CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATIONS, COMPARISONS AND REFLECTIONS

PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

Having described a certain religious experience expressed in the poetry of Nammālvār and Hopkins, the critical task of examining certain questions of interpretation regarding the central experience described is to be taken up. The primary concern here will be with how the general type of experience may be interpreted. The main goal is to evaluate certain possible interpretations of the general experience prior to comparison of the universal aspects of religious experience as revealed, if any.

There will possibly be three questions dealing with the experience. One is concerned with the cause of the experience. The other question has as its focus essential classification - what is the essence of the experience; that is, of what kind or type is it? What place does it have among the many kinds of experiences, religious or otherwise, which humanity has and has had? The third is the question of final cause, the purpose or end served by the experience. In other words, the problem of efficient cause, the problem of formal cause and the problem of purpose concern us here.

The question of what causes the religious experience of a sense of being estranged from God and engaged in life's situations which is finally overcome partly through effort of one's own and inevitably by the grace of God becomes a philosophic question when it is asked what kinds of causes are to be admissible as possibilities. The answer will depend much on metaphysical perspectives.

Three groups of causes can be said to be possible origins of the experience. These may be called physical causes, mental causes and spiritual causes. The last two can be considered
variations of mental events. A distinction can be made between them if we take mental causes to include natural events as related to extranatural or divine power. The ultimate analysis of causes will depend partly on how the reality of matter, mind and spirit is interpreted.

Physical causes such as a delicate constitution, diseases, chronic painfulness, overwork, underwork, immobility of various kinds, disagreeable surroundings, accidental deaths and injuries and so on may account for one's despair and desolation. But the question of how these causes are related to restoration thereof need not be taken as always generating despondency among the spiritually committed. Indeed there are examples to the contrary. Similarly, pleasant physical experiences do not vouchsafe an offset of a drift towards despair. Thus physical causes remaining important in personal experience, it cannot be granted the position of universal explanation to spiritual desolation. In fact, neither the poetry of Nammāḻvār nor that of Hopkins (in spite of his delicate constitution, a physically based condition of neurasthenia, the laborious requirements of examination grading, specific physical surroundings like slums and general weariness of body) seem to attribute desolation to any specific physical cause or condition.

However, it is to be noted that IV.9.1-6 of the Tiruvāyvāli does speak of certain characteristic conditions of life as lived as prompting Nammāḻvār to come out with a desperate cry for God's grace. The vicissitudes of fortune in this life become the source of sadness to the near and dear of those who suffer them and happiness to the hostile ones; death strikes one unseen and unexpected; death nullifies all human achievements in the human realm; all creatures appear to be subject to endless cycle of birth, death, old age, pestilence. It is the regret that he has to live in the midst of those who are tuned to a different mode of life that can never go to make an authentic life that makes him feel the burden of life; the burden not of his life but the burden of life in general.

The first of the mental causes that strikes one as a possible cause for the initiating phase of the religious experience is some kind of mental disequilibrium, an example of which can be said to be severe anxiety caused by a sense of isolation from one's milieu. In the case of Hopkins, John Wain would say:
So why speak of desparation? The answer is that the desparation was in the loneliness. Only someone who was completely alone could have produced an art that takes so little and gives so much. For Hopkins, the struggle of creation must have been agonising; the incomprehension which met his work must often have numbed his entire being ... ... His isolation removed him from the hubbub of marketplace and enabled him to listen in silence to the messages which came from the real spirit of his age. Yet the deepseated inability to trade in that marketplace also involved him in disappointment, humiliation and weariness. (Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Idiom of Desparation, p.24.)

The isolation spoken of here is different from personal isolation from others in that this is an isolation of the one who has found his true home in religion thought of to be in opposition to the secular age that surrounds him. Naturally such an isolation leads to the declaration:

Besides all which, my mind is here more at peace than it has ever been and I would gladly live all my life, if it were so to be, in as great or a greater seclusion from the world and be busied only with God. (Correspondence p.75.)

This isolation thus is to be looked at as an enervating factor applicable to other religious believers in other times and places too.

In the case of Nammālvar, on and off do we get an expression of his impatience with the way of the worldlings who seem to stand in isolation from one like him to whom the one and only business of life is to be preoccupied with God.

Another possible psychological explanation can be in terms of a more general psychological problem faced by the creative minds, the mental conflict between emerging creative thought and the pool of inherited ideas in society. In the case of Hopkins, Herbert Read would say the following:

We are born with sensibility and come into a world of ready-formulated ideas ... The space between self and dogma is ... bridged by doubt. My contention is that a creative gift or poetic sensibility is only consistent with such a state of spiritual tension and acuity. True, originality is due to a conflict between sensibility and belief ... The evidence is clear to read in all genuine mystics and poets; and nowhere more clearly than in the poetry and mysticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins. (Poetry and Mysticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s New Verse, p.15).

The key phrase here is conflict between sensibility and belief. It may indicate desolation as necessarily involving dogmatic doubt. But dogmatic doubt is part of conversion experience and not of the kind of experience described in this study. Yet it remains a fact that mental conflicts of one sort or another may heighten the desolation felt by some people.
In the case of Nammāḻvār, there does not seem to be any indication of this mental conflict between sensibility and belief. In fact, his sensibilities are viewed as contributing to a heightening of his faith. There are instances where he seems to have a sacramental attitude towards creative thought, directed through the pool of inherited ideas in society, if by society we mean the religious tradition. (III.9).

Still, the desire to be different from the routines of conventional literary themes is expressed by Nammāḻvār. He would declare that he would sing of and only of God and not of any human subject in the literary convention of praise of the great in expectation of a reward. Such a declaration is to be taken as a bold defiance of the literary conventions and not as a source of mental conflict between sensibility and belief.

Another explanation in the case of Hopkins is that he underwent a kind of neurosis or mental disorder in later years. Gardner is found observing, religious apologists have underestimated the agonies of failure and frustration which creative genius, without any religious complications, can undergo; they seem to have ignored the neuroses which may be caused when powerful instincts and impulses are repressed or imperfectly satisfied (Study 1:36). Gardner becomes further strong in a statement of this explanation: Aggravated by bodily weakness, his constitutional melancholia begins to show itself in an acute form which bordered, as he said, on madness, though his judgement was never impaired. (Poems, Introduction, p.XXV). Gardner goes to find a specific cause for it in a certain lack of self understanding in Hopkins: ... it seems to us that his lack of balance consisted in his inability to recognise his own congenital limitations.

In the case of Nammāḻvār, absence of biographical details accounts for lack of any critical interpretation of his poetry in terms of mental states which might have influenced his poetry. If the poems alone are to be taken as the source in this regard, there are occasions where the poet seems to acknowledge a certain state of mind which can well nigh be described as madness but such madness has more of mystical overtones than any that can lend itself to a psychological interpretation.
Hopkins himself has been found complaining at times about a feeling approaching madness. So some weight must at times be given to such a condition as described by Gardner. But in the case of Nammāḻvār, no material evidence in this direction being found, it would be unfair to interpolate for the sake of interpretation in this regard. In sum, it can be said that physical causes singly or in combination can trigger the initial phase of the experience described in this study.

In the later phase of the experience where the mind affirms and the will makes efforts to work out a recovery, the efficacious power of will ought to play a conscious role in the self initiated phases of recovery. It is in this phase that mental causes and physical causes both seem to contribute to an experience of alternating states of mind between despair and desolation on the one hand and conscious volition on the other. Thus a pluralism of causation seems indicated at least for the stage of despair and human endeavour towards release. But it has been indicated in the study that the experience of grace in the total experience implies the belief in divine causation. If such implication were not to be obtained, an explanation to the experience of grace can be looked at as a heightened version of causal explanation in terms of physical and mental causes. In such a case recovery may come to be attributed partly to self-induced recovery and partly to unusually affable outer conditions.

Thirdly, spiritual causes: already a loose distinction has been made between mental and spiritual causes. Spiritual causes can be described as such mental events already overladen with allusion to extranatural reality in the name of a personal God as contrasted to natural phenomena alone. If, for example, the condition of man wherein he is overweighed by a sense not of mistake but of sin is taken seriously, it amounts to accepting spiritual causes as being operative in the experience described in the study. Sin as contrasted to mistake is not a particular commission or omission. In the case of Hopkins, it may be the sense of pride which is a hindrance to spiritual growth (Studies in Structure, p.9). It may be interpreted as prideful self will, the inflation of the ego, which obliterates openness and humbleness towards God. It is this egoism which Hopkins as an experient found to lie behind the struggle in his desolate experience. The cause of that struggle is the persistence of selfhood, the refusal to abandon totally the will to God's will, the failure to achieve complete self
abnegation and humiliation. This state of the experience is significant in that its cure is what religion from one point of view, seems to be all about. But this does not amount to saying that Hopkins was obstinate in will and greatly lacking in humility and charity. It is notorious that the best of men often think of themselves as the worst of sinners.

