



01

BEYOND THE EXECUTIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH SHEKHAR SHERPA ON BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

*Nobida Anjum*¹ & *Dr. Sabuj Sarkar*²

About Interviewee:

Shri Shekhar Sherpa is an independent Buddhist scholar and administrator from Darjeeling who advocates for universal love across all social and national boundaries. Educated in English Literature at North Bengal University, his intellectual pursuits extend to comparative religion and wildlife. Currently serving as a beloved administrator in the Ratua-2 region of Malda, he is widely recognized for his kindness and selfless public service. His worldview is deeply rooted in the values of his middle-class upbringing in Kurseong and the spiritual traditions of Mahayana Buddhism. Through his work and social activities, he effectively bridges cultural gaps, embodying the benevolent principles of his faith in diverse community settings.

About Interviewer(s):

*Nobida Anjum*¹ is a PhD Research Scholar in English at the University of Gour Banga, Malda, West Bengal, India. She is an activist with special concern for social well-being. Her areas of academic interest include Buddhism and South Asian Literature.

*Dr. Sabuj Sarkar*² is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Gour Banga, Malda, West Bengal, India. While his doctoral research focused on the “Narratives of Tea and the Nation Question,” his broader academic interests encompass World Religions, Philosophy, Psychology, Film Studies and the History of Food.

Abstract

This illuminating interview with Shekhar Sherpa, a dedicated activist, environmentalist, and philanthropist, explores the profound connection between Buddhism and social amelioration. He believes that true societal improvement transcends the conventional powers of an administrator, and the fundamental tenets of Buddha Dharma are rooted in the humble, simple and honest work. Shekhar Sherpa thinks the teachings of Buddha, irrespective of sectarian divisions, hold a timeless appeal for fostering human and social well-being. The interview emphasizes that the moral integrity of a true Buddhist should be defined by a deep-seated love and concern for all beings. This principle guides his field work, enabling him to approach social issues with a more inclusive and eco-sensitive mindset. He illustrates how the Buddhist way of life has enriched his efforts, promoting harmony and understanding without overt references to conflict. His work is a testament to the idea that a compassionate approach can lead to meaningful and lasting change. For him, religious tolerance is not merely a political ideal but a cornerstone of India’s cultural heritage and plurality. He argues that it is essential for the healthy development of society. By embodying the core principles of Buddhism—kindness, mindfulness, and non-violence—he showcases how one can contribute to a more harmonious and tolerant world. His life’s work is a powerful example of how personal faith can inspire a broader commitment to the well-being of the entire community, building a society where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Keywords

Amelioration, Eco-Sensitive, Social-Wellbeing, Cultural Heritage, Plurality, Tolerance, etc.



Introduction:

Shri Shekhar Sherpa, an independent Buddhist scholar and administrator from Darjeeling, promotes universal love beyond religious, gender, and national boundaries. Raised in a middle-class Kurseong family influenced by his parents' values, he studied at St. Alphonsus High School and St. Joseph's College before earning a postgraduate degree in English Literature from North Bengal University. His interests also include wildlife and comparative religion.

Buddhism plays a pivotal role in the spiritual, cultural, and social life of countries of Southeast Asia, which includes a variety of traditions of Buddhism with two main traditions, i.e., Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, which is mistakenly labelled as the Hinayana tradition, is actually rooted in Sri Lanka, and eventually spread to Burma and later to lower Thailand. Some Western scholars used the term Hīnayāna to describe the early teachings of Buddhism, while the Mahāyāna teachings were considered to have developed later.

However, modern Buddhist scholarship no longer supports the use of the term Hīnayāna because it is viewed as derogatory and polemical. Instead, scholars now prefer the term Nikāya Buddhism, which refers more accurately to the early Buddhist schools. Mahāyāna Buddhism is rooted in Northern India, from where it traveled to Tibet and China, Vietnam, Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. When we talk about Buddhism, we are not supposed to focus only on the religious practices; rather, we are supposed to bring light to a particular culture that has a strong influence on the Indian subcontinent. Buddhism plays a central role in defining the spiritual, cultural, and social life of India, like other South Asian countries. In the Darjeeling hills, in India, Buddhism has a lively presence shaped mainly by Tibetan Mahayana traditions. Historic monasteries, known as *gompas* such as the one at Ghum, built in 1850, play an important role in community life. These monasteries are not only places for prayer but also centers for cultural events, learning, and spiritual guidance.

