

# APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT OF BRAHMA IN BUDDHIST CONTEXT: A CRITICAL STUDY

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## Abstract

The objective of this research is the critical examination of the application of the Brahma concept in Buddhist context. In doing this attempt was made to understand the origin, development and its spread throughout Indian religious thought, from Early Vedic time up to the development of Vajrayāna or Tibetan Buddhism. The various stages of the gradual development of the Brahma concept, and how the Buddhists made use of it for particular purpose according to different contexts has been the focal point of discussion in this study.

This study shows that by the time of rise of Buddhism Brahma concept had gained considerable importance in the religious sphere of the time, and the Buddha using his skillful means identified its value as a device to get a breakthrough to the religious scenario; and on the one hand to establish his own teaching, and on the other to criticize the Brahmanic teaching. For this he cleverly used many methods: Brahma Sahampati to implore the Buddha to teach the doctrine, Brahma Sanañkumāra to reject Brahmanism's claim for social superiority, Baka Brahma to redescribe the creator God concept etc.

As he commonly does when communicating his doctrine using the prevalent concept, the Buddha gave new meaning to the term Brahma, molded it as a ethico-spiritual ideal, and coined different related concepts and used them to inculcate sensitivity to ethical living. Thus, he gave new meanings to the terms *Brahmacariya*, *Brahmabhūta*, *Brahmasahavyatā* etc, and even created new concept such as *Brahmavihāra*, linking

them to cosmological ideas, attempting to explain the gradual spiritual rise of an individual through meditation by equating this gradual rise with ascending order of the Brahma-worlds in which meditators find rebirth.

The Buddhists, at a later stage, re-endowed Brahma with his original Creator God like nature which the Buddha redescribed and remodeled the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as the Buddhist counterpart of Hindu Brahma, and used re-molded Avalokiteśvara not only as the supreme Godhead but also as the great Vanquisher of Hindu gods: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva etc. This research highlights very effectiveness of the use of the Brahma concept in these varying contexts.

Mahāyāna was a more liberal and flexible form of Buddhism compared with Theravāda, and it was the result of cultural and philosophical adaptations. Brahmā was raised by early Buddhism to the level of a secular role model of ethical perfection. Gradually he became the preacher and the savior in Northern Buddhism. Mahāyāna and Vajirayāna Buddhism had more exposure to cultural varieties and adjusted accordingly. It is evident that there is a representation of Vedic Gods in Mahāyāna literature as well. Even the Bodhisattva has divine qualities of the gods and different forms of the gods. Later with the rise of Hinduism, what was more required was the Brahma omnipotent power which could be used as powerful force to counter the Hindu challenge to Buddhism. As the result, the concept of Brahma had been followed the Bodhisattva doctrine becoming very popular in Mahāyāna Buddhism.