

"Transcendentalism"

Introduction:-

It was a religious, philosophical and literary movement. It was started in New England during mid 19th century. This movement valued individualism, nature and intuition. It was a reaction against "Age of reasons".

Definition:-

People, men and women equally have knowledge about themselves and world around them that transcend or goes beyond what they can see, hear, feel, taste and touch.

Origin:-

There the scholars and writers come together to discuss spiritual ideas. There was debate between New Lights and Old Lights.

In new lights, there were theologians who believed religion should focus on emotional experience.

Old lights oppose them who value reason in their religion approach. Old lights were named after the liberal Christian and then unitarianism (focus on reason).

Many peoples start following the old light but after some times they came to spirituality and new movement starts called as transcendentalism.

It spilt from unitarianism and embraces spirituality - It focus on idealistic theory.

Boston newspaper called them the transcendentalist. They were against empiricism and rationalism.

The transcendentalism word comes from Latin word *transcendere* and climb over or beyond.

Characteristics:-

Individualism:- Emphasize that each individual is unique and should be independent in their thoughts and beliefs.

(ii) **Spiritualism**:- Giving importance to spiritual experience that establish a direct connection between human soul and the divine.

(iii) **Nature**:- Transcendentalists viewed nature as divine expression and highlight its importance in ^{writing} divine and philosophies.

(iv) **Non-conformity**:- This movement challenged conventional norms and institution in society, encouraging individuals to act according to their inner voice and beliefs.

(v) **Idealism**:- Transcendentalists being held idealistic view, believing in inherent godness of people and nature. They aimed to reform society and promote social change based on these ideals.

vi) **Self reliance**:-

Human should be reliant on himself - He does not depend upon his parents, institution and god - And when

he was independent he
is on the right way and
he is good.

(vii) Educational reform:-

The education
is source of knowledge for
the peoples not only a piece of
paper (degree).

(viii) Revolt against tradition:-

The
people should not follow the
old traditions. They must break
that old traditions because
transcendentalist thought that these
tradition make the people limited
and bounded.

Belief:-

Transcendentalist "advocate
idea of a personal knowledge
of God, believing that no
intermediary was needed for
spiritual insight." They embrace
idealism, focusing on nature and
opposing materialism.

"They also believe that humans are inherently good but can be corrupted by society and institutions. Insight and experience are more important than logic, spirituality should come from self not organized religion and nature is beautiful and should be respected."

Example:-

An example of transcendentalism is the belief that man is at best when he is independent and not a part of organized religion or politics. An example of transcendentalism is a quote:-

"A man in debt is so far a slave"

(Ralph W. Emerson)

Basic ideas of transcendentalism

This movement emphasize basic ideas:-

Connection to nature:-

Humans are connected to nature and can find spiritual and emotional nourishment there.

Intuitive thoughts:-

Insights are more important than logic and experience for discovering truth.

Rejection of societal divides:-

People should avoid conformity and societal divisions based on religion.

Divinity of nature:-

Nature is divine and grows according to its own law.

Divine experience:-

The divine is present all around us especially in our daily life.

(2) Formation of Transcendental Club (1836)-

A group of writers, philosophers and intellectuals including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and others, began meeting in Boston and Concord, Massachusetts. They discuss issues related to religion, philosophy, and social reform.

(3) Publication of Emerson's nature (1836)-

Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" became a foundational text of transcendentalism, outlining its core ideas:

The spiritual connection between humans and god, natural world, self reliance and individualism.

The Dial (1840-44).-

The transcendentalist

Aim of transcendentalist:-

The aim of transcendentalists is to transcend the material world of reason and rationality and to experience the divine in everyday life.

Transcendentalism is a philosophy that emerged in 1830 in eastern United States as a reaction to intellectualism.

Major events in transcendentalism:-

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i) Emergence of transcendentalism:- (1830s)

Influenced by European Romanticism, German idealism and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, transcendentalism took root in US emphasizing power of individualism, nature and intuition.

journal, coedited by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson published essay, poetry and articles expressing transcendentalism idea. It provides a platform for emerging writer like Fuller and Thoreau.

(5) Henry David Thoreau's Experiment at Walden Pond (1845-47):-

Thoreau lived in a cabin he built near Walden pond to participate self-reliance and simplicity. His reflection were later published in Walden (1854) a seminal work of transcendentalist literature.