In the case of Nammāylvār, his chief lament is about the sinfulness elemental to human existence, in terms of ānam. Thus the problem of spiritual cause of human predicament gets a much broader basis in Nammāylvār's poetry. The description of the role of ānam in making human life what it has become given in Chapter III points to a definite implication. Sin in Nammāylvār's poetry refers to bad ānam which is the accumulated results of bad actions known not for what they are in that they had been committed in previous births. It is the demerit that man carries with him at birth. Thus this life comes to be looked at as a misfortune of reaping the consequences of long forgotten acts whose results cling to him like a restrictive garment so that he is powerless to do anything about it. It is more a lament that he is bound by ānam than a repentance of commitment or otherwise in this life. Responsible for one's predicament but not being powerful enough to wriggle out of it, man's dependence on the grace of God for deliverance comes to be underlined in the concept of ānam. But ānam is like a snowball in that past ānam continues to exercise a compelling force over one's actions and choices in the present and such actions and choices become the origin of present ānam leading to future life of ignorance, sensory enticement and misdirection. This process would operate without God's intervention to the contrary for so long as man does not commit himself to the only human action which can lead to salvation - placing himself in the pathways of God's grace so that one can be liberated from that over which one has no control and which controls oneself. Thus central to Nammāylvār's concept of a felt sense of desolation in human life is the concept of ānam and, the physical and mental causes thereof, though not denied the existence, are made peripheral causes. Plurality of causes being accepted, the core of the cause is identified as the spiritual cause, an explanation of which further slides into the limitations of all that man can do implying that God and God alone will be effective redeemer of man from the clutches of ānam. The basic self situation and self understanding of man has to be radically altered by the free choice of the will to get aligned with God for the malign influence of ānam to be broken by God. Thus the spiritual cause of human predicament becomes the crux of the problem of man; the problematic human condition placed in juxtaposition to surrounding evidences of God's love and grace, makes the condition only problematic and not evil.
In sum, the problem of cause of the religious experience studied herein is to be resolved in that pluralism of causes stands out and that therefore a multiplicity of causes with their cumulative effect decide man's predicament. The predicament shoots man through a personal spiritual pilgrimage in which the seeking of God directs one's life. In this notion of ongoing spiritual pilgrimage traced in the name of a religious experience, a general framework of ups and downs, uncertainties and triumphs, dryness and rainfall, characteristic of the experience, is obtained. Physical and mental causes not being undermined, it has to be said that spiritual causes which are operative in all phases of the experience can be said to initiate the only human causation of being opened to or prepared for divine grace. If divine grace is authentic in the religious sense, spiritual causation from beyond must be operative in the process of realisation of human situation and its graceful culmination.

The second problem of interpretation of the religious experience described is the problem of classification: that is, whether the experience falls under some wider type of human experience which can throw more light on its aspects. In trying to answer this question, it has to be asked if there is any aspect of human experience at a wider sense always present in this experience which ultimately decides its peculiar identity. Such an attempt will take into account two broader classes of human experience namely nonreligious and religious.

In the case of Hopkins, Jesuit Frustration Theory comes readily to mind. Hopkins is looked at as a victim of the repressiveness of the Jesuit order. It is often asserted in diverse ways that Hopkins's membership of the Society of Jesus was a disaster for him as a poet. (Humour and Hopkins, Ducket's Register). The question then is, if Hopkins is a healthy minded, joyous, thankful worshipper of God or a depressed, frustrated, wearied spiritual slave. In other words, if the religious experience of Hopkins is to be looked at as an offshoot of institutional oppression, or at least disciplinary frustration of a genius blasted by asceticism (Society of Jesus, p.31). Such a question can easily be dismissed in the words of Downes: Our expectations of true religion lead us to think of vocational enhancement rather than the inhibitions of honourable human endeavours (Hopkins Enigma, p.584).
In the case of Nammāḻvār, poetry comes to assume a sacramental value and the joy in singing in praise of God is often affirmed and therefore the question of institutional oppression or disciplinary frustration is totally out of frame.

The second nonreligious classification can be one of chronic self pity. In other words, does the experience expressed belong to some emotional category in that it is not genuinely religious but some kind of self indulgent absorption in one’s own feelings? Implied in the question is the human tendency to take one’s sadness or preoccupation as indicating some meaning, some insight, some truth or some destiny. If the question were to be answered in the affirmative, the implication will be that the poetry of Hopkins and Nammāḻvār depict emotion. But there is more than just emotion there. There is also the action involved in conscious moving and struggling to extricate oneself. It is a commitment of effort, not just prolongation of self indulgence. Renunciation, meditation, service, worship, ritualistic offerings, ethical concern and sacramental efforts in the case of Nammāḻvār, and creative expression, moral endeavour, daily work, human association, intellectual activity, spiritual discipline in the case of Hopkins besides resistance to evil, efforts to maintain elemental state of being, commitment of one in one’s entirety and openness to receive from without rather than an emotive closure within all go to make up integral parts of the experience. As such, the experience goes far beyond a self indulgence in self pity. So self pity may be part of the experience expressed in terms of being entrapped in life’s situations and lament at very existence but it is not the essential property of this experience.

Another possible nonreligious classification will be in terms of a conflict between religious sentiments incorporating ideas of transcendent reality and those sentiments of a religion of earth. In other words, living in the context of what is of this earth, a lack of reconciliation between man’s spirit and earth because of one’s concern with a transcendent reality leads to a conflict and this conflict widens the gap between religion and actuality resulting in denial and starvation of the senses. Such a contention would imply that the experience has lost his delight in nature and has consequently to pay heavily for it. Neither in the poetry of Hopkins nor in that of Nammāḻvār do we find material evidence for this. Both the poets seem to affirm that their religion was not love of nature. Nature becomes only the transcendent God’s immanent activity. It has never been a doubt in transcendent religion but an acceptance and acknowledgement of grace therefrom as a source of consolation that seems to be underlined in the poetry of Nammāḻvār and Hopkins.
The first religious category in terms of which the experience can possibly be explained is devotionalism. The poems can be looked at as nothing more or less than devotional utterance. Such an outlook would imply that the experience in the poems is simple devotional experience. Such an explanation may be grounded on the contention that these poems deal with the poets' experience as individual souls rather than as one of the many members of the Vaishnava religion or the Christian Church. Devotional poetry, then, is private, subjective effusings of a poet in relation to a God. They may be designed to prompt similar meditations in others. But we have seen in the foregoing chapters that the experience reported is not necessarily that private.

In the case of Nammalvar, in the explanation given to a sense of sin as part of the early stages of the experience, it has been made clear that in terms of the concept of karma, sin is elemental to human being and it is this elemental state of sinfulness common to anybody who has suffered a causal birth that gives birth to a sense of lament at the very existence itself. In the case of Hopkins, Miss Phare, who looks at his poetry as belonging to two categories, namely didactic and devotional, has declared:

*Hopkins in his best work comes as near as, say, Dante, to making his experience available to all (The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins p.150)*

But the main objections to classifying the poetry of Nammalvar and Hopkins as just devotional is the fact that devotional element notwithstanding, the positive spiritual outcome of an experience of grace notwithstanding, a fuller scope of the experience includes much more. Devotion again, may suggest so much of inspiration and meditation that at times it may mislead one's study of the poetry into construing the experience therein in terms of easy spirituality and cheap, mundane inspiration. Stark and deep experiences also act as stimulants to meditation and religious awareness and such overtones somehow elude the simplistic devotional classification. The second religious category to which this experience can be ascribed is didacticism. In other words, these poems are to be looked at as straightforward instruction in religious truths. In the case of Hopkins, it is said,

*It would advance the glory of God, as the study of no other body of poetry would do, because it would lead them to the realization that all this beauty is but a faint reflection of the beauty of God...It is no small thing that we have the truths of our faith in artistic form.* (The Teaching of Hopkins, Jesuit Educational Quarterly, 7.No.2 (October, 1944) p.94).
In the case of Nammālvār's, it is said:

Nammālvār's hymns reflect primary religious experience: as such they are pre-philosophical and pre-theological, and pre-prescriptive; though they certainly contain philosophy and theology and ritual indications, they are not expressed for the purpose of prescribing in any of these areas and they are resistant to later attempts to find in them normative thought and normative action (God Far and God Near - An Interpretation of the Thought of Nammālvār, p 69).

That does not mean that Nammālvār's poetry is totally devoid of any explicit advocacy of human action for the sake of salvation. But whatever human action is advocated, it remains a fact that Nammālvār holds that grace is always prior to and not derived from human action. So the poetry of both Nammālvār and Hopkins are insightful, provocative and instructional. But the emphasis is not on doctrinal or didactic notes. The poetry has personal experiential character rather than abstractions. Thus Abbott would say this about the poetry of Hopkins:

These poems are salt with the taste of his blood and bitter with the sweat of his anguish, the work of a man tried to the utmost limit of his strength and clinging to the last leg where reason may find a refuge. Their authority and truthfulness cannot be questioned. Here indeed, is a chart of despair, made by one who still believes in the justice of God (Letters, p.XXXVIII).

