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Sri Aurobindo's Discourse of Political Resistance in "Conversations of the Dead"

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The patriot who offers advice to a great nation in an era of change and turmoil, should be very confident that he has something worth saying before he ventures to speak; but if he can really put some new aspect on a momentous question or emphasize any side of it that has not been clearly understood, it is his bounden duty, however obscure he may be, to ventilate it.

-Sri Aurobindo

I

Sri Aurobindo's "Conversations of the Dead" includes five small pieces that he wrote originally for *Karmayogin* in 1909-10 but they were published separately between 1909 and 1923 in *Karmayogin* and *Standard Bearer*. They are the fictional/imaginary conversations among the dead who lived during the ancient, medieval and modern periods of history. The personas are mythical as well as historical. Further, these dead belong to different countries like Iran, Italy, India, England and Romania. Sri Aurobindo seems to have looked at his the then present time (the time of their publication) through the eyes of these gone generations, who speak with their respective countries in their minds but their ideas and concerns have metaphorical relevance to the then India also. The personas in their conversations in each piece represent the then prevailing disagreement among Indians, in particular, the Indian leaders. Often, they hold polemically opposite views, in spite of the fact that they all loved their countries. They wanted to do something for their countries, as they were not happy with the conditions of their countries at the time of their conversation.

These "Conversations" reveal Sri Aurobindo's patriotic concerns, particularly when he was aware of the nation passing through an era of change and turmoil. He wanted to provide a direction to the nation and alert itself against the challenges then. He wanted to awaken the feelings of patriotism amongst the Indians and, at the same time, wanted them to be careful and cautious in their endeavours. He felt that they should not be carried away just emotionally or intellectually in wrong direction. Or, they should not be too much obsessed with what they subjectively believed to be the truth. He wanted them, and particularly the then leaders, to take a holistic, comprehensive and unbiased view of the challenges and take an appropriate course of action to face them.



Aurobindo was well aware of the ambivalence in the attitudes of the compatriots in the first quarter of the 20th century. He did not doubt the integrity of any leader, but certainly, he had some questions regarding their attitudes to many crucial matters, as they were to determine the foundation of the independent India. Perhaps, it was for this reason that he had chosen to write these metaphorically significant conversations. Moreover, in this regard, these conversations stand for various prominent nationalist attitudes among the then Indians.

II

Sri Aurobindo was a patriot, a nationalist and a great humanist. Patriotism, nationalism and humanism were the three most prominent ingredients of his vision. Hence, they are essentially found in all of his writings. Like all the great leaders anywhere in the world, he also had a bifocal vision. His immediate aim was the freedom of the nation, Mother India; while his ultimate aim was to establish a nobler and an ideal world that would be a good, harmonious and trouble-free. When India attained its independence, Sri Aurobindo's immediate aim came to be fulfilled. On that occasion, he mentioned in his message (on 15th August, 1947) that it was the end of an old era and beginning of a new age for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. He strongly believed that India's independence and prosperity were a precondition for a better world. He stated in the message,

On this day, I can watch almost all the world movements, which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. (81)

Sri Aurobindo has shared several of his dreams in this message. He had dreamed of a free and united India. Secondly, he had dreamed of India's resurgence and liberation and also a role of the Asian countries in the progress of the human civilization. Thirdly, he had visualized a world union for a better, brighter and nobler life for the humankind. Lastly and most importantly, he had dreamed of one-step forward in the evolution i.e. he had visualized the growth of the spirit and inner consciousness. One must observe here that though he had given his message late in 1947, his vision was the same even when he was so young. This is possible to see in his "Conversations of the Dead", which he wrote in 1909-1910.



It is possible to read all the five pieces forming the parts of “Conversations of the Dead” in a sequence, though they were published separately over a period. “Dinshah-Perizade” was published in *Karmayogin* on 12th February 1910. “Turiu-Uriu” was also published in the same magazine on 19th February, 1910. The three other conversations were published in *Standard Bearer*. “Mazzini-Cavour-Garibaldi” was published on 7th November 1920, “Shivaji-Jai Singh” on 26th December 1920 and “Littleton-Percival” was published on 29th May 1923 as well as on 5th June 1923. Sri Aurobindo’s message of life can be easily traced in these pieces, when read as a single whole. The five conversations form a unit revealing a gradual unfoldment of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of life.

