CHAPTER-4
MYSTICISM IN EMILY DICKINSON

Mystic literature is most often concerned with the methodology of mysticism. To describe the unitive 'way' is a task which has proved impossible for most mystics. But the way of purgation, especially, has given rise to some very graphic mystical writing. In both Christian and non-Christian mystical literature there is a deliberate withdrawal from the external things of life in order that attention may be concentrated on the one thing necessary. In the Christian this purification is motivated by his sense of sin, but goes much further than the conscientious effort to rid himself of sin which is the duty of every Christian. For the mystic there is a deliberate choice of a difficult self-training, and it is this which constitutes the asceticism of the genuine mystic who leaves the things that warm the lives of other men and goes forth on a lonelier and stricter way.

In Emily Dickinson's poetry we do indeed find that intense sensitivity to experience which is characteristic of the mystic. Her self-chosen isolation from the world might easily be interpreted as the retirement for contemplation which a mystic practices. But the writing which came out
of this solitude does not tell the story of the mystic quest. Her poems seem to evoke the picture of one whose intellectual and emotional equipment for life was extraordinary in perception and depth.

Emily Dickinson is a great American poet of the nineteenth century. She was the most perfect flower of New England transcendentalism, an anticipator of metaphysical poetry, a smeller of modernity, and an upholder of romanticism. In her thought she was metaphysical, in her attitudes a Romantic and in her poetics a modern. A.C. Ward has called her 'perhaps next to Whitman the greatest American poet of the last century'. She achieved fame very late, but when she became famous, she was backed with Walt Whitman as a pioneer of 19th century American poetry.

Emily Dickinson deals with mysticism in her religious poems. Her favourite themes are love, nature, death, immortality, body-soul relationship with God, Christ, Eternity, Heaven; etc. The concept of mysticism in Dickinson is not spiritualized all at once there is a gradual experience and conversion of the experience into a divine path for the attainment of the mystic stance. Natural, it
includes all other themes such as love, pain, and fear as the part of a mystic experience. As a transcendalist she depends more on nature, for her nature is a force that has been elevating the human soul from the mundane pond of Walden. She is more a romantic and a follower of Thoreau in her attitude to nature. The description of nature and love in her poems are not distinct but the parts of her total experience of mysticism. Hence it is a thought of dealing with the theme of love, death and nature. She uses poetry as a rich that links both the human and divine.

She believed in the Christian values of life but had no faith in blind rituals, dogmas and traditions. She prefers the poetic to the dogmatic religion. She views God from the liberal instead of an orthodox perspective. She sees God in the red glow on the hill in the morning. God is also perceived as a great architect and builder whose creations cannot be altered. God is the savior of the afflicted. He remains an enigma for man who lacks the desired imagination to grasp Him by his limited imagination.

Dickinson glorifies the man in Jesus Christ who is to her a perfect emblem of the human-divine power and an embodiment of all virtues. She also considers him an
embodiment of self-realization through suffering and sacrifice. She perceives soul as a divine queen absorbed in her own selected society. Soul enjoys perfect autonomy and can exist without the body. Soul is always conscious of her own identity and maintains a dignified distance from other. Soul is the animating power of the body; the body is the palpable and perceptible manifestation of the soul. Each is vital for the other because they are the integral parts of the being.

Emily Dickinson believes in the reality of death. She loves to deal with death in a very courageous manner in her poems. She indentifies herself playfully with the dying sun in the evening. Dickinson, however, does describe death scenes. She realistically presents the attitudes and responses of the people around a dying person.

No other nineteenth-century American poet ever equaled the intensity of Dickinson’s love lyrics. Most of her love poems seem to have a biographical origin, and her treatment of the passion of love is characterized by the originality which is a feature of all her works. Love, in her opinion, triumphs over both life and death to achieve an almost divine status. One of her poems, “Till Death-is
narrow Loving,” (No.907) # states that only death’s separation truly measures the extent of love. Her poem, “The Soul selects her own society”, (No.13, p.no.7) ## describes the exclusiveness of affection or the highly selective quality of love.

The poem, “In winter in my Room”, (No.1670) # deals with repressed passion. “My Life had stood-a Loaded Gun” (No.754) # is perhaps her best poetic statement about the explosive changes that passion wrought on her emotions. “Come slowly-Eden” (No.211) # and “A Bee his burnished Carriage” (No.1339)# convey physical desire through the erotic image of the bee and the flower. “Again – his voice is at the door” deals with a sublime emotional moment when two human beings are united by love. But Dickinson’s treatment of the love-theme is not limited to such secular poems. She sublimated her passion of love and visualized a heavenly marriage with God or Christ.

The most important poems of this other category are “Mine-by the right of the White Election” (No.528) # and “Title Divine-is mine.”(No.1072)#. In the latter of these two poems the ritual of an actual marriage without the human bridegroom is so fully developed that one can
almost feel the human passion being transformed into divine love. Most of Dickinson's poetry had its source in her own experience of passion, but she also considered the subject from a philosophical viewpoint. She attached a great importance to love and almost equated it with God like a true mystic.

One group of Dickinson's poems investigates the tremendous emotional influence exerted by the male upon the passive female. These poems emphasize the power of physical attraction and the fear of passionate response within an allegorical framework. One of the lighter poems,

"I started early, took my dog,
And visited the sea;
The mermaids in the basement
 Came out to look at me,
And frigates in the upper floor
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---At me, the sea withdrew.(No.520)"

This poem has a childlike surface story. A young girl visits the seashore, gets her shoes wet, and then, cold and frightened, runs home. The final lines of the poem echo the girl's loss and isolation, as she perceives what she has
rejected. The poem examines all the associations of the sea, his beauty, freedom, haughtiness, male power; it also considers the shy, fearful, repressed qualities of the female and the land. The poem may thus be interpreted as the emotional and physical effect of a lover’s advances. The girl nearly yields, but her life of control and suppression proves stronger and she returns to the “solid” town. “In Winter in my Room” (No.1670) # is a disturbing poem. It contains a graphic description of sexual attraction with an analysis of the fascination and fear with which that attraction arouses.

The woman’s rejection of the physical, and her determination that ‘this was a dream’, illustrate how the conscious mind, the ego, denies and rejects the surging drives of the subconscious.

