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PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH OF FAITH AND IMAGINATION IN *LIFE OF PI*

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**ABSTRACT**

In Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, Pi survived 227 days of horrible situations in Ocean through faith and imagination. Through these techniques of survival he explored the boundaries between physical and spiritual life. Yann Martel included the themes of survival, faith, imagination and miracle in order to present a formula for the harmony of life. The author is not out to prove the existence of God, but rather to justify a faith in God's existence. God's existence has the same status in relation to truth and reality as Pi's experience of shipwreck. Human beings are blessed with a multitude of senses such as sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (the five traditionally recognized senses). Imagination is something different from these senses. It creates some fascinating images in mind which will give access to a whole new world. Faith can be regarded as a belief in a system of religion or as inner confidence. Through faith, human beings are healed of their inner conflicts and tensions. This paper tries to establish that imagination and faith have a role in the day to day life and they have clear survival and psychotherapy values.

**Key words:** Faith, Imagination, Survival techniques, Existence, Psychoanalysis

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**INTRODUCTION**

Usually adventure fictions deal with the story of a small group of people or an individual, trapped in an isolated Island or an unknown place, who will eventually escape by using a "survival kit" containing makeshift tools necessary to fight for life. *Life of pi* is entirely different from such adventure stories. It is the story of a teenage boy who used faith and imagination as survival kit, to survive a shipwreck.

**Psychoanalytical perspectives in *Life of Pi***

This novel begins with Pi's childhood and youth. In India, Pi's family had owned a 'zoo' but they later decided to sell the animals and immigrate to Canada on a cargo ship named Tsimtsum. A terrible storm that occurred during the voyage killed Pi's entire family. Pi, stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean for 227 days, with only some animals like a tiger named Richard Parker, Hyena, an injured Zebra and an orangutan named Orange Juice, felt utter hopelessness. There, Pi had to witness how the hyena killed the zebra and Orange Juice, and Richard Parker killed the hyena. Like any other person who got entrapped in life threatening situation, Pi was also having hard times and was ready to go any extremes to save himself, both

from starvation and Richard Parker. For that, Pi had actually changed his entire nature. Pi killed and ate fish and turtles to sustain his life in the middle of the ocean and gave up his lifelong pacifism and vegetarianism. Pi didn't want to kill Richard Parker instead he tried to tame it by giving some food. He resolved to live peacefully alongside Richard Parker. In all the challenges that he faced, Pi made use of his "coping skills" which included his faith in God, his faith in himself, his imagination, his memories with parents and siblings etc.

Adaptation is the way of animals to survive and to live in its environment. They have natural instincts to respond to danger. But human survival is more complicated than that. It involves conscious knowledge of the fear of death. "I must say a word about fear. It is life's only true opponent. Only fear can defeat life" (Martel 178). Fear can be defeated through faith in a superior realm.

To have faith means placing blind trust in something outside of oneself. Letting go of fear, both rational and irrational, was not something that could be easily achieved. Pi had gone through significant religious awakening in his childhood. He was inspired by a variety of religions like Hinduism, Catholicism, and finally Islam. His family supported him with his idea of plural religion and he remained highly devoted to all his religious paths for his entire life. During the moments of helplessness he looked up to God. "Faith in God is an opening up, a letting go, a deep trust, a free act of love" (231). Alone in the Ocean, Pi had enough time to think about the spiritual homework he did in the past. His curiosity about religion had given him multiple perspectives about what was right or wrong and what would bring him spiritual salvation.

In *Life of Pi*, there is an 'author's note'. The 'author's note' recounts how the author encountered Pi's story. He came to India to write a novel. The author meets a man named Francis Adirumbasamy in an Indian Coffee House on Nehru Street in Pondicherry. Francis tells the author: "I have a story that will make you believe in God"(Martel xii). Francis Adirumbasamy (also known as Mamaji) is the guru of all gurus, a catalyst, a seed and the spark of the novel. In fact, Mamaji is believed to have introduced Pi to spirituality as a practice and taught him how to swim. The ability to swim turns into a pretty practical gift when Pi ends up in the middle of the ocean. It is also a metaphor for the gift of faith, which helped Pi to sustain on the open sea.

Mr. Kumar (the Biology Teacher), Mr. Kumar (the Humble Muslim) and 'Father Martin' (the Catholic Priest) taught Pi invaluable lessons. They serve more as vehicles for different viewpoints rather than characters with deep psychologies.

