Perception of ‘Inscape’ and Power of ‘Instress’ in the Poetic concept of
Gerard Manley Hopkins

Dr. Kamal J. Dave,
Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Samarpan Arts and Commerce College, Gandhinagar Gujarat (India)

ABSTRACT
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was held to be a priestly metaphor of Victorian Poetry and a syntactical simile of Modern Poetry. To express the individualizing characteristics of an object in a metaphysical terminology, Hopkins coined the terms ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’. He opines that ‘Inscape’ reveals their creator just as the inner ‘self’ of the bluebell explicitly manifests the divine. For Him, “Inscape is the very Soul of art” Thus, ‘Inscape’, for Hopkins, doesn’t mean just a visible scene which can fall into a satisfying artistic composition with a harmonious design or pattern. Another Hopkinsian term, ‘Instress’ is closely related to ‘Inscape.’ To Hopkins, it meant the internal force which holds inscapes together. It seems that in these usages, ‘Instress’ is referred to the undercurrent of creative energy that supports and binds together the whole of the created world. It is meant to give things shape, from and meaning to the eye of the beholder. To Hopkins, ‘Instress’ “refers to that core of being or inherent energy which is the actuality of the object; in effect ‘instress’ stands for the specifically individual impression the object makes on man.”

INTRODUCTION
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was held to be a priestly metaphor of Victorian Poetry and a syntactical simile of Modern Poetry. He had prophetically been in search of the “authentic cadence” that paved the way for his spiritual fulfillment. Hopkins was an acute observer of the things. He recorded his sensitive response to the beauty of things around him with his acute power of observation. He was longing for the individual distinctiveness of an object. Hence, in due course of time, he arrived at some insight into the essence of an object. So, to express this set of the individualizing characteristics of an object in a metaphysical terminology, Hopkins coined the terms ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’.

In fact, nowhere Hopkins had given any precise critical theory of ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’. The connotation of them should be grasped by the contextual usage of these words as recorded in various notes, journals and letters of Hopkins. As Graham Storey consciously noted; “The word ‘Inscape’ is first used in the Journal of Swiss trees, on a continental walking – tour of July 1868; ‘Instress’ of the beauty of Giotto; inspired by a visit to the Natural Gallery shortly before.” Thereafter, Hopkins used both the words many times to describe for himself the beauty and impact of a multitude of objects.

An analysis of some of the contextual usage of ‘Inscape’ by Hopkins would shed fresh light on it.

1. “I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell. I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.”(N 133-4)

Here, it seems that, ‘Inscape’ is a concept which is upheld by faith; it is the faith that all created thing, if seen properly, reveal their creator just as the inner ‘self’ of the bluebell explicitly manifests the divine.

2. “All the world is full of Inscape.” (N 113)
It seems that, in this statement, ‘Inscape’ is associated with beauty or reality. According to W.A.M. Peters S.J;

“The reason why he related beauty to inscape must consequently be that in inscape there is inherent unity that is proceeding from the nature of the object itself”

3. “Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the Inscape in things is.” (N 140)

This statement gives the impression that ‘Inscape’ refers to the infinite energies of God as well as inner order or form of any object.

4. Regarding art, Hopkins’s final judgment on a picture by Holman Hunt was; “It has no inscape of composition whatever … Inscape could scarcely bear up against such realism.”

Here, Hopkins seems to indicate that the picture is devoid of the unity of vision. For him, Art has nothing at all to do with the reproduction of Surface reality. This view can be collated to his remark. “Inscape is the very Soul of art” (D 135)

5. The most noteworthy, above all, is Hopkins’s last recorded usage of the word ‘Inscape’ related to defending his poetry from the charge of oddity;

“As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling ‘Inscape’ is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the voice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice, I cannot have inscape.”

Thus, ‘Inscape’, for Hopkins, doesn’t mean just a visible scene. But it is the way in which a visible scene can fall into a
satisfying artistic composition with a harmonious design or pattern.

