

CHAPTER 23

THE BUDDHA ON THE SO-CALLED CREATOR-GOD

“I count your Brahmā one th’ unjust among,
Who made a world in which to shelter wrong.”

— Jātaka

The Pali equivalent for the creator-god in other religions is either *Issara* (Skt. *Isvara*) or Brahmā. In the Tipiṭaka there is absolutely no reference whatever to the existence of a god. On several occasions the Buddha denied the existence of a permanent soul (*attā*). As to the denial of a creator-god, there are only a few references. Buddha never admitted the existence of a creator whether in the form of a force or a being.

Despite the fact that the Buddha placed no supernatural god over man some scholars assert that the Buddha was characteristically silent on this important controversial question.

The following quotations will clearly indicate the viewpoint of the Buddha towards the concept of a creator-god.

In the Aṅguttara Nikāya the Buddha speaks of three divergent views that prevailed in his time. One of these was: “Whatever happiness or pain or neutral feeling this person experiences all that is due to the creation of a supreme deity (*issaranimmāṇahetu*).”³²⁹

According to this view we are what we were willed to be by a creator. Our destinies rest entirely in his hands. Our fate is preordained by him. The supposed free will granted to his creation is obviously false.

Criticising this fatalistic view, the Buddha says: “So, then, owing to the creation of a supreme deity men will become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, abusive, babblers, covetous, malicious and perverse in view. Thus for those who fall back on the creation of a god as the essential reason, there is neither desire nor effort nor necessity to do this deed or abstain from that deed.”³³⁰

In the Devadaha Sutta (DN 11) the Buddha, referring to the self-mortification of naked ascetics, remarks: “If, O bhikkhus, beings experience pain and happiness as the result of a god’s creation, then certainly these

329. Aṅguttara Nikāya i, p. 174. *Gradual Sayings*, i, p. 158.

330. Majjhima Nikāya ii, p. 222. Sutta No. 101.

naked ascetics must have been created by a wicked god (*pāpakena issarena*), since they suffer such terrible pain.”

The Kevaḍḍha Sutta narrates a humorous conversation that occurred between an inquisitive bhikkhu and the supposed creator.

A bhikkhu, desiring to know the end of the elements, approached Mahā Brahmā and questioned him thus:

“Where, my friend, do the four great elements—earth, water, fire and air—cease, leaving no trace behind?”

To this the Great Brahmā replied:

“I, brother, am Brahmā, Great Brahmā, the Supreme Being, the Unsurpassed, the Chief, the Victor, the Ruler, the Father of all beings who have been or are to be.”

For the second time the bhikkhu repeated his question, and the Great Brahmā gave the same dogmatic reply.

When the bhikkhu questioned him for the third time, the Great Brahmā took the bhikkhu by the arm, led him aside, and made a frank utterance:

“O Brother, these gods of my suite believe as follows: ‘Brahmā sees all things, knows all things, has penetrated all things.’ Therefore was it that I did not answer you in their presence. I do not know, O brother, where these four great elements—earth, water, fire and air—cease, leaving no trace behind. Therefore it was an evil and a crime, O brother, that you left the Blessed One, and went elsewhere in quest of an answer to this question. Turn back, O brother, and having drawn near to the Blessed One, ask him this question, and as the Blessed One shall explain to you so believe.”

Tracing the origin of Mahā Brahmā, the so-called creator-god, the Buddha comments in the Pātika Sutta (DN 24).

“On this, O disciples, that being who was first born (in a new world evolution) thinks thus: ‘I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the All-Seer, the Disposer, the Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Assigner, the Master of Myself, the Father of all that are and are to be. By me are these beings created. And why is that so? A while ago I thought: Would that other beings too might come to this state of being! Such was the aspiration of my mind, and lo! These beings did come.

“And those beings themselves who arose after him, they too think thus: ‘This Worthy must be Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the All-Seer, the Disposer, the Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Assigner, the Master of Myself, the Father of all that are and are to be.

“On this, O disciples, that being who arose first becomes longer-lived, handsomer, and more powerful, but those who appeared after him become shorter lived, less comely, less powerful. And it might well be, O disciples, that some other being, on deceasing from that state, would come to this state (on earth) and so come, he might go forth from the household life into the homeless state. And having thus gone forth, by reason of ardour, effort, devotion, earnestness, perfect intellection, he reaches up to such rapt concentration, that with rapt mind he calls to mind his former dwelling place, but remembers not what went before. He says thus: ‘That Worshipful Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the All-Seer, the Disposer, the Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Assigner, the Master of Myself, the Father of all that are and are to be, he by whom we were created, he is permanent, constant, eternal, unchanging, and he will remain so for ever and ever. But we who were created by that Brahmā, we have come hither all impermanent, transient, unstable, short-lived, destined to pass away.’

“Thus was appointed the beginning of all things, which ye, sirs, declare as your traditional doctrine, to wit, that it has been wrought by an over-lord, by Brahmā.”

In the Bhūridatta Jātaka (No. 543) the Bodhisatta questions the supposed divine justice of the creator as follows:

“He who has eyes can see the sickening sight,
 Why does not Brahmā set his creatures right?
 If his wide power no limit can restrain,
 Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless?
 Why are his creatures all condemned to pain?
 Why does he not to all give happiness?
 Why do fraud, lies, and ignorance prevail?
 Why triumphs falsehood—truth and justice fail?
 I count you Brahmā one th’ unjust among,
 Who made a world in which to shelter wrong.”

Refuting the theory that everything is the creation of a Supreme Being, the Bodhisatta states in the Mahābodhi Jātaka (No. 528):

“If there exists some Lord all powerful to fulfil
 In every creature bliss or woe, and action good or ill;
 That Lord is stained with sin.
 Man does but work his will.”