Mr. Kumar, the Biology Teacher, shows Pi that science is made up of wonder and it invalidates "the darkness" of religion. But his passion challenges Pi to see science as a committed, atheistic belief, and therefore a type of faith. Mr. Kumar allows his childhood disease 'polio' to erode his faith in God. "What a terrible disease that must be if it could kill God in a man," Pi says (28.) In this way, Mr. Kumar allows suffering to diminish his capacity for belief. Perhaps because of this, he exaggerates the power of reason.

Kumar, the Humble Muslim, teaches Pi to pray until the believer has a mystical connection with God. After Pi leaves Kumar's (the Muslim) hovel, he says: "...I suddenly felt I was in heaven... Whereas before the road, the sea, the trees, the air, the sun all spoke differently to me, now they spoke one language of unity... I felt like the centre of a small circle coinciding with the centre of a much larger one. Atman met Allah" (62). Pi found an inclination towards Islamic religion. He achieved a sense of unity after his exposure to Islamic prayer.

Father Martin tells Pi about how Christ, the Son of God, because of his love for mankind, suffered and died just like a human. He tells Pi how love motivated Christ to endure suffering. Thereby he shows how human losses and pain can be redeeming. "I was fourteen years old- and a well-content Hindu on a holiday- when I met Jesus Christ" (50). Suffering becomes a part of him, like an appendage or a beautiful deformity. Both Christianity and Hinduism seem to combine in Pi's practices and his encounter with Islam. The utter physicality of Islamic worship ("Hot-weather yoga for the Bedouins") recalls the garlands and bells of Hinduism and the principle of incarnation in Christianity (60). Pi says: "I challenge anyone to understand Islam, its spirit, and not to love it. It is a beautiful religion of brotherhood and devotion" (61). Pi's ordeal doesn't obscure his religions or his love of science and the world, but instead forces him to put these into practice. Christianity now has to show Pi the redemptive qualities of suffering. Hinduism shows him the rituals of survival and Islam as the way to the beloved even if the beloved wants to kill you.

Storytelling process itself functions as a survival technique in *Life of Pi*. In order to cope up with the trauma of his mother's death and his own cannibalism, Pi decides to change the tragic events, so that he can see himself anew and that is why Pi imagined his accompanying survivors as animals. Pi's tedious life at sea has been alleviated somewhat with sporadic new activities: killing fish, taming Richard Parker, creating drinking water using the solar stills, and so on.

Richard Parker and Pi go temporarily blind initially. The cause is not clear. Pi hears another voice. It is a Frenchman on another lifeboat who has lost his sight. Both Pi and the French castaway talk about several survival methods and nonsensical stories. Pi invites this man into life boat calling him "brother". As the man boards Pi's lifeboat, he sets on Pi to kill and eat him. Later the man is killed by Richard Parker. This blind French castaway and the days spent on the floating island gave Pi a change in routine. But soon the novelty had worn off and nothing was expected to happen. Pi experienced utter hopelessness, yet he must continue living. At this point Pi turned to God and invented the story. His mind seems desperate to escape the physical reality of continued existence on the lifeboat, and so it soars into the realm of fiction.

The authorial voice within *Life of Pi* recognizes the importance of faith. He knows that without faith, imagination has no power. 'Imagination' is fortified and perfected through faith in the power of our own soul and 'each doubt' destroys the effects of its labour. "Doubt is useful for a while. We must all pass through the garden of Gethsemane. But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transport" (28). Faith must confirm the imagination, because it perfects the will. Those with utmost faith and confidence possess the divine power, which eventually protect them from all evil influences, whether they come from an incarnated or a disincarnated entity.

When The New Testament talks positively about trust or faith, it only uses words derived from the Greek root which means 'to be persuaded' (bethinking.org). According to P. Moreland, an American philosopher and theologian, the essence of faith (biblical or otherwise) is confidence or trust; one can have faith in a thing or a person and one can have faith in the truth of a proposition. When faith is directed toward a person or thing it is called 'faith in'; when it is directed toward the truth of a proposition, it is called 'faith that'. It is a great misunderstanding of faith to oppose it against reason or knowledge. In actual fact, faith (trust) and confidence are rooted in knowledge. Pi's faith is vested in knowledge (130-31).

Pi resorted to prayers of three major world religions (Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism) and surpassed the threat of wild animals, shark, monstrous waves, starvation and dehydration. There are two instances in the novel. The first instance involves Richard Parker's survival and the second instance involves Pi's survival. "I could see [Richard Parker's] head. He was struggling to stay at the surface of the water. "Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu, how good to see you, Richard Parker! Don't give up, please come to the lifeboat! ... Swim, swim!"(97). The next prayer is a bit different, to say the least: "My heart stopped and then beat triple speed. I turned. "Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu!" I saw a sight that will stay with me for the rest of my days. Richard Parker had risen and emerged. He was not fifteen feet from me. Oh, the size of him! The hyena's end had come, and mine" (150).

