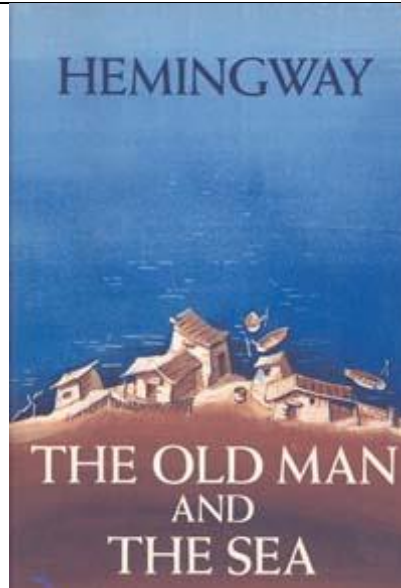


Survival Instincts in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea* And Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi*

S. Vandhana, M.A.



Abstract

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea* and Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi* made them significant novelists of Nautical Literature. Their main focus is on survival of their protagonists. Both the novels have an autobiographical touch in them. Hemingway had described his own fishing experience in Gulf Stream in *The Old Man And The Sea* and Yann Martel wrote Pi's own story narrated to him by Pi. Santiago in *The Old Man And The Sea* and Pi in *Life Of Pi* are the victims of wilderness. *The Old Man And The Sea* was constructed like a five-act play. The incidents unfold in a dramatic manner. The incidents that happened over the next three days include Santiago catching the marlin and losing it consequently. The harpooning of the marlin and its destruction form the climax and anti-climax respectively. *Life Of Pi* has built in three parts. The first part dealt with Pi's childhood. The second part narrated Pi's survival in a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with Richard Parker, an adult Bengal Tiger. The third part

described Pi's conversation with two officials from the Japanese Ministry of Transport about his survival in sea with a tiger. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Hemingway had given equal importance to both Santiago and Manolin, though Manolin appeared only in the minor part of the novel. In *Life Of Pi*, Yann Martel focused mainly on Pi's survival story and with lesser importance on other characters in the novel. Both the novels end positively with a sad note. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, though Santiago had survived, he lost his greatest catch in his life. Similarly, in *Life Of Pi*, Pi also survived from all the dangers that fate had offered him. But the loss of his greatest companion, Richard Parker made him gloomy. Thus both Ernest Hemingway and Yann Martel had dealt with the theme of survival successfully in their respective novels.

Key words: survival, sea, companionship

Survival

In *A Survival Guide for Life: How to Achieve Your Goals, thrive in adversity and grow in character* Bear Grylls says that,

We can't always choose our circumstances but we can choose how we respond to what life throws at us, and there is power when we realize our ability to alter our destiny. (278)

The term "Survival" was first employed by the British anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871). Survival is the fact or state of continuing to live or exist, especially in difficult conditions.

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea*

Ernest Hemingway's sixty-two years were packed with excitement. Encountered with adventure after adventure, he has told us the stories of his life. *The Old Man And The Sea* is a simple story on the surface, but it is a tale with a much deeper message and impact that transcends time and place. The story deals with an epic struggle between an old experienced fisherman and the greatest catch of his life. The first novel *The Old Man And The Sea* deals with

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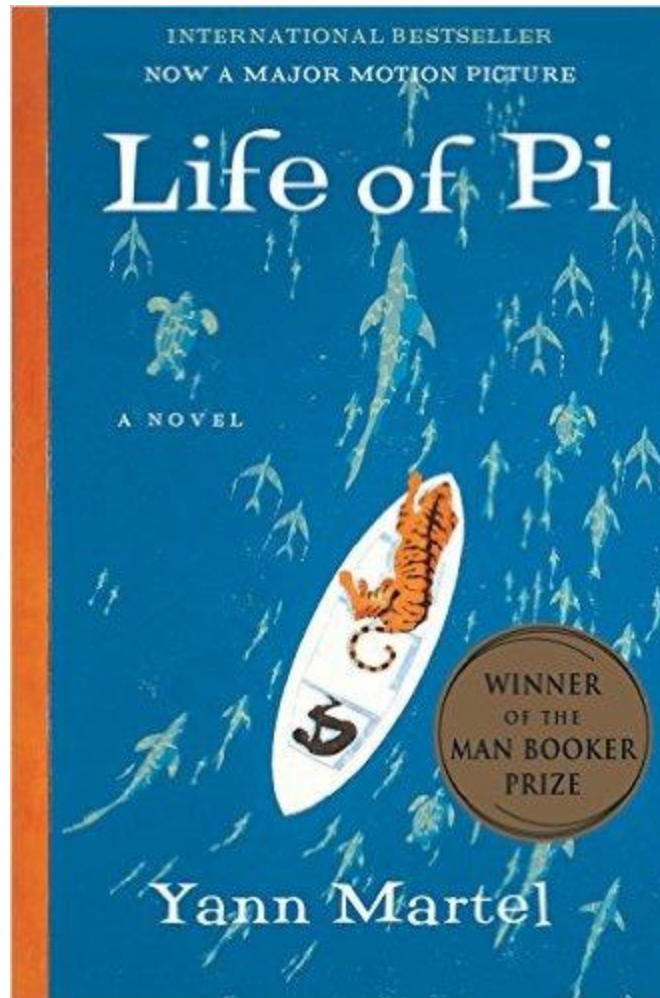
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the adventures and struggle faced by an old man in the sea. It is a short novel and has not been divided into chapters.

