CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the great problems that poetry works at is to renew life, renew the poet's own life, and, by implication, renew the life of the people, if they respond to the way he has done it for himself.

(Ted Hughes in an interview with Amzed Hossein, 1989.)

The study of poetry in an age that is increasingly influenced and conditioned by technological progress and scientific patterns of thinking entails a re-examination of the functional value of poetry in human life. It is true that the large-scale invasion of technology in human life has marginalised the role and significance of poetry in the life of modern man. In a world of "technological sensibility", poetic pre-occupation may appear tantamount to idleness and detrimental to progress in society. The technological patterns of human life progressively devalue the poetic mode of truth-seeking. In the process of prioritization, poetry may have gone down on the agenda of modern man, who seeks, more than anything else, economic fulfilment of the highest kind. He is unmindful of the ecological imbalances which technology creates for the sake of progress and is innocent of the imminent extinction of human life owing to the onslaughts of technology over-used and misused. Actually what goes on in the name of progress is a systematic suicidal retrogression from Nature accompanied by ruthless exploitation of Natural resources. Ted Hughes gives an eloquent expression to this cultural crisis of contemporary life in his essay, "The Environmental Revolution":

[Ongoing text]
The story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western Man. It is the story of his progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost....It is the story of spiritual romanticism and heroic technological progress. It is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end. According to this our civilization is an evolutionary error. ¹

This study is based on a belief that poetry has a function and significance beyond the tangible achievements of science and technology. The laws of science, based on a logical processing of empirical reality can never open the doors of perception to the essence of reality. In the creation of a poem what comes into play is not the cold logic of material reality but a creative functioning of the visionary imagination. Thus, it can be said that genuine poetry transcends human reason and its egocentric perceptions based on empirical phenomena. The positivistic materialism which forms the mainstay of science and related disciplines confines truth to phenomenological patterns of experience totally eclipsing the significance of intuitive revelations on which genuine poetry is based. "Science has thus become the Great Dictator, to whom the spiritual republics of religion and poetry are yielding up their autonomy in bloodless defeat. ²

This implies that poetry has an essential function of prophetic revelation. These revelations emanate from a

momentary and yet momentous flicker of metaphysical perception or a Joycean epiphany. Such revelations of transemprirical dimension penetrate into the visionary imagination of the poet necessitating the creation of great poems. These poems naturally function as agents of regeneration and renewal in particular cultural contexts of human social set-up, asserting their universal significance.

Poetry has become more valid and relevant than ever before to our age of science and technology that question the validity of the positive assertions of religious dogmas. As Matthew Arnold envisions, genuine poetry, today encroaches upon the territory of religion by exploring and exposing the mystique of life with its various nuances. The myopic vision of science, which brings within its purview, rational and empirical aspects of the phenomenal world is unfortunately incomplete and inadequate to contain life in all its multifarious implications. It is here that poetry steps in and speaks of the varied aspects of man's non-rational, emotional and intuitive experiences with or without emphasis on values that sustain human life. Thus, in a unique way, poetry brings perfection to human life, much more artistically than religion could ever do.

The Greek wisdom of assigning the role of a prophet to the poet has come to have a special significance in our times. The poet being a seer can "look before and after", and can prophesy the direction in which the world is moving. For the Greeks, the prophet was a vital link between the supernatural world and the humdrum world of human existence. Equipped with intuition, the latter-day poet foresees, prepares and warns the reading populace, pointing to the eventualities near and
far. Poetry with an ecological bias as produced and displayed in our times testifies to the Hellenic wisdom of assigning the role of "vates" to the poet. Having observed man's past thoroughly and having mastered the here and now conditions, the poet is appropriately poised to work as a prophet in our times.

Not satisfied with the role of a witness of events, great poets virtually become conscience-keepers of their age. Their remarks and assessments of the human situation become a veritable record of evaluations and prophetic warnings prompting men to act on suggested lines. This suggestiveness of poetry works the magic of persuasion as far as the future of mankind is concerned. Therefore the prophet's mantle is something that has grown naturally as a second nature of the poet.

Unlike religion that is based on positive assertions and dogmas, poetry functions as an agent of regeneration and renewal. In a variety of ways it shows what is beneficial to mankind and points out what is harmful to their welfare. This religious function of poetry is accentuated by the fact that Christianity has taken man away from Nature by promoting "the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use."3 Such anthropocentric conception promoted by religion, necessarily invites environmental disaster threatening the very existence of this planet. It is a universal truth that all great literature is born out of a direct interaction between the inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. An

3 Quoted in Ekbert Faas, op. cit., p. 186
author cannot be understood and appreciated fully in isolation from the social, cultural and historical forces of his immediate surroundings. It is only when he relates himself meaningfully with the outer reality that his work becomes great and transcends the confines of time and space. Ted Hughes amplifies this truth through his concept of visionary imagination formulated in detail in his essay on "Myth and Education":

So what we need, evidently, is a faculty that embraces both worlds simultaneously. A large, flexible grasp, an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention, and which pays equal respects to both sides. Which keeps faith, as Goethe says, with the world of things and the world of spirit equally. This really is imagination. This is the faculty we mean when we talk about the imagination of the great artist.  

