Ordeals of the Female Gender

P.M. Sakina “Concept of heroism in the selected novels of Mark Twain and R.K. Narayan” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 2005
An authentic and successful portrayal of the female is a baffling question to many good writers. It is not always a woman's prerogative to offer a convincing and acceptable delineation of women in literature. Both the authors under discussion are noted for their preference for the depiction of the masculine world as the sphere of activity in their novels, where female characters are foils that highlight the complex nature of the male protagonists. They act and react in a very modest fashion, giving no room for any kind of heroic activity. It is as if the term "hero" and "heroism" were alien to the world of women. However, we cannot have a world worth living in, without the presence of women, and the worlds of Twain and Narayan do have a good number of women worthy of study.

If Huck could be accepted as an archetype for heroism by the critics, what could be the attributes of Joan of Arc for contesting to the same office? Joan of Arc is the village girl who challenged the course of history, whereas Roxana, the mulatto slave can never have such epithets describing her. But a
careful perusal through the novels, **Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc** and **Pudd'nhead Wilson**, will definitely enlighten the reader on the efficacy of the description of two women of character and strength, one representing the freshness and vigour of youth, and the other representing the warmth and tenderness of motherhood. There are quite a few other women characters too in Twain, who attract our attention. The term of reference applicable to many of these characters can never be the "hero," but they also show heroism in their own way by confronting this world of bitter and dark experiences with a rare kind of determination and confidence, that can be emulated. Joseph Campbell observes:

> The world-generating spirit of the father passes into the manifold of earthly experience through a transforming medium -- the mother of the world. She is a personification of the primal element named in the second verse of Genesis, where we read that "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." In the Hindu myth, she is the female figure through whom the Self begot all creatures. More abstractly understood, she is the world-bounding frame: "space, time,
and causality" -- the shell of the cosmic egg. (The Hero with a Thousand Faces 297)

Such being the role of women in mythologies and legends, heroism, in the fast changing modern world, can no more be a term strictly applicable to a group of chauvinistic individuals, who act as the pivots of action in the novels. It is only proper to say that the depiction of woman in fiction is a powerful vehicle for the exposition of the author's perception and, hence, she cannot be ignored. A study of the concept of heroism can never be complete without exploring the position of the heroines of these two authors.

Heroism, a term with masculine connotations, can be applicable to the performances of the womenfolk also. The female characters portrayed in the novels of both these authors are comparatively very few in number, though they exhibit a variety of heroic characteristics. An analysis of the character of Roxana in Pudd'nhead Wilson, Joan in Joan of Arc, Laura in The Gilded Age, Bharati in Waiting for the Mahatma or Daisy in The Painter of Signs, will reveal interesting facts. Not only does it offer a solid base of study on the predicament of women of nineteenth century America, and that of twentieth century India, but it also exposes a wide variety of human experiences that
obviously point to the skill of the creators behind them.

When we come to view these women of the world of Twain and Narayan, we can observe that these characters could very conveniently be classified under two groups. The first group consists of young and rebellious non-conformists, and the second group is represented by the mother figures who act as the protectors and preservers of the young. We have numerous characters who belong to the first group -- Laura, Ruth and Alice in *The Gilded Age*, Joan in *Joan of Arc*, Rosie in *The Guide*, Daisy in *The Painter of Signs*, and Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, to name a few. To the second group belong Aunt Polly in *Tom Sawyer*, Mrs. Hawkins in *The Gilded Age*, Mrs. Tom Canty in *The Prince and Pauper*, Savitri in *The Dark Room*, Sita in *The World of Nagaraj* and the innumerable number of mothers, grandmothers and aunts present in Malgudi and St. Petersburg. To put it briefly, almost the entire feminine community created by these two writers under discussion belongs to either of these two groups.

It is a common aspect to note that both Twain and Narayan led happy married lives, and shared a very warm and respectful attitude towards women. Twain's own words point to his stand towards women:
Human intellect cannot estimate what we owe woman; she
gives us good advice, and plenty of it, she soothes our aching
brows, she bears our children . . . In whatever position you
place a woman, she is an ornament to society and a treasure to
the world. As a sweetheart, she has few equals and no
superiors. As a grandmother with an incurable distemper, she
is precious. (Mark Twain to Mrs. Fair Banks 71)

Yet, he was scornful of the sentimental delineation of women by many of
his contemporaries, like Maria Cummins, whose Lamplighter offered a tearful
picture of the heroine. He was never interested in the portrayal of the sentimental
musings of the fair sex and naturally, the world he created in his works was
primarily a man's world where women were expected to play a modest part,
with the exception of Joan of Arc, of course.

