Chapter 4

The Transcendental Experience in *Rasa* and Hopkins

The religious implications of Indian aesthetic theories are very relevant to the study of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The theory of rasa proposed by Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* very strongly influenced the aesthetic theories that came after it. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, rasa is not the principal subject of discussion; it is treated as one aspect of dramatic presentation. The rasa theory was an attempt to indicate the “character of the emotional effect of drama,” an enjoyment experienced by a spectator while witnessing a play. Bharata in the sixth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* explains rasa realization thus:

In that connexion I shall first of all explain the Sentiments (*rasa*).


But according to Manomohan Ghosh, “the *NS*. nowhere explains the terms *nispatti* and *samyoga* of this definition and does not include the *sthāyibhāva* in it (the def.). Hence the theory of *rasa* has come to be interpreted differently in later times by Lollaṭa, Śankuka, (Bhaṭṭa) Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta (*NS*: 1, Note 105).
The commentators of Bharata’s text developed divergent philosophical theories to explain *rasasūtra*, the most important of them being Bhāṭṭalollata, Śankuka, Bhāṭṭānāyaka and Abhinavagupta (Vijayavardhana 85). The most comprehensive discussion of this is in *Abhinavabhārati*. The *rasa* experience has a spiritual dimension in *Abhinavabhārati*. A significant improvement on the existing *rasa* theory was the postulation that *rasa* was always suggested (Vijayavardhana 93).

Though the theory of *rasa* is associated with Bharata, there are also references to it in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and Vālmīki. But in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads where *rasa* is mentioned, the references are not exactly to aesthetics. *Rasa*, in many contexts, refers to the experience of the Supreme Reality, the self-existent delight. Thus, the core of Indian aesthetic theories is the experience of *rasa*, and in its fullness, *rasa* leads to religious experience.

*Rasa*, which is the result of the combination of *vibhāvas, anubhāvas* and *vyābicāribhāvas*, yields a kind of pleasure that can be compared to the pleasure attained through a very absorbing religious experience. In the enjoyment of *rasa*, there is an experience of the transcendence of time and space. In this experience, a *sahrdaya* becomes totally divested of all egoistic feelings and experiences aesthetic pleasure.

The aesthetic relish attained through *rasāsvādana* comes close to the experience of the Ultimate Reality. In the Maitrī Upaniṣad there is a
passage which elucidates the meaning of the Ultimate Reality as *rasa*. The Ultimate Reality is described as the “lord of all pleasures and delight” (V. 2. 1). It is as relishable as *rasa*. The Upaniṣadic teaching that the Ultimate Reality is essentially ānandam is expressed by the concept of *rasa*. The experience of bliss is always associated with *rasa*. For on getting the essence (*rasa*) one becomes blissful.

All Indian aestheticians who came after Bharata, especially Abhinavagupta, a major figure in this regard, admit the existence of *rasa*. Harriette D. Grisson in his essay “Feeling as Form in Indian Aesthetics” observes that “like much of Indian aesthetic speculations, *rasa* theory was inevitably linked with spiritual perspectives and examined in relation to the four aims of life recognized in Vedic philosophy – dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa.” In Gnoli’s opinion, “after Abhinavagupta, the study of aesthetics continued in India up to the present day, but without receiving much creative stimulus” (Introduction lii). He adds further, “The concept of art as an activity and an independent spiritual experience, freed of practical interests, which the intuition of Kant perceived for the West, was already, in the 10th century India, an object of study and controversy” (Introduction lii).

Though Bharata is credited with having originated the *rasa* theory, it was Abhinavagupta who developed it into a systematic poetic principle. His works in the field of aesthetics are two, namely, *Abhinavabhārati*, 
which is a commentary on the *Nātyaśāstra*, and the *Dhvanyāloka Locana*, a commentary on Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*. According to Susheel Kumar De, “although Abhinavagupta contented himself with the writing of commentaries in the field of Sanskrit Poetics, his works have almost the value of independent treatises for their profound erudition and critical acumen” (1: 42-43).

Abhinavagupta was a mystic, and the tradition as recorded by his followers and commentators tells us that he had realized the Absolute. He discusses both in *Locana* and in *Abhinavabhārati* the nature of *rasa* and the manner how the *sahrdaya* gets over the obstacles to attain the experience. This realization is considered *alaukika* or transcendental. It is ineffable and cannot be expressed in words. It is a peculiar kind of cognition similar to, but not identical with, yogic knowledge and realization. Mulk Raj Ānand defines the nature of *rasa* and the Absolute thus: “it permeates the differentiated universe of maya (appearance) and we can feel it in the veins of existence, we cannot know it, materially, through the senses . . . the same is true of rasa” (396).

