



AN ANALYSIS OF THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN BASED ON THE COSMOGONIC CYCLE

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Abstract

Learning or development or change occurs when one is aware of the changes in the relationship between the individual and society. Their initial understanding of the world as existing at the beginning of the novel, their gradual growth through the novel and the reasons for it and the finally emerging worldview are highlighted and analysed. The question of self-identity which is linked to character development is also focused on. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a bildungsroman novel. Huck's perception of the world, his moral development and his return to civilization are portrayed based on the Cosmogonic cycle.

Keywords: development, Cosmogonic cycle, cognition, environment



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INTRODUCTION

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) is one of the nineteenth century coming of age novels by Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). Huck, the protagonist of the novel undergoes the process of development not as passive recipient but as active participant. It is established that cognition and perception are the *sine qua non* of Huck's experiential journey towards self-actualization. Special emphasis is laid on how self-perception and others' perception of the protagonists are crucial to their development. The journey of the protagonists is divided into phases on the basis of Cosmogonic cycle. The protagonist's return to life and the affirmation of it are highlighted.

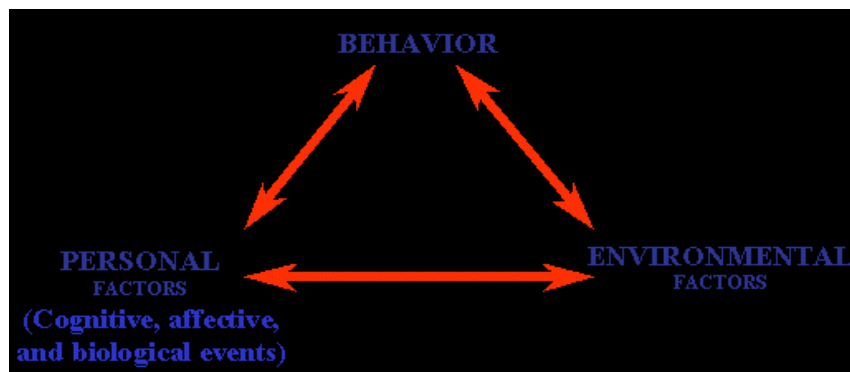
Organisms interact with environment. The mode of interaction is through the sensory devices. Environment makes its mark on the organism in a variety of ways – by stimulating neural activity in the eye (inside which is the retina), the ear (inside which are the cochlea, a sound-sensing device, and the vestibule, a balance sensing device) and the myriad nerve terminals and signals to circumscribed entry points in the brain, the so called sensory cortices of vision, hearing, somatic sensations, taste and olfaction (Damasio 91). Neural modelling (Damasio, 1999, 2003; Edelman, 1992; Narayanan, N., 1993, Narayanan, S., 1997) and

theories of cognition (Barsalou, 1999; Johnson, 1993; Kosslyn, 1980, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Paivio, 1971, 1986, 1991) emphasize that embodied experience is the basis for knowledge and reason (qtd. in Karen A. Krasny 6). Cognition is central to all activities and because perception is a cognitive process the role of environment in it is a major one. Perception is defined as a process involving a movement from external to internal components. In connection with this comes the study of situated cognition and embodied cognition. George Lakoff, Damasio, Gerald Edelman, Mark Johnson have emphasized the complex, metaphorical nature of human cognition and its roots in the experience of embodiment. According to situated cognition theories, human actions are dependent on the context (environment).

Gibson through his theory of affordances and Vygotsky through his social learning theory brought out the importance of situated cognition in learning. Gibson proposes that the environment in which one interacts consists of various affordances which provide the cues that are necessary for perception. Driscoll argues that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social environment in which the individual is situated. To prove his point he quotes Vygotsky. "Every function in the child's development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people (interpersonal) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (57).

One of the major areas related to perception is societal relationships. The individual's perception of and communication with society plays a crucial role in depicting the nature of the individual. Also, this is more essential for the development of the individual. According to Leon Festinger "processes of social communication and social influence are ... inextricably interwoven with the process of creation and reduction of dissonance" (177). Social cognitive theory lists three interrelated variables

- o behavioral factors
- o environmental factors (extrinsic)
- o personal factors (intrinsic)



Social Cognitive Theory Illustration (Pajares 2002)

The behaviour of a person is influenced by personal and environmental factors and vice versa. Social cognitive theory foregrounds the argument that new experiences are to be evaluated by the learner by means of analyzing his past experiences. Learning is thus a product of a thorough evaluation of the present experience against the past.

The novel takes different forms as it grows. The History of English Literature reveals that the individual, the hero, had stood at the centre of romantic fictions since the Middle Ages. The early novels placed the story itself at the centre. It was driven by incident and accident rather than being the story of a single figure. The late eighteenth century exploration of personal development created room for depictions of personal experiences. These types of novels brought out the relationship between the individual and society. The individual perspectives in these novels allowed for personal revaluations of the public historical perception and personal development. The nineteenth century Bildungsroman became the area for such explorations of personal development that separated the individual from and then reunited it with, his or her social environment. Wherever development is present, conflict has to be there. In fact, development and conflict are interconnected. Conflicts are of two types – interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal conflict is that which the individual has with other persons and intrapersonal conflict is that which occurs within the individual. Both these conflicts help in the growth of an individual.

