Chapter 3

The Concepts of Self, Beauty, and Being

in Hopkins and Indian Poetics

The concepts of self, beauty, and being are deeply implied in the poems and prose writings of Hopkins. His interest in the concept of being is evident in an undergraduate essay in which he comments on Parmenides:

His great text, which he repeats with religious conviction is that Being is and Not-being is not—which perhaps one can say, a little over-defining his meaning, means that all things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it. (JP 127)

Hopkins’s insight into Parmenides’ philosophy of being is remarkable. Any “being” whether the being of a drop of blood, a leaf, a person, or the Ultimate Being, becomes meaningful when one asserts that it “is.” This view is clearly and insightfully stated in the apt expression, “Being is.”

It is interesting to note that Hopkins mentions his concept of “instress” for the first time in the essay on Parmenides’ philosophy of being: “His feeling for instress, for the flush and foredrawn, and for inscape / is most striking and from this one can understand Plato’s reverence for him as the great father of Realism” (JP 127). Hopkins seems to emphasize Parmenides’ insight that there is no greater truth than being.
Truth is equated with being as nothing is truer than being. Assertion of being is the assertion of truth. As Hopkins puts it,

... things are or there is truth. Grammatically it=it is or there is.

But indeed I have often felt when I have been in this mood and felt the depth of an instress or how fast the inscape holds a thing that nothing is so pregnant and straightforward to the truth as simple yes and is. (JP 127)

The acknowledgement of being by the verbal response of assertion, “yes” or “is” is of great importance for Hopkins. His coinage “instress” is evolved in this context. As critics J. Hillis Miller and James Finn Cotter point out, the key to “instress” and “inscape” lies in the philosophical insight into being and self. Miller remarks: “The instress and inscape of individual things and the drama of our intercourse with things are diverse manifestations of the universal power of being, and Hopkins, like Parmenides has felt its permeating power” (108).

In order to explain “instress” Hopkins uses the expression, “the flush and foredrawn.” The “flush” is the pressure exerted by the objects in existence on the perceiver. Beings constantly exert pressure on the perceivers to acknowledge or to respond in the form of a “foredrawing.” When the “flush” is taken in, it is “foredrawn.” Hopkins argues:

There would be no bridge, no stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over: without stress we might
not and could not say/ Blood is red/ but only/ This blood is red/or/

That last blood I saw was red/nor even that, for in later language
not only universals would not be true but the copula would break
down even in particular judgements. (JP 127)

If we etymologically analyze “foredrawn,” we find that the prefix
“fore-” comes from Anglo Saxon “fore” which means “for, before, in front,
coming first,” etc. The Anglo Saxon “fore” is related to Greek Παρος,
“before” and Sanskrit puras, “before,” “in front.” So “foredrawn” is that
which comes in before the “drawn.” If the “drawn’ is the individuality or
“thisness” of an object, that which is “foredrawn” is its existence or being.
The “flush and foredrawn” is clearly an indication of the force of existence
that beings exert on the perceiver, which the perceiver may acknowledge.
This process is implied in “instress” as well as “inscape”: “inscape/ is most
striking and from this one can understand Plato’s reverence for him as the
great father of Realism” (JP 127).

As Cotter points out, in Hopkins’s lifetime the term “being” had the
meaning that “something exists” or “it is.” “Being,” which was the
accepted translation for “IT IS,” meant that something actually exists.
According to him, “The statement is not tautological, rather, it marks a
major philosophical intuition in the exploration of human knowledge and
has become the cornerstone of metaphysics” (Cotter 13). Gradually the
term “being” acquired further meaning and by the beginning of twentieth
century, it acquired the meaning of not only “existence” but also “anything that exists” (“Being”).

Miller remarks that “being” is not an abstract philosophical category of existence in Hopkins. It is a living principle, vital, creative energy that unites all finite beings with the Ultimate Being: “Being brings everything together and is “throughout one with itself” (JP 130). Being is a vital force, a creative energy. It is mentioned repeatedly in Hopkins’s notes on Parmenides as “the flush and foredrawn” (JP 127), as an energy that collects things together and gathers them into one (JP 127). Being is “instress,” that which foredraws things and holds each thing fast in itself. Since this gathering power is the same everywhere, the most important characteristic of any individual thing is that which it shares with all other things—namely, the fact that “it is.” The individuality of finite beings, their unique selves as well as the uniqueness of their form and beauty, need to be acknowledged as existing. When one is struck by the beauty of a flower, the glory of the flight of a bird, the awesomeness of a storm, the unique pattern of a group of objects, the unique selfhood of a person; all these need to be acknowledged. Language is the means to acknowledge being. The description of individuality comes only after the acknowledgement of the fact that “it is,” “it exists.” As Miller puts it, The best way of recognizing this is not by a description of the distinctive individuality of a thing but by a “simple yes and is.”
These are the fundamental words, the words on which the very possibility of language depends. Unless we can say: “yes, there is” something rather than nothing,” or “It is,” we can say nothing at all, for all words are merely different ways of saying “yes” and “is.” As the instress of being lies behind the particularities of inscape, so the verb “to be” lies behind all words and makes them possible. The instress which foredraws all nature is the same as the “is” which gathers all language together for language is a manifestation of thought, and thought, like external instress, is foredrawing act. (Miller 109)

