

9. AN EPISODE IN YOGA

For days, I did not know that I had been brought to the Lahore Fort prison. That was the time of the open rebellion, some sabotage of war material, a few dozens of British and Indian functionaries killed by the people but scores of thousands of Indian patriots destroyed by the British government in many ways, and above all of thick and strange rumours. Many rumours were afloat concerning the Lahore Fort. Here, so it was said, the British brought their most dangerous prisoners and practised all the old methods of torture and devised strange and new ones. They did this in order to extract information or to incriminate. I do not quite recall the whole complex of emotions that went through me during the first days of the Lahore Fort, when I did not know where I was but knew perfectly well what was in store for me. I can, however, remember a certain thread of curiosity that ran through all fear, helplessness, anger and despair that must have passed through me and also of a certain stodginess which sometimes comes over me in such situations.

I am sometimes immeasurably stodgy and insensitive. Some of us were once trapped on the third storey of a house, which the police had surrounded and begun searching from the ground floor upwards. Knots of people had gathered on the balconies around us, as though to look at a fire that was just beginning or some other exciting street scene. I only knew what had happened when someone told me about it. I had no plans to offer. Others discussed all possible ruses and escape. I listened to them alright. But I had turned to stone. This is probably the defence that my own peculiar system devises against the interval between the beginning of a tense situation and its eruption into the first cognisable act. I suffered a

similar experience on the Goa train between Panjim and Madgaon when thick rumours of machine guns were brought to me at each intermediate station. But one cannot for ever stay in such a stodgy situation particularly in a prison. Nor is there much opportunity to act. The tension of a torture prison rarely matures in a fashion so as to let the prisoner act. Deeds belong to free men, rarely to prisoners.

The prison in the Lahore Fort was ordinary except for its bleak and forbidding cells. Its offices might well have been those of a commission agent or a lawyer. One looked in vain for any instruments of torture. But these men, the torturers, were skilled in their craft. They had known from long experience that man yields, almost always. He is only to be exposed in the raw spots of his body and mind. Let him have no friend around. Let him have no one to confide to, talk to or write to. Let him have no books, paper or pencil. He will soon begin to feel that the world around him did not know nor cared that he existed. He will think that he will meet none but foes for the rest of his life, only hired enemies at that.

My torture began in a small way, as though not to make me too angry right at the start and also to bring into play the curious element of my nature. Curiosity can sometimes be dangerous. It leads man into unnecessary situation of peril. In the early days, I used to be moved back and forth between my cell and the office with much irregularity and frequency. The time of the day or the night did not matter to them. They kept me in their office, sometimes interminably long and sometimes over short periods, glued to a chair. They would repeat a word or a sentence fifty or a hundred times. They would put handcuffs on me, of varying size and weight. I did not at first understand that the constable had nothing to do with the selection of handcuffs on any particular day. That was regulated as a small item in the total scheme of torture.

They tortured me with the forced absence of sleep, with being forcefully kept awake. That was not a simple matter of not being allowed to lie in a bed, for one can also sleep in a

chair. The eyes had to be kept open. They could only close for the brief instant during which eye-lids normally drop in waking hours. If one tended to close one's eyes longer, the policeman would give tugs to the long chain of the handcuff or shake the head in all directions with some force. Such forced sleeplessness was staggered in my case. In the very beginning it did not go beyond a day and a night. This period gradually grew. It was as though they did not want me to rebel at the start and wanted me to get used to my situation and that they knew the curiosity of my nature.

The periods of forced sleeplessness grew to three days and five in the second and third months of my torture. By that time, I had lost the will for a physical fight, if I ever had any. If I may anticipate events, I was mad only twice during those four months of torture. Once when the policeman in charge started abusing national leaders and my friends filthily, that heated up my blood, but I kept quiet until he started playing with Gandhiji's name. I asked him to shut up with all the force that I could. That gesture was pretty useless inside the Fort, where I had no friend. I suppose that one does not reason out such matters and that an element of rare irrationality, which helps a person to get out his skin, is a mark of health. The policeman stormed and fumed and made as though he would use his last methods on me. But no policeman ever again repeated this line with me.

