

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) is the only 19th century poet, who is included in the anthologies of both the Victorians and Moderns. This greatness was due to his technical originality and constant innovations in language, rhythm and syntax which were indeed daringly experimental. His remarkable sensitivity to detail, to the minutiae of nature and the expressions of the labyrinths of mind are unique. Thus Hopkins occupies a position of considerable importance in the poetry of the third and fourth decades of this century.

He was a blend of three personalities; Hopkins the man, Hopkins the poet and Hopkins the Jesuit father. But it was his vocation that dominated his poetry. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola which he studied had inspired him to write :

"Man was created to praise"<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by Loyola's teaching such as 'man was created to praise', he tried his best to praise the Creator of the universe and " render him

back in return for the 'being' God has given"<sup>2</sup> in the form of poetry. He stands among the few poets, who have so strongly communicated the joys of nature around us and transmit a sort of religious experience of the beauty of nature around us.

Hopkins being essentially a religious poet, he stresses that ultimately true peace, joy and help (comes) only from the Heavenly father. Hopkins proves himself a priest, the caring shepherd of his flock, through his poetry, when lies and evil philosophies bursting as bomb shells in ones life try to hide the plain truth of God's superiority. His humanitarian concern on the unwavering awareness of the human condition and predicament were echoed in his poetry from time to time. This indicates that he remained in the tradition partly of Ruskin, Dickens, Browning and a host of popular victorian writers in the earlier decades.

But I.A.Richards, William Empson and F.R.Leavis have regarded Hopkins as the classic example of the modern poets. Hopkin's stature

as a poet has continued to grow over the years and subsequently a number of books criticizing his poetry have been published accordingly.

'A Critical essay towards the understanding of Hopkins' poetry' by W.A.M. Peters published by Oxford University Press in 1948 is an original, and illuminating study which has been called essential Hopkin's reading and one of the best books ever written. Father Peter looks at Hopkin's fundamental concepts of "inscape and instress" as moving on to the other areas of his poetic diction.

Religion has been the centripetal force in his life and poetry. F. R. Leavis remarks that Hopkins is : "the devotional poet of a dogmatic Christianity".<sup>3</sup> His conversion to Catholicism was distinct in his religious life. Owing to his devoted life on the teachings of Christ, Allison Salloway says that "Hopkins would have been shocked to know that he is not yet as readily admitted into the company of the victorians as he is in 'Christ's Company' where he also belongs".<sup>4</sup> This necessarily does not mean that much of his criticism has been written

only with a religious frame work. In "The poetry of Meditation" Louiz Martz claimed that Hopkins belongs to that great Seventeenth century tradition, wherein poems were written in meditation celebrating the created world in all its beauty and wildness and in all its detailed texture and colour as embodying God. Most of the recent critics have been obliged to discuss him in terms of rational thinking. But Geoffrey Hartman writes that "Relieved at its source is the double nature of the poet, who is always both popular and learned, natural and artificial, holy and profane".<sup>5</sup>

In ~~one extreme~~ a critic writes that "Hopkins was one of the most gifted Englishmen of his generation".<sup>6</sup> The other height of extreme opinion is given by D.S. Mac Coll who gives his ~~his~~ essay titled 'Patmore and Hopkins' the subtitle 'Sense and Non-sense' where the 'Nonsense' stands for Hopkins.

Hopkins's technical innovations, and his implication of 'Sprung Rhythm' have been daringly experimental. In his technique he was

considerably influenced by the Welsh chimes called cyghanedd. According to Elizabeth Scheinder " the Sprung rhythm that Hopkins maintained has over conventional meter the distinct advantages of strongly marked emphasis, naturalness and flexibility in the placing of accents while its disadvantages lied in its frequent lack of both rhythmic and rhetorical clarity".<sup>7</sup> Edith Sitwell discourages new poets who desire to write in the style of Hopkins. Louis Mac Niece proves the same in clarity when he says " Hopkins's influence on the younger poets has been unfortunate due to a closer imitation of his rhythm and syntax which were more personal".<sup>8</sup> Harold Whitehall showed convincingly in an essay in The Kenyon critics most of " Hopkins distinctive poetic devices viz. alliteration, internal rhyming, " Chiming" of consonants have achieved more brilliancy and brighten up his poetry".<sup>9</sup>

