Chapter Two

Dominant Influences in the Lives and Works of Toru Dutt and Emily Dickinson

Toru Dutt and Emily Dickinson were two poets who lived and worked in circumstances and conditions, which were diverse and dissimilar. The influences that shaped their outlook on life and the expression of that outlook in their poetry were varied.

I. TORU DUTT - Personal Influences

European Culture and Education held a stronghold in Toru’s life and created a sensibility, which set her apart from contemporary Bengali society of the Eighteen Seventies. After her return to Calcutta in 1873, she experienced a deep sense of alienation socially, intellectually and spiritually.

In her letters to Mary Martin collected in Harihar Das’ Life and Letters of Toru Dutt, we come across a nature unblemished in its characteristics, deeply religious, warmly sensitive and friendly and reserved to the extent of being self-willed and strongly opinionated.

It was Mary who received and replied to her intensely personal and intimate letters that spoke of her experience and feelings, her tragedies and joys of her last remaining years in India. This friend beyond the Ocean sufficed the lack of any warm friendships, which Toru failed to
seek in Calcutta. She was also a literary companion and guide to Mary and shared notes on books and critical works.

In a letter dated February 3, 1877, Toru writes to Mary thus, “I wonder what I should do without your dear letters; there would be such a gap in my everyday life, if I did not receive them”.

The Dutt family could well have been prejudiced, for note Govin Chunder Dutt’s reply “Let us return to England. Where in Calcutta will you get such warm hearted friends, Toru”.

Her longing for England was whole and devoted and Mary was a large part of that whole. Her last years saw the search for roots and she felt torn between two loyalties. Aware of the sad failure of British rule in India, yet too loyal to rebel even in her writings, her close observations of the political situation in India brings forth the sarcasm in her remark, “There are no real English gentlemen or ladies in India, except a few. People generally come out to India to make their riches, you see, and real gentlemen and ladies very rarely leave home and friends for the yellow gold.”

Her poem Near Hastings is a tribute to an expression of spontaneous kindness received in an alien land.

“Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade,
Still bloom her roses in my heart!
And they shall never fade.”

Govin Chunder Dutt

Mr. Govin Chunder Dutt, the guiding spirit behind the successful literary pursuits of Toru Dutt, had an honest disposition and cared less for social prejudices and its extravagances.
This aristocratic Bengali gentleman provided his daughters, Toru and Aru with education, freedom and self-confidence. After the loss of his dear son, Abju, and later Aru, he became anxiously watchful of Toru, of whom he spoke with broken hearted sorrow and wistfulness, "she had read more, probably also thought more and the elder sister generally appears to follow the lead of the younger. ........... It seems perfectly natural to Aru to fall in the background in the presence of her sister. The love between them was always perfect." 

Toru was an enigma and a curiosity to her Bengali relatives who entered into matrimony as early as eight years of age. Needless to say that Govin’s watchful eyes were there to protect and guide young Toru whose mind was like a keen torch, shedding forth light with its perception of language and literature, unlike her Bengali contemporaries, who where still in their purdah. His care reached almost to possessiveness towards the end when he must have felt that soon Toru will be snatched away by fate, "........... Papa is so careful! I tell him he should keep me under a glass case, for I am not half so delicate as he makes me out to be...........” 

Toru’s own gratitude and recognition of his loving care extended to her interest in literature and life as expressed in the following lines, “I wonder what I should have been without my father; nothing very enviable or desirable. I know; without Papa, we should never had learned to appreciate good books and good poetry”. 

The concluding sonnet in a Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields titled A Mon Pere, is a tribute to Govin as well as an occasion to convey poetic honesty.

"The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
Amid their kindred branches; plucked, they fade
Wouldst thou again new life in them infuse,
Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
Ask Memory . She shall help my stammering Muse”.

b. Aru Dutt

Aru Dutt, her twin in studies and companionship died of consumption in 1874. The sisters had planned a novel in French in which Aru would illustrate and Toru fulfilled her part by writing the tragic romance, Le Mademoiselle de l’Arvers Aru had succumbed before her mission was initiated. An urgency in Toru’s writing is noticed after Aru’s sad demise. Premonitions of her own end haunted her. For what reason can be conferred upon such startling expression, “.....now I am getting quite old, twenty and some odd two months and with such an old-fashioned face that English ladies take me for thirty! I wonder if I shall live to be thirty”.

Following the concluding sonnet of the Sheaf, Toru adds a note asking for the reader’s indulgence as Aru’s contribution to the volume are a few in number due to her early death. She quotes the famous couplet expressing her pathetic loneliness----. “‘Of all sad words of tongue and pen/The saddest are these— it might have been’.”

