Conclusion

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
"Every culture seems, as it advances toward maturity, to produce its own determining debate over the ideas that preoccupy it: salvation, the order of nature, money power, sex, the machine and the like," says R.W.B. Lewis in The American Adam (2). The intellectual history of a nation, exposes not only the dominant ideas of a period, or of the nation, but more importantly, the dominant clashes over ideas. No wonder, many critics were able to perceive an "American Myth" at work, while studying American Literature of the nineteenth century. Virgil's Aenid did this in Rome, establishing a Roman Myth, a myth of the "city" or the "republic," with all human concerns subordinated to the political and moral (Lewis 2). But, the American Myth, unlike the Roman, was not fashioned ultimately by a single man. It reflects a collective effort on the part of many creative writers.

This collective effort was instrumental in the introduction of a new "hero," who represented the embodiment of a new set of ideal human attributes. He was a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure; an
individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race, an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. (The American Adam 5)

He was called the "American Adam." Hawthorne's The Marble Faun and Melville's Billy Bud are instances for this. While Henry James named his protagonist "Adam" in The Golden Bowl, Emerson argued in favour of a plain old Adam, who could pose himself as the genuine simple self against the whole world. Almost a similar type of a hero was introduced into the tragedies, whose innocence and newness happened to be the cause for his tragedy. This was widely accepted as a pattern for American fiction of the period too.

"Heroism" has been a term of fascination for writers of all times. Whether it is the abstract heroism of traditional literature, or the more concrete one of modern literature, the term is of considerable interest. The American dream of success was a by-product of the heroic ideal prevalent in the nineteenth century, and Mark Twain was definitely attracted by this dominant theme.
But he made deliberate attempts to deviate from the accepted pattern of fiction by introducing the unpromising hero motif in literature. He seems to have had no faith in the glorified antics of the heroes, celebrated in the fictional works of this period. He felt that such books gave a distorted vision of the world of fantasy, which can never be found in the ordinary world. The heroes created by the volatile imagination of Twain were entirely different from their contemporaries. "The hungry need for heroism" (Gross 7) was felt by Twain who also was an American. But he was equally aware of the need for a deviation from the accepted idea, which happened to be one of the chief attractions of his novels.

Twain hated the cultural pretensions of European society, which claimed a greater history and heritage. When writers like Cooper and Henry James were writing about the European influence on American fiction, we see a shift of interest in Twain. "Mark Twain was an actor," observes Edward Wagenknecht, "who appeared beneath the proscenium arch of the heaven in many different roles. He was Tom Sawyer (with a touch of Huckleberry Finn); he was Colonel Sellers, he was the Connecticut Yankee; he was Joan of Arc" (Cavalcade 109). To put it briefly, one who goes through the works of
Twain is capable of knowing not only the author, but also the representatives from various classes of society. Like Walt Whitman, Twain celebrated America and the Americans, but it was with a deliberate difference. As a result, his fictional works and his heroes look entirely authentic and, at the same time, fresh and vital. He was able to identify himself with the common man, and made it a point to write for him.

Perhaps, this is why he never wanted his heroes to be persons endowed with superhuman qualities. The heroism he advocated was the heroism of the common man without much valour, but who is driven to undertake acts of courage. His unceasing attraction to the myths of America and the unpromising hero motif in many of them, paved the way for the introduction of humane and simple characters like Huck in *Huckleberry Finn*, Wilson in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Tom in *Tom Sawyer* and Hendon in *The Prince and the Pauper*.

Fiction, in his hands, was a powerful weapon for social criticism. We find scathing attacks on the frivolous and the selfish nature of the American society in his novel, *The Gilded Age*, which was written in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner. Colonel Sellers, like Twain, remains a dreamer with a great faith in his novel ideas which were supposed to make him a fortune.
Philip Sterling alone is allowed to be prosperous at the end. It is as if he was pronouncing the fact that success is not very easy, and it is not enjoyed by many, though they can still dream of it.