Many critics, have considered his poetry from various angles. Some writers have accepted him as a poet, but have given a blind eye to the priest in the poet. Some say

that his poetic career was throttled, due to his vocation as a priest, as his religion was allergic to his aesthetic sense. Fortunately, there have been some optimistic approaches towards his poetry. One of the most successful attempts of configurating the Jesuit Priest with the poet is done by Dr. Pick, where in Hopkins's poetry is viewed as truth revealed to the poet, as a loving regard of God and His creatures, in the light of The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola and the sacramental doctrines of the Church. But there still remains a need to evaluate the themes and messages of his poetry, which is relevant now and ~~precisely~~ all the more, at present since as man has been drawing away from God and falling down, in his moral values. Fear of God is absent since the very existence of God is doubted, by the present generation. Hence the researcher attempts to go through the themes of his poetry and the message they proclaim to all mankind. Indeed Hopkins was a common man who loved God and so loved mankind, whole heartedly.

Many critics seem to have neglected the fact that even religious feelings can be

poetic. The religious poetry has therefore been specifically considered in this dissertation. The topic "Gerard Manley Hopkins as a religious poet" has been dealt with without giving much emphasis on his controversial technical aspect. The researcher regards his poetry as a fountain head from where some concrete help can be obtained by man which can console and comfort humanity. For this basic reason the themes of his religious poems are significant. It was thus essential to use the formula of description. Only on the basis of detailed analysis of his poems can one reach his soul and come out with his message. His perception of eternity which is conveyed through his poetry is exemplary.

The moods of Hopkins mostly depended on the personal surroundings, his reading and his psychology and all these attributes have to be considered to view his poems from the angle of influences on the poetry of Hopkins. The autobiographical background of his poems gives us an account of his creativity and hence it is worth studying. His



letters and journals throw much light on this aspect. The canon of his poems numbers more than a hundred. There are several fragments and incomplete poems. Only the main religious poem are analyzed in detail, with a general remark on the remaining several poems however. The most controversial aspect of going into the details of the sprung rhythm is avoided and main emphasis is given on the dominant overtone of religious attitudes struck in the poems.

Primary data:

The standard text of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The Oxford Authors edited by Catherine Phillips is used for the explication of various poems.

Secondary Data:

- i) Extensive Biblical study has been done to determine the nature of the subject under the present study. All the references from the Bible are taken from The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues; and

with the former translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty's special command. A.D.1611.London:British And Foreign Bible Society, 146,Queen Victoria Street printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd.

This dissertation concentrates mainly on Hopkins religious thought. Because of his life and poems are closely related. The first chapter viz."The Biographical Backgrounds of the poetry of Hopkins " describes events in Hopkins life which shaped his poetic mind. The second chapter viz. "Influences on the poetry of Hopkins" points out the main literary and social influences on his poetry. The influences seem to have been interlocked to an extent. The core chapter of the thesis; "The Dominant Religious Thoughts In Hopkins's Poetry"points out and explains with illustrations, dominant religious attitudes, which have struck the poet in various poems. Here, the group of poems are made,depending upon the attitudes.The chronology of the composition is not taken into account, while making the groups of these poems. In the fourth chapter "The Human Element In The Poems Of

Hopkins" humanity as viewed in Hopkins's poetry is dealt with. In the fifth chapter, "The Technique And Rhythm In Hopkins's poetry" the technical and rhythmical nuances that have greatly deepened and enhanced his religious emotions has been substantiated with illustrations. References from other religious texts have been taken for comparative study in order to make the study interesting. The conclusion of this dissertation summarizes and brings forth the quintessential aspects of Hopkins's religious poetry.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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