

## **MARK TWAIN'S HUCKLEBERRY FINN: THE HUMAN FACE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE**

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Samuel Langhorne Clemens who is better known as Mark Twain, left his deep impression and style not only on American, but also on the literatures of other countries. His works exclude the frenzy and vitality of the "frontier spirit" which loom large on the stipulation of the literary form absorbed from the old world, by writers like Henry James and others. Mark Twain preferred to present the unsophisticated life patterns in their rawness, without neglecting the significance of basic values cherished by all civilized societies. He gave more importance to devise new modes of expression in different genre of literature, than following the theories of past writers.

The pitch and refineness of Twain's humour changes according to situation and person. The chief characters in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (AOHF) are teenagers who do not possess much experience of the society surrounding them. Huck, Tom, Jim and company are under grip of superstitious ideas. Mark Twain's humour has roots in the environment of his childhood, and is tinged with his pliant personality. His humour is seldom irritating and never obnoxious and meaningless.

Mark Twain wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn over a longer period of time incorporating several changes and its language especially is innovative and matches the diversity of his childhood experiences. In the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn the seeds of American flavour of English language have sprouted into buds and flowers. Ernest Hemingway finds in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, origin of American literary tradition in an authentic way. Mark Twain is a trend setter influencing the coming generations of writers.

Mark Twain had the good fortune of exposure to the values of love and friendship in the person of Dan'l (Daniel), a slave, who was a wise counsellor to all irrespective of age and class. It is apparent that Mark Twain was deeply impressed by the unstinted affection shown by uncle Daniel, whom he portrayed in his works. It is no wonder that Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn shares the character and broadmindedness of uncle Daniel. That colour or class does not make anyone superior to the human values, is brought out by Mark Twain in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn which remains the

perennial favourite of generations of children and adults, because of its roots in the structure of ideas and values which are shared by people belonging to different countries and climes.

Mississippi like a mother is taking Huck and Jim to their desired destination. In all civilizations rivers have been praised in sublime terms. Humanity has thrived on the river banks, and great cultures have reached the pinnacle of glory and achievements in all fields of human endeavour. It is no wonder, if Mark Twain is fascinated with the awesome power and stretch of Mississippi, showering benefits and also causing destruction during its flood avatar. The great rivers are the lifelines of humanity, and Mark Twain is one among the eminent writers who have expressed in passionate terms their admiration for Mississippi. T.S. Eliot in "The Dry Salvages" expressed his devotion toward Mississippi and has addressed the river as the 'brown god'.

The importance of Mississippi diminished in ratio to the increase in the transport of goods by railways. The end of Civil War brought many changes in American society. The increase in trade and commerce meant more chances for making money, hitherto unimaginable. The earlier days of simplicity in the attitudes and behaviour of people vanished, and many poets and writers were struck by nostalgia for the way of life in the past. Mark Twain has taken to task the predilection of people, to make more and more money by hook or by crook. The tempo, tenor and spirit of life in its variety in pre-Civil war American society, is recorded by Mark Twain in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

T.S. Eliot has traced in Mark Twain the foundation of the personality and beliefs of Huck Finn. Mark Twain has projected the ideal which is universal and acceptable, the triumph of conscience over the ill-will and sinister motives engulfing the societies, in the character of Huck. Huck's ideas and beliefs cannot be bracketed with the institutionalised set of hard and fast rules, and restrictions. Huck "belongs neither to the Sunday school nor to the Reformatory". (T.S. Eliot, "Introduction" The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Crescent press, London, 1950, P- 327) Huck is guided by his innate nature and never came under the influence of friends or strangers. He never diverted his energies from the chosen course of action, and like Tom Sawyer did not spend his time in seeking fresh targets of his pranks.

Mark Twain's creative abilities are evident in shaping and developing the character of Huck. Mark Twain brings out the experiences of his younger days and perhaps his yearning for adventure in the character of Huck. Huck's struggle to free himself from the restrictions on him, and his unwavering effort to stick to moral values, even under stress and duress, brings out his sterling character developed by Mark Twain.