(6) Margaret Fuller's contributions-

Fuller's book in 19th century (1845) Women, extended transcendentalist principle to feminist thought, advocating for women's intellectual

and social equality.

(1) Social reform movement:-

Transcendentalists became involved in various reform causes including abolitionism, educational reform and women's rights, often tying these efforts to their spiritual and philosophical beliefs.

(2) Decline of the movement (1850s):-

While its influence persisted, transcendentalism as a distinct movement faded by mid nineteenth century as other social and literary movements emerged.

Legacy:-

Transcendentalism significantly influenced American literature, philosophy and social reform. Its emphasis on individuality and spiritual connection to nature

continues to inspire modern thought and environmentalism.

Important writers

(i) Ralph Waldo Emerson:-

He was the central figure in transcendentalist movement and its leading essayist, philosopher and public speaker. He played a vital role in shaping ideas and principles of transcendentalism, which emphasizes individual intuition, spirituality and harmony with nature. His key contributions are below:-

1. Foundation thinker of transcendentalism:-

Emerson's intellectual background in philosophy and his break from traditional unitarian belief led him to advocate for a more personal, intuitive form of spirituality, center to transcendentalism.

(i) Mentor and inspire:-

Henry D. Thoreau Emerson mentore on transcendentalist idea in his work Walden.

He also influence other key figures including Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, shaping course of American literature.

(ii) Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862).:-

He was known for his advocacy of simplicity, individualism, and deep connection between human and nature.

• Thoreau's role in transcendentalism:-

Thoreau was a student and mentee of Ralph W. Emerson and their relation greatly influenced their thinking. He emphasized practice application of transcendentalism principle self reliance, living in harmony with nature.

His philosophical approach drew from Europe, romanticism, Hinduism and work of Immanuel Kant.

(2) key writings and ideas:-

• Essay, Nature (1836):-

Emerson nature is consider foundation of this movement - It outlined belief that humans can experience divine natural world and that nature serve as teacher and spiritual guide.

• Self reliance (1841):-

This essay emphasizes individualism, self trust and non-conformity, encouraging people to rely on their inner intuition rather than social expectations.

The Over-Soul (1841):-

Emerson describe a universal spirit or Over soul that connects all living being emphasizing unity and inter-connectedness.

→ Major contribution and work-

- Experiment at Walden Pond (1845-47)-

Thoreau spend two years living in small cabin near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. He celebrate simplicity and self sufficiency, aimed to "live deliberately" and connect with nature.

His reflections on this experience were published in "Walden" (1854) a transcendental masterpiece exploring themes of simplicity, nature and spiritual fulfillment.

- Essay "Civil disobedience" (1849):

Thoreau wrote there this essay after being jailed for refusing to pay a poll tax that supported slavery and Mexican American War.

This essay advocates for nonviolent resistance to unjust laws, drawing on transcendentalist principle of

- morality and individual conscience.
This work inspired later leaders
like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin
Luther King Jr.
- Other Writings:-

Thoreau journals, essays,
and poems often explored transenden-
talist theme like nature's spiritual
power, critique of materialism and
celebration of individualism.

⇒ Core ideas and Beliefs.

- Social reform:-

He criticized slavery,
institutionalized religion and the
materialism connecting his activism
to transcendentalist ideas.

- Individualism and non-conformity:-

Thoreau
urged people to trust their inner
voice rather than conform to
societal expectations. They consider
nature as source of healing & truth.

2) Margaret Fuller (1810-1850):-

Role of him in transcendentalism:-

Fuller was prominent writer, editor and feminist, deeply involved in transcendentalist movement. She believed in intellectual and spiritual equality of women and men.

→ Key contribution:-

Editor of The Dial (1840-42), the transcendentalist journal where she published essay and poetry.

Author of Women in 19th Century (1845), a groundbreaking work advocating for women's right and equality, considered one of the earliest feminist texts.

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→ Belief:-

Fuller argued for personal and intellectual self development and emphasize that women like men should achieve spirituality

Theodore Parker (1810-1860)

A Unitarian minister and social reformer, Parker blended transcendentalist philosophy with activism, particularly in abolitionist movement.

Key contribution:-

Known for his sermon "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity" (1841), which challenged traditional religious doctrines.

