

## COMPARING BASAVANNA WITH R.W. EMERSON'S TRANSCENDENTALISM



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#### ABSTRACT

Today's human issues are more difficult to solve than they have ever been. There is no doubt that mankind has amassed an incredible amount of information and power; but, these things have generated unprecedented changes, and as a result, life has become even more confusing and perplexing. Totally everything about us is in the process of changing. Given the current state of affairs, the need for spiritual ministry is more pressing now than it has ever been in the course of our nation's history. We may learn how to develop the spiritual stamina we require to get ourselves out of the rut of everyday monotonous

circumstances from the great poets and saints who have lived throughout history. Basaveshwara, also known as Basavanna, was a saint from the Indian state of Karnataka. He was also a poet and an ardent social reformer. He is considered to be one of India's most influential spiritual instructors. The teaching of Basaveshwara takes on a new level of relevance when placed in the context of modern India's shifting social landscape and increasing religious consciousness. The Indian society of today is undergoing a process of self-transformation. At the core of this transformation are the concepts of democracy and nationalism, as well as an

emphasis on the dissemination of education and a scientific worldview. The dominant school of thinking in the world is a significant source of inspiration for it. Our ways of thinking are shifting so drastically that it appears difficult for some of our more traditional values, institutions, and practises, such as castes, creeds, and rituals, as well as our blind beliefs, to continue

existing in their current forms. Although Basavanna lived 800 years ago, he comes across to us as fully modern and practical; as a result, the lessons that he taught are still applicable in present times. If only that instruction had been followed, it would have been possible to paint a very different picture of Indian society.

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**KEYWORDS:** Transcendentalism, Novel, Themes, Feminism

## INTRODUCTION

Epigraphical evidence makes it abundantly evident that the Aryan religion had already made a significant impression over the land even before the beginning of the Christian period. It was supported by the Royal Family. Alongside this Hindu religion, it appears that other indigenous forms of devotion, such as those of the cobra, or of a specific tree, or of many different female deities, also seemed to have predominated in ancient Karnataka. Then came Buddhism and Jainism after that. But Buddhism never achieved the same foothold and popularity in this part of India as it did in Northern India; in contrast to Jainism, it quickly became obsolete. Patronage was bestowed upon Jainism by virtually all of the important rulers that were in charge of Karnataka during its history. Because of this, the contribution that it has made to the culture of Karnataka is both substantial and abundant. The downfall of Jainism may be traced back to the twelfth century and continued beyond that. Around the time of the seventh century, a towering figure began to emerge on the landscape of South Indian history. It was Shankaracharya. He was born in Kerala and spent his life travelling around India, where he revitalised Vedic religion and advocated the Advaita school of thought. He made the decision to found the first of his maths in Shringeri, which is located in Karnataka.

Shaivism was one of the earliest forms of religion and went on to become the most extensively practised religion in Karnataka. Within this religion were several sects, such as Pashupata, Kalamukha, and Kapalika. Both Kashmir Shaivism and Tamil Shaivism made their way into Karnataka and exerted a significant amount of influence on the various Shaiva sects. Some of

the professors and leaders of religious monasteries associated with the Kalamukha tradition were renowned intellectuals who enjoyed widespread renown in the state of Karnataka. Ramanuja, the proponent of the Vishishtadwaita school of thought, appeared in the beginning of the twelfth century. He departed Tamil Nadu because the Chola King was persecuting Vaisnavas there and he didn't want to be a part of that. Karnataka, being true to its history of independence, welcomed him in the same way that it had welcomed Shankara in the past. The King of Hoysala, Vishnuvardhana, decided to become one of his disciples. After that point, Jainism's sphere of influence began to shrink.

The Vedic religion made its presence known once more. However, at this time, in spite of the teachings of the Acaryas like Shankara and Ramanuja, the Vedic religion had already degraded into dogmatic rigidities. Even the brilliant vision of the Upanishads was obscured by the practises of the various sects. Blind beliefs, as well as useless and superstitious rituals, had become growths that were parasitic on society. The practise of sacrificing people was widespread across the culture. When it was first implemented, the Caturvarna system, which consisted of a fourfold separation of society into the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas, and the Sudras, may have been beneficial to society since its spirit was better grasped at that time. However, throughout the course of time, it resulted in the disintegration of society. It's possible that, in its earlier incarnation, it