Huck's language is similar to that spoken by persons around him, and if certain words like 'nigger' were used frequently in that period he cannot be blamed for it. Mark Twain has done a good service by recording the language expressions of that era in American history. There was of course heavy censoring, when the book was published in 1885. But this could not effect in anyway the popularity gained by the book, in all the circles of American society, and elsewhere in the world. The fascination to read the adventures of Huck did not diminish with the passage of time.

The grouse of Mark Twain against religion is not based on mere sentiments, or it is irrational. He finds that religion could not uplift humanity from the pull of vile instincts, selfish interests and hatred against the fellow beings, on the basis of color and race. He finds a dichotomy between the religious tenets and the behaviour of people, as is evident in the feuds and violence perpetuated in societies and nations. If individuals and classes are led by selfish interests and ideas not sanctioned by teachings of religion, then blame ought to be put on the persons who are demeaning the higher values of love and compassion asserted in scriptures. Mark Twain's agnosticism is to be regarded as his personal view, which in no way diminish his contribution to literature.

Mark Twain's writings are pointing towards the disharmony, ill-will, mutual misunderstandings and lack of trust, amidst the social groups and families which worshipped in the same church. Two influential families Shepherdsons and Grangerfords were engaged in a long feud, while attending the same church on Sundays. Huck is surprised and shocked, and wondered why the sermons in the church could not bring any change in the hearts of either Grangerfords or Shepherdsons towards each other. Huck's interaction with the people living on the banks of Mississippi shows how keenly Mark Twain has dealt with the different aspects of the social life in a way which is purely Twainian. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn records the tenor, living conditions, beliefs and presuppositions of people who lived in that period.

Mark Twain has demonstrated that the scourge of poverty effects both blacks and whites in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Social disparities disintegrate the societies, and there will be constant conflicts between people on the basis of colour and creed. He has observed that the living conditions of poor whites are not better than that of poor blacks like Jim and his kin. Mark Twain finds it a slur and stigma on human civilization, when dominant sections of society help in the perpetuation of social inequalities. Mark Twain in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has pointed out that evils lurking in the society and the suffering of the people are due to the deliberate policies of powerful classes and groups.

The actions of Huckleberry Finn demonstrate the supremacy of human conscience and moral values. Huck seldom wavers from the moral path and always follows the

spirit of rationality, equality and freedom. Mark Twain prefers to highlight the importance of amity and unity amongst individuals, who are the foundation of society, culture and country. Huck is never blindfolded by the false notion of the superiority of white people over the blacks, and he had brotherly love and regard toward Jim and others.

The father and son duo are a picture of total contrast. There is no iota of goodness in Pap, and he is an irresponsible father. His son is humane and ever ready to help persons in trouble. Huck helped Jim not to get any credit, but to ease his suffering. While Pap nurtures ill-will towards the blacks, Huck respects blacks and whites equally. Pap is a die-hard racist and the nucleus of the story lies in the total contrast in the characters, attitudes and ideas of Pap and Huck. Mark Twain has presented a wide agenda of sociological, political and racial issues in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

The journey of Huck and Jim on the raft is the journey towards freedom. Huck does not like to return to St. Petersburg, and Jim finds an ally in his search for the land of freedom and human rights. Huck's experience of what he saw in the place where Shepherdsons and Grangerfords lived left him totally disillusioned, and afraid of the senseless violence. Huck wants to continue his journey to gain freedom, with an honest desire to help Jim in all possible ways. Huck's reflections after escaping from the feuding families is symptomatic of the redemption he gained from the atmosphere of violence perpetuated by the feuding families. Huck says, "I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we were free and safe once more. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and butter milk, and pork and cabbage and greens - there ain't nothing in the world so good, when it's cooked right- and whilst I eat my supper we talked, and had a good time. I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on the raft." (AOHF, Chapter xix p-95)

Huck and Jim have shown exemplary qualities, even though they belonged to different cultural and social backgrounds. Huck gained insight into the dynamics of life and society on the raft floating on Mississippi, and his sojourn in the towns and villages on the river banks. Huck's ideas are highly sensible and his tackling of the complicated issues confronted by the orphaned sisters Mary Jane, Susan and Joanna depict his pragmatic approach, which is commendable. He guided the distressed sisters in overcoming the evil designs of the two rascals, the king and the Duke. Huck felt pity for the sisters who were left alone in the world.

