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Five Senses Cultural Study of *Life of Pi*

Reading *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and researching Indian culture has been both a window and a mirror, allowing me to see Indian culture in a new light, and reflect on my own culture as well. Reading *Life of Pi* has cast a light on my own life by showcasing the many opportunities afforded to me in Canada. If I were born in India it would be much more difficult to achieve my personal goals of receiving a post-secondary education and becoming a software engineer. Although the cost of attending university in India can be as low as $4413.58 to $10432.11 per semester for graduate studies, universities have very high entry requirements due to the limited number of universities in relation to the number of applicants. In addition to this, the average wage in India is only $1535.53 annually and only 27% of women have paid jobs. In Canada, the average cost of tuition is $6907.00 for a graduate degree, the distribution of women and men in the workforce is close to even, split 47% women and 53% men, making financial support much more available. In addition to this, the minimum wage in Ontario is $31 200 annually, making it a very realistic goal to finance attending university. The financial freedoms we have in Canada are shown in the life of Pi when Pi’s family decides to move to Canada. India was facing financial and political hardships and Pi’s family zoo would have closed down in the struggling economy of India, but in Canada, it would be able to thrive and provide them with a higher quality of life.”Why do people move? What makes them uproot and leave everything they’ve known for a great unknown beyond the horizon? Why climb this Mount Everest of formalities that makes you feel like a beggar? Why enter this jungle of foreignness where everything is new strange and difficult? The answer is the same world over: people move in the hope of a better life” (Martel 77). In conclusion, reading *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel has cast a light on my life by showcasing the many opportunities afforded to me in Canada that would be much more difficult to achieve in India.

Reading the book *Life of Pi* has influenced my worldview in a positive way by helping me understand the importance of culture in society. Culture is a medium that brings people together by uniting people of various beliefs. In the book *Life of Pi*, Pi holds many different religious beliefs, he is a practicing Hindu, Muslim, and Christian, and has many friends of various faiths. By sharing a culture it is easier for Pi to relate to, and have relationships with many people of different faiths, including deeply religious spiritual leaders in his community. When Pi accidentally runs into his local imam, priest, and pandit they begin arguing about what the one true religion is until Pi says, “Bhapu Gandhi said ‘All religions are true.’ I just want to love God” (69). Bhapu Gandhi was a social activist and an important cultural figure in India. Before the religious leaders realized their common ground, they were fighting and telling Pi that he had to choose one religion in order to be accepted into their churches, mosques, and temples. By realizing their cultural connection the spiritual leaders were able to put aside their differences and allow Pi to attend each of their religious ceremonial events. In conclusion, reading *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel has influenced my worldview by helping me realize the importance of culture in society.

While reading *Life of Pi* and while researching Indian culture I found many aspects of the culture interesting. One of the things that I find fascinating about the culture was the Ayurvedic tradition of eating using your hands. When Pi ate Indian food for the first time in Canada he was scolded for using his hands to eat, but in India, it is very common to eat many types of food without utensils. I also found the reason behind the tradition to be interesting, when Ayurveda was first used thousands of years ago it was believed that the world was comprised of five elements; fire, water, earth, air, and ether, and having the correct proportions of each in your body could change your mood and health. Because of this, it was important for people to ensure elements were put into the body in balanced proportions, and it was believed that each fingertip had the ability to sense the elements in the food that was to be consumed, helping you receive the proper amounts of each. Something else that I found fascinating is the Islamic tradition of dhikr, the recitation of the ninety-nine names of Allah. It is interesting that Allah has a multitude of names which describe all of its characteristics and that a Dakhir can gain a greater social standing in the Muslim community by committing them to memory. In conclusion, I found many aspects of Indian culture interesting, especially the ayurvedic teachings and the Islamic tradition of dhikr.

This project affirmed much of what I already knew about Indian culture. One such Idea that was affirmed was that many Indians have very little exposure to other cultures. In the book *Life of Pi,* Pi is surprised when his father suggests that his family move to Canada, “It was announced to us one evening dinner. Ravi and I were thunderstruck. *Canada!* If Andhra Pradesh, just north of us, was alien, if Sri Lanka, a monkey’s hop across a straight, was the dark side of the moon, imagine what Canada was. Canada meant absolutely nothing to us. It was like Timbuktu, by definition a place permanently far away from us.” (79) By saying that Canada meant absolutely nothing to us Pi makes it clear that he has heard very little if anything about Canada before in the past, and when he says permanently far away from us it is clear that he believed it was impossible for his family to emigrate out of India. Another way this is proven is when Pi is living in Canada and goes to an Indian restaurant, when his order arrives he begins to eat it with his hands and the waiter says “fresh off the boat, are you?” (7). This clearly displays that Pi has never been exposed to any other cultures because eating food with your hands is a tradition largely specific to India. In conclusion, this project affirmed much of what I already knew about Indian culture, especially that Indians often have very little exposure to other cultures.

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