CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
The previous chapters stressed the role of Mark Twain as a thinker and reformer on a number of issues: religion, philosophy, science and politics. His views on these subjects changed gradually and there is a definite watering-down of his early convictions in his later work. Many factors account for these changes. Towards the end of his literary career, he faced many personal tragedies: business failure and the death of his daughter. Moreover, the time also changed for him with many developments taking place in the world: the growth of scientific thought, menacingly growing materialism and the imperialist lust for colonies. The most important factor, however, was the intellectual maturity of Mark Twain which made him see things in a new perspective. It is for these reasons that the mood, tone and the perspective of *The Mysterious Stranger* is totally different from *The Innocents Abroad's*.

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain's first literary work, the reader meets a mild but serious critic of religion. The narrator of this book is critical of the organized Church and the unchristian behaviour of Christians who follow the letter of religion rather than its spirit. In *A Connecticut Yankee* and *Joan of Arc* also he takes to task the false
Christianity and exposes the evils of the Organized Church. He shows how the Organized Church reduced common people to a life of misery and victimized even a perfect individual like Joan of Arc. Highly critical though Twain is in these works, his censure is mingled with his praise of the Bible and Christ. He praised the Bible eloquently in *The Innocents Abroad* and showered encomiums on Christ calling him the 'prince of peace' and the 'saviour of all people.' In fact he sketched the character of Joan of Arc in the mould of Christ.

Significantly this element of praise is missing in his works written just before his death. "Reflections" and *Letters from the Earth* which were published after his death, make this point very clear. In these works Twain very bitterly pounces at all things religious. He denies the divinity of Christ, charges Bible of obscenity and a lack of originality, challenges the moral foundations of the Christianity and calls the real God unjust, unmerciful, vindictive and above all one who derives sadistic pleasure by inflicting torture on the innocent and helpless human beings. In a way the genial critic of *The Innocents Abroad* was lost somewhere in the vitriolic diatribes of the embittered atheist and nihilist in these works.
Twain's writings are characterized by his ambivalent attitude towards all things in life. This ambivalence manifests itself in his treatment of the myth of progress and the theme of primitivism. Works like *The Innocents Abroad*, second part of *Life on the Mississippi* and *A Connecticut Yankee* suggest that he embraced the doctrine of material progress. The narrator of *The Innocents Abroad* who undertakes a trip to Europe and the Holy Land views everything with his materialistic yardstick and is disgusted to see dirt, decay and degradation in the Holy Land. In *Life on the Mississippi* Twain is all praise for the new burgeoning civilization of America. The new face of America with its remarkable industrial progress wins him more than the worn-out institutions of the South. More than these, *A Connecticut Yankee* clearly shows that the nineteenth century America devoted to science and technology is better than the sometimes glorified Middle Ages. Hank Morgan, the protagonist of this novel, epitomizes the spirit of the nineteenth century America.

However, in his later fiction Twain came to have doubts about this whole business of progress. *Following the Equator* does not present a very rosy picture of history. *Joan of Arc* suggests that Twain lost belief in the redemptive
value of history. As if it was not enough, *The Mysterious Stranger* exhibits a very ghastly and heart-rending view of history. There has not been any progress but simply, wars, wars and wars.

Even when he fully believed in the myth of progress, a streak of primitivism cried out within him for expression and hence his special liking for the essentially good human beings endowed with the folk wisdom of a *Huckleberry Finn* and free from the cant and hypocrisy of the 'sivilized' Aunt Pollys and Miss Watsons. He sketched a number of memorable characters who are innately good and virtuous but are faced with a hostile environment. Tom, Laura before her seduction, Huck, King Edward and Joan are some of these characters who are pitted against a hostile society. They try to confront the world with their goodness but most of the time their goodness does not prove equal to the dominant values of society. By the time of writing his last important fictional work, *The Mysterious Stranger*, Twain lost belief even in the innate goodness of man. The most important reason why mankind is always shedding blood is the innate depravity of man.

This ambivalence leads to much complexity of meaning in some single works of Mark Twain. The criticism of the
old Masters and the praise of renaissance artists in *The Innocents Abroad* makes it difficult for the reader to form judgement about his appreciation of art. His other important work, *Life on the Mississippi* is a blend of contraries. The idealization of the village society of his youth in the first section of the novel is immediately followed by his strong-worded approval of the new industrial culture of the United States.