The transcendental nature of aesthetic experience is traceable in Hopkins also. But, as we have seen, he achieves it with much conflict. We can trace a gradual movement from the sensuous to the transcendental in his writings. In spite of the conflict between the aesthete and the priest in Hopkins, his final conviction that mortal beauty leads to immortal
beauty is similar to the development of aesthetic experience as discussed by Abhinavagupta. Like him, Hopkins also at times transcends his own limitations of individuality in the experience of beauty. According to Abhinavagupta, “the experiencing subject also in aesthetic experience is free from all limitations of individuality. He is universalized. His experience is free from all impediments (vighna)” (qtd. in Pandey 1: 108). We find a similar movement in the poem “The Windhover.” The sensuous individuality of the Windhover is surrendered and transcended.

The transcendence of subjectivity is very important in aesthetic enjoyment. This is present in the aesthetic experience of the poems of Hopkins. The spiritual depth of these poems is the result of the transcendence of subjectivity at many levels. When we analyse how Hopkins enjoyed the beauty of things, we find that the enjoyment begins with the appreciation of the sensuous qualities of an object. It also demands the transcendence of his subjectivity at least for the period of enjoyment. This is reflected in the conflict that the enjoyment of beauty produced in him. Subjectivity includes one’s personality, and it was difficult for a person like Hopkins to forget the taste of his self, which was as strong as the sour taste of ale or alum. Hopkins was a person who always sensed the uniqueness of his self: “the taste of myself” is “more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of
walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man. . .” (SD 123).

As in Vedanta, it is only when human beings overcome selfishness and realize the highest truth that they will be in rapt ecstasy wherever they turn, for they see the glory of being everywhere (Hiriyanna 163). According to Pandey, for Abhinavagupta mystical experience was nothing but the “realization of the Self, free from all impurities, which constitutes the individuality of the individual self. This implies the identity of the individual and the universal in essential nature” (1: 93).

As a Jesuit priest, Hopkins was aware that he was not allowed to immerse himself in the enjoyment of sensuous beauty. But during the development of his aesthetic experience, he attained the ability to enjoy the sensuous qualities of objects as he realized that they reflected the divine form of the Ultimate Reality. The “inscapes” of things became symbols of the creator, and they became universalized.

As discussed already, it was through the philosophy of Duns Scotus that Hopkins was able to unite his sensuous and religious experiences. He acknowledges this in his poem “Duns Scotus’s Oxford” where he says, “He . . . most sways my spirit to peace” (Poems 79). Sprinkler observes:

Beginning with a sense of his own isolation and idiosyncrasy, Hopkins turns outside himself to nature, to poetry and to God. Gradually he integrates all things into one chorus of many voices
all singing in their different ways, the name of Christ. Poetry is
the imitation and echo of this chorus. Even the poet, by virtue of
his share in the common nature, is assimilated into the melody of
creation. The inscape of words, the inscapes of nature, the
inscape of the self can be expressed at once as the presence of
Christ. (63)

The aesthetic perception of Hopkins involves a sense of wonder. It
reminds him of God who created the world and the “inscapes” that he
perceives as beautiful. The love of nature in all its moods and appearances
enabled him to experience in a supernatural perspective “the dearest
freshness deep down things” (Poems 66). He speaks of the power of the
divine hand as it moves over mountains and streams. When he looks at
mountains, he sees the majestic shoulders of God: “And the azurous hung
hills are his world-wielding shoulders/Majestic—as a stallion stalwart,
very-violet-sweet!—” (Poems 70).

James Finn Cotter has made an elaborate study of Hopkins’s sense
of wonder in his book Inscape: the Christology and Poetry of Gerard
Manley Hopkins. He attempts to show that Hopkins’s use of the
interjection “O” in his poems is an attempt to express his wonder in the
experience of the divine in earthly things. He tries to contrast this to the
Alpha and Omega symbols that stand for the Ultimate Reality. As he was
acutely aware of the transience and flux of life, he looked with awe at
nature that was like a spiritual book providing intermittent access to the Ultimate Reality. The formulation of the theories of “inscape” and “instress” is an attempt to define this wonder. There are numerous instances in his writings where he uses this interjection “O” to express the wonder he felt at the glory of God. In “The Wreck,” he marvels at the lightning:

O at lightning and lashed rod;

Thou heards t me truer than tongue confess

Thy terror, O Christ, O God; (Poems 52)

Cotter attempts to connect Omega to “O” and says, “Transliterated into English, Omega becomes long O, (actually the more ancient form of the Greek letter)” (Cotter 286-87). He further observes:

Hopkins, who showed a familiarity with Oriental religion and shared in the new interest at Oxford in philology and comparative mythology, privately may have associated Greek Omega with the sacred syllable Om, uttered at the opening of each verse of the Vedas and used by Hindu priests in the offering of their sacrifices. The mystic syllable sounds the beginning, middle, and end of the universe, its essence and totality. Om is the center of man’s contact with Brahman, the Self of all selves, as the Munḍaka Upanishads declares: “Om is the bow, the Self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim” (2.2.4). By concentration, man
may “hit the mark, as the arrow the target,” and become one with Brahman. By sounding *Om* man can attain to the triune God, “the Utterer, Uttered, Uttering” (P145), since the syllable expresses the cycle of waking dream — sleep of cosmic life.

