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UNIVERSALITY OF TRANSCENDENTALISM : A REDEFINED IDEALISTIC LITERARY MOVEMENT



Dr. PRAMOD AMBADASRAO PAWAR

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR & HEAD,
DEPT OF ENGLISH,
& IQAC COORDINATOR,
SANT DNYANESHWAR MAHAVIDYALAYA, SOEGAON,
DIST. AURANGABAD MS INDIA

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Website : <http://www.epitomejournals.com>
Email : iamdrpawar@gmail.com
Mobile : 88 88 9 51 51 0

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ABSTRACT

Transcendentalism is a redefined idealistic movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in the eastern United States. It arose as a response to protest against the general state of intellectualism and spirituality at the time. What is Transcendentalism? Transcendentalism was a nineteenth-century philosophical movement. They assumed that true reality transcends, or exists beyond, the physical world. Ralph Waldo Emerson opines that *"We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."*

KEYWORDS

Transcendentalism, Ubiquity, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Romanticism

RESEARCH PAPER

Transcendentalism was a literary and philosophical movement that emphasized transcendence, or "going beyond." Proponents of the movement believed in going beyond the ordinary limits of thought and experience in several issues namely: transcending society by living a life of independence and contemplative self-reliance, often out in nature, transcending the physical world to make contact with spiritual or metaphysical realities; transcending traditional religion by blazing one's own spiritual trait, and transcending reason to embrace intuition.

American Transcendentalism began with the creation in 1836 of the Transcendental Club in Boston. They had a magazine named "The Dial". The major transcendentalists who attract the attentions are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott...etc. Romanticism focuses on Nature, Individual and Subjectivity. It also encompasses the elements from Gothic literature as Emotion, Supernatural elements and Atmosphere.

On the other hand, Transcendentalism only deals Nature, Individual and Subjectivity in its philosophical way. Some of the basic beliefs of Transcendentalism include the notion that everything in the world along with people is a reflection of God or the Divine Soul. The physical world is a doorway to the spiritual world. People can use intuition to see God in nature and in their own souls. A person is his or her own best authority but not society, the church, or government. It focuses on the fact that feeling and intuition is superior to reason and intellect. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the best-known Transcendentalist. He was a highly

influential writer, lecturer, and social reformer. He lectured and wrote extensively on Transcendental ideas. He was greatly admired by and influenced other writers and artists, including Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. The Transparent Eyeball could simultaneously absorb and observe information while being part of that information was a symbolic representation of these ideas.

In a literary sense, Transcendentalists, like their fictional counterparts, the Romantics were trying to forge a distinctly American literature and philosophy that valued the power of the individual.

Still on the subject of nature as one of the tenets of transcendentalism, one acknowledges that in Ubiquity, Pramod Pawar expounds on the aspect of time and beauty. These are elements of nature that profoundly influence or impact life. In his usual controversial but philosophical way of juxtaposing words, he muses about life thus:

Truth is time

Time is external

I mean the truth

I mean the truth ...

Time heals wound when you are born

Time begets new life when you die

Time is permanent, beauty not

Time defeats beauty, all, all a lie Beauty enslaves time, all, all a lie.

Beauty enslaves time, all, all a lie.

Beauty is physique, but time external (22-23)

Life is meant to be Bad or Good in different contexts. Puritans think it as sinful, Enlightenment view it as Blank Slate (i. e. *Tabula Rasa*). But transcendentalists mean life as good. About the Nature and the Oversoul, transcendentalist writers expressed semi-religious feelings toward nature. They viewed a direct connection between the universe and the individual soul. They think that divinity permeated all objects, animate or inanimate. The intention of human life was union with the "Oversoul". It is a sort of spiritual union of the individual, God and Nature.

Pramod Pawar in his Ubiquity expresses his admiration and frustration about nature. The theme of nature runs across Ubiquity. Pramod's transcendentalism is glaring when he hints on the unity and inseparable link that binds people and other creatures. The philosophy of

the oversoul can be deduced from the following lines extracted from Part III of Ubiquity:

Who is I in me?

All that I can see

Can you see I in you?

Can you see I in you? (Ubiquity 34)

Major Transcendentalist works include Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841), Henry David Thoreau's "Walden" (1854) and "Civil Disobedience". Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville are anti-transcendentalists who investigate the darker side of nature and human nature. Both believe life in its tragic dimension, a combination of good and evil.

According to Wikipedia, Karma is a concept in Hinduism which explains casualty through a system where beneficial effects are derived from past beneficial actions and harmful actions creating a system of actions and reactions through a soul's reincarnated lives forming a cycle of rebirth. Karmas to the poet-speaker is what he thinks he must do or follow in order to benefit from every good thing that is derived from beneficial actions. Due to unhappiness, pain and frustration, the speaker embraces religion as his ultimate source of hope and consolation in a world where in happiness in but an occasional episode in the entire drama of pain. The speaker continues by referring to another aspect of Hinduism which if attained will give him the comfort or satisfaction he badly needs. He declares again: Every life is a hope, it's a sin... Every life I beg for redemption. I long for stillness and exception Samadhi I attain now Samadhi I attain now... I am for redemption I've been for redemption I yearn for redemption I yearn for redemption ... (Pawar 41)

Transcendentalists assumed that humanity was Godlike and viewed the world in which only good existed. They chose to focus on the positive rather than evil and darkness in life. The roots of Transcendentalism are found in Idealism in Greece in the 4th century B.C., Puritanism in North America in the 17th century, Romanticism in Europe and North America in late 18th century through mid- 19th century, transcendentalism in North America in the 19th century. Idealism was a philosophy explained by the Greek philosopher Plato in the 4th century B.C. Idealists believed that true reality could be found in ideas rather than in the physical world. Talking about Idealism and Transcendentalism, Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed that Transcendentalism was simply Idealism rediscovered and applied to the nineteenth-century world. They shared Plato's belief in an all-encompassing spiritual reality. They applied Idealist ideas to human life, believing in human perfectibility and working to achieve that goal. Focusing on Puritanism, it was an early American religious

philosophy. The Puritans believed that religion is a personal, inner experience that should not be filtered through clergy or government. People should be self-reliant. They expressed that God's presence reveals itself primarily through the Bible, but also through signs in the physical world. Human salvation is reserved for a few "elect" people—the majority of humanity is destined to damnation. About Puritanism and Transcendentalism, Transcendentalists shared the Puritan beliefs in the personal nature of religion and the desirability of self-reliance. However, Transcendentalists differed because they looked to nature, not the Bible, as a primary source of divine revelation. They simply believed that all humans, not just the "elect," were connected to a divine source. In Romanticism, Romanticism was a school of thought that began in late eighteenth-century Europe and spread to America in the nineteenth century. The Romantics valued imagination, feeling, and nature over reason, logic, and civilization. They championed individualism and reflected on nature to gain spiritual wisdom. About Romanticism and Transcendentalism, Transcendentalism was one of the faces of American Romanticism. Transcendentalists took the Romantic belief that spiritual wisdom could be found in nature one step further—they believed that everything in the physical world, including human beings, is a reflection of God. They believed that because human beings are a part of the Divine Soul, they are capable of perfection, that they can meet the Absolute.

Transcendentalists believed in the possibility of human perfection. They pursued practical goals for improving people's lives. They developed plans for creating a perfect, or utopian, society. They worked for social change.

In the words of HANS NDAH NYAA, The University of Bamenda, Higher Teachers' Training College Department of English Modern Letters :

Transcendentalism is a 19th century literary movement in the realm of American literature. Although it is a purely American literary concept which was informed by Romanticism from Europe, its tenets can be applied to other literatures across the world.

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