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ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN: A QUEST FOR FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

Huck being one of the curtain raisers and torch bearers of liberty and independence represents natural life through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways and desires to escape planned civilization. Huck's struggle for social freedom and civilization is pervasive in the novel. Huck is an indomitable soul, a protagonist against socially established rules and discipline, who holds a strong resistance to anything that might imprison his conscience and his self. The novel brings forth a representation of the conflict of natural free individualism contrasted with the expectation of the society. Sickened by the feelings of confinement set by social expectations of civilization, Huck combats with all kinds of challenges in his urge to liberate himself from social, cultural, religious norms, that he is forced to submit to. This paper aims to study Huck's freedom juxtaposed with the liberation of his conscience. The life of the author (Mark Twain) of the book (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn) has also been described in short in this paper. From being a printer's apprentice to a river pilot's assistant and ultimately an author, Mark Twain's life has been similar to that of the character of his book. The era he belonged to was the one where slavery was rampant and hence the idea of getting liberated from the clutches of time can be seen in the book as well as in the life of Mark Twain. The following work therefore focuses on the life of Mark Twain and the book through which the idea of liberating one's soul is apparent on the face.

Keywords: Liberation, Social Expectation, Individualism, Natural life, Inner Conflicts.

Introduction

It is eternal truth that man has always liked to live without bondages and fetters in this world. Although, absolute freedom for everyone is impossible because it will result in anarchy and conflict between different members of the society, nonetheless certain fundamental essential liberties are *sine quibus non* for full fledged growth and development of human beings. One of the significant contributors in the field of securing such liberties and freedoms are eminent piece of writings by some eminent authors, who later on become the source of inspiration for rulers and policy makers. Mark Twain is one of such writers, who always, through his eminent writings¹ supported the concept of freedom and equality.

Early Life of Mark Twain

On November 30, 1835, the small town of Florida, Missouri, witnessed the birth of its most famous son. Samuel Langhorne Clemens was welcomed into the world as the sixth child of John Marshall and Jane

Lampton Clemens. Little did John and Jane know, their son Samuel would one day be known as Mark Twain - America's most famous literary icon².

Approximately four years after his birth, in 1839, the Clemens family moved 35 miles east to the town of Hannibal. A growing port city that lay along the banks of the Mississippi, Hannibal was a frequent stop for steam boats arriving by both day and night from St. Louis and New Orleans.

Samuel's father was a judge, and he built a two-story frame house at 206 Hill Street in 1844. As a youngster, Samuel was kept indoors because of poor health. However, by age nine, he seemed to recover from his ailments and joined the rest of the town's children outside. He then attended a private school in Hannibal. When Samuel was 12, his father died of pneumonia, and at 13, Samuel left school to become a printer's apprentice. After two short years, he joined his brother Orion's newspaper as a printer and editorial assistant. It was here that young Samuel found he enjoyed writing.

At the age of seventeen, he left Hannibal behind for a printer's job in St. Louis. While in St. Louis, Clemens became a river pilot's apprentice. He became a licensed river pilot in 1858. Clemens' pseudonym, Mark Twain, comes from his days as a river pilot. It is a river term which means two fathoms or 12-feet when the depth of water for a boat is being sounded.

"Mark Twain" means that it is safe to navigate. Because the river trade was brought to a standstill by the Civil War in 1861, Clemens began working as a newspaper reporter for several newspapers all over the United States. In 1870, Clemens married Olivia Langdon, and they had four children, one of whom died in infancy and two who died in their twenties. Their surviving child, Clara, lived to be 88, and had one daughter. Clara's daughter died without having any children, so there are no direct descendants of Samuel Clemens living³.

Literary Career-Reflection of Liberal Ideology

Twain describes in *Life on the Mississippi* how, when he was a boy, "there was but one permanent ambition" among his comrades: to be a steam boatman. "Pilot was the grandest position of all. The pilot, even in those days of trivial wages, had a princely salary – from a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars a month, and no board to pay."

