Chapter 6

Conclusion

One of the main conclusions arrived at in this study is that the diverse Eastern and Western poetic traditions have certain common aspects. In both these traditions, we find a movement from immanent reality to transcendence in aesthetic experience. The aesthetic rapture in *rasa* experience is found to a certain extent in the poetry of Hopkins. Like the Indian thinkers, Hopkins also illustrates that the aesthetic enjoyment of beauty in finite objects leads to the Ultimate Being. The contemplation of beauty is a path to the sublime in Hopkins as well as classical Indian poetics. However, in Hopkins, transcendence is achieved by surrendering individuality through intense conflict, whereas in *rasa* experience, the surrendering of individuality is a joyful experience.

The apparently striking differences in Hopkins and Indian tradition disappear as we probe deeper, and we discover harmony and similarity at the core. We find in Hopkins a search for salvation through mystical union with God. Though this does not exactly correspond with the Indian concept of *mokṣa*, a certain amount of liberation from the limitations of the individual self is achieved in Hopkins. *Mokṣa* in Hindu philosophy demands the surrendering and merging of the finite self in *Brahman*. We find a similar process 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. The mood that finally prevails after conflict and turbulence in most of his poems is sublime tranquility or \( \text{sāntarasa} \).

The intimate interconnection of art and religion in Indian culture enabled Indian aesthetics and poetics to exist in harmony with religion. It is claimed by Rajashekara in his \( \text{Kāvyamīmāmsa} \) that the science of poetics is proclaimed by Śiva to Brahma (Kane 1). Paul Valery observes that the Western tradition also has this tendency, but it is not always fully developed in art and poetry (Gnoli, Introduction, xxxiv).

Another finding of the study is that the expression of wonder and awe, a characteristic of Hopkins’s poetry, is seen in the \( \text{camatkāra} \) concept of Indian poetics. The aesthetic delight that is the result of \( \text{rasa} \) experience is termed \( \text{camatkāra} \) by Ānandavardhana (Masson 1:18). In Śaiva philosophy, the term has a deeper meaning signifying a perfect self-consciousness that is “consciousness of Self, free from all limitations” (Pandey 1: 107). Abhinavagupta uses this term in the philosophical sense of 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). 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 xlvii).

Hopkins’s attraction towards the individuality of things and his wonder and awe in perceiving the “inscapes” in the creations of God are similar to the camatkāra concept in Indian aesthetics. This sense of wonder leads him to a sacramental vision of reality. Every “inscape” reveals the glory of the Ultimate Being. The attempt of James Finn Cotter to connect the interjection “O” often found in Hopkins’s poems, with Omega and Om illustrates this.

The wonder that Abhinavagupta discusses is present in the aesthetic perceptions of Hopkins. Donald Mc Chesney in his “The Meaning of ‘Inscape’ ” says, “Hopkins, like many mystics, ascetics and visionaries, was given intermittent access to this . . . ” (203). In his 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. He writes in the poem “God’s Grandeur,” “The world is charged with the grandeur of God / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil” (Poems 66).

The dissatisfaction with the finite beauty is the motive behind the search for the manifestation of the Absolute in the world in both Abhinavagupta and Hopkins. According to Abhinavagupta, even in
aesthetic enjoyment we find an obscure unrest. He quotes from Kālidāsa and explains the relentless search for the infinite by the human mind: “in the act of admiring in happiness beautiful shapes or listening to sweet sounds, feels in himself 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.

As aesthetics is the core of poetics, a brief history of its development in Western culture is unavoidable for a comparative study of Hopkins and Indian poetics. The term “aesthetics” was first used in philosophy and it was much later that it came to be used in the field of literature. Various developments of aesthetics in the imitation theory of Aristotle and Plato, and the Hedonistic pleasure theory provide the background. A brief review of the history of German aesthetics reveals its seminal influence on Western aesthetics. This helps us to place Hopkins’s aesthetics in the Western aesthetic and literary tradition. The Victorian critics’ lack of awareness of Hopkins’s merit was due to their inability to understand the greatness of the technical innovations that he introduced into poetry. However, it is not to be ignored that Victorian influence is also very strong in him, especially of John Ruskin and Walter Pater.
As art and poetry developed in close union with religion in India, the history of Indian poetics goes back to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. During the period of the great epics, the Rāmayana and the Mahābhārata, we find literary expressions of aesthetics, though it had not emerged as a discipline. The development of various schools of aesthetics and poetics under the theories of *rasa*, *alankāra*, *rīti*, *dhvani* and *vakrokti* shows the importance given to this branch of study in ancient India. Śankuka, Bhaṭṭatāuta, Bhaṭṭānāyaka, Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta took the study of aesthetics and poetics to great heights.

The study of the development of Indian poetics from the *Nātyaśāstra* of Bharata into a unified discipline encompassing various views on art shows that unlike Western aesthetics, Indian aesthetics has always had a spiritual dimension. The transcendental aspect of *rasa* and *dhvani* theories helps in a comparative study of the theological aesthetics of Hopkins and Indian poetics. The existence of transcendental experience in both Hopkins and Indian poetics provides the validity for such a comparative study.

