CHAPTER – V

CONCLUSION

Poetry which is the form of imagination expressed in the literary terms, effects the readers by the rhythm, the sound and imagery of its language. This, very famous form of literature adopted by the nineteenth century recluse, Emily Dickinson, gifted American literature in particular and English literature in general by means of nearly 1700 poems which added grandeur and new techniques to them. Emily Dickinson, though born in a highly traditional and puritan family presented the world her liberal ideas through her poems. She was in short an embodiment of all the ages of literature. She was given a higher realm though not during her lifetime but posthumously, she achieved a major success as A.C.Ward says, “Perhaps next to Whitman the greatest American poet of the last century”.

Mysticism actually means the spirituality of the direct experience of God, it is just like the adventure of “the wild things of God”. This direct experience is not just a matter of “belief” or intellectual understanding or emotional experience but is marked by love and joy where one can have the lasting experience of God.

Emily Dickinson’s poetry hits upon this facet of mysticism. She covers almost each and every concept related to mystical beliefs in her poems. She talks about “death” in many of her poems like “Because I could not stop for
death, "I felt a funeral in my brain," "The Last Night that she lived" etc; she covers the theme of immortality very beautifully in "After great pain a formal feeling comes"; "A Death – blow is a Life-blow to some"; "I Heard a fly buzz when I died" etc; she expresses her belief in God in, "I know that He exists", "I Never saw a moor" etc; she praises nature in, "There came a Day at Summer's Full"; "A Bird came down the walk" etc. These all themes bring Emily Dickinson closer to the mystical elements.

Dickinson lived a life of isolation from the world, she was against the conventions of society and especially the religious fervent of the nineteenth century. So Allen Tate remarks,

With the exception of Poe there is no other American poet whose work so steadily emerges, under the pressure of certain disintegrating obsessions, from the framework of moral character. There is none of whom it is truer to say that the poet is poetry.

It is observed that Emily had modernistic ideas especially the spirit of rebellion, the skepticism and above all the freedom she used to express her ideas. She took the liberty of expressing God as a "burglar", "banker", "father", "Papa above" and she also blames God for this duplicity. This type of rebellious attitude was not to be seen during the nineteenth century. So in spite of all the blemishes in her poetry she was identified as "one of the great poets of all time," by Robert E. Spiller in 1955. The conceits, metaphors and vague descriptions did not gain fame during her lifetime but after her death they were
recognized as a part of her poetic genius. So George F. Whicher in 1939, considered Emily’s poetry as, “No finer body of lyric poetry by an American author of the nineteenth century can be found.”

The period of Emily was in the midst of two great forces – Transcendental idealism of Emerson and the Puritanism. Besides the conditions of the family with the father, Edward Dickinson, a patriarchal and puritanical person influenced her personality. Her sister Lavinia, talking about her family says that Emily “had to think she was the only one of us that had that to do. Father believed; and mother loved; and Austin had Amherst; and I had the family to keep track of”.

Thus the base of her poetry ranged from her family background, to the surroundings, the society, the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, her growing enthusiasm to know God, afterlife, her interest in probing the deeper untouched realms of death and immortality. Her approach cannot be limited to any one age, she was a poet in whom different qualities of different ages were embedded. She praised nature, celebrated the self etc like the Romantics, her conceits and metaphors make her one with the Meta Physical poets and her unique and remarkable style, form, metrical pattern, usage and coinage of new words link her to the Modernists. Hence Egbert S. Oliver remarks:

Emily Dickinson has affinity with Emerson and the transcendentalists, with the hymns of the New England churches……with the metaphysical Poets in her turns of wit and her
elliptical Metaphors, with the poets of the twentieth century in her detail, her "imagism," her use of half-rhymes and dissonant qualities. But withal she is Emily Dickinson, belonging to no school, fitting into no formula, associated with no master, followed by no disciples, friend of no literary coteries." ¹

Emily Dickinson had an optimistic attitude and at the same time she was bold enough to face any circumstances in her life through poetry. Her poems picturise a horrifying clarity and spiritual maturity which her mind has attained unconsciously. According to her one can differentiate the sweetest experience of life only if one knows that nothing worse can happen; A defeated soul is not afraid of any misfortune in future,

Life is but life and death but death
Bliss is but bliss, and breath but breath
And if, indeed, I fail,
At least to know the worst is sweet
Defeat means nothing but defeat.
No drearier can prevail.”
(Life is but life and death but death).

She feels that victory or success cannot be appreciated unless and until one has faced defeat in their early life,

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne’er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.”
(Success is counted sweetest).

The use of words in Dickinson's poetry is remarkable. If she did not find suitable words, she would coin new words to describe exact thoughts. This proves her talent in vocabulary; she gives this credit to her tutor, Benjamin F. Newton, who rescued her from the manacles of tradition. In one of her letters to Higginson nearly after ten years of Benjamin Newton's death, she remarks, "When I was a little girl I had a friend who taught me Immortality – but venturing too near, himself, he never returned – soon after, my tutor died – and for several years my Lexicon – was my only companion."

