ABSTRACT
It is an established fact that the religious, political and intellectual ideas of an age leave their mark on the literature produced in that age. In this case the influence exerted by the ideas and issues current in the nineteenth century America on the literature of that period is of special note. Some of the important ideas and issues that the nineteenth century American writers could not ignore, include: the rising industrial capitalism, various opposing currents in religion, the almost official belief in the idea of progress and American's drift towards imperialism.

The political and economic thinkers of the time favoured equalitarian thought and stressed free franchise and an identification of democracy with economic individualism. They held that the concept of laisses faire did not run counter to the ideas of liberty and equality long propogated by Americans. Moreover, the tradition of moral philosophy preached by Stanhope Smith and Francis Wayland in this period, also did not see anything objectionable in the idea of
economic individualism.

With these ideas providing a sort of stimulus, the United States of the nineteenth century witnessed unprecedented industrial development. The industries of railroad, meatpacking and oil had a mind-boggling rise and the country went through a rapid process of urbanization. However, the industrialization also had its attendant dangers as it gave rise to plutocracy and a rich-poor divide. The most tragic change that took place was in the scale of values where a person's worth was evaluated only in material terms. These values were further implanted into the minds of the people by the stories of Horatio Alger. The business tycoons of the time became the revered figures and the 'rags to riches' myth gained wide currency.

Though many economic and political thinkers of the time — James Russel Lowell, George William Curtis and Edwin Lawrence Godkin among others — warned that the new industrial civilization of the United States, it ran counter to the concept of democracy and true individualism, it was left to the writers to explore
various moral and spiritual consequences of the questions posed by the rise of industrialism. Walt Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau and Elder Henry James regarded the 'national love of trade' the main reason behind America's ills. The theme of a number of American novelists, like Hawthorne, Henry James, Melville, Howells and Mark Twain was the moral alienation of the individual because of the false functioning of democracy. They rejected the false values of the age. If Howells, Twain and Hamlin Garland expressed their rejection of these values in the form of scathing criticism of the 'gilded age', Henry James and Henry Adams showed their disapproval by finding an escape in a world and setting of their own choice.

The influence of religion on the writers of the nineteenth century was equally great. The reception given to many books in the later half of the nineteenth century propounding Calvinistic theology, notwithstanding, there was a definite delimitation of religious ideas. The rise of industry, the march of science particularly the popularity of the evolutionary theory and the higher criticism of the Bible by some scholars
using anthropological tools weakened the force of traditional Christianity. The liberal ideas triggered off by the enlightenment still held appeal for the thinking people. There was a sudden growth of some new religious movements which beside having a touch of novelty answered the emotional needs of a large number of Americans.

The intellectual temper of the nineteenth century America barring its last decade was optimistic to a great extent. It believed in the myth of progress, the belief that men and his world have improved over the ages. The idea of progress characterised the writings of political scientists, sociologist, Biologists and literary artists. However, the optimism of the evolutionary theory was greatly undermined by the findings of physics which unfolded a world that did not have order, harmony or growth but only flux and chance.

The last decade of the nineteenth century also witnessed the American excursion into imperialism. The popular arguments in favour of imperialism took various forms. Some imperialists viewed the political situation in Darwinian terms and that the subjugation of
the weak nations by the stronger ones is inevitable. Others pointed out that as a result of political unity at home, America needed new markets across its border. While still others, guided by a false missionary zeal as they were, considered it America's goal to bring civilization to the people sitting in darkness. The world picture also favoured imperialism. China, South Africa and Philippenes were the hunting ground of the imperialist powers. Though they received some opposition in the form of anti-imperialist protests, they were largely successful in involving the United States in the imperialist game.

II

It is true that Mark Twain was a thinker but he was not a thinker in the ordinary sense of the word. He was a presentational thinker and as such devised many literary techniques to transmute his ideas in art forms. His reliance on realism as his literary credo, his use of various masks to cover his personality, his experiments in the field of point of view and his employment of various techniques to evoke laughter are some of the
characteristics of Twain's art.

