Chapter V

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As proposed in the introductory chapter we undertook this work with a view to study the concept of the sublime, to explore some area of intersection or parallelisms on the concept, if any, in the Indian tradition and to find the possibility whether "The Sublime and Indian English Poetry" can go together, in other words, is there anything sublime in Indian English Poetry.

In the subsequent chapter we noted that the sublime is a quality of 'elevation', 'intensity' or 'eloquence' in writing. It is that property of great writing / grand style which is not one of the many qualities of it but its very soul. It is the name given to the effect achieved by the other qualities which Longinus refers as the five fruitful sources. These sources are: (1) the power of forming grand conception; (2) powerful and inspired emotion; (3) proper formation of figures; (4) noble diction; and (5) total effect resulting from dignified and elevated 'composition'. The first two sources have to do with the subject - matter and the last three with the art of poetry.

Longinus rightly maintained that 'thought and language in literature are interfolded each in other'. This organismic union of content and form which Longinus gives us has been emphasised by various scholars.¹ Schiller, who insists on strict reciprocity of content and form, called its union by the name of

'living shape.' Flaubert wrote: 'Form is the flesh itself of the idea, and the idea is the soul of life.' 'Idea and form', Baudelaire thought, are two 'realities in one' Ransom calls poetry 'aesthetically organized language'. A.C. Bradley makes the same point more clearly when he remarks: 'In Poetry the meaning and the sound are one: there is---a resonant meaning, or a meaning resonance' (Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 14).²

Longinus expounds in detail the nature of the sublime and all the devices leading to it and maintains forcefully that the proper formation of figures of speech and of thought together with the use of a noble diction and apt imagery lend dignity and elevation to a work. Such a work 'uplifts our souls' and 'we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy, 'it can stand up to a repeated examination'; 'it is impossible to resist its appeal; 'it remains firmly and exists in such works as please all men at all times, 'it leads to ecstasy and transport' and 'carries one up to where one is close to the majestic mind of God'. Towards the end of the work he goes on to say that in literature 'we look for something transcending the human'. The following lines sum up Longinus's attitude to the quest for the indefinable:

Nature has judged us men to be creatures of no mean or ignoble quality---from the first she has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for

all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves---in all such circumstances I would say only this, that men hold cheap what is useful and necessary, and always reserve their admiration for what is out of the ordinary (On the Sublime 35. 146-147).

Thus Longinus alludes to the supermundane quality of literature which is also alluded to in the Indian tradition as is evident from our brief study. The Indian theoretical tradition from Bharat (5 C.B.C) to Jagannath (17 C.B.C.) bears witness to the existence of a highly developed theory of poetics which ponders over the relationship between content and form of literature and holds fast to the attainment of pure happiness (ananda / ahlada) as the primary goal of poetry. Later on this pure happiness becomes happiness in the liberation of the self through identification with the larger self (paramananda). As in every area of thought, in the definition of the effect of literary experience / aesthetic enjoyment also, there is a movement from the mundane to the divine. Thus for both Longinus and the Indian theorists the end state of literary experience would seem to be almost identical, both insist on the supermundane quality of literature, literature which elevates and uplifts and 'carriers one up to where one is close to the majestic mind of God.'

Now coming to Indian English Poetry in general and its poets in particular one feels that neither Indian English Poetry nor its
poets with the exception of Sri Aurobindo match the high qualities of great writing / grand style which Longinus has set forth in his work. Both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu whom we have discussed in some detail, with all their fine artistry in resonance with their poetic conception, their great felicity of words, wealth of imagery and musical power do not reach, in total effect, the desired level where poetry casts a spell, enchants, enthralls and lifts to a higher state of consciousness. The modern poets seem to be lacking in noble thoughts, noble emotions and noble diction as well. Their choice of words and use of imagery bear witness to the weird and grotesque imagination which is hardly conducive to the concept of the sublime in which there is always an emphasis on nobility of thought, nobility of emotion and nobility of diction. 'Words finely used are in truth the very light of thought' said Longinus and maintained that 'dignity, grandeur, and power of persuasion are to a very large degree derived from images.' The lexis of modern poets and their choice of imagery as we have noted may hardly be said to bring any sublime effect on the mind of the readers. Neither in thought nor in language the poetry of the modern poets can ever be said to be anywhere close to the concept of the sublime. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, strikes a different chord. Both in his poetic theory and practice he tries to strive for 'divine ananda.' As he himself says in The Future Poetry, '---the true creator (of poetry) is the soul---A divine anada... is that which the soul of the poet feels and which ---he succeeds in pouring out into all those who are prepared to receive it.' As already noted, both in depth and exaltedness of
thought and language, Sri Aurobindo's poetry exercises an irresistible charm and has the capability of swaying the reader off his feel and lifting him to the highest states of consciousness. In the portrayal of character, in the delineation of emotion, in the development of theme and in formal features there is no other poet in Indian English Poetry who can invite any comparison with him. Sublimity of conception, opulence of imagery, spiritual potency, vision and revelation, truth consciousness are all there in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. And so is the incantatory power of words which Abercrombie, in modern times, seeks to restore while reminding us of the important and high function of poetry. 'What then', asks Abercrombie, 'is the first thing which we require of all poetry, not merely to be great, but to exist at all?'\(^3\) (The Idea of Great Poetry, p.18). And quite at once he replies, 'I will call it, compendiously, incantation, the power of using words so as to produce in us a sort of enchantment; and by that I mean a power not merely to charm and delight, but to kindle our minds into vitality, exquisitely aware of both of things and of connexions of things.'\(^4\) This power of incantation is not at all a matter of technique or craftsmanship, continues Abercrombie, and yet it is in and through the quality of words, first of all, and more than anything else, that the critical mind will be able to lay hold on this peculiar power of incantation which is the hallmark of all true and great poetry. And that power a reader experiences in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo.

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\(^4\) Ibid., p. 18.