The other occasion transpired on the fourth or the fifth day of the longest single stretch of my forced sleeplessness. It was around four in the morning. My head felt as though it was smouldering in a burnt up fire of hot ashes. The policeman would beat the table with some metal object and make sudden or continuous or loud sounds. Each one of these sound went to the heart sometimes like a hammer stroke and again like the smouldering in a burnt up fire of hot ashes. The policeman shouted. I kept my eyes closed. He sprang from his chair and made as though he would assault me. There must have been calm determination in my voice. This officer was at that time

alone with me; he had sent away the other constables. I asked him simply never to take me on singly in a physical fight, for that would not be good for him. Normally, there would be a team of several policemen, more often only two to keep watch over me. They would change their duty as though in a shift. Every four hours or so, the policemen would change, for they had to replenish their tired body and mind.

The officer shrank back. I could not have been very hefty at that time. During periods of continuous sleeplessness, I did not eat solid food and confined myself to a cup of milk in the morning and a cup of tea in the evening. Also, otherwise, when the torture took less ugly forms and my food was sometimes sought to be shoved in from under the iron door of my cell, a passage for dirty water, too, I had refused to eat. But the officer was intimidated. He shouted for help with the shriek of a maniac. Four or five policemen came running to the room and also the armed sentry who always stood in front of my cell or the office room. They lifted me up from the chair and stood me against the wall. The officer tried again to come near me, when I told him that he was the coward of the Fort. I learnt later from some policeman that this phrase rang throughout the Fort, for this officer was harsh also to his men. I closed my eyes again. The officer had me dragged in circles on the rough matting on the floor. This must have gone on for over an hour, my palms and elbows were slightly bruised. But no other forms of assault took place. I was then led to my bath, after which the torture continued.

I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if I had refused to keep my eyes open right at the start. Whatever may have happened, the matter would probably have been over more quickly one way or another. But I would have been denied a very rich insight into the mind of man, to which British imperialism without the least intent and my own stodginess and curiosity led me. I will begin describing this experience only after I set out the situation in its bare bones.

My police officers, particularly the highest of them, knew

how the intersperse my ugly despair with flattery and cajolings. Some of them even touched my feet or knee in reverence. It was a most peculiar experience, to be so cruelly treated on some days and again with such seeming worship. This sometimes brought me near to relenting. But, on such occasions, I had a dread picture before me. It was as though I had been imperceptibly and in stages brought near to drinking gutter water. I told them that I would not refuse to tell them of my own acts, but that they could not expect me to give them incriminating information about others. The chief officer who had been put on to me had also been put on to Bhagat Singh, who had avenged with violence many a wrong done to India and was later hanged by the British. Bhagat Singh, so this officer said, had spoken. I asked him as to how old Bhagat Singh was at that time. He was a younger man. What may be forgiven or at least understood in a younger man is more difficult to forgive or understand in an older man.

During most of the torture, the policeman and I stopped being on talking terms. For part of the time, when the torture slackened, some desultory conversation used to take place. During one such conversation, one of my policeman, who was a master of arts in history and who had risen from a constable to be an inspector, and prided himself on this score and was, therefore, in some ways crueller, told me that Jesus Christ spoke the English language. Once the day of Bakrid fell during a particularly ugly torture and he did not slacken it. But he brought pineapple and other fruits in the evening, thinking that I, as he, had never before eaten pineapple in my life. His was a rustic soul, which must have been somewhat pleasing in its base, but had got twisted in the course of his job and his desire for preferment. He had a most vicious habit of bringing a flock of young fowl inside a cage or simply tied up in a cloth. He would hang the cage or the cloth on a peg in front of me. He did not perhaps know how I disliked that sight of young fowl, which made occasional noises and sometimes fluttered with force and then lay their head down as though in docile

expectancy of death.

I was often overwhelmed with savage loneliness and black despair. I had come to a hole which seemed to have shut up completely after my coming. The world around me contained no friend and any other did not seem to be aware of me. I had once tried to throw myself down the stairway that stood on the way between my cell and the office. I could not. All that I got was a tug at my handcuff and a sneer.

