



Walden and Ecotourism: Living and Travelling Responsibly

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Abstract— Henry David Thoreau's philosophy in *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1971) is to live amidst nature responsibly and become close to one's roots. Ecotourism in contemporary times let people live within nature and connect to it. Thoreau, through *Walden* (1971), proposes certain ideas that closely relate to today's ecotourism. Thoreau and ecotourism talk about immersing with nature, living in a sustainable accommodation, conservation of nature, educational awareness on it, and promoting responsibility towards nature's preservation. This paper is going to analyse this interconnection of ecotourism and Thoreau's ideas in *Walden* (1971). Ecotourism, with its environmental conservation aspect, will be analysed.



Keywords— Ecotourism, Sustainable, Thoreau, Travel, Walden.

Walden (1971) can be taken as a way of life. Thoreau went to live near Walden Pond for two years, two months and two days. This time span taught him certain lessons, and he, in turn, taught the readers certain principles that make absolute meaning in today's scenario. Thoreau lived in nature and became a part of it. In that, he understood nature more than anyone else. He knew the world's coming and he gave ways to preserve nature in its rawest self. In today's time, with climate change, there has been an increased focus on the conservation of nature, even in the field of tourism. Modern-day ecotourism addresses such issues which were raised by Thoreau years back, living in a cabin near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. Ecotourism is a niche segment of tourism in natural areas. Fennell described ecotourism as "a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature... It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation and preservation of such areas" (Fennell, 43). Its principles are immersive connection with nature by living in a sustainable accommodation, education on nature and an adventure of responsible travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas. These principles are followed by Thoreau and ecotourism alike, which will be discussed further in the paper. Further, ecotourism is a delicate balance between

environmental conservation, economic development and cultural appreciation. In this paper, ecotourism with the aspect of environmental conservation is taken for analysis. *Walden* (1971) and ecotourism, with their close resemblance, are discussed in this paper.

Immersive Experience with Nature

Thoreau lived amongst nature near Walden Pond. He remarks that he lived in a "lower heaven" (Thoreau, 243) in between nature where wind blows amidst the company of birds. He lived among the wild mice, robin, partridge, cat, loon, phoebe, mud turtles, ducks, hens, raccoons, the wood thrush, the veery, the scarlet tanager, the field sparrow, bees, hawks, wild pigeons, fish hawk, sedge, red birds, cocks, blue-jays, wild geese, and the whippoorwill. In his yard, there were strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and citrus fruits. Thoreau lived amidst the stillness of air and the smoothness of water alongside all the neighbouring species. Thoreau shows nature's goodness from eating food from gardens, gathering wood for the evening fire to picking huckleberries. Thoreau lived an immersive life in nature "in the midst of a young forest of pitch pines and hickories," (Thoreau, 113).

In ecotourism, such an immersive living experience with nature is promoted as well.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), all nature-based forms of tourism in which the primary motivation of the tourist is the observation and appreciation of nature, is ecotourism. It invites travellers to forge a deeper connection with nature, emphasizing experiences that go beyond conventional tourism. The basic aim is to immerse in nature and live within the natural forest, hills, and nearby river where the boundaries between nature and human is blurred. They can live in the company of different varieties of trees, species of animals, and birds like Thoreau. They can wake up to the call of a rooster and pick their own berries for breakfast.

