

The Concept of Krishna in Indian Psyche: A Study in the Light of Jung's Collective Unconsciousness

Dr Mridusmita Mahanta

Associate Professor, Dept. Of English, Sonapur College

Abstract

The very utterance of the word Krishna' sparks the psyche of the people who belong to the culture with the conscience of Krishna ideology. The term 'Krishna', in this context, refers to the character found in the Indian epic the Mahabharata depicted as one who turns out to be the driving force for winning the battle of righteousness over evil. The psychological construct of 'Krishna' holds the embodiment of an oriented archetype that runs through the veins of the people concerned. The paper will focus on how Carl Jung's idea of 'collective unconsciousness' lays the foundation for the growth of individual conscience with the backdrop of psychic association to the concept of Krishna. Krishna is the guiding spirit to lead a mentally healthy life.

The identification of Krishna as a deity is worshipped as the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu in India. This incarnation of Vishnu is more humanized than other incarnations. So, the association of Krishna in the collective psyche paves the way enroute an orientation towards a social order.

As far as the question of Indian context is concerned Krishna is found to have rooted in the Indian psyche in two periods of his life time viz. the childhood and the adulthood of Krishna. The construct of 'adult Krishna' in the Indian mindset represents a collective manifestation and thereby generating an unconscious effort to internalize 'the sixth sense' which is considered to be the self-mentoring spirit for every individual.

The study will be conducted with the available secondary information collected from the text where Krishna as a character is found to have engaged in discourse with argument for the journey towards righteousness in establishing a balanced psychic order.

We are not human beings having spiritual experience

We are spiritual beings having human experience.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The very word *Krishna* evokes a multi-directional response from both the addresser and addressee in a dialogic context. 'Krishna' the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu is a dearly figure for all Indians across the space and time. Mere utterance of the term 'Krishna' rarely evokes any sense deep religious connotation. The present study refers to the character of Krishna in the narrative of the Indian epic *the Mahabharata* and hence including *Srimadbhagawatgeeta*. Questions may be raised whether the psychological construct of the concept of Krishna emerges out of the reading of the narrative or it has been running in the unconscious of the concerned group as a form of inherited knowledge. Ambiguity arises about people's conceptualising of Krishna as a worshiping deity or Krishna's image as residing in the heart

of people. Krishna is a multifaceted character reminding every human across ages the presence within each heart. This paper

Krishna's saga appears in a variety of narratives ranging from the epics and puranas to folk stories of different languages in India. Every Indian child is drawn to Krishna's miraculous childhood activities that insert a sense of supra capability inherent in the unconscious state of mind. The narratives on *Bala Krishna* i.e. child Krishna, appeared in a variety of art forms, imaginatively and poetically represents a power irrespective of the different social classes to whichever the child belongs. It opens up a view of childhood in the Indian context and outside the Eurocentric experience. The most popular image of Krishna with blinking eyes and chubby cheek, with his hands in the earthen pot of churned butter, the face smeared with the butter not only wins the heart but also provides a sense of locating oneself near to divinity. For letting children acquaint with the idea of a greater power, the image of Bala Krishna works in a pragmatic way. Jane H Sahi in his article "Bala Krishna: A Paradigm of Childhood Relevant to the Present Time" shows his concern over the dominant view of childhood that is rooted in linear and universalised world view. The linear world view is bound by historical consciousness. The children are under pressure to perform according to the trajectories of societal expectation. Sahi observes:

... the vast majority of children in the Indian context are under pressure to conform within a tightly structured hierarchical society with little space for negotiation or deviance either at school or at home, on the other hand, there is still a visible counter cultural utopia of the child in the form of Krishna, Bala Krishna, who mocks authority and turns the social order upside down. (2018)

Considering the idea of Krishna as imbibed in the heart of the adult the unconscious reaches out to the knowledge system that are exhibited through a series of narratives both oral and written beginning from the epic to folk narratives till the present literary texts. Culture exists in community context. An individual with Cultural Quotient (CQ) performs better in encountering the pluses and minuses of life. With the growth of an individual the consciousness keeps on building up with the help of an unconscious awareness towards the socio-psychological milieu. The relation between the cosmos and the individual is best understood with the help of a knowledge system that runs through both resources inherent in a culture.

