

## HINDU BRAHMĀ IN THAI LITERATURE

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The physical description of Brahmā in Thai literature is nearly similar to the Hindu account. His best known characteristics are having four faces and riding on the Swan Lord. These two are always mentioned whenever Brahmā is referred to in any Thai text. However, differences occur too. In Hindu mythology Brahmā, who has four faces, has only four hands.<sup>1</sup> In most Thai literary works Brahmā is described as having eight hands. In only one place is Brahmā referred to as a deity with four hands. But there is still a slight difference even in this description. In Hindu mythology Brahmā has four hands holding a sceptre, a spoon, a string of beads, (or his bow Parivita, or a waterjug), and the Vedas. In the Thai account Brāhma's four hands hold a sceptre, an alms-bowl, and the Vedas.<sup>2</sup> The fourth object is missing in the Thai text, while an alms-bowl is wanting in the Hindu list.

The difference in the number of Brahmā's hands is considered to be late Thai literary tradition. From the twelfth century onwards until the Ratanakosin period Brahmā (though often confused with the Buddhist Brahmas) has been represented in sculpture as having four faces and four hands.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that the poets of the Ratanakosin period must have speculated that the god should have eight hands, a reasonable number, to agree with his four faces. The sculptures of Brahmā in Thailand do not give much help in informing what he has in his hands. This is because most of the time it is the Buddhist Brahmas, who possess the same physical characteristics as the Hindu Brahmā, i.e. four faces and four hands, who are represented. Most of these Brahmas are represented as one of the chief attendants of Buddha. They are usually coupled with Indra and are represented as holding more or less the same thing as Indra, such as an umbrella for Buddha, a cauri whip—part of Buddha's regalia, and a lotus.<sup>4</sup> But there is one sculpture<sup>5</sup> in which a Brahma is represented as holding a water-jug which is also held by the Hindu Brahmā. This and the following passages show that the confusion between Buddhist Brahmas and the Hindu Brahmā in Thai culture in general, not just in literature in particular, is very great.

Four major characteristics of Hindu Brahmā are referred to in Thai literature. They are : (1) as the Creator of the world, (2) as the Lord of Knowledge, (3) as being responsible for the destiny of any creature, (4) as being born from a lotus rising from the navel of Viṣṇu.

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1. John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, 12th ed; London, 1972, p. 57.
  2. Lūang Thammāphimon (Thu'k), "Chan Klōm Phra Sawēt Wachiraphaha" *Chumnum Chan Dutsadi Sangwoei*, Bangkok, 1914, p. 313.
  3. Dhanit Yūphō, "Phrom Si Nā" *Sinlapakorn*, IX (February, 1965), pp. 24-25.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
  5. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Brahmā the Creator, together with his creation, is mentioned in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* (attributed to the 14th century) which is one of the few extant early works of the Ayuthya period. It concerns ritual oath-taking. In the invocation to the Hindu triad in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* nearly all the prominent characteristics of Brahmā are mentioned. It is clear from these characteristics that Brahmā here is the Hindu deity rather than any Buddhist one. The passage which follows reveals this.

The Lord, who has a lotus as his seat, is four-faced. He, who rides on the Swan Lord, created the earth and the sky. He has reigned over the universe (brahmāṇḍa, see below) for a very long time. He is renowned for his justice and is the great Lord of Knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

This passage, however, discusses certain other characteristics which are not so unequivocal. In this text, Brahmā, the Creator in the Hindu Pantheon is partially confused with a being or beings termed *Phrom* (Brahma) by Thai Buddhists. Thus in addition to the above characteristics, he is also called 'the revealer of the Sixteen Tiers of Brahma-Heavens.'<sup>7</sup>

In the Buddhist literature Brahma is multiple. These multiple Brahmas are not seen as founding figures of the Buddhist cosmology but rather as mere dwellers in it with responsibilities for lordship over certain levels of heaven. Any sage or hermit who attains a certain level or virtue, accompanied by meditation and contemplation, may be born in one of these Sixteen Tiers which all together are called Rūpa Bhūmi or Rūpa Brahmāloka, 'The Brahma World of Form'. Sages who attain higher levels of meditation may be born in Arūpa Bhūmi or Arūpa Brahmāloka, 'The Formless Brahma World', which consists of four heavens. The Sixteen Tiers of the Brahma Heavens are described in the *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang* attributed to Phrayā Li Thai of Sukhothai (14th century) as a thousand times more splendid than the heaven of Indra. In each tier of the Brahma Heavens there is a lord who is ruler over it. Among these Brahma Lords, Lord Maha Brahma and Lord Sahampati Brahma are better known than the others.<sup>8</sup>

The Hindu Brahmā the Creator rules only one particular heaven. It is called Brahmāloka or Satyaloka, which is the world of Infinite Wisdom and Truth. It is the highest world above the earth, and is the seventh in order counting up from the Pitṛloka,

6. "Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam", *Lilit Lae Nirāt*, by Watcharī Romyanan, Bangkok, 1974, p. 11.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Phrayā Li Thai, *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang*, 8th ed.; Bangkok, 1972, pp. 237-248.

