

Chapter 1

Yann Martel and the *Life of Pi*

Background of the Study

Yann Martel is a Canadian writer, born in Spain in 1963 to a wandering family and best known for his famous novel *Life of Pi* (2001). As his father was a diplomat and had to stay in different countries, Martel had chances to live in several countries, so he was familiar with different cultures. He completed secondary education at Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ontario (1979–81), and later he attended Trent University (1981–84; 1986–87) and Concordia University (1984–85). He did his bachelor's degree in philosophy. The publication of his magnum opus established Martel as a prominent author.

Martel's *Life of Pi* published in 2001, gained international admiration for its inclusion of the elements of parables, fantasy and magical realism. Martel won the prestigious Booker Prize for the novel *Life of Pi*, which has been published in more than 30 languages. The story of the novel has been adopted for a movie that won Academy Award in 2012. Directed by Ang Lee, the movie is equally interesting. .

Life of Pi became a popular and successful novel among the readers, and it encouraged Martel to go ahead with more creation. Very soon, he published another volume entitled *Beatrice and Virgil*. This is an allegorical creation intended as a literary expression of the Holocaust. Animals (donkeys and monkeys) interact with human characters, even if they are stuffed and exposed in the taxidermist's store. Though the work has received varied reviews, Martel has effectively used animals as storytelling instruments, equipping them with human attributes, therefore “the animal is both itself and something else, a kind of canvas.”(Martel 23). He gives a slight religious touch to his writing. In his own words, Martel remarks: “I’ve always been

struck how . . . religion is deeply narrative. All religions relay stories and I assume that speaks to who we are as a species” (7). This displays Martel deals with the problems related to human nature, existence and life.

The novel *Life of Pi* can have varied issues to be researched, but the present study is an existential analysis. This novel is a story an adventure of Piscine Molitor Patel, aka Pi, the protagonist in the novel. In this particular research, the concepts of existence, anxiety, and survival draw major attention, focusing on the struggle of the protagonist on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker in the Pacific Ocean.

Pi's family decides to shift to Canada from India with other animals which are to be deposited in a zoo. However, the ship they are travelling in is hit by a storm and gets capsized. Pi and Richard Parker are fortunate enough to survive on a lifeboat and have to rely on each other in many ways. Both have few choices and preparations and are always faced with the danger of being lost in the ocean. They withstand hunger, thirst, sleeplessness and many other dangerous situations. Sometimes they are very close to death in the ocean.

Pi suffers from an existential crisis while trying to feed the tiger and to keep himself alive. Apart from that, he confronts the possibility of losing his existence thinking whether the tiger gets hungry enough to kill him. Both of them confront many dangers in the sea in course of their voyage. After sailing for 277 days, they reach a deserted island where there is no sign of human beings; neither can they find fresh water and adequate food. Frustrated Pi, sometimes thinks this is the outcome of his struggle for existence. The protagonist befriends Richard Parker developing camaraderie with each other for existence. However, at last on the Mexican beach, they are disintegrated and suddenly the tiger chucks him selfishly, and this hurts him.

Pi finds himself in a dilemma when the tiger enters the nearby forest. In such a manner, this study strives to portray Pi's struggle for existence, and the constant sense of anxiety confronted by Pi.

The novelist has asserted the theme of alienation in *Life of Pi*. A little boy who is disintegrated from his parents at a tender age and completely isolated from the entire world for 227 days without human communication. When Pi was in Pondicherry, India, he was an enthusiastic, outgoing and excitable child, dependent on his family for protection and guidance. When the ship overturned, he separated from his family and entire world, and left alone in the lifeboat along with other wild animals. Finally, he develops self-sufficient though he loses his family.

Therefore, this is a challenging life-story of a sixteen-year-old boy, who struggles in the sea with a tiger for 227 days. This novel has been divided into two parts, first part illustrates the animals and the humans. The second part is about a motivating story that provides a boost to the individuals who have suffered in life. The novel asserts the possibility of survival in the world without the help of others. In *Life of Pi* Martel explores the struggle for existence in the face of a strenuous situation.

Review of Literature

This part presents some literature reviews that have been done on Martel's *Life of Pi*. Sanguinely, these studies will help the reader to figure out the shortcoming and the greatness of Yann Martel's work from different points of view. Many critics have taken the story of *Life of Pi* as similarity to real life. With this regard, Roland Barthes pens, "The image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect analogue and it is exactly this analogical perfection which defines the [text]" (46). This process that Barthes explains ultimately "reduce[s] the poly semantic possibilities to a single

interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual meaning” (Iser16), which accounts for the countless responses that any text, but especially *Life of Pi*, may generate.

The novel has been analyzed through eco-critical perspective, describing the interdependence between Pi and the tiger, presenting them as the representative lives of coexistence. In this context, Deepali Yadav in "Eco-critical Reading of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*. in *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* " pens:

Firstly through biocentrism, when the story takes its course with the involvement of animals and humans in all three sections- in the zoo, in the ocean and in Mexico where Japanese officials cannot find it true to believe in animal stories but they readily accept human story (anthropocentrism). While the second manner of approaching the novel is through eco-centrism. This concept has been brought into force while giving the descriptions of certain places like France and Munnar, in the novel. (1)

Yadav's point of view to look into the novel through biocentrism and eco-criticism is worth attending. A contemporary novel like *Life of Pi* has embarked to develop a parallel relationship between humans, animals, environment and literature to broaden the sphere of nature studies in the literature.