From his undergraduate days, Hopkins was deeply interested in the philosophical and aesthetic implications of the concepts of self, beauty, and being. His poems and prose writings explore these concepts from the spiritual viewpoint also. His concern for self and being results in a vision of reality that is God-oriented or “Christo-centric.” The present study
agrees with the observations of James Finn Cotter and J. Hillis Miller that a thorough analysis of Hopkins’s concern for being is necessary to understand his poetry and the concept of “inscape.”

Indian thinking on being and self goes back to the Vedic period. The tracing of the etymology of the concept of *Brahman* throws light on its key role in moulding Indian thinking on self, being, and beauty. The conceptual difference between the Indian concept of *Brahman* and the Western concept of God with patriarchal implication has deep significance in a comparative study of two different cultures. But the universality of certain ideas lying deep within the worldviews of different cultures and its expression in literature show that this fundamental view of truth remains the same in spite of peripheral differences. The search for the essence of things culminating in an experience of reality that is like a revelation helps us to compare Hopkins’s insights with the universal truth revealed in Indian thinking through the realization of *aham brahmāsmī* (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.10).

The analysis of Hopkins’s unique perception of being enables one to link it with his concepts of “instress” and “inscape.” We find aesthetically refined expressions of the concepts of being and self in his poems and prose writings. His view of being and self has similarity to the concept of *Brahman* and ātman. The study of the concept of self in the light of the
concept of ātman helps us to reach a point of contact between ātman and Brahman.

The study shows that the religious implications of the theory of rasa can be compared to the religious poetry of Hopkins. Abhinavagupta gives a mystical dimension to the theory of rasa. He says that the aesthetic relish or rasa is a peculiar kind of cognition similar to but not identical with yogic knowledge and realization. The interpretation of rasa experience by Abhinavagupta strikes a parallel with Hopkins’s aesthetics. The aesthetic relish attained through rasāsvādana comes closer to the experience of Ultimate Reality. The study asserts that the transcendence of subjectivity is the core of the aesthetic appeal of the poems of Hopkins. The spiritual depth of the poems is due to this transcendence. In Indian tradition, yogic practice and aesthetic relish have important role to play in the experience of Brahman. But in Hopkins aesthetic experience leads to transcendence through conflict, suffering, and self-sacrifice. An analysis of this aspect of his poetry throws light on his experience of inner conflict expressed very poignantly in his “Terrible Sonnets.” The experience of self-sacrifice and aesthetic enjoyment are reconciled in “The Windhover.”

The study reveals that the dissatisfaction with the finite beauty is the motive behind the search for the Absolute in the world and its experience in art in both Hopkins and Abhinavagupta. Hopkins’s aesthetics develops from the search for beauty and wonder of individuality in nature to the
awe-inspiring experience of its spiritual dimension. The mystical insight that Hopkins gains through the contemplation of the beauty of nature is very much similar to the transcendental significance of *rasa* experience. The tranquillity in *śāntarasa* is similar to the tranquil experience of God’s presence attained through the storm in the poem “The Wreck.”

Tracing the development of *dhvani* from *spoṭavāda* of ancient Indian grammarians is necessary for the proper understanding of this difficult concept in Indian poetics. The composers of *māhakāvya* relied on the suggestive power of language. But its full theoretical development is seen in the works of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. Ānandavardhana highlighted the difference between explicit and implicit meanings. He also established the importance of *dhvani* in *rasa* realization.

Abhinavagupta makes a distinction between the ordinary and the poetical uses of language. The potential of the suggestive power of poetry to develop aesthetic as well as religious consciousness opens up the possibility of comparing Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory with the poetry of Hopkins. The evolution of aesthetic experience into religious consciousness through the suggestive power of language is the distinctive quality of the theological aesthetics of Hopkins’s poetry. Miller highlights the suggestive power of Hopkins’s poetry in his essay “The Univocal Chiming.” The multiplicity of meanings generated by Hopkins’s use of language enables us to study his poetry in the light of *dhvani* theory.
Sprinker’s analysis of the apparent logocentrism of Hopkins’s poetry shows its deeper affinity to the deconstructive theory developed later by Jacques Derrida. The implications of the terms “inscape” and “instress” become clearer in the light of *dhvani* theory. The analysis enables us to understand Hopkins’s innovative use of words in his poems.

Another important conclusion of this study is that the response to being and beauty can be the same for individuals belonging to different cultures with apparently opposing religious beliefs. As Indian poetics evolved largely under the influence of Indian religious thinking, the poetic theory of Hopkins based on his theological aesthetics provides several areas for comparative study. The similarity of Hopkins and Indian Poetics is in the perception of a dimension of reality that is transcendental, but the difference is in the means by which this transcendence is achieved. The conflict seen in Hopkins and his demand for self-surrender is not prominent in Indian poetics. In the Indian view of reality, *Brahman* and *ātman* move smoothly towards identification, whereas for Hopkins nature is fallen and we require grace and self-sacrifice for a union with God.

