CHAPTER V
Syncretism between Buddhism and Brahmanism

In its essence Buddhism is different from Brahmanism, though it derived much inspiration from the Upanishads, which have formed the basis of the intellectual life of the Hindus across the centuries. Buddhism does not entertain any question regarding the God and the Soul; and in its early form, called the Hinayana or Theravada, there was no place for the practice of image worship, all of which constitute major features of Brahmanism.

Understandably from the beginning the adherents of Buddhism stood on a different plane and they were not well-disposed to different Brahmanical sectaries. Their feelings of superiority became apparent even in the early phase of Buddhism. In the Hinayana form the Brahmanical deities like Sakra and Brahma were admitted to the Hinayana Buddhism with their names unchanged, but only as acolytes or the attendants of the Master. Among other deities who found place in the pantheon were Vishnu, Narayana, and Vaisravana-Kuvera. In the Mahayana Buddhism and later in the Vajrayana-Tantrayana

1. According to A. Grunwedel (Buddhist Art in India, p. 182), these Brahmanical gods were carried into Buddhism by the Hindu converts out of their reverence to them. But this does not seem to be the reality, for as noted above, the old Brahmanical gods did not get any honourable position in Buddhism. Besides, if we read between the lines of the early Buddhist texts we shall be convinced about the validity of our contention. For instance, in the Majjhima-Nikaya it was Brahma who prevailed on him to do so lest the world should otherwise perish. Brahma is said to have come down from heaven, appeared before the Buddha, saluted him reverently and assured him that there would be some who could grasp his doctrine. See A. K. Warder, Indian Buddhism, p. 50.
Buddhism the traffic between the two religions became more brisk and many interesting developments in respect of concept and iconography took place (see below).

Before we proceed to discuss the Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna form of Buddhism which was in vogue in eastern India during the period under review and its relation with Brahmanism, we may say a few words about the Mahāyāna from which it was developed. Without going into details of the differences between Hinayāna and Mahāyāna it may be briefly said that the latter, which came into existence towards the end of the first century A.D., accommodated the idea of God, which had no place in the original teachings of the Master, and interestingly enough, the Master himself came to be worshipped as God. As a corollary to this idea necessity was felt for worshipping the Buddha in his anthropomorphic form in preference to the older mode of venerating him through symbols like Bodhi tree, footprint and diamond-seat. And sometime in the middle of the first century A.D. appeared the image of the Buddha. Conceptually the major and the most marked difference lies in the means to reach the goal of Nirvāṇa: the Hinayanists aim at the Arhat-hood and individual Nirvāṇa, whereas a Mahayanist endeavours for becoming a Bodhisattva on the belief that every sentient being is a potential Bodhisattva ('one having the essence of the Buddha') having within him all the possibilities of becoming a Samyak-sambuddha ('a perfectly enlightened one') and after becoming a Bodhisattva he deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings is emancipated. In the first few centuries of the Christian era appeared different schools of Mahāyāna Philosophy of which the two most important in the context of Tantrayāna Buddhism

Buddhism are the Madhyamika or the Sûnyavāda of Nagarjuna (late first-early second century) and Vijnānavāda or Yogachara of Maitreya (third century), Asaṅga (fourth century), Vasubandhu (fourth century) and others. According to the former, 'there is no difference between Samsāra (phenomenal world) and Nirvāṇa or Sûnyatā (reality), Sûnyatā stands for the 'middle' which avoids the basic views of existence and non-existence and is the relative existence of things, or a kind of relativity; of the two truths, saṁvṛiti (conventional or empirical truth) concerns the world of phenomena which is all but illusion, while paramārtha (higher or transcendental truth) is the realization of this illusion.

