

## The Need for a New Walden. The ideal life in post coronavirus world: a literary study with a reference to Thoreau's Walden

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### Abstract

This study highlights on the Transcendentalism as an outstanding movement in the nineteenth century and core of American philosophy. The study tries to rereading the thoughts of transcendentalism with new perspectives and views.

Transcendentalism emerges as a reaction against materialism and commercialism which are dominant in America life. The article traces the principles of transcendentalism as showed the practical steps of Henry

David Thoreau to find best solutions to our world in the twenty first century and especially after the spread of novelty Covid19 disease. This paper also tries to recall Thoreau's words and sermons in Walden to face people's dilemma in twenty first century. The research shows that Thoreau's Walden is the best solution can guide us to live calmly and peacefully. Simplicity is the typical way for living according to Thoreau's philosophy. So, this research tries to prove that Thoreau's philosophy 'simplicity' is a proper solution to the dilemma of our new

times. The study discusses the relationship between Thoreau's practical steps in Walden and post corona world. It asks some questions about ideal life after the spread covid 19. We have an obligation to think beyond our materialistic world. The study suggests a new Walden for living after we have obliged to follow new life style as well. It finds the health crisis as a chance to rethink about meaning of our life and break the daily routine. As well as the study includes many valuable lessons from Thoreau's Walden to face new situations in post coronavirus world.

**Keywords:** Walden, Thoreau, simplicity, coronavirus

### \* Introduction

Henry David Thoreau (1818-1862) is an American thinker, writer, poet and leading member of Transcendentalism. Thoreau's "Walden "(1854) was a unique experience of being close to nature. We may have a rudimentary understanding of Transcendentalism. It is the movement arose in America in the nineteenth century. The word transcendentalism was derived from Germanic Romantic philosophy and influenced with thoughts of philosophers like Kani, Hegal, Fichte,

and Schelling who affirmed that a man could reach reality by spiritual insights. As well as Transcendentalists were influenced by Plato, Plotinus, and Hindu. "Emerson like Thoreau and other transcendentalists was influenced by the concept of " selfhood " and found in Hindu scriptures a well elaborated doctrine of self". (UPKARUS UGC English Literature p.410) Emerson's nature is concerned with the secrets of nature and how they can be used to alleviate human suffering. Emerson expressed nature as helper and savior to free us from all worries. Thoreau's Walden portraits the needs and suffering of human kind and shows the way to overcome it. Whether people live in west or east, there is one fact that they are similar in their dreams and ambitions and similar in living and die. "Walden" is a series of essays compiled into a book that reads of Thoreau's journey during this time of self-discovery and spiritual awakening (Gura, 1988). Transcendentalism emerged from romanticism and transcendentalists influenced with romantic poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth. Transcendentalism grounded in feeling and intuition, and regarded "a turn away from modern society, with its getting and spending, to the scenes and objects of the natural world, which

were regarded both as physical facts and as correspondences to aspects of the human spirit” (A Glossary of Literary Terms P. 413). Individualism and democracy are rooted in the Transcendentalists' emphasis on the centrality of the individual. One needs to depend him/herself.

Transcendentalism has been precisely described as " Romanticism on Puritan soil " (" A history of American Literature p. 74-). Thoreau's *Walden* was and still influenced human thought and behavior. Thoreau draws attention to how human being faces new challenges especially which concerned with way of living. In addition to the change in our relations after the spread of Covid19. The crisis of pandemic may consider as a chance to correct mistake ways of relations and behavior. Pandemic is a global health crisis. This may lead to break the regional, ethical or any other barriers between people around the world. When people infected with the disease or plaque, they are united and forged their differences. They become all brothers. It is not limited to one area or one country. When we search for dilemma exit or solution for it, we never restrict in regional or ethical considerations. This study presents a pilot study to find the answer about the

ideal life in post Coronavirus world. We see people of society banding together at COVID 19. The distinction between our "wants" and "needs" has become more apparent during the last few weeks, Thoreau drew attention to a different way of life by choosing to live simply and writing about it in "Walden." His work encouraged people to live simply and to think about the natural world around them, thereby protecting the environment. Thoreau's message is just as relevant today as it was when he wrote it. Perhaps we will uncover inner beauty and the urge to appreciate the riches around us if we slow down and look at the world through a new, simpler lens. During the COVID-19 virus, Thoreau's beliefs on coexisting with nature and living simply are at the forefront of our nation's living situations. “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau urges, “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million-count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail.” (Thoreau, 1906).

