

Foreword

It has long been observed that at certain levels in Buddhist thought and religion there appear divine beings, celestial and daemonic, that do not belong strictly and exclusively to Buddhism alone because their counterparts or namesakes are to be found also in what we now term 'Hinduism' or 'Brahmanism' (and eventually in Jainism too). In this connexion there are two questions at least that arise: What are the status and significance of these entities within what we call 'Buddhism'?, and how exactly do they relate to their Brahmanical/Hindu namesakes and counterparts?

An answer that has often been given is that these entities have been borrowed by Buddhists from Brahmanism/Hinduism. This explanation, however, raises the further question as to why Buddhists would have wished to borrow entities that are alien to the religion they follow. For a borrower borrows from an *other*, thus raising the issue of alterity and the alien. What then could it have been that motivated Buddhists to borrow so long as Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism are *ex hypothesi* regarded as separate religious systems alien to each other? Was it confusion of mind, or perhaps the laziness of habit of new converts to Buddhism? Or was this borrowing motivated by Buddhists' desire to emulate or compete with Brahmanism/Hinduism? But why should supposed converts from Brahmanism/Hinduism have wished to vie with what they had converted from by borrowing from it? Trying to answer such questions may lead to endless speculation perhaps more revealing about the speculator than about what actually happened at some time in ancient and mediaeval India. More fundamental is the question whether one can even properly speak of borrowing where a civilization and religious culture are known to be in large part shared by both Buddhists and Brahmanists/Hindus, at least at certain significant levels. Seldom have advocates of the borrowing hypothesis adequately examined this crucial question.

Another way of explaining the presence within Buddhism of the namesakes and counterparts of Brahmanical/Hindu divinities is then to hypothesize that they belonged to a common ground, a 'substratum' shared by both Buddhism and the ambient religions in the land of its birth. The expression 'substratum' was employed, between inverted commas, in our article 'Sur les rapports entre le bouddhisme et le "substrat religieux" indien et tibétain', *Journal asiatique* 1964, pp. 77–95.

Here ‘substratum’ is to be understood in a sense different from its meaning in linguistics, where a language’s substratum will often be of a type different from, and genetically unrelated to, that language. In the ‘substratum model’ under discussion in the present study, however, the religious substratum is not allogenic, or exogenous, in relation to the form of Buddhism incorporating it. (Such an interpretation based on the ‘substratum model’ is of course not reducible to a version of the modern idea of ‘Hindutva’.) This observation is in its turn related to one of the great problems arising in the history of India, the question of the circumstances in which Buddhism largely disappeared as a distinct entity from the land of its birth.

Why then did the Buddhists not all engage in good housekeeping and clear out everything that was shared with Brahmanism/Hinduism, and which might seem alien and exogenous to Buddhism? By thinking in terms of borrowing, advocates of the ‘borrowing model’, and in particular those opposed to the ‘substratum model’, have presupposed that Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism are two separate and different religious systems requiring to be kept neatly apart at all levels of analysis. However, even though many of their basic texts clearly show that they were very well aware of the differences separating them from Brahmanists/Hindus, it appears that Buddhists did not necessarily wish always to engage in such tidy housekeeping. And, evidently, this was because the entities belonging to the shared Indian substratum had a role or function within Buddhism. A brief, and still preliminary, statement concerning this function is that, within the Buddhist world view, it was not unusual to conceive of such entities as occupying its ‘mundane’ storey. This storey is what is known in Sanskrit terminology as the *laukika*, the ‘worldly’ or ‘mundane’, as opposed to the *lokottara*, the ‘supramundane’ or ‘transmundane’. (See our ‘Note on the relationship between Buddhist and “Hindu” divinities in Buddhist literature and iconology: The *laukika/lokottara* contrast and the notion of an Indian “religious substratum”’, in R. Torella [ed.] *Le parole e i marmi* [R. Gnoli Felicitation Volume, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. xcii, Rome, 2001], pp. 735–742.)