Hence a genuine work of art is a reflective analysis of the cultural milieu of a race. In this sense they become valuable documents that operate beyond the cold terrains of human reason, filling the gap that science creates by working only on the rational aspects of human existence.

The English poetic tradition beginning with Chaucer and culminating in Eliot is a veritable document of human history moulded in poetic imagination. Each age in turn has supplied an adequate poetic idiom to meet the exigencies of the period. They bespeak the wisdom of ages and function like effective antidotes. Thus, Chaucer's poetry, which is a virulent attack on the hypocrisy practised in social life, helped in curbing the rampant corruptions of his time. This is further amplified.

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4 Quoted in Ekbert Faas, op. cit., p.191.
in the lives of more recent poets like Arnold, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Yeats and Eliot. It is impossible to view them in isolation from their immediate surroundings and the prominent issues of their time. The poetry of Arnold and Tennyson grew chiefly out of the Victorian dilemma of the conflict between science and religion. Arnold looks for sustenance in real love while Tennyson considers change as a natural phenomenon of life. Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets had the bigger problem of the dehumanization of man in the new-found culture begotten by industrialization and the resultant consumerism. When Wordsworth lamented that the world was too much with him he was trying to come to terms with a juxtaposing of the outer and inner realities.

Compared with the Victorians and the Romantics the outer reality which the moderns like Eliot and Yeats faced was still complex. With the onset of industrial revolution and the consequent mechanization of human life, they were facing the grim reality of the disintegration of modern man's personality. Eliot's masterpiece "The Wasteland" came as a response to this grave problem. It ushered in a new era of poetic tradition. Eliot's vision rises beyond England and passes through Greek mythology to the Indian Vedas. His prophetic utterance Datta, Dayadavam, Damyata, (give, sympathise and control) meant as an antidote to the ills of his time is taken from the Upanishads. The examples of these immediate predecessors demonstrate that great poetry is always born out of a meaningful interaction between the inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. If this is to be accepted, any serious poet wanting to write poetry, would certainly recognize the critical issues of his time. After Eliot, poetry gravitated
around the "macspaunday" group whose leading spirit was Auden's political poetry. The poetic idiom of this group was shaped by the rise of international fascism and the impact of the great economic depression. Marxian ideology and Freudian psychology formed the theoretical foundations of the poetry of the thirties.

The emergence of Dylan Thomas in the forties supplied a new poetic idiom which matched the violent social reality of the war time England. Death, destruction and decay, a necessary concomitant of the war, made Dylan and his group base their foundation on the mythical "anima" or the indestructible "spirit" dealt with elaborately in Jungian psychology. Hence their poetry was characterized by visionary intensity coupled with an apocalyptic mode of expression. It suited the temper of their disintegrating world. After the war people yearned for a peaceful social life. The general tendency was for poetry which maintained decorum and moderation.

The political climate provided by the labour party contributed towards the literary movement in the fifties with its impulse to build a new society based on democratic socialism. Mohan Ramanan who has made a detailed study of the Movement Poetry describes it thus "It was inimical to the irresponsible bohemianism, the lush loose emotionalism of the 40's and to the political pre-occupations of the Marxist 30's. It demanded from people civic sense, politically responsible behaviour and the avoidance of extreme attitudes." This loosely knit group of poets who promoted

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a new sensibility in post-war England could not sustain it longer as they developed their own individual idioms in the years following the publication of two collected anthologies namely, D.J Enright's *Poets of the 1950s* and Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). This new movement characterized by a new sensibility was viewed with suspicion by many critics as an advertisement hoax. However it was an undeniable development in the poetic scene of England.

The "Movement" tradition is chiefly carried on by D.J Enright and Philip Larkin. Yet, one cannot ignore the other distinct voices in contemporary English poetry. One such insular and distinct voice is that of Ted Hughes which flourished even when Movement Poetry was reigning high: "Ted Hughes is, in a sense, the most important contemporary poet to emerge at about the time the Movement was being formed in the 1950s." His voice is still resonant with newer nuances of contemporary life. Since the problem confronted by today's poets is the very relevance of the art of poetry, it requires genuine solutions. The importance of Ted Hughes can be highlighted in this context. His poetic response to this contemporary issue is formulated in his concept of visionary imagination which distrusts the logical axioms of human reason on which technological and scientific progress is grounded. This visionary imagination is a unified synthesis of the mutually contradictory inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. Through this mode of poetic perception, Hughes is trying to reinstate the primary function of poetry as a renewal of life. The concept of Hughes's visionary imagination

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imagination is basically grounded in the world of experience, embodying in it the violence of creation and destruction as a natural process in the environment. Above all, this concept of visionary imagination promotes ecological harmony as it is based on a belief of the inner spiritual unity of Nature:

The idea of Nature as a single organism is not new. It was man's first great thought, the basic intuition of most primitive theologies.... Now it has suddenly re-emerged, within the last few years, presenting respectable scientific credentials through the voice of the computer. Science, it has often been said, which began by deposing every primitive idea, will end by reinstating them as the essential conditions for life and as true descriptions of the universe.\(^7\)

Since the greatest danger of today is an environmental disaster begotten by technological exploitation of Nature, the Hughesian concept of ecology can function as an effective antidote to the ills of the present day civilization.

