

Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo: The Nation Builders

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Pranams to Yogeshwara Sri Krishna and Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo, whose birthdays happen to be in August. Today I plan to speak on Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo and their work on the outer level as well try to understand what they both came to manifest on earth. We see, Sri Krishna, declaring about his own birth in the Bhagavad Gita. Though I am the unborn, though I am imperishable in my self-existence, though I am the Lord of all existences, yet I stand upon my own Nature and I come into birth by my self-Maya. For whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right I am born from age to age. (CWSA 19: 146)

We have all heard about this great secret that Lord Sri Krishna reveals about himself. But I do not know if many of us have given a deeper thought to it! Normally, we think that the divine incarnates for upholding the dharma, as is said by Sri Krishna, but Sri Aurobindo, has a different interpretation. He says that upholding of the dharma cannot be the sole mission of the coming of Avatar on earth. In fact, Sri Aurobindo explains that there are two aspects of the descent of the Avatar. One, a descent, the other an ascent. Descent is the birth of God in humanity and ascent is the birth of man into Godhead. Now, we see that there are two reverse movements, the descent and the ascent. And this second part is as much important for all of us because that's how the Lord, the Avatar, the incarnate, comes very close to the human beings.

In fact, "If there were not this rising of man into the Godhead to be helped by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarhood for the sake of the dharma would be an otiose phenomenon",

(Ibid: 148-149) writes Sri Aurobindo. He argues that if it is just a question of delivering a new dharma, it could be done by great men or movements or sages or religious teachers. The Avatar need not descend into the human body, into the physical. So, what is important is that the Avatar comes also for the purpose of the birth of man into the Godhead. So, when he descends there are different roles he plays. He is not just a religious or a spiritual leader but also "the political leader, the great educationist, the regenerator of society, the captain of cooperative industry, with the soul of the poet, scholar and artist." (CWSA 8: 249). In the light of this explanation, we will now analyse Lord Krishna's aspect as a political leader and see how he attempted to take human society to greater heights.

When we speak of the human society, we know that there are five different stages in its evolution. Primarily, we are only the family formed around – the individual, then comes the clan and the nation followed by the human collectivity. These are the five stages of human evolution. In the light of this, what we see is that in ancient India, we had well established and strong clans. And then there was a kind of an obstruction or a blockade, when there was the need of the clans emerging into a nation. They were a big impediment because "Each of these different clans either claimed descent from a common ancestor, or even though growing out of different families was accepted as born of a single ancestry". (Bengali Writings: 138) There was a time when the powerful clans like Kurus or Panchala or the Koshala or the Magadha ruled this country for centuries. Now, the problem was that they became so very powerful in themselves, that they did not allow the next step in evolution – that is, the creation of a nation.

They became very rigid and parochial and did not allow any changes in their ancestral traditions. That was the big problem in the times of Sri Krishna the whole of India could not become

one single big nation though (there prevailed a common culture). When we talk about Bharat's bygone centuries, we speak not of a country but of a common civilization, a common sanatana dharma. Relationships like marriages or some festivals etc. were common, but we did not have a geographical unit called nation as such. As we understand, the making of a nation was to be the next step in the evolution of a society. This was Sri Krishna's political objective, apart from the role of an Avatar: to build a great single nation called Bharatvarsha.

Here the main obstacle, as we have already said, was the proud and powerful family of the Kurus. We don't have to get into the history of the Kurus as we are well aware of their disputes and problems. But they had a long "hegemony". That is, a position of pre-eminence and leadership among a number of independent peoples of equal status – to that the Kurus had an ancestral right. As long as the pride and power of this people remained intact, unity would never be established in India. Sri Krishna came to realise this. (Bengali Writings: 139)

Sri Krishna took up nation-building as one of the most important works of his time. If he had to achieve the next evolutionary step in the collective living, that of a group consciousness beyond the clan consciousness, then it was but an absolute necessity that the Kauravas had to be removed. There was no other choice. But then, Sri Krishna did not go about executing his plan immediately. He was a very patient politician and he respected the law of the country.

