

## Colours as Symbols in *Life of Pi*

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### Abstract

*The intent of this paper is to bring out the importance of colours which are used in literature as symbols to show the emotions and meanings beyond what is expressed. Colours are very much attached to each person's life. People consider it as the upgradation, when transformation happened from 'Black and White' to 'Colour'. People always expect more colours in their life. Language and literature are very close to the colours, where authors use it as symbols to provide great meaning. This paper attempts to bring out the colours used as symbols in the novel *Life of Pi* by Yaan Martel.*

### Introduction

Colours play a momentous role in human life and a significant role in literature. It has the great ability to communicate more effectively. Many poets use colours as their tool to bring out their emotions and feelings and they are used as symbols in literature for the readers to explore and get deeper into the text. Some authors even use colours in the titles to represent the whole meaning. *Blue Highways* (1982), *The White Princess* (2013) and *The Virgin Blue* (1997) are examples of how colours are the tag for many literatures. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison and *The Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Ngozi Adichie clearly show the authors' intention to represent colours as a tool to explore their emotions and make readers feel the novel. Colours have the ability to make people feel certain emotions. Every

nation has a flag to represent its own, and it is filled with colours. So, colours represent the nature and reality, and it is a major point of symbolism. In 1940s, the psychologist Max Luscher introduced colour therapy where he explained that he could determine the stress level and psychological make-up of a person by the colour chosen by the person. Colours are all around us, they create a milieu of our mood that is why, a few hospital rooms are painted in some particular colour which makes the patients feel better. Every consumer products' success mainly lies in the colourful packing, which mostly attracts the consumers. Each person has a favourite colour that reflects his/her emotional or spatial attachment; every religion has a particular colour that shows the spiritual attachment. A transformation from 'Black and White' to 'Colours' is considered as the evolution in cinema, television and mobiles.

Colours have the attachment towards English language right from the early ages. Idioms and phrases are the best examples of it. Caught red Handed, Black Market, Feel Blue, Golden Opportunity are few idioms which are associated with colours. In literature, colours have played a dominant role. Right from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, French writers have used seven colours to represent emotions and feelings. White, Red, Yellow, Blue, Green, Black, and Brown are the seven colours used by them. In Gothic literature, Red is considered as the dominant colour, where it is used to represent war, fire, determination and power. It is used to symbolize both positive and negative emotions.

According to colour psychology researchers say that colour has the ability to influence human behaviour, and it varies from individual to individual. Researchers have proved that 62% to 90% of the judgment on the product is based on the colour, and the human psychology decides it within 90 seconds. Each and every individual's intuition differs according to age, gender and culture. Every colour has a particular meaning and a symbolic representation. This paper analyses the symbolic representation of colour in *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel published in 2001.

It is a fantasy adventure novel. Piscine Moliter Patel is the protagonist of the story, an Indian boy from Pondicherry. His family has a zoo in Pondicherry. Due to the government issues, they plan to move to Canada. During the journey, shipwreck happens and Pi Patel is the only human survivor with a hyena, orang-utan, zebra, Richard parker (tiger) in a life boat. He survives 227 days in the sea. The story details the life of Pi in the sea, his spirituality and the struggle. Whether he manages to come back is the remaining story. *Life of Pi* is a mirror that shows the part of India and its culture.

The author has used various colours in his novel as symbols to represent the strong feelings and emotions. Even a simple joy and hard feelings are portrayed through colours in the novel. This paper attempts to show the strong representation of colours and its importance in the novel. Only a few incidents in association with colours are taken and analysed. The colours taken to analyze are orange, gold, and green due to their importance in the novel.

## Colours in *Life of Pi*

Symbol takes the form of the object, sound, visual images to represent the ideas and beliefs. *Life of Pi* is full of adventure where it is filled with the essence, emotions and new experiences of Pi. So, the author uses colours as a wonderful tool to intimate the emotions which are handled in the book. It helps the readers to get the outright feel emotions and experiences.

### Orange colour

Orange colour represents rewarding ambition. It is mostly associated with Hinduism and Buddhism. It is considered as a sacred colour and because of its higher visibility; it is mostly associated with safety purposes. In colour psychology, “it combines the energy of red and happiness of yellow, and it is mixed with enthusiasm, happiness, creativity and determination. It also has the capability to increase oxygen supply to the brain and stimulates the mental activity”. It is the colour of fall and harvest and also considered as the colour of uplifting. The orange colour gives the emotional strength at the difficult times.

