Chapter 1

Introduction

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a priest-poet of the nineteenth century, is noted for his originality of style and technical innovations. He remained almost unknown as a poet during his lifetime and for many years after his death in 1889. Ever since the publication of the first edition of his poems in 1918, there has been a growing interest in the exquisite sensibility, spiritual depth, and meticulous craftsmanship of his poetry. His aesthetics is different from that of the Victorians as it is a poetic principle that attempts to reconcile the immanent and transcendent aspects of the Ultimate Being.

Hopkins’s ideas on literary aesthetics and his prose and poetic works have a lot of similarity to the Indian tradition. After extensive search, only short studies have been found on this topic. Like ancient Indian poets, Hopkins was also a meticulous observer of the experience of aesthetic enjoyment and artistic creation. His Journals and Papers contains detailed discussions of the aesthetic techniques used in painting, music, and poetry. His thorough analysis of the experience of being and art bears a striking resemblance to Indian thinking on these subjects.

The concepts of self, beauty, and being have profound significance in the writings of Hopkins. He has poems, essays, notes, and sketches related to these. The implications of these concepts can be found in his
poetry and aesthetic theories. In Indian poetics too, these concepts are of
great importance as the search for beauty leads to the self both finite and
non-finite. Indian theories of ontology are closely related to the philosophy
of self and beauty.

As many studies in this area illustrate, the metaphysical question of
going beyond the experience of ego in the form of limited "I" and "mine,"
which has been the central problem in almost all the schools of Vedic and
non-Vedic Indian philosophy, is also linked to the Indian view of creative
process and aesthetic experience. Postulating “being” as pure unity and
non-differentiation in order to explain the profound correlation of objective
and subjective aspects of reality culminates in the aesthetic theory of
unified experience of rasa (Tripati 1).

Treatises on aesthetics and poetics first appeared in India around first
century A.D. One of the earliest and most famous of such treatises is the
Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata. It is from this work that Indian aesthetics
developed and reached its culmination in later centuries. Rasa is the central
concept of aesthetic experience in the Nāṭyaśāstra. The Dhvanyāloka of
Ānandavardhana, a pivotal work in the history of Indian poetics, with the
Locana of Abhinavagupta, dominated traditional Indian theory on poetics
and aesthetics. Abhinavagupta is called the great devotee of the Supreme
Self or Śiva. Though there are several works attributed to him, our chief
concern is his commentary on Ānandavardhana’s Dhvanyāloka. The
Dhvanyāloka revolutionized Sanskrit literary theory by proposing that the main goal of good poetry is the evocation of a mood or "flavour" ([rasa](#)) and this process can be explained only by recognizing a semantic power beyond denotation and metaphor, namely, the power of suggestion.

Sanskrit literature occupies a prominent place in the classical literatures of the world by virtue of its “great antiquity, amazing magnitude, luxurious development of various literary forms, and a comprehensive range, which it amply commands” (Gupta, Preface 1). Classical Sanskrit poetics deals with numerous topics such as grammar, semantics, aesthetics, rhetoric, prosody, and the philosophical analysis of language. Critics formed different theories on the art of poetry and discussed various topics of language and literature. Sanskrit aesthetics and rhetoric discuss the artistic value of sound and sense as well as the aesthetic aspect of literary thought. The concepts of [alankāra](#), [guṇa](#), [vṛtti](#), [rīti](#), [dhvani](#), [vakrokti](#) and [rasa](#) form the focus of these discussions. Indian thinkers have attempted to delve into the outer structure and inner qualities of sound and sense, word and meaning, tone and rhythm, rhetoric and prosody, mood and colour, melody and harmony, and style and diction. [Alankāraśāstra](#), the theory of literary criticism in Sanskrit as a whole, treats not only phonetics, grammar, and semantics but also the rhetorical devices of stylistic diction and the aesthetic value of literature.
The texts of Hopkins offer great scope for interpretation in the light of classical Indian aesthetic theories. Hopkins’s poetry can be interpreted by means of theories such as *rasa*, *dhvani* and *vakrokti*. This is possible because of the fact that like the Indian aestheticians, Hopkins was also aiming at scientific precision and systematic formulation of poetics in an aesthetic framework.

