Chapter I

Introduction
The Subject of Enquiry

The present study proposes to undertake an analysis of first, the concept of the sublime, second, to explore some area of intersection or parallelisms on the concept, if any, in the Indian tradition and third, to find the possibility whether "The Sublime and Indian English Poetry" can exist together, in other words is there anything sublime in Indian English Poetry.

The Sublime

On the Sublime is a work attributed to Longinus. Longinus argues in favour of an underlying property of great writing / grand style and designates it by the word 'hypsous' (usually translated as the sublime). This is not one of the many qualities which great writing / grand style should possess, but its very essence, its soul. It is the name given to the effect achieved by a proper fusion of the other qualities (which Longinus qualifies under five heads and refers to them as the sources of the sublime). These qualities are:

(1) the ability to form grand conceptions (the most important of all the sources);

(2) the stimulus of powerful and inspired emotion;
(3) the proper formation of two types of figure - the figures of thought and the figures of speech;

(4) the creation of a noble diction which includes the choice of words, the use of imagery and the elaboration of style, and

(5) the total effect resulting from dignity and elevation (a source which embraces all those already mentioned).

Of these, the first two are innate - they refer to the state of the poet's soul and may be said to pertain to the 'content' while the last three refer theoretically to the 'form'. These are the products of art and refer most specifically to the use of the language. All these, however, presuppose as a common foundation 'the command of language without which nothing worthwhile can be done' (On the Sublime, 8. 108).

Longinus is associated with passion and ecstasy, with enthusiasm, inspiration and transport, and his treatise On the Sublime is hailed as a victory of passion over verbal rhetoric. Many a time in the treatise he talks of immoderate passion, profusion of passions, unconquerable passions, grandeur and passion. To quote Longinus, 'nature has adjudged us men to be creatures of no mean or ignoble quality --- she has implanted in our soul an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves'. Passion
is considered as the very soul of poetry by romantic theorists. 'If the poet's subject be judiciously chosen' said Wordsworth, 'it will naturally --- lead him to passions' and maintained that 'the end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an over balance of pleasure' and its effect is 'to rectify men's feelings', to widen their sympathies, and to produce or enlarge the capability of 'being excited' without the application of 'gross and violent stimulants'. Wordsworth defines poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and as 'emotion recollected in tranquility' (Preface to Lyrical Ballads). Keats longed, 'for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts !' ( "Letter to Benjamin Bailey", 22 November 1817). Coleridge forcefully affirms that 'poetry --- does always imply passion' by which he means 'an excited state of the feelings and faculties' (Biographia Literaria, XVIII, 1817) John Stuart Mill in his essay "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties" (1859) writes that 'the object of poetry is confessedly to act upon the emotions', and it 'does its work---by moving' and James Henry Leigh Hunt writes in "An Answer to the Question What is Poetry", that 'Poetry---is the utterance of a passion' and '...it seeks the deepest impressions'.

Naturally, Longinus for his association with passion and ecstasy, enthusiasm, inspiration and transport has been called 'the first Romantic critic'. But this should not make us

forget Longinus's remarks on language which as Wimsatt and Brooks have noted fills a very large part of what survives the work.² Any discussion which leaves out the linguistic dimensions of the subject may not do justice to the sublime. What is important, therefore, is to take both equally and give them equal importance. Passion and mode of expression proper to a literary text, if used with propriety, sway the reader and take him out of himself.

Whether Longinus takes into account the different kinds of styles suited to literary expressions is a matter of some debate. It is true that distinction of this kind is not explicitly stated in the treatise, though this is probably because three or four kinds of verbal styles had been generally accepted by his time, and Longinus took the subject to be part of a common language. We may even conjecture that there was a passing reference to them in one of the lacune, most probably in the one appearing at the end of the second chapter. At any rate, when the third chapter resumes Longinus is in the middle of a discussion of the vices bordering on sublimity, of which three are named: (1) tumidity or bombast, (2) puerility, the complete antithesis of grandeur and (3) parenthyrsus or false sentiment.

Besides, Longinus's awareness of the different modes or styles is illustrated by his treatment of the five sources of the

sublime which implies that anyone of the sources, or any combination of them, can lead to the sublime. He was evidently conscious of the different kinds of sublimity.

