

Muslim and Buddhist Encounters: Between Conflict and Harmony

Hubungan Muslim dan Buddha antara Konflik dan Keharmonian

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ABSTRACT

Recent public concern over Muslim–Buddhist relations in South and Southeast Asia has emerged because of massive violence against Muslim minority groups in the region’s Buddhist-majority states. The Buddhist have expressed fear that the rise in the Muslim population would force out the Buddhists, as has happened in several historical records. Thus, in this article, we provide a preliminary analysis of Buddhist-Muslim relations from past to present as it unfolds the various forms of relations, conflicts, and harmonies. This article also analyses the driving factors that contribute to the relation of both religious societies in terms of politics, religion, and economics. This research is qualitative. The research method used is descriptive-analytical by emphasizing content analysis of data information from various books and articles covering the Muslim and Buddhism encounters. Despite certain polemics having occurred along the relationship, the study shows that Muslim-Buddhist encounter occurred in harmony, particularly when relation was rooted in tolerance. Studies affirm that disputed facts ought to be critically updated to establish the causes, which will also help address the misunderstanding between religious societies.

Keywords: Muslim-Buddhist relation; Islam and Buddhism; interfaith relation; religious tolerance; religious studies

ABSTRAK

Isu hubungan Muslim dan penganut Buddhisme kembali menarik perhatian umum rentetan insiden keganasan dalam kalangan penganut Buddha terhadap kumpulan minoriti Muslim di rantau Asia Selatan dan Asia Tenggara. Di negara yang didominasi agama Buddha, wujud dalam kalangan penganut agama keimbangan dengan peningkatan populasi Muslim atas persepsi boleh menggugat survival penganut Buddha sebagaimana yang tercatat dalam rekod sejarah. Artikel ini akan menganalisis hubungan Muslim dan penganut Buddhisme sejak dahulu sehingga kini dalam pelbagai bentuk, melibatkan konflik dan keharmonian. Artikel ini juga menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi bentuk hubungan kedua-dua penganut agama dari segi politik, agama dan ekonomi. Kajian ini adalah bersifat kualitatif dengan memberi penekanan terhadap kaedah deskriptif-analisis, melalui penganalisan data daripada buku dan artikel yang bertemakan pertemuan Muslim dan penganut Buddhisme. Meskipun dapatan awal kajian mendapati wujudnya polemik dalam pertemuan kedua-dua penganut agama tersebut, kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa hubungan tersebut turut berlaku dalam keadaan harmoni yang berdasarkan semangat toleransi. Kajian mencadangkan agar fakta sejarah yang bersifat polemik perlu dinilai semua secara kritis bagi memurnikan kesalahfahaman dalam kalangan kedua-dua penganut agama.

Kata kunci: Hubungan Muslim-Buddhisme; Islam dan Buddhisme; hubungan antara agama; toleransi agama; kajian agama-agama

INTRODUCTION

Muslims are recognized as; minority population in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Singapore, while accepted as the majorities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. The Buddhist majority in their countries have expressed concern that the increase of the Muslim population will drive out the Buddhists. The Buddhists often address their proclamation on the

historical legacy of Islamification and Islamization, carried out by various the Muslim rulers that purportedly drove out the Buddhists from their territories particularly in the Central Asia likewise the current public concern over Muslim–Buddhist relations in South and Southeast Asia will take place on the awakening of massive violence against Muslim minority in Buddhist majority states in the region. During these years, scholars and journalists

raised questions about Muslim-Buddhist relations in the awakening of anti-Muslim violence (Frydenlund & Jerryson 2020; Schissler 2017). Certainly, the classification of threads on Buddhist anti-Muslim sequences of sentiments can be traced historically. Yet, the scale of attacks on Muslim minorities was historically still vague and undefined in total number including the clashes between Muslim and Buddhist reported has been happened in Sri Lanka (Stewart 2014), and the campaign against Muslim minorities led by the Buddhist name Ashin Wirathu in Myanmar (Akbar 2019; Kipgen 2014; Lehr 2019; Parnini 2013; Prasse-Freeman 2017; Schissler 2017). Wirathu, entitled as the 'Face of Buddhist Terror' by Time Magazine in 2013, and he launched an anti-Muslim campaign. The intense tensions between Muslims and the Buddhist population in Myanmar become more apparent when Muslims Rohingya remain forced out from the majority and suspended from citizenship by the government. Consequently, more than 200 people were killed and 140,000 displaced when Buddhist extremists attacked Rohingya homes and businesses in Rakhine State in retaliation for reported assault on a local woman (Lewis 2019). Undoubtedly, the Muslim-Buddhist clash is rooted in the spirit of extreme nationalism. Contrarily, (Gravers 2015) and (Stewart 2014) suggest part of the motivation could be led by prejudice against Muslims where they deemed and capable of competing religious, cultural, economic, national and government influence. Imtiyaz Yusuf (2018) in this regard concludes that Buddhist religious animosity of Muslims is also due to their belief that Muslims once plundered Buddhist lands (Imtiyaz Yusuf 2018). As such, the Muslim community perceived as a threat to the survival of the religion, culture, and economy of the nation and a threat to the Buddhist kingdom (Crouch 2016; Gravers 2015; Stewart 2014; van Klinken & Aung 2017). Such sentiments are often baseless and have no indication of merit as proven by Imtiyaz Yusuf (2018). He emphasized that both religious communities in Myanmar once had a long history of good relations. Present-day the propagation of religious sentiment influence Buddhists group and provoke prejudiced sentiment against Muslim community, obliquely proven the element of Islamophobic among Buddhists (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al. 2020; Sharma et al. 2019). In fact, the possible explanation of the phenomenon between Muslim-Buddhist shows conflicting principles of peace, tolerance, and compassion

teaching embedded in Buddhism (Iqbal et al. 2017; Keyes 2016). The accusation against Muslims causes Buddhist religious hatred toward Muslim community. As an example, Ashin Wirathu's accuse Muslims as terrorists, see The Guardian (2017):

It only takes one terrorist to be amongst them," he says. "Look at what has happened in the west. I do not want that to happen in my country. All I am doing is warning people to beware."

