The Moulding of Unpromising Heroes

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Chapter 5
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While discussing the nature of the heroic ideal in American Literature, Theodore L. Gross makes the insightful observation that there is a central paradox in American culture -- its political commitment to the common man and its literary obsession with the extraordinary man or hero. There is a second paradox too which is connected with the very foundation of the American sensibility. The United States of America claims to be the strongest of the nations, though it is founded upon Christian principles that speak of humility and abnegation (The Heroic Ideal in American Literature vii). It is the actual power of the American nation that has conditioned the heroic posture of the characters in their literature. The writers of the nineteenth century were conscious of this paradox in the texture of their lives, and so, they resorted to the portrayal of a heroic hero, who symbolically suggested victory. The so-called American dream of success was popularised as a result of such literary efforts.

"Success" is a magical word that has always exacted the attention of all the writers of the world. The idea of a common man, who ends up victorious
after his struggle with life, is an enchanting one. Consequently, there was an urgent need for the depiction of such characters in all literary works. Many of them went to the extent of giving a romantic halo to this story of success, which made the literary world quite familiar with terms like the Emersonian Hero, the Code Hero of Hemingway, the Black Hero, the Southern Hero and the Quixotic Hero.

An analysis of the protagonists of Twain and Narayan helps us to arrive at a conclusion that all of them refuse to be categorized like this. Though Twain celebrated the frontier man in his novels, all his characters can never be called typical southern heroes. In the case of Narayan, we come to assume that his protagonists, in most cases, belong to a single category of the ancient heroes called dhīraśānta. Naturally, there is an evident overlapping of the qualities associated with these different sects. They are men and women who refuse to be heroic, in spite of their occasional acts of valour. They remain simple men, who, at times, are driven to face difficult situations that call for courage. Many of them, to their surprise, act impulsively though that does not always go well with their true nature. Almost all of Narayan's heroes are dreamers, who have very little to do with the world of action. But, the case of
the Twainian heroes is different. Despite their capacity to dream, they believe in action as a means of fulfillment of their dreams.

A study of the concept of heroism of these two authors will not be complete, if we do not consider the various factors that have been instrumental in moulding the nature of the protagonists. Though belonging to different periods, Twain and Narayan have many common grounds -- their capacity for creating humour and satire, their treatment of juvenile heroes, their preferences for a favourite idyll, and their attitude towards politics, -- to name a few. Equally perceptible is the intellectual kinship they exhibit, in the handling of certain themes, characters, and situations. Both the writers under reference, have emerged as undisputed masters of verbal humour. There is no history of literature, which bestows greatness on any literary figure, whose fame solely rests upon the basis of humour, however enchanting or universal that humour may be. What an intelligent reader expects is a deep and serious implication, which is capable of giving distinctive solidity and acceptability to the work. No wonder, Twain and Narayan could be ranked very high for their judicious and delicious mixing of humour in their works. Both of them are capable of creating humour through verbal adroitness, which, definitely, is of a subtler kind, than the one
based on situational humour.

Humour born of linguistic devices has a permanent attraction to the careful readers, as they prefer inaudible laughter to the boisterous one. Of all types of verbal humour, it is the dialectal humour that is more popular with the common man, and which finds its best expression in Twain's novels. Apart from being a master of vernacular, he is noted for his ability to perceive the absurd and the comic, which forms an integral part of the charm of the humour in his novels. Guru Dayal Grover points out: "Twain's use of the colloquial idiom acted as a proclamation of emancipation to countless writers who would not have dared to depart from the literary language of their contemporaries (Mark Twain: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn 104).

Humour is employed as a powerful weapon by these authors to attack the pretentiousness and falseness of the society of their time, though Twain's is more poignant and caustic. A.B. Paine, in his book Mark Twain: A Biography mentions Twain's own remark about his humour, while writing to his publisher McClure thus:

I value humour highly and am constitutionally fond of it, but I
should not like it as a steady diet. [. . .] Of the twenty three books which I have written, eighteen do not deal in humour, as their chiepest feature, but one half and half admixtures of fun and seriousness, I think, I have seldom deliberately set out to be humorous, but I have nearly always allowed the humour to drop in, or stay out, according to its fancy. (100)

There are times when Twain uses fantasy as a comic mask for common sense, which is meant to evoke humour, while castigating manners and morals. His **Pudd'n head Wilson** is one such example. While Wilson amuses us with his cranky calender entries, we are reminded of the eternal and naked truth behind their apparent mockery. For instance, one of his calender entries reads: "Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education" (*MT* 458). It was as a result of such a misunderstood joke that he was treated as the "Pudd'nhead." His first meeting with a group of local people at Dawson's Landing proves abortive when he is found to think aloud about the yelping dog thus:

"I wish I owned half of that dog."

"Why?" Somebody asked.

"Because I would kill my half" was the answer. (*MT* 445)
But the mischievous humour behind the remark goes unnoticed, and a prolonged discussion as to the sanity of the speaker follows, at the end of which, they come to the conclusion that the new citizen is a crank, a jackass and a Pudd'n head. He has to wait twenty long years to prove them wrong.

**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** abounds in humour. This novel is viewed as a comic epic, though, evidently, we can find a change of attitude in Twain in this novel. He is not concerned with the humorous aspect alone, but he has deeper and more serious considerations while writing this novel. The tone of the novel too grows serious here. Issues like the slave trade, moral degradation, the presence of the schemers and manipulators and the like, attract the attention of the author. The very question of the "superiority" of the white man over the black man is also treated in detail, though coated with humour. The creative use of the vernacular is an outstanding achievement of Twain's, and finds its highest expression in this novel.