Her novel Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden has autobiographical touches where Inez is the prototype of Aru and Bianca of Toru. It begins with the death of Inez and the ensuing sorrow of Bianca and her father, Mr. Garcia. Toru’s own feeling of empathy and sorrow is felt by Bianca- “Why should she so strong be housed from the weather in a warm lighted room while Pale Inez lay cold and stiff in the lonely grave-yard? She looked with drear despair at the drizzling snow and rain”.

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Mrs. Govin Chunder Dutt or Kshetramoni Mitter, a quiet, self-effacing lady brought up in the rigid Hindu customs must have tried hard to live out the Christian life successfully. She made her children acquainted with Indian folklore and legends from their earliest childhood and Toru's famous Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan is a silent tribute to her. In Jogadhya Uma from her Ballads, the last quatrain is an expressive tribute to Mrs. Govin.

"Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill-suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes"  

To Mary, she exclaims, "......... You would then see how grand, how sublime, how pathetic, our legends are. The wifely devotion that an Indian wife pays to her Husband, her submission to him even when he is capricious or exacting, her worship of him, 'as the god of her life' as old Spencer has it ..........."  

E J Thomson comments on her letters thus, "It is impossible to read them without feeling how beautiful and noble that home-life was ........ father and child, though Death came not as a visitant only but as an inmate and constant shadow over all events, preserving their love of 'the things that are more excellent,' of books and pets, their care for dependants, and clinging the closer to each other as everything in their perishing world grew dim but love- these form a picture no feeling reader will be slow to take or quick to forget. ......."). Further, on the poem
Near Hastings "......... a lyric which brings a lump to the throat, and should convince the most
careless and supercilious of the grace and wisdom, the political expediency even, of receiving
with kindness these strangers with whom destiny has strongly linked us and who so often find
our manners, like our northern climate, cold" 15.

II. Influences of Hinduism and Christianity

Toru's conversion to Christianity early in life sowed the seeds for the smooth
intermingling of all that is best in both religions. She expressed this in her poetry. In Europe it
was easy to imbibe the Christian traditions and way of life. In Bengal she felt isolated when
Hindu relatives distanced themselves from her family and Europeans looked down upon
Bengalis. She was deeply fond of her grandmother "......... she is, I am sad to say, still a
Hindu, but she is so gentle and loves us so much" 16.

In maturity, the slow realisation of her strong true faith dawned upon her. No external
trimmings found their way to her family's faith, not even the regular attendance at Church. But
Toru believed and bore her tragedies, losses and sufferings with faith, stoicism and resignation to
the Will. Narrating the festival of Kali-Pooja, "One feels sometimes so sad when one looks on
all these processions following a graven image, offering goats, and other sacrifices to it, and
bowing themselves before it. Oh, that all India should turn to the true and loving God, who is
alone able to save us and cleanse us from our sins!" 17. This sentiment she fulfils in the legend of
Prahlad, where little Prahlad seeks the gods in spite of his father's blasphemy and ultimately
attains the wisdom of her true faith.

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"For I have in my dungeon dark
Learnt more of truth than e'er I knew,
There is one God-One only, - mark!
To Him is all our service due". 18

Charles Freer Andrews, in his book The Renaissance of India, its missionary aspect calls Toru a Christian missionary who conveyed the spirit of Classical India through her ballads and poems. She has "pointed out the pathway of assimilation between East and West through the indwelling Spirit of Christ." 19 Quoting from a few of her haunting melodies like Our Casuarina Tree and Sita,

"Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
   In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
Of France or Italy beneath the moon,
   When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon" 20

Andrews further adds, "Only in a Christian home, in the middle of the last century in Bengal, would such a perfect blossom of song as that of Toru Dutt have shed forth its fragrance. The Christian spirit is all pervading; at the same time her faith itself causes her to love more deeply than ever the ballads and songs of her own Hindu past" 21.

Born a Hindu, Toru showed respect and toleration to other faiths. She believed and hoped in the salvation of Christ. She also believed that iniquities are punishments for sin and felt
that the defeat of France in the war of the Eighteen Seventies is due to her callousness and prayerlessness. Yet her sorrow is expressed in the short poem, *France 1870*

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"Head of the human column, thus
   Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?
Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous,
Whence then shall Hope arise for us,
   Plunged in the darkness all again?" 22
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In her diary of 1871, she wrote “alas! Thousands and thousands of men have shed their hearts’ blood for their country and yet their country has fallen into the hands of their enemies. Is it because many were deeply immersed in sin and did not believe in God? ............. O France, France, how thou art brought low? Mayest thou, after this humiliation, serve and worship God, better than thou hast done in those days — Poor, poor France, how my heart bleeds for thee!” 23

III. Cultural Influences

a. Europe

European travels and her four years’ sojourn in the West gave Toru a wide spectrum of learning on social aspects as well. A great many letters were sent home to her cousins. Unfortunately most of these are now lost or destroyed. They would have given keen insights into
the European mind, culture and civilisation and the quick assimilation of it by Toru. Cousins, Arun Chunder Dutt and Omesh Chunder Dutt, received her letters which bore news of her studies and social life in England and France. Many of the lost letters would have shed light on aspects of French and English literature which Toru and Aru studied ardently.