(Cotter 286)

The sense of wonder that is present in Hopkins’s poetry is very much there in Indian poetics too, especially in the *camatkāra* concept. The aesthetic delight that is the result of *rasa* experience is termed *camatkāra* by Ānandavardhana (Masson 1:18). In Śaiva philosophy the term has a deeper meaning signifying a perfect self-consciousness that is the “consciousness of Self, free from all limitations” (Pandey 1: 107). Abhinavagupta used this term in the philosophical sense signifying “consciousness” as part of aesthetic experience. He holds the view that the self shines and this luminosity, which is pure consciousness, gives bliss. In the observation made by Vijayavardhana, “the experience of *rasa* is transcendental (lokottara) in nature, and it has its essence or soul, *camatkāra*— a peculiar state of wonder taking the form of a dilation of the mind.” (93). K. D. Tripati in his article entitled “From Sensuous to Supersensuous: Some Terms of Indian Aesthetics” says that the term *camatkāra* designates flash and wonder of aesthetic delight. Quoting V. Raghavan he says that it is an onomatopoeic word referring to the clicking sound we make with our tongue when we taste something snappy (7).

The Rasa, arising from an exaltation of the quality of *sattva* or goodness, indivisible, self-manifestated, made up of joy and thought in their identity, free from the contact of aught else perceived, akin to the realization of Brahman, and having for its essence supernormal wonder (*camatkāra*), is enjoyed by those competent in its inseparableness (as an object of knowledge) from the knowledge of itself. (2: 263)

De explains “*camatkāra* as consisting of an expansion of the mind and as synonymous with *vismaya*. In this connection, Viśvanātha quotes with approval an opinion of his ancestor Nārāyaṇa who put a premium on the sentiment of the marvellous (*adbhuta rasa*) and maintained that it was essential in all Rasas” (2: 263).

Gnoli observes, “The aesthetic and mystical state of consciousness is not only characterized by a particular bliss or response. According to Abhinavagupta and his school, they are accompanied by a sense of wonder or surprise” (Introduction xlv). The word expressing this wonder, *camatkāra*, is frequently to be found, in its ordinary non-technical sense of surprise and amazement in Indian literature. According to Abhinavagupta and his school, this wonder is present in a broader sense in every form of life and it is like consciousness itself. According to him, aesthetic
sensibility is nothing but “a capacity of wonder more elevated than the ordinary one” (Gnoli, Introduction xlvi).

Dissatisfaction with the finite beauty is the motive behind searching for the manifestation of the Absolute in the world in Abhinavagupta and Hopkins. Abhinavagupta quotes from Kālidāsa and explains the relentless search for the infinite by the human mind. According to him, even in aesthetic enjoyment we can find an obscure unrest. Kālidāsa says that “in the act of admiring in happiness beautiful shapes or listening to sweet sounds, feels in him a keen disquiet. Does he, perhaps, recall, in his soul, affections of past lives, deep within his spirit without his knowledge?” (Gnoli, Introduction xxv). The disquiet to which Kālidāsa alludes, observes Abhinavagupta, is an unobjectified desire; it corresponds to, metaphysically, the desire which induces consciousness to deny its original fullness and to crumble in time and space.

The wonder that Abhinavagupta describes is very much present in the aesthetic perception of Hopkins. He wonders at the “inscapes” created by God. Donald Mc Chesney in his “The Meaning of ‘Inscape’” says, “Hopkins, like many mystics, ascetics and visionaries, was given intermittent access to this world described…. (203). In the famous “bluebell passage” Hopkins says, “I do not think I have seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at and I know the beauty of our Lord by it” (JP 99). The sense of wonder in the perception
of divine beauty in earthly things is very evident in this passage. In his poem “God’s Grandeur,” “THE world is charged with the grandeur of God / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil” (*Poems* 66). Everything was new and special in his eyes as in the poem “Binsley Poplars,” “The sweet especial scene, / Rural scene, a rural, scene” (*Poems* 78). The aesthete in Hopkins perceived that a rural scene is sweet to the eyes and regretted that people failed in noticing the “inscapes” in nature. He remarks poignantly: “I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again” (*JP* 221).

The aesthetic perception that begins as a sense of wonder passes through various developments in Hopkins. Abhinavagupta also speaks about the different stages in aesthetic enjoyment, but in a more explicit manner. In the first stage, the universalized basic mental state is apprehended in an objective manner. In the second stage, the duality of subject and object disappears through basic mental state. At this level, the basic mental state sinks back into the subconscious. The final stage of aesthetic experience is *paramānanda*. This stage is described as *vyatireka turīyātīta* in which all subjectivity merges in the subconscious. At this stage, the self attains its full effulgence, it shines in its ānanda aspect.
Pande in his work *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study* speaks about this stage thus:

Abhinavagupta in his *Īśvara Pratyabhijnā Vivṛti Vimarsinī*

‘admits that there is a stage in the process of aesthetic experience, in which the Self experiences itself as affected by Sthāyin; but that is not the final stage.’ He definitely asserts that the final stage in the aesthetic experience is that in which there is the experience of Paramānanda and that in it even the basic mental state, awakened by dramatic presentation, sinks into the subconscious. He holds that the aesthetic experience, in its final stage, belongs to the level of Vyatireka Turīyātīta, in which all objectivity merges in the subconscious and the subject, the Self, shines in its Ānanda aspect. (621)

A similar movement from the sensuous to the supernatural is seen in Hopkins. According to him, the perception of “inscape” of objects is very sensuous at the first stage. However, his aesthetic enjoyment never stops with that, it reaches a level where the subject-object relationship disappears, and it moves to a universal experience. Thus, the “inscapes” become the sparks that tell of God.