Author has used orange colour as the symbol of hope and spirituality. Pi, the protagonist is a spiritual person who follows Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. When the family starts the journey, the ship sinks and Pi becomes a castaway. He survives amidst of escaped animals. He has no hope, but the things which he receives are mostly orange in colour. “I noticed an orange whistle dangling from the life jacket” (105). The first thing which he gets is a whistle that is in orange colour, which is the colour of Hinduism and also represents creativity and determination. It gives him a ray of hope.

“It seems orange---such a nice Hindu colour---is the colour of survival because the whole inside of the boat and the tarpaulin and the life jackets and the lifebuoy and the oars and the most every significant object abroad was orange. Even the plastic, beadless whistles were orange”(138)

The above lines exhibit the author’s intention to use the orange colour as a symbol of hope and determination. The objects around him create the spiritual aura which makes him feel better. He prays regularly which keeps his confidence alive. The orange colour makeshim spiritually bonded and gives a hope and determination to lead a new life and moreover it gives new breath when he starts his journey in the sea.

### Golden colour

According to Hindu mythology, gold is the colour of knowledge, whereas in Islam it is the colour of paradise. Gold represents understanding, respect, virtue, majesty and generosity. It is considered as the colour of success, achievement and triumph. Golden colour

reflects the positiveness and it has the strength to enlighten the people's thought in the spiritually heightened manner.

Author certainly uses the colours as perfect symbols. Pi Patel, as a castaway starts his life in the sea. He is physically going weak due to lack of drinking water and food. He sustains his life in the boat for a few days but he cannot find water because of the tiger which accompanies him. Finally, he manages to open the boat and finds the water in the golden colour can. Thus gold becomes the symbol of victory, and it shows his success.

“Oh, the delight of the manufactured good, the man-made device, the created thing! That moment of material revelation brought an intensity of pleasure—a heady mix of hope, surprise, disbelief, thrill, gratitude, all crushed into one—unequaled in my life by any Christmas, birthday, wedding Diwali or other gift giving occasion.....on this lifeboat, the wine of life is served in pale golden cans that fit nicely in the hand.”(141)

Author evidently shows the victory of Pi, it is the victory over the fear, negative thoughts and irrational and insecure feelings. The author could have given any colour for the water can, but uses golden colour to portray the victory.

## Green colour

Green is the colour of beauty, joy, health and hope. It is the loyalty in love. It portrays growth, fertility and harmony. It is considered as the peaceful colour for the human eyes. It is closely associated with the Islam. It has great strength and gives hope than any other colours.

Green is the symbol of hope. The author symbolizes green to give a new life and a new hope. Pi Patel, the spiritual person follows Hinduism and Christianity in the beginning at the end he meets Islam. “I came to Mullah Street. I had a peek at the Jamia Masjid, the Great mosque....The building, clean and white except for various edges painted green.”(58) When he walks through the street, author symbolizes it through the green colour.

When he sees the Mosque, Pi Patel sees various edges painted in green. Author symbolizes the white for purity which refers to his heart and green as the symbol of Islam in that pure heart. There comes a ray of new hope and he starts following Islam.

In another situation, Pi Patel is in lifeboat and he finds the survival manual and he starts reading it. In the 9<sup>th</sup> point, he finds “look for Green” (167). In his journey, he finds that green colour gives more hope. The following line asserts the idea. “Green sea turtles gave more meat...” (197).

In his miserable journey, Pi reaches the floating island and eventually finds the green trees and it gives him a new hope to survive. He describes it as “Since the trees continued to stand, I continued to look. To take in green, after so much of blue, was like music to my eyes. Green is the colour of Islam. It is my favourite colour.”(257).

## Conclusion

Symbolism is mainly used to describe the meaning beyond what is expressed. Symbols in literature create a large space for the readers to explore and express beyond the given point. Symbolism has the ability to enhance emotions and feelings and to get the readers deep into it. Yann Martel has used colours as symbols to represent the experience of a castaway. Colours have the ability to mirror the emotions and feelings. In the novel, Pi Patel gets hope and strength from different colours that he encounters in different occasions. When he first sees the orange colour it gives him spiritual strength, next golden colour shows the victory and the last green colour shows the new life. Life of Pi undoubtedly has produced the deeper meaning and understanding through colours which are used as symbols.

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