Hopkins is a suitable point of contact for East-West dialogue in the transcultural study of aesthetics, which is gaining attention all over the world. His liking for Indian philosophy and literature makes his aesthetic theories an adequate subject for comparative study. The striking similarity of some of his ideas on aesthetics, philosophy, and theology with Indian philosophical and aesthetic concepts open up an area of fruitful transcultural literary research. Like most of the Indian poets and ālankārikas, Hopkins was also a skilled literary craftsman. The aim of his poetry was attaining unique patterns which he called “inscape.” We find something similar in Indian poetics especially in the *Dhvani* theories of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. Hopkins’s innovative approach to poetry and his selection of themes are quite suitable for analysis in the light of Indian literary theories.

This study intends to prove that cultures as distinct as Indian and English have many things in common. The differences are only superficial as there is unity at the inner core. Apart from expanding the scope of
transcultural studies, it will lead us to a better understanding of poetry and beauty and above all the mystery of being to which artists and poets hold the key. As Sprinker has pointed out:

Hopkins’s theories of poetry and beauty command our attention for two reasons: first, they are basic to any understanding of his poetry; second, along with the aesthetic speculations of Coleridge, they are the most important nineteenth-century precursor in English of certain of the more important strains in contemporary poetics. (20-21)

He adds that “as a theoretician, Hopkins anticipates many of the pronouncements of the Russian Formalists, some aspects of the work of English critics like William Empson and Kenneth Burke, and also some of the more recent deconstructive theories of Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller” (21). Hopkins’s ideas on beauty have more similarity to the theory of vakrokti, rather than to the linear theory of Platonic tradition. His poetry is not logocentric, but suggestive of multiple meanings and deviant-resonance.

Patric Colm Hogan in his essay, “Ethnocentrism and the very idea of Literary Theory” makes a distinction between two types of comparative studies: “sequential” and “parallel.” In a sequential study, the aim of the researcher is to find out the influence of one culture on the other. However, in a parallel comparative study it is not necessary to consider the
question whether one literature or culture has influenced the other. The present study being a parallel comparative study, examines similarities and differences outside influence. In a parallel comparative study, one may “seek universals, which is to say, common principles shared by all or most traditions” (Hogan 5). The aim of this thesis is to examine “the ways in which literary theories from different traditions may be drawn together to form a more comprehensive theory which treats all traditions more adequately” (Hogan 6).

In this study, adequate importance has been given to both the Western and the Eastern literary traditions. The concepts of “inscape” and “instress,” the basis of Hopkinsian aesthetics, are compared with the theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* of Indian poetics. Conclusions are drawn in the light of the core issue of these two literary traditions.

The second chapter, “The Aesthetics of Hopkins and Indian Poetics” attempts to trace a brief history of the development of the term “aesthetics” in Western culture as well as in Indian aesthetics and poetics. The term “aesthetics” was first used in philosophy and it was much later that it was used in the field of literature. Alexander Baumgarten used the term in the early decades of eighteenth century for an independent science concerned with investigating the phenomena of art and its place in human life. An attempt is made to trace various developments of aesthetics in imitation theory of Aristotle and Plato, and the Hedonistic pleasure theory. A
history of German aesthetics is traced as it was a seminal influence on Western aesthetics. German aesthetics emerged as a philosophical discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century. The contributions of Alexander Baumgarten, Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Arthur Schopenhauer, Martin Heidegger and several others are briefly summarized. The chapter also traces the relation of aesthetics to other fine arts and also to religion. A brief review of mystical aesthetics is also given. The difference between the terms “aesthetics” and “aestheticism” is also briefly discussed. The section entitled “A Brief History of Indian Aesthetics and Poetics” of the second chapter traces the history of Indian aesthetics and poetics.