“My life had stood- a Loaded Gun” (No.754) # is perhaps Dickinson’s best poem stating the explosive changes that the passion of love wrought on her feelings. The central conceit of a loaded gun signifies a potential, immobile force, one with explosive power, which can only be released by another. The concept of the active male hunter possessing the passive woman guides the whole poem. Once he leaves, she reverts to her inactive, gun state.
Apart from these psychological studies of repression and emotional desire, the majority of Dickinson's poems handle more openly the effects of passion upon a human soul.

The first group contains her most sentimental and derivative love poems. Some deal with erotic expectations, employing the bee-flower image to convey physical desire as in “Come Slowly Eden” (No.211) and “A Bee his Burnished Carriage”. (No.1339). Others have as their subject a longing for imagined visits. Such as “If you were coming in the Fall” (No.511) some deal with an abstract examination of transport and awe, such as “‘Tis so much Joy! ‘Tis so much Joy!”(No.26.p.no.13). Two poems express her exultation and triumph as she imagines herself a true wife and boasts of the superhuman intensity of her passion.

The poem, “Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?” (No.43.p.no.19) is a more moving emotional utterance, though it lacks the intricate structure of the poem. It passionately taunts the onlooker to view the burning intensity of her love without being blinded. She says that red is the usual sign of love but that her passion has conquered this to blaze at white heat.
The unhallowed fire of secular love and the holocaust of suffering have so perfected her soul that she is now ready for God’s immortal light. The author’s emotional experience is transformed through the poem’s vivid ‘forge’ imagery into a divine readiness for immortality or heaven.

The largest group among the love-poems consists of those which deal with the actual meeting of the lovers. The poems of this group are dominated by a haunting sense of anguish due to the possibility of separation and a realization of the termination of love. These poems constantly emphasize her sense of loyalty and dread of change and increasingly consider the spiritual aspects of love, rather than its human importance.

“There Came a Day at Summer’s Full” (No.13.p.no.67) ## treats a similar experience from a religious standpoint, boldly assuming that the lover’s earthly renunciation will bring them heavenly bliss. However, the poem is not basically religious, for she insists that their temporary ecstasy and long separation will lead to a greater spiritual happiness. God is curiously absent from the poem as she considers heaven acceptable only if it brings about the complete fulfillment of their love. Here
the loss is accepted, not because denial is beneficial, but because it must bring an eternal and perfect union.

By contrast, the poem "I Got so I could take his name" (No.293) # catches the terrible misery that the separation causes, depicting the bleak efforts of the soul to find some degree of religious consolation.

"I should have been too Glad, I see," (No.99.p.no.42) ## marks the transition into the Bride of Christ poems. Dickinson’s most artistic love-poems are those which deal with brides and marriage. These poems show the sublimation of her human passion into a divine experience. Here, like other religious poets, she dramatically merges the sacred and disrespectful aspects of human passion, transforming her desire for human marriage into a Bride of Christ vision.

Throughout most of these poems the term "bride" is viewed from various angles: first as an actual woman being married; then as the bride of death, which allows her to enter the third stage as wedded to God in paradise. The adjustment to the idea of a divine lover was gradual, and in the beginning she insists that, after a long separation, the
heavenly lovers will celebrate a spiritual marriage in the presence of a multitude of angels. "Of All the Souls that Stand Create" (No.1.p.no.61) is perhaps the best among the many poems dealing with this heavenly marriage.

It uses the framework of the Last Judgment. After much pain and denial she is convinced that eternity will vindicate her selection. She claims that she has chosen the best bridegroom, the one soul whose value can be recognized only in eternity. Utilizing the doctrine of election and God’s irresistible grace, she finally cries out for all to view the one person, the atom, she has chosen. Interwoven throughout the poem is the basic contrast between temporal life and eternity. She can be compared, in this context, to Akkamahadevi who seeks her husband in lord Chennamallikarjuna.

In a poem “Title Divine-is mine!” (No.1072) blends spiritual love and human passion more inherently. Here the ritual of an actual marriage without the human bridegroom is fully developed so that one can almost feel the human passion being transformed into divine love. “Given in Marriage unto thee” (No.189) where actual marriage is banished for a complete heavenly union. Now there is no
hint of human love, only the blissful serenity of a numb
voicing her vows to the bridegroom Christ.

Such was opinion of the traditional, personal god.
Her real reverence, the reverence that made her a mystic
poet of the finest kind, was reserved for nature. Nature
seemed to her a more obvious and more beautiful evidence
of divine will than creeds and churches. Nature she saw,
observed, and loved with a burning simplicity and passion.

Many of Dickinson's conventional Nature-poems
praise Nature as "the gentlest mother", who soothes and
comforts her bruised children.

"Her real reverence, the reverence that made her a mystic
poet of the finest sort, was reserved for nature, which seemed to her a
more manifest and more beautiful evidence of Divine will than
creeds and churches. This she saw observed, and loved, with a
burning simplicity and passion which nevertheless did not exclude
her very agile sense of humour"!

Some of Dickinson's poems emphasize Nature's
decaying and corruptive power. Death lies at the core of
Nature, continually threatening man with extinction. Many
poems like "the morning after Woe" (No.364) # and 'I
dreaded that first Robin, so" (No.348) # analyze Nature's
betrayal of those hearts that love her best. In a poem about
the frost's killing a flower, "Apparently with no Surprise"
she even questions if Nature has any meaning at all, because a universe that proceeds indifferently and is untouched by such crimes haunts one with terror.

The destructive power of Nature's winds, rains, and lightning-storms also impressed Dickinson. But her chief response to Nature was a fascination with its continual change, the daily passage of the sun, the sudden alterations wrought by storms, the miracle of spring-growth, and the deceptive appearance of summer. The unusual and the odd aspects of Nature attracted her, and she transmutes unpoetic subjects like crickets, flies, weeds, and rats into art. She qualifies her genuine enthusiasm for the beauty of external Nature with an awareness of its innate mystery and strangeness. Never certain of any clear correspondence among God, Nature, and Man, she remained a skeptic who both admired and doubted. Dickinson refuses to employ nature as a guide for moral behavior. She shows too an unusual skill in presenting sensuous impressions. Her poems on birds, flowers, insects and natural processes rarely become didactic or insist upon divine analogues.