Abhinavagupta speaks about the “deindividualised” self in the aesthetic enjoyment in an elaborate manner. As *rasa* springs from selfless sympathy, not every one will be capable of attaining it. In aesthetic
experience, all that is externally manifested is essentially “blissful”
(ānandamaya), but in actual experience we find the worldly objects painful
or pleasant. Abhinavagupta explains this feature of aesthetic enjoyment
thus:

External objects are painful or pleasant, when they are related to
the individuality of the perceiving subject, when they are viewed
objectively and purposively, when the relationship between the
subject and object is utilitarian. But when the utilitarian relation
is substituted by the aesthetical, when the object is viewed
without any objective purpose, when the perceiving subject is
free from all elements of individuality, when object is reflected
on deindividualised self, it is not experienced as either pleasant or
painful, but simply produces a stir in the universalized self of the
perciptent, brings about the predominance of the Ānanda aspect
of the self. (Pandey 1: 562)

Abhinavagupta views aesthetic experience as the experience of “bliss”
(ānanda) at the transcendental level. As Mishra says, “At the level of
generality, rasa is the state of ānanda, a word that carries with it the sense
of both blissful joy and the union with Brahman as well as “‘orgasmic
rapture’” (20).

In his aesthetic perception, Hopkins is seen transcending his own
subjectivity on many occasions. The aesthete in him is so strong at
moments that he becomes virtually unconscious of his own self. This is very evident in his perception of the beauty of the Windhover: “My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird, the achieve of, / The mastery of the thing” (Poems 69). For a moment, he immerses himself in the perception of the glorious flight of the bird. However, when he realizes that the sensuous enjoyment of the beauty of the bird conflicts with his spiritual commitment, he surrenders the glorious beauty by using the powerful word “Buckle.” Thus the “Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here / Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, / A billion times told lovelier” (Poems 69).

The aesthetic experience that begins with the perception of finite beauty transcends the limitations of time and space and through the surrendering of the self moves to greater glory. The transcending of the limitations of the finite self and moving into a realm beyond earthly glory is clearly seen in “The Windhover.” The inner conflict produced by the love of beauty, earthly glory, and the self-taste of individuality is resolved in a symbolic act of synthesis with the Ultimate Being. As Gardner says, “inscape was something more than a delightful sensory impression: it was an insight, by Divine grace, into the ultimate reality” (1: 27).

The aesthetic enjoyment that begins as a sensuous perception transforms itself into a Christo-centric vision of reality, or, in Indian terminology, an experience of the Absolute. Hopkins sees the glory of
being everywhere: in potsherds, in grass, in bluebells, and in the whole world. As Peters says, “It was his spiritual outlook on this world that made inscape so precious to Hopkins; the inscape of an object was, so to speak, more ‘word of God’ that reminded him more of the Creator, than a superficial impression could have done” (6). In a passage on “pitch,” we find Hopkins speaking about the Ultimate Being in terms of “pitch of self”:

And when I ask where does all this throng and stack of being, so, rich, so distinctive, so important, come from / nothing I see can answer me. And this whether I speak of human nature or of my individuality, my selfbeing. For human nature, being more highly pitched, selved and distinctive than anything in the world, can have been developed, evolved, condensed, from the vastness of the world not anyhow or by the working of common powers but only by one of finer or higher pitch and determination than itself and certainly than any that elsewhere we see, for this power had to force forward the starting or stubborn elements to the one pitch required. (SD 122-123)

Hopkins’s poems are mystical in appeal because of the experience of subject-object transcendence in them. The earthly glory of the windhover that filled the consciousness of the poet disappears with the self-surrender, and in his mystical perception, the bird vanishes into Christ, the glorious redeemer. The subjective experience of the transcendence of
subject-object difference, a characteristic quality of mystical experience, is seen as,

. . . the annihilation of every pair of opposites; everything is reabsorbed in its dissolving fire. Sun and moon, night and day, beautiful and ugly, etc., no longer exist in it. The limited “I,” is completely absorbed into Śiva or Bairava, the adored object; everything vanishes from the field of consciousness. (Gnoli, Notes 82-83)

In the process of aesthetic experience, the emotively affected persons completely forget themselves. According to Deshpande, certain emotional states “deindividualises” an individual and frees him or her from those elements that constitute individuality such as place, time, etc. These emotional states raise one to the level of the universal. This is the process of universalisation (sādhārāṇīkaraṇa or sādhārāṇībhavana) and may be called the “cathartic” level in the “deindividualisation.” At this level, the emotive experience is completely free from all objective references and from spatial and temporal relations, which are responsible for individuality (83-84).