So he followed the law and chose Yuddhisthira for the kingship. Although, left to himself, he might have given the kingdom to Arjuna. But, according to the custom of that time, the eldest of the family had to be given the crown. Yudhishtira, by himself was eligible for the kingship by being a very honest, truthful and wise person. Indeed, he was the rightful claimant. That is why, the first plan executed by Sri Krishna was to

install him as the king. He advised Yudhishtira to take up the Ashvamedha yajna by which an emperor gains power and support of all the kingdoms and could establish himself as the king of all. But then, there was a great defect in this rule. That means an emperor could be there for a while, but as soon as he died, the subordinates, the other kings, kingdoms would collapse and the empire would fall apart. Hence, it was a temporary arrangement. So, Sri Krishna thought that if he could establish Yuddhishtira through the Aswamedha yajna, this too will fail after a certain number of years. Hence, that was not the best solution!

Being one of the greatest revolutionists of the age, he realised that unless and until he brought in a new policy, a new way of dealing with this Kurus, the old rules of the game, might not work. The imminent next yuga was that of the Kaliyuga. And in the Kaliyuga, the rule of the Dwapara yuga will not work. That means the moral rules and ideals of that yuga cannot be implemented in the Kaliyuga.

So, he decided to use the statecraft suitable in Kaliyuga. What does it mean? The Kaliyuga emphasizes on war and strife, therefore, he directed his efforts towards making the future of the empire, free of obstacles using war as a medium. It is easy to say that, but we also understand that with the coming of the Kaliyuga, the new principle of war was set forth. And, we see that till today, though centuries have gone by, this method of war and strife remain the predominant mould of collective life. So Sri Krishna's plan for realising one nation, one India had to come by war. This is how the politician in him, the righteous person, the great man of law, changed his approach which resulted in the inevitable war. That's why it is said that Kurukshetra war is the result of Sri Krishna's policy. This is something very difficult for some of us to accept, but he is surely the designer of the Kurukshetra for achieving a higher step in evolution.

Personally, he may not have been against the Kauravas; he had nothing to do with importance of this clan or that clan. But any clan that stood against this new principle of a greater unity of India had to be destroyed. Of course, he did have the intention of trying out one more method, that of peace. But that also did not succeed. So what we see is that having tried out several different ways of approach, including that of peace, when all of them failed, Sri Krishna had no choice but to work towards the Kurukshetra.

In this Kurukshetra, he chose Arjuna as his instrument. And if Arjuna had really collapsed, as he did in the beginning, what would have happened? That was a crucial moment, not only for Arjuna, also for Sri Krishna because he was planning to win this war. It is as if, if this war was not fought by Arjuna, as his disciple, the whole plan of Sri Krishna would have come to a naught, and then the great evil of the Kauravas would have forever overtaken the future of the Bharatvarsha. That's why, Sri Krishna himself says that Arjuna's role was crucial, because had he not done his part, the whole history of India would have been quite different today. That's why Sri Krishna takes utmost pain and trouble to convince Arjuna to fight, because this was to be the very turning point in the history of the land. And of course, we see there are some critics who say – what about the immense destruction in the Kurukshetra war? Millions of people were killed, thousands of wives became widows, children became fatherless – was such a war really the plan of Sri Krishna? It is difficult to accept.

It turns out to be a very logical question. However, can this question be answered in the light of what we are discussing? We have to look at the events and we have to understand things on a deeper level: a nation cannot be great if it is founded solely on the strength of the Kshatriyas. This is a very important point to consider in order to appreciate the Kurukshetra war. All the fourfold powers of the four orders of society form the basis of

a country's greatness. However great a nation maybe, just one clan, one caste cannot make up for the four castes or the four levels of the society – the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishya and the Sudras. All of them have to come together and flourish; that would be the true greatness of a country. Sri Krishna feels that one cannot allow any one class to dominate and rule the country. Basically, there has to be both the castes helping each other – the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The Sattwic power of the Brahmins keep alive the Rajasic Kshatriya; if the Kshatriyas are bereft of Brahmin's sattwic strength, they turn brutal and uncontrollable. This has been the main problem. Even the wisdom of great sages like Bhishma Pitamah could not control the Kauravas, nor the asuric nature of the Kshatriyas on the Kaurava's side.

Therefore, Lord Krishna had to really deal directly with the Kshatriyas because, as Sri Aurobindo notes here;

In the age of the Mahabharata the earth was groaning under the load of titanic power. Neither before nor after, was there in India such an outbreak of strong and powerful and violent Kshatriya power, but there was little chance of that terrible power being turned to good purpose. Those who were the vehicles of this power were all of them of an asuric nature, vanity and pride, selfishness and self-will. (Bengali Writings: 148)

So we see that from the point of evolution, this period of Mahabharata was really one of those periods when the earth was groaning under the load of the Titanic power. This was the age when Sri Krishna descended in order to destroy this Titanic asuric power, which was full of vanity and pride and selfishness.