Richard Parker, a deadly animal, could have easily killed Pi. However, due to the divine grace (that Pi possessed through faith) he got saved. A miraculous rat "appeared out of nowhere" and that Pi is able to fling it at Richard Parker who, already a bit hesitant to leap on the less than firm tarpaulin, accepts the rat as an "offering" and flops back down on the bottom of the lifeboat.

Pi prays no less than five times every day and considers those prayers just as important as any other physical or survival preparations. "I kept myself busy. That was one key to my survival" (190). Although he used his faith and religious beliefs to cope up with the ordeal, he doesn't pronounce his religion. He finds out consolation, energy and suffering capability through his faith and knowledge of various religions.

Pi remembered the story of Markandeya (from Hinduism) who fell out of Vishnu's mouth into the entirety of the universe and found out how miniscule and meaningless his suffering was. Christ's suffering (from Bible) saved humanity from eternal damnation and he knew that everything would be okay even if he

were not to live. In the same way, from the Islamic religion, he learned that all creatures belong to 'one entity' and love them even if they are dangerous. So Pi knew he had to coexist with Richard Parker in order to survive.

During moments of despair, a kind of 'atheism' reflects in Pi affected by his earthly needs. In such cases, readers often find him struggling with hunger, thirst, survival, animal psychology, wind, anchors and weather. He viewed everything scientifically, observing, hypothesizing and then experimenting with ways to get out of the problem. Pi used different mediums to survive but he only had one aim which he achieved through faith.

Secular psychologists focused upon the 'bio-psycho-social' model of human development and behaviour. Accordingly, human development is based on biological, psychological, and social influences. This means that, one will fight with all his or her biological and environmental stresses naturally, because they are interlinked. Here Pi realised that his only weapon to survive is faith and he strongly adhered to it. He trusted in God but he never bothered about which God or religion he must believe in.

Faith is a process of moving from "blind faith to conviction bolstered by philosophy, and finally to certainty forged in the fires of personal experience. The cultivation of faith can be compared to the growth of a tree. As a young sapling, it can easily be uprooted, just as faith based solely on belief can easily be shaken or destroyed. Faith bolstered with philosophical knowledge is like a medium- size tree, strong and not easily disturbed. Faith matured by personal experience of God and the Gods is like a full-grown tree which can withstand external forces. (Veylanswami)

Pi's faith was like a strong tree nurtured by religious and philosophical knowledge. He showed how belief and hope could strengthen the will to live and provide some meaning to life even in the darkest times. For instance, his 227 days long struggle of existence on a life boat in the Pacific Ocean with a zebra, an orangutan, a hyena and a tiger, was miserable but still he expressed his trust in God.

Through the plot's remaining action, Martel emphasizes that a strategy for self-preservation can actually be astonishingly effective. Immediately after this moment in the text, Pi lands on a beach in Mexico. Women in village were rescuing him from the depths of his misery. At last, Pi has succeeded in overcoming the disaster. We cannot ascertain that Pi's rescue is only with faith and imagination. 'Reason' has its own role in sustaining Pi's life. But the so-called 'Reason' has its base on imagination and faith- the two main coping mechanism men choose to survive. These aspects are reflected in the last part of the novel. Pi asks his interrogators: "Since it makes no factual differences to you and you can't prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is a better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?" (317). After their response, Pi says; "Thank you, and it goes with God" (317). Pi's life revolves around two stories. First one is his true life story and the second one is the fictional story that he created for his own convenience. In both versions, Pi survives without his family.

Throughout the life of 'Pi', there is a constant struggle between faith and reason. He chose the story with Richard Parker and the floating island. That was the story with God. The story in which Pi believed, miracles happened, and God saved him. Pi was given two choices that included Reason and Faith. Reason is a consistent contradiction of faith and Pi chooses faith. This proves that life is not about truths but about faith. It is true that reason played a role in his survival, but faith is what kept him from not 'giving up'.

Sometimes my heart was sinking so fast with anger, desolation and weariness, I was afraid it would sink to the very bottom of the Pacific and I would not be able to lift it back up. At such moments I tried to elevate myself.... I thank God it always passes (209).