What is the significance of this *laukika* level for a Buddhist? Concisely stated, this level is inhabited by ‘worldly’ divinities and numina that occupied the minds of Buddhists as well as of other Indians. In Buddhist thought, the position of these entities was an inferior and subordinate one relatively to that of beings representing the supramundane level

of the cosmos, namely the Buddha and the higher Bodhisattvas including the higher protectors of the Dharma (*dharmapāla*, Tib. *chos skyoñ*), who have been classified as *lokottara*. (It is important to observe that the *lokottara* level is not here identical with the *pāramārthika*, the level described as being ‘of ultimate meaning’; for this *lokottara* contrasted with the *laukika* is still conceptualized as being intra-cosmic, even if beings classified as *lokottara* in the structure under discussion in the present study may relate or point to the acosmic *paramārtha*.)

Now, in the frame of the *laukika* : *lokottara* contrastive opposition, the mundane and transmundane levels were not necessarily and invariably thought of as frozen and as hermetically sealed off from each other in an immutable vertical layering. Because the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (both peaceful and wrathful ones) act compassionately for the benefit and the ultimate liberation of all sentient beings (*sattva*), a mundane divinity or daemon occupying the *laukika* level may finally be raised – i.e. transfigured or trans-valued – to the *lokottara* level of the *ārya* or ‘Noble (of the spirit)’, thus becoming even a higher protector of the Dharma. In our sources, the process of perfectionment undergone by ordinary, mundane, beings, regarded as ‘trainees’ (*vineya*, Tib. *gdul bya*), may be referred to as a process of training (Skt. *vi-nī-*, Tib. *’dul ba* ‘tame’), a concept that is only inadequately rendered by the term ‘conversion’. This is a salvific act of liberation characterized, from the point of view of both trainer and trainee, as compassionate, even when it is represented as being not totally peaceful but highly energetic and even forceful. Just as ordinary beings or worldlings (*prthagjana*) – however much they may still be mired in defilements (*kleśa*) – may benefit from this compassionate liberating activity of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas and thus, in the perspective of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, themselves eventually accede to ‘noble’ (*ārya*) bodhisattvahood (and onwards to buddhahood), so may divinities and numina of the worldly level be ‘trained’ and transformed into Ārya-Bodhisattvas, thus finally becoming integrated into the *lokottara* level.

The contrastive *laukika* : *lokottara* structure, as thus understood in its connexion with the ‘substratum model’, is antithetical to the view according to which the schema where the *lokottara* is superordinate to the *laukika* level was intended by Buddhists to express in agonistic and secular-historicist fashion the victory of Buddhism over Brahmanism/Hinduism. This has been a widely spread view, and it seems to have

been maintained by modern writers on the basis of iconographical depictions of a superordinate Buddhist deity, classified as *lokottara*, dancing, or treading, on a putatively ‘Hindu’ one. (This view may have been influenced by an icon such as the *śarabheśvaramūrti*, on which see p. 60 with notes 68, 70 and 138, and perhaps by the theme of *brahmahatyā*, on which see p. 59 with note 87.) But this interpretation of the Buddhist icons in question is by no means necessary, and it is not supported by the way such figures have been understood in a large number of relevant Buddhist texts where, iconologically, the schema represents rather the superordination of the transmundane over the mundane and subordinate level.

