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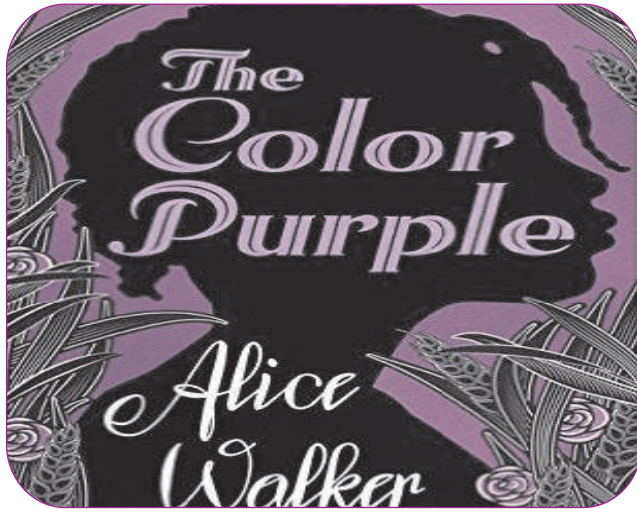
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A STUDY OF THE VARIABLES BETWEEN ALICE WALKER'S 'THE COLOR PURPLE' AND ITS FILM ADAPTATION OF THE SAME TITLE BY SPIELBERG



ABSTRACT: -

The *Color Purple* is a modern classic in American Literature. It is the assertion of the dignity of a single woman. The female protagonist Celie asserts her individuality as an independent entrepreneur. Along with her, Nettie, Shug Avery too assert themselves. This is the saga of the endurance, the fighting spirit, the endless sufferings and never say die attitude of these four prominent female characters. Of these, Celie's condition is the worst but she fights it out and emerges successful in the contemporary dominated by the males. The present paper has pointed out the dissimilar points in the text. The novel *Color Purple* by Alice Walker used as the text and the film of the same title as its adaptation. The changes are inevitable when a printed work is adapted for its presentation in a non print visual work of art as it is used for its film adaptation. The major points are used for its film adaptation. The major points are compared and contrasted in the paper.

KEYWORDS: Text, Adaptation, Script, Music, Character, Setting.

INTRODUCTION:

The basic difference between the novel and its film adaptation is that the novel is meant for the

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literate people while the film adaptation is for the masses. Another significant difference between them is that writing a novel in the case of a novelist and reading a novel in the case of a reader are actually activities performed by a single individual while making and viewing the film are a group or a mass activity. The purpose of writing a novel is for reading it while its film adaptation is meant for visual purposes. The writer plays the roles of a writer and the reader at the time of the composition of the novel. Filmmaking is a highly difficult and a very challenging task. It is the unanimous group activity of different types of skilled persons. The filmmaker plays the roles of a writer, technician, actor and audience at the production of the film. Film adaptation is an effective art form as it gives way to listening, reading and viewing at one and the same time.

The basic difference between a novel and its film adaptation is that the film conveys the words of fiction through the effective visualization with the help of sound, music, dialogue, acting and mixing of shots whereas a work of fiction describes visuals in words. Another difference is that fiction in view of contributing messages requires plenty of words and pages while the film is required to use a perfect combination of the precise sound, script, setting, and other essentials. Another difference between the two art forms is that the filmmaker even though imitates many parts from its source material, he contributes to the source material through his own outlook, taking into consideration the psyche of contemporary society for financial output and the needs of transforming the story of the novel into a film. Film adaptation is a new attire of the earlier story of the novel. As the story of the novel is well known to the reader, the reader looks or searches the similar spirit of the story of the novel in

the film adaptation. Since, it becomes a difficult task for a filmmaker to bring the similar effect or spirit and outcome reflected in the novel. At the time of making film, the filmmaker is fully aware about to make the story most likable to the contemporary society with keeping it in the province of film art. The filmmaker views to lead the viewers towards the ideological and imaginative world of the filmmaker. The filmmaker toils to provide immense emotional gratification on the part of viewers. The filmmaker although selects his or her likable story for film adaptation, he/she transforms the story into present form and suitable form to film art. Novel is a distinctive form of art in compare to its film adaptation. It has its own merit, distinctions and limitations as well. This paper aims to highlight the merits and limitations of both forms of art. It is not a matter to compare which art form is superior to the other. One thing that is to be noted is that the stylistic aspects in the novel like motif, metaphors, allusion, imagery, symbolism and stream of consciousness technique can never be adequately translated into film. Another difference is that the novelist contributes to real society and human life by the power of imagination while the film-maker contributes the same by the power of visualization.