Twain's use of the word "hero" itself shows an equally radical departure from the ordinary. For him, the hero is apparently a man, limited in his social and humanitarian usefulness by "consideration of self" and "narrow feelings" (Unpromising Heroes 87). This does not, in any way, mean that Twain despised heroes. On the contrary, he worshipped General Ulysses S. Grant as a great hero. But while analysing his literary contributions, we come to realise that he was against the idea of traditional heroism, which dragged the heroes away from the common man, putting him on a high pedestal. All his protagonists -- Huck in Huckleberry Finn, Tom in Tom Sawyer, Prince Edward and Tom Canty in The Prince and the Pauper, Wilson in the Pudd'n head Wilson, Hank Morgan in A Connecticut Yankee and Joan in Joan of Arc -- all offer a firm foundation for a study on Twainian heroism.

Partaking in the American dream, Twain allows many of his heroes to be successful at the end. The idea of gaining popular respect without sacrificing self-respect happened to be the enigmatic question of the American hero. This
kind of winning popular respect is one of the themes of **Tom Sawyer** and **Huckleberry Finn**. Tom is interested in maintaining the social status, whereas, Huck is not. Tom secures the community's approval on his own terms. When Tom gets the hidden treasure, it's value for Tom is not as wealth for its own sake, but for the occasion it affords for the big scene, the heroic gesture, the dramatic revelation before the assembled townsfolk. This is Twain speaking directly to the readers on his concept of heroism, in a wider sense.

Heroism for Twain does not mean a deliberate physical action, it is rather an intuitive and unconscious one. The reward expected by the heroes has nothing to do with the material gains. For Tom, his reward is glory, whereas for Huck it is happiness through freedom: for Wilson it is recognition of his potential, and for Joan it is the liberation of France.

There is a basic difference between Tom's heroism and the heroism of Huck. If Tom's actions are motivated by glory, Huck demonstrates that heroism is possible without the antics of heroism. Hank Morgan's heroism is of the former kind whereas Wilson's and Joan's belong to the latter. Little Satan's heroism stands apart. He is more interested in revealing the truth behind the darker issues of life. Twain presents a sardonic commentary on human society
in general, wherein one does not have much scope for true heroism. However, one does not have to try hard to perceive the complete negation of the traditional concept of heroism in his works.

In Narayan, we can see an equal disinterestedness in depicting his protagonists as real heroes. All of them are essentially average and inconsequential. The ancient classical categorization found in Dasarupa, a treatise on dramaturgy, can well be taken as a guideline for arriving at a concrete idea regarding their heroism. The term dhira is common to all the four sects — dhirodatta, dhiroddata, dhiralalitha and dhirasanta — though the individual characteristics may differ. But on a close analysis one is tempted to trace the influence of the dhirasanta nature of the heroes in his delineation, though the identification stands incomplete.

Whatever might be said of the basic nature of these protagonists of Malgudi, they are never highly ambitious. According to Hariprasanna, Narayan's vision is characterized by a unique Indian sensibility. And his adherence to the ancient Indian tradition — as reflected in his fictional world — a tradition which is deeply rooted in the beliefs of the transmigration of the soul, karma, reincarnation and renunciation, becomes clear through a perceptive study of
his fiction (The World of Malgudi 15).

This observation is quite relevant, considering Narayan's ability to bring in various myths and legends drawn from The Mahābhārata, The Bhagavada, the Panchathanthra and Jataka Tales into his novels. There is, definitely, an improvisation of the legends in his works. One does not fail to notice the author's deep knowledge in classical Sanskrit Literature too, which again points to his preference for dhiraśanta svabhava of his heroes, which is a unique feature of Narayan as a novelist.