Turning our attention to the world of the female seen in the novels of
Narayan, one is really impressed by the variety of the characters found in his
novels. We have Rosie, the dancer, Daisy, the Population Control Officer,
Bharati, the disciple of Mahathma Gandhi, Commandant Sarasa, the iron
woman and so on. The mother and grandmother of Swami, Raman, Krishna
and Sriram leave indelible marks on the minds of the readers for their total dedication and unswerving faith in the goodness of man. While the young women of Malgudi show spirit and vigour, and a desire for liberation, the members of the older generation remain orthodox to the core. Saxena, while making an insightful study of the female in Narayan's novels observes:

The traditional Indian womanhood derives its strength and enjoys its particular status with family and the society at large from sacrifice and service, an ideal forming basic Indian ethos; Sita, Savitri, Draupadi, Kunthi and Sakunthala are the embodiments of feminine ideals and values. (117)

By and large, this is still our archetypal pattern. In spite of the passage of twenty centuries, the ideals of service and sacrifice as integral parts of a woman's life are still found acceptable by the enlightened readers of the world. In fact, many of the modern women are desperately engaged in a war against these cliched ideas associated even with their very outlook on life. However, the women of the fictional worlds of Twain and Narayan exhibit a rare emotional and attitudinal kinship with regard to the ideals of their lives. One is surprised to find that the mothers in the novels of Twain and Narayan exhibit a similar
concern over the welfare of their wards. The cultural, geographical, social, and intellectual differences notwithstanding, they pose themselves as epitomes of motherhood, radiating warmth. Meanwhile, one should not be negligent of the fact that the American women are pictured as more vehement and determined whereas their Indian counterparts are meeker and more docile in their approach to life. Many of Narayan's heroines show an inclination for resignation and mute suffering.

This does not in anyway mean that the Indian womanhood as expressed by Narayan is devoid of strong sparks of character. Though, not always heroic, they too struggle to maintain a moderate amount of freedom in their lives. Rosie leaves Marco, not so much because of her lack of love for the uncaring ways of her husband, but for perfecting her art. Daisy's act of absconding is an act of defiance and protest at a society that allows bridal examination and bargaining before marriage. Bharati is even willing to keep aside her marital life, for the sake of the political upliftment of the nation. In an understated manner, these acts of protest are the illustrations of their heroic bent of mind.

Laura, Ruth and Alice in The Gilded Age are the creations of Twain and
Warner. Still, Twain's attitude to the status of women in society, goes a long way in their delineation. Of all the women characters of Twain, the most powerful one is Roxana, the mulatto slave. Twain has portrayed this woman with such skill and clarity that all the other characters fade into insignificance when she is around. Roxana, actually, remains more life-like and authentic than the hero of the novel, David Wilson, the Pudd'nhead himself. The portrayal of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, tells us another tale of individual adoration. The personal attraction felt by Twain for the girl's story has a very long history. Albert E. Stone observes:

Few natural events in the history of American letters seem in respect less accident than the wind when, one day in 1849, supposedly blew the stray leaf from a book about Joan of Arc, across the path of a thirteen-year old printer's apprentice in Hannibal, Missouri. Clearly, Mark Twain himself, who came to believe in a world wholly determined from the beginning, regarded it as the first, if not the last, turning point in his life. (71)

This was the casual beginning of Twain's fascination for the worlds of literature and history.
Mark Twain's devotion to girlhood is seen at work in the depiction of Joan of Arc. The popular notion that the maid was believed to have remained a child in body as well as in spirit seemed to have pleased him much. Joan is definitely a hero in an unheroic world of the rough English soldiery. But Twain is rather more concerned about the unpromising heroic aspect of the girl's nature than that of the heroic side. In fact, he dwells more on the personal life of Joan than on her political life. Joan moves about in a man's world. But she remains unique in her outlook and actions, as she listens to her "inner voice" to bring about a total change in the political situation in France.

While Twain has the portrayal of a political heroine to his credit, what Narayan can lay claim to is the comparatively bolder sketch of Bharati, the ardent disciple of Gandhiji, in the Waiting for the Mahatma. Bharati can never be compared to Joan on political or individual grounds, but, both these characters show a rare and admirable kind of devotion to duty while performing in a man's world. Though not an exact parallel to Joan, Bharati is a special woman, who is willing to sacrifice her lovelife and personal happiness for the welfare of the nation. Malgudi, being a world of mediocre people, has the highest demonstration of heroism, that too, among the women folk, in offering
a protest against any kind of authority, be it social or political. Daisy does this, and Rosie also is not much different. Compared to the average heroes of Narayan, many of his heroines definitely show better spirit and valour. While the male protagonists function primarily as average heroes in Narayan's novels, the heroines operate in a more realistic fashion and so are better accepted.

Savitri in *The Dark Room* suffers intensely, she being an ineffective woman who is scared of raising her voice against her chauvinistic husband, Ramani. But the rest of the heroines are capable of handling even the toughest of situations satisfactorily, all by themselves. In a place where politics is viewed with real scorn, Bharati's determination and dedication are qualities worthy of emulation. She offers a clear contrast to the male protagonist of the novel, Sriram, whose interest in politics is superficial. To him, politics is only a means by which he could be assured of Bharati's nearness. Neither the Mahatma nor the ideals for which the Mahatma stood are of any importance to him. His interest is in Bharati and her love. He adores Bharati and her dedication to politics, though at times irritating, provided she acknowledges his sincerity and affection. On the other hand, Bharati remains undaunted by the external event, like the death of Mahatma Gandhi, and she has an untiring interest in
social service. Her emotional need for Sriram and the prospect of a life with him are secondary interests as far as she is concerned. She remains an enigma to Sriram when she does not reveal much enthusiasm in associating with him. To put it briefly, Bharati is more of a "hero" than Sriram himself.