Martel's *Life of Pi* reveals his storytelling capabilities through the dramatization of faith versus reason, which Pankaj Mishra praises in his review:

Martel is incapable to uncover satisfactory, after the whirlwind of colourful devout data within the early pages, the exact nature, or instabilities, of Pi's confidence. The enormous questions approximately life and ethical quality that any discourse of God incites are as unimportant to Pi on his raft as they more often than not are within the animal kingdom. (18)

Pi, sounds to be theist and simultaneously adopts three religions, namely, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, but does not overburden himself with big queries. He overcomes to outlive his trial basically since he commits his time to figure out what to do within the troublesome times.

Plot structure is one of the important aspects of a narrative, especially, a novel. Different types of plot structure are found depending upon different authors. Regarding this particular novel by Martel, Allan Kotmel call it a nonlinear narrative. Talking about linearity and non-linearity of a novel, he states:

Linear writing is straight-line writing [in regards to chronology and narration]. Most paper text documents are linear. A linear document would have a fairly definite beginning, middle and ending... Non-linear writing is more associative. Non-linear writing involves many different paths. . . . There may or may not be a beginning, but there is rarely a definite [personal narrative] path or single ending. This makes for a more reader-based document and allows the reader to make choices. (1)

Kotmel only describes two types of narratives: linear and non-linear, and says linear narratives are comparatively easier to read and perceive as the story moves ahead in a straight line. The readers do not have to invest much labour to grasp the meaning. Such narratives have clear beginning, definite end and there is a lot in the middle. On the other hand, non-linear narratives have different associations and the story does not move in a straightforward way. Readers have to work hard to work out the meaning. Readers are in the center in non-linear narratives.

In spite of being a non-linear narrative, the novel has exceptional novelistic qualities and elements. As David Pendery points out:

It [*Life of Pi*] is an avant-garde montage, a new fable, a tableau of the weird

and fantastic—in other words, a book outside the realm of normal novelistic portrayal and exposition. In one important sense, the novel is a combination of the fictional and the factual which can be understood as transacting modes in a single paradigm, with fictional and non-fictional assets overlapping each other. But there is much more in this work, for the book is as well an essentially unfinished, enigmatic, and deeply spiritual exploration of the godhead and what this means for human existence. (67)

The novel is categorized as an experiential work of narrative with some peculiarities as compared with the traditional fictions.

The novel combines varied issues like religion, ecology, psychology and other disciplines, so in this regard it can be rated as an interdisciplinary work of literature.

This work is a new study of reality, spirituality and existence, utilizing both fictitious and non-fictitious elements that are uniquely narrated.

In spite of different themes in the novel, the issue of existence of Pi and Richard Parker is more foregrounded. Therefore, the present study is focused on the very issue.

Problem/Questions/Objectives

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* dramatically portrays the struggle for existence in the postmodern era. To live, Pi must face a human-natural conflict. Human-natural conflicts include animals, elements and carnivorous islands. His duality is demonstrated by facing the constructed reality that provides a fictional expression of his fear, psychological survival, and postmodern identity in the face of adversity. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the cause of his existential crisis throughout the analysis.

This paper attempts to answer what is the existential theme in Yann Martel's

The *Life of Pi*, and how the theme is presented through the protagonist. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to present existential themes in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* to show how themes are presented through the protagonists. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the analysis of existential theories, especially Sartre's analysis of Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*.

It is expected that the analysis of this study will provide both practical and theoretical contributions to the related study. Theoretically, this study is intended to make a contribution and a literary-scientific consideration, in particular to the understanding of literary psychology about the main character of literary work. Practically, this research is also done for the benefit and is intended to be useful for further researchers, especially students of the English department who want to analyze the novel with the theory of existentialism. For the teacher, this research should contribute or be additional material for the literature materials.

Methodology

In this paper, I first read Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* as a primary source and begin with a study of the library. Then, to support my analytical research, I will search for reading materials from reference books and Internet sites to get more relevant information about the theory related to the approach used and applied to the analysis of my dissertation. Finally, I use all the information to analyze the topic I have selected for my dissertation. In analyzing the dissertation, I use Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism to understand the hero's struggle for meaningful life. I study the choices, freedoms, and the existence of individuals. And I study the theories related to his personal life, society, and desires in the social environment.

The thesis is divided into four chapters: the first chapter is the introduction, which consists of the research background, problem statement, objective,

methodology and the structure. The second chapter analyzes the existentialist criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre. The third chapter analyzes the original work "*The Life of Pi*". The thesis ends with the conclusion of the whole work.

Chapter 2

Existentialism: Concept and Practice

Existentialism is a twentieth-century philosophical theory that stresses human freedom, choices and actions. Existentialists surmise that society should not restrict an individual's life or actions and that these restrictions hinder free will and the development of that person's potential.

Existentialism claims that choices have to be made absolutely by individuals, who consequently create themselves because there are no objective values to govern choice. Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the void of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which agony, frustration, illness, hatred, alienation, malaise and death dominate.

At the time of World War II, Europe finds itself in a crisis and experienced death and destruction and the existentialist movement starts right from that time. Existentialism spreads its zenith in the year following the war, the time when Europe is in despair and pessimism. The pessimistic aspect of the life of the contemporary time contradicts the life of the nineteenth century which was full of optimism and brightness. The very scene can be perceived in the works of the great thinkers of the world such as Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrich Nietzsche. These writers and philosophers have contributed a lot to find out the human dignity and the spiritual and material features of life. Their works are concerned with the existence of human beings.

