

CHAPTER 8

The Silence of the Buddha

The silence of the Buddha on some ten questions called *avyākatas*¹ is one of the subjects that troubled many scholars. There are many attempts made to give a satisfactory interpretation of the matter. Interpretations are numerous and contradict each other in many cases. On the basis of the silence over these ten questions scholars have said that the Buddha was an agnostic (Keith), esoteric teacher (Radhakrishnan), pragmatist (Organ), conformer to the tradition (Coomaraswamy), rejectionist of the tradition (Poussin, Oldenberg), rational agnostic (Beckh, Murti) etc. etc.² In the present study we will only take this problem in so far as it is connected to the Buddhist attitude to other religio-philosophic systems.

For three reasons the unanswered problems are relevant to our study. First we have seen that these questions have some connection to the views presented in the *Brahmajāla*. N. Dutt, for instance, says that the *Brahmajāla Sutta* is an expanded version of the ten unanswered questions.³ We have to note however, that although the unanswered problems are represented in some *Brahmajāla* theories, the relationship is not strong enough to permit one to affirm that the Sutta itself is an expansion of the ten unanswered problems. Second, some scholars have tried to use the Buddha's silence to support their interpretations negatively. We have seen for example, how Radhakrishnan tries to add some extra propositions to the Buddha's teachings on this ground.⁴ We have also seen how Pratt uses the same kind of argument to support his soul-oriented interpretation of Buddhism.⁵ On the same basis

1. Murti has translated *avyākatas* as 'inexpressible'. (*Central*, p.36). Jayatilleke points out that the translation is not literally correct. Instead, he suggests that it has to be translated as 'unexplained or unanswered'. (*Theory*, pp.470ff)
2. In the following studies all these theories are presented and discussed. These are very useful comprehensive studies on the subject.
Jayatilleke, *Theory*, pp.470-6.
Murti, *Central*, pp.36-54.
Troy Wilson Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha" in *P.E.W.* Vol.IV, pp.125-40.
3. See *supra*.
4. See *supra*.
5. See *supra*, Chp. 6.