I once saw from a window of the office a group of sentries playing with a deer in the compound. This was no ordinary play. The deer frolicked and jumped in a terrible excitement and it looked as though with a throbbing heart she was trying to smell or lick or kiss some of these sentries. Her eyes appeared at this distance of time to have been more beautiful than deer-eyes if one may say that. I was told by a police officer that these sentries were used to putting the deer in the heat and some of them were such votaries of the life-principle that they demolished the barrier between animal and man. These were fierce men, from the Punjab and the frontier. They seemed to live their life for the few wants they had with a primitive vigour and were beyond good and evil in social matters. They did not seem to be aware that they helped practice brutalities upon their fellow-men in that torture house, and if they were, they must have considered it as something outside the scheme of their responsibilities. None of these armed sentries spoke a word to me for the first two months and more. I soon learnt that I was trying to speak to a wall. Only when word went round that I was not likely to sequel, one or two among them whispered to me about the other inmates.

One unarmed constable was particularly nice. In those exceedingly rare moments, when he was left alone with me, he let my eye-lids drop. He was a kindly and middle-aged person who, during the last days of my torture, was so worked up as to ask me to assault the most offensive officer. In spite of their obvious lack of any social thought, they were after all simple

men. But the air of torture that they breathed every day seemed to have calloused their souls. I sometimes heard loud and piercing shrieks in that death house. Generally, the air was still. Only once had an intrepid soul come who defied his keepers with loud and continuous singing of the Gayatri. The Fort was otherwise efficient, understandably efficient. During four months of my torture I had not one small bit of paper, blank or printed except once. This was when a sentry brought me some sugar, which the officers had strangely enough permitted me, wrapped in a half page of an old newspaper. The writing was Urdu. I read it with the devotion of one deciphering an old and forgotten script. I must have read that essay on Kalidas and Shakespeare for two hours and more before I could make out what it was all about.

I had no brush nor paste to clean my teeth, not the tender neem twig. For a whole four months I had to do with soap or coal powder or ash. My keepers would not let me bathe in the beginning. I just stopped eating food. They relented. They gave me ten minutes or so under the water tap. This was the only time during the more aggressive tortures when they took away the handcuffs. This was also the time of distilled joy and an extreme sensuous pleasure, at least on some days, when the heat of a whole twenty-four hours of forced sleeplessness seemed to go out of my body. Before I go on to describe my experience, I must issue a warning lest someone should imitate the practice that was forced on me. My teeth would not have probably started decaying so soon. Nor would I have had to think of my poor heart as often as I now do.

The longest stretch of forced sleeplessness lasted ten days and nights. At the end of it, blood came out of the nose and the mouth. Tiny clots of blood were also formed in the nose. I seemed to have acquired a fairly high fever. My keepers took me to my cell. The jail physician called it a seven day fever and told me that I would be alright by the end of it. He seemed to have spoken humourlessly and without awareness of the issues then being fought out in the country but I cannot say

whether he was totally devoid of kindness. At the end of those seven days, I was led into another kind of office, somewhat like a cellar. This was the famed elephant stables of the old Moghuls, which had now become notorious for the stories of torture that were associated with it. Here, the policeman told me vaguely of the incomprehensible torture that was still in store for me. I must have become wholly calm by now. The British government called the engagement off.

Thirteen years is a very long time to remember an experience in all its details. The richest item in it can, however, never go out of my mind. But it was surrounded by hundreds of ideas and feelings, some of which repeated themselves every day and some only occasionally. When I try to sort out these ideas and feelings, I believe them to have come to me under three somewhat distinct categories. There was the category of plans for the future of our freedom fight, of correction of mistakes that had been made in the organization. This was the time of the forenoon. There was also the category of philosophy, of contemplation of the universe and man's destiny. This was the time of the afternoon and evening. Sheer misery, as black as the night around me, came after midnight. These were the three main phases of my daily experience.

I also recollect having had cruel thoughts of vengeance. That was the time when I devised the most ingenious and subtle, but refined tortures. These I practised in a state of dream on the men at the top who ruled Britain and India. I do not now remember whether this came as appendix to the forenoon phase of plans or to the afternoon phase of philosophy or was interspersed. It was probably interspersed. I remember no more of it than an indeterminate cage which could be pulled up and down with a pulley, but stayed most of the time near a high ceiling. All that man could need was placed in sight of the cage, but without its reach, and some manipulations with fire and water were also there.

