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Poetry of Emily Dickinson in the Light of the *Bhagavad-gita*

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ABSTRACT

Emily Dickinson, now a celebrated poet, is still studied more from the subjective angles which belittle her stature than the objective ones which may contribute in highlighting her genuine poetic worth. This perspective is a modest attempt to decipher Dickinson's poetry in the light of the *Bhagavad-gita*, the flashes of which are flashed in her concept of soul, self, non-attachment, renunciation, equanimity, happiness within, removal of false ego for peace and rejection of sense objects for a higher taste. A few relevant excerpts from the *Bhagavad-gita* and Dickinson's poems have been analysed to trace out the spiritual light that reveals the path leading to her invisible connection with India. In her poems, she exhorts like Krishna of the *Bhagavad-gita* and reveals the truth of the material existence while making her journey from outside to inside. The application of the objective approach helps in bringing out the real worth of Emily Dickinson and contributes in connecting the threads of her poetry to the other parts of the world claiming for a universal appeal of her poetry.

Keywords: *Spiritual light, Self, Immortality of Soul, Life blow, Death blow, Journey within*

Emily Dickinson, who remained unknown in life, has become a celebrity in America after her death. Today she is a world poet by virtue of her unusual imaginative creativity and extraordinary poetic craft. There was a time when her poems were considered ambiguous but, now, they are being deciphered from the modern and postmodern angles. It is an irony that most of the Dickinson's scholars remained busy in unearthing her life-history through her letters and biographies, which contributed more in belittling her stature than highlighting her genuine poetic worth. The mystery whether she was a lesbian or not has nothing to do with her poetry. The scholars who realise the futility of such questions have now started taking an interest in objective view of her poetry.

This paper is a modest attempt to decipher Dickinson's poetry from the Indian point of view. Whether Dickinson was well-acquainted with Indian culture and her religious literature, particularly the *Bhagavad-Gita* is not a matter of discussion here. The flow of the reflections of the *Bhagavad-Gita* can be traced in her poetry. A reader is transported to the other world while going through her poems which offer him the feeling of universality. Here lies the greatness of Dickinson who worked minutely, imaginatively and devotedly while remaining in the particular circumference which she drew for herself.



The *Bhagavad-gita*, the ‘Song of God’ is a Hindu scripture. It offers an essence of Vedic knowledge focusing on the immortality of soul, God, self, liberation, non-attachment, renunciation, happiness within, rejection of sense objects for a higher taste, equanimity in all circumstances and removal of false ego for attaining peace. In the middle of the battlefield, Lord Krishna gives Arjuna the message of performing duty and exhorts him to fight for the right cause without considering his relation to the enemies. All the aspects of life related to personal, physical, emotional, professional, devotional and spiritual are beautifully explained in this scripture. The fragrance of the *Bhagavad-gita* can be felt in the poetry of Emily Dickinson who secludes herself for a greater cause—the cause of composing poems in which she pours the fruits of her creative imagination and minute observations from within.

In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna thus:

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः |
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता || 2.58||

yada samharate cayam kurmo 'nganiva sarvasah
indriyanindriyarthebhyas tasya prajna pratisthita (The Bhagavad-gita 2.58)

“One who is able to withdraw his senses from sense objects, as the tortoise draws his limbs within the shell, is firmly fixed in perfect consciousness” (Swami Prabhupada 132).

योगी युञ्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः |
एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः || 6.10||

yogi yunjita satatam atmanam rahasi sthitah
ekaki yata-cittatma nirasir aparigraha (The Bhagavad-gita 6.10)

“A transcendentalist should always engage his body, mind and self in relationship with the Supreme; he should live alone in a secluded place and should always carefully control his mind. He should be free from desires and feelings of possessiveness” (Swami Prabhupada 281).