Nobida Anjum: Shri Sherpa, this is Nobida Anjum, a Ph.D Research Scholar specializing in Wellbeing and Buddhism. I, along with my teacher Dr. Sabuj Sarkar, want to conduct an interview with you. He is not physically present here, but the concept is vigorously built, and the manuscript of the questions is primarily prepared by him. However, I first met you (with a smile) through various social activities and have since become well-acquainted with your social and religious beliefs. Now, as the newly appointed administrator of our rural area (Ratua, 2, Malda, West Bengal), which is mainly Muslim populated, you are incredibly beloved by the people for your kindness and selfless service, which they think is the inspiration of Buddhist beliefs. Now we have a few questions, particularly about Buddhism and its benevolence on the lives and living of common people. Henceforth the interviewers Nobida Anjum and Dr. Sabuj Sarkar will be referred to as N. A. and S. S. in this interview.

Shekhar Sherpa: Yes, please, Miss Anjum .

N. A. & S.S: Are you a believer in God ?

Shekhar Sherpa: Yes, I am.

N. A. & S.S: Are you a practicing Buddhist, Shri Sherpa?

Shekhar Sherpa: No, Miss Anjum. I just go around living with the basic principles of all religions, i.e., to be good to all, to love mankind and try not to hurt anyone. If you happen to sneak into my bedroom, you would find pictures of Buddhist, Hindu and Christian deities, a Bible and a Taabeej from Ajmer e' Sharif.

N. A. & S. S: What are your views regarding the various sects in Buddhism?



Shekhar Sherpa: The various sects of Buddhism have their different approach towards worship, though the basic principle is the same. Though I was born in a family belonging to the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, I have some soft corner towards Hinayana Buddhism in the sense that they have maintained tranquility and simplicity all these years. On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism is heavily loaded with Southeast Asian culture and has increasingly become expensive over time. But having said that, I also feel that there is life in Mahayana Buddhism, whereas Hinayana Buddhism somewhat resembles the Protestant Sect of Christianity.

N. A. & S. S: Do you differentiate Theravada tradition of Buddhism, practiced in Sri Lanka and some other Southeast Asian countries, from “Hinayana” Buddhism?

Shekhar Sherpa: I think it would be better to say that the term Hinayana refers to an individual’s spiritual commitment rather than to a specific Buddhist school.

N. A. & S. S: Don’t you think Theravada or Sthaviravada is a sub-sector school under the Hinayana? There are around 18 sub schools under Hinayana, and Theravada is one among them. Theravada is sometimes called Southern Buddhism, while Mahayana is often referred to as Northern Buddhism, since it developed and spread widely in regions such as China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet.

Shekhar Sherpa: I think your observation is quite right. Please continue.

Nobida Anjum (with smile): What is the general view of a common Buddhist regarding women, Shri Sherpa? And what do the Buddhist Scriptures talk about women?

Shekhar Sherpa: There are controversies surrounding the Buddhist view of the position of women in society. Some scholars argue that in the beginning, Buddha himself was reluctant to include women as nuns or Bhikkhunis under his patronage, but later they were included as his disciples. However, Mahayana Buddhism observes the equal status of men and women in society. Coming from the hills of Darjeeling, I can say that women are in top positions of Buddhist Religious Institutions there, and there is no discrimination whatsoever.

N. A. & S. S: Do you think Buddhism actually promotes the well-being of an individual/community?

Shekhar Sherpa: In my opinion, Buddhism is more of a discipline than a religion. To abstain from worldly desires, abstain from hurting others, and abstain from violence is what Buddhism is all about ...

Nobida Anjum: So it means if an individual or a group can maintain that discipline, she or the group will achieve the wellness of her/ its being.

Shekhar Sherpa : Yes, Ma’am... exactly. Following these principles will lead to detachment from lust and greed and ultimately take one to the state of peace and well-being, as mentioned by you. This is, in fact, the pathway to attain Nirvana after death in Buddhism. Nirvana is a belief indeed.

