

## INTRODUCTION

The present thesis is an attempt at a thematic study of the Buddhist canonical discussions of some non-Buddhist religio-philosophical activities. The Pali Nikāyas and Vinaya texts are used as the basic source material while references are made to Brahmanical and Jaina texts as well whenever it is found necessary.

Reference made to other religions within one particular system can be used in a study of religion in three different ways:

- 1) As a 'defence-mechanism' in a polemical sense,
- 2) As historical data,
- 3) In relation to internal purpose other than polemics.

The first involves a thorough and systematic understanding of the institution of debate in the realm of religion. This kind of a study, in respect of Buddhism, is particularly rewarding when pursued with special reference to scholastic Buddhism which stretches from Abhidhamma Buddhism to medieval Mahāyāna. Within that period inter-religious and inter-denominational arguments flourished. This kind of study is done by Smart in his *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (pp.51-61, 125ff).

But as far as early Buddhism is concerned, this kind of approach does not seem to be the best available since we do not come across many such passages in the Pali Nikāyas which are basically polemical, although not totally lacking a polemical character.

The second approach is mainly undertaken by the historians of religion and they use the data with a view to constructing the historical phenomena of religious activities. By this way, interrelations and conflict between religious systems are understood. Some of the scholars who adopt this approach are specially interested in reconstructing thought patterns of minor religious groups, of whom we do not get much information from what they have left. This is not an easy task, for when a theory is presented for criticism by a thinker of different commitment the presentation might not always be as accurate as it should be. In spite of this difficulty there has been some valuable research carried out by a few outstanding scholars among which the *History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas* by Basham deserves special

mention. A comparative and analytical study of the data found in Buddhist literature is carried out by Jayatilleke in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. These studies are preceded by Barua's *Pre-Buddhist Indian Philosophy* and Pande's *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, both of which are of extreme importance. The third way of using the kind of material that we are concerned with is not yet very popular. It proposes an appreciation of the references made to other systems and thought patterns in a rather non-polemical or extra-polemical sphere. Anticipation of this approach itself has been challenged by Christian in his otherwise enlightening monograph *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines*. He says: "In the standard settings of primary religious discourse disagreement and arguments about doctrines are of incidental importance if any." (p.14) Yet the present study consists of an attempt to establish that this approach can be meaningfully exercised at least with respect to the Buddhist references to other systems of thought.

We shall try to show that Buddhist criticism of other religious systems was developed mainly as an aid to the practitioners of meditation whose goal was Nibbana. Using the *Brahmajāla Sutta* as the spring-board we shall bring many passages from the Canon into focus; and for convenience sake we reduce all the speculative possibilities to three basic philosophical problems, namely, Soul, God and Liberation from suffering. Then we discuss how the criticism of non-Buddhist positions of these problems helps Buddhists to clarify their own attitude and thereby aids their meditational practices. We also mention that the Buddhist understanding provided a healthy environment in which the Buddhists could respectfully appreciate the others' religious advancements.

Although the present study is thus conditioned by the third approach, it nevertheless takes into account the use of other approaches as well. Thus in the third chapter the historical authenticity of the *Brahmajāla* references to other teachings is not neglected. The first two chapters concentrate especially on historical and sociological links of Buddhism with other systems. As an attempt is made to avoid the repetition of common place knowledge in Buddhist scholarship (both to avoid irritating the informed reader and to circumvent a great and inflated manuscript) some of the following discussions may appear to be somewhat incomplete. Yet, as we are here only trying to get at 'positive dhamma' via 'negative teachings', our work here then ought, at the very least, to compliment the many other valuable exegetical appraisals made by generations of careful scholars.

Before proceeding to our analysis as outlined above, a few remarks of a technical nature must be made here. First, the translations of the Pali passages are generally kept in line with the Pali Text Society translations, although we have at times taken the liberty of translating some passages ourselves and altering slightly other Society translations. Since drastic changes of meaning are not effected such alterations are not specified. When the passages are taken from another source other than P.T.S. translations the source is mentioned. Secondly, foot-notes found within

quotes are generally omitted. However, when left they are inserted directly into the text itself. Thirdly, Pali words are freely used in the text but are italicised. Where the word is rarely used in western writings on Buddhism, translations are given in brackets. The Pali form of words is preferred to the Sanskrit form except in cases of such well known Sanskrit terms as Varna (P.Vaṇṇa) Ārya (P.Ariya) Kṣatriya (P.Khattiya) Vaiśya (P.Vessa) Śūdra (P.Sudda) etc. Fourthly, the term 'early Buddhism' is used to specify the type of Buddhism found in the Pali Nikāyas and Vinaya texts. And lastly, we have often referred to secondary works on Buddhism without citing in full their titles. References to them is made by selecting a key word from the title which word will be found italicised in the bibliography, e.g., reference to Jayatilleke's *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* appears in the text as *Theory* and in the bibliography as *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*.