The drama of sunset particularly attracted her. One poem, "I'll Tell you how the sun Rose" (No.318) uses a series of action verbs and domestic images to convey the
quick surprise and changing colours of the dawn. One more poem about the same subject is “Blazing in gold and Quenching in Purple” (No.228) # it deals with the dramatic occurrences of summer rains and lightning storms. A later storm poem, ‘There Came a Wind like a Bugle” (No.1593) # enlarges the feeling of reverence and surprise that any life can survive such onslaughts.

Dickinson loved flowers and had a great knowledge of them than of any other item in Nature, though her poems on rose, buttercup, and daisy are generally conventional and sentimental. Only a poem on the arbutus has the freshness and precise detail that distinguishes her best work;

Pink-small-and punctual-
Aromatic-low
Covert-in April-
Candid-on May-(No.1332) #

These clipped, humorous adjectives focus our attention on the furtive beauty of this early spring arrival. Some of Dickinson’s best nature poems pertain to bees, birds, and insects. She was particularly fond of bees and delighted in caricaturing their incessant activity. A light poem, “A Bee his burnished Carriage,” (No.1339) #
describes the honey gathering process as the frank seduction of quivering rose.

However her most famous nature portrait is that of the humming bird in the poem, “A Route of Evanescence,” (No.1463) # which, besides registering a vivid poetic response to nature, also conveys Dickinson’s sense of the mystery and elusiveness of nature.

In her best nature poems, Dickinson skillfully deepens her concrete detail and sensuous surface-imagery by contrasting the world of man with that of Nature. For example, the poem, “A Bird Came Down the Walk” (No.33.p.no.104) ## can be read literally as an exact description of the quick, furtive movements of a bird as it eats, hops about, and then flies gracefully away. By the final stanza the tone develops into one of awe and aesthetic response to the bird’s beautiful flight. Yet various undercurrents of fear takes deeper into the poem, for the bird’s initial casualness changes into hesitancy and suspicion.

One group of Dickinson’s nature poems deals with the neglected and grotesque aspects of nature, the rat, the mushroom, the fly, the bat, the snake, the weeds, the
frog, the stones, the spider, and the caterpillar. Dickinson makes them live before us. The lighter, humorous, side of nature’s off-shoots is depicted in the poem, “The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants” (No.1298) # Making use of the fairy associations connected with elves, she whimsically explores the illusory, transitory qualities that underlie nature’s surface. In “the Rat is the consistent Tenant” (No.1356) ## an odd creature mocks man’s complacent trust in law and social patterns. The poem, “A narrow Fellow in the Grass,” (No.986) ## contains a disturbing investigation of nature’s mystery. Here Dickinson examines the terror and awe that the presence of a snake can give rise to. The snake in the poem develops into a symbol of the unknown. A sense of hidden terror behind nature’s surface-beauty fascinates and frightens the onlooker.

The seasonal cycle had also a great appeal for Dickinson. The miracle of the barren winter containing the seeds of fruitful summer and the rich crops foretelling the death of harvest never ceased to fascinate her. But she realized that no one could fully understand nature’s processes and so she restrained her enthusiastic response to the change of seasons with undertones of this mystery.
Spring was of course her favored season, since it displayed the wonder of rebirth and openly promised the warm beauty of summer. The poem, "New Feet within my Garden go," (No.99) though fully considers the whole cycle of the seasons, the opening stanza here expresses the poetess's wonder at the first stirrings of plant life and the initial song of a bird. In the second stanza her pleasure diminishes as she contrasts the new children playing upon the green with the new dad sleeping in their graves. Finally, her joyous response to spring is muted by the knowledge that it only a part of a complete cycle that punctually arrives and leads again to winter.

Dickinson's only memorable poem on summer deals with the sense of loss that summer's departure brings, "As imperceptibly as grief-the summer lapsed away" (No.1540). The season of winter never had much appeal for Dickinson, even though she wrote two imaginative descriptions of a winter snowstorm; "It shifts from Leaden Sieves," (No.311) and "Like Brooms of Steel."(No.1252).

Dickinson constantly examined man's relation to the world of natural phenomena. She did not resort to any easy
religious affirmation or indulge in excessive romantic enthusiasm. She looked closely at natural objects, contemplated their functions, and recorded her responses with scrupulous exactness.

All Dickinson’s best nature-poems continually challenge and invite new readings, and will therefore continue to fascinate as long as there are sensitive readers of poetry. Her unique approach to the external beauty of nature, the power of storms, the strangeness of creation, the fleeting aspects of the material, and the mystery of the seasonal process fully demonstrate that even the most neglected and hackneyed subjects can be revitalized by genius.

Many of Dickinson’s poems are also concerned with the creator, the redeemer, with death and immortality. These are themes which might be described as mystical in nature because mysticism involves a deep, almost obsessive, concern with such problems as death, the existence of the soul, immortality, the existence of God and heaven, salvation or redemption, etc.

Mysticism also means the capacity to establish a spiritual contact with God. The mystic is a visionary who
claims to hold a direct communion with the divine spirit. A glance at the themes of Dickinson's poetry reveals an extreme preoccupation with the effect of death, the nature of the soul, the problem of immortality, the possibility of faith, and the reality of God. But these poems do not belong to the body of that literature which is based on the search of the mystic for God and for union with Him. There is faith, certainty, and religious conviction; but nowhere do we find that effort at a complete identification with the Divine spirit which motivates the true mystic. Dickinson certainly believes in God and in the things of the spirit which motivates the true mystic, but we cannot say that her belief was enriched by any contemplative vision of God or even by a desire for such a vision.

Death and heaven were the objects of constant speculation with Dickinson, almost to the point of obsession, but her speculation was not that communion with the divine which the mystic longs for. Her speculation was imaginative and entirely based upon sensory experience. Metaphysical thoughts are found in many of her poems. Sizeable numbers of poems have the word death occurring in them. There are scores of other poems in which there are words
associated with the effects of death, grave, funeral, bereavement, etc.