Existentialism, being a school of thought, devotes itself to the interpretation of human existence. The term, "existence" comes from the Latin root Ex "out" + Sistere "to stand" (Cuddon 316). Thus, existence is to stand out in the universe. It takes human beings as isolated existent into the alien universe. The feeling of despair and

separation gives the idea that people have to create their values and meaning in life. This is why one is bound to make choices and create self. One exists up to the time, s/he makes choices. After all, it focuses on the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the solitude of human existence. It indeed concerns what particular way people have to follow and how they deal with the negatives such as depression, frustration, pain, anxiety, and alienation which are the byproducts of modern society.

The existentialists make it obvious that the human choice is momentary and personal since every individual makes one's choice keeping oneself away from any prejudices. Since people choose things following their taste and need, they are responsible for any kind of consequence their choice brings about. Hence, he makes his stand clear regarding the choice of his liking and disliking. After all, existentialists stress the freedom that is accompanied by responsibility in a world devoid of meaning. Existential philosophy is concerned with the existence of the individual's life and death. They seek for what it is like to be an 'individual' human being in the world. Whether the thing is true or false that eventually depends on the decision an individual makes. There is no conclusive meaning and definition of anything. Rather its nature is unsolidified and relative. In *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre says: "We are condemned to be free" (56). He means to say that people are cursed to be free and they keep on making choices to please their taste on this ground their freedom turns a curse and they indeed never become free at all. Their freedom proves harmful and unbeneficial to them.

There is a deep concern for existentialism with the man's pre-philosophical attempts to attain self-awareness and understanding of existence. Out of many prominent figures, Sartre's view is relevant here to bring about into light. He entails in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions* about the individual and her/his

potential to become more than what s/he is, "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (15). To him, humans have immense potentials that they use and create their outstanding presence in the world they live in. Furthermore, he claims, "there is no reality, except in action" (32). There is no reality without action. Reality and action are aligned with each other. They are reciprocal. Sartre puts living in two different parts; authentic and inauthentic. He opts for authentic living and focuses that one must opt for and make a commitment to better it. He makes a vivid difference between being-in-itself (en-soi) and being-for-itself (pour-soi). En-soi refers to things; this means a thing is primarily what it is. For a human being, existence precedes essence. Therefore, the man pours -soi: "The best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God" (63). So, men first exist, appear and then make a choice and gradually create their identity.

Sartre's notion is different from other philosophers in that a person's existence leads him to his/her essence which is changeable according to the will of the person. It means a person is free to make choices of his own. It is his choice that forms his essence, which goes on changing during different stages of life. In this connection, Senejani states:

The notion in existentialism is that, man spends his life changing his essence.

There is not any objective form of truth, but the truth is formed by personal choice. Existentialism does not support the following concepts: first, wealth and honor make a good life; secondly, social values control an individual.

Thirdly, acceptance of what happens to us, and never try to change it.

Fourthly, science makes life better. What is important in existentialism is that, human being is free and his nature is made through his choice. (16)

The exact nature of that choice can vary as per the time and circumstances, but when

people have a choice, they have freedom. In his book, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre has famously argued that 'Existentialism' can be summed up in the phrase, "Existence Precedes Essence" (159). In other words, Sartre believed that for human beings, our real existence comes first before essence. What we do for ourselves is more important than what we are.

French existentialist Albert Camus reflects on the loss of certainties in the postmodern world. To him, each individual has a plan in her/his own life as a project. The person is responsible for the choice and even failure of the very design as well. Hence, his concern is with the freedom and responsibility of the person and their alienated state that is due to social mechanisms and difficulty that one confronts due to lack of belief and admiration to the almighty. His entire focus is on the absurd life of individuals and their meaningless involvement in materialistic acts. He thinks that human existence is futile.

The modern world is full of injustice: millions work in a cyclic way that is exploitative. Furthermore, he thinks that humans should rebel against the absurdities just by discarding such futile things. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he says that Sisyphus is the replica of modern people and makes his fate though he knows the implication of his deed is no more fruitful. Camus says:

"I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of the night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." (70)

To have an easy exit from the anxiety, depression and frustration of the absurd world,

one needs to follow the dictates of God or he/she should submit to death. But to the modern man, either of the choices is a ridiculous coward. Rather s/he likes to exist in the absurd world struggling hard.

Sisyphus disobeys God and creates his fate though this fate is much more challenging and complicated and similarly to the plight of modern people is. They create their future which is dreadful and extraordinary. Camus makes a glimpse of the miserable plight of the modern man:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is familiar. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels like an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.

(13)

Camus believes that a human being is an isolated existence in an alien universe. The universe does not possess any innate truth, value or meaning. "This universe", states Camus, "henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" (85).

Camus concludes that the condition of man becomes absurd when he realizes that the speculative system of the past provides him with no reliable guide for life. Since the man in the absurd world becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and helplessness. At the cost of his pleasure, he chooses fate and a life full of anxiety, helplessness and depression.

Existentialists are preoccupied with the meaning of life, therefore, the main focus is on the life of people. Life is very difficult and does not have any core meaning, existentialists attempt to create meaning in this modern world full of unwanted situations like alienation, isolation, loneliness, frustration, lack of

authenticity and absurdity. After all, existentialism moves around the man's desperation and disenchantment.

Existential philosophers like Nietzsche and Camus afflict fatalism. They boycott the ideas that our fortune is pre-determined and that we can't chuck or alter it. Nietzsche declines an interpretation that deems fate as a manifestation of benevolent divine providence. For him, fate is faceless so that none can ever fall the victim to his hand. People blindly believe in fate as objects. It is just our coincidence what happens in actions. He argues that every man has some sort of and the course of the world that must be destined to be oriented. He says that "free will" is the strongest power of fate which is felt in the medium of freedom of will.