N. A. & S. S: Can Nirvana be achieved in worldly life before death? What is your view, sir?

Shekhar Sherpa: Nirvana is believed to be a liberation from the state of suffering and chains of reincarnation. During one’s lifetime, sacrificing worldly desires and living an austere life may liberate one from suffering and pain.



N. A. & S. S: Let us be enlightened with the concept of Maitrayee Buddha.

Shekhar Sherpa: Frankly speaking, I don't have much knowledge about Maitrayee Buddha. Have just overheard that he will be the future reincarnation of Buddha, a belief similar to the second coming of Christ.

N. A. & S. S: Anyway, Shri Sherpa, then let us know your views regarding the Bodhisattvas. Is there any female Bodhisattva in the Buddhist practices?

Shekhar Sherpa: In Mahayana Buddhism, anyone sacrificing worldly pleasures and attaining enlightenment may be regarded as a Bodhisattva, provided that he or she prefers to reincarnate in order to help others get enlightened. Maa Tara or Tara Devi has been depicted as a female Bodhisattva. At present, there are some female Rinpoches or reincarnated lamas who are examples of living Bodhisattvas.

N. A. & S. S: Do you think Buddhism has much more therapeutic value than other religions?

Shekhar Sherpa: Saying this would be tantamount to partiality, Madam. But yes, Buddhism has many therapeutic values which have attracted the western world and Hollywood actors like Richard Gere, Steven Seagal, Sharon Stone, singer Tina Turner and Golf Player Tiger Woods to adopt Buddhism. In India, too, some personalities like AyushmanKhurana and AbhijeetSawant have adopted this religion.

Nobida Anjum: Do you think Buddhism is recognised in its teaching as a religion that is full of ecological wisdom? What are your views regarding its concerns towards sustainability and environmental protection?

Shekhar Sherpa : People have different perceptions and approaches towards religious dogmas, Madam, and the approach of scholars toward Buddhism is not an exception.

My blunt answer to this question would preferably be that I do not subscribe to the view of ecological wisdom. Regarding sustainability and environmental protection, scholars have figured out that Buddhism aims at shredding worldly desires, lust, greed and violence, and not to kill animals for food. Hence, a new theory has evolved that Buddhism believes in simple living, not killing, not harming the flora and fauna and hence preserving the ecological balance. But that is too extensive a research for a common man like me.

N. A. & S. S: Our next question is regarding Lamas. What role do they play in spreading and preserving the Buddha Dharma?

Shekhar Sherpa: Lamas are gurus who perform Buddhist rituals daily, whether it be some birth or death rituals or normal pujas at people's homes or in the gumba (temple). Some gumbas house small kids who come to learn Buddhist rituals and become a Lama. The senior lamas explain the concept of pujas and dharma to the disciples and the learning kids. This is one simple way in which Buddhist Lamas have preserved the Buddha Dharma so far.

So far as the spreading of Buddhism goes, it was in the past that kings and scholars helped spread Buddhism in the East and Southeast Asia.

Today, Buddhism stands more as a discipline than a religion, and there are no forces behind to spread it. People who have visited India and Nepal have often been attracted towards the discipline, and some of them even adopted it.

N. A. & S. S: Sir, we have found the "non" concepts as the central key factors to Buddhist doctrine, like non- attachment, *non-atta*, *nekkamma* etc. As we generally know, the prefix "non" is



usually used with a simple negative force to imply the absence of something. A non-Buddhist may take it as a philosophy that defies the existence of everything that has material value and is essential for a healthy living. What are your observations regarding this?

Shekhar Sherpa: The “non” concepts are key to Buddhism, which can invite a number of criticisms in the modern era. Nonviolence, non-attachment... these values may not work in the material world today, but then, these drawbacks have been faced by other religions as well.

It is true that the word “non” implies the absence of something that may affect our material life, but it does not simply mean that it defies the existence of everything that has material value. To be precise, austere religion cannot be followed by all. These principles are mostly followed by the gurus and some stoic people who are deeply absorbed in religion. For example, Lord Buddha left his wife and son in his quest for truth, though it was irresponsible as a husband and a father, and Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for the salvation of mankind, though he knew that he would be betrayed and killed. Hence, for a common man, all the “non” concepts of Buddhism do not imply compulsorily. It is for him to choose the austere path or just follow the basic values in his own terms as a discipline.