A brief history of the development of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory is attempted by tracing its beginning under the influence of Ruskin and Walter Pater. The importance of the undergraduate essay “On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue” is highlighted as we can find the seeds of Hopkins’s aesthetics in this. One of the reasons for the ignorance of Hopkins’s merit by Victorian critics is found in the great importance he gave to the technical aspects of poetry. But it is not to be neglected that Victorian influence is also very strong in him, especially of John Ruskin and Walter Pater. The conflicting ideas of Hopkins’s sacramental aesthetics and Jesuit theology are also discussed in this chapter. Hopkins’s love for individuality is illustrated using his poems and prose writings. His
love for nature and his development of the theory of “inscape” and “instress” out of his love for individuality of form and pattern are also discussed. The conflict between the poet and the priest is traced, as it is very relevant to the study of his poetry. The multiplicity of interpretations of the word “inscape” is traced and evaluated. The spiritual insight in the poems of Hopkins is studied by examining the implications of the concepts of self, being, and beauty in his poems. The culmination of Hopkins’s aesthetics in a religious vision is attempted with the help of poems such as “The Windhover,” “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire,” and “The Wreck.”

The history of Indian aesthetics and poetics can be traced back to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads because in India art and poetry developed in close union with religion. Even in the period of the epics, the Rāmayana and the Mahābhārata, one can find literary expression of aesthetics, though it had not emerged as a discipline. The importance of Bharata’s Nātyaśāstra is highlighted. The emergence of various schools of aesthetics and poetics under the theories of rasa, alankāra, rūtī, dhvani and vakrokti are traced. The emergence of rasa theory as the most dominant of all these theories is attempted. The contributions of Śankuka, Bhaṭṭatauta, Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta are also briefly discussed.

The development of Hopkins’s aesthetics, incorporating the ideas of haecceitas of Scotus, to a sacramental vision in his poems is traced. The
The development of Indian poetics from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata into a unified discipline encompassing various views on art is also attempted. Unlike Western aesthetics, Indian aesthetics has always had a spiritual dimension. The transcendental aspect of *rasa* and *dhvani* theories makes them suitable for the study of the poetry of Hopkins that has also a transcendental aspect. The dimension of transcendental experience in Hopkins and Indian poetics gives the scope for a comparative study.

The third chapter, “The Concepts of Self, Beauty, and Being in Hopkins and Indian Poetics,” explores the implications of the terms self, beauty, and being in the writings of Hopkins and Indian poetics. Hopkins from his undergraduate days 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 a spiritual viewpoint also. His concern for self and being results in a vision of reality that is God-oriented or “Christo-centric.” The earliest use of the term “instress” is found in his undergraduate essay on the pre-Socratic philosophy of Parmenides. The etymology of the words “inscape” and “instress” is traced. Hopkins’s concern for “being” is discussed in the light of studies by James Finn Cotter and J. Hillis Miller. The role of consciousness in the understanding of being as stressed by Hopkins is also examined.

The implications of the terms self, being, and beauty in Indian aesthetics and philosophy are explored in this study. Indian thinking on
being and self can be traced back to the Vedic period. The significance of the concept of Brahman in Indian thinking is highlighted by tracing its etymology. The difference between the Absolute Reality called Brahman and the Creator god Brahman is pointed out. The conceptual difference between the Indian concept of Brahman and the Western concept of God with patriarchal implication is highlighted as it has deep significance in a comparative study of two different cultures. The universality of certain ideas lying deep within the worldviews of different cultures and its expression in literature is discussed, as the fundamental views of universal truth remain the same in spite of peripheral differences.

The concept of self is examined in the light of the concept of ātman. The point of contact between ātman and Brahman is traced. This unity that is achieved through yogic practice and to an extent from art experience is gained by Hopkins after much personal conflict. Hopkins’s love of his self and the self-taste is explored by studying his Journals, Letters, and Poems. The love of individuality and selfhood that attained a spiritual significance in Hopkins is studied in the light of his works. This chapter also explains the relevance of the assertion of the concept of being through language. His unique perception of being is analyzed and an attempt is made to link it with his concepts of “instress” and “inscape”. In his view, being and self have deep implications and we find their aesthetically
refined expression in his poems and prose writings. Hopkinsian view of being and self has similarity to the concept of *Brahman* in Indian context.

The origin of the word *Brahman* is traced, and an attempt is made to distinguish the conceptual difference of God in Eastern and Western religions. The awareness of self, which is very prominent in the poems of Hopkins, is illustrated. The search for the essence of things culminating in an experience of reality that is like a revelation is compared to the universal truth revealed in the Indian thinking through the realization of *aham brahmāsmi* (*Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* I.4.10).