To Nietzsche, fate is not a compelling power. Rather it is an experience of free will. Through freedom, we can endure fate. This world is not perceived as a place of comfort for human being by free consciousness but as resistance, struggles to establish its latitude within it, and in doing so our experiences themselves become the supportive elements of "free will". But it is our self-perception of consciousness that makes it a free will.

Safranski further considers the interrelationship between free will and fate and determinism and adopts the views of Nietzsche as follows:

He reflected on the circumstance that reason is free enough to allow the problem to arise in the first place. Even the question itself-"How is freedom possible?"-manifests a "free will". Although a free will does belong to the universe of determination, it is still free enough to be able to distance this whole world conceptually. To this liberated consciousness, the world appears as the grand other, the universe of determination. Nietzsche called it "fate" (37).

To Nietzsche, the enigma of freedom is equivalent to the idea of fate. He says, whether the relationship between freedom and fate is established that depends on the individual to connect the two fields in his own life; every person becomes a ground of the world as a whole. Each individual is a case in point of the link between fate and freedom.

Camus reflects on individual freedom as well. He thinks that an individual can make his fate through his actions. He asserts that the individual must not bow his head before God or authority, and should neither negate nor objectify him. He worries about the false spirituality, religion, and authority in the *Myth of Sisyphus*:

It is Camus's insight into his awareness of Sisyphus during the process-his insight into the fact that Sisyphus knows what he is doing-that gives Camus's courage. Like Sisyphus, Camus tells us, that humans make their fate, their own choices, and to that extent are in control of their destinies. By defying the gods, Sisyphus made his choice and his fate. (67)

Here, Camus entails that those human beings are free to make their own choices and thus make their fate. In other words, they are responsible for their actions. So, human beings can control the course of the future if they so desire.

If we think of the mythical hero Oedipus, he is isolated to fight against the adversity remaining in Thebes: Plague that has damaged the entire city. The struggle between these two forces is evident in Sophocles's next play *Antigone*. Antigone is rightfully obliged to accept the state law i.e., not to bury her state claims traitor brother Polyneices but she is more obliged to undertake the divine law, once it depends on the proper cremation of her brother Polyneices. This becomes the cause of the tragedy of Antigone. Jacobus further says: "The main conflict 'Antigone' centres on a difference between law and justice, the dispute between a human law and a

higher law" (70). Antigone begins with a hero who possesses forward hoping that she is right. Thus, in the struggle between individual force and divine force, individual force seems to be feeble. But it is the choice of the individual which can counter divine force thereby changing their destiny.

In his writings, Paulo Coelho has dealt with existential themes that are alienation, frustration, depression, hopelessness, mechanical human relationship, meaninglessness, absurdity, instability, uncertainty etc. The narrator's quest for self is the focus of study and search over here. Sartre's views are much more pertinent in this regard. Sartre says: "Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself; he is, therefore, nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life" (769). The excerpt clearly states that a man's essence is the outcome of his choice, that is, his actions and thoughts, and therefore, his life is fully controlled by his own will; there are no other forces to control him while forming his essence. Consequently, it is not the essence that creates a man but just contrary to it, the man creates his essence. The judgements a person makes determine the type of his personality.

Sartre's view regarding atheistic existentialism is much well-intentioned here to get highlighted. It affirms with greater reliability that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being that exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. He says, "That being is the manor, as Heidegger has it, the human reality" (214). The notion behind the statement is that first there is the being, the existence and then there forms the essence. After birth a person struggles to give his identity in the world. His struggle is oriented towards achieving identity, that is, meaning in life.

For example, when a person becomes conscious about the outer world, he tries

to shape his life; which way to go ahead; what profession to choose and how to lead a meaningful life. If there is some imposition from outside, there is some unpleasant situation to him, and his smooth way may be disturbed. It means a person is guided not by other's direction, but by his own. There is the notion of "subjectivity", that is, a person's life is not determined by any other object but by the subject, means the person himself. In *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre writes:

Existentialism states, what is at the very heart and centre of existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity -a commitment always understandable, to no matter who in no matter what epoch - and it is bearing upon the relativity of the cultural pattern which may result from such absolute commitment. (216)

He, therefore, emphasizes the commitment that one makes. A person's free commitment is very important in shaping the life. No doubt, the cultural issues may affect in the making of personal decisions, but in moving ahead with free will, it is the person's individual decision that is of prime importance.

Existentialism is thus a philosophy with diverse meaning and interpretation. So clear perception of the meaning is very difficult. Senejani formulates some easier ways to understand what existentialism. He presents five basic concepts about this philosophical thought:

1. Existence precedes essence: what you are (your essence) is the result of your choices (your existence) rather than the reverse.
2. Time is of the essence: We are fundamentally time-bound beings. Unlike measurable, clock time, lived time is qualitative: the 'not yet', and the 'present' differ among themselves in meaning and value.
3. Humanism: Existentialism is a person-centered philosophy.

4. Freedom/responsibility: in existentialism existence precedes essence, so man has no predetermined nature.
5. Ethical considerations are paramount: though each existentialist understands the ethical, as with freedom, in his or her own way, the underlying concern is to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society. (16)

The five concepts incorporate almost all the views given by different philosophers and critics. The list includes all ideas about existentialism, though briefly, starting from existence and essence, connection between time and humanism with existence and essence, and limits of responsibility and ethical considerations that we often study in gain the concept of this philosophy.