The difference between novel and its film adaptation is also basically found in the time usage, plot, characterization, morals, visual imagery, symbolism, narration and tone. The story of "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker is adapted into the film of the same title in 1985 directed by Steven Spielberg.

2. The variables between the novel 'The Color Purple' and its film adaptation-

2.1:- The Color Purple (1982) is the novel by Alice Walker which has won the Pulitzer Prize. It was the first such honor accorded for fiction written by an Afro- American novelist. The novel is unique in its revival of the old 18th century format of the epistolary novel. Samuel Richardson in the middle of the 18th century along with Fielding, Sterne and Smollett was one of the four charioteers of the English novel. Samuel Richardson's novels Pamela and Clarissa are in the epistolary format. Some of his letters are twenty or twenty four pages long. This format is used to convey the conditions to which woman in those days were subjected and to present the woman in dire conditions and problematic situations. Alice Walker in the last two decades of the twentieth century has the same mission of depicting the pains, pangs, storms, suffering, tortures and torments of the women in pitiable conditions of her time. She desires to present the separation and reunion of the two Afro- American sisters in her novel- The Color Purple. Celie is the female protagonist who has addressed fifty- six letters to God and fourteen to her younger sister, Nettie and Nettie has sent twenty- two letters to Celie. These 92 letters make the novel. A very useful format is used so that Celie is able to pour out her inner feelings in the letters. This feature of the novel is completely absent and is totally lost in the film. The film does not bring out the letters but just shows the discovery of the letters sent by Nettie but which were never delivered to her and were hidden in a trunk. The discovery of the letters makes Celie realize that there is somebody in the world who cares for her, loves her and wants to be reunited to her. In the film, the epistolary format is not used because of practical constraints of handling the medium of the film.

2.2: The main difference between the novel and the film is that the number of characters, Celie's Pa, her mother, Celie, Nettie and young brother, Lucious make five members, three kids and Celie's husband, Mr. Albert Johnson and old Mr. Johnson make another family of five members, Celie's step- son, Harpo Johnson, his wife Sofia, two more strong sisters like her and three strong brothers are eight persons in a family, Shug Avery, her father the preacher, her husband Grady are three more, The Mayor, his wife Miss. Millie and their daughter make three more are just twenty- four characters belonging to just five core families. This means that the novel presents more than forty characters. In the film, all these characters are reduced in number. Taking into consideration, the star system in the Hollywood means substantial pay- packet to them, no producer, financier or director like Steven Spielberg of The Color Purple can pay such gross amounts only on casting the stars to play the assigned roles. Therefore though there is a galaxy of a number of characters in the novel, in the film of the same title the number of characters stands reduced. There are about eight characters who rule the major action of the novel and the film. There are a dozen more minor characters in the film. There are some mob scenes as those of the market- place, the joint constructed by Harpo and some other scenes in which there are large crowds present. There is a substantial reduction in the number of characters presented in the film. There are not more than twenty such characters of which eight are major in varying degrees and about a dozen again in some minor roles.

For monetary reasons, this reduction is essential and therefore justifiable. In a novel, the number of characters is not at all a problem as the characters are presented without any other – such as commercial involvement. The second contrastive feature is therefore the reduction in the number of characters presented in the film- is made and it is justified on every ground.

2.3: -The third difference between the novel and the film is that in the film there are eight characters which are quite prominently presented. In these prominent eight characters there are five female characters. These five female characters are – Celie, Nettie, Shug, Sofia and Squeak. The Color Purple is mainly the story of two sisters of which Celie is shown more prominently in the film. Nettie is presented in snatches in the separation scene, the second separation scene and the reunion scene and while doing her missionary work in Africa. More prominently two other female characters are presented in the film- Steven Spielberg- directed The Color Purple who are Shug Avery, Celie's husband Mr. Albert Johnson's beloved and Sofia, Harpo Albert's (Celie's step- son) wife. His girl friend Squeak is also presented in some prominence. This means that Celie, Shug and Sofia are more prominent and the star cast is of Whoopi Goldberg, Margaret Avery and Oprah Winsfrey. The star-cast has two newcomers in the film though both of them are popular TV stars. They are cast in a Hollywood film for the first time but their first performances were so much appreciated that they were nominated for the Oscar awards. The Best Actress nomination was given to Whoopi Goldberg who played her maiden filmy role of Celie Harris Johnson. Oprah Winsfrey played the role of strong independent woman and the golden hearted Sofia. Shug Avery's role was played by Margaret Avery who is almost sisterly to Celie and who teaches Celie how to become self- confident, self- independent and self reliant. Both Margaret Avery and Oprah Winsfrey were nominated as the Best Supporting Actress for Oscar awards. The trio of these female stars did not get the Oscar but their nomination itself was not a mean achievement. The other two female characters are Nettie and Squeak but their participation in the action of the film is reduced in the film. The three prominent male characters are Mr. Albert Johnson, his son Harpo and Albert's old father, old Mr. Johnson. Their roles are played Danny Glover (Albert), Willard E. Pugh (Harpo Johnson) and Adolph Caesar (Old Minister Johnson). These three male characters are given some space in the film. Danny Glover who plays the role of Mr. Albert Johnson in the film is given much more prominent space than what is given to Harpo and his father Old Minister Johnson are presented in a less prominent manner. Ultimately, there are three major and two minor female characters while there is one male major character and two minor male characters. In the last analysis, there are four major characters of which three are females and one male. The focus on women shows how the film is oriented as a film depicting women's problems and the ways of becoming empowered women as Celie does through making quilt, Shug by singing and dancing and Sofia through her self-less service, determination and strength.