Indraloka (or Svarga), Divaloka (or heaven), Gandharvaloka (or Mahāloka which is the world of celestial spirits), Janaloka (or the sphere of saints), and Tapoloka (the region of the seven sages)<sup>9</sup>.

What is certain is that Brahmā the Creator is not found in the classic Thai work on cosmology the *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang*. There is however, mention of Brahmā as Creator in some other Buddhist scriptures. In these texts it is highly likely that Brahmā the Hindu deity is meant. For example, in the Agañña Suttanta of the *Dīghanikāya*, which is a part of the Suttapiṭaka, sages Vasiṣṭha and Bharadvāja tell lord Buddha that Brahmins think that they only are perfect, and no others. This is because they were created by Brahmā (brahmanimmitā), and were born from his mouth (brahmuno mukhato jātā).<sup>10</sup> It follows that Brahmā the Creator here is Hindu, not Buddhist. The concept of brahmins being born from the mouth of Brahmā is as old as the time of the Ṛgveda, and is sustained in all later Hindu works.

The fact that Brahmā in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* is described as 'four-faced' allies the passage still more with the Hindu tradition. In the Buddhist scriptures the Brahmas are nowhere described as having four faces. In the *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang*, the Brahmas in the Rūpa Bhūmi are described as having hands that shine : One single hand of a Brahma can shine over ten thousand universes. Their hair is beautiful and bound in a chignon. Brahmas in the Arūpa Bhūmi are mere effulgences or spirits without forms.<sup>11</sup>

The word 'brahmāṇḍa' appearing in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* puts additional emphasis on Brahmā as the Hindu deity. In the *Manusmṛti*, 'brahmāṇḍa' is the egg which was engendered from a seed placed in the water by Brahmā himself. Then Brahmā entered into this egg and stayed there inside for a whole year before he broke it into two parts. Out of these two halves he formed heaven and earth.<sup>12</sup> In later works this egg is given still more characteristics in addition to being the abode of Brahmā in the beginning of the world. The duration of Brahmā's stay inside it is also lengthened to a thousand years. In the end the egg has the connotation of 'the universe'. The description of this primeval egg in the *Viṣṇu Purāna* may be quoted as an example.

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9. Matsya Purāṇa 86.6; 178.76;  
 Bhāgavata Purāṇa IV 31.23; XI 23.30;  
 Vāyu Purāṇa 101.27.  
 10. Dīghanikāya III.81.  
 11. Phrayā Li Thai, *Trai Phūm* . . . , p. 242.  
 12. Manusmṛti I. 8-13.

In that egg, O Brahmin, were the continents and seas and mountains, the planets and divisions of the universe, the gods, the demons, and mankind.<sup>13</sup>

The appearance of the word 'brahmāṇḍa' in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* makes it certain that it is Brahmā the Hindu deity which is meant, and not any Buddhist Brahma.

Another point which definitely shows that Brahmā in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* is Brahmā the Creator, not Lord Maha Brahma or Lord Sahampati Brahma of the Buddhist tradition, is that Brahmā is invoked together with Śiva and Viṣṇu<sup>14</sup>, the other two of the Hindu triad, and he therefore completes this triad.

The description of the Hindu Brahmā, then, associated with the mention of the Sixteen Tiers of the (Buddhist) Brahmāloka, provides evidence of a confused attitude towards the two traditions.

The confusion between the Hindu Brahmā the Creator and a Buddhist Brahma persists through time and becomes more pronounced in some Ratanakosin literary works. In the *Sanphasit Kham Chan* (1829), a renowned poetic Jataka tale, Prince Paramānuchitchinōrot, the learned author, invokes Brahmā as 'Lord Thādā (Sanskrit : dhātā) or the Creator, who has four faces and lives happily in the Sixteen Tiers of the Brahma Heavens.'<sup>15</sup> In the *Chan Sangwoei Klōng Winitchai Phērī* (A poem in *chan* meter for the religious ceremony of the installation of a drum—Winitchai Phērī the Court Judgement Drum) the same author replaces Brahmā the Creator with the Buddhist Sahampati Brahma in the invocation to the Hindu triad.<sup>16</sup> Phrayā Sī Sunthōn Wāhān (Nōi), a very famous Thai language preceptor who lived during the reign of King Rama IV and Rama V, in *Chan Klōm Phra Sawēt Suwaphāphan* (A poem in *chan* meter sung as a lullaby for a royal elephant called Phra Sawēt Suwaphāphan), invokes Brahmā as a deity with four faces who rides on a Swan; he also reveals the Sixteen Tiers of Heaven.<sup>17</sup>

The confusion of the Hindu god Brahmā with Buddhist Brahmas illustrated above provides evidence for the existence of Buddhist myths side by side, or in confusion with, Hindu myths. The myths of creation in Thai literature also show the same confusion. The earliest Thai myth of creation by a Hindu god is narrated in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, The *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* agrees with most Hindu scriptures in making Brahmā the performer of creation.

13. Viṣṇu Purāṇa I.2.54-55.

14. "Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam", *Lilit Lae Nirāt*, pp. 7-11.

15. Somdet Phra Mahā Samana Chao Kromaphra Paramānuchitchinōrot, *Sanphasit Kham Chan*, 2nd ed.; Bangkok : Khurusaphā, 1968, p. 1.