The Title

This study entitled "Violence in the Poetry of Ted Hughes: An Organic Growth", aims at an analytical exegesis of the totality of forces working behind violence, showing itself in a pattern of organic growth. The word violence has wide implications and has become rather amorphous in modern times. Hughes consistently employs it in the sense of Natural life-giving force, energy, vigour and vitality as manifested in Nature contrasted with the marginalized nature of modern man. Hence throughout this work the terms energy and violence are used interchangeably to signify the same aspect of life.

\(^7\) Quoted in Ekbert Faas, op.cit., p.187.
Significance

The poetry of Ted Hughes stands apart from the general currents of contemporary British poetry. Hughes is so unique and distinct that he has ushered in new trends in poetry compelling us to revalue life from an ecological perspective in our scientific era of technological progress. The ecological overtones in his poetry coupled with his concept of visionary imagination render his poetic art significant in a variety of ways, making him a prominent poetic voice in modern times. His present position of the Poet Laureate of Britain is certainly an official testimony to his poetic genius. Above all, Hughes merits our attention singularly for offering a prophetic insight into the subject of violence.

Hughes appeared on the poetic scene of England at a time when most of the post-war British poets took upon themselves the task of exploring the world of war-related violence. Their endeavour culminated in the birth of the genteel verses of New Lines which upheld the need for negotiations in society for peaceful co-existence. The few poets who still wrote about violence could understand it only in the narrow sense of war-related violence. It is at such a time that Ted Hughes emerged with his vibrant and dynamic verses, and came into prominence with the publication of The Hawk in the Rain (1957) and Lupercal (1960).

The dominant impression his poems leave with us is a sense of violence which is inclusive of vigour, vitality, energy and stamina. It is closely related to the condition of modern man's life. Hughes deals with the subject of violence in such a way that it ultimately achieves the grandeur of a timeless myth. For Hughes life is an endless "war between
vitality and death." When Hughes began writing poetry, rapid urbanization was taking place in England. This resulted in an experience of emptiness and consequently a general lifelessness. Thus, "his poetry broke upon a dead decade and brought a breath of provincial fresh air into an increasingly drab metropolitan culture and proved to be an order beyond the bland superficialities of affluence and consumerism." Hence it offers a welcome change for the industrial population fed with stereotyped poetry which lacks perceptions of vigour and vitality.

Hughes is often charged with painting a dark view of life. It is true that his depiction of violence is mostly gruesome with its vivid physical details. This is partly due to his childhood experience. "Hughes grew up hearing his father's stories of the horrors of the First World War and he spent part of his childhood in the middle of the Second World War." Since Hughes employs biological parameters to explore reality, the physical and psychological aspects of violence take precedence over its moral and social implications which are later evolutions or superstructures imposed by human reason. Thus, the poet's excessive concern with violence is actually an invitation to modern man to return to the primal world of energy and vitality. Here it is apt to recall the comment of P.R. King. "Hughes's apparent concern with violence


is not an admiration for a life of violence; it is part of that exploration of the battle field of man's experience of war between life and death.\textsuperscript{11} Since Hughes's poetic preoccupation is closely linked with modern life, the study opens up immense possibilities. It is also relevant in the Indian context because we live in a period of rapid urbanization and competitive consumerism which make us alien to the world of commanding energies symbolized in Nature and in the life of animals.

Though Hughes is known chiefly as a poet, his works are not confined to the realm of poetry alone. He is a "restless writer hurrying from verse to short stories, preparing libretti, translations, experiment with 'orghast' or talking without words."\textsuperscript{12} However he stands out as a poet of the first order. His experiments remind us of Blake and Yeats. Like them, he too is a genuine poet with the gift of visionary imagination. "I believe Hughes to be a great poet because he possesses the kind of imagination which issues in the purest poetry, charged poetry, visionary revelatory poetry, that sees into the life of things, that takes over where all other modes of apprehending reality falter."\textsuperscript{13} Hughes's total absorption in shamanism and his interest in other oriental cults, especially his belief in the efficacy of the ritual death and regeneration seen universally in all vegetation myths, make his poems visionary experiences similar to that of

\textsuperscript{11} P.R. King, op.cit, p.122.
\textsuperscript{13} Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p.3.
Blake and Yeats. Like them, he too is fascinated by dreams and occult symbolism and is drawn to the whole body of magical literature. This is further attested by his deep study of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* and James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* together with the choice of archaeology and anthropology as his subjects of study at Cambridge. As Hughes is a living writer with a fertile imagination, his endeavour, as P.R. King points out, is "the creation of a poetic myth that will stand for our late twentieth century experience."\(^{14}\) It may not be too distant a dream as Hughes is a poet with visionary imagination and a powerful contemporary appeal.

**Justification**

One can certainly justify a study on the nature of violence in the poetry of Hughes on the basis of its literary value, social usefulness and contemporary appeal. Violence as envisaged by Hughes is remarkably different from the common notion of it. A close study of his poems reveals that his obsession with violence is his desire to affirm life and existence amidst general lifelessness. Even the pronounced quality of sound in his poems manifests life in its fulness and affects the reader totally. Seamus Heaney calls it "the monosyllabic consonantal shootings of the bolts."\(^{15}\)

Hughes is a poet who finds the human condition too much to take. The violence in him is a revolt against general apathy.