Emily Dickinson knew that the theme of death has always its sickening unpleasantness. She keeps out of her poetry the groans and convulsions of death. There is very little mourning in sack cloth and ashes. She has instead long rides in death’s chariot, lying in the cozy comfort of alabaster chambers, her euphemism for finely-built tombs. And her poetical persons die like some knights of old, or a mantle clock stops all of a sudden. She associates death with such things as a fly buzzing, or a fast moving chariot. Death is at her hands stripped of some of its sinister associations.

Emily makes good use of death an array of metaphysical implements like wit and farfetched conceits. Yet she never allows herself to draw for a long time upon this fund. Emily, for all her greater powers of perception and poetic skill, is still in essence like any man. Her several attitudes to death merely correspond to the attitude to death of several others. She visualizes death as the river Nile, or as a chariot with rumbling wheels, going about gathering people. It is the very same fancy which supposes death to
be an alabaster chamber in which the dead people carry on what remains to be spoken of their earthly days.

Emily seems from her childhood to have had certain unaccountable associations of feelings and words. This would explain Emily's buzzing flies in association with death in "I heard a fly buzz when I died" (No.40.p.np.168) ##. In "A thought went up my mind today/that I have had before" (No.4.p.no.4) ## she is again trying to express in words such an amorphous thought.

The wrangle in Emily's mind and the resulting observations on death are rarely those of a pagan. Any Christian sect promotes thoughts of a life after death. This modifies Emily's thought to a certain extent. The poem - The fact that earth is heaven/whether heaven is heaven or not, contains her doubts about the existence of a heaven as conceived by Christian fathers. She is puritan in her doubts and assertions.

To get an idea of her range and variety of attitudes to death, an examination of some poems is necessary. The manner of death of an individual, the psychic distance death creates between the dead and the living, the quaint feeling one gets when a mound of newly turned earth has
feeling one gets when a mound of newly turned earth has gone up over a friend’s grave—all are treated in her poems. In a poem like “Apparently with no Surprise” (No.19.p.no.98) makes no life after death explicitly plain. Man is not exactly dying; he/she is getting killed just as flowers get accidentally beheaded by winter frost. The poem has definite fatalistic overtones. In a later poem Dickinson affirms a strong faith in a life after death,

This world is not a conclusion
A sequel stands beyond
Invisible as music
But a positive sound (No.1.p.no.147)

She is here a superior person in having made this discovery for herself. She is conscious of great philosophers being ignorant of it, scholars puzzling over it. Several times in her poetry Emily seems ‘half in love’ with death. She woos it, has ‘soft names’ for it, but never quite gives into the temptation to end herself.

In Emily’s eyes death is a struggle too. She gives this last battle the colouring of some medieval crusade. Medieval knights went to Jerusalem either to win the battle or to perish fighting. So before entering upon the
sweat and toil of this blood feud with Saracens, the nobles signed away their estates and other possessions at home. This freed them from all home-thoughts. The following lines in “I heard a fly buzz when I died” (No.40p.no.168) ## have great relevance. Before going to witness the king in his power

I willed my keepsakes signed away
What portion of me I could make assignable.

Dickinson has only a few poems that are blatantly religious in tone. Religions represent death as a passing from one stage to another. They have led to a diminution of death’s importance, death being regarded as a portal. In one poem Dickinson imagines herself as one to whom Jesus vouchsafed assurance that she would never die. Assuming a fervently religious air, she draws a distinction between the two sets of people: “a sort that shall not taste of death” and another which die to perish. Salvation and damnation are here distinctly eluded each other.

Dickinson thinks that death is an intensifier of the senses. Death means for her a kind of duality. In dying
the senses are high strung with activity in a body whose corporeal activity is laid at rest. The "Chariot" gives a sample of this experience. The poet is riding in death's chariot. The chariot's passing by schools where children are at play and over roads. Fringing cornfields is all part of a poetic way of saying that the dying man recalls in review his childhood days. Early recollections come with an unprecedented clarity when death summons them. "It was just this time last year I died" is another poem in point.

Dickinson's efforts at conceiving eternity in a clear fashion are found in several of her poems. She reaches the conclusion that in one's life time a consciousness of eternity is all that one can have. But what is winsome in her probing of eternity is a big hope that man after death will proceed to know of it firsthand. Her conception of the whole thing is as if man's life on earth were a short rest and recreation only. Eternity is the thing man is made for. Going into eternity, she says in one poem, is like an inland soul, living among the mountains, going to sea. Such a man's jubilation over being a league out on the sea will not be within a sailor's grasp. The sailor has had the ocean to a sickening satiety.
It is rarely that in poetry one comes across Dickinson's sort of playful attitude to death. dim sounding as the idea of going to heaven is, it is a sure thing, says Dickinson in 'Going to Heaven' (No.13.p.n.152) ##. It is as natural as flocks going home at night. In a playful stroke of her fancy, Dickinson has this prayer to make to those who are first getting to heaven.

"If you should get there first,
Save just a little place for me
Close to the two I lost" (No.13.P.N.152)##

She is in no haste, for this earth has many more attractions enticing her to stay. Death offered Dickinson a fine escape from the ills of life. When the dark clouds gathered in her mind's sky and thunder crashed, she wished to die.

The great pathos of death is well brought out by the poem -A Dying Tiger Mourned for Drink. It is the dead that do not murmur plaintively.

Sometimes she calls death with soft names like a chariot with plush seats, a calm ocean, an autumn frost, etc. Death is at her hands less gruesome and is devoid of
much of its unpleasantness. It is an experience like dozing off to sleep.

Dickinson saw around her people shedding unavailing tears for the dead often as a mechanical act. A realistic mood Dickinson satirizes man’s hypocrisy. She suggests that tears be better shed for the living. For it is the living who for all their miseries and toils deserve sympathies. Before they too are dead, let us haste to sympathies with them, give them some encouragement. It would be both an act of charity and labour of love.

The several poems of Dickinson do not have such consistency. Death is to her at once a welcome thing and an odious thing. Her strong faith in a life after death is often offset by an equally strong skepticism. Half dozen times at least she talks of death as a destroyer of all beautiful things.

In a short poem of just three tightly-set lines Dickinson contemplates man’s powerlessness to dodge death. If it were possible not even a beggar would give into death. She writes:
Oh thou unknown renown
That not a beggar would accept
Had he 'the power to spurn!