Taking all these points into consideration, it is only natural for a writer like Narayan to have been influenced by the ancient literary dogmas that classify the heroes and heroines of literary works under the four classes, based on their individual nature or svabhava. As we all know, Narayan's protagonists are famous for their moderation in action. Swami and Friends, like The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, is a remarkable novel written from the child's point of view. Though a world of amusement and joy, the children have their own troubles and tribulations. There are parallel themes of loneliness, protest against authority, the desire for glory and the aversion to politics, which are deftly handled by the authors

Comedy is a forte shared by both the authors. While Narayan shows amused tolerance towards society's members, Twain is ruthless in his attacks. However, this comic element in the novels acts as a decisive factor in moulding the character of the protagonists. The life depicted in the novels of Twain is a bleaker one compared to the novels of Narayan. Jayanth K. Biswal points out that Narayan's characters, like "caravans journeying along life's varied experiences complete their journey of life from innocence to experience and then to wisdom." *(A Critical Study of R.K. Narayan 26)*

Twain's *Joan of Arc* and Narayan's *The English Teacher* do not come directly under the comic vision of these writers. The atmosphere, to a large extent, is charged with intense emotions and the Maid of Orleans and the English teacher wait for their final call from God. But the fact that these two novels show a considerable similarity, cannot be denied.
Far from having thwarted Twain's natural genius, Industrial Capitalism seems to have stimulated him both to criticism and satire, on the one hand, and to the proclamations of the humane, democratic values, on the other. Maybe, that is why *A Connecticut Yankee* remains a defence of industry and machine and a satire on romantic feudalism, which reveals the withering blight that an exaggerated property consciousness casts over civilisation. Moreover, it flays the concept of divine right of Kings who enslave the common people and withhold from them the technological advances by which their lot might be improved.

Twain's novels reflect his views of man as an almost helpless, and therefore, comic free agent in a still incompletely formed society uncertain of its direction. Civilisation seems to be a vulgar parade of hypocrisy and scheming pretence and his novels mirror these aspects truthfully. Naturally, this does not give much room for the portrayal of heroism in its conventional and traditional form. All that he could do was to approach even that with a comic attitude, giving birth to books that treat gloomier aspects of life in a deceptively lighter fashion. Mark Twain, like Philip Traum in *The Mysterious Stranger*, is found to ridicule "the pride of man in their warlike deeds, their heroes, their
kings, aristocrats and history" and asserts, "In self-deception, man thinks that
he is gold, but actually, he is brass" (The Mysterious Stranger 247).

The Indian counterpart likes to view the sardonic aspects of life in a
milder manner. He is quite conscious of the pride and greed of men. But the
people of Malgudi have an unwritten code of conduct to be followed. Those
who try to go against it are harshly punished by nature. Raju and Rosie in The
Guide try to do it; so are Ramani in The Dark Room, Vasu in The Man-
Eater of Malgudi, Balu in The Financial Expert, Mali in The Vendor of
Sweets and Tim in The World of Nagaraj.

The protagonists of Narayan are engaged in diverse professional pursuits
like printing, teaching, film making, banking, politics, performing arts, and
journalism. They at time have to act as confidants, tricksters and fixers of all
kinds. But each individual consciously or unconsciously is guided by the
invisible concept of "purushartha" (the objectives of life) and, hence, they
have to act out different roles, ranging from dharma to moksha. The Hindu
traditional concept of the four arthas or purusharthas, dharma, artha, kama,
and moksha -- are found to be followed by the protagonists of Narayan.

Dharma refers to the duty of any individual in life ranging from filial duty to
professional duty. **Artha** manifests itself in the individual's desire to make money, and Kama exhibits interests of man starting from romantic involvement to repulsive lust. **Moksha** is the last stage for which every Hindu is to aspire, to get salvation, so that the **jeevatma** (individual soul) could be united with the **paramathma** (the supreme soul). In Narayan's novels, **dharma** is found to be followed by all the characters at some time or the other, whereas, **kama** predominates in **Mr. Sampath** and in a considerable parts of **The Guide** and of **The Painter of Signs**. **Artha** is the governing motive in **The Financial Expert**. Towards the end of **The Guide**, Raju is waiting for Moksha which again is the ultimate aim of Jagan in **The Vendor of Sweets**.

