



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Thesis Title: THE NATURE OF EMERSON'S SKEPTICISM: A STUDY OF HIS MAJOR SKEPTICAL ESSAYS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) is considered one of the chief spokespersons for Transcendentalism, an idealistic philosophical and literary movement of the mid-nineteenth century which professed superiority of intuition, belief in individualism and self-reliance, nonconformity to customs, tradition and government authority and the inherent goodness of people. His philosophies as unfurled in his groundbreaking essays like "Friendship", "Nature", "Experience", "Montaigne; or the Skeptic" and "Circles" appear to be pulled by two different and extreme propensities of life concurrently that shows the fluxions and mobility without loyalty to any extreme polar part of the double consciousness of his mind. Emerson is a believer of both idealism and pragmatism (Weiland 166). He seems to believe in both i.e. Theory and Practice.

The problem while discussing the issues in relation to Emerson's skepticism is that of placing him in a particular fold of philosophy due to his restlessness in the exhibition of his philosophical tendencies. Being an "experimenter" ("Circles" 180) —a term Emerson himself uses to define the nature of his thought process—he enjoys ample opportunity to shift his points of view while

preaching his ideas both in the form lectures or in the written word. Emerson's limited adherence to skepticism seems to be owing to his double consciousness that exists in all parts of Nature. It is his approach to life that makes him an experimenter whose experiments appear to be incomplete without taking into consideration the dualism, and it is the demand of his experimental attitude for which his exploration of the meaning of life is not affirmed. It can be said that skepticism in Emerson's writings is simply a phase not only of his life but also of his mind. It is his mood that dictates his thoughts that dwell frequently upon a particular idea or concept. The unpredictability of human life is linked with the unpredictable nature of human thought or mood. Life becomes colorful when human temperament is good.

The present study conducts a *close reading* of selected major essays of Emerson with a view to addressing the existing research gap by exploring the various and complex implications of skepticism in Emerson's essays. The objective of the study is to highlight *the nature* of Emersonian skepticism as revealed in the selected essays. The aim of the study is to attempt a comprehensive study of Emerson's skepticism so as to understand a key aspect of the writer that still invites wide-ranging and in-depth exploration. The study of necessity is on generic or abstract themes like Friendship, Politics, Experience, Life, and Fate since the focus is on the nature of his skeptical writings. The selected essays are subjected to close reading using the relevant literature on skepticism as a philosophy as well as the general attributes of literary skepticism.