Emily Dickinson withdraws from the outer world and confines herself to the world within in the manner of a tortoise in order to be in the depth of knowledge. She controls her mind and concentrates on ‘Self’ and the ‘Supreme Self’ while avoiding all longings and belongings. She has embraced solitude for her poetic creations. To be away from this material world requires courage which she possesses. Like the followers of Jesus, she is also in the line of martyrs as she follows the path of renunciation.

To put this World down, like a Bundle -
And walk steady, away,
Requires Energy - possibly Agony -



'Tis the Scarlet way

Trodden with straight renunciation
By the Son of God - (Poem 527)

Renunciation, though “a piercing virtue” (Poem 745), is “the Choosing / Against itself - / Itself to justify / Unto Itself” (Poem 745). She is a transcendentalist who concentrates on the Supreme Self. She never thinks of moving away from the Supreme Self with whom she lives and continues to see his face. She knows that he has not granted any wedlock but has an invisible claim over her. She rises far above this physical world and lives with the Supreme Self to be a witness of greater knowledge.

I live with Him - I hear His Voice -
I stand alive – Today -
To witness to the Certainty
Of Immortality - (Poem 463)

It does not mean that she has become a recluse who has no concern for the people of this world. She has renounced all the attractions and possessions which allured her earlier. Despite being confined to her place, she still has a connection, but this connection with her friends is different as it has a wider vision with her non-attached attitude. She uses the word “sea” for distance but this distance becomes closeness with “flowers” which she sends.

Between My Country - and the Others -
There is a Sea -
But Flowers - negotiate between us
As Ministry. (Poem 905)

While talking of a transcendental enjoyer, Krishna shares his stand with Arjuna thus:

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।
परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥ 13.23॥

*upadrastanumanta ca bharta bhokta mahesvarah
paramatmeti capy ukto dehe 'smin purusah parah (The Bhagavad-gita 13.23)*

“Yet in this body there is another, a transcendental enjoyer who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitter, and who is known as the Supersoul” (Swami Prabhupada 591).

As Dickinson avoids sense objects and lives within with her Supreme Self while leading a life of seclusion, she becomes detached to the temptations so profoundly that she does not like to see the show of the world with her eyes. She sees within and with her inner eyes she can see from her



window what she wishes to see. She knows that the Supreme Self remains within her as Overseer who does not take part in her activities but witnesses everything. The individual Soul i.e. Self sees and enjoys but the Supersoul or the Supreme Self witnesses.

The Show is not the Show
But they that go -
Menagerie to me
My Neighbor be -
Fair Play -
Both went to see - (Poem 1206)

In her poem “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died” (Poem 465), the fly is the symbol of death and the King God is the Supreme Soul with light. Soul, which is a part of the Supreme Soul, has to be in union with the Supreme Soul and this union is possible only after death. The buzzing of the fly makes her speculate over her death. She sees a light when the King i.e. God enters to take away Soul to the other world. She hears buzz which is not as audible as it was and, then, witnesses it between light and her physical self. As soon as Soul is released, all her windows i.e. senses fail to work resulting in her inability to see the Supreme Soul. She has lost the power of witnessing, with which she used to witness when she was alive. To be taken away from this physical world to the unknown world of the Supreme Soul reveals her belief in immortality. For her there is afterlife even after death.

With Blue - uncertain stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see - (Poem 465)

‘Updrasta’ i.e. the spectator witnesses all the activities which are performed by the mind and the senses. When the body dies, this spectator ‘the Supreme Self’ is released and then Self cannot see what it wants to witness with ‘Updrasta.’ Emily Dickinson remains non-attached to the world and always thinks of the welfare of others without hoping anything in return. She does it as a part of her duty without being attached to the results of those activities. Krishna tells Arjuna about the importance of being non-attached thus:

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् |
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता || 2.57||

*yah sarvatranabhisnehas tat tat prapya subhasubham
nabhinandati na dvesti tasya prajna pratisthita (The Bhagavad-gita 2.57)*

“In the material world, one who is unaffected by whatever good or evil he may obtain, neither praising it nor despising it, is firmly fixed in perfect knowledge” (Swami Prabhupada 131).