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\(^{14}\) P.R. King, *op. cit.*, p.151.

and lifelessness in modern man. Since his concept of violence is far superior to the common notion of it, the Hughes oeuvre necessitates and calls for fresh and unconventional modes of perception. Though, there is no terminal point at which one may stop the enquiry to draw definite and final conclusions, the impression of violence one gets in his poems is inseparable from the indestructible life-energy in Nature. Thus Hughes's concept of violence is based on a belief of the inner spiritual unity of Nature. So, for Hughes, Nature becomes a radiant principle of energy embodying an organic vision of life. The poet's use of primitive ritual forms, his apocalyptic mode of expression and his concern with the absolute make his poems great and he stands justified in offering his own view of life.

Hughes merits our attention singularly for offering a prophetic insight into the subject of violence. Though most of the critics identify violence as an integral part of the poetic vision of Hughes, so far no systematic and comprehensive study of violence in his poetry has been undertaken. As the topic is of great contemporary appeal and is directly related to the life of modern man, it would be rewarding to examine this unexplored area of Hughes' poetry.

When a good number of critics make significant observations regarding a singular aspect in his poetry, it is highly relevant to take up a detailed study of the subject.

State-of-the-Art Review

The bulk of critical materials available on Hughes invariably touches upon the aspect of violence in his poetry. Yet no single work has captured the graph of violence in his
poetry in a systematic manner. Before embarking on a detailed study of the topic, it is relevant to record the observations of some of the prominent critics on Hughes. Keith Sagar who made a comprehensive study of Hughes's poetry in his book, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, records the following observation: "From the beginning Hughes is searching for a way of reconciling human vision with the energies, powers, presences, of the non-human cosmos. At first his main concern is to identify these energies and to describe them, not only in human terms but in their own, that is in Nature's terms."\(^{16}\)

John Press dwells chiefly on the negative aspects of Hughes's concept of violence. In his book *Rule and Energy*, he acknowledges the primacy of violence in the Hughesian scheme of things. "Hughes contemplates with a steady mind and saturnine humour, the nature and function of violence in the universe."\(^{17}\)

Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts in their study on Hughes frequently mention the importance of violence for a fuller comprehension of Hughes's poetry. "The reason for the problem about violence in Hughes's work is the determination to acknowledge the predatory, destructive character of Nature, of which man is a part, and not to moralise about it."\(^{18}\)

Similarly, Walder Dennis also acknowledges the primacy of violence in the poetic fabric of Hughes. "The animals are

\(^{16}\) Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 4.


not there for their own sake, however brilliantly defined they seem to be but they serve as metaphors for a particular human vision. This vision is many-sided, but can be reduced to two fundamental and opposing qualities; a celebration of energy, spontaneity and instinctual drive on the one hand, and a fearful admission of the deadly abiding predatoriness of life on the other hand."  

Margaret Dickie Uroff also underlines this opinion in a comparative study of Hughes and Plath in her book, *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*: "Throughout his career, Hughes's imagination has been engaged by what he imagines to be violent energies in man and nature. In his efforts to describe these energies, to explore their connections, to explain their short circuits, Hughes has been drawn into submerged areas of the psyche."  

Lawrence Kramer goes to the extent of declaring that "violence is to Ted Hughes, what obscurity is to Mallarme, the source of poetic identity, the mark of authentic vision and the consequent shaper of language." Fully endorsing this opinion, this work aims at an *exegesis* of the totality of forces working behind violence, showing itself in a pattern of growth. Since the word violence has wide ranging implications, the first task is to show how Hughes uses it in

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his poetry. A number of significant works on his art have been appearing over the years. Keith Sagar of Manchester University has done extensive research on Hughes. His first book *The Art of Ted Hughes* (1975) is an outstanding critical work. Since then he has edited two more significant books on the author namely, *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* (1983) and *The Challenge of Ted Hughes* (1994) and has compiled an exhaustive bibliography in collaboration with Stephen Tabor. Other meritorious works include: *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* by Ekbert Fass, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* by Terry Grifford and Neil Roberts, *Re-making Poetry: Ted Hughes and a New Critical Psychology*, by Nicholas Bishop, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* by Stuart Hirschberg and *Ted Hughes* by Thomas West. Besides these book length studies, interviews and reviews about Hughes appear regularly in current journals. As Hughes is a living writer with a fertile imagination, he eludes the certainties of categorization and avoids the fallacy of positive assertions. That is why Keith Sagar, in the introduction to his latest book on Hughes — *The Challenge of Ted Hughes* (1994) says:

> The narrative or dramatic or thematic context has to be inferred. And each sequence in turn forms part of a dramatically developing œuvre, a poetic quest. Thus, though the anthology poems reveal a gifted and powerful poet, only the reader who has read the complete works in order is really in a position to recognize the magnitude of the achievement.\(^2\)

Thus, in this study the major collections of his poetry are taken up for analysis in a chronological order to detect the patterns of violence in them. This topic has been chosen

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due to its challenging nature and contemporary appeal. Above all, the area of this proposed work remains unexplored as yet.

Objectives

Since meaning is always dependent on and relevant to specific cultural contexts, language becomes a sign encoded within the cultural consciousness of the perceiver. Thus a text can be decoded in a variety of ways depending on the cultural unit that assigns the function of a sign. So a variety of readings have become possible and theoretically valid for a single text.