The south-west humorists like Longstreet, Harris and Thorpe have also experimented with dialectical humour. But in Twain's novel, dialect becomes a part of Huck's character. The conflict in man over moral issues is indirectly expressed through Huck's innocent observations. When Twain makes Huck
narrate the story, he is giving ample scope for the varied uses of the dialect, which are in agreement with the mood of the narrator. The humour in *Huckleberry Finn* varies -- ranging from high comedy to low farce and the life pictured here shows the poetic tranquility of the life on the raft, the violence of the mob, and the depravity of human beings.

The Indian author, too is acclaimed for his humorous and graphic perspectives in his novels. William Walsh refers to Narayan's novels as those belonging to a difficult genre, the serious comedy (*Indian Literature in English* 79). Comic realism is the forte of Narayan. It is through his comic realism, he weaves intricate patterns of life, which reflect his amused tolerance. Nowhere does he seem either caustic or didactic. Even when he makes fun of the idiosyncrasies and hypocrisies of society, it is not with the zeal of a preacher. He appears to be a tolerant observer holding a mirror to the innumerable types of life prevalent in the small town of Malgudi, and who would like to keep a distance from the affairs of the town, so that he can always use the weapon of criticism, untainted by pedantry. As such, his comedy is never cutting, and hence, is well appreciated by the reading public. Twain's humour is dark and pungent, while Narayan's is light and accommodating. When Twain shows
his anger and irritation at the follies and foibles of the American society, Narayan demonstrates a more sympathetic attitude towards Indian Society.

Both these novelists present the constant struggles of the protagonists in an unfriendly world. But the Malgudians are reticent, and even a bit diffident even, Vasu in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and Dr. Rann in *Talkative Man* being exceptions. They are pictured as the undesirable yet unavoidable human types in the peaceful world of Malgudi. Likewise, the heroes are found to be satisfied with the state of things where heroism is not at all necessary for the smooth flow of their lives. Though they are referred to as psychologically active people, the men and women of Malgudi are not much keen on exhibiting physical valour. Their heroism is more on the side of fortitude. Most of them are dreamers who prefer to remain as such, as they find no special glamour in being otherwise.

As mentioned earlier, Narayan's *Swami and Friends* has many things in common with Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. The world of the children operates almost on the same level everywhere, which is a world full of laughter and diversions. Usually, the more serious issues of society are unrelated to that world, and, hence, the children tend to keep a distance from
such issues. But Twain’s world is one where fun and frolic are just superficial, and it is a world where children too are made conscious of the existence of evil and darkness. The problem of the black slave Jim’s escape is not a problem of Jim or Huck alone, it is a problem posed before the sympathetic hearts of the readers all over. Tom’s eternal thirst for heroism in *Tom Sawyer* shows man’s constant desire for glory. Malgudi also, has children like Tom. But they can never have a chance to exhibit heroism of any kind, because they are under constant vigil of the elders. Nevertheless, Swami plays truant, like Tom, and he too gets involved in all sorts of troubles.

Twain and Narayan revel in dealing with the world of children. It is as if they were re-living their old days when they were unaware of the bitter realities of the world. St. Petersburg offers Twain opportunities to recollect his childhood days in Hannibal, and the children’s life in Malgudi is nothing but a re-living of Narayan’s school days. The words of the Headmaster in *The English Teacher* appear quite relevant here. He affirms: "Most of us forget that grand period. But with me, it has always been there. A time at which the colours of things are different, the depths greater, their magnitude greater, a most balanced and joyous condition of life. There was a natural state of joy over nothing in
Swami's account of his teacher Ebenezer and his lecture on Jesus Christ can never fail to create a smile on the face of the reader. Swami gets annoyed and hurt at the same time when the fanatical teacher compares Jesus with the innumerable number of Hindu Gods. Swami's blood boils at the scornful mention of his favourite Gods in whose mercy he has great belief. Ebenezer asks the students: "Did our Jesus go about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter?" (Swami and Friends 5). When the rest of the students keep quiet, Swami cannot help asking, mustering up all his courage: "Why was he crucified then? If he was God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?" (5). Even Ebenezer is shocked to see Swami retort like this. As a result, he advances towards Swami, in complete rage, to wrench his left ear off. The very thought that a God could be a non-vegetarian astonishes Swami, as "non-vegetarianism" was considered a sin in his Brahmin house.

Swami's Monday morning syndrome reminds one of Tom's. Narayan, like Twain, does not miss any opening to bring forth laughter wherever and wherever possible. Swami's serious discussion with his grandmother on cricket
is such an occasion. S.C. Harrex observes:

In Narayan's novels social attitudes and cultural beliefs may be treated disrespectfully, or exaggerated to the point of absurdity, but the consequential comedy remains relevant in being enjoyable for its own sake and in manifesting a compassionate awareness of the world of childhood. (*Fire and Offering* 57)

Twain seems to be aggressive in his criticism and more forceful in approach. Even when he attacks the decadent and perverted culture along the banks of the Mississippi, knowing fully well that the traditional values of life are fast deteriorating, he remains steadfast in his convictions. Even the innocent boys like Huck and Jim are at the mercy of the scoundrels like the Duke and the King who know how to exploit their delusions and prejudices. Twain cannot discard humour even while approaching serious issues. This inimitable trend in Twain remains a unique feature of his novels. His humour has a robust virility. Maurice Le Breton points out the two trends in Twain's comedy, "one pure fantasy, completely spontaneous, the other, more thoughtful and tinged with seriousness" (*Mark Twain: An Appreciation* 37). Depending on the aspect that is emphasised, Twain appears "either an overgrown child who amuses himself in the simplicity of his heart with enormous lies, or an embittered
sentimentalist who barely hides his deep pessimism beneath the mask of humour."