The Yogachara school, as the name implies, put emphasis on the practice of yoga (the art of the control of body and mind) as the most effective method for attaining the highest truth. Like the Madhyamika school the Yogacharins look at the world as māyā or illusion, but they do not lay undue emphasis on the absolute negation (nāstitya) like Nagarjuna and his followers. In these fundamental tenets of the Madhyamika and the Vijnānavāda schools of the Mahāyāna philosophy, which demonstrate the monistic conception of the Ultimate Reality of the Vedantins, lie the ground for the rise of the Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna Buddhism of our period.3

II

Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna Buddhism, or simply Tantrayāna Buddhism, centres round the belief in a Supreme Being, a Godhead and concomitantly in a

3. For the exposition of these two schools, see S. B. Dasgupta, Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, pp. 5-31; Gayatri Sen-Majumdar, op.cit., pp. 95-97.
number of gods and goddesses emanating from Him. In other words, apart from a Supreme Lord, Tantrayana Buddhism also conceives of a wide pantheon of deities arranged in an elaborate hierarchy (see below). The Supreme Lord of this form of Buddhism is Śūnyatā, about which it is said: 'Śūnyatā, which is firm, substantial, indivisible and impenetrable, incapable of being burnt and imperishable, is called Vajra'. In a way, therefore, Vajrayāna is Śūnyatāyāna, the path of void which is the adamantine path. The Supreme Lord of this form of Buddhism is Śūnyatā, about which it is said: 'Śūnyatā, which is firm, substantial, indivisible and impenetrable, incapable of being burnt and imperishable, is called Vajra'.

The aim of the followers of Vajrayāna is therefore the realization of the adamantine void-nature of the self and the not-self. This Supreme Lord is called Vajradhara, 'The Being who holds thunderbolt' - the ultimate principle of the unity of the universe (he is sometimes confused with Vajrasattva, a Dhyāni Buddha, infra). The other appellation, Tantrayāna, is self-explanatory; it is based on the Tantra, that is, Tantrika ideas and principles, the two main of them being the union of the Male and Female Principles and the supreme position of the Guru or Preceptor. As to the first, the adherents maintain that the union of Prajñā and Upāya, the Primordial Female and the Male, annihilates all principles of dualism at the final stage of non-duality, the Absolute Being, the Yoganaddha (same as Advaya or Maithuna of the Brahmanical esoteric system), where one enjoys supreme bliss (Mahāsukha) or perfect enlightenment, the other name of Nirvāṇa. As it is extremely difficult to reach this stage of Mahasukha through the union of Prajñā and Upāya, the Tantrika Śādha (disciple of a higher mental order) has to take the help of a guru from whom he takes lessons in esoteric...
sexio-yogic practices, necessary for achieving the desired goal. The other elements of Tantrayāna Buddhism consist of mantras, (strings of certain words of alleged spiritual powers), dhāraṇīs (collections of mantras), mudrās (generally hand-poses, esoterically women) and maṇḍalas (mystic circles). Most of them were present in Mahāyāna Buddhism, but with Tāntrika Buddhism they came to be inseparably connected and the Tāntrika Buddhists, unlike the Mahayanists, restricted themselves to an inner circle of 'initiates' presided over by a guru.

Chronologically, Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna Buddhism was an active force in the religious and cultural life of eastern India from the eighth to the twelfth century. During this period from it evolved two more schools, Kālachakrayāna and Sahajayāna. Kālachakrayāna, which came into existence in or about the tenth century, has Śrī-Kālachakra as its Primordial Lord, similar to Vajradhara of Vajrayāna, and a pantheon of fearful gods and goddesses; the other notable feature lies in the concept that within this human body, the veritable epitome of the universe, are posited all the divisions of time (kāla), the causes of all worldly miseries, and the whirl of time (kāla-chakra) can be overcome through yogic practices and thus the system puts an emphasis on astronomy and astrology. Sahajayāna, the other school, also stresses on the human body, tries to make the physical body perfect for sādhanā, in other words, for reaching the stage of Mahāsukha through sexio-yogic practices with the help of the guru.

6. To some adhents during this period these mantras were of supreme importance, and hence they were called Mantrayāna Buddhists.