Wirathu regards Muslims as terrorists and nothing more than mad dogs (The New York Times 2013). The anti-Muslim racism, according to Bayrakh and Hafez (2019) plays a significant role in predominantly Muslim societies and participant in Muslim countries' public policy, state ideology, elite/mass relations. Wirathu claim was false as Muslims disagree with the Taliban's intolerance for destroying the Bamiyan statue in Afghanistan in March 2001 which belong to the Buddhist. The recent conflicts in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and southern Thailand suggest that Buddhists and Muslims have irreconcilable contradictions in religious. However, history shows that Muslims and Buddhists have lived together for centuries without partisan, prejudiced views of Buddhist followers, violence, or even significant contestation. Therefore, it is important to address and focus on the historical background of Muslim-Buddhist relation, which can demonstrate the true meaning of peace and harmony in a religious society. Thus, this article discusses the relation between Muslims and Buddhists from past to present times. The Buddhists will see Muslims as the initiator in building Muslim-Buddhist relations through several practices and approaches ahead of the western, as the outcome of this article. This study has limitations. The discussion will only cover two to four eras of the Umayyad, Abbasid, Ghaznavid dan Delhi which provide several historical records on the relation and conflict.

METHODOLOGY

In discussing this article, we mainly used a qualitative method. By using the method of descriptive-analytic this article emphasizing the content analysis in analysing on the data from various books and articles covering the Muslim and Buddhism encounters.

UMAYYAD DYNASTY (661-750 AD)

Muslim-Buddhist relations took place in the early stages of the Umayyad period, through the conquest

mission of extending the Umayyad influence to Central Asia, which predominant by Buddhists (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et. al. 2020). According to Avari (2013), under the reign of Umayyad Caliph Walid I (705–15), his governor Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi (661-714 AD) took the decision in 711 decided to revoke Caliph Uthman's in 711 as an earlier decision to invade Sind; the part-fertile, semi-arid territory of the lower Indus basin and a gateway to inner India or, the Arabs called it, al-Hind. It was a well-planned attack and part of the Arab expansion strategy. The motivation to disseminate Islam throughout the world and in line with the Islamic teaching generally lead to this strategy (Avari 2013). Notwithstanding the motivation, Hamka (2016) addressed that Muslims in India dealt with double standard circumstances, including business and other related living principles. Muslim historian al-Baladhuri's in *Futuh al-Buldan*, asserted that there was an incident where the Indian burglars abducted Muslim women without any action from the ruler known as Raja Dahir (663 - 712 AD), which control the Sindh kingdom at that time (Elverskog 2010; Smith 1973). The maneuver happens to be at the Persian-Aranian Gulf; a specific route was known for piracy by the semi-nomadic and pastoralist ethnic group; the *Mids*. This tract concealed boats at the confusing maze of crisscross water located in Indus Delta, which also surrounded by the main port of Debal; (near modern Karachi) (Avari 2013). The Sind Buddhist dealers and money-makers arrange an intense threat against the Persian via Sri Lanka. This hazard give benefit to flourish inter-regional trade network for the Sind.

The Persians confront this matter before Islam came as they secure the lucrative trade with the Indians, while the Arabs adopt the exact conduct in this current time. Governor al-Hajjaj admits that Arab invasion can bring piracy to the end. Thus, in 711 A.D When the Arabs who had settled down in Sri Lanka died, the local king thought of prudent and discreet in the most affectionate actions to send back the widows and children to Arabia, along with gifts and letters of goodwill for al-Hajjaj. Unfortunately, strong winds drove ships with abundant gifts to the location where the pirates besiege, captured women and children, and steal the presents. The Governor al-Hajjaj asked the King of Sind, Dahar, to act against the pirates and free the captives, but the answer remained vague. In this situation, the Arab has no way to correspond to their countrymen and the dignity of the women other than invaded Daibul.

The Arabs repulsed twice and eventually succeeded in the battle on the third attempt, Conquering Daibul. This history is considered as the set stage for the following conquest of the kingdom of North-West India in its entirety (Elverskog 2010). Whatever the historical accuracy of this episode, a significant and meaningful story narrated about the Muslim savior overthrows a false and oppressive king.

Based on the story itself, the presumption is built into the paradigm where Muslims invariably better in stewards the economy than the local Hindu, the despot. The Arabs claim that they want to introduce law and develop the economic sector rather than to interfere with local affairs. This new law and economic improvement will benefit most people in the country. Yet, no detail on the economic transformation under the regime that obstructs local people's activities. The most interesting component in the story is on the religious-economic paradigm. Dahir bin Chach portrayed as a stereotypical Hindu ruler, an antagonist toward the city and the trade. While the Arabs or the Muslims who practice the Islamic financial and law, not just benefit the business world but also protects their interest and entered war. This show that the main concern of the Arab is the fundamental purpose of enriching the Muslim state, which benefits both parties, including the citizen, and clears away the obstruction to provide competence circulation of commodities. The Buddhists understand this subject well as they run business with Muslims, as illustrated in the description on Daibul pirates. "To apologize and dissociate themselves from the piracy at Daibul, the Buddhists thus sent envoys". They offered to pay tribute in periodic installments and obtained a written agreement from the governor of Iraq in exchange. These same Buddhists opened the gates of the city when the Arabs came into force a few years later, buying and selling with the troops. (Elverskog 2010).

Muslims began the expedition led by General Muhammad bin Qasim (695-715 AD) to conquer East Persian, Transoxiana, Sindh, and Multan (Imtiyaz Yusuf 2005 & 2010). Muhammad bin Qasim, a 17-year-old Arab general, successfully seized the port of Debal with a force of 6,000 cavalries, 6,000 camel riders, and a naval force of five catapults (Avari 2013) and Sind around 712 AD (Wink 2010). He arrived at the land of India to punish Dahar; the Sind ruler; who had failed to curb pirates operating off the coast of his province. Dahar was believed to have been disrupting Muslim ships.

