

ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals critically with two focal issues. One is the belief in the existence of something with an intrinsic nature, underlying, specially the human individual. The other is the relevance of this belief to the classificatory methods of doctrines adopted in the *Nikāya*.

This dissertation, explaining at the outset what this something with intrinsic nature is, presents a critical account of the Buddha's early encounter with this belief as reflected in the *Nikāya*. By citing Sutta evidence, it is shown how the Buddha countered this belief. From this point the dissertation directs its focus to more important aspects bringing to light early Suttas evidence, the Buddha's critical and more concrete and pragmatic arguments he presented to reject this belief. Then, the examination proceeds to explain how sectarian Buddhism faced this moot issue, at times even presenting innovative ideas, making the issue still more complex and complicated. In this context, special focus has been laid on *Sarvāstivāda* views, and the *Mādhyamaka* responses. Then, the dissertation makes a general, but insightful survey of the *Nikāya* that serve as the most primary sources and inquiries into classificatory methods of doctrines adopted in them.

It is also shown how, with the change of circumstances and the expansion of the audience to include the lay-disciples, a new phase of teaching developed bringing to prominence basic moral teachings and principles of social philosophy, sometimes overshadowing doctrinal and philosophical issues. It is also shown what influence it had on the classificatory methods of the doctrines. These as well as other relevant issues have been taken into consideration when arriving at a critical and balanced conclusion.