For a thing to exist and for us to think about it, only the same thing “is” or to put in Parmenides’ words, “The same thing exists for thinking and for being” (qtd. in Miller 109). The “being” of beings is the ground for existence as well as for our thinking. As Miller puts it, mind’s act of thinking and “inscapes” of nature are two different manifestations of being. The same energy of being manifests in thinking, in language as well as things (109). That is why Hopkins says, “To be and to know or Being and thought are the same” (JP 129). For him each word is a sound pattern to manifest the pattern of being. Moreover, each statement like “Blood is red” is an assertion of being. We find this thinking of being developed into a theological aesthetics in Hopkins and its full illustration is found in his poetry. Mishra observes:
Beauty is an important manifestation of Reality, because in the realization of the Beautiful, there is the awareness of a phase of our higher existence. The need for such an experience being imperious, as devised art to grasp, for a while, the spirit or Reality in an illuminating way. (110)

Hopkins’s idea of beauty issues from the conglomeration of different traditions including the biblical, classical, romantic, Pre-Raphaelite, and Ruskinian, and from the scientific thought of the nineteenth century. Hence, it is difficult to place him under the auspices of any particular school. It is said that in the heaven of Indra, there is a network of pearls, so arranged that if you look at one you see all the others reflected in it. In the same way, each object in the world is not merely itself but evolves into every other object and in fact is everything else. “In every particle of dust, there are present Buddhas without numbers” (Eliot 109-10).

The idea of being is intimately connected with the perception of individuality in Hopkins. As observed by Ballinger,

The ‘unity’ between the physical and spiritual is at the heart of Hopkins’ aesthetic theory – a theory that had its beginnings in Hopkins’ talent and practice of paying close attention to the uniqueness of everything he observed. A word and concept at the centre of his theory is *inscape*. (4)
Norman Mackenzie too remarks that “inscape is not a superficial appearance, rather it is the expression of the inner core of individuality, perceived in moments of insight by an onlooker who is in full harmony with the being he is observing” (*A Reader’s Guide*, 233). Hopkins conveys “inscapes” through his poetry. In his better moments, he saw his poems as a kind of “sacramental medium,” a communication of the incarnate and creative divinity to others. Yet this view and his aesthetic inclinations produced conflicts, confusion, and suffering in his life.

When we see an apple or some drops of blood, what gives significance to the colour and shape of these things and their form and beauty is the fact that “they are.” The “instress” of being gives meaning to the particularities of a particular being. Hopkins calls these particularities “husks and scapes” (*JP* 130). The ability to know an object resides not in its particularities like shape and colour, “husks or scapes,” but in being or the mind’s grasp of being, its foredrawing act. As Parmenides says, “The same thing exists for thinking and for being” (Miller 109).

Being is the most fundamental philosophical concept. It has the capacity to include all other philosophical concepts. On the other hand, if we try to exclude the concept of being, nothing else will be left. The understanding of being differs from philosopher to philosopher. In the Western philosophical systems, starting with pre-Socratic philosophers, there is a whole range of systems dealing with being. All major modern
philosophers like Hegel, Kant, Heidegger, Derrida, and Sartre have given
the concept of ‘being’ prominence in their philosophical discussions.

Consciousness is implied in the philosophical discussion of Being
because beings exist or “stand out” in the consciousness of an individual.
Being is known to exist through human knowledge. Being, if it is not
known in consciousness, can only be considered as an abstract category.
Being and existence are not the same. We do not meet with pure existence.
Everything that exists, exists as this being, this self or that self.

The concept of being can be examined under the following
meanings:

1. The fact of existing
2. Substance or nature that exists
3. Something or someone or a self that exists

“Being” understood as something that exists is in Hopkins’s terminology,
the self of an existence. The understanding of being, existence, and self
are different in different philosophies. In Hopkins as well as in ancient
Indian thinking, the self is related to being and is not confined to human
selves. It is a more specialized idea of being. The self is the manifestation
of unified form of inner unity. In Hopkins, even inanimate objects have
their own selves. However, fragmentary objects do not have selves, as
their being is not unified. Inner unity is the principle that gives a being its
unique self. It is also the principle of beauty in Hopkins’s aesthetic theory. The inner unity of the self gives beauty to a being.

Indian thinking on Being and self can be traced back to Vedic hymns. Philosophical thinking in ancient India was extensive, vibrant and subtle. In the period before 100 BC, philosophy and religion could not be meaningfully separated because of the cultural integration of religious practices and philosophical and mystical pursuits. Mysticism, with the claim that ultimate truth can only be obtained through spiritual experience, dominates much of ancient Indian philosophical thinking as well as products of culture including literature. Such experiences are thought to reveal a supreme and trans-mundane reality and to provide the meaning of life. Spiritual experiences point to the supreme transcendental reality from which finite reality and human life derives their meaning. Through meditative techniques of yoga, it is believed that one discovers one’s true self (ātman), God (Brahman), and enlightenment (nirvāṇa).