Muhammad bin Qasim and his forces conquered several Indian cities (Mohamad Zulfazdlee Abul Hassan Ashari et al. 2013), including the Hindu pilgrim city of Multan, and seek to kill Dahar (Afsaruddin 2002). Muhammad bin Qasim gave no quarter to the people of Debal, many of whom were massacred, in compliance with Hajjaj's orders. The enemy should be killed as far as Sind was concerned, not because he was a non-Muslim, but because he offered military resistance. He may become a Muslim or remain as non-Muslim until his resistance broken. The choice was not between Islam and the sword, but Islam and *jizya* (Avari 2013). The Buddhist stupa, or the *budd*, as the Arabs called it, was destroyed; part of the city area was marked out for Muslims' settlement and those who converted to Islam. A mosque, known as the first mosque officially approved in the subcontinent, was constructed. The women prisoners were released and one-fifth of the booty, cash and slaves were sent to al-Hajjaj, in accordance with the Umayyad military tradition (Avari 2013). Muhammad bin Qasim should have focused his energies on defeating the pirates after completing his brief; instead, he went on to pursue more inland conquests. King Dahar had fled to the town of Alor but lost in the final battle and abandoned by his mercenaries. Gruesomely, his head and those of his other commanders were sent to al-Hajjaj as victory prizes, along with one fifth of the booty and the Hindu royal princesses. The conquest of the major cities in Alor, Brahmanabad and Multan located at the north was relatively easy for Muhammad bin Qasim (Avari 2013).

Thus, in other words, the prevailing conflict between the Hindus and Buddhists tends to be a significant factor in the success of the Arab conquest. The death of father of Dahar aggrieved the Buddhists. Chach; the former throne of Rai dynasty in Buddhism, has usurped the throne. The Buddhists and the Hindus had divergent socio-economic interests in Sind. The Hindus were mainly peasants and farmers, while the Buddhists dominated the inter-regional and maritime trade and exploited financial influence. The Buddhists found none of the Hindus support for the political establishment. Governor al-Hajjaj no less had to tell a group of Buddhist envoys about the Arab plan to invade Sind close to the border of China'. Considering the strong economic ties and relationship of the Buddhist merchants between two parties, Central Asia and China, the Arab conquest could be an alarming sign to the commercial advantages. Therefore, The

Buddhist cooperation with the Arabs may have started even before the Arab invasion, which was the most probable outcome (Avari 2013).

Moreover, the Arab troops, traders, governors, and travelers were most likely the very first Muslim community in Sind. In due course, the Muslims ranks were become more extensive by the conversions of mainly Buddhists and the Hindus (Avari 2013). The first meeting held by the Buddhists in Sindh discloses the shortage of knowledge about Buddhism in Islamic sources. Thus, the Muslims made *ijtihad* to classify the Buddhists as *Ahlul Kitab* (People of the Book). It means they are protected communities with specific rights, privileges and duties (Nielsen 2003), thus ensuring their temple from being demolished. They are also given the freedom of right to practice their religious teachings. (Ikram 1969). Simultaneously, Muslims obligate the Buddhists to pay *jizya*; an Islamic tax (Musa 2015 & Yusuf 2017). However, Muslims no longer recognized the Buddhist as People of the Book after a period where Muslims understand Buddhism's teaching associated with idolatry doctrine. Thus, the status of Buddhists classified into *dhimmi*; a group that belong to those who are non-Muslim and live under Islamic rule and subject to pay *jizya* (Asilatul Hanaa Abdullah & Fauziah Fathil 2021). This specific group was subject to a certain rule and policy of freedom, including practices the religious teachings remained persistent. Muhammad bin Qasim interpreted this ruling in a constant liberal manner. Nearly sixty percent of the Arab population in Sind being successful in life and their position were secured through the treaty (*sulh*). Muhammad bin Qasim was very generous with the treaty, but very particular about conquering the towns where the merchants, artisans, and agriculturists considered the crucial elements in the population. He remains to be a generous person in the application of Islamic injunctions. The way Muhammad bin Qasim followed al-Hajjaj's good advice on religious toleration by permitting Brahmans to continue working as revenue officers in rural areas as accustomed in pre-Islamic Sind. This justifies as so-called Brahmanabad Settlement. He had, moreover, withheld three percent from the principal's revenue assessment for the Brahmans and Buddhist monks as a charity amendment. The other talented non-Muslims likewise offered with high positions in his administration. Thus, the Arab administration in Sind was sustained as a non-sectarian for a considerable time; under the legacy of Muhammad bin Qasim's benevolence. Therefore,

most of the later Arab rulers in Sind respected the legacy (Avari 2013). This proves the fruitful in tolerance and good relations with Muslims, which also motivated Buddhists to embrace Islam (Shah-Kazemi 2010; Berzin 1995; Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al.)

After the Arab invasion, the Buddhists were no longer the majority in southern Sindh until the end of the tenth century, and the sign of Buddhism hardly remained. This appears as the group had never existed before. Nevertheless, some Buddhists might have migrated to other parts of India as evidence of population movement. The reason for disappearing likewise, not because the Buddhists were assimilated into the Hindu fold as most of the Sind Buddhists theoretically belonged to the Hinayana tradition, the quintessential anti-Brahminic tradition. Besides, it seems unlikely for the Buddhists to give up on their cherished convictions. Thus, the most logical and appropriate reason for the declining numbers of Buddhism in Sind was Buddhism's major conversion to Islam. In the subtle way that economics can affect one's sense of identity, the explanation can lie. As merchants and traders who gave the least resistance to Arab forces, the Buddhists had cherished high hopes of prosperity under Arab rule. And yet, it was the Arabs, not the commercial champions. Buddhist monasteries, which were also manufacturing units, were replaced by Arab centers of production and Arab caravanserais. Indeed, the Buddhists faced a covert form of discrimination against non-Muslims by Arab traders. In these conditions, experiencing a sense of relative deprivation, they more than likely concluded that conversion to Islam was the most convenient and realistic way of preserving the fortunes and well-being of their families. The method did not have to be arduous. Contrary, Ramzy (2012) rejected the claim where there is no historical evidence to prove the force conversion in Sind. The Buddhists in Sind converted to Islam themselves following the conversion of the mercantile Buddhists. Maclean (1984) remarks that after the Muslim conquest of Sind, the mercantile Buddhists were attracted to the Muslims, followed their fashion, and dressed like them, while ordinary Muslims in Sind dressed like their compatriot non-Muslims. These Buddhists found the conversion to Islam as a good option for them to continue their business (Ramzy 2012)

Conversion to Islam was not precisely the same as Islamization. While conversion is about following Islam's not too onerous five main practices, along