III

Sri Aurobindo begins by championing the cause of patriotism and one’s love for one’s motherland. The first conversation is between two mythical Iranian/Persian characters Dinshah and Perizade, who lived in Iran two thousand years ago. After their death, they reside in Mazinderan i.e. the heaven. Even after two thousand years in Mazinderan with all comforts there, Dinshah and Perizade nostalgically crave for their motherland and miss it badly. They pine for returning to their old haunts. Perizade states,

I am not weary of Mazinderan, but something calls to me to have joy again that is mortal and fleeting, but without its poignant sense of a swiftly-snatched and perfect bliss. (475)

Even Dinshah expresses the same feelings,

Perizade, the shades of Iran were not so cool and sweet as these in our city of Mazinderan.... Here for two thousand years we have tasted the bliss of the angels; but I know not why, it seems to me that memories of Iran come back to my heart. (475)

Sri Aurobindo presents his romantic view of life in this piece. He tends to be very idealistic and emotional in response to the reality. He is not giving any significance to the material aspects of life. He reveals his commitment to the Nature, which is the gift of God and perhaps the most significant one. He advocates the case of beauty and joy in life. Both the personas in this conversation represent the authorial voice. He makes both of them quite sensible and sensitive to the degeneration on the earth in general and of Iran in particular. He makes both of them realize soon that the earth had changed completely by then, as it was not the external change alone. What was more alarming for them was the fact that the world by then had been stripped of beauty and it had been replaced by meanness, clumsiness, pretensions and false elegance. The



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industrialization had destroyed the beauty of the earth. Both observe that there were many cities in the world, and they were full of buildings, noisy clanging of the metal, and the smoke in the sky. It had scant greenery and was inhabited by people, who had joyless faces and awkward limbs. They found it to be a world of barbarians.

Dinshah and Perizade's residence in Mazinderan is full of comforts and bliss. Further, the world of their dream (Iran) is full of nauseating objects and devoid of any material attraction. Yet, they want to go to their motherland. They make a determination to go down to the earth and try

to make the world once more what it was, a place of beauty, song and delight.... we shall not be content to leave it till it is utterly changed into the likeness of our desire. (476)

The conversation reminds us of the well-known words of Sri Ram in *The Ramayana*, after he conquered Lanka:

Api swarnamayi Lanka na me rocate Laxman

Janani janmabhumisca swargadapigariyasi.

(I do not want this golden Lanka, o Laxman, because the mother and the motherland are more valuable than the heaven itself).

Sri Aurobindo appears to be implanting the idea that the external beauties of England should not mesmerize the Indians. Further, he implies that there was no question of any comparison between India and England, as the nature of relationship with both on the part of Indians was different. This could be an indication to those Indian intellectuals who were dreaming of going to England. He wanted to make an appeal to them that they owed some responsibility to their motherland and must do everything possible for its betterment. If Dinshah and Perizade could discard Mezinderan for Iran, why should not they do it themselves for their own country?

Thus, Sri Aurobindo establishes the supremacy of one's own country and reminds the readers of their commitment and obligation to it. He presents Dinshah and Perizade as ideals with respect to their love for their country and their commitment to elevate it to the ideal condition.



IV

Aurobindo signifies, in the first conversation, the place of one's motherland in one's life and also one's duties to change it for better and restore its gone glory. In the second conversation, which is between Turiu and Uriu, he explores the paths available to its children for restoring its glory to it. Aurobindo was aware of the fact that there could not be just one way of making it independent and a strong nation. He knew that many nationalists and patriots were engaged then in this proud job. He knew that there was a sort of strong disagreement among the people, who were working for its liberation. There were two main paths for this purpose and there was a lot of misunderstanding among the subscribers of one regarding the others. One was the path of revolutionaries, who believed in taking recourse to violence against the oppressors and thus teaching a hard lesson to them. The other group believed in a non-violent struggle against the foreign rulers. So far as the devotion to the cause of service to the motherland was concerned, both the groups were equally dedicated. Perhaps, because of this, Sri Aurobindo does not seem to be taking side of any. He rather endeavours to reveal the arguments of both the factions and towards the end of the conversation, both of them are shown as agreeing to go to the earth together and find out what was needed more. Further, both of them feel that the world needed both the paths, as the God performs both protection as well as destruction. He seems to be suggesting mutual understanding among them.

