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The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isphahan as a Picaresque Novel

Maryam Saeedi¹, Samira Bameshki²

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Abstract

Rereading Persian novels from the perspective of genre classification is a necessity that is lacking in literary research. The main issue in this research is to study this novel as a Picaresque novel and to show Picaresque features in it. The necessity of conducting this research is that in this article, we investigate why this novel can be considered as a picaresque novel and Hajji Baba as a Picaro character, and in addition, the historical, social and cultural context of the period of writing this work and the relationship between this type of novel and the situational context of the time of text production is also studied. According to the obtained results, this novel is a Picaresque novel due to its satirical and critical language, simplicity of writing, first person perspective, realism and having an episodic plot and Hajji Baba is also due to possessing traits such as lying, cunning, shrewdness, belonging to the lower classes of society, being constantly traveling, being dependent and on a ration of many masters, and not being morally committed means a picaro hero. Also, the unsettled political, social and cultural situation in the period of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, caused chaos, insecurity and disorder in the

¹ . M.A graduated of Persian Language & Literature, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, Email: Maryamsaeedi0110@gmail.com

² . Corresponding author, Assistant Professor of Persian Language & Literature, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9634-0442> ; Email: bameshki@um.ac.ir

society in Iran at that time and emerge of picaresque people, which eventually led to the appearing of this narrative genre which critical-satirical approach to the situation and having picaresque people is one of its important features and has favorably depicted the conditions of that era.

Keywords: *picaresque novel, Picaresque, The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan, Mirza Habib Isfahani, James Morier.*

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In the sixteenth century, a new type of literature became known as Picaresque narration or Ayari narration (see: Sieber, 1389: 8) whose main character is a Picaresque. A thief or a rogue who is helpless and earns his living by deception and gimmick. Appearance of such heroes in the world of writing, especially in Spanish fiction - in which the main character implied and emphasized the fundamental impact of social, economic and cultural conditions on members of society - signals the collapse of a system called Feudalism in which aristocracy were assumed ideal and great.

Picaresque novel was not limited to Spain, but " later the continuation of this type of literature penetrated in Europe (Italy, Germany and France) and even in the twentieth century some works in the Picaresque style were written in America" (see: Sieber, 1389: 30-40). This genre also exists in Maqamat, which is a style of writing in the Arab countries of Asia. Some even believe that picaresque was taken from Arabic Maqamat. For example, Ghunaymi Hilal has pointed to the similarities between Badi al-Zaman's and Hariri's Maqamat with the stories of the Spanish Picaresque and the imitation of Spanish Muslim writers of Arabic Maqamat in the late thirteenth century (Ghunaymi Hilal, 1390: 280-279).

This type of literature continuously appeared in the field of fiction. It seems that by the translation of Mirza Habib Isfahani from the novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* by British diplomat James Morier, this genre became more prominent in the area of Iranian story writing. According to a search conducted in the fictional works of Persian literature, the novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* is one of the best works that shows the most features of Picaresque.

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the features of Picaresque in this novel and to open the door for further studies of this type of novel among different types of Persian novels. The main issue in this research is reading and reviewing this novel as a picaresque novel and the main focus is on this purpose to show that:

Research Questions

- what and how are the Picaresque features in novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*?
- for what reason (s) can Hajji Baba's character be considered as a Picaro?
- what has Hajji Baba's novel got to do with the context of its translation and its political, social and cultural condition?

2. Literature Review

Reading the Persian novel of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* as an example of Picaresque novel and examining its background shows that the researches that have been done in the field of Picaresque so far have examined the origin of Picaresque type and its similarities with Ayari literature or Maqamat which has nothing to do with our research; Such as the article "Comparative Narratology of the Maqamat and Picaresque" (2016); "Writing Maqama and picaresque based on Hariri's Maqamat and the life story of Lazarillo de Tormes" (2016); "Maqama and Picaresque: Has the style of Picaresque story writing been influenced by Maqama writing?" (1397); "Elements of intertextuality in the narratives of Picaresque and Maqamat" (2015); "Origin of Picaresque, East or West?" (2015) and the article "Features of Picaresque character in Iranian and foreign stories" (2015). In all of these articles basis of the work has been on the authors of Western Picaresque novels or Maqamat, and none of them has studied a Picaresque novel among Persian novels. Only two studies have been conducted on the study of the characteristics of Picaresque story in Persian stories; an article entitled "The Story of Picaresque in Jamalzadeh Short Stories" (1397) whose author to conclude that the literary genre of Picaresque novel owes much to the Iranian literary tradition, studied short stories by Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh (ie: Vilan al-Dawlah, Bile Dig Bile Choghondar, political men, The chats of Mullah Ghorban Ali, Goose Kebab) and next to it, recounted one of the anecdotes of Hariri's Maqamat and also an anecdote of Gulistan as a complete example of Picaresque anecdote. The second is an article entitled "Picaresque, the link between" *The Adventures of Hajji Baba*

of *Isfahan* "and" *Voyages d'un faux derviche* "(1398), which is a comparative study that bears the similarities of this novel with a work called " *Voyages d'un faux derviche* "by the Hungarian writer Arminius Vambery. The present study differs from the mentioned research both due to the detailed study of the characteristics of Picaresque and *Picaro* and also the study of the text production context.

3. Methodology

In this article, narratology and theory of narrative have been used to study *Haji Baba's* novel.

3. Results

The present study is dedicated to the study of the literary genre of Picaresque novel in the novel of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*. The results of the studies are as follows: *Hajibaba's* personality due to his characteristics such as: poverty and misery, being handyman of many masters, instability and change of identity, agility and intelligence, being opportunist, being deceptive and cunning , lying and being liar , hypocrisy and duplicity, stealing, not adhering to morality and being stationary is considered a *picro* character. *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* is a Picaresque novel; because the structure of the story is episodic and includes 134 chapter; is realistic; it has a critical view, it is satirical and sometimes humorous; story is told in the language of the main character of the story, *Haji baba of Isfahan*; therefore, the point of view of the work is the first person and the novel is expressed in a simple and fluent language, the life story of a *picro* is depicted and the main character of the novel, *Haji Baba*, is a *anti-hero*.

It is the political, social and cultural condition of society that give rise to this species; and in any society where the conditions are prepared, characters of *Picaro* appear. The time of writing *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* is in the period of the reign of *Fath Ali Shah Qajar*. In this period, the king's weakness and incompetence, his tyranny, selfishness and lust, corruption of officials, courtiers and politicians, foreign interference and aggression, especially *Britian*, war with *Russia*, poverty and low literacy in society, distressed condition of people and anxiety of people about the situation of the country has caused insecurity, chaos, the deterioration of the situation of *Iranian* society at that time and appearing *picro* characters ; therefore, we can say this genre, the content of which is criticizing conditions of that time and *picros*, has well described conditions of that period.

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