The Indian as well as the American author employ humour in order to highlight the attitudes of their protagonists. In the depiction of the life of true "heroes," one cannot have much scope for amusement as they will always be engaged in making their basic dreams come true. That is why we cannot just imagine traditional heroes being entangled in a comic situation, which calls for humorous description, however attractive the whole exercise may look. In a way, this is why the comic element in the nature of the heroes of Twain and Narayan appears more humane and, hence, convincing. Characters like Margayya in The Financial Expert, Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets, or Raju in The Guide can be seen anywhere around us. They are made dearer to us for their authenticity and for their realistic simplicity, which, definitely, is Narayan's hallmark.

Behind the eccentric humour of Pudd'n head Wilson, what we can perceive is a curious mixture of the dark humour of Philip Traum, the "Little Satan" in The Mysterious Stranger and the innocent laughter of the juvenile heroes. True to the image of an iconoclast, Twain was always involved in war with the corrupting tendencies of society. Though a man with considerable aspirations
in life, Twain never wanted them at the cost of others' misfortunes. Perhaps, this has been instrumental in making Huck, Wilson, or Tom admirable characters. None of them appear to be unrealistic. Wilson's calendar entry throws light on his attitude towards valour. He writes: "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear -- not absence of fear" (MT 485). Quite true to this entry, Wilson is delineated as one who is struggling to conquer fear throughout the novel.

Narayan's heroes are also engaged in a constant struggle to free themselves from the intricate designs of life in Malgudi. They too are required to perform certain roles which are often misunderstood as their heroism. Their heroism lies not in the exhibition of physical power, but in moral and spiritual power. Margayya's decision in The Financial Expert to go back to his seat under the banyan tree, after years of affluence, requires such a moral and spiritual strength. And so is Raju's decision in The Guide to do justice to the role of the Mahatma thrust upon him. In spite of his villainous activities in the past, Raju finds himself quite earnest, thinking about the possible results of his fast thus: "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?" (The Guide 238). He starts to enjoy the peculiar feeling in his
body produced by the lack of food. He goes to the extent of thinking that the
enjoyment in that special case is something that Velan cannot take away. If
these acts can be taken as illustrations of heroism, they remain true to the term
hero. But a close analysis reveals the fact that in both instances, the protagonists
had no other alternative. So, Narayan's heroes, undertake acts of valour,
when they find themselves at the end of their resourcefulness. They are by
nature reserved, and choose to remain unnoticed, with quite reasonable aims
and expectations. Talkative Man, for all his tall talk, remains ineffective when
he finds the enforced company of Dr. Rann unbearable. The Hindu belief of
"atithi devo bhava" (ed. Namputhiri Chandogyopanisat) pulls him back even
when he is irritated and angry at the crude ways of the doctor.

Heroism in Twain's novels is invariably associated with the dream of
escape, shared by many of his characters. This escape may be from the
mundane activities of life, or from the suffocating problems faced by the
individual, or it may be from the more serious questions related to the very
existence of man. However, the protagonists of both these writers, at some
point of time, prefer to move away from the chief scene of action, quite often,
to come back. This short interval sometimes opens up an entirely new world
before them, making them more experienced and matured. They are made to arrive at the realisation that what they considered as crucial problems are not problems at all, and that there are others who live in constant threat of misery and misfortune. We have the instances of Prince Edward (The Prince and the Pauper) and Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts) who learn very valuable lessons, which come to their help at a later stage when they have to face real life. In fact, Hank Morgan's visit to the sixth century Arthurian Land (A Connecticut Yankee) is another manifestation of Twain's escape motif in novels. The same is the case with the experiences of the Little Satan. Huck's journey is nothing but an attempt to escape from the suffocating circumstances in St. Petersburg.

Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets feels the necessity of having a retreat, so that he could sufficiently disentangle himself from the problems of the samsara (world) where he could take a few steps to sanyasa, the final stage of man's existence in this world, according to Hindu philosophy. But vanaprastha (Ascetic life in the forest) has to precede sanyasa, and, to him, this is the right time to enter into this third ashrama in one's life. He is excited to think of the prospect of such an action: "Yes, yes. God knows I need a retreat. You know,
my friend, at some stage in one's life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so that others may continue in peace" (126). Though he appears quite sincere in his desire, at a later stage Narayan pictures him taking his cheque book along with him, which is another typical humorous observation at the falsity and hypocrisy of Jagan. Narayan's heroes find it difficult to face the trials of life. In fact, V.S. Naipaul, the celebrated West Indian novelist holds this view in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, when he says that Jagan's is "an act of despair" and he runs away in tears" to retreat "from civilization and creativity" (40-43).