The "unknown renown" is her pregnant phrase for death. The theme, 'death the leveller', through a commonplace of poetry is newly clothed in Dickinson's poetry. Off and on an undercurrent of humour offers itself as a relief. The way she counterpoises the element of death in "The bustle in a House" (19.p.no.155) by a little humour is fairly admirable.

The common run of people considers death at best as a curse and a misfortune. But Dickinson for one would desire for her true friend in one of her enthusiastic moments an early death. Death was for her a welcome.

Some of Dickinson's figures of death are happy. One instance in which death appears as a supple suitor. He begins wooing people in a very subtle and stealthy manner. Once he has gathered courage he dares to make bold advances. He is not very well mannered. His morality admits at times a little assault even. The picture emerging from the poem -Death is the supple suitor, is of death as a semi barbarian.
One string of thought that we frequently come across in Dickinson's poetry is rather an uncommon one. She imagines herself as dead, this 'negative capability' enables her to look beyond some of the cramping limitations a living man is subject to. "Just lost when I was saved", (No.92.p.no.38) is a poem having some relevance. Dickinson speaks in this poem as a person who has just returned from the periphery of eternity. She has almost dies and gone, when breath blew back and restored her to life. She is presently a different sort of person, possible the only one alive who can narrate the secrets of eternity.

Frequent thoughts of death may in some cases have a purging effect on the human soul. They may act as a check on some of man's turbulence. Without exaggeration one might say that even a cursory glance at Dickinson's poetry will bring home the notion of her being too much pre-occupied with death. She has whole pages smelling of death. The mystery of death continued to haunt her mind all through her life. Death and love raised many questions in her mind, and she answered them asking the same questions in other forms or resolved them in paradoxes. Love might be the crowning glory of life, but one becomes
fully aware of such transcendent value only when confronted with its extinction in death. She tried to believe in immortality but could not rally make up her mind, so that her attitude in her poems remains ambivalent.

With her religious bent of mind and her Calvinistic upbringing, Dickinson’s preoccupations with death and immortality are perfectly understandable. Her letters and perms continually referred to the problems of faith, the identity of the soul, and the reality of god. The death of many great poets the problem of immortality taxed her inquiring mind, while her perplexity with its mystery became the cause of poetic tension in her. Almost any aspect of belief and of doubt can be found in her writings on immortality. She desired immortality, asserting that the soul never changed. And yet she denied the orthodox vision of paradise and even feared that eternity would be cosmic annihilation.

She wondered if paradise could ever surpass earthly beauty or human love. Her confidence that love endured beyond the grave supported her hope of immortality. Though never certain that death was the threshold of immortality, she firmly believed that the soul’s identity could not be lost. Indeed she surveyed every area of the
domain of immortality, examining its relations with death
and life, satirizing its solemnity, depicting is terrible
Although some of her poems express her religious doubt,
the majority accepts God as a true personality whom she
could love, hate, joke with, and be irritated by. Mainly she
accepted God as the omnipotent ruler and respected the
supreme majesty of God's person. But that does not mean
that she had no doubts or that she did not waver.

Death, the ultimate experience, is for Dickinson the
supreme touchstone. It reveals ultimate truth or reality; it
makes clear the true nature of God and the state of the soul.
She held the common puritan belief that the way a person
died indicted the state of his or her soul, a peaceful death
being a sign of grace and harmony with God. Death is
personified in many guises in her poems. Ranging from a
suitor to a tyrant. Her attitude is ambivalent; death is a
terror to be feared and avoided, a trick played on humanity
by god, a welcome relief, and blessed way to heaven.

Immortality is often related to death. In a number
of her religious poems Dickinson considers the relation of
human love and earthly experiences to life in paradise.
Even god himself, she felt, saw dependent on human love
for complete happiness. Her poem “I'll never Felt at
Home-Below’ (No.413) # states that she doubts if heaven will please her, since only saints will be there. Certainly her best poems about religion are witty comments on conventional piety and orthodox beliefs. She ridicules the weekly churchgoers in the poem ‘Some keep the Sabbath going to Church’ (No.324) #. In another poem she ridicules the historical significance of the Bible and the orthodox insistence on doom and damnation; “the bible is an antique volume” (No.1545) #. Here ‘antique’ means something out-dated and impractical, rather than rare or precious. Like other history books, the Bible was not written by inspired prophets but by men who have faded with the passing of centuries. The weak urgings of specters rather than divine inspiration prompted their writing. Thus she here reduces the entire concept of the Bible’s truth and sacredness to the level of ghost-stories and unconvincing inventions.

Another poem, “No Crowd that has Occurred” (No.515) # deals with the Last Judgment. The poem opens with an ironic blend of humour and disbelief which soon change into a complete and solemn acceptance. At the Last Judgment, the resurrected body rejoins the supreme soul to await its individual sentence. “I Taste a Liquor
never Brewed" (No.214) # describes, through a drinking metaphor, the ecstasy that accompanies a revelation. The exaggerated phrases convey the divine exhilaration of this insight. "The soul’s Superior Instants" (No.306) # makes use of images of regality and elusiveness to describe that moment of exhilaration. The theme of this poem is that the most significant experience in life remains that most intangible and fleeting. The poem concludes with only a few ever perceive the vision of immortality.

But her finest poem on the philosophic implications of this vision is ‘Behind me dips Eternity” (No.721) # which relates immortality and death. This poem focuses attention on the moment of death as the soul hovers between chaos and eternity. Perhaps Dickinson’s most typical approach to the problem of immortality is seen in the poem “This world is not Conclusion” (No.501) # after a definite assertion of belief, the poem explores the perplexing inability of philosophers, scholars, and saints to prove adequately the truth of immortality.

Another approach to immortality is provided by the poem, “A Solemn Thing within the Soul” (No.483) #.
Here the image of fruit ripening in the sun reveals the confidence and tranquility produced by faith. This poem conveys perfect resignation and serene submission to God’s will. Two other poems, ‘Though the Great Waters Sleep” (No.1599) # and “my Cocoon Tightens” (No.1099) #, also describe the certainty of immortality.