The two characters involved in the conversations are Turiu and Uriu, who are Romanians. They represent two opposite views for the betterment of the world (their nation). Both of them feel that the world, which was made up of both the good and evil forces, needed drastic changes.

Turiu wants to spread the message of love, songs and beauty. She wants to take up "the song and the sweetness in the mortal places of pleasure" (578) She thinks that the world needed poets and lovers. Uriu, on the other hand, thinks that the world needed the warriors, the delight of slaughter and the trampling of the face of the fallen foe. Hence, when Turiu sings the song of the Goddess Leda, the Lady of laughter and bliss, Uriu sings the song of Tanyth, the terrible mother, who is laced with a garland of skulls and who drinks the blood of the victim upon the alter. Turiu wants that love embraces the world and makes it a garden of love and song. Uriu, on the other hand, prays to the mother to madden men's hearts with thirst for blood, the rapture of death and the joy of the killing" (478). Uriu feels surprised at the sinking of the thunder of war in 'the land of the mighty'. A little later, Turiu reminds Uriu of a significant development that the men had "grown merciful, full of tenderness and shrinking." (479) Perhaps, Sri Aurobindo had realized that the people



were not capable enough to carry out an open war with the enemy. He perhaps had realized by then that the violence was not going to succeed, as the people were not mentally prepared for it. Thus, he indicates the decline in the violent revolutionary struggle against the oppressor, as well as the gradual irrelevance of it in the light of the mind-set of the public in general.

V

In the third piece, Aurobindo takes recourse to the world history to convey the next step, i.e. the assessment of India's actual resistance of the colonial rule. This conversation is among the Italian leaders Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi, the three 19th century Italian leaders, who were contemporaries and played key role in the unification of Italy during the mid 19th century. They were the unquestionable great nationalist leaders of Italy. They made Italy free and provided unity to it. They had resisted the hegemony of Austria and the Papal government and restored the gone glory to Italy.

The role played by these three leaders is known to the world. Garibaldi was a military leader and he fought successfully against the Austrian rule. He could not succeed so well against the Papal authorities and win back the Italian territories held by them. Nevertheless, he was instrumental in establishing a united Italy.

Cavour was the statesman and the main force behind the unification of Italy under Victor Emmanuel II, who was the king of Sardinia. Cavour sought international support by forming an alliance with France and participating in the Crimean and Franco-Austrian wars. He became the first Premier of independent Italy in 1861.

Mazzini was the main inspirational force behind the struggle for Italy's independence. He was an idealist and wanted to establish the republic of Italy. He was the founder of the patriotic movement of Young Italy in 1831. In fact, Garibaldi and Cavour had joined this movement and emerged as the national leaders out of it. It was Mazzini, who took the movement to various parts of Italy and generated insurgency in Italy. This is a historical fact that the freedom of Italy did not satisfy him fully and therefore he continued his campaign for a republican Italy. He did not appreciate country's unification as a monarchy.

Sri Aurobindo had written this piece for *Karmayogin* in 1909-10, but it was not published then. Then, when the country was passing through decisive moments, he published it in *Standard Bearer* on 7th November 1920. Aurobindo could have published it in 1910 also, but he did not do it. Why he did not do it can be an



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interesting investigation. Further, why did he published it in 1920 can also be an interesting enquiry.