We can conclude that felt experience is essential in the poetry of Hopkins and Nammālvār rather than doctrinal articulation which comes as an aftermath.

Another possible religious category of explanation is mysticism. Geddes MacGregor, writing about how mystical experience is to be interpreted would write as follows:

... all forms of mysticism have a springboard of one sort or another and so it is certainly possible to distinguish between the theological presuppositions that the mystics of various religions and religious traditions claim to get beyond. In comparing the respective processes involved in these various mystical pilgrimages, differences are indeed found, and it is arguable that the authenticity of the experience claimed by a mystic may be tested with reference to the total process by which he arrives at it. If we are to make any judgement at all about the authenticity of this or that claim to mystical experience, we must use some criterion other than the experience itself since this is unique and incommunicable (Introduction to Religious Philosophy, p 182).
One of the most common religious interpretations of Hopkins among various Catholic writers has held that he belongs in the mystical tradition. Such interpretation often means that he exemplifies the classical pattern of the purgative way, the illuminative way and the mystical way. It is also said that he somehow discloses that spiritual communion with God characteristic of mysticism. Writing about Hopkins’s final sorrow, Lahey would say,

It sprang from causes which have their origin in true mysticism. Hopkins, smiling and joyful with his friends was at the same time on the bleak heights of spiritual night with his God. All writers on mysticism have told us that this severe trial is the greatest and most cherished gift from One who has accepted literally His servant’s oblation (Gerard Manley Hopkins p.143)

Geraldine Colligan would more explicitly identify Hopkins with mysticism in the following words:

Yet he is a poet most deserving of the name in its true meaning. Mysticism, in the Catholic tradition, means a union, during this life, of the soul with God in sublime contemplation; so intimate that the soul well-nigh loses itself in its transformation into God ... From his poems, it appears that Hopkins experienced these tests and so was admitted to this close, contemplative union with God (The Mysticism of Hopkins, Ave Maria 581 (November, 1943) 591).

But declarations like The soul well-nigh loses itself in its transformation into God are not to be accepted without qualification. Signs of recovery from grief testifies to grace given renewal and indications of happy ending of religious experience are to be taken as indications of infused contemplation (Studies in Structure, p.5). In other words, without indulging in extrapolation, it may have to be said that religious interpretations of Hopkins in terms of mysticism minimize the real, living, personal character of desolation as part of the experience studied. If we enquire into the why and wherefore of such interpretations, we find lying beneath them the contention that the desolation in Hopkins’s poetry is not real in the literal sense; it is too desperate, too vivid to be fully real; it must be phenomenal only masking some ulterior meaning. But one cannot give a mere phenomenal reading of desolation in order to support an overdrawn spiritual interpretation that if desolation is a matter of inexplicable dark night of the soul, so must the final culmination be. Hopkins’s experience is a running, very human mixture of decline and ascent in felt consolation.
In the case of Nammālvar, it has been made clear that mysticism in his poetry underlines a sense of existential estrangement rather than identity mysticism. The human self is not existentially one with God. The existential longing for realization of communion with God seems to be the core of his experience rather than its realization. Then it has been said that his mysticism is of the bhakti type. It is a craving for a unity of feeling, of will, of mind, of person, a unity in which there is a joyous encounter of the self with another self. Thus the essential elements of Nammālvar's mysticism can be identified and related to each other as follows: Affirmation by mind of an essential unity of the self with God which intensified the longing for a realization of the unity, for what could be but is not presently experienced.

In the context of a discussion of mysticism, it has to be noted that

Whatever Christians may feel about the nature of their pilgrimage on earth, they recognize that its goal is that future enjoyment that the medieval theologians called the beatific vision. The whole direction of Christian experience on earth must therefore be regarded as towards that goal. What the Christian mystics claim is a sort of foretaste of the beatific vision, as brief anticipation of heaven and the Christian notion of heaven is that it essentially consists in a fuller knowledge of God (Introduction to Religious Philosophy, p.183).

Whether the poetry of Hopkins in any way indicates this notion of foretaste of what the spirit craves to be in mystical terms is a subject that is to be dealt with later in this chapter with a reference back to Christology in Hopkins. Suffice it to say that mystical element in Hopkins's poetry indicates his belief that man might not return in spirit to God but such a return can be facilitated by mystic experience.

In the case of Nammālvar, the idea of foretaste does find a specific place. A mystic union is acknowledged to have been experienced but such experience is impermanent, though not illusory. As such, it is deeply satisfying and terribly frustrating - satisfying because it is a taste of that ultimate state for which one longs and to which one knows himself to be destined; frustrating because once he has an experience of it, he is dissatisfied with anything less.
From the foregoing discussion of the problem of classification of religious experience in the poetry of Nammālvar and Hopkins, it is to be obtained that the experience studied is too elusive to be classified as belonging to this or that particular nonreligious or religious classification. It is an experience in the life of individuals in their confrontation with God. It is an experience of personalistic theistic apprehension of the holy. At the same time, it is part of human religiousness in various ways. The problem of purpose of this experience can be explained in three ways: bringing a person into communion or relationship with God, the strengthening of will and divine encouragement to a person to be a genuine individual. In the poetry of both Nammālvar and Hopkins, the first of these purposes seems to be the special outcome of grace. Strengthening of will is the purpose served by human exertion in the context of the created order in which man occupies a unique position. Individuality seems the special outcome of the desolation-isolation-alienation syndrome. The experience suggests an ascending scale in religious movement from a felt sense of alienation through naturation to grace. Priority is assigned to communion with God first and then to strengthening of man’s will to live an authentic life in service and devotion to God and lastly to the achievement of the experient’s full individuality. Thus there comes to be a threefold purpose in the religious experience: The spiritual, the moral and the artistic. The spiritual remaining paramount, the moral and artistic remain complementary to the total design.

From the foregoing discussion of cause, classification and purpose of the religious experience as expressed in the poetry of Nammālvar and Hopkins, it is to be obtained that in the case of both, certain common causes and a certain common classification which by extension can become general in a study of the phenomenology of human religious pilgrimage and an almost one to one correspondence between the purposes behind religious experience are to be discerned.

**THE EMERGENT TYPOLOGY**

With the problem of cause, classification and purpose having been enquired into, it will be in place to enquire into the problem of typology that has emerged consequent to the study of religious experience in Nammālvar and Hopkins to obtain the typology of Religious experience.
In the discussion of encagement in the poetry of Hopkins, it has been asserted that man is looked at as having been caught in an existential trap and the longing thereon has been identified as that for an unencumbered existence. In the case of Nammāljār also it has been asserted that life in the phenomenal world is full of the sorrow of being isolated from one’s true home, shut off from one’s own proper estate. Unencumbered existence in the case of Hopkins has been later identified to indicate a stage of communion with God. In the case of Nammāljār also it has been seen that the goal of life is to facilitate unimpeded communion with God. In the case of both the poets, it has been found that frustration more than guilt seems to characterize the experience of present existence.

Hopkins has been also found to have felt a sense of holy thwarting which has been identified as a sense of bitter defeat of unthriving stagnation. This sense, as it is especially found in Thou art indeed just, Lord, can be explained in the words of Geddes MacGregor:

The older Hebrew tradition was that God rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked in this life and so there was no need for a future life to fulfil the divine justice. One could not fail to observe, however, that very often the wicked, far from being punished, seemed to get away with their wickedness and have a good time, while the righteous, on the other hand, met with all sorts of misfortunes and suffered all manner of distress. ‘Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper’ cries the anguished Jeremiah, ‘Wherefore’, asks Job, ‘do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?’ For while the wicked were not expected to enjoy the blessing of ‘length of days’, observation could not but disclose the fact that many scoundrels lived on in health and comfort to an advanced age while good, honest men died in their prime and seemed to have even in their shorter lives endured woeful trials. Where was the justice in that? God, who was both just and mighty, could not be content to leave matters thus. Surely, it came to be argued, there must be a way of putting all this right after death. What we ought to note especially here is that the belief in a glorious future life was seen as a corollary of belief in the infinite righteousness and justice of God, who would not in the long run allow the wicked to trample with impunity on the just and mock them in their distress. God’s goodness seemed to demand a life beyond the grace that looked as though it must be even more important than this life which to the Hebrews had always seemed very important indeed. (p 219)

This sense of holy thwarting finds an expression in Nammāljār’s poetry also but with a difference. He does not look at his particular failure in the context of others’s, particular thriving. He seems to wonder why God who can prevent the affliction within, the sense organs which separate man from God, did not prevent it. He asks, what do you (God) have to gain by making these five indestructible sense organs afflict within me so that I am prevented from reaching your feet?
### HOPKINS

#### ENCAGEMENT

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<td>Transitoriness of beauty</td>
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<td>Sadness</td>
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NAMMĀLVĀR

EXISTENTIAL EXTRANGEMENT

Entrapment  Hollowness of human values  Frustration of human ideal

Transitoriness  Fatality of human attributes and powers  Exasperation at human nature  Disregard to worldly values

Felt separation from God
Agony of the dark night of the soul
Felt alienation from others
Complaint about absence
Regret at losing communion

Aspects elemental to human nature
Bondage of Karmā

Ignorance  Enicement

Embodiment
Thus the feeling of being trapped, thwarted, confined, contained, caught, ensnared is to be found in the poetry of Hopkins and Nammālyār. In the case of both the why of it is asked not because an answer is expected but because the perplexity is to be expressed and a prayer for deliverance is to be made.

