

## **I: Introduction**

This research explains Emily Elizabeth Dickinson's obsessed attitude and behavior to death in her poetry through the perspective of psychoanalysis. Dickinson undergoes several experiences of death along with her family, friends and relatives. She tries to share her inner experiences, ideas and expressions, which directly or indirectly explores the theme of obsession to death throughout her poetry. Her poetry becomes the medium of expressions that reveals the meanings of death. Her whole poetry revolves around the themes of life and death by exposing inner psychological contents. Therefore, it would be relevant and contextual to examine the emergence and historical development of psychoanalysis for dealing with the obsession to death.

Dickinson is one of the greatest American poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She has produced several poems that reveal the reality of life and death. These were hardly published during her life time. She generates poems in her whole life intending to reveal the natural, social and psychological issues and problems of human life and death. She shares these expressions to come out of her emotions, feelings and experiences which are grounded on the obsession to death upon which this research delves. So, in this chapter, this research deals with obsession, obsession to death, Dickinson's life and death and general themes in her poetry on how they reveal the psychological motives of her composition of poetry.

### **Obsession**

Obsession refers to the state of mind of a person in which he thinks about something constantly or frequently mainly in a way that is not normal. It is basically regarded as an activity or action of a person who is very interested in or spends a lot of time involving the same fundamental elements or components of the surroundings. It truly represents the figures or images or ideas of person. It appears in the distressing form that affects the person from going beyond the normal situation. According to *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1969 obsession means:

The action of besieging a place; a siege; the supposed action of an evil spirit in besetting a person; the supposed state of fact of being affected by an evil spirit from outside – an idea or image that repeatedly intrudes on the mind of a person against his or her will and is usually distressing; the state of being affected in this way.

The aforementioned statements reveal the evil aspect of the human mind. It gives both negative and positive results in the mind of a person. It is the repeated action of the person who always meditates upon particular things. And here, Dickinson throughout her poems often revolves around the themes of life and death. Moreover, she is very obsessed by the death that frequently comes in her real life as well as in the form of her poetry.

There are various interpretations of obsessions that either reflect upon the human activities or actions or behaviors. Obsessions often appear in the form of intrusive, repetitive thoughts, images and impulses that are both the results of wanted and unwanted human desires and wills. Rochman and Hodgson define obsessions as: "intrusive, repetitive thoughts, images or impulses that are unacceptable and/or unwanted and give rise to subjective resistance . . . the necessary and sufficient conditions . . . are intrusiveness, internal attribution, unwantedness and difficulty of control" (*Obsessions and Compulsions* 151). They are on the opinions that obsessions are the results of human intrusive thoughts, images and impulses that give rise to the personal feelings, emotions and experiences that become difficult to control.

S.A Ranchman searches cognitive knowledge of obsessions that primarily happens in the human mind and body through two realities such as unwanted intrusive stress or emotions which also become the raw material for the obsessions. And the obsessions are beyond the human confirms which they find difficult to access in their everyday life. Obsessions distangle humans from their initial positions to deviant

forms out of which they also search particular meanings out of the situations, moments and activities. He defines:

At this stage, however, two facts about the origins of obsessions are worth remarking. Firstly, we know that exposure to stress increases the incidence of unwanted intrusive thoughts, which are after all the raw material for full of obsessions. Secondly, a surprisingly large number of obsessional thoughts . . . the beliefs that obsessions are essentially, exclusively, internally generated have not been confirmed. (*A Cognitive Theory of Obsessions* 797)

He explains two aspects of obsessions of human mind. The process of obsessions happens because of the opposite forces of human drives. It results out of the thoughts, beliefs and attitudes in which the person is not confirm in such actions. Dickinson, in her poems, does not find certain beliefs and attitudes that confirm her actions. She just goes on expressing her feelings, emotions and experiences that they overwhelmingly come in her mind through which she composes these elements in the form of poems.

The psychologist such as Scott Kiloby tries to understand obsession in term of intense caring energy that happens in human body and mind in the unconscious way. He defines, "obsessions often lead to compulsive, addictive 'acting out' behavior and even relapse while in recovery" (*Paradoxical: Journal of Nondual Psychology* 2). He finds obsession as the expression of human energy that comes in unconscious form of both carrying the influences of body over mind and mind over body. In comparison to Dickinson's poems, she comes across the feelings, emotions and experiences that are the products of both the body and mind which are in underlying level and the results of the unconscious. She frequently reveals the realities of death phenomena that actually emerge in her poetry.

## **Obsession to Death**

There are various understanding to death. People conceive deaths that really differ and carry historical meaning. The meaning of death comes through various interpretations. It may be social, psychological or religious interpretation. Death is a part of human life and it is regarded as the historical phenomenon of human existence. There are various beliefs regarding the immortality of the living being. For some cases, Physical death is not real death. Even in death there is continuity of soul. Death is the absence of physical life. Unlike these expressions, Dickinson finds death that obsesses her in her whole life. She comes across the various expression of death that happens among her family, friends and relatives.

Moreover, others metaphorically view life and death. Life flutters on the ground but death remains unconscious. Life and death are simple ideas. People are not responsible to find mistakes in their feelings and emotions but they are frequently wrong while reasoning about life and death. Many opine that death arises necessarily from the removal of life. Some think life becomes meaningful while ceasing some pain, sufferings and troubles through death. However, life and death, in their most simple and natural manner of affecting, are each of a positive nature and by no means necessarily dependent on each other for their existence. The human mind is often in a state neither of life nor of death. Dickinson is also on the crux of her opinion of death that really obsesses her out of which she searches reliefs and meanings of death. Yet she finds it obsessive to her.

She believes on life and death. She defines different aspects of love, pain, loneliness, and obsession as her own part of life. She accepts these motifs along with the life of beauty and obsession to death as well. She seriously judges upon the human existence imagining her own and facing her friends' and relatives' death. They often obsess her. She has no counterfeit claims in her dismay and obsession to death. She encounters these energies of sufferings, pains, angers and troubles that they

concurrently come together in her mind and engage her in the bitter experiences of being close to death. These elements in her poems become true obsession to death that she faithfully accepts and expresses throughout her poems.

### **Dickinson and Her Works**

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts on December 10, 1830 as the second child of Edward Dickinson and Emily Norcross Dickinson. William Austin Dickinson, Emily's elder brother was born on April 16, 1829 and her younger sister Lavinia Norcross Dickinson on February 28, 1833. These are the family history that empowers readers to know about Dickinson. She experiences the life and death in American history that encourages her to create poems throughout her life. She basically tries to create her own faith in life, god and religion in which she also challenges conventional social values and norms like, for instance, she remains unmarried in her whole life. She shares her experiences on death of her family, relatives and friends that become a way of engaging herself in the creativities, which often comes in the form of poetry. Moreover, they disclose the themes of death in which she gets obsessed, and the obsession to death in her poems becomes the central points of studies.

Dickinson's family was a prominent, well-recognized and established family in Amherst at that time. Her father Edward Dickinson was a multi facets personality in society. He was a prosperous lawyer, a member of state legislature for several times, a treasurer of Amherst College from 1835. He involved himself in various political affairs. He became a member of congress. But as a father, he was somewhat harsh in nature. As a father, he was demanding, autocratic and possessive to a considerable extent. He appeared not only as a guardian but also a faithless father throughout her life.

By 1862, she had become less concerned with the outside world and was more involved within her garden. And by 1870, she became a complete solitary person. She

became a total recluse, not leaving her house nor seeing even her closest friends. She started living in retreat within the boundary of her father's ground, where there could have been various causes like her ill health, natural shyness, poetic composition or psychic withdrawal. She even did not dare to appear in the drawing room when guests were present. Yet whatever the causes, despite her physical retirement from the outside world, she was always in contact with it psychologically, baking bread, making pudding for the neighbors and children and writing innumerable letters to the near and dear ones. She chooses loneliness to spend her life. Her sister Lavinia became real bridge between Dickinson's retiring world and the outside world. Dickinson used her window, her garden and church to see outside phenomena and social realities that differ from the general perception of understanding window, garden and church. She considered these things to find the knowledge and utilize in her life.

She never tried to publish her poems. She sent four of her poems to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a writer and former minister. Higginson replied her urging to send more and to tell him something about herself. Though Higginson frequently tried to improve her unconventional style, he offered her a good friendship she needed. So she wrote to Higginson, "you were not aware that you saved my life . . ." (*A Biographical Dictionary of American Literature* 216). In fact, Higginson not only saved her life but her poetry as well. He constantly motivated her to keep on composing various poems.

Susan, her brother's wife, very fond of poetry, betrayed her by sending one of her poems for publication to the Springfield Republican. Then, their relationship cooled. Dickinson heavily and heartily loved and trusted her younger sister Lavinia and thus left her more than 1700 poems in her care. After her death in 1886, Lavinia published her sister's deeply emotional poetry.

