CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

"Peace and joy are not to be found in external nature. They are treasures lying hidden in the inner realms of man. Once they are located, man can never more be sad or agitated".

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

The end of a work of art is beauty. John Keats says, ‘beauty is truth, truth beauty’. Thus poetry which is the nobler art has truth also as the end. True religious verse in any language and time stands pivoted on beauty, truth and love, reminding us that the end of man is God.

Physical evolution, cultured life form into man. When individual men ‘cultured’, the great religions of the world were born. With the help of the disciplines advocated by these religions, each man can ‘culture’ himself into God. Thus religious poets play an important role and a deeply religious poet is also a great one at the same time, playing the role of a mentor of souls and society. Swami Vivekananda and G.M.Hopkins qualify to be great in this regard in no small measure. Their poetry prompted by the deep set Religion in them establishes philosophy and poetry as complementary. They make it clear that religious verse can be the best vehicle for theology to reach the masses properly.
What we see in Hopkins the poet is a metaphysical fusion of the scriptures which he mastered and nature which he adored. In Vivekananda the poet is a unique fusion of the self-realisation that dawned on him so very early in life, the scriptures whose message he signified and presented to posterity, and nature with which he experienced himself becoming one. And quite understandably the religious verse of these poets reveal to us a quasi-mystical recognition, a degree of speculative mysticism and the awareness of their religious symbol. The spontaneous unification of the intellect and the sense which characterise the religious and spiritual experience of these poets is writ large all over their religious verse. Our poets establish that Creation speaks a Universal language, independently of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; and it cannot be surpassed.

A sincere critic going in for an objective, or even a subjective analysis of the religious verse of Hopkins is, thus, bound to miss a Jesuit-poet behind the verse, as much as he is bound to miss the saint-poet in the religious verse of Swami Vivekananda. He would, instead, find a strong, invincible spirit of religion, or Religion, in every phrase and line therein, inviting him to join the select band of the blessed league for whom religion is a way of life: something that is to be felt in the blood and felt along the heart rather than a thing to talk about, be told about, argued about or fought for, discussed or propagated. One very great truth that man has confronted time and again is that he is not going to
be saved by reason alone or liberated by will-power alone. The religious
verse of our poets here can give man the most needed direction to
progress spiritually. We have here a verse that comes not from a mere
theoretical level of understanding; nor does it hold a doctrinal tone in
it. It carries a universal message, meant for all mankind. Every devotee
of every God, irrespective of his religion, caste, creed and nationality
wherever he is and whatever he is, is shown 'the light' and 'the path'. It
is up to him to 'see', understand and adapt them for his own benefit and
salvation.

In our everyday life we find that the lower-evolved the mind of
man, the more delight he finds in the senses: with unchecked and
unlimited sense-pleasures, man cannot but degrade himself to the brute
within himself, who would very soon be his master. The only way open
for man to save himself from such an end is to cultivate Religion as his
own second-nature. Our two poets here demonstrate how this can be a
conscious effort and not a coincidence or chance-result. The Religion
surfacing in their religious verse elaborates it. Every man, earnest about
a spiritual progress in life, can learn from the endeavour of these two
poets in their diverse circumstances.

Man is much more than a mere 'contribution of the cells' that
makes his body. Realising this, he must domesticate these cells, the
body and the mind to act as instruments to bring out his own Original
Nature. The conviction of our two poets that their religion and a life of
Religion were the right devices to unfold the potential divinity within, is
brought out here. The verse is thus potent with spiritual energy enough to effect a similar unfolding and expansion of Religion in any devout reader. In matters of religion and Religion, earnestness and endeavour are the two inevitable oars. The yearning and hunger of the soul is not appeased by the finite and the fleeting, but only by the Eternal and the infinite. The saints, seers and messiahs of every religion worth the name vouch for this as per their own scriptures and personal experience. Our poets stand as towering examples to show how the process is expedited through selfless service, which they had embraced voluntarily in life. This path is the quickest means to the final goal of life on earth.

