
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn- An Overview

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Abstract:

Since literature reflects life through the medium of language, one can grow worldly wise enough to face the challenges that one often comes across by reading literary texts. With their pen power, the writers dictate the world and bring about the expected changes. In America, there was once slavery so terrible that the blacks were ill-treated by the whites like beasts. This racial discrimination reveals our inherent animal tendencies and the loss of basic human instinct. In such circumstances, only the writers can pen their thoughts and ignite desired feelings among the people to rebel against the atrocities committed in society. Mark Twain, the father of American literature, in his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, through the character of Jim, tried to show the deplorable state of the enslaved people in America who were sold and bought in auctions like animals. He also tried to expose social and religious hypocrisies and the hypocrisy of slavery in this novel. With its primary focus on the spirit of freedom, the novel attracts the attention of the world's readers with its funny and sarcastic dialogue. It is actually a critique of societal norms and racism. By writing in a vernacular style and creating characters imprisoned by their social milieu, Mark Twain succeeded in connecting his characters with the people around him. In my paper, I will show how Mark Twain showcased his talent by aptly criticizing society through various characters in his popular novel.

Keywords/phrases: basic human instinct, deplorable state, religious hypocrisies, spirit of freedom, social milieu, showcased.

Introduction:

Mark Twain's picaresque novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in the USA in 1885, was among the great American novels written in vernacular English. Having been told by Huck in the first person, this story is a sequel to *The*

Adventures of Tom Sawyer. This novel, which was set before the Civil War, runs on a satirical tone depicting the entrenched attitudes like slavery and racism, in addition to its colorful description of people and places along the Mississippi River. Besides exploring the themes of identity and race, this novel touches upon grave issues like illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition by focusing on the character of a loyal nigger named Jim, a gullible enslaved person. Huck's friendship with Jim is too strong to be separated as he follows his heart rather than his mind. In his lecture, Mark Twain commented that "a sound heart is a surer guide than an ill-trained conscience." He further says that "a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision, and conscience suffers defeat."

Huck suffers from a conflict with the values he receives from society and the love, affection, and humanity he extends towards Jim. He lives in such a society where morals are taught only in letter but not in spirit. On the one hand, the white masters who teach him morals treat the blacks, and on the other hand, they respect their fellow white people. By helping Jim escape from slavery, Huck thinks he is committing a grave sin, yet he keeps aside these thoughts and decides to save Jim. Being enslaved, isolated, and beaten by his own drunken father, Pap, Huck escapes from his father's hold and finds Jim doing the same thing illegally. Even the judge supports the claim that Pap has a legal right to custody of his son, though he compromises Huck's rights and welfare. In the name of civilization, the so-called cultured people suppress the rights of the weak. Huck's guardian, Widow Douglas, and her sister, Miss Watson, try to give moral lessons that are nauseating to Huck. In his view, it is sheer hypocrisy as they do not follow true Christian ideals in spirit. Huck thinks that people like Sally Phelps, who are racist slaveholders, are the biggest hypocrites he has ever met on his travels. The institutional enslavement of the blacks is shown through Pap's ill-treatment of Huck.

Being a bad man and drunkard, Pap harasses his son Huck for no reason. He kidnaps Huck from widow Douglas as she refuses to give him money and places him in a cabin across the river near St. Petersburg. Being a clever boy, Huck manages to escape from Pap by manipulating his death in the cabin and hiding himself on Jackson's island in the middle of the Mississippi River. He uses a canoe to reach over there. There, he happens to see Jim, a runaway slave from Miss Watson, when she is about to sell him to a plantation where, he thought, he would have unbearable ill-treatment. Since both Huck and Jim had a common problem of being ill-treated by their own guardians and were being chased, they remained together and were on an escape. Huck knows that it is illegal to help a runaway slave, yet being a man of heart, he decides to help Jim. Both of them were happy to inhabit Jackson's island, fishing, lazing, and so on. Using a raft, they even went on a trip to the town in disguise to get the latest news. Huck comes to know that slave hunters are searching for the runaway slave Jim to capture him for a reward. Now, he experiences a struggle between his

