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OBITUARY

J. N. (Jitendra Nath) Mohanty

(1928–2023)

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Professor J. N. Mohanty has characterized his life and philosophy as being both 'inside' and 'outside' East and West, i.e., *inside* and *outside* traditions of India and those of the West, living in both India and United States: geographically, culturally, and philosophically; while also traveling the world: Melbourne to Moscow. Most of his academic time was spent teaching at the University of Oklahoma (Norman, OK), The New School Graduate Faculty (N.Y.), and finally Temple University (PA). He was

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also for a while Chandler Visiting Professor at Emory University (Atlanta, GA). Yet his preeminent work in Husserlian phenomenology developed alongside his eminent work in Indian philosophy: describing his interests as 'a fusion of disparate horizons.'

Jitendra Nath Mohanty was born September 26, 1928, in Cuttack (Odisha, East India). After graduating from high school, he went on to study both Indian and Western philosophy in Calcutta, earning bachelor's and master's degrees. There he read Whitehead and Kant's *First Critique*; although he wanted to include mathematics in his curriculum, he was led instead to include Indian philosophy and Sanskrit. On the shelves of his teacher in Calcutta, the Vedānta philosopher, Ras Vihari Das, in 1949 he came upon a copy of the Australian philosopher Boyce Gibson's translation (*Ideas I*, 1931) of Edmund Husserl's classic *Ideen I* (1913), which presented Husserl's groundbreaking conception of phenomenology. In 1952–1954, young Jiten left India for the first time, reaching Göttingen to study mathematics and philosophy, which earned him a doctorate in mathematics and 'philosophy of mathematical sciences' (in his own words). In Göttingen, Mohanty found the powerful mathematical world that Husserl himself had earlier interacted with, where several Husserl students had formed the Göttingen school of phenomenology.

During these years, Mohanty studied primarily mathematics, alongside Kant, and also Vedic Sanskrit. From his friend Günter Patzig, interpreter of Aristotle and Frege, Mohanty was drawn to Frege in relation to mathematical logic. He attended lectures of Heidegger, intrigued by his ontological thinking. Yet, despite the Husserlian legacy, Mohanty was completely self-taught in his studies of Husserl (as he has reported). With a doctorate in mathematics, and ideas from Kant and Frege in his philosophical background, Mohanty set about crafting his own conception of philosophy grounded in phenomenology, drawing on Husserl's extensive work, critically sifting through Husserl's texts and their emerging concepts of intentionality, meaning, subject, intersubjectivity, and world. In between, he wrote his first book-length study: on phenomenological insights in Nicolai Hartmann and A. N. Whitehead (1958).

Over many decades, Mohanty formulated and argued, in analytical detail, for a conception of phenomenology and its place in philosophy, later presented in a clear and concise book titled *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytic Account* (1989). Over these very decades, the same scholar explored classical and recent Indian philosophy, thinking through kindred ideas of consciousness, self, and knowledge drawn from the Indian philosophical contexts. While writing on Nyāya theory of truth, he also pondered whether the world and finite individual are illusory or real, and whether Marx, Arendt, Aurobindo, Gandhi (whom he heard speak in Calcutta), or Vinoba Bhave (with whom he marched across India for the land-grant movement) could best navigate post-Independent India's social and *svarāj* or self-rule reforms. The two Mohantys, thinking through a vision of self and world, turned out to be 'non-different' or 'non-dual' as they each practiced critical phenomenology from both inside and outside the respective philosophical and cultural traditions. Numerous students, fellows, and colleagues or collaborators have benefited immensely from this infusion and unified approach to diversity in philosophical thought.

In the 2000s, moving into retirement, Mohanty wrote two long books devoted to his understanding of Husserl and phenomenology and the calling of philosophy itself. This two-volume study shows Mohanty himself thinking through Husserl, critically, in *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl: A Historical Introduction* (2008) and *Edmund*

Husserl's Freiburg Years: 1916–1938. As Mohanty worked on Husserl, he carefully indicated where he agreed and where he rejected or changed ideas, all part of his practice in phenomenology of 'description and interpretation.' It was the same pattern he used in addressing the thought of Husserl vis-à-vis Kant or Frege or even Quine.

As Mohanty developed his understanding of phenomenology over the years, he wrote books on theory of meaning and the concept of intentionality, developing a model of ideal meaning and its foundation in intentionality, drawing on Husserl's results. He followed these with the book *Husserl and Frege* (1982), linking the thought of those foundational figures for the 'continental' and 'analytic' traditions, respectively, in twentieth-century Western philosophy. Over his long career, Mohanty addressed both traditions in his clear and accessible writing style. While developing his views on phenomenology, Mohanty regularly looked to 'Husserl and his others,' evaluating views in Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and then Derrida and others in the wake of Husserl. With his background in Kant, Mohanty also looked toward Heidegger and Hegel in relation to Husserl's later work in the *Crisis* (1935–1938).

