



ESTRANGEMENT AND SURVIVAL - A COMPARITIVE STUDY OF  
*ROBINSON CRUSOE AND LIFE OF PI*

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ABSTRACT

Literature as known by everyone always serves the life with many social realities and so literary works are considered to have some social functions. Every human being has to face many problems in his/ her life as it has become an important part of human society that cannot be separated from the reality of life of every people. While facing such problems, the inner character of a person comes to the light. Such a thing can be understood from two different novels namely *Robinson Crusoe* and *Life of Pi* written on different centuries have taught us. Though these two novels were written in different centuries, the basic things in these novels can teach the readers a lot on the same platform. This paper is an attempt to bring out some similarities between the two novels and compare the main elements that lead to the survival of the protagonists from both the novels.

**Key words:** shipwreck, character, loneliness, moral values, integrity.

Man, the so called social animal, is directly or indirectly dependent on others for his survival and also for living his life in a better standard. So, mankind started to lead the life, as a community satisfying the needs of fellow human by doing the works that they can do. A group of individual together form a society with some rules and regulations formed to maintain the discipline in the society. These rules and regulations are considered as moral values that every individual ought to follow in order to maintain the dignity of the particular society and also the individual himself/ herself. Practicing these moral values for years, every individual develop the sense of vice and virtue that are reflected in their actions. It gets stored in their conscious and subconscious memory and even in some unconscious actions, it reflects its effects.

Sigmund de Freud, an American Psychologist, classifies human tendency on reacting to the circumstances into three namely ID, ego and super –ego. ID represents the basic human behaviour which does not consider the moral values or the ethics that are manmade, while super-ego is reacting to a situation in a manner that is based on the moral values and ethics created by the society. Ego stands between the ID and Super-ego as explained by Freud. The protagonists of the novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *Life of Pi* are taken as examples to elucidate this theory of Freud and also to show that moral values can give an individual the courage to survive at any situation.

*Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a successful eponymous novel written by Daniel Defoe, narrates the story of a young man who on a sea voyage got ship-wrecked and was the only survivor of the wreck supposed to live lonely on the island for years since there is no other way to escape from the island other than giving up surviving. When humans live in groups as a society, they would observe certain rules and regulations in order to maintain the discipline of the society where each individual has to curtail his/her interests. In a communized society, no individual is supposed to act according to their ID as it is considered as an unacceptable behaviour or sometimes even a punishable offence. One needs to act according to their super-ego in the society to be identified as a good human being. But not everyone can follow this principle entirely on all the places around the clock. Everyone behaves based on their ID in a place where they consider themselves to be safe to express their internal desires. The values and morals that the society teaches the people decide the virtue and folly in the individual actions. Robinson Crusoe was still following the moral values created by the society even when he was alone in the island. He ought to take necessary work in order to make his survival but as he believed that Sunday is Sabbath day, he did not work on the particular day and was relaxing ideally doing nothing. But as the days went on, he could not keep track of the days of the week and so he failed to follow the same. This made him to behave according to his wish not following many rules and regulations created by the society he lived. Thus, when someone is left alone from his/her society, there is no surety that they should follow the rules and regulations laid by the society. Robinson Crusoe was the only one who survived the shipwreck. Unfortunately he got struck in a lonely island where he needed to take care of all his daily routines. There was no one to look out for the works he ought to do. There was no one to monitor his behavior and so he can do anything that he wanted to do; he became the master of his days and nights. There was no one to control his actions and so he can do anything he wanted. But the circumstances around him forced him to search for a way to survive. At the later part of the novel, Crusoe finds a companion and names him Friday and becomes his master by preaching the teachings of the holy Bible. Crusoe at that situation could have taught anything and made his own rules and regulations, yet he followed the Bible that was introduced to him by his society earlier. Even at his own kingdom of survival, Crusoe still followed the society he lived that shows us that he acted according to his super-ego.

