

## CHAPTER 4

### ‘Critical Tolerance’ : The General Buddhist Attitude

In the last chapter we presented the Buddhist classification of the religio-philosophic environment of Buddhism mainly as it is given in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. In this chapter we will discuss the Buddhist attitude to this religio-philosophies view-formations. The Buddhist attitude, as Jayatilleke has rightly put it, has been one of critical tolerance from its very inception.<sup>1</sup>

There are two important points that we have to take note of as they will throw much light on the subject. First, we have to note the Buddhist emphasis on the fact that the truth has to be understood by everyone for himself. The Buddha did not believe in distributing ready-made transcendental wisdom for everyone. He wanted people to get at the Dhamma by themselves (*paccattam veditabbo*). When someone presented a theory the Buddha would naturally ask him “Do you know and see this yourself?”<sup>2</sup> This attitude is epitomised in the Buddha’s unwillingness to accept tradition, hearsay etc, as means of knowing the Truth.<sup>3</sup> In the *Kālāma Sutta* he advised Kālāmas not to accept things on the ground of tradition, hearsay, conformity with scriptures, respect to the teacher etc.<sup>4</sup> One might here reasonably wonder, however, whether the presence of the Buddha would not itself constitute such an authority. The Buddha has done his best to avoid such a situation. “Among the founders of religion”, writes Rahula

“...the Buddha (if we are permitted to call him the founder of a religion in the popular sense of the term) was the only teacher who did not claim to be other than a human being, pure and simple. Other teachers were either God, or his incarnation, in different forms, or inspired by him. The Buddha was not only a human being; he claimed no inspiration from any god or external power either. He attributed all his realisation, attainments and achievements to

1. Jayatilleke, *Attitude*, P.1.

2. *Jānātha paṇṣatha* as in *M.II.214*.

3. For a systematic discussion of this, Jayatilleke, *Theory*, Chapter 4 (Attitude to authority).

4. *A.I.189*.