7. For a succinct account of these systems, see S.B. Dasgupta, op.cit. pp. 64-67, 143-44; Sen-Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 104-7.
Tantrayana Buddhism seems to have originated in Gauda-Magadha during the Paramasaugata Pāla monarchs and soon spread to Orissa where the Buddhist Khauma-kara kings were ruling. And that it was enjoying a pre-eminent position in a wider area of eastern India has been vouchsafed by a large number of sculptures from Jhewāri (Chittagong district, Bangladesh), Nālandā and Kurkihār (Bihar) and Ratnagiri and Bānpur (Orissa) in addition to many more sites (of late the Pilāk-Jollābarī region of Tripurā has yielded some examples) included in the area under investigation. Together with sculptures have been recovered a fairly large number of paintings borne by the palm-leaf manuscripts (occasionally also on their wooden covers) of sacred Buddhist texts like the Pañcharakṣa and the Asaṭa-Sahasrika Prajñāpāramitā, copied in the celebrated viharas of Nālandā and Vikramasīla and in others of lesser note, such as Vikramapura. All these sculptures and paintings representing various deities of the pantheon of Tantrayāna Buddhism and enunciating Tantrik Buddhist ideas and ideations are thus the most tangible records of the popularity of this particular form of Buddhism during the period under review. And at the same time they seem to bring out the validity of Tāranātha’s statement regarding the emergence of a new school of sculpture and painting under the sponsorship of Dīmān and Mītpālo of Varendra (roughly north Bengal). Incidentally, the Tantrayāna art of eastern India transcended its geographical limits and entered the neighbouring countries like Nepal and Tibet.

8. The negligible finds from Assam indicates that the religion failed to take roots there.

9. Chronologically, the sculptures range from the eighth to the thirteenth and the paintings from the tenth to the thirteenth. The pictorial style survived for about a couple of centuries more, but by then it lost all its vitality.
The elaborate pantheon of Tantrayāna deities represented by these sculptures and paintings demonstrate a regular hierarchy of gods and goddesses at the apex of which stands the divine pair of Adi Buddha and Adi Prajñā, the Primordial Parents; from them emanate Five Dhyānī Buddhas, named Amitābha, Akshobhya, Vairochana, Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi, who symbolize, the cosmic elements, viz., Air, Water, Ether, Fire and Earth). A sixth Dhyānī Buddha named Vajrasattva is also conceived of in some quarters and he is sometimes confused with Vajradhara who icono-plastically represents Śūnyatā, the Supreme Being of Tantrayāna Buddhism. The five Dhyānī Buddhas create in turn Bodhisattvas for participating in the act of creation and several other gods and goddesses. The Bodhisattvas are further supposed to have been working through Mānushi Buddhas like Krāuchchhanda, Kanakamuni and Gautama. Expectedly, in a system which puts emphasis on the female principle, each of these divinities, right from Adi Buddha, has been given a consort, Adi Buddha having the aforesaid Adi Prajñā as his consort. The consorts of the Bodhisattvas, like their respective spouses, emanate from the Dhyānī Buddhas. All the gods and goddesses of the pantheon belong to the kula (family) of either of these five Dhyānī Buddhas, and each of the kulas symbolizes an attribute or a human instinct, as for instance, the kula of Akshobhya symbolizes dvesha (hatred). 10

The anthropomorphic representation of Adi Buddha in art is known as Vajradhara, vajra (thunderbolt) being his characteristic emblem. Vajradhara, is depicted singly or in the yab-yum form, that is, in embrace with his

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10. Sometimes the same deity appears to belong to the families of more than one Dhyānī Buddha.

The feelings of animosity which the Hinayanists displayed towards Brahmanism found a sharpened expression in the attitude of the Tantrayānists. This is well reflected in the concepts and iconic forms of some
Tantrayāna deities. The Sādhanamālā, a compilation of 312 dhyānas of various Tantrika Buddhist deities, contains, inter alia, a sādhana of a god named Trailokyavijaya; it describes him as trampling upon the head of Maheśvara and the breasts of Gaurī by his left and right foot respectively.

