). There are no appreciable differences among the various regions of India but for the tools used and, quite often, for the different nature of the documentation at our disposal. The dynamics observable in the Valley of Kathmandu, in Orissa, at Ellora, and, again, in Kanchipuram, may help clarifying the point.

A hymn engraved on the Garuḍa pillar at Andigrāma in Viśalnagara (early Kathmandu) praises the tīrṣi Vyāsa for having cured the evils described in the Kali Age literature: “men had taken to atheism”, and “the false logicians (i.e. the Buddhist vādins) were suppressing the truth”. These “disciples of the Sugata” are called “crooked distorters of this world” (Regmi 1983: no. XXVII; see here fig. 4). The excavations carried out in the adjacent area have shown that a stūpa was dismantled after AD 749, that the area was thoroughly cleared of all Buddhist memory, and that a Viṣṇu temple was erected on the Buddhist monuments razed to the ground (figs. 5, 6). The Garuḍa pillar was erected on a base made with the bricks robbed from the stūpa (Verardi 1992, I: 88–90; see here fig. 7). Andigrāma became Harigaon, the village of the temple of Hari whose revenues were assigned to the maintenance of the Viṣṇu temple.21 Bhāgavatism established itself in the Valley as the hegemonic power, but the role played by the Sivaites in curbing down the śramaṇas was not less effective. The evidence is provided by the transformation into liṅgas of votive stūpas, usually known as “Licchavi stūpas” from the name of the royal family that ruled over Nepal for a long time. They are provided with niches, but these are empty because their images were chiselled away, and they have been deprived of their

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21 The place name Andigrāma is found in an inscription dated AD 749 from the excavated site (Verardi 1992, I: 143–44).
finials (Wiesner 1980): an example comes from Chabahil, the Cārumatī Vihāra said to have been erected by the daughter of Aśoka (figs. 8–9).

The local *vamśavālīs* keep memory of the conflict thatcornered the Buddhists in a subaltern position, the responsibility of past events being attributed, as commonly done in these texts, to Śaṅkarācārya. Although the saint probably never set foot in Nepal, we cannot discard the information that these texts provide, because it integrates the evidence given above. Some followers of Buddhism fled, we read, and some others were put to death. *Bhikṣuṇīs* were forced to marry, monks were equated to *gṛhaṇīs*, sacred texts were destroyed. Yet, in some places, Śaṅkara was obliged to leave the Baudhāmargīs as temple priests (Wright 1877: 118–23). We have, in essence, an account of the formation and characteristics of Newār Buddhism, forcibly subaltern and yet strongly identitarian.

In Orissa, we have the chance to see the Kāpālikas in action. Reviled in Brahmanical texts for the dirty jobs they executed, they were functionally connected with the clean castes through mechanisms where the Brahmans, normally only associated with the *dakṣinaḥpāṇa* or performance of the five *mahāyajñas*, could take part to heterodox forms of worship, though with very strict limitations (van Kooij 1972: 29). The Kāpālikas, besides exercising magic and black magic, had the task of getting rid of “learned Brahmans” (Lorenzen 1972: 74–77). The latter could hardly be the *vaidikas* or the *tīrthikas* imbued with ritualistic doctrine: the only learned Brahmans whose suppression makes sense were those who had apostatized, especially the Buddhist controversialists who kept the orthodox in check. The *bhrūṇahana* was the gravest of sins, and the *mahāvratā* of the Kāpālikas was exactly the penance for removing it (ibidem: 77–81). The split personality of these ascetics reflects the equally split personality of Śiva, who, according to a little understood myth reported in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (184.81–94; vol. 2, pp. 168–69), cuts Brahmā’s fifth head, resplendent for the asceticism. In the *Śiva Purāṇa*, it is Kālابhairava, one of the *vāma* aspects of Śiva and reference God of the Kāpālikas together with Cāmuṇḍā, the “left” aspect of the Goddess, who commits the murder (*Rudrasaṁhitā*: II.xxxiv.52; p. 434). Śiva is condemned to wander from *tīrtha* to *tīrtha* until he is delivered from his sin in Benares.\(^{22}\) It was Śiva’s deed that the Kāpālikas re-enacted, thus moving from one place to the other and ready to kill and be pardoned again.

