

A Study of Trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

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Abstract

A Pale View of Hills (1982) is Kazuo Ishiguro's first novel. *A Pale View of Hills* shows us the traumatic effect of World War II. The city of Nagasaki was going through reconstruction not only in constructing the buildings but also with its people who were trying to look forward towards future with optimism. The paper analyses the novel from the lens of trauma studies and try also explaining the consequences of trauma in their life. The paper focuses on the scary effects of the World wars on the lives of the individuals as well in collection.

Keywords: Trauma, Reconstruction, Optimism

A Pale View of Hills (1982) is Kazuo Ishiguro's first novel. Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan in 1954. His father being an oceanographer shifted to England when he was 5. Although he never witnessed the War in Japan but he came to know those traumatic stories by his parents and grandparents. In other words, he carries cultural trauma. His first two novels *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) show the mental and physical injuries which the War caused on the people of Japan.

The novel *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) depicts the mental and physical injuries suffered by the people in such a way that it led them again and again to revisit their past. It is the story of a Japanese woman Etsuko. She at present lives in England and is a widow. The sudden revisit to her past is instigated by the suicide of her elder daughter Keiko by her Japanese husband and her younger daughter Niki's visit because of it. The novel starts with Etsuko saying:

Niki, the name we finally gave to my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I – perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of the past- insisted on an English name. (APVH 9)

She herself does not want “to be reminded of the past” (APVH 9). Keiko's sudden suicide and her younger daughter Niki's return that led her flip the pages of her past. She clearly states:

Perhaps it was not just the quiet that drove my daughter back to London. For although e never dwelt long on the subject of Keiko's death, it was never far away, hovering over us whenever we talked. (APVH 10)

Her sudden remembrance of past is due to Keiko's suicide. The flashbacks she gets of the past are her traumatic memories. In their book *Trauma* by Lucy Bond and Stef Craps in the Chapter- Introduction: Not Even Past, pg 13, they state:

Traumatic memories are repressed as they are formed, leaving them unavailable to conscious recall; subsequently, they recur in various displaced ways, as hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares. (13)

It is through the memories of Etsuko that readers know her traumatic past. When Etsuko talks about herself back at the time then, she reveals her conversation with her father-in-law Ogata San:

‘What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person? You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who

were left. Now, Etsuko, let's forget these things. I'm sorry I ever brought up the matter.' (APVH 58)

Etsuko suffers mental and emotional trauma. The bouts of madness that she suffered because of War devastated her life. She perhaps lost her family in the War because of which she went to stay with Ogata San, thereafter she got married to his son Jiro. The readers get no evidence of her married life with Jiro perhaps may be pointing that she was unhappy in her married life. Even at present Etsuko seems to be haunted by the memories of her elder daughter Keiko after she committed suicide.

At first it had seemed a perfectly innocent dream; I had merely dreamt of something I had seen the previous day – the little girl we had watched playing in the park. And then the dream came back the following night. Indeed, over the past few months, it has returned to me several times. (APVH 47)

Indeed the death of Etsuko's daughter Keiko has reminded her of her traumatic past. It has perhaps led her to narrate her past which she had been avoiding. Not only Etsuko but there are other characters also who are traumatized by the War. She also narrates the story of her friend Sachiko and her daughter Mariko.

Sachiko's daughter Mariko is also assumed to be traumatized by the War. Sachiko plans to leave Japan with her American boyfriend Frank whom her daughter hates. Mariko calls Frank a "pig". She moreover describes a woman who she claims to have seen drowning the kittens. She appears wild in her attitude. She does not want to leave her kittens behind while leaving for America. However, Sachiko is reluctant on leaving Japan. She says:

"And Mariko would be happier there. America is a far better place for a young girl to grow up. Out there, she could do all kinds of things with her life. she could become a business girl. Or she could study painting at college and become an artist. All these things are much easier in America, Etsuko. Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look forward to here?" (APVH 170)

But when Etsuko says to Mariko/ Sachiko : "if you don't like it over there, we can always come back." (APVH173) It is then that the readers realize that Sachiko is a counterpart of Etsuko and Mariko is a counterpart of

