

Understanding the ‘Self’ as a Way Leading to Peace: Jiddu Krishnamurti

Mausumi Bhattacharjya

Abstract

Krishnamurti puts fundamental importance on living life. In his opinion, the only concern of man should be living. At the same time, he also maintains that true living requires certain things and peace is one of them. However, in his opinion, we are devoid of peace because we are constantly living in the midst of conflict and contradiction. And as far as Krishnamurti is concerned, the very reason for our being in conflict is lack of our proper understanding of ourselves. So, in order to have peace, we need to put an end to our conflict which can be made possible through understanding of the ‘self’. The present paper is an endeavour to find out how understanding of the ‘self’ can lead to peace in the Philosophy of Krishnamurti. In order to venture into that, the present paper also takes into account what does Krishnamurti understand by the ‘self’. The paper ends with some observation.

Keywords: Krishnamurti, self, understanding, conflict, peace, thought

Introduction:

Krishnamurti puts fundamental importance on living life. In his opinion, the only concern of man should be living. At the same time, he also maintains that true living requires certain things and peace is one of them. He is found to consider peace as a necessity: “We must have peace in order to grow, to flower, to understand, to have time to look around, to explore into ourselves and see what we can find here” (Krishnamurti, 2011, p.18). Krishnamurti sees the world as devoid of peace since chaos, disorder, violence, war, conflict and the like pervade the entire world. In his own words, “There is no peace in the world. There is chaos, disorder, great danger, terrorism, threats of war. These are all facts. We live every day of our lives with all turmoil, with all the labour that people have to do, with all the problems we have to face. The politicians talk about peace, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church talks about it, so do the Hindus and the Buddhists and the Muslims, but actually there is no peace” (Krishnamurti, 2011, p. 17-18).

We find Krishnamurti saying that we lack peace in the outside world because there is no peace inside us. In his opinion, the inner and the outer are not different from each other as the outer is the projection of the inner. In fact, according to Krishnamurti, it is the individuals that make up the world as he says, “The world is only the individual in his relationship with others based on what he thinks of himself” (Krishnamurti, 2013, p. 152). That is why, he says that to have peace inside the individual is essential to have peace in the outside world.

Krishnamurti says that we lack internal peace as we are in the midst of conflict and contradiction. As we are in conflict, so also the world is: “Whatever our ambitions, our pursuits, our aims, it is upon them that we base the structure of society. So, because we are in contradiction, there is lack of peace in us and therefore, outside of us. There is in us a constant state of denial and assertion—what we want to be and what we are. The state of contradiction creates conflict, and this conflict does not bring about peace” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 7). By conflict and contradiction, Krishnamurti understands the constant struggle of one trying to become something which one is not as he says, “You understand what I mean by contradiction—this constant struggle to be something apart from what I am. I am this, and I want to be that” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 7.). In other words, according to him, being in conflict means to have opposing desires, interests and pursuits such as I want to be honest, and I am not able to be.

Krishnamurti asserts that we are required to understand this contradiction in us in order to have inward peace: “Life is a series of contradictions and without understanding those contradictions, there can be no peace” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 10). And Krishnamurti is found saying that this understanding of contradiction is possible through the understanding of the self. To understand the self is to know the self in his Philosophy. Thus, it is self-knowledge that leads to peace, both inward and outward. In my paper, I am trying to show how understating of the ‘self’ can make possible peace to take place. In order to accomplish this objective, I have made a discussion on how the ‘self’ is treated in Krishnamurti’s Philosophy.

Krishnamurti considers the ‘self’ or ‘I’ as the cause of conflict and suffering as he is found to say, “As long as the self exists, there must be conflict, misery” (Krishnamurti, 2012, p. 30). The reason behind such a consideration is his findings of the ‘self’ as a matter of the past and our life as a movement. According to Krishnamurti, our life is continuous; it is always in the present: “After all, life is constantly changing environment” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 46). Life is forever new and living life requires our meeting as it comes. In his view, life is full of challenges and to meet the challenges adequately, we need to stay in the present and staying in the present is possible only when we free ourselves from the past, from the knowing; otherwise, conflict arises. And freedom from the past demands that we should not act according to knowledge from the past. We generally try to mould the present in the light of the past which are the teachings we have been given, the beliefs we have been taught to hold, the knowledge we have accumulated and so on. As a result, we land in conflict. Krishnamurti says, “Life is and must be, a series of challenges and responses. The challenge is not according to

our particular desire, but assumes different forms at different times. And if we have the capacity to meet that challenge adequately, fully, directly, then there is no problem. But because we do not meet that challenge, a problem arisen” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 211-212).