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\(^{22}\) Lorenzen (1972: 77–81) examines the passage of the *Matsya Purāṇa* and provides references to other relevant material. The Vāraṇāsī Māhātmya of the *Matsya Purāṇa* has long been thought to be the earliest in the literature, but see now Bakker and Isaacson (2004).
The Kāpālikas are represented in a frieze in the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneshwar, naked and with kathvaṅgas, i.e. sticks surmounted by the skull of the victims (fig. 10). In this temple, they are associated with other groups of Sivaites, a central position being given here to Lakulīśa, who deeply restructured the movement of the Pāśupatas in the second or third century AD. The presiding deity in the garbhagrha of the temple is Cāmuṇḍā, flanked on both sides by the māṭrkās. Among the terrific forms of Śiva, we note a form of Bhairava sitting in a fighting posture, holding a sacrificial knife: a severed head, with the feature of the Buddha, lies in front of the God, and two chopped heads are depicted on a tripod on the pedestal (fig. 11). Outside the temple, there is a much worn, reworked Buddhist sculpture serving as base of a yūpa, the sacrificial post (fig. 12), testifying to the sacrifices – including human sacrifices – offered up to the Goddess. It was made reusing on purpose an architectural feature from some destroyed Buddhist edifice (cf. Verardi 2011b: 235 and esp. note 222 on p. 261).

In the eighth century, the brahmanization of the Deccan was a done deal, and it was time to break through to the north: Orissa found itself caught between the orthodox push from the South and the new Buddhist power of the Pālas. This situation put the stall in Indian history for centuries, and did nothing but worsen. In both geostrategic and symbolic terms, the objective was Magadha, the cradle of Buddhism, adjacent to both Bengal and Orissa. Looking at the images of Cāmuṇḍā scattered all over Orissa, we often see her triumphantly seated either on a naked, dead man – an asura often identifiable with a śramaṇa, or on a tribal rājā threatened by the settlement policy of the tūrthikas and supporter of the śramaṇas. A stele from Kalamisri (fig. 13) makes us understand who suppressed the heretics and their allies: a Kāpālika is still hitting, while the prey animals begin to feed on the corpse – primarily the owl, the vāhana of the Goddess.

23 Opinions on Lakulīśa, his religious role, the epoch when he lived, and even his historical reality, are extremely varied. I limit myself to recall, with Debala Mitra (1984: 104), the Mathurā Gupta inscription of AD 380, from which it may be inferred that a militant form of Śivaism was already in existence.

24 The best description of this temple and the relevant iconographic material is still that provided by Panigrahi (1961: esp. 32 ff., 77–81, 233–34).

25 For the textual evidence on the balidāna, see Kālikā Purāṇa, 55; vol. 2, pp. 385 ff. This purāṇa is dated to the mid-ninth century. See also the apocryphal story in the biography of Xuanzang where the pilgrim is said to have run the risk of being sacrificed to the Goddess (Beal 1911: 86–87).

26 Some of the dead, besides being naked in that they do not wear the cloth of the Veda, show elongated ears and hair shaved or nearly shaved.
In the majority of cases iconographies are not so explicit, and even less explicit is, in general, the epigraphic record, not to speak of the many elusive myths, but integrating the various sources to create a credible scenario is possible. In the epigraphic record and literary works, the opposition lion/elephant is mentioned very often: elephants are described as the enemies won in battle by the conquering lions. We have whole temples defended by rampart lions, and other built on crushed elephants. In the Kailāśanātha temple at Kanchipuram, where rampart lions are ubiquitous, King Rājasimha Pallava (c. AD 700–730) states that Puruṣottama (Viṣṇu) was born to rescue from the ocean of sin the sinking people swallowed by the monster known as the Kali Age, and defines himself that pious king who has made the universe obedient to his orders: he has proved a royal lion (Rājasimha) to the troops of the elephants of his foes (cf. Hultzsch 1890: no. 24, v. 8, 11; p. 14). The reference to the Kali Age brings us to wonder about the meaning of a relief with Śiva as a teacher seating under a tree with a couple of deer (fig. 14), a scene which is not simply modelled on that of the Buddha’s first sermon but is intended to replace it: the elephant head below is a cut-off head that we also see under the other temple panels that depict Śiva fighting the asuras. The meaning of lions and elephants, semantically ambiguous, becomes clear: their polarity appears, in context, as the opposition between the victorious orthodox kings (the lions) and the defeated Buddhists (the elephants), the Buddha being the Elephant by definition.27