Twain believed that a writer's experience should provide him literary material. He can give this experience not only by a conscious observation of reality but also by an unconscious absorption of the facts of life. But Twain does not argue for a photographic realism; his stress is on the sense of facts, a seeming of reality. His own experience with the primitive and folk mind provided him some memorable characters and some patterns of story. However, from *A Connecticut Yankee* onwards he could not rely on realism as a literary technique because of its unsuitability to the dark themes that he took up in his later fiction. His later works show his drift into the realm of fantastic and the Absurd. These works are, peopled by rogues, anti-heroes, and the figure of a stranger who like the hero of an absurd play is alienated from his environment.

Mark Twain spoke through many masks in his long literary career. The mask of "Mark Twain" remained with him throughout his life without concealing the identity of Samuel Clemens. Within this mask he adopted three poses in his different writings for writing
serious social criticism: pose of a fool, of a growler, and of a transcendent figure. The fool is a naive figure who comments on everything going around him, although no one expects him to make such comments. He appears in Twain's early fiction and is very clearly noticeable in *The Innocents Abroad*. The growler talks in a more serious and sincere manner and can be seen in *A Tramp Abroad* and Twain's anti-imperialistic writings. The third pose was that of an overpowering personality, what has been called a transcendent figure, who rises above the action and is clearly marked from others in the story because of his superior intellectual endowments. The creation of this character was an attempt by Twain to solve some of his own intellectual and emotional crises. Hank Morgan, Colonel Sherburn, Dave Wilson, and Satan are some of Twain's transcendent figures. The last of the list is omnimiscient and omnipotent.

Twain's experiments in the field of point of view have been his distinct contribution to literature. In his finest travelogue *The Innocents Abroad*, he adopts the point of view of a letter writer who intimately knows his subject. As a letter writer he acts both as a supplier...
of useful information and a humorous story teller. The Gilded Age has been narrated from the omnimiscient point of view but again the narrator gains the intimacy of the reader by various devices: use of italics, exclamations and footnotes. In his next series of works, "Old Times on the Mississippi", Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, he attempts to capture a detached and limited point of view of a boy. The telling of the story from Huck's point of view in Huckleberry Finn makes this story a devastating satire because Huck's is the folk mind and he analyses the mores and values of his decadent society from which he is seeking a refuge. A number of Twain's works, A Connecticut Yankee, Joan of Arc, and The Mysterious Stranger have been narrated in the first person. These works are marked by Twain's pessimism and the narrator in these works maintains the perspective of a historian. In fact in his later works Twain is more concerned with ideology than with art.

Humour is the most pervasive element in Twain's work. A study of Twain's treatment of humour in his different books written at different stages of his life provides an interesting commentary on the gradually
changing vision of the writer. Thus in *The Innocents Abroad* his first book, he relies on the techniques of burlesque, exaggeration and his famous deadpan expression. *The Gilded Age* is characterized by Dickensian humour with its fine mixture with pathos especially in the figure of Colonel Sellers. In *Tom Sawyer* he uses the devices of parody and burlesque and satire is fully identified with pleasure principle. The plot of *A Connecticut Yankee* is full of comic possibilities because of Hank Morgan's incongruous presence in the sixth century. However, the novel turns out to be a scathing satire because of Twain's propagandist intentions. The works produced after *A Connecticut Yankee* are marked by bleak, dark and dismal humour which was in keeping with Twain's personal despair and determinism. The maxims included in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and pessimistic ideas developed in *The Mysterious Stranger* are very bitter in tone, a far cry from the genial humour of *The Innocents Abroad*.

III

Throughout his life Mark Twain's mind was preoccupied with
questions of religious and philosophical significance. However, Mark Twain's critics have not given due attention to two important facts about him. First, the publication of "Reflections" and Letters from the Earth in the early sixties changed the largely accepted picture of Mark Twain. Second, Twain's religious writings should not be set apart from his philosophical writings.

Twain's early attitude towards religion was one of scepticism and irreverence. 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 talked about Bible in a very eloquent manner 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.

Despite Twain's love for a Christ-like Joan, the novel reflects the deep spiritual unrest that troubled Twain towards the close of his life. This failure to come to a final solution of life's mysteries also marks "What is Man", which Twain called his gospel. In The Mysterious Stranger also Twain views life from two contradictory angels: Scientific and Christian.