Living in a Sustainable Accommodation

The style of living that Thoreau adopted in *Walden* (1971) was living in a sustainable accommodation. His house was almost like a part of the natural landscape, with its walls lacking plaster and wide chinks making it porous, obliterating the boundary between human dwelling and the natural world. In the "House-Warming" chapter, Thoreau talks about a room making the best architecture, which warms the house without any essential house-warming materials in it. Thoreau was critical of the many consumerist attitudes his fellow Americans adopted in the 1800s. Margot Wielgus said that Thoreau did not favour his friend's life who tries to get houses, fine clothing, food, shelter and goods that society normatively values (211), which according to him, ultimately leads to hopeless despair for the masses of men. (11). W. Barksdale Maynard wrote on Thoreau's house at Walden, who said that he relocated not to the wilderness but to a recently logged clearing in an intensively used landscape just a minute's walk from town. He created a dwelling in terms of economy, sturdiness and rusticity. He further said that the way Thoreau has situated the structure and descriptions of his arrangements suggests an awareness of specific dictates derived from villa books, as if meant to offer an example of the "villas which will one day be built." (180). His country house recalled several rustic types - summerhouses, hermitages, wilderness retreats etc. Thoreau brought the wilderness values to a suburban location as a part of his desire "to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilisation" (Thoreau, 11). Thoreau built his house in a way that there was no yard and unfenced nature reached up to the sills. He believed his home was like a wilderness retreat. In ecotourism, such suburban houses are built within nature for a rustic yet comfortable stay. Rustic houses from the time of *Walden* (1971) are also famously build in today's time like in eco-resorts. One such example of an eco-resort is Jungle Bay Ecolodge, Dominica, which was rated by Forbes as top 10 eco-resorts for environmental and biodiversity protection.

Thoreau got all the materials from nature or from the nearby place where he lived. In ecotourism, a key pillar is the choice of sustainable accommodation. According to Elena et al, "Within the global framework of sustainable development, falls ecotourism". Today's eco-conscious travellers opt for lodgings that prioritise sustainability. Green hotels, eco-friendly resorts and nature-based accommodations practise such energy conservation, waste reduction, and uses locally sourced materials to provide an environmentally responsible stay. Stays within nature also account for sustainable accommodations. Retreat homes are built from trees nearby, while natural products such as bamboo, reclaimed wood and palm fronds for thatched roofs are used for construction. Recycled plastic, glass and even tires are used for the construction of an ecolodge. Ecolodges provide for such experiences in ecotourism. Some examples of such eco lodges around the world are – Volcanoes Safaris in Rwanda and Uganda; Mountain Cabins of Terragna Mountain Hut Italy; Origins Lodge Upala, Costa Rica, where one can hike to a cloud forest and to the active Volcano spotting jaguars, toucans, sloths; Wolwedans Lodge, Namibia where they have a range of camps from Dune, Desert, Mountain View to Boulders; Mara Serena Safari Lodge in Masai Mara, Kenya; Gili Lankanfushi, North Male toll, Maldives; Christalino Lodge, Amazon Rainforest, Brazil with the best birdwatching on the planet with 586 bird species; Tsermang Eco camp-Ladakh with no permanent building materials, etc. Certification programs like EarthCheck, GreenKey and Travelifi can help travellers identify responsible eco-friendly accommodations along the lines of ecotourism. Thoreau also built his cabin using sustainable materials. He marked a reform in domestic architecture. He used deadwood, waterlogged logs, to make an old fence. In building his house, which he compares to building a bird's nest, he used humble log huts and cottages of the poor. He took up an old shanty from an Irish worker, using the boards for his new ones. He built a 10 x 15 foot long and 8-foot ceiling with reclaimed old bricks and boards for dollar 28.12. Similar reclaimed materials are used for eco lodges and eco tourist stays. According to Brown, Thoreau's house would remain a theoretical example for future design. (322).

Thoreau designed his house in today's eco-friendly manners. All were rustic, was an approach that Thoreau repeatedly endorsed. He stopped using wood to not harm the environment and shifted to a stove. He took most of the sun light to use it for every day work. He built his chimney using stones and sand. Many of the ecotourist accommodations with eco-friendly options are provided by Airbnb who took up ecotourism. Unique stays like earthen homes, cave homes, forest stays, cottages, cabins in the midst of nature, campsite rentals, nature eco lodge, tent

homes, dome rentals, beach houses, boat rentals, island rentals, beach front rentals, brings the advantage of living within nature. In Airbnb, all provides such an intimate relaxation home within nature, making them “ecobnb”. Also, these eco lodges are mostly built in the hearts of forests and solar powered resorts are built on remote islands. Some of the examples are an ecolodge in rural Panama featured in architectural magazines, a British Columbian cottage hand sculpted from natural materials, a traditional seaside earthen lodge in Japan, a renewed cave home in Spain, a restored trullo home in Southern Italy, a solar-powered abode dome in the Texas desert and a hobbit cottage in the Costa Rican rainforest.