When Narayan's heroes attempt to escape from the warmth and security of the life of Malgudi, Narayan has a clever way of calling them back to enact the roles kept aside for them in the drama of life. Perhaps, this regression is made easy for them due to the support they get from a firm religious faith. In Twain's world religion is treated with scant respect. A direct confrontation with religion is found in its aggressive form in *The Mysterious Stranger*, a lighter variety of which is reflected in *Huckleberry Finn* itself. When Little Satan pictures God as a powerful bad boy, it is the apparent duplicity in the existence of God that confuses Huck, because he is given two different versions
of the same God by Miss. Watson and the Widow. If Twain's protagonists desire uninhibited existence, Narayan's child heroes prefer fraternity.

The superhuman heroes of traditional literature do not have a place either in Twain's or in Narayan's world. The traditional heroes are accepted by the common man due to their affinity to the world of religion. Where religion holds no power, how can one expect the religious heroes to be celebrated? Even Joan of Arc, the religious martyr is portrayed as a person who is essentially guided by her intuitions, and not by religion. In fact, Joan of Arc illustrates Twain's yet another attack on the degenerated state of the Church. The greed, pettiness, and the insincerity of the clergy, are attacked scathingly, while Joan remains innocent and unpolluted. The same attitude is at work when Twain deals with Philip Traum, the Little Satan. He is the "mysterious stranger," who has come to please himself with the same kind of showmanship, exhibited by Tom Sawyer. The civilization he encounters at Eseldorf is nothing but paltry and contemptible, and he tries to expose its pettiness. In his final speech, the children of Eseldorf are given a shocking realisation, which is meant for the community of human beings as well. He states:

It is true that which I have revealed to you; there is no God, no
universe, no human race, no earthly love, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream -- a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. (The Mysterious Stranger 405)

This sheer existential argument has no place in Malgudi which is rich in its religious and cultural heritage. From the young Swami, to the elderly, worldly-wise Jagan, God is a living truth. None of the Malgudians can afford to be heroic at the cost of irreverence to God. The "Rakshasas" who come into contact with the god-fearing people of Malgudi fail to bring about any change in their attitudes. Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, like the mythical Bhasmāsura, becomes the cause for his self-destruction. He can never kill the temple elephant Kumar, because the Gods of Malgudi will take care of their loved ones. A Tiger for Malgudi takes one to deeper and more serious problems regarding the existence of man. Tiger Raja, the only non-human protagonist of Narayan, narrates the different stages of his life -- his life of captivity, and his life of liberty -- which act as a threshold to a life of spirituality.

Temperamentally there is an affinity between Vasu and Little Satan. Both of them have a very low opinion of human beings around them. Vasu enjoys
killing animals and Nataraj, the poor printer, is hurt and frustrated at the state of affairs at his Press. He is unable to concentrate on his business, and he finds himself, against all his interests, drawn towards the demoniac character. Like all the other heroes of Narayan, Natraj also is most inadequate as an agent of action. He just cannot tolerate Vasu, because he was brought up in a house where they were taught not to kill. He avers: "When we swatted flies, we had to do it without the knowledge of our elders." (The Man-Eater of Malgudi 67)

Narayan has a habit of giving the familial details of all his important characters, with the exception of Vasu. Even Tiger Raja, in A Tiger for Malgudi narrates his familial life in the Meppi forest with his mother. But Vasu is pictured as a person who has no ancestral roots. Perhaps, he is a born outlaw. One is left to wonder whether the omission was deliberate. Narayan being a traditionalist, would have, naturally, wanted this cruel "element" to be an outsider, devoid of any familial relationship. The sacred bonds of a family can never accommodate a person like Vasu. He has a very poor opinion of women too. He believes that only fools marry in this world. Quite sarcastically he states: "You don't have to own a coffee estate, because you like to have a
cup of coffee now and then" (41).

Vasu, the man-eater of Malgudi, is a contrast to the real "man-eating tiger" of Malgudi. Raja, the Tiger, is more modest than Vasu, the taxidermist. Raja is presented as a contented and happy tiger in a zoo who recollects the story of his past life. Like the other heroes of Narayan, he too leads a happy life in his childhood, under the care of his mother, whom he loses eventually. There is a struggle for survival and the tiger establishes itself as the supreme "Lord of the Jungle" (A Tiger for Malgudi 13). When Raja becomes a householder, with his wife and four cubs, he becomes somewhat sober in his attitude to fellow creatures. But he becomes vengeful towards the human beings, who have killed his family. In his attempt to do this, he is caught, and is trained to perform in a circus, where he becomes the star performer. He emerges from his captivity soon, only to find solace in the company of his "Guru," the hermit in the novel. While narrating the story of the tiger, Narayan is actually extending the concept of renunciation followed by many of his characters, when they reach a state of maturity.

There is an obvious disinterestedness in Twain to portray his heroes as absolutely powerful masters, devoid of any association with society. With all
his evident disregard for the hypocrisy in the American society, he seems to be equally conscious of the necessity of having one's roots firmly embedded in the ground. One cannot always live in the company of nature. Even Huck desires for fellowship when he has had too much of loneliness. Society, with all its inadequacies, is a necessary evil. It may stifle, corrupt, and contaminate one. What is required is a change in attitude. David Wilson keeps himself aloof from society in *The Pudd'nhead Wilson*, only to come back, well received. Even Huck's father requires the company of at least his son, though he is as free as a bird. A careful investigation into the novels of Twain reveals himself as a man who wants the "damned human race" to change its ways. He wants the world to be a habitable place for the innocent and the experienced alike. Otherwise, there will be no meaning to man's "moral sense," which will be the butt of ridicule for all the Little Satans to come. This feeling is central in his novels, and it certainly has a role to play in the mental make-up of his heroes. Through his heroes he tries to make one wary of the cultural erosion that has already taken place in America.

