Twitter Thread by [redacted]

[redacted]
@KausalyaSupraja

Thread about Shashanka and alleged persecution of the Buddhists. The purpose of this thread is to defy their claims while tackling a few other issues.

(Very long thread but useful) 1/n

Shashanka was a Shaivite king of Gauda with his capital being Karnasuvarna.
He is often accused to be a persecutor of Buddhists by the certain historians prejudiced folks to form a picture that Hindu kings were also against other religions just like the muslim kings. 2/n

Much of Shashanka's life after 619 CE is not very much known to us. Historians primarily cite from a few sources like 1) Banabhatta's Harshacharita and 2) Hsuan Tsung's Si Yu Ki(SYK), both being 7th century texts and 3/n

3) Manjushri Mula Kalpa(MMK), an 8th century text sometimes also dated as a 12th century text. 4/n

The method of accusing Shashanka as a Buddhist hater is established by saying that Shashanka desecrated Buddha's sacred marks, destroyed the Bodhi Tree in Gaya and replaced the Buddha statue w Shiva after which he died as he incurred a mortal flesh-rotting disease 5/n

based on SYK and MMK, primarily SYK. Hsuan Tsung writes from hearsay as he did not witness these events. Hsuan Tsung also adds miracles to these accounts. 6/n

Bael's translation says that when the footprints were broken by Shashanka, they came whole again and when he threw the marks into Ganges, the marks came back to it's old place. 7/n

Watters' translation says when he tried to efface the footprints, he threw them into Ganges but the stone having the footprints came back to it's original place. 8/n

The miraculous description of Hsuan Tsung doesn't stop. He continues to say that Purnavarma, a Magadha king, the last descendant of Asoka revives the the Bodhi tree and overnight, the tree magically grows up to 10 feet. 9/n

Suprisingly, these accounts of religious persecution and destruction of Buddhist elements by Shashanka finds no mention in Banabhatta's Harsacharita although Banabhatta had every reason to assasinate the character of Shashanka for killing the brother of his Lord,King Harsha. 10/n

Perhaps he didn't do so because Shashanka did not commit any hateful anti-Buddhist activities during his reign. 11/n

When Shashanka is mentioned in Harshacharita, he is referred to as the King of Gauda contemporary to Harsha when Banabhatta writes about the treacherous murder of Harsha's brother, Rajyavardhana. 12/n

Many sources online state 600 CE as the year when Shashanka destroyed the Bodhi tree. This is around the time where he expresses his wishes to replace the image of Buddha with Shiva. SYK mentions that once the image of Shiva was established, Shashanka fell ill and died. 13/n

This can't be true as Rajyavardhana was only slayed in 606 CE and the Ganjam Copper Plate dated 619-620 CE mentions of Madhavaraja II of Silodbhava family as a tributary king of Maharajadhiraja Shashanka. This shows that Shashanka was very much alive up to 619-620 CE. 14/n

Hereon, we are unsure about Shashanka's life except from SYK and MMK(keep in mind that MMK was written very much later after Shashanka). 15/n

Say we accept the incident of Shashanka cutting the Bodhi tree and putting Shiva in place of Buddha in the shrine, 636/637 CE should be the most plausible year that those incidents could have occured 16/n

as Hsuan Tsung notes when he goes to Magadha in one of those years that Shashanka passed away shortly after the alleged desecration of the Buddhist shrine due to a flesh-rotting disease. 17/n

If Hsuan Tsung's accounts are taken to be credible, the above shall be true. However, sometime along Shashanka's life, he is afflicted with an incurable disease that was however cured by 12 Sakadwipi Brahmanas or Grahavipras brought from the banks of Sarayu to aid Shashanka. 18/n

If this disease is the same disease mentioned by Hsuan Tsung that afflicted Shashanka, then, we have two contradictory stories. 19/n

Maybe Shashanka never damaged the Bodhi tree or the Buddha shrine. It is possible that Shashanka may have been caught ill some time before his death but cured by the Sakadwipi Brahmanas. And later in 636/7 CE, he passed away. 20/n