Rosie's case also is not much different. She has a single-minded devotion to dancing. She leaves Marco, and joins Raju primarily because she has been able to find a better and ardent admirer of her art in Raju. Raju provides her with what had been lacking in her marital life -- due acknowledgement of her skill in dancing. For the sake of this, she is willing to sacrifice her financially secure and peaceful life with Marco. It is Marco's indifference and Raju's sympathetic approach that draw her closer to him. Even amidst Raju's caresses, she is painfully reminded of her wifely duty towards her husband. Consequently, she feels terribly guilty and is tormented by scruples. Rosie is not a coward; she is heroic enough to admit her adultery to her husband, for which she has to pay heavily. Though a woman with an unconventional and independent attitude to life, Rosie finds it hard to bear the negligence and insult of her husband who refers to her dancing as "Street Acrobatics" (The Guide 152).
Rosie is relieved to find that she is accommodated in Raju's house. She expects him to help her arrange a public performance. She becomes "Nalini," an act symbolic of the change brought about in her mental attitude. She is not bothered about the financial aspect of her performances; she is bothered only about the emotional satisfaction she receives from her dancing. However, amidst her moments of sheer happiness over her performances, she is conscious of her existential predicament. She feels that she is "a bull yoked to an oil crusher" or like a "performing monkey" (202-03). But she tries to overcome these moments of total desperation.

It is after Raju's eclipse due to the forgery that she becomes her own mistress. By now she has no ill-feelings towards Marco. Unlike her earlier days, she has come to understand the silent potential in him as an excavator. She treasures the book he has written; the write-up on Marco and his book are treated as valuable by her. It is Raju's jealousy and greed that prompt him to forge her signature. But he is caught by the intelligent Marco and he eventually falls from grace. Rosie's resourcefulness and boldness in facing life is commendable. She makes Raju understand that they cannot have a life together. They have to lead separate lives. She cannot succumb to the power of a
romantic hero any more. Once again, Narayan is able to bring about a change in attitude on the part of the reader towards Rosie. The shift is from one of total indifference to marked admiration for Rosie.

Undoubtedly, the sketch of Rosie as a victim of romantic illusions is quite convincing. There is poetic justice in Rosie's suffering. The doubt remains: did Narayan want his heroines to be more powerful and life-like than his heroes themselves? Because one feels that Daisy's life in The Painter of Signs is also directed towards this. Raman, the male protagonist of the novel, in spite of his blind love for Daisy, remains unimpressive as an agent of action. He pleads for her love, is willing to incur the displeasure of his mother, but Daisy remains steadfast to her convictions, among which the idea of marrying does not hold a place. She is a feminist in her own fashion, and is not ready to sacrifice her ideals for the sake of a foolish romantic infatuation. She appears more masculine in her outlook than feminine, in the sense that she is realistic enough to admit her "biological need," but she does not believe in marriage. Marriage and its social sanctity are no concern of hers. She is more concerned about the rising population of India. Narayan writes: "Her imperious manner, both charmed and frightened Raman. In her previous incarnation, she must
have been Queen Victoria or in a still earlier incarnation, Rani Jhansi, the Warrior Queen of Indian History" (The Painter of Signs 69).

Perhaps this trait in her character comes to her help when she has to explain the process of birth control in front of the "giggling women and sniggering men." She quietened them with a "word or gesture" (58). It is as if, in the process of liberation, Narayan's female protagonists are made to acquire more masculine traits than feminine manners. To express their creative powers in a male-ordained world, women like Rosie, Daisy and Bharati tend to be masculine, even if it is at the cost of scorn and sniggering from the orthodox members of society.

Educational empowerment acts as a prerequisite for heroism in Narayan's heroines. There is a world of difference between the attitudes of Savitri and Rosie. The latter has a Postgraduate Degree in Economics, whereas the former's educational standard is not mentioned. Savitri is found to be resigned to her fate whereas Rosie asserts her independence. Sarasa in Talkative Man is portrayed as a strong woman working in the army. Daisy is exceptionally independent, and hence she leaves her husband's people to lead a life of her own. The bridal inspection itself creates a rebellious attitude in Daisy. She
does not believe in exhibiting herself as a commodity for bargain. In The Bachelor of Arts and The World of Nagaraj, Narayan gives us amusing scenes of bridal inspection by Chandran and Nagaraj. From the male point of view there may be nothing wrong in this age-old custom. But to a liberated and intelligent woman like Daisy, the experience is humiliating. She hates her husband's people who treat her as a commodity worth possessing. Having a good opinion of herself, she risks her future and leaves the village in search of a new world. She is taken care of by the Christian Missionaries from whom she gets the name "Daisy." May be this is why she does not succumb to Raman's desire to get married. She is not a romantic fool and the confinement of marital life is not meant for her. Her views are quite progressive, in fact, more progressive than any of the male members of Malgudi. Hence, she reacts in a natural fashion:

