The name of Mark Twain reverberates throughout the civilized world today. Not long ago, he came out of the American West, exuberating with wit and humour, with no reverence for conventions, and then introduced into Europe and elsewhere the relish of American humour. The world has from age to age, looked on and applauded him while he, through his work, endeavoured to dispel many illusions. His novels like *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Tom Sawyer* have won the appreciation of the reading public and invited enough of critical attention.

More than sixty years after his death, Mark Twain continues to enjoy a captivating charm. Considerable work of criticism has been done on him as a novelist, and also as a writer of travel books. However, sufficient attention has not been paid to his short stories, although, as Twain himself admitted, his short story, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," was the starting point of his literary career. This thesis proposes to study the themes and techniques of the short stories of Mark Twain. For the purpose of consistency, this dissertation has been divided into eight chapters.
Chapter One: **Telling The Tale** examines the types of the humorous oral story as conceived by Mark Twain. He believed that the story teller in all times, including our own, must be an entertainer of the spirit and not simply a preacher of the social and political ideas. He divides stories, "told by word of mouth," into three categories—humorous, comic, and witty. According to him the humorous oral story is the most difficult one and requires due artistic skill for its effective narration. People will not show allowance for a boring storyteller. Similarly, a tedious story that does not intrigue the reader or the listener, that does not elevate his spirit and give him joy, would soon lose ground. Mark Twain's stories depend for their effect upon the manner of narration. He sways the emotions of his readers and listeners, making them weep, laugh, and crave far more.

Chapter Two: **Pervading of the Rainbow** traces the development of the humorous oral story at the hands of Mark Twain. His characteristic humour is one that dissipates all hoaxes, complexes, and prejudices. His love of truth and his sense of humour permeate the world and his humourous stories aim gently at making the earth a better place of living than what it is today. The stories, of course, do not give the boisterous laughter expressive of the vacant mind, but diffuse the dynamic fun of human mirth that enlivens the
heart and enlightens the mind. The rainbow of his humorous story has cast a girdle around the globe.

Chapter Three: **Steamboat on the River** analyzes the thematic patterns of Twain's short stories. He has written stories on all the main representative themes like Adventure, Romance, Society, Mystery, Melodrama and Alien Encounter. The Twainian story themes reveal his personal and universal experiences. They also reflect his alternating moods of high and low spirits. The stories written during the later period of his life show glimpses of dejection which has given rise to the critical debate as to whether he was a cynic.

Chapter Four: **The Troubled Air** explores the charge of cynicism against Mark Twain. The main factor that has led the critics to call him a cynic is Twain's ambivalence. After considering the different views, the chapter seeks to establish that he is not a cynic in the sense of one who refuses to see positive value of anything. He is rather "a surgeon wielding his knife to purge humanity of its ills." His sense of humour always gives him love for humanity. It is his humour that makes his morality soothing and it is his morality that makes his humour sublime. The blending is very much noticeable in his short stories.

Chapter Five: **A World to Win**. The Copious diversity of the characters in Mark Twain's stories indicates his interest in human life. His stories win the interest of perusal by
showing people from real life and by exhibiting traits common to human beings. The immediacy of characterization contributes ultimately to the general organization of his stories.

Chapter Six: The Wide Net. Here it is shown that Mark Twain was one of the precursors of the modern short story. After taking into account the general principles of story-structure and examining the four representative short stories of Mark Twain, it is found that the structure of his short stories is not very much different from the traditional concept. Only the technique of presentation is different which is sometimes misunderstood and the critics complain about the lack of structure in his stories. Some of the modern short story writers who have in a way, adopted Twain's technique also face the fallacious charge of the absence of structure in their stories.

Chapter Seven: The Best of Two Worlds. Mark Twain's contribution towards the development of the technique of the short story is highlighted here. In his short stories, he could achieve a synthesis of the romantic spirit and the literary form. Some "soft spots" of Twain like the topical nature of his humour and the unpredictable nature of his preferences are also considered. In spite of these flaws, Mark Twain's contribution to the technique of the short story is no small. He freed the short story from the
European tradition and made American short story a genre to be reckoned with.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion. The chapter propounds the thesis that Twain's best work has been done in short forms like the short story or even in the novella. It is here that he allows his imagination a free play. His stories exhibit his narrative art at its best combining the native folklore tradition and bringing forth the lively picture of universal human conditions. Above and beyond everything, the stories show Mark Twain as a great raconteur. Within his limits Mark Twain succeeded well as a writer of short stories. His best short stories provide a testimony that the form of short fiction was the most congenial one for him.

A.A. SIDDIQI