Tapasvi Nandi observes that the Vibhāvana process in the enjoyment of rasa is like an alchemy that turns the gross into the ethereal, the ugly into the beautiful, and the earthly into the divine. It transforms
material contexts into spiritual, raises the gross to the level of art-experience, i.e. *rasa* (37). According to Nandi,

This art-experience is made of supreme bliss, and to differentiate it from worldly experience, the art-critics have equated it with the divine joy caused due to the realization of *Brahman*, the supreme spirit. They term it as “*brahmāsvāda-sahodara*.” Actually, critics like Jagannatha explain that this aesthetic delight, *rasānubhūti* or *kalānubhūti* or art-experience is even superior to, what the philosophers call *brahmāsvāda*, which is experienced by the yogins in a state of *nirvikalpasamādhi* or state of meditation beyond discursive consciousness. (38)

In art experience, there is no total annihilation of the personal or individual factors. There is also no total negation of individuality. However, in “de-individualization” the denial of gross ego-sense full of personal likes and dislikes takes place. The experience of *rasa* demands a close union of human intelligence and the consciousness of the divine. As Nandi says, “it is, so to say, growing of an individual viewer into a higher self, it is a passage to the realm of higher consciousness, reaching the divine in you, the revelation of one’s spiritual consciousness” (38).

Hopkins in his poems often portrays the transformation of the ordinary into the image of the divine. This transformation of the finite, sensuous reality into something spiritually significant is the theme of many of his poems.
In the poem “That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire,” he speaks about the transformation of an ordinary man into the image of Christ. After the transformation, he is described as “Immortal Diamond.” The process is well illustrated by the following lines:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,

I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and

This Jack, joke, poor, potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,

Is immortal diamond. (Poems 106)

Moreover, as Robert Bernard Martin has remarked, in Hopkins the “aesthetic and religious experience became one in the sacramental apprehension of beauty” (207).

Hopkins’s aesthetics passed through various stages of aesthetic enjoyment as explained in the discussions on art experience. The sensuous aspect in him gave way to the spiritual and produced “deindividualization.”

As discussed already, an approximately equivalent expression for “deindividualization” in Sanskrit is “sādhāranīkaraṇa” or “generalization.” In this state, limited ego-sense fades away giving place to a higher self. The process is well captured in his poems, which can be cited as powerful examples of spiritual transformation. At the deepest level, the aesthetic developments in Hopkins and Indian poetics blend harmoniously.
Abhinavagupta speaks about the need for overcoming the preoccupation with one’s ego in order to reach a state where the individual identifies himself or herself with the universal. Grazia Marchiano in his essay “What to Learn from Eastern Aesthetics” observes:

By aesthetic experience, Indian rhetoricians, who have been systematically exploring it since the 7th century, mean a dynamics of subjective consciousness which does not identify itself with the source of pleasure by which it is triggered, but becomes a totally absorbing experience. Whoever experiences this process is absorbed in it to the point of transcending his own limited subjectivity.

However, the surrendering of the self is not unique to Eastern thought alone; one can find similar ideas in Western thinking, both aesthetic and spiritual. In the Western spiritual thought, surrendering of one’s will is essential for spiritual progress. Dante has beautifully put it in his famous line, *E’n la sua volontate è nostra pace* (And in his Will is our peace). When one’s will is surrendered, one’s self is also surrendered. It is by surrendering one’s will to the Absolute that one establishes perfect harmony. This is the theme of T. S. Eliot’s remarkable play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.

In primitive cultures art existed in close union with religious rituals. But certain poets, artists, and pious people often misunderstood the affinity
between art and religion. Religious theories evolved in the West projecting art and poetry as hindrances to attaining spiritual perfection. This attitude sometimes produces conflict in religious minded artists. A very poignant example is the conflict in the mind of Hopkins. The absence of the realization that aesthetic enjoyment also can lead a person to God produced conflicts in the early stages of his poetic career. This is evident in a letter he wrote to his friend Alexander Baillie:

You know that I once wanted to be a painter. But even if I could I wd. not I think, now, for, the fact is that the higher and more attractive parts of the art put strain upon passions which I shd. think it unsafe to encounter. I want to write still and as a priest I very likely can do that too, not so freely as I shd have liked, e.g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what wd. best serve the cause of my religion. (FL 231)

But later he recognized that mortal beauty could lead to immortal beauty. In his Journals we find this remark: “I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it” (JP 199). Through self-surrender the finite self attains infinite glory. In the famous poem “The Windhover” he speaks of this transformation:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier! (Poems 69)

In aesthetic experience, all that is externally manifested is essentially “blissful” (ānandamayā), but in actual experience, the worldly objects are either painful or pleasant. According to Pandey, in Abhinavagupta we can find an explanation for this problem in aesthetic enjoyment:

External objects are painful or pleasant, when they are related to the individuality of the perceiving subject, when they are viewed objectively and purposively, when the relation between the subject and the object is utilitarian. But when the utilitarian relation is substituted by the aesthetical, when the object is viewed without any objective purpose, when the perceiving subject is free from all elements of individuality, when object is reflected on deindividualised self, it is not experienced as either pleasant or painful, but simply produces a stir in the universalised self of the percipient, brings about the predominance of the Ānanda aspect of the self. This is exactly what happens when an aesthete hears sweet music. Now if the music or any other aesthetic object be not essentially of the nature of bliss or Para-Brahman how could it manifest the aspect of ‘bliss’ (Ānanda) of the deindividualised subject? The aesthetic experience from music, according to Abhinavagupta, is the experience of ‘bliss’ (Ānanda) at the
transcendental level. Accordingly, he holds that Sahṛdaya or aesthete is one who is capable of rising to the transcendental level. Therefore, one who cannot cast off the limitations of body, etc. and rise to the transcendental level is ‘not-aesthete’ (Ahṛdaya). (1: 562)

In Western philosophy, the conscious mind has long been regarded as the essence of selfhood. This view is encapsulated in the proclamation by Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” Lacan lays down a dramatic challenge to this philosophical consensus when he reverses this into “I am where I think not” (Barry 112). Abhinavagupta is not a rationalist of the Kantian type. On the contrary, he belongs to the Hegelian type and devotes serious attention to the problem of ultimate origin and the nature of the world of experience. He was a mystic, and the tradition as recorded by his followers and commentators tells us that he had realised the absolute:

Mystic experience, therefore, he held to be nothing but realisation of the Self, free from all impurities, which constitute the individuality of the individual self. This implies the identity of the individual and the universal is essential. This means that the universal is essentially the same as the individual. His conception of the Universal, the Absolute, is, therefore, based upon the analysis of human mind. (Pandey 1: 93-94)
In Abhinavagupta, aesthetic experience begins at the sense-level. It rises to the transcendental level through imagination, emotion and catharsis. In order to attain experience, one has to rely on pramata. It is the light of cit itself as a limited manifestation of the universal consciousness. As it sends its light towards the object it is pramana, or means of knowledge (Tharakan 74).

The unselfishness signified by art experience is not only spontaneous but also complete. One grows so unselfish that one becomes virtually unconscious of one’s private self. This is the meaning of saying that art experience consists in the disinterested contemplation of beauty. The intrusion of any selfish aim is sure to vitiate it, and make the pursuit of art unsuccessful. As Hiriyanna says, the aim of art experience “is to secure for man a unique form of experience which according to one view can never be attained in actual life” (164). In his view, one important quality needed for art experience is selflessness: “The selflessness signified by art experience, on the other hand, is not only spontaneous but also complete. Man grows so unselfish then that he becomes virtually unconscious of his private self” (Hiriyanna 164).

Art experience yields a kind of joy that is pure and untainted even by pain. This is a further indication of the transcendental character of art experience; and it shows that the aesthetic attitude stands higher than that of common or everyday life which is invariably characterized by more or
less of mental tension. Because of these reasons, art experience is regarded as identifiable with the ultimate goal of life as the idealists conceive it. As Devy says, “Śāntarasa is to be known as that which arises from a desire to secure the liberation of the Self, which leads to a knowledge of the Truth, and is connected with the prosperity of higher happiness” (*Indian Literary Criticism* 71). According to him,

The actual act of literary enjoyment can be compared to the moment of union between lovers or that between God and the seeker, for all these are modes of entering which also admit being entered into. They are acts which rise above the duality of passivity and activity. (*After Amnesia* 126)

*A sahrdaya* must have taste or *rasikatva, sahrdayatva* or aesthetic susceptibility, power of visualisation, intellectual background, contemplative heart, the necessary psychophysical condition, and the capacity to identify oneself with the aesthetic object. Aesthetic enjoyment also demands an effacing of the individual self or the surrendering of the self, which is seen in mystical experience also. However, in aesthetic experience it is transitory, while in mystical experience it is more of a stable nature.

Abhinavagupta in *Abhinava Bhārati* elucidates the nature of aesthetic experience:

Aesthetic enjoyment consists in the tasting of one’s own
consciousness; this tasting is endowed with extreme pleasantness (beauty), which is obtained from a contact with the various latent traces of pleasure, pain etc. It differs both from ordinary perception, which is full of obstacles (pragmatic requirements etc.), and from the perception of the yogins, which is not free from harshness, on account of the total lack of any tasting of external objects. (qtd. in Gnoli, Notes 83)

The aesthetic enjoyment from the reading of the poem “The Windhover” may attain the quality of the mystical in a sahrdaya. The transcendence of subject-object difference, so important in mystical experience, appears. The earthly glory of the windhover that fills the consciousness of the poet with admiration vanishes with the self-surrender, and the mystical perception of the transformation of the bird into the glory of Resurrection of Christ emerges:

. . . My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

The admiration for the earthly glory changes into ecstasy and mystical vision in the sestet of the sonnet:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

