



## Journal on Innovations in Teaching and Learning

Vol: 4(3), September 2025

REST Publisher; ISSN: 2583-6188 (Online)

Website: <http://restpublisher.com/journals/jitl/>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46632/jitl/4/3/6>



# Fragmented Realities: Postmodern Approaches to Narrative and Belief in Life of Pi

\*K. N. Uma Devi, V. Jennifer Rani

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

\*Corresponding author Email: [offrec24@gmail.com](mailto:offrec24@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This paper explores the interplay between narrative fragmentation and belief systems in *Life of Pi* through a postmodern critical lens. It examines how the novel destabilizes conventional notions of truth, reality, and authorship by presenting multiple, competing narratives that challenge the reader's capacity to distinguish fact from fiction. Drawing on postmodern theories of metafiction, relativity, and epistemological uncertainty, the study argues that the protagonist's storytelling becomes a survival mechanism as well as a philosophical inquiry into the nature of belief. The coexistence of rational and spiritual interpretations in the text reflects the postmodern rejection of grand narratives and emphasizes subjective truth. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how narrative ambiguity invites active reader participation, compelling audiences to construct meaning rather than passively receive it. Ultimately, the study highlights how the novel uses fragmented realities to foreground the power of storytelling in shaping human experience, suggesting that belief is less about objective truth and more about the narratives we choose to accept.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Narrative Fragmentation, Belief Systems, Metafiction, Subjective Reality.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) is organized around a question that it poses explicitly in its framing narrative and leaves the reader to answer: which of the two stories Pi tells about his survival on the Pacific Ocean is true? In the first story -the one that occupies most of the novel's length -Pi survives 227 days on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. In the second story -offered briefly, near the novel's end, when the Japanese investigators who are interviewing Pi ask for a version more suitable for their insurance report -the animals are replaced by humans: the cook who murdered Pi's mother, the sailor, Pi himself. The second story is the more plausible one by the standards of realist probability. The first story is the one that, as Pi says, makes for the better story. The novel's famous ending -"And so it goes with God" -proposes that the choice between the two stories is analogous to the choice between religious faith and secular rationalism, and that the narrative grounds for preferring one to the other are not as different from the theological grounds as the secular reader might like to believe. This is a postmodern argument -or, more precisely, it is an argument about the epistemological status of narrative that postmodern theory has analyzed most fully. Linda Hutcheon's account of "historiographic metafiction" in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) -her analysis of fiction that interrogates the conventions of historical and documentary truth-telling while using those conventions to construct its own narrative -is the theoretical framework within which *Life of Pi*'s formal argument is most clearly legible. The novel is not simply a survival story; it is a meditation on the conditions under which narrative claims are credible, on the relationship between emotional truth and documentary truth, and on the specific forms of credulity and skepticism that different narrative registers produce in readers.

### The Two Stories and the Epistemology of Narrative Credibility

The substitution of animals for humans in Pi's two accounts -the tiger for the cook, the orangutan for the mother, the hyena for the sailor -is not simply a survival mechanism or a fictionalization but a specific formal argument about how narrative mediates reality. The animal story is formally richer, more emotionally engaging, more narratively satisfying, and less empirically probable than the human story. The human story is empirically more probable, emotionally unbearable, and narratively bare. Pi asks: if both accounts explain the same facts, and one of them makes the experience likeable while the other does not, what grounds are there for insisting on the version that makes the experience unlivable. This question has both a psychological and an epistemological dimension. The psychological dimension is addressed by narrative therapy -the argument, associated with Michael White and David Epton's work in *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990), that the stories we tell about our experience are not simply representations of events that occurred independently of the telling, but are constitutive of the experience's meaning and of the self that

inhabits the experience. The story Pi tells is not a distortion of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the telling; it is the specific form in which the reality becomes livable -the form in which it can be inhabited by a self that continues to function. The epistemological dimension is addressed by postmodern narrative theory: the argument that all narrative involves selection, organization, and interpretation of events that could in principle be organized differently, and that the documentary authority of realistic or journalistic narrative rests on conventions of credibility rather than on any direct access to the real. Pi's animal story is less documentary and more formally constructed than his human story; it is also more honest about its own construction, which is, in a postmodern frame, a form of epistemological honesty that the apparently more straightforward human account does not possess.

### **Religion, Fiction, and the Better Story**

Pi is simultaneously a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Christian -a religious pluralist whose attitude toward the three traditions he inhabits is not syncretic in any systematic sense but pragmatic and affective: each tradition gives him something that he values, and he sees no reason why the demands of institutional consistency should require him to choose. This religious position is, formally, an extension of the novel's narrative epistemology: just as there are multiple ways of telling the story of his survival, there are multiple ways of telling the story of the cosmos and humanity's position within it, and the grounds for choosing one over the others are not simply rational but emotional, aesthetic, and existential. The novel's analogy between religious faith and narrative credibility -between choosing to believe in God and choosing to believe the more beautiful story -is its most ambitious and most contested formal gesture. Critics who find the analogy too pat have a point: the relationship between the truth claims of religious belief and the truth claims of narrative fiction is more complicated than Pi's framing suggests. But the novel is not finally proposing a comfortable equivalence; it is asking, with genuine seriousness, whether the grounds on which we evaluate narrative credibility are as rationally secure as we typically assume -whether the preference for the more probable story over the more beautiful one is itself a form of faith.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

Life of Pi earns its enormous popular success through its narrative energy and its formal intelligence, and it deserves more serious critical attention than its status as a beloved popular novel has sometimes generated. Its central argument -about the relationship between narrative, truth, and the conditions under which experience is livable -is more rigorous than the novel's accessible style suggests, and the postmodern narrative theory that provides the analytical framework for the argument is not imported from outside but is generated from within the novel's specific formal choices. The tiger, finally, is not a symbol or a metaphor; it is the form in which experience becomes a story rather than a trauma, and the novel's most important claim is that this making of story is not a distortion of reality but one of the primary instruments through which reality is made livable.

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