
Research Papers



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUCK AND JIM IN THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLBERRY FINN

Prof. Vijaya Narendra Joshi

Raver, Dist - Jalgaon.

M.S.

Abstract

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLBERRY FINN is written by Mark Twain in 1883. Huck is a lovable, innocent and neglected 14 years old boy – hero of the novel. His mother is dead and his father is a cruel drunkard

When the novel opens, he is living with the widow Douglas in the small riverside town of St. Petersburg. The Widow adopts Huck and tries to civilize him. The widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson give Huck a home and try to reform this rough, dirty and illiterate boy, who likes to sleep in hogshead. But Huck does not like the rigid discipline of the Widow's house and her 'civilized society'. He feels uncomfortable and finds life very difficult. So he feels happy when Pap-his father takes him to the woods.

Pap is a heavy drunkard who does not know morality, conscience or God. His God is wine for which he does not spare even his son. He keeps Huck underlock for many days. He treats Huck roughly and beats him. Yet Huck bears it to avoid the restrictions of the civilized ladies. But Pap beats him brutally and cruelly. He threatens Huck with a knife. It becomes unbearable to Huck and he runs from there. Pap treats him so violently that Huck stages a mock murder of himself and goes to Jackson's Island where he meets Jim.

Jim is a negro slave of Miss Watson. He overhears that Miss Watson will sell him to New Orleans trader for 800 dollars. So he runs away to the Jackson's Island where he meets his would be liberator. As a slave he enjoys no personal rights. He and his family are the property of their owner. They are thought to be sub-human species. Jim becomes fearful to see Huck to be a ghost. But Huck swears not to give Jim away even though people would despise him for keeping mum.

Thus Huck feels sympathy for Jim who is the victim of society and its rotten rules. As Huck is gifted with heart and insight, he cannot stand cruelty and violence. It involves Huck in a moral dilemma. Huck is caught slowly between his friendship with Jim and the mores of a society ---- which allows human being to 'own' another human being only because he is black.

Jim is the only person for whom Huck is willing to sacrifice something of himself. So the growing friendship of Huck and Jim is an interesting part.

But Huck and Jim, at first, are so apart that any real friendship between them seems impossible. Jim is an older Negro and Huck, a white boy. Jim believes that white men are superior to him. This feeling is deeply rooted in his sub-conscious. Hence, although he has physical powers, he becomes a mouse before a white man. So he feels secure in the company of Huck who is just a boy of fourteen. He runs for freedom but

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carries a slave-mind with him. Yet his flight is not a mean attempt to save his own skin. But he risks his life for the sake of his family. So he plans to work hard and save money to buy his wife and the two children.

Huck and Jim took shelter in a cave from the storm. After the storm, a wooden house floats by. It is Jim who goes aboard first. When he sees the corpse of Pap in the wooden house, he won't Huck behold it but quickly covers the corpse with some rags. He says-

“Come in, Huch, but doan' look at his face-it's too gashly”¹

It is a good example of Jim's sensitivity towards his young friend-Huck. Jim's protective love for Huck is a contrast with Pap's cruel treatment to Huck. Huck's 'white' father treats him so cruelly that he has to enact the drama of self-murder. Pap-a member of superior race shows lack of culture and human feelings. On the contrary Jim takes Huck under his protection and cares him with a Fatherly concern. Jim gives Huck a fatherly love in learning that his father is dead. Jim does not reveal this frightening truth till the end. Thus he establishes here human values.

Huck visits the village in guise of a girl, in order to hear what people are saying about his death. Mrs. Loftus tells him that old Finn as well as Jim is suspected of having killed Huck. She tells that she believes Jim might be hiding out on Jackson's Island. So Huck becomes uneasy and wants to get away. He quickly returns to the Island and rouses from his sleep and says:

“Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain't a minute to lose. They are after us.”²

Leo Marx rightly remarks about this saying in his essay,

“Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling and Huckleberry Finn.”

“What precious counts here is the 'us'.

No one

is after Huck: no one but Jim knows he is alive.

In that small word, Clemens compresses the exhilarating power of Huck's instinctive humanity.”³

The two fugitives make a very hasty departure down the river. Their journey on the raft begins.