Santiago is an old fisherman. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish. For the first forty days, a boy named Manolin had fished with him. But Manolin's parents called Santiago "salao" that is, the worst form of unlucky person and force him to work in a more prosperous boat. One early morning Manolin and the old man leave the shore and part ways in the sea. The Old Man rows steadily away from the shore towards the deep waters of the Gulf Stream. On the eighty-fifth day, he feels the light delicate pulling and then a harder pull. The marlin finally takes the bait, it starts to move with it. The fish drags the skiff farther, deeper into the sea. Santiago holds the skiff and promises that he would kill his opponent before the end of that day.

Suddenly, the fish jumps magnificently into the air. Santiago feels that it was bigger than any other that he had ever seen. He pulls the fish to the side of the boat and stabs it to death. An hour later, a mako shark arrives and hits the marlin. The old man stabs his harpoon into the shark's head. But it takes away nearly forty pounds of meat. Then the Galanos and a Shovel-nosed shark finish the rest. Santiago returns home with empty hands and sleeps in his shack. Manolin cries on hearing about Santiago's failure. But he believes that his hero would win one day. The old man sleeps and dreams about lions.

Life Of Pi



Life Of Pi by Yann Martel is a Canadian fantasy adventure novel. It deals with the adventures and struggles faced by Piscine Molitor “Pi” Patel. He was an Indian boy from Pondicherry. He survived two hundred and twenty seven days after a shipwreck on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. As *San Francisco Chronicle* says,

Right out of the gate, *Life of Pi* is full of fierce but friendly storytelling energy. It’s a real adventure: brutal, tender, expressive, dramatic, and disarmingly funny... It’s difficult to stop reading when the pages run out. (Kiefer 12)

Three Parts of *Life Of Pi*

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Life Of Pi is divided into three parts. In the first part of the novel, Pi declares that he had suffered a great deal. It has left him hopeless. He says that his academic study and his religious practice have brought him back to life. It deals with Pi's childhood experiences and sufferings.

The second part deals with how Pi had survives in a lifeboat after their shipwreck with a Grant's zebra, a hyena, an orangutan and a Royal Bengal tiger, Richard Parker. Slowly after one animal killed another and the same thing was repeated again, Pi is forced to survive with Richard Parker in the lifeboat. Although Richard Parker has had its feast by eating the hyena, it seems to make an unusual noise when it looks at Pi. So, Pi decided to tame Richard Parker. He blows the whistle, which he finds from one of the life jackets. Richard Parker dislikes the sound of the whistle and lies down in the bottom of the lifeboat. This act of Richard Parker encourages Pi and he begins to train him.

One day, Pi encounters a terrific storm. So he rushes into the lifeboat, where he lies flat on a bench at the end farthest from Richard Parker. He closes the tarpaulin over them. The storm fumes for a day and a night. Once when Pi is relaxing on the tarpaulin, suddenly he encounters a whale. He is shocked because the whale is gazing at him. Pi fears that, it might strike them with its tail. But it goes down and vanishes in the sea water. Then Pi encounters a French man. Pi asks the French man, whether he had ever killed anyone. The French man says that he had killed a man and a woman. When their boats came closer to each other, the man shifts to Pi's boat in order to kill Pi. But when he steps into Pi's boat, Richard Parker kills him. Pi cries and he gains his vision.

Gradually, the lifeboat comes across a low island. It is covered entirely with algae. Pi sees that the island is full of meerkats. Pi notices that the island has burnt his feet at night but not during the day. Pi sees that the meerkats are spending their night on the top of a tree. So Pi also joins them. One day, Pi finds a tree that bears fruits. But it was very strange to find, that the centre of each fruit held a human tooth. From this evidence, Pi decides that the island was carnivorous. So he decides to leave the island. He fills his lifeboat with the dead fish and meerkats. He eats the algae and fills his stomach with fresh water. Then he waits for Richard Parker to board the lifeboat. After Richard Parker has arrived, Pi begins his travel.

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The lifeboat reaches the shore of a Mexican beach. Pi falls down in the sand and Richard Parker goes its way into the jungle. Pi is weeping because he has lost his comrade. He worries that Richard Parker has not found time to say good bye to him. The villagers have rescued Pi and taken him to the hospital. Tomohiro Okamoto and Atsuro Chiba were the officials from the Maritime Department in the Japanese Ministry of Transport. The Ministry has directed them to speak with Pi because he is the lone survivor of the Japanese Tsimtsum. Pi has narrated his entire story of survival to the officers. Okamoto and Chiba tell Pi that his story was very interesting. But they say that, they were not ready to believe Pi's story. Okamoto says that there has been no trace of Richard Parker in or around Tomatlán.