Since Hsuan Tsung consistently painted Shashanka as a sinful persecutor of Buddhism, it seems convenient to describe the end of his life as a tragic event resulting from his evil deed to Buddha or the Buddhism. Thus, Hsuan Tsung successfully tarnishes the image of Shashanka 21/n

https://t.co/SrSYIeIai7 explains about the Madhuban Copper Plate of the 25th year of Harshavardhana's reign, which is 606 CE + 25 = 631 CE as mentioned by historian Shankar Goyal.
Basically, the crux of the matter is that Harsha was a devout Shaiva just like Shashanka. 22/n

There are more problems with the Chinese pilgrim's Hsuan Tsung's SYK. He consistently includes supernatural events here and there along his work. 23/n

In his account about Kanyakubja where he speaks about Harshavardhana, he describes that the Harsha went to the banks of the Ganges where stood a statue of Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva as ask for advice. Boddhisattva then appears in a human form and speaks to him. 24/n

Bodhisattva apparently also told him that if Harsha properly executed his words, he would have not been able to be defeated by any of his neighbours but then we have the event of victory of Chalukya's Pulakesin II over Harsha in 618 CE. https://t.co/RerXPK32sH 25/n

So, the doubt is, did Bodhisattva appear and promised Harsha that he would never be defeated for real or Harsha did not execute Bodhisattva's orders? 26/n

In Harshacharitra, we also read about Harsha meeting Avalokiteshvara in the form of an ascetic but he did not emerge from a statue. Towards the end of Chapter 8 of the text, Harsha is tells the Avalokiteshvara personified that he would take up red robes along with his sister 27/n

(become Buddhist monks) after he accomplishes his duties. But this brings about a doubt. Didn't we see the 631 CE Madhuban copper plate describing Harsha as a devout Shaiva? Bana's account could be understood as an exaggeration of Harsha's inclination towards Buddhism. 28/n

MMK also speaks about Buddhist persecution of Shashanka and his death but scholars don't take it as authority as it was written in Buddhist prophetic text fashion dated 1or5 centuries after Shashanka and Harsha and the information appears to have copied information from SYK. 29/n

Regarding the murder of Rajyavardhana, Banabhatta mentions that he was treacherouly murdered by Shashanka as Rajyavardhana met Shashanka weaponless and alone. S. Bael translates Hsuan Tsung as the ministers of Shashanka asked Rajyavardhana for a conference and murdered him. 30/n

Both these accounts give an idea of deciet but SYK doesn't make it clear. 631 CE Madhuban grant says that "he through his trust in promises lost his s". What promise? Anyway, the key point in this inscription is that it does not accuse Shashanka of treachery although 31/n

Bhanabatta hyperbolically describes Shashanka as a mortal enemy of his King Harshavardhana. 32/n

Regarding Sankara in his commentary of Harshacharita, Sanketa says that Shashanka sent a message to Rajyavardhana regarding the offer of his hand in marriage of his daughter to Rajyavardhana and while the latter was having dinner in his enemy's camp, Shashanka killed him. 33/n

But the question is, how did Sankara(not Adi Shankaracharya) know what neither Harsha, Bana nor Hsuan Tsung knew when he was not a contemporary of the former? 34/n

Another question that arises is why was Shashanka so obsessed with the virtue of Rajyavardhana who was still new to the throne of his kingdom after the death of his father. RC Majumdar says: 35/n

No prior hostility is described between Shashanka and Rajyavardhana. Thus, the murder seems to be committed out of mere jealousy alone by both Banabhatta and Hsuan Tsung. 36/n

The thread purposely traversed through all necessary matters. Take home messages:
1) Harsha was a patron of Buddhism despite being a Shaiva 37/n

2) Apart from Hsuan Tsung's SYK and, MMK, we do not find any solid reason to believe that King of Gauda, Shashanka was extremely prejudiced towards the Buddhists. 38/n

Exercising the idea of innocent until proven guilty, King Shashanka should be acquitted of the crime of persecuting Buddhists during his reign due to the lack of evidences. 39/n

The issue about Mihirakula's brutality against the Buddhists is very elaborately covered in this article. Mihirakula is guilty. Hindus won't be defend him simply because he was a Shaiva. https://t.co/gEPGTDBm6H

The point is, temples desecration, forced conversion and killing of the innocent heretics are not Hindu practices unlike that which are encouraged by abrahamic texts.