Of the plans, I have one very distinct recollection. They seemed formed after the pattern of an electronic factory, where

all one had to do when the last moment came was to press a button. This would have got the whole organization going with a bang and an irresistible force throughout the land. The British government, or no government could have been a match to it. I now wonder how I could have formulated such plans of an organizational perfection, when the essence of my thought is built on the spirit of man and its spontaneity. I ascribe the exclusive organizational character of such plans to the violent stress under which I lived in those days.

One such plan had to do with a force of about a lakh of trained agitators and volunteers, one to every ten villages or so, who would be firmly grounded in all-round elementary knowledge and would be continually acting on his own initiative but would also have absorbed organizational principles so much as to become a cog in the wheel. In short, he was to have been a combination of courage, wisdom, activity and a wholly unindividualistic organization, and a lakh of such persons! I was later amused to read of a somewhat similar plan that Mahatma Gandhi outlined when he came out of prison. That plan also came to nothing. I at least have never before talked of the plan that came to my mind in the Lahore Fort. It was so wholly irrelevant to the situation of men and money with which a political party would be faced in our land for a long time to come. But I wonder whether Gandhiji was not also suffering under some kind of a torture, not necessarily physical, for that anyway was the origin of my plan.

I also thought of a scheme of publications, which would print weekly and monthly periodicals in all the major languages of India, whose printed matter would be common to the extent of $\frac{2}{3}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$, all part of a great drive for the integration in mind and radicalization of the people, of my country. This plan was later expressed through the "Pothi Patra," which meant much effort but came to nothing. All that I wish to emphasise here is that this part of the day which was given over to the formulation of plans and also perhaps to thoughts of vengeance, in which actual violence, I must hasten

to add, did not play a part, gave me the pleasure that one gets from the contemplation of a desired meeting or a favourite dish.

The hours after midnight, particularly around and after two, were undiluted and monotonous and misery. This misery was sometimes turned into sharp agony. My head used to be in a state of continuous haze and dull pain. The heat inside grew after two in the night or so it seemed to me. It used to reach its climax for sometime before the first light of the dawn. On occasions I felt as though my head was on fire, a somewhat mild fire indeed, and was issuing wisps of smoke. I distinctly remember that my hand went up on an occasion or two to feel the wet warm smoke or the heat of the fire. I still cannot recall how I passed through this ordeal. At time I waited in agony for the dull explosion that was about to take place when my head would burst into pieces.

During this time between two in the night and the dawn, the policemen would sometimes play their tricks with the table and the hard object or would keep repeating a question without seeming end. If I remember aright, undiverted occupation was at such times to be completely and painfully aware of my own condition. I also wondered whether I would be able to endure the agony much longer and what the next moment would bring to me. There was a slender element of curiosity in the whole situation. I was curious about both the properties of the next moment, about what it would do to me physically and also whether my mind not break under the stress.

What Indian has not heard of Yoga and its variant Hathayoga with its weird practices at the crematorium or with the human skull and of keeping awake almost endlessly. As a child, I had also heard my father recite the first two Sanskrit mantras of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, "Thus begins the discipline of Yoga. Yoga is control of the trends of the will." I sometime thought that I was practising Hathayoga under compulsion. I was also curious about the trends of the will and whether I

would be able to control them. The body's agony made the mind miserable. But, of this misery, there were, as I have already said, phases.

One such phase came with the approaching dawn. My occupation with my own condition used then to be diverted to the study of the ramparts and the lines of the Fort such as stood before me. The dawn was sometimes false and gave added pain. It sometimes took a long time to clear its light and to spread it. That felt like an endless time and I was angry with the dawn. It came generally in steps that were very slow indeed but were unfaltering. The line of the wall or the spike would slowly show itself, a clean, straight, well-formed and beautiful line.