There is also the possibility of taking into account Basavapurana of Bhima Kavi, Sivatatva Chintamani of LakkannaDandesa, and AmalabasavaCharitra of Singiraja, which is more often known as Singirajapurana of Singiraja. They did not want to write history; rather, they intended to chant the praises of Basavanna with a religious fervour that would eventually lead to his deification. However, a thorough examination of these writings written in Kannada will still be of use to us in establishing some historical truths. On the basis of all of the materials that are now accessible, an attempt has been made to offer a brief biographical sketch without delving into contentious specifics. This was done in this article. Around the year 1131 A.D., Basavanna was born into a prominent Brahmin family in the town of Ingaleswara-Bagevadi, which is located in what is now the Bijapur District of Karnataka.

Gramanimani was the title given to his father, Madiraja or Madarasa, who held the position of head of the Bagevadiagrahara. His wife Madalambe, also known as Madambe, was an extremely devout individual who had a deep devotion to Nandiswara, the primary god of Bagevadi. Their third child was a girl they named Basavanna. He had an older brother who went by the name Devaraja and an older sister who went by the name Nagamma. Both of these

siblings were very involved in the subsequent religious and social activities of Basavanna. A prominent Saiva saint named Jatavedamuni, who is also known as Ishanya Guru, travelled all the way from KudalaSangama to the hospital as soon as the baby was born in order to bless the infant with a symbolic linga and to introduce him into the new path. Even as a young child, Basava had characteristics that pointed to his future brilliance and uniqueness. He was ahead of his peers intellectually and had a strong sense of self-reliance. He was brought up in a traditional Brahmin household, and he had plenty of opportunities, both at home and in his community, to think about the rituals and strict customs that were being rigorously obeyed by the orthodox.

He discovered that men and their minds were firmly held captive by the dogmas and superstitions that were practised in the name of many religions. Even the religious institutions, like as temples, had turned into centres of exploitation. The young Basava gave some thought to these matters. He had to deal with the first major challenge of his life when he was just eight years old. He witnessed his parents making preparations for his Upanayana, also known as an initiation ritual or thread ceremony, and he vehemently objected to their doing so. His defence was that he had already gone through the Linga initiation process when he was born; this was his main point. After his father demanded that he take part in the ritual, he exited his home with his mother and father and headed in the direction of KudalaSangama. Harihara recounts the event using a narrative that is marginally distinct from the standard account. According to him, the rite was carried out, and when Basava was sixteen years old, he cast aside the sacred thread and travelled to KudalaSangama. However, the other authors are in complete agreement that the

There was absolutely no ceremony carried out at all. But one thing is for sure: he was unable to make any concessions when it came to the matter of his Upanayana and the ensuing observances that were tied to it, because the Upanayana had become nothing more than a symbol of caste hierarchy. According to him, donning a Linga was never intended to be a symbol of one's social standing; rather, it was a form of worship. It was possible for anyone of any caste, creed, or gender to wear it; there was no discrimination of any kind. Therefore, even at such a young age, he discovered that the significant symbol of Shiva could become a powerful means to propagate social and religious equality. As a result, he was drawn to Veerasaivism, which regarded Lingadharana, or the wearing of Linga on the body, as initiation, or Deeksha. This is why he became interested in Veerasaivism.

His time spent at Sangama instilled a fresh vigour in his ideas and provided him with a new perspective. In ancient days, the location known as KudalaSangama, which is located at the point where the rivers Krishna and its tributary Malaprabha meet, was considered to be one of the most important intellectual hubs. When Basavanna was a little kid, he often heard stories of the majesty of Sangama, and it is likely that he had been to that sacred spot in the past. It is also important to keep in mind that Ishanya Guru, who was the Sthanapati or chancellor of that educational institution, was the Guru who had given a linga to the young Basavanna as part of the Veerasaivism initiation ceremony. Therefore, when he severed all of his social ties and left his house in an effort to find light, it was only natural for him to head in the direction of KudalaSangama. In addition, Nagamma, his older sister who had a strong familial bond to him and travelled with him to Sangama, was there. At this point in time, she had already tied the knot. According to Singiraja, her husband Shiva Swamy was a member of the KudalaSangama, which was in and of itself a very fortunate coincidence. Basavanna was able to concentrate on his studies and achieve his most prized goal since Sangama provided the perfect environment for him to do so. Ishanya Guru was presumably a member of the Kalamukha school of the Saiva faith. He was a brilliant scholar of Catholic perspectives and favoured Lingadharana (the practise of wearing the Linga on the body) over Vedic sacrifices and ceremonies. He discovered in Basava the potential for an amazing professional life.