We thus encounter three distinct interpretations of the relation between Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism, and of entities of the *lokottara* level in relation to those of the *laukika* level: (i) the ‘substratum model’, (ii) the ‘borrowing model’, and (iii) a more or less secular and historicist interpretation of the schema as representing the agonistic or hostile relation ‘Buddhism vs. Hinduism’ in the world, i.e. in history. Although interpretations (i) and (ii) are theoretically opposable, they are not entirely exclusive of each other: in the practice of historical analysis of individual cases in Indian (and Tibetan, etc.) religion the former model will be most appropriate in certain instances, while in other historically and philologically defined cases the second model may be relevant. It does not seem that both models will normally be applicable simultaneously to a single individual case; but it does appear that a given historically verifiable borrowing can best be explained against the background of a common ground, the ‘substratum’ shared between Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism. As for the agonistic view (iii), it is of course possible that the structured contrastive opposition *laukika: lokottara* relating to two levels, one superordinate to the other, has on occasion been understood (or misunderstood) in terms of a historical-secular hostility ‘Buddhism vs. Brahmanism/Hinduism’, or *vice versa*, as has indeed happened in modern India where icons depicting a divine being dancing, or treading, on another entity are sometimes being explained in just this fashion. Such a ‘Buddhism vs. Hinduism’ view of the relevant icons has been adopted uncritically also by some workers in the fields of art history and iconography, who speak of ‘Hindu’ gods being trampled upon and humiliated. But such subordinate entities seem better described as ‘mundane’ and pan-Indian – i.e. as belonging to a shared religious substratum – rather than as strictly Brahmanical/Hindu alone. Here the

expression ‘pan-Indian’ is not to be understood to imply that a given entity or feature is to be found in the same form in each and every Indian religion without exception, but rather to signal that it is widely represented both in what is called Brahmanism/Hinduism and in Buddhism. (Concerning an icon depicting the victory of the Buddha over heterodox *tīrthikas*, compare pp. 75–76 below.)

With regard to the ‘borrowing model’ (BM), in one version of it (see below, p. 105 ff. with p. 150 note 202) examples of material held by both Śaivas and Buddhists have been indifferently termed Śivaism, notably in the case of Yoginī or ‘Mother’ Tantras. Two analytically distinct things – namely Śaiva material in the strictest sense and material common to both religious groups – are thus grouped together as a single entity labelled Śivaism. For the ‘substratum model’ (SM), on the other hand, what was held in common and shared would remain unspecified and unlabelled as to sectarian affiliation (except of course in a case of historically characterized and verified borrowing by one religion from the other), while when expressed in Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava scriptures it might no doubt be referred to as Śivaist or Viṣṇuite, and when expressed in a Buddhist text it might be no less appropriately called Buddhist. In other words, in one version of the BM, materials distinguishable from the viewpoints of both religious history and psychology have received the selfsame appellation. But for the SM the telescoping together of what are after all two analytically distinct levels is something to be carefully avoided whenever possible. And the SM seeks to take due account of the two different levels within Buddhism known as the *laukika* – i.e., *inter alia*, what is held in common between Buddhists and Hindus, etc., and does not require to be identified in sectarian terms – and the *lokottara* which, for the Buddhist, is strictly speaking Buddhist.

Of course, as already mentioned, in the course of Indian religious history it may well be that a Buddhist living, and perhaps also educated, in a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava milieu might take over into his ideas and practices certain matter acceptable to Buddhism but still identifiable as of Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava origin. Once this transfer has been accomplished in time, however, the material would become integrated into a new synchronic whole, a Buddhist one. Under the appellation of *laukika* such an adopted component would be contrastively opposed in Buddhist thought to the properly Buddhist *lokottara*. To label it as Śivaism or Viṣṇuism, as Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava, once it has been incorporated within the Buddhist system

seems methodologically problematic inasmuch as it collapses the diachronic and synchronic axes. To do so is also questionable; for, from the religio-philosophic viewpoint of at least an informed and educated Buddhist, such specification and labelling would tend to render it ritually and doctrinally devoid of meaning and hence unauthentic and inoperative. It may be recalled that Buddhists have themselves been aware of, and have indeed confronted, the possibility of infiltration into Buddhism of non-Buddhist elements. An example, usually regarded by Buddhist tradition as a contamination, were ideas and practices that Buddhist sources have attributed to the so-called Red-Ācārya and the Blue-clad ones who were active at the turn of the second millennium in the western Himalayan area (see below, pp. 127–129). Numerous other examples of various kinds regarded in Buddhist traditions not as cases of contamination but rather as ‘mundane’ or ‘worldly’ – i.e., explicitly or implicitly, as *laukika* – components are discussed in this book.