_Brahman_ is the central concept in Indian religious and philosophical thinking during the Vedic as well as the periods that followed it. The term occurs 240 times in Rg Veda itself. Hervey De Witt Griswold observes that the earliest use of _Brahman_ in Vedas is to indicate a prayer or hymn (5). No sacrifice was considered complete without the sacred utterance of _Brahman_. In Atharva Veda, _Brahman_ acquires the meaning of magical utterance or _mantra_. The term acquired greater meaning as time went on.
During the period of the Upaniṣads, the term acquires more psychological and philosophical depth and has the meaning of being, Ultimate Being, self-existent reality, and the ground of being. In still later development of the meaning of the term, we find the following: “Brahman ‘the immanent word,’ the energy which manifests itself in both sacred hymn and sacred order and indeed in all things” (Griswold 19). We find parallel developments in the Hebrew religious and the Greek philosophical traditions.

A brief overview of the etymological development of the term “Brahman” is useful for a clear understanding of this important concept in Indian religious thinking and poetics. It comes from the Sanskrit root brhā, which is interpreted as “growth, development, expansion and swelling.” During the Vedic period, Brahman (neuter gender) meant the Great Cosmic Spirit. Another related term Brahmā, nominative singular, was also in use. The expression Brahmanḍā (nominative singular), from stems brhā (to expand) and anḍā (egg), means that the universe is an expansion of a cosmic egg (Hiṁya-garbha). Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa discusses cosmogenesis in detail. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam also discusses cosmogony and fundamental principles of material nature. In later Sanskrit usage, Brahman (stem, neuter gender) means the concept of the transcendent and immanent ultimate reality of the One Godhead or Supreme Cosmic Spirit in Hinduism. This concept is central to Hindu philosophy, especially Vedānta.
and finds expression in Hindu culture, religious art and poetry. *Brahman* (stem, masculine gender), and *Brahmā* (nominative singular), mean the deity or *deva Prajāpati Brahmā*. He is one of the members of the Hindu trinity and associated with creation, but does not have a cult in present day India. This is because *Brahmā*, the creator-god, is long-lived but not eternal i.e. *Brahmā* gets absorbed back into *Puruṣa* at the end of an aeon, and is born again at the beginning of a new *kalpa* (“Brahman”).

*Brahman* as the Absolute Reality or universal substrate is not to be confused with the creator god *Brahmā*. *Brahman* is said to be eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and ultimately indescribable in human language. The sage-seers of the Upaniṣads had fully realized *Brahman* as the reality behind their own being and of everything else in this universe. They were thus *Brāhmīns* in the true sense of the word. These *ṛṣis* described *Brahman* as infinite Being, infinite consciousness, and infinite bliss (*saccidānanda*). *Brahman* is regarded as the source and essence of the material universe. The *Ṛg Veda* says that by the desire of the Supreme Being (10.129.4), the initial manifestation of the material universe came into being from *Hiranyagarbha* (literally "golden womb"), out of which all worlds, organisms and divine beings (*devās*) arise.

Connected with the ritual of pre-Vedāntic Hinduism, *Brahman* signified the power to grow, the process of ritual and sacrifice, often visually realized in the sputtering of flames as they received *ghee* (clarified
butter) and rose in concert with the mantras of the Vedas. The term brāhmin in the Vedic period actually meant one who had realized Brahman. However, later on, brāhmin came to be identified with the highest of the four castes, the brāhmins, who by virtue of their purity and priesthood, held themselves to be initiators of rituals, though sometimes without actual realization of Brahman, or without acquiring Vedantic knowledge.

Among Hindu sects, advaita vedānta is the first instance of monism in organized religion, and Hinduism in the only religion with this concept. To call this concept ‘God’ could be imprecise. The closest interpretation of the term can be found in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad where Brahman is described as satyam jnānam ānantaṃ brahma (“Brahman is of the nature of truth, knowledge and infinity”) (2. 1). Thus, Brahman is the origin and end of all things, material or otherwise. Brahman is the root source and Divine Ground of everything that exists, and is the only thing that exists according to Śankara. It is defined as unknowble and saccidānanda (“Truth-Consciouness-Bliss”). Since it is eternal and infininte, it comprises the only truth. The goal of vedānta is to realize that the soul (ātman) is actually nothing but Brahman. The Hindu pantheon of gods, is said, in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, to be only higher manifestations of Brahman. For this reason, “ekam sat” (Truth is one) and all is Brahman. This explains
the Hindu view that “all paths lead to the one Truth, though many sages (and religions) call upon it by different names” (“Brahman”).

