

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Robinson Crusoe and Life of Pi are two novels that share the same view of life: that life is a struggle. Both literary works also convey a comparable idea about survival and share the same theme that faith helps one survive spiritually, while one's characteristics determine one's survival from the physical dangers one faces.

Despite the similarities that the two novels share, the protagonists in both novels demonstrate their survival in exceptionally different ways. The differences between the protagonists are inseparable from their backgrounds, characteristics and the ordeals they encounter.

Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel, the protagonists in the two novels, come from two very dissimilar backgrounds, which essentially also influence their views of God and religion. While Crusoe is an older Caucasian man, Pi is a younger coloured Oriental boy. As a product of the seventeenth-century English society, Crusoe views God in a way that is influenced by the Protestant values. Pi, on the contrary, grows up in India in the twentieth century as a zoo-owner's son. Pi's view of God and religion is influenced by an understanding of life as well as the meaning of freedom that he learns from the zoo. Whereas Crusoe professes a

single religion, Pi professes multi religions.

These different points of view between the two protagonists evidently influence their ways of survival. When faced with physical dangers in the nature, they both have only two choices: either to fight to live or to give up and die. Both Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel choose to fight for their lives, owing to the spiritual comfort that their faith provides. However, having dissimilar religions and views of God, each protagonist finds spiritual comfort in different ways.

Influenced by the Protestant values, Crusoe views God as either merciful or resentful and believes that obedience and repentance are values for every Christian. Therefore, when he disobeys his father, Crusoe believes that God punishes him by isolating him on a deserted island. On the contrary, when he repents his sins, Crusoe believes that he is saved. This thought gives him strength and spiritual comfort so that he recovers from his serious illness on the island and stays alive.

While Crusoe believes in Protestantism, Pi embraces Hinduism, Christianity and Islam at the same time. Pi's practising these three religions simultaneously leads him to realize that they all share the same foundation; that is, the belief in a loving higher power. Therefore, while Crusoe views God as either merciful or resentful, Pi views God simply as a loving mighty figure. Pi believes that his being alive is an evidence that God loves him and is with him. During his ordeal, although he suffers great mental anguish, Pi endures with the strength and comfort that his faith provides.

Another noticeable difference between Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel is the ordeals they encounter. While Crusoe is isolated on a deserted island, Pi's

survival is tested in the open sea. Besides their different circumstances, Crusoe's and Pi's respectable personalities, as well as their beliefs, also determine their ways in surviving the physical dangers they face.

Being a cast-away on a deserted island, Crusoe has to work hard to convert all the natural resources provided by the island into the equipments he needs. Crusoe's view on hard work is influenced by the Protestant work ethic he values. Crusoe believes that God has granted human beings the earth and its contents and hard work is the way to utilize the natural resources into worldly materials they can benefit from ("Robinson Crusoe and the Protestant Work Ethic"). Furthermore, living alone with no companion and nobody else to rely on, Crusoe is forced to be independent. This trait of his is also influenced by a Protestant value which emphasizes self-sufficiency. Protestantism believes that man should rely on himself in meeting his needs ("Protestantism"). As a Protestant, Crusoe clearly demonstrates his self-sufficiency during his years of isolation. Hard work and independence are the qualities without which Crusoe will not survive the physical dangers he faces on the island.

Different from Crusoe who is supplied with abundant natural resources, Pi has to use his intelligence in utilising the limited sources in the lifeboat. While Crusoe counts on independence to survive, Pi is given wild animals as companions, forcing him to practice the knowledge about animals that he learns from the zoo, as well as adapt himself to their behaviour in order to stay alive. When faced with numerous horrors in the open sea, Pi's courage gives him the will to live. Pi's intelligence, courage, and ability to adapt are the reasons he survives his oceanic ordeal.

Whereas Crusoe's traits are influenced greatly by the Protestant work ethic, Pi's belief system does not actually influence his characteristics. However, the knowledge about animals that Pi gains from growing up in the zoo evidently helps him to stay alive. Without that knowledge, Pi will not be able to handle the wild animals with which he shares the lifeboat. Furthermore, without that knowledge, Pi will not know how to adapt to the animals' behaviour. Ultimately, that knowledge helps Pi to a great extent in surviving his days on the lifeboat.

While both novels initially seem to view life somewhat pessimistically by presenting the stiffness of life, they in fact demonstrate through their protagonists that life has always prepared every being before actually confronting them with its challenges; that everything happens for a reason. Life puts Crusoe in England in the seventeenth-century to inculcate him with the sense of hard work and independence for the reason that he will need to practice them later on the deserted island. The same applies to Pi. Life places Pi as a zoo-owner's son because he will need the knowledge he learns there to help him survive during his days on the lifeboat. Without their being placed in their particular situation, the protagonists will not survive the challenges that life offers them in their future.

In my opinion, survival is a state where one is secure not only physically, but also spiritually. Both Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel survive the physical dangers because of their traits, while their sanity is the result of their faith. Based on the analysis above, I conclude that both Robinson Crusoe and Life of Pi illustrate that faith helps one survive spiritually while one's characteristics determine one's survival from the physical dangers one faces.