According to Krishnamurti, the self is a constituted being and it gets created in our awareness that we are nothing; everybody is aware of this emptiness, consciously or unconsciously. This feeling of emptiness makes one to feel insufficient, “One is aware, consciously or unconsciously, of a sense of emptiness in oneself, a sense of being nothing, a sense of being insufficient” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 356). And in Krishnamurti’s view, the feeling of being nothing makes one desire to be something which one is not. This duality of what one is, which is nothing and what one desires to be, creates the feeling of incompleteness. To fill up this incompleteness one tries to become something. This very urge for attainment makes one to look for comfort, for security which results in resorting to authority. This resorting to authority prevents meeting anew, afresh. Thus, according to Krishnamurti, it is because of this desire of the self to be something that makes one unable to understand the ever-changing life that consequently gives rise to conflict between ‘what one is’ and ‘what one should be’. He says, “You have a set of values established through experience, through tradition, and those values have become your guide; with these past standards and values you approach a fresh experience which must naturally create a conflict” (Krishnamurti, 2007, p. 120).

In the philosophy of Krishnamurti, to understand the self is to know that there is no self or I. The moment we know the non-existence of the self, we stop thinking for its security, for its permanency and thereby we stop conflict to take place.

According to Krishnamurti, understanding of the self ends conflict and suffering since it is because of the ignorance on our part about ourselves that we create the ‘self’. It is because of our not knowing what makes up the ‘self’ that we give permanency to it. There is no self in reality according to Krishnamurti. The very concept of a permanent self is considered as an illusion in his philosophy as he observes the ‘self’ as nothing else but our thoughts; the two are identical. He does not believe in the existence of a self that exists separately from our thought. To put it differently, there is no thinker who thinks; the thinker itself is thought. It is because we desire to allot permanency to the self that we create the idea of the thinker existing separately from thought as we find Krishnamurti saying, “The observer and the observed are one. To experience the thinker and his thought as one is very arduous, for the thinker is ever taking shelter behind his thought; he separates himself from his thoughts to safeguard himself, to give himself continuity, permanency. The thinker is his thought, the thinker and his thoughts are not two different processes” (Krishnamurti, 2013, p. 80). In fact, according to Krishnamurti, it is the thought that creates the thinker, “It is the thought that makes the thinker, and if there were no capacity to think at all, there would be no thinker” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 70). The entire thought process is conceived of as self by Krishnamurti. In his opinion, self is the way one talks, the beliefs that one holds, one’s reactions to situations and people, one’s desires and intentions. And as our thoughts change in every passing

moment, so also the self; we create or give permanency to the self by identifying ourselves with the ever-fleeting thoughts.

As far as Krishnamurti is concerned, there is no substantial self that continues, one is not continuously one thing. For instance, if one is honest at a particular moment, he cannot claim to be so throughout his life because in the very next moment, he may not be honest. So, Krishnamurti opines that the ‘self’ comes into existence due to one’s thought of oneself as the enduring being. It is the result of considering oneself possessing certain characteristics. But since one change from moment to moment, so one cannot be continuously ‘honest’, ‘violent’, ‘generous’, ‘kind’ etc. What one is at a particular moment is true for that moment only; it does not continue. It is when a person identifies himself with an image he has of himself that he confers permanency, eternity to his self. “So, what is the self? The name, the form, the body, certain characteristics identify themselves with the ‘me’” (Krishnamurti, 2015, p. 34). Therefore, the permanency that we ascribe to self is apparent, not real as per Krishnamurti. What I am at a particular moment is true for that moment only. As the moment gets over, the ‘I’ of that moment vanishes. And a new ‘I’ gets revealed with the next experience. But due to the absence of the understanding of the self, we carry the ‘I’ of a particular moment beyond that moment. If I was kind yesterday, my thought carries the notion of the ‘I’ as kind which right now I may not be. At the present moment I may be cruel. Therefore, Krishnamurti says that the ‘I’ has to be discovered anew from moment to moment.

For the discovery of the ‘I’ anew in every passing moment, Krishnamurti asks us to observe it passively from moment to moment. This observation, then, reveals the transitoriness of the ‘I’. This is what Krishnamurti means by understanding of the ‘self’; it is the understanding that the self does not exist. What actually exist are our thoughts. There is no ‘I’ who is violent, but simply violence. I am not different from my violence. In his own words, “I am not different from the greed or envy or hate or jealousy. Suffering is me. But I have separated anger, jealousy, sorrow from me so that I can control it, shape it, run away from it. But if that is me, I can do nothing about it but just observe it. So the observer is the observed, the thinker is the thought, the experience is the experienced. The two are not separate” (Krishnamurti, 2005, p. 13).

