CHAPTER - I

Indian Buddhist and Brahmanical deities - A comparative Study

Buddhism, which originated in India in about the 6th century B.C., underwent remarkable changes in respect of its tenets, philosophy and ceremonial practices. Such changes were of a radical nature across the centuries. With the growth of the Vajrayāna system Buddhism went a step further from its primitive form and lost all its pristine purity. Buddhism of the Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna phase came to know of a large number of gods and goddess belonging to a well-developed hierarchical set up. Interestingly enough, many of these Vajrayāna dieties were of Brahmanical origin or inspiration. Vajrapāṇi and Mañjuśrī, for example, are the Buddhist counterpart of Brahmanical Indra and Brahmā. Likewise, Jāmbhala and Vasudhārā are the Buddhist counterparts of Brahmanical Kubera and Lakṣmī respectively. A similarity can also be found in the features of Avalokiteśvara and Viṣṇu[1]. The Brahmanical goddess of progeny Saṣṭhī has conceptual affinity with the Buddhist deity called Hārītī. Sarasvatī and Gaṇapati of the Brahmanical pantheon are represented in Buddhism by their own name with little variations[2]. While Heruka, the prominent Buddhist god of Eastern India has

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1. DHI, p.558.
2. IBI, p.344.

conceptual proximity to the terrific Bhairava aspect of major Brahmanical god Śiva.

Niṣpannayogāvalī, the celebrated Buddhist text of c. 12th century A .D. gives us a detailed idea about the large number Brahmanical divinities that are included in the Buddhist pantheon. Niṣpannayogāvalī is a unique work on Maṇḍala and is remarkable for its richness of informations on the host of Buddhist as well as Buddhist-Brahmanical deities. The Mañjuvara Maṇḍala of the above mentioned work described different deities, e.g. the sixteen Bodhisattvas, the twelve pāramitās, the twelve Vaśiṣṭas and etc.

A perusal of Niṣpannayogāvalī, Sādhanamālā[1] and other Buddhist texts shows that Buddhism incorporated many Brahmanical deities in different manner. Most of these deities are converted to Buddhist faith which are evidenced by the fact that a large number of these deities are still revered with great honour in purely Buddhist countries.

The study of the method of classification of the Brahmanical gods determining their colours and directions are highly interesting. Sometimes they are given very humiliating roles and some of the deities are often trampled under the feet of the angry Buddhist gods to show their aversion to the Brahmanical faith. Gaṇeśa, as for example, is found trampled by different Buddhist gods. Similarly four important

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1. Sādhanamālā composed in A.D. 1165.

Brahmanical gods, e.g. Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Indra are considered to be the 'Māras' or 'Wicked Beings' and different gods of Buddhism are often found trampling them under their feet. Interestingly enough, Brahmā also has been treated very humilatingly by the Buddhists. "Brahmā should be very old with grey beards" as Brahmanical tradition says, but "the Buddhist deities mercilessly hold the heads by the matted hair and flourish them in their hands"[1]. In this way the Buddhists tried to impose superiority of their gods over the Brahmanical deities.

Now an attempt is being made to discuss in brief the features of a few counterparts of Brahmanical gods in Buddhist pantheon and some Buddhist gods of Brahmanical origin.

AVALOKITEŚVARA vis-a-vis VIṢNU, BRAHMĀ & ŚIVA

The Buddhist deity Avalokiteśvara has an affinity with different aspects of Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva. Avalokiteśvara generally exhibits a mudrā of Namaskāra. The identification mark of the deity are rosary and the pink lotus. The distinctive mark of the deity is a cresent which is placed in his hair (Plate VI. Fig. 1.). This cresent signifies his akinness to Śiva who holds a moon in his Jaṭā and which is why he is called the Candraśekhara. Another symbol of Avalokiteśvara is lotus which reminds us of the lotus seat of Brahmā.

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1. IBI, p. 389.

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Moreover, Avalokiteśvara exhibits Brahmāñjali attitude in his hand. The Brahmāñjali mudrā or devotional attitude is a symbol of Brahmā of the Hindu pantheon.

But unlike Brahmā he is regarded as the preserver and defender of the earth in the Buddhist belief. This function of preservation is done by Viṣṇu in the Brahmanical pantheon. Viṣṇu is also supposed to hold a Padma in his hands in the Brahmanical conception. In the Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheon, Avalokiteśvara has emanated from the Dhyāni-Buddha Amitābha. Amitābha is the spiritual father of Bhadrakalpa. In the Sādhanamālā there are thirty two Sādhanās which describe the different forms of the deity. The deity has as many as one hundred and eight forms. Most of these forms bear the image of Amitābha in their crowns.

