

Huck's Adventures in India: Cultural Conversation in Select Hindi Adaptations

SEEMA SHARMA

Jai Hind College, Mumbai University

Mark Twain's popularity in America shows no signs of abating with the passage of time. The *Time* magazine 2008 annual issue featured him on the cover with a caption "What His Writings Can Teach America Today."¹ The recent protests in response to George Floyd's killing, and their extensive media coverage has again highlighted the relevance of issues engaged by Twain's writings, such as race and inclusion in the United States. Though often considered a quintessential American writer, Twain has an immense global presence in the academic world as well as in popular culture, where his works continue to serve as reference points for issues of marginality, social justice, and citizenship.

Mark Twain in India

In India, where he also remains popular, Twain has a rather bifurcated existence. Scholarly studies have acknowledged the role of his writings in critiquing social justice within a transnational framework. A. N. Kaul, a scholar and teacher of great repute, sensitized generations of students to the "adult questions" raised by *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—hitherto considered a children's classic—pondering whether "the question of slavery in this book include[s] but also go[es] beyond the historically specific institution of chattel slavery in the United States?"² However, in the popular sphere Twain is seen primarily as a humorist and as a writer of tales of boyhood adventure, and his relevance to current social issues has not been fully realized. Systemic oppression is a concern in India and texts like *Huckleberry Finn* have the potential to socialize young readers into a culture of tolerance through awareness of the deep-seated prejudices against *Dalits* (earlier known as Untouchables) and African Americans as part of the history of two of the world's largest democracies.³ Just as

Twain, on his visit to India, while witnessing a German man beating a native servant, makes a pertinent connection between slavery in his hometown of Hannibal and racism abroad,⁴ contemporary young readers would benefit by drawing similarities between racism in America and caste-based oppression in India. This article uses select juvenile translations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in Hindi to explore what has and has not been accomplished in the task of using literature to sensitize children to the values of inclusivity. My hope is that by looking at these extant texts, we can assess the potential of works like *Huckleberry Finn* to foster a more just and equitable society.

Twain's connection to India dates back to 1896, when he toured the country as part of his lecture tour around the world, later publishing his experiences in the travelogue *Following the Equator* (1897).⁵ At the time of this visit Twain was popular with a niche readership consisting of the English, Anglo-Indians, and the English-speaking Indian elite.⁶ Twain's reputation and visibility dramatically increased in post-independence India, as evidenced by the proliferation of translations in Indian languages, introduction of his texts in university courses, and publication of abridged versions for young readers. In his survey of worldwide translations of Twain's works, Robert Rodney documents that within two decades after independence thirty-four editions of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Prince and the Pauper* had been published in nine Indian languages.⁷ Twain's works address questions of equality, freedom, and justice, issues which were also faced by post-independence writers and intellectuals in India. The promises augured by both Reconstruction in the US and Independence in India gave way to disappointment and frustration. This disillusionment was echoed by writers in India as subsequent decades left hopes of a more equitable society unrealized, with the deepening of divisions along lines of class, caste, gender, religion, region, and language.⁸

History of US Literature in India and Twain's Place in Academia

Twain also gained prominence in academia post 1960s, in part because Indian universities made a conscious attempt to widen the scope of English Literature programs beyond British and European literature, to include works of American writers. This effort was aided by the setting up of the Fulbright Program in 1950, which was administered by the United States Educational Foundation in India (USEFI) and facilitated the exchange of scholars between the US and India. Additionally, the establishment of the US funded American Studies Research Center (ASRC) in Hyderabad in 1964 was majorly responsible for the growth of American Studies in India. American Studies programs were introduced in several universities and Delhi University was chosen as the University of Excellence for an American Literature graduate program.⁹ Several journals and anthologies of American Literature were published during this time by scholars who had benefited from US exchange programs and research material available in India. These anthologies prominently featured

essays on Twain, along with other nineteenth century writers like Melville, Cooper, and Hawthorne.¹⁰

Eminent Americanists like A. N. Kaul catapulted Twain's writings to center stage in literature programs in India.¹¹ I was fortunate to be a student of Professor A. N. Kaul in the 1980s at Delhi University when *Huckleberry Finn* was a prescribed text in the graduate program. His classroom discussions encouraged us to appreciate the value of this text in generating critical thought about systems of oppression in India and elsewhere in the world. In the 1990s the scope of English literature programs in universities in India widened to include more Indian writing in English and translation, and world literature. Nevertheless, academic interest in Mark Twain continued, as is evident in the publication of books and journal articles on the author.¹² *Huckleberry Finn* is currently part of the American Literature course in the graduate program in English at The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), established in 1985, which has the highest enrollment of students in India through its Open and Distance Learning mode.¹³

Twain in Popular Culture in India

Mark Twain also continues to attract a popular audience. The play *Mark Twain: Live in Bombay*, which recreates the author's lecture at Novelty Theatre in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1896, was performed to full houses in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Delhi in 2018. It was directed by eminent theatre artist Vinay Sharma, who also played Twain with his uncanny resemblance to him. The play draws from Twain's writings about his childhood in Missouri, travels on the Mississippi, corruption in politics, dishonest reporting, and religious bigotry. In an interview with *Indian Express* Vinay Sharma noted Twain's contemporary relevance, "whether he was talking about the freedom of the press, the religious witch hunts, or the censorship of writers and artists. It has resonances with whatever is happening in various parts of the world today."¹⁴ Twain also finds visibility in the popular realm in India in the form of adaptations for juvenile readers, graphic novels, and excerpts in school readers. The most often reproduced excerpt is from *Tom Sawyer*, where Tom tricks his playmates into painting the fence for him. In the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, the initial chapters where Tom forms a band of robbers, or one of the other Mississippi-town episodes, find a place in texts designed for young audiences. Indian scholars of Twain like Prafulla C. Kar noted the implications of Twain's novels for children: "Apparently comical and playful, these two novels [*Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*] transcend their comic exterior and address issues which have profound psychological significance even for children."¹⁵ However, these insights have generally not filtered down to children's translations in India, which have missed the opportunity to use the text as a vehicle to socialize the younger generations into a truly democratic culture. There has been an important exception, as we will see, which does address some of these issues, if only in supplementary material.