The best-known symbol of elephant hunting and killing is the Gajāsuraṁhāramūrti of Śiva. The myth, set in Benares, is narrated in the Kūrma Purāṇa in relation to the Kṛttivāseśvara Liṅga, the liṅga of the Lord who is clad in the garment of the elephant’s skin: the God has killed the dāitya who had taken the form of an elephant, and has made its hide his robe (Kūrma Purāṇa: 1.32.16–18; vol.1, p. 253). Here the myth allegorizes the clash between the Sivaite devotees and the Śramaṇas, whose elder, the Elephant, was killed as an intimidation act aimed at dispersing his followers. The Buddhists-elephants are the major obstruction to the complete affirmation of Śiva, and they must be removed, or obliged to submit.28 The poems of Campantar explain this clearly: “Those Buddhists and mad Jains may slander speak. / Such speech befits the wanderers from the way. / But he who came to earth and begged for alms, / He is the thief who stole

28 As emphasized by the same text a little below (l. 21), the Kali Yuga “is terrible and full of evil”.

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my heart away. / The raging elephant charged down at him; / O marvel! He but took and wore his hide” (Kingsbury and Phillips 1921: no. 18; p. 27).

The exploits of Śiva and Viṣṇu against the asuras and their mythicization in the devāsura war barely conceal the identity Devas/Brahmans and Asuras/Heretics (pāsanās and nāstikas). In a number of texts, the heretics are described as nagdās, naked,29 because, as said above, they are deprived of the cloth of the Veda. This is the reason why we can identify the asuras killed by Kālabhairava with the help of Gaṇeṣa and the Goddesses in the yajñaśāla (fig. 15) of the mammoth Kailāsānātha temple at Ellora in upper Deccan. The Goddesses take directly part in the suppression of the asuras fighting against them and drinking their blood, as is explained in the Devī Māhātmya (8.7–62; pp. 63–67). What is then the yajñaśāla? It may be interpreted either as the actual place where special yājnas, centred on the ritual killing of religious enemies were performed or as the stone rendition of the temporary structure erected outside the temple where the heretics were or had been executed.

4. The Vajrayāna Revolt

The Guhyasamāja Tantra delivers a radical attack to social institutions and socially accepted behaviours maintaining that no one can succeed in obtaining perfection through difficult, painful processes and that one can succeed easily through the satisfaction of all desires. Mahāvairocana declares that the outcaste, workers and similar people find perfection in this yāna, which is likewise for those who do not respect the life of the others, who delight in telling falsehood, who steal other people’s property, who continuously take recourse to sensual pleasures, etc. (Guhyasamāja Tantra: V. 3–7; cf. Gnoli 1983, pp. 631–32).30 One would say, at first glance, that this text actively favours the establishment of a collapsed, broken-up society: the addressees of the initiates are not only the outcaste, but the murderers, thieves, liars, immoral and incestuous persons, the defamers. However, many of these epithets were just those given by the orthodox to their opponents in order

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29 See e.g. Vāyu Purāṇa (II.16.31; vol. 2, p. 613). The text makes the example, among others, of Brahmans who shave their hair “for nothing”.

30 For a complete translation of this tantra, the reader is referred to Gäng (1988).
to defame them, and we probably have to see in the text a deliberate provocation.\textsuperscript{31} We should examine Indian Vajrayāna in its initial, generating context, limiting the level of symbolic explanation to a minimum, and further considering that we mostly deal with metaphors, not with symbols in the proper sense.

The authors of the \textit{Guhyasamāja Tantra} and other texts addressed social sectors only partly superimposable to those on which the Buddhists had staked to establish their hegemony in the past. The “bourgeoisie” of trade and industry had disappeared a long time but for Bengal, and the attempt of the Mahāyāna to counteract the agricultural policy of the \textit{tīrthikas} on their own ground had failed. The lands owned by the monasteries were deeply infiltrated by theistic and caste practices, even where, as in Bengal, the monastic institutions could not easily be blackmailed with the threat of destruction. It is not possible, however, to explain the rise and success of the Vajrayāna abstracting from the rise and success of Pāla power. In the second half of the eighth century, throughout the ninth century and even later, the Pālas succeeded in controlling a large part of the subcontinent and provided a safety net to the advocates of the new yāna. Dharmapāla (AD 775–800) conquered geostrategic Kanauj, and extended his control on the Panjāb and Gandhāra (Kielhorn 1896–97: v. 12) and on parts of the Deccan, and his successor Devapāla (\textit{c.} 800–840) was equally successful: with his successors, too, it seemed that northern India, and even parts of the South, could be restored to the religion of Dharma.