Her poems had to bear harsh criticism when first published, it was soon considered outstanding from both intellectual and emotional aspects. Most of her poems revolve around the theme of nature, love, life, death, eternity and immortality. Her poems regarding on loss and death disclose the clear-cut truth about loneliness, separation and finally death issues. Her poems share the deeply felt emotions of absence, parting, emotional attachments, arrival, life and relationships.

Dickinson was a solitary lover yet she had a kind of attachments with the men especially elder than herself. Benjamin Franklin Newton, a law student, who was serving his apprenticeship in her father's office in Amherst for two years, was nine years older than Emily Dickinson. He was the one who gave her Emerson's poems. He died of tuberculosis on March 24, 1853, after five years she had met him. Later Dickinson expressed her heartfelt remembrance for him. She immortalizes her dearest well-wisher and friends. She met several personalities in her lifetime who were of discrete characters. She met reverend Charles Wadsworth who was Emily's spiritual preceptor for several years. He is the one from whom she is believed to have heard a sermon in Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

Dickinson composed about experiences in which few poets have dared to explore into themes of life, love, friendship and death. She effectively draws vivid pictures of life in all its aspects through her epigrammatic style. Though her poems are shaped in a childlike, playful manner, they are full of undeniable truth. Under their small surface, her poems have large dimensions of humanity, society and world.

Dickinson grew up in a puritan village where the church was the centre of activity – moral and physical and her family followed strict religious rule. In 1847, at the age of 17, Dickinson entered Mount Holyoke Female Seminary at South Hadley. But she could not confine herself within its religiosity and then could not stay long there. She jumbled herself with many religious questions that came out of her mind. Then she found the seminary better to leave. Though she had some consideration of

church membership, she feared of its outcome and she determined to stand apart from her community. Her studies were largely suppressed by New England Puritanism, with its doctrines of a sovereign god, predestination and personal salvation. Because of debility and languorous health, her formal education was often interrupted. Although her family attended Unitarian church, she was unable to accept its teachings.

She remained agnostic throughout her life. But it is hard to say that she was an atheist. She did not prefer going to the church but she respected its beliefs and teachings. She did not want to be in the community of church members but she continued attending church services periodically until the early 1860s when she withdrew entirely from the church and from the palpable world. She did not want to recite bible in the church but she had read bible thoroughly many times and almost all of her poems are based on hymns. All these evidences demonstrate that Dickinson had suffered the religious crisis. She had gone through its trauma. She possessed the culture but was not confined with it. She knew the religious teachings but was not guided by them. She struggled against all the forces which challenged her to give openly to Christ. There was always tension in her mind that resulted from her struggle with orthodoxy.

She believed in the principles of Christianity, she, nevertheless, remained a free thinker and she refused to join any church. This individualism within the societal boundaries can be applied to every aspect of her life. She lived within the walls of her house but never married, remarried with confinement of Christianity but allowed her questing mind to range over multiple possibilities of belief. Thus Dickinson's poems present a broad conception, free from creedal narrowness and bible worship. Though most of the time she disbelieves god, she never goes against god. Her crisis moves between belief and disbelief in god. She denies the bible sometimes but she has also written profoundly about afterlife which is one of the sparks of bible. She wrote about



salvation, she wrote about renunciation. She has strong faith on god and meanwhile she also doubts god. Thus, the readers find difficult to analyze her and to interpret her being in one fixed direction. What makes analysis difficult is her paradox, her swings towards belief and disbelief, her personal doubts which neither allowed her faith nor renunciation. Her poetry is a quest for answers and for confirmation, where she does not know she seeks; she knows that she wants confirmation in her life.

### **Thematic Contents in Dickinson's Poems**

Different analysis, interpretation and criticism come under her life and poems. Some praise in the physical structure of her poems that they always appear in poetic forms of expressions. Some say that they may sound harsh and unpleasant because of her frequent engagement with death. However, the heart of the poems stands out in finely cherished clarity of theme, perception and beauty. She explores theme of death. She, imaginatively, enters into a dying person and goes with her into death. She had to die a moment in imagination that she generalizes in her poems.

Her poems truly encompass her personal feelings, emotions and experiences that explore specific to general themes. Though they are personal, they really mean life and death in term of natural, social and psychological phenomena. She has shown her vividness by challenging with her emotional dilemma, stamina and instability that they appear in her poems. These intelligent qualities alarm and conquer the pious straightforwardness and real occurring in the mind of the reader as well.

She finds poetry as the expression of critical meanings through which she has transferred obsessive feelings and profound convictions. Her poems carry efficiently lyrical theme. She does not use the slow, retreating harmonies of epic type expression which is measured in the common themes. She proceeds while composing her poems without preparations or confession, impulsive and intelligent motives. Yet these features in her poetry have the movement of tranquility and sluggishness. Even

callous death is figured into beautiful ideas, images and expressions that come under the themes of obsessive nature to death.

In her real life, she isolated herself from the social harmony that might have created psychological equilibrium. It remains beyond her life. Such a nature of determined, inquisitive energy of mental action captivated her to engage in the creativities. As a result, her poetry leads towards the assumption of a purely philosophical understanding. She learnt her willful beliefs from her early childhood days which also remained in such paradoxical conviction such as life, beauty, love and death. She explains grief, pains and riddles, which are similar to death and at the same time immortal and obsessive, that undergo in her life in the form of creativities.

Her poetic journey from her personal emotion to public feeling really conveys and generalizes the true meanings of death and its obsessive nature to the poet. She composes poetry to come out of surpassing personal experience. The unrelieved expression of emotional truth are the best examples and generates the theme of death in its obsessive and immortal nature because it appears in different form such as events, troubles, sufferings, endings and separations. Such themes can be easily found in her poems.

Dickinson also praises natural beauty in her poems. She loves to be natural throughout her poems. Nature as the theme of her poetry builds strong consciousness in her life. She passes through these issues and themes that really kill her isolation and sufferings that she expresses in her poems. These expressions and experiences reduce her pains though she finds death as the obsessive forces in her life. Her poems desirously regard the nature as the central inquiries for exploring the real meanings of life and death upon which she can generalize the nature of life and death in terms of negative and positive, constructive and destructive and separating and uniting forces of human existence in the world.

Further, Dickinson's feelings, emotions and experiences and their impact on her poems explore the meanings of obsessions to death. Her life and death experiences to a great extent become the style and the contents of her creations of poems. In social, cultural, psychological and philosophical understanding, she becomes more obsessed to death during her life span because she suffered from several death experiences that ultimately pushed her into isolation, separation and disharmony in addition to being reclusive that had a great influence and impact on her poems.

## **II: Psychoanalysis, Death Instinct and Obsession**

Psychoanalysis primarily refers to healing technique for the treatment of the hysteric patient, later extended as a technique for psychological study of the psycho-sexual development of human personality, the unconscious mental activities and psychotherapy for the treatment of neurotic, psychotic, and psychopathic patients. Its contribution goes to Sigmund Freud and his original ideas of id, ego and superego. These three ideas, trends and discoveries have brought a new level of thinking, understanding, awakening and altering the devout image, attitude and level of mankind. These new trends in thinking and treating human have been evolved, shifted, and reproduced since the beginning to present. He has expressed these ideas in his psychoanalysis. Freud's three-fold meaning of psychoanalysis can be traced in the following lines:

It is, first, a school of psychology that emphasizes the dynamic, psychic determinants of human behavior, and the importance of childhood experiences in molding the adult personality. Secondly, psychoanalysis refers to a specialized technique for investigating unconscious mental activities. Finally, psychoanalysis is a method of interpreting and treating mental disorders, especially psychoneuroses.

*(Introductory Lectures 179)*

Before his era, such kind of practices remained unknown and was taken for granted or treated in conventional way through witchdoctor. In contrary, he and his ideas remain one of the live histories in the history of human civilization. His influences on these three fold personality structure has become one of the land-marking personality theories even in this present day various treatment, analysis and studies such as art, literature, medicine and society. M. H. Abrams highlights Freud's focus on understanding human mind and their various products and activities. He explains:

Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called psychoanalysis as a means of analysis and therapy for neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion, as well as literature and the other arts. (*Glossary of Literary Terms* 248)

He focuses on the aspects of imagined, fabricated and wishes fulfilling and dreams of human mind that come through the art of literature. It has also become the part of his understanding on psychoanalysis. These kinds of practices of psychoanalysis turns into the psychoanalytical studies which talk about relation of human mind and productions of literature and other forms of creativities.

Norman L. Munn introduces psychology in relation to the biosocial science. He views the term psychology in term of human interaction. It has appropriateness in understanding human behavior and attitude. Munn defines, "Since the behavior of human beings is grounded both in biology and in social interaction, psychology is often referred to as a biosocial science. The appropriateness of this designation becomes increasingly apparent as psychologists penetrate the intricacies of human behavior" (*Introduction to Psychology* 5). He sees the scope and application of psychology to go into the depth of the human attitudes and behavior. These expressions, influences and impressions have frequently become the part of the study of psychologists which has also become the details of human activities, actions, attitude and behavior as the study of psychoanalysis.