Huck did not like the regimen imposed on him by Miss. Watson. The zeal shown by her to make him adhere to the social situation is the second turning point in the

life of Huck, While the first had been the abnormal behaviour of the father towards him. Huck disliked her restrictions, but he had no hatred towards her. Huck was afraid to live with his father, and felt danger to his life from him. Huck had no alternative than to escape from the house. Huck desired freedom from all shackles, and help Jim also in gaining freedom from slavery. Huck never wavered when there was need to take a decision against parochial views. Mark Twain has developed the character of Huck with a liberal and moral outlook, and has thrown the spotlight on the barbaric practices in the antebellum south, during the different phases of Huck's adventures. The young Huck emerges as the moral hero, untutored and unguided, depending solely on his conscience and moral values, in his fight against anti-human tendencies.

When Huck tumbled into the house of Grangerfords, and after undergoing initial scrutiny that "there ain't any Shepherdson about him", he found how excellent were they as hosts. Soon he came to know about the young poet Emmeline Grangerford who died at a young age. Mark Twain has shown the humaneness, culture and interest in art and poetry through the character of Emmeline Grangerford. Amidst social and political turmoils and feuds, there lived persons like Emmeline whose work directly or indirectly signified the need for the elevation of the thinking of persons towards the aesthetic appreciation of art and poetry. Huck even tried to write some verses on Emmeline without success. Huck in a pensive mood says "I liked all that family, dead ones and all, and warn't going to let anything to come between us. Poor Emmeline made poetry about all the dead people when she was alive, and didn't seem right that there warn't nobody to make some about her, now she was gone; so I tried to sweat out a verse or two myself, but I couldn't seem to make it go, somehow." (AOHF chapter xxvii p-85).

Huck felt deeply the pain of others, irrespective of their being known to him or not. Such a characteristic of his personality makes him a saintly being. The spontaneity of Huck's sympathy is evident in the circus scene, when the artist acting as the drunkard enters the arena and tried to ride the horse in a most awkward way. The audience laughed at him and ridiculed him in harsh terms. The circus audience were shouting "Knock him down: throw him out:" (AOHF, chapter xxii, p119). Huck observed all this and felt a flood of sympathy for the circus artist. Similarly when the fake royalty faced the anger of the people, Huck felt that "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another" (AOHF chapter xxxiii, p 180) Huck had no heart to harbour ill will, even against his tormentors.

Huck's journey to gain freedom is kaleidoscopic. The varied phases of societies, the good, ugly and beautiful find a place in the explorations of Huck. Huck is endowed with robust commonsense and is highly pragmatic and alert, and possessed the ability to manoeuvre the situation to his advantage without any intention to foment trouble for others. In a subdued way Huck is as daring as Tom Sawyer. Mark Twain has presented the factual presentation of the American society of that period, in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain concludes the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn on an optimistic tone. Huck does not like to enter St.Petersburg again and is anxious to realise

his freedom, and plans to embark on a new journey. He says, "I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before." (AOHF, chapter xxxvi, p226)

Mark Twain has focussed on the innate moral equilibrium of Huck, in contrast to persons in the different strata of society, who are at peace with the prevalent inequities and injustice rampant around them. Huck finds a kindered soul in Jim, and he would be the most happy person, if circumstances favour Jim in joining his family. Huck is lonely, but not lost, for he hopes to find a place for the realisation of his aims and destiny.

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