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THE SITUATIONAL HUMOUR OF MARK TWAIN'S IN
"THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN"

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ABSTRACT

As a fiction writer, Mark Twain, whose original name is Samuel Langhorne Clemens, stands apart as a comic genius. In America, Mark Twain had popularized this new genre through two of his well-known novels. One is *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and the other *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Mark Twain's idea of a boy character is based on the picture of an average American boy. The American boy, by nature, is enterprising and mischievous, not a reserved character like his counterpart in England. His counterpart is bolder and hence a more interesting character. Mark Twain's portrayal of the twin boy characters - Tom Sawyer, and Huckleberry Finn is actually a portrayal of the American boys in general. This does not mean that American boys are not good or obedient.

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Mark Twain's times America was facing tremendous challenges of all kinds – geographical, cultural, social, economic and political. America started coming up as a great country in the world. This was the time when Mark Twain was growing in to youth and started writing. Samuel Langhorne Clemens popularly known as Mark Twain, his pseudonym in the literary world. He became the great American humorist in the nineteenth century. He has various capacities, as a lawyer, store-keeper and farmer, success always eluding him. Sam Clemens continued as a pilot on the river Mississippi until the outbreak of the civil war.

The humour of situation and that of character represent the higher form of humour. Mark Twain and has written novels and stories in which humour arises out of situation or character, or stories in which situation and character combine to produce the humorous effect. Mark Twain has excelled in producing humour of situation as well as of character. At times, in his novels in every page we have humour of situation. He has taken the raw materials from the people and events around them to highlight this humour.

Humour of situation depends purely on the situation that turns out to be funny due to a juxtaposition of incongruities. We see dogs every day and think nothing of them. But if a dog does not belong there, and the situation is incongruous causing laughter. If a man meets a lady on the street, he lifts his hat to her and a pigeon flies out from beneath it, most of the people who see it would roar with laughter. This is called the humour of the unexpected happening.

From everyday experience, readers know how things usually happen and how people react. A distortion of action or an understatement of effect gets a special response from readers, because they consider these changes improbable or the unexpected. The reader has to be alert to the actions of character because actions are the author's way of showing, not telling, what the characters are like. Appearance may be taken as a due to the nature of a character if the author leads the reader to attach significance to it. Literary analysis is not pure description or a summary of the action, although it may include these elements.

He should also pray for strength to help other people. He should never pray for himself. As Huckleberry Finn says,

"I went out into the woods and turned it over in my mind.
I thought about it for along time, but I could see no advantage
in it for me —only for other people—so at last I decided that
I wouldn't worry about it any more". [12]

The band of robbers was disbanded after a month's time. Huckleberry Finn resigns from the band. All the other boys followed suit. What Huckleberry Finn says about the activity of the band of robbers is quite humorous. In one sentence, he summarizes all the activities of the robbers —"We hadn't robbed or killed any people, but only just pretended and we soon tired if it". This declaration becomes humorous in the light of the serious preparation made when the band of robbers was started.

Huckleberry Finn's aversion to being civilized is revealed in his Twain aversion living in a house and sleeping in a bed made him uncomfortable. Sometimes he would sleep out and sleep in the woods. However, Huckleberry Finn satisfied the widow with his progress. One day he dropped the salt cellar at breakfast. He tried to throw the broken pieces over his left shoulder to keep off bad luck. Miss Watson scolded him but Widow Douglas had a good word for him, Huckleberry Finn knew it was not going to put off the bad luck.

The arrangement made by Huckleberry Finn when he detects the presence of his father in the scene is another humorous situation. He went down the hill fast to Judge Thatcher's house, and asks the Judge to transfer all the money and prepare a paper on the transaction Huckleberry Finn signed off everything to Judge Thatcher and came away. He did all this to escape from his father's claim over his money. Finn was particular that his father should not get his name because Finn's father was a no-gooder. He was a drunkard. He would waste all the money in drinking if he got his hands to it.

Huckleberry Finn's encounter with his father is another humorous situation. His father compares his own shabby clothes to the starched clothes worn by Huckleberry Finn. He asks Huckleberry Finn to drop off from school. His reasoning is quite humorous. He says,

"your mother couldn't read and she couldn't write.
None of the family could. I can't. I won't stand
for this nonsense, you understand?".[16]

However, paradoxically he orders him to pick up a book and let him hear him read. Huckleberry Finn obliges and reads for half a minute. His father snatched out his hand and threw it away. Here is a piquant situation for Huckleberry Finn. Miss. Watson and Widow Douglas want him to go to school. But his own father says, "If I catch you near the school I'll thrash you". When he finds out that Huckleberry Finn has only a dollar in his pocket, he gets it from the son and goes to the tavern.

The next humorous situation that we encounter in the novel is the elaborate arrangement made by Huckleberry Finn to fake a killing. He himself calls it a brilliant idea. It will look like that he was savagely murdered. For this he shoots a pig, smashes the door with an axe, drags the pig in, cuts its throat and lets it bleed profusely. He then fills a sack with stones and drags the weight along the blood trail. He also takes a sack of meal and cuts a hole in the bottom. He took the sack to the other side where there was slake. He thinks that people will believe that robbers had killed him and taken things from him. The humour of the situation lies in the fact that a pig is chosen as a substitute for Huckleberry Finn.