This study intends to delve deep into the fabric of the poetic creations of Hughes and to understand the psyche of violence embodied in them. It is an investigation geared towards a detailed and in-depth examination of his poetical works in a chronological order to discover the patterns of violence in them. The study has the special objective of assessing the impact of his poetry on common readers, especially in relation to modern life. The analytical strategies employed in this study also include a semiotic reading of the text from an ecological perspective, thereby unlocking the great psychic and spiritual power these poems embody.

The ecological perspectives in Hughes are a gradual evolution of his poetic growth, emanating from a deep awareness of the basic function of genuine poetry as a renewal of life. Hughes's idea of ecology is based on a belief of the wholeness and inner spiritual unity of Nature. He views Nature from an ecological point of view and indicts man for
his ruthless destruction of the environment. Hughes employs biological parameters to show the inevitability of doom, if man doesn't desist from his crime against Nature. His poems have thus become testaments of his biocentric vision of life.

Hughes's concern for ecology is voiced by portraying the fate of animals that face extinction due to human wilfulness and cruelty. As Hughes would write only obliquely about contemporary issues to avoid getting caught up in the excitement of the times, his indictment of man is subtle as it never falls into propagandist mode of expression. The two archetypal images that Hughes employs consistently to voice his protest against man's exploitation of Nature are the wolf and the hawk. In his earlier collections they are portrayed as embodiments of energy capable of activating human imagination, but in his later volumes they enter human consciousness not by their compelling external presence but as remnants of human crimes against ecology.

The consistent endeavour of Hughes in his poetry has been to offer a viable alternative to prevent the disintegration of life ushered in by an excessive anthropocentric vision of life. The development of human technology has reduced Nature to a subset of human activity. In his eagerness to master the environment man has denied integrity to animals and has given rise to serious ecological problems that threaten the existence of this planet. Hughes's distrust of man stems from his belief that cerebral activity deprives man of his integrity and makes him diabolical and destructive. "All the
great dangers threatening humanity with extinction are direct consequences of conceptual thought and verbal speech."\textsuperscript{23}

Hughes accepts only the biological reality of existence as ultimate and considers human concepts of religion and morality as evolutions or superstructure built up by human reason. "The deepest strata of human personality are in their dynamics, not essentially different from the instinct of animals, but on their basis human culture has erected all the enormous superstructure of social norms and rites."\textsuperscript{24} This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in animals that live according to biological laws of necessity enhancing harmony in themselves and in ecology. Hughes, from his earlier impressions of anthropocentric perception of the universe, through stages, develops a biocentric vision of life. He believes this alone can save man from ultimate destruction.

**Hypothesis**

A detailed examination of Hughes's poetic output reveals that his approach to violence is highly scientific and systematic. For him violence is an affirmation of life and Nature is a source of creative energy. As P.R. King says:"This source has strength and violence and for men to be cut off from these sources is to run the great risk of instinctual energies being perverted into destructive paths."\textsuperscript{25} The hypothesis on which the study is based may be summarised as follows:"Violence is synonymous with the energy of life. To be


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.248.

\textsuperscript{25} P.R. King, \textit{op. cit.}, p.122.
cut off from this primal source of energy is suicidal to human existence. " This primal explosive energy in Nature is the sap of man's life. Just as plants need the sap for their sustenance, human beings should be charged by the elemental power circuit of the world. It is this elemental power that a common reader perceives as violence in the narrow sense of the term in the poetry of Hughes. This necessitates a clarification of the Hughesian concept of violence.

Definition of Violence

Lexically violence means use of force or energy. Hughes goes much beyond this simple definition of violence as visible manifestation of forces or energy. His endeavour is to trace the source of this elemental power circuit in Nature. Thus he grapples with the basic source of indestructible energy which is inherent in all living beings. In common parlance, it is difficult to dissociate the term from its derogatory implications. Violence as commonly understood is an undesirable element in human society. Often it is understood as indiscriminate release of mechanical energy for destruction as employed in war and in the purposeless infliction of pain by man against his fellow beings. "Because the twentieth century has witnessed such extensive violence, and because not only the news media but sociologists, historians and psychologists have made man so conscious of his destructive potentiality, the term has become rather amorphous."²⁶

After witnessing two world wars and their cruelties, people have come to realize that violence is undoubtedly the biggest problem confronted by today's world. It has infiltrated into the very fabric of our society which we can no longer afford to ignore. It is in this context that the contribution of Hughes becomes relevant. He dares to deal with the reality of violence and to explore its essence through his poetic art when most of his contemporaries are afraid to approach the subject due to its dangerous potentiality.

As violence is an amorphous term with wide-ranging implications, the first task is to define violence and to show how Hughes uses it in his poetry. Talking about violence in contemporary poetry Lawrence R. Ries makes the following observation: "The first kind of violence is that injury whether physical or psychological, that man inflicts upon his fellow man. The second is the spontaneous powerful energy which belongs to the Natural order; though this force may be terrible and dangerous it is also a source of life." The first kind of violence described above is destructive and is a crime against Nature because the injury which modern man inflicts on his fellow man doesn't usually arise from an inner need of the instinct but is based on conceptualization of instincts and is mostly executed by mechanical energy. Being mechanical, it is basically destructive as it deprives man of his intimate personal expression. Thus, what Hughes advocates is the spontaneous powerful energy which belongs to the Natural order, which is inherent in all the living beings. As it is the source of life no one can afford to ignore this.