I have limited my scope to translations of *Huckleberry Finn* for young readers in Hindi as it is my mother tongue and I do not have the requisite competence in any other Indian language. There are 121 languages and thousands of dialects spoken in India. Twenty-two of the 121 languages are recognized as Scheduled languages by the Indian Constitution.¹⁶ Hindi, one of the Scheduled languages, is spoken by nearly forty-four percent of India's population.¹⁷ Here I would add that my selection was also limited to Hindi translations which were accessible to me during the period of the Covid 19 pandemic when libraries and other institutions were closed. Hence, the breadth of my survey is limited, and my commentary pertains to the editions to which I had access.¹⁸ Since these translations are simplified and much shorter versions, it is to be expected that not all incidents from the original text are reproduced. However, it is crucial to weigh what is included and what is omitted to understand the intent of the translations.

These juvenile translations tend to focus on incidents which present the text as a lighthearted idyll of childhood, rather than on Huck's moral struggles and Jim's humanity as the raft floats further south. I see these omissions as a regrettable waste of a potentially valuable instructional text. For instance, one middle-school Hindi reader carries an abridged account of chapters 17–18 describing the Shepherdson–Grangerford feud, Huck–Jim reunion, and resumption of their journey on the Mississippi thereafter.¹⁹ The excerpt appears without any introduction about the author or the socio-historical context of slavery and race relations in nineteenth-century America, and is not supported by illustrations. Excerpting the scene removes the racial and age markers of the main protagonists, which means that the young readers miss out on the crucial age and color difference between Jim and Huck. Hence the section reads as a story of two boys on a picaresque journey. Jim's journey as a hazardous undertaking from slavery to freedom, and the significance of Huck's friendship with Jim, elude the young readers.

A Comparative Analysis of Two Select Juvenile Translations of *Huckleberry Finn* in Hindi

Of the translations available to me I have focused my detailed analysis on two: *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Though representative of juvenile translations in Hindi in general, these two translations have the advantage of being more popular, currently in press, and on the prescribed reading list of National or State-level school educational boards. In spite of their limitations, they provide a range of translational efforts which are in some ways an improvement on other texts. *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*, for instance, provides ample supplementary material that facilitates students' grasp of both the novel's US context and its relevance for their own country. This edition is, in this way, an exception to the general practice in Hindi juvenile translations of treating the novel as purely an adventure story.

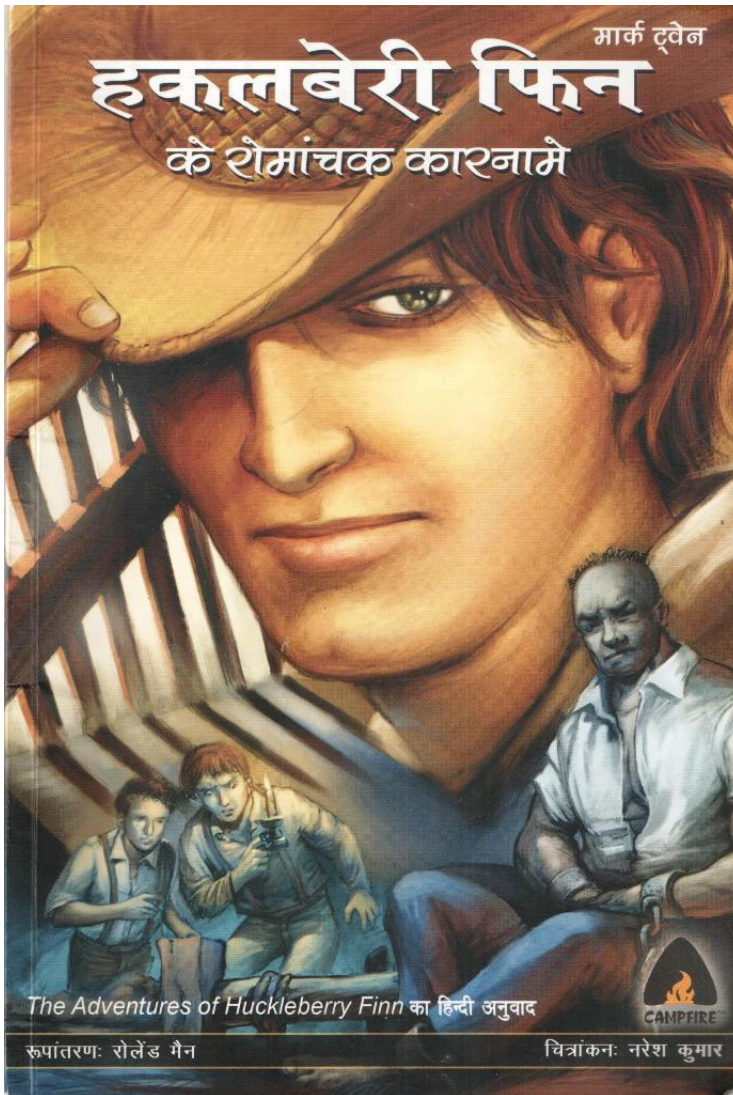


Fig. 1: Cover page of *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Artist Naresh Kumar. Source: *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Translated by Arvind Bharadwaj. New Delhi: Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010. © Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010, used with the permission of the publisher Kalyani Navyug Media, New Delhi, India.

हकलबेरी फिन के रोमांचक कारनामे (*Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*) (see Figure 1), is a graphic adaptation of sixty-eight pages published under the Campfire series by Kalyani Publishing House, Delhi.²⁰ It has sold more than thirty-thousand copies and has been recommended by educational boards for classroom reading in middle schools.²¹ The colored and sharp illustrations foreground the age, and more importantly, racial difference of the characters to young audiences. Further it fits into the appeal of graphic texts to children in India, due to the comic book form popularized by *Amar Chitra Katha*, which translates as “immortal picture stories.” Founded by Dr. Anant Pai in 1967, *Amar Chitra Katha* was the first Indian comic book series and forms a repertoire of children’s books in India to this date.²² Dr. Pai was inspired to use the graphic medium because of the popularity of the American superhero comics with the young generation in India. Using this medium he made stories from Indian mythology, folklore, and history accessible to the generation of children born in independent India to instill in them values of inclusivity which, according to him, were central to building