"Let us face the fact," she whispered, her breath, wafting on his face. "Married life is not for me. I have thought over it. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone. It won't work... I want to forget my moments of weakening and you must forget me, that's all." (The Painter of Signs 179)
She may appear callous and unsympathetic to the readers, as she fails to understand the depth of the havoc she has wrought upon the poor painter of signs. But Santha Krishnaswami in *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English* has a different opinion regarding this. She observes: "Daisy's story is one instance where the possibilities in the active feminine are used for the good of the society. She is no longer the persecuted maiden who believes in motherhood as an act of God" (142). The world of the female recorded in Narayan's novels illustrates his own changed assumptions regarding the role of women in the present time, for, we witness an evident difference in the attitudes of Savithri, Daisy and Saroja.

The women who have been most studied and analysed in Twain's fiction are those who function as foils for the young protagonists. "Sexless and rigidly conventional, they are a far cry from the loving wife he ultimately celebrated" (120), says Susan K. Harris in *Mark Twain's Escape From Time*. Although woman shares the destiny of man on earth, Twain puts a halo around her head. He regards her as morally superior to man, and feels confident that she can play a prominent role in the moral regeneration of the world. Twain's devotion to his wife Livy, his attachment to his daughter Susy, his love for the
other two daughters Clara and Jean, and his admiration for Mrs. Fairbanks, whom he called "mother," all seem to have been consummated in his portrayal of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans. Twain wrote this novel when he was facing financial ruin. But it was not written with a motive to make money. He never expected it to bring much. He is reported to have written to Mrs. Fairbanks in January 1893 thus: "That is private, not for print, it's written for love, and not for lucre, and to entertain the family with, around the lamp by the fire" (qtd. in Albert E. Stone 71).

Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc was written after fourteen years of ardent labour, twelve years of study and two of writing. Though Joan is known to the reading public through Holinshed, Voltaire, Southey and Schiller, Twain's treatment of the girl has something unique about it. The opinion of many critics about the lack of convincing women in his novels is found baseless when we see the portrayal of Joan of Arc and Roxana. Bernard De Voto in his "Introduction" to The Portable Mark Twain observes:

But there is a striking limitation. Nowhere in that gallery, are there women of marriageable age. No white women, that is, for the slave Roxana in Pudd'nhead Wilson lives as vividly
as old man Finn himself. It must be significant that the only credible women of an age that might sanction desire is withdrawn from desire behind the barrier of race. None of Mark Twain's nubile girls, young women, or young matrons are believable; they are all bisque, saccharine or tears. He will do girl children in the romantic conventions of boy's books and he is magnificent with the sisterhood of white frontier wives whom Aunt Polly climaxes, but something like a taboo drains reality from any woman who might trouble the heart or flesh. (18)

This argument does not necessarily mean that Twain's portrayal of Joan is also defective. Twain found himself more at home when his heroines were given some masculine qualities, because he wanted them to wage a war with the custom-bound society of the nineteenth century America with the particular intention to establish their identity in a hostile world. The image he constructed of them in his novel was the result of much thought; it answered not only to his intellectual interests, but also to his personal and emotional needs. To him, Joan of Arc epitomised an age-old struggle of the common folk against the
twin institutions of cruelty and oppression of the Crown and that of the Church.

Twain, at all times, was dead against oppression and tyranny of any kind. Twain's idea of a woman-hero was justified in the portrayal of an innocent and intuitive girl, like Joan, who was the perfect hero in his eyes. She was courageous, rebellious, and at the same time a confirmed nonconformist. It was in this role he found many of his male heroes too. Nonetheless, Joan is heroic. She is not a romantic hero like Tom, or a moral hero like Huck, or an intellectual hero like Wilson. Her heroism, too, is devoid of the frills of heroics, because, through Joan, we are introduced to a lonely girl, who is doomed to suffer on account of her purity and innocence. The world of practical human beings cannot tolerate that kind of purity, and therefore, they will try to break in down, whereby the pure will have to suffer.

Joan's early life is described with a rare kind of radiance and innocence, cast in the role of a shepherdess. She leads the life of a blissful child in Domremy, in the company of village urchins, the portrayal of which follows the life pattern of the other picaresque heroes of Twain. But her mental growth at a later stage baffles even the translator of her history. Sieur Louis de Conte wonders how she could carry out these marvels. He writes: "She
who could not read and had no opportunity to study the complex arts of war?

. . . It is a riddle which will never be guessed" (Joan of Arc 304).