Thoreau also went to live in Walden Pond to write, to work in a way. It was his “bleisure” trip of two years, a literary retreat. Such homes are also provided in ecotourism. They provide “bleisure” opportunities.

Thoreau advocates for a style of living according to Cafaro, to satisfy his basic needs, avoid luxuries, find happiness in being with nature, preserve nature for future generation. Ecotourism builds along these lines and helps the sector in the present as well as the future. Thoreau’s call for simplicity focuses on slow living movement, minimalism or sustainable living which is what is offered in ecotourism stays. Ecotourism connects with slow tourism and responsible tourism. Slow tourism is characterised by longer, slower, and more spontaneous travel experiences, strong engagement with local culture and environment, and an emphasis on quality over quantity (Guiver & McGrath, 2016). It is a responsible tourism which is anti-commercial, promoting authenticity, advocating for getting to know one small area well, rather than superficial visits to multiple locations. This is a similar philosophy that Thoreau incorporated in *Walden* (1971), by living in Walden Pond and taking every day walking routes in exploring the same place for two years. Slow tourism uses environmentally friendly transport, mostly walking tours across the areas - making it ideal for ecotourism in protected regions.

Conservation and Education

Thoreau believed, in nature, one can learn everything. It is about living a slow, relaxed life in the woods while learning about nature for both Thoreau and the ecotourist. Thoreau talks about coming to the woods for sustenance, recreation and contemplation, participating in the freedom that the natural world provides. Thoreau strongly believed that one should be educated on nature and the surroundings. While living near Walden Pond, he gathers knowledge on different fishes living in the water, like eel, pickerel, shiners, and perch, on whom he conducts an extensive study. He studied even the other ponds nearby like a naturalist. Thoreau also researched at Walden Pond.

He calls the pond “earth’s eye” (186), personifying it and therefore conducting a study of bio-regionalism, an intimate understanding of nature-place. He also thoroughly studied the Walden pond in the winter about the extent of ice in the water. He talks about the perfection in the Walden pond’s position. Thoreau’s love for nature is called “biophilia” by Edward O. Wilson. It talks about an innate affinity of Thoreau to the natural world because of his intense desire to learn about all the living species, their physiologies, life histories and behaviours. This education on nature showed him the significance of conserving it, and he spoke on it. He spoke against cutting of trees for commercial benefits, he was against exploiting the ponds, specially the pond which was named Fleet, on the person who exploited it for commercial gains. He believed that natural objects should be named after one of their natural inhabitants rather than someone who exploits it. He was also against the cutting of ice for commercial reasons, thus becoming a conservationist. According to Peter Barry, Thoreau’s *Walden* (1971) is considered one of “the foundational works of American 'eco-centred' writing” (162). Thoreau brings nature and literature together. He criticised deforestation as the hoe woodchoppers decimated the forests that once surrounded the pond, and the Irish immigrants built their sites by it. He said, “How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?” (192), providing an ecological viewpoint. He also criticised on the exploitation of some fruits like huckleberries, which were made a market commodity and lost their true flavour. He considered nature as “heaven...under our feet as well as over our heads.” (240).