The developmental journey of the protagonist in the Bildungsroman depends entirely on the social background or the social surroundings of the protagonist. The developmental journey, the growth process, presents the quest for meaning in the protagonist's life. Therefore, the protagonist's implicit motifs of struggles, conflicts, sufferings and success that lead to an emergence of personality can be witnessed.

Huck alienates himself from the family. The mind of Huck is described and the perception of the world and other people are brought out. Huck faces the hurdles that come his way and he has the potential of changing those hurdles into stepping stones for success.

Development of self is the basic concept in human life. The developmental process is best present in the adolescent stage. Freud was the first to propose the theory of human development. An important psychologist who dealt with the theory of adolescent development is Erik Erikson. The fifth stage of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is 'identity versus inferiority' – a crucial stage in determining the overall quality of life which is usually associated with great turmoil. He also suggests that human development is a lifelong process and identity formation is a crucial aspect in the developmental process of adolescents.

Joseph Campbell in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, has introduced the application of the idea of cosmogonic cycle to the hero's journey of life. The journey of the protagonist can be categorized into different phases based on the idea of Cosmogonic cycle. The term covers universal and archetypal situations. There are six parts that make up the cycle: the call to adventure, the threshold crossing, the road of trials, the supreme test, a flight or a flee, and finally a return. Interpreting the novel based on the idea of Cosmogonic cycle offers an interesting and informative perspective. The term 'cosmogony' refers to the study of the origin of the universe. The term has a close relationship with myths. In myths it is related with the eternal hero and is about 'the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth.' The life of the mythical heroes is seen to bear a close similarity to the creation of the world. The cycle of creation is linked to the hero's story.

The novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* depicts a journey towards identity and maturity, the core theme. The protagonist moves away from the comfort zone into the real world where he gets opportunities to perceive their self. By this movement, an understanding of themselves and society accrues. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Huck tries to find purpose and identity through his moral battle with society; this moving out by the protagonist constitutes the call to adventure stage of the Cosmogonic cycle. Many times the call to adventure is set in motion by desire, chance, abduction, or lured by an outside force.

The second stage is the threshold crossing. The term refers to the place or the person that the character crosses over or through into the Zone Unknown. Huck witnesses a symbolic death. He sets up his father's cabin to make it look like he was brutally murdered.

After the escape he is on his own as an adolescent and must be careful now of what he does so that he does not get caught. He gives false aliases of himself to prevent being found out. Every time Huck does this, he symbolically dies and reemerges as a more experienced person.

The Road of Trials is the third step in the Cosmogonic Cycle, the obstacles which the character faces in his/her journey. In *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, Huck's Road of Trials occurs on the Mississippi River. He faces many obstacles, including the pressure of taking moral decisions, dealing with con-artists and helping a runaway slave.

The supreme test or the ultimate test is the fourth stage where the character is faced with a dilemma of enormous proportions. Huck is faced with a moral predicament between the received opinions regarding slaves and his individual conscience. Huck is torn between the dictates of his heart and allegiance to his society throughout the novel. Huck passes his supreme test by acting on his own intuitive morality rather than following society's norms.

The fifth and sixth parts of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the flight or flee and the return, can be combined into one instance. After the character surmounts the obstacles and passes the supreme test, he/she is allowed to return to the real world. Initially, Huck is a social misfit and wants to escape civilization. But finally, Huck accepts to go with Aunt Sally and get civilized. Finally Huck reaches an evolved state, emotionally and intellectually equipped to take on life backed by understanding achieved through their experiential journey.

Huck is a different person at the end of the novel. In the beginning Huck has no sympathy for the "niggers." But his journey down the river helps in developing compassion for Jim. Twain has often noted that the human conscience pursues humanity like a "yellow dog," (Kravitz 23) and Huck himself utters that remark (295) after the tarring and feathering of the duke and the king. But his compassion emerges not only from the guilt he feels at the predicament of the two scoundrels but also because he learns from this episode that "human beings can be awful cruel to one another" (295). Huck gains moral maturity and does so through a process that involves what Cox calls the "interplay between morality and sense making, conscience and cognition." The moral concerns of the novel are obvious when we follow Huck's journey inward.

The pivotal crisis of the realist text often involves a test of the protagonist's moral agency. Unlike the naturalist, the realist presumes that all people, including those in straitened circumstances, are endowed to some extent

with moral agency. The realist focuses on the process of deliberation brought on by moments of crisis: Huck Finn's decision to "go to hell" so that Jim can go free.

(Crane 162)

It is Huck's personal sense of ethics rather than the moral scruples of society that determines his ultimate decision. Huck and Jim are not able to fully overcome the social obstacles but they establish a bond that overcomes the boundaries set up by society through the qualities of perseverance, loyalty and faith.

CONCLUSION

Huck's moral sense improves to effect a broader, less egoistical social perspective. The morally right now becomes that which is compatible with the friendship he has with Jim. This broader social perspective is made possible by developing an ability to take the role of others – to differentiate the self from the needs of the self. Once he understands this differentiation, he is capable of distinguishing the needs of others from his own. Huck tries to find purpose and identity through his moral battle with society. Huck realizes the impossibility of total severance from civilization and accepts to being civilized which he had rejected in the beginning.

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