In a country where such moral and ethical codes of law are irrevocable, it is difficult for the individual to go astray. Narayan, who had a deep and unfailing faith in the basic goodness of man, was always careful to bring the wayward souls back to the warmth and security of puranic thought. He, then, makes many of his protagonists follow the principle of **nishkama karma** (action unconcerned of results) by the end of the story. We have the examples of Jagan in **The Vendor of Sweets**, Margayya in **The Financial Expert** and Nagaraj in **The World of Nagaraj**. Even Raju, the likeable rascal, in the course of his enforced fast, decides to follow this path.
Turning to the American author, we can see him also highlighting some of the moral lapses of man, prominent among them, being his greed. He presents some of his characters as mean and unscrupulous in money transactions. Although he has faith in the prosperity and happiness of man, Twain does not compromise on morals. He rejects easy money, like Huck. The Gilded Age exposes man's greed and dishonesty. Along with speculation, it shows how greed for money turns man into a swindler, and how he tries to enslave his fellow human beings on the flimsiest grounds of colour, race, and rank. In Huckleberry Finn, A Connecticut Yankee, and Pudd'n Head Wilson, we have ample instances for this.

The American hero can make money and enjoy his life, but it should not be through fraudulence. He is an advocate of honesty and truthfulness and hence exposes fraudulence relentlessly. Such honest and truthful individuals who people St. Petersburg and Dawson's Landing refuse to be "heroic" as there is no meaning in heroism devoid of truthfulness. To Twain's characters, being truthful, at least to one's own self, is the highest point of heroism. They can be heroic enough to accept their frailties and follies and can refine themselves to be better citizens of a great nation that requires true, and patriotic men. An
analysis of Twain's novels gives us a profile of his "ideal hero": his beginning will be modest; he will suffer scorn and derision, with some degree of patience; he will rise high not by seeking applause or position but merely by working with noble kindness to advance the interests of his fellow men.

Coming to The Prince and the Pauper, we can see Twain creating three heroes: Prince Edward, the pauper Tom Canty, and the Prince's protector Miles Hendon. One cannot fail to observe that boy-heroes of the novel combine attributes of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, and that they both, progress from a vision of life typical of Huck. Prince Edward is forced to see the life of Offal Court, which eventually will help him to become a better ruler. Tom Canty is made to see that his royal state, in actuality, is a kind of slavery and there are moments when he dreams of being back in Offal Court. Miles Hendon is made to help the real Prince Edward, not out of any desire for glory at a later period, but out of sheer sympathy towards the Prince in rags. All the three become successful at the end, though without much effort. Twain had only contempt for the opportunists and the utilitarians and, hence, he cannot let his heroes be like that.
Another important factor about the worlds of Narayan and Twain is the depiction of evil in them. The boy's world in *Swami and Friends* is devoid of evil, but in Twain, in the course of Tom's adventures, we are shocked to see the dark side of society represented by Injun Joe and the murder of Dr. Robinson. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the frightening presence of Pap and the fraudulent Duke, and the Grangerford feuds remind the reader of the hidden darkness behind the apparent joviality in the world of the children.

Narayan's child characters are kept off from serious and philosophical musings. If at all there is some kind of a serious thought on the part of child characters, it goes well with their nature as Narayan puts himself into their personalities and understands them fully. We can see Swami pondering over the position of Europe in the world atlas thus:

> It puzzled him how people managed to live in such a crooked country as Europe. He wondered what the shape of people might be, who lived in places where the outline narrowed as in a cape, and how they managed to escape being strangled by the contour of their land. And then a favourite problem began.
to tease him: how did those map makers find out what the
shape of a country was? How did they find out that Europe
was like a camel's head? Probably they stood on high towers
and copied what they saw below. He wondered if he would be
able to see India as it looked in the map if he stood on the top
of the town hall? (60)