Now the iconographic features of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva can be discussed hereunder. Avalokiteśvara seems to have his similarity with these three Brahmanical gods.

According to the Vedic belief Prajāpati-Brahmā is the creator of the Universe. In the Brahmanical conception he is regarded as one of the principal deities. He is described as having four heads and four arms. He holds a Kamandalu in one of his hands. His mount or vāhana is Swan. He should have matted hairs. He is either sitting on a lotus seat or on a chariot drawn by swan. In different representations he is generally reproduce according to the descriptions given in

different texts.

In a sculptural representations of Nalanda (Pl. XVI Fig.1.), the deity exhibits a peculiar hand gesture (which is quite akin to one of the hand gestures of Japanese Dainichi Nyorai or Mahāvairocana). Brahmā is seated on a lotus pedestal. The cranium is elevated. The deity has four faces, but the three faces only are visible from the front.

The Niṣpannayogāvalī describes the iconographic features of Brahmā in details. It describes the deity as yellow in complexion and has four arms. He carries the rosary and the lotus in his two hands, and two other hands hold the staff and a Kamaṇḍulu, sometimes he exhibits Añjali Mudrā in his two hands.

In Gandhara there are many Buddhist reliefs. Some of these reliefs represent Brahmā either in nativity scene of Buddha or as an attendant of the Buddha. In these sculptures he is represented as a Brāhmaṇa. He has dishevelled hairs. He generally wears the white garments like that of Brāhmaṇa. He holds a water vessel in one of his two-hands. This is one of the typical Buddhist representations of Brahmā.

two-armed

In one of the Brahmanical representations Brahmā is depicted in the Kalyānsundaramūrti relief of Ellora. Here he is represented as an officiating priest and sits before a fire. The god is four-faced (three faces are visible) and two-arked. He has completed the works of a priest as generally done in a Hindu marriage.

Viṣṇu, the preserver of the Brahmanical conception, is variously described by the different texts. The Bṛihatsaṁhitā, the Vaikhānasāgama, describe Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in different forms. The Bṛihatsaṁhitā describes the deity as having numerous hands. Sometimes he has two hands, sometimes four or eight hands. His colour is yellowish green. He wears yellow garments, earrings, jewelled crown. In his eight-armed form he holds sword, mace, arrow in his three right hands, while the fourth one exhibits abhaya-mudrā. The attributes of his left hands are a bow, a shield, a wheel and a conchshell. In his four-armed variety he exhibits assurance pose or abhaya-mudrā in one of his right hands, while the other one holds a mace. In the left hands he holds a conch-shell and a wheel. In two-armed variety the deity has only a conch-shell in his left hand but he shows abhaya mudrā or assurance pose in the right hand. This text does not mention about posture. That is why he can be seen as represented either seated or recumbent.

But all these texts describe some essential accessory deities. There should be a Garuḍa as his Vāhana or Vehicle and the Āyudhapuruṣa surrounded him. J.N. Banerjea opined - "One of the Viṣṇu figures in the Chandragupta cave facade at Udayagiri, the half length figure of Garuḍa on the plain pedestal between the legs of the deity is very similar to the partially shown Yakṣa figures below Buddha frontally represented in some Mahābhiniṣkramaṇa reliefs hailed from Gandhara[1].

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1. DHI, p. 402.

The Niṣpannayogavālī, the Indian Buddhist text describes a god named Viṣṇu[1]. The description is quite similar to that of the descriptions given in some Brahmanical texts. The Niṣpannayogāvalī describes Viṣnu with four arms. He rides on Garuḍa. He has four hands. With the principal two hands he holds the Cakra and the Saṅkha, while the other two hands hold a gadā or mace and the bow.

Thus from the above discussion it can be concluded that Avalokiteśvara is identical with Viṣṇu in limited aspects. Only the work Avalokiteśvara has done is similar with Viṣnu. Both of them is regarded as the preserver of the world in Brahmanical and Buddhist faith.

Another important deity in the Hindu pantheon is Śiva. He is generally represented as a malevolent deity who causes death and disease among men and cattle. He is generally tawny in colour or of having a very fair complexion with beautiful chin and generally wearing golden ornaments. He carries bow and arrow and is described as weilding the thunderbolt.

