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1. Yugal Jyoti Borah

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## World of Death depicted in the poetry of Emily Dickinson Yugal Jyoti Borah

Assistant Professor, Department of English Marangi Mahabidyalaya

#### Abstract:

Emily Dickinson carried a tragic vision filled with pain and suffering throughout her life. A melancholic note run throughout her poems based on death and immortality. The non-stop untimely loss of her family members and friends have added to her tragic plight. It should be noted that Dickinson's mind is always haunted by the fear of death and this immensely coloured her vision of life. Thus Dickinson's faith in the sanctity of the material life suffered a severe set-back.

This study tries to discover the poet's attitude towards death. Moreover, it will cover some information on the poet's personal life in order to determine a possible explanation of the views on death. As Ruth Flanders McNaughton states in "Emily Dickinson on Death", she "usually spoke of immortality with fervour and mentioned faith with reassurance" (Page-203). Moreover, McNaughton mentions the importance of Dickinson's father. This paternal relationship is also explained in Austin Warren's critical essay "Emily Dickinson" where he asserts that "Dickinson saw her father as dominant but also distant" (Page-110). Another compelling idea in order to further understand Dickinson's poems is offered by both Warren and McNaughton, and it is her delighting in reading the mortuary accounts published in the newspaper. On the other hand, Dickinson did not feel identified neither with an agnostic nor with an atheistic view of death, but she was never afraid of death. Instead, as McNaughton puts it, "she looked forward to [death] as an adventure, the passing through a door, the answer to a riddle, the end to her own private Calvary, and perhaps – just perhaps – reunion with all her friends and relatives and especially with the man she loved" (207).

(Key notes: death, puritan, Transcendentalism, grave)

#### Introduction:

Emily Dickinson was one of the best and influential American poet. She started to write poetry around 1855, and continued for ten years. Emily Dickinson, the secluded writer, was born on December10,1846 in Amherst, Massachusetts and died on May 15, 1886 at the age 55 in Amherst, Massachestts. Because of her brilliant style and integrity of vision, Dickinson is widely considered to be one of the leading 19th-century American poets.

Emily Dickinson lived in a Christian atmosphere that put pressure on her to receive conversion, something she became obsessed with, as she felt she could not "make the required formal declaration of faith" (Ford-37). This is important, since Puritanism believed that personal conversion brought about salvation in an afterlife, thus being one of 'the elect'. "Her interest in death was an aspect of continuing and profound concern over her own salvation" (Ford-39). It seems that she tried to strongly believe, due to the stress society put on religion with little or no success. However, she was not a rebel who went against Puritanism, it just did not grow inside her. Her obsession regarding what might happen after death, therefore, appeared as major source of inspiration for her poetry.

Emily Dickinson had a deep attachment with her father Edward Dickinson, her mother. Mr. Dickinson was undeniably a religious man. He embodied the Puritan heritage and "received complete obedience from every member of his family" (Ford-42). His image commanded respect and that may be the reason why Emily Dickinson felt so much pressure to convert. Such a chief figure as her father increased Dickinson's concern towards death. In addition to this, Edward Dickinson did not encourage Emily Dickinson to read 'modern' writers such as Charles Dickens. This can be seen in a letter by Emily Dickinson from 1853: "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 Literari' who he says are nothing, compared to past generations, who flourished when he was a boy" (I, 237; emphasis original). After her father's death, her life was shaken felt devastated, because he was the only person with whom she as well as her family felt secured. It was he who made her life a religious living.

Another movement to which Dickinson was attracted to was Transcendentalism of Ralf Waldo Emerson who was one of the leaders of this movement. This philosophy created a belief in the essential unity of creation, the goodness of humanity, and the supremacy of insight over logic and

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reason. These new ideas led her to realize a lot more about life and it's ultimate destiny. The concepts of life and death turned into an obsession with Emily Dickinson which led her to spent time worrying about it as her life slowly went by instead of enjoying life and living it to its fullest.

Nevertheless, Dickinson's interest in death was also triggered by the presence of specific illnesses typical of her time. Smallpox and cholera were the main ones and as a consequence, "the death rate of youth was very high" (Ford-54). As McNaughton exposes, "Emily Dickinson's curiosity about death began when as a child she noticed that 'people went away and never came back. "She tells of this in one of her earlier poems" (Page-208). Therefore, Dickinson's awareness of death at an early age helped to develop her later obsession. Indeed, as shall be seen in a poem she dedicates to her neighbor, "she continued to show extreme concern and sympathy for families experiencing such trouble" (Ford-56). Another important fact to consider is the proximity of the Dickinson home to the cemetery, which supposed a first-hand experience of funerals and mourning for the poetess. Furthermore, she "must surely have enjoyed funerals" (McNaughton-210) as they served as a source of inspiration and helped her to generate a better understanding of death, although it was not completely satisfactory. Also used to read the death related news with keen interest in the daily newspapers. It seems Dickinson enjoyed such suspense and mystery of death and immortality. "What would death lead to? It was not a riddle, but the riddle" (Ford-76; emphasis original). In fact, she struggled all her life to find the answer to the riddle of death.

#### 2. review of literature:

Emily Dickinson has published many books, collections or volumes etc, and many other prominent writers has been written out collections on the poetess itself, now which I have collected as review of literature for my research work. Listed of books or volume names with the review of it are as following:

● Emily Dickinson, "Selected Poems". This book gives me ample knowledge about Emily Dickinson and her Poetry, who was a deeply sensitive woman who questioned the puritanical background of her Calvinist family and soulfully explored her own spirituality, often in poignant, deeply personal poetry.

Neeru Tandon and Anjana Trevedi, "Thematic patterns of Emily Dickinson's Poetry". This volume has been chosen for my research work due to having the honest efforts at reconciling the finite with the infinite without sacrificing the integrity of the humour soul, and also understanding of American poetry in general and Emily's poetry in particular.

O Joyce Carol, "The Essential Emily Dickinson". Another important book for my study work as Dickinson always shied the great subjects of human suffering, loss, death, even madness, but her perspectives was intensely private, thus inwardn

#### 3. main objectives of the proposed research work:

- Here, my main objective is to see how Emily Dickinson reveals in her poetry 'the theme of Death
   To extend Emily Dickinson's literary concerns and the various complexities of the life of a woman those are highlighted in her work.
- To study keenly on the use of 'concrete images' that portrays the main themes of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

#### 4. methodology:

This paper is completely based on descriptive method. Need base secondary data are collected from books, magazines and internet.

#### 5. discussion:

Critic like McNaughton classified Dickinson's poetry into four categories. Firstly, those dramatizing "the physical fact of death" (Page-208); secondly, "those dramatizing the pageantry of death" (208); thirdly, those that read "imaginative descriptions of the grave" (Page-208) and, finally, those regarding immortality.

Some of Dickinson's poems on death emphasize its physical aspects to illustrate the terrible emptiness which the soul's departure gives rise to. In this we may quote the *poem "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died"* (I, 465). Here, the persona is the one who is passing away and expresses the experience of dying:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – The Stillness in the Room Was like the Stillness in the Air –

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