Walden (1971) and Thoreau is studied under ecocriticism extensively. Lawrence Buell was greatly influenced by Thoreau, who referred to him as “green Thoreau” (12). Buell believed that Thoreau’s *Walden* (1971), could shape the “environmental imagination” by bringing ecological consciousness. He talked about how Thoreau mirrors most closely today’s environmentalist ferment” (115). Philosopher Kate Soper and Andrew Ross talk about the need to persuade people about the significance of ecology. They believed that to safeguard the environment, democratic politicians should take up eco-friendly practices like “ecocriticism” (966-967), a term given by William Rueckert (1978), which advocates for the conservation of the environment. Also, “deep ecology”, coined by Arne Naess (1973), as an ecocritical perspective can be taken to talk about the biocentric worldview in ecotourism, where nature has value independent of its utility to humans. People have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs. It advocates for changes in our consumption habits while developing an intrinsic, deeper connection with nature (969). Thoreau protected the nature around him,

advocated for vegetarianism, and stopped eating meat. He believed in environmental and animal rights. He educated people based on his days near Walden Pond to respect nature and to follow nature ethics. Ecotourism is a form of such ecocriticism. In ecotourism, conservation efforts are integrated with education on nature and its preservation through various activities. Travellers are offered opportunities to engage in conservation efforts, whether by participating in wildlife monitoring programs or supporting local initiatives. Ecotourism provides for such experiences of educational retreat in informing people of the nearby natural objects and their significance. Education plays a key role, with guided tours and information sessions helping visitors understand the delicate balance of ecosystems and the importance of preserving them.

Ecotourism by itself is at the very core educational, and many things can be learned on the natural environment, flora and fauna. In Pikaia Lodge of the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, along with ecotourism activities like scuba diving, kayaking, and mountain biking, children are taught biology and conservation. It provides activities of trips to the forest, boat trips, bike rides around the area, diving, snorkelling, safaris around natural reserves, etc., which helps provide information. Local guides accompany at most times and gives a briefing on different species of wildlife and plants living in nature. Sometimes people are taken to untouched areas and made to learn about the significance of the nature there. Travellers can learn about the environment, wildlife and conservation efforts. This education on nature makes people aware of the necessity of conserving it. So, it becomes really beneficial for both the tourists as well as nature. It also helps in improving the quality of the travel experience. Engaging with nature and exploring pristine landscapes while getting educated on it offers a unique adventure. Places like Costa Rica, Bhutan, Kenya, Tanzania, and Iceland has implemented measures for improving the natural landscape and travel experience along such lines. Camping, hiking, bird watching, wildlife spotting, sightseeing tours, are other ways in which tourist are engaged and educated. Thoreau in *Walden* (1971) also went for similar activities throughout his stay. According to Lascurian, an ecolodge also offers tourists an educational and participatory experience, to be able to function in an environmentally sensitive manner, and protect the operating environment (197).

Thoreau, according to Cafaro, tried to build a deep connection with nature, which, he believed, was educational to oneself and would help him to build a closeness to himself (37), thereby helping to explore his transcendental self. Even in ecotourism, it is designed to escape the hustle-bustle of everyday city life and immerse oneself in the tranquillity of natural settings. It has proven to be

therapeutic, educational, giving the space to connect with oneself and, therefore, transcendental.

Adventure with Purpose and Responsible Travelling

Thoreau lived in Walden Pond with a purpose. He took an adventure with the purpose of taking care of the nature around him. He never disturbed its natural course but rather engaged in activities to explore more of it and enjoy it. Ecotourism strives to leave destinations better than it found them. Thoreau teaches to live minimally and calls for simplicity in life. He wants his life to be an example for people that life can be lived sustainably. He advocates for such sustainability in living near Walden Pond. According to Daniel Ogden, Thoreau's *Walden* (1971) is an example of ecotopia, a term coined by Ernest Callenbach in his seminal ecotopian romance, *Ecotopia* (1975). It talks about an ideal society that takes into account the problem of limited resource and tries to create a sustainable economy based on this limitation. This was his adventure with purpose. Nature fulfils one, as emotional and spiritual needs can be met through a direct, non-consumptive, sustainable relationship with nature. He believed that one should see, travel and enjoy whatever nature has to offer and live minimally while doing that. He considered Walden a sacred place. Thoreau urges people to "simplify, simplify" (91). Ecotourism aims to provide such responsible travelling through sustainable solutions as well. Nature is the ultimate teacher, providing the essential facts of life that civilisation obscures. So, one should learn to live sustainably. Thoreau wanted people to live in log huts and cottages which were "picturesque" (44). In ecotourism, homes are built in the shape of huts and cottages where people live to get the authentic notion of sustainable living. Further, Thoreau proposed the notion of living minimally. People in today's time have started to adapt to this minimal living.