Heruka, the Buddhist deity is generally identified with Śiva. Heruka is a fierce deity. He has two arms in many figures which have been found in eastern India. He is actually depicted in dancing posture. He stands upon a corpse with a Vajra and a Kapāla in his hands. Sometimes Khatvāṅga is also represented as his emblem. A muṇḍamālā decorates his breast. All these emblems and attributes are quite similar to the attributes of Śiva.

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1. IBI, p. 363.

One image from the Subhapur, village on the west of the Biharmaṇḍala in Tippera district in black chlorite stone is presented in dancing attitude[1].

Images of Heruka is not very frequent. According to the descriptions of the Sādhanamālā he is a great warrior and should be meditated upon. He wears Muṇḍamālā in his head and he has terrible eyes. His brown hair rises upwards and forms into a crown which bears the effigy of Akṣobhya. He also wears a Kuṇḍala and is bedecked with ornaments of bones. His head is beautified by the skulls. "He bestows Buddhahood and protects the world from the Māras or the wicked beings."[2] In all descriptions he is described as seated in ardhaparyaṅka attitude. As Śiva is the destroyer of all evils, Heruka is also believed to destroy the evil spirits from the world. Thus the idea behind the two deities has many aspects in common.

In Indian Buddhism we find references of abother important deity who is known as Mahākāla. Mahākāla is also one of the epithets of Lord Śiva. In the Niṣpannayogāvalī and the Sādhanamālā there are several descriptions of the deity. He is described sometimes as one faced with four, six and even with two arms. He is also described as having eight faces with sixteen arms. He wears ornaments of snake and his garments are made of tiger skin. The deity is also portrayed as having canine teeth. When he is

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1. IBBSIDM, p. 96.

2. IBI, p. 156.

represented as two-armed he holds Kārtri and the Kapāla in his two hands. His colour is blue. In the four-handed form, Kārtri, Kapāla, sword and Khatvāṅga are his attributes. Six-armed Mahākāla holds Kārtri, rosary and Ḍamaru in his three right hands, while his three left hands hold Kṣpāla, Śūla, Vajrapāśa. The Sādhanamālā describes the sixteen armed Mahākāla as having "eight faces, twenty-four eyes, four legs and sixteen arms. He carries in his seven right hands the Kārtri, the Vajra, the elephant hide, the Mudgara, the Triśūla, the sword and the staff of Yama, and in the seven left hands the Kapāla full of bloods, elephant hide, the bell, the goad, the white chorie, the Ḍamaru and the human head. The two remaining hands arranged in embracing the Prajñā. He bears the image of the five Dhyāni Buddhas in his crown, is decked in garlands of heads as ornaments, and is more awe inspiring than Awe itself.[1]

MAÑJUŚRĪ AND BRAHMĀ

Another important Buddhist deity Mañjuśrī may be regarded as possessing similarity with the features of Brahmā who is one of the important members of the Hindu Triad in the post vedic age. He was undoubtedly derived from 'Prajāpati', the vedic god of sacrifice. The Śrūka, Śrūva and Pustaka became his special emblems. Separate temples dedicated to Brahmā are very few. The Brahmā figure from khed-Brahmā temple, shows the god as standing on the western niche, has

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1. IBI, p. 347.

the usual symbols in his hands (Śrūka, Śrūva, Akṣamālā and Kamaṇḍulu) but here he has a bull as his mount instead of a swan.

Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist counterpart of Brahmā is represented generally in two distinct types. In one of these two representations he holds the sword and book and in another representation he is depicted as holding utpala or lotus and with a book. He is regarded as the god of wisdom. He bestows the lights of knowledge, while he brandishes the sword of knowledge to clear the cloud of ignorance.

ŚAKRA-INDRA & VAJRAPĀṆI :

Indra is one of the important vedic deities. He is placed in the group of eight dikpālas. Indra is regarded as the lord of the east. But Indra had really no cult of his own. In Brahmanical Iconography he is generally described as riding on his mount, Airāvata, the white elephant. He has four tusks. The god should hold a thunderbolt in his hand. He has a third eye. This eye is horizontally placed over his forehead. Almost all Brahmanical texts like the Aṁsumadbhedāgama, the ~~Kiranx~~ Viṣṇudharmottara and others describe the deity in same terms. These books describe him as two-armed. He carries either Śakti and Aṅkuśa or Vajra and Aṅkuśa; some texts describe Nilotpala, i.e. blue lotus as his symbol and he has three eyes and four arms.