Concentrating on Indian Knowledge System, it refers to a structured and systematic approach to transmit knowledge regarding the age-old richness of the nation across generation. The very idea of transmitting knowledge rather than conceiving it merely a tradition requires study from the root sources of wisdom. The core concepts of IKS being knowledge i.e. *jnana*, Science i.e. *bijnana* and philosophy of life i.e. *darshana* run in the hearts of a conscious Indian through a sequence of narration both in the oral and written form. Its implication in the growth of the inner thought of an individual provides the foundation of a placid study on the unconscious of the human mind. Such a study was developed by the renowned Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) through his theory of personality. The focus on the interplay between conscious and unconscious mind, universal archetype, the process of individuation, psychological types mark a paradigm shift in the field of psycho analytical study of the era. Various aspects of personality are studied to achieve self-realisation and encompass universal and individual dynamics. Going by Jung's terminology, the psyche is made up of ego, personal unconscious and collective unconscious. The ego representing conscious comprises of thought, memory and emotions of a person is fundamentally considered to be responsible for the feeling of identity as well as the continuity or discontinuity of the feeling. Personal unconscious refers to the temporarily forgotten information and repressed memories. Collective unconscious is an inherent shared and unconscious knowledge system and experiences emerged out of being a member of a group. The same is expressed through universal symbols

and archetypes that are essential to all human cultures. Archetypes, according to Carl Jung, are universal thought forms that guide an individual; in the words of Christian Roesler (2022) they structure and channel emotion.

A few representative archetypes are considered to mention here to have an overview of the thought of commonality and shared experiences independent of culture. The persona, the self, the shadow, the hero, the innocent, the ruler, the magician, the animus dwell the universe of the archetype. Jungian archetypes are defined as images and themes that derive from the collective unconscious, as proposed by Carl Jung. Archetypes have universal meanings across cultures and may show up in dreams, literature, art, or religion. They manifest in narratives, myths, fairy tales, fairy tales. Notwithstanding the conscious effort to learn these narratives, the social discourse itself install the sense of identifying one with the knowledge system inherent in the social memory. Jung expressed:

The term archetype is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg, the bird builds its nest, a certain kind of wasp stings the motor ganglion of the caterpillar, and eels find their way to the Bermudas. In other words, it is a “pattern of behaviour”. This aspect of the archetype, the purely biological one, is the proper concern of scientific psychology’. (1921)

Archetypes abound in contemporary art forms, for example, films, music, cartoons, videogames, fabric patterns etc. it defines the projection of collective unconscious that dominates the thought process which share the mass social attitude with the help of common experiences and thereby reflecting individual's response to the events of the world as a member of a social group. This naïve attempt to peep into the concept of Krishna in consonance with Jung's collective unconscious aims to channelise the stream of consciousness into the action of the world. The 12th chapter of *Madbhagawatgeeta* reiterates the need of conscious effort of an individual to surrender the self to Krishna.

mayyeva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṃ niveśaya
nivasiṣyasi mayyeva ata ūrdhvaṃ na saṁśayaḥ 12-8

(Fix your mind on Me only, place your intellect in Me; then, (thereafter) you shall, no doubt, live in Me alone.)

The association of Jung's archetypes of self and hero works represents the lifelong process of self-realization and self-understanding. The understanding is about becoming the person that one innately means to be, realizing and fulfilling the unique potential. Carl S Pearson in his noteworthy work *Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help us Find Ourselves and Transform the World* comments on the archetype of hero through the following words:

Everyone who takes a journey is already a hero. The rewards of self-discovery is great... The inner guides are archetypes that have been with us since the dawn of time. Because the guides are truly archetypal, and has reside as energy within the unconscious psychological life of all people everywhere, both inside and outside the individual human soul. They live in us, but even more importantly, we live in them. (2012)