I have seen and studied object under the sharp light of the day or the fading light of dusk and especially under the moonlight. The glare of the day does not promote beauty: It shows too much. The contours are overwhelmed by the details. The fading light of dusk indeed promotes beauty, but it is a somewhat unreal and vanishing beauty. The great promoter of beauty is the moonlight, the fuller the better. It was not for nothing that prospective bridge in ancient India and probably elsewhere showed themselves for the first time under the soft light of the full moon. The moon bathes everything in beauty, but it is unable to import the cleanliness of the dawn. I cannot to this day recall without a heart-throb the clean majesty of the line under a dawn that treads softly and very slowly.

I had often been brought near to relenting. The agony appeared unbearable. But each time the image of gutter water and the drinking of it came to me. After overcoming many such agonies, which appeared unbearable when they came, I set myself to a study of pain and its bearability or otherwise. There must surely be something wrong with the thought of unbearable pain. I had suffered it so often. And yet I had overcome it every time. It could not, therefore, be called unbearable pain. When such instances of seemingly

unbearable pain multiplied, I found that each subsequent shoot of pain, although grimmer in character, was overcome by me with greater calm. This nerved me and led me to the irrefutable conclusion that no pain could ever be unbearable.

Was I not seeing for myself that every increase in pain was also accompanied by an increase of calm. The body could of course not alter or set aside the laws of nature. It had to suffer pain and to register it. There was probably a limit to such suffering. Then, the body would just cease to be or it would become senseless. But the physical suffering of the body and the agony that went with it could be met with increasing calm. The trends of the will could be controlled. It would be easy to let them register the physical agony and surrender to it. That would be the way of an uncontrolled will. A controlled will would undoubtedly have to register the physical agony but would meet it with calm even unto death or unconsciousness. I set myself to a study of where this calm came from.

I have said that the pain which came to me often appeared unbearable. But I bore it alright. Therein lay a secret, which had to do with the mystery of time. The bearable appeared to be unbearable, because of an error in the comprehension of time, and the unbearable became the bearable, because of correction in the mistaken notion of time. The present was always bearable. It was the future which appeared unbearable. Every shoot of pain as it came brought with it an imagination of the greater pain that was still to come. The pain that actually came was bearable. The imagination of the greater pain that was still to come was unbearable. While the thought of the next moment put me in a state of fear at the start of my forced sleeplessness, I learnt from successive experiences that the past moments as well as the present moment were devoid of fear and of unbearable pain. Fear like pain belongs to the future; it does not belong to the present. We do not live in the future. We only imagine it. We always live in the present. Fear does not belong to the present, for such as have witnessed the mystery of time. There has, therefore, been no such thing as

fear for the controlled man.

Philosophical concern with time was not always so purely speculative. It was sometimes diverted into cheerful routes of hope. Philosophy tended to become superstition, a somewhat vigorous superstition indeed. I thought of the allotted number of days that I had to spend in the Lahore Fort. If I had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment there would have been some basis for such thought. I was on an indefinite detention. And yet I thought of the allotted days of my stay in the torture house. This thought had to do with destiny.

Destiny need not necessarily have to do with God or a supernatural agency. Men think all the world over in terms of a destiny. This concept of destiny is on the whole superstitious. But it is at last in part based on certain rationally comprehensible forces of collective and individual history. The concept of destiny is somewhat more applicable to collective history, where the past is carried like a seed within the womb of the future, which enables prophesy of sorts. But here I was concerned with my own destiny. This wholly superstitious destiny thinks of one's allotted span on earth and its division into various episodes. Accordingly, I thought of the episode of torture as limited in time. Some day it had to end. That day was more or less distant. I did not indeed know of its exact date, but it was nonetheless there. I could, therefore, be sure of the steady diminution of my allotted time in the torture house. Each day that I passed successfully made one day less in the period allotted to torture by my destiny. There was an absolute certainty in this hope, in the steady diminution of my destined days of torture. This was also a concern with time, in its less philosophical aspects indeed but decidedly more cheerful. There seemed to be hope in the future.

At the same time, the role of the future in individual destiny may be full of limitless despair: When I thought that destiny must have allotted me a definite span of time in the torture house, I was not justified in imagining any particular length of time. It may have been time without end, as far as my

own individual life was concerned. Destiny may have meant me to stay in the torture house as long as I lived. There was then no question of a steady diminution of days, but that day would follow day in meaningless repetition. According to this concept of time within my destiny, my torture and my life would end together, so I thought. Such a peep into the future disclosed black despair. After sometime I thought of both these properties of the future simultaneously.