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In Buddhism also Indra is regarded as one of the important dikpālas. The Dharmadhātuvāgiśvara[1] describes the deity as riding on the Airāvata and he is yellow in colour. "He holds in his two hands the Vajra and the breast of a woman".[2]

In the Buddhist Iconography he is known as Śakra. He is generally represented as an attendant of the Buddha. But in this aspect he is generally depicted along with Brahmā. In some of the representations of Gandhara, Mathura and Paharpura the deity is depicted as an attendant deity of the Buddha and he is accompanied by Brahmā.

In one representation from the Pāhārpur basement the deity is seen as standing. He is facing the east, while his mount stands behind him. He is holding an indistinct object, and a citrus in his left hand. His right hand is being placed in the Varada-pose. He has a jewelled Kirīṭamukuṭa in his head with a halo behind him and a horizontally placed eye on the forehead.

Now we must discuss some aspects of Vajrapāṇi as a Buddha as well as a Bodhisattva in Indian Buddhism because Vajrapāṇi has similarity with Indra or Śakra.

As a Buddha, Vajrapāṇi is described as the spiritual

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1. Nsp, p. 61.
2. IBI, p. 352.

son of Māmakī who is the consort of Dhyāni Buddha Akṣobhya[1]. Vajrapāṇi is represented as carrying a lotus on which is placed his family symbol Vajra. He either sits or stands on a pedestal. His symbol Vajra is sometimes placed against his chest in one of his hands. Sādhanamālā describes the deity in its Bodhisattva form. In this form also the deity carries Vajra as his symbol in his one hand, while his other hand shows abhaya-mudrā. He is of white colour. He is regarded as 'the Dhyāni-Bodhisattva' of Akṣobhya (a Dhyāni-Buddha).

Thus Indra and Vajrapāṇi has only similarities so far as their emblems or attributes are concerned. Both these deities hold the Vajra or thunderbolt as their emblem, while both are also regarded as the main dikpālas. Mainly they guard the eastern corner of the universe (Pl. IX Fig. 1.).

AGNI

Agni, the lord of south-eastern quarter is regarded as one of the principal eight dikpālas in the Brahmanical conception. Here he is generally described as bearded, four-armed, four-tusked and three-eyed. He is either riding on a chariot drawn by parrots or mounted on a ram or goat. But sometimes the figure of Agni bears no similarity with the descriptions of the iconographic texts.

A figure of Agni (Pl. XVI, Fig. 1.) discovered from

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1. IBI, pp. 53, 53.

Nalanda. The deity is in standing posture. The flame of fire emanates from his body. He has two attendants also.

There are several other examples of Agni from different parts of the country. One of the representations from the Paharpur basement depicted Agni as two-armed. The god holds a rosary and a water vessel in his two hands. Circle of flames is issuing forth from his sides. But his mount is absent in this sculpture. In another representation[1] the deity is depicted as pot-bellied and two-armed. He sits on the back of a ram or goat. He is in the Paryaṅka attitude. He holds a rosary in his right hand while his left hand is carrying a water vessel. He is bearded and staring at the people with angry look in his eyes. There are traces of long waving flames emanating from his body. He wears a sacred thread and a few simple ornaments.

In Indian Buddhism also Agni was incorporated into the Vajrayāna Buddhist pantheon. Niṣpannayogāvalī describes the deity as the lord of Agni corner. He is sitting on a goat. His complexion is red. He is two-armed and holds in his two hands ladle and water bowl. The representation of Agni in India as a Buddhist deity is not very frequent.

GANEŚA

Another popular deity is Gaṇapati or Gaṇeśa. As a Hindu

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1. Refer, DHI, Plate XLV, Fig. 4.

divinity he is represented as either seated or standing. The seated posture may be a Padmāsana and the deity sits on a mouse or sometimes on a lion. Images in this pose is seen with left leg as folded horizontally and rests on the pedestal or seat. He is pot-bellied and his legs are crossed. When he is represented as standing he is either in Dvibhaṅga, Tribhaṅga or Sambhaṅga postures. He holds a Cakra and a plate of sweetmeat in his two hands. Sometimes Padma, Noose, Rosary, Pāśa, Paraśu are also added as his attributed. He is also regarded as the bestower of wisdom and knowledge.