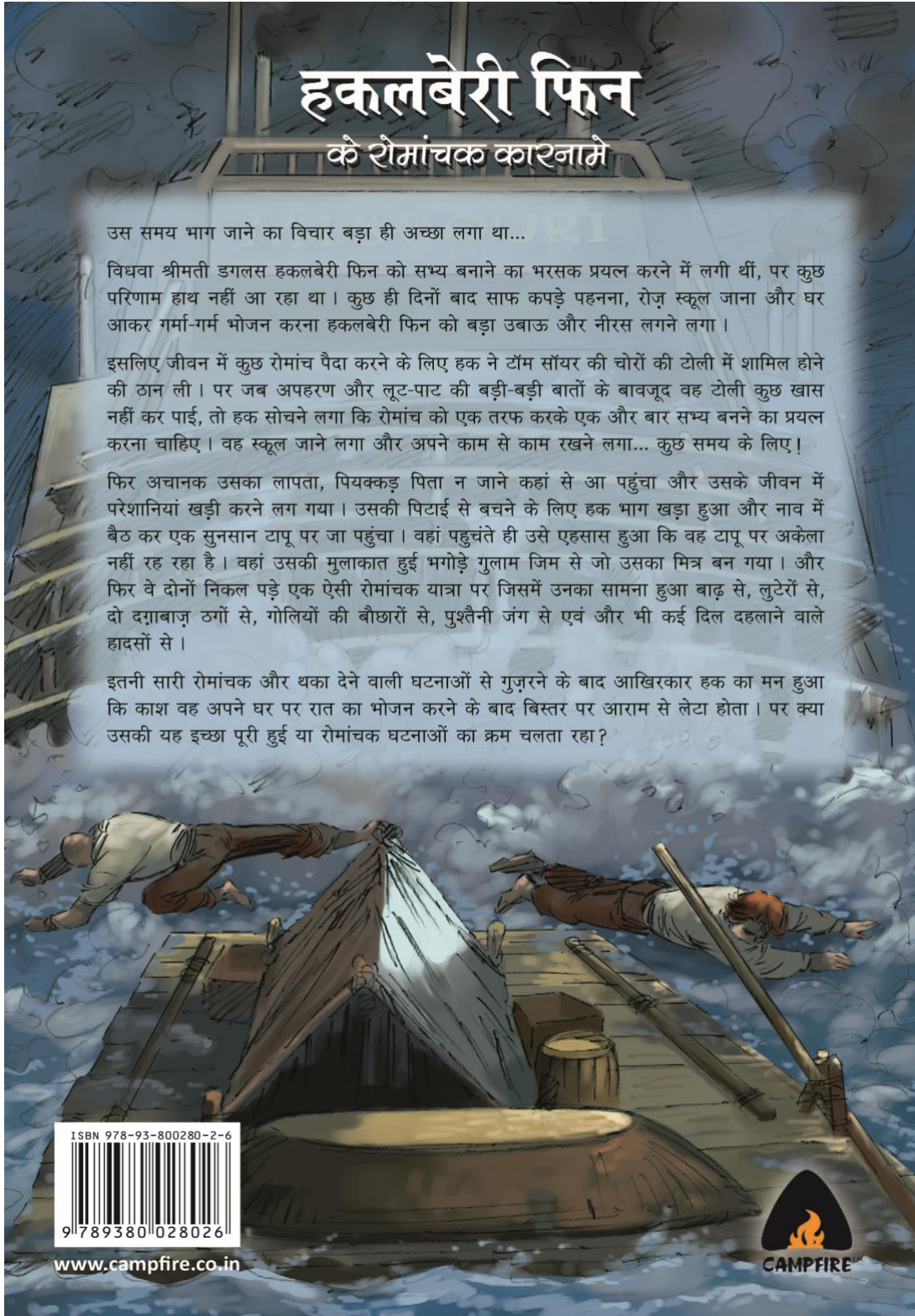


Fig. 2: Back cover from *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Artist: Naresh Kumar. Source: *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Translated by Arvind Bharadwaj. © Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010, used with the permission of the publisher Kalyani Navyug Media, New Delhi, India.

a strong and secular nation. In an interview Dr. Pai expressed that without children developing such sensibilities “newly independent India’s national unity could too easily be sundered along its diverse religious, regional, linguistic, economic and other lines.”²³ The Campfire edition, then, fits into the tradition set up by *Amar Chitra Katha* to use the illustrative form for educating and entertaining to connect with its readers. On the Campfire edition’s back cover (see Figure 2), the editors of the series state that their aim is “To publish graphic books to entertain and educate the young readers, to present stories of eternal human values, to generate curiosity about other cultures and provide inspiration through the stories of great men” (my translation).²⁴

The Campfire edition is most remarkable for its contextualization of the novel’s US setting. It provides brief notes at the end with illustrations, which situate the novel in its historical setting by giving a glimpse of the unique history of slavery in America. This encourages schoolteachers and young readers to appreciate the text against the backdrop of racial oppression and also draw parallels with caste-based discrimination in India.

The two pages of notes at the end of the novel give a vignette of life under the institution of slavery. The first picture featuring two enchained enslaved people (see Figure 3), locates *Huckleberry Finn* in the context of nineteenth-century slaveholding American society. The picture below of a steamship is accompanied by an account of the importance of the Mississippi River—its centrality to the slave trade, the trade of cotton, and also as an escape route for enslaved people. This is followed by a picture of cotton-picking enslaved people along with the description of the drudgery of enslaved life, long working hours, inhuman living conditions, and the cruelty of the overseers and masters. This informs the young readers of the oppressive conditions of slavery, and has the potential to sensitize them to the exploitation of lower castes in India who are forced into hard labor and stigmatized as “unclean” because of the work they perform.

On the next page, under the heading “The Underground Railroad,” is a picture of a house with a lantern along with an explanation of how a secret network of such houses called “stations” served as safe havens for runaway enslaved people who were helped by “conductors” to escape to the free Northern states and then to Canada (see Figure 4). Titled “Moses of her People,”²⁵ the explanatory note talks about the runaway enslaved Harriet Tubman who earned this name for helping hundreds of enslaved people escape to freedom through The Underground Railroad. The note on “Abolitionism” gives a short history of opposition to slavery by white Americans who came to be known as the Abolitionists. It mentions the contribution of William Lloyd Garrison and his antislavery newspaper *The Liberator* and the hostility of the slaveholding populace towards such efforts. The note highlights slavery as one of the issues which led to the Civil War from 1861–1865 and the resultant 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery. The last note summarizes the story of Henry “Box” Brown who escaped from Virginia in a cargo box.²⁶ It gives details of his arduous twenty-seven-hour journey to freedom to give a sense of the trouble an enslaved