Chapter 3

Pi's Struggle for Survival

In *Life of Pi*, the protagonist Pi Patel, a 16-years-old Indian boy is helplessly left on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean after a shipwreck. Even he is so young, he attempts to discover who he is, that is, his existence. His plight entails the separation of his own circle of relatives since the boat he is travelling on is full of water resulting Pi to be left by himself with the dangerous animals. However, as an existential hero, he decides to respond to the condition after the shipwreck. He believes "to think that [he will be saved] is itself a source of hope and hope feed on hope" (199). In the novel the novelist presents the protagonist as a person who challenges the established concept of survival. He seems to be believing in the personal quality, decision and patience as the weapons to fight the dangerous situation. He shows that optimism, faith and confidence give strength to our survival.

Being trapped in the middle of the sea changes Pi's mentality and he loses his self-innocence, "You might think I lost all hope at that point. I did. And as a result I perked up and felt much better" (37). This displays that people who unable to make moves or make their own choices cannot have a meaningful existence. Pi travels through rebellion and struggle, and gradually he becomes able to achieve life after hardships and suffering. The novelist demonstrates the protagonist's will to survive, and for that, his personal choices and decisions are placed at the front. This is what existentialists term as "subjectivity". This is the existential choice that helps him survive in the face of hardship.

As the boat somersaults, Pi shortly realizes that he must must be safe and escape the condition of inaction. He will not survive unless he does something for himself heroically to protect him.

Without questioning about the condition, Pi is determined to work out the steps for the survival of those on the boat. Pi identifies that he ought to "stop hoping so a great deal that a ship [will] rescue [him] [he] no longer rely on outside help. Survival [must] start with [him]... to look out with idle hope is tantamount to dreaming one's life away" (169). By comprehending how his aspiration has been a hindrance, the protagonist is penetrating the circumstance of hopelessness that Sartre depicts as the realization that "limit[ed] to a reliance upon that which is with [his] wills" (Sartre 357). Moreover, Sartre asserts that the commitment to hope is a precondition to overcoming life's obstacles, and by relinquishing his faith in being rescued, Pi finds his "situation [to be] patently hopeless" (169). The forlornness that Pi undergoes is what impels him to act and to make them try to protect himself, therefore, in this way, Martel's perspective of desperation as a scenario of action appears to replicate that of Sartre's philosophy.

On the contrary, Martel delineates Pi's lack of hope as inflicting him to query the necessity of his survival, thus contradicting Sartre's positive, optimistic view of despair. Pi correlates despair to that of "a heavy blackness that let[s] no light in or out ... a hell beyond expression" (209) and when he becomes blind and mislays his last bit of hope. He "resolve[s] to die" (242).

Additionally, Martel elucidates that there is a definite sense of hopefulness that compares with the sort of hope Sartre denounces as resulting in a condition of inaction that convinces Pi to act in such a way that furthers his chance of survival. For instance, as Pi devises a plan to expunge the threat of Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger got on the lifeboat, "a modest glow of hope flicker[s] to life without [Pi], like a candle in the night [because he has] a plan and it [is] a good one" (159). Even though this hopefulness appears to parallel Sartre's assertion that a man "ought to commit

[oneself] and then act [one's] commitment," it is Pi's hopefulness that induces his action, which contradicts Sartre's reasoning that "one need not hope to undertake one's work" (Sartre, 358).

No one can explain Pi's condition in the same way he does because no reality is objective. Additionally, Pi is free to surmise the incredible reality of surviving at the sea with a tiger, "it is the better story" (316). So, Martel depicts the power of explaining the universe as one opts for rather than limiting oneself to the indisputability of objective reason. Hence, this view of Martel's novel parallels the existential attitude that each person freely explicates and comprehends his existence when he chooses.

Existentialism accredits that every man, thrust into the universe with no pre-determined values or nature to lead his works, is completely accountable for who he becomes. His "existence precedes his essence," (Satre, 159) and thus, he is no more than the sum of his actions. Mainly, he is what he does. In the novel, Pi first begins off with rebellion in his journey to searching for his meaningful existence. Pi does not give credence to following foreordained religion or thought in a hard time. That is to say, he does not confine himself to what one religion utters and expires by blaming fate. He does not like to remain in a limited area, sooner he longs to become a man of action. Pi revolts early in the novel by studying three different religions, "They didn't know that I was practicing Hindu, Christian and Muslim" (87). Following more than one religion is unusual in any culture, but Pi challenges his culture by following three religions simultaneously.

However, an outcome denotes his active and mutinous attributes and significant actions. He does not trust what social institutions tell him to do, rather he believes in existence in front of him. This also presents that Pi is defying social norms

and values. At the end of the novel, Pi persists to disclose rebellion, as he eats parts of the cook's body, "I ate his liver. I cut off great pieces of flesh" (249). Eating flesh of another person is known as cannibalism which is not normally accepted by any society. When Pi persists to have human flesh, he is disclosing more and more rebellious nature. For existentialists, the unusual behaviour of Pi is an existential choice to survive in face of the arduous condition although it is against foreordained rules and values of society in day to day life.

Next, Pi exists himself losing the complicit nature that tenses him and loss of his essence. The protagonist (Pi) makes his own choice by chuckling the way of vegetarianism as he catches and kills the fish to quell his hunger and feed the tiger for survival, "I heard a cracking sound and I no longer felt any life-fighting in my hands...The flying fish was dead" (203). Pi, being a vegetarian in his life, is showing his obsession with essence because he no longer follows his vegetarian principles. When a man alternates his beliefs and makes his own choice, it appears like he focuses on existence rather than essence. Further in the novel, Pi grips his choice to further extremes as he kills the cook, "The cook killed my mother . . . Then we fought and I killed him" (343). When Pi makes the conscious decision to kill a human being there is no turning back on childhood innocence. Although he kills the cook in self-defense and for survival reasons this is an existential choice in the face of difficulties. The author further explains we can see how the lead character has continued to act and make his own choices amid the hardships he meets.