The concept of self has exerted profound influence on Indian thinking, which is reflected in every aspect of cultural expression such as philosophy, art, and poetry throughout its history. As Mishra says, “almost every branch of knowledge (philosophy, literature, religion, linguistics) has grappled with this extremely elusive concept” (21). In Sanskrit there are several terms to denote “self” such as ātman, aham, ātma-vidyā, and ātma-brahman. The concept of self in the well-known expression: aham brahmāsmi, “I am Brahman,” is, according to Mishra, an “uncompromising abstract conception of the self in the domain of philosophy and aesthetics” (21).

Indian thinking distinguishes the self one experiences in social contexts of everyday living from the true self or ātman. Ātman exists in relationship with Brahman and is distinct from one’s social or psychological self. The true self or ātman is an ideal or spiritual self. Only when one is convinced of the truth of one’s spiritual self one can say: “aham brahmāsmi.” Śankara goes to the extreme of this line of thinking and argues that not only the social self but also the world is unreal. The spiritual self which is true is “none other than Brhaman”: brahma satyam jagan mithyā jīvo brhmaiva nāparah (Mishra 21-22). Śrī Kṛṣṇa asserts his all-encompassing existence when he tells Arjuna that: “I am the universal
Self seated in the heart of all beings; so, I alone am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all being” (Bhagavadgīta 10: 20).

The social or psychological self with its feeling of uniqueness and difference from all other things is denoted as *ahamkāra* (self conceived in the aspects of uniqueness, individuality, and self-consciousness). This concept of the self is similar to the self-taste of Hopkins, “which is more distinct 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). Hopkins in his personal life as well as poetry attempts to achieve “the better self” by surrendering the individuality or *ahamkāra* of the self. In the poem “The Windhover,” the falcon is asked to surrender or “buckle” its pride and plume in order to be transformed into a glorious and more truthful self. In fact the true nature of this self is to attain its *adhyātman* which is identical with *Brahman*. Quoting *Bhagavadgītā* Mishra says, “the *adhyātman* is the inherent nature of the individual self (*svabhāva:svabhāvo [a] dhyātman ucyate*)” (22). The individual self when it becomes inherent self it becomes *adhyātman* (Mishra 22). Therefore, realizing the spiritual aspect of the self is not moving away from the true self or losing individuality. It is a process of shedding its illusion in order to achieve its true, inherent nature. When the self attains its true nature, it also attains God. In this state of bliss, the distinction between *ātman* and *Brahman* disappears. The self shines like *Brahman*, which can be effected
in every self. The issue of whether there is another God distinct from this aspect of Brahman does not arise in the mystical view of ātman and Brahman.

Various philosophical schools argue the presence of God in various ways. We have seen that Advaita Vedānta claims that the Ultimate Reality is identical with one’s true self. A mystical experience can reveal the spiritual reality of the unity of Brahman and ātman. Many are endowed with this gift, and Ānandavardhana is said to be one of those ancient Indian philosophers who had realized the absolute in finite existence. It is interesting to note that many of his ideas strike a parallel with that of Hopkins who, though not an obvious mystical poet, still has many mystical insights.

Poets generally are endowed with a special gift of perception that enables them to see truth in ordinary human experience. William Blake is revealing a great scientific truth when he says, “God in a grain of sand.” Modern science has proved his insights to be true because at the sub-atomic level the nature of being seems to be similar to what he has expressed in his poems. Hopkins too had an insight which enabled him to perceive God, or in Indian terms, Brahman, in all the “inscapes” that he perceived. When he looked at a mountain, he saw “the shoulders of God,” and when he looked at a bluebell, he could see the beauty of Christ.
In the Upaniṣads, the concepts of *Brahman* and ātman occupy a prominent place. *Brahman* is regarded as the most profound discovery of the Upaniṣads. But the equation of ātman with *Brahman* is also of profound significance. The ātman within the individual being is the enjoyer of inner experience, the data for which are brought through the *manas*, from within and also from the external *indriyās* or senses (Rao 2). Mind can lead up to the self, but not into the self itself. The self has been called the “Life of life,” “Eye of the eye,” “Mind of the mind” (*Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* IV. 4. 18). The self is the ultimate substrate of all experience. At this point Indian philosophical concept of mind deviates from the Western. In the latter school, the self is dispensed with and importance is given to the mind beyond which nothing like the self is postulated.

Within the Indian context, no surrender of the self is required as *Brahman* and ātman have intrinsic unity, but in Hopkins it is needed because an individual self is considered as separate and inferior to the self of God. The conflict in the mind of Hopkins can only be properly understood within the limits of Western philosophy and Christian theology. In the Indian context, there is no room for conflict like that of Hopkins and this is the striking difference between the two. In Western philosophy, the conscious mind has long been regarded as the essence of selfhood. This view is encapsulated in the well-known assertion of personal conscious
being by Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” For an understanding of the absolute being too, consciousness is essential, because the absolute or ultimate being is pure consciousness. There should be a self for consciousness to exist, and the self leads it to the absolute. It is also the principle of transcendence in rasa experience through the contemplation of beauty. Grazia Marchiano in his article “What to Learn from Eastern Aesthetics” says that “by aesthetic experience Indian rhetoricians, who have been systematically exploring it since the seventh century, mean a dynamic subjective consciousness, which does not identify itself with the source of pleasure by which it is triggered, but becomes a totally absorbing experience.”