The distinctive traits of the Vajrayāna are the legitimation of violence in order to defend the religion and the acquisition at the theoretic and not only factual level of sexual behaviours in open opposition to the caste-and-family social model of the \textit{tīrthikas}. Regarding violence, the Buddhists had learnt the lesson imparted to them by the violent eight-century events. A rethinking of the whole matter had started even before, arguably in connection with the violence experienced in Gupta times,\textsuperscript{32} but now the \textit{Guhyasamāja Tantra} explicitly invited concentration on the three-pronged \textit{vajra} “that paralyzes all the

\textsuperscript{31} I no longer think that they were simply paradoxical (Verardi 2011b: 304), but that the followers of the Vajrayāna made their own the insults of the \textit{tīrthikas}, transforming them into a weapon (as if to say: we are murderers? Well, yes, that’s right: here we are…).

\textsuperscript{32} According to Asaṅga’s \textit{Bodhisattvabhūmi}, the Bodhisattva is ready to be reborn in hell to kill those potentially responsible for the slaying of innocent beings. He would fight to get back the property of the \textit{saṃgha} or a stūpa robbed by “thieves and bandits” (cf. MacFarlane 1995: 194, quoting from Unrai Wogihara’s edition of the text, Tokyo 1930–36, 165–7). With the latter, the armed groups organized by the \textit{tīrthikas} in order to intimidate the monks are probably alluded to (see Verardi 2011b: 231 ff.).
non-Buddhist teachers” projecting it on the head of the enemy, which will not prevail against the buddhasainya, the army of the Buddha (cf. Davidson 2002: 193–94). In the Sarvatathāgatatattva Samgraha, Vajrapāni warns the Tathāgatas against the existence of criminals such as Maheśvara and other Brahmanical gods, who are summoned by a mantra. Śiva is eventually annihilated by Vajrapāni, by whom the other gods take also refuge. He abandons his form of Mahādeva and is reborn, entering the mandala with another name (cf. id. 1991: 200–2). The mandala is thus the conceptualization of a territorial space where Brahmanical power must be terminated with violent means if necessary to allow the Buddhists to recreate the Kingdom of Dharma. The “great strategy” of yore, the Mahāyāna, was ineffective and obsolete; a strategy of violence, exemplified by the vajra, was now needed.

The social sectors involved in the Vajrayāna revolt included, besides the outcaste and lower-caste people exemplified by the social origin of the eighty-four siddhas, the “tribals” who opposed the reclamation of land and their forced annexation to the caste society. The tribal chiefs of the Vindhyas are the men with long hair, often styled in elaborate manner, lying dead under the Goddess or with their heads chopped off (fig. 16) or, in certain cases, surrendering and imploring her clemency. We know them also from the literature (the Śabaras are topical) and, if the explanatory model presented here makes sense, from the very tradition on the origins of the Vajrayāna as well. A tribal chief probably was king Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna, where Vajrayāna Buddhism originated (Tucci 1949: 212–13). He may be a mythical king, but myth can be explored and contextualized: it is reasonable to believe that he was one of those chiefs who took advantage of the situation arisen with the military campaigns of Dharmapāla and the temporary disruption of the Brahmanical social order imposed in the Northwest by the Śāhīs (Verardi 2011a: 159ff., 168 ff.).

Buddhist images documenting violence as a political means started being produced as early as the ninth-tenth century in Bihar, where we see Aparājitā triumphing on


34 On the Vajrayāna and North-western India, cf. also Davidson (2002: passim). The line of interpretation according to which the origin of the Vajrayāna should be looked for in eastern India, particularly in Orissa (identified with Uḍḍiyāna by some authors; see e.g. Sahu 1958: 152 ff.), is due to the overflowing amount of textual and iconographic documentation that comes from that area – a documentation, however, in which converge very different materials indiscriminately labelled as “Tantric”.