And this contact of hers with the "Lexicon" enabled her not only to use the vocabulary meaningfully but also to mould it in the way she likes.

Dickinson's poetry is often presented in brief stanza forms and in different combinations of iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines. Her rhyme schemes were varied and simple which was not seen in the poetry of her contemporaries but in the poetry of later ages. Though she uses simple language, her syntax paves the way for different connotations even from the commonest words. She combines the universal themes with vivid expressions of her personal feelings in almost familiar verse forms, and this gives her lyrics a mystical directness and this mystical element is sometimes compared to that
of William Blake's. She is not just a poet of the soul, but the poet of perception. A.C. Ward remarks,

It is certain, at any rate, that in Emily Dickinson the verse and the vision are one. Her apparent simplicity is as delusive as Blake's; and she uses no poetic ornamentation when simple metrical rhyming verse serves for what she has to say, she uses that . . . . But always the thing — to — be — said finds the fit mould that will exactly contain it in utmost concentration — which is only to express in another way what has already been noted, namely, that her vision and her verse attain the unity which is achieved only by poets of a higher order.

It is a known fact that Emily's poems were published posthumously. Though she was not interested in publishing her poems, she regularly sent her messages to T. W. Higginson for his critical views. Perhaps she was interested in publishing them in the beginning and she asked Higginson to tell her if there were mistakes in her verse, she affixed some of her poems with a letter of this request. Higginson replied to her "Change your style with life" Dickinson at that moment understood that her poetry would not be accepted by the society of her time. But she did not stop writing, she continued it with no change even after persistent advice from Higginson. The fact is that Higginson viewed Emily's poetry from the nineteenth century perspective and so he could see in her poetry only, "beautiful thoughts and words" but no form; "remarkable" patterns, but odd.
Emily Dickinson’s mystic quality is mainly identified by the themes she uses – death, immortality, religion, God etc. But what makes her different from other poets is her approach towards them. For example she rarely uses the term “person” or “human” to address, instead she uses the term “soul”. This indicates that Emily attaches more importance to the inner soul rather than the physical appearance – as death ends the physical body i.e. physical body loses its significance after death but the soul never dies, it rather enters another life of immortality. She says,

The soul selects her own society,
Then – shuts the door –
To her divine Majority
Present no more.”

(The Soul Selects her own Society)

Some of her poems, are openly without any ambiguous tone are dedicated to God, like “Given in marriage, unto Thee,” “Title Divine is Mine”, “Mine – by the right of the white Election” and in all of these she blissfully speaks of her marriage with God, rather than attaining the salvation. She feels death as a vehicle which would lead one to eternity. So her poems depict her desire to achieve death for example the poem “Those not live yet.” The poem, “There came a day at summer’s full”, uses the gospels and the traditions of the Christian church for some ready symbols.
There came a Day at summer's full
Entirely for me;
I thought that such were for the saints,
Where revelations be.

The sun, as common, went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed blew,
As if no soul the solstice passed
That maketh all things new.

The time was scarce profaned by speech;
The symbol of a word
Was needless, as at sacrament
The wardrobe of our Lord.

Each was to each the sealed church,
Permitted to commune this time,
Lest we too awkward show
At supper of the Lamb.”

(There came a Day at summer's full)

The imagery she uses in this poem like the Lord’s wardrobe, Christ as the Lamb, Calvary and the Crucifix as a symbol of God’s love which are the general elements of Christianity also. This quality of hers blends her with Christian mysticism. David Yezzi says,
“......... it seems that where Emily Dickinson (1830-86) is concerned, no two critics can agree on much. So, too, with regard to her spirituality. There are those writers, for example, who doubt that Dickinson’s religious beliefs bear greatly on her poetry; others assert that she rejected religion outright, while still others feel poetry itself became her religion”.  

Emily with her romantic, metaphysical, modern, shamanistic approach and her clear thoughts portrayed in the form of a poetry like a mirror, has truly gained significance in the English literature. Her irregular metrical pattern, disordered rhymes, extensive use of dashes, confusing punctuation, non-titling make Emily Dickinson stand unique in the world of poetry. So Norman Forester remarks,

In her drive to express her perceptions and awareness, Emily Dickinson tried, like the scientist, to be exact and honest, but to do this in the special way of poetry.  

Emily Dickinson’s isolated life makes understanding her a bit difficult. She loved recitence and that is what is expressed even in her poetry. An introvert in nature, she couldnot mingle up with the people but remained in contact with few of them like Higginson, Abiah Root, Lavinia etc through her letters. So her poetry more or less becomes the main part of her autobiographical element. One can see the reflection, the soul of Emily Dickinson in her verses. She says,
My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If immortality unveil
A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.”

(My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close).
REFERENCES

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2. David Yezzi – Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief – Commonwealth,
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