“Two Lengths has Every Day” (No.1295) # logically argues that the identity of the soul cannot be lost in immortality. This poem examines a common psychological experience, namely that the soul not only realistically perceives an object but imaginatively creates its full impression. So each day has two lengths, an absolute one of twenty-four hours, and an ‘area superior’ which depends upon a soul’s mood.

Arguing from this basic truth, the poetess says that eternity will be similar, either an active, evolving existence or a static, suspended state. The final stanza asserts that death will not destroy the soul or even change its identity, for man’s individual consciousness will guide his journey to immortality. “Those Not Live Yet” (No.1454) # is one of her most confident statements about the existence of the soul after death. It triumphantly asserts that death brings no substantial change. The other
poem, ‘Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (No.216) # is one of Dickinson’s fine lyrics on the ambiguous relation of death and immortality. Neither the terror of death nor the assurance of immortality is presented here. The poem offers only a sense or the sublimity and isolation that death brings.

In her poems on immortality, Dickinson reveals not only her religious depth and perceptive insight into spiritual reality but also her artistic ability in employing both skepticism and faith as a strategy to increase the dramatic tension of her poems.

A large number of Dickinson’s poems investigate the nature of pain, its stages, its effects upon the human soul, and finally its relation with death. These poems dealing with misery, anguish, and despair are closely related to her philosophy of life.

The knowledge of pain became for her a touchstone for estimating the depth of a human soul. The poem “I Measure every Grief I Meet” (No.61.p.no.27) ## presents her philosophy of pain and analyses its specific characteristics, primarily she notes that true pain becomes such an essential part on one’s being that its departure causes a deeper loneliness in the soul since pain’s intensity
is harsh, one can never master it, nor even hope that time will moderate its power. Yet pain has its value. It provides the victim with enlightenment to a larger pain many of her poems on pain deal with the moment after a near disaster. These poems show her preoccupation with moments of change and her fascination with the border-line between life and death.

Another poem, “It was not Death, for I stood up” (No.36.p.no.164) ## examines the state of shock and numbness that extreme grief causes. Many of the poems on pain bypassed its underlying causes to examine its physical and emotional effects. Rather than deal with extreme psychological tension, they stressed the courage required to endure the burden of pain. Once the initial shock receded the more difficult task of living with this death-in-life began. In “I dreaded that first Robin, so” (No.61.p.no.120) ## the soul waits for external nature to mirror its misery, only to observe all the beauties of spring unfolding to mock the victim’s bereaved state. Noting that not a single blossom sympathetically defers to her martyrdom, she concludes that nature is basically indifferent and that man is isolated from its harmony.
Dickinson’s finest poem about pain is “After great pain, a formal feeling comes”.( 341) # Here the soul’s numbed response after a weakening shock illustrates a fundamental law: that pain is an unavoidable aspect of human existence, the overall form of this poem exhibits the death throes of various parts of the body—the nerves, the heart, and the feet. The dull instinctive reactions of the system gradually subside to a static frozen immobility. The poem describes a person who is alive yet insensible, a living organism frozen in eternal numbness. This is the way one experiences pain by a complete death of the senses and a freezing of all hope and activity.

Dickinson knew how small a part ecstasy made in the sum total that constituted life. Her impulse was to give weightage to pain. The pleasure-pain antithesis runs through many of her poems. As ‘water is taught by thirst,’ (No.117, p.no.196) so joy is taught by suffering. In other words, she takes full advantage of contrast as a mode of definition. As she says “Delight becomes pictorial” (No.572). # In a poem made up entirely of such contrasts, in terms of intensity and duration, she says: “For each ecstatic instant”. (No.125) #
There is a wide range of pain explored in her poetry. She separates the lesser pain, that will heal, from the greater pain that will not, and she chooses the latter category as her special concern, noting with precession its qualities and above all its effects. Her obsession with the theme of extreme pain has given rise to the feeling that some personal experience of unusual intensity was at the root of it. Perhaps she experienced an extreme emotional and psychological crisis.

A number of poems seem to be related to a loss in love, but there is no certainty. Two of her better poems on the pain of renunciation deal, respectively, with the acceptance of loss as an inescapable part of the human condition, and with the sheer quality of the resulting agony. In both, the specific event of a love-parting is reduced to a generalized idea of deprivation. The first of these is “I Should have Been too, Glad, I see” (No.313) # in which she says that one cannot escape from the “little circuit’ of petty realities by leaping directly into a ‘new circumference’. The other poem ‘the Auctioneer of Parting” (No.1612) # describes the nature of despair itself rather than the story of how she rebelled against it or finally accepted it. In this poem she boldly adapts the great
Christian symbol of Crucifixion to human agony. Contrary to many romantic poets, she found no healing balm in Nature for human agony.

The absolute cleavage between man and the external world was one of her basic convictions. The indifference of Nature to man’s plight is her theme in many poems. Perhaps her best poem on the theme of human suffering confronted by Nature’s gay parade is the one that begins: “I dreaded that first Robin, so” (No.348) #. Here nature’s indifference threatens at several points to break out into open hostility, but a close reading proves that she does not commit the error of endowing Nature with life or consciousness. On the contrary she makes deliberate use of emotional extravagance to create a sense of nightmare. She fears that the sounds of spring would ‘mangle’ her that its colours would ‘pierce’ her, and so on. Nature is not only personified but shown to be on the war path. The poet’s soul is so hypersensitive that it can be wounded by anything.

The pain that Dickinson explores in her major poems is of a kind from which the victim never fully recovers. Furthermore, her best poetry is concerned not with the causes but with the qualities of pain. In several minor
poems she uses time as a measure of degree in defining that extremity of pain which was her real concern. Extreme pain changes the very nature of time, as she pointed out in the poem; “Pain expands the time...pain contracts the time” (No.967) #. In other words, pain makes the clock and the calendar meaningless. Pain is thus a quality of being that exists outside time and space, the only two terms in which it can possibly be externalized.

In the most extraordinary of poems of this category, she projects the abstract concept of death as inflicted on the consciousness by despair. The poem is ‘I Read my Sentence-Steadily” (No.412) # in which she vividly depicts a court-room scene of nightmare. The victim is on trial for his life, though for some nameless crime. The machinery of a relentless judicial procedure grinds to its conclusion in a kind of wordless horror. The legal language, concentrated in the first half, not only sets the scene but controls the meanings throughout. The speaker in the poem is the one condemned to death. He is aware that the whole ritual is simply a nightmarish image of another and worse kind of death, the dying of consciousness under the pressure of despair. But he has lost his sense of identity, and this is what accounts for his
apparent apathy. His detachment is such that he can read his own death sentence as if it applied to someone else.