Sri Aurobindo warned that without the war, "India would have fallen prematurely into the hands of the barbarian". (Bengali Writings: 148) It was after two thousand five years that the first successful invasion of barbarians could reach on the other side of the Indus. Thus, had not Kurukshetra war taken place, the

barbarians would have attacked India long many years ago and India would not be the country that it is today.

To recapitulate all that we have discussed - why was Kurukshetra war so important? First, because the Kauravas were an obstacle in the establishment of the Dharma. And second, if the asuric forces had not been wiped off, the new balance could not have been established. A new balance means – the balance between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. If this balance was not established, India would have been swept away by the barbarians. So, we have to see that although there has been the great destruction, it was a destruction meant for the future good of the country. That means India got rid of a very evil asuric force, which would have really dominated our country killing her soul and culture. And here, it is noted, that because of this renewed balance established by Sri Krishna that there was a possibility of the kingdoms of Chandragupta or Pushya Mitra, Samudra Gupta, Vikramaaditya, Sangham Singha, Pratap, Raja Sangha, Shivaji – all these galaxy of mighty warriors and rulers. They possess the true Kshatriya power, not the power of egoism and selfishness, like the Kauravas. What Sri Krishna establishes is a new Kshatriya power of control of the Brahmins and their great wisdom.

Therefore, now we understand what a great role Sri Krishna had played by destroying the Kauravas. Well, the basic thing we have to understand is that although in modern times we criticise Sri Krishna for the battle of Kurukshetra, he did not extinguish the Kshatriya power in India in the bloodbath of Kurukshetra. On the contrary, by destroying the Titanic power he saved both the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. And this is where we see Sri Krishna's role becoming prominent. He gave our country a future and brought about the first collective consciousness of India as a nation. Such an act could have been undertaken only by an Avatar.

Well, whatever the criticism, Sri Aurobindo says that God never comes to destroy humanity. So we should never criticise Kurukshetra as something negative that happened in India's history. So he says, "God never descended on earth to bring about a downfall. The Incarnation is for saving the Law, the world and men. Particularly in the Kali age does God incarnate Himself in full. The reason is that in Kali there is the greatest danger of man's downfall, there is a natural increase of unrighteousness." (Bengali Writings: 149) So, we understand the role played by Sri Krishna as a political figure. Well, we can discuss about Sri Krishna's many aspects but this was the most prominent aspect apart from his being the Avatar. On the physical level, he was a political genius who brought in for the first time the consciousness of one single country Bharat.

Well, what then happened between the age of Sri Krishna and that of Sri Aurobindo? India experienced golden periods of cultural peaks as also despicable periods of utter stagnation. This is a long history which we cannot now go into, but I am sure the purport will be clear for all.

The spirit and ideals of India had come to be confined in a mould which, however beautiful, was too narrow and slender to bear the mighty burden of our future. When that happens, the mould has to be broken and even the ideal lost for a while, in order to be recovered free of constraint and limitation. (CWSA 8: 247)

There was a beautiful period, but slowly the great creative aspect of Indian vitality, of the Indian mind started waning. In fact, in one of his books Sri Aurobindo would explain that because of the thousands of years of creativity, there was a kind of fatigue that came over our country. This fatigue could not be stopped. There set in the conventional age, a rigid mould of customs and ideas which had to be broken. For that, Nature chose a very easy means – it brought in the English,

the British to occupy India. The work of re-moulding India was best suited for the British. Why? Because, the British have a stubborn individuality, and a great streak of commercialism and materialism in them. Therefore, they were chosen by Nature for their unrivalled efficiency and skill to organize an individualistic and materialistic democracy.

However ugly and unacceptable the reign of the Britishers in India, we have to accept that from the point of view of evolution it was an inevitable step. We see that we had in the beginning, the Brahminic age, followed by the Kshatriya age and then we had this age of the Vaishyas where commercialism, individualism and other skills, came to the forefront of our culture. That means, on the material plane, an aspect of Mahalakshmi who brings in a balance and an equal distribution of wealth was ushered in India. So that is what had happened with the coming of the colonialists. But then, the most important thing is that they brought about the first steps of democracy which was important for our country. Sri Aurobindo writes that, for the future of humanity true democracy is required. We have got to perhaps get rid of individualism and materialism. And democracy is what we are left with. We should now propagate democracy in our own light not try to imitate the West. Basically, democracy is not necessarily a Western concept. It may be so politically, but from the point of view of an ideal, we in India, already had this idea of democracy.