Basavanna spent a number of years under his skilled tutelage engaging in intense academic study and spiritual meditation. This time in his life was extraordinarily important since it was at this time that he formulated his long-term strategies and chose his courses of action. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Agamas, the Puranas, and the Kavyas, in addition to the expositions of a number of other theological systems and philosophies, were all subjects of his in-depth research. He gave them careful consideration as his revolutionary mind worked toward the goal of turning the concepts and principles that inspired him into actual actions. Being himself a brilliant Bhakta, he studied with a great deal of zeal the devotional hymns that Saiva saints had composed. As he attempted to give voice to the fervour of his devotion via the recitation of vachanas, the poet inside him began to flourish. It is possible that he stayed in Sangama for almost twelve years. After then, a significant event occurred in his life. His maternal uncle, Baladeva, served as the Minister of Finance (Bhandari) for the Kalachurya Dynasty during the reign of Bijjala. Basavanna was the recipient of the proposal to marry the man's daughter. But Basava, who was completely committed to the noble goal of spiritual development, was not yet ready to take advantage of the opportunity. But Ishanya Guru was successful in

persuading him that he ought to take part in worldly life with his new message to the people of the globe. Basavanna left Sangama and travelled to Mangalavada, which is now known as Mangalavedhe and is located close to Pandarapur in the state of Maharashtra. Mangalavada was the capital of Tardavadi at the time, and Bijjala was its monarch. He was joined by his wife Nagamma, her husband Shiva Swamy, and their son Channabasavanna, who was perhaps eight or 10 years old at the time. Basavanna wed not just Gangambike but also Neelambike, who was Bijjala's adoptive sister. Gangambike is the daughter of Baladeva and Neelambike. We are not aware of the specific conditions under which he was compelled to marry Neelambike. But there doesn't appear to be any disagreement regarding the fact that Basavanna had two wives, even if Harihara calls them Gangambike and Mayidevi. This is something that everyone appears to agree on. He remained in Mangalavada for a couple of years and, as a result of his abilities, ascended to a position of power and fame. It was determined that he would be the best successor to Baladeva in the position of Bhandari. At the period in question, the political climate in Karnataka was beginning to shift. After Tailapa III became emperor, the Chalukyas of Kalyana, which is now known as BasavaKalyana and is located in the Bidar District of Karnataka, began to see a decline in their power.

A feudatory of the Chalukyan kingdom at the time, Bijjala took advantage of the circumstances to take the Chalukyan crown and establish himself as Emperor of Kalyana. He was successful in convincing Basavanna to accompany him to Kalyana and to take the position of minister to the empire there. Basavanna had little interest in the political turmoil, nor did he seek to further his position in the political hierarchy. But he only consented to go to Kalyana and assume command as Bhandari because he knew that doing so would afford him a great deal of opportunities to carry out his goal in an efficient manner. It is estimated that he arrived in Kalyana in the year 1154 of the common era (A.D.), and he remained there until 1167, which is the year that inscriptional evidence indicates was the end of Bijjala's tenure. It is remarkable how much he has accomplished in the relatively short period of twelve or thirteen years that he has lived at Kalyana. He immersed himself in a variety of spiritual and social pursuits. At KudalaSangama, he applied himself with unquenchable fervour to the task of bringing his vision to fruition. The entrances to the Dharma were made available to everyone.

all without any limitations imposed by differences in caste, creed, or sex. He founded a social and religious institution known as Anubhava-Mantapa, which drew hundreds of saints and others seeking spiritual enlightenment from all parts of the nation. To mention only a few: Allama Prabhu, Siddarama, MadivalaMacayya, AmbigaraCowdaiah and others from different

parts of Karnataka; Urilingadeva from Maharashtra; BahurupiCowdaiah, SakalesaMadarasa from Andhra; Adaiiah, SoddalaBacarasa from Saurashtra (Gujarat), MoliageyaMarayya and his wife Mahadevamma from Kashmir. The Dharma evolved into a dynamic force that was crucial to the vital cause of widespread enlightenment. Never before in the annals of religious history had the Dharma attained such splendour and been endowed with such supernatural power. It is stated that Basaveshwara accomplished numerous miracles, but the biggest marvel is that he brought regular people and outcasts to the celestial heights of spiritual realisation. This is considered to be the greatest miracle. His unconventional speech and crusade caused a stir among the traditionalists. They arranged themselves in order to fight against him. They fabricated a number of claims and made up stories about Basaveshwara in an effort to bring him into disrepute in Bijjala's eyes. Basaveshwara was accused of using state monies for the upkeep of his followers without permission, which is a violation of state law. However, when Basaveshwara presented the full state's financial records before the King, it was revealed that the claim was a fabrication and slander without any foundation.