Her best poems on the extremity of pain, the kind producing a state of trance, made its quality of spiritual death concrete in terms of physical death and at the same time dramatise it in the ritual of burial. In ‘I felt a funeral, in my Brain’ (No.280) #, the levels of sinking down to unconsciousness follow step by step the ceremony of a real burial.

There are two kinds of death, apart from the death of the soul in the theological sense of despair. One may literally die away from the world, but Dickinson never made the mistake of trying to embody her own demise in a serious poem. On the other hand, the world may die away from the perceiving consciousness under stress of pain, and the resulting death to the spirit can be experienced and rendered. Such pain overwhelmed Dickinson during her last years, as death took an increasing toll of the members of her small intimate circle. In the poem mentioned above she projects her imagined spiritual death from excessive pain.

The poems of Emily Dickinson published in a series of three volumes at various intervals after her death in
1886. Many of her poems have been reprinted in anthologies, selections, textbooks for recitation, and they have increasingly found their elect and been best interpreted by the expansion of those lives they have seized upon by force of their natural, profound intuition of the miracles of everyday life, love, and death. She herself was of the part of life that is always youth, always magical, she wrote of it as she grew to know it, step by step, discovery by discovery, truth by truth until time merely became eternity.

She was pre-eminently the discoverer eagerly hunting the meaning of it all this strange world in which she wonderingly found herself, surmising what laid beyond the purple horizon. She lived with a God we do not believe in, and trusted in an immortality we do not deserve. Her aspect of Deity, as her intimation, was her own, unique, peculiar, unimpaired by the brimstone theology of her day. Her poems reflect the direct relation toward the great realities. All truth came to Emily straight form honor to honor unimpaired. She never trafficked with falsehood seriously, never employed a deception in thought or feeling of her own. This pitiless sincerity dictated:
"I like a look of agony
Because I know it’s true
Men do not sham convulsion
Nor simulate a throe" (12, p.no.152)

As light after darkness, summer follows winter, she is inevitable, unequivocal. Her entities were vast—though her words were few; those words like dry-point etching or frost upon the pane doubly accepted, every event, and every object seemed to hold for her both its actual and imaginative dimension. By this power she carries her readers behind the veil obscuring less gifted apprehension. She even descends over the brink of the grave to toy with the outworn vesture of the spirit, recapture the dead smile on lips surrendered forever; then, as on the wings of Death, betakes herself and her reader in the direction of the escaping soul to new, incredible heights.

‘Mystic to mystic, mind to mind, spirit to spirit, dust to dust. She was at the source of things and dwelt beside the very springs of life, yet those deep wells from which she drew were of the wayside, though their waters were of eternal truth, her magnificent one of the certainties of every immortal being’. (article-1 from net).

The poems of the 1850s are fairly conventional in sentiment and form, but beginning about 1860 they
become experimental both in language and prosody, though they owe much to the meters of the English hymn writers Isaac Watts and to Shakespeare and the King James’ Version of the Bible. Dickinson's prevailing poetic form was the quatrain of three iambic feet, a type described in one of the books by Watts in the family library.

She used many other forms as well, and to even the simpler hymnbook measures she gave complexity by constantly altering the metrical beat to fit her thought: now slow, now fast, now hesitant. She broke new ground in her wide use of off-rhymes, varying from the true in a variety of ways that also helped to convey her thought and its tensions in striving for an epigrammatic conciseness; she stripped her language of superfluous words and saw to it that those that remained were vivid and exact. She tampered freely with syntax and liked to place a familiar word in an extraordinary context, shocking the reader to attention and discovery. (Article-2)

Like John Keats, Dickinson is a passionate poet, though in seclusion, she lived a passionate life. Within the confines of the family home, the garden, and her circle of family and friends, she felt with her whole
heat, thought with intensity, and imagined with ardor, and she shared herself in her poetry and in her letters. Her intensity is reflected in the dramatic quality of both her poetry and her life.

Writing poetry may have served Dickinson as a way of releasing or escaping from pain of the deaths of loved ones, from her inability to resolve her doubts about God, from the terrors, however faint, she saw within herself and others and in the world outside yet nearby. Like John Keats, Dickinson saw writing poetry as an exalted calling and dedicated her life to poetry. And like him she was concerned with the transitory and the permanent, with mortality and immortality, though her views and her poetry differ from his. Dickinson was concerned with the essence of living. She distilled or eliminated the inessential from experience until what was left was pure. What was left was the quality that made the thing or experience itself, that distinguished it from all other things or experiences. In her poems, Dickinson adopts a variety of persons, including a little girl, a queen, a bride, a bridegroom, a wife, a dying woman, a nun, a boy, and a bee. Though nearly 150 of her poems begin with 'I', the speaker is probably fictional, and the poem should not
automatically be read as autobiography. Dickinson’s attitude towards religion and spiritual matters is poetic rather than philosophical. A note of mysticism runs throughout the poetry Dickinson. She is not a pure mystic poet because she combines realism and mysticism in her poetry. In her poems eternity, immortality, heaven, paradise are not words which she makes fine distinction. She deals with the problems of Death, Immortality, Eternity, Heaven, God and Body-soul from a critical and not a superstitious perspective. Dickinson is a liberal religious thinker whose approach to religion is anti-traditional.

Dickinson’s vision of life is quite tragic. It is tragic because it is filled with pains and sufferings. A note of melancholy runs throughout her death poems which intensifies its tragic intensity. The continuous and untimely loss of family members and friends has added to her tragic plight. Dickinson’s mind is always haunted by the fear of death and this has immensely coloured her vision of life. Thus, Dickinson’s faith in the sanctity of the material life has suffered a severe set-back.

Dickinson consciously withdrew from the society of her times to realize her artistic goals. She never felt lonely
and depressed in her self-imposed isolation. She showed no desire to interact with the males of the society of her times. She utilized her isolation for the realization of her ambitious artistic ends. She had found sufficient space and freedom to write in a focused manner in her privacy.