In Buddhist Inconography, Gaṇapati or Vināyaka is sometimes regarded as an evil spirit or as a demon. Sometimes he is represented as a Hindu deity and wears the Jaṭa-mukuṭa of Śiva which resembles the Hindu god Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati.

In the Buddhist pantheon Gaṇapati is generally regarded as red in complexion. He is also seen as twelve-handed and a mouse is represented as his Vāhana. Here also he is bedecked with the Jaṭā-mukuṭa of Śiva which is sometimes regarded as the identification mark of the god.

We may mention here about a figure of seated Gaṇeśa, which was discovered from Nalanda (Pl.XVIII. Fig. 1.). This image is made of bronze. The deity is two-armed and holds two different attributes. A beautiful hallo is placed behind him.

But this Vināyaka or Vighneśa form of the deity is placed

in the group of minor deities in the Buddhism. The Indian Buddhist text Nispannayogāvalī describes the deity as white in colour. He is elephant-headed, and a snake forms his sacred thread. He carries a Triśūla and a Ladduka (sweet balls) in his two right hands while his two left hands carry a Paraśu and a Mūlaka. He is generally described as two-handed.

JĀMBHALA & KUBERA

Jāmbhala, another important Buddhist deity has some similarity with the Hindu god Kubera, the god of wealth. Usually he has one face and two hands. Left hand holds a citron and the right one holds a mongoose and he is vomitting jewels. According to the Hindu mythology he is regarded as the regent of the North and his special emblem is Dhvaja or flag. He is dressed like that of a warrior. But in Buddhism he was regarded as the Dharmapāla. He is sometimes also regarded as a Lokapāla. He is the guardian of law as well as the god of wealth. He is yellow in complexion and his attributes are caityas, dhvaja, Kalaśa, Kolbok, Nakula, roaring lion and vomitting cintāmani. A dragon is generally regarded as his Vāhana. Sometimes white horse is also regarded as his Vāhana. His emblems are generally regarded as Jāmbhara (lemon), Nakula (mongoose), Saṅkha (conchshell), Triśūla (trident) and etc.

In the Hindu Iconography Kubera is considered to be the god of wealth. In one representation he is depicted as having bags and vases overflowing with coins. These are shown beneath

the branches of the tree. A conch shell and a lotus flower are also associated with Kubera. Padma, Mahāpadma, Saṅkha, Makara, Kacchapa, Mukunda, Nanda, Nīla and Kharva are regarded as the nine gems of Kubera[1]. But this list of nine gems are not always same in all texts.

According to the Hindu mythology Kubera was the son of the sage called Vaiśravas or Vaiśravaṇa and he was the guardian of all treasurers of the earth. We may cite here an illustration of Kubera discovered from Nalanda (Pl.XXI. Fig.2).

In Indian Buddhism Jāmbhala is regarded as one of the emanations of Ratnasambhava. Jambhala is the deity of wealth or Buddhist Kubera. But the meaning of Ratnasambhava is "Jewel born". Vasudhārā is regarded as the consort of Jāmbhala. The Sādhanamālā describes Jāmbhala in different forms. He is represented either in single form or in Yab-Yum attitude. When he is depicted as a single deity he is of golden complexion and carries the mongoose in the left hand and a citron in the right hand. When he is represented in Yab-Yum form with his Śakti he is white in colour. He has three faces and six arms.

In one representation (Pl.XXI.Fig.3) we find that Jāmbhala is seated on a pedestal. He is four-armed and hold a Jāmbhara (lemon) which is placed in his lower right hand.

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1. DHI, p. 30.

Jāmbhara, as is already noted, is one of the main identification symbols of Jāmbhala. In his other hands he holds a pāśa, a a flower and one hand is placed over his left foot which is folded horizontally.

Thus the similarity between the Hindu Kubera and Buddhist Jāmbhala can be traced in many aspects. The eight jars of wealth (which are called Aṣṭanidhis of Kubera in Hinduism) are the attributes of Buddhist Jāmbhala and Hindu Kubera. This is, however, a strong point of similarity between Jāmbhala and Kubera. Moreover the conceptual aspect of these two gods are more or less the same. Both are the guardians and protectors of all earthly treasures and wealth. It may not be out of place to mention here about Kuberāṇī. A representation of Kuberāṇī is illustrated in our work (Pl.XXIV,Fig. 1.). The goddess is standing on a lotus pedestal which is placed over five jars full of gems. One of her hands (right hand) shows Varada mudrā. While in the left hand she holds the flower stalk.

