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MARK TWAIN'S *HUCKLEBERRY FINN* AS A SOCIAL SATIRE

MUZIFAR YOUSUF

Research Scholar, School of Studies in English,
Vikram University Ujjain (M.P)



MUZIFAR YOUSUF

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research paper is to analyze various social aspects used as a satire by Mark Twain with the intention to reform American society. This very society which had been scourged by the social evils they are Murder, religious hypocrisy, slavery, drunkenness, injustice, materialism and discrimination. Later on this novel has been credited to have helped in abolishing the social evils from this slave holding society. As we know before Mark Twain, the American social cause had been pioneered by Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Keywords: Satire, ridicule, drunkenness, materialism, antebellum, injustices, Juvenal, Slavery, racial prejudices

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Mark Twain is a towering figure in the history of American literature who has written in his eternal lines the injustices and social evils practised by Americans during his time. This entire has been exposed in his world famous novel, *Huckleberry Finn*. The basic thing which is commendable to know about him, that he has left no stone unturned in playing his part to ameliorate American society. Mark Twain's reactions against evil practices appeared almost in his all writings, which earned him great fame and respect in the world. His had positions against those practices which lead readers of his works to classify him among the pioneers and supporters of the black cause, as Harriet Beecher Stowe did by writing her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which a lady dismisses the slaves as a "shameful sight". (Beecher, 1981: 199). This very novel for the revolutionary act in supporting to black cause has been appreciated by Abraham Lincoln.

So for the novel *Huckleberry Finn* is concerned, it is a protest in the form of a social satire. Throughout this novel, Twain delineates Negro Jim in a way who makes a scorn on the conventional notion regarding Negro character. As an intelligent, sensitive, clever and considerate individual, Jim demonstrates that one's race provides no positive manifestation of one's character. When this point is to be seen with gravity it is a bold step taken by any Nineteenth century American novelist to emancipate a Negro in such a way.

In general when we see satire is a type of literature and sometimes pictorial arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule perfectly with the intent to humiliate individuals, and society itself, into improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, its greater purpose is often constructive in nature, using wit as a tool. So a Common features of satire is irony, but ridicule, parody, overstate are all frequently used in satirical speeches and writing. This irony or sarcasm often professes to approve of the things the satirist wish to attack. Satire is nowadays found in many artistic forms of expression including literature, plays, commentary, and media. In fact there are various types of satire that are

not meant to be funny at all. On the other hand, not all humour, even on such topics as politics, religion or art is necessarily mocking, even when it uses the satirical tools of irony, parody, and mockery. Ironical satire in some cases has been regarded as the most effective source to understand a society. It provides the keen insight into any society's overall psychology; reveal its deepest values, tastes, and structures of power. Some authors have regarded satire as superior to non-comic and non-artistic disciplines like history or anthropology. For its nature and social role, satire has enjoyed in many societies a special freedom license to mock prominent individuals and institutions. A few satirists are Balzac in France, Dickens in England, Aravind Adiga in India and Twain in America. The satiric impulse, and its ritualized expressions, carries out the function of resolving social tension. So, satirical literature can commonly be categorized as either Horatian or Juvenalian, although the two are not entirely different. Good judgment and biting satire on social institutions and individuals became a popular tool in the hands of satirists. The turn to the 18th century was characterized by a change from Horation, soft, pseudo-satire to biting Juvenal satire.

A novelist such as Charles Dickens has written passages on satire in his novels for treatment of social issues. In the same period, Mark Twain in the United States, (1835-1910) was a great satirist. His novel *Huckleberry Finn* is set in the antebellum South, where the social as well as moral values Twain wishes to promote. His hero, Huck, is very simple but goodhearted boy who is ashamed of the immoral persuasion that leads him to help a runaway slave. In fact his conscience, deformed by the distorted moral environment he has grown-up in, often bothers him most when he is at his best. Ironically, he is prepared to do good, believing it to be wrong. Such was the influence on his innocence from the social environment. Mark Twain also showed aggression on religion which was the key supporter of slavery. He always made Huck choose the right and moral side and disobey religious norms. Through Huck's hesitations and choices, Twain encouraged people to listen to their instinct rather than to their conscience. He proved that the latter may easily be corrupted by society and religion. Twain clearly makes Huck's choice a pointed attack on Southern Church. Huck scolds himself saying "There was the Sunday-school, you could 'a' gone to it; and if you'd 'a' done it they'd 'a' learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting tire." (Twain, 2012: 198).

