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MYSTICISM IN THE SELECT POEM AND FICTION OF EMILY DICKINSON : A PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Emily Dickinson is a great poet whose life is a tale of poetic beauty and truth – a tale always useful for the prosperity. She lived a life of simplicity, chastity and divinity. Today she is regarded as one of the greatest American poets. She is accepted as a poetess all over the world for her unorthodox attitude towards her gender, distinctive style and her forthright examination of philosophical and religious skepticism. That's why her poetry becomes most curious, mystical and distinct from the mainstream of English Poetry.

KEY WORDS:

Poem and fiction , Mysticism , Emily Dickinson.

INTRODUCTION

The most important characteristic feature of her poetry is its mystical tendency. Her life is like her poetry too. She is a poet of her own conviction like Akkamahadevi, Mirabai, Emerson, Thoreau etc. In her way she looked towards life. Her poetry reveals their remarkable divergence from the customary approach to the problems of human experience. There is something more than interrelationships of persons within a social situation, possibilities of various courses of action and facts of environment in her poetry.

There are some thinkers who think Emily is not a mystic. Such thinkers are Genevieve Taggard, Blackmur and Winters. The reasons are : she had paradoxes of duality, she did not completely experience the transcendental unit with divinity. These critics tend to regard mysticism only as a secret and exclusive cult wrapped in mystery without knowing that in everyone of us there lies an element of it. However, when one searches for a deeper reality about mysticism, the true tenets of it are available. Mysticism is according to Evelyn Underhill, 'the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit toward complete harmony with the transcendental formula under which that order is understood'. As per this interpretation, Emily Dickinson is surely a mystic poet, for the reason, much of her poetry is incomprehensible to readers. Her felt-experience transcends our observation. Nobel Todd says about her that she is a lady whom the people call the 'Myth' She is sister of Mr. Dickison and seems to be the climax of all the family oddity. She has not been outside of her own house in fifteen years, except once to see a new church, when she crept out at night and viewed it by moonlight..... She dresses wholly in white and her mind is said to be perfectly wonderful. She writes finally, but no one every sees her. Her sister... invited me to come and sing to her mother something She will be near, but unseen". She was able to contemplate and experience aspects of human existence which ordinarily escape notice. Moreover, her concern with religious thought, with death and immortality gave her stimulus to attempt to comprehend a greater, more complete knowledge than is

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possible for the rational intelligence. Thus, she had both the capability and incentive to attempt a mystical development. There are hundreds of books and thousands of articles-all unearthing her implicit mystical tendency. No doubt, she is a mystic poet.

She is just one of the non-conformists. She did not believe the Trinitarian theolog, she abandoned Calvinism; and she did not become a church member. Even she had no belief in the ways of world. She was a rebel. She is often uneasy with ecclesiastical authority, and anxious to avoid heresy. She is like Thomas Hardy, and Nietzsche the atheist. Woman of enquiring spirit unable to accept anything without a clear personal examination. She did not believe in Heaven as of God. It is observed that as long as man is in mortal body he is prone to suspect any divine objects. Atheists belong to this category of doubting. This is seen Emily's early poetry. Emily criticizes heaven :

I went to heaven _____
Twas a small town _____
Lit-with a Ruby _____
Lathed _____ with Down _____

She is unhappy about heaven when she thinks, "In heaven – they neither woo nor are given in wooing What an imperfect place ?" Following poem is another example of the same thought –

What is _____ 'Paradise' _____
Who live there _____
Are they 'Farmers', _____
Do they 'Hoe' _____
Do they know that this is 'Amherst' _____
And that I _____ am coming _____ too (Poem 215)

The following lines show that she is unhappy both with the world and with the idea of heaven.

I never felt at Home _____ Below _____
And in the handome skies
I shall not feel at Home _____ I know _____
I don't like paradise _____

Emily thinks of Jesus Christ after God and Heaven, in terms of human relationships. Her regard for the Bible was as low and earthly as her evaluation of the Son of God. In her view, the Holy Book is not at all holy book but, :

An Antique Volume
Written by Faded Men
At the suggestion of Holy specters

She who did not go to church, nor listen to holy Sermons. She was a gross non-conformist. She would not go by the appearance of things.

