



Celluloid Reflections: Contrasting Holocaust Narratives in *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*

Mufasir Babu P*

Assistant Professor of English, Ideal College for Advanced Studies, Kadakassery.

*Corresponding Author Mufasir Babu P

Assistant Professor of English,
Ideal College for Advanced
Studies, Kadakassery.

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Abstract: The Holocaust has been a traumatic event in the history of humankind, and it has been depicted through a lens of humour, fantasy, and symbolism. The Holocaust narrative refers to a written or spoken account that recounts the experiences, events, and impact of the Holocaust, particularly the systematic genocide carried out by the Nazis during World War II. *Life is Beautiful* and *Schindler's List*, both focus on the theme of the Holocaust and World War II. Both films explore the Holocaust and differ significantly in their tone, style, and narrative approach. The objective of this paper is to analyze how these films portray the Holocaust and Nazi atrocities by exploring the role of human relationships in providing strength and resilience during periods of extreme crisis.

Keywords: Holocaust, World War II, Nazi atrocities, human relationships, film analysis.

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Introduction

The term 'holocaust' is defined as the destruction or slaughter on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war. Holocaust narrative refers to a written or spoken account that recounts the experiences, events, and impact of the Holocaust, particularly the systematic genocide carried out by the Nazis during World War II. These narratives are the accounts from individuals who directly experienced the Holocaust, either as survivors of concentration camps, ghettos, or those who lived through persecution. Numerous films have depicted the grim realities of the Holocaust, showcasing themes of survival, struggle, and the enduring memories of those who lived through this harrowing period.

Life is Beautiful and *Schindler's List*, both focus on the theme of the Holocaust and World War II. The films are notable for its treatment and narrative style on Holocaust, one of the darkest incidents in the history of world. These films are set against the backdrop of the Holocaust and the atrocities committed by the Nazis during World War II. Both films depict strong connections between characters, emphasizing the importance of human relationships during times of crisis. In *Life is Beautiful* the bond between Guido and his son is central, while *Schindler's List* explores the relationships between Oskar Schindler and the Jews he saves.

Critical Analysis of the film *Life is Beautiful*

Besides being a source of entertainment many films carry a message for the public. The 1997 film, *Life Is Beautiful* is a tragic comedy directed by and starring Roberto Benigni and is set during the holocaust. This film received several laurels including three Academy Awards. Roberto plays the role of Guido Orefice, a young Jewish who along with his family falls prey to the Nazi

death camps. The film is divided into two parts, the first is entirely comic, the second, a bittersweet portrayal of love, sacrifice and suffering. The appeal lies in the challenges Guido must encounter in order to save his family. This forms the dramatic heart of the film.

The film represents the political corruption and class inequalities that have bedevilled Italy at various points in its history. The backdrop of Fascist Italy that forms the film's setting shows huge disparities in social class and the corruption of political elites, particularly in the first half of the film. The differences between rural Italy and the urban Italy are also seen in the film, Guido's family and Dora's family reflect the differences in regional and class identity. The film was inspired by the story of Auschwitz survivor Rubino Salmoni and by the experiences of Benigni's own father who was imprisoned in a Labour Camp and told humorous stories about his experiences in order to not scare his children. Benigni has said that his aim wasn't to create historical realism but a 'poetic and beautiful truth (about humanity)'.

The main protagonist, Guido, is portrayed as a man of humour as well as ignorance of situations of seriousness. Due to his Jewish religion, he and his family (wife Dora and child Joshua) are sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. Guido and Joshua live together in a men's quarter, and the narrative relies on this close relationship between Guido and his younger son Joshua. However, in reality, no child would be allowed to stay in the barracks. Horrifyingly, children sent to the camp were to be murdered at arrival. One of the most debated aspects of the film is its use of humour in the context of the Holocaust. Guido's attempts to shield his son from the horrors of the concentration camp by turning it into a game are both heart-warming and controversial. While some appreciate the film's ability to find humour in

adversity, others argue that it risks trivializing the historical tragedy.

Guido creates an alternative reality for his son by turning their dire situation into a game. He transforms the harsh conditions of the concentration camp into a theatrical performance, complete with points and rules. This use of fantasy and imagination becomes a symbolic act of preserving humanity and hope in an inhumane environment. The tank that Guido encounters early in the film becomes a recurring symbol. Guido, who initially mistakes the tank for a friendly vehicle, later uses it to create a diversion during a critical moment in the concentration camp. The tank can be seen as a metaphor for unexpected allies and unconventional strategies in the face of oppression.

To sum up, *Life is beautiful* portrays the dark realities of Nazi concentration camp accurately. Even though the film begins with some comic narratives, it finally manifested the dangers of holocaust as a serious subject. The film tackles the Holocaust through a lens of humour, fantasy, and symbolism. Its unique approach has sparked discussions and debates within the film community and beyond, making it a work that continues to be analysed and interpreted in various ways. The film's impact lies not only in its representation of historical events but also in its exploration of broader themes of love, imagination, and the human capacity for hope in the face of darkness.

Critical Analysis of *Schindler's List*

Schindler's List, directed by Steven Spielberg and released in 1993, is a powerful and critically acclaimed film that tells the true story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved the lives of more than a thousand Polish Jews during the Holocaust. In movies set in modern times, a director's choice to use black and white might seem trite and artistically showy. In *Schindler's List*, however, the black-and-white presentation effectively evokes the World War II era and deepens the impact of the story. Black and white also presents the filmmaker with the opportunity to use sparing colour to highlight key scenes and signal shifts in time. For example, the opening full-colour scene, one of only a handful of colour scenes in the movie, fades into the next scene, in black and white.