### **Id, Ego and Superego**

Sigmund Freud, along with his innovative ideas in the field of psychology – a pattern of the treatment of human mind as new science of mind, challenges the traditional way of understanding rational and compassionate human image, attitude and manner by exposing it to the world in terms of the darker side of human psyche

that governs in the actions and behaviors that the human mind produces in everyday activities. Freud has divided the process of mind into three categories such as the id, the ego and the superego. M. H. Abrams adds:

Prominent among these developments was Freud's model of the mind as having three functional aspects: the id (which incorporates libidinal and other desires), the superego (the internalization of standards of morality and property), and the ego (which tries as best it can to negotiate the conflicts between the insatiable demands of the id, the impossibly stringent requirements of the superego, and the limited possibilities of gratification offered by the world of reality). (*Glossary* . . . 249-50)

In his understanding Freud and his psychoanalysis, the pleasure motifs become the main sources for the Id. It is totally characterized by these characteristics. It does not care about the future outcome and rather gives priority in search of immediate satisfaction of emotional needs. It focuses on the negative human drives such as passions, greed, love, hatred and other desires. It becomes sometimes illogical and irrational and goes out of reality. It is regarded as the source of all desires and aggression. It is lawless, asocial and amoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts. Benjamin B. Laley writes, "The attempts of the id to seek immediate pleasure and avoid pain, regardless of how harmful it might be to others" (*Psychology* 466). Id sometimes becomes the energy source of ego.

Laley further defines Ego which is associated with physical reality. It differs from id and superego in many cases or remains in middle position. It observes outer world and is very much close with the reality principle. Laley highlights, "the ego operates according to the reality principle. This means that it holds the id in check until a safe and realistic way has been found to satisfy its motive . . . the attempts by the ego to find safe, realistic way of meeting the needs of id" (*Psychology* 467). It

shows that ego represents the reality and safety to the human being. And the functions of ego are to please the diet related needs of the body. It functions to protect against injury and to enforce repression of human mind that often happen in human life. In this way, there are connections between id and ego though they represent distinct situations and positions.

Munn compares these processes of human mind in relation to the personality. He presents the issues of ego as he says, "These acquired aspects of its personality which lead it to act or refrain from acting in terms of what it knows rather than in terms of what it is biologically, and are what we refer to as the ego or the self" (*Introduction . . . 250*). He deals with the ego as biological process and it has connection with the personality. The human beings can acquire this process throughout the life.

Superego stands for socialization of the individual and community. It resembles with the conscience. It functions as balance between the conscious and unconscious. It covers the hereditary and collective means of controlling human negative drives. It acts as the controlling mechanism for protecting individual and society from their instincts while getting direct access. Therefore, it is considered to be the managerial personality of human mind which tries to resolve their conflicting demands. It illustrates that it is the supreme form of human psyche or mind that also makes human being into consciousness and sociable person or personality. Wilfred L. Guerin et. al. write, "The superego is the moral censoring agency, the repository of conscience and pride" (158). It shows that the superego is the best medium of acquiring aspect of human personality.

Through these comparisons, it shows that id becomes the energy sources of ego whereas ego, as Freud sees the conscious self, is created out of the dynamic tension and interaction between the id and superego. And superego becomes the departing point of both id and ego to lead the person and society into socialization

process. That is to say, Freud regards these three fold personality structure – id, ego and superego as representative features of social, psychological and biological constituents and conditioned processes of human mind.

### **Death, Obsession and Unconsciousness**

Freud introduces two essential motivating forces such as the constructive life urges and the destructive death urges. These forces become the usual discourses from Greek mythology, he calls the life forces Eros and death forces Thanatos. The life instincts serve the purpose of individual survival and racial preservation. Hunger, thirst, and sex fall in this category. The life instinct produces the form of energy which he calls libido. He regards the sex instincts which are in several forms and perform several meanings. It means that there are different kinds of bodily needs that produce erotic wishes. Each of these wishes has its origin in different bodily expressions which collectively refers to creativities. Thus, he regards Eros is also the psychological source of all creative intellectual activity. Freud says, "Anguished psyche refers to the unconscious mind of which nobody can be directly aware. It is an artist who allows this part of mind to come to expression in a very distorted form" (Creative Writers . . . 714). He clarifies the art of literature and their expressions as the true results of distorted form of libido expressions and come from the unconscious mind of the writers.

Death instincts appear in the opposite forms of life instincts. It has destructive nature. It has the aggressive drives or motives. In this process, any individual struggles to come out of his death instincts consciously or unconsciously. The aim of death instinct is to injure, destroy and kill the person out of which s/he tries to come out. In short, the goal of life and death is often known. The assumption that life and death instincts are separate entities having opposite goals can be challenged. Freud writes:



The two instincts are not to be looked on as opposed and mutually independent forces. Behavior primarily motivated by life instinct may have strong component of death instinct and vice versa. It is only through the neutralization of destructive urges by constructive one that we are able to keep going all. (*Psychodynamics* 158-59)

The life drive can further be divided into two groups such as the ego drives that fulfill the organic needs of nutrition and self presentation, and the sex drives that find expression in pleasurable and affectionate pursuits. In Freudian psychological analysis, ego impulse plays an insignificant role, and that major importance is attached to the sex and aggression drives. These two drives which are not antagonistic but compatible and coexisting lead to the Freudian principle of understanding the human mind.

### **The Preconscious, the Conscious and the Unconscious**

Freud further studies an abstract division of mind into three levels such as the preconscious, the conscious, and the unconscious. Freud regards the preconscious is the storehouse of experiences, memories and desires. They happen in conscious process. Freud calls conscious is the mental activities and memories of the person who is aware of action. It plays middle role in the mental process. The unconscious is the storehouse of repressed ideas, desires and impulses. It is also regarded as the chaotic, infantile and primitive in nature. Freud argues that human mental processes are basically unconscious. It represents slips of tongue, dreams, inner conflict and neurotic symptoms. That is the reasons Freudian psychoanalysis can be considered as the way of understanding human mind that interacts with the dynamics of human behavior, attitudes, activities and beliefs. In addition, Freudian psychoanalysis is directly or indirectly related to the nature of unconscious human mind. However, the motive here is concerned with the psychological aspect of criticism for discovering the obsession to death in Dickinson's poetry. Freud states, "When this happens we

say of the idea that it is in a state of being 'unconscious', and we can produce effects, even including some which finally reach consciousness. The unconscious had wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious" (*Essentials* 142). He interprets unconscious with the various human mental processes that produces the effects and has the meanings in wider scales.

Freud being the first influential thinkers of psychology centers his ideas in relation to unconsciousness as the psychic reality. It is the products of external world that comes from the interaction with our sense organs. Freud writes, "The unconscious is the true psychological reality; in its innermost nature, it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communication of our sense organs" (*Essentials* 613). He finds this process of human mind and it has become the human interaction with innermost nature of outside world that the human beings observes through his different organs in their everyday activities, experiences and ideas.

Freud observes repression as one of the prominent parts of psychoanalysis. It is considered to be the feedback for unconscious and the major ingredients of human life. It is through the repressed ideas that result into the unconscious level of human mind. The normal and neurotic mind uses these strategies. Freud defines it as "the process by which a mental act capable of becoming conscious is made unconscious and forced back into unconscious system. Repression can also be described as reversion to an earlier and lower stage in the development of mental act" (*Introductory Lectures* 163). It appears from the childhood life and gets maturation along with the familial environment. In this way, individual experiences instinctual impulses to behave in a manner in which superego deems reprehensible. These impulses appear in opposite form or expressions. These opposites or expressions are the result of psychic struggle between positive and negative drives, creative and constructive drives and holy an unholy spirit of humans, repression becomes the

controlling mechanism through which ego uses both id and superego for avoiding inner conflict and pain for settling the disputes or realities.

Obsessions instinctively emerge out of the human mind and it has neurotic symptoms. It sometimes goes beyond the human control. Freud deals with the problems of the neurotic obsession as a situation. Freud explains, "the patient's mind is occupied with ideas, expressions and images that do not really interest him, he feels impulses which seem alien to him, and he is impelled to perform actions which not only afford him no pleasure but from which he is powerless to desist (*Introductory Lectures* 160). Freud has understood obsession has the meaning. He describes that obsessions are the troublesome situation of human mind that tries to search the meaning of the existence of god and the meaning of truth, or morbid doubt concerning of human mind that comes from the correctness of one's past actions. Freud often attributes the origin of obsession to the rigorousness and ignorance of the individual or person. The home atmosphere of children who later become compulsive is unfriendly and austere. To be specific, obsessive concern of neurotic is seen as resulting from the unresolved conflict/repression occurring at immature period.

