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## THE STEWARD OF THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ECOTHEOLOGICAL STUDY OF YANN MARTEL'S LIFE OF PI

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**Abstract:** Ecotheology sturdily explains the term 'steward' as care-takers and not as servants. The theology further explains that man in his course of life with the nature world, should develop himself to exercise his authority over nature to take care and not exploit. Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, provides fine grounds to probe into this concept of stewardship. As the story unfolds, the challenging situation Pi faces changes his whole idea of the natural world. He eventually learns to relate himself with the wildest tiger (Richard Parker) with which he is left alone in a small boat in the Pacific Ocean for months. His relationship with the tiger begins initially as a matter of survival but gradually he discovers the truth that nature is an integral part of the environment and therefore he begins to take care of the tiger and thereby proves to be the steward of nature.

**Keywords:** Ecotheology, environmental stewardship, kinship, biocentricism.

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**Introduction:** Due to the dire need for an ecological awareness around the globe, ecocriticism has taken up the attention of many researchers in literature. It is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, which has caught up the attention of the present readers. 'Ecotheology', an emerging concept in ecocriticism, is the analysis of the relationship between man and nature in the light of the scriptures. It has several outlets of scriptural analysis stating the relationship between human and nature. The Bible postulates a distinctive analysis of ecological outlook. It is the man's stewardship towards nature or rather 'man - the assigned environmental steward'. The created world belonged first and foremost to the Creator and humans were mandated by God to exercise dominion over the earth. But that dominion is understood as caretakers not as a license for exploitation. The ecological reading of the Bible highlights a bio-centric attitude rather than anthropocentric where human is expected to manage nature as he has the autonomy to use its resources.

Ecotheology sturdily explains the term 'steward' as care-takers and not as servants. The theology further explains that man in his course of life with the nature world, should develop himself to exercise his authority over nature to take care and not exploit. This presentation intends to make an insightful study of the concept of 'stewardship' in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*.

The term 'Steward' in its original sense means 'a person who is responsible to take care of something'. Therefore, the biblical view of stewardship can be consciously defined as "Utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation"(Holman Bible Dictionary). The central essence of biblical view of stewardship is managing everything God brings into the one's life in a manner that honors God and

impacts eternity. Environmental stewardship is typically thought of as entailing of human impacts into the natural world. Neil Paul Cummins claims that humans have a special stewardship role on the planet because through their technology humans are able to save life from otherwise certain elimination. This is a modern day interpretation of Noah's Ark, the cornerstone of human stewardship being technological protection and regulation. According to Calvin Dewitt and Neil Paul Cummins, the prominent ecotheologists of the environmental stewardship, stewardship is a theological idea that humans are accountable for the world, and should take care of it since they are created by the same God who created the universe. Taking care of the earth, which is God's dominion, is the responsibility of a Christian steward as God is the owner of the universe. Psalm 24:1 explains the ownership of God, "The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it"(The Bible 507). Therefore, human is not the owner of the earth but rather a steward.

There are three types of environmental stewards: doers, donors, and practitioners. Doers go out and help the cause by taking action. For example the doers in an oil spill would be the volunteers that go along the beach and help clean up the oil from the beaches. A donor is the person that financially helps the cause. They can do anything from donating their money, to having galas or other fundraisers. They are typically governmental agencies. Lastly there are practitioners. They work on a day-to-day basis to steer governmental agencies, scientists, stakeholder groups, or any other group toward a stewardship outcome. Together these 3 groups make up environmental stewards and help keep the ecosystem running healthy.

Yann Mantel's novel, *Life of Pi*, pictures the concept of stewardship. On the outset, the novel does not explicitly portray stewardship, but reading in

between the lines does expose stewardship. As the story unfolds, the challenging situation Pi faces changes his whole idea of the natural world. He eventually learns to relate himself with the wildest tiger (Richard Parker) with which he is left alone in a small boat in the Pacific Ocean for months. His relationship with the tiger begins initially as a matter of survival. In the beginning, he finds several ways to kill the tiger in order to survive but in the course of time he understands that animals are also an integral part of the environment. Gradually he begins to take care of the tiger and thereby proves to be the steward of nature.