Another aspect of experience at this stage is one of inadequate fulfilment. In the case of Hopkins, it is the ruins of wrecked past purpose (No 68). Some purpose, some intention, some ideal rudely wrecked, leaving the desired fulfilment in ruins. To seem the stranger lies my lot conveys a sense of falling short of what one might be or should be. Thou art indeed just Lord, compares his own futile efforts with nature’s fruition: Man, despite all his struggle and strain, has to remain a eunuch in his endeavours, not producing anything that matters while the creatures of nature perfect their ways smoothly and rhythmically. The spiritual fire within man has become a smoldering ash. Spiritually and secularly one has come to little or nothing. A deeper, more pervasive sense of barrenness in life comes to be felt. With sealed sap and dry roots no fruit but only sin comes to be felt of life.

Frustration at nonfulfilment finds an expression in Nammālyār’s poetry too. In III 2.9 he would word human predicament in terms of having lost one’s way caught up in dense worldly life. Life appears to be groping in the misdirected path even with the full awareness of its being misdirected. VII.6 talks about frustration of living amidst the seeking presence of God still being not able to taste it in any way. The greatest regret about life - ignorance of the true goal of life - which initially and ultimately accounts for nonfulfilment is to be found in the following words:

Many men of yore had just come and gone,
Oblivious of the true goal eternal, alas!

Thus frustration at nonfulfilment of what is life’s ideal is found to trigger the early phases of desolation and despair in the poetry of both Nammālyār and Hopkins.

Being thwarted, trapped, imprisoned and caught in human situations and frustrated in the pursuit of life’s ideal is to aspire and yet feel barren, to conclude that one has nothing to offer. It is this felt emptiness or barrenness in life that has been repeatedly referred to by both Hopkins and Nammālyār. This is a spiritual threat from which even the spiritually minded is not exempt on account of his spiritual interest or even his attained spirituality.
At this point of discussion of the initiating conditions of encagcment and existential estrangement, it would be in order to refer back to what has already been said in the Preamble to the study. It has been pointed out that it is inevitable that all the self reliant efforts of human consciousness to seek the Divine end up in utter despair and frustration. This was looked at as a precondion of the Divine disclosure. Thus this experiential content of annulling egotistic affiliations for divine encounter marks an upward movement from the temporal to the Divine.

The element of felt separation from God expressed in terms of desertion by God and the lament and regret thereon along with despondent cries in sorrow, complaint about absence, regret at noncommunion, angry reproach, sober questioning and supplication thereof have amply been illustrated from the poetry of both Nammāljār and Hopkins. Also lament at existence and finitude, transitioniness of everything that is human and of this world, exasperation at human nature and universal desolation with sadness thereon have been illustrated. Such illustrations only go to mark what is Religious within the religious. However, it is to be noted that such outcries are made in the general context of the affirmation of the redemptive grace of God. Ignorance, mistaken knowledge, wrong apprehension, misapprehension or inverted apprehension, blemishes of the mind, transitoriness of life, helplessness against the influences of past sins, puzzle at what had been the cause behind such sins, embodiment and its shackles - if these are the elements of the experience of a sense of desolation and despair, are they not also elements of universal religious experience? It is the existence of common elements of experience that has prompted this study as indicated in the Preamble. How the other two aspects of the religious experience studied here also go to facilitate a better perspective of Religion is to be seen hereafter.

Charts .....
By nature, human experience is such that one may live the harrowing experience of encagement and existential estrangement to the end of life. But life can be made a process of resolution of this spiritual problem through an ongoing combat looking for release, rejuvenation and solace even while suffering the living tension of encagement, despair and torture. Entrapment, threat of nonfulfilment, emptiness, desertion, isolation, world sorrow and agony as juxtaposed with release, assurance of success, new birth, rejuvenation, steadfastness, communion, world affirmation and joy as felt about life and expressed in the poetry of Namālvār and Hopkins make the reader simultaneously caught upon entrapment and resolution. The way of the resolution begins with some steps that man can take and culminates in God's initiative on man's behalf. This twofold distinction remains within the present life of man. The first of these two emphases as found in the poetry of Namālvār and Hopkins is to be considered herein.
Hopkins

Naturation

Openness to Beauty

Alter attention from the temporal
Outward magnificence
Awareness of goodness
Enlivening moral responsibility
Ecstatic Response

Activity

Creative Expression
Reveal the self
Abandoned sense
Patience
Moral endeavour
Moral obligations to
God, Soul and spirit
Daily Work
Bringing glory to God
Human Association
Affection
Fondness
Sympathy
Empathy with past personae
Comraderie
Significance of human embodiment
Spiritual Discipline
Resolve to undertake quest
Teaching
Dedication
Natural goodness
Intellectual goodness
Renunciation
Humour
Nammāḻvār

Life of the Devotee

Openness to Beauty

Perception of God through the beauty of the created world.
Perception of God through the beauty of the consecrated icon.
Ecstasy of Loving Devotion

Activity

Creative Expression
Sacrament
Ethical life
Daily work
Service to God
Human Association
Service to Devotees
Comraderie
Sympathy
Significance of human embodiment
Spiritual Discipline
Resolve
Teaching
(Exhortation)
Dedication
Renunciation
What an apperception of beauty does by way of altering one’s attention to the things that are has been discussed in the description of Hopkins’s religious experience. Awareness of beauty is to be taken as a heightened awareness of what is manifest through the outward beauty beheld - the inner form and meaning of each thing. In this context, a brief description of the relevance of Hopkins’s concept of inscape and instress will be in place. Inscape is used by Hopkins himself to refer to design, pattern (Letters No. 53, (15 February, 1879), p.66), which is individually distinctive (Further Letters No. 188, (7 November, 1886) p. 373). John Pick, incorporating these two aspects of inscape would say, usually he employs the word to indicate the essential individuality and particularity of selfhood of a thing working itself out and expressing itself in design and pattern (Hopkins, p 33). Thus inscape refers to the formal element. Instress, on the other hand, refers to the tendency or power of a thing to manifest itself, its dynamic element. Raymond Schoder would describe instress as the powerful impression made on a beholder by the inner energies of a thing’s beauty (An Interpretative Glossary of Difficult Terms in Hopkins’ in Immortal Diamond, ed., Norman Weyand p.199). Thus it refers to the enclosed inner power of a thing’s unique being and the seething urge of this power to break into conscious impressions. Leaving many definitions of the terms attempted at by Hopkins’s scholars down the years, it would be enough to deduce that inscape is individually distinct form and instress is straining revelatory power. But form does not refer to just shape but in a metaphysical sense to the total interlacing of parts giving a thing its unity of organization. It is this external sensory pattern that brings one into awareness of the inner nature of something. The instress of a thing pommels its inner nature into our consciousness through the sensory pattern. Thus the polarity between the two terms comes to be established. Instress without inscape is wild; but inscape without instress is frozen. The religious significance of these concepts lies in Hopkins’s belief that God has devised the inscapes in nature and also the ultimate power behind the instresses in nature. They are related to man’s finding of God in that inscape, an individuality in unity which is a model of the great individuality in unity, God Himself. Maximal perfection of God is unique but he unifies maximal diversity in His conceptual understanding. Each thing’s inscape can serve as a mirror or symbol of the divine being. The words of Loyola readily come to one’s mind in this context:

See God, living in his creatures: in matter, giving it existence, in plants, giving them life; in animals, giving them consciousness; in men, giving them intelligence. So he lives in me, giving me existence, life, consciousness, intelligence. (Spiritual Exercises, p.80).
Thus inscape and instress earn things a meaning and value. Hopkins's own view is that inscape and instress account for the convertibility of being and value. The universality of good in creations as vouchsafed by himself while writing about Parmenides: *all things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it* (*Journals*, p. 127). Thus they come to remind everyone of God. They lead one to God initiating a religious experience. God's will becomes known to one in a thousand ways, as many ways as there are men (*Sermons*, 25). The experience of inscape and instress in created things is certainly one among these thousand ways. They set in motion a recurrence of reflection and experience carrying the seeker into continuing, deepening modes of experience. Thus creation comes to exist in a ladder of excellences culminating in the perfection of God Himself. The created world thus becomes an inexhaustible resource for the discovery of God.

In the case of Nammāḷvār, it has been shown that he looks at his own experience with the world as revelations of the Divine. The world conforms to the will of God in all its manifestations and phenomena indicating the necessity for man's conformation. It is more for the sake of illustrating the intimate association between the Creator and the created order than for the sake of pantheistic adoration that he describes the beauty of nature. His songs display a sensitiveness to the revelation of God through everything that is around him. In terms of philosophy, this notion is explained in the name of inner controller or the one who goes in or the indweller or the interior one (*antaryāmin*). God thus becomes the world's ground as well as its ruler. It has also been described in detail that man achieves a transvaluation when he becomes aware of the indwelling aspect of God in the world around him and himself. The unique position of man in the context of such a concept of the world has also been explained. The mystical overtones of the concept of indweller have also been indicated.