So, this is the peculiarity of Hopkins to see an object within an object in the form of ‘Inscape’. Thus, in a Hopkinsian Sense, each and every object has its own ‘Inscape’ which reveals its ‘Self’ or ‘Identity’. In this way, it appears that, for Hopkins, ‘Inscape’ stands for a religious idea as well as an artistic one. In the view of W.A.M. Peters, “It was his spiritual outlook on the world that made ‘inscape’ so precious to Hopkins.”

The poetic revelation of an ‘Inscape’ can be found conclusively in his sonnet, As kingfishers catch Fire… Here, Hopkins seems to sing of the uniqueness of each created thing. He holds that each thing in Nature strives to proclaim its own inner identity;

“Each mortal thing done one thing and the same;  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves – goes itself.”  (5-7)

It reflects that even though there are many so called spiritualists who outwardly pose to be advanced in the science, yet inwardly or privately are completely under the particular modes of nature which they are unable to surpass. It means that each and everything in this world is bound by his own ‘self’. This is also acknowledged by Hopkins in his prose writings; “I taste self but at one tankard, that of my own being.”

“So inscape,” as Geoffrey Grigson puts it, “is akin to the ‘self’ Hopkins writes of, the totality of the animates or inanimate individual and ‘self’, ‘selving’, is strongest of all in human nature, more highly pitched, selved and distinctive than anything in the world.”

Another Hopkinsian term, ‘Instress’ is closely related to ‘Inscape.’ To Hopkins, it meant the internal force which holds inscapes together.

Like ‘Inscape’, an analysis of some of the contextual usages of ‘Instress’ by Hopkins would shed fresh light on it.

1. “… as in man all that energy or instress with which the soul animates and otherwise acts in the body is by death thrown back upon the soul itself.” (unpublished notes)
2. “All things are upheld by instress and meaningless without it.” (N.198)
3. “…for the constant repetition, the continuity, of the bad thought is that actualizing of it, that instressing of it…” (N.321)
4. “… It is choice as when in English we say ‘because I choose: which means no more than…’I instress my will to so–and-so.” (N.328).
5. “This access is either of grace, which is ‘super nature’, to nature or of more grace to grace already given and it takes the form of instressing the affective Will, of affecting the will towards the good which Be proposes.” (N. 325).

It seems that in these usages, ‘Instress’ is referred to the undercurrent of creative energy that supports and binds together the whole of the created world. It is meant to give things shape, from and meaning to the eye of the beholder. The poetic revelation of ‘instress’ can be found in his poem, The Wreck of the Deutschland; “Since, tho’ he is under the world’s splendor and wonder. His mystery must be instressed, stressed.” (stanza-5)

Here, it is implied that, though Christ sustains the world’s beauty and life, his mystery cannot be taken for granted. It must be actively perceived and proclaimed. So, in this context, ‘instress’ is meant to ‘perceive’ or ‘realize’. Explaining the interdependent relation between ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’, W.A.M. Peters. S. J. remarks;

“Inscape being a sensitive manifestation of a being’s individuality is perceived by the senses; but instress, though given in the perception of inscape, is not directly perceived by the senses, because it is not a primary sensible quality of the thing. Hence, it follows that, while inscape can be described, however imperfectly, in terms of sense – impressions, instresscan not, but must be interpreted in terms of its impression on the soul, in terms, that is, of affects of the soul.”

This sense is clearly stated by Hopkins himself in his poem Hurrahing in Harvest;

“Our things, these things were here and but the beholder
Wanting; which two when they once meet,
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off
under his feet.” (11-14)

Thus, Hopkins beholds the ‘instress’ of nature. He perceives Christ through nature. He feels as if he were being propelled upwards after thrusting away the earth under his feet. The image of soaring upwards and hurling the earth is intended to express the sense of exaltation and the feeling of ecstasy that seems ‘Instress’. Here, ‘Instress’ is felt in the form of the divine energy that furnishes all things. In this way, ‘Instress’, to Hopkins “refers to that core of being or inherent energy which is the actuality of the object ; in effect ‘instress’ stands for the specifically individual impression the object makes on man.”