His irresistible charisma allowed him to triumph over even the most formidable challenges, and he persisted in his purpose with an even deeper sense of commitment. It reached its zenith when the daughter of Madhuvarasa, who had once been a Brahmin, married the son of Haralayya, who had formerly been an untouchable. This marriage was the event that brought it to its conclusion. The orthodox believed that the violation of Dharma was caused by Varna-sankara, which literally translates to "the mingling of Varnas." Therefore, worrying and seething, they made a racket and a fuss over it. They brought their grievances against Basavanna and his supporters to the attention of the king, who was supposed to be the keeper of the Varna-Dharma. However, Basavanna has never shown any interest in the so-called Varnas. His mission throughout his entire life was to do away with the Varna divide. According to him, everything was in fine order with the marriage.

He argued that once Madhuvarasa became part of the Sarana family, he was no longer considered a Brahmin, and neither was Haralayya, who was considered an untouchable. They were able to transcend their Varna status once they donned the linga and become Bhaktas. We who live in a time after the Gandhian period are able to comprehend the logic behind this statement. However, the society of the twelfth century was not capable of accommodating such an extreme point of view. It is possible to say that Basavanna lived 800 years in the future of his period. Basavanna's opponents got stronger. Because of the pressure from the entrenched interests, Bijjala had no choice but to cave. Both Haralayya and Madhuvarasa, who were both

innocent, were subjected to cruel treatment. They were dragged to their deaths while tethered to the legs of an elephant, which ultimately caused their deaths. The Sharanas were astounded by this heinous crime. Some of them were furious and loudly begged for retribution and reprisal against those who had wronged them.

Since the takeover of the Chalukya throne by the Bijjalas, a political undercurrent has been growing, and it has now become stronger. Bijjala's foes have taken advantage of the situation. Mallugi or Mallikarjuna, the younger brother of Bijjala, collaborated with Kasapaiah, the governor of Banavasi, in an effort to seize the Chalukyan crown by deposing Bijjala. Mallugi's full name is Mallikarjuna. Even Bijjala's own sons, RayamurariSovideva, Sankama, and Singhana, were in competition with one another for the throne. All of these forces were patiently awaiting an opening to act. Bijjala was killed in a plot that was devised during a religious upheaval. His assassination was most likely carried out by Bijjala's political adversaries. However, the Saranas were made to take the responsibility for it. What exactly was Basavanna doing when such heinous acts were being committed in Kalyana? If he had been in Kalyana at the period in question, then events of this nature never would have taken place. He would have been the one to carry out the execution of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa, which was the punishment that was handed down.

He had no idea that everything would progress at such a rapid pace. There is a mountain of evidence that points to the fact that he went to Kudala Sangama, most likely to get away from the mayhem and to enjoy some peaceful days there. However, everything progressed at such a rapid pace that he was unable to take any action, and he found himself to be a powerless victim of the confluence of events. After leaving Kalyana, the Sharanas dispersed and went in a variety of ways. One significant group, led by Channabasavanna and consisting of Gangambike, Nagamma, Shiva Swamy, and other individuals, travelled to Ulavi, which is located close to Gokarna in the North Kanara region. To spend the final days of Basavanna's life with him, Neelambike travelled to KudalaSangama alongside Appanna, one of Basavanna's most devoted disciples. Because Basaveshwara was not just a social reformer but also a prophet and a renowned mystic, he is referred to as "Basaveshwara."

He had the ability to recognize the divine dispensation that was operating through the events that were taking place. He believed that his work was done, and that he could now go back to Lord Sangameswara, from whom he had gotten the commission to carry out the Divine Will through the role of an instrument. When he was just 36 years old, he presumably obtained Linganga Samarasya, also known as consubstantial union, with Lord Sangama. This was



probably in the year 1167. This summary of Basavanna's life is just intended to serve as a formal narrative. The history of the development of a prophet or saint's inner world, their spiritual life, their vision, realization, and mission are the essential components of a genuine biography of such a figure.