In the wide sea, Pi discovers limitless freedom and joy, "There were many skies" and "many seas" (289), and "there were all the nights and all the moons" (290). Pi views "many starry nights, where with just two colours and the simplest of styles nature draws the grandest of pictures, and I felt the feelings of wonder and smallness

that we all feel and got a clear sense of direction from the spectacle, most definitely, but I mean that in a spiritual sense" (259). Another time Pi views a stunning blast of lightning striking the sea, and "puncturing water, a white splinter came crashing down from the sky . . . The water was shot through with what looked like white roots, briefly, a great celestial tree stood in the ocean . . . The flash of light was incredibly vivid" (312). With this, Pi finds himself celebrating in "a state of exalted wonder," and he wonders whether "This is an outbreak of divinity" (314).

As an existential hero, Pi even creates his sort of existence and visionary experience, when he ceases the passage of time in his psyche, dons a sea-water dipped piece of attire over his face (a "dream rag" he calls it (318), and lies back to be visited by "the most extra-ordinary dreams, trances, visions, thoughts, sensations, remembrances" (318). Pi's utmost aim, in the midst of what is mostly a dreary and endlessly monotonous sea journey, is to find "the feeling that things were different, that the present moment was different from the previous present moment" (318). This is how he chooses what he desires in his life – for Sartre freedom is that people always have a choice and hence are always free. Thus, for existentialists, freedom is significant.

His options guide him from dark gloom and profound grief to heights of seventh heaven and freedom. Pi notes, "You reach a point where you are at the bottom of hell, yet you have your arm crossed and a smile on your face and you feel you're the luckiest person on earth" (292). He loses the whole family and succeeds in finding freedom despite the dangers loitering everywhere. Solitary and bleakness are a constant threat: "Despair was a heavy blackness that let no light in or out. It was a hell beyond expression" (281), and fear "is life's only true opponent. Only fear can defeat life" (214). "I have so many bad nights to choose from," Pi says, "that I've made none

the champion" (163). But he also finds that gifts from paradise seem to be common, and his persisting attempt is to lessen the hardship and finds his existence. Three days later, he found himself on the lifeboat, he was about to die of starvation and thirst, but then he found a goldmine of nourishment in the lifeboat's dire emergency rations locker (which also provides him with many other life-saving materials, even containing "1 God," though we may assume this was Pi's imagination). After drinking two liter of protected water found in containers in the locker, "Everything in me, right down to the pores of my skin, was expressing joy" (190). His first taste of emergency ration, a dry baked-wheat biscuit is just as good:

They were savoury and fragile to the palate...They crushed under the teeth with a delightful crunching sound...They made a powdery paste that was beguilement to the tongue and mouth blending with saliva...And as I swallowed, my belly had only one thing to say: Hallelujah!" . . . "Now I will turn miracle into routine." (191).

Pi finds many more such joys although they are always interblended with despairing low points and terrible life-threatening conditions. Owing to his hope and action, he ultimately finds joy and freedom.

When the ocean swells and where the strong storm hits, a massive splash of water erupts hovering above Pi and the boat, it has boat was once swamped Pi feels that he is going to pass away, however, he does not longer lose his braveness. Around the clock, they often go up and down until fright became monotonous and was replaced by numbness and a complete giving-up. An experience like this is certainly not for the faint of heart, even though lucky for Pi the worst moments and storms are always followed by calm seas, and he finds his hope coming back, as frequently as not to be expressed in his pious dedication and love of God. Every day, he practices

religious rituals several times, and no less than involves the deceased zebra and a flying fish he killed in his prayers. When he feels he may lose his faith in one grief-stricken moment, he reaches the supreme level of his dedication and proclaims:

At such moments I attempted to elevate myself. I would touch the turban I had made with the remnants of my shirt and would say aloud, "THIS IS GOD'S HAT!"

I would pat my pants and say aloud, "THIS IS GOD'S ATTIRE!"

I would point to the lifeboat and say aloud, "THIS IS GOD'S ARK!"

I would spread my hands wide and say aloud, "THIS ARE GOD'S WIDE ACRES!"

I would point at the sky and say aloud, "THIS IS GOD'S EAR!" (281).

When the middle part of the novel draws on, and we are involved in all of the wonders, despair and danger described above, Pi finds grimly at one time that "Everything suffered," and "We perished away" (320-321). One day at the dawn, he indeed feels that he is on the verge of perishing, and when he turns into the visually impaired and finds himself clinging to life, his body wasting away, he gives up all hope. In a final grasp at salvation, he thinks of first Richard Parker, "Goodbye Richard Parker. I'm sorry for having failed you," (326) and then his lost family -- Father, dear Mother, dear Ravi (his brother) whom he often bears in his mind. For Pi, life is strenuous and does not possess any objective meaning, so as an existentialist. He makes his choice to confront adversity and he tries to create meaning in this modern world full of detachment, solitude, forlornness, frustration, segregation lack of authenticity and idiocy as an existentialist.