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a subjugated Gaṇeśa (fig. 17). At Nālandā, Trailokyavijaya stands victoriously on Śīva and Pārvatī annihilated (fig. 18). On behalf of these iconographies, which would multiply over time and grow in ferocity, it appears that it is difficult to distinguish between the siddha movement and institutional Buddhism (the monasteries of Nālandā, for instance, where similar images were produced; cf. Misra 1998, III: 143, 149 ff.). We actually do not know how long it took to the shocked Bodhisattvas, namely the great Mahāyāna monks, attending the saṃgīti in the Guhyasamāja Tantra (V. 8; cf. Gnoli 1983, p. 632) to accept the Vajra strategy. But texts, too, could hardly be produced without the active collaboration of learned monks capable of rethinking the fundamentals of Buddhism.

In the (partly) ritualized sexual practices introduced into the system, scholars have seen since long a giving in to pressure from the bottom of society. However, rather than a giving in, we should speak of a conscious, even if risky strategy aimed at becoming fully credible with the social sectors deemed essential to the revival of Buddhism, at mixing with them. The taking on in person of sexual behaviours undermining social order is just a reversal of strict monasticism, always criticized as anti-social by the tīrthikas. We are in front of a renewed, violent opposition to the caste-and-family model, as intolerably disruptive as strict monasticism. The one and the other are also sharp alternatives to the compromising householder monks.

The history of the lowermost castes and the untouchables has attracted little attention in India, where research is inhibited by the preconception according to which the Brahmans would have created a social system where the conflict rate was low (though at the price of reinforcing the caste system and creating the barrier of untouchability). This view is a legacy of nineteenth-century historiography, which created an exotic India compensating Europe and its violent history. The Vajrayāna revolt ravaged northern India and was a serious challenge to the establishment. We observe a progressive radicali-

35 This is also true of certain fringes of Sivaism (here we have mentioned the Kāpālika) as has often been pointed out by scholars, and in Bengal it would be also true of Visnuism, which, using every means, would inherit the Buddhist masses left without points of reference. But we cannot be satisfied with analyses that stop at the phenomenological level. As I am trying to explain in these pages, the aims of the Buddhists and of the theistic movements were very different. The purpose of the latter was to restore a rigid order in society.

36 Sometimes we forget the meaning of even the best known events in the Buddha’s life: that Siddhārtha, in contrast with the rules that a twice-born should have followed, left his young wife was an extremely provocative act.
zation of the uprising, and the open-air temples of the yoginīs may be taken as indicators of the increasingly difficult social, ethnic and inter-religious situation. These temples are situated along the critical borderline constituted by the Vindhyas, from eastern Rajasthan to Bhubaneshwar, and arise in places that are secluded but not distant from the local centres of power.37 The yoginīs are a spatial projection of the Goddess in her vāma aspect, and in fact, at the centre of the yogini enclosures (fig. 19) there usually is an aedicule with the images of Cāmuṇḍā and Śiva in one of his terrific forms. The enclosures are, on reflection, a functional transformation of the garbhagṛha of the Vaitāl Deul, where, as we have seen, two rows of mātrakās flank Cāmuṇḍā on both sides, and of the yajñāsāla of Ellora, less structured though the latter is. It is unlikely that the people suppressed in these enclosures were “normal” enemies killed in war: we are out of the logic of the battlefield, the natural place for the fallen to die; it is more probable that the victims were killed in odium fidei. They were the protagonists of an insidious guerrilla war whose stake was Bodhgayā. That in a number of cases religious enemies were meant, appears in a tenth-century stele from Bihar where Cāmuṇḍā, after beheading a group of enemies (mostly men of religion), takes her seat under the pipal tree on a naked asura who has the shape of the Buddha, whom she has dislodged from his throne. A few other chopped-off heads, two of which showing uṣṇiṣās, are in the sacrificial basin in the lower part of the stele, together with amputated legs and arms (figs. 20–21).

