



ROLE OF EMERSON IN SHAPING THOREAU'S LITERARY CAREER

N. ANKANNA

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Yogi Vemana University,
Kadapa (AP) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Thoreau's friendship with Emerson played a pivotal role in his life. Though Henry David Thoreau, fourteen years junior to Emerson, they would become close friends and their intimacy continued almost 25 years until his death. Emerson had already published Nature when Thoreau introduced it to Emerson. Emerson recognized his potential as a writer, although young Thoreau produced few immature poems. Without Emerson's intellectual guidance and financial assistance Thoreau couldn't have become one of the major writers in American Literature. Emerson influenced Thoreau towards Transcendentalism, very soon he became the most uncompromised and rugged transcendentalist. Later Emerson allowed him to construct a cabin near Walden Pond to experience and to teach the transcendental values. Emerson is the thinker Thoreau is the doer.

Key Words: *friendship, intellectual guidance and transcendental values*

INTRODUCTION

In 1837, Thoreau was introduced to Emerson and from that onwards they started meeting occasionally. Once Emerson had delivered ten lectures in Boston entitled '*Human Culture*,' it was a revolutionary advice to the young minds of New England. He shared a pessimistic note on Calvinism and the Rationalism that suppressed the Unitarian thought. Emerson explained Kant's belief that man has innate knowledge to see beyond mere senses to arrive at truth, in other words to transcend it. Youth of New England was captivated by Emerson's message but no one tried to live up to the full extent of it except Thoreau, he took these words to heart.

N. ANKANNA

1 Page

When Emerson met Thoreau he recognized that he was a man with lot of potentiality. Though Thoreau produced few immature poems in the beginning, Emerson saw a budding writer in him. Emerson's trust on Thoreau helped him to develop his intellectual career. Emerson supported him financially, morally and intellectually.

Emerson invited Thoreau to live in their house at Lexington Road. The intimacy between the two had grown and they started to know each other better. Emerson offered him his board and room. He planted Emerson's garden, apple trees grafted & Chimneys burned out. When Emerson was out of station on lecture tours and he used to look after his wife and children. Thoreau was so happy in taking care of his children and wrote a poem on Emerson's daughter.

*Thou little bud of being, Edith named,
With whom I've made acquaintance on this earth,
Who knowest me without impediment,
As flowers know the winds that stir their leaves,
And ride upon my shoulders as the sphere,
Turning on me thy sage reserved eye,
Behind whose broad & charitable gaze
Floats the still true & universal soul..... (128)*

Emerson was so fascinated and preserved the poem. One of the important benefits Thoreau gained in Emerson's house was his library. He had given complete liberty to his library and also borrowed books from George Bancroft for him. He loves reading from his college days and it has increased. At times he even translated some books from French and German when the books were not available in English. Since his college days Thoreau had a strong affinity towards classical languages. He was attracted by Hindu scriptures and read volumes of Hitopadesha and Laws of Manu. While he was at Emerson's house his journals showed maturing thoughts and he got an opportunity to sharpen his talent of expression. Emerson started treating Thoreau as one of his family members. He invited him to stay in his home, where he stayed for two years. Through Emerson, Thoreau was introduced to major literary figures like Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, William Ellery Channing etc.

Margaret Fuller was the literary friend of Emerson, published several articles and worked on the biography of Goethe. Once Emerson wrote to Margaret Fuller saying that Thoreau's poetry was maturing and that he wanted her to see it, when she visited Concord. She came to Concord at the end of March to meet Emerson where he insisted to see the works of Thoreau. To her the poems written seemed like the exercises of a student than the expression of a poet. Under the guidance of Emerson, Thoreau started writing the general literature. Thoreau had written a critical essay on Greek satirist Persius, Emerson suggested him to revise and sent it

to the magazine but Thoreau wanted to correct it by Emerson or Fuller. Finally Fuller accepted to correct the manuscript of Persius and later it was sent to the publication. Thoreau brought the boat which he and his brother John had built and often took it out to the lake. Once Emerson joined him and wrote about the trip in his journal.

The good river-god has taken the form of my valiant Henry Thoreau here & introduced me to the riches of his shadowy, starlit, moon stream, a lovely new world lying as close & yet as unknown to this vulgar trite one of streets & shops as death to life or poetry to prose. Though one field only we went to the boat & then left all time, all science, all history behind us and entered into Nature with one stroke of a paddle. Take care, good friend! I said, as I looked West into the sunset overhead & underneath, & he with his face toward me rowed towards it, - take care; you know not what you do, dipping your wooden oar into this enchanted liquid, painted with all reds & purples and yellows which glows under & behind you. (55)

During summer months Margaret Fuller and Caroline Sturgis came to stay with Emerson. Thoreau used to take them on the river in his boat. Thoreau was so happy that he got an opportunity to spend time with these people in Emerson's house.

While Thoreau was at Emerson's house he saw a book named orphic hymn which was in Greek, having had fascination towards classical languages he started translating that into English. The pages of his journals showed a lot of maturity and sharpness because of Emerson's intellectual guidance. Two years after Thoreau left Emerson's house and sent a poem:

*This true people took the stranger
And warm hearted housed the ranger
They received their roving guest
And have fed him with the best..... (131)*

During Thoreau's friendship with him, there were other men like William Ellery Channing, Jones Very, Charles King, and Christopher Cranch graduates from Harvard school also caught the attention of Emerson. But Thoreau was one who lived full extent and practiced Emerson's transcendental views. In 1837, Emerson delivered Phi Beta Kappa address on "The American Scholar" describing in it the features of an ideal man. He found the qualities of an ideal man in Henry David Thoreau. The two men were more and more attracted to each other, though Emerson had well established fame and older than Thoreau, the two looked each other as equals. They achieved a special feeling of respect and regard for each other.