In his discussion of the nature of the sublime and the means by which it may be acquired, Longinus gives due importance to the work of a genius which is innate. However, he suggests 'that there is a case for the opposite point of view when it is considered that, although nature is in the main subject only to her own laws where sublime feelings are concerned, she is not given to acting at random and wholly without system--- the function of a system is to prescribe the degree and the right moment for each to lay down the clearest rules for use and practice' (On the Sublime, 2.101).

This is one of the many other topics which Longinus discusses in his treatise. He, however, constantly talks of ecstasy and transport, enthusiasm and inspiration and discusses most of his sources in terms of the irresistible effect, force and mastery of great writing / grand style.

Longinus exercised a remarkable influence in the shaping of a tradition of the sublime and is held in the greatest esteem by his successors. A revival of interest in his treatise had far-reaching effects on poetry and criticism in the 18th century. His name constantly appears in the writings of English critics from Dryden onwards. For the Augustan critics one of the most important classical influences was that of
Longinus. A favourable judgement on Shakespeare was often arrived at by an appeal to the authority of Longinus, and Pope's praise of Homer's 'fruitfulness' in the. Preface to his translation of the Iliad and An Essay on Criticism is also in the true Longinian spirit: Be Homer's works your study and delight, / Read them by day, and meditate by night (An Essay on Criticism). Addison familiarized his readers with the notion that Milton was the poet of the sublime, par excellence. In a series of eighteen essays on Paradise Lost in The Spectator papers Addison compares Milton with Homer and Virgil and says that the action in Milton excels---Milton's subject was greater than either of the former (The Spectator, No.267, Saturday, January 5, 1712). Longinus was frequently appealed to, in the 18th century against the neo-classical standard of 'correctness' and sublimity was thus associated with a poetic style and diction which was daring, irregular, romantic. Passages in Thomson's "Seasons" which excited awe or terror were admired as 'sublime'. The odes of Gray especially "The Bard", were 'sublime'. In critical writings later than the eighteenth century the term 'sublime' tended to be replaced by others, e.g. the 'grand style'.

Indian Tradition

Although not a comparative study of any sort, the present work discusses in brief the Indian theoretical tradition with a

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view to get some parallelisms on the concept of the sublime, if any, in Indian tradition. It begins with the origin of the Indian literary tradition in the Vedas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata and quickly moves on to Bharat, the first enunciator of a theory in the Indian theoretical tradition. Bharat’s theory of rasa, with forty-nine bhavas makes a claim to the whole human experience. As a theory of aesthetic experience it takes into account emotions and its effect on the spectators. The bhavas are the mental states; they bring rasa into being and pervade the mind of the spectators. Bhavas mean that which cause something to be, bhavna, which is capable of weaving grand conceptions into sublime verbal structures. Bharat's elaborate description of 'bhavas' maybe said to take due care of Longinus's first two sources viz (1) the ability to form grand conceptions; (2) the stimulus of powerful and inspired emotion. Bharat's description of the sattvikbhava relates especially to Longinus's elaboration of nobility of soul which plays the most important part of all the sources of the sublime (Each rasa according to Bharat has three subtypes—three—fold division of almost everything on the basis of the three gunas—sattva, rajas, tamas—provides the basis for classification, Abhinavbharati on Natyasatra).

His discussion of language, of 'diction' and 'style' – the thirty six excellences, the four figures of speech and the ten merits and ten faults relate to a discussion of language and hence

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may be said to encompass Longinus's remaining sources of the sublime viz. (3) the proper formation of figures (4) the creation of a noble diction (5) the total effect. The critics who take *On the sublime* as a discourse on elevated / grand style will be pleased to note that Bharat talks of different styles and recommends different sentiments for them. Thus he has *bharati* (verbal) for the pathetic and the marvellous; *sattvati* (grand), a style endowed with the spirit (*sattva*) for the heroic and the marvellous; *kaisiki* (graceful) for the erotic and the comic and *arbhati* (energetic) for the terrible, the odious and the furious. In short, all the sources of the sublime – of content as well as of form, may be suitably traced in Bharat's theory of *rasa* and his elaborate views on diction, style and language.

Bharat was followed by Bhamaha who considered figurative expression, the grammatical accuracy and the pleasantness of sound to be the locus of literariness. Dandin discussed wholistically the excellences and the faults both of content and form of literary composition. Then comes Vamana who considers mode of expression *riti* to be the soul of poetry. He talks of three kinds of mode: *vaidarbhi*, *gaudi* and *pancali*.