So far only one iconic representation of Trailokyavijaya has been found in the subcontinent; it probably hails from Bihar and is now on display in the National Museum. Another deity of similar nature is Hari-Hari-Vāhanodbhava Lokesvara, still known to be represented in Indian art.

A form of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, this deity is described in the relevant sādhana as riding on Vishnu (Hari), who has Garuḍa (Hari) as his mount the latter in turn seated on the back of a lion (Hari).

12. The earliest manuscript of this treatise is dated in the Newari era 285, that is, 1165 A. D. see Bhattacharyya, IBI, p. 16.


14. Tantrayāna Art : An Album, fig. 178. Trailokyavijaya is also known in Tibet (see A. K. Gordon, The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism, p. 60) and China (see Alice Getty, Gods of Northern Buddhism, p. 115).

15. Images of Hari-Hari-Hari-Vāhanodbhava Lokesvara are extremely rare. There is one sculpture at Svayambhūkṣetra and a bronze in a monastery at Pattan in Nepal. Another example also from Nepal, is preserved in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Vārāṇasi. The god is also familiar in China (Clark, TLP, p. 260).
the list of similar deities are to be added Pārṇāśāvaraī and Aparājitā, who are however, portrayed in the art of eastern India, and in accordance with the relevant sādhanas each of them is found trampling upon the Brahmanical god, Gāṇeśa and in addition Brahma holds a parasol on the head of of Aparājitā. It is interesting to note in this connection that Trailokyavijaya and Pārṇāśāvaraī belong to the family of Akśobhya which has been termed in the Śrī Guhyasamāja and others texts dvesha-kula (family symbolizing hatred). And evidently this dvesha was towards the Brahmanical deities and their devotees.

IV

All what has been said above (Section III) represents but one side of the medal. On the other side we find attempts at both ends to effect a rapprochment between the Buddhists and the followers of different Brahmanical cults. But such attempts were articulated not in the way in which composite type of images like Harihara and Ardhanārīśvara were created by the Brahmanical sectaries. In the paradigm of Buddhism - Brahmanical relationship are found Buddhist deities who are either direct borrowals from the Brahmanical pantheon or are adaptations of the Brahmanical deities, and on occasions they are also found to have borrowed the attributes of the

16. For some relevant examples, all from eastern India, representing these goddesses, see Tantrayāna Art: An Album, figs. 184-87 (Aparājitā), 188-89 (Pārṇāśāvaraī); Bhattacharyya, IBI, fig. 190 (Aparājitā), Sādhanamālā, II, pl. XVI (Pārṇāśāvaraī).
Brahmanical gods. The process of assimilation was discerned as early as the Hinayana phase when, as said before, Sakra, Brahma and Narayana entered the Buddhist fold without any change of their names. The Mahayanaists adopted Brahmanical deities rechristening them, as for instance, converting Kuvera-Vaiśravaṇa into Jambhala and Gaṇeśō into Vināyaka (the last name, of course, also occurs as a synonym of the Brahmanical Gaṇeśa, and later Gaṇapati was accepted in toto, see below). Similarly, Padmapani Avalokitesvara, and Nilakantha appear to be the adaptations respectively of Viṣṇu and Śiva.

In Tantrayana Buddhism the process of adopting Brahmanical deities became more apparent, as exemplified by Simhaṇāda-Lokesvara and Hālāhala as the Buddhist counterpart of Śiva, and Jānguli and Vasudhārā as those of the Brahmanical goddesses Maṅeś̄a and Śrī-Lakṣmi respectively. The transfer of the attributes of the Brahmanical deities like Indra, Brahma and Viṣṇu will be met with in the representations of Vajrapaṇi, Maṅjuśrī and Padmapaṇi-Avalokiteśvara respectively.