16. Somdet Kromaphra Paramānuchitchinōrot, "Chan Sangwoei Klōng Winitchai Phērī", *Chumnum Chan . . .*, p. 96.

17. Phrayā Sī Sunthōn Wāhān (Nōi), "Chan Klōm Phra Sawēt Suwaphāphan", *Ibid*, p. 155.

Creation, as narrated in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, is according to Hindu traditional cosmogony, pratisarga or 're-creation' which occurs at the beginning of each Kalpa, or Day of Brahmā. What attests this supposition is the description of a partial destruction of the world which takes place at the end of every previous Day of Brahmā. It affects only inferior creatures and lower worlds. Gods, Buddhist Brahmas and sages, are left unharmed. Here is the description of the destruction of the world in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*.

The story of the destruction of the universe by fire will be narrated. At that time seven suns blazed forth and dried up all the waters in the world. Fat from seven fishes which lived beneath the earth set fire to the world. It burned up all the Hells and the worlds of the Asuras, the Pretas and the animals. It burned up to the Tāvātimsa Heaven of Indra and turned it into ashes. A great crowd of gods fled as refugees into the Suddhāvāsa Heavens which were not burned because they were ruled by Lord Brahmā. Then the sky became clear. The fire stopped. Heavy rain then poured down on the earth extinguishing the great fire. The seven fishes floated with the rising water up as far as the sky itself and reached the moon and the stars. Strong winds blew violently. Khun Phāēn (the Creator) created cities for Indra and for Buddhist Brahmas.<sup>18</sup> He recreated earth and heaven as they used to be. Khun Phāēn created four continents, Mount Sumeru, Mount Kailāsa, Mount Gandhamādana and other great mountains as before<sup>19</sup>.

The above description of the dissolution of the world has some similarity to the great destruction described in the *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang*.<sup>20</sup> All the incidents and the agents of the destruction of the world too, are very similar to those in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*. But in the Buddhist treatise, after the dissolution of heaven and earth has been described, there follows an account of how these re-evolve into their previous shapes and conditions by themselves. Brahmā the Creator is not involved in the matter at all. The following passage bears this out.

18. The meaning of the word *thādā* (Sanskrit : dhātā) used here should not be taken as "Brahmā the Creator" only, but as a Buddhist Brahma too. This is because the author of the *Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, after mentioning that Brahmā had revealed the Sixteen Tiers of Buddhist Brahmas, goes on to say that Khun Phāēn (i.e. the Creator) also provided *mu'ang In* and *mu'ang Thādā* (cities for Indra and for Dhātā). It is not considered likely that the Creator here is referring to a city for himself. It is more likely, in fact, that the *mu'ang Thādā* here is another term for the Sixteen Tiers of the Brahma heavens mentioned earlier.

19. "Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam", *Lilit Lae Nirāt*, pp. 13-16.

20. Phrayā li Thai, *Trai Phūm . . .*, pp. 294-298.

After the great fire had stopped and the whole world was swallowed up by the great flood, four kinds of strong winds blew water to and fro. In the end the waters evolved into the Heaven of Lord Mahā Phrom. All gods, sages and Phrom from the unharmed tiers of heavens higher up then moved down to this heaven and to the successively evolved levels below. After this, Mount Sumeru, its seven surrounding mountains including their encircling oceans, the four continents, the world of human beings, Pretas, animals, Asuras and the Hells, appeared in the same forms and shapes as before.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the destruction of the world in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* is reminiscent of passages in some Buddhist texts, such as, the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa and the *Trai Phūm Phra Ruang* of Phrayā Li Thai, the re-creation of the world by Brahmā in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* is also slightly similar to the Hindu myth on the same subject, i.e. the creation of the world by Brahmā, which is as old as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Hereunder is a passage from the *Līṅga Purāṇa* quoted to attest the statement.

At the end of the night, Brahmā wakes up and beholds a void instead of the world of mobile and immobile creation. Then he, the most excellent among the knowers of Brahman, decides to create. He assumes the form of a boar and lifts the earth which is submerged under the water. He lifts it up and places it as before, together with all the rivers, rivulets and oceans. With great effect he makes the earth even. He gathers together on the earth all the mountains burned by fire. He establishes the four worlds as before. He, the lord creator then decides to create everything afresh.<sup>22</sup>

In later parts of the *Līṅga Purāṇa*<sup>23</sup> and in some other Purāṇas<sup>24</sup> the boar form of Brahmā is taken over by Viṣṇu. It becomes one of his avatāras. In the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, and in other Thai literary works, there is no mention of Brahmā's taking the form of a boar in order to lift up the earth, as described in the Hindu scriptures above.

It is likely that the Buddhist account of the creation of the world was widely accepted by the Thais at the time of the composition of the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*. This explains its existence in an avowedly Brahmanistic text. However it can be seen

21. *Ibid.*, p. 300-303.

22. *Līṅga Purāṇa*, I.4. 60-63.

23. *Ibid.*, I. 94.

24. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III. 13. 18-45; X. 2.40;

*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* V 5 15;

*Matsya Purāṇa* 47.43.

that this Buddhist account is slightly altered at the end. The agent of creation, unknown to Buddhist cosmologists, has been inserted. This is none other than *Khun Phāēn*. There may be an argument whether *Khun Phāēn* is the same as Brahmā or not. How is it that the word 'Brahmā' is not used here? A plausible answer is that by that time there was already confusion between Hindu Brahmā and Buddhist Brahma. This can be seen from the passages above. If the word Brahmā or Brahma had been used in the place of *Khun Phāēn*, there might have been a misunderstanding among the readers. They might have thought that it was Mahā Brahma or Sahampati Brahma who was the creator. This was certainly not intended by the Brahmins who composed the text.

Moreover, if the word Brahmā had been used here, there might have been confusion with the word dhātā, in the same stanza, which refers to Buddhist Brahma. In the invocation, the description of Brahmā in the text indicates that by that time Brahma was known by the Thais as the creator of the world. Therefore, the same creator figure (but with a different name) who occurs in the following passage on the creation, cannot be anybody else. Finally, there is no folk-tale about, or legend of, a figure called *Khun Phāēn*, except for the one in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, who performs any kind of creation. Therefore, it is certain that *Khun Phāēn* in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* is meant to be the same as Brahmā the creator.

Confusion of multiple Buddhist Brahmas with the Hindu god Brahmā occurring in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*, also exists in another Thai work on cosmology called *Nārāi Sip Pāng*. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, there is mention of some Brahmas who became jealous of Brahmā the Creator and were therefore born as Asuras.

In the Thai story of the Fish Incarnation of Viṣṇu, in the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* a Brahma is described as being envious of Brahmā the Creator. He thinks, "I am also a Brahma who has four faces and eight hands. Therefore I will not let any Brahma be superior to me." For this sin he is born as Śankha Asura, 'Conch Demon', who robs Brahmā the Creator of the Vedic texts. Śankha Asura is the cause of Viṣṇu's incarnating himself as a fish in order to win the Vedic texts back by force.<sup>25</sup>

In the same text, i.e. the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, another group of Brahmas thinks that Śiva has done something improper. He has permitted Brahmā the Creator to have the Swan Lord as his vehicle. This Swan Lord should rightly belong to them who became Brahmas before Brahmā the Creator. As a result of their jealousy these Brahmas are born as Asura Macchā, 'Fish Demons'. They want to destroy the Sumeru Mountain. This causes Viṣṇu to take the form of a turtle in order to kill them all.<sup>26</sup>

25. Praphan Sukhonthachāt (ed.), *Nārāi Sip Pāng Lae Phong Nai Rū'ang Rāmakian*, 2nd ed.; Bangkok, 1968, p. 6.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

It is unlikely that Thai authors got the idea of multiple Brahmas from the Hindu Brahmaṛṣi, which, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,<sup>27</sup> are nine in number. These Brahmaṛṣi are Marīci, Atri, Aṅgiras, Pulaha, Kratu, Pulastya, Vasiṣṭha, Bhṛgu and Dakṣa. Of this list only Vasiṣṭha appears in Thai literature (as one of the two preceptors of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa), but he is never referred to as Brahmā but always as ṛṣi, tāpasas, or siddha. The last two names of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s list, viz. Bhṛgu and Dakṣa appear to be mere additions to the list of seven sages (saptarṣi) as found in the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>28</sup> These Brahmaṛṣi are described, in the *Manusmṛti*,<sup>29</sup> as the same as Prajāpatis which are ten in number. Nārada is added. Teachers of Thai classical music regard Nārada as their great preceptor. Nārada is always called ṛṣi by them. These ten Prajāpatis are created by Manu Svāyambhuva for the production of all other beings including gods and men. At a later period they are described as the mind-born sons of Brahmā. It might be thought possible that these sons of Brahmā, who are also the progenitors of all beings in the world, could easily have been confused by Thai authors with Brahmā the Creator. But this is not the case. Whenever these mind-born sons of Brahmā appear in Thai literature, they are always called ṛṣi, or siddhas, or tāpasas. In the *Rāmakīan*,<sup>30</sup> sages Vasiṣṭha, Bharadvāja, Svāmitra (for Viśvāmitra?), and Vajja Aggi (for Jamadagni) are described as the chief sages belonging to the race of Rāma. Only one among these names, i.e. Vasiṣṭha, is on the list of the mind-born sons of Brahmā. Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Bharadvāja, and Jamadagni, however, belong to the list of the Hindu saptarṣi or the seven sages mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.<sup>31</sup> It is certain that it is the ṛṣi, not the mind-born sons of Brahmā, who are referred to in the Thai literature.

In Thai literature the Buddhist Brahmas persistently appear in, or side by side with, the myths of Brahmā the Creator. In the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam*<sup>32</sup> Brahmā the Creator is described as creating cities for Indra and the (Buddhist) Brahmas. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*<sup>33</sup> and the *Rāmakīan* the Buddhist Sahampati Brahma appears in the myth of the construction of the city of Laṅkā, capital of Rāvaṇa. In the *Rāmakīan*<sup>34</sup> of King Rama I, Sahampati Brahma comes down from heaven to an island

27. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.7.5, 7, 37.

28. *Mahābhārata* XII. 208. 3-4.

29. *Manusmṛti* I. 34-35.