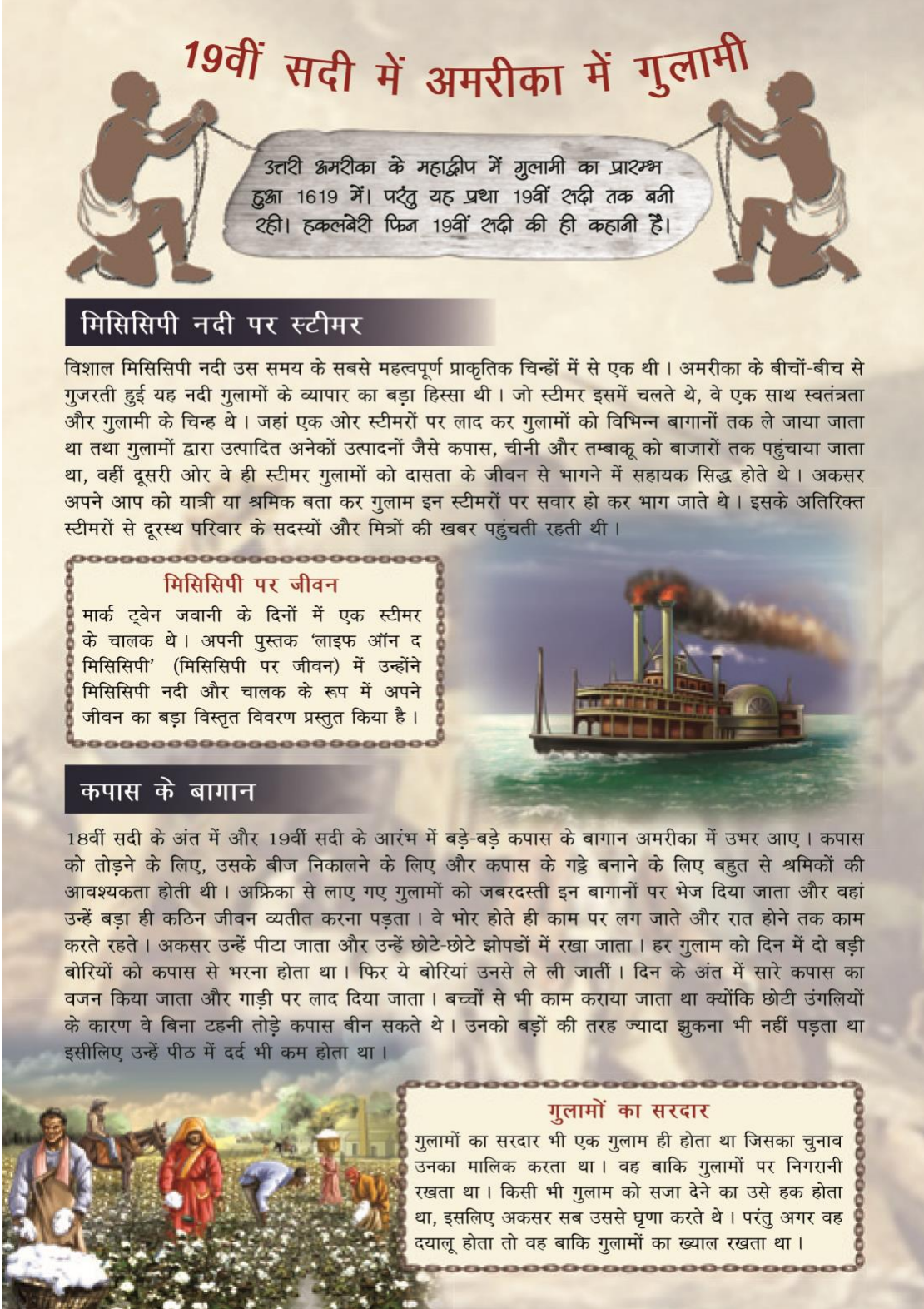


Fig. 3: Supplementary information (provided as end pages) in *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Artist: Naresh Kumar. Source: *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Translated by Arvind Bharadwaj. © Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010, with the permission of the publisher Kalyani Navyug Media, New Delhi, India.

भूमिगत रेलरोड

भूमिगत रेलरोड वास्तव में कोई रेल नहीं थी और न ही वह ज़मीन के नीचे चलती थी। असल में वह गुप्त रास्तों का एक जाल था जिसका प्रयोग 19वीं सदी में अफ्रिकी गुलाम करते थे। इन रास्तों से होकर भगोड़े गुलाम दक्षिण के गुलाम प्रधान राज्यों से निकल कर उत्तर के गुलाम रहित राज्यों में जा पहुंचते थे और वहां से कैनाडा पहुंच कर पूर्ण स्वतंत्र हो जाते थे। पर इनका प्रयोग होता कैसे था? गुलामों को चुपचाप एक घर से दूसरे घर ले जाया जाता था जब तक कि वे सुरक्षित स्थान तक न पहुंच जाते। जिन घरों में उनको आश्रय मिलता था और जहां उनको खाने और सोने को मिलता उनको स्टेशन कहा जाता था। कंडक्टर वे लोग होते थे जो कि भागे हुए गुलामों को एक स्टेशन से अगले स्टेशन पहुंचाते थे। रात को स्टेशनों के बाहर लालटेन लटका दी जाती थी एक गुप्त संकेत के रूप में उन लोगों के लिए जिन्हें आश्रय की आवश्यकता होती। माना जाता है कि 19वीं सदी के मध्य तक करीब 50000 गुलाम भूमिगत रेलरोड की सहायता से भाग निकले थे।

अपनी जाति की मसीहा

हेरियट ट्यूबमैन एक गुलाम थी जो कि भूमिगत रेलरोड की सहायता से भाग गई थी। बाद में वह 'मोसेस ऑफ हर पीपल' अथवा अपनी जाति की मसीहा के नाम से प्रसिद्ध हुई क्योंकि एक कंडक्टर के रूप में उसने करीब 300 गुलामों को स्वतंत्रता दिलाई। बागान के मालिकों को उससे इतना खतरा महसूस होने लगा कि उन्होंने उसे पकड़वाने के लिए 40000 डॉलर का इनाम घोषित कर दिया।