But they get caught in a thick fog. The raft breaks loose and they get separated. Jim is on the raft while Huck is at a little distance from him on a canoe. When Huck wakes up, the fog is over and he sees the raft at a short distance. He reaches

on the raft and finds Jim asleep. He tells Jim that it was only his dream that they were separated. At first, Jim believes him. But soon he comes to know that Huck is fooling him. He is deeply hurt. Huck feels ashamed of his own mean trick to befool his Negro friend. He wants to humble himself to Jim and he does it and will not feel ever sorry for it. It is only after this incident; Huck becomes aware of Jim's status as an equal human being. He promises Jim never to hurt him. Thus, Huck changes gradually his attitude towards Jim. Daniel G. Hoffman remarks about this event, in his essay, “From Black Magic---and white in Huckleberry Finn”

“Huck now realizes that he is bound to Jim by ties too strong for mischievous trifling, ties so strong that he must break the strongest mores of the society he was raised in to acknowledge them. “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger, but I done it and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither.”⁴

When Huck learns that he and Jim are inseparable, circumstances at once thrust them apart. Their raft is run over by a large steamboat. Both Huck and Jim jump off the raft to save their lives. When Huck comes out almost half dead, his first concern is Jim and he makes all possible efforts to find out Jim. He says:

“I sung out for Jim about a dozen times, but I didn't get any answer.”⁵

When Huck learns how he and Jim are inseparable, they are separated from each other. Huck is deeply moved and sad. But he becomes glad when he gets back Jim and raft. Jack (a nigger) brings him to Jim, near the river bank.

He says, “Why didn't you tell my Jack to fetch me here sooner, Jim?”⁶

Here, the word “sooner” shows how Huck eagerly longed for the company of Jim. Jim has repaired the raft and the journey starts.

It is only when Huck is on the river in the company of Jim that he feels secure and natural. Their companionship on the raft is the guarantee of mutual security from hardship.

He is troubled about helping a slave escape. But when slave-traders come to their raft, he has no courage to give Jim up. He tells them a lie that his family are ill on the raft with smallpox. He knows that the best way to keep the people from Jim is to request them to come aboard. The men do not come near the raft for the fear of infection. Thus Huck invents a lie and saves Jim from being arrested. In spite of his inner conflict about helping

Jim to escape. Huck acts following the dictates of his instincts and saves him. His world is founded on emotional relationship. He lies, runs and hides for Jim's sake, not for anything like high morality, but only for his self-interest to a family of the two on the raft, where he finds love, security and freedom.

Now, Jim is no more a “nigger” to him as other black men are. In Jim, he finds an ideal substitute of his father, who had always treated him cruelly. Huck's goodness and self-sacrifice makes him help Jim. Daniel G. Hoffman says in his essay “From Black magic----and White ----in Huckleberry Finn”:

“Jim is free to take the place that Pap was never worthy to hold as Huck's spiritual father. Jim can act as Huck's father and Huck's first act is to protect him, as a son might do.”⁷

When the King and the Duke come on their raft, they tell Huck and Jim to serve them. So Huck and Jim call them Your Majesty and Your Grace and serve them. They are the cheats who suspect that Jim is a run-away slave. They injure and exploit Huck. But he bears it only for his interest of freeing Jim whose security is important and foremost for Huck. The King and the Duke paint Jim all “solid-blue.” Jim could easily make a safe escape, at least for these two. But he does not want to desert Huck, whom he dearly loves.

Jim is uncultured, but he has a deep sense of loyalty and gratitude for Huck. His friendship with Jim is founded not on racial consideration, but on love, sympathy and mutual understanding. Huck also becomes aware of Jim's unquestioning faith in him. As their friendship grows, Huck has begun to lose something of his loneliness. The love and company of Jim awakens in Huck a sense of humanism and responsibility.

During the journey, Huck and Jim keep watch on the raft under the control of the King and the Duke. But most of the watches are kept by Jim who allows rest to Huck.

Huck says, “....he was always mighty good that way, Jim was.”⁸

When Jim finds Huck asleep, he moans and mourns for his children. Huck wonders to see Jim caring as much for his people as white folks do for theirs.

Thus in earlier parts, Huck looks upon Jim as the negro slave. But as they progress, he comes to see Jim as a human being with natural human desires. Then Jim tells Huck the account of his slapping of his deaf child. It is only after this event that Huck decides to help Jim and steal him out of

slavery. He has purity of heart and nobility of mind. He does not think of material gains or profits. So when he comes to know that a reward is being offered for Jim's capture, he is not tempted by the money. So he does not hand Jim to the rightful owner. Although he wears rags in this respect, his is a “highly civilized nature” So when the King sells Jim for forty dollars, Huck calls it “dirty.” His concern for Jim is revealed in the following lines:

“....they could have the heart to serve Jim such a trick as that and make him a slave again all his life and amongst strangers too, for forty dirty dollars.”⁹

His remark reveals that, at least, for him, Jim has no longer remained a “nigger slave”, but a loving friend.

“Jim was gone! I set up a shout ----and then another ----and then another one----and run this way and that ----but it warn't no use ----old Jim was gone. Then I

Huck is guided by the voice within himself. This inner probing is most important in his developing relationship with Jim.

Yet, Huck knows that he is helping a slave to escape. After all he is born in a slave holding civilization. So he accepts slavery to be natural. He thinks that anyone who tries to liberate a slave commits a crime against society. At the same time, he loves Jim sincerely. So his traditional attitude towards slavery creates a conflict in his mind ----should or should he not help Jim to escape?

