

In my paper, I argue that the innovative way in which Buddhists situated Βραημ□ and Βραημ□σ in the cosmos had a palpable effect on the way in which the emerging ζαι•)απα and |αιπα sectarian movements situated Brahma in their visions of the cosmos. First, I make use of late Vedic texts and the testimony of the Pali Canon to argue that by the mid to late first millennium BCE, certain Brahmanical circles had developed a conception of Brahma as an eternal, supreme deity who was simultaneously the Creator of the universe and the embodiment of the νιω◆ττι goal that transcended cyclic existence. The early Buddhists, in turn, criticized this conception of Βραημ□ by mocking the idea that the creator of σαασ□ρα could at the same time transcend it. They demoted *brahmaloka* to being merely one of the many worlds of rebirth *within* σαασ□ρα and asserted that Βραημ□σ, out of ignorance of the fact that they are subject to death and rebirth, develop the false view that they are the Eternal, Omnipotent Creator.

I argue that we find evidence that this critique was accepted by non-Buddhists in India as early as in the Μαη□βη□ρατα and that the emerging Hindu sectarian traditions abandoned Βραημ□ as the supreme deity and sought new, more subtle ways of accommodating both the σαασ□ριχ and trans-σαασ□ριχ within their cosmic visions. A major ζαι•)απα approach, exemplified by the Γ×τ□, was to have the Supreme Godhead subsume the σαασ□ριχ universe *within* himself, while advancing a theory of *karmayoga* that allowed devotees to practice an “inner” renunciation without renouncing the outer forms of ritual orthopraxy. The |αιπα response, on the other hand, as exemplified by the Στη□)υ myth in the *MBh.*, gave priority to νιω◆ττι values, but nevertheless showed how σαασ□ρα was an inevitable by-product of the renunciatory quest. The legacy of the early Buddhist cosmological vision, therefore, has been a permanent demotion of Βραημ□ in Indian religious thought, and a

redoubled effort within non-Buddhist traditions to show how both renunciatory and non-renunciatory values are compatible within a single religious cosmos.