One of the most important Buddhist texts which throws more light on this issue is the Nishpannayogavāli authored by Mahāpaṇḍita Abhayākara-gupta who was a teacher in the Vikramaśila monastery during the reign of Rāmapāla (c. 1072-1126). This text, particularly its 'Dharmadhatu-Vajrāvalī-manḍala',

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17. A work consisting of twenty-six mandalas in twenty-six chapters, the Nishpannayogavāli describes numerous deities of Tantrayana Buddhism. In the words of B. Bhattacharyya, who edited it in the Gaekwad Oriental Series (no. CIX, Baroda, 1949): 'The Nishpannayogavāli presents a unique, original, useful and most valuable information which constitutes our most authentic material for the study of the images and deities belonging to the Buddhist pantheon. Nishpannayogavāli excels Sādhana-pañcāla since the material here is more varied, more extensive and more prolific.' IBI, p. 3.
amply bear out the assimilation of ideas and ideologies of the Buddhist and Brahmanical religions. Notable among the Brahmanical divinities who were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon almost in toto are Śiva, Gāṇesa and Sarasvatī, the first two being looked upon by the staunchest Buddhists as lying prostrate under the feet of their deities like Trailokyavijaya, Parnasavāri and Āparājītā. A perusal of their sādhanas will reveal that they are pure Brahmanical divinities with a simple Buddhist background. For instance, Śiva in the text concerned appears under the name Mahākāla in a variety of forms. In almost all of them he displays kartri, kapāla, khaṭvāṅga, akṣhamālā and ādamaru, attributes which are seen in different forms of the Brahmanical god Śiva-Mahādeva; and thus it would not be unreasonable to consider the Buddhist Mahākāla as the Brahmanical god Śiva-Mahādeva in his terrific aspect. Among the other divinities, Gānapatī, Sarasvatī of the Buddhist pantheon, are identical with their Brahmanical counterparts, conceptually as well as iconically, as described in the Nishpannayogāvalī. The former, according to a sādhana is to dance in ārdhaparyanka and in addition to his normal attributes to carry, some Saivite emblems, such as khaṭvāṅga and kapāla, full of blood and dried meat. Sarasvatī, appears in the sādhanas devoted to her in the sādhanamālā in a variety of forms, including those endowed with many faces and several arms, the usual form being designated as Mahāsarasvatī in which she displays like the Buddhist goddess Tara the varada-mudrā in the right hand and a padma in the left and show four deities, (Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛiti and Māti) identical in form with herself. To this list of Brahmanical

18 B. Bhattacharyya, IBI, p. 344, describes the Buddhist Mahakala as the proto-type of the Śiva-Mahādeva. This is palpably wrong, since the Brahmanical Śiva-Mahādeva is much earlier than the Buddhist Mahākāla.
divinities is to be added the Dikpālas and the Navagrahas who are identical in appearance in both the pantheons. We hear also of a deity called Gaṇapati-ḥṛdayā from the eighteenth-century Nepalese writer, Amṛitananda. As the name indicates, she is in all likelihood the Sakti or the consort of Vajrayāna Gaṇapati.

Tārā, most popular goddess of the Buddhist pantheon, deserves a special consideration in the context. She is the counterpart of the Brahmanical Durgā and like the latter is the great Mother-Goddess, who later on came to be looked upon as the consort of Avalokiteśvara. According to different sādhanas devoted to her in the Sādhanamālā, she enables her devotees to overcome all dangers and calamities and a mere prayer to her ensures the removal of eight Mahābhayas (great dangers). As the name implies, the great Brahmanical goddess Durgā is also the saviouress of a devotee and it has been suggested that the concept of the Brahmanical Durgā is earlier than that of the Buddhist Tārā, and that the latter appeared in the Brahmanical garb under the identical name as one of the ten Mahāvidyās (Dasamahāvidyās).

19. The work compiled by Amritananda is entitled Dharmakosha-Samgraha, a manuscript of which was collected by Haraprasad Sastri from the Nepal Durbar Library. It is now preserved in the Asiatic Society. The Dharmakosha-Samgraha is based on ancient traditions, as evidenced by descriptions of deities and other related materials. Incidentally, it contains descriptions of many a Buddhist deity, not known from any other source.