Similarly, *Life of Pi: A Novel*, a booker prize winning Canadian philosophical novel written by Yann Martel published in 2001, also picturizes the life of Pi Patel who after a shipwreck struggles for 227 days in a lifeboat sharing with a Bengal Tiger all alone in the Pacific Ocean. Like Robinson Crusoe, Pi Patel also supposed to struggle for his survival and the difference between them is that Robinson Crusoe survives on land and Pi Patel survives on a lifeboat with a Bengal Tiger. But both their situations are more or less the same. They need to face all the challenges, on their way to survival, themselves. There was no one to help them. Pi Patel also came out of the values that he was following so far when he moved away from the society and left alone in the Ocean.

When analyzing the characters of both of them, the readers can understand that their characters were not same when they were safe on their comfort zone. Their characters changes when they were left alone. For instance, Pi Patel was a vegetarian and hates eating fish and other non-vegetarian food when he was with his family. When they were on the journey to Canada in a ship, they make quarrel with the chef of the ship as they were denied to get vegetarian food and then refuse to eat anything instead they eat bananas that were kept as a food for the animals they take along with them. But everything changes when he was left alone in the ocean. He was supposed to eat whatever he gets from the ocean for his survival as he came to know this truth from the booklet in the lifeboat. Then he started to eat fish which is the only thing that he can do for his food else he would lose all his energy. The situation forces him to do this and all his values and morals that he kept when he was with his family was broken at a moment in the fear of losing his life. While killing the fish, he thanks the Hindu God Lord Vishnu for showing him a way to survive by becoming a food in the form of a fish. Yet he apologies to the God for killing a fish as he needs to provide food to the Bengal Tiger else he would be the food for the wild animal and he also eats the fish. Though it is not his internal desire to eat fish, he behaved in such a way just to save his life.

However it was a little different in the case of Robinson Crusoe that he had no practice of praying to God ever in his life until he was left alone in an island. Even then he never prayed to God. He mentioned in his journal that he prayed to God for the first time on June 21 since he was left helpless because he was confused

what to do after the storm. Thanatos or the fear of death, as explained by Sigmund Freud in the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) has a pivotal role in the life of everyone and Robinson Crusoe and Pi are not any exceptions to the death instincts. This fear of death forces the people to do whatever they wanted in order to survive and that particular fear has forced Pi to face such a situation where he has to survive all alone in the ocean with a Bengal Tiger, Richard Parker. When a man is supposed to face the fear of death, he is ready to face anything and there is no limit for him to go to any extreme and Pi is an example for this as he shares the lifeboat with a ferocious animal that is already sea-sick making it more ferocious. If he became a little careless for a minute he would be killed by the tiger.

Both Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel were almost in the same situation where they were forced by the fear of death as they were struck alone and there were no hope of escaping from that worse situation which got worst on the go. Still they managed to survive out of all struggles that came their way. Though both the novels were written in different centuries, they convey the same truth that when someone is left alone with nothing they ought to restart their life as a new species. Robinson restarts his life in the island and lives there for almost twenty eight years while Pi restarts his life on a lifeboat and lives in it for two hundred and twenty seven days. During these time periods, both of them learn to live their life without depending on others for anything. They learn to take care of all their routines themselves as life has given them an opportunity to each of them to learn what life is. Their way of behavior and manner of life got changed after these incidents.

When both of them were suffering alone, they did not behave according to their ID always, as they maintained the moral values and ethics that were thought to them when they were with the people. The situation and the circumstances they were supposed to face in order to make their survival forced them to come out of the rules and regulations, made under the name moral values in their society. They expressed the emotions like rationalization, regression, fantasy, apathy and aggression and also tried to get diverted from the fear that they experienced. Such situations teach the reality of life and decide the character of a person to face the situation in such approach that brings out the way of approaching the problems. Whatever the situation may be, the moral values and ethics that a person keeps in life is the lift to take the life to the next level. Though both Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel have changed the values according to their situation for their survival, they stick to a few ethical and moral values that keep their confidence of living. Though they faced many situations that would have forced anyone to give up on the survival, both these protagonists of the two novels have kept the belief in the God that have given the energy for them to survive even from the worse of the worst situations. Both of them could have acted according to their ID as mentioned by Freud, yet both of them have acted based on their ego at the most maintaining to keep the values they learnt. Though they have bent the rules according to their convenient, they still followed the societal values acting on their super-ego. Hence life is like a climber and the moral values and ethics are the supporting stick for the climber to climb upwards.

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