

Indian Philosophy and Some Perspectives of Non-Violence

Abstract: The interview given by Dilipkumar Mohanta (b.1959), a Professor of Philosophy in the University of Calcutta (India). He is presently the Joint Secretary of Indian Philosophical Congress (Estd. 1925). He is a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kalyani, and also the founder Vice-Chancellor of the Sanskrit College and University. He is a former member of Indian Council of Philosophical Research. Professor Mohanta is the recipient of number of awards for his academic contribution; such as US Government State Scholar Award (2008) at the University of California (Santa Barbara), Fulbright-Nehru Visiting Lecturer (2011) at the University of Florida, William Paton Fellowship at the University of Birmingham (2015), IUC Associate at IAS (Shimla, 2001-2003), Professor B. M. Barua Samman (award) in 2016, Jan Jacobsen prize (2016), Manjusree Samman (2022), Kamaladevi Smriti Samman (2022). He is the author of 15 books and 60 papers (in English & Bengali) published in journals in India and abroad. *Cognitive Scepticism and Indian Philosophy, Studies in Vaidalyasutra of Nagarjuna, Studies in Jayarasibhatta's Critique of Knowing from Words, Advaita-Siddhanta-Sara-samgraha* (Sanskrit text



with Introduction in English), *Collected Works of Brajendra Nath Seal* (ed.) are some of his important books in English. Mohanta also authored some books on Buddhist Philosophy, Advaita Vedanta Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion and Political Philosophy in Bengali.

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Andrew Schumann: India is a rapidly developing democratic society and a fast growing economy. Indian philosophy is one of the most ancient forms of philosophical reflection. What role does India's own philosophical tradition play in India's development?

Dilipkumar Mohanta: I think, the essential features of India's Philosophy, like argumentativeness and openness along with its moral and spiritual ideal called *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) have been promoting towards a favorable condition for India's sustainable development. By *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, I mean, all the inhabitants of the increasingly interdependent world that includes great cultural, ethnic, racial, local, national, and religious diversity. These are necessarily the relatives of one another. In short, the inhabitants of the world are inter-related and inter-dependent. It is imperative that the ways to come together as a human family honouring and respecting the commonly adjustable diversities have to be worked out relentlessly to ensure global peace and harmony. If we look at both prosperity and peace, we find them inter-linked from the perspective of India's material-spiritual heritage which is holistic in nature. It includes both *abhyudaya* (the worldly well-being) and *niśreyasa* (the spirit of non-attachment). Material ideal of prosperity has a spiritual and holistic efficiency in India and the efficiency is the means by which the goal of prosperity is realized. Therefore, philosophical attitude is seen as a component of India's 'soft power.'

Andrew Schumann: By the beginning of the 21st century, the world has reached a state of calm, peace and non-violence. However, the war in Ukraine began to threaten with a new world war and

dramatically changed the attitude towards violence. Violence has again become a way to resolve political conflicts. Have the ideas of non-violence in politics, perfectly applied by M. K. Gandhi, lost their relevance? How can we stop this war?

Dilipkumar Mohanta: Sorry, I cannot agree to your statement expressed in the 1st line. How can we ignore 9/11 which led to series of violent events throughout the world including 26/11 in India and numerous other events in different countries? Cross-border-terrorism, aggression in Asia cannot be over-looked. *Non-alignment* and *pañcasīla*, the twin key concepts of India's foreign policy are rooted in Classical Philosophy of India. It speaks of the mandate of a policy of equanimity in one's international stand for maintaining relations. Violence is not the proper way to resolve political conflicts. It is to be resolved through dialogue with *understanding* and *empathy*. War is opposed to all three virtues of human being, e.g. spirituality, freedom and culture. The model based only on 'right' and 'competition' is *inadequate* for the promotion of peace and prosperity. A kind of reconciliation is necessary. This reconciliation implies ending of quarrels, conflicts, hostilities through settlements by dialogue/polylogue, and agreements based on material, moral and spiritual values. The effort to build one world requires a closer understanding among the people of the world and their cultures. One-dimensional and unilateral identity cannot lead to peace, which involves social, ethical, religious and political elements. In this pluralistic world the application of this holistic, interdependent outlook may be an alternative paradigm for peace and prosperity. 'People to people' cultural diplomacy, I think, may work as an additional and alternative way to the monopoly of political diplomacy for international understanding. In view of this, the philosophical ideals of both Buddha and Gandhi are quite relevant today if we can put it on proper context and do not accept *non-violence* in the categorical and simplistic sense.

