

Life of pi: ang lee's movie

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Film adaptation is a delicate science for filmmakers, authors, and fans of the original book. In the case of Ang Lee's adaptation of "Life of Pi" the film is beautiful in its scope, and doesn't necessarily fail as a film itself, yet it suffers because for being just loosely tied to the book's original point and characterization.

First and foremost, Pi's character is not terrible in the film yet it extremely off in terms of decision-making. This is not due to the actor(s) portraying Pi, this is because of writing. In many cases an actor can make or break a character, for example, Benedict Cumberbatch's portrayal as Sherlock Holmes was so well received it became a defining feature of his career. In the case of Suraj Sharma, he displays incredible talent as an actor and clearly worked well with the text he was given. After all, he must carry a majority of the whole story by himself, only working off CGI animals for at least half the film. Sharma is one of those actors who can display a lot of emotions with his facial expressions, a trait displayed most prominently during the scene where he tells the second story without the animals. His raw voice and expressions are what make it difficult for the audience to discern whether the second story is a put on or the first story happened at all, which is a beautifully done adaptation of the book's ending where no emotion was detailed for that story-in other words, that was all the work of the actor pulling emotion from the text. However, the text in the book as opposed to the script is where the differences become obvious. Two of the biggest examples are his introduction to Richard Parker and training of Richard Parker. First off, the book explicitly states Pi never did and would never attempt to feed a tiger by hand. Not only does he do this in the movie,

but the scene is framed in a way that makes the audience think Pi might've been safe with Richard Parker even if his father hadn't interrupted. This is not animal behavior, even animal experts who bond with animals like Richard Parker enough to pet them and play with them do not try feeding them by hand unless they are cubs. Even then, they are usually feeding them from a bottle with protective gloves and gear. Secondly, the tiger used to illustrate the danger of animals isn't Richard Parker in the book. Instead, it's a tiger named Mahisha who attacks the goat and hasn't been fed for three days. This sets up the potential for danger Pi is in on the lifeboat but also keeps Richard Parker's specific temperament unknown to the reader until he is on the lifeboat. For both these points, it may be argued that changes needed to be made for running time. However, in the book the warning about dangerous animals is random for both Pi and his brother Ravi, so there is no need for cutting some explanation out. If the point was to create a reason, then by comparison it would've made more sense to have Ravi be the one try something dangerous with the animals than Pi. Despite this also not happening in the book, Pi is established as being knowledgeable about dealing with animals, while Ravi is established as having no interest in the zoo and frequently causing trouble. The second example also disregards a whole plot of the book just for a comedic gag. In the book, the methods Pi uses to train Richard Parker and keep peace between them work and even hold moderate scientific merit. In the film, it's portrayed as a failed attempt that is never picked up again and explicitly stated as a failure. Not only does this disregard the characterization of Pi as a person who is knowledgeable

about animals, it again disregards animal behavior which was very well portrayed in the book.

Ang Lee added a lot of pointless threads or disregarded material that made it's former meaning pointless. As mentioned, Pi loses some major facets of his personality portrayed in the book, turning him into more of an “ every man” trope for the audience to relate to. In the same way that Bella from Twilight was used to allow teenage girls to slot themselves into the role to both engage and make the audience sympathize. What Lee missed in this regard is obvious: The story is about a boy on a lifeboat with a tiger. The description alone is guaranteed to raise eyebrows provide immediate sympathy for the character. Even if they don't show sympathy, the story is already unique enough to garner interest and get the audience listening. So there is no point in making Pi Patel an “ every man.” Also, the addition of the character Anandi as a love interest for Pi was entirely pointless. Not to say that adding more female characters is bad, it gives work to actresses and makes the story less of a sausage-fest. The problem with Anandi is that even in the context of the movie, her character added nothing to the story. As Pi's love interest and a female, her character's existence lets the audience know Pi is straight. Yet at both the end of the book and movie, we see him married with children to a woman. Thus, this is pointless. There is a scene where she notes the body language of Richard Parker to Pi, so it could be she is teaching him something he'll use later. Except his father and studies already are insinuated to have taught him this information. Again, pointless. Anandi and Pi also make promises to see each other again when he moves, so it could be said she's his reason for living. Again, this is made pointless

because the whole storyline of both the book and movie is about the innate survival instinct in all of us.

There are methods to satisfy both the story needs and the film needs, which Ang Lee either didn't see or disregarded. If the point of Anandi's character was just to make the story less male-heavy, why not make one of the Mr. Kumars a woman? Both Mr. Kumars are integral to Pi's character development, both characters meet at the zoo with the animals, and both were cut from the movie despite their significance. Making one of the Kumars a woman would even mirror his parents, one man and one woman. Another option might be to change the priest in the church to a nun, again playing into Pi's character development and making the movie less male-centric. However, if Ang Lee was uncomfortable gender-swapping roles, why not then give the mother more scenes? The father already has major scenes in the movie, and the mother has an established character and scenes that are also integral to Pi's development in the book. There are plenty of characters that could be re-added or explored further to make up for the time Anandi had on screen and give more substance to the story.

The movie is beautifully filmed and if one hasn't read the book, the movie on its own is a great story. The scenes where the water appears to glow in the darkness and Pi imagines looking through the eyes of Richard Parker are breathtakingly gorgeous. These aren't even scenes necessarily taken from the book, yet Ang Lee's decision to add them in was a grand idea that was equally well-executed. For all the issues with adaptations from book to film, the cinematography and direction are great strengths. The book was not

short on good imagery, but as a literary medium the point for the book was to allow the audience to imagine Pi's experiences based on his words. Meanwhile, film is a visual medium, thus a lot of effort always needs to be put into the visual aspects-which may account for some of the writing deficiencies. However, the film is entertaining and provides a poignant story. The acting, the direction, and (again) the visuals are the strongest points of the film which makes for excellent film-making. The only real crime of the film was that it came so close to being a faithful adaptation of the book, but missed key points and made strange choices to account for those mistakes. Yet the movie didn't butcher the original story, like some adaptations do. If Ang Lee had made the story a Doctor Doolittle style comedy about a boy and his tiger companion, for example, then that would be butchering the story-even if he did only use text from the book for dialogue. Since nothing like that happened, it can't really be said he tore apart the material. The poor transfer of character and original meaning to screen make it a hit and miss adaptation, but the sublime acting and direction make it a wonderful movie on its own.

Overall, readers of the book will not find a faithful adaptation to the book but people who want to see a great film will be more than pleased. For some, the book-to-film treatment of the morals and characters may be too much for the loyal book lover to sit through, and for good reason. The film, however, is not beyond enjoyment and can definitely be watched again many times in its own right.