Commenting upon this inner conflict in Jim's heart. Arthur Mizener says:

set down and cried; I couldn't help it.”¹⁰

“When Huck's conscience is thus badly shaken by Jim's 'wicked' talk of stealing his children from 'innocent' owner, he decides it is moral duty to betray Jim....He sets off in the canoe to find somebody to capture Jim. Unluckily, as he is leaving, Jim says to him, 'I couldn't ever been free ef it hadn' been for Huck....You's de bes' fren' 'only' fren' ole Jim got now.' This innocent expression of human affection and gratitude is very ill-timed for poor Huck.”¹¹

Huck feels restless because his conscience blames him for helping a runaway slave. But he remembers how good Jim has been to him. His belief in 'slavery' and his natural human feeling for Jim come into clash. There is a struggle between his heart's sympathy and conscience. He realizes that Miss Watson would probably sell Jim as a punishment for running away. So he tears up the letter at last, and says, holding his breath, that he is

ready even to go to hell, for Jim's sake. Henry Nash Smith says in his essay "A sound Heart and a Deformed conscience":

"It is the memory of Jim's kindness and goodness rather than Jim's actual voice that impels Huck to defy his conscience."12

Thus Huck decides not to give up Jim. We find his virtue in not betraying Jim. He cannot forget his personal devotion to Jim. He realizes that Jim is more valuable to him as a person than all the standards of society. He discovers his own goodness and more than the loving friendship of Jim. He listens to the voice of his heart. He is the Eye among the blind. Edger Branch remarks in his essay:

"Experience teaches Huck that truth is weak and evil is inevitable. But notably in his greatest struggle over Jim he acts spontaneously and defiantly for goodness."13

He fights for the natural human rights of Jim as a man to love his wife and yearn for his children. So he does not send him back to slavery. His senses of wrong, his feeling of guilt are results of his intimate relationship with Jim. His friendship with Jim helps him in his moral growth. He likes Jim's simplicity, kindness and generosity. Huck would be incomplete without Jim. They both are highly sentimental. While it seems that Huck is protecting Jim, Jim is also taking care of Huck. So he saves Huck from the storm, goes aboard on the wooden house first, hides the cruel fact of Pap's death. He takes Huck to his own bosom, knowing that Pap is dead forever. Here lies the warmth of his heart for Huck. In his essay, "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn", James M. Cox remarks that, "It is Jim who 'mothers' Huck,(14) who acts as Huck's foster father."(15) He further points out that:

"Jim brings to that role warmth and gentleness which Huck had never known under the brutal masculinity of his real father."16

Thus Jim does his role of 'motherly father' to Huck. He calls him honey.

When Huck does not find the raft and Jim, he becomes fearful. But when he hears Jim's voice, he at once says,

"It was Jim's voice—nothing ever sounded so good before." 17

Jim Proves to be Huck's spiritual father. We find his fatherly concern for Huck when he refuses to recognize Huck when he is brought back to the Phelps's farm. Daniel G. Hoffman says:

"Jim refuses to recognize Huck in the crowd- lest he involves his truer friend in his own

misfortune Jim's loyalty is so great that he is willing to sacrifice His freedom for his young friend's sake. His Selflessness is truly noble.....It is his "inner whiteness."18

At the end, Tom is wounded in attempt to rescue. It is then Jim nurses him and refuses to run away. He stays with Tom and takes the risk of being arrested. His humanity reaches the highest point of values. Huck, too acknowledges it.

"I knewed he was white inside."19

Shalini Anand aptly remarks:

"Huck is certainly happier without his father, but somewhere deep in him is every child's need for a protective elder and a vagabond desire to belong to a family to pretend himself and others that he is like any other normal boy. Huck discovers a father figure in Jim, who is thereto interpret experience for him from psychic injury as far as he can."20

Thus, it is not either 'black' or 'white' that is important. It is rather the mind and goodness, love and self-sacrifice which shows the real worth of man. Here both, Jim and his 'honey' Huck both have these qualities. It is Jim's devotion and loyalty that Huck accepts him as a friend. At the same time, Huck's innocent love and purity of heart attracts Jim and the relationship between them develops gradually.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn.
2. Modern Promotions New York. P.25.
3. Ibid, P.33.
4. Ed. By Charles Feidelson: and Paul Brodtkorb. Interpretations of American Literature, New Yor Oxford Uni. Press 1959, P 214
5. Henry Nash Smith: Mark Twain: a collection of critical Essays Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, P 105.
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8. Henry Nash Smith: Mark Twain: a collection of critical Essays Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, P 104.
9. Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn: Modern Promotions New York, P. 62
10. Ibid. P. 124
11. Ibid. P. 123, 124
12. Henry Nash Smith: Mark Twain: a collection of critical Essays Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, P 90
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14. Charles Feidelson: and Paul Brodtkorb.
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15. Ibid, P.241.

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17. Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn: Modern
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