We have here an unequivocal statement of how true love lies at the roots of selfless sacrifice. Such love is Divine and can be described as a simple extension towards others of our love for our Maker and His for us. All religions of the world give pride of place to this love since it can bring about the happy transformation of man's ego-centric nature into the all-beneficial, Divine, cosmo-centric one. Sans this, man is like a rudderless boat in the high seas. The poets remind us of the variety and evanescence of the meaningless life the majority of men are happy to lead. They bring home to us the fact that it is not 'enough' if we merely have a religion to 'belong to'. We must use our religion to cultivate Religion in us and to make our lives sublime. In the priest-poet thus twinkles the making of a saintly soul, while in the saint-poet shines the gleam of the high priest of a Universal Religion.
This is not to say that our poets had no dissimilarities. Their thought process as well as concepts of God and religion were as different as their cultures and circumstances were. Both were saturated with the strength of their chosen vocations. Their approach to God and practice of religion had enough differences. For instance, panentheism was foreign to Hopkins's religious background, but the Religion in him was strong enough to lend him glimpses of panentheism on occasions, making him cut across the bounds of his conservative concepts. On the other hand Vivekananda touched the pinnacle of panentheism when he realised God 'enthroned in majesty' in himself. With this, Vivekananda makes the most shocking realisation - again, the experience of his own land - that he could only love, help, tolerate and sacrifice, since all men were 'but One'. This 'Oneness' of all individual souls and the unity in spite of all diversity in creation is an oft-repeated idea in his poems. The greatest advantage of this 'Oneness', when experienced, leaves no scope for any fear in the devotee, not even the fear of death. But Hopkins has to stop at the point of experiencing the thrill of abject surrender, as in 'The Wreck of The Deutschland' and elsewhere and total resignation to God's will, to quell all fear and the fear of death.

The idea of rebirth is indeed the most unique of all Eastern concepts which has not been easy for the West to come to terms with. An expression of this idea cannot be expected in Hopkins's poetry - like it finds repeated expression in Vivekananda's. For example

"From life to life I'm waiting at the gates, alas,
they open not" (l. 5).
(My Play Is Done"). An extension, of this idea makes birth on earth a 'death' at the 'original source' and a 'short sojourn' or 'unreal waking state' here on earth. Thus, attaining salvation or Godhead is described as 'life in Eternal Bliss' at the Original Source. Swami Vivekananda puts the longing of the soul for its return to this 'Original Source' thus:

"My thirst for life is gone;
Eternal Death is what I want,
Nirvanam goes life's flame".

(No One to Blame" : ll. 32-34). A complete understanding of this unique Indian concept presupposes a spiritual experience and not mere inquisitiveness or blind faith.

Again, on the subject of 'Peace' the East and the West have a divide, which is easily discernible in the experiences of our two poets. The study of the poems titled "Peace" by the two poets (another coincidence?) is indeed an enlightening one. For Hopkins, peace is attainable only at the feet of Jesus the Saviour. For Vivekananda it can be attained right here amidst the turmoil of life, on Self-realisation, when the dualities of life cease to exist or cease to thwart the devotee. Spiritual advancement for the East is a progress of the mind from a 'lower truth' to a 'higher truth', with higher degrees of Religion. For the West, it is a switch over from 'wrong' to 'right' or from 'falsehood' to 'truth'. Further, for the East this progress continues through a series of deaths and (re)births, or as long as it takes to attain this 'Peace', (which is the Ultimate). The West is not very agreeable on this 'modus mentis'. 
Further, the Vedic stalwarts intertwined social life and religion so inseparably that the later ages hardly saw the two as different. The greatest advantage of this situation was, and is that religion takes roots naturally in the minds of people (though nurturing it cannot but be a conscious effort). Physical and spiritual lives tailored to be mutually supporting and nourishing would be the healthiest for man in all circumstances. The more they are separated and felt as different and optional as is the present trend the world-over, the more is the casualty for man in terms of peace of mind, without which, all hard-earned progress and civilization is ever under threat.