30. Phrabāt Somdet Phra Phuttha Yōt Fā Čhulā Lōk (King Rama I.), *Rāmakīan*, vol. I, Bangkok, 1951, p. 271.

31. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II. 2.3-4.

32. "Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam", *Lilit Lae Nirāt*, p. 15.

33. Khun Ying Lū'an Rit (ed.), *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, 1923, p. 24.

34. King Rama I, *Rāmakīan*, vol. I, pp. 15-19,

called Rang Kā (meaning 'crows' nest, a Thai punning allusion to Laṅkā). He sees that it is a very suitable place to build a city. He orders Viṣṇu Brahma (a figure unknown in Hindu mythology) to build the city and names it Laṅkā. Then the Buddhist Sahampati Brahma Sends Brahmadhātā or Brahmā the Creator to come down and rule that city. Brahmadhātā is renamed Chaturaphak (Sanskrit : catura vaktra, an epithet of Brahmā). Chaturaphak is the grand-father of Rāvaṇa. The persistent appearance of the Buddhist Brahmas associated with the myths of Brahmā the Creator makes it clear that the multiple Brahmas in Thai literature are Buddhist, not Hindu, and thought of as enjoying a separate (and sometimes superior) existence of their own.

It is possible, however, that in Thai tradition, the idea of multiple Brahmas may not be exclusively Buddhist. There is another category called Asuraphrom (Demon Brahmas). These are notionally Hindu. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* an Asuraphrom named Mūlākhanī (Sanskrit : Mūlāgni) is very proud of himself and oppresses the three worlds. Śīva has to come down from the Kailāsa Mountain to kill him and bring peace back to the gods.<sup>35</sup>

In the Buffalo Incarnation of Viṣṇu, an Asuraphrom, out of his jealousy of Brahmā the Creator, changes his body to the form of a buffalo. He wants to destroy the Sumeru Mountain. Viṣṇu has to incarnate himself as a buffalo too and kill the Asuraphrom.<sup>36</sup>

In the same text an Asuraphrom named Nonthuk is described as having the duty of washing the feet of the gods who come to see Śīva at the Kailāsa Mountain. Later he becomes very mighty by means of a boon given to him by Śīva. He thereupon oppresses all the gods. Śīva orders Viṣṇu to destroy him. Viṣṇu incarnates himself as a beautiful goddess and kills him by a trick.<sup>37</sup>

These Asuraphrom cannot be the same as Buddhist Brahmas. The Buddhist Brahmas always do good deeds and are nowhere described as demons. Asuraphrom are reminiscent of the Hindu Daityas and Dānavas, the progeny of Brahmā the Creator. In the epics and the Purāṇas, the Daityas and the Dānavas are the children of Prajāpati Kaśyapa's union with Diti and Danu, daughters of Dakṣa. Both Kaśyapa and Dakṣa are mind-born sons of Brahma the Creator. The Daityas and the Dānavas are classes of demons. They are implacable enemies of the gods. The Daityas and the Dānavas are often identified with each other. Both of them are called Asuras.

35. Praphan Sukhonthachāt, *Nārāi Sip Pāng* . . . , p. 39.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

However, it is possible that the idea of Asuraphrom in Thai literature might be influenced by the Thai story of Rāma as well. According to Thai tradition, the race of Rāvaṇa is called Brahma Vaṃśa or *Phong Phrom* (vaṃśa-brahma)<sup>38</sup> in Thai. This is because the first ancestor of Rāvaṇa is Chaturaphak Phrom who is crowned as the first king of Laṅkā by Sahampati Brahma, the creator of that city.<sup>39</sup> Rāvaṇa and his relatives are also described as being demons or Asuras. They are then understood to be both Asuras and Brahmas. The devilish and vicious nature of Rāvaṇa and his race might thus have been the origin of a new category of wicked Brahmas. These would be called Asurabrahma.

Another distinguished characteristic of Brahmā which is recognized by the Thais is his being the Lord of Knowledge. This accords well with what Max Müller says in his introduction to the *Śvetāśvara Upaniṣad* – “It is a well known fact that the Hindus, even as early as the Brāhmaṇa period, were fond of tracing their various branches of knowledge back to Brahmā or to Brahmā Svayambhū”.<sup>40</sup> Brahmā is referred to in Thai literature as being well-versed in the Vedas, in Nītisāstra and in the Rājadharmā.<sup>41</sup> In *Chan Sangwoei Klōng Winitchai Phērī* composed by Prince Paramānuchitchinōrot to celebrate the ceremony of the installation of the Court Judgement Drum–Winitchai Phērī–, Brahmā is invoked as the guardian of martial law and the royal family laws. Here, however, Brahmā is confused with Sahampati Brahma. What makes it certain that it is the Hindu Brahmā is that this Sahampati Brahma is described as being the Lord of the Lotus, Kamala–īśa. This is usually a description for the Hindu Brahmā. Brahmā, who is here described as being well-versed in the Dharmaśāstra, in the Nītisāstra and in the Rājaśāstra, is also invoked to look after the judges and their judgements.<sup>42</sup>

There is a Thai myth which shows how much Brahmā is dependent on his knowledge of the Vedas. In the story of the Fish Incarnation of Viṣṇu, in the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, Brahmā is mentioned as being in charge of the Vedas and his prestige seems to be directly dependent on these sacred texts. The conch demon comes to know of this. The demon, out of his jealousy towards Brahmā, wants to reduce the fame of the god. He therefore robs Brahmā of the sacred texts. But Brahmā is saved by Viṣṇu in the form of a fish. Viṣṇu kills the demon and gives the Vedas back to Brahmā.<sup>43</sup>

38. King Rama I, *Rāmākian*, Vol. I, p. 15.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

40. F. Max Müller (trans.), *Śvetāśvara Upaniṣad*, vol. 15 of *Sacred Book of the East*, ed. Max. Müller, Oxford, 1884, p. XXXIX.