Sri Aurobindo wanted India's independence. He wanted a united India. One finds in his writings his emphasis on the country's unity. Perhaps when he wrote it, he must have had the issue of the partition and the unity of Bengal in mind. Somehow, he did not address these issues then. But when India entered a decisive moment in its history in its efforts for independence, Sri Aurobindo felt certain apprehensions regarding some decisions of the then Indian leaders. Sri Aurobindo was in favour of a unity among different communities. But perhaps, he was apprehensive of the role of the Indian Muslim League or he was apprehensive of the division within Indian National Congress on an issue, which was not directly related to it as an organization, or to the country, as it was related to the relationship between Turkey and England. Moreover, he was not happy with the thinking on the part of our then leaders for inviting the Amir of Afghanistan to invade India and defeat the colonial rule. Thus, Sri Aurobindo did not appreciate the attempt on the part of our leaders to appease the Muslims and thus seek their support for freedom movement. Perhaps he was unhappy with the policy of Indian leadership for winning the Muslim support.

This piece reveals Sri Aurobindo's true concerns and worries regarding the suicidal zeal of the Congress leaders to win the Muslim support against the British. What he published towards the end of 1920, proved to be true in the first half of 1921. It is a known fact that leaders like Aga Khan, Amir Ali and Ali brothers among others went to Kemal Pasha to reinstate the Caliph Sultan Abdul Majid or assume the role of Caliph himself. When denied by him, they went to King Abdul Azeez Ibn-Saud of Arabia and the ruler of Iran, Reza Shah Pehlah to do so. All of them refused this. Aurobindo did not think that India would attain Independence that way. On the contrary, he found it to be dangerous for the country. His concerns were true because soon, after a few months, a letter and then a wire from Maulana Mohammad Ali (a prominent Muslim Leader from Congress, who became its All India President in 1923) to Amanulla, the Amir of Afghanistan, inviting him to invade India and his assurance of full support came to light and became a debate nationwide. This had infuriated the common Congress workers and the second rank leaders. However, the top leadership was not fully against the Maulana. Swami Shraddhanan, who was among the prominent leaders of Congress then, in his book *Inside Congress*, writes that when he criticized Maulana, the latter took him aside and showed a draft to him. This draft shocked him, because

What was my astonishment when I saw the draft of the same telegram in the peculiar handwriting of the Father of the non-violent non-co-operation movement! (Swami Shraddhanand: 150-51)



Since it became a hot debate, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*:

I would, in a sense, certainly assist the Amir of Afghanistan, if he waged a war against the British Government. That is to say, I would openly tell my countrymen that it would be a crime to help a Government, which has lost the confidence of the nation to remain in power.

(04-05-1921)

Again, he wrote in *Young India* thus,

It is no part of the duty of a non-violent non-cooperator to assist the Government against war made upon it by others. A non-violent non-cooperator may not secretly or openly encourage or assist any such war. But it is no part of his duty to help the Government to end the war. On the contrary, his prayer could be, as it must be, for the defeat of a power, which he seeks to destroy. I, therefore, so far as my creed of non-violence is concerned, can contemplate an Afghan invasion with perfect equanimity, and equally so far as India's safety is concerned.

(18-05-1921)

Sri Aurobindo felt that India was to be free in real sense and on its own i.e. on its Hindu strength. Others were to support it, irrespective of their creed, as they were residing in India. Hindus were to seek the Muslim support, but not by consolidating their strength, which perhaps stood the risk of bringing back the Muslim rule in India, because it was likely to give a lot of moral boost to the defeated Muslim psyche. Aurobindo was aware of the tyrannical Muslim rule in Indian history. He perhaps found this to be an occasion for alerting the Indian leadership against the strategic dangers as far as the future of India was concerned. Therefore, he published this early written allegorical piece of the conversation among the three great nationalist Italian leaders, particularly when they were in a position to see the outcome of their similar efforts then.

Mazzini shows his disappointment over the degeneration of Italy. He had struggled for the liberation of it, but Italy could be free in body only; its soul could not gain the expected liberation. He feels that Italy had failed in fulfilling its mission of leading the world and is sad that it had remained an inferior Power, which leaned for support on "the selfish and unscrupulous Teuton" (Here, Indian leaders went to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan for support). He mentions, "She who should have been the fountain of a new European culture, hardly figures among the leaders of humanity"(481). He further mentions,



It is not the diplomatist and the servant of the moment who can bring about that great consummation, but the heroic soul and the mighty brain that command Time and create opportunity. (482)

He further feels that Italy should have conquered “not by diplomacy, but by truth and ardent courage” (482); not “by kingcraft but by love for humanity and a noble wisdom” (482). He blames Cavour for the failure, as Machiavellianism rose in his policy and he gave more significance to the result of the efforts. He mentions that eagerness for the result led to the fall from the clarity of the vision of goal. It further led to the sacrifice of the true means and then to the sacrifice of the true end. He strongly feels that Italy had sacrificed what was essential.