All animals on the isle in turn are killed by Richard Parker over the past few days. The presence of these animals, especially Richard Parker, survives alongside Pi

until they reach Mexico. Natural events are also presented as remarkable, and Pi derives force and aid from them. For Pi, observing the sea life on the underside of his raft is peace (built to put him out of reach of Richard Parker): "What I saw was an upside-down town, small, quiet and peaceable, whose citizens went about with the sweet civility of angels. The sight was a welcome relief for my frayed nerves" (198). An electrical storm is "something to pull me out of my limited mortal ways and thrust me into a state of wonder", and he praises Allah, saying to Richard Parker 'Stop your trembling! This is a miracle. This is an outbreak of divinity" (233). Pi's miraculous experiences are not always uplifting; his meeting with another castaway is quite opposite. This meeting has a dreamlike quality because Pi and Richard Parker are both temporarily sightless from malnutrition, and when he hears a human voice, Pi thinks that he is hallucinating. Firstly, he believes that he is talking to himself, and secondly talking to Richard Parker, before realizing that the voice belongs to a Frenchman who is admitting to cannibalism. Richard Parker kills him when he is threatened by the Frenchman and this facilitates Pi's cannibalism: "driven by the extremity of my need and the madness to which it pushed me, I ate some of his flesh... You must understand my suffering was unremitting and he was already dead" (256). This is unfavourable to Pi's morale even before he eats the flesh. This is all situation of anxiety, fear and despair that Pi undergoes.

Pi's struggle supports his optimism for existence. His survival as more than minimally human is also presented as dependent on his ability to transcend his physical situations. In this regard, the danger is that the need for physical survival, specifically in terms of consumption, might render him uncivilized and less than human. Pi has no choice but to murder other animals, and here he confronts both moral as well as practical complications. He embarks for his safety by catching fish to

feed to Richard Parker, and even though he is not eating them himself yet, he feels guilt: "A lifetime of peaceful vegetarianism stood between me and the willful beheading of a fish" (183). Even though this vegetarianism presumably originates from his Hinduism, and despite having just lost his real brother, Ravi, Pi describes this in terms of biblical fratricide: "I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul... I was now a killer. I was now as guilty as Cain" (183). This reference implies that Pi might see nonhuman animals as beings not dissimilar from himself, whom he must not kill. However, he adapts readily: 'the explanation . . . is simple and brutal: a person can get used to anything, even to killing' (185). The image of human-animal equality is thus rapidly replaced by one of mastery. 'It was with a hunter's pride that I pulled the raft up to the lifeboat' (185). 'With time and experience, I became a better hunter' (195). Pi even sets up his control over nature . . . by "farming", albeit for water,' with his solar stills; Pi represents one as "my sweet sea cow" (187) and comments, "these technological devices became as valuable to me as cattle are to a farmer. De facto, as they floated placidly in an arc, they looked nearly like cows grazing in a field. I ministered to their needs" (188). Pi sees his killing and eating of animals, however, as threatening to blur the distinction between humans and other species. 'I descended to a level of savagery I never imagined possible" (197). He realizes, "I ate like an animal . . . this noisy, frantic, unscrewing wolfing-down of mine was exactly the way Richard Parker ate" (225). The comparison between Pi and Richard Parker is an evaluation in the same terms of brutality and refinement. In the context of decolonization, the dangers of this failure of distinction are mainly important. A point is emphasized in the novel when in an Indian eatery in Canada, a waiter sees Pi using his fingers for eating and says "Fresh off the boat are you?"(7). Pi has just come off the boat, but the expression means inexperienced and

unsophisticated. The recovery of refinement is so important to the assertion not only of Pi's humanity but his civilized status. These attributes are further threatened by his eating of human flesh. Sax's point about consumption also applies to individuals and what they eat. Flesh-eating of man, conventionally assumed as the most extreme instance of savagery, even though represents the lowest point in Pi's struggle to survive, is an existential choice.

The threat to Pi's condition as a human is also conflicted by his responses to Richard Parker. The domination of the tiger is the main means by which individuals make for survive and these are acts that are part of Pi's efforts to survive bodily. In a nutshell, he has no way to kill him, Pi's first idea is simply to keep Richard Parker well-nourished and to remain out of reach on a raft fastened to the boat. This changes as Richard Parker points out that he means no harm. "He was simply taking me in, observing me, in a manner that was sober but not menacing . . . He made a sound, a snort from his nostrils . . . He did it a second time. I was bewildered. Prusten?" (162-63). Pi explains, "Prusten is the quietest of tiger calls, a puff through the nose to express friendliness and harmless intentions" (163-64). Ironically, given his interpretation of Richard Parker's meaning, this leads Pi to decide, "I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but him and me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat" (164). This shows that Pi's conclusion here sums up an authoritative existential choice he has made for his survival.

Concerning Richard Parker, even though Pi's decision to rear him is expressed concerning shared survival, the outcome does not echo the tiger's friendly sound. Instead, it is an ongoing assertion of mastery for survival. For one thing, Pi vividly takes himself as continuing to occupy the position of a keeper, while Richard Parker

remains a zoo animal. "It occurred to me that with every passing day the lifeboat was resembling a zoo enclosure more and more: Richard Parker had his sheltered area for sleeping and resting his food stash and now his watering hole" (188-89). This shows how Pi and Parker struggle to make their existence in a cold environment.