### **R.W. Emerson’s transcendentalism**

As the son of William Emerson (1769-1811) and Ruth Haskins, Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in a vicarage as the third of four children (1768-1853). He was the third kid out of a total of eight. When Emerson was just eight years old, Emerson's father passed away at the age of 42 from complications related to his work as a Unitarian preacher. Following the passing of his father, Emerson's intellectual development was entrusted to his aunt Mary Moody Emerson. At the age of fourteen, Ralph Waldo Emerson became a student at Harvard College. During his time there, he worked as a teacher and was recognised for his efforts as a class poet, in which he read a variety of poems to his fellow students.

He graduated from Harvard with a degree in education. In addition, when Emerson was still a little child, he began compiling a list of the books and poetry he had read, together with personal notebook entries he called "Wide World." The shift that Waldo Emerson made to Florida had a significant impact on his development as a person. He became acquainted with Prince Achille Murat, with whom he engaged in lengthy conversations on philosophy, politics, religion, and society, with whom he shared a consensus on many subjects. In addition to this, Emerson started composing his own poetry on a very intense level, and he made his first interactions with slaves, both of which had a profound impact on Emerson as a student. Following the passing of his wife, he embarked on a journey around Europe. It was during this time that he became acquainted with notable figures such as Thomas Carlyle, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. During this trip, Emerson also got familiar with German idealism and Indian philosophies, both of which would later leave traces in his work. These ideologies would subsequently leave traces in Emerson's work.

In the 1830s, he started seriously considering a career as a lecturer and established his first office in Boston. The material presented in this lecture served as the basis for his well-known essay "Nature," which he wrote when he was 33 years old and published in 1836. In this collection of writings, he expressed his conviction that individuals should strive to live lives that are uncomplicated and in balance with the natural world. He found the genuine source of divine revelation to be in the natural world. At the same time, he underlined the significance

of human creativity as a driving force for fundamental renewal as well as a source of an individual's independence and capacity for self-determination. Therefore, construct your own universe, was Emerson's renowned call to action as Nature came to a close. Emerson shifted his understanding of the divine such that he no longer considered it as an external or superior power, but rather as something that had been transferred into man himself. The transcendentalist triad, which consists of the self, nature, and oversoul, was one of the fundamental figures that he constructed in Nature as part of his philosophical system. According to Emerson, the Over-Soul is not a self-sufficient entity that exists in isolation from the world of occurrences; rather, it is just as powerful in this realm as it is in the mind of a person. In this way, Emerson maintains that man is capable of direct participation in the divine via the contemplation of his own thoughts and the observation of the natural world. It is well documented that the essay had a significant influence on Henry David Thoreau. It had a significant impact on his work, particularly his novel *Walden*, which was first published in 1854. Emerson served as a guide and mentor to Thoreau, and the two of them went on to become two of the most influential transcendentalists in history.

## REVIEW LITERATURE

Ankita Chopra, Professor, will retire on August 8, 2022 The term "transcendentalism" refers to the belief that humans, both men and women, have knowledge about themselves and the world around them that "transcends" or extends beyond what they can see, hear, taste, touch, or feel. This is a simple concept that is referred to as "transcendentalism." Rather of viewing physical and spiritual phenomena as separate entities, transcendentalists viewed them as dynamic processes. Empiricism, on the other hand, takes a back seat to subjectivity and intuition in transcendentalism. The Upanishads in particular were a major contributor to the development of Buddhist and Hindu ideas about the mind and spirituality. Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the founding members of the philosophical movement known as transcendentalism, which emerged in the middle of the 19th century. It is believed that Emerson was the first American to read the holy texts associated with the Hindu religion. (Rehman & Ahmed, 2017/01/01). Because of the impact of the Vedantic Philosophy on him, he included discussions of Hinduism in his books.