Andrew Schumann: What do Indian philosophers think about the war in Ukraine, according to your opinion? Perhaps are there some thinkers with anti-American attitudes who can support the Russian aggression in Ukraine?

Dilipkumar Mohanta: As I already hinted, I think, the principles of *non-alignment* and *pañcasīla* are the philosophical ideals that are important for international relations today. The principles of peaceful co-existence, interdependence and elimination of domination to be taken together to promote universal brotherhood. So neither Russian nor American attitude is perfectly consistent with the philosophical Ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* of India's culture. As 'there is nothing nobler than humanity' and 'war destroys humanity,' we cannot, in general, support war, unless it is inevitable as the last option. Every nation, every person should enjoy the right of self-defense. The simplistic understanding of *non-violence*, as categorical one, is not practicable.

Andrew Schumann: What are the most fundamental characteristics of Indian Philosophy when viewed as a whole?

Dilipkumar Mohanta: It is a quite relevant question. But it is difficult to put the answer in a sentence. However, I think, argumentativeness, openness and holistic spirituality conjointly characterize India's philosophical approach to life and the world. The views of cognitive skeptics like Nāgārjuna, Jayarāsi Bhaṭṭa and Śrīharṣa are very important even today, because they uphold a position of *non-finalizing* and this admits the *fallibility of human being* and welcomes the *growing feature of knowledge*. I think, Indian Philosophy addresses the problems of our life-world and philosophy (in the sense of *Darśana*) means 'philosophical problems' in spite of geographical, historical and cultural differences at the genesis of the approaches or addresses. A deserving candidate for this may be seen in combination of reason, morality and spirituality in modern Indian philosophical approach clubbed under the word *Darśana*. It is called *Darśana*, that is, seeing the things in their right perspective and as they really stand. In India philosophizing is expected to act

as a *therapy of the soul* and so it should not remain confined within the boundary of “purely cerebral activity.”

Andrew Schumann: What trends in Indian Philosophy can be the most promising?

Dilipkumar Mohanta: I think, in theoretical side, pragmatic idealism of the maxim ‘let noble thoughts come to us from different directions’ and in applied side, ‘live and let live’ is the goal. What I feel about the task of philosophy is that it is not ended with a commentary of life, but to ‘lead the life in the right direction.’ Indian Philosophy does not negate the life and the world, but discovers a new meaning of both. We are to be ready, to use a recent Indian philosopher D. P. Chattopadhyaya’s words, “to learn from others’ mistakes, to peruse others’ ways of understanding and misunderstanding and finally to see how much” we “owe to others.” In this sense social and impersonal conditions are important considerations for philosophical thinking. As I have already said, two features seem to be important in Indian philosophical enterprise today, namely ‘the fallibility of human being’, and ‘the growing character of knowledge.’ Revival of old Indian thoughts through modern acceptable idioms of comparative philosophy is a dominant trend in recent Indian Philosophy. I think, a kind of hermeneutical exercise is being seen among Indian philosophers. In other words, one of the current trends among philosophers in India consists of an endeavour to contextualise what they inherit and in doing so they consciously deviate from their inheritance and recreate it. I think, they consider that ‘deviations and counter-positions’ are as essential as the inheritance. They inherit the past and also claim freedom from it. This seems to be one of the most promising features of contemporary thinkers in Indian Philosophy. There are other trends also.

Thank you.