41. Phra Ongchao Kalayā Na Prawēt, “Chan Sangwoei Phrā Mahā Sawētachat” *Chumnum Chan* . . . , p. 68.

42. Somdet Kromaphra Paramānuchitchinōrot, “Chan Sangwoei Klōng Winitchai Phērī”, *Chumnum Chan* . . . , p. 96.

43. Praphan Sukhonthachāt. *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, p. 6.

In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* Brahmā is described as the great preceptor of Brahmins. He teaches them *Trai Phēt* or the Three Vedas. The Vedas, according to the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, contain knowledge of sacrificial ceremonies; Brahmanical ritual and rites; astrology and astronomy; and ancient medicine for "preserving life and wreaking destruction."<sup>44</sup> Here again Buddhist lore is inserted. Brahmā teaches Brahmins not only the special characteristics of the Hindu triad, of emperors, and of wealthy merchants, he also teaches them the Buddhist thirty-two auspicious signs on the body and one hundred and eighty marks on the foot of the Mahā Puruṣa, or Lord Buddha, too.<sup>45</sup> In this story Brahmā is also made to acknowledge the superiority of a Buddhist figure, as he has to in the myth of the construction of the city of Laṅkā for Rāvaṇa too. Brahmā is quoted, in the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, as advising Brahmins to worship the Mahā Puruṣa first. When they have done that, then only can they turn to pay homage to him. If Brahmins do not follow his advice their merit will be unfruitful.<sup>46</sup>

Brahmā is responsible for the destiny of any creature he has created. There is a superstitious idea which prevails very generally throughout India that on the sixth day after birth Brahmā writes the child's future destiny on its fore-head. The lines of destiny written by Brahmā are called Brahmarekhā or Brahmalkhita. Oddly enough there is no special ceremony instituted to mark this particular day, or to propitiate Brahmā on so momentous an occasion.<sup>47</sup> The Thais have also adopted the idea of Brahmalkhita from the Hindus. The Thais do not have any ceremony relating to the day of Brahmā's writing the predestination lines on a child's forehead either. The idea

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

45. The Mahā Puruṣa quoted in this passage must not be confused with an epithet of Viṣṇu who has already been mentioned in previous sentences. It cannot refer to the Ādi Puruṣa, 'the first man', of the Hindu mythology either because the Ādi Puruṣa is nowhere described in Hindu literature as possessing auspicious signs on his body. In the Māhapurīsalakkhaṇāni in the *Dīghanikāya* (II. 17F.; III. 142 FF.) and in the Majjhimanikāya (II. 136 f.) of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, 'Mahāpurīsa' (an equivalent of the Sanskrit word 'mahapurūṣa') is a name given to a great being who is destined to become either an emperor or a Buddha. He carried on his person thirty-two marks. In the text with which we are concerned it is definite that an emperor is not meant here because an emperor too has already been mentioned in preceding sentences. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* therefore, the possibility arises that, once again the Hindu god Brahmā the Creator is being confused with the Suddhāvāsa Brahmas as mentioned in the *Papañca Sūdanī*, Majjhima Commentary of Buddhaghosa (II. 761). When the time comes for the birth of a Buddha, then Brahmas visit the earth in the guise of Brahmins and teach men about these bodily signs as forming part of the Vedic teaching so that thereby auspicious men may recognize the Buddha.

