

MARK TWAIN AND THE SETTING OF HIS NOVELS

K. Kanchana Devi

Assistant Professor

Shri Krishnaswamy College for Women

Anna Nagar, Chennai-40

Mark Twain is the most recognizable figure in American world of letters. He is considered as the father of the American literature. Twain, perhaps the most widely known writer, is regarded as a humorist and children's writer. He broke with the genteel traditions of the nineteenth century by endowing his characters and narratives with the natural speech patterns of the common person. Twain wrote under the pseudonym of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He was a novelist, short story writer, journalist, essayist, lecturer, memoirist, autobiographer and dramatist.

Mark Twain was born on the 30th of November 1835, in a remote village of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. When he was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, thirty miles from Florida, seeking for a good fortune. This town was used by Twain as an imaginary in one of his most famous works Tom Sawyer. He wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in 1876 and its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885. Twain grew up in Hannibal, Missouri, which provided the setting for *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. After an apprenticeship with a printer, he worked as a typesetter. He contributed articles to the newspaper of his older brother Orion Clemens. He later became a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River before heading west to join Orion in Nevada. He was posted as a pilot at the river ports of St. Louis and New Orleans from 1857 until 1861. It was here that Clemens glided regularly through the Deep South sugarcane fields of Louisiana and Mississippi. That was why the theme of nature is a prevalent theme in several other novels and stories by Twain.

His life on the river influenced him a great deal. Perhaps most important, the riverboat life provided him with the pen name Mark Twain, derived from the riverboat leadsmen's signal—"By the mark, twain"—that the water was deep enough for safe passage. Life on the river also gave Twain material for several of his books, including the raft scenes of *Huckleberry Finn*, and the material for his autobiographical *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). The majority of the novel 'The adventures of Huckleberry Finn' takes place on the river or the banks of Mississippi. The river represents freedom for both Tom and Huck. On the raft, they are completely independent and determine their own courses of action. Initially, the river is a safe place for them but soon they realize the reality.

The town, the river Mississippi and the people of Hannibal served as models for the settings and characters of many of his novels. The town supplied him many characters. The town had fights and killings on the streets. The town had Injun Joe; a character appeared in *Tom Sawyer*. But he was not as cruel as he was portrayed in the novel. Twain's wanderings, the beautiful landscape of the country, his wonderful friends, adventures and idyllic days with his companions are reflected in his several books. From his very early life, he had a great ambition towards becoming a steam boat pilot. And he also became one as he dreamt in the river. He enjoyed his work till the Civil war closed the river to commercial traffic. Obviously, the river played a major role in Twain's life as well as his works. Its vast variety, the wood and birds, the

villages along the shore, the different kinds of boats that moved up and down the muddy water and the people there, all made him an artist. He observed to people very much around him. With simplicity and naturalness he modified the dialects and comic expressions. The milieu in which he lived and his personal experiences in his place in the Mississippi gave rise to the need for realism in Twain. The character portrayal of Twain is realistic and the characters are mostly taken from the strange and motley world between the Mississippi valley and the Pacific Ocean.

In Tom Sawyer, Hannibal became St. Petersburg, where the novel takes place. The American classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is the most remunerative of all his works. Twain glorifies the life of the Mississippi constructs his boyhood days and also takes us to our childhood. Huck is portrayed as an admirer of nature in *Huck Finn*. He experiences the greater pleasures of admiring the shallow water and the dawn over the river. It not only delights him, but also the readers. The experience he gained in the places made him splendidly a genius in creativity. Indeed, no other writer has ever known American life as intimately as Twain. This is evident in his novels. He brought the life of America before our eyes and for that alone he would be remembered forever in the American Literature.