I took my power in my hand _____
And went against the world _____

She did not believe in the corrupt orthodox and ignorant world. Her very originality of thought, her adherence to her own life ethice and her inner religion made her hate bad elements. She tested everything whether it was given by experience or by imagination. Every house had to be searched for ghosts. Many of her poems apply to the great religious doctrines the same interrogative pressure of her own religious faith, virtually anything may be said, with some show of evidence. She may be represented as an agnostic, a skeptic, a Christian. She did grew up in a Christian family, but she was not a devout. However, once this doubt in god and heaven, hatredness for the ills of the world and other things was over, the provincial lady started to return to the faith yet in an otherworldly sense. Faith in her and she thought of God in a friendly way.

My faith is larger than the hills,
So when the hills decay,

The Rivet in the bands

Then, we find her belief in God. Like Radha, Krishna's beloved, she turns God's beloved. She thinks soon after her death, she will be one with God through her marriage with Him. This kind of speculation about the nature of death and the after-life gave Emily a new faith in the believable, comprehensible resurrection. She thinks soon after her death she will have a crown reserved for her in heaven. Therefore, she is not afraid of death's icy hand.

According to William of St. Thierry, 'Mystics claim to know the secret things of God disclosed in a particular way to their innermost self and then undertake to express their knowledge for the benefit of humanity at large. So she understands God and establishes her own rapport with him. For her, life is a form of death and once she dies, she thinks, she will get resurrection to find what she could not find in her mortal life. Mysticism is a personal religion. So mystics know God in their personal ways, which the worldly-wise can not understand. She is compared with Akkamahadevi who married to God Chennamallikarjun and with Mirabai who married with Lord Krishna. Though the world did not like her, she was not afraid of it. She who was deprived of a happy earthly life dreamed of a heavenly life. This is shown in her poem, 'I can not live with you', which secularizes Christ-centred fervor. She is religious in an entirely different sense of the word. She never followed any dogmatic customs or observed religious austerities. According to her, to be human is to be more than divine, for when Christ was divine he was uncontented till he became human. She says I have perfect confidence in God and his promises and yet I know not why, I feel that world holds a predominant place in my affection.

She believes in the Biblical precept – The kingdom of God is within us :

Who has not found the heaven below

- - - - His furniture is love. - - -

Many mystics had been social reformers. There are ample of examples – St. Joan of Arc, St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, Rolle, G.M. Hopkins etc. In fact, many of us are mystics since we have within us the seeds of mystical experience, which we detect by reflection.

Life for her brought more sorrow and happiness. This made her live in solitude, which helped her for enhancing her life with subtlety of feeling, compassion and understanding. Great suffering made her think of God as much, as death compelled her to have friends. She sings with inner sweetness like mystics Rolle, Blake, Wordsworth, Emerson and others. Her nature poetry is having mystical overtones. Her poems on the lines of hills, fresh and fragrant air, rain-bearing clouds. Flora and fauna, drive home the fact that nature is a divine embodiment.

For Emily, love is a cosmic force responsible for creation, preservation and destruction. Love realizes worldly and otherworldly. It is through love that man and woman unite with each-other. Again, through love man will get united with God. Love is eternity there. As she born and brought up in Victorian tradition accepts Neo-platonic love as the most ideal for the realization of human aspirations. In her view this living world is a shadow of divine love. The world is a divine dream or a book written by God in the wake of His love for the earthlings. Her concept of immortality is that of the primitive belief in the imperishability of the soul even after death.

In this way, much of her poetry is about the other world. She through her mystical eye, has written a species of poetry that is rarely written by others. Her poetry has become a challenge to critics for interpreting it properly. Thus, a greater portion of her poetry is related to death, divinity, salvation and immortality.

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