The Sivaites were not alone in the attempt at eradicating Buddhism. In the ninth century, the Viṣṇu-Gadādhara in the town’s main temple:38 with his “sharp axe”, the God had hewn “the tree of great sin” (Vāmana Purāṇa: 50.15, pp. 424–25). The tree is naturally that of the Awakening. In fact, the Visnuites appropriated Bodhgayā, as appears from the archaeological documentation (F. Barba in Verardi 2011b: 409–11) and as is attested to in the Kalki Purāṇa, a late composite work preserving an extremely valuable

37 For a description of the yogini temples, I refer the reader to Dehejia (1986) and, in relation to Orissa, to Donaldson (2002), where he will find a lot of interesting material. These authors would probably not share my view on the matter, which I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Verardi (2011b: 288–89, 294–95).

38 Viṣṇu Gadādhara, a violent manifestation of the God, is first mentioned in an inscription datable to AD 1058 (Sircar 1964–65: v. 9). With reference to Bodhgayā, the frightful nature of Viṣṇu is made explicit also in the Gayāsura myth, first analyzed by Rajendralala Mitra (1878: 9 ff.).
material. It contains a detailed description of the battle of Kīkaṭā (Bodhgayā/Magadha) waged by Kalki, the last *avatāra* of Viśṇu, where the Buddhists are said to have drawn up in battle order accompanied by “millions of outcaste” (*Kalki Purāṇa*: II.vii. 38; p. 80).

5. The Suppression of Buddhism in Magadha and Eastern India

The “Turuṣkas” started advancing into northern India when the conflict between the *tīrthikas* and the Vajrayānists was reaching its apex. Indian powers fought against the Turuṣkas for long, while the Buddhists tried, in places, to benefit from the situation weakening the *tīrthikas*: besides stirring up the lower classes, they often sided with the Muslims, as had happened in eighth-century Sind, where the good relationships between Muslims and Buddhists are well documented.\(^{39}\) When the *tīrthikas* realized that they would never defeat the Turuṣkas in battle, they strove to separate the Muslims from the Buddhists striking the latter very hard. Finally, the *tīrthikas* compromised with the invaders, particularly under the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1290). The compromise allowed them to re-establish social order in certain territories, to retain an operational political space and reorganize themselves.

The actors on the Indian political scene were very numerous, but here we focus on the Gahāḍavālas, who ruled Madhyadeśa from Kanauj and Benares and were, in places, supportive of the Buddhists, and on the Senas. The latter were an orthodox dynasty original from South India that put an end to Pāla rule in Bengal and inflicted a mortal blow to the Buddhist monasteries of eastern India. In AD 1128–29, the Gahāḍavāla king Govindacandra donated six villages to the community of śākyabhikṣus of the Jetavana at Sravasti (Sahni 1911–12), a policy followed by his local vassals, too (Kielhorn 1888: 1. 15–16; cf. Niyogi 1959: 258). Two of his queens were Buddhist – an early model of differentiated social intervention that was again put to test. Who were the śākyabhikṣus? Our closest chronological and spatial reference are the śākyabhikṣus, or householder monks, of Newār Buddhism – a crucial, though little-used “fossil guide” to Indian medieval Buddhism.\(^{40}\) It is reasonable to think that the Gahāḍavāla donations

\(^{39}\) Maclean (1989: esp. 51–52, 58, but passim). For Sind as a place where the fundamentals were fixed for the later interaction between Buddhists and Muslims, cf. Verardi (2011b: 350ff.).

\(^{40}\) John Locke, to whom we owe the most valuable contribution to Newār Buddhism, maintains that the latter was probably structured on the presence of householder monks, the śākyabhikṣus or śākyavamśas, since its inception (Locke 1985: 4, 484).
went to the advantage of the more integrated, non-violent sectors of Buddhism. Queen Kumāradevī, although not endowed with all the royal prerogatives (Niyogi 1959: 199), donated a vihāra to the sthavīra of the Buddhist community of Sarnath to honour the Dharmacakra Jina, whose image she also restored (Konow 1907–8: v. 20–23).41