This revelation can happen only when one passively observes the ways of the self in freedom. In other words, understanding the self is possible in *choiceless awareness* of the self in freedom. It is through freedom that we can confront the truth of the self that it is not something continuous, something permanent. In the philosophy of Krishnamurti, freedom is freedom from all sorts of conditioning as he says, “without freedom truth cannot be discovered, without freedom there can be no experience of the real. Freedom must be sought out—freedom from the self-enclosing walls of good and bad; freedom from authority and imitation, freedom from self, the cause of conflict and pain” (Krishnamurti, 2013, p.49). Conditioning makes one to observe one’s self with choice; one tries to choose between ‘what one is’ and ‘what one should be’, i.e., between the actual and the ideal. But the observation in freedom is required not to have any choice: “Freedom does not imply

choice” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p.182). Krishnamurti’s view is that one cannot actually choose as there is no ‘I’ existing separately from one’s thoughts as its controller; one cannot mould the present according to one’s desire as that desire itself is self. One cannot control over the fact. So, he talks about passively aware of the ways of the self without any condemnation or judgment or scrutiny. Such awareness brings the understanding of oneself as mere desire and nothing more than that. And in this understanding, the self comes to see itself as false. Thus, one’s understanding of the background of the self that it is conditioned, it is made out of desires and thoughts leads one to understand the falsity of the self. Then the ‘I’ ceases and when there is no ‘I’, there is no conflict. And in the absence of conflict, peace comes upon.

The present paper finds that while talking about the understanding of the ‘self’, Krishnamurti actually talks about *destruction of the ‘self’*. In fact, his primary concern is how to destroy or dissolve the ‘self’ or the ‘I’. In his own words, “I am concerned with the dissolution of the ‘me’, of the ‘I’, the negation of the self” (Krishnamurti, 2012, p. 31). When we understand the ‘self’, it leads us to destroy it. As the ‘self’ is our creation, we create it through not having knowledge about it, so its understanding leads us to destroy it. This very destruction of the ‘self’ brings peace as there remains no center from which conflict emanates. As per the discussion made, we land in conflict because we constantly struggle to become something which we are not. It is because we do not know that we cannot change the actual; we cannot choose between ‘what we are’ and ‘what we want to be’, as we are nothing but our desire which are ever fleeting. When we fully understand the self as false, we destroy our own created ‘self’ and thereby, stop our attempt to act against the actual which results in cessation of conflict. And when we make ourselves conflict-free, we can hope for taking place the same in the world outside.

Another point revealed from the forgoing discussion is that Krishnamurti makes peace in the individual level is a necessary pre-requisite for attaining world-peace as he is found to make no difference between the individual and the world; the world is what the individual projects himself. So, his view is that until and unless we establish peace within ourselves, it is a futile attempt on our part to establish peace in the world outside. If the individual himself is the source of conflict, then naturally everything he does will breed conflict and nothing else. Therefore, Krishnamurti puts fundamental importance in bringing about radical revolutionary transformation on the individual level in order to transform the world. In his own words, “We want to bring about changes in the world—economic changes, social changes, and so on, but it seems to me that one cannot really bring about a significant outward change, unless there is a radical psychological revolution, transformation. For the inner, surely, always overcomes the outer. What one is, that one creates outwardly. And unless this transformation takes place, mere outward reforms, outward changes, however carefully worked out, will inevitably fail because the thing that is missing is this inward revolution, this inward transformation” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 362).

This inner transformation that Krishnamurti talks about is possible through self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is nothing but understanding of oneself according to him. He is found to say, “So, it is essential to

begin with oneself; to bring about the transformation in one's own attitude, actions and direction. That transformation, surely, must begin with self-knowledge, because without self-knowledge, there can be no radical revolution. Revolution is not according to an idea, according to a pattern; then it is not a revolution—it is merely a modified continuity. But, if one can understand the psychological process of oneself, the inward demands, pursuits, fears, ambitions, hopes; and if one can go through the whole process of them—then it is possible to bring about a transformation. And, therefore, it is necessary, surely, to understand oneself before one can bring about a transformation, outwardly or inwardly” (Krishnamurti, 2014, p. 363).

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