

# Holocaust and Hope in Steven Spielberg's Fiction

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**Abstract:** The paper delves into the cinematic work, *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg that depicts the horrors of the holocaust during the Second World War. The film is explored as a cultural artifact. The characterization and cinematic techniques are delved into for the purpose of comprehending how the message of hope in the time of holocaust is communicated to the audience. The relationship between the characters of Oskar Schindler and Itzhak Stern is explored. Moreover, the film's resemblance to reality is also discussed. Lastly, the relevance of the film as a timeless work of art is mentioned. Thus, the paper elucidates the manner in which Steven Spielberg weaves the success story of *Schindler's List* as a cinematic work with universal appeal and socio-historic relevance.

**IndexTerms**–*Schindler's List*, Oskar Schindler, Steven Spielberg, holocaust, fictional representation.

## I. Introduction

Many cinematic works have portrayed the evil of holocaust that led to the loss of thousands of lives during the Second World War at the brutality of the Nazis. It needs to be reckoned that both the genres of fiction and non-fiction films have portrayed the historic occurrence in different ways that have successfully reached out to the audience. Steven Spielberg's seminal cinematic work, *Schindler's List*, can be described as one of the very best cinematic endeavors in the history of cinema. The entire work has been complemented by the stellar performances of Liam Neeson and Ben Kingsley. The film about holocaust was made in the country of the United States of America, and Universal Pictures went on to distribute the film across the entire globe. The famous creative artist, Steven Zaillian, went on to write the screenplay of this cinematic work. The film is a cinematic adaptation of the literary work, *Schindler's Ark*, penned by the literary artist, Thomas Keneally. Beyond any doubt, this cinematic endeavor goes on to stir the audience to the very core of the hearts owing to the quintessence of aesthetic portrayal and emotional appeal of the narrative. The filmic narrative spans for 184 minutes, and creates utmost emotional impact on the minds of the audience with the sheer perfection of cinematic portrayal and the content. Even after so many years of the initial theatrical release in the year 1993, this cinematic work has remained extremely popular among the audience. An exploration of the characterization and cinematic techniques would lead to a better idea about the effectiveness of this contextual film in reaching out to the masses over the years.

## II. Characterization in the film

The filmmaker develops the titular character of Oskar Schindler all through the filmic narrative to bring out the impact of the holocaust on the human psyche. Toward the inception of the film, the audience sees how the male protagonist is bent upon making profit from his business venture, while he engages in a life of materialism and grandeur. Schindler transforms from being a selfish businessman with Nazi ideology to one who braves all the odds coming in his way to save as many lives of hapless Jews as possible. Schindler having started with the aim of extracting utmost profit by employing the workers at lower wages goes on to plan against the Nazi authorities to save Jews losing all his money in the process. He succeeds in saving eleven hundred Jews by the end of the war.

Spielberg highlights the relationship between the male protagonist and Itzhak Stern, his Jewish accountant, played by Ben Kingsley. The filmmaker is successful in developing the relationship between these two characters with utmost prowess and affective appeal for the audience. Stern is the only person who comprehends the emotions and motives that drive a greedy man like Schindler to engage in the risky affair of saving the lives of so many Jews by duping the Nazis for so long. The narrative trajectory of the film explores the relationship between the characters, and also the experiences that ignite the higher motives in Oskar Schindler. The protagonist finally transforms into a selfless heroic character by the end of the film, having started off as a casual profiteer. There can be no denial of the fact that the transformation of the male protagonist as a character is influenced by his relationship with Stern. Stern can be described as the catalytic force that guides the selfish and materialistic man to become someone who does not care about money or position anymore. Oskar Schindler's personal transformation gets juxtaposed with the imagery showing the unfamiliar faces of Jewish prisoners who are on the receiving end of brutality and savagery that get inflicted by the Nazis. The director leaves no stone unturned to bring out the pain and suffering of the hapless Jews who were made to live in the ghetto and then in the concentration camps.

## III. Cinematic Techniques

The film goes on to exude the use of perfect cinematic techniques that bring out the affective appeal of the narrative. The excellent cinematographic work communicates with the audience with utmost effectiveness. JanuszKaminiski's appealing black-and-white cinematography also portrays the character of Oskar Schindler as a mesh of supreme confidence and opportunism,

while this is contrasted to the surmounting hardships and imminent jeopardy of the Jewish people. Toward the beginning, when Schindler takes over the kitchenware factory and occupies this apartment from where an affluent Jewish family has been evicted by the Nazis, he does not come across to be a heroic character. The director juxtaposes the grandeur and pomp encompassing Schindler's lifestyle, while the Jewish people are sent to the Cracow ghetto. When the ghetto gets evacuated, these Jews are sent to Plaszow that is overseen by AmonGoeth, a cruel, cold-hearted SS commandant. Oskar shows no sign of empathy toward the fate of the thousands of Jews toward the first part of the film, and is only bent on making profit for himself through his business.

Among the various exceptional elements that catapult the cinematic work to perfection, the editing by Michael Kahn should be mentioned discreetly. The film portrays the perfect balance between dramatic elements and realism. Moreover, the background score composed by John Williams constitutes the soul of the film as the music sets up the somber mood. The violin solos leaves a lasting impression on the audience augmenting the affective impact of the entire film. It would be correct to say that the director leaves no stone unturned to reach out to the spectators, and make the filmic text a memorable one that would be cherished for a long time. He uses the cinematic techniques to bring out the thematic content of the film with effectiveness. The film uses colored scenes only when the Jews saved by Schindler come to pay their respects to the grave of Oskar Schindler. The entire narrative evokes the emotions of the audience, and makes them ponder about the film even long after having finished watching the narrative.

#### IV. Depiction of facts

One can refer to Alain Resnais' cinematic work, *Night and Fog* that depicts the horrors of the holocaust. This seminal documentary film portrays the picture of the concentration camps in front of the avid audience. Also, this cinematic work uses real footage to show the physical condition of the Jews during the time of their captivity in the camps. Now, one can understand that the facts that are shown in this documentary film are echoed in the fictional representation in the contextual film by Spielberg. Also, the story of Oskar Schindler is a real one, and the film should be credited for representing true occurrences on the screen with utmost prowess and accuracy. As such, it goes beyond any doubt that this film by Spielberg can be considered a valid socio-historic commentary and representation that brings a very significant chapter of the holocaust on the large screen.

#### V. Conclusion

It would be correct to end by saying that the film has remained very popular even after so many years of its initial theatrical release owing to the cinematic genius exuded by the filmmaker. The content stirs the audience to the innermost core of their hearts, and the film uses the best techniques to bring life to the various characters. What resonates in the minds of the audience is the message of hope that transcends the challenges that thwart the lives and wellbeing of common people in times of war. Oskar Schindler rises above all with his character development as an epitomic figure of hope and resolution. He braves all the odds to save the innocent lives that could have been taken otherwise. The film is a tribute to the great deeds of Schindler. The cinematic work has attained timeless appeal and universal acclaim. In a world of pain and haplessness, Spielberg brings out the need and importance of hope for treading on the path of life.

#### REFERENCES

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