As Twain described it, the pilot's prestige exceeded that of the captain. The pilot had to "get up a warm personal acquaintanceship with every old snag and one-limbed cottonwood and every obscure wood pile that ornaments the banks of this river for twelve hundred miles; and more than that, must ... actually know where these things are in the dark..." Steamboat pilot Horace E. Bixby took on Twain as a "cub" pilot to teach him the river between New Orleans and St. Louis for \$500, payable out of Twain's first wages after graduating. Twain studied the Mississippi, learning its landmarks, how to navigate its currents effectively, and how to "read the river" and its constantly shifting channels, reefs, submerged snags and rocks that would "tear the life out of the strongest vessel that ever floated". It was more than two years before he received his pilot's license. Piloting gave him his pen name, Mark Twain, from "mark twain", the leadsman's cry for a measured river depth of two fathoms (12 feet), which was safe water for a steamboat⁴.

It is submitted that earlier days of Mark Twain's life were not easy and he was leading a common man life. However, his life took a turn when he established himself as writer. His first success as a writer came when his humorous tall tale, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County", was published in a New York weekly, *The Saturday Press*, on November 18, 1865. It brought him national attention. A year later, he traveled to the Sandwich Islands (present-day Hawaii) as a reporter for the *Sacramento Union*. His travelogues were popular and became the basis for his first lectures.

In 1867, a local newspaper funded a trip to the Mediterranean. During his tour of Europe and the Middle East, he wrote a popular collection of travel letters, which were later compiled as *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). It was on this trip that he met his future brother-in-law, Charles Langdon. Both were passengers aboard the *Quaker City* on their way to the Holy Land. Langdon showed a picture of his sister Olivia to Twain, who claimed to have fallen in love at first sight.

Twain's first book, "The Innocents Abroad," was published in 1869, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" in 1876, and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" in 1885⁵. Basically, The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn is

related with quest of freedom, where a boy named Huck dreams to lead a free life away from all kind of encumbrances.

Huck as a Flag bearer of Liberty:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is one of the most celebrated novels in American literature--arguably the greatest novel in American literature. The justification usually cited is its commentary on the social institutions of slavery and discrimination; however, no less important is the aspect of the story that demonstrates one boy's coming of age.

On its surface, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a straightforward story about a boy and a runaway slave floating down the Mississippi River. But underneath, the book is a subversive confrontation of slavery and racism.

It seems that Twain was himself a great champion of liberties and fundamental freedoms for everyone irrespective of race, creeds, nationality etc. Twain wrote in his Autobiography "In *Huckleberry Finn*, I have drawn Tom Blankenship exactly as he was. He was ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as any boy had. His liberties were totally unrestricted. He was the only really independent person--boy or man--in the community, and by consequence he was tranquilly and continuously happy and was envied by all the rest of us. We liked him; we enjoyed his society. And as his society was forbidden by our parents, the prohibition trebled and quadrupled its value, and therefore we sought and got more of his society than of any other boy's⁶."

In the literary arena, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a sequel to *Tom Sawyer*, Twain's novel about his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri. Huck is the "juvenile pariah of the village" and "son of the town drunkard," Pap Finn. He wears cast-off adult clothes and sleeps in doorways and empty barrels. Despite this, the other children "wished they dared to be like him." Huck also appears in *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, and *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, as well as the unfinished Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians.

At the beginning of the novel, Huck lives with the Widow Douglas, who wants to "civilize" Huck, as he puts it. Although he dislikes the restraints society puts on him (i.e. stiff clothing, education, and religion), he prefers it to going back to living with his drunken father. However, his father kidnaps him and locks him up in his house. Therefore, the first major chunk of the novel focuses on the abuse Huck experiences at the hands of his father--abuse so bad that he must fake his own murder in order to escape alive.

After staging his death and running away, Huck meets up with Jim, a runaway slave from the village. They decide to travel down the river together. Both of them are running away to gain their freedom: Jim from slavery, Huck from his father's abuse and the Widow Douglas's restrictive lifestyle (although Huck does not see it that way yet). For a major part of their journey together, Huck views Jim as property.

Jim becomes a father figure--the first Huck ever had in his life. Jim teaches Huck right and wrong, and an emotional bond develops through the course of their journey down the river. By the last segment of the novel, Huck has learned to think like a man instead of a boy. This change is most poignantly demonstrated when we see the melodramatic prank that Tom Sawyer would have played with Jim (even though he knows that Jim is already a free man)⁷.

Huck is genuinely concerned with Jim's safety and well-being, whereas Tom is only interested in having an adventure--with complete disregard for Jim's life or Huck's concern. Comparing the two, Tom is still the same boy as the one in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but Huck has become something more. Experiences that he has shared with Jim on their journey down the river have taught him about being a man. Although *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contains some very poignant critiques of slavery, discrimination, and society in general, it is also important as the story of Huck's journey from boyhood to manhood, where he preferred liberty over the social bondages and barrier.