India was passing through this stage and slowly the freedom movement set in our country. Here begins a new chapter, when the country was gearing up for a new phase in its life. It is at this revolutionary juncture when India was breaking the shackles of Conventionalism and taking a new form of liberty, equality and fraternity, that Sri Aurobindo came upon the rising wave of Indian revolutionary spirit. Like Sri Krishna, Sri Aurobindo too was a Yogeshwara, a master of yoga. He had launched himself

on the yoga of self-perfection, on the advice and guidance of Sri Krishna. There is a direct link between Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo. We see Sri Krishna himself advising Sri Aurobindo about his yoga, about his work and what he should be doing for the freedom of the country. And it was Sri Krishna, who had placed the Gita in his hands, when Sri Aurobindo was in the Alipore jail in 1907. Sri Aurobindo says, in his famous Uttarpara speech – "His [Sri Krishna's] strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhan of the Gita". (CWSA 8: 5)

Their connectivity is very obvious. So Sri Aurobindo starts his life, his political and yogic life, on the lines given by Sri Krishna himself. That is why, he says, I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita and practiced it in the jail: "I was not only to understand intellectually, but to realize what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna". Let us analyse these words closely – intellectually, we may try to understand here and there but then, Sri Aurobindo says, he realised:

...what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. (CWSA 8: 5-6)

Inner realisation may be a long way but the work of the ideal divine worker –detachment, equality, samata – all of that he realised right in the prison. Even the question of "sarva- dharmān parityajya mām ekam śharanam vraja" (Bhagavad Gita, Ch.18, Ver-66) was really practiced and realised in the jail itself. And all those realisations within one year! That is what gave Sri Aurobindo the strength to do the work that he did after coming out of the jail. And then there was the question of being a faithful servant in

His hands. Those of us who have read Sri Aurobindo's life know very well as to how he really followed the advice of Sri Krishna. When Sri Krishna told him to go to Chandannagore, he left all his works and within ten minutes he was at the ghat to catch a boat to Chandannagore. Then again, when Sri Krishna says 'Go to Pondicherry,' Sri Aurobindo left everything and proceeded. So, every time he was a faithful instrument in the hands of the Lord. That is why we say Sri Aurobindo realised the entire yoga of the Gita. And that too directly under the instructions of Sri Krishna himself. So what more do we want? What is more wonderful is, long before he had received this instruction from Sri Krishna in the Alipore jail, he had written to his wife, I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly...I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not a physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or a gun, but with the power of knowledge...God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. (Bengali Writings: 352-353)

Here was a person who believed that he had the strength to uplift this fallen race. Yes of course fallen during the times of the British – we were at our lowest because centuries of serfdom had broken our back, our confidence, we had no faith in our own culture. That is why he uses these words 'fallen race'. But then through what means? "Not Kshatriyahood, not the power of the soul, or the gun, but the power of knowledge." This reminds us exactly what Sri Krishna himself had done in the Bhagavad Gita, during the Kurukshetra war when the Kshatriyas had lost their inner values. It is the wisdom, the knowledge, that Sri Krishna used to awaken the Kshatriyahood.

Similarly, the same means were applied by Sri Aurobindo – the power of the Brahman, the 'Brahma teja', as it is called. And when he returned to the Kshetra, the Indian freedom struggle, he leaped into the movement with the mantra of 'Vande Mataram'. So these are the two things that we should

remember. He had a great mantra in his hand, "Vande Mataram" and he had a great Yantra – the journal of 'Bande Mataram'. Hence, with these two things, he leaped into the fray. Long before, it was the Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna, leading the war; now it was the freedom of the country being led by Sri Aurobindo. He provided the vision of independent India with which he awoke in the masses the spirit of nationalism. He gave the call for "Purna Swaraj" – the goal of the whole freedom movement. He not only gave the vision but he gave also the practical operational tool. What is important is that he gave us the vision of why India should be free: is it only for the sake of its own freedom like many other nations which have become free from their colonial despots? No, not at all. India's Independence has a deeper meaning. Her freedom is not only for herself, but for the whole world and humanity.

It is because of this great spiritual vision that today we all say 'India will be the guru of the world'. But it is not an easy task. He has written volumes of articles arousing the Indians to understand and distinguish and discriminate between who we are and the foreigners. He wrote about their true culture, the aim of their life etc. Perhaps, in the time of Sri Krishna it was easy to arouse the dormant section because there was only one section of people called the 'Kshatriyas' who were to be transformed. But, now the times have changed – it is now the spirit of democracy which believes in, the rule of by the people, by the people, for the people. Therefore, the whole freedom movement had to be done with the help of the people and by the people.