Pi, the central character of the novel, is introduced to the readers as a teenager of less experience. The novel begins with the narration of Pi's early life with his parents. He was very much dominated by the views of his father, Mr. Patel, who was running a zoo. Due to the misfortunes he faced in the course of running a zoo, he decides to take his family as well as the animals of the zoo abroad to make fortune. But unfortunately the shipwrecks and Pi along with few animals – a zebra, a hyena and a tiger survive with limited food on a small boat. When left alone in a small boat with few animals, the tiger eats up the other animals. Only Parker and Pi were left at last. In order to save his life from Parker, Pi decides to kill the tiger. He thought of many plans of killing Parker that would set him free from the dangers of Parker.

Parker thought to "Push Him Off the Lifeboat", "Kill Him with the Six Morphine Syringes", "Attack Him with All Available Weaponry", "Choke Him", "Poison Him", "Set Him on Fire", and "Electrocute Him" (LP 158). But he simply couldn't kill the tiger. The idea of taming the tiger came in at last. Since his childhood days Pi seems to have quite a good experience with the animals at the zoo. He being the son of a zoo owner was familiar with the animals' behaviour. He knows that animals too have feelings and so they must be respected and provided with a space needed for them. He also knew the fact that animals do not attack anyone needlessly except for a grave attempt to attack their territory. According to him, animals are good when provided with timely food and care. When left in a dilemma, Pi noticed Parker making a friendly sign. Parker made a sound from his nostrils, which was neither 'woof' nor 'meow', but 'Prusten'. 'Prusten' which is the stillest of tiger calls is a sign of friendliness. It is so caustic that Parker was the first one to initiate a friendly sign to Pi. This was the moment that brought in a complete change in Pi's life regarding his notion about the animal world.. This understanding enables him to accept the tiger as a co-existent and he starts loving and caring of Parker. His love for Parker is expressed as follows, "A part of

me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger. If I still had the will to live, it was due to Richard Parker. He kept me thinking too much about my family and my tragic circumstances. He pushed me to go on living... I am grateful. Its plain truth without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story" (LP 164).

The novel, *Life of Pi*, progressively reveals the development of Pi's character throughout the novel. In the beginning, Pi thought that animals are good for nothing. He like his dad had the idea of keeping animals in bars where they can be served with all amenities. But the sudden alienation from the human world and the unexpected company of Parker enables Pi to discover the mysterious relationship between the human and the natural world. He realizes that man should not exercise his dominion over the animal world to exploit it but rather should exercise his dominion to take care of it.

Pi after establishing his relationship with Parker starts to take care of it. He provided Parker with timely food and tried to relate with it as it fell seasick. He treated Parker like a human being and considered it as a perfect companion. This understanding of stewardship dawned on him without any instruction. His companionship was more than enough for him to understand his human responsibility of care-taking towards the natural world.

On the outset, Pi's relationship with Parker seems to be out of dire need, but an intense reading would reveal the fact that Pi just couldn't kill Parker because he started loving it. The novel also portrays the fact that human can realize and understand nature only when left alone in the natural world far from the civilization. Since this realization, Pi takes good care of Parker all along the struggles. He in fact does not leave Parker away for a little while when they reach a toxic island. On their return from the island he gathers healthy food for both him and Parker. He also starts talking to Parker telling his beliefs and thinking. In the progress of their relationship, Pi fathoms the mystery behind the human and nature's relationship. He understands that animals and human are integral part of the environment. Almost all religions are rooted in this faith of togetherness. Deepali Yadavin "Ecocritical Reading of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*" affirms, "Yann Martel has not only dealt with the issues of environmental concern but also has hinted out the ways through which these problems can be skilfully handled".

**Conclusion:** To conclude this novel, *Life of Pi*, explains the theory of 'kinship', which is a part of Ecotheology. Pi understands these factors through his lonely experience with the animal world.

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