This new industrial culture of the United States is identified with Hank Morgan the protagonist of *A Connecticut Yankee*. This book presents the best example of Twain's ambivalent attitude towards man's potential and capacity in general and the nineteenth century civilization of the United States in particular. Though Twain establishes the superiority of the nineteenth century civilization over the sixth century civilization, he was also aware of the destruction that was latent in the civilization of his time. Moreover, Hank Morgan was but a man, cursed with an imperious desire for power. The awareness of Twain of the basic weaknesses of human nature coupled with his scepticism about the worth of the new culture of the nineteenth century bring about the fall of his promethean hero and thereby of the civilization he personified.
Some of his other works are also characterized by his ambivalent attitude. *Joan of Arc* is noted for Twain's sentimental love for Joan. Yet in the same book the narrator's scepticism about Joan's voices and the reasons for her death render the meaning of the novel very complex. One is not quite sure whether *Joan of Arc* is a pessimistic novel or there is an optimistic note in it. In *The Mysterious Stranger*, on the other hand, he presents two world-views contrary to each other: Christian and Scientific. Although both these world-views are consistent in themselves, Twain judges Christianity with scientific viewpoint and the scientific world view from Christian angle.

Not confined to his fictional works, this ambivalence also marks his analysis of imperialism in *Following the Equator* and some of his essays. Thus he very bitterly criticized the British imperialists in Australia and South Africa. In fact he launched a very bitter attack against Cecil Rodes, the leader of the imperialists in South Africa. But strangely Twain approved of the British rule in India and very glowingly praised the military might of the British and their qualities of mind in suppressing the Indian Mutiny successfully.
The anti-imperialistic writings produced in the last phase of his career highlight his role as a political thinker and more importantly that of a reformer. In various pamphlets like *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, *Czar's Soliloquy* and essays like, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" Twain lambasted the imperialist powers: Germany, Russia, England, France and Spain. He also took to task his own country the United States for its role in Philippines. In his analysis of imperialism he sometimes clearly points out while at others implies all modern theories about imperialism: imperialism as an extension of capitalism, imperialism for selling civilization to the savages of the 'white man's burden' concept and finally imperialism explained in Darwinian terms. These anti-imperialistic writings greatly shaped the public opinion and also the foreign policy of his country.

However, a thinker and a reformer that he was, he was not a thinker and reformer in the ordinary sense of the words. He thought but did so in literary terms—in terms of metaphor, symbol, imagery and setting. He tried to reform, but not like other reformers whose ideas lose their relevance with the passage of time. As an artist he could not have expressed himself directly. He adopted many masks
and experimented with various points of view to clothe the
destruction of his targets. Mention may be made of at least	hree recurrent masks through which Twain the social critic
judged various things. In his early writings he adopts
the persona of a fool who is ignorant of everything going
around him but comes up with very valid observation. In
some of his later works — *A Tramp Abroad* and the anti­
imperialistic writings — Twain plays a grumbler who is out
to criticize anything very savagely. The third important
mask that Twain adopted was that of an empowered persona­
lity, a kind of transcendent figure who rises above the
action and has a very privileged existence. Hank Morgan,
Colonel Sherburn and Satan fit this category. Through this
mask is expressed Twain's cynicism and despair of humanity.

Twain's humour, generally considered to be the
single most important characteristic of his work, further
enhances the appeal of his work. In his case humour and
social criticism are fully identified. His humour also
assumes different forms in different works reflecting his
changing vision of life. In his earlier writings he relies
on burlesque, exaggeration and his famous deadpan expres­
sion. His later writings are, on the other hand, marked
by the bleak and cynical humour which was in keeping with his
personal despair and cynicism. The maxims of Pudd'nhead Wilson or the utterances of Satan in The Mysterious Stranger, intended to be humorous, present a very bitter and insane brand of humour.

However, Twain's concern with art — in the field of point of view, persona or humour, — helped him in transmuting his ideas into art forms. It is for this reason that the reform motive that informs his writings appeals not to discursive reason but to the imagination of the reader. All great literature is propagandist and reformist in the sense that it unmistakably appeals to the imagination of the reader by distributing and then realigning sympathies in art forms. Twain's work is no exception. He talked about the life of his time but in artistic terms. He touched some universal human problems but through his varied persona. In this sense he was an artist and thinker and reformer as a result.