At the end of the novel, when Pi reached the shore, he initially questioned God's abandonment of him and then confirms God's presence. "This beach, so soft, firm and vast, was like the cheek of God, and somewhere two eyes were glittering with pleasure and a mouth was smiling at having there" (285). God had given Pi the strength to go through all the hardships. What he receives from the Richard Parker story (animal story) is "the faith in the existence of God". Despite the version of the story, Pi wanted to focus on the fact that God helped him in his survival.

Faith neither promises immunity from suffering nor escapes from stress. As we have seen, it is linked with enhanced joy and strengthened walk through valleys of darkness. It does enrich our lives with social support, meaning, ultimate acceptance, a focus beyond the self, a hope-filled enlarged perspective on the day's stresses. Here Pi realised from experience that spiritual survival depends on harmony of some factors like overcoming fear, having faith in oneself, self-understanding and acknowledging one's place in the universe, understanding the symbiotic connection of all these ideas. According to social scientists, religion and mental health are linked in such a way that religious people tend to become physically healthier and therefore live longer. They are less likely to feel in control of their own fate, depression and never succumb to psychological disorders such as schizophrenia. Religion is all about faith and faith is powerful.

Imagination can be regarded as a God given link to tap into the mind of God. God has given man the ability to see what He sees through a mental image on the canvas of his imagination. His imagination could either become a positive or a negative force. Doubts, fears, insecurities, worries and counter-thoughts blur the mental pictures of the targeted success. Imagination is the essence of human consciousness. It can override one's will and make the needed adjustments one is seeking.

Pi's use of 'imagination' as a survival technique, is intermingled with his faith in God. His imagination draws on the experiences and knowledge of the world around him, which he combines to make something new.

When Pi was stranded on a life boat in the Ocean with animals like a tiger named Richard Parker, Hyena, an injured Zebra and an orangutan named Orange Juice, he imagined them to be his mother, a sailor and the cook. The zebra is like the Taiwanese sailor; the hyena is like the cook; the orang-utan is like Pi's mother; and Pi himself fills the role of Richard Parker.

The equivalence between the zebra and the Taiwanese sailor is easy to infer. Both are foreign (the Taiwanese sailor speaks nothing but Chinese and so is unable to communicate with the others), and both have a broken leg. The cook removes the sailor's leg just as the hyena bites off the zebra's leg. (305). About the sailor, Pi says: "I couldn't believe a human could survive so much pain, so much butchery" and he makes almost the same observation about the zebra (305).

Orange Juice and Pi's mother share some similarities. Both of them have two boys and each pair of two boys is three years apart. Pi talks about his entry into the world: "a last, welcome addition to my family, three years after Ravi" (12) and that Orange Juice had "given birth at the zoo to two young ones, strapping males five and eight years old that were her—and our—pride" (124-125). Both make it to the lifeboat by holding onto floating bananas. In Pi's mother's case, she "held onto some bananas and made it to the lifeboat. The cook was already aboard, so was the sailor" (303). All these are mirrored in the story with animals, especially when Pi sees Orange Juice "floating on an island of bananas in a halo of light, as lovely as the Virgin Mary" (111).

In this instance, Martel uses the pronoun "she" without giving us an antecedent, and the reader might be tricked, on a much smaller scale (for only a couple of lines) than the trick perpetrated against the reader about Richard Parker into thinking the "she" might be Pi's mother. After the hyena bites off the zebra's leg and makes the move to attack Orange Juice, she hits him. Pi describes this: "She thumped the beast on the head. It was something shocking. It made my heart melt with love and admiration and fear" (129). This moment is paralleled in the story without animals where Pi's mother hits the cook. The cook cuts up the sailor's leg. Pi says:

The next time the cook was close by, Mother slapped him in the face, a full hard slap that punctuated the air with a sharp crack... He stood without moving or saying a word as Mother looked him straight in the face. I noticed how he did not meet her eyes (308).

The key similarity between Pi and Richard Parker is that Richard Parker kills the hyena, just as Pi kills the cook. In the story with animals, after avenging his mother's death, Pi cannibalizes the cook. He describes: "His blood soothed my chapped hands. His heart was a struggle—all those tubes that connected it. I managed to get it

out. It tasted delicious, far better than turtle” (310-311). He ate cook’s heart which is a sign of social dominance than hunger, although hunger was probably also a motivating factor.