20. These dangers or terrors have been enumerated by a certain Sarvajnamitra (c. eighth century), such as shipwreck, conflagration, enraged elephant, brigand, pouncing lion, serpent, captivity and demon. See Bauddhastotra-Samgraha, I (Calcutta, 1908). According to an eleventh-century Chālukya inscription (see Indian Antiquary, X, 1881, p. 185) the goddess saves her devotees from eight dangers such as those of lion, elephant, fire, snake, thief, fetters, ocean and demon.

It may be noted that the royal banner of the Pūla monarch Dhammapāla used to beat the effigy of Tārā, which was once claimed to have been snatched away by the Rashtrakūta king Govinda III. Iconographically, the sculptural and painted representation of the goddess are of numerous varieties and a manuscript of the Astasahasri Prajñāparamitā copied in eastern India in the year 1015 A.D., now preserved in the Cambridge University library bears an illustration of the goddess with the caption 'Chandadvipe Bhagavati Tārā', i.e., the goddess worshipped in Chandadvipa (Barisal, Barisal district, Bangladesh). It has been suggested that the Pūla kings like Dhammapāla were great devotees of the goddess Tārā, who was originally worshipped by some aboriginal people (probably of eastern India) and later on was adopted in both the Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheon in the early century of the Christian era.

23. D. C. Sircar, 'The Tārā of Chandadvipa' in The Sakti Cult and Tārā, p. 133. There is, however, no material evidence in favour of Sircar's suggestion that the goddess Tārā came to be worshipped by the adherents of both these religions in the early centuries of the Christian era. Though the syncretistic factor was more active in the Buddhist end, the case of the goddess Tārā shows that the Brahmins also absorbed ideas and deities from the Buddhist world. As said above, Tārā in her reoriented form, resulting from the influence of the Buddhist Mahāchintāmāna, entered the Brahmanical fold as a Mahāvidyā, under the identical name. Similarly, another Mahāvidyā called Chhinnavastā closely resembles the Buddhist Vajrayogini.
In the light of the foregoing discussion it may be held that in spite of occasional animosities, sometimes sharp, Buddhist and Brahmanical creeds maintained in general cordial relations among themselves. A tangible evidence in support of this view is furnished, among others, by a tortoise-shell inscription, palaeographically datable to the eleventh-twelfth century, now preserved in the Dhaka Museum. This inscription refers to the simultaneous adoration of Vasudeva as well as the Buddha, and most probably the person responsible for this record was a Buddhist. And it appears to be further interesting on account of the material, the tortoise-shell, on which it is inscribed, the tortoise symbolizing the popular folk deity of Bengal called Dharma thakur (in Burdwan and the Presedency divisions of West Bengal even now Dharma thakur is worshipped in the form of tortoise). The tortoise-shell inscription in question, indicating the association of the Dharma cult with Buddhism as well as Vaishnavism, this furnishes a dependable evidence of the amity between Buddhism and one of the Brahmanical systems, namely, Vaishnavism.

Before we conclude mention is to be made of a class of images showing a Brahmanical deity with an effigy of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha on his crown. So far three varieties have come to light, and all from eastern India. In the first the central deity is Vishnu, in the second Siva, and in the third Surya, and in each case there is a figure of the aforesaid Dhyani Buddha. On account of the presence of the Dhyani Buddha

24. By this time Buddha came to be regarded as Vishnu's avatara and so the person concerned need not have expressed his special predilection for the Buddha as a devout Vaishnav.