It is strange to note that both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins are carried away by this immanent aspect of God in the created order and the conviction that an awareness of God's presence in the world of nature brings about a certain altered attention towards the world, a transvaluation. The best aspects of comparison in the thought of Nammāḷvār and Hopkins are to be found in the strikingly similar views to be found in Hopkins's idea of inscape and instress on the one hand and Nammāḷvār's concept of God the indweller on the other. Thus to be open to the beauty of the world is to be open to the ultimate beauty of God. In the poetry of Nammāḷvār an additional strain of thought relating a sense for beauty with the purpose of
fulfilling life's objective pervades in terms of a perception of God through the beauty of the consecrated icon.

While contemplation of beauty was looked at as a possible means of coming out of despair, action was also looked at as another possible way out. In the case of Hopkins, we found that artistic creation was a means to reach the true self. It was also looked at as an anodyne restoring psychical freedom. Also it had been the same ability at creation that enabled him to express moods of despair and desolation of existence.

In the case of Nammālvār also, the ability to sing was looked at as a bliss that was made the best of. The benefit of singing in praise of God, the futility of poetic endowments not dedicated to His praise, the meaninglessness of singing of human subjects at the expense of praise to God have all been made clear by Nammālvār.

Thus both the poets supply enough ground for believing in the possibility of the healing creativeness. But differences in details are not to be ignored. Hopkins admires the expression of each man's individuality and peculiar genius in art which speaks for the unique being and worth of every person. Nammālvār does not speak of creative genius in this vein. He refers to the benefits that accrue subsequent to creative expression. He also talks about the futility of singing in praise of a human subject in anticipation of a reward. To Nammālvār, poetry has a sacramental value about it which should not be wasted upon unworthy subjects. But the sense of abandon that accompanies creative expression as expressed by Hopkins in Windhover finds an expression in Nammālvār's poems too. He is least bothered if the ecstasy in singing on his part is misconstrued as madness. At the same time, in the case of Hopkins, a sense of stifling of poetic expression is also referred to especially when a sense of despair about existence fills the mind and overpowers and chokes art. The Caged Skylark has already been referred to in the context of the discussion of this stifling.

Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells

But in the case of Nammālvār, despair and desolation appear to further implore poetic outflow. In the case of Hopkins, there are then three stages of emotive elements regarding creative expression: on the one hand, a sense of abandon in singing the praise of God and on
The second aspect of man's conscious volition towards solving the predicament of man gets an expression in the poetry of Hopkins in the name of moral resolution, living a moral life, persistence in one's vocation and human association. In the poetry of Nammalvār, it gets an expression in terms of action in the context of human life, the way of the life of the devotee and association with the devotees. In the context of Christian concepts, in so far as the potential of will is part of man's original creation by divine act, the natural employment of it has to be in a moral resolve to act towards rooting out sin, counteracting desolation and calling off thoughts from this life. *all sensuous delight in appearances as well as the halftruths and ambiguities with which we surround ourselves in life are swallowed up and nothing but absolute right and wrong remains.* (James Reeves, ed. Selected Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, note to Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves).

Action in the context of Nammalvār's poetry is looked at as a context of grace (*vyājya*). Acts like chanting the names of God, meditation, offering prayers with sincerity of mind and dedicated worship are identified as factors about man's life which occasion God's grace.

Thus in the poetry of both Nammalvār and Hopkins, moral resolve to perform prescribed duties is identified as a definite course of duty towards an escape from despondency. Both the poets are equally explicitly exhortative on this score as has been illustrated.

Moral life expresses itself as indicated in protecting natural surroundings, performing one's duties to society through care and concern, examining one's self and negating sensuous delight, half truths and ambiguities in the interest of resolving the human predicament. These contribute to the totality of moral outlook in the poetry of Hopkins.

Nammalvār is much more elaborate on this score. That integrity of character is of real consequence to Nammalvār has already been seen. What is interesting in this context is that Nammalvār considers human perfection as a transvaluation - an orientation to a new set of values and aims - which do not however jar with ethical codes. The concept of
renunciation has already been explained as giving up the notion of fulfilling the self from the created world in favour of desire and attachment to God. It is to be noted that Hopkins also talks of calling off thoughts of this world. But in the case of both it is to be emphasised that there is no negation of this world. As described earlier, Hopkins, in terms of inscape and instress, and Nammāḻvār, in terms of antaryāmī have looked at the beauty of the world as a paradigm for the self's submission to God's supremacy.

In the context of a discussion of moral implications of religious experience, much has to be said about the implied ontology of human existence. It is a longstanding question whether ethics and morality have received sufficient attention in the Hindu tradition. Without attempting to settle that issue, an examination of Nammāḻvār's poetry can show what moral implications are to be found in Nammāḻvār's poetry and what implicit consequences of explicit teachings concerning moral actions are advanced explicitly by Nammāḻvār. In the context of a concept of God who is looked at both as heaven and hell, good and evil, it has to be taken to imply that even such a concept is but an imperfect statement and not a declaration final truth because God in his totality is beyond human comprehension and God's will in its totality cannot be either possessed or performed by any man, leave alone that portion of God's will that directly applies to himself. So the ethics in Nammāḻvār's poetry is an ethic which attempts to bring to expression an ever expanding vision of goodness, truth and reality.

Another strain of thought that runs through the poetry of Hopkins is his respect for daily work in which one is engaged. It has been pointed out that work brings glory to God and the troubled soul thereby finds a measure of restoration. In the poetry of Nammāḻvār, this strain of thought is not to be found. The difference can be accounted for in the name of the social and cultural backgrounds peculiar to each of these two poets. Not much need be said on this score since this is a peripheral issue to the subject of this thesis.

But sentiments regarding human association as found in the poetry of Hopkins and Nammāḻvār needs a greater attention. In the discussion of Hopkins's poetry, it has been pointed out that mere human contact, familiar closeness, hospitable friendship, affection extended even to strangers, a special fondness for children, sympathy with the sick and with the victims of accidents, sympathy with workers and respect for the personae of the past are instances of the theological basis for the Christian outlook that Hopkins avows - the basis in the original
goodness and worthiness of man. It has also been pointed out that he considers that human community has been so designed that each person can be a healing vehicle for another in time of trouble. The incarmational elements involved has been explained in terms of Hopkins's faith in human embodiment as the vehicle for mediation between man and God.

Nammāyār cannot be said to have spoken so elaborately about human association. That he rejoices in the company of devotees to God and that a sense of appreciation and attitude of service towards devotees is desired are two strains of thought regarding human association that we find in Nammāyār's poetry. The sense of joy that Nammāyār expresses as felt through the senses during moments of the ecstasy of the experience of God is parallel to Hopkins's faith in human embodiment. That, however, is not to be taken to mean that Nammāyār has sung a hymn in praise of embodiment. However imperfect, precarious, misleading and binding may incarnation be, it is nevertheless not to be denied that God is to be enjoyed through the embodied self also.

Spiritual discipline as a means of recovery has found an expression in Hopkins's poetry in the form of a resolve to undertake spiritual quest, teaching the faith, dedication of all the parts of the body to silence and poverty, natural and intellectual goodness and renunciation. The therapeutic value of spiritual discipline has been explained in terms of the following: filling a gnawing vacuum of time, deflecting the barrenness of brooding, bringing consolation and comfort. Spiritual discipline has been looked at as a price to be paid for natural goodness to be reaped. Thus does the spiritual life come to be seen as a sacrifice - willingness to sacrifice coveted earthly goods. One's higher spiritual nature is to hold under check one's desires, passions and egoism.

Nammāyār is much more explicit than Hopkins on this score. Renunciation in the context of Nammāyār does not mean a way of life but an attitude towards the self. To realise the essential relationship between the self and God is to derive one's identity in relation to God. Identity derived from any source other than God is pseudo-identity and pursuit of any ideal other than God is false. The elimination of the notion that the self can be fulfilled from the created world opens the soul up to God's fulfilment of it.
Thus in the poetry of both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins, what is to be obtained is that spiritual discipline practised especially through maintaining a certain attitude of emptying of oneself, holding of oneself back with regard to all that is temporal is the central theme in the practical side of the philosophy of religion in both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. The implications of this theme to the philosophy of religion to be described in this study will make clear what religious living means to both poets.