A great number of books, articles and critical texts have written about Thoreau and his masterpiece *Walden*. Furthermore, the study includes the ideas and opinions that has written about COVID-19 pandemic by

specialists in the fields of environment, sociology, human rights, etc. As well as the study should focus on the changes might happen in the human behavior. Critics, reviewers, scholars, and researchers have done their researches on transcendentalism and Thoreau's Walden. In many ways and from different angles and they present worthy and great efforts. But the current study shows there is a gap in the light of transcendentalism and their writers' treatment of current problems of society especially after the spread of Covid 19 pandemic. This study shows and describes Thoreau's life in Walden and how we benefit as a typical experience to get ideal life in post coronavirus world.

#### **\* Discussion**

After spread of pandemic of novelty covid 19, people begin new life style. They follow never seen measures. They use new words in their daily routine such as quarantine, social distance, isolation, ban gathering, lockdown, mask face, vaccine.etc. People have forced to try new patterns of life. This change has made people to rethink about their life. They begin to ask themselves what is the form of ideal life should be? How can we abandon our relations in society and work? Old business has lost and new job opportunities are found. New

system of learning is created. Sudden change has surprised people. Absolutely, literature has found answer to all questions which concern with human life. Immortality of a literary piece embodies in its ability for application at any time. A genius writer is not written only to his/ her age or community, but he / she addressed all ages and places. This study is a modest contribution to the ongoing discussion on how to find ideal life after spread of Covid 19? It shows that return to Thoreau's Walden is best way.

Thoreau united transcendentalist principle with pragmatic way of life. His decision to live alone in the Walden Pond was in order to be away from the trappings of civilization and to be close to nature. Thoreau's Walden portraits the needs and suffering of human kind. So, in the midst of turmoil of modern technology and the huge influence after the spread of Covid 19 pandemic, we need to move (physically or spiritually) to a new Walden. Thoreau's words simplicity, simplicity can rescue us. " Another important and valuable lesson which Thoreau teaches people of our time is that they should " simplify, simplify, simplify their lives. Life indeed, very complicated and highly sophisticated today.

Thoreau recognized that American society's dilemma lies on how dependent industrialization was on the exploitation of labor. In the same time, the rapid progressive and how this lead to make people a victim civilization. And through the westward movement and the displacement of Native American, Thoreau as preacher, his aim is surviving people and unable them to enjoy their life, true life. "A valuable idea which Thoreau give us is that people who experience boredom have a false approach to life."(Walden – critical study – 101) (only writer's name and page number). He wrote in the chapter 11 of *Walden*.

Time is but the stream I go fishing in. I drink at it: but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. its thin current Slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the Sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

When we read *Walden* in a new perspective according to our times, we shouldn't misunderstand it. New Walden doesn't mean to abandon our cities or relations and our responsibilities towards our society but to find new way of living dependently from all obstacles " I would not have anyone adopt *my* mode of living on any account .... but I would have each one

be very careful to find out and purse *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead."(Walden p. 68) The attempt to find a new Walden is to explore valuable lessons which Thoreau tries to send to us in hid validity masterpiece *Walden*. For Thoreau " simplicity" is the main point on all his philosophy revolved around it. For Thoreau, simplicity is very necessity to free a man from the obstacles of civilization. To live simple live means to live valuable life but without sophistications and difficulties.

Before spread of pandemic, people were too busy or that they were overworked. They had no time to stay with their families or friends. Now, during these times majority of us are obliged to realize our responsibilities towards our families and ourselves. Some may feel bored that have nothing to do now but reflecting on what Thoreau said in *Walden* reflect another aspect of reality. "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry" (Walden, 14). During this pandemic, we reveal that we should to take a breath and search for the meaning and value of our life. Before pandemic, we were busy, but now we have extra time. What should we do with this extra time? Being able to

consider where time should be spent based on one's ideals may be all we need to slightly slow down our lives, which is something we all require at some point. We have a strong desire to engage in activities and to achieve our objectives. Now that many of us can't be as busy as we once were.

