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## Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Pale View of Hills* as Memory of Social History

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### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to evaluate the novel *The Pale view of Hills* by Kazuo Ishiguro in the context of social history as memory of one's past from England. Ishiguro, a Japanese British novelist who often writes about memory in his novels focuses on social history in *The Pale view of Hills* which is the story of women, Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese, living alone in England, and begins with discussion between Etsuko and her another younger daughter, Niki, about the suicide of Etsuko's older daughter, Keiko and her past life with her former husband in Japan. By looking back at her life in Japan, the protagonist narrates the social history of Japan during wars, the problems faced by people and trauma caused by wars. The novel will be evaluated through critical approach focused on social history of unemployment, education, poverty and life without security and its effects on common people.

**Keywords: Social History, trauma, memory, unemployment, poverty, past and amnesia**

As in the 1960s and 1970s, Social History studies the experiences of common people in the past especially their life and social status, poverty, tradition and customs. This branch of history focuses mainly on common man and societal status in that particular period. In this paper the overall idea of common people in the past, as represented in the novel is being focused. Two world wars put Japan in big trouble that means common man suffered with unemployment and poverty and trauma of war. Here in this novel the protagonist Mariko suffers from her amnesia and life in post war period. She with her daughter, Niki explores her past which is filled with pain and loss. She identifies herself with Sachiko who had faced the same problem.

In *The Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro analyses social history with memory of an ordinary woman Etsuko and her experiences in the past of post-war period. Here in this novel Mariko remembers her past with other characters like Sachiko and Mariko. With the visit of her younger daughter Niki, Mariko recalls her past about Japan where she spent almost half of her life with her husband Jiro, who was not taking care of his family. And she also remembers her life with her friend Sachiko and daughter of Sachiko by name Mariko.

The trauma of war brings unfriendliness among Sachiko, her daughter Mariko and her neighbours. All the time Mariko feels alone in the small cottage and her only friends are cats. Hence, Etsuko is Sachiko; Keiko is Mariko. Etsuko is unwilling to accept her past behaviour (Sachiko is a terrible mother and frequently leaves her daughter alone for hours at a time, allowing her to wander around by herself even though there has been a spate of child murders in the area; she also hasn't enrolled Mariko in school, and plans to take the child against her will to America with her boyfriend, whom Mariko hates), so she invents a "friend" to project her disapproval. This explains the parallels in Etsuko's and Sachiko's lives: Both leave Japan with a daughter for an English-speaking country (though in fact it's unclear in the novel whether Etsuko ever makes it to America). Mariko is a lonely, unhappy child

who doesn't want to leave Japan; Keiko is described similarly and never adjusts to life in England, hence her withdrawal and eventual suicide.

The novel begins with the discussion of both Etsuko and Niki about the recent death of elder daughter Keiko. Keiko was not comfortable with new world that is England. As she was very much innocent and an introvert, she was not able to understand the new life in England and new father. Then Keiko committed suicide. So Etsuko recalls her life with Keiko in front of Niki. But she suddenly starts to remember her friend in Japan who has gone to America as Etsuko has come to England:

I have no great wish to dwell now, it brings me little comfort. I only mention her here because those were the circumstances around Niki's visit this April, and because it was during that visit remembered Sachiko again after all this time. I never knew Sachiko well. In fact our friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago. (11)

Here in the above lines it clearly shows that Etsuko sees herself with Sachiko and her daughter with Mariko who was very cute but not mingling with anybody since she was in society which had the trauma of wars. Wars affected the life of all common people in Japan especially the women who lost their husbands. Sachiko lost her husband in the war. All characters in the novel struggle with the trauma of wars and memory of this trauma.

As poverty was more predominant in Japan, she had to suffer with her poverty. It can be seen in the visit of Etsuko to Sachiko's Cottage.

The cottage was tidy, but I remember a kind of stark shabbiness about the place; the wooden beams that crossed the ceiling looked old and insecure, and a faint odour of dampness lingered everywhere. At the front of the cottage, the main partition had been left wide open to allow the sunlight in across the veranda. For all that much of the place remained in the shadow. (17-18)

The cottage of the Sachiko is about fall down and not even clean. Etsuko struggles a lot to enter into the cottage as it is very untidy and full of old materials. Though Sachiko is in the midst of trauma of war, poverty and unemployment, she treats Etsuko with a lot of love and affection by offering her tea.