Huck's confrontation with the genteel society widens the scope of his experience. And one can never live in a permanent state of innocence in this
world. Even Adam was required to have his Fall. The unpromising hero motif in Twain's novels makes it necessary for the protagonist to lead a life of unpretentious existence, so that he could climb up the steps of heroism. David Wilson in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Miles Hendon in *A Connecticut Yankee*, Tom Canty in *The Prince and The Pauper*, Joan in *Joan of Arc*, Huck Finn and even Tom Sawyer in *Huckleberry Finn* belong to this category of the unpromising hero. Wilson's act of proving the innocence of the twins is such an attempt, that fetches success for him. The Prince of Offal Court, Tom Canty, is a beggar with a golden dream, which is materialised in the most unusual fashion. Miles Hendon, the Earl of Kent, is an insignificant man, whose titles, revenues, and privileges have been snatched away by his own brother. The role of an unpromising hero, who happens to be an achiever at the end, suits no other character so well. Huck's qualification for such a role is undisputed. Perhaps, this is why Twain does not bestow superhuman powers on his characters, Little Satan being an exception. The powers that are conferred upon his best heroes are the powers of observation and intuition. The Twainian hero refuses to be treated as an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-centered, for, no man can be an island.
Prince Edward in *The Prince and The Pauper*, normally, cannot be treated as an insignificant person. But even here, Twain has a way of making him yearn for success, that is, by making him exchange his role with the pauper, Tom Canty. If the swapping had not taken place, the story of Edward would have been different and we could never have included him under the title "unpromising." Tom Canty, the lowly beggar is a dreamer who enacts the role of a royal personage, when he is in the company of his friends. Victory is accorded to him in the form of entry into the palace, whereby he is capable of enjoying all the luxuries of power and wealth. But the exchange of roles is not deliberate or conscious: the circumstances force Prince Edward to live in the Offal Court and Tom Canty to spend many an unhappy day in the palace. But Twain shows that even the innocent tend to be malicious and selfish, once they come into contact with the aristocracy, by showing Tom's negation of his mother at the time of coronation. But remorse follows and he owns up his crime. Even the crime does not get the deserved punishment, because the Prince's magnanimity saves him at the crucial point.

The individual characteristics of Narayan's protagonists are eternally connected with the society of Malgudi. Malgudi is a place where shockingly
disruptive happenings do take place. It is always described as a quiet place where individuals live in perfect harmony with nature. The youngsters of Malgudi at times wish to go away from the place, seeking more comfort, but invariably they too come back to the consoling presence of the small town. Mali in *The Vendor of Sweets* and Balu in *The Financial Expert* offer solid evidence to support this view. People living under such conditions can never fathom the relevance of heroism. Arguably, this is the basic reason for their timidity and averageness. Their highest act of physical heroism is illustrated by the hero's participation in a political demonstration or in undergoing imprisonment as a political prisoner. But one should not fail to notice the intellectual capability of Raju in *The Guide*, Krishna in *The English Teacher*, Margayya in *The Financial Expert*, Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*, or Nagaraj in *The World of Nagaraj*. Even the tiger of Malgudi has a amicable existence. Raja, the tiger has displayed cruelty before he became a householder, but *grihasthāsrma* teaches him a lesson in moderation.

Individual isolation and psychological alienation are not very popular terms in Malgudi because Narayan has "scrupulously avoided high-strung crusading attitudes and extravagant, intellectual, and ideological commitments, while
animating the familiar known world with luminous liveliness of wit and feeling" (Raghavacharyulu 21). Nowhere do we find a total contempt and lack of faith in the works of Narayan, though he points out the falsehood and hypocrisy of man. When Natraj is upset, over the irritating presence of Vasu inside his Press, Sastri consoles him that the universe has survived all the "Rakshasas" that were ever born. He, quite pertinently, states: "Every demon carries within him unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction and it goes up in the air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise, what is to happen to humanity?" (The Man-Eater of Malgudi 231). This comment prompts Walsh to make the following assessment: "Sastri's remark offers a modest word of hope about the possibilities of human survival and that it indicates the quality of the quietly complex tone of Narayan's fiction" (R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation 139).

Meenakshi Mukherjee in the book The Twice-Born Fiction notices a particular pattern in Narayan's novels -- a pattern of order - disorder - order (154). There is a sense of orderliness in all his novels at the beginning, which is thwarted by some external element. But towards the end of the story, order is regained, to the great relief of the Malgudians. This cyclic pattern is
perceivable in The Bachelor of Arts, The Guide, The Financial Expert, A Tiger for Malgudi, Mr. Sampath, and Talkative Man. Even in The Dark Room, there is an evident return to order, in spite of Savitri's change in her attitude to life. Traditional Hindu Literature like The Mahābhārata or The Ramayana follows this pattern; as these epics describe the victory of the suras (Devas) over the asuras (Demons). When the asuras disrupt the peacefulness of the country, it becomes the duty of the devas to regain it, by defeating them. Both the asuras and the devas are warriors.

Though Malgudi does not offer much scope for physical heroism, the eternal war between the good and the evil -- Devas and Asuras -- takes place here. Natraj's confrontation with Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Talkative Man's tussle with Dr. Rann in Talkative Man, Nagraj's constant quarrels with Tim in The World of Nagaraj, and Jagan's rivalry with the new and deteriorated value system represented by Mali in The Vendor of Sweets, are illustrations of this aspect. What is peculiar, is the absence of "action" in these novels. The evident answer for this is the author's preference for unheroic heroes, who are interested in extending the principle of niṣkāma karma.