Freud seems to be more revolutionary in clinical and mental health problem which studies the human mind problems. He sees the problems of repressions for both normal individual and the neurotic. He strongly believes on the facts that this action takes place from childhood days. His focus is onwards the sexual development of person or individual. The obsession behavior of neurotic becomes the instinctual drives or life and death drives that come in the repressed form from the childhood life. He regards these drives are highly irrational and not within the control of the human mind and they are also driven by the unconscious repressed drives of human mind. Freud explains, "Repression was the fundamental problem from which the study of the neurotic process took its whole start; the theory of repression became the cornerstone of our understanding of neurotics" (*Essentials* 393). Dickinson in the

poetry also expresses her repressed desires and wishes that may be of her relatives death phenomena or her struggle for life that turns into the behavior expressions into the writing of poetry upon the death.

Freud experiments his ideas going outside the bed of patients and knows the emotions and experiences of creative writers. The human beings interact with different means of productions and collections. They are in different moods and repressed desires out of which they produce or engage themselves to remove their own emotions or others. They are the education, folklore, religion, art and literature and other forms of human interests that directly or indirectly come from human mind. A.A. Brill writes, "Freud thus discovered material that is of the utmost importance not only in the treatment of patient – but also in the development of normal people in education, folklore, religion, art and literature, and every other field of human interest" (*Fundamental Conceptions* 24). These diverse human interests come under the studies of psychology; Freud as influential and original thinkers becomes the most essential personality of psychoanalysis.

Carl Gustav Jung deals with the human mind through analytical psychology. Jung focuses on human neuroses as insufficient attempt to bend some disturbing situation. He is different from Freud in a sense that he talks about the collective unconscious of human mind. For him, the human neuroses arise from a clash, conflict or opposite ideas, emotions and experiences. These sources of conflicting ideas, emotions and experiences is between person's sensual and spiritual aspiration and discord between conscious and unconscious impulses. Page particularly says in these lines:

Jung stresses the importance of repression and inhibitions in the formation of neurotic symptoms . . . the repressed experiences contain memories, wishes, fears, needs, or views with which we have never really come to terms. These buried complexes that have been

disassociated from consciousness and relegated to the hinterland of unconsciousness give rise to neurotic symptoms as long as they are denied access or full expression in consciousness (*Abnormal Psychology* 204)

Page, through these above lines, explains nature of human mind which has the grounds in unconsciousness. He focuses on the repressed experiences that they encompass memories, wishes, fears, needs and views that are the products of human mind. They come collectively to represent human psyche. Abrams states:

Jung's emphasis is not on the individual unconscious, but on what he calls the collective unconscious, shared by all individuals in all cultures . . . Instead, Jung regards great literature as, like the myths whose pattern recur in diverse cultures, an expression of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. (251)

Jung's focus is in the collective unconsciousness of human mind that work in any form of human activities, behaviors and attitudes. He regards great literature such as the myths that pass through the various forms of cultures and expression of the archetypes has specific meanings in collective unconscious.

Jacques Lacan studies psychoanalysis in term of unconscious level of human mind through relating it with language. He focuses on the situation of unconscious mind of human that begins from the mirror stage. He sees the similarity between the unconscious and language. Hazard Adams criticizes Lacan as he writes:

The unconscious is structured like a language. . . . In the mirror stage the child discovers its own image which becomes other to the self, thereby establishing subjectively, in the symbolic stage the child enters language and the subject, now linguistic, is continuously deferred down the chain of signifiers. (*Adams* 897)

Lacan, by comparing three stage of human development such as the mirror, the imaginary and the symbolic stage, concludes unconscious is structure such as language. He deviates from Freud along with the Saussure' signifier over the signified that differ because of their structure and the origins of difference. Abrams says, "In a parallel fashion, Lacan translates Freud's views of the mental workings of dream formation into textual terms of the play of signifiers, converting Freud's distorting defense-mechanisms into linguistic figures of speech" (252). For Lacan, the human desires have the unstable signifiers and there is no fixity in their desires upon which the aspects of linguistic expression and interpretation goes on working without certain meanings.

Lacan deals with the problems of death instincts or drives that become the part of psychoanalysis. He conceives these processes as the component part of the human mind that also brings certain changes in human life. He observes the death instincts or drives as destructive drive as he says, "The drive as such, insofar, as it is then a destruction drive, has to be beyond the instinct to return to the stage of equilibrium of the inanimate sphere. What can it be if it is not a direct will to destruction, if I may put it like that by way of illustration?" (Death Drive 262). He analyzes the human mind that both passes through the creative and destructive drives of human mind. It has also the deferral analysis, interpretation and meanings.

Jay Damousi distinguishes psychology with psychoanalysis. She is on the opinion that Freudian theories of self or unconscious differs from psychology because psychoanalysis is related to the unconscious and psychology is focused to deal with conscious world. Psychoanalysis privileges the life of the unconscious as the major way of understanding psychic life. She explains:

Psychoanalysis –the body of thought which brings Freudian into a coherent theory – differs from other theories of the self because it takes the unconscious as its key organizing principle. Unlike psychology,

which is concerned with the conscious world and aspects of socialization, psychoanalysis privileges the life of the unconscious as the way of understanding psychic life. (1)

She differs from Freud who utilizes the philosophy and psychoanalysis through viewing the distinct meanings and features of these two terms that they have become the interesting part of discussion of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is more usual and practical for understanding the unconscious of human life.

Meredith Skura focuses on the critical aspects of psychoanalysis. Skura criticizes the practices and tendencies as put forward by Freud, Lacan and other major theorists of psychoanalysis. Skura, in these studies, examines going into the depth of clinical aspects of psychoanalysis. He writes, "Psychoanalysis is a 'talking cure' rather than a medical treatment, and Freud came increasingly to focus on the talking as an end in itself when he found his patients not only describing past conflicts but acting them out again with the analyst" (Skura 351). He distinguishes Freud in this sense that psychoanalysis goes beyond the medical treatment and treats the human and other its productions through redrawing the boundaries from previous aspects of studies.

Lois Tyson, a professor of England at Grand Valley State University, focuses on the psychological problems of human beings. She defines, "The goal of psychoanalysis is to help us resolve our psychological problems, often called disorderly or dysfunctions (and none of us is completely freed of psychological problems), the focus is on the patterns of behavior that are destructive in some way" (11). She finds psychoanalysis as significant part of analysis and interpretation of psychological problems of human mind. Her way of dealing with psychoanalysis is to resolve the destructive aspects or the death instincts of human mind. She views death as follows:

In fact, our relationship to death, whether or not we are traumatized by it in childhood, is a principal organizer of our psychological

experience. . . . some tendency to treat death as an abstraction – that is, to theorize about it in ways that don't allow us to feel its force to intimately –presumably because its force is too frightening. So even when, or especially when, theorists have addressed the subject of death directly, they sometimes have done so in ways that tend to keep it at an emotional distance from themselves and, therefore from us, I think this is the reason –to cite just one example – behind Freud's theory that death is a biological drive, which he called the death drive or Thanatos.

(22)

Tyson studies the meaning of death by discovering the death as psychological problems. She agrees upon the definition of Freud who defines the death as biological drive. Dickinson comes across various forms of death that happen in the life of her relatives and herself that really proves that death is part of the psychoanalysis.

This research essentially explores some gap while understanding the obsession to death in Dickinson's selected poems. In regard to the studies, this research finds various critics; scholars and reviewers who have worked from various perspectives. Moreover, the research has attempted to study psychoanalysis perspectives for understanding the obsession to death in her poems, thus, has become the new area of the study in this research. Then after, the following chapter analyzes the text from the perspective of psychoanalysis exploring the obsession to death in Dickinson's selected poems. These issues and problems go side by side, how psychoanalysts understand obsession to death and how the poet Dickinson explores these issues in her work.



### **III: Obsession to Death in Dickinson's Selected Poems**

Dickinson's poems just reveal the contextual and thematic meanings of death. Throughout her poems, she is very much obsessed to death under which this research tries to analyze how her poems represent true expressions, thoughts, symbols, meanings and moments one after another relying on death. She easily catches these fundamental sources of death, which makes her feel obsessed, in her poems. These expressions appear in various forms in her poems that are the results of both her inner world and outside experiences that she encounters from her surroundings. She expresses these elements throughout her poems which become the parts of analysis regarding the issue of obsession to death. So this chapter passes through the various attempts to analyze the meanings of death in relation to obsession to death as the essential theme and meaning in her poems.