The fourth chapter entitled “The Transcendental Experience in *Rasa* and Hopkins” discusses and compares the transcendental dimension of Hopkins’s poems and the *rasa* experience in Indian aesthetics. The religious implications of the theory of *rasa* can be compared to the religious poetry of Hopkins. The interpretation of the *rasa* experience by Abhinavagupta strikes a parallel with Hopkinsian aesthetics. The aesthetic relish attained through *rasāsvādana* comes closer to the experience of the Ultimate Reality. 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 nature of *rasa* experience is very much similar to the experience of the Absolute. The transcendence of subjectivity is strongly present in the aesthetic appeal of the poems of Hopkins. The spiritual depth of the poems
is due to this transcendence. The conflict in Hopkins can also be studied in this light.

Hopkins’s attraction towards the individuality of things and his wonder and awe in perceiving the creations of God is compared with the *camatkāra* concept in Indian aesthetics. The attempt of James Finn Cotter to connect the interjection “O” often found in Hopkins’s poems, with Omega and *Om* is briefly discussed. The study draws the conclusion that the dissatisfaction with the finite beauty is the motive behind the search for the revelation of the absolute in the world and its experience in art both in Abhinavagupta and in Hopkins. The development of Hopkinsian aesthetics from the search for the beauty and wonder of individuality in nature to the awe-inspiring experience of its spiritual dimension is highlighted in this chapter. 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 concept of *śāntarasa* as discussed by Abhinavagupta is explored in the light of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory. The relevance of *śāntarasa* in devotional poetry is briefly studied. The tranquillity in *śāntarasa* is compared to the tranquil experience of God’s presence after the storm in the poem “The Wreck of the Deutschland.”

The fifth chapter entitled “The Implications of *Dhvani* in Hopkins” traces a brief history of the development of the concept of *dhvani* from
sphoṭavāda of ancient Indian grammarians. The suggestive power of language as used by composers of mahākāvya is highlighted. The development and the establishment of the theory in the works of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta are also discussed. Ānandavardhana highlighted the difference between the explicit and the implicit meanings. The attempt by Ānandavardhana in establishing the importance of dhvani in rasa realization is highlighted.

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. Hillis Miller highlights the suggestive power of Hopkins’s poetry in his essay “The Univocal Chiming.” The multiplicity of meanings generated by Hopkinsian use of language opens the scope for studying his poetry in the light of dhvani theory. Michael Sprinker’s analysis about the apparent logocentrism of Hopkins and his deeper affinity to the deconstructive theory developed by Jacques Derrida is explored in this chapter. The implications of the terms “inscape” and “instress” are examined in the light
of dhvani theory. Hopkins’s innovative use of the linguistic capacity of words in his poems is also explored.

The sixth chapter, “Conclusion,” sums up the findings of the study, “Gerard Manley Hopkins and Indian Poetics.” The conclusions drawn include observations that traditions as diverse as Eastern and Western have many things in common and the differences are peripheral as there is unity at the core. Indian poetic tradition includes innumerable concepts and theories, of which, only a few such as rasa and dhvani concepts and the concepts of self, beauty, and being are chosen to examine in the light of the poetic theories and aesthetics of the Victorian poet Hopkins. Further research from a comparative perspective may open up newer areas of similarity both in Hopkins and in the Indian theory of poetics. One major conclusion drawn in this thesis is that the response to being and beauty can be the same for different individuals belonging to diverse cultures with apparently opposing religious beliefs. Indian poetics evolved to a great extent by Indian religious thinking and the poetic theories of Hopkins, a priest poet of the Jesuit order, contain several areas of comparison. The similarities as well as differences are highlighted in this study. The main similarity of Hopkins and Indian Poetics is in the perception of a dimension of reality that is transcendental and the difference is in the means by which this transcendence is achieved. The conflict in Hopkins and his demand for self-surrender are not prominent in Indian poetics. In
the Indian view of reality, *Brahman* and *ātman* move towards identification, whereas for Hopkins nature is fallen, and we require grace and self-sacrifice for a union with God.