46. Praphan Sukhonthachāt, *Nārāi Sip Pāng* . . . , p. 5.

47. Sir Monier Monier Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, 4th ed.; London, 1891, p. 370.

of the Thai Brahmalikhita is mostly explained indirectly in Thai literary works. The word Brahmalikhita connotes solely predestination with regard to the moment of death. It is noteworthy that the word is most of the time used with a word *thu'ng* meaning 'reaching'. The phrase *thu'ng Phromlikhit* (*thu'ng Brahmalikhita*) would then translate as an expression such as 'Reaching the last stage of one's predestined life'. In the *Rāmakīan*, when Vālī realizes that the wrong done to his brother Sugrīva is going to be penalized by Rāma, he accepts that his body and his life have reached 'Brahmalikhita' on that day.<sup>48</sup> In the *Khun Chāng Khun Phāēn* (a romantic epic of the lives of Khun Chang and Khun Phāēn), the hero Khun Phāēn consoles Phra Wai, his son, for the death of Wan Thōng, his wife and Phra Wai's mother, that all living men and women have to relinquish life when they 'come to the Brahmalikhita'.<sup>49</sup> However, there is one example where Brahmā is described as being responsible for the misery of a living being, and yet the word Brahmalikhita is not used here. In the *Dutsadi Sangwoei Klōm Chāng Khōng Kao* (a poem sung as a lullaby for a newly captured white elephant) believed to have been composed during the Ayuthya period (date uncertain), the poet consoles the newly captive elephant that it should not be so depressed at being separated from its family and from the forest surroundings. All these sufferings are the result of the power of his own 'karma' which has been deliberately predestined by Brahmā. The elephant should not blame either its own family or any man or god.<sup>50</sup> It is quite clear that the idea of Brahmalikhita is meant in this example even though the word is absent. It is noteworthy that the word Brahmalikhita is not found in any of the literary texts composed during the early period of Ayuthya. The word 'karma' (Thai: *kam*) appears in its place and is also used with the verb *thu'ng*. In the *Lilit Phra Lō*, Phra Lō consoles his mother, who is greatly agitated by his departure for their enemies kingdom, saying that he cannot keep his hold on life once he 'reaches his karma'.<sup>51</sup> When the word karma is used without the word *thu'ng* it always denotes bad deeds done in the past (which can be from previous births also). This meaning is clearly and widely expressed in Thai literary works of all periods. It is possible that this meaning of the word karma also plays some part when the same word is used with *thu'ng*. But it may have a slightly different meaning, i.e. the power of bad deeds performed in the past resulting in death. The doctrine of karma, the result of the deeds of one life affecting the next, is first referred to in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The text declares that the souls of those who have lived lives of sacrifice, charity and austerity,

48. King Rama I, *Rāmakīan*, vol. II, pp. 740.

49. *Khun Chāng Khun Phāēn*, 11th ed.; Bangkok: Sinlapa Bannakhan, 1966, p. 886.

50. "Dutsadi Sanwoei Klōm Chāng", *Chumnum Chan* . . . , p. 116.

51. *Lilit Phra Lō*, Bangkok: Sinlapalorn, 1953, p. 44.

after certain obscure peregrinations, pass to the World of the Fathers, the paradise of Yama, while the unrighteous are reincarnated as worms, birds or insects.<sup>52</sup> This doctrine of karma soon became fundamental to most Indian thought, whether Hindu or Buddhist. It provided a satisfactory explanation to the mystery of suffering. The Thais have adopted this doctrine from Buddhism. There is a very understandable tendency to confuse karma with simpler ideas of fate or destiny. Later on, when the idea of Brahmālikhita had been adopted, the two words were further confused and used as if they were one and the same. However, by the time of the early Ratanakosin period each of them had come to have their own idiomatic usages and thus attained some degree of independence from each other.

Thai literature contains some accounts of the creation myth which presents a rather Vaiṣṇava point of view. An account of Brahmā's birth from the navel of Viṣṇu is referred to in some works. In the *Khlōng Thawāthotsamāt*, (Poem on Twelve Months), (attributed to the 15th century), Brahmā the Creator is invoked as 'The Lord whose great delight is in staying in the navel which shines brilliantly'.<sup>53</sup> This undoubtedly refers to the Purāṇic myth of Brahmā being born from the umbilicus of Viṣṇu. This myth may be accepted without refutation as a Vaiṣṇava myth. It is narrated in both epics and in nearly all of the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. The Śaiva scriptures also have this story, but make Brahmā and his progenitor Viṣṇu inferior to Śiva.

There are some interpolations in the myth of the Lotus-Born Brahmā in some works of the Ratanakosin period. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* (Watcharin Press Version) it is not only Brahmā who rises from the navel of Viṣṇu. A character of considerable importance in the Thai story of Rāma is also described as a lotus-born child of Viṣṇu. In the Watcharin Press Version of the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*,<sup>54</sup> after Viṣṇu in the form of a boar has killed the demon Hērantayak, he returns to his own form and goes back to sleep on the Serpent Lord Ananta in the Ocean of Milk. While he is lying there a lotus springs from his navel. That lotus unfolds and from within it Brahmā, who has four faces, appears holding a princely child. Viṣṇu takes the child from Brahmā and goes to Mount Kailāsa to present him to Śiva. Śiva, by means of meditation, realizes that the boy will extend the race of Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu. Śiva, therefore, orders Indra to build a city on earth for the boy. The city is named Ayuthya, and is described as being as beautiful as heaven. Śiva names the boy Lord Anōmātan and blesses him with the power to overcome all evil demons. Śiva gives Lord Anōmātan a discus and a diamond mace and sends him down to earth to rule over Ayuthya. He is the great-

52. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad VI. 2.16.