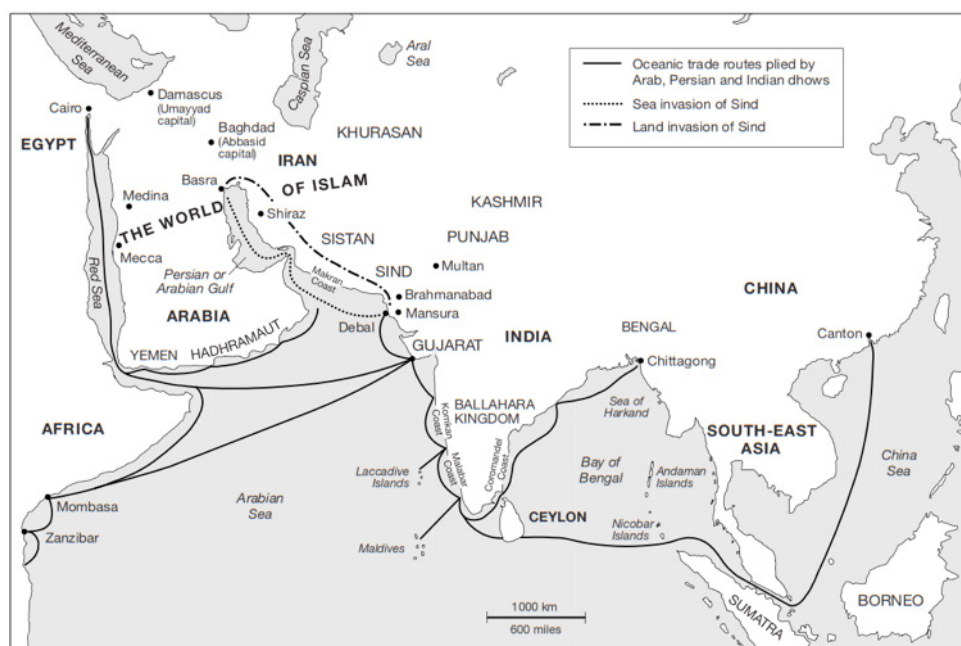
with a few customs like male circumcision and some external behavioural modes such as women's modesty in dress, Islamization is about a much more challenging adherence to the Islamic belief systems and philosophy mentally and spiritually. By converting to Islam, the urban Buddhists escaped the *jizya* and the petty restrictions and discriminations they could easily fall victim to: that was what immediately mattered to them. The conversion was a steady protracted process rather than a single event. But eventually, the urban Buddhists became urban Muslims. Then, as contributions to their monasteries shrank, and these institutions fell into disuse and disrepair, there remained no further social structure for the survival of the Buddhists and Buddhism in Sind (Avari 2013). There is a particular aspect of similarity in Islam for the converted Buddhists that inspired them to accept the religion. The discipline of studying the Quran and the hadith, for instance, was very close to the study of the Vinaya-Pitaka, the great Buddhist Pali canon covering many Buddha-related traditions. Both studies require a very high degree of intellectual argument from their adherents. The converted Buddhists, also possessing the degree of cerebral rigor, brought the understanding of Islamic practices to bear on their own individual genius, rooted in their pre-Islamic history. The great and the strong of traditional Muslim society is taken from the ranks of traditionists, such as the *qadis* (judges). Their decisions in various conflicts were based on the work of Islamic scholars, theologians, and philosophers, who were also held in high regard. The mysticism and wandering saints in Islam, on the other hand, also suggested that the doctrine derived from Hinduism and Buddhism in Sind (Avari 2013).

While on the other part of Buddhist territories in Bactria, the encounter took place when the Buddhists seek to reclaim their sovereignty after the Muslim conquest. In 705 A.D., the Tibetans allied with the Turki Shahis and attempted to drive the Umayyad force from Bactria, and eventually, they succeed in removing the Umayyad in 708 A.D. With the achievement, the Buddhist prince Nazaktar Khan established a fanatic Buddhist rule in Bactria. The prince even executed the former abbot of Nava Vihara, who had converted to Islam (Shah-Kazemi 2010). This event urged Muslims to respond to uphold justice. Seven years later, Qutaybah, the Muslim general, succeeded in recapturing Bactria from the Turki Shahis and their allies in Tibet. Because of their past brutality against Muslims, Qutaybah imposed harsh punishment on

the monastery. As a result, many Buddhist monks have migrated to Khotan and Kashmir, reinforcing Buddhism in these regions. Though Buddhists who wish to stay under Muslim rule are subject to general politics, they are subject to public policy. As long as they have not engaged in any subversive resistance to Muslim rule, they are free to practice their faith and restore the temple. The Tibetans, formerly aligned with the Turki Shahis, pursued an alliance with the Umayyads and sent Umar Abdul Aziz's ambassador to the Umayyad Court in 717, who in turn sent al-Hanafi, a Muslim scholar, to Tibet to preach Islam to the Tibetans. It seems that he was unsuccessful. For over a hundred years of Muslim rule, Buddhism remained high in Central Asia, suggesting a general tolerance of the religion. But by the middle of the ninth century, amid widespread Buddhist tradition, Islam started to take root among Central Asians (Shah-Kazemi 2010)

While in the 8th century, under the leadership of the 6th caliph of the Umayyad government, al-Walid (705–715), sent General Qutaybah b. Muslim (669–715) who was appointed as a governor of Khurasan crossing the river Amu Darya (Oxus) to begin the conquest mission (*see* Map 1) of the cities involved Bukhara, Samarqand and Khiwa (Punjab), which predominant by the Buddhist (Sen 2009: 81), and uphold Islamic rule (Adamec, 2009: 259). Upon his arrival with his army, he found the Buddhists

and perceived them as idol worshippers. The locals warned him not to destroy the idols because it can lead to destruction according to traditional beliefs. Unexpectedly, Qutaybah b. Muslim destroyed the idol in front of them. Seeing his condition that has no effect as believed by the community, many embraced Islam and left the superstitious belief (Hamza Yusuf 2010). Through the encounter and relation which has been developed, Muslims became serious in studying Buddhism. In the ninth century, writings on Buddhism and Buddhists continued to gain Muslim scholarly attention in their work, among them (d.892 AD), al-Ṭabarī (838-923 AD), al-Mas'udi (896-956 AD), and al-Maḳḳisi (d. 974 AD). Generally, the early writings by Muslim scholars do not discuss Buddhism in a theological context. Still, they adopt a narrative style as a result of their observations and personal interactions with Buddhists. Among the highlights included in these works are the design of Buddhist temples and the appearance of Buddhists (al-Maḳḳisi 2004; al-Ṭabarī 1991; al-Baladhuri 1987). The discussion of Buddhism was continued by the famous Islamic bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim (935-995 AD) in his *magnus opus* al-Fihrist, followed by al-Biruni (973-1048 AD) in his work *al-Āthār al-Bāḳiyah min al-Qarūn al-Khāliyah* (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al 2020).