The movie presents an eclectic mix of styles, such as film noir, which is associated with the great detective stories of the 1940s. The style links the film to that time period and serves to deepen viewers' immersion in the historical setting. During the Holocaust, German soldiers burned the bodies of deceased Jewish civilians when they began to pile up as more and more people passed away. This absolutely horrific, inhumane act began by placing the bodies in wheelbarrows and bringing them to incinerators.

When Schindler saw the little girl in the red coat's corpse, he knew he needed to save as many lives as he could. Earlier in the film, the girl in the red coat walked peacefully down the streets of Poland. Her perfectly curled hair, tiny body, and confused style of walking contrasted with the chaos occurring around her. The pop of color catches Schindler's eye, who is watching from a hill nearby. When he sees her body lying lifeless later on in the film, he is prompted to act. She causes Schindler to realize the extent of the atrocity inflicted on the Jews. He listens to his conscience after this sight and saves as many innocent people as he can. The red coat symbolizes the blood that was shed during the

Holocaust, and this color has also been proven by psychologists to cause stress and anxiety. The small child wearing this red coat signifies how innocent the people were and how carelessly they were slaughtered.

Another colour symbol used in the film was Sabbath candles. In a brief moment during the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, a Jewish family is shown lighting Sabbath candles. The candles are depicted in color, emphasizing the cultural and religious significance of this ritual amidst the tragedy surrounding it. These intentional bursts of color amidst the black-and-white cinematography are meant to draw attention to specific elements and enhance the emotional impact of the film. The use of color in these scenes helps the audience connect with the characters and events on a deeper level, making the atrocities depicted in the film even more resonant.

In particularly morbid scenes, there was no music. For example, when the Jewish prisoners are pushed into the shower that they believe is a gas chamber, there is screaming and gasping, but no music. The underlying silence makes the audience feel what the group of prisoners are feeling: pure fear of what is about to happen. During the calm, sad scenes of the movie, classical music plays softly. In some parts, the sound began to gradually crescendo. The music contributes to the depressed mood of the film and intensifies this atmosphere at specifically dreadful scenes. *Schindler's List* is not noted for its musical score, but the subtle music blended into certain sections fulfils Spielberg's intention of emphasizing the tragedies of World War II.

The legacy of the girl in the red coat from *Schindler's List* continues decades after the movie's 1993 release, but few know much about the young actor who played the role, Oliwia Dabrowska. Dabrowska was just 3 years old when she played the iconic role in Spielberg's movie. The Polish actor remembers the Oscar-winning director suggesting to her at the time of the filming that she wait until she was 18 years old to watch the movie. However, Dabrowska admitted she watched it when she was 11 years old and had a very negative reaction to it, saying "I could not understand much, but I was sure that I didn't want to watch ever again in my life." However, over time, Dabrowska's feelings about being in the movie changed and she began to embrace her role as part of an important movie, saying "I had been part of something I could be proud of."

To Spielberg, the black and white presentation of the film came to represent the Holocaust itself: "The Holocaust was life without light. For me the symbol of life is color. That's why a film about the Holocaust has to be in black-and-white." In conclusion, twenty-five years later, the film is seen as a realistic depiction of life during the Holocaust, in terms of the brutality of the Nazis and the lifestyles of those they persecuted, though it does stray from the real story in a few big ways. For example, the person who gave the real Schindler the idea of putting Jewish people to work as essentially slave laborers in his factory, thus saving them, was a Jewish Polish former factory co-owner named Abraham Bankier — a critical role that is not in the film.

Hitler's attempt at genocide is the most inconceivable event that occurred during the 20th century, and many pieces of art keep the memory of the deceased alive. The *Diary of Anne Frank* is a book that youngest students read. The fear and confusion in Frank's writing is the same fear felt by the Jewish people in the

films Sophie's Choice, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, and Schindler's List. The journey of these Jews is traumatic, gruesome, and constantly filled with terror. The compassion of Oskar Schindler had a lasting effect for generations, as the people he saved had children and grandchildren. We will never know the true impact of Schindler's list, because the future is filled with descendants of people whose names were on it. But it will always be known who had the power to kill and chose not to, because generations remember those with true power.

Conclusion

One can conclude that both *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful* picturize the pathetic conditions of holocaust. *Schindler's List* is a stark and realistic portrayal of the Holocaust. It has a sombre tone and is shot primarily in black and white, conveying the gravity of the historical events it depicts. *Life is Beautiful* is an Italian film takes a more whimsical and comedic approach. While it begins as a romantic comedy set against the backdrop of World War II, it transforms into a tragic tale when the characters find themselves in a concentration camp. *Schindler's List* is more straightforward and serious portrayal, Spielberg's film delves into the historical facts and atrocities of the Holocaust. It aims to educate and commemorate the victims while emphasizing the individual acts of resistance and humanity.

While the film *Life is Beautiful* addresses the Holocaust, it does so through a lens of optimism and love. It highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the lengths to which a father will go to protect his child. The tragic events are presented with a touch of surrealism and hope. In summary, while both films explore the Holocaust, they differ significantly in their tone, style, and narrative approach. *Schindler's List* is a sobering and historically grounded depiction, while *Life is Beautiful* combines humour and tragedy to convey a message of hope in the face of unimaginable darkness.

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