Similarly, he looked to contemporary analytic philosophers, adjudicating his own, oft-wise Husserlian views in relation to Frege, Nagel, and others. Amid his active scholarly career, Mohanty co-founded the journal *Husserl Studies*, and was editorial advisor to *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research, Philosophy East & West, Journal of Indian Philosophy, Sophia*, *Monist, Mind, International Philosophical Quarterly, Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, JICPR*, among others.

Yet all this while Mohanty was also thinking and writing about Indian philosophy and its relation to phenomenology. In his own retrospective, Indian philosophy is 'the permanent background' of his Husserlian thinking, while Kant is the recurrent Western background of his Husserlian phenomenology. Mohanty's form of 'transcendental phenomenology' evolved, in his own perspective, against the background of his studies of Navya-Nyāya on logic and Vedānta on consciousness, in Indian philosophy, and against the background of Kant's First *Critique* on the transcendental, in Western philosophy. Accordingly, Mohanty's study of logical form and of the intentionality of consciousness seeks a fusion of East and West in the conception of transcendental phenomenology. (Cf. Mohanty's apt response to critics in *The Empirical and the Transcendental* (2000).) He also interacted with the Oxford Indian philosopher, Bimal K. Matilal, whose groundbreaking work on Indian logic and epistemology Mohanty graciously reviewed; he also wrote critical Forewords to modern forays in Indian philosophy, such as on *Śabdapramāṇa and Testimony* (Bilimoria 2018). These were issues he had spent half his life thinking about, wrote papers on, and put together in his books on Indian philosophy: *Gaṅgeśa Theory of Truth* (1966), *Essays in Indian Philosophy* (ed. PB with biographical introduction), *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought* (1992) *Philosophy* (1993), and *Explorations in Indian Philosophy* (2001).

Even in the context of North American Husserl scholarship, Mohanty has exercised an earnest fusion of East and West. For the so-called East Coast and West Coast interpretations of Husserl's crucial notion of noema, both find a sympathetic spirit in J. N. Mohanty's careful and nuanced interpretation of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology. With Mohanty, the two faces of the noema are the logical (Fregean) and the phenomenal (Kantian), and these views of intentional structure join in consciousness—in a way resonant with Indian thought.

By way of a couple or so of personal anecdotes. After delivering a keynote lecture at the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy in Melbourne, and reading papers to philosophers around Victoria and Queensland (AAP), Mohanty requested to visit Phillip Islands to watch those delightful little penguins parade from the sea to the shores after dusk; but he also took great delight in pinching the nose of a koala at the Healesville sanctuary (outside Melbourne), letting out his characteristic laughter. When I turned up at their home in Norman (OK) in the middle of winter with my baggage lost in transit (on the long flight from Australia), Mrs Bani and Dr Mohanty went to the local mall to pick-up a pair of shirts and pants to get me through until the baggage was delivered. Returning from a brisk walk, we found that we had forgotten to take keys to the entrance door at Birchwood House (All Souls College's extension lodge for visiting faculty, outside Oxford), but Mohanty seemed unfussed and virtually went inwards before responding to the small crisis; he came up with a surprise solution that led to my climbing up the rear of the two-storey building and getting into the bathroom hallway from a window that he had left slightly open in the morning—a fortitudinous intuition. My friend Douglas Berger (who studied with Mohanty in Temple University, and now a professor of comparative philosophy in Leiden University), has a telling anecdote from Mohanty's class on Hegel's *Phenonemology:* 'Mohanty would sit in front of the room, with a translation of the text before him but never opened, and he proceeded, for two and a half hours, to give a completely organized, systematically developed and surpassingly brilliant lecture every session... mixed with brief moments of humor and pithy revelations of almost shocking lucidity: "Hegel did not know enough about Indian philosophy to take its full significance into account [that] allows us to dismiss his assessments of it. They were just wrong. But does that mean that the Hegelian system itself cannot go on, as long as it takes into account Indian rationality, Chinese rationality, African rationality, and the rationalities of other traditions?"'[1]

When Renuka Sharma (my beloved late spouse, also close to the great mind) passed way prematurely, and Mohanty knowing that I would be at the AAR conference in Toronto three weeks later, came all the way from Philadelphia just to spend a few long moments in a quiet corner with me; it was heartening, comforting, and touching to the core of the soul. Several such episodes reveal clearly that Mohanty was a person with deep empathy (*Einfühlung)*, care and forbearance, with a touch of practical phenomenological skills also; he processed every experience he had with people he came across and in the world also, deeply and introspectively: as a true phenomenologist would (*à la* Amardeo Giorgi, a long-time friend of Mohanty, hence this appreciation is apposite). Dr Mohanty is survived by his son Udayana Mohanty, daughter Yasodhara Means, granddaughter Padmini, and great-granddaughter Arabella.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

[1] https://indianphilosophyblog.org/2023/03/20/some-memories-of-my-teacher-j-n-mohanty/.