2.4: -In the novel The Color Purple the first seven letters tell about how Celie's mother was sick, how she had recently delivered a baby boy- Lucious, Celie's Pa pulled on her sick mother's hand to allow him to make sex to her. She refuses it. This is noticed by Celie taking place twice. Then she found her Pa asking her to give him what her mother can not give. He raped her many times and made her pregnant twice. She delivered a baby daughter first and then she delivered a baby son. Both the infants were lifted by her 'Pa' and she never knows where her children were and whether they were killed or were still alive. Then her Pa brought another girl after her mother's death. Then Mr.---- came to demand Nettie's hand. That was refused by pa but he offered him Celie as a bride. This is what is there in the first seven letters. The novel presents these facts in about eight pages and just One Hundred and Forty- nine lines only. The film shows the birth and lifting of the two infants just in two three shots and the waiting of Mr. Albert Johnson at Alfonso Harris's porch on the horseback in as many as four- five shots. What is in the beginning of the novel in the first eight pages is presented in the first just in the first eight passing. This is how the contents of the first eight pages are compressed in few shots. That brings out the distinction between the print media and the non print media like the film- visual on the celluloid screen.

2.5:-After Celie becomes pregnant for the first time, Pa stops Celie's education. She is not allowed to attend school. "The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it. Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand. I was all dress for first day. You too dumb to keep going to school; Pa say, Nettie the clever one in this bunch." (The Color Purple,1983, 01)

Nettie pleads on Celie's behalf. She tells Pa that Celie is also smart and she should be allowed to continue

her education. Nettie did not give up her efforts. She called their teacher Miss Beasley at their home to persuade Pa. Miss Beasley assures him that both the girls are keen on learning at her school. Pa called Celie out and when Miss. Beasley, the teacher saw Celie's being pregnant, she stopped talking and returned. This is the reason why Nettie and Celie turn out to be different. Her ignorance and illiteracy made Celie submissive, timid and shy as well as dependent on others. On the other hand, Nettie continued to learn. She became self-confident, independent and empowered. She goes to Africa to help the missionary couple in their humanitarian selfless service. The difference between the two sisters is because Celie was not allowed to attend school and so she remained uneducated. This is explained in the novel in adequate details. The Color Purple the film directed by Steven Spielberg does not mention anything about Celie's education being stopped in the initial stages only. That has made her what she is. Education has made her sister, Nettie an independent capable woman. This is not at all shown in the film.

2.6: - In the seventh and eighth letters presented on the pages 9 to 13 is the way in which Pa made Mr. Albert Johnson to accept Celie instead of Nettie as his wife. After some hesitation Mr. Albert Johnson accepts the proposal because there is nobody to look after the three kids at his home. In this episode, it is noticed that Mr. Albert Johnson is patient and waits for the verdict silently. He shows his gentle humility when he is in the presence of Alfonso Harris who just flips newspaper when he address Mr. Albert Johnson. This is not his real nature but necessity has made him behave in his manner. He needs someone to look after his three kids and so he pretends to be gentle and modest. This portion of the film is rather exquisitely shown in the film rather more elaborately than what it contains in the novel. This is the license taken by the film director to present the background information and to present the hypocritical nature of Celie's husband- Mr. Albert Johnson. There is the first separation between Celie and her dear younger sister, Nettie. This is not found in the film as it should have been. This deletion is one more departure in the film. The film director is entitled to take some liberties from the original text, that is, the novel The Color Purple.-This is the liberty of deleting the first separation scene between the two sisters Celie and Nettie.