यस्त्विन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन |
कर्मन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगमसक्तः स विशिष्यते || 3.7||

yas tv indriyani manasa niyamyarabhate'rjuna
karmendriyaih karma-yogam asaktah sa visiyate (The Bhagavad-gita 3.7)

“On the other hand, if a sincere person tries to control the active senses by the mind and begins karma-yoga (in Krsna consciousness) without attachment, he is by far superior” (Swami Prabhupada 153).

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर |
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः || 3.19||

tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samacara
asakto hy acarana karma param apnoti purusah (The Bhagavad-gita 3.19)

“Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment, one attains the Supreme” (Swami Prabhupada 166).

The message of Krishna is quite applicable in case of Emily Dickinson who wants to help others selflessly. She thinks that her life will be a meaningful life if she may save anyone from despair. The universal feeling of love and benevolence makes her balanced and peaceful. She is detached to be attached without hoping for the fruits. She will make the world happy and ease the pain and suffering through her poems. Her words “I shall not live in vain” (Poem 919) are true as her poems have the healing effect on the heart of human beings who find the source of living life purposefully.

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain. (Poem 919)

Love with attachment leads to misery while love with the spirit of detachment gives pleasure and relevance. She loves and gives the proofs but she realises that when she loved with attachment, she never lived. Loving with attachment is meaningless. The moment she develops this love to higher level with the feeling of detachment she finds that love is life and immortal as it will continue even after death. Love never dies when it is mixed with the spirit of detachment. The feeling of selfishness makes life hell and turns love into hatred. One who doubts it remains in suffering. Love



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without being attached is the love that she recommends for all.

That I did always love
I bring thee Proof
That till I loved
I never lived – Enough-

That I shall love alway-
I argue thee
That love is life-
And life hath immortality

This – dost thou doubt – Sweet-
Then have I
Nothing to show
But Calvary (Poem 549)

In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna thus:

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत |
कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसंग्रहम् || 3.25||

*saktah karmany avidvamso yatha kurvanti bharata
kuryad vidvams tathasaktas cikirsur loka-sangraham (The Bhagavad-gita 3.25)*

“As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment to results, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path” (Swami Prabhupada 172).

To live for the fruits of action is no life. Such life is worse than death as it makes a person slave who has no control over himself. Attachment is death while detachment is life. Though it seems to be a paradox, it is the only truth that Emily Dickinson knows. Living for others with the spirit of non-attachment is life. Death to the attachments is no death at all. Living without being attached to allurements is really to live life meaningfully.

To die – Without the Dying
And live - without the Life
This is the hardest Miracle
Propounded to Belief. (Poem 1017)

Krishna shares with Arjuna how a man can restrict his taste for objects by experiencing a higher taste:

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः |
रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते || 2.59||

*visaya vinivartante niraharasya dehinah
rasa-varjam raso 'py asya param drstva nivartate (The Bhagavad-gita 2.59)*

“Though the embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment, the taste for sense objects remains. But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness” (Swami Prabhupada 132).

One can restrict one’s self from sensual pleasure but its taste is felt and somewhere it remains in its dormant state. It is really better to experience a higher taste if one really wishes to be away from sensual pleasures. Emily Dickinson knows it and so does not care for worldly pleasures which attract her in the form of visitors who come in chariots. She chooses higher pleasure and confines herself to her circumference. While remaining in her boundary, she composes poems which give her an outlet through which she shares her Self with the Supreme Self. This is the society which her Soul chooses while shutting the door and remaining quite inattentive like stone to worldly things and their pleasures. In one of her poems, she clearly reveals her Soul’s longing for experiencing higher taste which makes her forget sensual pleasures.