KĀRTTIKEYA

Several other important Brahmanical deities have also found prominence in the Buddhist pantheon. Kārttikeya, the war god, is known both in Hindu as well as in the Buddhist world. But it can be said that he is more popular among the Hindu devotees than those of the Buddhists. But the image of Kārttikeya is not very frequent in ancient art. Some early Indian

(Hindu) kings worshipped the god and thus the symbol of this god is depicted on their coins. In the copper coins of Yaudheyas Kārttikeya is depicted as holding a long spear which is the special emblem of Kārttikeya[1]. Cock and the peacock associated with various aspects of the deity.

Stella Kramrisch has published an interesting picture of Kārttikeya which is worth noting here (Plate published in JISOA, Vol. II, 1934). This figure is shaped according to the Śāstric descriptions and it is made of dark chlorite stone. In Buddhist belief he is described as six-headed and six-handed. Among his emblems, he is seen holding his special emblems, spear and cock.

The Indian Buddhist text Niṣpannayogāvalī describes Kārttikeya in quite different form. He rides on a peacock and he is red in colour. He has six faces. With his two right hands he holds the Śakti and the Vajra, while the two left hands hold the hen. With the two other hands he shows the Añjali-mudrā.[2]

LAKṢMĪ & VASUDHĀRĀ

Brahmanical Lakṣmī has her counterpart in the Indian Buddhist pantheon. In Buddhism, she is known as Vasudhārā. She is regarded as the consort of Jāmbhala. Vasudhārā bears the miniature figure of Akṣobhya or Ratnasambhava on her crown. She

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1. DHI, p. 140.
2. Nsp, p. 62.

is generally described as two-armed. She is represented either as standing or seated. She is decorated with ornaments and accompanied by her attendants. Her complexion is yellow. She holds in her left hand the ears of corn with the vessel that showers gems, while she exhibits the Varada-mudrā in her right hand. Sometimes she is represented as having one face and six arms. In six-handed form she holds book, ears of corn and water-vessel in her three hands. The other three hands exhibit the Namaskāra, and the Varada mudrā.

In the Brahmanical concept the goddess of wealth is called Śrī or Lakṣmī and is well represented in the numistatic, glyptic and sculptural arts of ancient and early medieval India.

Different Brahmanical iconographic texts variously define the goddess as two- or four- and sometimes multi-armed. But the two-armed variety is more popular in India. The texts describe her attributes either as the lotus flower, a wood-apple, a conchshell or a pot of nector etc. Sometimes she is described as eighteen-armed. In such representation, she holds rosary, hatchet, club, arrow, thunderbolt, lotus, bow, small pitcher, staff, spear, sword, shield, bell and wine cup. Almost all texts describe the goddess as dressed in heavenly garments and gorgeous ornaments.

In different sculptures of India Śrī Lakṣmī is depicted in different ways. In some representations she is depicted as being bathed by the two-elephants. This aspect of Lakṣmī is

known as Gaja-Lakṣmī. In the Kailasa temple of Ellora there is a representation of Gaja-Lakṣmī. Here the goddess is bathed by the elephants. She is seated on a lotus inside a lotus pond, and there are other celestial attendants by her sides.

SARASVATĪ

The goddess of learning and knowledge in the Brahmanical pantheon is Sarasvatī. She is associated sometimes with Brahmā and sometimes with Viṣnu. Now the form of Sarasvatī which is much more popular is associated with Brahmā because of her vāhana swan.[1]

In India she is often represented as associated with various other vehicles such as lion, ram, peacock etc.[2] Different Brahmanical texts like the Viṣnudharmottara, the Aṁsumadbhedāgama, the Pūrvakaraṇāgama, the Rupamaṇḍana describe Sarasvatī as four-armed, white colour, dressed in white ornaments. She is described as bedecked with heavenly ornaments. She holds a manuscript, white lotus, rosary and a musical instrument in her four hands. Sometimes she holds a water vessel also.

One of the important figures of Sarasvatī is met with on a Bharut pillars. In this figure the deity is seen standing

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1. HDIJBP, p. 108.

2. Sarasvati, fig. 14.

on a lotus in a graceful posture. She plays on a harp with her hands.