According to Cafaro, Thoreau talks about the preservation of the natural environment, thereby raising a 21st century ecological concern (29). Thoreau promoted water, forest, and natural resource preservation. Thoreau advocated for fully preserving semi-wild areas, which are in today's time taken to create tourism spots with retreat homes. He supported minimum displacement of wild nature (Cafaro, 47). This he teaches to the future sustainable tourism sector building. He advocated for the preservation of wild nature and the wise use of natural resources. Thoreau talked about how a park or a primitive forest near each town must be preserved. He talked about protecting the "old-growth forests, where native species reside" (Cafaro, 52). This is something that makes Thoreau an inspirational leader in the ecotourism sector, who aims to provide tourism facilities while preserving the natural environment.

As we collectively move towards a more sustainable future, world travellers seek more responsible travel to natural areas with better environmental and cultural understanding. Ecotourism in today's time also raises this concern, therefore, popularising responsible travelling. Because of that, there are new implementations of international environmental certifications and the integration of smart technologies in ecotourism. Such ecotourism strategies are taken up to address environmental issues. Ecotourism helps in the preservation of natural environments. Travellers are educated on ethical behaviour, ensuring that their presence does not disrupt the delicate balance of the natural ecosystem. From trekking through lush rainforests to exploring underwater ecosystems, travellers can still indulge in thrilling activities while contributing to conservation efforts. Ecotourism doesn't compromise on adventure but creates conscious travellers. Such ecotourism practices educate the local tourist about the wild life and the local area, of the biological diversity. It provides first hand experiences in nature from staying in an ecolodge in the jungle to bird watching. It demonstrates sustainable tourism practices, creating responsible tourists. According to Kostilnikova, Ecotourism aligns with soft tourism values, including low-carbon travel, environmental sensitivity, longer stays, slower travel, immersive experiences, and local involvement for conserving nature. Further, Airbnb provides ecotourism activities for example- an afternoon in a jungle nursery with the Free Tree Society in Kuala Lumpur, Kayak with penguins in Cape Town, tour an urban farm in Sydney, search for wild dolphins off the coast of Maui, explore the lush forests outside Havana, help restore coral reefs in Bali and support the London Wildlife Trust at intimate concerts in London. Bhutan, as of December 2023, has unveiled a plan for building a sustainable Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). According to Lotay Thsering, the governor of GMC city, it will be a state within a state with numerous towns and streams, all connected by bridges, where the river will flow beneath an airport without causing any disturbance to the fishes. It is a city in harmony with nature, which will bring in tourists and teach them to live and travel responsibly.

CONCLUSION

In criticism, ecotourism has a chance of human-animal conflict with people disturbing the natural habitat and living conditions of the biosphere. Many businesses, for profit and popularity, claim themselves to be eco-friendly; therefore, comes an inevitable potential for the deceptive practice of "greenwashing", where businesses falsely claim to be environment friendly. However, despite this, ecotourism is a great approach for the preservation of the

planet while exploring its gems. It positively influences the tourism industry towards adopting ecological sustainability, therefore, bettering the world we live in.

According to Wielgus, Thoreau was an early ecologist, early conservationist who showed how to live a balanced life, therefore showing its significance even in today's time. *Walden* (1971), is an eco-friendly guidebook that aligns well with the concepts of ecotourism. Therefore, both cooperate with each other in presenting an ecological point of view. Thoreau through *Walden* (1971), showed himself as a visionary, and ecotourism showed the creation of environmental consciousness and responsibility for the only place where living beings thrive. It is an interesting cross disciplinary study of analysing both the contexts in a world that ever longs for its protection and preservation. *Walden* (1971) provides a framework for future sustainable living and ecotourism implements that in the real world, real time for living travelling responsibly.

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