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to be read and analysed as a satirical work. It has targeted many social classes, their way of thinking as well as their way of act. To achieve this with success, author has used a twelve-year-old protagonist, who laughed at the corrupt society, denouncing swindling, drunkenness and materialism. The hero Huck used his inventiveness, quickness, morality, innocence and love of adventure to ridicule not only the above mentioned vices, but also social, cultural and institutions. Huck says related to his father's drinking habits "Every time he got money he got drunk; and every time he got drunk he raised Cain around town; and every time he raised Cain he got jailed. He was just suited-this kind of thing was right in his line." (Twain, 2012: 21). Violence was one of the first evils that Twain satirized. He first presented the most frequent forms of it through Pap Finn's (father of Huck) brutality, the bloodshed resulting from a disagreement opposing two aristocratic families and Lynch Law. Here Huck gives the description of a lynching scene as "Well, by and by somebody said Sherburn ought to be lynched. In a minute everybody was saying it; so away they went, mad and yelling, and snatching down every clothes-line they come to do the hanging with...." "The idea of YOU lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a MAN!" (Twain, 2012: 133-34). All these social vices had plagued American society witnessed by Mark Twain and remained on his mind since his childhood. He found no other means to fight it but through satire, which is a much well-organized powerful tool than any other means in terms of ridding of the society from vices and other impious practices.

The other major evil that Mark Twain wanted to denounce with all his might was slavery. In the mid Nineteenth century, life on the frontier was based on slavery. A slave was not a man, who could be sold anywhere at any time, and had no way to show his worth and claim his rights. Author himself, was born and grown up in a slave-holding society, intended not only to reveal slaves' conditions, but also to denounce and condemn slavery. A slave was considered sub human as many passages of *Huckleberry Finn* shows it. Surely,

the most shocking scene is the slave auction, where slaves are considered not as humans, but as mere property to be sold anyhow, when they are no longer needed. Huck gives full spectacle of it in this manner: a couple of nigger traders come along, and the king sold them the niggers reasonable, for three day drafts as they called it, and away they went, the sons up the river to Memphis, and their mother down the river to Orleans. I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other,...I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying... (Twain, 2012: 169).

Certainly, one of Twain's goals was proving to the entire humankind that a slave too, was a man, that blacks were no different than whites since the latter too were subjects to the same follies as blacks. Besides, in some cases, Mark Twain presented a black being kind, more loyal and more superior in morals than whites like in case of Jim. He treats Huck like a son as Manolin is treated by Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. In this moment Huck without any hesitation affirms his relation with Jim as "he was always mighty good..." (Twain, 2012: 119). Like Jim and Huck, Santiago and Manolin too not have any problem in maintaining their age differences.

To achieve his goal, Twain used various means such as, to allow Jim to achieve positive things, allowing him to display his human sentiments as well as good-nature, kind-heart and his loyalty. Satire played a very great role in Twain's success, because it served as a medium of his disgust and hatred against the frontier's evil practices. Besides these social stigmas American society was also overwhelmed by superstitions and we have an account "I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill * (sis) and dog crying to whisper somebody that was going to die;..." (Twain, 2012: 3).

Conclusion

From the above discussion *Huckleberry Finn*, appears to be simultaneously a literary, sociological and anthropological text. It deals with a real situation, in a precise part of the world and during a determined period of time. Twain chose characters who exactly give a clear idea of mid nineteenth century frontiersmen and their way of living, thinking and acting. This novel took inspiration from author's day-to-day life, and which is not far from reality. While writing this research paper, we also come to know, that Mark Twain has tried his utmost in satirizing various social aspects of his own American society through *Huckleberry Finn*. It is a landmark novel in the sense that it has helped in bringing social changes in the said society. In this way Mark Twain has joined hands with the American pioneers of the social cause; who were Harriet Beecher Stowe and Abraham Lincoln.

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