*Joan of Arc*, nevertheless is a deeply pessimistic book. Though it affirms the power of innocence, it also records the author's caustic attack on the betrayal of innocence. According to Albert Stone, to Twain "Joan was the incarnation of youth, purity and power" (75), and so Twain willed her to remain eternally young. We do not find any hint of sexual development in his heroine. Twain was never keen on disclosing details about sex in his novels and, as such, this image of Joan as an innocent young girl appealed to him very much. Twain makes the aged narrator Conte refer to Joan thus:

She was truthful when lying was become the common speech of men; she was honest, when honesty was become a lost virtue; she was a keeper of promises, when the keeping of a promise was expected of no one. (60)

Not a word of reproach comes out of her mouth when the French fails to ransom her, allowing her to fall into the hands of the English, as de Conte says: "She was too great for that. She was Joan of Arc; and when that it said, all is
said" (215). This remark holds good for anyone who makes a study on the heroic qualities of Joan. But what is specially relevant is the fact that the heroism manifested here is not a conscious one; it is unconscious and intuitive, for Joan expects to get no glory out of any of her acts of heroism. Perhaps, Twain, in his own way, was making her follow the route of Huck, one of the greatest democrats and nonconformists. Heroism without the help of heroics is found to be established here too.

Twain has never appeared more poetic than in his description of Joan. To him, Joan's death is like the death of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his life for sinning humanity. Joan, like a true martyr, dies with a cross pressed to her bosom, praying for the welfare of the King of France. She, who had an army of friends around her, dies a lonely and pitiful death. This is another instance where Twain shows his temperamental inclination to depict his heroes and heroines, as essentially alienated and tormented by incidents beyond their control.

Though we are told of the victories of Joan, the real act of heroism of the girl is found during the trial scene. All through the victories in the battlefield Joan remains unaffected. Her divine innocence and humility are stressed, throughout the novel and one cannot but notice Twain's similar treatment of
Huck. Huck is baffled and, to some extent, irritated by being the focus of attention, unlike Tom. So is Joan. After the siege of Orleans, we see the exalted and the jubilant people welcoming Joan, "those acres of people that plowed through shed tears enough to raise the river, there was not a face in the glare of those fires, that hadn't tears streaming down it; and if Joan's feet had not been protected by iron, they would have kissed them off of her." (Joan of Arc 270) But she remains calm and unaffected by the open admiration in all the faces that surrounded her because she had the "greatest and the simplest heart that ever beat." (270) She can never be like Tom, who is ready to do anything to achieve glory, to be the centre of attraction.

Joan is more powerful than all the heroines of Narayan put together. But in many of his novels, women play an important role, sometimes passively, and at other times, militantly, with a view to bring about changes in the otherwise changeless world of Malgudi. Actually, Bharati in Waiting for the Mahatma and Daisy in The Painter of Signs could be termed as the precursors of feminism in Malgudi, as both of them represent unconventional and aggressive Indian womanhood. Santha Krishnaswami's comments look quite relevant in this regard:
In western countries, the women's issue is mostly one of identity, job equality and sexual roles. But in India, for majority of women, it is a question of stark survival. The few who have escaped the vicious existential circle through education and better opportunities also find themselves in a constant tussle with inevitable social mores with the oppressive weight of tradition behind. (The Woman in Indian Fiction 5)

The problems faced either by Rosie in The Guide or Daisy in The Painter of Signs may not be very devastating ones, compared to the problems confronted by the Maid of Orleans. But in the comparatively staid world of Malgudi, their problems have the power to create a commotion. Daisy's illicit relationship with Raman infuriates his aunt, who is hurt by her nephew's growing infatuation for a Christian woman. She can do nothing else, but ask him, "A Christian; how can you bring in a Christian?" (47), for which Raman has no answer. So, she decides to leave for Banares, hoping for a change of attitude in Raman.

Saroja in The World of Nagaraj and Savitri in The Dark Room are diametrically opposite to each other. Narayan has created another woman, in
The World of Nagaraj, Sita, who acts as a foil to the modern minded Saroja. Sita is the representative traditional Indian woman, who considers motherhood as the highest post of glory in this world. Saroja chooses to be different. She decides to work in a nightclub called "Kismet," singing and earning fifty rupees an evening. The prospect of a daughter-in-law of a respectable family working in a nightclub is outrageous for both Sita and Nagaraj. Despite their constant appeals, Tim allows Saroja to do as she likes. When Saroja has her own say in all activities connected with her marital life, Savithri is forced to remain a weak, malleable, and economically backward woman and a subordinate being. Ramani, the chauvinist of the family is the one who runs the whole show. Narayan, like Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own (1929), seems to believe that economic independence is the prerequisite for intellectual independence. He makes Savitri think thus:

No one who could not live by herself should be allowed to exist. If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall feed on my father's pension. If I go back home, I shall be living on my husband's earnings and later on, Babu's, what can I do myself? Unfit to earn a handful of rice except by begging. If
I had gone to college, and studied, I might have become a teacher or something. (*The Dark Room* 114)

Her self-contempt moves her to radical thinking. She painfully understands that she was in darkness till then, and that her life with Ramani is nothing but licensed prostitution, for she muses thus: "What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman? The prostitute changes her men; but a married woman doesn't. That's all, but, both earn their food and shelter in the same manner" (116). Her absconding remains an aborted act of protest. Her attachment to family is so strong that she wants to come back and start her life anew. But even when she is found to function in the same manner, cooking and cleaning and caring for the family, she strongly feels that she has undergone a transformation after her escapade. She feels that "an essential part of her is dead" (120), and she is doomed to lead the same old life of a traditional Indian woman.