Govindacandra was exposed, from the west, to the attacks by the Muslim rulers of Panjab, to whom he paid tribute (D.C. Ganguly in R.C. Majumdar 1957: 51), and, from the east, to those of the hardliner Senas. His successor Jayacandra (c. AD 1170–93) found himself in an impasse that led him to radical choices. He owned a white elephant (Niyogi 1959: 198) – an animal, and a colour, laden with precise symbolism in Buddhism.42 We have a clue regarding his policy from the fact that his dikṣaguru was Śrīmītra, a siddha, whom he praises because at the Mahābodhi he had recovered numerous lost scriptures (N. Sanyal 1929: esp. 11.7, 11; Niyogi 1959: 198, 210, 260), arguably those pertaining to the third setting in motion of the Wheel of the Law. Kanauj was lost, and the dynasty controlled only parts of its former territories from Benares. It is not difficult to imagine the opposition that, exactly in Benares, the policy of the king had to meet. At Sarnath, a very large Brahmanical temple was built in the northern area, where the so-called “Monastery I” is located. The area appears as a walled compound accessible through huge gateways, erected on a dismantled Buddhist monastery the inner court of which was made to coincide with the courtyard of the new building (F. Barba in Verardi 2011b: 427 ff.). “Monastery I” started being called “Dharmacakra Jinavihāra” (Sahni 1923: 28) with reference to the donation of Kumāradevī, but the relevant inscription is not associated with “Monastery I” (Mani 2005–6). At least fourteen Brahmanical sculptures and architectural fragments were found in the area (cf. F. Barba in Verardi 2011b). D.R. Sahni, who carried out excavations at Sarnath after John Marshall, understood that these fragments must have belonged to a Brahmanical temple (Sahni 1914: 243–44) but was unable to locate it because he failed to grasp the stratigraphic conundrum. Around AD 1200, the Lord of Isipatana may be said to have been Śiva Sāraṅganātha (hence Sārnāth), usurping the park and the deer from Śākyamuni.

41 Kumāradevī refers explicitly to the Jina, and does not seem to have paid homage to a form of Śiva such as Anṃṭėśvara that assimilates the Buddha and bestows “the reward of liberation upon women” (Sanderson 2004: 254).

42 The white colour is the sum of all other colours, thus being “central”. This is why the Buddha appears to Queen Māyā as a white elephant, and why the colour of Vairocana (a hypostasis of the Buddha), whose position is central in relation to the other Buddhas, is white.
Research work on the Sena dynasty is still limited, and scholars continue to adhere to the misleading construct of a unified Pāla-Sena period. The concern of the Senas, while the Turuṣkas were advancing towards the middle and eastern Ganges valley, was to establish *varṇāśramadharma* in the territories that came under their rule. King Vallālasena (c. 1158–1179) started abusing the Buddhist merchants, who were numerous in Bengal. Vallabha Ādhya, the richest merchant and banker of the region and leader of the Sonār-Vaniās, had always financed the king: when the latter showed the intention to march against Magadha, he refused to do so, and the Vaniās were forcibly expelled from Bengal. Those who remained were downgraded: the Brahmans were prohibited from teaching them and officiating for them (H. P. Shāstri 1911: 21–22). The Senas started a radical administrative-territorial overhaul of the former Pāla territories. Judging from the *vijayakṣetras* established in the various grāmas, villages were conceived as administrative and political units of the new power and milestones in the creation of a caste agrarian society. The largest concentration of these new centres was in the navigable sector of Vaṅga and near the estuarine mouth of the Bay of Bengal (R. Sanyal 2008–9: 101). This may be construed as a determined attempt at curbing down trade – or at least the trade that was in Buddhist hands.

The Senas are responsible for the attacks on Buddhist monasteries. We have an echo of the attack against Somapura/Paharpur from a Nalanda inscription, according to which “the ascetic Karuṇāśrīmitra … when his house was burning, *(being) set on fire by the approaching army of Vaṅgāla, attached *(himself) to the pair of lotus feet of the Buddha, *(and) went to heaven*” (N.G. Majumdar 1931–32: v. 2–3). We also know of the attacks against Vikramasila/Antichak, whose end is commonly but groundlessly attributed to Bakhtiyār-i Khaljī, the military adventurer who first opened to the Muslims the gates of eastern India in the early thirteenth century and who never passed through the region of Vikramasila to reach Bengal (Chaudhary 1978: 217–18). A Brahmanical temple was built on the Buddhist ruins of the monastery *before* the arrival of the Muslims, to be abandoned later on. Other attempts to destroy the monastery had already taken place. An inscription on a pillar stump mentions a local chief, Sahura of Campā, who had dispelled a planned attack by “the rulers of Baṅga” (Verma 2001, II: 303): evidently, the Senas.43