The third aspect of religious experience as described in the discussion of the poetry of Hopkins and Nammāḷvār is grace which connotes divine initiative rather than human effort. In the poetry of both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins, the absolute dependence of man on divine gift or bestowal in the form of grace is what is invoked. Grace in a theological definition would be *God's self communication in his own divine life, both as given and as accepted by man, is essentially God's free, personal, uncovenanted favour* (Sacramentum Mundi, 2:416)

That grace enables one to maintain one's elemental being, that grace endows man with certain virtues, that grace showers the bliss of love, that God is found anew through grace, that grace removes specific barriers to the knowing of God, that grace leads one to one's true self, that God's will is fulfilled in man through grace, that grace gives a sense of purpose to life, that grace is felt in terms of steadfastness, that grace leads one to a sense of identification with Christ, that grace makes the soul joyful have been well illustrated in the discussion of Hopkins's poetry.
HOPKINS

GRACE

Resistance to evil
Elemental maintenance of being
Endowment of virtues
Finding God anew
Removal of barriers
Fulfilment of God's will
Partnership of mercy
World outlook - seeking presence of God
God's steadfastness
Personal Identification with Christ
Commitment of one's entirety
Joy.
GRACE

NAMMĀLVĀR

Easy Accessibility
Creator, Preserver, Destroyer
Divine Manifestations
Arca form,

Condescending grace of God

Transformer, and Fulfiler of life
Deliverer
Partnership of mercy
God's steadfastness
Removal of Barriers
Endowment of Virtues

God's Concern for men

Unmerited grace
Spontaneity and surprise
of grace

Priority of grace

Communion or Identity?
Universal knowledge
Growing in God's knowledge

Divine knowledge
Finding God anew

Overpowering the soul
and imposing His will

Fulfilment of God's will.
Doxological or hortatory?
It has been illustrated that Nammāḻvār’s poetry celebrates the easy accessibility (saulabya) of God without any contradiction involved with God’s attribute of transcendence. The special grace of God is manifest in the concept of God as preserver. The concept of God being the destroyer, again, has been referred to and it has been indicated that even in that role no negation of grace but only an assertion of grace is found. God’s manifestations (avatars) in human form have been referred to as His act of condescending grace. The implications of the condescending grace only go to show Nammāḻvār’s faith in the fact that God and God alone can be the transformer and fulfiller of life, deliverer from human predicament. Even the absence of God was looked at as an act of mercy. God’s love is considered so great as to exceed human constancy. The influx of grace is not conditional. There is even an element of surprise at grace to the unmerited. The spontaneity of grace for preservation of the elemental being of life has been described in terms of the secretion of milk. Though Nammāḻvār does not elaborate on specific purposes in creation and accounts for it in the name of the mystery of the creative power, it cannot be said that man is living in a purposeless world. The context and course of life acquire their purpose in terms of God’s unfailing concern for man.

From what has been said so far, a comparative chart of aspects analogous in the religious experience Nammāḻvār and Hopkins can be obtained.

Charts Cont’d...
Caught in an existential trap - Isolated from one's true home

Communion with God
Communion with God

Holy thwarting:
Holy thwarting:

Unthriving stagnation in the context of particular failures/partial thriving
Unthriving stagnation because of impediments in God realisation

Unthriving stagnation because of impediments in God realisation

Perplexity and prayer for deliverance

Inadequate fulfilment
Inadequate fulfilment

Spiritual fire extinguished
Frustration at nonfulfilment of communion

Ignorance of life's real goal.

Frustration at nonfulfilment as a precondition for

Divine disclosure

Initiating an upward movement from the temporal to the Divine

Felt separation from God
Felt separation from God

Experiential content:
Experiential content

Impediments in God realization
Impediments in God Realization

Impediments in God realisation

General context: Affirmation of the redemptive grace of God.

Encagement

Existential Estrangement

175
HOPKINS

Openness to beauty.

Inscape, Instress

NAMMALVAR

Apperception of beauty

Antaryāmi (Indweller)

Immanence

Reflection and experience

Action

Creative Expression

Persistence in one's vocation

Human Association

Moral Life

Protect nature.

Examining Self

Action

Creative Expression

Performing prescribed duties

Association with Devotees

Moral Life

Maintaining Integrity of Character

(Transvaluation)

Negating sensuous delight

Self fulfilment from created world

be given up

Resolving half truths and ambiguities

Rejection of faiths other the faith in Viṣṇu

Spiritual discipline

Renunciation

Priority of spiritual life

Attitude of emptying oneself

Naturation

The Life of the Devotee

176
HOPKINS

Elemental Maintenance of being
Partnership of Mercy
God's steadiness.

Seeking Presence of God

Finding God a new
Personal identification with Christ

Experiential aspects of Divine knowledge

Fulfilment of God's will

Purpose of Life

Unmerited grace

Spontaneity and surprise of grace

Priority of Grace

Commitment of one's entirety

Divine will

Restoration / Joy / Bliss

Bliss

Over powering the soul.

Grace
Having so far discussed aspects analogous in the religious experience of Namâlvâr and Hopkins as revealed through their poems, this study reaches its logical climax in an inquiry about the framework of religious thought in Namâlvâr and Hopkins which lies behind the expression of the experience. It is of course an acknowledged fact that both Namâlvâr and Hopkins are tradition-bound in their religion. Nevertheless, it is not incompatible with active thinking about religion and God. Therefore, the pattern of religious thought that emerges in the study of Hopkins and Namâlvâr is worth being investigated. Such an investigation would reveal a certain implicit \textit{philosophy} of religion. Religion in this context is to be taken as a personal disposition. To refer back to an attempted definition of Religion, \textit{Religion in a tentative definition}, would be a commitment to a kind or quality of life which recognizes a source beyond itself, usually called \textit{God} and \textit{it manifests itself} in recognizable \textit{fruits} in \textit{human conduct, culture and thought on the one hand and attitude on the other}. It has also been indicated that the life Religion proposes to commit itself to is a specially valuable kind of life. In the words of Vernon J. Bourke, \textit{the special virtue of life consists of a special virtue of human will, perfecting the moral agent and his actions in order that he may give to God the honour which is owed to Him (Ethics)}. Further, it has been indicated that this life is an experience of living with the fullest awareness of the fact that one's real commitment is not to this life but to a different and deeper life whose source is beyond this life. It is in such a context that the possibility of studying religious experience from the phenomenological perspective was validated with a threefold parameter of the nature of the experiences of this life, the longing for the life committed to and the necessity for inspiration from the source beyond for such fulfilment. Thus Religion as a special virtue does not become just a subjective feeling or a private glow because the reference to God is part of the definition. External acts are not repudiated since the perfecting of religion takes place in the agent and not his actions. Therefore the reflective views relating to the virtue of religion of the state of personal religiousness as found in Namâlvâr and Hopkins are to be traced in terms of what may be called a \textit{Philosophy of Religion}. Thus the essential human religiousness and not abstract concepts comes to be the subject of this part of the thesis because religion is an intensely practical demand and not merely a stimulus to intellectualizing. The single and ultimate goal of life is God— to praise and serve God. Every aspect of life is to be directed to this end. Both Hopkins and Namâlvâr never seem to deviate from this commitment as a total demand. The primary
appeal of both Hopkins and Nammāyār is in the name of God's absolute sovereignty as creator. In Christian theological terms, God has placed the imprint of His will on the creatures and man is to act in a way befitting the form he has. In Hindu theological terms, man is a form created out of the being of Gods; he is the unifying principle of the activities of gods, or, in other words, of the processes of the natural elements and forces presided over by Gods; but whose real nature is concealed by the will of God. The King/Subject relationship is the most explicitly worded concept in both Nammāyār and Hopkins. But submission to God is not just submission to power only. God unites power with infinite goodness and it is this goodness that justifies the submission. But this divine goodness is not retained as a monopoly of God; divine goodness also involves the communication and sharing of good with man to enable him to partake His goodness of being. This sharing aspect of divine nature is stressed in the poetry of both Nammāyār and Hopkins. This is the motivation for serving God. The paradox involved is that in so far as religion is worship of God and not a self salvation technique, by losing ego preoccupation and achieving knowledge of God, man is brought to his own fulfilment. Thus religion comes to be a fulfilment and not an obliteration of the self. God as the end of a singleminded practical course in life is what all men are to live for in all they do. Prospective death which hangs like a Democle's sword intensifies the longing for the single and ultimate end and is a vantage point in that it always obliges man to turn from the temporal: Do you love what is better than all these, to do God's work, to do good to others, to give alms, to make God's kingdom come? Make haste then, work while it is day and despair of any other chance than this. (Sermons, 245).

For such an infinitely powerful, infinitely good God to be served, He must be found. Divine discovery is made universally possible in a general revelation through the created world. In Hopkins's case, God is the deviser of individuality in a unified pattern (inscape) and the ultimate power behind the instresses in nature. In the case of Nammāyār, God is the indwelling Brahman. In Loyola's words: So He lives in me, giving me existence, life, consciousness, intelligence. Such assertions are plenty to obtain from Nammāyār's poetry too. Secondly, inscape and instress in the poetry of Hopkins, antaryāmin concept in the poetry of Nammāyār ascribe meaning and value to human context and make the universe value laden. Thus the fact of existence and the value thereof intermesh and the convertibility of being and value is signified. The human context is rightly the context of religious experience leading
one to God. It sets in motion a recurrence of reflection and experience carrying the seeker into continuing, deepening modes of experience.