There is a social problem posed in *The Dark Room*, because, it directly deals with the status of women in society. In his *My Days*, Narayan himself explains the circumstances in which he chose to write about Savitri's plight:
I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the "woman's lib" movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian Society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with her, with this philosophy broadly in background. (*My Days* 119)

Heroism, is not the forte of the traditional woman of India, as it is a term with masculine connotations. Savitri's bold act of leaving home is the only gesture of protest that we can see in this novel. Her willing acceptance of fate towards the end of the novel reminds one of Isabel Archer's in *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) by Henry James.

Another woman, worthy of special mention in this context is Commandant Sarasa of *Talkative Man*, a liberated woman. She is one who has undergone a total disillusionment in her love life with Dr. Rann, a cheat and a trickster. She has learnt her lessons through the hard way and presently, she has become
a mistress of her emotions. She tries to win her husband back, knowing perfectly his weakness for women. She also operates in a man's world wearing trousers and shirt, and travels alone in a jeep. She becomes a curious spectacle before the people of Malgudi where the very idea of a woman wearing jeans is considered blasphemous. Sarasa's portrayal illustrates Narayan's own change of attitude towards women, as we witness a steady growth of the status of women, represented by the hapless and woe-begone Savitri, to the self-confident and liberated Sarasa, who is ready to stay in the railway resting room all alone.

According to the Indian concept of womanhood, matrimony is incomplete without motherhood. Once a woman becomes a mother, she is expected to make all kinds of adjustments for the sake of her family. In return, she receives veneration and care. Narayan seems to believe that virtuous womanhood, educated motherhood, wife, and companion -- all yield pride of place to woman as a person. Women like Rosie and Daisy can never be the devoted, suffering, and submissive Sitas and Savitris of epics and legends. Yet, one cannot ignore the heritage of the past. However, even the so-called traditionalists among women of Malgudi find it difficult to accept the codes of law prescribed by a masculine world. Savitri, for example, tries to bear all
domestic injustices patiently for a long time, but eventually, she also protests. She comes to the sad realisation that all that a woman possesses in such a set up is her own body and that everything else she has is either her husband's or her father's or her son's. Narayan, in his own modest way, is ridiculing Manusmriti wherein a woman's place in the world is described thus:

Pītā rākṣati kauṁāre
bharta rākṣati youvane
rākṣanti sthavire putrā
na stī svātantryamarhati (Nene, ed. Manusmriti ix.3.)

Translated into English, this verse reads thus: "Her father protects [her] in childhood, her husband protects [her] in youth, and her sons protect [her] in old age; a woman is never fit for independence." However, Narayan does not want his modern, educated women characters to think along the lines of Manusmriti, and, perhaps, this is why he makes them more heroic than the moderate heroes of Malgudi.

Twain's The Gilded Age offers a wide variety of women -- ranging from selfless and adorable mothers to the spirited and self-confident young women.
Though the American author is criticized for the lack of convincing heroines in his novels, we see a few deft strokes while sketching women characters like Laura, Ruth, Alice, Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Bolton in *The Gilded Age*. *The Prince and the Pauper* too shows the venerable presence of Mrs. Canty who is the incarnation of selfless motherhood on earth. Furthermore, we have Aunt Polly, Miss Watson and the widow Douglas in *Huckleberry Finn*. But the most striking of all these, apart from Joan of Arc, is Roxana, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The view of many critics that Roxana is the only complete woman Twain had created, throws ample light on her characterisation. She has a different order of fictional reality from the figures of fables, with which she is surrounded. Though born a slave, she is a fine, brave and majestic woman whose vitality expresses itself in pride, high spiritedness, and generosity.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* it is Percy Driscoll's threat to send the negroes down the river that sets Roxana to thinking of swapping the small children. It is a natural act of protection on the part of an unfortunate mother who wants to safeguard the interests of her only child. But the dream of having the constant companionship of that child in the house is proved meaningless, as Tom develops an antagonistic attitude to the slave woman. Roxy reminds
him, in spite of a wounded heart, that he will have to beg for her mercy in future. For a moment, she forgets the ties of motherhood and craves for revenge. After Tom's realisation of the truth, his attitude to his mother is not much different. At times, Roxana is an accessory to his criminal, clandestine efforts, and on other occasions, she is just a slave woman to him. Still, Roxana's heart goes out to him, when he is in despair. She comes out with the only possible way of escape—to let him sell her down the river. Even the heartless Tom is astounded to hear this. But Roxana in her own fashion, justifies the decision.