they have been respectively designated as Vishnu-Lokesvara, Siva-Lokesvara and Surya-Lokesvara. Scholars have seen in such images syncretism taking place between Buddhism on the one hand and the Brahmanical cults centering round deities like Vishnu, Siva and Surya on the other. Before we examine the validity of this viewpoint let us take note of the chief characteristics of these so-called syncretistic images. As many as ten images of Vishnu-Lokesvara, known so far, have hailed from different parts of Bengal: Ghisyasabad, near Azimganj (Murshidabad dist., West Bengal), Garui near Amansol (Burdwan District), Sagardighi (Murshidabad district), Surotar (Dinajpur district, Bangladesh), Sonarang (Dhaka district, Bangladesh) and Midnapur (West Bengal). A central deity in all the sculptures is multi-handed, the number of hands goes up to twelve, and they hold various attributes, such as lotus buds, (in two hands, plough, conch, garudadhvaja, and the figures of makara, vrishna and hamsa, some of these attributes being placed on fully bloomed lotuses held by their stalks in the concerned hands. In many of them appear as noteworthy features the canopy of a hooded snake above the head of the deity and a small image of Bodhisattva Dhyani Buddha Amithaba above this snake canopy. While the central deity bears the characteristics of Vishnu, the presence of the Dhyani Buddha Amithaba above his head shows that the representation to be a blend of Vaishnavism and Buddhism.

26. R. D. Banerji (EISMS, pp. 94-96, 125, pl. XXXVIII) coined this nomenclature Vishnu-Lokesvara, which he applied to the images concerned. Images of Siva-Lokesvara and Surya-Lokesvara, one in each case, were discovered long after his demise.

Analogous to these so-called Vishnu-Lokesvara figures are two examples, one in brass, the other in stone. The former, discovered at Kesabpur (dist. Barisal, Bangladesh), now an exhibit in the Asutosh Museum, portrays Siva as standing in samudrarāga on a double-petalled lotus on a trimūra pedestal; the god is ithyphallic and carries an akṣaśūtra in his right hand and an indistinct object (probably a bunch of flowers in the left. On the top of his matted crest is a small effigy of the Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha. The god is flanked by attendants, both standing, and to the right of the attendant is planted a longish trisūla. The other statue, most probably hailing from Orissa and also preserved in the Asutosh Museum, is damaged; here the god is seemingly ten-armed, four of whose hands survive; of the four hands, the upper right and left hands carry full-blossomed lotuses by their stalks and the lower right an akṣaśūtra and the lower left an indistinct object. As in the previous specimen here also a tiny figure of Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha is seen on the top of the raised coils of jatamukuta of the god.

All the figures described above demonstrate that they conceptually belong to a distinct and compact group. In all of them the central deity is a Brahmanical one, each being surmounted by a figure of Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha. These sculptures have therefore posed a problem. Various suggestions have been put forward, and after the names of the central deity they have been designated as Vishnu-Lokesvara, Śiva-Lokesvara and Sūrya-

28 J. N. Banerjea wrongly identified the object in the right hand as a kapāla and the indistinct object as a trisūla; he also missed the miniature figure on the top left (proper right corner which is of Gaṇeśa). DHI, p. 547.
Lokeśvara. Thus in such divine images an attempt at syncretism between Buddhism on the one hand and the Brahmanical cult on the other has been discerned. Attempt has also been made to look at these figures from a different angle and in preference to appellations Vishnu-Lokesvara, Śiva-Lokesvara and Sūrya-Lokesvara the designations Buddhist Vishnu, Buddhist Śiva and Buddhist Sūrya, have been employed to them. Of late the view seeking to describe the images under study as syncretistic has been challenged. It has been remarked in the context of the image of Śiva-Lokesvara that since Śiva, the central figure of the sculpture, carries on his head the figure of Amitābha, he is inferior to the latter in position and in a way is subservient to him, and therefore the so-called Śiva-Lokesvara sculpture is far from a syncretistic image; it has been tentatively suggested that the image of the so-called Śiva-Lokesvara represents a Buddhist divinity with iconographic traits largely borrowed from the Brahmanical god Śiva, and may stand for a particular form of Avalokiteśvara, such as Jñāmukuta-Lokesvara, Śaṅkavasāra, and Sugatismāndarāma.