(Poems 69)
We can find in Hopkins a search for salvation through mystical union with God. Though this does not exactly correspond with the concept of mokṣa, a certain amount of liberation from the limitations of the individual self is achieved. Mokṣa in Hindu philosophy demands the surrendering and merging of the finite self in Brahman. We can find a similar surrendering at many levels in the poems of Hopkins. However, the merging retains its character of transformation without the loss of identity of the individual self. According to Mashar Hussain and Robert Wilkinson, nirvāna, which is the final state of mokṣa, “literally means extinction or blowing out, as of a candle flame, and what is extinguished when nirvana (and so on) is arrived at is individuality” (8). Under the influence of Vedantic philosophical systems, rasa theory underwent new developments. Śānta rasa and bhakti are the results of such developments. The unity with the Absolute becomes the orientation of rasa. The deeply emotional and aesthetic experience of rasa gradually develops into an experience of Brahman.

According to Pande, “before the time of Abhinavagupta, Śānta Rasa was a point of great controversy among the authors” (219-220). Dahnanjaya and Abhinavagupta, who were contemporaries, had differing views on śāntarasa. The former admits only eight rasas and refutes the view that śānta is the ninth rasa that could be presented on the stage. The latter takes particular pain to establish it as an independent and basic rasa
and holds the number of *rasas* to be nine. According to him, *śānta* admits its presentation on the stage (Pande 221). In *Abhinava Bhārati*, *śama* is the *sthāyībhāva* of *śāntarasa*. The absence of passions such as love and anger are depicted as the *anubhāva* of *śānta*. It is useful to refer to the views of Bhānudaṭṭa as expressed in his work *Rasa Tarangini*. He says, “i) Rati is called Vatsalya, when it appears as Vyabhicārin and expresses itself in tenderness in the context of Karuna (ii) it is called Bhakti when it figures as Vyabhicārin and manifests itself as faith in the context of Śānta” (Pandey 1: 192). According to him,

The implication of this assertion is that the hero in the context of Śānta has to be one, who has reached the transcendental level, but has temporarily descended to the empirical level, because of the revival of ignorance, due to Karma-samskāra. Its Vibhāva can be any worldly situation, in which the hero may be pursuing any worldly objective, irrespective of the fact that it brings merit or demerit to him. But in the case of poetic presentation of Śānta, its Sthāyin is Nirveda; its Vibhāva is freedom from evil effects of surroundings; its Anubhāvas are tears of bliss (*Ānandāśru*), horripilation etc. (Pandey 1: 193).

The concept of *śāntarasa* developed by Abhinavagupta has an important component of *bhakti* or devotion, which is also the predominant feature of the poems of Hopkins. We have seen that the aesthetic experience
of his poems is related to the experience of devotion, which moves close to the ecstasy of mystic vision and the corresponding state of stillness or tranquility. It produces a transitory consciousness of transcendence of space and time. This aesthetic state is similar to the experience of śānta rasa as discussed by Abhinavagupta. He sees the sthāyibhava of śāntarasa as nirveda. It is a state of mind of detachment to the finite world. This attitude can lead one to the knowledge of truth and to mokṣa. In the words of Abhinavagupta,

Knowledge of any object other than the Self is the knowledge of worldly objects. For anything that is different from the Self is nothing but non-self…. The ātmān alone possessed of such pure qualities as knowledge, bliss, etc., and devoid of enjoyment of imagined sense-objects is the sthāyibhāva of śānta. (Devy, Indian Literary Criticism 66)

Abhinavagupta speaks about the bliss of śāntarasa in the following words:

Just as the white string, whereon gems of different kinds are loosely and thinly strung, shines in and through them, so does the pure Self through the basic mental states such as Rati and Utsāha, which affect it. The aesthetic experience of Śānta, consists in the experience of the Self as free from the entire set of painful experiences, which are due to the external expectations, and, therefore, is blissful state of identity with the Universal. It is the
experience of Self in one of the stages on the way to perfect Self-realisation. Such a state of Self when presented either on the stage or in poetry and, therefore, universalized, is responsible for the arousal of a mental condition which brings the transcendental bliss. (Pandey 1: 249-50)

Śāntarasa leads to self-realisation as well as self-liberation.

According to Deshpande,

Śānta Rasa is to be known as that which arises from desire to secure liberation of the Self, which leads to the knowledge of Truth and is connected with the property of higher bliss. Various feelings because of their particular respective causes arise from Śānta and when these causes disappear they melt back into Śānta.

(99)

He further observes, “Śānta is, thus, the basic Rasa, all other Rasas being only its variations due to superimposition of different Sthāyībhāvas” (99). It is interesting to note in this context that Abhinavagupta in his Abhinava Bhārāti refers to certain old manuscripts of the Nātyaśāstra where śāntarasa section is found treated before the śṛngārarasa to indicate that it is the “prakṛti” of all the Rasas (Despande 99). Masson and Patwardhan observe that śānta arises from “vībhāvas such as ascetic practices, association with Yogins, etc. It can be represented on the stage
by *anubhāvas* such as the absence of lust, anger, etc. Its *vyabhicāribhāvas* will be firmness, wisdom etc.” (Devy 62).