"Karmanyevadhirasthe mā phaleṣu kadacana," thus says the
Bhagavad Gita (ii.47). If one has to perform his act of karma without caring for the result it fetches, one necessarily should be a person with a sense of tolerance. One cannot be easily excited or easily disappointed. One ought to possess great fortitude. Raju does not wait for the result of his final act of martyrdom. And so are Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets, Raja, and the hermit in A Tiger for Malgudi.

If Narayan's novels offer us glimpses into the Hindu myths of bhasmasura and the other devas, Twain's novels provide us with an opportunity to trace the growth of a cherished dream of the author himself, the American dream of success, and the myth of the American Man as the innocent Adam. The myth of the unpolluted innocence of the American Adam has been treated very well by the other writers of American Literature. Emerson's The American Scholar seeks to define heroism that is peculiarly organic to America. Gross points out that Emerson, while examining ideal aspects in individual heroes like Pluto, Montaigne, Swedenborg, Shakespeare, Napoleon and Goethe, "confronts them personally, forgetting the average man" (Emerson and The Heroic Ideal 11). Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter and in The House of the Seven Gables illustrates the incongruity of the Emersonian heroic ideal that takes literature
away from the common man. The passion for heroism was always the object of Hawthorne's criticism, for the very reason that he was persistently aware of man's limitations that make him real and more convincing.

Twain desired to write profoundly on the American hero's innocence. David Wilson's innocence in Pudd'nhead Wilson is quite convincing as he is considered to be a crank by the commoners, and Huck's innocence in Huckleberry Finn is beyond criticism. Joan of Arc, perhaps, is the incarnation of innocence and purity on earth. Conte's account of Joan's childhood is replete with references to the pastoral life of Domremy. But the mood of the narrator changes, as Joan gets involved in the political drama. The boyish voice of admiration that Conte has, while narrating the story, gives way to the voice of the unhappy old man in him. Twain was personally happy to write about Joan because her personality refused to be categorized under one head - that of Christian or Pagan. Joan of Arc, to him, escapes from time, from old age, and from loss of faith, which were some of the problems that baffled the minds of the intelligentsia. These sentiments are well expressed in the "Song of the Fairy Tree" which was written by Twain himself. The tree is a symbol that represents happiness and innocence, freshness and vitality, which at a
later period "shares its power with the cross, in sight of which, she dies" (Stone 93). Roger B. Salomon rightly remarks:

While Edward magically puts everything to right at the end of his wanderings, while Huck (at least in Huckleberry Finn) succeeds in escaping to the West, Joan, on the other hand, is abandoned by her friends, and burned by her enemies, and nothing De Conte and his creator are able to do, can save her.

Twain is all praise for his young girl protagonist, Joan of Arc. Such words of praise coming from a man who never attached any importance to religion, show his faith in the basic innocence of man. He always believed that the human race lived in a world of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception. It duped itself from cradle to grave with shams and delusions which were mistaken for realities. He does not hesitate to call it paltry, lying, always claiming virtues which it has not got. Twain, by the end of his career, was tormented by serious thoughts about man's essential loneliness and rootlessness. Even behind the seemingly genial atmosphere of St. Petersburg, there lurks the shadow of lonesomeness and gloom which troubles the minds of the boys. Hank Morgan's story in A Connecticut Yankee is the story of a single man
against the Church and its authority. Both David Wilson and Joan are lonely, though Joan finds herself pathetically alone in front of a hostile crowd.

Narayan's happy Malgudi is also not devoid of such issues. From Swami and Friends onwards we can see instances of haunting pain experienced even by the innocent boys of Malgudi. Swami's agony, when he stands on the railway platform, is his first experience of sorrow. His isolation becomes even more acute, because, Swami still does not know whether Rajam cared for him or not. After the horoscope episode, Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts also feels listless and gloomy. Having got over this first pang of unrequitted love, Chandran learns to start his life anew. Krishna's desolation in The English Teacher is the most painful. But like a true Hindu, he learns to bear the pain, receiving consolation from mystical experiences and religious thoughts, which help him to pull on. Jagan's final realisation in The Vendor of Sweets about man's loneliness makes him a changed man. The doting father in him dies a natural death, leaving him unconcerned about the release of Mali from prison. But, he is reminded of his karma, the duty towards his son, however spoilt he may be, and hence arranges with his cousin to bail him out. Mr. Sampath, the eponymous protagonist of the novel, at the end, is a man shorn of all his pomp and glory.
The delineation of Krishna in *The Dark Room* is especially noteworthy. After the death of Susila, though a desperate man, Krishna does not accept help even from his mother to take care of Leela. He derives a "peculiar satisfaction," like Chandran, in his decision to "live it out alone, to face the problems alone, never drag in another to do the job" (109). He feels that a "terrible fatigue and inertia" have set in. But, as time passes he finds solace in communicating with his wife by way of telepathy.

