

CHAPTER 3

The Buddhist Analysis of the Religio-Philosophical Scene

We have already seen how vivid and complex was the religious environment in the days of the Buddha. Philosophically, India had, so to speak, come of age. Almost everyone held a philosophical position, and many were highly interested in conceptually schematizing their views. The fascination of the concept of '*diṭṭhi*' (view) led people to reformulate any simple observation, as a 'view' thereby giving it a bit more weight. For instance, Brāhmaṇa Vassakāra, a minister of king Ajātasattu, said to the Buddha that he considered (i.e. his 'view' was) it is good to report things as they were seen, heard and felt.¹ Brāhmaṇa Jānussoni claimed (i.e. his view) that there was no man who does not fear death.² These utterances could be passed over as mere 'common sense' remarks but were given added strength when explicitly referred to as '*diṭṭhis*'. '*Diṭṭhi*' is a technical term used in philosophical and religious contexts, with a meaning roughly equivalent to the common sense usage of 'dogma' today-implying a knowledge of the (absolute) truth. This tendency of qualifying thoughts with such a strong word shows us how trendy this theorising activity was. People prided themselves in the novelty of their own *diṭṭhis*. Some *diṭṭhis* were considered important enough to be passed from one generation to another and so some inherited *diṭṭhis* from their forefathers. A dancer, for example, inherited a view from his family, claiming that a dancer who makes people happy and laugh goes to heaven for this good act.³

The importance given to the *diṭṭhis* can be seen in the typical way that people used to question a monk when they saw him for the first time. The monk was asked what was his *diṭṭhi* and what *diṭṭhis* he had learned from his teacher. '*Vāda*' was another word used to mean *diṭṭhi* and this also was used to enquire into one's philosophy.

This proliferation of *diṭṭhis* and *vādas* was bound to lead people into opposition and arguments. Reasoning, speculation and meditation or whatever other means they

1. A.II.172.

2. A.II.173.

3. S.IV.306