

18.5.20
Week No. (28)
Dr. Hemfari Jha

Eng. (Hons.)
Paper VI : Modern Literature
Topic : G. M. Hopkins : "Poet Beauty"

1. Life and Works :-

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in 1844 of a cultured and artistic family. He was educated at Highgate and then at Balliol College, Oxford where he was an outstanding Greek scholar. He was converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1866, when he was a young undergraduate at Oxford. In 1868 he joined the Jesuit Order. Then followed a period of training till he became a Jesuit priest in 1877. During the next four years he was engaged in preaching. In 1884 he began to teach Latin and Greek at Stonyhurst. In the same year he received the chair of Greek at the University of Ireland. He had the post till 1889 in which year he died of typhoid.

In his boyhood and early youth he wrote poetry. But in 1866, before he joined the Jesuits, he burnt some of his early poems, thinking that the ~~profession~~ profession of a poet was incompatible with his duties as a devout Jesuit. Fortunately, a few poems survived accidentally. He broke his self-imposed silence in 1875 with "The Wreck of Deutschland." He continued to write poetry till the end of his life. To the last phase of his life belongs some moving sonnets.

None of his poems was published during his lifetime. He offered "The Wreck of the Deutschland" to a Jesuit ~~Magazine~~ Magazine, but the editor refused to publish it. The poems were published posthumously in 1918 by his friend Robert Bridges.

2. As a poet:-

Though his poems were published as late as 1918, Hopkins is today regarded as one of the greatest and by far the most original poet of the Victorian era.

As a boy Hopkins wrote poetry under the influence of Pre-Raphaelites. He was then a close observer of nature. And his early poetry testifies to his ecstatic joy in the sensuous beauties of Nature. But, when he was at Oxford, torn by an inner spiritual strife, the thought that to sing of the beauties of the natural world was incompatible with the ascetic's life that he had chosen to live. So in "The Habit of Perfection," he bade all his senses renounce the world. Then followed a period of self-imposed silence after which he could reconcile his love of Nature with his ascetic life, and for a few years from about 1875 he sang of God rapturously and could rejoice in all the beauty of earth and sky. Now his enjoyment of Nature became a sacramental experience to him. He spoke of God and emphasised the grandeur and glory of

god. Such poems as "God's Grandeur", "The Starlight Height", "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty" celebrate Nature as part of God's glory.

"But there was also the Hopkins who experienced agonizing spiritual desolation." The sonnets that he wrote in 1885, are the expressions of his inward spiritual tension and frustration. These poems are complete in gloom and awful in their anguish.

Hopkins was great original genius who refused to tread the beaten track of Victorian poetry. He got away from poetic words and tried a contemporary colloquial style. His diction was in no way conventional, his vocabulary being drawn from different sources — archaic, colloquial and dialect words. This at times results in obscurity; but whatever its shortcoming, it has energy and vitality. His images are concrete, sensuous, precise and vitally illuminating.

More remarkable than anything else are the innovations he introduced into the metrical pattern of his verse. His most important experiment was with "Sprung Rhythm". Herbert Read explains about this specific device: "By this he meant rhythm based on measurement of feet of from one to four syllables. The stress in each foot falls on the first syllable — or on the only syllable

④ if there is only one. The result is a rhythm of incomparable freedom. It is the rhythm of common speech: and of written prose when rhythm is perceived in them. It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music". About this particular rhythm Hudson has to say this: "To describe his own system of prosody he used the term "sprung rhythm", and the word "inseparable" to denote his aim in the treatment of material. Neither of these expressions can be defined apart from a close study of the poems and of the letters which he wrote about them to his friends, one of them Robert Bridges?" Hudson, again, quite effectively praises Hopkins in the following words which rather sums up the contribution of the poet: "There is no parallel in literary history to the case of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who published nothing in his own lifetime, yet after his collected poems were first ~~published~~ issued in 1918 had so deep and wide an influence upon the younger generation that the aspect of modern poetry was changed right up to the present time and his influence is still unexhausted."

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