Mariko and these lines are actually uttered by Etsuko for her daughter Keiko. The present circumstances reveal that Keiko committed suicide because she could not adjust herself in England. She perhaps feels that she failed as a mother. Perhaps the statement by Sachiko for Etsuko that "I'm sure you'll make a splendid mother" (APVH 15) perhaps is also a justification towards her failure as a mother. Her narration appears highly unreliable. Even in the book *Trauma*, by Lucy Bond and Stef Craps, pg 64, points out that: "Caruth warns that the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory 'may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall'" (1995b: 153) Etsuko also feels the presence of ghost on imagining the girl swinging. Now and then she feels haunted. She says finally in Ch-11:

At first, I was sure someone had walked past my bed and out of my room, closing the door quietly. Then I became more awake, and I realized how fanciful an idea this was. (APVH 174)

Her past has perhaps begun to disturb her presence. The unreliable narrator is also a part of the trauma that these people faced due to the War. Besides these individual traumas, we also have collective trauma represented by the older generation of Japan who mourn the loss of old ideals in Japan. They dislike democracy. He says:

There was a spirit in Japan once, it bound us all together. Just imagine what it must be like being a young boy today. He's taught no values at school-except perhaps that he should be selfishly demand whatever he wants out of life. he goes home and finds his parents fighting because his mother refuses to vote for his father's party. What a state of affairs. (APVH66-67)

The paragraph clearly points out how Ogata San detests the changes in Japan. He resents those changes and grieves the loss of old culture and traditions there. Similar condition is also seen in Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*(1986) where the painter Ono also sees Japan changing before his eyes- in buildings, in ideology and in culture. Although he worked for the country before the War but his decisions led Japan into the War. He is claimed to be an anti-nationalist. The two characters

definitely are traumatised by the War. Ono also lost his sons and wife in the war. He speaks of his childhood as:

I was very young when I prepared those prints. I suspect the reason I could not celebrate the floating world was that I could not bring myself to believe in its worth. Young men are often guilty about pleasure, and I suppose I was no different. I support I thought to pass away once time in such places, to spend one's skills celebrating things so intangible and transient, I suppose I thought it all rather wistful, all rather decadent. It's hard to appreciate the beauty of a world when one doubts its very validity. (AFW150)

Despite all the damages that the city faced due to the bomb droppings, it is also getting reconstructed. The citizens of Nagasaki back at time could witness the peace after the destructing war. In page 11, Chapter 11, Etsuko describes:

The worst days were over by then. American soldiers were as numerous as ever –for there was fighting in Korea- but in Nagasaki, after what had gone before, these were the days of Calm and relief. The world had a feeling of change about it. (APVH 11)

The devastation caused by the war had led to the destruction of buildings. The novel provides evidences of reconstruction of buildings devastated making them grand and beautiful. Etsuko says in Ch-1

Rebuilding had got underway and in time four concrete buildings had been erected, each containing forty or so separate apartments.(APHV 11)

Even the people had “sad and terrible memories” and they were trying to cope up with “the tragedies and nightmares of wartime”(APHV 13). The people who suffered this are also trying to come out of this trauma. The reconstruction in the city shows the growing hope amongst people. The city and its people are trying to recover from the trauma by being optimistic. Even in the book *Trauma* by Lucy Bond and Stef Craps, Ch- 3, *Trauma Theories*, Page 82

For La Capra, the key to surviving trauma is not to surrender oneself to the endless repetitions but to find a way of reconnecting knowledge and feelings, so

that the survivor can re-engage with the present and begin to look towards the future.(82)

The above statement finds its resemblance in the novel. As we see the characters, they look forward towards the future with optimism in their lives. For ex, Mrs. Fujiwara in *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), always looks on the sunnier aspect of the life. She lost her husband who was “an important man”(APVH 111) and her four sons in the war. But she is very optimistic regarding her life ahead. She asks Etsuko when she looks “tired” (APVH24). She advises her to focus on her child as she was pregnant with her elder daughter Keiko at that time. She also cites the example of a seven months pregnant young woman who comes to the cemetery on every Sunday. She says “it's a shame” and that “they should be thinking about the future”. (APVH 25)

Even Sachiko's friend Mariko looks towards her daughter's future and leaves Japan. She thinks that maybe she will be able to give her daughter better future prospects there. Even Etsuko leaves behind her past and settles in England getting remarried to an English guy

Conclusion

Trauma stands as an important theme in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* (1982). Viewing the novel from the lens of trauma studies gives it a completely different perspective. It also helps us know that the deliberate forgetting and remembering on the part of the narrator was due to the trauma she witnessed in the past. The novel portrays aftermath effects of World War. It pictures the physical, mental and emotional trauma of the people after the bomb drop at Nagasaki.

References

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