

Tom Jones - Reflects the Age - Social Document, Realism of
Pg. Eng - Sem - 1 cc 4 A. Hays Fielding.

Henry Fielding, as a matter of fact, is the first English novelist and holds a prominent status in the history of English Novel. He is the novelist who gave it a proper shape, bade farewell to the fantastic world of Romance and planted it in his own soil. He is pioneer of the realistic novel in English literature and is rightly called the father of this genre. He enjoys intimate knowledge and variegated experiences of life and human nature. His novels reveal his personal experiences and hold a true mirror to the age he belongs to. He himself declares, 'I believe, I might aver that I have written little more than I have seen'. A critic observes that "he is the first writer to focus the novel in such a way that it brought the whole as we see it, within the scope of this new rapidly maturing literary form. Tom Jones, like his other novels, depicts his contemporary society of England with all its hopes and aspirations, problems and complexities, vices and virtues with distinct humorous and ridiculous touches.

As it evidently appears, Fielding has a close and personal acquaintance with all classes of the English Society. His to the countryside and his visits to London made him know the diverse modes of life that he profitably has used in this novel. In fact, this social background, painted in the novel, is the mirror of his age. Furthermore, his vocation also provided him with a vast experience of actual life lived by the common people. Actually, Fielding had been a lawyer, a pamphleteer, a dramatist and a magistrate that enabled him to probe deep into the inner recesses of human heart and mind. Just as the medical profession taught Mungbam subtle nuances of life, in the same way, the different vocations

helped Fielding in understanding life with all its complications.

Fielding is really a great master of the realistic novel in English. His Tom Jones presents a vast panorama of English social life. Here we find cruel laws, bitter persecution of innocent people, numerous ills abounding everywhere in the country side, the wayside inns, the high ways and byways of life. We find here rogues and scoundrels, barons and bullies like Blifil, Molly, Black George or Miss Allworthy as well as good people like Allworthy and Sophia. Fielding also refers to the Gothic style of building which was prevalent in his time. He remarks that 'the Gothic style of Building could produce nothing nobler than Mr. Allworthy's House.'

Tom Jones paints a vivid picture of the moral life and the moral laws of the time. Violation of chastity was looked down upon but the whole ^{society} was affected by immoral activities. We see that the hero of the novel Tom, is a foundling, the undesirable fruit of the immoral acts of Robert looking Miss Allworthy. Tom himself develops illicit relation with Molly and believes to have fathered a bastard. Mr. Western is found fulfilling his lust in Molly's bed. However, chastity was honoured and cherished in the society. Mr. Allworthy says to Jenny, "I intend to administer you, I mean the violation of your Chastity - a crime however lightly it may be taken by debauched persons, is very heinous in itself, and very dreadful in its consequences."

Tom Jones realistically reflects the country life with all its pomp and show as well as its misery and poverty. There is a thorough description of the high living standard of the Allworthies and the Westons as well as the pitiable condition of the Scapions and the Partridges. Similarly, the city life is portrayed by taking all the important characters to London. The town and then along Tom's route to London, the streets, taverns

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and theatres of the metropolis have been accurately described. There is also a vivid picture of the working of law and justice in England of Fielding's time. The very system of Law and Court is defective. The judges are drawn to themselves. Most of them are partial in their judgement and are affected by various factors, both personal and impersonal. Crabbe's trial and Jenny Jones' banishment shows the incompetence of the system.

Fielding also demonstrates the social status of women folk. They were no more the submissive instruments of pleasure for men. They enjoyed their independent living and disliking. Sophia, the heroine of the novel, revolts against her father's dictation to marry Blifil. She takes all risk and follows Tom Jones, the hero of her choice, to London and, finally, after some confusions and misunderstanding, marries him. Mrs. Western says to his brother, "How often have I told that English women are not to be treated Circassian slaves. We have the protection of the world; we are to be won by gentle means only, and not to be lectured, and bullied and beat into compliance. The novel presents the picture of both the high and low class women. The women of low class like Molly were corrupt and unchaste while those of the high class were also not free from social evils.

In short, Fielding, in Tom Jones, faithfully delineates the various shades of social relations and conditions of this time. The English society was deep in scandals, gossip mongering and both facts or fictions were exaggerated to the undesirable extent. The common people were credulous enough to believe to swarms and took pleasures in the predicament of the victims. The robbers and the rogues were active and unchecked. Besides, the eccentricities of the landed gentry have also been described with great fidelity. Squire Western and Mr. Allworthy, quite different

in their temperament, are the two typical representatives of this class. However, their tendency to wield power, or feudal trait, is common to both.

Thus, in Tom Jones, Fielding's presentation of human life and human nature is comprehensive in its sweep and range. No aspect of human life and no trait of human nature remains unrepresented. In the words of a critic, "Fielding shows the whole of the life he sees in its extreme of poverty and luxury, from Molly Seagram to Lady Bellaston, its extreme of folly and generosity from Blifil to Tom Jones. To conclude, the real common life is the material of this history of Tom Jones but it has been handled with the freedom and imagination of a great artist. Really, this novel is a master piece of fictional writings that shows Fielding's distinct art and creative power to commingle facts with fiction."