Elaborating the approach of freedom in the Novel, Ralph Waldo Ellison said, "Huckleberry Finn knew, as did Mark Twain, that Jim was not only a slave but a human being [and] a symbol of humanity... and in freeing Jim, Huck makes a bid to free himself of the conventionalized evil taken for civilization by the town..."⁸

To help steal a horse or a cow was a low crime at that time, but to help a hunted slave, or feed him or shelter him, or hide him, or comfort him, in his troubles, his terrors, his despair, or hesitate to promptly to betray him to the slave-catcher when opportunity offered was a much baser crime, & carried with it a stain, a

moral smirch which nothing could wipe away. That this sentiment should exist among slave-owners is comprehensible--there were good commercial reasons for it--but that it should exist & did exist among the paupers, the loafers the tag-rag & bobtail of the community, & in a passionate & uncompromising form, is not in our remote day realizable.

It is noteworthy that as a child, Twain didn't question the institution of slavery. Not only was Missouri a slave state, his uncle owned 20 slaves. In *Autobiography*, Twain wrote, "I vividly remember seeing a dozen black men and women chained to one another, once, and lying in a group on the pavement, awaiting shipment to the Southern slave market. Those were the saddest faces I have ever seen." At some point, Twain's attitudes changed and he married into an abolitionist family⁹.

However, it seems that Twain was also impressed and inspired by George Washington, and this possibility cannot be ruled out that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contain characteristics of George Washington also as it revealed from "Newspapers Articles Written By Mark Twain".¹⁰ In one of such articles, He wrote in the praise of Washington-

"This day, many years ago precisely, George Washington was born. How full of significance the thought! Especially to those among us who have had a similar experience, though subsequently; and still more especially to the young, who should take him for a model and faithfully try to be like him, undeterred by the frequency with which the same thing has been attempted by American youths before them and not satisfactorily accomplished. George Washington was the youngest of nine children, eight of whom were the offspring of his uncle and his aunt.

Extending his praise for Washington, he went ahead: "As a boy he gave no promise of the greatness he was one day to achieve. He was ignorant of the commonest accomplishments of youth. He could not even lie. But then he never had any of those precious advantages which are within the reach of the humblest of the boys of the present day. Any boy can lie, now. I could lie before I could stand—yet this sort of sprightliness was so common in our family that little notice was taken of it. Young George appears to have had no sagacity whatever. It is related of him that he once chopped down his father's favorite cherry tree, and then didn't know enough to keep dark about it. He came near going to sea, once, as a midshipman; but when his mother represented to him that he must necessarily be absent when he was away from home, and that this must continue to be the case until he got back, the sad truth struck him so forcibly that he ordered his trunk ashore, and quietly but firmly refused to serve in the navy and fight the battles of his king so long as the effect of it would be to discommode his mother. The great rule of his life was, that procrastination was the thief of time, and that we should always do unto others. This is the golden rule. Therefore, he would never discommode his mother¹¹."

Further, "Young George Washington was actuated in all things, by the highest and purest principles of morality, justice and right. He was a model in every way worthy of the emulation of youth. Young George was always prompt and faithful in the discharge of every duty. It has been said of him, by the historian that he was always on hand, like a thousand of brick. And well deserved was this noble compliment. The aggregate of the building material specified might have been largely increased—might have been doubled—even without doing full justice to these high qualities in the subject of this sketch. Indeed, it would hardly be possible to express in bricks the exceeding promptness and fidelity of young George Washington. His was a soul whose manifold excellencies were beyond the ken and computation of mathematics, and bricks are, at the least, but an inadequate vehicle for the conveyance of a comprehension of the moral sublimity of a nature so pure as his".

Though, the character of Huck does not possess all the qualities of George Washington, but one thing is common between them that none of them accepted the domination of another upon their persons.

Conclusion

Mark Twain passed away on April 21, 1910, but has lot of admirers still today. One can say without slightest skepticism, after reviewing the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that it is a great pro-libertarian novel as well as historical document of treasure of English Literature, which reflects the personal thoughts of the author in fictional mode.

The effect of Twain's works upon the thinking of jurists and common people across the world was immense and that's why, on the advent of Twentieth Century, voices for protection of Human Rights become stronger and steady.

References

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