N. A. & S. S: Critics say, “If the goal of the Buddhist practitioner is to get off the wheel of birth and death in final extinction, or blowing out, what value does life hold?” Buddhism always taints/accuses *tanha* or desire as the root cause of suffering, controlling and resisting impulses, urges, and temptations or cravings for anything, is the sole purpose of a practicing Buddhist. A question arises in the critics’ minds: “Is Buddha a nihilist?”

Shekhar Sherpa: I think I’ve answered this question earlier for you. Please refer to where I talked about practicing lamas and stoic people who are deeply absorbed in religion. Not compulsory for any Buddhist to follow it hard and fast. Nihilists are pessimists, madam. They condemn each and every aspect of life... even basic principles and moral values of life. However, Buddhism does not condemn moral values and basic principles of life.

Nobida Anjum: Yes, exactly. I got your point of view. My scholarly reading is such that non-attachment (*Vairāgya* or *Upekkhā*) is an important idea in both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, but the two traditions understand and practice it in different ways. In the Theravada tradition, non-attachment mainly focuses on achieving individual liberation. The goal is to end suffering by overcoming craving or *tanha*. This is done through the practice of wisdom or *panna*, moral conduct or *sila*, and concentration or *samadhi*, which eventually lead to *nirvana*. Ignorance or *avijja* is seen as the main cause of attachment, which then creates desire and suffering. My observation is that in monastic life, non-attachment is expressed through *nekkamma* (renunciation) which is highly valued.

In Mahayana Buddhism, however, the idea of non-attachment goes beyond individual liberation. It is connected with the concept of emptiness and the bodhisattva path. A practitioner follows non-attachment not only to overcome suffering but also to help all living beings move toward enlightenment.

Shekhar: Exactly that.

N. A. & S. S: What are your views on religious tolerance? Please try to relate it to your working experiences also.

Shekhar Sherpa: Religious tolerance is one beautiful facet of the Indian subcontinent, where we live in harmony with numerous religions and cultures. As an individual, I have grown up



celebrating the festivals of different religions along with my friends and neighbours, so religious tolerance is in my veins. As for my fellow mates and acquaintances, I would just like to say that every religion has a good moral principle, and that is what we should focus on. The followers may interpret and follow wrong practices, but at the end of the day. The Almighty is one, and we should be able to identify the basic principle and goodness of each religion.

N. A. & S. S: We want to know about your experience as an Executive Officer in the Block Development Office, where you work with a lot of projects dealing with humanitarian social activities and where unfortunately you have to face huge political pressures. How can bureaucracy and in net peace be balanced?

Shekhar Sherpa: That is a really tough question. It is very hard to balance bureaucracy and inner peace. Once you enter this profession, it's like a blast furnace where your time management skills get vanished into oblivion. It's through service to the common public that you get a feel of that inner peace occasionally.

I had come here with a vision to serve the common people and the poor, but circumstances have confined me to some limits. Though I try my best to break convention and work directly for the poor, I still find myself short of it at the end of every day. However, I've kept on trying and will continue to do so...

Nobida Anjum: Thank you heartily for your brief and insightful answers. Stay always happy and serve us just like Lord Buddha (smile).

Conclusion: We can conclude by saying that the interview of Shrishekhar Sherpa is really a masterpiece that highlights how Buddhist values can meaningfully guide both social service and administrative responsibilities. As a social worker and a bureaucrat, he emphasises the importance of communal harmony, mindfulness, and moral responsibility in addressing social issues for the development of community. His experiences show that Buddhist principles such as non-attachment, non-violence, empathy, and a sense of collective well-being can influence more humane approach both to governance and community. By balancing professional duties with spiritual values, the interviewee demonstrates how Buddhist teachings can contribute to more compassionate public service and social development.

Article Received:15/03/2026

Article Accepted:23/03/2026

Published Online:30/03/2026

To Cite the Interview: *Anjum, Nobida and Sarkar, Sabuj.* "Beyond the Executive: An Interview with Shekhar Sherpa on Buddhism and Social Well-Being." *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VI, Issue-4, March, 2026, 04-09. www.literarycognizance.com

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