Trust and confidence in one's self is the key for any success. When one wants to take a step towards any oriented goals, must have confidence in himself. We may help ourselves and those around us cope with this type of isolation by encouraging them to do. We may help ourselves and those around us cope with this type of isolation by encouraging them to do so. Even though we are imprisoned and isolated from others, we can be awakened. A man has potential power and abilities, but he needs to reawaken them. "The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred million to a poetic or divine life." (Walden p.85). Every one of us, according to Thoreau, has the power to become completely awake. He believes that the ability to transform one's life for the better via conscious effort is a man's highest power. Others are being challenged by Thoreau to open up and change for the better in

order to live more fulfilled lives. COVID-19 has essentially compelled people to break the ice and improve themselves and the world in which they live. In chapter two, Thoreau writes "to be awake is to be alive". Thoreau's message encapsulates how we have the ability to improve today over yesterday.

### **\* Post Coronavirus world and new Walden**

Changing in daily routine and following a new social system after the spread of pandemic are the biggest challenges to people's lives. Precautionary measures that people have forced to follow it such as social distancing and wearing a mask face in public places affected them psychologically. In this case, we should pay people's attention to practical experiments to lessen the pains and remove fear. Henry David Thoreau's Walden is coming suitable for that.

There are no big differences in changes that occur between American society in nineteenth century and our world in the twenty first century. A society is influenced by social and economic changes that happen in it. We can consider Thoreau's reaction against social changes in America in nineteenth century is a general

phenomenon. 'The technology advancement contributed to rapid industrialization. With the spreading up of manufactured there came up the commercial class which had great importance. Big cities came into existence. There was revolutionary change in urban way of life." (p.66/ A history). So that Thoreau's treatment was not limited to his age or society but it can be applied where the same situations happened. Thoreau found that best way for living is the simplicity. He gives his lesson to all generations. Simplicity of living does not mean to live in isolation. It's not easy to live in materialistic situations and try to keep your spirituality. This requires from anyone to be awake and reorganize the meaning of life. Thoreau is the undisputed master not only in practical matters but also in philosophical ones. Thoreau is the undisputed authority on not only practical advice for living simply and minimalistically, but also on the philosophical and emotional framework for the necessary shift in life's focus to accommodate such a lifestyle, whether by choice or by circumstance, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

To overcome any possible dilemma after spread of covid19, it is

necessary to ask question that Thoreau tries to discuss. "Where I Lived and What I Lived For". Thoreau insisted that a man should have a goal and purpose in his life. Mechanical and material world make his existence meaningless. After we lost a large number of our relations and jobs, life seems to some of us as meaningless. It cannot be denied that there is much attached to these relations in our life. But this does not mean true or ideal life. As a pioneer of transcendentalism, Thoreau shows the difference physical awaking and spiritual awaking. " For the Transcendentalists, capitalism was inherently materialistic, and materialism was inherently wrong. Mankind must see the higher reality behind things, not worship the things themselves."(41. Transcendentalism). Thoreau describes his life before Walden Pond as a useless search for a "hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove" (Walden Economy.24), that is, a search for the impossible. Similarity, during Covid 19, people have resorted to religious practices and begging to heaven. Amid the unpredictable reach of the COVID-19 pandemic, hope represents a psychological resource that could enable people to overcome setbacks or maintain progress towards goal attainment while under stay-at-home orders (Schwarzer &

Luszczynska, 2008). Covid 19 pandemic has changed our outlook on life and forced us ask ourselves essential question. Thoreau's words simplicity, simplicity, simplicity " pave the way for ideal life without sophistication. In addition to merely economic reasons, simplifying is significant for other reasons. Simplifying and slowing down allows the mind, heart, and soul to live more fully in the present, allowing us to discover the simple pleasures and transcendent moments of everyday life that we tend to overlook in busier or more prosperous times.