MAP 1. the expansion of Islamic Empire eighth to ninth centuries CE (Avari 2013)

Instead of Central Asia, Muslim-Buddhist encounter also occurs in the Malay Archipelago region in the 7th century during the Srivijaya kingdom (600-1200 AD). The center of government located in Palembang, which strongly influenced Hindu-Buddhism, is also known as an important center of Buddhism studies and development in Southeast Asia (Melton & Baumann, 2002; Zawiah Mat & Sulaiman, 2007). This is where Buddhist scholars from different region come to study Buddhism. Among the famous Buddhist scholar is Dharma Kirti, a Malay Buddhist scholar who became the religious adviser to Srivijaya Emperor (Mohamad Zain 2003). He is considered the 'Greatest Monk' to be the main reference, including being a teacher to Vajrabodhi from Nalanda and Atisa from Tibet (Ramstedt 2002). Hence, on a mission, the Umayyad government (661-750 AD) sent envoys to build diplomatic relations with the Srivijaya government. The first letter as in the record of al-Jawzi (d. 597H) through his work *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam* noted:

From the King of al-Sin, in whose stables are a thousand elephants, (and) whose palace is built of bricks of gold and silver, who is served by a thousand daughters of the kings, and who possesses two rivers which irrigate aloes plants, to Mulawiyah.

(al-Jawzi 1995; Fatimi 1963)

The contents of the first letter, however, are incomplete and the purpose of sending the letter is not stated. Until the 8th century AD, during the time of Umar Abdul Aziz (682-720 AD), another letter was sent to the Buddhist Emperor Srivijaya (Salomon 1996) named Sri Indravarman (702-728 M). Under his rule, Buddhism was well preserved. Then second letter sent in 718 AD (al-Andalusi 1983; Fatimi 1963; Fā'ūr 1991; Slatyer 2012) as follows:

Nu'aym b. Hammad wrote, "The King of al-Hind sent a letter to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz, which ran as follows: From the King of Kings, who is the descendant of a thousand kings, whose consort, too, is the descendant of a thousand kings, in whose stables are a thousand elephants, and in whose territories are two rivers which irrigate plants of aloes, odoriferous herbs, nutmeg, and camphor, whose fragrance spreads to the distance of twelve miles, - to the King of the Arabs, who does not associate other gods with God. I have sent to you a gift, which is not much of a gift but (just) a greeting and I wish that you may send to me someone who might teach me Islam and instruct me in its Laws [or as in another version: 'might teach me Islam and explain it to me. And peace be upon you!']"

This letter is a response from the Srivijaya kingdom to the Umayyad. The contents of the letter were initially identical to the Srivijaya kingdom with elements of grandeur and strength. Then addressed to the King of Arabia, who is characterised by monotheism (Islam) creed. Along with the delivery of gifts, the purpose of this letter is as an introduction between both parties. In response, Maharaja Srivijaya asked for a cleric to be sent to teach him further about Islam. What is interesting, Ibn Taghribirdi (1411-1470 M) in his works entitled *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa al-Qahirah*, claimed the Srivijaya ruler eventually becoming a Muslim:

Narrated by Ibn Asakir, the King (of) al-Hind, has written a letter to Umar bin Abdul Aziz, which ran as follows: From the King of kings (*Malik al-Amlak*), who is the descendant of a thousand kings, in whose stables are a thousand elephants, and in whose territories are two rivers which irrigate plants of albes odoriferous herbs, nutmeg, and camphor whose fragrance spreads the distance of twelve miles - to the king of the Arabs. Indeed, Allah has guided me with Islam, then send me a man who can teach me about Islam, and the Qur'an, and the law of Islamic law. I have sent to you a gift, which is not much of a gift, in the form of odoriferous herbs, and nutmeg and camphor. So, have accepted it. And verily I am your brother in Islam. And peace be upon you!

(Taghribirdi 2010)

The letter's content gives the impression that there are three forms of the Muslim-Buddhist form of the Malay Archipelago, namely diplomatic, commercial, and da'wah. The diplomatic form started with the sending of Umayyad government representatives to establish ties with the maritime government that governed the Melaka Straits. Thus, the Umayyad government was interested in developing relations between the two kingdoms, in line with the significant power and position of the Srivijaya government. Due to its strategic location boosts trade and business activities through a strong partnership, connecting the states in the Malay world with China, India, and the Middle East (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019). Most of the Muslims who come to the region are not only traders, but some of them also have the status of cleric and pilgrims. While waiting for the monsoon winds to end, they repaired their ships after a long journey, besides continuing trading and praying activities. Some of them married the local women, including the daughters of local kings (Denisova, 2008). As a

result of the attitude of tolerance and da'wah by the Muslim community, then some people accept Islam as a religion, then move the heart of the Buddhist Emperor also to accept the religion. However, after the time of Maharaja Sri Indravarman, no record of the emperor's Islam was found after him, except the description of the arrival of Islamic preachers in that century. The Hinduism and Buddhism influence as noted by Indriaty Ismail Saupi and Muhammad Khairul Anuar Mat (2020), can be seen in on some Malay customs and the Wayang Kulit (puppet-shadow play) which displays the epic stories of the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

ABBASID DYNASTY (750-1258 AD)