The next humorous situation in this novel involves Jim and Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry Finn is surprised to find Jim in Jackson's Island. Jim, the negro slave, has escaped from Miss Watson. He mistakes

Huckleberry Finn to be a ghost. He falls on his knees and prays to Huck for mercy. What he says is laced with fine humour,

"Don't hurt me-please' I have never harmed a ghost I always liked dead people and have done whatever I can for them .please go back to the river where you now belong and don't harm me. I have always; been your loyal friend, Master Huck". [22]

The efforts taken by Huckleberry Finn to convince him add to the humour of the situation, It is ironical for a living person to prove that he is not dead.

Huckleberry Finn is anxious to know what has happened on the shore. Jim suggests that he should set out in the dark .this is followed by an unexpected suggestion. Jim suggests that he should dress like a girl. He could wear one of the dresses they had found. The arrangements made by Jim and Huckleberry Finn to make Huckleberry Finn look like a girl provides hilarious laughter. Huckleberry Finn explain, how they

"shortened one of the gowns and I got into it after I had turned up my frouserlegs to my knees. Jim used pins to fold in the gown where it was loose and then it looked as if it had been stitched to fit me.1 put on the faded sun-bonnet and tied it under my chin." [28]

Huckleberry Finn takes a special effort walking around all day. He tries to get used to unfamiliar dress; he also tries to walk like a girl. Jim advised him not to pull up his gown to get into the trouser pocket. The point is understood by Huckleberry Finn and he stops doing it. Huckleberry Finn goes to a house where a woman is knitting a muffler by a candle. She was a woman new to that place. Huckleberry Finn decided not to that he was a girl. At first he gives his name as 'Sarah Williams. Later he changes it to Mary Williams. When the shrewd woman questions him about the confusion in his names, by uttering huckleberry Finn is not all worried. He is resourceful enough to escape from that tight corner by uttering a lie. He tells the lady that name is his Sarah Mary Williams. He goes to the extent of informing the lady that Sarah is his name and that people called her either 'Sarah' Or 'Mary'. But the clever Huckleberry Finn immediately says "what's your real name?'. She elaborates the question further and asks, "What's your real name? Isn't it Bill, or Tom or Bob?" Huckleberry Finn tries a little to pretend that he is a poor girl, 'but the lady is not to be easily deceived.

The lady then makes certain that Huckleberry Finn really comes room the country side. The questions she asks are all quite interesting and humorous. It is quite surprising that Huckleberry Finn answers them correctly. The first question is with regard to how a cow lying down gets up. Huckleberry Finn gives the right answer. He also answers correctly how a horse gets up. He shows his intelligence in replying that heads of fifteen cows grazing on the hillside will be pointed in the same direction. Now the lady is convinced that Huckleberry Finn is really from the country side. Then she says, "I thought maybe you were trying to deceive me again. What's your real name now?"

To this question, Huckleberry Finn gives a fictitious name as answer. He calls himself George Peters. The way in which a torrent of lies that pours out of his little mouth is quite suprising. This escapade ends with the lady giving him tips as how to masquerade as a girl. She tells him that he should hold the needle and poke the thread into it. This suggestion makes the whole thing humorous. Huckleberry Finn's motive is not to masquerade as a girl. It is only a temporary arrangement so as to collect information regarding himself.

The situation regarding slipping into the cornfields before day light to pick up a water melon or a pumpkin or some new corn becomes humorous when Jim and Huckleberry Finn have a discussion over it. Huckleberry Finn remembers his father saying that there was no harm in borrowing things 'if you were intending to pay them back some time. But according to widow Douglas it was stealing and that no upright person would do it. Jim listened to both the view points and ruled out that both were partly right. So he suggests that the best way for them is to pick out two or three things from the list and say that they would not borrow them any more. The brilliant idea given by Jim is that then it would not be borrowing. They were crab-apples and date-plums. Huckleberry Finn is not unhappy because he "didn't like crab apples any way, and the date-plums wouldn't be right for two or three months yet" [37].

While Jim is hiding in the raft, Huckleberry Finn comes ashore to investigate. At that time a boat came alongside. Huck found two men inside. They had guns with them. One of the men asked Huckleberry Finn what was that they saw in the distance. Huckleberry Finn replied that it was a piece of raft. The man asked him if it

belonged to him. Huckleberry Finn answered in the affirmative. He also volunteered the information that there was only one on board. The man then said that they were looking for five slaves who had escaped that night. The man then enquired Huckleberry Finn if his man on the raft was white or black. Huckleberry Finn answered that he was white. Then the man expressed his intention to see for themselves. Huckleberry Finn then said to him that he wished he would because his father was in a very sick state. His mother, Mary Ann is also sick. The ease with which huckleberry Finn delivers these lies is breath-taking. The situation becomes humorous with the instant invention of a father and mother who are sick. Huckleberry Finn's infinite variety like that of Sir John Falstaff brought out in this situation. But the man was not to be discouraged easily that the curiosity of the stranger Huckleberry Finn tells him that his father will be much indebted to him. Everybody had gone away when he wanted them to help him turn the raft ashore. He was unable to do it alone. Now, the man asks Huckleberry Finn.