The ‘emic’ *laukika : lokottara* structure – well attested as it is through the history of Buddhism – merits close attention because it yields a highly useful interpretative schema or template, one that often turns out to be at least as pertinent as the concepts of interreligious borrowing, syncretism, fusion, relativism, indifferentism, or inclusivism (i.e. Paul Hacker’s *Inklusivismus*). The *laukika : lokottara* schema corresponds to a vertical, two-layered, symbiosis of Buddhism and ambient Indian (or Tibetan, etc.) religion, with Buddhism in its *lokottara* aspect constituting the upper, superordinate, level. In view of the fact that communication and a passage between the two levels are open (see above), it is possible to speak of an intercommunicating bi-level symbiosis and transfigurative accommodation.

Evidence is also collected here showing that the schema of the *laukika : lokottara* – known in Tibetan as the *’jig rten pa : ’jig rten las ’das pa* – has been employed not only in India but also in Tibet (and other Buddhist lands) in order to structure and represent the relationship between so-called ‘local’ divinities and cults and the great figures of a universalist (but imported) Buddhism. In this connexion, attention may also be drawn to the East Asian concept of a ‘true ground’ and its ‘trace’, known in Japanese Buddhism as *honji suijaku*.

It is not to be supposed that the *laukika : lokottara* schema, meaningful and productive though it has been in Buddhist thought, provides the

single and sole key for interpreting all relevant texts and iconographic depictions. Especially pertinent already in Indian Buddhist thought have been the concepts of transformation (*vikurvaṇa/vikurvāṇa*, Tib. *rnam par 'phrul ba*) and (docetic) manifestation (*nirmāṇa*, Tib. *sprul pa*). Beside the vertical and hierarchical schema of the mundane : supramundane levels, Buddhist versions of docetism thus occupy a central place in some of the structures and processes considered in the present study.

This study thus offers materials and interpretations concerning the 'emic' contrastive opposition mundane : supramundane and related topics, the substratum and borrowing models for religious symbiosis, and the question of the confrontation between Buddhism and Hinduism. Rather than with attempting a linear historical treatment of the materials over a period of a couple of millennia, this study is concerned in the first place with themes, motifs and structures. In our sources the application of the *laukika : lokottara* schema is sometimes made explicitly, and sometimes it is more implicit or latent.

It is hardly necessary then to state that the following pages are not intended to provide a complete and exhaustive account either of the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism and between it and local divinities and cults in Tibet, or of all the various aspects of the *laukika : lokottara* contrastive opposition in the history of Buddhist thought. (A few further aspects have been touched on in our *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet* [Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fasc. 64, Paris, 1995].) In the present study attention is given in particular to the pertinence of the 'substratum model' beside the 'borrowing model' in analysing certain highly important features in the history of Buddhist thought and religion. Whilst (as already mentioned) the 'borrowing model' may no doubt be applicable in certain historically and philologically defined instances, the 'substratum model' retains its significance and usefulness – one being to provide the necessary cultural-historical conditions for borrowing of any sort to have taken place from Brahmanism/Hinduism to Buddhism, or indeed *vice versa*. An effort has also been made to show how the processes of religious integration investigated here differ from those that are explainable in terms of Paul Hacker's often-discussed concept of inclusivism.

The primary sources and the secondary literature relating to the topics investigated here are of course very abundant. Concerning the original

Indian, Tibetan and other Buddhist sources, for reasons of space it has been possible to consider here only a limited, but nevertheless significant, selection of textual and iconographic evidence where the *laukika* : *lokottara* schema is found to be applicable to Buddhist religious, ritual and philosophical thought in connexion with the incorporation of the 'mundane' level, along with its pan-Indian divinities and numina, in the Buddhist world view. As regards the secondary literature, because of its abundance and variety references to it could not be exhaustive. But with a view to furnishing at least an indication as to the discussions that have appeared over the years, bibliographical notes refer to earlier treatments of the problems as well as to more recent examinations of them; unavoidably, some intervening contributions have had to be left unnoticed.

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