Twain does not allow his juvenile heroes to stray away from the world of reality, however ugly it is. The pain of separation is aptly expressed by Twin in the picaresque novels. Huck undergoes such an experience of severe boredom, and inexpressible gloom, just after the widow's study classes. He goes to his room in a dampened mood. Sitting by the window, he tries to think of something cheerful, but in vain. "I felt so lonesome, I most wished was dead," says Huck (MT 144). The same sense of desolation pervades the mood of the boy, confronted by the vast wilderness of the forest and the river. At night he sees the shining stars in the sky, and hears the mournful sigh of the leaves rustling in the wind. He feels that the wind was trying to tell him something, something fearful, most probably of death and he admits that he
could not "make what it was and so it made the cold showers run over me" (MT 144). This incident reminds one of Swami's own feeling when he is trapped in the Mempi Forest. He, too, like Huck, feels that his ears have grown abnormally sensitive. In Swami and Friends Swami's thoughts of fame, through the heroic escapade, bid farewell to him at night fall and his heart started to beat fast. Narayan writes: "His throat went dry as he realised that he had not reached the Trunk Road. [...] But here one could hardly see the sky, the stars gleamed through occasional gaps overhead" (157).

Swami, the little hero of Malgudi, is made to stand still, frightened to the core, to listen to the "uncanny ghostly quality" of the fluttering of the wings of the birds and "to the sinister whispers calling him to dreadful sacrifice" (158). This marks a turning point in Swami's life. He is getting prepared for darker experiences in life that await him. The departure of Rajam, is a landmark in Swami's journey from innocence to experience.

Regan observes that Twain had a predisposition to identity himself with the unpromising hero, for, he was one who detested the self-glorifying antics of the showmen heroes (Unpromising Hero 218). Hank Morgan, the technical wizard in A Connecticut Yankee, who wants to prove the superiority of the
Yankee over everyone, also becomes desperate at the end of the novel. In spite of all his mechanical and electrical inventions, he is condemned to a thirteen century sleep by Merlin. Though the Yankee claims himself to be the antithesis of sentimentality, and professes that he is barren of sentiments, his final doom haunts the reader. His world of technological marvels is blown up forever. Twain, who never wanted his protagonists to move away from the world of the common man, makes Morgan experience self-realisation.

Narayan, like his heroes, is modest in his criticism of the unscrupulous and hypocritical ways of modern man. Susila's cremation and its related rituals in The English Teacher are given in detail by the author, who, in a way, is recollecting the silent anguish and the darkness experienced by him at the time of the death of his wife, Rajam. There is a clinical detachment in his description. Disregardful of his pain, some of the visitors were discussing the hike in the price of commodities and their deteriorating quality. He observes that the trappings of trade do not leave us even at the scene of death. With a mathematical precision Krishna describes the cremation:

Presently, I go over, plunge in the river, return and perform a great many rites and mutter a lot of things which the priest
makes one repeat. They build up a pyre, place her on it, cover her up with layers of fuel. (182)

Here, too, we can see the glimpses of Hindu philosophy at work, for, death to a true Hindu, is just an intermediary stage in the life of man. His daughter, Leela's departure along with her grandmother is as painful as Susila's death is to Krishna. "A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false" (The English Teacher 203); this realisation helps him bear the ordeals of life more serenely.

The heroes of Twain and Narayan may vary, to some extent, in their essential nature and disposition. But a common factor, like the recurrence of the same locale for many stories, calls for some careful analysis. Narayan is famous for his permanent locale of Malgudi. It is true that Twain shows a considerable variety in choosing the locales of his novels, which range from St. Petersburg to sixth century England, and, hence, his canvas is broader by way of comparison. But many of his best novels are set along the banks of the Mississippi, which appears to be the favourite idyll for Twain. Dawson's Landing, where the story of Pudd'n head takes place, is the same St. Petersburg in progress, and resembles Hannibal, where Twain spent his childhood. In
creating St. Petersburg, Twain has put in all his cherished memories of a little river town where he himself was an urchin like Tom, Huck, or Sid. In the description of Domremy also we can see the influences of Hannibal. The charm of the prairies and forests was not inaccessible to the children of Twain's world. Bernard De Voto observes: "Wilderness [...] nurtured the memories of Samuel Clemens, out of which came five-seventh of his books and those of men who were boys when he was" (Mark Twain's America 30). Walter Blair is of the opinion that Tom's house is the "old Clemens' house, Becky Thatcher's, that of a childhood sweetheart of Twain. Cardill Hill, where Tom re-enacts Robinhood's adventures, is Holliday's Hill, the cemetery where Tom and Huck watch the murder is the Baptist Cemetery and Jackson's Island is Glassock's Island" (65). In short, St. Petersburg, like Malgudi is an idyll and a cosmos.

Malgudi has definite topographical features and it acts as a living presence in Narayan's novels. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar assumes that it might be Lalgudi on the river Cauveri or Yadavgiri in Mysore (361). There are some other critics who identify this town with Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, because it has a river on one side, forests on the other; it can proudly boast of having a Mission
School and a College, a Town Hall and a Municipal Office -- in short, all the extensions mentioned in his novels, could be located in Coimbatore. Narayan is able to achieve an organic whole through the presence of Malgudi as a permanent backdrop where each of his characters takes part in a human comedy. In fact, Malgudi is Narayan's "Casterbridge" according to Srinivasa Iyengar (360). Indianness and Indian sensibility pervades the whole of Malgudi.

Narayan proudly admits that the name Malgudi dawned upon his mind on a Vijayadasami day, which is supposed to be the day of initiation of learning (55).