"Ain't you my chile? En does yo know an anything that a mother won't do for her chile? De aint nothing a white mother won't do for her chile? Who made 'em so? De Lord done it? En who made de niggers? De Lord made dem? In de inside, mothers is all de same." (MT 452)

But Tom is unworthy of such boundless love. He does not want this poor lady to have anything to do with his life. When Roxana comes to realise the fact that Tom is planning to sell her down the river, she is totally shattered. She opens her eyes to the most shocking truth that her only son is the "low-
downest orniest hound that was ever pupped into this worl-en I's sponsible for it," (MT 453) and she spits on him. Leslie Fiedler observes:

In all of the book (Pudd'nhead Wilson) only a single mother is allowed the centre of the stage -- the true mother of the false Tom, the slave girl Roxana. Just as in Huckleberry Finn, Nigger Jim is played off against the world of Aunt Polly, Aunt Sally, Miss. Watson, so in this reversed version, a negress is set against the society refined by Driscoll, Howard and Essex. (Fiedler 136)

Roxana's endless self-sacrifice and unfathomable love for a brute of a son speaks volumes about the boundless and unswerving faith that a mother has in her child, be it Indian or American. In The Prince and The Pauper Mrs. Canty's case too is almost similar. Her love would not have been understood by Tom Canty, had he been a bit more selfish. He is not such an unscrupulous child, and hence his conscience pricks him. He could do nothing but to admit the truth in public that the woman in rags is his mother. He offers the crown to the rightful heir, Prince Edward.
This is the kind of love at work, when Prince Edward reaches Offal Court. Mrs. Canty, the silent and sympathetic mother, offers her love and attention to the heir of England. When Tom Canty reaches home in the evening without any money, he is beaten up by his father and grandmother. But at night, the starving mother of Tom provides him with any miserable crust she has been able to save for him by going hungry herself. She is often caught in this act and is severely punished. Still, she becomes the protector of Prince Edward, who is mistaken for Tom. Like Savitri, in *The Dark Room*, she intervenes, when Tom is punished by her husband, in the process of which, she is made to receive all the blows directed at Tom. Here, too, it is the "fire in a mother's belly" (*The Dark Room* 111) that prompts the mother to protect her son. No wonder, Mrs. Canty is the only person who understands that the boy in her home is not her real son. She feels: "there was some undefinable something about this boy that was lacking in her own son" (*MT* 347). She realises that it is beyond description, yet, her sharp motherly instinct can never be blind. Even when she realises the truth, she cannot give him up.

This prompts her to attend the coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey.
The false prince recognises her, but does not acknowledge her at first. But the mother dashes forward and covers his legs with kisses, but is thrown back by the guards. Seeing this, Tom's pride is shattered and he feels that "his grandeurs were stricken valueless; they seemed to fall away from him like rotten rags" (MT 423). That happens to be the greatest moment of realisation for Tom Canty who offers the crown to the prince himself. Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Hawkins in The Gilded Age are etched with great care. Both of them are exquisite mother figures, who, despite their own inadequacies, are capable of offering selfless love and service to their children.

The Hawkinses are not financially very well off and they already have two young children, to which is added Clay, the orphan boy. Mrs. Hawkins gives all moral support to her husband when Clay is brought home. Almost similar are the circumstances in which Laura is brought to their home. She remains a true mother, in all senses of the term, to Laura who is forced to murder Colonel Selby, who had cheated her with his insincere love.

Narayan's portrayal of mothers is also carried out almost along the same path. The Indian author has shown great regard for grandmothers, a regard he himself shared for his own grandmother. Sriram's grandmother in Waiting
for the Mahatma is quite worried when she comes to know of his association with Gandhiji and the Congress, for it definitely meant an unsettled life for her boy. The police raid, and the subsequent imprisonment are too much for her to bear. She leaves for Benares to await the final call from God. It is quite curious to note that the elderly mothers and grandmothers of Narayan's novels are allowed to spend their last years of their lives in a holy place like Rameswaram or Benares. We have the instances of Raman's aunt, in The Painter of Signs, Raju's mother in The Guide, to add to the list of such old women. William Walsh observes that these elderly women were modelled after Narayan's own grandmother who had a great influence on him. He observes that she was clearly the original of those robust, dry, temperamental old ladies, who flourish in Narayan's fiction and that she was an orthodox woman of extreme devotion and individuality (Sweet Mangoes 91). Krishna's mother in The English Teacher also can be described likewise.