A beautiful stone image is now preserved in the Nalanda Museum (Pl.XXVI,Fig.1.). The goddess holds an instrument with her two hands. She sits in ardhaparyaṅka attitude and places her right leg on a separate lotus below the seat.

As a goddess of learning she finds mention in the Buddhist iconography. In Indian Buddhism Sarasvati is represented as seated and holding a Vīṇā with her two hands. Sometimes she is depicted as having three faces with six arms. She confers wisdom, learning, intelligence to her worshippers. She is variously known to the Indian Buddhists as Mahāsarasvatī, Vajravīṇā-Sarasvatī, Vajrasāradā, Aryasarasvatī, Vajrasārada etc.

It may not be out of place to describe here one image of Vajrasāradā (Pl.XXVI,Fg.2). This image is made of stone. The deity, flanked by her four female attendants, sits on a lotus in Ālidha attitude and places her feet, whose ankles are crossed on a lotus pad. The serenity of the face and the sublimity of the whole composition are expressive of special beauty of the image. A tiny figure of the Buddha is placed in her crown.

SŪRYA : MĀRĪCĪ

Sūrya or the sun-god is another important deity of the Hindu pantheon. In Indian art the god is seen riding on a

chariot drawn by seven horses. The charioteer is regarded as Aruṇa. He holds a full blown lotus flower in his hand. In the coins of early Indian tribes (c.1st-3rd century B.C.) Sūrya is represented anthropomorphically (PL. XXVIII, Fig. 1).

The Bṛhatsaṁhitā, the Viṣṇudharmottara and other iconographical texts describe the deity. The identification symbols of the deity are the full blown lotus flower placed in his hand and the chariot drawn by seven horses, while the charioteer is Aruṇa.

Mārīcī is the female counterpart in the Buddhist pantheon of Sūrya. She, as the goddes of dawn, is usually invoked at dawn with proper ceremonies and rituals. Iconographically Mārīcī has many similarities with Sūrya. Mārīcī also has a chariot drawn by seven pigs, while the chariot of sun-god Sūrya is drawn by seven horses. Again, like Aruṇa, the charioteer of Sūrya, Mārīcī's charioteer is either Rāhu or a goddess with no legs.

An image of Mārīcī from Sarnath, now preserved at National Museum, Delhi, helps us in understanding the iconographic feature of the deity. Here the goddess stands on a chariot and holds six different emblems and exhibits gestures with her six hands. Seven pigs drew his chariot and a goddess, whose legs are not visible, works as a charioteer. (PL. XXIX, Fig. 1.).

VARUṆA

Varuṇa is one of the dikpālas of the Brahmanical

pantheon. The Visnudharmottara and other iconographical texts describe the deity as pot-bellied and is riding on a chariot drawn by seven swans. Generally depicted as four-armed he has a lotus and noose in the right hand and the conchshell and jewel box in the left hand. A beautiful image of the deity at the Rajarani temple of Bhuvanesvara is represented artistically.

In the Buddhist belief also Varuna is regarded as the god of "rain and heaven" like the Hindu belief. The Sādhanamālā describe the deity as white in complexion. He has two arms; crocodile is his vehicle and sits in the western direction and holds in his two hands the noose of snake and the conch.

One representation of the deity from Sanchi is illustrated in this work (Pl.XXVIII,Fig.2.). The deity does not possess any iconographical similarity with the descriptions mentioned above. In this representation the two-armed deity appears to be holding the tail of a snake in his left hand, while his right hand is placed near his bosom. He is decorated with crown and various ornaments.

VĀYU

Vāyu, the lord of the vāyu corner is also known to the Buddhists. The god is depicted as riding on a deer. His complexion is blue. The deity is generally two-armed and he exhibits the mudra of 'empty folds'. In the Brahmanical conception also he is regarded as a deity of the vāyu corner. The Visnudharmottara, the Rupamandana, the Aṅsumadbhedāgama

describe the god as riding on a stag. His hands are busy in carrying a banner and he also holds an elephant goad. Sometimes he is described as holding a staff and a banner.

YAMA

To the Hindus Yama is regarded as the ruler of dead. He is also incorporated in Indian Buddhism. Brhatsamhitā x one of the important Brahmanical texts, explains the deity as having a staff in his hand and riding on a buffalo. Buddhist Sādhanās variously described the deity. Generally he is two-armed and blue in complexion. 'Staff of death' and Śūla are regarded to be his weapons. He sits on a buffalo.