The Malgudians also show moderation in outlook. None of them can boast of any high stature in the social hierarchy, nor do they belong to the lowest strata. Moderation, in the strict Hindu terms, is considered as a virtue. Even in the case of a scholar, traditional Sanskrit literature advises temperance. The maxim, "mitam ca saram ca vacohi vagmita," (a scholar is one who practises frugality in words) applies not only to the scholar, but to any of the heroes of Malgudi as well. Though Talkative Man claims himself to be a "loose talker," he appears modest in comparison with Dr. Rann. The eagerness to get involved in others' affairs is a common characteristic of Malgudians. But, this is not out
of any unhealthy inquisitiveness, but out of sheer sincerity and compassion.

Raju in The Guide, tells us that he cannot deny any help to anyone. Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets, Margayya in The Financial Expert, Srinivas, and Sampath in Mr. Sampath find pleasure in doing this. Srinivas's involvement with Sampath and the old man takes away a major share of his time. Jagan decides to enter a retreat as a means to escape from worldliness. But he is generous enough to offer the expenses of a ticket to America if Grace wants to go back.

The Indian as well as the American heroes under reference, live in close association with rivers. While St. Petersburg is blessed with the presence of the river Mississippi, Malgudi has its own Sarayu which offers emotional consolation to the men and women in their moments of utter desperation. Sarayu, like Malgudi itself, is a living presence. The children as a rule, are invariably attracted towards the calmness and comfort of the river. It is on the banks of the river Sarayu, Chandran meets his first love, Malathi in The Bachelor of Arts. Rosie, in The Guide, finds comfort on the river bank after her rejection by Marco. For the boys, Sarayu's banks offer a meeting place where they can even have a duel. Sampath's confession takes place on the
banks of this very same river. Rivers are considered sacred in India. To a Hindu, a dip in the holy river offers purity of body and soul. The river has almost become a symbol of spiritual cleansing, and has a wonderful ability to provide relief to ailing minds.

A river journey offers all kinds of freedom, as the traveller is not restrained by external influences and Huck and Jim in *Huckleberry Finn* take the maximum advantage of this freedom. The fact that the greatest civilizations of the world sprang up on the banks of rivers provides ample proof for the relevance of rivers in moulding man's character. The river has a redeeming influence on Raju, by which, the initially reluctant saint gets the courage to become a true martyr.

Hero-worship is a common trait of man, especially of the young. The renowned boy protagonists of Twain and Narayan have their own heroes, Tom and Rajam respectively. Swami is evidently attracted by the smart and fashionable boy who has newly joined his class. Rajam becomes a shining star in Swami's eyes, and he even feels proud of being called "Rajam's Tail," disregarding the insinuations. For Huck, Tom represents the very world of heroism, wherein he does not have a place. Tom is all that Huck can never
become. He believes that Tom's conduct is worthy of emulation. The "hero" in Tom is so glorified-looking to Huck that he tries to follow what Tom would have done, if he were placed in similar circumstances. When he sees the wreck, he thinks:

Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for a pic, he wouldn't. He call it an adventure that's what he would call it, and he would land on that wreck if it was his last act. [. . .] I says to myself "Tom Sawyer wouldn't back out now and so I wouldn't either." (MT 183)

Swami, in all respect and humility, tries to imitate Rajam's conduct. Swami's admiration for the sophisticated Rajam is enhanced after his visit to his house. So when Rajam is invited to Swami's house, the latter asks his father to lend him his room temporarily. Swami talks in an unusually authoritarian manner, to the shock of his servant, who chooses to be deliberately disrespectful to the new ways of the young master. Swami is terribly hurt to see that the servant has not complied with his request to wear a clean dhoti at the time of Rajam's visit. The fundamental difference in the attitude of the two boys accounts for the existence of familial ties in the case of Swami and the very lack of it in the case of Huck. Swami has a responsible father and a
caring mother and a doting grandmother. All that Huck has is a drunkard for a father, who does not have any emotional ties with anyone. But at the prospect of a choice between the stifling security of the widow's house, and the crude confinement of his father's cabin, Huck chooses the latter as the better one. He even enjoys his Pap's act of kidnapping him, for the very reason that it will at least fill his life with some excitement. The ugly hands of the civilized society, he hopes, will not be able to reach up to him. His escape from such a society is inevitably inexorable. Huck, being the child of Nature, does not plan to come back at all. Huck hates all aspects of civilization, which ultimately means social captivity.

It is not the fault of the author, if Huckleberry Finn celebrates the principle of escapism. Twain was an admirer of the escape dream which many of the intellectuals of the period shared. The Jackson's Island or the raft on the Mississippi happen to offer the best idyll for his dreams of escape. An escape from the work-a-day world is a most welcome thing, though, it may adversely affect the world of the youngsters, at times, when things go out of control. They wish to enact the adventures of endeared outlaw, Robin Hood, and with this idea in mind, they form a group of robbers. But a few days' freedom
bores the children and, eventually, they all return. For Huck, yet another journey awaits, the choice of which proves crucial, because he has much to lose when he embarks on his journey. This is really heroic of Huck. But Huck's decision to help Jim partially comes out of his practical wisdom. He decides to protect Jim partly due to his boundless compassion, and partly due to the consoling thought that he will never again go back to St. Petersburg and hence he does not stand the risk of being called an "abolitionist." This is worthy of special mention in the present context, which opens up a new line of understanding of Twain's concept of heroism. Huck's action, definitely, is one devoid of heroics.

The men that people the worlds of Twain and Narayan are never types. They are extremely authentic and life-like, and their heroism, just for that very reason, is also, not out of proportion. All of them, whether they are dhīrasānta heroes or dhīrodatta heroes of Dhananjaya, remain very close to the hearts of the young and the old alike.