When a person encounters dangerous situation, his mind fills with fear and he won’t be able to think properly. But human mind is powerful enough to produce wonderful imaginations that can act as a coping mechanism to survive and regain mental power. In *Life of Pi*, while interviewing Pi, the pair of Japanese Ministry of Transport Officials found the animal story too unbelievable to report. Hence, Pi told them a different version of story and that was the human story that paints emotionally disturbing variation of events. Through Japanese investigators, Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, we get a very clear explanation of the possible allegory. Pi, because he kills the cook, imagines himself as a terrible and violent tiger. This stands as a vicious instinct for survival, at a safe distance. Perhaps Pi found it better to deal with his traumatic experiences by transforming these animals into people with human qualities. When Pi was young, his father taught him the difference between animals and humans on biological and psychological level. Pi achieved the ability to tame animals, their emotions and instincts through those lessons. This has influenced his power of imagination. The cook’s inability to control his animal instinct in the face of death might have pushed Pi to relate him with ‘hyena’ and triggered the schizophrenic story that kept him going through his journey.

Pi imagines himself as a Bengali tiger (his animalistic side, the carnivore) which is the strongest living creature on earth. As the inhabitant of wilderness, tiger has the natural instinct and power to handle the challenging situations. It is noted that Richard Parker was absent from the boat until the hyena (the cook) kills the orang-utan (Pi’s mother). A sign that the animal instinct was buried deep in Pi’s subconscious, restrained by the gentle, religious being that he was, until a tragic event like his mother’s death unleashed it. Like two sides of a coin, human nature has got two sides: a kind and innocent part nourished by love and a harsh and violent part ruled by angst and hatred. In this novel, Pi expresses both these aspects. As time progressed, vegetarian Pi turned non-vegetarian. He found ways to kill fish in order to feed Richard Parker (himself). He became more brutish about it, tearing apart birds and greedily stuffing them in his mouth, the way Richard Parker does. Pi has changed over time due to this internal conflict between his animalistic and humanistic nature. His power of imagination made him busy with Richard Parker and Pi enjoyed the situation, unaware of the fact that his life is likely to end at any moment. Pi knew that Richard Parker was an imaginary character but his subconscious mind was not ready to accept it. If he admits the truth, then he won’t be able to survive the tragedy. So it was necessary to establish a powerful tiger as his opponent in his life boat to distract his mind from fear and attain power to deal with the matter of life and death. Richard Parker was a way of dealing with the darkness and bestiality within himself. The tiger stands for Pi’s personality which means that the tiger’s violence is actually a manifestation of a side of Pi’s soul that will do anything to survive the shipwreck.

From the beginning of this novel, Pi muses on the nature of animal territories, especially regarding the zoo and his father as a zookeeper. He explains that animals love rituals and boundaries and they don’t mind being in a zoo as long as they accept that their enclosure is their territory. His mind worked on some calculations and conclusions about the tiger and fixed a boundary between them. Pi, surrounded by the boundless ocean and sky has his own clear territory separate from Richard Parker. Pi marked his territory – “the raft and the top of the tarpaulin with his urine and training whistle” (172) and Richard Parker has his territory on the floor of the lifeboat (171).

Somehow, Pi wanted to survive. So he also imagined that his parents were waiting for him to arrive. Pi felt responsible and struggled hard to keep himself alive, so that they could start afresh. “I would climb aboard and be greeted by my family. They would have been picked up in another lifeboat. I only had to ensure my survival for the next few hours until this rescue ship came” (113).

Richard Parker disappears when Pi first crawls ashore, showing that the tiger (if he is fictional) was a part of Pi that existed only on the lifeboat. Pi is then able to move on with his life – he goes to school, gets married, and has children – because of that boundary between himself and Richard Parker. He kept himself sane and humane by symbolically cutting off the animal part of his nature.

In this novel, there are two versions of story narrated by Pi, while he got interviewed by a pair of Japanese Ministry of Transport officials. The story that is assumed to be true is the animal story. Later when the officials found it hard to digest the true story, Pi invented a human story. Through his imagination he urged the listeners to believe in the unbelievable. May be in reality, the truth about the life of 'Pi' is a mix of both stories. The novel appears to be open for multiple interpretations. What the novel ultimately focusses upon is how the power of imagination as a coping mechanism for survival psychologically affected a person in an optimistic manner and helped him to achieve his goal.

**Conclusion**

Human beings on earth have to experience anxieties, fears, inhibitions and confusions as they try to face reality or external world. In such a context 'faith' in a superior power and within oneself as well as 'imagination' assist a person in survival and help them to come out of the cocoon that they have created for themselves. This paper focuses on how a person makes use of his natural instincts like faith and imagination to survive when he encounters hardships of reality. Faith and Imagination are two aspects of Psychotherapy or Psychoanalysis that relieves human beings from stress. This is very clear through the novel *Life of Pi*.

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