INTRODUCTION

Hopkins occupies a unique position in Victorian poetry. Largely unknown in his lifetime, long neglected after the first publication of his major verse, Hopkins is now regarded by some as the greatest of the Victorian poets. His daring experiments in the language of poetry has even prompted critics to rank him among the Moderns.

All discerning critics of Hopkins have noticed that the beauty of Hopkins's mature verse lies largely in the beauty of his language. Here is a poet who has always 'very little to say'. His poems are almost always configurations of words around very slender 'themes' or 'ideas'. This has led to confusion among the critics. Critics are bewildered in face of Hopkins's poetry. The initial reaction of critics like Middleton Murray and others against Hopkins's verse was one of resentment and hostility. Hopkins's violation of the norms of grammar and usage was frowned upon by critics. With the birth of new sensibility and development of new tools, these violations came to be looked upon as merits of Hopkins's poetry. His boldness and forward-looking experiments in language have blinded and misled his critics all the way. Later, critics like I.A. Richards, Herbert Read, William Empson and others
defended Hopkins in the light of newly-developed theories of poetic diction. It is the contention of this thesis that both these groups of critics failed to do justice to Hopkins or his poetry. Hopkins was a sound classical scholar. His wide reading in classical poetry and rhetoric had convinced him that English poetry was deficient in a particular respect. It 'says' too much. English poetry had traditionally moved along the lines of exposition of beauties of Nature and philosophical ideas and reflection of some mood. Hopkins was not satisfied with these functions of poetry. He went to the root of the matter. Poems are basically structures of words. Words are a poet's primary concern, not ideas, philosophies or moods. So, the beauty of a poem, according to Hopkins, lies not in its 'content' or 'theme' but in the arrangement of the words. This body of words or 'Verbal Icon' according to Hopkins, is the end of poetry. The reader's primary duty is to appreciate and enjoy this verbal configuration or contour.

Hopkins has clearly expressed his theory of poetry and language in numerous letters, and in his Essays and Journals. A careful study of these Journals and correspondences is a sine qua non for the appreciation of Hopkins's verse. It has been the principal effort of the present researcher to draw again and again on this store. Sometimes
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a repetition of excerpts have been found unavoidable for clear exposition and elucidation of Hopkins's ideas about poetry. Hopkins was not only a sound classical scholar, he was a man endowed with rich poetic sensibility and keen intellectual faculties. A careful study of Hopkins's letters, essays and Journals has on numerous occasions drawn attention to similar or parallel ideas in other authors. But the main drift of the present researcher has been to explain Hopkins in terms of himself. External evidence is used only when Hopkins clearly anticipated a later poet or author.

Although the bulk of critical materials on Hopkins is steadily growing, very few books have been written on the language of Hopkins's poetry. Besides the omnibus volumes of Gardner, two books discuss Hopkins's language in great length. They are Gerard Manley Hopkins: a critical essay towards the understanding of his poetry by W.A.M. Peters and the Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins by James Milroy. The present author is deeply indebted to W.H. Gardner, W.A.M. Peters and James Milroy. Other critics who have occasionally drawn attention to particular aspects of Hopkins's poetry, have been suitably mentioned.

The thesis ranges over five Chapters. In Chapter I
entitled, Hopkins - the least understood poet of the Victorian era a brief survey has been made of Hopkins criticism. The aim of this chapter is to show the points where the critical attention has been mainly fixed. But this is not a random review of Hopkins criticism. Since the first publication of Hopkins's major verse the charge of 'obscurity' has been brought against Hopkins's poetry by one critic or other. This chapter mainly traces the undulating graph of critical attention to Hopkins's poetic diction.

Chapter II is entitled, Flexibility of Poetic Language. Hopkins is one of those few English poets who thought deeply over the phenomenon of language. He was fascinated by language - its beauty and wonder, its growth, decay and change. In writing poetry, whereas other poets were concerned with the exposition of beauties of nature and philosophical ideas or reflection of some mood, Hopkins turned away from them. Rather these things were not Hopkins's primary concern. Hopkins believed that communication of some thought, emotion, feeling was not the poet's chief concern. He held that language was always in a flux and so 'meaning' was elusive. It was, therefore, the poet's duty to turn away from 'meaning' and concentrate on language. This Chapter throws light on how Hopkins looked upon the semantic fluidity of language.
Chapter III is entitled Sound—the flexible basis of language. Hopkins thought deeply over the relationship of sound and sense. A poet writes with words which are so many 'signs'. These 'signs' lead to sense and sound. Now meaning or sense being elusive a poet has no other way than to fall back on sound — this is how Hopkins understood poetry to be. Thus Hopkins's mature verse appeals to the readers at the level of melody. Chapter III analyses this auditory aspect of Hopkins's poetry.

Chapter IV is entitled Patterning as a poetic idea. Hopkins coined the word 'inscape' which he considered the soul of poetry. By 'inscape' Hopkins meant 'pattern' or 'design'. So poetry was to Hopkins verbal designs or patterns. Now if this merely meant that poetry should have a definite structure, Hopkins would have taken his place beside so many Victorian poets. What Hopkins really understood by 'inscape' in the context of poetry, was that poems were primarily structures of words-as-sound and not structures of words-as-meaning. This concept of poetry as configuration of spoken sound was Hopkins's subtle innovation in the field of poetry. Chapter IV discusses various aspects of 'poetry as configuration of spoken sound'.
Chapter V is entitled, Pattern and Poetry. Hopkins's mature verses are configurations of spoken sound. Of course, every poem of Hopkins has a structure of meaning. But meaning is secondary in it. It is the configuration of sound which really matters in it. Now this creation of pattern is a difficult process. Language has a life of its own and moves on at its own free will taking turns and twist. It is extremely resistant to human effort to forge patterns out of it. In order to do it the language has to be made supple and malleable. Sometimes this may go against the genius of the language. But Hopkins did not shrink from them if they were necessary for patterns. All the 'oddity' of Hopkins's mature verse, which are now looked upon as beauties, stem from his pattern-making effort. Hopkins's use of strange words, his use of dialect and archaic words, compounds, his use of various rhyming devices like alliteration, consonance vowelling-on, vowelling-off etc., his dislocation of normal English syntax — these are all means to the end which is the achievement of poetic pattern. In this chapter structural elements in Hopkins's poetry have been isolated and analysed to show how they contribute to the process of pattern-making. Implied all through this Chapter is the idea that the strange use Hopkins put to language was not due to any conflict in his mind or due to the fact that he wanted to extricate as much sense out of words as is possible, but due to the fact he
thought that without wrenching the language violently as he did new patterns could not be created. The whole drift of analysis in Chapter V is that autonomous patterns were what Hopkins was really after in his poetry and autonomous patterns justify his highly individualistic use of language.

The 'Conclusion' sums up the whole idea of the thesis for quick analysis and assessment.