The chief aim of the Dutt family’s stay in Europe was to let the sisters learn and excel themselves in the foreign tongues of English and French and to cultivate finer arts like music and painting. They found a good number of English friends, attended the theatre, carnivals and social evenings. Much time was taken up for literary pursuits and discussions. They made the acquaintance of great personages like Sir Edward Ryan and his family who were impressed by the intelligence of the Dutt sisters. Mr. Govin Chunder Dutt wanted his daughters to be thoroughly bred in the literature of the West, namely English, French and occasional German.

The Dutts were a reserved lot. Haribar Das in his Life and Letters of Toru Dutt gives us a picture of the Dutt family on their return voyage to India. They had made friends on board but were shy to join in the singing and games. Toru passed her time reading French literature.

Mr. Govin Chunder Dutt gives recollections of the pleasant time, his family had at Sir Edward Ryan’s house. They had a discussion on novels and when the name of Trollope was mentioned Toru said “……. There is nothing sensational in Trollope, which is what I like best in him. His novels are so like ordinary life. ………. ordinary life is dull and insipid often, so are the novels of Trollope; sensational stories can only please the young.” Sir Ryan was astonished on hearing a teenager speak thus. On another instance, when Lord Lawrence suggested to Aru that they should read histories rather than novels, Toru replied, “We like to
read novels. Because novels are true, and histories are false." 24a Mademoiselle Clarisse Bader observes in the Memoir "Toru Dutt, in replying with such a paradox, proved a true daughter of this poetical Hindu race who prefer Legend to History." 25

"A Mon Pere, the concluding sonnet of the Sheaf delineates the feelings of a poet who writes in a foreign tongue and begins to realise the richness and variety of the native tongue.

"Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil
To wander through the valley, now in shade
And now in sunshine, where these blossoms made,
A Paradise, and gather in my spoil.
But better than myself no man can know,
How tarnished have become their tender hues,
E’en in the gathering, and how dimmed their glow!”

b. Bengal

Toru realised how unfit she was in the society of British India. Indians under the British rule faced many problems. More often justice was not done – superstitions among the Hindu community prevailed. British justice was partial and diseases were not uncommon.

Reconciliation to such a social set up was impossible for Toru. She felt lonely and sad. Bengali society remained corrupt. Toru lamented over the countless inhuman occurrences in the country. Besides expressing her anger in the letters, Toru could have voiced her objections in
journals. Why didn’t she? Was she afraid? Did she count on her father’s feelings and her own loyalty to the British in terms of language, culture and education? She confined herself to no. 12, Manicktollah Street and Baugmaree. Her social life was limited to occasional visits to relatives and regular rides in a coach drawn by her favourite horses, Jeunette and Gentille. She relates an incident where an English pleader struck his Indian groom when he did not stand in attendance. The strike proved fatal and he was fined only two pounds as punishment. Toru exclaims with bitter sarcasm to her English friend, “You see how cheap the life of an Indian is, in the eyes of an English Judge – two pounds!”

Toru believed and hoped in the emancipation of women and was a living example of one. She was aware of the potential of her country men and of her own sex which was hither to lying dormant and occasionally when news reached of any Indian passing a highly credited examination or acquiring a noble career, none is more happy than this young Bengali woman of twenty. Liberation had already percolated the higher strata of Hindu society and Toru in her seclusion and resignation, felt the shedding orthodoxy and revelled in it in her heart.

“Hindus are getting more liberal in their views; there are some orthodox families who will not mix with friends and relatives who have been to England, ………”

“I do hope Indian girls will be in the future better educated and attain more freedom and liberty than they now enjoy.”