Hopkins was keenly aware of the experience of self. All his writings including Poems, Sermons, Letters, Journals and Papers bear testimony to his acute awareness of his own self as well as the selves in nature. He beautifully brings out the selfhood in nature in this poem:

As kingfishers catch, fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

Selves-goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying what I do is me: for that I came. (Poems 90)

Hopkins’s favourite term “inscape” captures the uniqueness of each individual object, which was very precious to him. He was also acutely aware of the uniqueness of his own self:

And this is much more true when we consider the mind; when I consider my self-being, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnut leaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (SD 123).

As Peters says, “Hopkins habitually looked at objects with the fixed determination to catch what was distinctive in them in order thus to arrive at some insight into their essence as individuals. To express this set of individuating characteristics in a suitable term he coined the word ‘inscape’” (2).

Hopkins captures the selfhood and individuality of objects through the beauty of form and pattern, which occasionally reaches the level of mysticism. As Donald McChesney in his essay, “The Meaning of ‘Inscape,’ ” says: “Hopkins, like many mystics, ascetics and visionaries, was given intermittent access to this world so described; a world in which forms shine by their own light, where colours glow from within and where all things fall into inexpressively significant pattern” (203). Several other
writers stress the religious and mystical insight in Hopkins. Ballinger says of Hopkins:

   No doubt he was a poet, perhaps one of the greatest Victorian poets, but before through and beyond his poetry he was a subtle philosopher and theologian whose poetic uniqueness arose in part because of his desire to speak as aptly as possible of the immanent God, of the Incarnate Christ” (2).

Robert Bernard Martin remarks that Hopkins’s “aesthetic and religious experience became one in the sacramental apprehension of beauty” (qtd. in Ballinger 2). The multiplicity of forms and patterns revealed to Hopkins, the beauty of God:

   For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
   Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
   To the Father through the feature of men’s faces. (Poems 90)

In the poem “Pied Beauty,” he praises the multiplicity of form and pattern and their contrasting features as well as similarity:

   All things counter, original, spare, strange;
   Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
   With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
   He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him. (Poems 70)
The manifestation of God in nature is a theme that Hopkins uses in his poems frequently. The revelation of God’s glory in natural phenomena is beautifully brought out in the poem “God’s Grandeur”:

THE world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (Poems 66)

This sonnet speaks about the sacramental view of nature. The revelation of God’s glory in nature is highlighted. McNamee comments on Hopkins’s perception of God’s beauty:

The wonder and splendor of God’s beauty, he insists, is trembling at the brink of man’s consciousness, pressing in upon him from the whole hierarchy of created being. But thousands of men have been insulated against that revelation by artificiality and convention, by industrial ugliness and squalor. (229)

The glory of God is present in nature to tell how God is manifested: “And for all thing, nature is never spent; / There lives the dearest freshness deep down things” (Poems 66).
Hopkins considers an awareness of the beauty of the selfhood of being as very precious, because he arrives at it after much personal conflict and religious struggle. In Indian thinking, such insights are gained not by inner conflict but by systematic yogic pursuits and also through art experience, which is very often compared to religious experience. Thus, everything leads to the Absolute. As Tripathi in his article “From Sensuous to Supersensuous: Some Terms of Indian Aesthetics” observes:

The multiplicity of name and form and the imaginative participation with the celebration of colour, sound, touch and smell does not simply stop there. It goes further to the unity of being through the impersonalization of emotive status. It is a journey from sensuous to supersensuous.

There are references in Hopkins’s writings to prove that he was familiar with the Indian concept of self. In his papers we find quotations from the Rg-Veda, taken from Max Müller’s “Chips from a German Workshop.” One extract connects being with the circle and the self:

Self is the Lord of all things, / self is the King of all things. As all the spokes of a wheel are contained in the nave and the circumference, all things are contained in this Self; all selves are contained in this Self. Bahman itself is but Self. (Cotter 17)

The unity of being is stressed in the spiritual instruction given by Śrī Krṣṇa to Arjuna. He says that the “multitude of things and events around
us are but different manifestations of the same Ultimate Reality. This reality, called *Brahman*, is the unifying concept which gives Hinduism its essentially monistic character in spite of the worship of numerous gods and goddesses” (Capra 77). Within the limits of Christian ideas, Hopkins is seen as a person who gains insight into the cosmic unity, which makes all the multiplicity merge within the creator. Thus, he writes in “God’s Grandeur”:

THE world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from a shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. . . (*Poems* 66)

Indian philosophy considers *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, as the “soul,” or inner essence, of all things. We see in Hopkins also a search for the essence of things. The glory of this search culminates in the realization of a synthesis of the individual self with the Ultimate Being. This is achieved through an act of surrender of the individuality of the self before the Supreme Being. This act of surrender can at times be terrible as seen in the poem “The Wreck”:

I did say yes

O at lightning and lashed rod;

Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess

Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:

The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee
trod

Hard down with a horror of height:

And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.