#### **Dickinson's Selected Poems: A Close Call to Death**

When we as readers read her poems, we become familiar with various moments of her mind that basically exercises upon the death, which possesses her whole life. They come in the form of poems in her life. Her poems are so and such fanciful, paradoxical and very complex that they reveal underlying meanings of obsession to death. It is psychologically distinct and evocative to the readers. George Frisbie Whicher writes, "Readers of Emily Dickinson who wish to know the most intimate facts of personal history need offer no apologies for indulging in what is a perfectly natural and legitimate curiosity" (Whicher 79). Her poems encompass the theme of life and death that are clearly analyzed through her selected poems. She feels free to express several meanings of her obsession to death.

She explains the meanings of death. She regards death both as natural and human constructed realities. It generates clear-cut meanings that directly regard the process of understanding death as psychological processes of human mind. She does her various attempts to know the death in her poems by expressing her obsession

towards death. She, in her poem, "I died for beauty –but was scarce", basically talks about the truth of death:

I died for beauty –but was scarce  
Adjusted in the tomb  
When one who died for truth, was lain  
In an adjoining room – (from *Baym et. al.* 2458)

The above mentioned poem shares her experiences of encountering with the death that begins from the womb to tomb. She reveals about true nature of death that the place of death is everywhere. She sees the death that is next to door that carries truth and it is impossible to escape from the death in real sense. Then, the death often comes in her mind. So she calls it as assaults of minds that they appear in her mind. Later she expresses it in her poems in which the death becomes the beauty.

We, while observing her poems, can be familiar with obsessive nature to death that she frankly expresses in them. Her attempts are to capture such moments that basically follow life and death instinctive and religious issues. These forces come in such ways that they expose true meanings of close call to death in her poems. She challenges all conventional beliefs and faith even defying existence of God because the God could stop her and her families, friends and relatives from the hands of death. These are the bitter realities that actually obsess her in her whole life. Her God is the God of her questions. Perhaps most things she describes so strongly are various representation of death which is most likely the creations of her poems. She questions for knowing the real meanings of death in her poem.

He questioned softly "why I failed"?  
"For beauty", I replied –  
"And I –for truth –themselves are one –  
We breathe, are", he said –  
And so, as kinsmen, met a night –

We talked between the rooms –  
 Until the moss had reached our lips –  
 And covered up –our names – (from *Baym et. al. 2448*)

Her nature poems are the best in its features and qualities because it discloses clear meaning of death. They are often astonishing, charming and graceful to the readers. Yet they seem to be apparent and often recurring, and deep-seated revolving around same theme of death. She expresses the timeless most captured life and death that focus on the time immemorial and eternity. She uses all the thoughts, events, forms, brilliant and obvious symbols, metaphors that directly or indirectly deal with the themes of obsession to death which analogously, plainly and transparently appear in her poems.

She frequently engages her readers with death and the problems of life after death. The way she constantly speaks upon the death which suggests that she died all her life. She expresses her thoughtful ideas to prove death as obsessive nature because it becomes finally gruesome and painful not only to her but also to the readers while undergoing her poems. The below mentioned poem "My life closed twice before its close" tells the reality of death upon which she meditates to reveal the consequences of life:

My life closed twice before its close –  
 It yet remains to see  
 If immortality unveil  
 A third event to me  
 So huge, so hopeless to conceive  
 As these that twice befell.  
 Parting is all we know of heaven,  
 And all we need of hell. (from *Baym et. al. 2477*)

At this moment, she confesses about her life how she experiences about the life and death that come twice. This twice reveals two deaths of her mother and her best friends Higginson. She shares these experiences of life and death, mortality and immortality, and heaven and hell as two opposite phenomena of life. In this stance, common people regard this sort of parting as of going to heaven. Unlike it, she preoccupies her mind with its horrifying worries and doubts that they one way or the other rely on close call to death because it deals with mysterious nature of death along with justifying the meaning of hell.

Dickinson's unconscious level of mind discloses the reality of death, which exists in the form of doubts about religious matters. Dickinson challenges on the nature of death in the hope that she perhaps glance going beyond in her death poems. Freud writes ". . . That is, that in their case dream-situation represents as fulfilled a wish which is known to consciousness, which is left over daytime life, which is deservedly of interest"(Essentials 115) . At this moment, Dickinson means death to be both terror for repressive God and sources of releasing relief from pain, anger, ideas and unsteadiness. She in her poem "This Consciousness That is Aware" tells us that the consciousness is lonely without the awareness of death:

This Consciousness that is aware  
Of Neighbors and the Sun  
Will be the one aware of death  
And that itself alone (from *Baym et. al. 2467*)

Dickinson tells about the consciousness that keeps her aware on the existence of death. It is both applicable in term of neighbors and sun because the neighbors become the closest members of human and sun gives the heat and light to the human that they will be aware of death and at the end the death is alone.

Dickinson interprets death in various meanings out of which one is agony. Death is true. Men are not fit for death which comes in any time and place. The eyes

just can have a glance once over the face of death and no one can pretend before death. Death is so psychologically depth-stricken that it gives sharp, strong and long impact in the mind of bereaved families, friends and well-wishers. She in her poem "I like a look of agony" reveals true nature of death.

I like a look of agony,  
 Because I know it's true –  
 Men do not sham Convulsion,  
 Nor simulate, a throe –  
 The Eyes glaze once – and that is Death –  
 Impossible to feign  
 The Beads upon the Forehead  
 By homely anguish strung. (from *Baym et. al. 2451*)

Dickinson gives multiple meanings of death such as agony, anguish and gazing eyes. It means she tells the nature of death that projects various reactions. She finds impossible to pretend before the hand of death. She also finds the homely environment full of anguish because she experiences death of her families, relatives and friends.

Dickinson further explains the death that gives certain glimmer of light. It means that anyone is bound to bow before the hands of death. It is cold and always oppresses her to feel irritated and senseless. It produces monotonous tones that we often pray in church to remember the dead person. She uses winter afternoons, cathedral tunes, heavenly hurt to represent the hidden meanings of death that she share being close to death. She in her poem "There is a certain slant of light" focuses on the various facets of death:

There's a certain Slant of light,  
 Winter Afternoons –  
 That oppresses, like the Heft

Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –

We can find no scar,

But internal difference,

Where the Meanings, are – (from *Baym et. al.* 2451-52)

The death gives us unexpected and unimagined hurt from heaven although we are unknown of the facts of heavens. In natural death, we do not find any scar. But it gives great pain and agony inside. The people have to suffer for a long time because it is natural and beyond the human access to avoid the death. Later or sooner, anyone of the earthly living beings has to accept death. No one can teach death. It gives great despair like sea consisting of its huge water space. The poem further reveals the truth of death.

None may teach it –Any –

'Tis the Sea despair –

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –

Shadows –hold their breath –

When it goes, 'tis like the Distance

On the look of Death – (from *Baym et. al.* 2451-52)

Dickinson compares death experiences with sea and imperial encroachment that creates trouble, difficulties and complexities in the life of commoners. She believes on the facts that death takes us away in the air. The landscape only knows the arrival of death because we set the dead body on the landscape that can listen to it. The shadows remain there but it only creates the distance.

Dickinson seems to be revolutionary and goes beyond the conventional perception of death. For instance, she does not believe on these stereotyped judgments

of life and death, god and church, mortality and immortality, and heaven and hell. Her idea of death represents her idea of God because she serves clear-cut ideas of death. In her understanding, life leads to death, death to immortality and immortality to God. Sometimes, life to death, good to evil and heaven to hell are the two phenomena that rely in her mind and come in the form of poems. She in her poem "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" explains truth of death that appears in different forms.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
 And Mourners to and fro  
 Kept treading –treading –till it seemed  
 That Sense was breaking through – (from *Baym et. al. 2452*)

Dickinson imagines to be dead and writes how a lifeless feels her funeral procession. At this overwhelming situation, she imagines her death, her funeral and her burial in which she remains in her mind unsolved and juxtaposed and obsessive. In this sense, she is powerfully energetic of realizing the motifs of death that are beyond her access which truly passes through her mind and comes in the form of poems.

She often characterizes death, immortality, and eternity that become clear after observing her poems closely. She encounters the death that becomes obvious. It is no time and space bound since life breathes in the earth as supreme knowledge of human being. The death does not say friendship, relatives, love, and nature. This happens once but with her several experiences of death of her own people and others. She talks of the curiosity, immortality and eternity. The poem "The bustle in a house" reveals the pain of parting caused from death:

The bustle in a house  
 The morning after death  
 Is solemnest of industries  
 Enacted upon earth –  
 The sweeping up the heart

And putting love away

We shall not want to use again

Until eternity. (from *Baym et. al. 2469*)

The day one dies there is haste at home. But the next morning it is the calmest because everything is over, the loved one has just left for good, the hearts are broken and how we wish this heartbreaking never to happen again, not until eternity.

Dickinson has looked at the nature of death from the point of view of both the living and the dying and the nature and personal angle. She even went to imagine her own death, the loss of her own body and the journey of her soul to the unknown.

There is personification of death and is given so much life to it that death becomes a fluctuating figure. It is beyond the human access and takes away the life of livings.