53. Chanthip Krasācsin (ed.), *Khlōng Thawāthotsamāt*, Bangkok, 1961, p. 55.

54. Praphan Sukhonthachāt. *Nārāi Sip Pāng* . . . , p. 11.

grand-father of Rāma. In the other two versions of the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, (i.e. the Royal Press and the Lū'an Rit Versions)<sup>55</sup>, the original lotus-born child of Viṣṇu, i.e. Brahmā is absent. Only the interpolated character is retained. It is Lord Anōmātan only who rises from the navel of Viṣṇu while he is lying in the Ocean of Milk. To account for these differences, it is not sufficient merely to say that the scribes copied the story wrongly. The Royal Press Version of the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* was acknowledged as authentic by the court scholars of King Rama V. Its acceptance as a work of authority can be judged from the following. In the year 1879 King Rama V commanded his court poets to compose poems on the Ten Incarnations of Viṣṇu recorded in the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* (Royal Press Version). These poems were to be inscribed on a wall in the Emerald Buddha Temple.<sup>56</sup>

Brahmā the Creator does not appear at this juncture in the *Rāmākān* of King Rama I either. Here, again, it is Lord Anōmātan only who appears from the lotus rising from the navel of Viṣṇu. But it does not mean that the author, or the compiler of the text, had no knowledge of the original myth. There is even a passing reference to Brahmā the Creator's lotus-birth in this work. Lord Anōmātan is described as, 'A handsome child who appears in the lotus as if he were mighty Brahmā whose vehicle is the Swan Lord.' (มีพระกุมารโผล่มาอยู่ในห้วงดวงโกเมศ ดังพรหมเรื่องเดชครรไลหงส์)<sup>57</sup>

It can be certain that Brahmā is omitted from the text in order that Lord Anōmātan may possess more dignity and power. Thus it appears that the myth of Brahmā's being born from a lotus must, tacitly at least, have been accepted in the Thai story of Rāma. But something else is put in its stead. The figure of Brahmā is replaced by that of Anōmātan, probably with the aim of praising the race of Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. To be more specific: the attempt seems to have been made to associate Rāma's ancestor directly with Viṣṇu, without Brahmā being an intermediary in any way. Thus the line is Viṣṇu-Anōmātan-(Atchabān-Daśaratha)-Rāma in contrast to the line Brahmā-Pulastya-Rāvaṇa.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 49;

Khun Ying Lū'an Rit (ed.), *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, Bangkok, 1923, p. 22. The *Nārāi Sip Pāng* exists in prose in three versions; the Royal Press version, the Watcharin Press Version, and the version of Khun Ying Lū'an Rit. The Royal Press version was first published in 1874 under the title of *Thēwapāng*, "Incarnations of the Gods" and republished in 1935 under the title of *Nārāi Sip Pāng* "Ten Incarnations of Nārāyaṇa". The Watcharin Press version was first published in 1869 and again in 1901. The version of Khun Ying Lū'an Rit was published in 1923.

56. Praphan Sukhonthachāt, *Nārāi Sip Pāng* . . . , p. (8).

57. King Rama I, *Rāmākān*, Vol. I, p. 5.

Brahmā appears as performing the creation in the *Lilit Ōngkān Chaeng Nam* only. In another Thai work on cosmology, the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* (all versions), Brahmā is not the creator. It is Śiva who effects creation, including the creation of Brahmā. In the *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, Brahmā is said to be created by Śiva at the same time as Viṣṇu. It is narrated in the text that Śiva stroked his right hand with his left hand and when he stretched out his left hand away from the right hand Nārāyaṇa (or Viṣṇu) was created. Then he stroked his left hand with his right hand and when he stretched out his right hand away from the left Brahmā was created.<sup>58</sup> But whenever there is an invocation to the Hindu triad, in almost all Thai texts, it is Brahmā, not Śiva, who is invoked as the creator. In the *Lilit Yuan Phāi*, the story of a battle between King Bōrommatrailōkanāt and a northern prince, (about 15th century), King Bōrommatrailōkanāt is compared to Brahmā the Creator. Both of them are invoked as, 'The Lord who maintains the world'.<sup>59</sup> In *Chan Sanrasoen Phra Mahā Manīratana Patimākōṇ* (Poetical Eulogy on the Emerald Buddha), composed in the reign of King Rama IV, Brahmā is invoked as 'Brahmadhātā who is well versed in the Vedas; he creates the world'.<sup>60</sup> In the *Chan Sangwoei Phra Thīnang Bāng Pa In* (Poem on the Consecration of Bāng Pa In Palace), composed in the reign of King Rama V, Brahmā is invoked as, 'The Lord who created the world, who rides on the Swan Lord; he has eight hands'.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, although there is some slight evidence for sectarian preference as to the creator (e.g. Śaiva sectarian preference as above in the *Nārāi Sip Pāng* where Śiva is the creator), the impression on the whole is that there are distinct divine agencies, each with its own function to perform. In Thai literature Brahmā is mostly invoked as the Creator; Viṣṇu as the Protector; and Śiva as the Destroyer. In the Thai view, then, although texts are not unanimous in naming Brahmā as the Creator, they nevertheless agree in maintaining his independent existence.

58. Praphan Sukhonthachāt, *Nārāi Sip Pāng* . . . , 1, 3. 5.

Khun Ying Lū'an Rit, *Nārāi Sip Pāng*, p. 1.

59. *Lilit Yuan Phāi*, Bangkok : National Library, 1912. p. 15.

60. Khun Sāra Prasoen (Nut), "Chan Sanrasoen Phra Mahā Manīratna Patimākōṇ" *Chumnum Chan* . . . , p. 9.

61. "Chan, Sanwoei Phra Thīnang Bāng Pa In" *Chumnum Chan* . . . , p. 79.