When Dickinson shut herself away from the world and lived as a recluse, the world brought forward the explanation that she was taking flight from an unhappy love affairs. It is sensible to assume that frustration in love was not the real reason that made the sensitive soul of Dickinson to retire from the real world around her. The explanation must be sought for in the deeply serious nature of the poet, deep fountain within, capable of nourishing and sustaining her. Her poetry reveals her as a mystic in the true sense of the word, a person of far keener perceptions than the people of the mundane world around her.

The great mystic need not be conventional in religion. Often it is the other way. In their clear perception of truth, mystic poets do not require the help of dogma. One important thing that strikes the readers of Dickinson’s poetry is her spirit of religious unorthodoxy. She shared Emerson’s individualism and in the poem ‘Keeping the
Sabbath’ she makes it clear that she rules more on her soul to lead her to Heaven and to God than all the sermons and church goings that conventional religion recommends.

Like the romantic poets Blake and Coleridge, Dickinson discarded Reason and replied more on intuition and imagination. The poet Blake asserted;

"the world of Imagination is the world of Eternity.... The world of Imagination is infinite and Eternal."^2

Dickinson belongs to the same romantic world.

There is a playfulness and irreverence in Dickinson’s attitude towards God that runs contrary to the puritan attitude towards him. In her poems she refers to him as ‘a noted clergyman’ and superficially salutes him as ‘Burglar, Banker, Father.’ But in spite of her scornful attitude to the traditional picture of the Puritan’s God. We find in her true piety and a deep faith in Heaven and Immortality. This faith is given expression to in the poem “I Never Saw a Moor'(NO.127, P.No.199)##

For clear understanding of Dickinson’s greatness as a mystic poet one has to go to her poem entitled-Life, Time and Eternity. The idea of immortality hovered round the poet and saved her musings on death from becoming morbid. Her evolution as a poet is marked
by her early leaning towards graveyardism, and her gradual shift towards the Emersonian belief in the largeness and harmony of nature. At times she seems to be filled with terror while contemplating her destiny. Out of anguish caused by her contemplation of life has come the poem ‘My Life has Stood a loaded Gun’ (No.754)# a great poem an allegory whose reverberations are infinite, an in great music. This perhaps Dickinson’s best poetic statement about the explosive power which can only be released by another. The concept of the active male hunter possessing the passive woman guides the whole poem. Once he leaves, she reverts to her inactive gun state.

In trying thus to express what defies expression, the mystical poet often resorts to the use of symbols. Dickinson too employs terrible symbols to convey her profound impression. She compares the experiences of Suffering to dying of cold. Escaping from suffering is like getting away from the clutches of a fierce monster more dead than alive.

Two pieces where her power of using symbols is at its finest are "My life had stood a Loaded Fun" and "The Chariot." Indeed Dickinson was a visionary to whom truth
came with exclusive finality and who sought to give expression to these truths in images of startling clarity. She was a mystical poet of commendable merit.

Dickinson had never the slightest desire to publish her poems. She cared neither for fame nor for success. She was a young woman who loved and experienced all areas of life so intensely that the very heat and intensity of her sensations are passed on to the poetry she composed. To her, writing poetry was an outlet, a safety-valve that saved her from being destroyed entirely by the poignancy of her emotional crisis. That is why her poems are highly personal and they throb with her emotions.

The wider significance of her poetry lies in the fact that despite the deeply personal element, Dickinson has succeeded in giving too much of her verse universality. She grappled with her personal feelings and in the process transformed them into something general and applicable to the entire struggling humanity. The philosophy that Dickinson evolved out of her experiences and observation of life is also her own.

Though she referred to the Bible, to Shakespeare and to other writers such as Whitman, Keats, the Browning and others, yet she priced and maintained her
individuality. Her poetry helped to preserve her individuality and afforded her an adequate release for her pent up yearnings which could have upset her balance in a disastrous way. Withdrawn from the world, she mastered the art of self-introspection and her delicate analysis of emotion finds artistic expression in her poems. The hidden areas of the soul fascinated her and she had to grapple with her own passionate nature and resolve her mental conflicts.

In her love poems we find a frank record of her personal sorrow and misery. The crisis in her life was so devastating that if she did not have her poetry she would have been rendered insane. Rather than escape life, she confronted it on the most trying battleground- in her own spirit and mastered it through her art. In more ways than one her poetry was her triumphant.

Her religious verse also is an expression of her individual faith. Her refusal to conform to the religious enthusiasm of her age, her doubts, her open questioning, her skepticism regarding the hard dogmas about God and her playful questioning of the doctrine of regional sin are all found in her religious poetry. Dickinson was definitely oriented as her recurring themes indicate. But her
approach to religion was mystical rather than dogmatic and she relied on her own personal intuition and judgment to perceive largely her own experience rather than on classical or literary tradition for her vivid imagery and telling expressions.

Her death poems are the records of death-scenes which she witnessed too frequently. She watched numerous funeral processions passing by her door. Into her nature poetry also she brought her individuality. Her doubts appear here also for she does not accept the traditional belief that nature reflects God's divine scheme. Though her life was filled with pain and anguish she sublimated these and evolved a triumphant exhilaration of life's processes. And in doing this she was able to pass from the personal to the universal.

The charm of Dickinson lies in her unrivalled ability to convey varied states of mind through suggestive pictures. Abstractions lend themselves to pictorial treatment at the hands of the woman who was a genius. Speaking about the brain that runs efficiently the poet suggests that the slightest damage remains irremediable. This is expressed in the poem, "The brain within its groove".(No.25, P.No.12)
Emily Dickinson can be placed among any of the greatest women poets of any country. Dickinson was a visionary to whom truth came with exclusive finality and who sought to give expression to these truths in images of startling clarity. She was a mystical poet of commendable merit.
Notes:

1.# - The figures within brackets specify the number of poems from the book:


2). ## - The figures within brackets specify the number of poems from the book:

*The selected poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Wordsworth Editions Ltd,

Cumberland House, Crib Street, Ware, Hertfordshire, 1994.


4). ^2. Ibid p.no.226

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1. Dickinson Bianchi Martha, 'the poems of Emily Dickinson', Siena, March, 1924.

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