Toru faced embarrassment when her relatives and associates questioned her marital status. She did not venture out to meet people. To the Bengalis of the nineteenth century
marriage was a cardinal issue and Toru’s family sheltered her from the prying eyes of the orthodox society. It is impossible to point to any one aspect for Toru’s chosen state of life. It could be that Toru must have loved somebody not necessarily of her own culture, nationality or tradition. Her unfinished novel Bianca written probably before her return to Calcutta denotes a possibility. Young Bianca is Toru herself in all her bearings, in her appearance, indomitable spirit and dignity of speech and behaviour. Although Mr. Govin Chunder Dutt dismisses the work with a foot note which says that it was a first attempt, abandoned consecutively on account of its inconsistencies and its unpolished state, a more careful reading will show how greatly Toru’s own nature and life is apparent in the heroine, Bianca. Lord Moore, the hero of the romance, could well be the prototype of some aristocratic gentleman to whom Toru must have devoted herself. Her loyalty to her father and her still ancient Hindu culture which she could not shed off totally, in spite of a Christian upbringing, must have led her tongue and spirit. She must hence have abandoned the novel when the realization dawned that, should it be brought to its proper conclusion, the revelation would override the work. Probably the death of Aru, who would have known her secret, must have forced her to give up the attempt and thus turn urgently to more formal ways of expression, having heard the close call of death herself not from afar.

A N Dwivedi, in his full length monograph, ‘Toru Dutt,’ only gives us the technical defects of the novel and adds quoting Harihar Das, “‘the story reflects her talents, attainments, and character …… her intimate acquaintance with English and French literature, and above all, her deeply religious nature.” ……… The tragedy at home, it is obvious, seriously hurt the writer’s sensibility, and an element of morbidity entered into the novel.” 29

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Bianca says, "I am getting sentimental. I musn't say that 'young and tall and very handsome' and think of him. Pooh; it can never be. Why do I think of him? It does me no good; on the contrary it does me harm. He is lord of Burleigh. Now a days lords do not come to woo village maidens; and besides I am no village maiden; neither am I pretty. So be off -- all dreams never to be fulfilled." The novel breaks off in the beginning of chapter nine where Lord Moore slips a ring on to Bianca's finger and heads for the Crimean War -- "‘You will wear that for my sake, darling, and if I never return’ -- her downcast eyelids quivered." Was there any such Lord in Toru's life who gave hope?, Did Toru, true to her Indian ancestry, did not seek another man, just like her much loved heroine Savitri, who said to her father, "in the meek grace of virgin hood."

"Once, and once only, all submit
To Destiny, ‘tis God’s command;
Once, and once only, so ‘tis writ,
Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once, and once only, can a sire
Unto his well-loved daughter say,
In presence of the witness fire,
I give thee to this man away”?

It is impossible to ignore the probabilities of a possible love for this young Bengali poet who preferred romance to realism as is seen in her choice of poems in the Sheaf.
The *Sheaf* was the outcome of her early and earnest love of France and its fortunes. While in Europe, she had little sympathy for India and its problems. The Franco-Prussian war saddened her. The volume of the French poems is indeed a *Sheaf*, culling poetic ears following her heart's fancy from the vast treasury of French poetry. Victor Hugo of the Romantic tradition occupies the largest space in the volume. Thirty-one of his poems are included. It was the Romantic School of poetry that occupies the bulk space of the *Sheaf*. But Toru does not confine herself to such limits. The Transitional poets, the Classical poets and those that stood a little apart from the Romantic School like Alfred de Vigny, Alfred de Musset, Dupont and Madame Valmore are also included. Her love of France and her choice of the Romantic School shows the true Hindu nature of Toru, who loved these characteristic romantic traits of freedom, love, sentimentalism, dramatic and vigorous expressions and inclination towards the ethereal aspects of beauty.

"O Ocean vast! We heard thy song with wonder,
   The waves kept time,
'Appear O Truth,' thou sang'st with voice of thunder,
   And shine sublime." 33

France and its free spirit thus attracted Toru in the early years of her poetic career. The later stage saw her countrymen's lack of power and assertiveness as a whole, where religious and cultural superstitions prevailed. Toru longed for the freedom she experienced in her beloved France and demurely and plaintively says to Mary, "...... And then, as you say, it is always sad to live home, where so many happy and sad days have been passed; and after all India is my
and again, "The return to England is becoming a very vague and shadowy thing; it grows fainter and dimmer everyday almost."35

IV. Political Influences

A close observer of the political situation in India, Toru stood outside the circle and surveyed the panorama. Although she was well aware of the negative aspect of British rule, she could not conceive of the transfer of power. She had not gained that insight that comes with age to realise this cardinal issue.

In France 1870 and Madame Therese Toru brings out the ancient glories of France now torn by war. She voices the emotions of a French woman.

No such heart-felt emotions are given vent to, when often she heard of numerous oppressions Indians underwent during the British regime. Many such incidents are described in her letters. But in Prahlad, the last stanza is a warning of the poet. She has achieved maturity and control over her expressions and the lines speak to a universal audience, bearing her country's plight in mind.