दासता उन्मूलन

उन्मूलनकर्ता वे व्यक्ति थे जो दासता अथवा गुलामी का अंत चाहते थे। 18वीं सदी के मध्य में उन्होंने घोषणा कर डाली कि गुलामी या दासता अमरीका में व्याप्त एक राष्ट्रीय पाप है। 1831 में इन में से एक उन्मूलनकर्ता, विलियम लॉयड गैरिसन, ने *द लिब्रेटर* नामक एक अखबार शुरू कर दिया। इसने गुलामों की तत्काल स्वतंत्रता की मांग की। इसी दौरान राष्ट्रीय दासता विरोधी समाज की भी नींव रखी गई। दासता विरोधी आंदोलन के कारण उत्तर के राज्यों, जहां 1804 में ही दासता का अंत हो गया था, और दक्षिण के राज्यों, जहां गुलामी की प्रथा अभी भी ज़ोरों पर थी, के बीच तनाव उत्पन्न हो गया। अन्य कारणों के अतिरिक्त यह भी एक कारण बना अमरीका में गृह युद्ध का जो कि 1861 से 1865 तक चला। हालांकि राजनैतिक गतिविधियों, सामाजिक आंदोलनों और गृह युद्ध के कारण दासता का अंत हो गया, परंतु 1865 में हुए संविधान के तेरहवें संशोधन ने दासता का आधिकारिक तौर पर उन्मूलन किया।

हेनरी 'बॉक्स' ब्राउन

हेनरी 'बॉक्स' ब्राउन एक गुलाम था जो कि 1849 में वर्जीनिया से एक माल डिब्बे में बंद होकर भाग निकला था। वह एक डिब्बे में शरीर को सिकोड़ कर बैठ गया और इसका इंतजाम करा लिया कि उस डिब्बे को किसी स्वतंत्र राज्य में भेज दिया जाए। वह डिब्बा घोड़ा गाड़ी, माल गाड़ी और स्टीमर से 350 मील ले जाया गया। हालांकि रास्ते में डिब्बे के साथ काफी उठा-पटक हुई होगी, परंतु ब्राउन ने उफ तक न की और चुपचाप अंदर पड़ा रहा। 27 घंटे की लंबी यात्रा के बाद वह डिब्बा फिलाडेल्फिया पहुंचा तो ब्राउन बाहर निकला और स्वतंत्र हो गया। आगे चलकर वह एक विख्यात उन्मूलनकर्ता हुआ।



Fig. 4: Supplementary information (provided as end pages) in *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Artist: Naresh Kumar. Source: *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname*. Translated by Arvind Bharadwaj. © Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010, with the permission of the publisher Kalyani Navyug Media, New Delhi, India.

Brown was willing to go to escape from slavery. These brief notes about famous runaway enslaved individuals help young readers to grasp the concept of chattel slavery that ensured total control over enslaved bodies. They are further sensitized to Jim's aspirations for freedom and the urgency of his journey with its underlying dangers.

In contrast to the Campfire edition, with its rich contextualization, *हकलबरी फिन* (Huckleberry Finn), published by Radhakrishna Prakashan, does not incorporate any supplementary material.²⁷ It condenses the original text into eighty pages with no divisions into chapters and is interspersed with nine black and white sketches. These sketches are rudimentary, not delineating the characters sufficiently and also presenting the raft as a boat.

However, the Radhakrishna edition has a longer publication history than the Campfire edition. First published in 1972, it has gone through five editions to date. Translated and edited by Omkar Sharad, this edition provides more plot details as it is a narrative rather than a graphic text. Though it omits the Grangerford-Shepherdson incident, it gives more space to the machinations of the duke and Dauphin, the Wilks girls' episode, and Tom's farcical plans to rescue Jim. Interestingly the preface to both the editions endorses the role of these texts in inculcating ethical values in children. Like the Campfire edition, the foreword of the Radhakrishna edition notes that the publisher seeks to "make available world classics in abridged form and at affordable prices so that they give direction to young minds while entertaining them in a way that gives them knowledge about their time and society" (my translation).²⁸ In spite of their stated aim to instill a sense of value and give direction to young minds, both these translations—though varying in degree—do not fully exploit the potential of the novel for readers of impressionable age.

A comparison between the two editions is useful in assessing how fully they elicit, or fail to elicit, the intended conversation with their target reader. Both editions begin with Huck's resistance to Widow Douglas's attempt to "civilize" him. However, by translating the misspelt "civilize" as *sabhya* (सभ्य), meaning "sophisticated," both texts miss Twain's oft-stated skepticism of white civilization (in the context of nineteenth-century white discourse, "civilization" was synonymous with the white race, whereas "sophistication" would imply an individual trait).²⁹ In both editions, Huck's staging his death, meeting Jim on Jackson's Island, the beginning of their journey together on the raft, and the adventure befalling them until Chapter 14, are faithfully recapitulated. While Campfire omits the fog episode in Chapter 15 completely, Radhakrishna incorporates Huck's separation and Jim's joy at being reunited with him, but misses the climactic moment of Jim's displeasure with Huck and the latter's apology to Jim for playing a trick on him. In the original text Huck not only apologizes to Jim, but even pledges to himself: "I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't have done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way."³⁰ This detail is crucial as Huck, albeit reluctantly, sets aside his white superiority and

accepts Jim as a fellow sentient being. Radhakrishna strikes an erroneous note by paraphrasing the scene as an uncomplicated reconciliation between the two: “मुझे देखकर ईश्वर को धन्यवाद देने व प्रार्थना करने लगा। फिर हम लोगों ने नावों की सफाई की” (On seeing me Jim began to thank God and offer his prayers. Then we both cleaned the boat; translation mine).³¹ Similarly, even though Radhakrishna mentions Jim’s excitement at the prospect of reaching Cairo, both the editions gloss over Jim’s plans for freeing his family and Huck’s discomfiture at letting Jim escape, which is described at length in the original text (Chapter 16). This episode is crucial in sensitizing young readers in India to what family life was for enslaved people and how slavery took away the natural rights of parents over their own children and turned them into the property of their white masters. It also shows the degree of white complicity in racist discourse by noting Huck’s solidarity with a slave-owner in spite of his growing proximity to Jim as they journey together on the raft. Both editions outline Jim’s physical journey from his escape to Jackson’s Island, the travel on the raft under cover of darkness, the meeting with the duke and Dauphin, and their devious selling of Jim. The precariousness of Jim’s freedom at every turn is more relatable to the readers of *Campfire* as the supplementary notes provide details about The Underground Railroad and the dangers faced by runaway enslaved people. However, Jim’s emotional Journey—his longing for his family, his remorse at hitting his daughter, and other such incidents that humanize Jim—has been ignored in both the translations. The most glaring omission from both translations is Huck’s tearing up the letter written to Miss Watson to reveal Jim’s whereabouts. By not dramatizing the dominant racial discourse, the resultant tension between social obligations, and the pulls away from it, the translations miss the opportunity to close the gap between the academic readings of the text as a social commentary on race, and its popular status as children’s idyll. It is Huck’s defiance—his decision to “go to hell” rather than betray a fellow human being into slavery—to which readers through the decades have responded.³² Any adaptation which overplays the novel as a boys’ tale at the expense of its commentary on slavery and its complex moral vision, misses the novel’s poignancy.