In *Gītagovinda* there is transformation of *sṛangāra rasa* into *bhakti* (Mishra 122). Lonely Radha crying out in her pain symbolizes the cruel paradox of *bhakta* forever yearning for fulfillment, and this can be compared to the crying out of the nun to Christ to come quickly in Hopkins’s “Wreck.” According to Mishra, what we find in the *bhakti* texts
is an effort to transform “the abstract Brahman into a personal God and by advancing aesthetic strategies to explain the special nature of the self’s relationship with God. The nirvāṇic sublime gets rewritten as a sublime that one can live by in the world as it is” (122-23). This is exactly what Hopkins attempts to do in his poetry.

Critics often point out the suggestive quality of Hopkins’s poetry. “The Windhover” has numerous interpretations illustrating its suggestive quality. William Empson in his Seven Types of Ambiguity analyses the range of meanings implied in the word “Buckle” (260). According to him, “The Windhover” is an “evident example of the use of poetry to convey an indecision, and its reverberation in the mind” (260). The study reveals that the potential of the suggestive power of poetry to develop aesthetic as well as religious consciousness enables us to compare Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory with the poetry of Hopkins. It is interesting to note that the seeds of poststructural theories of interpretation of poetry can be found in the theory of aniyata of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. They explain that the nature of suggestion, though it is not niyata, is yet not arbitrary. Abhinavagupta introduces the pūrvapakṣa as follows:

Since it is not fixed, one can imagine it to be anything one likes, for it has no real nature. This means that it is not proper to examine something which has no real existence “aniyatavād yathāruci kalpyeta pāramārthikam rūpaṃ nāstīti, na cāvastunāḥ
We can see in this theory the foreshadowing of the deconstructive strategy without its extreme tendency of nihilism. Since meaning is neither fixed nor arbitrary, aniyata can lead to a response from the perceiver or reader towards carutvapratiti, dhvani and rasāsavāda. Though rasa is the goal of poetry, it is not something limited or configurable by the pattern of words in a poem. As Masson and Patwardhan say, Abhinavagupta often insists that rasa is not something “certain” (niyata) (1: 7). The same word is used of sahrdaya who is not “bound” by time and space in an aesthetic experience. Rasa experience takes the sahrdaya out of the limitations of logic and grammar into the experience of limitless enjoyment and ānanda, and the indescribable union of ātman and Brahman by suspending the experience of time and space.

The study agrees with Gnoli’s observation that in the religious or mystical moment God who remains immanent and consubstantial with the thought that thinks of him becomes as if transcendent to it and separate from it (Introduction xl). In the religious experience, the need for the transcendent God appears beyond the self-sufficiency of aesthetic experience. This is very evident in the development of rasa theory in Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and others. This study reveals that the very same movement is seen in the religious aesthetics of Hopkins. Aesthetic enjoyment produces conflict in him until he finds a
way to reconcile his concern for the beauty of individuality with the eternal beauty of God through the surrendering of individuality.

Hopkins’s ambivalent attitude to logocentrism is evident in his poems. As Sprinker says, this attraction and resistance are registered in the poems themselves, but it also appears in his comments upon the special difficulties presented to the reader by the poem (72). Though Hopkins’s poems have always stimulated large number of interpretations, sometimes even contradictory, this does not proceed to the full utilization of deconstruction. The study agrees with the following remark of Sprinker: “Though I shall finally argue that Hopkins’s poetry realizes a theory of writing not unlike the Derridian theory of the text, the drama of his poetic career was sustained by his continual and simultaneous attraction and resistance to precisely such a theory” (72).

It is to be further explored to find out whether this attraction and rejection of logocentrism has anything to do with the conflict of the priest and the poet in him. The conscious rejection of beauty by the priest is similar to the apparent attraction to logocentrism. A parallel movement is seen in the conscious attraction to beauty and the hidden tendency to outgrow the extremes of logocentrism and deconstruction. In an obscure passage in the *Sermons and Devotional Writings* Hopkins speaks about the centrality of the self. The self is presented as a centre of reference with concentric circles around it. The innermost circle, which can be called the
centre, is its own, but the rest of the concentric circles though belonging to it are outside it. As he continues the discussion, a deconstruction of the self takes place unknowingly:

If the centre of reference spoken of has concentric circles around it, one of these, the inmost, say, is its own, is of it, the rest are to it only. Within a certain bounding line all will be self, outside of it nothing: with it self begins from one side and ends from the other. (*SD* 127)

The alienation of the innermost circle from the rest of the circle is reflected in the personality and poetry of Hopkins. The mystery of God takes form in the world through the Word, but to grasp the Word in the world as beauty and to convey this as Word to others is not the same as wholly grasping God. The glory of Hopkins’s poetry and the conflict in his personality are reflected in this observation. Moreover, it brings into focus the similarity and difference between Hopkins and Indian poetics.