But the world at the same time appears to be a world of impediments in God realization. This life is a life of ignorance, evil and mischance, because the truth of things is either dimly seen or not seen at all. In the poetry of both Nammāḻvār and Hopkins it has been established that the barriers between man and God are manmade. In the case of Hopkins, in the name of the fall of man into evil and prevalence of natural evil, it is established that man lives in shadows of his own making. In the case of Nammāḻvār, the fivefold impediments to God realization are accounted for. But what is of significance is that both hold that the darkness of life lies outside God's direct immanent purpose and activity. Both the poets also hold that God is in some mysterious way involved in the darkness that enshrouts man. This aspect has already been discussed in the discussion of purpose of the religious experience. However, the withholding of Himself from man which is often complained about by both Nammāḻvār and Hopkins only shades man's life the more

Correlating the concept of divine proximity and divine distance to man, the human condition comes to be realised in both the poets as that in which man lives in a world where God's presence is potentially close, universal and knowable, but in which, for human, natural and divine reasons, God is felt to be distant, difficult and unknown.

Both Nammāḻvār and Hopkins do not deny the reality of evil in the spiritual and physical realm. But God is not held to be the immediate cause of evil. The created conditions that make evil possible are twofold: man's free will and desire and certain structural features in the objective order of nature. Though there are a number of occasions in the poetry of both Nammāḻvār and Hopkins full of regret at not having exercised free will towards a realization of life's goal, what seems to be implied is what we have not done yet we can do well hence forward; we can repent our sins and begin to give God glory (Sermons, 240). It is this sense of all not having been lost that sums up the explanation of human responsibility in solving human problems. Secondly, desire and expectations, not evil in themselves, are human traits involved in the occurrence of evil in such desires and expectations are set in a pattern towards the temporal. A more sensible desiring pattern would eliminate or prevent evil
identified as distress at nonfulfilment. In other words, much evil can be eliminated through a practical life of renunciation, which is characterised by lack of egoistic demands. Thirdly, the existence of evil, both moral and spiritual, is accounted for in terms of the faith that there is a greater potential for the realization of good with the possibility of evil than without it. But at this point, reason passes into faith and the premise is to be either accepted or rejected rather than validated. Fourthly, in both Hopkins and Nammaḻvar, we find the affirmation that the highest good is possible despite great evil. The highest good for man is the realization of God. Such affirmation gets worded in Hopkins in such a simple but emphatic statement: *Well, she has Thee for the pain (Wreck).*

The key to spiritual life is seen in sacrifice, in the context of the precariousness of man's life caught in the nexus of nature and human aspiration and the evil to which man is prone. Sacrifice consists of sacrifice of what one would otherwise be attached to by natural desire. Such sacrifice, at times painful and bitter, could result in a real, unexpected attainment at a different level of existence. In Hopkins's poetry, Christ has become the supreme model of sacrifice. Christ lived among men not as a proud master but as a humble servant. The avowed objective of both Nammaḻvar and Hopkins is the subjugation of sensual nature to reason, of lower appetites to higher powers. Life as a sacrifice, renunciation as the essence of living are the central themes in the practical side of the philosophy of Religion.

In both Hopkins and Nammaḻvar, two movements of creation come to be indicated: One toward man and the other toward God. In the first movement, man receives being and lives within a given framework. The second movement, returning to God, is open to choice. Life under earthly conditions with earthly interests will impede man's return to God in spirit. Thus failure to return to God may occur even in the absence of any datable fall or overt rebellion or any particular commission or omission in this life. To Hopkins, Christ's love and sacrifice show man the way back. Such a return to God is a return in praise; it is not just a recovery from sin.

From what has been said so far, the sovereignty of God, His benevolence, immanence and omnipresence, His holding back Himself off man, His making conditions for possible evil but not being the direct cause of evil are found celebrated in Hopkins and Nammaḻvar. Other
implications are there to be found too. That God is eternal and that He is out of time altogether living in or through time is one such implication. Another aspect of God celebrated is that God is absolutely self-sufficient in His being. Thus God is to be served not because man's service adds anything more to His infinite glory. Another aspect of God is the implication that God in His immanence has an immanent role to play in the realm of life with the self-chosen duty of redemption of soul. That accounts for God's role as the preserver of life. These aspects along with traditional Catholic and Vaisnavite teachings about God go to compose a total doctrine of God. The point of interest here is that there are so many similarities of attributes in their concept of the essence of Godhead.

It will be in context if we now turn from the concept of God to the self that is engaged in religious movement. It is to be obtained in the poetry of both Nammālyār and Hopkins that there is an ideal self that man has to aspire to become. This ideal self is shrouded by the human essence. Thus shrouded, the facticity of each self's existence as an individual comes to be. Life is an ongoing combat in which the self is ever striving to move from individual facticity to the ideal self through the human essence by exercising its free will. This free will is central to the full existential reality of human selfhood in that by it man can move toward or away from his ideal self. Life thus becomes marked by a course from the ideal to the actual and back from the actual to the ideal. Life then is an everincreasing, neverending self realization. It is this journey of actual human self back to the ideal self that comes to be looked at as the religious experience that has been studied in this thesis.

If most of what has been said in the name of a Philosophy of Religion as implied in the poetry of Nammālyār and Hopkins appears to be concerning facts, beliefs, and modes of argument from a common stock, that they have to be but so is to be acknowledged because the Philosophy of Religion is not perhaps original in the sense of being unprecedented. But what is of greater significance is the fact that several aspects of the philosophy of religion are so analogous. The significance is further enhanced by the fact that the two poets chosen for study are so highly personal in tone, so highly individual in passion and yet so similar in sentiments that it would not be an exaggeration to say that what has been claimed in the Preamble is validated:
But insofar as Religion as a whole arises in human consciousness due to certain common problems that human beings have to face in the world and people of different traditions share certain common feelings, ideas and sentiments, Religion exists as a whole concomitant as well as concurrent with religions.

The inquiries in the previous chapters point to the illumination of human experience in existential estrangement, human efforts to extricate oneself from the shackles of this life and the logical climax facilitated by God’s grace. The range of the present study has been limited to the poetry of Nammālvar and Hopkins religiously viewed. It has been taken that the poetry is widely descriptive of human experience and that through the course the two poets have struck the wider sounding board of human experience. What has been described may not be the de facto experience of all people. A potential religious experience out of the many possible diverse religious experiences has been traced in the poetry of Nammālvar and Hopkins. The universality of this potentiality’s intimations of this particular experience has been plausibly established. What has been done in this study is to show that this potential religious experience realised by Nammālvar and Hopkins has every possibility of being designated as at least one of the many possible religious experiences that a religiously conscious life is likely to undergo.

The point of referring to the religious echoings of themes in the poetry of Nammālvar and Hopkins is to suggest what many others may also come to say when confronting the human condition, past, current or perennial and hence to underscore their relevance. The central and unifying notion is the human apprehension of the divine subsidy upholding and continuing created nature. Human terror and struggle and grace experience obtain their meaning through divine subsidy.

The experience depicted in this study is doubtless individual experience in the case of the two poets. But the practical religion is not strictly in private terms. It derives its existential relevance by speaking to the reader’s personal situation. If he has known something of the pangs of existential estrangement, if he has known something of the struggles for self mastery and growing in God’s knowledge, and if he has ever experienced something of the liberating bounty of freely given grace, then, he will be grateful to Nammālvar and Hopkins for the personal word of truth that has been spoken through the eloquence of their poetry.
It has been claimed in this study that a certain phenomenology of religious experience is exhibited in the poetry of Nāmālvār and Hopkins. This phenomenology has been traced working outward from the poetry itself independent of whether the poets themselves have experienced it or the reader experiences it. If the experience portrayed is a profound human experience, and if the account illuminates the experience of a significant number of the religiously conscious irrespective of institutional differences, the greatness of the authors of the poetic phenomenology is redounded. To approach poetry with empathy and knowledge is to listen to a poetic word of power and experience, similar cultural contributions made, in so far as something significant has been said significantly to us individually.