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6 Ibid. XXII, pp. 63-64.
7 Ibid. XXII, p. 25.
9 Ibid. XXII, p. 27.
10 Ibid. XXII, p. 28.
As vaidarbhi is replete with all the gunas and does not have even the slightest faults, it is the ideal mode of expression.

Vamana's definition of riti as 'particular arrangement of words' seem to correspond at least in essence, to the last three sources of the sublime, in other words to the 'form' of literature which involves different aspect of word arrangement. His 'arthaguna' possesses features that do not have any direct connection with word – arrangement, but are related to the meaning or 'content' of literature. The first two sources of the sublime also refer to content, and as such are similar in kind to 'arthaguna'. Arthagunas, arthadosas and arthalamkaras refer more properly to the ideas of literature, hence to the 'content' of the composition. Further parallelisms may be found in Longinus's first source of the sublime, i.e., the ability to form grand conceptions which originates from the nobility of the soul and Vaman's arthaguna slesa as well as the first variety of meaning whose comprehension constitutes the arthaguna samadhi. Both rely on grand and clever ideas for their effectiveness.

Bhamaha, Dandin and Vamana emphasized 'form' and therefore, they could be styled as 'Expressionists'. Next comes Anandvardhan who emphasized suggestion, manifestation or revelation – dhvani, vyanjana prakasa. Suggestion is a unique process and could be employed even

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in realms where the primary or secondary meanings of words were enough to convey an idea. Even figures could be rendered more attractive by suggestion; in fact suggestion added to a new dimension to speech, and reinforced the power, of the limited medium of language. It may be the symbolism of suggestion that even the message of a whole work was conveyed by a poet. Anandvardhan thus emphasized ‘content’ or emotions as against the formal features, style, figures etc. The formal features, were to be evaluated in relation to the emotion which they were to suggest and this relative value of expression called *aucitya* (adaptation or appropriateness) was developed by Ksemendra as a life giving complement to the principle of emotional suggestiveness.\(^\text{12}\) Ksemendra's theory of propriety or appropriateness claims that in all aspects of literary composition, there is a possibility of a perfect, the most appropriate choice - of subject, of ideas, of words, of devices. Hence it has close affinities with Longinus's theory of the sublime (*On the Sublime*).\(^\text{13}\) Further parallelisms are found in Kuntaka whose theory of *vakrokti*, deviation or marked expression, claims that the characteristic property of literary language is its ‘markedness’. While elucidating the different excellences Kuntaka emphasizes the choice of felicitous phrases. Longinus, too, underlines the importance

\(^{12}\text{Ibid. p. 383.}\)  
of words and phrases to produce the effect of sublimity when he says that 'words finely used are in truth the very light of thought'. Kuntaka's attachment of importance to figures in his enunciation of vakya-vakrata parallels Longinus's acknowledgement of figures as one of the sources of the sublime, and his concept of ahlada largely approximates Longinus's concept of ecstasy or transport, belauded by him as the final result of reading poetry.\(^1\)

Abhinvagupta accepted Nayak's theory of generalization or universalization and pointed out that aesthetic experience was a unique category: it was a cycle which started with the poet and the poem and completed itself in the heart of the responsive or sensitive reader who had become by constant literary activity, attuned to the poet and was hence called 'one of the same heart'. The nature of aesthetic experience / enjoyment / bliss was further discussed by Viswanath and Jagannatha in terms of supersensuous (lokottara) wonder and supermundane bliss (lokottara – ahlada) respectively. Thus, from Bharat (2nd C. B. C.) to Jagannatha (17th C. B. C.) the Indian theoreticians enumerate certain properties of literary composition. These properties fall into the following groups:\(^2\)

1. of language and composition

\(^1\) R.S. Tiwari, A Critical Approach to Classical Indian Poetics (Delhi : Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1984), p. 262.

(2) of meaning

(3) of figurative devices

(4) of literary experience

We have already noted how Longinus talks of all the above properties of literary composition in his treatise *On the Sublime*. The above properties may be further reduced to two major divisions:

(1) of substance or experience or content

(2) of craft or representation or form

One may be tempted to ask what else does Longinus talk of in his treatise *On the sublime*, if not these two. As already noted, the first two sources belonging to the innate nature of the poet’s soul largely pertain to the content of the composition while the last three which are the products of art refer most specifically to the use of language, in other words to the ‘form’ of the composition.