In Abbasid times, Muslim-Buddhist encounters took place in three forms: trading activities, expansion of power, and intellectual activity. For the first form, relations in trade have taken place between Muslims and Buddhists in Sind. Involvement in trading activities with Muslims allows them to better the local economic status, even among those who embrace Islam to overcome Muslim Arab traders (Maclean 1993). In addition to trading activities, the Abbasid caliphate also expanded its power in the region, for example in 757 A.D., under the leadership of governor Hisham, from Sind he conquered Gujarat and Kashmir. However, the Muslim rule in the region experienced instability when there was a rebellion against the caliph (Ikram 1969). While the third form, which is through intellectual activity, resulted from the relationship built before. During the reign (753-774 AD) of Mansur, embassies from Sind to Baghdad included scholars who brought several religious texts and books from various sources. As part of the urbanization plan, the Caliph also built the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) as an institution for research and translation of Persian (Mohd Nasir Omar 1995), Greek, and Indian-Sanskrit works (Berzin 2010). By the time of Caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), he invited Buddhist scholars from the Indian continent and Balkh to serve at the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) where a massive project was taking place for translating Sanskrit works covering medicine and astronomy into Arabic. During this period, the early Muslim-Buddhist works entitled *Bilawhar wa Budhasaf* and *Kitab al-Budd* were translated into Arabic (Gibb et al. 1986; Goldziher 1981; Hamid Sadiqi 2008; I. Yusuf 2013; Selim 2011; Vaziri 2012; Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al. 2020).

The second fruitful period was the reign (780-808) of Harun al Rashid when the Barmakid Family, which provided wazirs to the Abbasid caliphs for half century was at the zenith of its power Arab bibliographers especially mention Harun's wazir Yahya the Barmakid, Yahya's son Musa, and grandson, Amran. The good relations between Muslims and Buddhists also inspired Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809 AD) to appoint Yahya Ibn Barmak as a Chief Minister. Yahya, who is from the Barmakid family, was the grandson of the Nava Vihara Chief Monk, at Balkh (S.M Ikram 1969). Besides sending scholars to India to study medicine and pharmacology, they brought their scholars to Baghdad, recruit them as head physicians of their hospitals and commissioned them to translate Sanskrit books on such subjects as medicine pharmacology, toxicology philosophy, and astrology into Arabic (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et. al. 2020).

Through significant positions in the Abbasid government, Yahya Ibn Barmak built an extensive network by inviting Buddhist scholars, especially Kashmir, to participate in translating works, especially in medicine, such as *Ravigupta's Ocean of Attainments* (Skt. Siddhasāra) (Berzin 2010: 189). The influence of the Barmakid family on the Abbasid government attracted the attention of al-Kirmani (d. 901 AD) to write their biographies in his work *Akhhār al-Barāmika wa Faḍā'iluhum* (Anna Akasoy et al. 2011; Bosworth 1994). Although Muslim scholars have shown interest in studying Buddhism, Buddhists have shown no interest in studying Islam. As such, there is no record of translating any Arabic book into Sanskrit, as well as works containing Islamic teachings and dialogues among the religious, although at that time Buddhist institutions of higher learning were established in Afghanistan and the Indian continent (Berzin 2010; Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et. al. 2020). During the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809 AD), Elverskog (2010) records the first Muslim-Buddhist theological dialogue:

At the eighth century a messenger from northwest India arrived in Baghdad and requested an audience with Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Since he believed that it would be valuable to display his magnanimity and magnificence to this poor vassal from the frontiers of the Islamic Empire the Caliph agreed. Yet when the man was finally brought before him in the glorious palace in the center of Baghdad, the Caliph was shocked to hear the message that this minion was sent to convey: "I have been told that you have no proof of the truth of your religion but the sword. If you are sure of the veracity of your faith, send some scholar from

your place to discuss religious matters with a pandit of mine.” The Caliph was so enraged that he almost had the messenger put to death on the spot; however, he was also intrigued by the audacity of this overture and thus decided to send one of his religious scholars to debate this pandit. Unfortunately, the debate did not go well. The pandit drew upon the deep tradition of Buddhist debate and logic in order to systematically attack the Muslim scholar’s claims of the existence of a single, all-powerful God. When the pandit asked his penultimate question – “If your God is all-powerful, can He create an entity like Himself?” – the Islamic scholar was so befuddled he could only respond that he did not know the answer. The local ruler of Sind, who had arranged the debate, thus announced the Buddhist scholar the winner and sent the mullah back to the Caliph with the following message: “I had heard from my elders, and now that I have seen with my own eyes, I am sure that you have no proof of the truth of your faith.” At this turn of events the Caliph was incensed, and he summoned together all of his leading scholars in order to address this Buddhist challenge. None, however, could come up with an adequate response until at last a young boy stood up and said, “O Prince of Believers, this objection is baseless; God is He who has been created by nobody. If God creates an entity like Himself, that entity will be in all cases God’s creation. Then, again, that there can be an entity exactly like God is an insult to God and God will not countenance His own disparagement. This question is like such questions as: Can God be ignorant? Can He die? Can He eat? Can He drink? Can He sleep? Evidently He cannot do any of these things as they are all derogatory to his dignity.” Everyone was pleased with this answer and Harun al-Rashid wanted to send the boy to India in order to defend Islam and defeat the Buddhists in debate. But the other scholars at the court objected by saying he was too young, and although he could possibly answer this question, what about other ones? Harun al-Rashid was swayed by this argument and thus he sent an older famous scholar in order to defeat the Buddhists in a new debate. By one account this scholar readily won the debate and the local ruler of Sind converted to Islam. Another account claims that the Buddhist pandit sent out a spy to see whether this Islamic scholar was a theologian, or else a scholar familiar with rationalism. When his informant told him that the mullah was indeed familiar with rational logic the pandit was afraid that he might lose the debate. In desperation he therefore paid someone to poison the Islamic scholar and he died before ever reaching northwest India.”

(Elverskog 2010)

The record shows that a Buddhist scholar first triggered the theological dialogue with a tone of provocation and prejudice that Islam was not based on truth and spread by violence. The Buddhist scholar also used the rhetoric in questioning the existence of a God whom Muslims consider to be All-Mighty and Most Powerful. In the early stages, Muslim scholars failed to answer the questions but eventually won the debate using the same rational approach adopted by their Buddhist antagonist. On the other hand, the dialogue manifested the willingness and effort among both sides – Muslim and Buddhist- to seek the truth besides defending their religious doctrine. The study on Buddhism

among Muslim scholars ends with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 AD and abolishing the Abbasid Caliphate. The invasion which under the command of Hulagu Khan (1216-1265), a Buddhist, subsequently destroyed the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah), which collected several vital records of Muslim-Buddhism relations and Buddhist works.

