

3 Write a critical essay on 'The Picaresque Novels'.

Introduction — The word picaresque has been derived from the Spanish word 'pícaro' which means a knave (pastoral) or rogue. In fact, the picaresque novel is the tale of the adventures or misadventures of a rogue who wanders from one country to another, from one inn to another and from the town to the country. The condition and person of the 18th Century time gave a satirical form to this very novel. Of course, this novel describes the life story of a person belonging to the low social class who earns his lively-hood on the basis of several tricks. The story of such a novel has a beginning but no end.

Characteristics of the picaresque novels.

Anti-romantic ideas of picaresque novels: — The picaresque novel is anti-romantic in theme. In the middle age of Europe, these novels were extremely popular. The life of the people living in that age was deplorable. The contemporary novelists tried their best to present

-the anarchy and disturbances of that time. The arrival of Renaissance rang a death knell for the medieval feudal society. In this way the picaresque novel developed in England.

Realistic Contemporary picture:- The central figure of this novel is a picaresque hero, who has to shift for himself to earn his living. He is born of poor and degraded. A picture of contemporary society is presented realistically and completely in it. The novelist is never moral in his intention. The novelist is never moral satirises several faults of character or the corruption of society but his purpose is not to reform but entertain and delight. Its plot is loose and episodic. Its incidents are thrilling and sensational.

Some important picaresque novelists and their contributions:-

Some popular English picaresque novelists were Daniel Defoe, Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, Charles Dickens etc.

Daniel Defoe - The History of English literature exposes the fact that in the first half of the 18th century the picaresque novel were made popular in England by Defoe and Smollett. The autobiographical method was well used by him. His famous picaresque novel is Moll Flanders.

He enlarged the scope of picaresque novel. Of course, Moll Flanders is the story of a picaresque heroine whose fortunes rise and fall on her several amorous experiences and experiments. She has to lead a very scandalous and malicious (mischievous) life.

Henry Fielding - Fielding also has a very significant and influential position among the picaresque novelists of the 18th century. He did his best to present a satirical and realistic picture of the contemporary rural society. His picaresque novels are Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews and Jonathan Wild.

The hero of Tom Jones is an illegitimate (bastard) child with no parents to look after him. He is involved in a no. of misadventures. He even joins the army fights several times for a good cause, and is wounded. The incidents of this novel are thrilling and sensational.

Tobias Smollett — Smollett also wrote some picaresque novels. He presents sarcastic and bitter his popular picaresque novels are Humphrey Clinker, Roderick, Random and Peregrine Pickle. He suggests to his readers to be quite considerate and sympathetic. His Humphrey Clinker gives a vivid picture of dehumanised hero presented in terms of his resemblance to an insect.

Charles Dickens — Charles Dickens is supposed to be one of the most popular picaresque novelist of England. His well known picaresque novels are 'Great Expectations', 'David Copper Field' and Oliver Twist. His David Copper Field is a favourite picaresque novel which is autobiographical in spirit. Dickens says about this novel, "Of all my books I like David Copper Field the best". The conditions of the school were very miserable in his times because schools were run by private authorities. The students of schools were mercilessly bitten by their cruel teachers even for trivial mistakes. There was a rampant tradition of bonded labourers every where in England. Many minor children had to work in blacking factories from dawn to dusk. The conditions of the working women and labourers were beyond imagination and description. As we find in David Copper Field we observe that Charles Dickens was beaten black and blue by his school master Mr. Creakle and he had also to work as bonded labourer earn his livelihood. Thus David

Copper field is an autobiographical picaresque novel.

Conclusion — We find that there is a true portrayal of the realities of life in the picaresque novel. These novels amuse the readers by the use of romantic and chivalrous details.