Most of the critics have identified the relationship between Sachiko-Mariko episode and Etsuko's own story. Cynthia F. Wong, for example, in her reading of *A Pale View of Hills*, points out:

In working through the meaning of her dead daughter's life, Etsuko situates her tale in Nagasaki and focuses on a strange and enigmatic friendship with another woman named Sachiko, whose own daughter's actions seem to foretell the suicide of Etsuko's daughter years later (Wong, 1995: 129).

She further sees in Sachiko's desire to leave Nagasaki for the United States "Etsuko's efforts to reconstruct a tale which would come years later" (Wong, 1995: 138). For Shaffer, the Sachiko-Mariko episode is reconstructed as a projection of Etsuko's "past difficulties with Keiko". Even Ishiguro himself, in an interview conducted by Gregory Mason, makes this point absolutely clear when asked whether Etsuko and Sachiko "were not one and the same person":

What I intended was this: because it's really Etsuko talking about herself, and possibly that somebody else, Sachiko, existed or did not exist, the meanings that Etsuko imputes to the life of Sachiko are obviously the meanings that are relevant to her (Etsuko's) own life. Whatever the facts were about what happened to Sachiko and her daughter, they are of interest to Etsuko now because she can use them to talk about herself. (Mason, 1989: 337)

It can be said that this is the amnesia of even Ishiguro towards his Japan since he left his country very long back. Sometimes the novel looks like semiautobiographical as Etsuko can always be compared with Ishiguro. As Ishiguro left the country to England with his father, Etsuko too left Japan with his new husband for England. But she lost her friend in Japan. Ishiguro can be compared here to Etsuko as she cannot talk about herself.

The trauma of wars made Mariko to fear all and not believe anybody. So she spends most of her time with kittens since they look very innocent to her compared to human beings in the war period. This can be seen in the discussion between Mariko and Etsuko:

Mariko came away from the window and returned to her kittens. Older cat had appeared and the kittens had cured up to their mother. Mariko lay down beside them and stared to whisper. Her whispering had a vaguely disturbing quality.

Your mother should be home soon. I said. "I wonder what she can be doing."

Mariko continued whispering.

"She was telling me all about Frank-San," I said. He sounds very nice man"

The whispering noises stopped. We stared at each other for a second.

"He's a bad man," Mariko said.

"Now that's not a nice thing to say, Mariko-San. Your mother told me all about him and he sounds very nice. And I'm sure he is very kind to you, isn't he?"(80-81)

Here Mariko does not believe anybody except her mother. Earlier she was not even responding to Etsuko also as she has in the trauma. The wars made Mariko to live in the isolated world where nobody is there to disturb her. This trauma not only has effect on children like Mariko but even younger generations and old people. That is why Etsuko too leaves Japan and comes to England to save her daughter Keiko but here in England Keiko commits suicide.

By justifying her moving to England, Etsuko says:

My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart. There is nothing to be gained in going over such matters again. (91)

This is a kind of self-satisfaction Etsuko gets as she lost her elder daughter.

Poverty is one of the social evils which kills the common peoples' lives and does not allow them to lead a happy life. It had its effect on Mariko. Though she was strong, she was not able to go school as her mother Sachiko was in poverty. Sachiko most of the time even does not think of the future of her daughter as she does not have money to spend on her

education. Abut Sachiko, with the help of Etsuko, joins the noodle shop for work. She is paid very less there where she cannot get even clothes and feed her daughter.

Finally Etsuko is introduced to Mrs. Fujiwara who is the owner of noodle shop. Here in this shop, she had to work more for small amount of money. It clearly indicates that Japan faced both poverty and unemployment. This book also describes the relationship between Jiro and his father, Ogata. Jiro is a busy worker, and every time his father wants to chat or play chess with him, he always refuses. This clearly shows the problem of unemployment in the war period as there is no time to spend with one's father.

*The Pale View of Hills* represents memory of Japan in the eyes of Etsuko. This is not only memory of one's past. But this is Japan's social history as it documents the problem faced by common people during wars. Ishiguro succeeds to give an account of social history through memory of Etsuko. She is an example of Japanese woman who is living in an European country with unforgettable memory her native country.

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