27 Ibid., p.5.
energy in Nature, though it may appear terrible and dangerous at times.

Violence in the form of physical and psychological injury which man inflicts on his fellow beings is temporal in dimension because it is a by-product of the cultural and social set up of society which is ephemeral. This human violence which grows out of particular social condition is only a faint and distorted version of the primal explosive forces of Natural violence which is universal. "Virtually all the poetry written after World War II that concerns itself with violence received its impetus from the perception of human violence, those immediate historical conditions that weighed upon the artist's sensitivity." While most of the post-war British poets busied themselves with human violence, Ted Hughes could transcend the spatio-temporal dimensions of human violence to explore the elemental energy in the biological cycles of Natural violence in the eco-system.

Hughes accepts violence as an indestructible principle in Nature partaken by all the creatures in the form of pure energy. Biologists call it the "elan vital" or the sap of life. Hughes describes it as the elemental power circuit of the world. The theoretical assumption that violence is central to the poetic art of Hughes is further highlighted by the observation of Lawrence R. Ries. He says: "The only contemporary British poet who has consistently explored and examined the problem of violence is Ted Hughes." The thematic concern of Hughes forms the mainstay of violence in

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28 Ibid., p.7.
29 Ibid., p.92.
his poetic fabric. In his endeavour to drive home this basic concept, he employs unusual linguistic ingenuity in the craftsmanship of his poems. In most cases the text of the poems usually becomes a literal explication of the semiotics of violence.

Theoretical Foundations

Since Hughes conceives of violence as an inner source of energy seen universally in Nature, for him it is an affirmation of life on this earth. The hypothesis that violence is synonymous with life and energy and to be cut off from this source of energy is suicidal to human existence stands on the firm foundation of science and philosophy. To a great extent religious rituals symbolize energy, vitality and regeneration. Hughes too makes use of these religious rituals in a symbolic way. The study intends to employ poetic techniques like surrealism, symbolism, allegory and parallelism to extract the essence of the text from its linguistic event. As Hughes is a master in craftsmanship the study would focus special attention on the semiotic implications of the text.

As the study is geared to an understanding of the Hughesian concept of violence, one has to see how it becomes sustainable in the light of the acceptable theories of science and philosophy. Since it is closely related to the life of modern man, it is viable to examine the psychological validity of the findings in the cultural context of human social set-up.

Hughesian Concept of Violence

Hughes sees the nature of man as a small thread in the huge tapestry of Nature. As man is part of this primal source
of cosmic energy, his instinctual expression of violence is quite natural. It is suicidal for him to be cut off from the elemental power circuit of this world. According to Hughes, man, by his conceptualization makes violence destructive, while animals by their instinctual existence upholds the law of Nature. Konrad Lorenz who made a scientific study of aggression verifies the contention of Hughes: "What directly threatens the existence of an animal species is never the eating enemy but the competitor." Violence resulting from competition arises out of cerebral activity and is seen only in the human world. Violence in the animal world is instinctual and is basically oriented towards promotion and preservation of the species. So Konrad Lorenz arrives at the conclusion that "aggression far from being the diabolical, destructive principle that classical psychoanalysis makes it out to be, is really an essential part of the life-preserving organization of instincts."

Hughes, too, upholds only instinctual violence arising out of an inner need. Energetic activity seen in the animal world is the finest examples of such violence. This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in the world of animals. In the human context violence rarely springs from an inner need of urgency. Mostly it is a depersonalized act expressed through mechanical devices which deprives man of his wholeness and integrity. So Hughes wants to bring back that "old heroic bang" into the lives of man. He thus admires the ancient warriors who "thinned down their fat fulsome blood "but

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despises the modern bomber pilots who bring about the destruction of large cities, but whose "heart is small and cold". In this context it is pertinent to ask why Hughes sees human killings as an aberration of Nature. It is to be noted that mass killings that take place in today's world do not spring from the instinctual needs of man. It is chiefly accomplished by machines and is invariably based on concepts and ideology. This impersonal mode of the expression of violence not only deprives man of his essential integrity but makes him diabolical and destructive. Thus, the Hughesian concept of violence is essentially a biological reality embedded in the physical nature of all living beings.

Hughes, being a visionary poet, wants to arrive at the ultimate experience of truth. He therefore accepts only the biological reality of existence as ultimate. Human beings at the most basic level do have an instinctual existence that accommodates violence or aggression as an integral part of their physical constitution. Hannah Ardent who made a comprehensive study of violence in human society from a social and ethical point of view admits that violence deprived of social connotations has an essential biological function. "So long as we talk in non-political, biological terms, the glorifiers of violence can appeal to the undeniable fact that in the household of Nature destruction and creation are but two sides of the natural process."²² Though Ardent considers violence in political context detrimental to society at large, she recounts its importance biologically as a manifestation of

"Long before Konrad Lorenz discovered the life promoting function of aggression in the animal kingdom, violence was practiced as a manifestation of life, specifically of its creativity. Sorel, inspired by Bergson's elan vital aimed at a philosophy of creativity."[^33]

The Hughesian concept of violence thus stands on the time-tested observations of many great thinkers. His concept of violence as an inner principle of energy seen in the organic Nature of this universe is analogous to Einstein's concept of indestructible energy scientifically formulated as $E=mc^2$. Bergson has called it the "elan vital". For Sorel, it is the principle of creativity, the vital moving principle that charges the whole of Nature and manifested fully in the dynamic life of animals. In this context it would be enlightening to examine Hughes's own statements regarding violence for a fuller understanding of his poetry.