The final “Evasion” episode of *Huckleberry Finn* has always been controversial, interpreted variously even within the US critical establishment.³³ The problems persist in the Hindi translations. The recapture and final freeing of Jim is played out differently in the two translations. Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* describes the violence of the local people towards Jim, “The men was very huffy, and some of them wanted to hang Jim, for an example to all other [N-word] around there ... and making such a raft of trouble, and keeping a whole family scared most to death for days and nights. But the others said, don’t do it ... his owner would turn up and make us pay for him.”³⁴ *Campfire* makes note of the townsmen’s intent to hang Jim, and their reason for holding back solely due to the fear of having to compensate Jim’s owner. Radhakrishna, on the other hand, not only omits the violence but also makes the end seem happier. In this edition, after Jim is discovered to be a free man and his role in helping the injured

Tom is revealed, he is freed from chains and also “he is given respect” (उसकी इज्जत करने लगे).³⁵ Such a mistranslation overturns the satire intended by the original, of the way the political gains made by freed Black people after the abolition of slavery were reversed by subsequent Supreme Court decisions, the passing of Jim Crow laws, and the rise of lynching. A brief note about the end of Reconstruction, and the racial tensions it engendered, would help the young readers to grasp the satirical intent of the “Evasion” section and also relate to the somewhat similar plight of marginal castes in India, where in spite of constitutional guarantees and legislation outlawing untouchability, discriminatory practices continue to be felt in everyday life.

Linguistic Choices in *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname* and *Huckleberry Finn*

I will now shift from structural concerns to linguistic ones, comparing how different characters’ speech is translated, and how the N-word is dealt with in the two editions. Apart from the difficulty in conveying the social critique in *Huckleberry Finn*, translators the world over have also struggled with the challenge of translating the different dialects used in the novel. Twain points out in his Explanatory at the beginning of the novel: “In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary ‘Pike-County’ dialect; and four modified varieties of this last.” He further draws attention to the fact that these dialects have not been randomly assigned to the characters, “but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.”³⁶ However, most translations have done away with Twain’s vernacular in favor of a standardized language. Selina Lai-Henderson observes that Chinese translators “often encounter questions such as what does one make of these dialects when they are placed in the context of China, where there are no equivalent dialectical varieties?”³⁷ Similarly Tsuyoshi Ishihara remarks that “Japan has no literary tradition of vernacular speech equivalent to that of America,” and further, “[t]he Japanese Ministry of Education contributed to the tradition of formal language in children’s literature through its strict policy of standardization of the Japanese language.”³⁸ This resulted in the sidestepping of dialects in Japanese translations of Twain.

The Hindi translations for children, including the two chosen for in-depth analysis in this article, have favored the usage of standard Hindi. Both editions omit the Explanatory page. Campfire edition uses the same language register for all characters. Radhakrishna edition’s use of a colloquial tone to differentiate Black dialect is strangely limited to Aunt Sally’s enslaved Nat. While Jim and other Black characters speak in standard Hindi, Nat speaks in the tone of the Nepalese immigrants in India,³⁹ often caricatured in popular media because of their different pronunciation. People of Nepalese origin usually use the masculine gender for words treated as feminine in Hindi, and speak the “s” sound as “sh.” Nat in his speech refers to Sid as “Shid” and

“master” which is “sahib” in Hindi as “shab.” The overall neglect of nonstandard speech forms of the original further compromises the possibility of using these translations as vehicles of social criticism. In American English, Huck’s vernacular voice serves as a tool for highlighting the hypocrisy behind the genteel pretensions of white society. Similarly Jim’s Black vernacular English highlights his humanity and compassion, showing that despite deviating from mainstream white standards of grammar, Jim is a kind, morally upright man. Shelley Fisher Fishkin aptly observes that, “Twain dissociates the notion of being good from the capacity to use grammar.”⁴⁰ Indian scholarship, too, has noted that Mark Twain provides “ethical legitimization” to the marginalized voices of Huck and Jim by deploying them to unmask the hypocrisy of white society.⁴¹ It is thus important for translators to find creative means to retain the diverse speech patterns to communicate the author’s message.

Potential Resources for Translation in Hindi

Linguistic traditions in India allow for the possibility to recreate Twain’s use of dialects. Indian languages have several dialects which are comprehensible to the speakers of the standard language of that region, much like the way African American English can be comprehended by speakers of standard English in the US. Hindi has more than fifty dialects spoken in the Hindi-speaking belt of Northern India. *Awadhi, Brajhasha, Garhwali, Khari Boli, Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, Haryanvi* are some of the popular dialects. Indian literary tradition also offers a way out with its precedent of vernacular storytelling. Premchand (1880–1936),⁴² a very popular Hindi writer and a contemporary of Twain’s, serves as an example. Premchand mastered the art of using the vernacular, a non-Sanskritized Hindi which is a mix of *Brajhasha, Prakrit, Urdu*, and English words. His peasant characters, who stand at the lower end of the caste/class spectrum, use the vernacular. However, their speech has a dignity which does not fade before the impeccable Urdu or the Sanskritized Hindi of the more educated upper caste/class character. In Premchand’s works the vernacular voice is not a sign of intellectual inferiority, but rather an eloquent expression of the characters’ sensibilities. This sentiment has found resonance with several twentieth-century writers, who have kept the vernacular alive in Indian languages.⁴³ The Hindi translations of *Huckleberry Finn* can retain the flavor and intent of the original by having Huck and Jim speak in differing peasant dialects to reflect Huck’s colloquial style and Jim’s Black vernacular. The older and more educated characters could use standard Hindi. The pretensions of the duke and Dauphin can be highlighted by giving them a bombastic language, for example, of a “Brown Sahib.” In much of nationalist literature an Anglicized native or “Brown Sahib” was a stock figure of ridicule. He imitated the lifestyle and culture of his British masters. Disdainful of his mother tongue, he spoke it with a British accent and a smattering of English words. Similarly, pap’s outburst (which has been omitted in both the versions) can be conveyed using the expletive language of the outlaws of Hindi hinterland, which is vulgar and threatening in its choice of words. These suggestions

do not encompass all options available to Hindi translators. My contention simply is that both Indian languages and literary traditions make it possible to retain Twain's use of language as a tool of social realism, and its role in naturalizing or subverting oppression. Further, a brief explanation about the dialects spoken by the characters in the original text and the approximation attempted in translations could be appended. This would expand the Indian readers' knowledge of American culture beyond the socio-historical information of the endnotes and also help them to appreciate Twain's use of language as a tool to critique the prejudices of his society.

