

# Religion and Pi – *Life of Pi*

Gurwinder Kaur

Assistant Professor, Lovely Professional University

**Abstract** - Religion is often used as theme in many novels, drama and poetry. It is one of the most important factors in life of people. Therefore writers do not hesitate to either use religion in positive or negative of religion to build up its plot or character of protagonist or antagonist. Religion is epitome of psychology of a person. It plays an important role in developing the mind set of any human being. The way a person think is directly proportional to the way he or she was raised with belief and religion. This can be seen in various texts. Religion often gives a ray of hope in one's life which can be seen in Martel's novel *Life of Pi*.

Pi's character developed through religion and also the hope and belief in religion was very important factor of Pi's survival in the sea. Pi has seen as polytheist, believing in many religions gave a new definition to character of pi's personality. The relationship of Pi and religion is that of a teacher and pupil. Pi's outlook toward religion is difficult to understand as one is not sure his dimension to look at religion. He rather being a blind follower shows a sensible approach to it. He is not religious for the sake of being religious but he is because he felt more close to the God which gives him peace. Pi believed in not harming any one that was challenged him on the quest of survival in the sea.

**Key words**- Religion, Pi, Life of Pi, science and religion

Life of pi is often seen as postmodern story. However there are various religious symbolism which date back to Noah's ark can be seen. Martel wrapped up many religious symbols and motifs in modern clothes and presented the world with master piece called *Life of Pi*. Religion become quite evident in the first few pages of the novel itself when Pi's uncle told writer in Pondicherry "I have a story that will make you believe in God". A novel of vagabond teenager in quest of survival is coming of age novel of hope and belief. The first encounter of readers with religion is introduced when Pi tells his story to the writer, he told that he was born into Hindu family and therefore, inherited this religion, he was overwhelmed with the stories of Krishna the notorious god, then Hanuman a monkey faced god, Ganesh a god with elephant's trunk and lastly Vishnu to whom Pi believed to be creator and thinks that we are in his dreams. Martel worked on the disbelief of readers , when the novel stated that the story will make you believe is one way proved that the writer think that readers are having disbelief not all but some. One day when Pi was on holidays in Munnar he finds a new religion Christianity. Before that he just had a rough idea about some sacrifice made by the god, but later found out that God has sent his only son to die for the sins of mankind. At first it was hard for Pi to digest all this however more he understand about it more he was inclined to it. Now, that Pi has two religions, he was thinking that he understands religion but then one day he encountered Islam. Pi accepted that he had zero knowledge of Arabic language but mare the sound of it makes him feel more close to god. After finding Jesus, Pi ran to temple to say thanks to Vishnu for

introducing him to Jesus. Pi liked one thing about Islam very amusing. He whenever put his forehead on the floor felt a deep religious contact.

Pi was developing a vision that God is present everywhere. According to him God is in humans, animals, and trees and even in handful of earth. This particular belief led him to think that animals have soul. Although Pi believed in three religions to which his mother was thinking him finding a way to his destination, other in the family mocks him for the same and were unable to understand that how a person can have faith in three different religions. Pi was a vegetarian in the start till he was in life boat. His urge for survival led him to kill his first fish. He cried after doing that and even remembered fish in his prayers. Pi when back in Pondicherry wanted to look at the new tiger from close but was stopped by his father. His father stated that tiger is dangerous; Pi answered and stated that I have seen in his eyes, he has a soul. Pi's religious belief was somehow responsible for this thought process. He believed that God is everywhere.

The religion in this novel has been taken by many critics as suspension of disbelief. It can be seen that how Japanese did not believe to Pi's first story because they find it unbelievable. However when Pi told them a new one they didn't like that either because this story was not as interesting as previous one or was very violent. The disbelief is important in this novel. Because in the starting lines disbelief of readers was challenged when Pi's uncle told to the writer that I will tell you a story which will make you believe in the God. Religion was tested; belief of Pi was tested when he was on the life boat struggling to LIVE. In spite of that, Pi's belief in God was strong and that can be seen when Pi stated that thank you Lord Vishnu that you came in the form of fish to save me from hunger. It can be said that Pi was not very traditional in his approach to religion that can be seen when Pi changed his religious belief of not killing any one to killing fish for eating. The structure of novel is of storytelling where we have read and seen the story of Pi through Pi's own interpretation. It is hard to believe or can put a person in dilemma that which story is true and which not, but readers defiantly liked the story with tiger. Richard Parker was given the persona of human being. He is companion of Pi and Pi stated that if Richard Parker would not be with him, he would have been dead for long.

In this novel one can see the finest Example of relationship and need of both religion and science. Pi believed in religion but it was science that helped him in his vengeance in the sea. Although pi believed that religion is there to give him a strong head go, he cannot deny the fact that science saved his life on many occasions, that can be seen when he prepared raft or when with his skills from zoo. Pi on many Occasions prayed to God but he need to do something in scientific way to live. In this way Pi will be able to live through being on life boat with Richard Parker, a Bengal tiger. Pi tried to understand animal psychology in order to save himself from Richard Parker. Through this he understood that Richard Parker can easily get sea sick. Pi used whistle and swing the boat in order to create a dangerous atmosphere for Richard Parker. This helped him to control Richard Parker with Whistle. One can compare the life boat to Noah's Ark which again represents the symbolism of religion. The Tsimtsum which sunk in the sea because of some scientific fault can be seen as counter to life boat

presented as Noah's ark where one human being and an animal survived in spite of storm and deadly floating island. Pi's religious beliefs though helped him to have hope but the science helped him to rationalise the event in order to survive.

Life of Pi is a novel of hope and belief. The survival of a teenage boy was seen to be a vengeance of a sailor who due to ship wreck got stuck in the sea. Martel used religion to develop the character of Pi. He made Pi warm hearted and a person who thinks that animals have souls and due to this reason he was unable to stop from helping Richard Parker to come on board in the life boat. However, Pi repeatedly stated that, Richard Parker is the reason he is still alive. He thought of him as a true companion of vengeance. Pi's religion gave him hope in the middle of sea and his willingness to live helped him even to control Richard Parker. It would not be wrong to conclude that Pi has survived the long sea because of science and religion. It is very hard to deny any one of these primary reasons of Pi's safe return to land. However, Pi was disappointed at the end of his story. He believed Richard Parker to be his friend and expected him to say good bye to him but Richard Parker proving animal behaviour did not even look back to Pi. All these events led Pi to learn about religion and Zoology. His two affections love for religion and love for animals were equally important thus proved by him.

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