So, Pi says that he would tell another story. He tells the same story by replacing Pi, cook, Pi's mother and a sailor for Richard Parker, hyena, orangutan, and zebra. Pi asks them which story they would prefer that is the story with animals or the one without animals. Both of them agree that the story with the animals is the better story. Then the officers leave Pi alone and file their report.

The Old Man And The Sea and Life Of Pi

According to Bear Grylls, "The rewards of the wild and the rewards of the survivor go to those who can dig deep, and, ultimately, to the guy who can stay alive". (Douglas 26) The novels *The Old Man And The Sea* by Ernest Hemingway and *Life Of Pi* by Yann Martel share the common theme that is the theme of survival. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago has survived eighty four days in the middle of the sea. Similarly in *Life Of Pi*, Pi has survived two hundred and twenty seven days in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. As the major parts of the novels are set at sea, both the novels give us the "lost at sea" feel. Both the novels give the beautiful description of the sea. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago describes the sea:

The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As he looked down into it he saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now. He watched his lines to see them go straight down out of sight into the water and he was happy to see so much plankton because it meant fish. (TOMATS 30-31)

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Struggle Between Man and The Beast

Both the novels portray the struggle between man and the beast. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago struggles hard to catch the marlin. After he has caught the marlin, it was attacked and finished off by the group of mako sharks and galanos sharks. Though Santiago fights with the sharks to save his catch, he loses the marlin to the sharks. In case of *Life Of Pi*, Pi has to survive with four animals, a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan and a tiger in a lifeboat. Though Richard Parker has remained silent under the tarpaulin, it creates fear in the mind of Pi. He knows that Richard Parker may appear at any moment and kill him. He says that,

I kept my eyes fixed on the horizon of the tarpaulin. Any second I expected to see Richard Parker rising up and coming for me. Several times I had fits of fearful trembling. Precisely where I wanted to be most still-my legs-was where I trembled most. (LOP 108)

When the hyena has killed the zebra and the orangutan, it turns its eyes towards Pi. When it is about to kill Pi, Richard Parker appears suddenly and saves him from the hyena by killing it. Though Richard Parker has saved Pi from becoming a prey to hyena, it has later become a threat to his life. But his confidence makes him to survive with Richard Parker.

Pi also experiences a strange encounter with a whale. But it goes back into the sea, leaving him unharmed. Pi has also survived in an island which is carnivorous by its nature. When Pi's blood fell into the water, it had attracted some sharks. The arrival of sharks adds further threat to Pi. But Pi has survived from all the dangers that fate offers him. *The Old Man And The Sea* and *Life Of Pi* explain about the thirst for water. Though Santiago and Pi were in the middle of the sea, they feel thirsty and they absolutely need water. As Santiago has planned well, he takes two bottles of drink with him. In the text it is explained as, "The old man still had two drinks of water in the bottle and he used half of one after he had eaten the shrimps". (TOMATS 80) In *Life Of Pi*, Pi has overcome his thirst by having water from the solar stills. He also provides some water to Richard Parker to survive.

Artistic Description of the Sea

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Both novels give the artistic description of the sea. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago says that he could not see the green of the shore. Instead, he is seeing the tops of the hills. He sees that the hills were covered by snow. The clouds are looking like high snow mountains above the hills. He says that the sea was very dark. The countless fragments of the plankton are emptied by the high sun. In *Life Of Pi*, when Pi looked under the raft he could view different kinds of sea life. It includes soft green algae, tiny shrimp, black worms with white spines, fishes with different colors and crabs.

Desire for Companionship

The desire for companionship is one of the important factors for survival in both novels. In *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago has enjoyed the companionship with a boy named Manolin. He has served the old man with a great respect. So during the isolated condition in the sea and the struggle with the marlin, the old man wishes he had the boy with him. So he keeps saying, “I wish I had the boy.” (TOMATS 38) In *Life Of Pi*, though Pi has feared Richard Parker, it is one of the important reasons for his survival. Though Richard Parker may have added a threat to Pi’s life, he does not want Richard Parker to sink and die in the sea. So he encourages and saves Richard Parker from dying in the sea. Pi gets excited and cries,

Richard Parker, is that you? It’s so hard to see. Oh, that this rain would stop!
Richard Parker? Richard Parker? Yes, it is you! I could see his head. He was
struggling to stay at the surface of the water. (LOP 97)

In *Mud, Sweat and Tears*, Bear Grylls rightly says that,

But I also knew if I could somehow replace my doubt with hope, my fear with
courage, and my self-pity with a sense of pride, then I just might be able to do
this. (103)

Hope in Life

So, in order to survive in any unexpected circumstance one should have hope in life. Though he has fear, he should replace his fear with hope. Though the two protagonists, that is Santiago in *The Old Man And The Sea* and Pi in *Life Of Pi* have survived successfully, the two novels somewhat end on a sad note. In Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea*, Santiago has lost his greatest marlin that he had caught. In Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi*, Pi's companion Richard Parker leaves him alone on the shore and walks away.

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