If the future was such that my destined stay in the torture house was considerably shorter than the duration of my life, it carried hope. In the other event of the destined stay being coterminous with the destined age, the future carried despair. There was obviously something wrong with the mind and the will, that was subject to both the trends of hope and despair. It struck me then that cessation of existence was not an unpleasant or undesirable experience. In fact, it could well be looked upon as the ultimate deliverance from pain and sorrow, as also from vain hope. What appeared as black despair was in reality ultimate deliverance. The untrained will had chosen to see in the passage to this ultimate deliverance hope and despair alternately according to its structure and inclination at any particular moment. The concept of time in the future was, therefore, full of pitfalls. If its property of fear was unreal so were its properties of hope and greed and despair and perhaps also of ultimate deliverance.

Even before my Lahore imprisonment, I had been aware in a literary fashion of the moment being the eternity. This was more a manner of speech than a felt experience. To the extent that it was a felt experience, it only meant thoroughness, an effort to live intensively in the present without much obstructing thought of the past and the future. After the Lahore experience, the living and the present moment acquired another meaning for me. Since then I have often observed myself desiring something that lay in the womb of the future, which may be no more than the next moment, rather than being content with the desirabilities of the present. The organising of a

demonstration or the striking of soft hair is not an act in itself; there is a preceding as well as a succeeding series of many moments. The controlled will, will probably not let anticipated desires of succeeding obtrude upon the relish of the present moment. That moment would be living life thoroughly and intensively, without greed.

But life is not a single disconnected act or event. It is a complex act, an infinite series of events. They follow one upon another. If they did not, life would cease to be and time would physically stand still. Revolution like love is a series of numberless events. I cannot conceive of a man who would not desire a particular constitution of the next moment or reject it in its other forms. Such a total eradication of desires is not possible. I will let pass the question whether that is desirable. If life is a succession of acts and events in time, the mind is bound to register them and also the calculations and anticipations connected with them. The controlled will may at most seek to cleanse these anticipations of greed or the fever that often lies in desiring. The present can be made so intensely desirable that the anticipated future may at best beckon but cause no fever nor greed.

To come back to the Lahore experience, I had seen time and the next moment in its various aspects of fear, hope, despair and ultimate deliverance. I felt as though Time stood before me and cast one apparel away in order to wear another. This seemed so unreal. I was victim to the chimeras of a fancy dress ball. I tried to deprive time of its numerous apparels and to stand it completely naked. On two occasions, I think I succeeded in doing so. But that was only for a flash, a fraction of time such as no instrument can grasp nor even the mind. I could not hold Time. Before my mind or fingers could fasten on it, it had already sped. It continued to speed. But, throughout its passage, the memory stayed that I had ordered Time to stand, although for an indescribably short flash, shorter than a millionth of a second. When time stood-still for me, a constant and unbroken sheet of undefiled purity, it had

shed all fear and greed and despair and even thought of ultimate deliverance. I was the king anointed of all the world, without care or crown, for, no matter how the world moved, I ordered it cleaned of all the dross. My order was sovereign. In fact, it was not an order for it could not be disobeyed. It was only a sovereign arrangement of a controlled will. I had seen Time as the everlasting present, pure and unsullied, without the past of regret and sorrow and the future of fear and greed to defy it. I was the conqueror of Time, although for a flash too short to remember.

I make no claim to have kept my mind or my will as clean and controlled as this experience would suggest. But the memory of the experience lingers. That may have been behind my theory of immediacy. That may also explain my attraction for ancient shrines of Mahakal, The Great Time. It is possible to render the mind or soul pure, like the refurbished mirror without spot or blemish or anything of its own, of which Indian philosophy has spoken. The mind that is devoid of fear and greed and despair is capable of right thought. Whether I have been able to practise my experience in politics and in other spheres of life is wholly irrelevant to the advice that I now give to all those who would hear me, to attempt to control the trends of the mind or the will so that it lives in the present devoid of the fear and the greed that belong to the future.

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