Human beings as thoughtful beings unconsciously react upon death and become close call to death and express the death with various meanings.

### **Faith on Life and Death**

Dickinson defines life and death through the faith that really exposes her identity. She links love to connect her identity that also links her life and death that lie down in the creation and exponent or promoter of earth in several expressions. These features occupy in her whole life that ends in the death of herself, families, friends and relatives. She in her poem hopefully connects life with love as she composes in her poem "Love –is anterior to life" as true bridge of life and death.

Love –is anterior to life –

Posterior –to death –

Initial of creation, and

The exponent of earth (from *Dickinson 448*)

Dickinson, in that venture, is faithful and gives meaning of faith rather than understanding faith in conventional religious beliefs and practices. So her observation on life and death differ and carries various meanings.



It is true that Dickinson carries the theme of death in which she universalizes the death. She discloses true meanings of death through her experiences that portrays life and death of her, other family members and friends. Yet, she shows her positive reaction with life and death as the sweetest. She in her poem "Success Is Counted Sweetest" shows her positive attitude and behavior on the death that enlightens her in life:

Success is counted sweetest  
 By those who ne'er succeed  
 To comprehend a nectar  
 Requires sorest need.  
 Not one of all the purple Host  
 Who took the flag today  
 Can tell the definition  
 So clear of victory  
 As we defeated –dying –  
 On whose forbidden ear  
 The distant strains of triumph  
 Burst agonized and clear! (from *Baym et. al. 2448*)

Dickinson claims that the success is for those who have never archived anything in their life. In order to know nectar that means the values of any success, anyone requires the clear cut need of their sources of victory. There are several people who can tell the victory story. They can raise the flag and be the host of winners but the death always defeats us in our struggle and success. At the time of dying, no one can get success before the hand of death. It is clear that the death leaves agony in the eyes of people and their triumph remains away from the victory.

Dickinson one after another moment unveils the reality of death. She gives different meanings of death that it appears in the form of pain, agony and sufferings.

And the humans are real witness of the death. Despite knowing its facts, people have to succumb before the hands of death. Dickinson means to say that the knowledge comes after great pain. She adds that people who face anyone's death in their life just reveals true meanings of death. The human mind does not work and it becomes the tombs. The tombs symbolize the final homage of the dead person upon whom we pay attention and ask for the peace of his/her soul. Dickinson, in her poem "After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes" tells a truth on death:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—  
 The nerves sit ceremonious, like tombs—  
 The stiff heart questions was it he, that bore,  
 And, yesterday, or centuries before? (from *Baym et. al. 2456*)

Dickinson tries to express her psychological state of the mind through which she reveals the reality of death. She draws the history of death going into the past of yesterday and centuries before. She means to reveal the reality of death that is constant in its positions and equal to all beings of the world.

The feet, mechanical, go round—  
 Of ground, or air, or ought—  
 A wooden way  
 Regardless grown,  
 A Quartz contentment, like a stone – (from *Baym et. al. 2469*)

Dickinson is frank while talking about death. Death neither says rich or poor nor has any prejudices over various walks of life. It goes round and round and everywhere death is visible in her mind. It is active and occurs in all living creatures of the world. It grows in its own positions and reacts upon other lives of the earthly living beings of the earth. So, she realizes upon the death that gives the knowledge that comes out of the great pain which is also the part of death.

Dickinson generalizes death by interrogating the paradise. Whether she believes in paradise or not she reveals truth of death that it appears in different motions. And it leaves great remarks in her life. She praises death relating with nature as Whicher tells "what was most grand or beautiful in nature, and that sublime lesson, a faith in things unseen, and in a life again, nobler and much blessed" (84-85). Whatsoever she wishes to call the death by using various names, other forms of beliefs and natural meanings that they appear in her life, she connects to mean death is for everyone. She expresses death as one form of reaching paradise. Yet she is not sure whether the paradise exists or not as she says in "What is – Paradise"

What is –"Paradise"

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 –too –

Do they wear "new shoes" – in "Eden" – (from Scholes et. al. 647)

Her expressions upon the paradise search different answers through questioning that has its findings to mean death. At the end, she also assures that she will be there alike farmers and others rest over there. She asks to know whether there will be pleasant and peaceful livings. She imagines by observing, the activities that take place in this earth may happen in paradise or unlike so and such activities will be the part of the everyday activities for those who go in paradise.

Is it always pleasant –there –

Won't they scold us – when we're hungry –

Or tell god –how cross we are –

You are sure there's such a person

As "a Father" –in the sky –  
 So if I get lost –these –ever –  
 Or do what the nurse calls "die" –  
 I shan't walk the "Jasper" barefoot –  
 Ransomed folks – won't laugh at me –  
 Maybe –"Eden" a'nt so lonesome  
 As New England used to be! (from Scholes et. al. 647)

She remembers her father because she witnesses death of her father who departs from her. She mythologizes the long experienced history of human activities out of which she remembers almost all objects of the world and beyond. Like remembering paradise, farmers, Eden, New England, jasper, father, and God reveal her various interpretation of death. The jasper attempted to defeat death barefoot but fails to succeed whom she compares with her life. After the fall of Adam and Eve, the Eden become lonesome and the New England just remains in the mouth of those people and could not pass through the reality because the conventional religious practices and resettlement of the English remain no more in the land of American history.

Dickinson in her life makes death memorable talking with the loved one. It means that she discloses her reality because death takes her lover away from her. In this moment, she enlivens her life with her death lover. She, in her poem "If I may have it, when it's dead" connects her life defining death of her lover.

Think of it lover! I and thee  
 Permitted face to face to be –  
 After a life – a death – we'll say –  
 For Death was that –  
 And this – is thee – (from *Dickinson 458*)

Death permits her from her friend who loses his life. In this case, she might be remembering her well-wisher who cannot be away from death. In her poems, death

becomes the central themes. No one could be away from death. She justifies death that takes her friends life. So she wrote Higginson you are not aware that you saved my life . . . (216) that gave her eternity in her life.

Dickinson describes death as an experience that she is looking back on. The idea of death in her poem is not portrayed as lonely or scared, but more memory and content in which she can recall the experiences that she undergoes throughout her life. She describes death as more of a person rather than just an event in one's life. Death is often thought of as dark and frightening, and if we could choose someone to play the role of death, they would fit into this description, but she regards death as a gentleman, almost like a potential suitor, coming to take her away in a carriage to make her immortal. She, in her poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" tells the nature of death:

Because I could not stop for death –  
 He kindly stopped for me –  
 The carriage held but just ourselves –  
 And Immortality. (from Scholes et. al. 648-49)

Dickinson explains the best theme of death. The poem seems to rest upon a death theme. She narrates the consequences of death. She further describes it is engaged in activities that she seems to be unable to stop. She addresses to death as it could not stop her. She kindly considers death as obsessive. She observes that the carriage is occupied by both death and immortality that keeps her in very dilemmatic consequences and makes her more thoughtful to engage her mind.

Dickinson illustrates her condition how she moves forward. She makes the things obvious that death is for everyone. She addresses death as masculine forces and call that he comes in his own way. She has to leave her labor and leisure away when

death comes to take her a way as well. She regards it as his courteousness which tries to do justice in her life taking away from her life.

We slowly drove –He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility – (from Scholes et. al. 648-49)

Dickinson takes a broad view while analyzing death. He comes politely to take away all creatures of the world that they rest upon him and are bound to be the part of the reality of death. Yet nature of observing death makes her obsession because she frequently faces death toll of her friends, relatives and herself.

She also remembers the world through the eyes of children who go all around and for merrymaking and enjoyments that interest her. Death takes away even such playful children. She recalls the images that she constructs, we passed the fields of grazing grain and we passed the setting sun both imply the life upon which we human beings rely on for struggle and make final rest upon the grass that the sun passes through the life accompanying death.

We passed the school, where children strove

At Recess –in the ring –

We passed the fields of gazing grain –

We passed the Setting Sun – (from Scholes et. al. 648-49)

These lines of the poem reveal true nature of death that remains in the way to take us away. Death neither has any prejudices, nor any biased nature and stops in his own direction and rather takes away all human being from its grips.

Dickinson juxtaposes being centered with the nature of death that actually obsesses her in her life. She comes to the idea that rather death passes through us. She compares death with dew drop that falls upon us. She often feels obsessed and remembers to find out real spirit of death that relies on the child. She sees death

transparent in all. She deals with the person, character and speaker who remain mysterious to readers. Some cases remain unidentified to the readers who pass through the mere guess. Yet, it reveals true meaning to death upon which she deeply observes and tries to find out the various nature of death.

