



Marxist Reading on Class, culture and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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Abstract

The world is filled with people who always wanted to live their life in-order to please the society and at the end they regret and feel sad for what they have lost, likewise this paper explores a Marxist perspective on Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day (1989), which examines how the protagonist, Mr. Stevens, becomes an emblem of false consciousness and ideological subjugation within the firm British class society. With the use of Karl Marx's concepts that speaks about the struggle in the society and alienation of individuals. The novel The Remains of the Day is analysed as a critique of how the working class people suffer from the elite people to enjoy their power. The protagonist Stevens's loyalty towards his master Lord Darlington and his aim of attaining Dignity are shown as a mask which Stevens wears to hide his emotions. The paper also explores how the social structure of Darlington Hall reflects the class struggle and dominance.

Keywords: class struggle, false consciousness, alienation, british aristocracy, loyalty, identity

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro, Japanese born British writer, who won The Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2017, his works have been highly recognised worldwide for his unreliable narration, for his thoughts, memory and identity that shapes an individual. In this novel *The Remains of the Day* one could analyse the exploration of memory, regretting for what is lost and longing for identity is shown through the protagonist Mr. Stevens, a butler who works in Lord Darlington Hall. On the basis of multiple analysis through the narratives of Ishiguro, there lies a rigid critique of class struggle and social structures and few psychological aspects which is layered and

brought out through this research analysis. Through the lens of Karl Marx's theories which focuses on false consciousness, class conflict, and ideological domination, this paper shows how Ishiguro portrays the nature of capitalist and how aristocratic traditions is imposed on working class people, where they start to internalise the struggle. By throwing the seeds of Marxism and its concepts within the personal and professional journey of Stevens', Ishiguro unfolds the destruction that elite people impose on working class people and how does it affects the human mind is analysed.



Karl Marx's Theoretical Contribution

The main concept of Karl Marx's theoretical contribution in literature discusses how culture and ideologies of elite people destroys the life of working class people. His concepts of the base and superstructure, ideology, and false consciousness shows how through literature one can reflect the society and the issues prevailing, and it also shows how people create a resistance towards the struggle. As Marx explains the role of base that is the foundation for all the aspects of the society. As Super structure explains the other ideologies that make up the society. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie had a control over the proletariat not only in the form of material power but they shape the ideas on such a way that the working class people must follow the beliefs they are putting forth. Through the Marxist reading, this paper highlights how the characters of the novel *The Remains of the Day* is related to the structures of power, labor, and social hierarchy.

Stevens as the representation of False Consciousness, Ideology and Identity

The Protagonist of the novel *The Remains of the Day* is Mr. Stevens who symbolize the role of False Consciousness which explains how the proletariat's accept the bourgeoisie's concepts worldview. Stevens throughout the novel feels proud that he has devoted his entire life in serving his master Lord Darlington and how he is referred as noble butler gives Stevens a proud moment in his life. Stevens believes that his role as a butler is noble. Stevens's world is Lord Darlington, he works for him, even when Stevens know that Lord Darlington makes mistakes in his rule, Stevens didn't correct him, rather he supports him. All these incidents helps us understand how deeply Stevens was under the control of Aristocratic Ideology where he can't opens his mouth, rather accepts what has happened

Early in the novel, Stevens said that , he strongly believe in Duty and Dignity, that he tells his fellow butlers that one has to serve their master to the fullest. This shows how Stevens has internalized the ideology of the English aristocrats where the employees must accept their Lord's orders, whether

it is right or wrong, because that shows the servitude. Under the political pressure of the time, where Lord Darlington dismisses two Jewish housemaids without any prior information. They were taken away from the job only because they were Jewish, Stevens even after knowing this as a great injustice to the Women, he didn't stopped that. When Miss. Kenton asked about this to Stevens, he answered that this decision was made by his lord and no more arguments should be done. When Miss Kenton protests this decision, Stevens responds, "Miss Kenton, I have just this moment explained the situation to you fully. His Lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over." (157). Stevens' refusal to take a moral decision shows how false consciousness serves as a masks oppression as duty.

A major theme in the novel is Dignity, which Stevens consider to be the main aspect of being a perfect butler. He gained this excellent quality from his father, as he too worked in Lord Darlington's house as a butler, Stevens' father has taught him how he has to behave when there is an emergency need, without worrying about the self, whatever happens the main role of a butler is to serve their masters. Stevens' at the end of the novel tried to shed off his emotional repression but he couldn't do it fully. This concept is ideologically constructed as Stevens without any question serves for his master.