REFLECTIONS:

The Christian concept of Union with God in love does not seem to move as does the Hindu tradition serenely on from pantheism to theism. Mystical temperament in essence is pantheistic in that it sees God everywhere. Pantheism of identification is at the antipodes of love while pantheism of unification is beyond even love. The former says that God is all while the latter looks at God as all in all. Christian mystical temperament looks for unity at the base through the dissolution of the self while the Hindu temperament looks for unity at the summit through ultradifferentiation. Christian mystical temperament tries to achieve a certain regression of consciousness towards the unconscious while Hindu mystical temperament tries to achieve a poise, a position of equilibrium situated not below but beyond all organization and all thought. But despite distinctions, there are certain common properties about them which make them terribly alike. Thence, distinctions are distinctions in emphasis and not distinctions in essence. The Hindu side of the picture emphasises liberation, emancipation, freedom of the spirit (mukti, mōksā, vimutti). The Christian side emphasises union with God. The relationship between mysticism of eternal repose and the mysticism of the unitive love of God has as its key factors detachment from the world perceived through the senses followed by perfect peace found in the still depths of the self to be followed by attachment to God to reach the culmination in a loving communion with God.
In Sanskrit, *Kutasthā* means sublime, aloof. It is this sublimity, this aloofness, that is to reach a state of being so high and so sublime that there is no point beyond. It is a transcendent stillness and rest. This state of being is an integrated state of being wherein the higher self of the self becomes subdivided, quietened, is rapt in *enstasy*, becomes self content and stands on a peak beyond the utmost peak. The Hindu temperament looks at this state of being as being Brahman. This is said to have been the state of man at the beginning of every cosmic cycle, the state of original innocence of Adam before the fall. So the reference to the one who stands at the peak of the soul may be taken to refer either to the liberated soul or the sum total of such souls. It transcends the perishable contingent beings to become the imperishable and witness perishable contingent, standing on the peak. But transcending this transcendent imperishable being is the All-sublime, All-Highest Self - the Lord who enters and pervades all, sustains them all and does not pass away. There is to be seen the clear link between the Christian and the Hindu concept of union with God. God transcends even the transcendent soul which stands on the peak, transcends the perfect stillness and tranquility of eternity itself. Both transcend whatever is qualified by pantheism. The man standing on the peak becomes eternal, unchanging, timeless, static, inert, and even “dead”, inhering all these from the transcendent transcending the transcendence and sees the world and himself from God’s utterly sublime point of view. He does not experience anything but experiences nothing short of being. The soul then hears not, speaks not, sees not, feels not, but knows he is in God’s presence. Is there then the experience of the presence of God? Perhaps a Biblical simile and a reference to the Gita would answer that question:

Supposing the glorious apostle St. John had fallen into a bodily sleep on his dear Lord’s breast at the Last supper ... in that case he would certainly have been in his Master’s presence, but without being aware of it in any way.

The Gītā says that those who revere the Imperishable Unmanifest also attain to God: they attain to an Absolute that is devoid of attributes, but they do not know this is also a personal God.

The Christian mysticism is preoccupied with love, communion and union with God conditioned by Christianity, which, having defined God as Love, is bound to admit plurality in God - the eternal Lover, the eternal Beloved and the mutual love that unites them.
Thence Christianity comes to have monists, pantheists as well as qualified monists. The qualified monists constitute a kind of Christian Bhagavad Gītā. They thirst above all things for changelessness and unmoving peace (fixed, still state of Brahman); to stand upon a peak and their soul receives the heart's eye from Reason (the Western equivalent to Divine Wisdom) as Arjunā receives a divine eye from Kṛṣṇa. All things pass away in the phenomenal world. The relentless ebb and flow of earthly life and death (the ocean of samsāra) then becomes terrible. It is the vanity of vanities. It does not abide; it is impermanent, it has no self; it is fraught with suffering. Thence the seeking for a dwelling beyond this world in order to remain unmoved, with God to remain in perpetual unshakable stability when all things keep passing away. We thirst to attain the simplest oneness, true simplicity, an everlasting changelessness.

The predicament of the human soul is that it is between God's world in the heights and this world in the depths, between God in the changeless condition of his eternity and this world in a state of flux and instability. It raises above the mutability below it by a certain native excellence but cannot attain that true changelessness above it. Suspended between where all is a changeless and unified whole and where everything is ruled by perpetual change and distraction, it is the nature of the soul of fallen men to be distracted and dispersed.

But man is not beyond recovery. The soul can recover its fundamental unity if he will pick himself up and shaking off base attachments learns to be with himself once more. To gather himself together in spirit, to forsake lower things and to raise himself in thought and desire is to come at last to that one supreme changelessness. This process is like the process of fire getting slowly hold of green wood though with difficulty, catching on more fiercely fanned by a strong draught, billowing black smoke, dispelling all darkness, spreading throughout consuming and penetrating and absorbing everything it had found outside itself into itself. The climax is yet to follow. Having brought everything beneath its control, and binding it up together in a sort of likeness to itself, it sinks down in deep peace and silence. There is now nothing other than itself, nothing in opposition to itself. This is the contemplative wisdom (jnānā) of the Gītā which reduces all works to ashes. It sinks down to rest in utter peace from every conflict and disturbance. It is then the fire of love. The whole heart having been turned into the fire of love, God is known to be truly all in all. The soul is received with a love so deep that apart from God, nothing is left to the heart, even of itself.

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This sinking down of the fire and the later theistic union with God or communion with God in love are synonymous with a spring board and a leap thereon forward into God. The thrust of the argument of the four chapters that precede is exactly this: to board the spring board impelled by longing and propelled by naturation to leap thereon forward into God by the grace of God.

The Gītā would speak of the Imperishable Unmanifest in paradoxes. It not only stands on a peak, unmoving and firm; it also courses everywhere. Its liveliness in the soul comes and goes with wonderful quickness; sometimes it circles round; sometimes it draws itself into a point and remains motionless. It roams at will and also gathers itself up into a single point. This paradox warrants an explanation. The self contemplates of itself as the image of God and it also contemplates of God Himself. But there is no real contradiction here. Knowing the atman is to become able to know God. The soul is the mirror of God. The desire to see God would lead one to wipe his mirror and cleanse his heart. The Śvētāvatārā upanished would say.

*Even as a mirror with dust begrimed*
*Shines brightly once it is well cleansed,*
*So too the embodied self, once it has seen*
*Self as it really is,*
*Becomes one, its goal achieved, from sorrow free....*
*(Then will he know) the unborn, the undying God, the pure,*
*Beyond all essences as they really are,*
*(And) knowing him, from all fetters he'll be freed.*

(2.14-15)

The single point that the self is, it is difficult to ascend but once ascended and understood as the image of God, it becomes the spring board for a leap forward into God. All religions, the Hindu, the Christian, the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Buddhist, the Taoist and the Muslim indicate how arduous and demanding this ascent is. But once ascended, it becomes Mount Tabor where Christ is seen transfigured; where Buddha-nature or the real self (Brahman) or the image of God is seen. Even the Muslim tradition has it. *Who knows himself knows his Lord.* To rise up by himself above himself; to rise up from self knowledge to the knowledge of God; to learn from the image of God, to learn from the likeness of God, to gather himself into a unity to enter into itself; to sit and make his mind a single point; to practise integration to purify the self - these are the Emptiness or Great Vacuity of the Buddhists and the Neo-Confucians, to see Christ transfigured, to know thyself and to know thy self.
The labour of the ascent having been sustained, the soul goes forth a free man, comes to have freedom of movement in all states of being liberated as it is from the trammels of space and time and circles around wherever the impulse takes. For this purpose, it must be supplied with wings. If one has to rise up beyond the peak, he needs wings. While it is perfectly possible to reach the top of the mountain by one’s own unaided efforts, to take off into the atmosphere, someone has to give the wings: these are the gifts of grace.

The top of the mountain then becomes synonymous with the Tabernacle of the Covenant. The ascent to the top, withdrawal into the inmost point without magnitude (the more minute than the minute of the Upanishads) - that is the point of convergence between time and eternity, the here and there - the mouth of the Brahman, where the sacrifice is consumed by the fire and transmuted into the divine. But the danger therein ought not to be overlooked. Winning the prize beyond all others; to be the Brahman that is ever the same; to be in peace, tranquility, rest and quiet, to be complacent with what appears to be sufficient and great, to experience the Muslim sobriety, to draw in on every side his senses from their objects as a tortoise its limbs - that is not the climax of the drama. That is to be frozen on the frosty peak of solitude. One is bound to fall for it unless God intervenes. The Catholic appeal to grace for the grand climax, the Hindu demand to Attach your mind to me - that is the anticipated grand finale of the spiritual drama. Unless this finale is reached through divine intervention, the self stops with knowing the image without knowing the author of the image; the self believes to have and to be that which it never achieves; the self becomes conscious of neither within nor without; the self is in the sleep of self-forgetfulness. The self has to outgrow this forgetfulness of the self which is the image of God and awaken to the wholly divine. This consists of enlarging the mind, raising the mind and abstracting the mind all of which is not possible without divine grace. It consists of one thing that is constant, but constant in increase - the soul’s thirst for God.

Thus the circle is complete: The soul’s thirst for God; the ascent up the mountain, the grace abounding flight into God - the subject of the second and the third chapters of this study as traced in the poetry of Nammāḻvar and Hopkins in their respective philosophic backgrounds. That is what is something significant said significantly to us individually by Hopkins and Nammāḻvar in their poetry. An understanding of these common elements of
experience described in terms of Encagement-Naturation-Grace and Longing-Bhakti-Grace syndrome as found in the poetry of Hopkins and Nammāḻvār resolves the paradox in the very first few sentences of this thesis - Concurrent with different religions, Religion; exists in its own respect. Different religions have come out of different traditions and against different backgrounds. But insofar as Religion arises as a whole in human consciousness due to certain common problems the human beings have to face in the world, and people of different traditions share certain common feelings, ideas and sentiments, Religion exists as a whole concomitant as well as concurrent with religions.