The pronouncements which Hughes makes about violence not only reveal it as an indestructible force of life in Nature but also confirm it as an authentic mark of great poetry. "Poetry is nothing if not that, the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error."[^34]

Hughes has been always keen to keep the two senses of violence distinct. His concept of violence centres round natural energy which springs from a genuine inner instinct. It has its root in the elemental power circuit of the world. "Any form of violence, any form of vehement activity invokes

[^33]: Ibid., pp. 69-70.
the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the universe. Once the contact has been made it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters.35

Discounting the derogatory implication the term has acquired in modern times, violence is of seminal importance to the hermeneutical aspect of Hughesian poetics. In Hughesian terminology, what we avoid as violence is actually the life sustaining force which no one can afford to ignore. "If you refuse energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept energy and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control."36

Hughes equates violence with the life energy in Nature and draws the fundamental axioms of his poetics with syllogistic precision. For him violence or energy is the biological foundation of life and the ultimate truth of existence. His poetry is an on-going exploration into the working of this cosmic force that governs life. Consequently one can perceive a consistent pattern of growth in his approach to violence.

Scope

This indepth study is confined to the poetic works of Ted Hughes published during the period starting with his first volume of poetry in 1957 and ending with 1989. It envisages a detailed examination of the major poetical works of Hughes in a chronological order spanning over three decades. As Hughes is a living author with a fertile imagination, the scope of this study is limited to the period ending in 1989. His first

35 Ibid., p. 103.
36 Ibid., p. 104.
volume *The Hawk in the Rain* was published in 1957. Since then he has produced a number of works. His latest volume is a prose collection *Winter Pollen* published in 1994. *Rain Charm for the Duchy and Other Poems* (1992) is another recent work. These two volumes fall outside the scope of this study as they are published after 1990. Moreover these two volumes do not have a continuity of the themes and concerns with which Hughes occupied himself till the publication of *Wolfwatching* in 1989.

*Rain Charm for the Duchy* (1992) is a collection of poems celebrating the events of the royal family. It is a tribute to the Crown which stems from the Poet Laureate's sense of obligation rather than issuing forth from pure poetic creativity. *Winter Pollen* (1994) being a prose collection doesn't fall within the scope of this study.

This study is thus confined to the 32-year-cycle of poetic activity of Hughes beginning with the publication of his first volume *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) culminating in *Wolfwatching* published in 1989. These 32 years of poetic activity mark the closing of a circle with regard to the gradual evolution of the poetic quest in Hughes. It is significant that the consistent endeavour of Hughes has been to offer a viable alternative to Christianity which is steeped in certainties of the unknowable. This prompts Hughes to invert some of the well-established beliefs of Christianity and to declare with audacity that Christianity is only a provisional myth like any other which may pass with the destruction of a race. Thus, he tries to create the body of a myth that can survive the worst kind of destruction.

**Methodology**

The methodology of this study is chiefly a theoretical analysis of the major collections of Hughes's poetry published
till 1989. A chronological order of analysis is adopted in detecting the nature of violence in the poems. The ecological perspective in the poems will also come under special attention endeavouring to highlight its contemporary appeal. The hermeneutical stratagems employed in analysis will focus special attention on the linguistic peculiarities of the poems in the larger context of semiotics.

Since Hughes considers violence as an indestructible principle, he employs it consistently in his poetry. On a deeper level of perception, one can detect the patterns of an organic growth in his treatment of violence. It is to be noted that many critics who have emerged with positive assertions about the presence of violence in Hughes's poetry failed to conceive its significance in the larger context of his creative output. John Press says: "Ted Hughes plots with notable skill 'the curve of violence in the cosmos, but makes scarcely any attempt to elucidate the significance of his graph."37 Likewise, Terry Gifford also holds a similar opinion: "The most obvious problem here -- a notorious matter with Hughes -- is the word 'violence'. He seems to equate violence with vehement activity." 38

The Hughesian concept of violence is firmly based on the biological reality of existence. Hence it rejects the human social set-up as a super structure having no solid foundation. In the Natural order of things destruction is part of the reality, yet there is a reverence for life that allows integrity to all living organisms which human society lacks very much. This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in the world of animals. His attempts to capture the dynamic life of animals can be traced back to his obsession with a

37 John Press, op. cit., p.186
38 Terry Gifford & Neil Roberts, op. cit., p.13
fulness of life at the most basic level. This is reflected even in his act of poetic creation. For Hughes, writing poetry is like capturing animals. This metaphoric description is amplified in great detail in his book *Poetry in the Making*:

"In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them."39

The cerebral pre-occupations of man dissipate his energy, making him incapable of such wholesome existence. The pattern of violence that emerges from a study of his poetry is categorized into five main chapters as follows:


This categorization is based on a chronological analysis of Hughes's major collections of poetry. The first section of this study takes up his first two volumes namely *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960). They can be considered together for a variety of reasons such as thematic unity and stylistic concerns. Both these books celebrate the spontaneity and energetic existence of animals. These animals appear as tangible witnesses of Nature's elemental power. Human beings are deprived of this elemental energy due to their excessive cerebral pre-occupations.