#### **\* The Challenge of Leisure Time**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a specific type of pneumonia firstly observed in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019 and immediately spread all over the world. Following the global trend in dealing with the epidemic, people around the world began to adopt a new way of life during the quarantine period in order to avoid infection. COVID-19 epidemic is a once-in-a-lifetime worldwide occurrence, and its social and economic consequences are affecting people of all ages in different ways. Home quarantine has psychological, social, and economic effects, and its execution necessitates the help and

supervision of medical personnel. The coronavirus epidemic has altered our lives and will continue to do so in the future. This leads to increase the challenges which have faced people. During the pandemic, the time spent on unstructured leisure increased, which according to developmental science least facilitates the development of young people, in comparison to structured leisure (e.g., out-of-school time programs), more effective to promote positive youth development, as it can increase challenge, independence, and initiative (Larson,2000).

Thoreau's treatment to spent his leisure time in the woods was considerable. Thoreau's experiment, immortalized in "Walden; or, Life in the Woods," became the most well-known act of social distancing. in the world. In Walden, he made himself into a reader. Thoreau's act of reading accepts a wide range of texts as appropriate objects of attention.

#### **\* Lessons from Thoreau's experience**

Thoreau's experience of being alone did not have to be viewed negatively. He was ecstatic about it. There are many important lessons we take from Thoreau's life in Walden. The first lesson we can get from

Thoreau's living in Walden Pond is freedom. Thoreau realized that most individuals waste more time living by society's norms than by their own needs and desires. He got his freedom by pursuit simplicity in his life. He was no longer enslaved by the commercial rat race and could allow nature to awaken him. The second lesson that we can benefit from Thoreau's experience is independence and self-sufficiency. He urged people to live within their means and learned how to make the best of their circumstances. Thoreau noticed a war between two ants, red and black. He considered it as a human battle. He expresses his belief that people and animals have similar survival instincts. At the same time, because of its negative economic implications and the windows of opportunity it provides to opposing movements, the pandemic may start and feed fighting. Many readers may be coming to terms with loneliness as governments impose social distance to safeguard public health. Thoreau spent a chapter to it, emphasizing the benefits of fully coming to know oneself. "Why should I feel lonely?" he asked. Thoreau learnt people how to enjoy their solitude. Thoreau was very concerned about how to educate oneself to be independent and responsible as a thinker. There are

many lessons can we take from Thoreau's Walden to face change in corona world. Our materialistic society's distractions were switched off by the pandemic, deepening our isolation and leaving us befuddled—lost in the solitude of too much leisure and unable to live with ourselves. The virus's demise provided us a chance to take a step back and consider what really important in our lives—to take a step back and see the world for what it is, rather than seeking solace elsewhere.

In times of difficult crisis, people turn to religion for solace and hope. people may become more religious in times of crisis and raising the morality. Some people claim that their faith is stronger now than it was before the COVID-19 outbreak. Thoreau's ascetic life was a religious practice devoted to the cultivation of an equitable, multispecies community. "Higher Laws" is the title of one of the most interesting chapters of *Walden* and religious insight. Thoreau talks on how people get their food, particularly fishing and hunting." The chapter reveals Thoreau's pure religious impulse which, by virtue of its power to move the reader, has a universal significance." (Lall, Ramji.p.91) There are many valuable lessons that we should learn from Thoreau's Walden in

order to confront difficult situations during spread of coronavirus and its impact.

### \* **Research questions**

Based on the history and the principles of transcendentalism and the biography of Thoreau and the critical analysis of his *Walden*, the study formulates many questions. Here are some questions:-

1- What are the similarities and differences between the circumstances which lead to rise Transcendentalism and the recent days?

2- What is the type of the ideal and new world people want to live?

3- What's the possible effect of nature according to the researchers' view in the post covid-19 world?

### \* **Conclusion**

This paper presents an innovative view of Thoreau's *Walden* and the philosophy of transcendentalism. Whether we live in nineteenth century or twenty first century, the challenges and difficulties of life and the influence of technology on our social life are the same. Transcendentalism is the core of American philosophy. It mixed between Puritanism and Romanticism. The transcendentalists are influenced

by many ancient thoughts. This study examines Thoreau's thoughts from new perspective. I have noticed the effect of nature on human life and how it makes changes after the pandemic covid 19. It sees the health problem as an opportunity to reevaluate the meaning of our lives and take a vacation from our everyday routine. The study has presented many valuable and important lessons from Thoreau's experience in *Walden Pond* that help us to face pandemic's situations. The final stage of our study included many questions about the relations between Thoreau's *Walden* and the possibility of ideal life in post coronavirus world.

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