Any reference to the role of mother figures in Twain's works necessitates the mention of Aunt Polly in Tom Sawyer. Behind a strict exterior, she has a very soft heart which yearns for the welfare of Tom and Sid. She tries to shelter her wards from external and internal threats. The code of conduct
prescribed by her is always violated by Tom. She is totally disturbed when Tom is found missing, and is overjoyed and exalted to see him alive again. Her happiness knows no bounds, when she learns that Tom's kissing her was not a part of a dream, but a reality. Even the possibility of Tom's lying again in this regard, is not admitted by her. She is willing to console herself thus: "It is a blessed, blessed lie, there is such comfort in it" (MT 119) and her heart goes out to pardon him even if he committed a million sins, just in return for the kindly act of kissing her.

A journey into the world of Twain's women characters will not be complete without a mention of Laura Hawkins and Ruth Bolton in The Gilded Age. Laura is a beautiful and educated woman with commendable manners at the beginning. But the unveiling of the secret of her parentage brings about a total change in her attitude to life itself. Though she takes refuge in books, to escape from bitter memories, local libraries could not offer much, apart from the usual romances, which fed her imagination with the most exaggerated notions of life and showed men and women with a very false sort of heroism (206).
Laura commits the greatest mistake of falling in love with Colonel Selby and marrying him. Selby's treachery teaches her the need for the emancipation of women. She becomes a strange woman with a total understanding of the endless capacities of a girl with good looks. She utilises her charm to win and to break men's hearts with a vengeance. She has a libertarian spirit and she hates the cruel world that pursues an independent woman as it never does a man. She is heroic enough to shoot Colonel Selby when he tries to abandon her a second time. At the time of her trial, she is arrives at the court quite majestically. Twain writes: "She would not have entered a drawing room with more self-poise, nor a church with more haughty humility. There was in her manner or face neither shame nor boldness" (400). Laura's trial scene reminds one of the trial scene in Joan of Arc. A.B. Paine identifies Laura with the young childhood sweetheart of Twain who lived opposite to his house in Hannibal (Mark Twain: A Biography 37).

Ruth Bolton, another lively presence in The Gilded Age is an independent woman with high ideals of life. She has her own convictions and is willing to sacrifice even her personal life for their realisation. She believes that a school is a place where the fruition of the young people is frustrated as it has a
tendency to stifle them. Her decision to learn medicine shocks her mother.

We can see the same fire of liberation in Narayan's characters like Rosie in *The Guide*, Daisy in *The Painter of Signs*, or Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Ruth, in *The Gilded Age*, who is disgusted with the lot of women exclaims:

> What a box women are put into, measure for it, and put in young; if we go anywhere, it is in a box, veiled and pinioned and shut in by disabilities [. . .] why should I rust and be stupid, and sit in inaction because I am a girl? (113)

Though self-willed and high spirited, she is not as objective and detached in her love-life, like Daisy.

The delineation of women by Twain and Narayan reflects their personal affirmations that the realms of intellect and career are no longer an exclusive masculine preserve. The assertive woman turns her attention from passivity, from reproduction to action and achievement. A closer look into the nature of the heroines portrayed by Narayan calls for a re-thinking on the nature of the heroines as envisaged by ancient Sanskrit scholars. Dhananjaya makes three
broad classifications, namely, the sviya nayika, (The married consort) the parakiya nayika, (The unwedded lady) and the sadharanī nayikā (common woman). The sviya nayika is a married woman, or legally wedded wife, like Savitri of The Dark Room or Susila of The English Teacher. She is further described as a "caste lady devoted to the domestic duties, modest in behaviour, and straightforward in her dealings. She is a partner both in times of weal and of woe like Sita of Ramachandran [sic]" (Surendranath Shastri 213). Women who come under this category are also called ātmīya nayika, which refers to their position in life. Savithri and Susila are sviya nayikas. Ramani, on the other hand, is after a parakiya nari, Santabai. Rengi, in The Man-Eater of Malgudi also comes under this division. Susila in The English Teacher remains a true wife to Krishna and she remains so, even after her death. parakiya nayika, can either be a virgin or mistress. Her nature may range from sheer bashfulness of an unwedded girl, to the immodest and frivolous nature of a woman with libidinous tendencies. Narayan has Daisy and Rosie whose personalities defy classification. But one cannot deny the apparent similarity in delineation of these characters. Santabai of The Dark Room and the numerous women who frequent the lives of Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi and Dr. Rann in Talkative Man could be accommodated in this group. As has
already been mentioned, Narayan does not show much inclination to deal with
the profane and immodest activities of the Malgudians, as he has a staunch
faith in the goodness of man. However, he does not shut his eyes to reality.
People like Vasu or Dr. Rann are unfit in a world like Malgudi, so he does not
allow the Santabais to remain in Malgudi. He also forces Vasu and Rann to
leave Malgudi because it can never accommodate such men.

Mark Twain, on the other hand, seems to be more realistic in his approach
as he is more conscious of the darker aspects of life. In fact, he makes a
scathing attack on the licentiousness of nineteenth century America. But he
holds men more in contempt than women as responsible for the fallen moral
standards. To him, women really occupied a high status. Though women
like Joan of Arc are rare in this world, we can at least hope to hope to imbibe
their spirit of independence and compassion.