The Soul selects her own Society -
Then - shuts the Door -
To her divine Majority-
Present no more-

Unmoved - she notes the Chariots - pausing -
At her low Gate -
Unmoved - an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat –

I've known her - from an ample nation -
Choose One-
Then - close the Valves of her attention-
Like Stone- (Poem 303)

Dickinson is aware of the true happiness which lies within. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna gives importance to the inner happiness which illumines a person’s real Self beaconing him the path that leads to the Supreme.

योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तज्योतिरेव यः ।
स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥ 5.24॥

*yo 'ntah-sukho 'ntararamas tathantar-jyotir eva yah
sa yogi brahma-nirvanam brahma-bhuto 'dhigacchati (The Bhagavad-gita 5.24)*



“One whose happiness is within, who is active and rejoices within, and whose aim is inward, is actually the perfect mystic. He is liberated in the Supreme, and ultimately he attains the Supreme” (Swami Prabhupada 266).

Dickinson’s religion is her true inner happiness. She talks of inner exhilaration, a divine drink of the Soul. She can offer what lies within her.

Exhilaration - is within -
There can no Outer Wine
So royally intoxicate
As that diviner Brand

The Soul achieves - Herself -
To drink - or set away
For Visitor - Or Sacrament -
'Tis not of Holiday

To stimulate a Man
Who hath the Ample Rhine
Within his Closet - Best you can
Exhale in offering. (Poem 383)

Dickinson is a real mystic who has awakened within while sleeping from outside. Metaphorically, night is day for her and day night. What Krishna tells Arjuna about the self-controlled mystic in the *Bhagavad-gita* applies to Emily Dickinson.

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी |
यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः || 2.69||

*ya nisa sarva-bhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami
yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisa pasyato muneh (The Bhagavad-gita 2.69)*

“What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage” (Swami Prabhupada 141).

She is different from the people of her time because of her attitude to the world and its ways. She has isolated herself for the creative process which offers her a therapeutic value. She knows that the ways she has followed are considered as mad steps by the majority. She feels that there is “Something’s odd - within” (Poem 410) and this strangeness does not make her feel the same. She is not sure whether this attitude is her madness. But, the same steps are divine steps for the people of good judgment. What is madness for the majority is divine for her. What is divine for them is not acceptable to her. She does not believe in the majority’s beliefs. What is sanity for the majority is insanity for her and what is insanity for her is sanity for them. She sees sanity in insanity and



insanity in sanity.

Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain – (Poem 435)

The belief of the immortality of Soul is echoed in Dickinson's poetry. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna:

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥ 2.17॥

*avinasi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idam tatam
vinasam avyayasyasta na kascit kartum arhati (The Bhagavad-gita 2.17)*

“That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy the imperishable soul” (Swami Prabhupada 87).

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ 2.23॥

*nainam chindanti sastrani nainam dahati pavakah
na cainam kledayanty apo na sosayati marutah (The Bhagavad-gita 2.23)*

“The soul can never be cut into pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind” (Swami Prabhupada 96).

Dickinson believes that Soul which is tied to mortal bone remains indestructible. As soon as the body dies, Soul flies to have liberty.

No Rack can torture me -
My Soul - at Liberty -
Behind this mortal Bone
There knits a bolder One -

You cannot prick with saw -
Nor pierce with Scimitar -



Two Bodies - therefore be -
Bind One-The Other fly - (Poem 384)

Soul remains immortal. She knows that “Mortality’s Ground Floor / Is immortality” (Poem 1234). She is in the bark of her life and if it sinks, it will go to “another sea” i.e. sea of immortality. Sinking of the bark is not the end of life; it is the beginning of the new life after death. She is still alive through her poems which have made her immortal.

If my Bark sink
'Tis to another sea-
Mortality's Ground Floor
Is Immortality- (Poem 1234)

She is surprised to see men who consider immortality “a bane” and feel “oppressed” (Poem 1728). Life is death; death life. One who has taken birth in this world will have to go away from here. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna:

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च |
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि || 2.27||

*jatasya hi dhrvvo mrtyur dhrnvam janma mrtasya ca
tasmiid apariharye'rthe na tvam socitum arhasi (The Bhagavad-gita 2.27)*

“One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament” (Swami Prabhupada 100).