31. M. T. Mallmann, de, Hindu Deities in Tantric Buddhism, translated from French by Simon Watson Taylor, Zentralasiatische Studien, 2, Bonn, 1968, pp. 44 ff. In the context of the iconography of these image-types Mallmann observes: 'In future, thanks to the Nishpanayogavali, whenever we encounter the image of a Hindu deity surmounted by a Buddha or wearing one in his head-dress, we need no longer invoke a hypothetical Lokesvara; we can now immediately identify the god or goddess, without fear or error, as a personage adopted by Buddhist and thus incorporated in to a particular Buddha's spiritual family.' Ibid., p. 49.
If this view is accepted, the nomenclatures like Vishnu-Lokesvara, Siva-Lokesvara and Surya-Lokesvara and their inclusion in the category of syncretistic icons seem to be inapt and inaccurate.32

Thus in the realm of Buddhism, we have not yet come across any syncretistic image showing the fusion of a Buddhist divinity with a Brahmanical god, of the composite type of Harihara and Ardhaarsinga images. In other words, while in the images of Harihara and Ardhaarsinga we have noticed the syncretism between Hari and Hará, and Siva and Harvati, signifying an equality of position of the constituent cult-deities, no such phenomenon has yet been noticed in the area of Buddhism or for that matter in the common field of Buddhism and the Brahmanical cults like Vaishnavism and Saivism. This however, does not imply that Buddhism was through out its career hostile to the Brahmanical religion or vice versa. As already pointed out, Buddhism on several occasions came under the influence of the Brahmanical religion, particularly during the period under review when Buddhist deities like Lokaratha, Nilakantha and Simhanada-Lokesvara and Jambhala and Janguli make a clear articulation of a respectful compromise or for that matter, syncretism between Buddhism and Brahmanism.

Notwithstanding all rivalries and animosities the syncretism between the Buddhists and different Brahmanical sectaries was undeniably effected during the period under review. This was not an unexpected phenomenon. This was a period when Tantrikism was in the ascendant. With a clear

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emphasis on the human body as the epitome of the universe, as the abode of Truth and the medium of its realisation, and concomitantly with a stress on the sex and its sublimation through the sexo-yogic practices by the help of a guru, Tantrikism provided a common background to and a source of inspiration of, a large number of followers of both Buddhism and the Brahanical religion Tantrayana Buddhism, which held the ground in eastern Indian from the eighth to the twelfth century and a few decades more, was much closer to Brahmanism during this period than to the primitive Buddhism called Hinayana. And indeed, but for Buddha himself at times it becomes difficult to distinguish Tantrayana Buddhism from Tantrika Hinduism. It developed from its immediate predecessor, Mahayana, which unlike Hinayana believed in God, the Supreme Reality, Buddha being that Supreme Reality, and the belief emerged seemingly under the inspiration of Upanisad monism. With the common belief in a Supreme Reality or Godhead both Tantrayana Buddhism and different Brahmanical sects as a matter of course made room for myriad of gods and goddesses emanating from the Supreme One in respective areas. In other words, the proliferation of deities and their diverse forms appeared as a characteristic feature of both Tantrayana Buddhism and the Brahmanical cults. And syncretism between them, either in the form of direct borrowal or adaptation or transferance of attributes, was but natural. The syncretism between these two religions was further facilitated by two material factors. The Brahmanical Raja monarchs of Gauda-Magadha and the Buddhist Brahma-kara kings of Orissa were catholic enough to patronize different Brahmanical cults (see Chapter III) and some of them leaned heavily on Brahmanism as well. This may perhaps account for the discovery of images of Brahmanical deities at predominantly Buddhist
sites like Nalanda and Ratnagiri. The other factor was the fear of a common danger which appears in operation in every age and clime (in ancient Crete, for example). Like their Brahmanical friends the Buddhists saw in the rise of Islam and its onward march a grave menace. The Kalachakra-tantra, a work of about the tenth century, reflects this phycosis of the contemporary Buddhists. As the text suggests, the Buddhists of the Kalachakrayana school attempted to unite themselves with the Brahmanical sectaries under the common banner of the god Sri-Kalachakra, 'The Circle of Time' against the political and cultural inroads of the Mlechchhas or the Muslims.