Preface

Mark Twain and R.K. Narayan have become an integral part of their respective literatures, the study of which is impossible without referring to these two literary luminaries. There is a large body of criticism available on Twain and Narayan, as both writers have been very popular subjects of study and research. The present study is an attempt to analyse the concept of heroism as reflected in their novels, an area where much research has not been carried out so far.

The prevalence of a heroic ideal in literature is not a novel idea. Attempts have been made to examine the possibilities of the Emersonian Hero, The Code Hero of Hemmingway, the Black Hero, the Southern Hero and the Quixotic Hero in literature. In spite of the geographical and cultural differences, the authors under reference exhibit an intellectual kinship, which is worthy of study. Narayan’s Swami and Twain’s Huck have been favourite boy heroes all over the world. When Narayan’s Swami and Friends was published, it was hailed by the influential Saturday Review of Literature as a book comparable to Twain’s masterpiece, since Narayan’s adolescent hero is a “Hindu Huckleberry”
Twain's novels show his great fascination for "the unpromising hero" motif usually found in the legends and mythologies of any literature. The story of an unassuming boy or girl, despite all misfortunes in their life, achieving unimaginable victory at the end, is of universal interest. Twain being a dreamer of success employed this motif in his novels.

R.K. Narayan is a worthy counterpart who is famous for his realism and humour. Heroism, among the Malgudians is not a demonstration of physical valour, as they are all the members of the South Indian middle class. The characters of both these authors show an exceptional mental courage, which accounts for their heroism, which again offers scope for a study in comparison and contrast. The method followed is mainly analytical.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that examines different aspects on which a comparison of the heroism in the works of Twain and Narayan can be made. The American dream of success as one of the formative factors is established in this chapter. The influence of traditional Indian Literature on Narayan, and the impact of the existing heroic ideal prevalent in America on Twain, have been examined in detail. The concept of Indian hero found in Dhananjaya's Dasarupa has been given special mention as a stepping-stone to
the better understanding of Narayan. Dhanañjaya defines four groups of heroes, dhirodatta, dhiroddhata, dhiralalita, and dhirasanta. Narayan’s heroes show more affinity to the last group. The protagonists of Twain and Narayan are not depicted as individuals with superhuman powers. Twain’s evident admiration for the unpromising hero fable has been brought to light in this chapter. All his heroes are unpromising at the beginning though many of them achieve success at the end. Robert Regan’s work Unpromising Heroes: Mark Twain and His Characters and Rajiv Taranath’s essay Average As The Positive offer a firm ground for study.

Chapter 2 deals with the world of children where the earliest sparks of heroism can be detected. Since childhood is the first phase of a man’s life, the treatment of juvenile heroes reflects the attitudes of both the authors. Huck, Tom, and Joe Harper in Huckleberry Finn; Swami, Rajam, and Mani in Swami and Friends are taken as children who represent the ideals of the nation itself. Huck’s idea of heroism and glory is different from Tom’s. The heroism of Swami, Mani, and Chandran has been analysed in order to arrive at Narayan’s attitude towards the concept. Swami is meek and unassuming. Rajam’s character reminds one of Tom, the bookish one, whereas
Swami, like Huck, is a natural child.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the view of the adults towards heroism. Wilson in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Colonel Sellers in *The Gilded Age*, Miles Hendon in *The Prince and the Pauper*, Raju in *The Guide*, Margayya in *The Financial Expert*, Nagaraj in *The World of Nagaraj*, and Krishna in *The English Teacher*, are taken as representative characters in this study. The chapter attempts to analyse them as being essentially unpromising, and who are driven to acts of heroism owing to the force of circumstances. It surveys how these characters represent the attitudes of the respective writers.

Chapter 4, entitled "Ordeals of the Female Gender," scans women characters in Twain and Narayan. It is curious to note that the women characters of Twain and Narayan could be classified under two heads — the young, spirited women of the world and the mature, elderly women who act as preservers and protectors of the young. Dhananjaya in *Daśarūpa* offers a classification of the heroines on the basis of their relationship to the heroes as *sviṣya nari* (or *Atmiya- nari*), *parakiya nari*, and *sadharāṇi nari*. Twain’s Joan of Arc, the mulatto slave Roxana in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Laura, Ruth, and Alice in *The Gilded Age* are well defined women characters. The depiction
of Narayan’s women protagonists like Savitri in The Dark Room, Rosie in The Guide, Daisy in The Painter of Signs, and Bharati in Waiting for the Mahatma provides a very effective study in comparison with the spirited women of Twain’s world.

Chapter 5 records various other aspects that contribute to the formulation of the concept of heroism in Twain and Narayan. The comic mode of treatment, the existential problems, the dream of escape, and the aversion to politics, are surveyed with the purpose of a better understanding of these two social critics.

Chapter 6 brings together the concluding arguments, evolved from the analysis of the first five chapters. Heroism is a necessary evil in society, as the latter cannot exist without the former. But the characters who take part in the human drama created by these two writers happen to be just ordinary. Even the so-called aristocratic protagonists are made to lead mundane lives due to certain circumstances, which teach them everlasting lessons in humility and compassion. In a world of deceit and treachery, it is better to be born as an average man. In fact, the two authors are not against the concept of heroism or hero. They are actually against the showmanship since what the world needs is “heroism without heroics.”