Using strict Vedantic terms, the stances of our two poets can be described as monistic and theistic. In the monistic concept through *saguna* you go into *nirguna* or from the enjoyment of the *roopa* and *swaroopa gunas* of the Lord you merge into Him and become one with Him. In transactional terms, this merging is the same as the annihilation of the 'I' and the 'me'. When that happens, there is no observer or the expericer. The knowledge and the knower, the experience and the experiencer become one - there is nothing to describe. Whereas in the theistic experience the ultimate is the enjoying of the qualities of a God with attributes or *saguna*. There is the perception of the whole by the part, and as it is an experience it can be spoken of and written about. There is difference between the knower and the knowledge and the experience and the experienced. This is the highest state to which theistic philosophy can take its enthusiasts. A poet is sensuous in his experience and whether what is experienced is
gross or subtle, it is still a describable or an accountable experience. All the religions barring Vedanta and its offshoots Buddhism and Jainism speak only of monistic experience. Christianity is one excellent example of theistic procedure and experience. Mysticism being what it is, will take the individual into integration with God. When the integration is sa-vikalpa it is theistic and can be described. When it is nir-vikalpa it cannot be described because all description is only of something which is apart from the describer. If integration is total dissolution of the Self in the Non-Self, there is no subject-object difference and there is no distinction between the Self and the Non-Self after the merger. In so far as such speculations do not exist in the context of Christianity, the poems of Hopkins cannot enter into such speculation. In Swami Vivekananda, the indescribable becomes the describable by means of suggestions - but these can have the desired effect only when the philosophical speculation of the reader partakes of the spiritual underpinnings of his transcendental possibilities. If the overtones of the transcendental do not reverberate in Hopkins, it is due to his spiritual inheritance being of that kind. In Swami Vivekananda that restriction does not exist.

The poems of the two poets analysed in the Chapters 5 and 6 establish the above conclusively. It is also seen how Hopkins's, 'heart in hiding', 'stirred for' the great reach but stopped short of the 'achieve of, the mastery of the thing' (to use the poet's own expressions). In this context, the sprung rhythm, an invention of Hopkins can significantly be explained as an expression of not only the turmoil and dilemma in
him but also as that of the hyper-activity in the soul of the poet struggling to find expression. Those which were fenced-in by the limitations of his circumstances, together with the Religion in the poet found a ventilation through this rhythm. When the soul of man, limited by the body yearns for its Original Freedom, the ordinary language of man becomes inadequate for the expression of the resultant experiences which are of a highly mystical and spiritual nature. Correspondingly, our 'ordinary' and conventional rhythms in poetry too became inadequate in the context of Hopkins's mystic flights and he had to have a totally new rhythm for his purpose, which becomes part of the poet's technique. The sprung rhythm, like the two new words 'inscape' and 'instress' stands for his unique experiences in religion and Religion and has undoubtedly enriched English poetry and literature.

The simple revelation emerging from a study of the religious verses here is that man is far more than mere male or female, Hindu, Christian or Muslim etc. Easterner or Westerner, civilized or barbarian (which are again points of view), black, white or yellow, rich or poor etc. He must be recognised as essentially the Conscious Being within - call it the Soul, the Spark of the Divine, the Spirit or aught else - in perpetual struggle for liberation. Hence, the religious verse of Hopkins as much as that of Vivekananda is sure to be a source of perennial inspiration to any serious student of religion and religious poetry. The verse is sure to enrich his soul with the seeds of Religion, to help them germinate to hasten the process of spiritual progress in him and make him experience the truth of the saying that the end of man is God.
The priest and the saint are worthy examples of how spirituality, devotion and religion are not 'painkillers' at 'times of need', but are a process to prepare the mind to meet the challenges of the physical world initially. On the higher plane they generate a happy willingness to love and serve all others selflessly - which is the strongest base for the salvation of man. The poets lived out more than a century ago what the spiritual leader from India, Mata Amritanandamayi in very recent times - on August 29, 2K - said at the United Nations, speaking on the "Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation: "We must plant seeds of love, peace and patience within ourselves". For this, each one of us need not be another saint, priest, Buddha or Jesus. It would suffice to subscribe whole-heartedly to Hopkins's prayer -

"...O Thou lord of life, send my roots rain"

at the individual level and expand it with

"Complete thy creature dear O where it fails" -

sharing Vivekananda's robust optimism in

"No good is ever undone",

and joining the poet to extend to one and all from the heart of his heart an unconditional, frank and friendly

"To thee may come all right".