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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

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Transcendentalism was one of the important manifestations of the romantic movement in America. It was identified as an intellectual movement. It defined as "the recognition of the man's innate knowledge and through this one can transcend the senses". The transcendentalists did not accept anything which attempted to organize and institutionalize human spirit. Transcendentalism inspired many intellectuals of New England; the main proponents to spread this movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The movement started as a revolt against sterile Unitarian orthodoxy; as a protest against the cultural dependence of America on Europe and then it laid an intense spiritual foundation. The transcendentalists believed that "the truth comes through intuition and is more valid than any truth arrived through reason and understanding." According O.B. Frothingham, "the movement though local in activity, limited in scope, brief in duration, engaging but a comparatively small number of individuals, left, a broad and deep trace on ideas and institutions. It affected thinkers, swayed politicians, guided moralists, inspired philanthropists, created reformers". Before 1830, there was no particular movement, the people who were with similar philosophical thoughts formed a group. In 1842 the movement got an identity and came in to focus. People wanted to know more about it.

According John Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1689) when an infant was born his mind was a tabula rasa (clean slate). Senses like touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing play major role to gain knowledge. Modern science and 18th century rationalism developed out of this theory. After American revolution many theological leaders of New England influenced by Locke's theory, and started to reject the Trinitarian Christianity (father, son, and holy ghost) for a more rationalistic Unitarianism. Locke's theory advocated "if the bible, word of God, it was the vocabulary set down by the men in a particular place and at a particular and it affected by the notion of human circumstance. So, writings did not consist of divinely inspired words but rather of a vocabulary that was the result of the time and chance above which no human being, Trinitarian and Unitarian, could rise". In late eighteenth-century some opinions had set against Locke's theories. James Murdock (before 1830) who was pursuing his

scholarship in church history devoted the last three chapters of his study to German Idealism. He devoted his first chapter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Aids To Reflection", through this Coleridge introduced German idealists like Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel to American Writers According to German philosophers Kant and Hegel, there was knowledge within man and this knowledge transcended the senses and thus given the name "transcendentalism". This knowledge was the voice of God within man his intuition. When a child was born, he was born with this innate ability to distinguish between right and wrong. But when he grew up he tended to listen the voice of the world and ignored his inner voice. Due to this man had developed the evil deeds. So, it's the duty of every citizen to listen the voice of God with in him. This was the basic grounding of American Transcendentalism. Transcendentalists focus was the liberation of the mankind. Higher criticism was the American scholar's area of interest. It was coincided with German philosophy. Through Anec-Louise-Germaine Necker they got the information from widely circulated "Germany" (1810) in French language. In 1813 which was available in English translation. Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge brought Kant's and Hegel's theories to England. It gradually spread to New England by the mid 1830s. Many of these transcendental ideas were discussed by the former students of Harvard College in 1836 at Harvard college celebrations in Cambridge. They also decided to meet again whenever there was an opportunity to discuss.

The members of transcendentalism were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Rev. Frederick Henry Hedge, Rev. George Ripley, Rev. Orestes Brownson, Rev. Jones Very, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Bronson Alcott, Rev. Theodore Parker, Christopher Pearce, Rev. John Sullivan Dwight and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson's house in Concord decided as their meeting place. These meetings got the attention of public and News Paper they called them 'Transcendentalists'. These meetings coincided with the Hedge's visits, so they called the Hedge Club. Thoreau did not join the Hedge club until 1831. But thereafter he was a regular attendant to that meeting. Among the members of transcendentalism - Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Walt Whitman were contributed more. The choice of subject and literary form

was different from one another. Psychological and allegorical analyses of certain types of human personalities were the focus of Hawthorne and Melville. Relation of man to Nature was the main focus of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Living at Walden Pond and going to jail for not paying tax made him a true transcendentalist. He acted as a true transcendentalist to the end of his life. As a transcendentalist he insisted his readers on the importance of the inner life. In the final chapter of the 'Walden', Thoreau said "Explore your own higher altitudes Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and world with in you, opening new channels, not of trade but of thought". Emerson's 'Nature' was the expression of the Transcendental philosophy. It was published in 1836. According to Emerson, "There was ' a new consciousness', for the new generation had 'with knives in their brain', a tendency to introversion, self – dissection, and anatomizing motives". Transcendentalism affected many people especially young people, advocating them to re-check their inherited beliefs. They introduced transcendental ideas through Fuller's conversations, Brownson's preachings, The Dial (periodical) and Emerson's lectures.

By the mid-1840s transcendentalism was a pulsing magnetic current, drawing many different people in to it and preparing them to work in various innovative ways. After 1850, New England's radicals whether supporters of self-culture or advocates of broad social reform, were alone with America. Transcendentalism rich intellectual garden began to bear new fruit.

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