The influence of the Gita on Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings is the topic that will be investigated in this study. A mysterious treatise that discusses "the nature of things," the *Bhagavad Gita* may be found in India. It is widely read since it is considered to be one of the

most important religious scriptures in Hinduism. It was originally a chapter of the Mahabharata, which is considered to be the greatest Indian epic. Today, it is more popularly known as the Gita. The Gitopanishads are an important part of Hinduism because they bring together the ideas presented in Hinduism's most important texts—the Vedas and the Upanishads—into a unified, comprehensive understanding of the Hindu faith's belief in a single God and the fundamental oneness of all things. Everyone, regardless of caste, group, school, sect, nation, or historical period, can claim the Gita as their own. It is generally agreed upon that it is applicable to the entirety of the cosmos and has universal applicability.

It is for people of every religion, in every country, and it is for men and women equally. This particular touchstone is what reveals the meat and potatoes of the reality. This is something that Ralph Waldo Emerson had to say regarding the Bhagavad Gita. "The Bhagavad Gita was responsible for the wonderful day I had. It was as if an empire had spoken to us, nothing small or unworthy but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence, which in another era and climate had pondered and thus resolved the same questions that exercise us. It was as if an empire had spoken to us, nothing small or unworthy but large, serene, consistent." With the use of ideas that are prevalent in Indian philosophy and transcendentalism, the researcher intends to analyse the influence that the Gita had on Emerson's written works. The objective of the researcher is to investigate the concepts of self-reliance, Brahma, and illusions. The following are some of the questions that the researcher would try to answer, seeing as how they give a profound understanding of Indian Philosophy and place an emphasis on the natural laws of the world.

Jingling Zhang, Peiwei Zheng Jul - Aug 2019 One of the most well-known lyric poems written by Emerson is titled "Brahma." In this song, Emerson assumes the persona of Brahma and conveys his belief that the only way for people to become morally and spiritually flawless is by coming to terms with the existence of the Brahman. This article is a preliminary investigation of the poem from the standpoint of transcendentalism, focusing on its artistic form and the meanings it conveys to the reader.

The Honorable Chidananda U. Dhavaleshwar, Ph.D. The process of assimilating newcomers or members of a minority group into the social framework of an existing society is referred to as social integration. The social and economic advancements of modern India, as well as the country's growing awareness of its religious traditions, lend new significance to Basaveshwara's teachings. The modern Indian society is undergoing a process of self-reinvention via the adoption of concepts such as democracy and nationalism, as well as an

emphasis on the growth of education and a scientific approach. It is affected by the great currents of thinking that circulate across the world.

### **CREATIVE ART OF NON-FICTION**

The book *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, which is written in the first person and documents Thoreau's musings and activities during his sojourn at Walden Pond, can (and, in some people's opinions, should) be analysed not as an autobiographical record of facts and truth but rather as a creatively manipulated work of literature that seeks to inspire its readers by portraying an idealised Transcendentalist figure. "Walden presents itself as the record of an experiment done in open inquiry and presented before the reader with a rigorous concern for truth," according to Milder (57), yet the book is "too rich of philosophical content to be a mere report" (Rokugawa 207). It is true that *Walden* is "based on Thoreau's genuine experience at the pond," but it is also "a planned construct" (Rokugawa 207), meaning that Thoreau altered the facts and added additional material in order to emphasise the transcendentalist ideas that he wanted to spread via his writing.

Paul Theroux makes the observation that Henry David Thoreau idealises the time he spent at the pond, but he neglects to note that while "moralising about isolation," Thoreau really "brought his mother his filthy clothes and went on eating his mother's apple pies" (ix). As Egill Arnaldur Asgeirsson points out, Thoreau did not have a choice but to grow his own food and simplify his needs because "after building the hut he had no money to live on, though he grew beans in an attempt to create an income." Thoreau had no choice but to grow his own food and simplify his needs because "after building the hut he had no money to live on" (14). Thoreau omits the information that he had "all his teeth extracted (they tormented him for years), and replaced by dentures" in the chapter titled "Higher Laws," which speaks about food and the avoidance of eating animal flesh. This is done on purpose (Meyer 24).