However, in his last two works "Reflections", and Letters from the Earth, he became a confirmed atheist and an embittered nihilist. Both these works show his utter contempt for traditional religion. He denies the divinity of Christ, charges Bible of obscenity and a lack of originality, challenges the moral foundations of 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.
There were many reasons for this gradual corrosion of his religious views. The influence of liberal ideas in the early stage of his life introduced to him through his father and Uncle and a reading of Tom Paine and his exposure to Freemasonry shaped his early attitudes. The scientific thought which proved man's insignificance in a vast universe also affected him. Finally his experiences of the world and his intellectual maturity made him see things in a different light.

IV

Twain's writings are characterized by his ambivalent attitude towards a number of important ideas. This ambivalence manifests itself in his treatment of the myth of progress and the theme of primitivism, the two important ideas which exist side by side in almost all his works. His belief in gradual onward progress of mankind owed to his reading of history and a comprehensive perusal of human conduct at different periods of history. Works like The Innocents Abroad, second section of Life on the Mississippi and A Connecticut Yankee suggest that he embraced the doctrine of material
progress. The image of past is very ugly and unattractive in these works and it has been identified with the wicked institutions of feudalism and catholicism. The narrator of The Innocents Abroad who undertakes a trip to Europe and the Holy Land views everything including the paintings of the Old Masters 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, symbolizing the spirit of the nineteenth century is a Democrat, technologist and a capitalist, all in one.

However, in his later fiction Twain came to have doubts about this whole business of progress. Following the Equator neither presents a very rosy picture of historical past nor that of contemporary world. 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 heartrending view of history and does not see any ray of hope for man even in future. The past saw deadly wars; the future will see even deadlier ones.

However, even when he seems to fully believe in the doctrine of progress, a streak of primitivism cried out from within him for expression. It exists in his writings in two ways: firstly as an attitude — the private metaphorical world of a writer being different from his public world inspired by his society's professed beliefs — and secondly as a form of protest against the phoney civilization of his time. The evils resulting from the new industrial civilization were too apparent not to be felt by Twain. He understood the need of some moral and spiritual values to rejuvenate a decadent civilization. His gaze turned to his childhood which provided him the images of innocence, repose, and contentment. The probe into the pre-civil war society of his youth also provided him an idyllic fictional setting to give these images a literary form.
Thus not satisfied with material progress alone Twain's innermost soul yearned for an instinctive, simple and natural life. He craved for a world without any warped human relationships 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 Polly's and Miss Watsons. He sketched a number of memorable characters who are innately good and virtuous but are faced with a hostile environment. 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 on most of the occasions their goodness does not prove equal to the dominant values of their society. In fact Twain was painfully aware of the vulnerability of the good values of his characters. Only in *The Prince and the Pauper* the values of innocence and purity of heart have power of their own but there they are identified with a benevolent monarchy. In his gradually increasing despair of humanity Twain desperately looked for some figures in history who could sustain his faith in his long-cherished
values. In *Joan of Arc* he tried to establish these values. But Joan also ultimately fails Twain firstly because she is the lone good individual in the midst of a generally depraved humanity and secondly because she herself needs divine help to succeed. In another important work of this period, *Following the Equator*, Twain not only ironically identified the disastrous results of civilization with progress, but was also reluctant to glorify the natives of Australia and Newzealand. Thus the belief in primitivism became hard to sustain. By the time of writing *The Mysterious Stranger*, his last important fictional work, Twain lost belief even in the idea of the innate goodness of man. He came to believe that mankind always sheds blood because of its innate depravity.

V

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 his various pamphlets like *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, *Czar's Soliloquy*, essays like "To the Person Sitting in Darkness"
Following the Equator, Twain sometimes clearly points out while at others implies all modern theories of imperialism: imperialism as an extension of capitalism, imperialism for selling civilization to the savages or the 'White Man's Burden' concept and finally imperialism explained in Darwinian terms. He also analyzed the role of certain forces that precipitate imperialism. Thus a blind sense of patriotism and the vicious role of yellow press were at the base of the American imperialist venture in Philippines.

In all these anti-imperialist writings Twain took to task all imperialist powers such as Germany, Russia, France, Spain, England and the United States. However, his analysis of British and American imperialism is marked by a strange sense of ambivalence. Thus in Following the Equator, he very bitterly criticized the British imperialists in Australia and South Africa. In fact he launched a very vehement attack against Cecil Rodes, the leader of the imperialists in South Africa. However, he 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.