**Indian English Poetry**

After attempting a definition of what constitutes Indian English Poetry a brief survey of its history is made from its inception to its present day. It is noted that the history of Indian English Poetry began in 1827 with Henry Vivian
Derozio’s book of poems entitled *Poems*. It is also noted that of the many poets writing in the nineteenth century, the most remarkable poet to emerge during the period was Toru Dutt (1856-77) whose poem “Our Casuarina Tree” is taken to be the first major poem of Indian English Poetry. It ‘heads a long list of distinguished poems written by Indian poets.’ Toru Dutt is preceded and followed by a number of poets but in our recounting of the history of Indian English Poetry we have focussed on the lives and works of the major poets.

It is found that the corpus of Indian English Poetry may be conveniently divided into two halves - from 1901 to 1950 and from 1951 to date. Interestingly 1950 is not only the numerical half of the century, but also the year of the publication of *Savitri*, and the year of the death of its author, Sri Aurobindo. As regards the first half of the century the prevailing critical opinion seems to converge on the four or five well-known names, prominent both in literary as will as socio-historical, political and cultural fields, viz., Manmohan Ghose, (1869 -1924), his brother, Aurobindo Ghose (1872 - 1959), Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sarojini Naidu (1879 - 1947). It is also noted that though Tagore exercised an enormous impact and influence on Indian English poets writing in the first half of the century, the inclusion of his works in the corpus of Indian English Poetry has been

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questioned and found to be unjustifiable. Tagore wrote only one poem, *The Child* in English. All other works of his, available in English, are translations. It is for this reason that we have excluded Tagore from our discussion.

The number of poets writing in the second half of the twentieth century is enormous. There is quite a formidable list of modern Indian English poets (according to a report, there are three hundred and odd Indian English poets belonging to this school). We have tried to focus on the major poets associated with the movement of 'modernism' in Indian English Poetry. It is noted that 'modernism' in Indian English Poetry came as late as the fifties with the publication of Nissim Ezekiel’s *A Time to Change* in 1952. Modern Indian English Poetry has had two patriarchal figures ensconced at two ends of India: P Lal in Calcutta, and Nissim Ezekiel in Bombay. They have worked in different ways. Lal by publishing poets from Nissim Ezekiel to Vikram Seth and Ezekiel by offering critical guidance to younger poets. Apart from Nissim Ezekiel (1924-) and P. Lal (1929-), the other poets discussed are: A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1995), R Parthasarathy (1929-), Jayant Mahapatra (1928-), Shiv K. Kumar (1921-), Arun Kolatkar (1932-), Kamla Das (1934-), K.N. Daruwalla (1937-), Dom Moraes (1939-), Gieve Patel (1940-), Adil Jussawala (1940-), Pritish Nandy (1947-) and A.K. Mehrotra (1947-). All these poets who began writing in

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18 In an interview on being told that there are 300 poets in Indian Writing in English, A.K. Ramanujan is reported to have said, 'I say good luck to them. Three hundred is not a large number for such a large country.' P.K.J. Kurup, *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996), p. 9.
the second half of the twentieth century, in the 50's or 60's or even in the early 70's as in the case of Shiv K. Kumar whose work *Articulate Silences* was published in 1970 are said to belong to 'the first generation of Indian poets'\(^{19}\) of the second half of the twentieth century. Mention has also been made of the poets who published their first works around the 1970s and 1980s and are said to belong to 'the second generation of Indian poets'\(^{20}\) writing in the second half of the twentieth century and of 'the poets of the third generation'\(^{21}\), i.e. the contemporary poets who began publishing around the late 1980s and 1990s. Some of the major themes such as love, nature, self, sexuality, mysticism, legends and myths, spiritualism, exile and urbanity have been noted and discussed and observations have been made on both the content and form of Indian English Poetry.

**The Method of Enquiry**

We have noted that the end-state of literary appreciation envisaged by Longinus and Indian theorists is almost identical, that both give due importance to the content and form of literature. In our final analysis of Indian English Poetry we shall confine ourselves to these two natural correlates of poetry.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 12.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 13.