"Tyrants of every age and clime
Remember this. - that awful shape
Shall startle you when comes the time,
And send its voice from cape to cape.
As human peoples suffer pain,
But oh, the lion strength is theirs,
Woe to the king when galls the chain!
Woe, woe, their fury when he dares!” 36

V. Influences of Nature

Finally, Toru Dutt is a romantic poet where Nature’s bounties filled her senses and her soul. She was not a pedagogue, yet the effects of Nature were not lost upon her.

The beautiful lines on Baugmaree, her garden-house in Calcutta are expressed in the petrarchan sonnet of the same name.

“But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the Eastward when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze” 37

EMILY DICKINSON

1. Family

a. Edward Dickinson

Early in her life, Emily referred to her father, Edward Dickinson, as one who perused “lonely and rigorous books” on Sundays, the only form of reading he advocated. Therefore, one seeks to wonder how his daughter possessed such poetic faculties so fierce in its independence and so cosmic in its themes. Yet here we have in the person of Emily Dickinson, a poet who
wrote poetry chiefly because her sire was chauvinistic, towered over his household and failed to recognise or encourage her.

During her lifetime Emily suffered both as a woman and as a writer, due to this lack of recognition. She was afraid to publish or even write the poems with the knowledge of her father. For Edward Dickinson, Emily was the dutiful daughter who baked his favourite bread, entertained his guests and played on the piano for his enjoyment. Edward’s expectations from all women were thus limited. Emily wrote her poems when the family slept, for she had to be the dutiful daughter during daytime, which she resented and her resentment found expression in her poems.

Emily could attain fulfilment both as a woman and as a poet only with her sire’s help, which was hither to, denied. Her sensitivity and temperament was such that it was unthinkable for her to emulate much of her mother’s qualities. Emily Norcross Dickinson lived and died as a perfect choice for Edward who chose his wife with such ‘preferable’ qualities as meekness, homebound and spirituality. Since Emily was the daughter born of parents who were bound together by religious fervour and the institution of marriage, though contradictory in temperaments. She found herself craving for her father’s love and appreciation. She could not become a woman like her mother, because she did not possess those qualities which were convenient for Edward Dickinson’s welfare. She loved him enough not to show open resentment, but her poems are poignant expressions of her feelings. In seeking the opinion of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an eminent literary critic, yet a stranger, Emily was treading on marshy ground and her insecurity is visible. Yet she felt secure enough to seek his opinion since he was not associated with Edward. Higginson’s rejection was a total mind blow for her and she
was left with a choice akin to her Dickinsonian nature – not to publish her poems during her lifetime. She did not mould herself to Higginson’s whims, who spoke as the voice of the decade. She wrote as she did, with the belief,

“All men for Honor hardest work
But are not known to earn –
Paid after they have ceased to work
In Infamy or Urn-” (Poem 1193)

Many of her poems are invisible arrows aimed at Edward for his failure to acknowledge her qualities. But without these arrows, nothing would have ventured forth from Emily’s pen. Only a stout authoritarian tyrant like Edward could shake up a person like his daughter Emily who was frugal in rendering through writing. Edward did this unawares.

In this poem, God in some way is her father or God has many of Edward’s qualities.

“I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!
“Angles-twice descending
Reimbursed my store -
Burglar! Banker – Father!
I am poor once more!” (Poem 49)
Edward resented his daughter rising anywhere near his son's level since he did not expect or provide for such an occurrence. "Father was very severe to me; he thought I'd been trifling with you, so he gave me quite a trimming about Uncle Tom and Charles Dickens and these 'modern Literati' who he says are nothing compared to past generations, who flourished when he was a boy ....... so I am quite in disgrace at present." 38

But yet note what Edward wrote to Austin, "I have written home to have Lavinia come with your mother and you, and Emily, too, if she will, but that I will not insist upon her coming." 39 Isn't this proof enough that Edward Dickinson, portrayed more often as a careless dominant figure, was not so much uncaring as he appeared to be and that he too, as early as Emily turned twenty four, began to accept her love of solitude and finer leanings, in spite of his busy public life?