Or rather –He passed us –  
 The dews drew quivering and chill –  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
 My Tippet –only tulle  
 We paused before a house that seemed  
 A swelling of the ground –  
 The roof was scarcely visible –  
 The cornice –in the ground – (from Scholes et. al. 648-49)

Dickinson personifies death stating its real nature. Death rests on the grounds carrying the human beings in the face of death. Death is analyzed often as unexpected, sequential and serious aspects of life. She depicts death along with the continuity that they appear everywhere. Death as eminent, natural and human constructed realities have come leading humans towards the eternity.

Since then – 'tis centuries – and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the horses' heads  
 Were toward eternity – (from Scholes et. al. 648-49)

Dickinson comes across these kinds of death expression as the eternity natural drives. These are possible because of ambiguous, varied meanings and the narrative qualities that extremely pass through the theme of death. She portrays death as a journey, and not just a single event that concludes a life but also process of reaching into the eternity.

Dickinson justifies death that can be any one's friend. No one can escape from death. She regards it as the sharpest theme. It happens at any time which is universal and all knowing in the history of human civilization that she expresses in her poems. She, in her poem, "If anybody's friend be dead" narrates the story of death that takes her friend away that makes any one bereaved and grieved.

If anybody's friend be dead  
 It's sharpest of the theme  
 The thinking how they walked alive –  
 At such and such a time – (from *Dickinson 491*)

She reminds of her friend whom death takes away. This death really obsesses her in her life for what she calls the sharpest theme. These friends could not remain alive because of death that takes them away from their friend. She also encounters similar theme of her friend's death that really makes her obsessed.

Dickinson suggests both aspects of life and death that can't occur at the same time and carries the distinct themes and meanings among the humans. Almost all people have their ideas on life and feel comfortable while talking on behalf of life. Yet death becomes greater issues for her and she tries to disclose the meanings of death because it obsesses her. She expresses her feelings in her poem "A Death blow is a Life blow to Some" and elucidates her feelings of death and life as the contrasting thing:

A Death blow is a Life blow to Some  
 Who till they died, did not alive become –  
 Who had lived, had died but when  
 They died, vitality begun. (from *Dickinson 36*)

Dickinson explains here both sides of life and death. Such idea of moment and her understanding the life and death focus on the presence of life in the absence of death or vice versa. She looks up at their surroundings relying on journey of life and death



that they accompany the vanity. Moreover, death livens up. Death is lively and only the dier lives. Death is such a pleasurable. When they die the vitality begins in the life.

Dickinson emphasizes on the theme of death that she compares with a fly buzzing. It gives to some extent different messages or beliefs about death. Through analyzing the poem and interpreting their meanings, we can understand the messages, meanings and lessons she shares with us. She perhaps talks ahead about the afterlife. She initiates her idea on her poem "I Heard A Fly Buzz-When I Died" around one central theme of death:

I heard a fly buzz –when I died –  
 The Stillness in the Room  
 Was like the stillness in the air –  
 Between the heaves of storm – (from *Baym et. al. 2458*)

This extract clutches our attention while explaining the momentum experiences of her death. As the readers encounter the fly buzzing, which remain intact and continuous in her poems, she means to say death is equal for all creatures of the world. She serves juxtaposing ideas by using the sounds of the noisy fly and the silence in the air that illustrates the deeper meanings of her poem. The image created by this contrast grounds on the issues of death. It stands out immensely and catches the reader's attentions. The readers are in full knowledge of death.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry –  
 And breaths were gathering sure  
 For that last onset, when the king  
 Be witnessed in his power – (from *Baym et. al. 2458*)

These stanzas deal with death and the power of death is so strong everywhere. It makes the eyes dry. The king also realizes its power when he comes before the hands

of death. When the mourners go round the dead body and seem to be looking for death. Despite its presence in the living beings, she prepares for a journey of death. There lies death between light and her. Everything becomes visionless to her because of death.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away  
 What portion of me be  
 Assignable –and then it was  
 There interposed a fly –  
 With blue –uncertain stumbling buzz –  
 Between the light –and me –  
 I could not see to see – (from *Baym et. al. 2458*)

Dickinson always makes a beautiful discussion of death. Such discussions of death equally focus on the life, death and after death moments. It is the dying moment upon which she feels that death essentially happens in non-human lives. They come in the hands of death out of which they cannot escape from the hands of death. In this sense, she tries to get relief from the inevitable forces of death through realizing upon it because death truly obsesses her in life and predicts her death towards which she is ready to succumb and get knowledge of the very facts of death. Thus, Dickinson generalizes the nature of death which is universal and appears in various facets of earthly living beings going beyond the conventional narratives of faith on life and death.

### **Style and Diction**

Dickinson uses the style and diction that gives her poems very unique meanings. They give lyrical meanings and systematically reveal the meaning of obsession to death. She is successful in achieving the position of lyrical poet as well. Almost all her poems are short and sweet and express her emotions very well. The lyric carries true features of her poems. Abrams' definition of lyric also resembles

with her themes of her poems. He writes, "Any fairly short poem, consisting of the utterance by a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception thought and feeling . . . lyric might be ceremonial poems uttered in a public voice on a public occasion, which is known as the public mode" (111). She claims the meaning of life, death and afterlife through the lyric of the poems in which she forecasts her experiences through the uses of the power of style and diction in the form of creativity and imagination.

Dickinson moves around the theme of death. Her views on death differ from point to point and moment to moment through which she associates her life with death. She, in her poem "A Dying Tiger Mourned for Drink" expresses on one way, creating a great pathos of death, she treats death as mighty brutal elements because when she brings water to quench the thirst of the dying tiger, she finds the tiger already dead and on other way, she generalizes death that uses its grasp in tiger wildlife. It means the nature of death and process of taking the living creatures of the world is exemplary.

A Dying Tiger –mourned for Drink

I hunted all the Sand –

I caught the Drinking of a Rock

And bore it in my Hand –

His Mighty Balls – in death were thick –

'Twas not my blame – who died

While I was reading him –

But 'twas –the fact He was dead – (from *Dickinson 40*)

Dickinson sees reflection in the tiger's eyes that evokes true meanings of death. She struggles to collect the water for the tiger's life. She could not save tiger from the dying moment. She addresses death as his mighty balls that take the life of tiger away. She assumes that death is equal and unpleasant to all livings of the earth. In this poem,

she uses the style and diction that begins with the capital letter which gives emphasis on death. For example, dying tiger, drink shows the attempts to make the tiger alive whereas sand, rock indicates the hardness in the life of tiger. Mighty balls also point out the nature of death. He refers to death of tiger upon which the speaker could not save. The emphasis upon the words, pause and hyphen stands for certain expression of style and diction that reveal the meanings of death.

Dickinson tries to escape from the entire illusion of life and death by presenting the obsessive nature of death on the one hand. She could not do so because of attractive, mysterious and glamorous nature of death on the other hand. She perceives death in all of earthly living beings of the planets. It appears in thunderbolts and the dark clouds that encircle her mind. She wishes to die; the peace of death entices her. She expresses in her poem "It was not death, for I stood up" the nature of death:

It was not Death, for I stood up,

And all the Dead, lie down –

It was not Night, for all the Bells

Put out their Tongues, for Noon. (from *Baym et. al.* 2460)

Dickinson makes several attempts to refuse death. Her act of dying just deals with the meanings of death through distancing her from the life. She tells that death lies down in every moment of life. In this sense, she finds out images, actions and personifications of death that would hypnotize death as point of being enclosed with outstanding theme of obsession to death. In this regard, her style and diction of composing poem also shows the changes and her personal refusal to death.

Dickinson exposes death that motivates her only with carrying death tolls one after the other. Death neither finds any ambition nor the affection. It has no consideration for human feelings. Yet death represents as the sources of immortality. Immortality considers the relationship between life and death keeping the journey into

a respectable ending. She, in her poem "Ambition cannot find him" exposes the immortality of life and death.

Ambition cannot find him.

Affection doesn't know

How many leagues of nowhere

Lie between them now.

Yesterday, undistinguished!

Eminent today

For our mutual home, immortality! (from *Dickinson 109*)

Death gives meanings to immortality. It was in the past and today so eminent. It lies between the life and death. She sees death from various outlooks, death presents its strong grasps which seems to be cruel, painful, ultimate peace and end of the human journey. It presents its brutality towards her. It also brings shatter in any society through dealing with the human reality. It happens in anyone's life and is taken as the phenomena. Death also violates social laws that appear not only in human history but in other beings of the world. She addresses friend who often comes in her poem may stand for her lover who taught the immortality. He becomes immortal only after he loses his life.

Dickinson explains one form of life that turns into death. She presents the corporeal, ambiguous and mysterious parts of death for giving the true meanings of death. In each breath, she tries to manage the mind-problems that are caused by death. These factors are real feature of her poems. She views these features in term of darkness to light, warmth to cold and motion to rest. She in her poem "An Ignorance as Sunset", depicts the victory, defeated and immortality come under the sunset:

An ignorance as sunset

And when the solemn features

Confirm – in victory –

We start – as if defeated

In immortality (from *Dickinson 116*)

Anyway, these are the techniques that give certain effects in her life out of which she achieves certain meanings of life and death. She expresses these constituents through death which seems to be obscure and deviant. She comes across the unfamiliar and unconventional types of feelings upon which she imagines and that become one of the most remarkable moments and thoughts in her poem. She presents both aspects of death that more obsesses her in life out of which she searches true meanings of death.

