

Introduction

That there was no sharp and radical break, no unbridgeable gulf, between many of the religious and cultural representations of Buddhism and the other religions of India seems sufficiently clear, even if their respective ideas and practices have very often been treated as if they were not only distinguishable but quite separate and even opposed entities. Their separate treatment is of course justifiable for many practical purposes, but not genetically or theoretically. This situation of religious and cultural relationship, and of polythetic family resemblance, on the two axes of the diachronic and the synchronic – which might, at least tentatively, be described as a CONTINUITY and SYMBIOSIS of what have been distinct but historically related traditions – is rooted not only in a common civilization but in matters of religious and philosophical ideas and practices: the Buddhists of India were after all Indians, even if we do not wish to reify these names. To say this is, after all, merely to state what should be obvious, namely that the ambient culture of India was the matrix from which, historically, sprang Buddhism as well as Brahmanism/Hinduism and Jainism and in which they developed and flourished over the centuries.¹

¹ As is well known, in the history of the Indo-Aryan languages the words *hindu/hindū* (not to speak of *hindutva/hindūtva*) are attested relatively late. In this study the term ‘Hinduism’ is being used simply as a convenient, and somewhat conventional, designation for the later periods of what – in particular in relation to the earlier period – is known to modern scholars as Brahmanism. Some scholars have employed the designations Hindu and Hinduism to denote respectively a person and a religious system excluding (and possibly opposed to) the Buddhist and Buddhism, the Jain and Jainism, the ‘tribals’ and their religions, etc. Others have on the contrary used the two words inclusively as cover terms to refer in general to the inhabitants and the (‘higher’) religion(s) of South Asia. Modern uses of the term ‘Hinduism’ have been surveyed by D. Lorenzen, ‘Who invented Hinduism?’, *Comparative studies in society and history* 41 (1999), pp. 630–59. As for ‘Brahmanism’, in the following the expression will often be used in a wide sense, the more eastern regions of India in which Buddhism arose not having originally been part of the area (the original *Āryāvarta*) in which Brahmanism in the stricter sense was centred. The expression as used in this study may thus cover also the religion and culture of those designated as *brāhmaṇa* in the compound *śramaṇa-brāhmaṇa* (cf. n. 3 below). It is not a main thesis of this study

Nevertheless, by some modern writers on the subject including Indian ones, the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism has not seldom been described in agonistic (and occasionally polemical) terms as one of confrontation and struggle. Alternatively, by a second group of writers, Buddhism has been subsumed under, or inclusivistically incorporated within, Hinduism. This second view sometimes even turns up not so much as an alternative to the first one but rather as a sort of free variant or alternate of it (for instance in the case of modern 'Hindutva'). Very remarkably, these views seem sometimes to have been adopted against the background of a fairly secularist understanding of the situation, including even when they were propounded in an ostensibly religious context. Confrontation and struggle – even antagonism or forceful incorporation – and much of what goes with them there have no doubt been aplenty. And, evidently, many a Brahmanical/Hindu authority has felt that his tradition was being attacked, perhaps even threatened, by Buddhists; whilst many a Buddhist did not spare certain ideas and practices of the Brahmins/Hindus. Yet the description of this relationship as predominantly one of struggle and antagonism appears one-sided. The relation has, rather, consisted in a complex historical and religious SYMBIOTIC INTERACTION that might, on occasion, also involve critical engagement, struggle (for social, secular, intellectual and religious dominance), and antagonism. This view of the matter that operates with the idea of a common GROUND or SUBSTRATUM underlying much of Brahmanism/Hinduism and Buddhism has been adopted by a third group of writers on the subject and is in part that of the present writer.²

that Buddhism was a development of late Vedic Brahmanism (whatever may in fact have been its links with it; see pp. 5–6 below).

² In part – but no doubt only in part – the problem has probably to do with the circumstance that, in practice, the terms of the familiar oppositions religious/secular (including political) and sacred/profane have been less markedly exclusive, and confined each to its own separate domain, in Indian (and Buddhist) thought than is now the case in the West. With respect to Indian culture and history, then, they are perhaps 'etic' more than 'emic' categories. And it could, then, seem that the understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism/Hinduism, and of certain of their religious narratives and icons, in a decidedly secularist-profane and historical-polemical sense – i.e. as Hinduism vs. Buddhism or Buddhism vs. Hinduism as represented for example by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya's interpretation of certain Buddhist icons (see below, pp. 45 n. 68, 60) – was a 'modernist' view due to Western influence

It is to an examination of certain aspects of this multi-layered and highly complex religious and cultural constellation (or nebula) that the following pages are devoted. Clearly, in view of the vast extent of the relevant materials, no claim can be made here to a full and comprehensive coverage of the primary sources or to exhaustiveness with regard to the secondary literature.

on Indian thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rather than to a searching analysis of the Buddhist sources. See, however, the Tibetan source cited below, pp. 75–76.

Yet, even in earlier Sanskrit works, secularist, social, (quasi-)historical, and polemical understandings of their relationship are not without precedent. G. Verardi has collected a number of Purāṇic passages indicating that narratives concerning the contest between the *devas* and *asuras*, and icons relatable to these struggles, were directed against Buddhists or Jains; see his article ‘Images of destruction: An enquiry into Hindu icons in their relation to Buddhism’, in: G. Verardi and S. Vita (ed.), *Buddhist Asia 1* (Kyōto, 2003), pp. 1–36. Now this situation raises the interesting question as to whether ‘orthodox’ Brahmanism/Hinduism – socially ‘lay’ with only a very limited monastic component – has been not only more socially and ‘orthopractically’ exclusive (both within itself and in relation to the ‘non-orthodox’ in India), but also, at least on occasion, markedly more secularist, even euhemerist, in its outlook than Buddhism has usually been. In the materials reviewed by Verardi, a concrete historical interpretation of narratives and icons seems to be present. A solution to the problem considered by Verardi might possibly lie in the direction of distinguishing between the ahistorical and universal value or significance of a narrative or icon in terms of atemporal archetypes – such as the structural opposition *laukika* : *lokottara* to be considered in the present study –, and the concrete, indeed euhemeristic, interpretation of which such a narrative or icon became susceptible with reference to a particular historical circumstance. However, such an assessment of course involves generalizations; and by its very nature generalization may require qualification and restriction in specific individual cases. (When the narrative or icon in question is ambiguous – that is, when it lends itself to interpretation either as an ahistorical and atemporal archetypal structure or as reflecting a historical event/process – the question may still remain open as to which interpretation is primary and which secondary. Perhaps the narrative or icon is to be considered atemporal and universal in its value and significance, but temporal and historical in its particular reference?)