"That's odd, boy, what's the matter with your father?" [54]

Huckleberry Finn makes the situation more comic by hesitating to reply. It is only a pretension.

He says,

"it's the —a-the-well, It isn't anything much". [54]

This answer is enough to ignite the curiosity of the stranger. He asks him what the matter was with his father. He instructs him to answer truthfully. Once again, Huckleberry Finn gives an answer, which is no answer at all. He leaves out unsaid what exactly the problem of his father is. He says,

" I will, sir, honesty I will-but don't leave us please. it's the - gentlemen,
if you'll only pull ahead, and let me throw you the rope, you won't have
to come near the raft".

Huckleberry Finn has thus kindled the interest of the strangers in the condition of his father. Huckleberry Finn gives a clue by saying that they will not have to come near the raft. The intended result occurs when one of the two men asks his companion, John not to do as Huckleberry Finn says. Backing some distance away, he says,

"Keep away, by-keep to starboard. I think I know what your pap is
suffering from. Your pap has got the smallpox, and you know that
very well. Why didn't you tell so? Do you want to spread it all over?"[55]

This is what Huckleberry Finn exactly wanted them to think. It must be said to his credit that he is able to arouse the curiosity of the two men and misguiding them with false clues. He succeeds in making them arrive at the wrong conclusion, which is to the advantage of Huckleberry Finn. Had they come to see the man in the raft, they would have found out Jim and caught him. But, thanks to the resourcefulness of Huckleberry Finn, the danger is successfully averted. In those days, when the world of medicine was not much developed as it is today, smallpox was almost fatal as and people had died because of the disease. Huckleberry Finn plays on this native fear in the two strangers and is able to ward them off the canoe where Jim is hiding. Huckleberry Finn is not at all exhausted. He has a final thrust when he says, "well ...I've told everything to others before, and they first quit," [p.55]. This comes in the end when one of the strangers says,

"Poor chap. We are really sorry for you, but we don't want the smallpox.You
see, it is a dreaded disease. Look here, I'll tell you what to do. Don't try to
land by yourself or you will smash everything to pieces. You float along
down about almost twenty miles, and you Will come to a town on the left
hand side of the river. You will reach long after sun-up. When you ask for
help there, you tell them all you folks are down with chills and fever. Don't
be a fool again, and let people guess what the matter is. We are trying to do
you a kindness. Just do as we say, that's good boy. Here-I'll put a twenty
dollar gold piece on this plant, and you pick it up when it floats by you. We
can't fool with smallpox, you see that, don't you?" [55]

The highlight of this situation is that they do not know that they had been deceived. They mistake Huckleberry Finny to be an innocent boy telling the truth. They teach him how to tell lies and get help. The funniest part of the situation is that they give him a twenty dollar gold piece. The way in which the coin is sent to Huckleberry

Finn is a proof that the little boy had completely taken them in. by telling a judicious lie through suggestions; Huckleberry Finn gets not only free advice but also twenty dollars. The other man adds twenty more dollars and bids goodbye to Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry Finn has the final laugh when he says,

"Goodbye, sirs 'I said, 'I won't let any runaway slave get away if I can help it".

He has actually helped a runaway slave get away. He has taken a lot of efforts to do it. This crowns the humorous situation suitably.

Another humorous situation is the adventure involving Huckleberry Finn and Buck. One day they were out in the woods. They were hunting when they heard a horse coming. Buck asked Huckleberry Finn to jump behind the bush quickly. Then they peeped out from behind the bush. They saw a splendid young Man galloping down the road. He was carrying a shotgun. He was none other than young Harney Shepherdson. At that time, Buck's gun went off Harney's hat tumbled off from his head. He rode straight to the place where they were hiding with gun in hand. Buck and Huck began to run through the woods. Huck looked over his shoulder and found their pursuer cover Buck with his hat. Buck and Huck did not stop running till they reached home. The old man's face blazed in delight. He said to him in a gentle voice.

"I don't like you shouting from behind a bush. Why didn't you step into the road, my boy?"[68]

The reply given by Buck is quite humorous. He says, "The Shepherdsons don't father. They always take advantage". [68]

The definition given to the word 'feud' is quite confusing and borders on the humorous. Buck knows that the feud started thirty years before. But he does not know anything about the reason.

Huck has another adventure by himself. One morning he found a canoe in the morning and crossed over in it to the main shore. Huck paddled about a mile up a creek to the cypress woods to see if he could get some berries. When he was passing a place where there was a cow path, two men came running down the path. As Huck says,

"I got scared, for whenever anybody was after anybody I thought it was me-or may he Jim". [79]

He runs away from them. But they were very close to him. They were ready to jump into the canoe. They could not and begged him to save their lives. They had done nothing but men with dogs were chasing them. So, in this situation, Huck thinks that he is being chased by two men. The comic perspective is to be seen in situations, characters and language. It is associated with humour and Mark Twain proves to be a master humorist.

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