The scientific notion that energy is indestructible makes Hughes accept violence as a cosmic force that forms the solid foundation of this universe. This theoretical assumption gains currency when viewed in the ecological perspective of the Natural cycles of living organisms. Every single living organism in this universe ultimately becomes part of the cosmic force by losing its individual specificity in passing through the cyclical process of Nature. It is this biological reality that initiates Hughes into a philosophic enquiry into the essence of this reality. Following the footsteps of the rational philosopher Descartes, Hughes begins with the logical step of proving the "self" first. Thus, the majority of the poems in the first two volumes consistently repeat the words "I" and "eye" which echo the Cartesian dictum "I think therefore I exist". The excessive physical energy displayed in the poems can also be attributed to Cartesian influence, as Descartes claims that the active animal is always up and doing.

Hughes, in his desperate desire to affirm life by proving the existence of self, believes energy to be the solid foundation of life. Thus the poems in the first two collections explode with physical energy which many critics perceive as violence in the narrow sense of physical brutality. In fact, the sheer physical energy displayed as vitality in the animals is a challenge and an invitation to the apathetic modern man towards a meaningful existence. As John Lucas remarks: "Violence as pure expression of spirit, violence as assertion of identity; these seem to be at the heart of much of

His next major work \textit{Wodwo} (1967) employs violence as a ritualistic primitivism. Assurance of self and existence of an external world prompt one to look into oneself and decipher the meaning of one's existence. Along the lines of Cartesian logic, Hughes sets out to explore the nature of this world and man's relation to it in \textit{Wodwo}. It may be noted that the poet or the already proved "I" searches for dreams and visions like the shaman, but is confronted by darkness and silence. Hughes employs primitive rituals as well as imaginary creatures in \textit{Wodwo} and makes use of the shamanic mode of operation to discover reality. Hughes believes that the empirical reality can be effectively apprehended by consciousness only through a shamanic process of flight, purgation and transcendence. Through \textit{Wodwo} Hughes employs surrealistic images obliterating the fine thread of distinction that demarcates the day-to-day world from the supernatural world of the shamans. In the height of surrealistic fantasy the human co-ordinates of time and space become irrelevant for the shaman who moves in and out of time at will transcending this empirical reality in the process. As the shaman has to pass through the ordeal of shamanic rituals to gain access to a vision of life, the violence in \textit{Wodwo} becomes a ritualistic primitivism.
The publication of *Crow* (1970) can be considered as the culmination of Hughes's quest along the lines of Cartesian logic. After exploring the essence of the self and the world, the question of the creator figures prominently in the Crow series of poems. It employs a pseudo-Biblical mode of narration and inverts many of the well established beliefs of Christianity. Through his protagonist Crow, Hughes demonstrates that violence which is universal energy is a paradox of creation and destruction. The intertextual dimensions of the work, especially with regard to the Bible and the mythical dimensions of the bird crow lend greater significance to violence. The elements of religion and mythology bring in parallels of contemporaneity and antiquity. the endeavour of the poet can be considered as an experimental attempt to understand the question of God.

The Nature of violence in Crow series of poems is crystallized in the scientific dictum "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". In this sense all the actions of Crow follow the basic law of Nature. Thus, Crow can encounter pain and suffering with laughter. In the world of Crow, the violence of death and destruction is counterbalanced by the violence of creation. "The creative and destructive capacities in crow are related to the creative-destructive nature of the universe. The inevitability of a moral awareness revealed in crow is closely related to the inevitability of metaphysical questioning. Ultimately this is a matter of the concept of self both in relation to the larger process of the universe."41 Hence violence in Crow is a

41 Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, op. cit., p. 145.
biological necessity based on the law of Nature which functions as a paradox of creation and destruction.

Gaudete (1977) treats violence as an apocalyptic ceremony as unfolded in the life of the Anglican priest Reverend Nicholas Lumb. He is seen waging a psychic battle which reaches a crisis point splitting his psyche into two separate selves. By an apocalyptic ceremony of violence, he emerges as a healed and wholesome man at the end of the narrative. Since Lumb is the central character in the narrative and his experience of life is enveloped in violence that is apocalyptic, the whole book examines violence as an apocalyptic ceremony.

The 32-year-long phase in the poetic career of Hughes from 1957 to 1989, culminates in the publication of Wolfwatching (1989). In this book violence appears as a timeless myth and archetype that embraces all the living organisms in the world. This work is noted for its ecological overtones. Hughes's concept of ecology is primarily based on a biocentric vision based on the essential integrity of all the living organisms in this universe. In this work Nature is portrayed as a radiant principle embodying an organic vision of life. In this sense, this book becomes the testament of Hughes's biocentric vision of life.

The poetic vision of violence in Hughes is, thus, far superior to our common notion of it. He sees violence as an affirmation of life and goes on to establish that it finds its fullest expression in ritualistic primitivism. He builds up his edifice on the paradox of creation and destruction and finds in it the greatness of an apocalyptic ceremony. Thus it achieves the grandeur of a timeless myth and archetype.