Cavour, who was a statesman, states that Mazzini’s views were not based on facts. He refers to the state of free Italy, which according to him, was the proof of his sound policies. He accuses Mazzini of being merely an idealist and a man of notions rather than that of reality. He further states that he, as a statesman, had nothing to do with notions, as he always focused on the main objectives. He also mentions that there were certain ages-old problems, which would take time to be resolved. He champions the cause of patience and the policy of working quietly towards the goal. He still hopes that Mazzini’s ideals would be fulfilled in the time to come and Italy would certainly lead the world.

Garibaldi denies the charge that he ever used Machiavellianism, statecraft and kingcraft. He says that he always made an appeal to the soul of Italy. He, too, accepts that there was no need to depend on those who were not Italians themselves. He states,

It was on the heroism and kingliness of the Italian soul, the resurrection in Florence and Rome and Naples of the ancient Roman, Etruscan and Samnite that Cavour should have relied, not on the false-hearted huckster of States and principalities, Louis Napoleon. (480)

Regarding the charge on him that he gave united Italy to a man, not to the nation, he clarifies that the king was the representative of the nation itself and hence, when the nation itself desired so, as a true democrat, he bowed to the voice of the nation.

Thus, one speaks of the ideals, the other of pragmatism and the third of democracy. All the three seem to be true when they articulate their individual views. The author does not seem to be siding with any. It seems that he was simply aiming at clarifying the major concerns of the people and that he wanted the then Indian



leaders to pay serious attention to them before venturing for any thing drastic. He seems to be giving an alarm to the diplomats as well as to the so-called democrats. He does not want them to be misdirected in the course of time and forget the essential ideals.

Sri Aurobindo seems to be indirectly referring to the Muslims in India and their role in its independence, particularly in the light of the Khilafat Movement. He wanted the leaders to identify the soul of the nation and avoid bargaining for a cause that was so crucial. He wanted them to be patient and focused in their efforts for independence. At the same time, he wanted them to keep in their mind the future role of India in the making of the world. He seems to be stating that, if India either lost or made compromise with its basic character, it would fail to play the historic role in future, which would be a permanent loss on the part of India as well as humanity.

VI

Sri Aurobindo picks up the issue of true leadership in the next conversation. This conversation between Jai Singh and Shivaji was also originally written for *Karmayogin* in 1910, but he did not publish it then. Instead, he published it in *Standard Bearer* on 26th December 1920. Interestingly, this piece also highlights the relationship of the Hindu leadership with the Muslims. He is giving expression to the ambivalent response to the decision of the Indian National Congress leaders to jump into the Khilafat Movement, which was started in India for the reinstating of the Caliph in Turkey.

Aurobindo appears to be raising several questions that were there in the minds of Indians then. These questions were : Whose support should Indians take? Should it go to those who look for inspiration at the places and persons outside India? Who would be the genuine freedom fighters? Would those, who do not look at India as their motherland and do not respect the Indian values of life as their values of life, and on the contrary look at India as the land to be conquered by them, if got a chance, ever restore India's glory? Who is a wiser leader? Aurobindo explores indirectly and metaphorically the qualities of a true and genuine leader among other things in this conversation between Shivaji and Jai Singh.

He presents two figures from the medieval Indian history. Jai Singh was the king of Jaipur and the right hand of Aurangzeb, who is known in the history as one of the most tyrannical rulers, and particularly an anti-Hindu 'Badshah'. Jai Singh was the military chief of the Mughal army. It was he, who in fact was instrumental in providing security to the Mughal Empire in India and indirectly perpetuate a tyrannical rule



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in India. There was strong resistance to the Mughal Empire in the form of Shivaji, Guru Govindsinghji, Banda Bairagi and Kumar Chhatrasal among others. But Jai Singh and his army were busy in protecting the Mughal Empire.