2.7: - Steven Spielberg directed film The Color Purple has made this film a musical one. There are in all sixteen songs such as 'Miss Celie's Blues,' 'Nettie Teaches Celie,' 'Celie Leaves With Mr.,' 'The Dirty Dozens,' 'Don't Make Me No Never Mind,' 'Celie's New House/ Body and Soul', 'Maybe God is Trying To Tell You Somethin',' 'Scarification Ceremony,' 'Heaven Belongs to You' and 'Katutoka Corrine' and others. Singing these songs is entrusted to Shug Avery. She sings and dances sometimes in Harpo's joint and sometimes at other places. These songs are appropriate to the situation. In order to make it musical in the film, the role of Shug Avery is extended quite substantially. She makes Celie aware of her own worth. She enables her to self confident and self-reliant through Folks pants business. This is a departure from the film and as Margaret Avery plays the role of Shug Avery, this departure is justified.

2.8:- Another character that is extended quite in a substantial manner in length and emphasis is of Harpo's wife Sofia. Celie and Sofia become almost sisterly. The idea of making quilt is suggested by Sofia and both begin their first newly designed quilt. Sofia is strong enough to hold her husband Harpo down as she proves to have the stronger hand between the two. She is independent, strong and asserts herself. She comments rudely about the Mayor's wife, Miss Millie and punches the Mayor himself. This lands her in the prison for some years and then in the Mayor's house as a maid. During this period she brings the Mayor's daughter so well that the daughter becomes completely attached to Sofia even after the end of her term as a maid. After the dinner scene she gets normal and in the reunion scene she joins. The casting of Oprah Winsfrey is the main reason behind extending her role in the film.

2.9:- Nettie went to Africa with the missionary couple of Samuel and Corrine. They were in Senegal doing selfless humanitarian service among the tribal people there. Their work consisted of giving health facilities and medicines teaching the children and also the adults of that tribe and generating awareness among all those for whom they worked in the forests and wildlife of Africa. They lived there for about a period of twenty years or so. Adam and Olivia had already become adults. Adam had set his heart on Tashi, who too loved him earnestly. Such a long span is summed up and compressed within a very small footage of life in Africa. This is a clear departure from the text: the novel. It insisted on the young children for finding a ritual of contemporary significance. The

actual cultural give and take is designed here. This portion of the novel is treated in the film rather superficially, in passing mention only. This is the change introduced by the film director.

3. CONCLUSION

The present study is a record of what the transformation of a novel means when it is changed into a film. Words on the pages become shots, visual images, walking, moving, talking and dancing figures on the celluloid screen. The novel *The Color Purple* and its film version by Steven Spielberg are as if two sides of the coin. About eighty- percent of fidelity to the text of the novel is observed. What is changed is on account of the problems of censorship, problems of star- based cast system, the financial expenditure involved in finding all the forty or so characters, different locations and time frames of forth years' duration and so narrow nationalism of Afro-Americans, the lesbianism involved in Shug- Celie relationship. The reduction of characters to five major female and three major male characters and about twenty minor characters are included in the cast of the movie. The eight major characters are further brought down to four prominent characters of Mr. Albert Johnson, Shug Avery, Celie Harris Johnson and Sofia Harpo Johnson. This is how the process of filming requires the visual presentation by the cinematographer, the musical composition by the music director, the contributions by the script- writer, the dance director, the art director, the production manager and a large team of hundred of technicians headed by the film Director- the Creator of the World of Make Believe on the Screen.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the media transfer from the verbal medium to visual medium ought to be encouraged at all costs. Whatever is printed on the page takes some time to be digested and imprinted on the brain of the reader who reads a printed text. The non print media proves more impressive and appealing as it appeals both to the eyes and ears of the viewers of a film. It is recommended that the classics in literature of the world need to be adapted into films.

CONCLUSION:

The present study is a record of the dissimilarities between certain things of the novel and its adaptation. The novel 'The Color Purple' and its film adaptation are if two sides of the coin. It is observed that eighty percent of fidelity of the film is to the text of the novel. The dissimilarities between the novel and its adaptation exist because of different forms of art, different viewpoints of the creators and the different psyche of literate readers of the novel and of literate or non literate viewers of the adaptation. The reduction in major and minor characters in the film adaptation of 'The color Purple' is a specimen to convert the long story of the novel into simplest and easiest form to viewers. The popular story of social or political concern is generally considered for film adaptation. The story of the film adaptation is already known to its viewers from its source text so they could easily understand and enjoy the known story in cinematic attire. Although, film adaptation is fully based on its source book, it contributes own merits, distinctions and limitations also.

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