Barbara Antonina Clarke Mossberg, in her critical study of Emily as the daughter all her life in the Dickinson household, portrays the poet as a deprived one from her early childhood from love and nourishment from her mother and lack of respect and recognition from her father. She points out that first and foremost Emily suffered and sought seclusion because of her father's disapproval - "In fact, she seems to have deliberately set herself out as a martyr to this troubled tyrant clown who 'steps like Cromwell when he gets the kindlings' bending to his will even when it is against her own or his own wishes." 40 Barbara all along calls Emily only as 'Dickinson', which confuses the reader. She may be trying to insist upon her point of view of Emily being the deprived daughter of a patriarchal society. The reference nevertheless sounds ridiculous in a full-length study.
It is unfair to blame Edward Dickinson for Emily's tragedy. It is improbable to think that a stern puritan and a staunch politician is uncaring or seemingly unaware. Edward succeeded in his life and in his career. He held on to his faith at all times, though hard testing did not come his way. Part of Emily's withdrawal could be due to Edward's mindless tyranny over the family, but the large portion is Emily's own. She did not have to succumb, but she did. It was this deprivation that gave her the inspiration to write and she wrote admirably.

b. Emily Norcross Dickinson

Mrs. Dickinson was the subject of Emily's occasionally careless remarks, such as "I never had a mother" and "Mother does not care for thought." It is demeaning and adds vice to the Dickinson personality. The references are cruel and inhuman. Emily made such uncalled for statements to a stranger, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a critic who believed that only poems that satisfied his conventional outlook could go into print. Well might Emily have earned his approbation apart from the poet persona, for making understatements of her own inheritance and sex! Critics generally sympathise with the portrait of a "poor Emily" deprived of maternal nurture. The fact was that Emily Norcross Dickinson was more inclined to domesticity than Emily was. She kept a boisterous, mindful Edward Dickinson long to return home after his travels. Emily's sensibility required special nurturing which the not so keen minded Mrs. Dickinson found unable to procure. From her earliest years Emily possessed a disinclination to anything called 'households' - "Vinnie sweeps - sweeps - upon the chamber stairs; and mother is hurrying around with her hair in a silk pocket handkerchief, on account of dust. Oh susie, it is dismal." To Abiah Root, her girlhood friend she writes, "God keep me from what they call households, except that bright one of 'faith!'" It is obvious that Emily was naturally inclined
against the little household chores which her mother and sister were naturally inclined to. Mrs. Dickinson had no time for Emily's poetry. If she had, she would have discouraged her, for sure enough she believed that a woman's most prized possessions are her home and hearth. Total disregard for Mrs. Dickinson's faculties is uncalled for. She was a philanthropist and before entering the Dickinson Homestead, had attended finishing schools and developed a taste for social activities.

While Emily derided her mother thus, her objection to Edward was 'slant' as her poem 1129 says "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant! Success in circuit lies." Why? Because Emily is showing a biased expression true to her sex who finds a man more attractive, be it father, brother or son. By hating 'households' she spoke for the suppressed emotion of the countless women of her century.

Though Emily makes undermining statements, on other occasions, the opposite is true. Emily dismissed Mrs. Dickinson's charities and the Sewing Societies, the only accepted outlets for women of her times: yet mother meant more to her than she can conceive. Towards the end, when Mrs. Dickinson became an invalid, Emily spent almost all her time caring for her. It is absurd to notice any resentment in her behaviour. Emily wrote to her cousins Louisa and Fanny Norcross, "Mother's dear little wants so engross the time,—to read to her, to fan her, to tell her health will come to-morrow, to explain to her why the grasshopper is a burden, because he is not so new a grasshopper as he was,—this is so ensuing, I hardly have said 'Good—Morning, Mother,' when I hear myself saying 'Mother, good-night'.'43 Apart from noticing that it is Emily's nature to exaggerate, nothing can be said against the letter. Barbara here points out in the chapter dealing with The Mother Matrix, "Dickinson was fifty when she wrote this complaint, and fifty-one when she complained of her 'Gymnastic Destiny' in taking care of her mother."
She was able to speak about her mother's death nonchalantly, but not so with the death of Edward Dickinson, Austin whose nature Emily shared, had remarked that Mrs. Dickinson's death barely "caused a ripple." Emily must have felt a similar feeling, for she says, "Mother was very beautiful when she had died. Seraphs are solemn artists. The illumination that comes but once paused upon her features, and it seemed like hiding a picture to lay her in the grave; but the grass that received my father will suffice his guest, the one he asked at the altar to visit him all his life." 44

