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THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON: AN INTERIOR JOURNEY

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Emily Dickinson shines and scintillates like a diamond in the galaxy of American Literature. Various acclamations as the “Amherst Nun”, “the Belle of Amherst,” the Female Blake,” “the New England mystic”, and “the Epigrammatic Walt Whitman”, Emily Dickinson stands out as a pioneering anticipator of the twentieth century trends and tendencies, technical devices and stylistic innovations. No tradition she belongs to; no models she emulates; no contemporary she imitates; no philosophies of others she borrows; no avocation she pursues except poetry writing; no worldly fame she counts. Known for her originality of thought and expression, chiselled phrases and startling images and surprising verbal arrangement, Emily emerges in the pages of Spiller as “the great poet of all times and perhaps the greatest poet of all women poets”.

The poetical oeuvre of Emily Dickinson reads like her Odyssey enfolded within its folds her interior journey. It is a great Souls' journey to take its place in the universe. It is an outlet for her inner conflict, emotional disturbance and agonizing experiences. Her poetical lines are the longitude and latitude of her landscape. Her poetry is a journal where she draws her career graph recording how far her inner life is depicted in her lyrical outbursts. Her soul is a workshop where she forges marvels of poetry through the tool of imagination.

An intriguing, playful girl, Emily lived an obscure life in solitariness, as a shy recluse dressed in white robes. She lived unknown and to be no one. Confining herself to the home she was born in and to the garden she moved around. She preferred to be nobody in the eyes of the world in order to be somebody within herself. Her withdrawal from life is no retreat from or renunciation of life but an adventure into the fathomless depths of life. Her room was her native soil and her visit to the garden was a trip to foreign strands. Her mind contained the universe. The external world she renounced but she returned to the inner world. With the insight of a poet and the vision of a mystic she explored her inner world. Her mind is the store-house of innumerable experiences and incidents to which she was exposed in the outside world. She has to nurture her poetry aflame with mystical meanings lit with the oil of her inner soul. Her poetry is a spiritual and emotional salvation.

Emily's poems have recourse to her inner life rather than her outer life. She is an addict to truth which she seeks through her interior journey. She gains more in sublime spiritual satisfaction than in worldly fame and popularity. In her poetical moments she enacts her inner drama. She eschewed all outside contact and lived the life of a poet-hermit.

The themes of her poetry embrace myriads of memories and moments with friends and family, with aches and ecstasies of love, the impact of the environment with flora and fauna, the sublime vision of the Infinite and Immortality. Well her poetry can be called a Spiritual Autobiography.

Emily's poetry has a special appeal to the Indian readers because our Upanishadic tradition lays stress on inner life than on the life in the outer world. Our home is where we gather grace. It is also in tune with the Christian theological dictum: “The Kingdom of Heaven lies with you”. Various factors are at work in determining the woman she became and the poet she blossomed into. She lived a cocoon-like existence and her poetic genius bloomed unnoticed. Her poems make inroads into her inner life. Any endeavour to delve into the exploration of her inner life has to take into account the style of life at Amherst with its

characteristic features of conventionality and puritanical morality exercising its influence upon her inner development. The various members of the family had an impact on the formation of her inner life. It makes a pointed reference to other social influences shaping the course of her career how the school she attended and the book she coned contributed to her inner development, how the institution of religion was a shaping force in her poetic career and how her seclusion moulded her inner being.

Her love lyrics are imagined dramatization of her unfulfilled longings accompanied with pangs of frustration. The 'He' of her poems defies identification with anyone in particular. Her love poems lend themselves to their being interpreted as reflections and revelations of her highly emotional or effusive love experience. The love she imagines to be courting refers to her inner experience of the soul on a spiritual plane, not on a mundane level. These inward feelings felt in her imagination are woven with the mystical concept of divine love running parallel to the concept of Radha-Krishna love. All these love experiences she undergoes are enacted within her soul.

In her acquaintance with and appreciation of Nature, there is keenness of observation as well as novelty of expression. Emily's companionship with Nature is an outlet for her moods and tones registering her early intimacy with Nature. She communes on a higher spiritual level with a drop of dew on a blade of grass or a petal of flower, the warbling of the robin in the garden, the kissing of a snake in the grass and the sound of the locomotive on its track.

The grand spectacle of Nature with its sights and sounds appears as a child's garden of plants and flowers and birds. It is a carnival of entertainment. But Nature delights and destroys. In its indifference and hostility to man, Nature is a symbol of the mystery of Death. The mysterious relationship between Man and Nature defies any rational explanation. In her attitude to Nature she belongs to no movement. Nature in Emily is a manifestation of the truth of the inner universe.

In her inner life, Emily probes into the depths of her soul to know the problems of Death. To her, Death is a leveller of man-made distinctions. Death is no more a thing to be lamented but a thing to be welcomed. It causes no pain but protects man from life-long misery. The man dead is happier than the man alive. Death is not the end of life but a beginning of another life-- an opening to new life. Death is not something to be dreaded but something to be delighted over. Death is a welcome relief. In her conception of Death she is Browningsque and Whitmanesque.

The death of her dear and near ones early in her life, the close proximity of the graveyard to her orchard and the sight of funeral processions passing by exposed Emily to scenes of Death. She consoles herself that there are others to fill the void left by the departed. It is no wonder that Emily thought about and wrote about Death. She transfers her experience into the lovely poems.

Emily stands as a forerunner of the twentieth century trends, tendencies and stylistic innovations. The stylistic devices Emily uses and the technical tools she employs to make the abstract concepts concrete. Emily's style is the clarifier and enricher of the meaning she wants to convey. In the matter of originality of thoughts, form, expression and images she has a few equals. She writes poetry not for the world but for her inner world. The images lend themselves to the interpretation of her various moods and varied ideas and concretize the abstract concepts in which her poetry is couched. She plumbs into the depths of her inner world and writes poetry with no ornamentation or decoration, no ambiguity or verbosity. Her language is cryptic and her poetry is a short-hand registration of facts.

Emily Dickinson is a poet *par excellence* in her faculty of imagination, fecundity of knowledge and profundity of insights. Her poetry is a rich repertoire of stylistic devices. In her poetry there are echoes of Donne, Emerson and Whitman which pave the way for a comparative study between Emily and the poets referred to.

Works Cited

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