She knows that “Death blow” leads to “Life blow.” The second part begins when the first one is over. There is life even in death. She confines herself to her room and, thus, keeps away from the world. This action is death blow but it results in her new journey and gives a life blow to her creative process. A social woman dies but a woman poet takes birth. Death blow becomes a life blow and life blow a death blow. Hence, one should not lament over such phenomenon. There are some people who lived but realised that their lives were worse than death. They feel that they are dead even while living. Death of one thing gives life to the new thing.

A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
Who till they died, did not alive become -
Who had they lived, had died but when
They died, Vitality begun. (Poem 816)

Dickinson feels the need of killing of one’s false ego i.e. self or *aham*. Mind is what counts. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna makes Arjuna understand about the mystery of mind thus:



उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् |
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः || 6.5||

*uddhared atmanatmanam natmanam avasiidayet
atmaiva hy atmano bandhur atmaiva ripur atmanah (The Bhagavad-gita 6.5)*

“One must deliver himself with the help of his mind, and not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well” (Swami Prabhupada 277).

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः |
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्ते तात्मैव शत्रुवत् || 6.6||

*bandhur atmatmanas tasya yenatmaivatmana jitah
anatmanas tu satrutve vartetatmaiva satru-vat (The Bhagavad-gita 6.6)*

“For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his very mind will be the greatest enemy” (Swami Prabhupada 278).

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः |
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति || 2.71||

*vihaya kaman yah sarvan pumams carati nihsprhah
nirmamo nirahankarah sa santim adhigacchati (The Bhagavad-gita 2.71)*

“A person who has given up all desires for sense gratification, who lives free from desires, who has given up all sense of proprietorship and is devoid of false ego—he alone can attain real peace” (Swami Prabhupada 143).

Mind is its greatest friend and enemy as well. Dickinson recommends that Soul should be at peace and in harmony with itself. If Soul struggles with itself, it will become captive and, then, fail to embrace liberty. Soul here is mind or self which a man has to conquer if he wishes to attain the real peace in life.

Except Thyself may be
Thine Enemy -
Captivity is Consciousness -
So's Liberty. (Poem 384)

Dickinson believes that the feeling of ego or self is so profoundly dangerous that it becomes the cause of one's own decline. She takes a bold step and goes against the world. No doubt, she takes the pebble like David and aims at Goliath but makes her 'self' fall on the ground.



I took my Power in my Hand -
And went against the World
Twas not so much as David - had -
But I - was twice as bold -

I aimed my Pebble - but Myself
Was all the one that fell -
Was It Goliath - was too large -
Or was myself - too small? (Poem 540)

Here lies her victory though she wonders as she fails to understand the largeness of Goliath or smallness of her 'self'. She is bold enough to banish her 'self' from herself. She attacks her 'self' to have peace as her 'self' always remains at war with her real 'Self' or Soul. She makes the self or the person free from real Self or Soul by subjugating her consciousness. Both Self and Soul are monarch. She realises the need of abdication of her Self or *Aham* or false Ego from her Self in order to have peace.

Me from Myself-to banish -
Had I Art -
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart -

But Since Myself-assault Me -
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by Abdication -
Me- of Me? (Poem 642)

It is tragic that Self and Soul remain at war. Self drags downward while Soul pulls upward. Self likes attachment while Soul loves detachment. Soul longs for the upward movement from the material pool. Self drags Soul downward into the material pool. Both are friends and remain in the same body but continue to attack each other.

Self is so selfish that he becomes soldier and wants to shoot the human race before killing himself. How beautifully Emily Dickinson presents this quarrel of Self and Soul!

My friend attacks my friend!
Oh Battle picturesque!
Then I turn Soldier too,
And he turns Satirist!