(Poems 52)

According to Capra, sacrifice, a “recurring theme in Hindu
mythology is the creation of the world by the self-sacrifice of God—
‘sacrifice’ in the original sense of ‘making sacred’—whereby God
becomes the world which, in the end, becomes again God” (77-78). In
Hopkins sacrifice transforms an ordinary person into the image of Christ:
“This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is
immortal diamond” (Poems 106).

Lonely Radha crying out in her pain symbolizes the cruel paradox of
bhakta forever yearning for fulfillment, and it can be compared with the
crying out of the nun to Christ to come quickly in Hopkins’s “The 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 nirvanic sublime gets rewritten as a
sublime that one can live by in the world as it is. (122-23)
This is exactly what Hopkins also attempts to do in his poetry.

According to Rajendran, though India is one of the few nations of the world that have given shape to lasting monuments of beauty, “Indian thinkers have seldom entered into overt philosophical speculations about the nature and function of beauty like their Western counterparts” (23). According to him, “the most striking description of beauty is seen in one of the memorable passages of Poet Māgha: kṣaṇe kṣaṇe yannavatvamapaiti tadeva rūpam ramanīyatāyāh; that ‘which appears anew is the nature of the beautiful’ ” (24). Beauty, according to Māgha, is never fixed or static. It has inexhaustible potentialities, which appears anew at every moment to the onlooker. Māgha here joins other Indian aestheticians who accept the inexhaustibleness of the beautiful.

According to Abhinavagupta, not only the creation but also the perception of beauty is essential to poetry. He remarks in the Locana: “Then the perception of beauty will be the soul of poetry’, we actually accept this. The only dispute is about the name (i.e. whether to call this cārutvapratīti or to call it dhvanī)” (Masson 1: 16). As Rajendran remarks, “the rasa experience came to be identified with the experience of the beautiful in authors like Bhaṭṭanāyaka and Abhinavagupta” (24).

As McNamee observes, Hopkins expressed his deepening conviction of God’s self-revelation in the beauty of creation in “The Wreck,” the first major poem he wrote as a Jesuit (230). In “God’s
Grandeur” he speaks of the world as “charged with the grandeur of God” 
(Poems 66). He greets God as familiarly “wafted” to him through stars, 
thunder, and the sunset:

I kiss my hand

To the stars, lovely-asunder

Starlight, wafting him out of it; and

Glow, glory in thunder;

Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:

Since, tho’ he is under the world’s splendour and wonder,

His mystery must be instressed, stressed; (Poems 53)

Hopkins began to feel more and more strongly that it was in the 
distinction and contrasting features of individually beautiful things that 
God was most clearly “wafted” to him. This idea of the communicability 
of God through the particular and the individual is beautifully expressed in 
the octave of the poem, “As kingfishers catch fire”:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s 
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.* (Poems 90)

Each individual thing in creation by being itself in as distinctive and individual fashion as it can, and by revealing itself to man as fully as it can, reveals to him a bit of God’s beauty that nothing else can do. Therefore, if one wants to catch the full natural revelation of God, one must learn to be sensitive to the particular, individualized aspect of “each mortal thing.”

Hopkins saw the beauty of God in the variety and multiplicity of nature, in everything that is “counter, original, spare, strange” (Poems 70), because he knew that the more distinctive a thing is, the more unique the revelation of God in it. As McNamee points out, “God multiplies species, and individual in the species, precisely that from the contemplation of the many, man might come to know something of the one” (231). That is why Hopkins loved the “sweet especial rural scenes” and all the variegated and contrasting features of those scenes. In “Pied Beauty,” he advises us to be particularly grateful for “dappled things,” for “skies of couple-colour,” for “rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim,” for the flashing contrast of jet-black wings on golden finches, for rural landscape, pastures, plough and meadowland:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him. (Poems 70)

Hans Urs von Balthasar greatly admires Hopkins because of his love for beauty. He observes that Christian tradition had great appreciation for beauty:

. . . how Christianity became such a universal power if it has always been as humourless, anguished and grumpy as it is today.

His answer is that today there is a missing element — the element of beauty: Beauty must be restored to faith and to its traditional place with truth and goodness as one of the transcendental attributes of the Christian faith. What follows, theologically, is that God’s self revelation in history and in the Incarnation must now become for us the very apex and archetype of beauty in the world, whether men see it or not. The supreme form of the beautiful is made manifest in Jesus Christ and particularly in his Resurrection. He is the visibleness of the Invisible One, the definitive and determinant form of God in the world. He is to be distinguished from all other forms of worldly beauty as their primal, archetypal source (qtd. in Ballinger 3-4).