In reality, as in the zoo, Richard Parker relies on Pi for physical survival because humans have removed him even further from his natural habitat: Pi observes, "I was the source of food and water ... when he looked beyond the tunnel, he saw no jungle that he could hunt in and no river from which he could drink freely... My agency was pure and miraculous. It conferred power on me" (223). Pi decides what empowers him for his survival. This difficult situation lasts until Pi makes another surprising discovery that the island seems to be supportive. Certainly, the carnivorous isle is dangerous, but so is the sea, and so is Richard Parker, who Pi takes with him when he escapes the isle. Therefore, Pi's leaving does not seem motivated by fear. Somewhat, he feels cheated:

‘The radiant promise it offered during the day was replaced in my heart by all the treachery it delivered at night’. However, his decision is phrased as preferring 'to set off and perish in search of my kind than to live a lonely half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death on this murderous island' (282-83).

On the island he confronts countless difficulties. He is not seen to be worried about getting lost. But he makes his choice so that he can survive on the island of murder. He does not portray it, but one possibility is that the island's carnivores remind him of the alien world he drifted around, and he is free to understand his life.

Additionally, he may be distracted by the idea that the island's dangerous nature challenges his scuffle for existence in a way that he cannot overcome. Unlike Richard Parker, over whom Pi has frequently asserted his power for his survival, the

island is not as friendly when he attempts to make it. Furthermore, he is compelled to remain to rely on the island to meet his needs in the way that a zoo animal is reliant on him.

The first story of Pi's survival, then, can be depicted as a version of a struggle for existence and struggle against essence. Its remarkable and magical realist elements continue Pi's search for existential meaning. He makes his choice and is accountable for what he does. For him, this is true not only because he needs to kill animals to sustain Richard Parker and himself, but also because eating like an animal and engaging in flesh-eating are the darkest instances of existential survival.

Pi, being an existential hero, struggles to the extent of his might and courage. But with the inevitability of demise, when the hope of being saved by a passing ship was shattered Pi gets discouraged.

Oncoming death is terrible enough, but worse still is oncoming death with time to spare, time in which all the happiness that might have been yours becomes clear to you. You see with utter lucidity all that you are losing. The sight brings on an oppressive sadness that no car about to hit you or water about to drown you can match. (186)

The existence of the tiger on the lifeboat symbolizes the undesirable confrontation with one's enemy, including the dark self. Extreme hunger elicited the bestiality of his personality when his physical necessities were denied by Nature. He was in perpetual lack of water and food, oppressed by a "fickle existence":

It was horrific, the extent to which a full belly made for a good mood. The one would follow the other measure for measure. So much food and water, so much good mood. It was such a fickle existence. I was at the mercy of turtle meat for smiles. (269)

He suffers from this spoiling state of being, departed between the awareness of human dignity and a horrible desire to survive.

The research highlights the quality of an existential hero as someone who has not only physical braver but mental capacity to decide for his survival. The hero's trip is a cycle that mentions a departure and returns full of challenges and hardships an inevitable force to aid the hero out of despair. The journey makes him move beyond the former universe of essence taking him to the present existence of knowledge and happiness.

Chapter 4

Pi as an Existential Hero

This thesis examines how the existential hero Pi in *Life of Pi* admits himself to a hope which stimulates him into action. Pi does not sit lazily cursing his fate in the strenuous times, rather he makes a conscious choice to struggle for survival in the boat on the sea. The first part depicts Pi in India. The second explains Pi's fright and anxiety on the lifeboat and subsequently his existential choice to act rather than sit idly waiting for his death. The study explores Pi's choice and freedom and how his hope in the face of adversity stimulates him into action. It explains Pi's hope and how he turned his fear and anxiety to hope and how he got his essence with his existence on the lifeboat. To analyze these three parts, I use the idea of existentialism in Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existence Precedes Essence", and some researchers' journals who have researched the field of existentialism including fear, anxiety, freedom, and essence. Those researchers and their theory or critical comments helped me explain and support my analysis of Pi's existence and essence.

The prime thrust of Sartre's existentialism "Existence precedes essence" is applicable in this novel. The changes in essence in the major character can be seen when he first lived in India. His customary existence lies there, but he misses his essence as a free man. He can not get his essence by doing what he longs for because he just did what people and social institutions have told him to do. His essence grows stronger as he gets trapped in the ocean with the tiger. He is finally able to make his existence stronger by facing his anxiety and fear. The act of facing makes him regain his essence as a human being.

To wrap up, from the choices he makes and the acts he does on the boat, his existence is full and he can shape his essence. Sartre's thought "existence precedes

essence” is proved by Pi’s search for freedom and hope confronting fear and anxiety.

The events Pi experienced on the boat give him scope to explore his freedom to shape the essence of his existence in the world.

Works Cited

- Camus, Albert. "Absurd Freedom." *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds to Modern Literature*. New York: Oxford, 1965. 844-52.
- - -. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Trans. Justine O'Brien. England: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Cuddon, John Anthony. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literary History* 3.2 (1972): 279-99. Print.
- Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Toronto: Random House, 2007. Print.
- Mishra, Pankaj. "The Man, or the Tiger?" Rev. of *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel. *New York Review of Books* 27 Mar. 2003: 17-18.
- Noth, Winfried. *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Panza, C., & Gale, G. *Existentialism for Dummies*. New York: Wiley Publishing, 2008.
- Pendery, David. "Life of Pi: Into the Divine, the Hard Way, or: Why the Tiger Didn't Bite." *International Journal of English and Literature*, Vol. 6.4, 2015. 67-75.
- Safranski, Rudiger. *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*. Trans. Ewald Osers. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957.
- - -. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington DC: Washington Square Press, 1992.
- Senejani, Akram Amiri. "Sartre's Existentialist Viewpoint in No Exit." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* 1.3 (2013): 15-23.

Yadav, Deepali. "Ecocritical Reading of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Vol. 4.2, 2013. 1-6.