Another problem faced by translators is in dealing with the pejorative racial term used in the novel over two hundred times. The use of the word in the original itself has been a source of considerable debate for a good part of the life of the book.⁴⁴ The Hindi equivalent of the word for an enslaved person is *Gulam* (गुलाम) and Campfire uses this word both to refer to Jim as a "slave" as well as a "[N-word]." While *Gulam* is adequate to convey Jim's inferior social and legal status in relation to white society, it fails to encompass his status as a "[N-word]" (his cultural positioning as a despised minority). In India the communities at the lower end of the caste spectrum have been assigned similarly denigrating terms. However, Indian laws ban the use of such terms in communication as well as print, making it difficult for translators to convey Jim's existential state. In recent years there has been a spate of cases where the use of such words in folk or film songs has been successfully challenged in the court of law. Thus, though it is not feasible to replace the term "[N-word]" with an equivalent caste expletive in Hindi, Radhakrishna uses the word *habshi* (हबशी) which means a person of Black African origin and is able to convey the negative connotations. African people came to India across the Indian Ocean between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries as traders, artists, and sailors. They were also brought as enslaved people by Arab traders and bought by kings, princes, and merchants. However, the number was negligible comparable to the transatlantic slave trade. Further not all remained enslaved and some of them shot into positions of prominence and power as warriors and petty rulers.⁴⁵ Hence *habshi*, though a better choice than *Gulam*, is still inadequate to describe Jim's position.

Conclusion

Discussion among Twain scholars has enabled a vibrant exchange on the subject of how *Huckleberry Finn* has been received, adapted, and appropriated in different cultural contexts, and has also inspired efforts to "forge new border-crossing, transnational habits of scholarship."⁴⁶ In the context of Twain's stature in India, this essay has analyzed the degree to which select translations of *Huckleberry Finn* in Hindi have been able to harness the potential of realizing the transnational relevance of Twain for younger readers in dismantling deep-seated prejudices. While translational efforts examined in this essay have made attempts to familiarize young readers with

the American context of the text, these efforts fall short of conveying the social critique of the novel, and its relevance in the Indian context. So one might hope that a new, twenty first-century edition of Twain's novel in Hindi might allow young readers more access to the book's potential to encourage them to think about not only the issues in America's past and present, but also in India.⁴⁷ *Huckleberry Finn* stands at the intersection of fiction and history, hope and pain, articulation and silencing, to raise universal issues of bigotry and injustice. Such literature will continue to have relevance as long as the social prejudices that divide humanity on the basis of race, caste, or class need to be challenged.

Notes

- 1 "The Dangerous Mind of Mark Twain," *Time Magazine*, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20080714,00.html>.
- 2 A. N. Kaul, *History, Sociology and the American Romance* (New Delhi: Manohar Publication, 1990), 28. Compiled in association with the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.
- 3 There has been a significant body of work comparing the condition of Dalits in India with that of African Americans, as early as Twain's contemporary Jyotiba Phule (1827–1890). Phule's seminal book *Gulamgiri* (Pune: Pune City Press, 1873), which translates as "Slavery," exhorted the lower castes in India to seek inspiration from the African American struggle against slavery. For more recent subaltern studies see Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 4 "It carried me back to my boyhood, and flashed upon me the forgotten fact that this was the *usual* way of explaining one's desire to a slave ... When I was ten years old I saw a man fling a lump of iron-ore at a slave-man in anger, for merely doing something awkwardly—as if that were a crime. It bounded from the man's skull, and the man fell and never spoke again. He was dead in an hour ... It is curious—the space annihilating power of thought. For just one second, all that goes to make the me in me was in a Missourian village, on the other side of the globe, vividly seeing again these forgotten pictures of fifty years ago ... and in the next second I was back in Bombay, and that kneeling native's smitten cheek was not done tingling yet!" Mark Twain, *Following the Equator and Anti-imperialist Essays (The Oxford Mark Twain)*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1897]), 217–18. All page numbers for quotations from this book refer to this edition.
- 5 Twain, *Following the Equator*.

- ⁶ For more on Twain's visit to India see Seema Sharma, "Mark Twain's India: The Private–Public Divide in *Following the Equator*," *The Mark Twain Annual*, 15 (2017): 22–37.
- ⁷ Robert M. Rodney, *Mark Twain International—A Bibliography and Interpretation of his Worldwide Popularity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), xxvi.
- ⁸ B. R. Ambedkar, Mahashweta Devi, Ismat Chughtai, Kushwant Singh, Jayant Mahapatra, Namdeo Dhasal, Dilip Chitre, Srilal Shukla, Kamleshwar, and Bisham Sahni are some of the writers in the English and Indian languages who address these issues. This list is by no means exhaustive. Dalit autobiographies like *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki, *Akkaramashi* by Sharankumar Limbale, *Batula* by Daya Pawar, *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar, *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble, *Karukku* by Bama, among several others, describe the harsh experience of untouchability in Independent India. See Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*, trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Limbale, Sharankumar. *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*. Translated by Santosh Bhoomkar. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013; Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, trans. Santosh Bhoomkar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daya Pawar, *Batula*, trans. Jerry Pinto (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2015); Urmila Pawar, *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, trans. Maya Pandit (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Baby Kamble, *The Prisons We Broke*, trans. Maya Pandit (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009); and Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ⁹ For more details on the rise of American Studies in India refer to B. K. Shrivastava, "American Studies in India," *American Studies International* 25, no. 2 (1987): 41–55.
- ¹⁰ C. Seshachari and T. G. Vaidyanathan, eds., *American Literature*, special issue of *Osmania Journal of English Studies* (1966); B. D. Narasimhaiah, ed., *Indian Responses to American Literature* (New Delhi: USEFI, 1967); and Sujit Mukherjee and D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu, ed., *Indian Essays in American Literature* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969) are some of the early journals and anthologies on American literature in India.
- ¹¹ A. N. Kaul, *The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Winner of the Porter Prize and the Egleston History Prize—both awarded by Yale University. Forty-six editions of this book were published between 1963 and 2002.
- ¹² Some examples of the later books and journals published on Twain include Prafulla C. Kar, ed., *Mark Twain: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1993); E. Nageswara Rao, ed., *Mark Twain and Nineteenth Century American Literature* (Hyderabad: American Studies Research Center, 1993); and

Harsharan Singh Ahluwalia, "Mark Twain in India," *Mark Twain Journal* 34, no. 1 (1996): 1–48.