Ballinger finds in Hopkins an attempt to reunite beauty and faith, and he observes that the “unity” between the physical and the spiritual is at the heart of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory. It was under the influence of
Puritanism that Christianity began to doubt the worth of the beautiful, because in the Bible we can always find fine expressions of beauty and its spiritual significance:

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6: 26-29)

In all physical beauty, in animals, trees, landscapes, and especially in the beauty of human body and soul, Hopkins, like Francis of Assisi, saw a revelation of the beauty of God. In Francis of Assisi, one can find very charming descriptions of the beauty of the Lord. In “The Canticle of the Creatures” he writes:

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creature,

Especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;

and bears a likeness of You, Most High One

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,

(Armstrong 1: 113)
In his poem “Pied Beauty” Hopkins also praises the glory of God:

GLORY be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;

And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things, counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow, sweet, sour, adazzle, dim,

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him. (Poems 69-70)

In “The Wreck” Hopkins praises the Lord for all his created beauty:

I kiss my hand

To the stars, lovely-asunder

Starlight, wafting him out of it; and

Glow, glory in thunder;

Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:

Since, tho’ he is under the world’s splendour and wonder,

His mystery must be instressed, stressed;

For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I under-

stand. (Poems 53)
In Psalms we find similar praises for the Creator:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all
the earth;
break forth into joyous song and
sing praises!
Sing praises to the LORD with the
lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of
melody!
With trumpets and the sound of the
horn
make a joyful noise before the
king, the LORD!
Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwells in it!
Let the floods clap their hands; (Psalms 98: 4-80)

We find that in Christian tradition beauty in nature has a place in the
revelation of God. There are numerous comparisons taken from reality to
express the divine incarnate beauty in the early Christian writings.

The conflict in Hopkins was due to his misconception that mortal
beauty is dangerous. In the poem “To what serves Mortal Beauty?” such
an anxiety is very evident:
To what serves mortal beauty—dangerous; does set dancing blood—the O-seal-that-so feature, flung prouder form
Than Purcell tune lets tread to? See: it does this: keeps warm
Men’s wits to the things that are; what good means—where a glance (*Poems* 98)

Hopkins was keen and meticulous in his observation of all the distinctive details of beauty in nature like Ruskin or Tennyson. The transitoriness of finite beauty is well illustrated in the poem “The Leaden Echo”:

How to keep—in there any any, is there none such, nowhere know some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace,
latch or catch or key to keep
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty,…from vanishing away? (*Poems* 91)

The awareness of the transitoriness of mortal beauty and the search for immortal beauty end up in a realization of the better beauty of the Creator. The answer to the quest is found in the following lines:

What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,
Home at heart, heaven’s sweet gift; then leave, let that alone.
Yea, wish that though, wish all, God’s better beauty, grace.
(*Poems* 98).
The Western art tradition often equates beauty with symmetry and similar mathematical properties. Indian thinkers did not try to locate it in such clearly defined objective factors. Their concept of beauty had always some reference to the experience generated by the beautiful. Hopkins had keen interest in the objective elements in the principle of beauty during student days, which evoked great admiration in the Russian Formalist Roman Jakobson. However, later we find in him an effort to move towards a synthesis of the objective as well as the subjective aspects of the beautiful:

The sun on falling waters writes the text
Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.
It was a hard thing to undo this knot. (*Poems* 130)

Ancient Indian aesthetics does not often discuss the important issue of whether beauty is subjective or objective. According to Rajendran, this may be due to the insight of Indian thinkers on art that “not all objects evoke the idea of beauty and not all people enjoy the beautiful” (24). According to Kanti Chandra Pande, “the word beauty is also a simple notion, unanalysable, and indefinable because the word and its meaning does not have eternity. Every use of the word had different meaning, because of the ambiguity it may mislead also” (sic) (78). However, there are some discussions by Indian thinkers on the objective and subjective aspect, especially in the *rasa* experience. Rajendran traces
a neat overview of this development (24). According to him, Vāmana equates beauty in poetry with alankāra. But in Kuntaka, vaicitrya or “strikingness” fashioned by the intuitive genius of the poet (kavipratibhānirvartya) and figurativeness is the source of charm in creative literature” (Rajendran 24). Moreover, according to him, “Kuntaka never loses sight of the fact that beauty is realized by sahrdaya.

Nevertheless, Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta have made profound attempts to link beauty with the transcendental experience of rasa. This is elaborately discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

It is interesting to note that according to Bharata, aesthetic enjoyment or rasa is produced by determinants called (vibhāva), which according to Gnoli, can be translated as, “cognition” (vijñāna) (Introduction xvii). In aesthetics, the purpose of art is to give pleasure. This pleasure is equivalent to brahmānanda. The essence of art is beauty that merges with the object and reaches the stage of ecstasy of the subject. However, we cannot see the existence of beauty apart from the object and the subject. We can say that an object is beautiful, but where beauty lies is a subtle issue related to mysticism and the experience of Brahman. Only the enlightened soul (ātman) gets the experience of pure beauty. Purpose of art is to create that beauty.