c. Austin Dickinson

With Austin Dickinson, Emily shared a life—long affection and attachment. Emily and Austin always formed a team in hunting parties or even to mimic the minister's sermon or device something secretive to be done without the knowledge of the austere elder Dicksons. Austin's marriage and traumas of his personal life that followed, deeply affected Emily. She was intimate with Susan whom she affectionately called Sue, before and after her marriage to Austin. Many of her poems are addressed to her. She was her first critic and mentor. Later in life, the cold war that ensued between Lavinia and Sue and Austin's illegal relationship with Mabel Loomis Todd, made Emily withdraw her visits to Sue and seek other mentors. Ironically, this personal upheaval in the domestic front made Emily's poems initially see light. Her earliest bond with Austin was open and he provides the sole outlet for Emily's aspirations and feelings. Though Austin never helped Emily along the way, his presence was there for the sister. In one of the early letters sent to Boston where Austin had charge of a school, Emily is seen as a close observer of nature with intense personal heartache and descriptive qualities.
"The earth looks like some poor old lady who by dint of pains has bloomed e'en till now, yet in a forgetful moment a few silver hairs from out her cap come stealing, and she tucks them back so hastily and thinks nobody sees." 45

After 1857. Austin returned to Amherst and eventually lived next door with Sue. He visited Emily and Vinnie so frequently that made the sisters feel that Austin had never left the Homestead to settle down at the Evergreens.

d. Lavinia Dickinson

In childhood, Lavinia was outside the ring of the creative minded brother and sister. Lavinia grew up to care for the reclusive Emily and after her death, spent her lonely, traumatic years to publish the poems of her only sister. Emily had begun to realise Lavinia’s importance when she wrote to her Norcross Cousins, “Sisters are brittle things. God was penurious with me, which makes me shrewd with Him.” 46 and to the Clark Brothers, “Your bond to your brother reminds me of mine to my sister, - early, earnest, indissoluble. Without her life were fear and Paradise a cowardice, except for her inciting voice.” 47

II. Education

Emily had a sporadic education stretching over a period of ten years. She was a wit and contributor of the Comic Column of Forest Leaves, a small journal that flourished for two years at the Amherst Academy. Emily Fowler Ford, an early associate and friend, recalls, “the other things which I wish I could put my hand on were funny – sparkling with fun, and that is a new
phase to the public: but she certainly began as a humorist." It is remarkable that Mrs. Ford thought that in spite of her seclusion, Emily “was longing for poetic sympathy, and that some of her later habits of life originated from this suppressed and ungratified desire.” A poem written in her prime reflects the futile reconciliation Emily tried to make with her unrecognised standing in the literary world. The poem by itself does not reveal much, yet it is one of the numerous poems that she penned on fame, appraisal and honour.

“Fame of Myself, to justify,
All other Plaudit be
Superfluous - An Incense
Beyond Necessity -

“Fame of Myself to lack – Although
My name be else Supreme –
This were an Honor honorless –
A futile Diadem – (Poem 713)

The contradiction is visible in poem 179.

“If I could bribe them by a Rose
I’d bring them every flower that grows
From Amherst to Cashmere!
I would not stop for night, or storm -
Or frost in death, or anyone –
My business were so dear!

...................................

That weary of this Beggar’s face -
They may not finally say, yes —
To drive her from the Hall?"

The Gospel reference is here where Christ speaks of a corrupt Judge and mercy of God.

Emily failed to reconcile herself with her position as an unknown poet. She juggles with reconciliation, the transcendentalism theory of Emerson and her own realistic expression of vehemence.

Judith Farr, in her studies titled *The passion of Emily Dickinson* says, “She realised that an artist must be satisfied with the artifact; otherwise, its recognition by others is hollow, even nugatory. Referring to a letter written to Daniel Chester French in 1884 where Emily says “Success is dust, but an aim forever touched with dew.” Judith adds, “... *dew* is a word that Dickinson had long associated with creativity. Artists want to be successful; it is only natural. Dew belongs to fresh mornings full of new chances; it is akin to inspiration; it is nature’s baptismal grace. Dickinson’s letter cautions French that success may fade and is valuable only as an aim, an incitement to creation. Still (living in the America of Horace Greeley) she recognises it to be a lure ‘forever’.”

Mount Holyoke Female Seminary where Emily spent a year is associated with her religious turmoil. Under the austere and stern tutoring of Mary Lyon, the pious preceptor of the
seminary, Emily realised the hopelessness of her position that moved her to utter. "I'm still one of the lingering bad ones." She stood her ground as one of the 'lingering bad ones' till the very end. Emily's nature found it hard to embrace something new, even in the form of faith, which had not already existed. She could not repudiate her own past and 'change' as her friends and family had done. She found nothing wrong with herself. Yet all her life she was searching for a master, a master unlike her father. Throughout her search, she seems to return to the starting point at which her life closed finally. When the search for earthly masters ended in vain, in spite of her showing feminine characteristics required of her times, like meekness, submissiveness and obedience, she comes back to the conception of God with reserve and self pride. To Colonel Higginson she writes, "When a little girl, I remember hearing that remarkable passage and preferring the 'power' not knowing at the time that 'kingdom' and 'glory' were included."