How martial is this place'
Had I a mighty gun
I think I'd shoot the human race
And then to glory run! (Poem 118)

This is the chain of anger, which if continues, leads to destruction. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna about the destructive consequence of anger thus:

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः |
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति || 2.63||

*krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smrti-vibhramah
smrti-bhramsad buddhi-naso buddhi-nasat pranasyati (The Bhagavad-gita 2.63)*

“From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls down again into the material pool” (Swami Prabhupada 137).

Control over mind is needed to have peace in the world. This mind should be engaged within resulting in thinking of the welfare of the human beings. Krishna makes Arjuna understand thus:

लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः |
छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः || 5.25||

*labhante brahma-nirvanam rsayah ksina-kalmasah
chinna-dvaidha yatatmanah sarva-bhuta-hite ratah (The Bhagavad-gita 5.25)*

“Those who are beyond the dualities that arise from doubts, whose minds are engaged within, who are always busy working for the welfare of all living beings, and who are free from all sins, achieve liberation in the Supreme” (Swami Prabhupada 267).

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति |
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया || 18.61||

*isvarah sarva-bhutanam hrd-dese 'rjuna tisthati
bhraimayan sarva-bhutani yantrarudhani mayaya (The Bhagavad-gita 18.61)*

“The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone’s heart, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are seated as on a machine, made of the material energy” (Swami Prabhupada 745).

Dickinson also talks of exploring Self while engaging the mind within. She realises the importance
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of the inward journey. There is an “undiscovered continent” within and this undiscovered is to be discovered. This is possible only when one is beyond duality and doubt and busy in working for the human welfare. Dickinson confines herself and treads on the undiscovered poetic world for the welfare of human beings. She knows that one who knows one’s Self needs nothing to know. The outside journey makes one doubtful while the inner journey leads towards the goal beyond duality and doubt.

Soto! Explore thyself!
Therein thyself shalt find
The "Undiscovered Continent" -
No Settler had the Mind. (Poem 832)

Though Emily Dickinson is not a philosopher in the strictest term, her poetry reveals the flashes of the *Bhagavad-gita* in her concept of Soul, Self, Non-attachment, Renunciation, Equanimity, Happiness within, Removal of False Ego for Peace and Rejection of Sense Objects for a Higher Taste. Her self-confinement makes reflect and visualise over life so profoundly that she reveals its mystery with her paradoxical approach which turns “Death-blow” into “Life-blow.” She has infused a fresh life even in the old themes and made the abstract concrete. She may be ambivalent, but she always listens to her heart and performs her duty accordingly. As she knows the secret: “Dust is the only Secret – / Death, the only One” (Poem 153), she erases the false ego—*aham* from her mind, becomes “Nobody” (Poem 288) and asks everyone to “Take care – for God is here – / That’s all” (Poem 155). She exhorts like Krishna of the *Bhagavad-gita* revealing the truth of the material existence to her readers and asking them to perform their duties even while living in the adverse circumstances.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः |
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते || 3.21||

*yad yad acarati sresthas tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate (The Bhagavad-gita 3.21)*

“Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues” (Swami Prabhupada 167).

What Krishna says to Arjuna here applies to Emily Dickinson. Dickinson is a great poet because of her innovative approach in conception and execution. Her dashes strike the reader’s mind and create the waves of thoughts. Her poetry possesses the magic that mesmerises the mind of the reader who, with her, turns his eyes within where he communicates and gets new experiences while observing the mystical sights. She has set new parameters in American poetry. Roger Lundin writes: “No other person in American history has become so famous in death after having been so anonymous in life... She pushed to the limit the Protestant tendency to shift the center of God’s activity from the world outside, the self to the spiritual world within it” (5). In her secluded life, she makes a journey from outside to inside resulting in her reflections over life. The spiritual light



that she has gained in her seclusion is fused into the light of her poetry. She fails to confine this light either to her room or America and after her death it spreads all over the world. This spiritual light somewhere connects her to India and makes her invisible presence visible when one studies her poetry in the light of the *Bhagavad-gita*.

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