Through Emerson, Thoreau met Bronson Alcott in 1839 and they both found common interests in them and spent a lot of time solving the problems of the world. Very soon Alcott

recognized Thoreau's genius. Like Emerson, Thoreau learnt that lecture would be the right platform for his writing career. He delivered a lecture at the Concord Lyceum, with the success of his first lecture, he soon started working on the next one named Sound and Silence. Thoreau was elected secretary of the Lyceum.

In 1842, Emerson along with his friends established a reading room with newspapers and periodicals. For many years it served as a meeting place for intellectual discussions and also a good reading room. Thoreau had utilized the opportunity and he immediately sent his writings to the periodicals. On the request of Emerson, he sent his poem "Nature doth have her dawn each day." Emerson insisted Thoreau to prepare a review and this resulted in the July issue with a title "The Natural History of Massachusetts," it served as the first major prose work of him. Emerson sent "My Prayer" poem of Thoreau to the July issue and in October Emerson printed eight poems of Thoreau. With Emerson's encouragement, Thoreau won the powers of editorials and edited the April 1843 issue by himself. Whatever Thoreau and Emerson shared during their walks and talks had written in their journals. Professor J. B. Moore stated in his work

Emerson journals refer to Thoreau more than twice as often as Thoreau's to Emerson. During this time Thoreau described to his friend both the sensory and the scientific aspects of that Nature which Emerson celebrated more abstractly, and Thoreau progressively realized in his life that ideal self-reliance which Emerson practiced only with qualifications. Both men first experienced, and then described at this time their ideal of friendship, in words so similar that they reflect frequent mutual discussions of the subject. (241)

After coming back from Emerson's house, Thoreau was in search of a job and Emerson helped him in finding a job in Staten Island, New York. He met two transcendentalists, Giles Waldo and William Tappan, in that place and shared his views. He met one of his teachers, who was the in charge of the Mercantile Library New York. He got access to the library books and he read all he could. Back to Concord Thoreau decided to live in solitude and started searching for suitable land. Inspired by the transcendental philosophy, Thoreau decided to prove it practically. In 'American Scholar' Emerson stated three stages of Transcendentalism and Walden is said to be the third stage of Transcendentalism. In Nature, Emerson stated that Nature should be explored personally "to understand God's revelation secretly imprinted upon it."(30)

Ellery Channing advised Thoreau to build a cabin on the land which was owned by Emerson to complete the book "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." Thoreau believed strongly that reform always starts with the individual. So he decided to detach from the society and enjoy the spiritual rich life at Walden Pond. He constructed a cabin with minimum things and on Independence Day, Thoreau settled down beside Walden Pond. He

worked hard to complete the book 'A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River'. He also practiced transcendental values at Walden Pond. Emerson was a frequent visitor to see Thoreau and others like Bronson Alcott, George Ripley, Edmund Hosmer, and Ellery Channing also used to visit him. Finally Thoreau completed the book successfully. Though the book was based on his voyage with his brother, it was highly influenced by Emerson's thought.

While Thoreau was at Walden Pond, he went to the nearby village to repair his shoe. There he was asked to pay the poll tax but he had refused to pay the tax in protest of slavery. He was arrested and released the next day. Emerson had been offended by this incident, according to him Thoreau was not behaving like a gentleman. Harmon Smith stated in his book My Friend, My Friend:

Not long after Henry's release from jail, the men sat down to discuss his actions. Emerson had conceded earlier that Henry's position was more sensible than that of the abolitionists who continued to pay all their taxes while objecting to the government's position on slavery. But this papering over of the issue did not affect the emotion that underlay the disagreement. Henry's anxiety had not vanished, nor had Emerson's growing discontent. (105)

Emerson planned to go to England, both were striving to fulfill their ambitions and slowly became competitors. A sense of separation increased slowly and their lives moved to different directions. Thoreau complained in one of his journals

"I thought that friendship, that love was still possible between us. I thought that we had not withdrawn very far asunder. But now that my friend rashly, thoughtlessly, profanely speaks, recognizing the distance between us, that distance seems infinitely increased." 300

After coming back from Walden Pond, Thoreau started surveying the lands. He maintained a book to keep his records and named it "Field Notes of Surveys made by Henry David Thoreau since November 1849." Along with surveying, he had chosen the lecture platform as another source of income. Still he managed time to write and to spend in Woods and fields. In 1861, Thoreau's health deteriorated. Soon he was confined to the house because of his health but he didn't stop his work. Fortunately he received a letter from James Field stating that he was interested in publishing Thoreau's works in the Atlantic Monthly. With the assistance of his sister Sophia, he completed his works 'Autumnal Tints', 'Walking,' and 'Life without Principle' and sent to the magazine. Emerson also made frequent visits and

read some works to him. He enjoyed every moment till his death. Emerson insisted that Thoreau's funeral should be held in church and he also given the eulogy.

Standing erect before the crowd, Emerson spoke at length about the man with whom he had been intimately associated for a quarter of a century. As might have been expected from Emerson, the appraisal was balanced. He did not try to present a Thoreau who had no faults; instead he memorialized the man he and those gathered before him had known so well. If his tone seemed detached at times, it was because he had stepped back to achieve a clearer view of Henry Thoreau, not because of a lack of feeling for his friend. (181)

WORKS CITED:

Emerson, Waldo Ralph. "Journals."

Gurudev, Sujata. "Studies on Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman."
American Literature, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2006.

Harding, Walter. "The Days of Henry David Thoreau: A Biography." Dover
Publications, 1982.

J. B. Moore, "Thoreau Rejects Emerson."

Smith, Harmon. "My Friend, My Friend: The Story of Thoreau's Relationship with
Emerson." University of Massachusetts Press, 1999.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Journals."