"When much in the woods, as a little girl, I was told that the snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or goblins kidnap me; but I went a long and met no one but angels, who were far shyer of me than I could be of them, so I haven't that confidence in fraud which many exercise." 

- In poem 413, Emily is the little schoolgirl in heaven, the imagery that she never put off in her adult life.

"I never felt at Home – Below –
And in the Handsome Skies
I shall not feel at Home – I know –
I don't like paradise –

47
Because it's Sunday – all the time –
And Recess – never comes –
And Eden' ll be so lonesome
Bright Wednesday Afternoons –

"If God could make a visit –
Or ever took a Nap –
So not to see us – but they say
Himself – a Telescope

"Perennial beholds us –
Myself would run away
From Him – and Holy Ghost – and All
But there's the "Judgment Day"!

Ironically, Emily believed in her own salvation. Her idea was not essentially the Christian salvation. It is more earth-bound. It is noteworthy to say that in her letters she explicitly refers to God, Christ, Salvation, Immortality and the Divine Love. The poems enclosed in the letters also portray a loving, caring Heavenly Father. It is only the poems written in seclusion which reveal her grudging relationship with God. Her tryst with God can be forgiven because of her changing moods, her insecurity and her perpetual doubts. To H.H she writes, "Knew I how to pray, to intercede for your foot were intuitive, but I am but a pagan - Of God we ask one favor, that we may be forgiven. For what, He is presumed to know ........."
"I hope you love birds, too. It is economical. It saves going to Heaven." 35

She found God in life, in its variegated colours and mysteries.

"The murmur of a Bee
A Witchcraft - yielded me-"

"The Red upon the Hill
Take th away my will -
If anybody sneer -
Take care - for God is here -
That's all."

"The Breaking of the Day
Addeth to my Degree -
If any ask me how -
Artist - who drew me so -
Must tell!" (Poem 155)

Emily's heaven is similar to her home. God will be like her father. And all the bees and birds and friends she loved will be there. So she does not question her own credentials, for a place in her own heaven.
III. Love and Friendship

“My friends are my estate” — she wrote to Samuel Bowles. Emily’s circle of friends were numerous and vast. During her Academy days and at Mount Holyoke she formed a number of friendships and remembered them. It was at this time Benjamin Newton and Joseph Lyman became acquainted with Emily. Newton was one of her early mentors. “When a little girl, I had a friend, who taught Immortality; but venturing too near, himself, he never returned.” When Newton left Amherst and later died, it was one of Emily’s early painful losses. Years later she was still thinking of him when she asked a clergyman how his last moments were.

Mr. Leonard Humphrey’s sudden death gave rise to a series of expression containing cemetery images — “The hour of evening is sad, — .......... my master has gone to rest, .......... make the tears come, and I cannot brush them away; .......... they are the only tribute I can pay the departed Humphrey / You have stood by the grave before; I have walked there sweet summer evenings and read the names on the stones, and wondered who would come and give me the same memorial; but I never have laid my friends there, and forgot that they too must die; ..........”

One by one of her early friends married, left the land or died. Some forgot as domesticity and religion cramped the extent of friendship. As a result, Emily suffered as a result. She wrote many letters and replies were rare or none. Emily further extended her friendship to many others as she grew into adulthood and till her death, continued addressing them with affection and love, occasionally enclosing a poem or delicacies like flowers or fruits. The Letters were an outlet to preserve her sanity and integrity. She could not accept the prejudices of the times, the dependence of women and the dominance of men in the literary world, the
religious orthodoxy and the Civil War. Her vehemence found expression in her poems and her social life (if letter writing alone could be called social) thrived through the letters.

Emily almost always fell in love with the wrong men. Most of them were father-figures. Charles Wadsworth, Samuel Bowles, Otis Philips Lord, Thomas Wentworth Higginson were men whom Emily looked up to, although Bowles was her contemporary.

Her letters to the Clarke brothers after the death of Charles Wadsworth, a married clergyman reveals much of Emily's sentiments. In the eighteen sixties, when Emily met Wadsworth, and became attached to him, she reached the height of her poetic sensibility.

“He strained my faith –
Did he find it supple?
Shook my strong trust –
Did it then – yield?

............

“Wrung me – with Anguish –
But I never doubted him –
‘Tho’ for what wrong
He did never say –” (Poem 497)
Hence we can assume that these dominant influences in the lives of Toru Dutt and Emily Dickinson shaped their poetic outlook to a large extent, more so with Emily Dickinson, as she wrote her poem in accordance with the inner life she led.

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