In both the Brahmanical and the Buddhist religion Yama has double entity. He is represented in benign and also in terrific forms. Although, Yama is generally revered in the Buddhist world sometimes he is humiliated by other Buddhist deity, such as, Yamāntaka.

SAṢṬHĪ:HĀRĪTĪ

Saṣṭhī, a folk goddess of Bengal is well-known to the Buddhist world. In Buddhism her name is Hārītī. Saṣṭhī is generally regarded as the goddess who protects the children from the evil spirits. Hārītī is also the goddess of children. She is depicted as standing or seated with a child at her breast and astride on her hips, she is surrounded by five children. They are regarded as the symbol of five-hundred

children of the goddess. In Japan she is also a popular deity.

TĀRĀ

Mention should also be made of two more goddess,. One of them is Tārā. She is the supreme goddess of Vajrayāna doctrine. But there is no evidence to suggest that the appearance of this famous Buddhist deity before the 5th century A.D. She is regarded as the female personification of Karuṇā. As the destroyer of all obstacles and frights and on the other hand as the bestower of boons the two roles of this female deity is indubitable. Her first appearance in the Buddhist pantheon as the Śakti of Avalokiteśvara conferred her "in the role of a saviouress of devotees from perils"[1]. In different cave paintings of Ajanta, Kanheri, Aurangabad, Ellora and other places we trace the presence of this female deity, who saves her devotees from the dangers. The concept of Tārā with her attribute are borrowed from the conception of Matṛkā in the Brahmanical pantheon.

There are controversies regarding the place of origin of Tārā[2]. This goddess manifests herself either in benign or in terrific form[3]. But in the Indian Buddhist art tradition the benign form is more popular than that of the terrific aspect of the deity.

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1. DBIEI, p. 15.
2. Cf. Śakti cult and Tārā, by K.K. Dasgupta, p. 126.
3. IA, p. xxiv.

Generally, Tārā occupies the same position in Buddhist pantheon as goddess Durgā does in the Brahmanical ideas. But in Tantric form of Hinduism or Brahmanical cult we come across a terrific goddess known as Tārā. Tārā in Buddhism has a pacific form. But the Buddhist goddess Mahācintārā is the derivation of terrific Tārā of Tantric Hindu cult. In her different manifestations she holds different attributes and symbols.

JĀṄGULI : MANASĀ

Another important Buddhist goddess Jāṅguli may be compared with Hindu goddess Manasā. Both these goddess is worshipped in order to avert snake-bite. Different Sādhanās describe goddess Jāṅguli in three different forms. She may have one face and four arms or three faces and six arms or four faces with four arms. In one of three forms either a Vīṇā or a snake is regarded as her symbols. In her three-faced form she rides on a snake which is her vehicle. When she is four-faced and four-armed she exhibits abhaya-mudrā with her upper right hand, while her upper left hand holds a white snake. Curiously enough, she holds a Vīṇā, the usual emblem of Sarasvatī, by her normal two hands. In this connection it may be mentioned here that the Atharvaveda describe Sarasvatī as the destroyer of poison. But this aspect of Sarasvatī did not get much popularity in the Brahmanical pantheon. Even the Indian Buddhist of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna faith did not recognise this concept of Sarasvatī. But in Japan Benzai-ten or Sarasvatī is sometimes associated with dragon or snake. In India, generally,

the identification marks of Jāṅguli are a snake and abhaya-mudrā.

The foregoing discussion on different Buddhist images and some Brahmanical deities apparently reveal the fact that the Buddhist pantheon is not wholly consisted of Buddhist gods. Different Brahmanical gods and goddess though they were sometimes given humiliating role were adopted in the Buddhist pantheon. Some deities were directly borrowed in Buddhism from the Brahmanical pantheon. Sometimes the Buddhists included some Brahmanical deities by ascribing different names to those deities and in some cases the Brahmanical deities were regarded as merely the accessory deities of the Buddhist gods and goddesses.

Not only in India but also in countries outside India we find that different Brahmanical deities are worshipped, but the presence of these deities in those countries are in 'Buddhist garb'. In China also Agni, Brahmā, Gaṇeśa and other important Brahmanical deities occupy honourable positions. But the iconographical and ideological concept related to these deities, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, underwent some changes. The interesting aspects of the changes in the ideas and beliefs have been variously noted in the following two chapters.