

## Picaresque Novel.

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Novel is the most popular of English Fiction. English Novel, in the process of its development, underwent many changes both in its themes and forms. As it received a popular acceptance, the vogue of writing novel became a cherished fashion of the prose writers. The writers, under the pressure of the requirements of their period, replaced the superfluous elements by the relevant ones. That is it got progressive deletion and addition at the hands of each group of writers. In other words, the present form of Novel is not <sup>the</sup> achievement of any particular group of writers or period. Rather, it is that of a continuous purging and gradual developments. That is why different labels are given to Novel to stress its different traits in abundance. There are Picaresque Novel, Gothic Novel, Sentimental Novel etc because, the novelists concentrate on this aspect or that aspect of the Novel. Let us see the Picaresque Novel.

The Picaresque has been derived from a Spanish word Picaro meaning by a rogue or villain. Originally a type of romance that dealt with rogues was called Picaresque. A Picaresque Novel presented a series of adventures or misadventures, most on the High ways. Some more enterprising novelists sent their heroes to the sea also. With the development of the Novel, a regular hero, adventurous in spirit and liberal in outlook, became acceptable. However, the distinct traits of the Picaresque Novel can easily be pointed out, for it immensely differs from the Modern Novel both in its content and style.

The Picaresque Novel does not require a regular, well organised plot. The Novelist can dispense with the, episodic unity and just contrive a succession of sensational events. He can also introduce a variety of events and characters. The hero is now in the country and now on the High ways. He is now in London confronting thieves, grappling



with rogues, rescuing beautiful damsels and falls in love. He is now fighting duels, getting arrested and languishing in prison, getting robbed by the innocent-looking people and helped by those looking scoundrels. In this way, he gets in touch with a vast variety of people from the country. Squires to the haughty and rakish aristocrats, from the boorish landladies to the morose and ill-tempered military personnels, from hypocrites to gypsies. Finally, the picaresque form offers enough scope to throw light on the life, culture and morality of the age. It enables the novelists to criticise the evils infesting the society.

The earliest examples of the picaresque novels are 'Lazarillo de Tormes' and 'Guzman de Alfarache' in French and Cervantes' 'Don Quixote' in Spanish. In English, Daniel Defoe, the real begotter of English novel, wrote picaresque novels. This tradition was followed by Henry Fielding in his 'Joseph Andrews' and 'Tom Jones'. Fielding sought to introduce solid and plausible realism and tried to paint the realistic picture of the society as he witnessed around him. He aimed to be a reformer for he wanted to purge of the evils rampant in the society. He used irony, satire and scathing criticism against the social evils. Smollett also adopted this tradition in his novels of sea adventures like 'Roderick Random'. Fielding exhibited some grains of humanity, but Smollett had certain waspishness of character. In fact, he was a follower of the picaresque tradition of Nash and does never care for the well-knit plot. The traces of picaresque tradition are found also in Dickens and Thackeray.

Thus, we see that the picaresque novel has its own distinct qualities both in themes and techniques. Thematically, its effect is purging, for the novelists give ironical and satirical exposition to the evils in the society.



Technically, it provides great liberty to the novelists. There may not be a single plot and the characters may be varied, focussing at various aspects of social life. In short, Picaresque Novel is a precious treasure of English Literature.