Such characters with this kind of naiveté and simplicity can never be
expected to perform real deeds of heroism. All that we could expect of them is
mock-heroic acts, for which we have ample evidences in the works of Narayan.
To consider the case of the grown-up heroes of Narayan, as mentioned earlier,
they are essentially average, but positive and their sphere of action is not one
in which deeds of heroism are called for. They are heroes with dhirasanta or
dhiralalita svabhāva, and as Gunachandra explains, they are all "easy-going
and straightforward, endowed with gentlemanly qualities. He is modest, yet a
diplomat, he is kind and gentle" (qtd. in The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit
Drama 206). If we extend the classification further, we can see that the
taxidermist Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, can be categorised under the
term uddhata as his character is dominated by self-conceit. He is presumptive,
treacherous, vehement, and deceitful. It is not to say that Narayan consciously adhered to the dictum in *Dasarupa* or any of the other ancient aesthetic texts. Such dictums, of course, were formulated for the purposes of dramatic performances, since novel as genre is of later origin. The same theory could be extended without marring the clarity and integrity of the work. Regarding his affinity to classical literature, Narayan himself writes:

For an Indian classical training begins early in life. Epics, mythology and Vedic poetry (of Sanskrit origin and of tremendous antiquity) are narrated to everyone in childhood by the mother or the grandmother in a cosy corner of the house when the day's tasks are done and the lamps are lit. Later, one reads them all through one's life with a fresh understanding at each stage. Our minds are trained to accept without surprise characters of godly or demoniac proportions with actions and reactions set in limitless worlds and progressing through an incalculable time-scale. (*The Writerly Life* 466)

Twain liked the unpromising hero motif: he liked success also. But the problem with Twain was to strike a balance, to achieve a synthesis of these
two apparently contradictory ideas. This again is a recurrent theme in American Literature. That is why, we are able to find through the innocent eyes of Huck Finn, a glimpse into the soul of Tom Sawyer and see an appalling relationship between Tom and Colonel Sellers. American Literature has the parallel stories of George Babbit and Willy Loman who, actually, have their origins, as Tom has, in the American myth of success. Huck, through his story demonstrates that heroism is possible without heroics. He also shows that it is not cheap; that it is not easy too. Huck's heroism lies in his uneasy and courageous struggle with the values of St. Petersburg.

If this is the case with the heroes of the American author, his heroines are definitely different from the male characters with regard to their mental make-up. Compared to his male characters, the female characters are very few and, to many critics, less convincing. But a close analysis of a novel like the Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc will reveal the unpromising hero motif accepted by Twain in the delineation of his protagonists. Joan of Arc is represented as a lonely child with a rare capability for intuition. But Roxana of Pudd'n head Wilson is a very strong character, who remains a pathetic woman whose sacrifices for the welfare of her only son are proved worthless. Ruth,
Alice and Laura in *The Gilded Age* are depicted as women who try to escape from the restraints of the American society of the nineteenth century.

Narayan's women characters offer wide variety. Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma* is the idealist and Rosie in *The Guide* is the romantic and Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* is the libertarian. Characters like Savitri in *The Dark Room*, Susheela in *The English Teacher*, Malathi in *The Bachelor of Arts*, and many others too are etched neatly and convincingly. The only difficult thing is that they do not have to do much. Narayan is more at home with the portrayal of men than women. But all of them are bold characters who function with a greater conviction than many of his male protagonists. Perhaps Savitri is an exception to this. In spite of Twain's ardent admiration for women and their capacities, he was not much inclined to depict the psychological or social problems confronted by women. But all those he has drawn in his fictional world are lifelike. Twain's own words give us a clear notion regarding the relevance of heroes in one's practical life, which in turn is reflected in his literary output. Mark Twain himself admits his own fascination for heroes thus:

Our heroes are the men who do things which we recognize,
with regret, and sometimes with a secret shame, that we cannot do. We find not much in ourselves to admire, we are always privately wanting to be like somebody else. If everybody were satisfied with himself, there would be no heroes. (qtd. in Regan 66)

Any work of Literature, however, embodies the wish fulfillment of the author. Twain, who was an earnest hero-worshipper tried his best to draw characters who emblematically embody the concept of a hero and heroism without the so called "heroics." Narayan has had nothing to complain of. In fact, he is quite satisfied with the kind of literary works he has contributed to Indian English Literature and to World Literature at large:

All that I am able to confirm, after nearly thirty years of writings is that it has served my purpose admirably, of conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourish in a small town named Malgudi supposed to be located in a corner of South India. (The Writerly Life 468)