### **SELF-RELIANT TRANSCENDALISM IN CONTEMPORARY CREATIVE NON-FICTION**

*Desert Solitaire*, written by Edward Abbey, has been described as "a difficult pastoral experience in a place of rock, sand, and cactus." In the book, the author searches for "refuge in the nonhuman environment in order to settle crucial tensions between himself and civilization" (Scheese 109). The story is inspired on Abbey's experiences working as a seasonal park ranger at Arches National Monument in Utah during the 1950s. At the time, she resided in a trailer in a remote area of the reserve. Wilderness excursions, solitary contemplations of civilization and

the vast beauty and emptiness of the desert, criticism of the environmental destruction and overpopulation occurring in Arches, and of the impact that society has on the individual are some of the activities that Abbey participates in while visiting the park. The book has been likened to Thoreau's *Walden* for a multitude of reasons, the most prominent of which being the general resemblance of the two authors' contemplations when secluded from civilization, as well as the usage of "the [seasonal] cycle of a year as the core narrative framework" in both works (Bryant 16). In point of fact, Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* is a reiteration not just of Thoreau's views but also of the Self-Reliant Transcendentalism that Emerson and Thoreau collectively espoused.

Abbey, like Thoreau, exaggerates the degree to which he was alone in the desert. However, unlike Thoreau, Abbey decides not to disclose that "during his second season at Arches [he] was accompanied by his wife and kid" (Pozza 10). Along the same lines as Thoreau's *Walden*, *Desert Solitaire* condenses the events of two years into a single seasonal cycle, beginning in April (Spring) and coming to a close in September (Fall) (Autumn). This time period is structured around "a single tourist season" (Bryant 5), and throughout the book, Abbey mulls over the impact that tourism has on national parks and the surrounding wilderness, as well as the ramifications that this has for those places. Abbey adopts a transcendentalist philosophy in his reflections on nature as a response to the depressing effects that humanity has had on the natural world. One of his primary interests is the expansion of urban civilization into the undeveloped areas of the desert.

### **Waterside Transcendentalism: Annie Dillard’s Pilgrim At Tinker Creek (1974)**

The novel *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* presents itself almost self-consciously as a modern Transcendentalist literature, articulating a worldview that incorporates the fundamental tenets of Emerson and Thoreau. Annie Dillard makes a compelling case for self-reliant transcendentalism in her account of her time spent at Tinker Creek. The author expresses ideas that primarily resonate with Emersonian concepts of the Over-Soul and of Nature as a spiritual source, while at the same time promoting self-cultivation and simplicity. At the same time, she presents a "darker view of God and the dynamics of the natural world" than either Emerson or Thoreau (Scheese 129), along with other perspectives critical of traditional Transcendentalist notions such as the purity of the unfiltered Transcendental vision and the concept of uniting with Nature and the universal spirit. In addition, she offers a "darker view of God and the dynamics of the natural world" than Emerson and Thoreau.

### **TRAMPING FOR IDEALS: JON KRAKAUER’S INTO THE WILD (1996)**

In his seminal work, *Into the Wild*, Jon Krakauer tells the story of Christopher McCandless, a university graduate who abandoned his family and modern civilization in order to live a nomadic lifestyle "in search of ultimate freedom, a nobler life closer to nature and divorced from the extreme materialism of American society." The book remained on the bestseller list of *The New York Times* for over two years, and Sean Penn directed the film adaptation of the book, which was titled *Vera 2*. (Vera 2). Jon Krakauer achieves a balance "on the narrow line between the job of historian and storyteller" by basing the narrative on Christopher McCandless's own notes and letters, as well as on information from friends, relatives, and other tramps he met throughout the course of his journey (Vera 1).

In addition, Krakauer sprinkles the book with a number of passages from Thoreau, a writer whom McCandless was known to devour voraciously, in order to draw parallels between the two authors, who shared a number of beliefs and concerns in relation to self-reliance, simplicity, and the natural world. The narrative of Christopher McCandless was initially told by Krakauer in the form of an essay that was published in the 1993 issue of *Outside* magazine. This piece was the catalyst for intense emotions from readers, both favourable and negative. It was suggested to Krakauer that he turn the piece into a longer creative nonfiction work suitable for book length.