GHAZNAVIDS DYNASTY (977-1186 AD)

In the early eighth century, after their initial conquest of Sind, the Arabs lacked the men and resources to expand their dominion deeper into India. Although they continued to exert power in Sind, until the early eleventh century, that region remained the limit of Muslim authority in India. However, from then on, under the tutelage and might of the Central Asian Turco-Afghan dynasties, Muslim influence and presence in India continued to accelerate for several decades. The first of these dynasties was that of the Ghaznavids, whose style of rule can be understood first by exploring the Turks’ history within the Khurasan province of eastern Iran and the surrounding Transoxiana area crossed by the Oxus River (now known as Amu Darya) (Avari 2013).

On seventeen separate occasions, Mahmud Ghaznavid (971-1030 AD), the Turco-Afghan sultan of Ghazna in eastern Afghanistan, mounted lightning raids on urban settlements in northern and north-western India. For the sedentary Indian population of merchants, craftsmen, bureaucrats and priests, the whirlwind pace at which his swift horsemen arrived at the gates of palaces, forts and temples and executed their strategy of looting and destroying sacred Hindu, Buddhist or Jain sites and the massacres of those they hated was a frightening experience (Avari 2013). The motivation to conquer Northwest India is to build a country under Persian influence, brought in culture, trade, and intellectual centers that almost rivaled the greatness of Baghdad. Thus the attack under the leadership of Mahmud Ghaznavid on Kabul, Hindukush in 1011 AD (Selim 2011; Vaziri 2012), according to some historical records, affected the Buddhist monastery and other religious centers (Scott 1995). On the conquest mission, Mahmud of Ghazni had declared:

“the religion of the faithful inculcates the following tenet: ‘at in proportion as the tenets of the prophet are diffused, and his followers exert themselves in the subversion of idolatry, so shall be their reward in heaven’; that, therefore, it behooved him, with the assistance of God, to root out the worship of idols from the face of all India.” to death

(Lopez Jr. 2013)

As remarks by Vaziri (2012), Such raids on the grounds against the Buddhists, who embraced a so-called polytheistic (*mushrikūn*) and 'idolatrous doctrine' according to the fanatical rulers, made the likelihood of any Buddhist survival in the region uncertain. Mahmud, with his orthodox and dogmatic policy of Islamization, went further when he reached the city of Rayy, he ordered the burning of all nonconformists' Islamic philosophical works of the rationalist Mu'tazili writers. Mahmud was always unable to keep the promises made to his men by letters and scholars, even as a great patron of literature, and that would not always have made them all thankful for their services in his court. In fact, Mahmud not just intolerant towards the Buddhists, but also any group of Muslims which considered against Islamic teaching. For example, the famous epic poet Firdousī (d. 1020) was refused the right to be buried in a Muslim cemetery simply because through his literary work *Shāhnāme*, he was seen to have praised the pre-Islamic Persian kings and heroes (Vaziri 2012). However, spiritual and philosophical Buddhism did not vanish immediately, despite the continuing military attacks and the destruction of physical proof of Buddhism. This Buddhist survival was due to its enormous variety, ranging from formal to esoteric, particularly along the Silk Routes. The question was how long, in the face of relentless existential attack, the Buddhists could maintain themselves. Khurasan's cultural transition became a reality as Buddhism was gradually replaced in the Islamic period by a new form of spirituality, one that retained links to past values and traditions even in the face of fading Buddhist asceticism and monasticism (Vaziri 2012).

The act of the Ghaznavid monarchs may, on some justification, be viewed as hostile bandits and barbarians, but some empathy towards them needs to balance such an excessively Indocentric view. Originally descended from the Turkish slaves of Central Asia, theirs was a society of nomadism; it was for them almost a natural order of things to loot the lands of their neighbors, far and near. Long after they arrived in the new environments of Persia and Afghanistan, the rapacious instinct for conquering and domination of land remained with them. They were also bringing it into India. But conquests and brutality are just part of the story. Via their migration to Persia and Afghanistan, both Persian culture and Islamic religion were imbued by the Central Asian Turks. Within the cultural milieu of Islamic Iran, the Ghaznavids' power was exercised. In India, Turkish

power spread the dominance of Persian culture rather than Turkish culture; and it was to be some centuries before the Persian could rival Turkish culture. At the same time, with the fall of the Abbasid Empire, the dominance of Arabic culture began to diminish. While Arabic remained the primary language of their faith for all Muslims, it was the Persian style that triumphed in India in the fields of government, literature and art. The Ghaznavids gave an exciting boost to the multi-cultural society of India by being the harbingers of Persian culture in India (Avari 2013).

While the Islamic view itself justified as intolerant (Asadu et al. 2020) and barbaric action as a jihad against the infidels who refuse to follow Islam, obviously against the true teachings of Islam, therefore some Islamic scholars are also contesting the authenticity of this argument (Jalal 2008), because in the early stages of the Muslim-Buddhist encounter perceived more tolerance. Therefore, Abu Rayhān al-Biruni (d. 1048) an influential Khurasan figure who stood fearlessly against their frightful dogma justified by the Buddhist persecution by the fanatical rulers. Given that he spent 13 years of his life at the court of Sultan Mahmud, the important and trustworthy observations and anthropologically sound accounts of this great scientist and 'indologue' are even more remarkable. However, on the issue of 'idol worship' attributed to the Buddhist population, al-Biruni explained that the higher order of Buddhism does not encourage idol or image worshipping. The Muslim perception of Buddhists as idol-worshippers is false. Despite such clarifications, the stereotyping of and prejudice against all the non-Muslim religious communities continued to predominate in the Islamic world. Birunī tried to research Buddhism and to teach his dogmatic fellow Muslims, but he acknowledges that this mission failed. Birunī did not know enough about the Buddhist world, and for more information, referred his readership to the book of Abul' Abbās Irānshahrī of the ninth century. However, Birunī conveyed to his pupil and personal acquaintance, Gardizi, who also created a non-polemical work, albeit somewhat less original than that of Biruni, his non-judgmental attitude towards Indian religions. Gardizi talks in his *Zayn al-Akhbar* about Buddhist empiricism and the rejection by the Buddhists of the need for prophecy and the substitution of karmic reincarnation for heaven and hell. Other medieval Islamic encyclopedic authors who also dealt with the Indian religions with references to Buddhism in

their works included Marvazi, Maqdisi (d. 946) and Ibn Nadim (d. 998) is a compilation and culmination of many lost works on Brahmanism and Buddhism. However, Gardizi and Marvazi, among others, wrote their works on Indian religions in Persian (Avari 2013). In the eleventh century, Muslim studies of Buddhism began adopting a theological approach such as al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 AD) in his work *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. Al-Shahrastani classifies the Buddhists under the sub-topic of *Ashab al-Bidada*.