Hence, here was a greater task – to awaken the masses, not a class of people, this party or that party, nor the elitists. Now the country had to demand 'Poorna Swaraj' on the grassroot level. And for that work, to start that work, Sri Aurobindo went to Bengal. That's because Bengal was the one state where people

had almost forgotten their own culture. They were imitating the West blindly. And so that was the real "Kurukshehra"; that was the place where the first awakening had to take place!

Here was a person who had given both the Brahmatej as well as the Kshatriya power, the way to act under the given circumstances. His revolution was similar to that of Sri Krishna who believed that we have to face the enemy up front, and not succumb and submit ourselves to the dark forces. Sri Aurobindo was the Gita yogin and the Gita warrior, he preferred facing the enemy and to give in submission of satyagraha. And then, suddenly

Sri Aurobindo left Bengal and withdrew to Pondicherry. Most people do not understand the deeper reason for this withdrawal. Here is Aurobindo's own explanation.

As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured. The eventual independence of India was assured by the march of Forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. (CWSA 36: 64)

Having realised this – the pressure of international events – Sri Aurobindo felt that there would be no need of armed resurrection, insurrection, and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause. The revolutionary spirit that was aroused by him would be sustained. Most important, he realised that his own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Here was a person who, like Arjuna, did not want to run away from the battle of Kurukshehra. He had done the work apportioned to him and he felt that he cannot be wasting his energies to lead the independence movement which would be accomplished by

others in the given time. He had foreseen that the leaders who would come after him would take more or less the same path. And all of those efforts would finally culminate in the freedom of the country.

However, when the independence of India came, it was not along the lines he had dreamt about. In his address on the 15th of August 1947, he wrote that one of his dreams was to see India free and united. Unfortunately, India was free but not united. Sri Aurobindo did not accept that division had settled forever. This, I think, the countrymen, the younger generation, especially should know this truth as seen by a great visionary. Sri Aurobindo did not accept this division between India and Pakistan and other smaller nations as settled forever. He said that the partition must and will go. And not only that, even he foresaw that there would be a reunion of Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan in a new form of a confederation.

Like Sri Krishna, who had tried to build a united Bharat, here was another "politician" who had worked for a free and united India. Sri Aurobindo had taken a further step in his political agenda: to work for a united world. In this march towards its union the world may have to face many difficulties, and even catastrophies may intervene, writes Sri Aurobindo, "But the final result is sure". "...human imbecility and stupid selfishness may delay but will not cancel it." In one letter he also wrote: "I've never known any will of mine for any major event in the conduct of the world affairs to fail in the end." (CWSA 35: 26) So this possibility of human unity, with the outer form of a world union may take time, because the world forces are trying to destroy the world and disunite it. But here is a man who has seen its success and has emphasised that his foresight will not fail. This is his deep prophecy. Besides getting freedom for India,

Sri Aurobindo wanted to achieve for humanity freedom from slavery and bondage to ignorance.

Then for achieving the next step of human unity, a new power, a greater power, a greater consciousness unheard of in human annals had to be brought in. And that is what he calls the Supramental consciousness. All that the past had given him through his realisations, he utilised for the freedom of our country, and all that he needed for the human unity was a new power which he manifested, which he brought down with his intense tapasya in Pondicherry.

By initiating the work towards the next step in human evolution – the step towards world union. No wonder, Sri Aurobindo told one of his disciples that the work of Sri Krishna is being continued by him in the Ashram in Pondicherry. He is continuing that work both on the physical and spiritual levels. On the physical level, we see the continuation of his work: from the freedom of a country to the freedom of humanity. On the spiritual level, we know that Sri Krishna had established a new Yuga-dharma, the Overmental consciousness whereas Sri Aurobindo established a new step in earth's evolution. So, we see that there is a close relationship not only between their outer work but also in their consciousness. Beyond the mind there is the Overmental consciousness, which is the range and realm and possession of Lord Krishna. Beyond the Overmental consciousness, there is a Supramental consciousness of which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the harbingers. So there is a continuum from Sri Krishna to Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, in this month, I wanted to offer my obeisance, my pranams to Yogeshwara Krishna and to Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo, who seem to be the same soul in different forms in different ages!