- ¹³ The course syllabi can be found here:
<http://ignou.ac.in/userfiles/MA%20ENGLISH%20SYLLABUS.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Vinita Tiwari, "Vinay Sharma's Mark Twain: Live in Bombay! To premiere in Kolkata," *Indulge*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.indulgexpress.com/culture/theatre/2019/feb/15/vinay-sharmas-mark-twain-live-in-bombay-to-premiere-in-kolkata-12860.html>
- ¹⁵ Prafulla C. Kar, ed., *Mark Twain: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1993), 11.
- ¹⁶ The Indian Constitution recognizes some languages as Scheduled languages and these can be used as official languages for administrative purposes in the states where they are predominantly spoken.
- ¹⁷ The Census of India has been the source of language data which is collected every ten years. Bharti Jain, "Hindi mother tongue of 44% in India, Bangla second most spoken," *The Times of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/hindi-mother-tongue-of-44-in-india-bangla-second-most-spoken/articleshow/64755458.cms>.
- ¹⁸ Some of the Hindi translations considered were: *Huckleberry Finn* हकलबेरी फिन, 5th ed., trans. Omkar Sharad (New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 2018); *Huckleberry Finn ke Karname* हकलबेरी फिन के कारनामे (New Delhi: Sasta Sahitya Mandal Prakashan, 1975); *Huckleberry Finn ke Sahasis Karname* हकलबेरी फिन के साहसिक कारनामे (New Delhi: Kamal Prakashan, 1980); *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname* हकलबेरी फिन के रोमांचक कारनामे, trans. Arvind Bharadwaj (New Delhi: Kalyani Navyug Media, 2010); and *Huckleberry Finn ke Karname* हकलबेरी फिन के कारनामे (Ahmedabad: Books For You, 2017).
- ¹⁹ Vijay Prakash, *Hindi Bal Bharti—6* (New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1986), 32–37.
- ²⁰ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname* हकलबेरी फिन के रोमांचक कारनामे.
- ²¹ Information received from Head of Sales and Marketing, Campfire Graphic Novels, via email dated April 8, 2021.
- ²² For a detailed study of the development and role of comic books in India see Karline McLain, *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

- ²³ Quoted in Karline McLain, “Gods, Kings and Local Telugu Guys: Competing Visions of the Heroic in Indian Comic Books,” in *Popular Culture in Globalized India*, ed. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanyake (London: Routledge, 2009), 157.
- ²⁴ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn ke Romanchak Karname हकलबेरी फिन के रोमांचक कारनामे*.
- ²⁵ Probably a reference to Sarah H. Bradford, *Harriet: The Moses of Her People* (New York: Geo. R. Lockwood, 1886).
- ²⁶ His story was published in *Narrative of Henry Box Brown Who Escaped from Slavery Enclosed in a Box 3 Feet Long and 2 Wide* (Boston: Brown & Stearns, 1849). See William L. Andrews, Frances S. Foster, and Trudier Harris, ed., *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102.
- ²⁷ Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn हकलबेरी फिन*, trans. Sharad.
- ²⁸ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn हकलबेरी फिन*, trans. Sharad, 5.
- ²⁹ Twain was satirical of the superiority of white civilization in his non-fictional writings as well, notably in *Following the Equator* where he remarks: “There are many humorous things in the world, among them the white man’s notion that he is less savage than the other savages” (Twain, *Following the Equator*, 213).
- ³⁰ Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1986), 72. All page numbers for quotations from this book refer to this edition.
- ³¹ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn हकलबेरी फिन*, trans. Sharad, 35.
- ³² Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 169.
- ³³ For critical debate about the ending see James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis, ed., *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua, *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998); and Richard Hill, “Overreaching: Critical Agenda and the Ending of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” in *Mark Twain Among the Scholars: Reconsidering Contemporary Twain Criticism*, ed. Richard Hill and Jim McWilliams (Albany, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 2002), 67–90.
- ³⁴ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 222.
- ³⁵ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn हकलबेरी फिन*, trans. Sharad, 86.
- ³⁶ Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 2.

- ³⁷ Selina Lai-Henderson, *Mark Twain in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 102.
- ³⁸ Tsuyoshi Ishihara, *Mark Twain in Japan: The Cultural Reception of an American Icon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 19.
- ³⁹ Though people from Nepal have been part of the Gurkha battalion in the Indian army since British times, a large number of immigrants from Nepal currently work in the unorganized sector as house helps, cooks, security guards, etc.
- ⁴⁰ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 189.
- ⁴¹ Dilip Kumar Das, "Language, Ideology and Style in Mark Twain," in *Mark Twain: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, ed. Prafulla C. Kar (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1993), 60.
- ⁴² Premchand has written fourteen novels and around three hundred short stories and has also translated works from foreign languages into Hindi. Many of his own works have been translated into English.
- ⁴³ *Anchalik bhasha* (आंचलिक भाषा) or regional dialects have been creatively used by noted Hindi writers like Phanishwar Nath "Renu" (1921–1977), Vijaydan Detha (1926–2013), Srilal Shukla (1925–2011), among several others.
- ⁴⁴ For arguments to ban the book for using the N-word as well as defense of the book as antiracist see Chadwick-Joshua, *The Jim Dilemma*.
- ⁴⁵ For more about the history of African people in India see R. R. S. Chauhan, *Africans in India: From Slavery to Royalty* (New Delhi: Asian Publication Services, 1995). The descendants of African people who settled in India are called *Sidis*. They speak local languages and are confined to the three western states of Gujarat, Karnataka, and Goa, where they are designated as Scheduled tribes.
- ⁴⁶ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Transnational Mark Twain," in *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning Toward the Transpacific*, ed. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 130.
- ⁴⁷ Full-length translations of *Huckleberry Finn* in Indian languages are no longer in print. I have a long-standing interest in completing a new full-length translation in Hindi which would hopefully do justice to issues which have not been adequately dealt with in the abridged versions discussed in this article.

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