

LIFE OF PI: FROM FICTION TO FILM**Prof.C.Manikandan**

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Abstract:

The paper throws light on Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*. The story adopts adventure, imagination and high religious belief, and elaborates the cinematic adaptation of the same. A film adaptation is the transfer of a written work, in whole or in part, to feature film. A common form of film adaptation is the use of a novel as the basis of a feature film. The novel, *The Life of Pi* has been taken as movie. It is considered to be as the masterpiece of the director and has become a good visual treat.

Keywords: Adaptation, Film, Novel, Fantasy, Tiger, Voyage, Boat, Isolated.

Introduction:

Life of Pi is a Canadian fantasy adventure novel by Yann Martel published in 2001. The protagonist is Piscine Molitor 'Pi' Patel, an Indian boy from Pondicherry who explores issues of spirituality and practicality from an early age. He survives 227 days after a shipwreck while stranded on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker.

The novel has sold more than ten million copies worldwide. It was rejected by at least five London publishing houses before being accepted by Knopf Canada, which published it in September 2001. The UK edition won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction the following year. It was also chosen for CBC Radio's *Canada Reads* 2003, where it was championed by author Nancy Lee.

The film 'Life of Pi' is a 2012 American survival drama film based on Yann Martel's 2001 novel of the same name. Directed by Ang Lee, the film's adapted screenplay was written by David Magee, and it stars Suraj Sharma, Irrfan Khan, Rafe Spall, Tabu Hashmi, Adil Hussain, and Gérard Depardieu. The storyline revolves around an Indian man named 'Pi' Patel, telling a novelist about his life story, and how at 16 he survives a shipwreck and is adrift in the Pacific Ocean on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. The film had its worldwide premiere as the opening film of the 51st New York Film Festival at both the Walter Reade Theater and Alice Tully Hall in New York City on September 28, 2012. *Life of Pi* emerged as a critical and commercial success, earning over US\$609 million worldwide. It was nominated for three Golden Globe Awards which included the Best Picture – Drama and the Best Director and won the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score. At the 85th Academy Awards it had eleven nominations, including Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay, and won four awards including Best Director for Ang Lee.

Many literary critics raved over Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, but most thought that the novel was unfilmable. Just consider the many obstacles set in the path of potential filmmakers:

- The novel has more animals than human characters.
- It's a one-man show other than the presence of animal.
- Nothing much happens while lost at sea.

It's a vast, historical, trans-pacific voyage that leaves readers wondering what is real and what the narrator has embroidered from his experience. In addition, directors regularly shy away from projects starring children or animals, and Pi had both. In spite of these facts, director Ang Lee accepted the job. Recognized for his work on *The Ice Storm*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Lee brought his unique vision to *Life of Pi*. Lee had become the first Asian American to win an Oscar with *Brokeback Mountain*. He took the award again with *Life of Pi* for his achievement in film directing.

Review of Literature:

Many researchers have made research on making a film from fiction. Mishra and Shubasree (2000) in a study on novel into film, analyses the aesthetics in transformation. The film, like the novel, tells a story through images. It is primarily a visual art highly technical in nature. The film is linked with painting and photography but it is kinetic, not static. It is very much aligned to the novel. The essential difference between the two is that the film uses images to tell the story, while the novel fulfils the purpose, using words.

George Bluestone rightly states that all the differences were derived from the contrast between the novel as a conceptual and discursive form, the film as perceptual and presentational form. Thus the novel is a linguistic medium using words or language as its principal tool while the film uses images or pictures or photographs as its basic medium. The novel is verbal and the film is visual. Even though there is a basic difference between the novel and the film, the link between these two art forms is very close and intimate. Both the art forms primarily aim at the entertainment of an audience. The principal aim of a novelist, as it has been pointed out by Joseph Conrad in his Preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, reads as “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear to make you feel- it is before all to make you see.

D.W. Griffith, the great American Director talking about the film says that the task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see. Thus a novelist and a director have the common intention to make the audience see life. This common intention links the novel and the film together in spite of their basic differences as art forms. Since the time of Griffith, novels have been adapted into the film. But, because of their inherent difference as two distinct media some critics are of the opinion that a novel cannot be successfully adapted into a film.

Norman Mailer has stated in an interview that film and literature are as far apart as, say, cave painting and song. In an essay, Mailer has further added that great novels invariably make the most disappointing movies, and modest novels sometimes make good movies.

The famous film director Bergman states the difficulties of adaptation of novels into movies. He maintains that film has nothing to do with literature; the characters and the substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict. Bergman is of the opinion that the mutation of verbal art into visual art is not possible. He further states that the irrational dimension of a literary work,

the germ of its existence, is often untranslatable into visual terms and it, in turn, destroys the special, irrational dimensions of the film. Bergman's view is on the one extreme while Griffith's opinion is on the other.

Research problem:

Transcription of a novel into film is impossible, even the purpose of accuracy is absurd. Either the effect of a novel or the theme of the novel or the message of the novel can be focused while making it as a movie.

Methodology:

The current analysis is based on Qualitative method since it requires deep study of both the novel and the movie and it is well compared. It gives the summary of both the novel and the movie. Though both take same plot, but the movie has slightly deviated from the novel. It also discuss about the difficulties faced by the filmmaker to adopt a novel based film.

Findings and analysis:

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* follows the lengthy journey of a young man and a Bengal tiger as they traipse across the ocean in a lifeboat. It's a vast, historical, trans-pacific voyage that leaves readers wondering what is real and what the narrator has embroidered from his experience. Martel's work is a truly unique piece of writing which blends action, narration, imagination, fancy, religion and emotion in a way no other book has managed.

The book was filmed by Ang Lee. Before director Ang Lee took up the mantle, many considered the book to be beautiful, but virtually unfilmable. If there is a will, there is a way, and Lee recognized very adeptly how *Life of Pi* needed to be narrated onscreen. Lee's version works because it gives us the chance to hear Pi's story told from the mouth of an older, wiser version of the young religious believer, who plays a smaller role in the books. It works because it takes all

of the visions readers have created in their heads while reading *Life and Pi* and makes those visions bigger, bolder, and brighter. Secondly, because it streamlines a lengthy tale without making us feel as we are missing anything key to the narrative. As a film, *Life of Pi* is a visual masterpiece. In the book, the author relies on words to evoke colours and visual images in the mind of the reader. There are moments in the novel that bring colourful, vivid images to mind. *Life of Pi* on film is a splendid of visual experience. One gorgeous scene, for example, makes it look as if the sky is blending into the ocean.

Lee has flawlessly managed to bring out the imagination of the famous book of Yann Martel. It really does not matter if the film is seen before or after reading it. Both the book and movie version convey the full extent of Pi's struggle, the chaotic but entirely necessary relationship between him the tiger Richard Parker and the heartbreaking duality of both the majesty and trouble that comes with the life of Pi at sea. By choosing a stunningly talented actor Suraj Sharma, and by adding the flavour of 3D to the film, Lee has proven himself one of the greatest directors of modern cinema. *Life of Pi* is a spectacle but never loses its heart and emotion. As a result, the film is a toned down, tamer version of the story.

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