Dickinson tries to reflect upon the meanings of death. She engages herself to reveal the overall meanings of death, her feelings and attitudes about death revolve around her mind that keeps her in the obsessed mind. Then after, her poems one after other, reveal the psychological realities of life and death. Her experiences upon death reveal the outlook of dying which for her is more rigorous, rebellious, obsessive and mysterious because the ideas on death violates convention of death and the journey through death becomes more difficult and dilemmatic to the human beings. It is more applied in her life, relatives and friends. She, in her poem “I've seen a Dying Eye” experiences death of her friends, relatives and family and those seen activities become her feelings, expressions and emotions. She expresses her deep seated ideas on death because it obsesses her. She compares death with dying eyes that moves around her room:

I've seen a Dying Eye

Run round and round a Room –

In search of Something – as it seemed –

Then Cloudier become –

And then –obscure with Fog –

And then –be soldered down

Without disclosing what it be

‘Twere blessed to have seen – (from *Baym et. al.* 2462)

Dickinson, here, claims to have seen a dying soul, and especially those eyes of the dying. Like an unfulfilled soul, as if something is still undone, as if some stories are yet to be heard, the eyes of the dying search the room. Or perhaps they go round and round because soon after they will cease seeing, or because they notice something invisible to the longer living souls. And then those eyes get clouded with the loss of the breath and the life because they are blessed having witnessed death, the unseen. But then they are no more there to tell what they have recently beheld. She comes across such a contrast to extend her knowledge of death that intrigues in her life. And her personal experiences, emotions and feelings turn into the general understanding of meanings of death that truly survives in her poems because she claims to have seen the dying eye that rounds around the room. Death searches her family and her that simply obsesses her and also hunts in her mind in whole life that these experiences finally become the poetic expressions that enliven her through the various forms of her poems. Her experiences of seeing dying eye represents one of her family members that discloses the reality of death what it actually is and how it appears in different motions such as moving around the room, fog and cloudier shows the reality of death that appear in various forms and takes away her family member one after other.

Dickinson has always been successful to secure her space of debate for her readers, either from the point of her life or from her poems which she never wishes to publish. But her images, tones, intensions and symbols and narrative techniques keep her familiar to her readers. Beyond, she passes along with other mystery that her poems deviate the conventional ways of expressions in terms of death and style and dictions. She in her poem “As if the Sea should part” presents such a kind of expressions, punctuation, hyphens to show the continuations of death that takes place in her life and appears in her poem.

As if the sea should part  
 And show a further Sea –  
 And that – a further – and the three  
 But a presumption be –  
 Of periods of Sea –  
 Unvisited of Shores –  
 Themselves the verge of Seas to be –  
 Eternity – is Those – (from *Dickinson 131*)

Dickinson visualizes the different forms of death with her mind that knows how her insistent rhythms, pauses, and gaps or slices of thoughts create unique voices. Her strange punctuation, uncertain parts of expressions, weird phrases draw her reader's attentions to inquire themselves whether her poems are for reading and knowing of her personal experiences to general nature of death that comes in the faces of obsessive nature, love, suffering and pains. These explanations variously justify about death engaging the readers in serious discussions to know very facts of death.

Dickinson accomplishes with her activities of creating poems that make familiar to varied attitudes towards life and death along with overcoming various questions. And she expresses these in variety of tones, expressions and juxtapositions. She presents the various speakers in diverse poems often to identify the meanings of death. Moreover, she prefers to reveal true nature of death that becomes often known to life, God, nature, society, body, spirit to mean the meanings of death. For her, death often suspects, obsesses and engages her. In other ways, her condensed style and monotonous rhythms make continuous reading of her poems difficult because she almost all revolves around death. In such point, no readers can make hasty judgment and misperception why she always engages in death. She, in her poem "Behind Me – dips Eternity" strongly supports the distinguished facets of death that she tries to prove in her life:



Behind Me – dips Eternity  
 Before me - Immortality –  
 Myself – the term between –  
 Death but the drift of Eastern gray,  
 Dissolving into Dawn away,  
 Before the West begin – (from *Dickinson 155*)

The stanzas are moments, thoughts, and strong reactions which are caught and held and a moment lent itself to long verbosity in her almost all poems. In reality, the readers being so accustomed do get to her conciseness engaged to illustrate the issues and problems of death that she interacts with it in her life. She struggles hard while revealing the nature of death along with carrying powerful words, rhyme and meter that also match with constant uses of the dashes which follow her poems of death that intrigues her to be the part of death. Her uses of unsystematic meters, rhymes and other syntactical error might suggest death which has no certain and fixed reaction in anyone's life. However, it passes in its own motion which really obsesses her life because she encounters death with her families, relatives and friends in different moments which obsesses her.

Death is both continuity and a parting and she looks upon the multiples of death in different circumstances. Such meanings and knowledge pass through the unconscious knowledge of life and death. She acquires such kinds of experiences from the earliest childhood life. These things in conscious or unconscious form appear in her poems. The ways she faces death are of both the natural and ego problems related to human mind that obsesses her throughout life which comes in unconscious level of mind in her poems. Moreover, she interrogates the existence of god and church practices because they are unable to save the life of those she witnesses and expresses in her poems. Her poems of longing for life, for death, love, immortality, freedom, eternity, day, night, and heaven and hell make her work more rewarding and

internalizing of not only her time and space that they come in her poems but also of global responses of its various readers both on knowing of her life and of death.

## **IV: Conclusion**

### **Death Obsession: Impact of Seeing Near and Dear Ones Die**

Dickinson's poems encompass the theme of death upon which she engages to find out the meanings of death that obsesses her. This research analyzes and interprets death related poems through psychoanalysis. It simply tries to know various forms of expressions, feelings and attitudes of her upon death. This research is just the analysis of Dickinson's selected poems to find out the meanings of obsession to death through the perspective of psychoanalysis.

Dickinson lived in an era what is generally known as an era of various forms of men-made violence, war and terror. She lived in a period of the war and the frontier movements of her society. She was affected by her life and the era she existed in. She had a view of god and his power that was very strange for a person of her time. She interrogated on the existence of god, church and conventional beliefs. She more believed on the existence of people in the society around her who made strong commitment to survive in powerful way. She enjoyed in outside environment rather going in the church and often praying with the conventional prayer of god. It does not mean that she was detached from the god, nature, life and death which remain major elements in her poems. The presentation of death comes in the form of veracities and differing nature. In this way, the main quest of the study is to explain the obsessive nature of death in Dickinson's poems.

There are several of her poems which try to justify the meanings of death. She explains about the immortality, eternity and continuity of life that become accessible and justifiable through various meanings of death. The most astonishing and appealing are the ideas, images, moments and symbols she comes across her life and in her poems, she survives with secluded life and defies with the conventional social survivals of her society, even the existence of God and power of God and church becomes defying elements. She could not deny death of her friends, relatives and

friends. She longs for attaining the meanings of death that really obsess her in life that she represents in her poems. In these situations, she pays her deep-seated feelings, attitudes and expressions towards the life, death and afterlife.

Dickinson composes the poems that carry the intellectual and phenomenal backgrounds that the ordinary readers could not pass through. There are various walks of life and critical responses that come in her life, poems and struggle for survivals yet some remains critical on behalf of her style and structure of the creativities. The poetic qualities of emotional, passionate, intense experiences that they come in her poems are of genuine knowledge. The short, plural meanings and contents are the features of her writing poems that they engage her readers to disclose the reality of life and death, which equally sound much more nature oriented, life and death defining and defying the conventional aspects of human understanding on god, power of god, church, heaven, hell and afterlife. Amidst these, the most intriguing feature of death really obsesses her in life that she creates in her poems.

Death and the problem of life after death obsessed her. She seems to have thought of it constantly – she died all her life, she probed death daily. Ultimately, the obsession became almost morbid. She has explored the nature of death in almost 600 poems. She has looked at death from the vantage of both the living and the dying. She even went to imagine her own death, the loss of her own body and the journey of her soul to the unknown.

Whicher tells us Emily was exposed to death from her earliest childhood, when some of her schoolmates succumbed to death even before the end of their teens. Illness brought death to Ben Newton when still young, and during the civil war, New England was flooded with death. And her cousins died. And her father. And her mother. The grief she managed, but the mystery always remained. And those losses deeply impacted her psyche and hence got reflected upon her poetry. Therefore, through psychoanalysis the study tries to understand her poems and finds that it is the

encountering of deaths of so many of her near and dear ones that makes her poems so much possessed by and obsessed to death.

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