Aurobindo seems to be siding with Shivaji rather than with Jai Singh, though he acknowledges the strength and capacity of both of them. He reveals how Shivaji was a wiser and far-sighted leader. While doing this he shows which concerns should be kept in mind while taking crucial decisions. He also reveals how certain Hindu values, particularly the chivalric values, had come to be deformed. Savarkar describes this phenomenon as '*sadgun-vikriti*' (perverted virtue). Because of this phenomenon, we had started taking pride in those things, which were harmful to us. In addition, we had started hiding our weaknesses in the name of values. Sri Aurobindo seems to be addressing this phenomenon through this interesting conversation and revealing various facets of the two kinds of thinking in the country on this burning issue then.

Jai Singh is senior in age, while Shivaji is a young emerging leader. Jai Singh argues with Shivaji that because of the conflict between them, a third force had entered into India. Perhaps he refers to the English rulers. He means that Shivaji weakened the Muslim rule and the English took the benefit of it. He states, "A third force has entered into the land and takes the fruits of your work". (483) Shivaji like a true and seasoned leader mentions that he did not work for any fruit, nor was he amazed or discouraged by the failure. Jai Singh feels the taunt of Shivaji. So he changes and says, "I too did not work for my reward, but to uphold the ideal of the Rajput." For him, the Rajput ideals were "unflinching courage in honorable warfare, chivalry to friend and foe, a noble loyalty to the sovereign of our choice" (483). He further adds, "this seemed to me the true Indian tradition, preferable even to the unity and predominance of the Hindu races."(483) He does not say that when Aurangzeb doubted his integrity, he went against him by facilitating Shivaji's escape from the Mughal jail.

Here, Sri Aurobindo has very subtly revealed the twisting of the ages-old ideals either for convenience or for justification of the wrong doings. Aurobindo does not rule out and make fun of the traditions of the Rajputs, although he seems to be arguing through Shivaji. Hence, like an intelligent leader, Shivaji puts forward his rationale behind his actions then in these words,



The ideal of the Rajput has its future, but the mould had to be broken in order that what was temporary in it might pass. Loyalty to the sovereign of my choice is good, but loyalty to the sovereign of my nation's choice, that is better.... God in the nation is the deity of which the monarch is the servant (483).

Jai Singh later on reveals his disagreement with what he describes as Shivaji's immoral means i.e. his ruse, "treachery, pillage, assassination" among others. Shivaji again argues that he never fought for himself but for the cause of 'God', "the Maharashtra *dharma*, the religion of the Hindu Nationality"(484). He further adds,

Treacherous I was not, but I helped my weakness in resource and numbers by ruse and stratagem, conquered physical force by keenness of wit and brain force. The world has accepted ruse in war and politics and the chivalrous openness of the Rajput is not owned either by the European or the Asiatic nations. (484)

Jai Singh at this juncture very ridiculously mentions, "I held the *dharma* as supreme and even the voice of God could not persuade me to abandon it."(484) Sri Aurobindo is perhaps referring to and then rejecting those voices in the nation, which had their own interpretation of the terms *dharma* and God. Jai Singh is made ridiculous again when he throws the entire responsibility on God and states,

He (God) sends us all, but for different purposes and according to the purpose he moulds the ideal and the character. ... Had he (Aurangzeb) deserved to retain sovereignty he could not have lost it, but even when he ceased to deserve, I kept my faith, my service, my loyalty. It was not for me to dispute the will of my emperor. God who appointed him might judge him; it was not my office. (484) (parenthesis mine)

Shivaji counters him wittily and mentions,

God also appoints the man who rebels and refuses to prolong unjust authority by acquiescence. He is not always on the side of power; sometimes He manifests as the deliverer. (484)



Jai Singh then wishes that if what Shivaji said was true, then God would come on the earth as the *avtaar* and justify the rebellion. Again Shivaji renounces the argument by stating that God was already there in the hearts and hence there was no question of his arriving from somewhere. Jai Singh demands a seal of His authority over Shivaji's works. Shivaji intelligently answers that "I undermined an empire and it has not been rebuilt. I created a nation and it has not yet perished." (485) and thus makes Jai Singh wordless.