conscience and his heart, and he decides whether to leave Jim or to live with him. His good heart conquered over his skeptical conscience. He decides to protect Jim at any cost. Though Huck gets the chance to turn Jim in, he declines to do so. He decides that he would rather save Jim and go to hell than let his dear friend Jim be returned to bondage. To manage an escape, both Huck and Jim board the raft and continue to drift downriver. Huck meets Aunt Sally at the Phelps farm and makes her believe that he is none other than Tom, whom she is eagerly waiting to receive. Both Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally on the Phelps farm take him to be Tom. Huck informs Tom about Jim and receives his help. One night, all three members make a break for the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, one of the pursuers shoots Tom in the leg, and at once, Huck fetches a doctor to treat his wound. After treating Tom, the doctor insists on bringing Jim back to the Phelps farm.

To everybody's amazement, Tom reveals to Aunt Sally and Huck that Miss Watson, in her will, wrote that Jim was to be freed after her death, and she had died two months before. For the sake of self-indulgent adventure, Tom wanted to liberate Jim. Jim also surprises Huck by revealing the news that Pap is no more. The corpse that Jim had earlier seen in the floating house was that of Huck's father. Another good news to Huck was that he had six thousand dollars in Judge Thatcher's safekeeping.

Main Themes: Slavery, inequality, and racism are the main themes that Mark Twain wants to explore in this novel. The enslaved Jim runs away from Miss Watson's house to meet his family members and be with them. As per the regulations prevailing in those days in America, Jim could be shot at sight. There was no security for the slaves in the southern states of America. Once a person is bought as a slave, he has to be at the beck and call of the master. The master is entitled to treat the slave as his property. The slaves have no rights. Such was the horrible society from which Jim wanted to escape. This inhuman practice of enslaving negroes was a blemish on American society. As Abraham Lincoln hated this horrible practice, he abolished it for good as soon as he came to power.

Comical Tone-Use of Satire: Satire is a kind of writing in which human shortcomings, follies, and vices are ridiculed by highlighting them through caricature or irony. The writer employs humor and exaggeration also to point out the stupidity or vices of a person, group, or society. This novel is written with social and political undertones touching upon serious issues. Being a satiric writer, Mark Twain employed satire in this novel to criticize American culture. It is both overt and subtle. His main intention was to show the world that racial prejudices were quite immoral and that slavery and bondage were things of the past. He criticizes asking how people can become Christians if they practice slavery. The Grangerfords go to church to pray daily, yet they carry guns to kill somebody they hate. Another thing is that Mark Twain mocks the superstitions for their fascination with the supernatural. Handling a dead snake skin is seen as a sign of bad luck. Young birds coming along and alighting

indicate the coming rain. Jim believes that all things that happen in nature will bear a sign. He believes that his hat was taken away by witches while he was sleeping to hang it on a tree above him.

Language in the Novel: Mark Twain's use of American slang expressions in his novel by doing away with European English, like "it ain't no matter" and "it wasn't no time to be sentiments ring," revolutionized American English. Once, Huck plays a trick on Jim to make him laugh, but it only causes him to feel a lot. Huck then realizes how wrong he was, and so says, "I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't do that one if I knew it would make him feel that way."

Conclusion: In the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain tries to show how one should behave with one's fellow beings, irrespective of race and religion. He also tries to establish the superiority of tolerance over racial discrimination, the power of the heart over the mind, and above all, the greatness of friendship over enmity and hatred. Huck, at first, finds himself torn between what he was told and what he witnessed. Later, he decides to follow his heart. For two reasons, this novel is highlighted. One is that this novel is, of course, the first American novel written in American dialect, and the other one is that it provides a realistic portrayal of American boyhood.

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