According to the *Rasasūtra* of Bharatha, for the culmination of any *rasa*, there should be *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva*. The *vibhāva* is the primary cause, the *anubhāva* is the situation and setting, and the *vyabhicāribhāva* are the accessory moods. When we analyse “the Wreck” in the light of this theory, we find a similar emotional and aesthetic progression as indicated in the *Rasasūtra*. The poem opens with an awe-inspiring description of the destructive power of God in the stormy sea:

> THOU mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World’s strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and vein in me, fastened me flesh
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee. (*Poems* 51)

What is revealed in the storm is the terrifying face of God, who is also the source and foundation of one’s being. It produces emotions of deep terror that is experienced as the dreadful dissolution of one’s finite self. As we have seen, there are similar expressions of the awe-inspiring aspects of the
Absolute in *Bhagavadgītā* also. As the poem progresses, the emotion of terror, *bayā*, progresses or transforms into *bhakti* and *śāntarasa*:

The frown of his face

Before me, the hurtle of hell

Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

I whirled out wings that spell

And, fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.

*(Poems 52)*

In *nirveda*, one develops detachment to things and in the process one realizes levels of one’s own self, the higher self and the lower self. The higher self is the detached self that resembles the true self or *Brahman*. That self that is attached to things is the lower self. *Nirveda* is the process of detachment for attaining truth. A deep understanding or awareness of the phenomenal self is found in Hopkins. The first step in the exploration of the inner self is the experience of the phenomenal self. Hopkins speaks about this self as self-taste, which is more distinctive than ale or alum (*SD* 123).

“The Wreck” also illustrates the transformation of a spatio-temporal event into an experience of transcendence through *bhakti*. The tempest, the destruction of the ship, and the drowning of the passengers are recalled to reveal the redeeming features of death and destruction. The absolute power of the mystery of salvation is revealed in this terrible
incident. Even the tragedy of shipwreck and drowning holds the possibility of a mystical vision of union with God:

Sister, a sister calling

A master, her master and mine!—

And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;

The rash smart sloggering brine

Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one;

Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine

Ears, and the call of the tall nun. *(Poems 57)*

Paul L. Mariani interprets the poem “The Wreck” as a prayer of Hopkins submitting himself to the complete will of God:

More than tongue can tell, God is sweet; He is both lightning and love, both a winter and warm. For we perceive God’s action on us in different and even paradoxical ways. God is a “Father,” a “fondler” who has wrung men’s hearts back to Him. In His dark and stormy descending, God most shows his mercies. *(57)*

According to F. R. Leavis, Hopkins “takes the actual wreck as the type of the worldly disaster that brings conviction, supernatural assurance, to the soul—and identifies such experience mystically with Christ’s Passion” (“Gerard Manley Hopkins” 27). This is touchingly portrayed by Hopkins, “Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver, / That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by, and melt” *(Poems 53).*
A close study of the poem from the view of bhakti poetry reveals that “thou” and “I” become one; there is spiritual union between a devotee and her God. Mishra observes:

Stanley Fish considers the self-consuming business of devotional poems as a series of “undoing” or “letting-go’s” in which the perceptual frameworks in which we live and move and have our (separate) being are undone. Thus the many pronominal and demonstrative markers of the self in Donne’s poems—“I/me/Mine/My,” “Thy/thou/thine/thee,” “that”—lose their separate identities as the divide between individual self and God disappears in these poems. (94)

The awe inspiring and turbulent storm in “The Wreck” ends on a peaceful note. As Paul L. Mariani comments, “we have a general movement, then, from the self to another, to a larger community, but the larger framework is God Himself, the first word (‘Thou’) and the last word (‘Lord’) of the poem, the alpha and the omega” (51). Viśvanātha in his Sāhityadarpāna says:

*Rasa*, which by the predominance of sattavaguna is full of limitless and spontaneous self-consciousness and bliss, which is free from the taint of intruding object, which, is akin to Brahmic bliss, whose life is super-worldly and of exquisite charm, is
enjoyed as a state of union of enjoyer and the enjoyed by fortunate and happy discerners of delight. (qtd. in Anand 396)

The consciousness of the finitude of the self in all its limitations and tragic dimensions opens up the door to transcendence and union with the Absolute:

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year’s fall;
The recurb and the recovery of the gulf’s sides,
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
Stanching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;
Ground of being, and granite of it: past all
Grasp God, throned behind

Death with a sovereignty that heeds and hides, bodes but abides.

(Poems 62)

Abhinavagupta holds the view that though śānta is not a principal rasa, it can be compared to the experience of yogins. Śāntarasa emerges when there is the realization of the Ultimate and the liberation of the self. This is at the root of the aesthetic experience of the poems of Hopkins. The tall nun in “The Wreck” perceives the divine touch of God in the violent storm that makes her attain an experience of salvation of her self. The
tragic event is transformed into an act of salvation. The narration of the event is also an occasion to experience, or to recreate the consciousness of the act of transformation. The finite being through a tragic event experiences the śāntarasa of mokṣa.