In India, aesthetic enjoyment has always been in harmony with religious experience. The sensuous aspect of beauty leads to an experience
of the Absolute, or in other words, the finite beauty leads to the
transcendental beauty or the sublime. This aspect is discussed in detail in
connection with the religious implications of *rasa* experience in this study.
In Hopkins, the transition from the sensuous beauty to the ultimate beauty
was accomplished through the painful process of inner conflict and self-
surrender. The Society of Jesus at that time considered sensuous beauty of
the physical world as an obstacle on the path of spiritual perfection. For
many years, Hopkins had refrained from enjoying the aesthetic pleasure of
poetry. Later through Duns Scotus he realized that finite reality and its
sensuous beauty can open the path to the perception of the beauty of God.
It resulted in a bursting of creative energy, which resulted in his poetic
output.

In ancient India, the experience of beauty was inseparable from
religious experience. As M. Sivakumara Swamy says, “beauty (*vāmam*)
was a value which was sought along with two other values, viz., Truth
(*Satyam*) and Good (*Bhadram*) (8). In Indian aesthetics, sensuous beauty
never produced any conflict because beauty was rarely separate from other
values, as in the familiar expression, “*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*,” (Singh
60).

The poets of the Ṛg Vedic hymns, the oldest compositions in any
Indo-European language, looked with wonder at the immensity and
mystery of the universe and saw it as full of forms (*rūpa*) and energy.
Objects manifested themselves as forms, and insight or inner perception revealed invisible, formless (*arūpa*) energy flowing through all objects. The “formless” (*arūpa*) was also known by different names, such as energy. Indian aesthetics is concerned with both *rūpa* and *arūpa*, the form of the object and its energy. It is interesting to compare these concepts with Hopkins’s “inscape,” the individuality of form of objects, and “instress,” the energy that upholds the form. In Indian thinking in this context, the “energy” does not exist outside the forms. Avadhesh Kumar Singh observes that “the Vedic perception of beauty is firmly fixed in the larger concept of ‘energy’ and ‘power.’ Indra is referred to ‘Rūpamrūam pratirūpo babhūva’ (Rig Veda 6.47.18). (‘In every form he becomes according to the form’)” 60.

In Bhagavadgītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to behold the infinite forms of the divine: “Arjuna, behold My manifold, multifarious divine forms of various colours and shapes, in hundreds and thousands” (11.5). In the seventh verse of the same chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: “Arjuna, behold as concentrated within this body of Mine the entire creation consisting of both animate and inanimate beings, and whatever else you desire to see.” As Arjuna cannot see the infinite beauty of God with his limited human vision, Śrī Kṛṣṇa bestows on him the divine vision and faculty with which alone human beings can behold the divine (11. 8). Towards the end of the chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that his beauty (a totality of the whole creation)
which Arjuna just beheld is very difficult to be seen by anybody. Even
gods are always eager to see it (11.53). As Mishra observes, “Beauty is an
important manifestation of Reality, because in the realization of the
Beautiful, there is the awareness of a phase of our higher existence” (110).

Through “inscape,” Hopkins tries to communicate the incarnate and
creative divinity to others. Poetry was a “sacramental medium” (Ballinger
6) for this communication. Yet this sacramental view of nature and the
aesthetic inclinations caused him confusion and suffering due to the
collision of his aestheticism and asceticism (Ballinger 6). We do not find
this sort of a conflict in the Indian aesthetic scenario. Aesthetics, as
discussed earlier, moves in harmony with asceticism and does not produce
the type of conflict manifested in Hopkins. When Ānanda, a disciple of
the Buddha, said to him that half of the holy life is association or
friendship with the beautiful, the Buddha replied that it is not the half, but
the whole of the holy life (The Principal Upaniṣads, Notes 271). The aim
of Eastern mysticism is to experience all phenomena in the world as
manifestations of the same Ultimate Reality. This is seen as the essence of
the universe, underlying and unifying the multitude of things and events.
Capra remarks that “the Hindus call it “Brahman, the Buddhists,
Dharmakāya (the body of Being) or Tathata (Suchness), and the Taoists
Tao; each affirming that it transcends our intellectual concepts and defies
further description” (175).
The manifestations of the Ultimate in the world are well illustrated by the words of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna who is in great despair being forced to combat his own kinsmen. The basis of Sri Kṛṣṇa's spiritual instruction, as of all Hinduism, is the idea that the multitude of things and events around us are but different manifestations of the same Ultimate Reality. This reality, called Brahman, is of a unifying monistic character in spite of the presence of numerous gods and goddesses. As Arjuna says, “Lord, I behold within your body all gods and hosts of different beings, Brahma throned on his lotus-seat, Śiva and all Ṛsi and celestial serpents” (Bhagavadgītā 11.15). Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is understood as the “soul” or inner essence, of all things. According to S. Radhakrishnan, “As Brahman is the eternal quiet underneath the drive and activity of the universe, so Ātman is the foundational reality underlying the conscious powers of the individual, the inward ground of the human soul” (Introduction 73-74). It is infinite and beyond all concepts; it cannot be comprehended by the intellect, nor can it be adequately described in words. Brahman is said to be without beginning or end, and is beyond “what is” and beyond “what is not.”