Stevens recalls about his father's words, where he said for butler what matters the most is whether he responded to the call of duty, either he serves well or not is secondary, but the former stands the first about his father. Such kind of ideologies made Stevens to neglect himself from emotional urgency where Stevens father was in his death bed, even in that time Stevens was in duty, where Miss Kenton comes in between and tell his father's condition. Kenton informs Stevens that his father is dead, he didn't show any sign of emotion rather he said he is in duty and once it's over he will come and do his rites for his father. "In that case, Mr. Stevens, will you permit me to close his eyes? 'I would be most grateful if you would, Miss. Kenton.'" (111).



On the other it is Miss.Kenton who always wanted to break the barriers and not confiding herself into the british aristocrats, she is challenging to other maids in the house, Kenton has raised her voice against the dismissal of two Jewish maids, whom Kenton finds to be helpful for her, but Stevens just obey his master. Kenton expresses her emotions and she is a symbol of moral awareness. Like Stevens Kenton also respects her profession but not subsumed under the class system. Another incident that shows Miss Kenton's revival is she decided to marry and leave the Darlington Hall which breaks the oppressive structure that Stevens lingers on Kenton her life is full of disappointments when Stevens' doesn't reciprocate her love. Her absence leaves Stevens in isolation.

The novel talks about one particular place that is the Darlington Hall which represents the strong sense of class difference between the servants and their masters. The arrangement of the hall itself tells the class difference where the upstairs meant only for the bourgeoisie and downstairs where all the proletariat was there which is compared with the butlers and masters in the novel. The Darlington hall shown as a cultural superstructure because as the novel proceeds one can understand the values and norms the ruling class people has. Steven took care of every minute things in the house and serve Darlington with respect. Even after Lord Darlington's death, Stevens still stick on to the past and owe a great respect for his new American Lord where he attains the real freedom.

The novel *The Remains of the Day* is set in a time of Post-World War II England, where the British aristocracy stated its decline in political and economic dominance. To analyse from a Marxist perspective, this period after World War II shows a shift in the material base, transformations in the superstructure. Stevens's journey plays a major role in his life, because only after the travel he understood what he has lost in his life and he wanted to live freely, atleast he goes back to the same hall and works for American employer. As years passed there was decline in the royal houses which shows the power structure has gone weak. However, Stevens

physically and mentally stuck on to his past and says "I gave my best years to Lord Darlington. I gave him all my loyalty, all my faith," (255).

Other incidents in the novel shows how powerful these class ideologies laid on Stevens which analyse his behaviour. This incident where Stevens' father was in his dead bed, in whatever form Stevens was designed to serve for all the personalities from various place to the hall for a conference , in which Stevens was not allowed to watch or hear, this scene shows how the elite people thinks about working class. Stevens always feel proud of whatever he does for his master. As he travelled, Stevens meet a group of villagers, where they enquire about Lord Darlington and his aversion towards the Jewish. However Stevens fully didn't break his illusion of building a life with Dignity and Loyalty and loosing one self.

According to Karl Marx, under capitalism, workers became lonely and alienated where they even go to the stage of forgetting themselves. In this novel Stevens is the best example of Alienation. Stevens' identity is defined only by his professional outlook. As he says, "What is the point of worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took?"(257). As the lines prove that there is no point in looking back the years and worrying for what has got over, just leave in the hand as fate, because the workers have to accept their powerlessness which is imposed by the class structures. Even now the same acceptance is been done in all walks of our life especially, in our working places, where being voiceless is the only option to survive.

Stevens couldn't confess his emotions for Miss. Kenton because of his proud nature of being called a perfect Butler, also he couldn't process his grief over his father death, those were the tragic incidents that happened on Stevens' life, later he understood all these are tragedy in his life not dignity. Ishiguro shows Stevens who was unable to express his emotions because of the class system. According to Mark, he says that class difference in the life of workers destroys their personal life. By the end of the novel, Stevens understood the loss that he faced



because of being professional. When Stevens spoke with Miss. Kenton, he understood that she has a love for him. Stevens' response is always silent which has made him incapable of reciprocation. The end of the novel *The Remains of the Day*, make anyone understand his personal loss. "I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you, Mr. Stevens. I suppose that's when I get angry about it, all over again." (251).

Conclusion

To conclude the analysis of Karl Marx in Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* Stevens towards the end, tries to acknowledge what he has lost and draws to an end and said "Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back so much," (256). Stevens says there is no point in going back and worrying about the life. This clarity which he got now is actually an outbreak from the ideology. *The novel* is a critique of class ideology and how it affects the human emotions. Through the character of Stevens, Ishiguro made everyone to

understand how working class people internalize and control them. A Marxist reading shows how false consciousness, emotional alienation, and how the ideologies affect people. The tragedy of Stevens' life is not because of his personal life but because of class subordination.

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