Krishna's wisdom remains a guiding light, illuminating the path of righteousness and spiritual growth. By a cognitive process, his teachings are to be applied to our lives, we can navigate challenges with clarity, make informed decisions, and lead a life rooted in purpose, integrity, and love for the selfhood. Just as Arjuna found solace and guidance in Krishna's words, so too can we find direction and solace in the enduring wisdom of Indian Knowledge System. Awareness about the knowledge system forms the foundation for personality development. Personality may be described as cognitive and non-cognitive

behaviours of the individual for his development regarding knowing, understanding and applying the knowledge in the journey of life. Many social scientists, psychologists, philosophers, thinkers, educators, educationists and educational concerns believe that personality is based on mind and heart that is ability to develop body, mind and heart and value body, mind and heart, while they devalue spirit. The relation between the personality and its development is what constitute “psycho-social-cultural structure” which is the dominant factor for human personality. So, what is the relationship between personality and body, mind, heart and spirit? Murray (1938) points that

The term personality has been reserved for the hypothetical structure of mind, the consistent establishment and processes of which are manifested over and over again in the internal and external proceedings which constitutes a person's life. Human personality is understood in terms of needs and it defines the concept of needs as a “hypothetical process, the occurrence of which is imagined in order to account for certain objective and subjective facts. It is a ‘theoretical construct’ which is inferred in order to account for human behaviour.

This paper journeys through the character of Krishna as an individual feels Krishna's presence as own insight. The psychological construct of ‘*Krishna*’ holds the embodiment of an oriented archetype that runs through the veins of the people concerned. No fallacy will be observed if the cognition of Krishna is synonymised with the sixth sense. The deciphering of the sixth sense in the understanding echo of the universe lands an individual as well as a group in a state of cognition. Does it help to understand Krishna philosophy in a pragmatic way in context with the humdrum of day-to-day life?

Human life since the time of its emergence is never realised as a bed of roses. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a British philosopher and essayist proposed great reformation in the process of knowledge for the advancement of thinking in the line of empiricism. Empirical knowledge demands inner processing of human mind. The basic need for knowledge is meant to utilise for the benefit of life and for an honest governance of a self-image. When considered from Jungian psychoanalytical concept, such basic knowledge of self-governance resides in collective unconscious. The collective unconscious helps an individual to retrospect experiences in terms of archetypes that ran in the psyche of all the members in a group. Mirabai, the noted mystic poet in her poem ‘Nothing is Really Mine Except Krishna’ finds her ultimate shelter and solace with Krishna :

‘Mira is absorbed in contemplation with Krishna

She is with God and all is well!

The dominant feeling is the presence of a semi-physical semi-spiritual existence of a concept named Krishna to whom we can talk, we can ask for answers for our queries of life, as Arjuna does to Krishna in the discourse of the Mahabharata. the eternal presence of Krishna in the psyche can best be explained by Jung's idea of individuation referring to a process in which incorporation takes place between the conscious and the unconscious mind. The narratives regarding Krishna are found to have explained the dichotomy between these two states of mind. It generates a trust that builds up the motivation for a process of self-mentoring phenomena. This state of mind is guided by the hero archetype of Jung as is manifested in the character of Krishna. The archetypal motif of a hero is based on overcoming obstacles and achieving certain goals. The hero archetypal goal is a metaphor for one's true feelings and unique potential. Here, in the context of understanding Krishna , the collective unconscious present inherently in every individual implies a sense of greater guidance, the name we give is Krishna.

References

1. Copley, Laura. 12 *Jungian Archetypes: The Foundation of Personality*. PositivePsychology.com, 2024.
2. Murray, Henry Alexander. *Exploration of Personality: A Clinical and Experimental Study of Fifty Men of College Age*. Havard University: OUP, 1938.
3. Pearson, Carl S. *Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves*. Herper Collins. 2012.
4. Roesler, Christian. *C G Jung's Archetype Concept: Theory, Research and Application*. Routledge, New York, 2022
5. Sahi, Jane H. "Bala Krishna: A Paradigm of Childhood Relevant to the Present Time". Saraswathi, T. S. Shailaja Menon, Ankur Madan. (Ed.) *Childhoods in India: Tradition, Trends and Transformation*. New York: Routledge, 2018