### **MOUNTAIN MAN OF TURTLE ISLAND: ELIZABETH GILBERT’S THE LAST AMERICAN MAN**

The concept that there is such a thing as a "True American Man" who lives psychically and spiritually close to the wilderness serves as the foundation for Elizabeth Gilbert's book *The Last American Man*, which details the life and ideas of modern pioneer Eustace Conway. Gilbert's book also serves as an argument for the existence of a "True American Man." Gilbert's treatment of Conway deviates from a straightforward biographical documenting of his life because she elevates him to the status of a friend whom she greatly admires and for whom she may or may not have romantic feelings. This is to be expected from creative nonfiction, which Gilbert's work is. She draws a big picture of Conway as an inspirational character who leads by example in a humdrum, materialistic, and even robotic contemporary world that he feels is in need of being rescued. Gilbert views Conway as one of the few "real American guys" who

still exists, referring to him as "a parable for our day" (Dizard, paragraph 3). According to the parameters of this investigation, he also fits the profile of a Self-Reliant Transcendentalist. Gilbert begins her explanation of what she means by the phrase "American Man" by describing how the American wilderness was tamed via the conquering and elision of the frontier and the building of towns and cities. She does this so that she may explain what she means by the word "American Man." After that, an important concern was raised, which was: what would become of young American lads, who, up until that point, had to spend time in the wilderness in order to mature? His mother allowed him to explore the woods freely when he was growing up and taught him how to set up a camp, create fires, make rope from grass, bait a hook, find clay, and cope with all types of wildlife. Eustace Conway was raised by this mother. Eustace Conway is considered by Gilbert to be one of the few surviving authentic American males.

### **WILDERNESS WARRIOR: WILL HARLAN’S UNTAMED**

Carol Ruckdeschel is sometimes considered to be "the wildest lady in America," as suggested by the title of Will Harlan's book. Yet, a careful reading of the text in which her life and endeavours are documented reveals that she is not only a wild scientist and militant environmental activist, but also an idealistic individual who finds solace living a (mostly) solitary and purposeful life on her own terms in the wilderness of Cumberland Island. This is revealed by the fact that she is not only a wild scientist, but also an environmental activist who is militant. Ruckdeschel is not "only trying to conserve Cumberland Island; she's fighting for the freedom to simply live on her own terms." Ruckdeschel is an unorthodox pioneer who seeks to live her life with distinct purpose and vigour (Begos par. 6). A fitting comparison, considering that, in Harlan's book, Ruckdeschel's ideas and activities are best understood within the context of Thoreau's (and Emerson's) Self-Reliant Transcendentalism.

Harlan himself describes Ruckdeschel as a "modern-day Thoreau who is even more outspoken in protecting her Waldenesque island." (Harlan xi) Ruckdeschel is described as a "modern-day Thoreau who is even more outspoken in Ruckdeschel's parents were concerned that she find a steady job in order to be financially secure, but she pursued her dream of living and working in the wilderness, and she eventually found a home as a self-taught scientist and protector of Cumberland Island. Ruckdeschel's love for wildlife and the outdoors began at an early age, and she spent a lot of time outside. From Ruckdeschel's upbringing all the way up to her current existence on the wild island, which is a national park located off the coast of Georgia and is known as "one of the most ecologically varied islands in the world," Harlan recounts

Ruckdeschel's independent nature and her interest in ecology (Harlan xi). When Ruckdeschel went to the island, she saw that the sensitive ecology and the species on it need protection from the destruction that may be caused by human activities motivated by greed. In addition to Ruckdeschel's ardent efforts to protect the ecosystem, Harlan details her tumultuous love affairs both on and off the island (with one resulting in her killing her boyfriend at the time, Louie, in self-defence). She does, however, end up settling down with a companion named Bob, who shares her passion for animals and the water and is as enthusiastic about it as she is. It is her romantic life that mistakenly brought her to Cumberland in the first place, as she initially moves there to get away from an emotionally trying divorce from her second husband, who is a university lecturer. Her third spouse is also a university lecturer. She said that Cumberland "reminded her of her childhood on the beaches of Hawaii, stalking sea turtles and falling in the tide." This is one of the reasons why she chose to live there (Harlan 39).

## CONCLUSION

It is very evident that the Romantic characters that are described in these five modern American works of nonfiction are familiar with the fundamental Self-Reliant Transcendentalist ideals of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and that they conduct their lives in accordance with those beliefs. The movies *Desert Solitaire*, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, *Into the Wild*, *The Last American Man*, and *Untamed* are all evidence that these beliefs have endured not just into the later part of the twentieth century but also into the twenty-first century. The men and women who are documented in these texts have all attempted to live similarly to what Thoreau did at Walden Pond, and the writing about them has been done in such a way as to emphasise the characteristics that identify them as belonging to the Transcendentalist movement. In this regard, the texts are similar to *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, in which the author attempted to promote himself as a transcendentalist figure and inspire his readers to live a life of self-reliant vitality.

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