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43 The archaeologists responsible for the excavations at Antichak show the traditional reticence and misunderstanding about the dynamics of destruction of the Buddhist monasteries of eastern India. B.S. Verma (2011: 17) writes that “[t]he introduction of tantra and the worship of large number of gods and goddesses
At Odantapurī/Bihar Sharif the monastery, which had already withstood repeated onsloughts of Vallālasena, was adjacent to the Pāla camp (Ali 1406 H/1985, I A: 50). The Muslim attack is narrated in a famous passage of the Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī (I: 551–52). The Muslims were apparently unaware of the real nature of the site, and were upset when they discovered the truth. There were no soldiers in the fortress, as became clear after the killing of the monks, and we must think that the Turuṣkas, who based their field operations on the information provided by local informers – inevitably, tūrthikas – were led to a place that was not defended at all. The Ratnodadhi library at Nālandā, we learn from the Tibetan sources, was put on fire by the tūrthikas,44 and Dharmasvāmin, who resided there in 1234–35, reports a story whose sense is that the Muslims had been instructed to launch an attack on the monastery, but gave the game away so that the monks could save themselves (Roerich 1959: 33b–34a; pp. 31–32, 93–94).

The rivalries between Buddhists played a role in accelerating the collapse of the religion. The monks of Sri Lanka, who had a large part in the management of Bodhgayā since Gupta times, were opposed to Mahāyānists and Vajrayānists. Dharmasvāmin was rebuked for carrying with him a manuscript of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, which he had to hide, the censor being the śrāvaka keeper of Vajrāsana proper (ibidem: 19b–20a; pp. 18–19, 73–74). Tāranātha reports an episode that he attributes to the time of Dharmapāla, but which is probably later on behalf of the fact that it is about an image of Heruka and the “many treatises on Tantra”. The śrāvakas of the Island and their allies burnt the books, and smashed the image into pieces (Tāranātha: 109A, p. 279). Inside the three gates giving access to the Mahābodhi Temple and the Vajrāsana, only the sacristans could sleep: the point is that there were “three hundred sacristans native of Ceylon, who belong[ed] to the Śrāvaka school; other (schools) ha[d] no such right” (Roerich 1959: 19b; pp. 18, 73). Why Indian Buddhist monks and priests were excluded from control of the Vajrāsana? The only possible explanation is that the foreign monks helped in cleansing the site from the supporters and sympathizers of the rebels. The śrāvakas had no following in India, they were not a threat, and could be sent back home at any time.

The reversal of alliances, which caused the Buddhists to fight on two fronts, against the tūrthikas and against the Muslims, and eventually be suppressed, is exempli-

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fied by the creation of the state of Mithilā, which included northern Bihar and a part of Magadha, with Bodhgayā. Dharmasvāmin reports that the few monks residing there in 1235 camouflaged the entrance to the Mahābodhi temple with an image of Śiva: thereby the Turuṣkas would not attack it (ibidem: 64). This means that the Muslims spared the religious buildings of the tīrthikas, being induced to attack those of the Buddhists. The kingdom of Mithilā under the Karṇāta kings and their successors kept its independence thanks to the alliance that king Narasimha made with the Sultān of Delhi, to whom he paid tribute: he helped him to capture the whole of South Bihar in the early 13th century. Mithilā’s “national” poet Vidyāpati (c. 1352–1448) would account for the alliance between king Sakrasiṃha (1296–1316) and ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī. He considered Ibrāhīm Shāh, the Sharqī ruler of Jaunpur (1402–1440), second only to God, and his capital a second Amarāvatī, and persuaded him to organize a military expedition to put an end to the still chaotic conditions prevailing in the country (Chaudhary 1970: 71). The majority of historians are reticent on what took place in the region, and we must be content with either short, apodictic statements or cursory admissions.45

Regarding the Buddhist communities that survived in Bengal and Orissa until the sixteenth century, their history remains largely to be written.

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45 B.J. Hasrat, a distant heir of those who, in Nepal, suffered the backlash of the events, has observed, for instance, that “… in the plains of India … the prosecution of the Buddhists was furious – root and branch eradication in fact” (Hasrat 1970: 39, note 1).
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Figures

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Fig. 20. Bihar. Cāmuṇḍā seated on dead asura in the shape of the Buddha. 10th century. Courtesy National Museum, New Delhi.

Fig. 21. Detail of preceding, with dead asura/Buddha and victims.
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