To Hopkins, a word seems as much individual as any other thing; it has a self as every other object and constantly strove to catch the inscape of a Flower or a tree or a cloud. He does not rest until the Words themselves manifest their inscape and instress. His consciousness of the various meanings words could have, irrespective of their spelling, can be marked in his practising homophones as in-

“On ear and ear two noises too old to end…”

(The sea and the Skylark, 1)

“When, When, Peace, Will you, Peace?
That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure peace allows Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, and the death of it?”

(Peace, 3-5)

Likewise, his exploitation of the word ‘Love’ can be marked in his poem, The half way house where he exploits the word ‘Love’ at least eleven times.

“Love, when all is given,
To see thee I must see thee, to love, love;”(13, 14)

Later on, Hopkins finds a philosophical justification of ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’ in the writing of the medieval philosopher and theologian Duns Scotus. Hopkins came across the philosophy of Scotus during his noviceship in 1872. As J.F.J. Russell noted;
“He quite clearly treated Duns scotus not as a remote object of academic study, but as a living being who had been disturbed by his experience as deeply as Hopkins had, and who had achieved a philosophical explanation of it which, to Hopkins, was self-evidently true. Hopkins’s study of Duns Scotus was thus really a process of self discovery; it made him more conscious of what he already intuitively knew- And Hopkins certainly hoped that the same kind of relationship would exist between himself and the reader of his poetry—that the poetry would revitalize the reader’s perceptions and awaken him to essential human experiences to which the nineteenth century ethos seemed hostile.”

Besides, the reason, why the philosophy of Scotus attracted Hopkins strongly, was denoted by Hopkins himself as “...When I look in any inscape of the sky or the sea I thought of Scotus.” Keeping this statement in mind, it seems that, to Hopkins, his theory of inscape harmonizes beautifully with the system of Scotus. In this context, Graham Storey’s words are apt:

“Scotus’s main distinction from the traditional theology taught to Jesuits was his belief in the ‘Principle of Individuation’, both of persons and things. All medieval philosophers were concerned with how human beings could come to know the universal. Scotus believed that they could do so by apprehending an individual object’s essence; which he named as ‘thiness’ (hecceitas) and that such apprehensions or intuitions ultimately reveal God. By directing such intuitions of nature towards God man can perfect his own ‘heccetas’, his will. Here, seemed to be the philosophical support for Hopkins’s theories of Inscape and Instress and a religious sanction for them.”

Apart from this, it would not be out of place to note that Hopkins’s terms ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’ correspond roughly to Ruskinese point of view of art. It is so, because during his years at Oxford, before the coinage of these terms, Hopkins was very much influenced by Ruskins ‘Modern painters. As Hopkins wrote to his friend, Baillie, “I am sketching (in pencil chiefly) a good deal. I venture to hope you will approve of the sketches in a Ruskinese point of view…” but that influence was not limited to the sketches; it went far beyond Hopkins’s senses. Ruskin’s theory of three steps, regarding the completion of the work of art, very strongly caught Hopkins’s attention. To Ruskin, The First step is to see an object with an innocent eye; the Second step is to respond and the third is to reproduce what an artist sees. Finding the analogy between Ruskin and Hopkins, Alison G. Sulloway writes;

“Hopkins’s term ‘Inscape’ is what the innocent eye sees; Instress is God’s plan behind nature’s inscapes and man’s submission to that plan. In step one, Hopkins quietly sketched or described natural things . During step two he became aware of his ‘fury’, ‘passion’, ‘admiration’ or ‘enthusiasm’ for ‘Nature’s self’. Hopkins’s nature poems represent the final step; they are lyrical descriptions of what Ruskin called the four great component parts of landscape –sky ,earth ,water, and vegetation.”

Hence, Hopkins’s theory of ‘Inscape’ and ‘Instress’ synthesizes the Ruskinese point of view of art with Scotus’ theory of individuating principle. According to Alison G. Sulloway their common way of thinking is;

“God created each living thing with its own specific peculiarities that would never be exactly recapitulated in another created thing:”

REFERENCES