Belief:-

Parker saw social reform as moral duty grounded in transcendentalist ideals of individual conscience and universal justice.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892):-

While not a formal member of the movement, Whitman was deeply

influenced by transcendentalist ideas particularly Emerson's philosophy of self and nature.

key contribution:-

Author of Leaves of Grass (1855) a ground breaking collection of poetry that celebrates individuality, nature and democracy.

Belief:-

He expresses transcendentalist theme of self reliance, the interconnectedness of all life and the spiritual significance of nature.

6- Edgar Allan Poe:-

He was a writer of 19th century ^{transcendentalism} & emphasizes the inherent goodness of people and nature the importance of individual intuition and a spiritual connection to universe.

Poe's philosophy perspective-

work often explore themes of madness, death and decay. Some say that Poe was influenced by transcendentalism and made significant contribution to American literature.

Important contribution-

- **The Raven (1845)**:- A narrative poem about grief, despair and unrelenting loss, featuring a mysterious talking raven that repeats "Nevermore". It solidified Poe's reputation and remains his most famous work.
- **Annabel Lee (1849)**:- A haunting poem about eternal love and loss, believed to be inspired by Poe's later wife, Virginia Clemm.
- **The Cask of Amontillado (1846)**:- A story of revenge in which the narrator lures his victim into a wine cellar to meet chilling fate.
- **The Black cat (1843)**:- A tale of guilt, cruelty featuring a narrator who descends into madness.

* The Transcendental club:-

The transcendental club was group of intellectuals and writers in the 19th century - It play a pivotal role in the development of transcendentalist movement in United state. (U.S)

Overview of this club.

(i) **Formation:-** This club was informally founded in 1836 in Cambridge. founded in Massachusetts. The first official meeting was held on Septem^{ber} 8, 1836 in Boston at home of George Ripley, a Unitarian minister and one of the club's founding members.

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Purpose:-

The group sought to challenge the rigid doctrines of Unitarianism and the materialism of the industrial revolution.

Members explore ideas of individualism, intuition, spirituality and connection between humans and nature. Emerson says on individualism:

"Man is not a farmer, or a professor or not an engineer but he is all"

Key Themes:-

Belief in inherent goodness of individuals and nature.

The importance of self reliance and intuition over institutionalized religion.

A focus on spiritual and intellectual transcendence.

Members:-

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Henry David Thoreau.

Margaret Fuller

Bronson Alcott.

George Ripley

Elizabeth Peabody.

Activities and influence:

(i) Meeting:-

The club met irregularly often in member's homes to discuss philosophy, religion and reform.

(ii) Publication:-

The Dial (1840-1844): The transcendentalist journal edited by Margaret Fuller in 1841-1842 and later by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1843-44. It published essay, poetry and critiques of contemporary society.

The name of magazine The Dial is suggest by father of Louis M. Alcott.

Social reform:-

Members were actively involved in abolitionism, women's rights and educational reform, applying their transcendentalist principles to real world issues.

Influence

It is said that the transcendentalism movement is influenced by German romanticism and also from American romanticism. It talks about American individualism that man is inherently wise and there is not hold of church on man.

Religious theme:-

Transcendentalist were against organized religion. And they also think that the religion is very subjective things.

Religion depend upon each person connection to god. They said that there are no actual set of rules that you must followed in order to reached the heaven or to known about their god.

Emerson says:-

"Emerson church consist
of one member that
is himself"

This line state core philosophy
of transcendentalism.

→ Transcendental philosophy is all
about that divine can be known
through **emotion and intuition**
not by reasons.

→ So you can't use your brain and
seek help from god. You
must need to ^{and use} know about the
knowledge of intuition.

Critical overview:-

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This is a shattered
movement - Ralph W. Emerson
influenced many writers and
people - If we consider Emerson
the centre he does not move
all people together.

Conclusion:-

The conclusion of transcendentalism can be understood as its enduring principle and impact, if left on literature, philosophy and society. This movement is short lived (flourishing in 1830s - 1850s)

- Transcendentalists concluded that individual is ultimate authority on truth, guided by intuition and inner experience, rather than social norms.

This movement emphasized that nature is reflection of divine and source of spiritual enlightenment. Thoreau say:-

"I found it whole sum
to be found the companion
that is so companionable
as solitude"

Many transcendentalists such as Thoreau applied their principle