Sri Aurobindo seems to be presenting a picture of an ideal leader who has historical sense and *vivekbuddhi*. He wants someone who can struggle with the mindset that Shivaji had. He does not want a weak and confused leader, who justifies his errors or blames the god as the ultimate responsible force and thus escapes the responsibility himself. He further wants to argue in favour of his proposition by countering the prevalent voices then. He gives more significance to national character over personal character. In other words, he wants the Indians to sacrifice personal likes, dislikes, choices etc. in favour of the national needs and choices. This piece of conversation is a sort of Sri Aurobindo's guidance to the nation, especially, when it was passing through a crisis. He projects a model of the true leadership in the form of Shivaji and suggests to the nation to know him and learn from his life. He feels that only then it would lead to real freedom and make India fulfil its role.

VII

As far as the ultimate goal of life was concerned, Sri Aurobindo visualized a world in which there were no binaries like good and bad, colonizer and colonized and oppressor and oppressed. He was aware that this would require the voluntary change within the evil forces. When it felt true remorse and then the desire to atone for the same, the evil would change from within. He felt that an ideal world could not come into existence until the entire humanity moved together in one direction. He had always been optimistic of India's brighter future in particular and that of the world in general. He always stated that the goodness in man has to come up and manifest itself.

Sri Aurobindo's fifth "Conversation" is between the two fictional colonizers Percival and Littleton. Though this piece was originally written for *Karmayogin* in 1909-10, it was published for the first time in *Standard Bearer* on 29th May, 1923 and then again on 5th June, 1923. Littleton is introduced as a descendent of the Vikings, and is a hard headed, pragmatic and successful lawyer, while Percival is described as a Welsh and a "connoisseur who knew something about everything except my (his) own affairs and could deal successfully with every business that did not concern me (him)" (486) Aurobindo is satirical in his introduction of them.



He portrays them as so unlike each other and yet together in the act of colonization. Percival mentions regarding their sins in these words,

As for sins let us not talk of them. ... But even there we differed. You sinned voraciously, robustly, with gusto but with very little of feeling; I stumbled in out of excess of emotion and could not recover myself because of the vibrant intensity of my memories. (487)

When both of them share their experiences after they parted, Littleton reveals that after death he went to a place, which was, in kind, like Greek Tartarus and Catholic Inferno. He also reveals what happened to him there and also his strong desire to atone for his sins in these words,

I was hunted and torn and devoured, I experienced the agonies of the men I had sent to the deliberate and brutal torture of our jails or beggared of their honour or their property. ... I lingered in regions where Love was not known and the souls of the inhabitants were hard and strong as bronze, dry and delightless as the Sahara. O Percival, Percival, when I go again upon earth, I shall know love and execute mercy. (487)

When Percival narrates his experiences, he mentions,

I too have had experiences similar to yours, though different in their nature and quality. I have sickened of the repeated weakness and selfishness of my life. I have experiences in my soul the sufferings of those I had injured.... It was a memory in the self of the moral endlessness of those torments. (487)

Percival is fortunate, because he feels remorse from within and therefore he goes to Elysium, where he trod the fields of asphodel. He mentions further,

And in those happy experiences, I have deepened the strength and quality of my love, intensified the swiftness of my emotions, refined and purified my taste and intellect. (487)

Percival is able to experience the true meaning of life, when he felt from within that he had done something wrong. Littleton gets severe punishment and therefore now wants mercy in life. Anyway, both of them change though for different reasons.



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Aurobindo is giving his discourse of resistance by making the oppressors confess their atrocities over the innocent people. He is making a point by showing two of them confess their atrocities and acknowledging that they were not kind, generous and benevolent as they publicized. They were on the contrary cruel, arrogant and atrocious. It was not possible to draw an authentic picture of the English and hence Aurobindo is revealing it indirectly by presenting two fictional English characters in conversation after their death. Both of them champion the cause of mutual respect, 'the heaven of comrades'.



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This epigraph is from Sri Aurobindo's notes in his student days in England, written between 1890 and 1892, as quoted in *Bande Mataram: Early Political Writings*, Vol. 1 (30 Vols. Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library De-luxe Edition, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.

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