While for the Buddhist side, the event shapes negative Buddhist views towards Muslims, as recorded in *Kalachakra Tantra*, which appeared around the late tenth to eleventh century AD. In this text, Muslim Arabs were regarded as *Tāyi mleccha*. The *mleccha* refers to a Sanskrit name given to foreign conquerors in the Indian subcontinent. Several characteristics of Muslims were described, such as the fundamental beliefs of Muslims such as not worshipping idols, honoring human rights, strict ethics, and praying five times a day (Berzin 2010). The text also describes the Muslims as barbarians who drink camel blood and cut off the ends of their penises (that is, practice circumcision), followers of one Madhumati (a Sanskrit approximation of Muhammad). The exact text foretold of an apocalyptic war in which Buddhist armies would sweep south out of the Himalayas to defeat the barbarians and restore the dharma to India. Regardless of the reasons for its disappearance, Buddhism did disappear from India, as Muslim sources confirm. Abū-al Fazʿl ibn Mubārak (1551–1602) was the vizier of Mughal emperor Akbar. He composed the *Akbarnāma*, or History of Akbar. Its third volume, entitled *Āʿīn-i Akbarī*, contains an “account of the Hindu sciences,” including the untraced of the Buddhists (Donald S. Lopez Jr. 2013). In the thirteenth century, the initiative to understand the Buddhism was continued by Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani (1247-1318 AD) in his work *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārikh*, which was based on Buddhist text, *Kamāla Śrī* and other Buddhist manuscripts exist in Central Asia and Tibet (Canby 1993; Jackson 2017; Robinson 2012; Vaziri 2012; Wink 2010; Hamza Yusuf 2010).

DELHI SULTANATE (1206–1526)

The Delhi Sultanate was a Delhi-based Islamic empire that lasted for 320 years (1206–1526) over large parts of the Indian subcontinent. It included parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and some parts

of southern Nepal. The Khilji dynasty (1290-1320) ruled sequentially over the Delhi Sultanate among the dynasties and was substantially in contact with Buddhists. It emerged through a revolution that saw authority shift from the monopoly of Turkish aristocrats to a heterogeneous Indo-Muslim nobility. The Khilji dynasty was a Turko-Afghan, established by Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji as the second dynasty to rule the Delhi Sultanate of India. This was also the form of the Muslim-Buddhist clash that occurred when General Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji led attacks on Bihar around 1197 AD and 1206 AD. The implications of this conquest are, according to Kumar (2011) and Scharfe (2002), causing three important areas of Buddhism to be affected, especially Nalanda, Vikramasila and Odantapuri, which in turn led to the closure of Nalanda University in 1202 AD as well as the disappearance of Buddhist influence in India. The monks were either killed or expelled (Wink 2010).

Consequently, the destruction of Nalanda Buddhist University in Bihar, one of the leading intellectual centers of Asia at that time, left a shameful blot on the record of the early Turco-Afghan invaders (Avari 2013). In the Muslim pre-modern record as *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, it is suggested that Bakhtiyar Khalji demolished a Buddhist monastery. Minhaj-i-Siraj, in his description, compares with the city calls Bihar, which the soldiers learn is called a vihara. The record can also be found from sources in Tibet and from the Buddhist scholar Taranatha at the beginning of the 17th century. The monastic universities of North India have become the favorite targets of Muslim troops, but the scale of the forced conversion of Buddhists to Islam is unknown. In certain instances, the Muslim army was more interested in the material riches of the Buddhist monasteries.

According to Donald S. Lopez (2013), the Buddhists regarded the Muslim powers as a mixture of fear and disdain and blamed them for the decline of the dharma in India. Muslim conquest may have triggered a Buddhist decrease in India, but according to some sources, the fundamental explanation for Nalanda’s closure is questionable to some scholars. For example Elverskog (2010) and I. Yusuf (2013) state the claim is not true, because the University of Nalanda still operates until the 13th century managed by Buddhists after negotiations with Muslims. Furthermore, the attack by Muslim forces apparently mistook it for a fortress (Donald S. Lopez (2013). Even after the Muslim conquest,

Buddhism still exists in India until the 17th century. The diminishing influence is only due to internal factors, not Muslims (Elverskog 2010; Imtiyaz Yusuf 2013). While in this regard, Ling (1980) and Scott (1995) had argued that such Muslim actions were not in themselves the cause for Buddhism's disappearance from India, instead of arguing that Buddhism was already declining before Islam dealt a final blow. In 1204, the Sena kingdom of Bengal came to an end (Avari 2013: 43).

CONCLUSION

Muslim-Buddhist relations took place in many places globally, mainly Central Asia, which includes East Persia, Transoxiana, Afghanistan, and Sindh, long before the rise of Islam in Southeast Asia. The relationship occurs in many ways, particularly diplomacy, social-cultural exchange, and theological dialogue. Without denying the historical polemics that led to prejudice, the good narrative must be promoted and discussed among religious communities to sustain harmony and unity in the contemporary world. Thus, to promote peace and harmony, all parties, particularly scholars, researchers, academics, religious institutions, and leaders of both Muslim and Buddhist communities, should engage in meaningful interreligious dialogues based on faith principles, core beliefs, religious laws, truths, and ideals that provide guidelines for human action.¶ Both Muslims and Buddhists must work on promoting religious tolerance to understand their faiths and each other's cultures.¶ Muslims must learn the history, theology, and philosophy of Buddhism, vice versa, Buddhist toward Muslims. Both religious followers require a comprehension that universal values are underlying all religions despite the differences. The essence of these great traditions, based on love, tolerance, peace, brotherhood, humanism, harmony, and coexistence, must be grasped in its pristine purity.

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