Struggle of Transition from Past to Future in Kazuo Ishiguro's A Pale View of Hills

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Abstract*— Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan but had physically lost his roots as the result of his family's migration to Britain when he was just five years old. However he could not escape his mental connection towards his origin. Living almost sixty three years in another country, Ishiguro could not completely disconnect from his roots. Thus as the title of his first novel A Pale View of Hills suggests he still has the pale memory of his country particularly the after effects of war. The psychological trauma that he had experienced personally might have resulted in the publication of his first novel which can be classified very well as a psychological novel. Though the traces of history are evidently exhibited it is still strikingly a psychological novel than to be classified as a historical novel. The post-nuclear bomb Nagasaki is just used as a backdrop setting to heighten the psychological disturbance of its characters. It gives the psychological sufferings of the three mothers, Etsuko-San Sachiko-San and Fujiwara in American occupied Tokyo. It shows how their past life had made their present life miserable and yet how these women try to resist all their setbacks for a futuristic hope. Thus the present paper is an attempt to find out the struggles of the female characters in the novel and how they make their survival possible from just enduring their suffering to endeavouring an alternate survival.

Indexed Terms- Kazuu Ishiguro, struggle to survive, psychological approach, narrative memory, A Pale View of Hills.

I. INTRODUCTION

Set in two time lines; one with the old age Etsuko, the protagonist of the novel, living currently in England and through her reminiscent discussion with her half-Japanese daughter Niki, the plot shifts to the another time line of middle aged Etsuko in Nagasaki, pregnant with Keiko her pure Japanese daughter. As a Psychological novel the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of Etsuko are given greater interest than the external action of the narrative. In a psychological novel the emotional reactions and internal states of the characters are influenced by and in turn trigger external events in a meaningful symbiosis. Thus Etsuko's thoughts and her actual narration blend to unfold the story though the meaning deviates as the memory fails purposely or ignorantly.

Thus the plot unfolds through Etsuko's narrative memory and hence a constant conflict brooks between her narration and her memory. Such conflict is quite common in any autobiographical narration. As Stanzel says it, "is the internal tension between the self as hero (protagonist) and the self as narrator, or what is called the experiencing self and the narrating self" (212). Etsuko is recollecting her past from her pale memory to reconcile her present and to remould herself from the guilt-struck conscience of her elder daughter's suicide.

I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko. In this country, after all, it is not unexpected that a young woman of that age should wish to leave home. All I succeeded in doing, it would see, was to ensure that when she finally left— now almost six years ago, she did so severing all her ties with me. (87- 88)

With the five days stay of Etsuko's younger daughter Niki who had come from London to console her mother over her grief on the suicidal death of her elder daughter Keiko, the novel shuttles between the past and the present thus taking the readers to the two different countries; England and Japan. Keiko though not alive as the plot unfolds still made to feel very much alive through Etsuko's description of Mariko the little daughter of Sachiko in Nagasaki. One can presume that Keiko must have also suffered like Mariko in the changing life patterns both domestically and worldly. Etsuko thought that Keiko will have a better life in England. On the contrary the new life had pushed her to the margin by her step-father and eventually she had alienated in her own house. "I

suppose Dad should have looked after her a bit more, shouldn't he? He ignored her most of the time. It wasn't fair really!" (175). As a step-father he had his own ideology. "Well it is understandable enough. He wasn't her real father, after all" (175). As Niki analysis the psychological trauma in Keiko would have made her to lead an eccentric life and end it in suicide in her room at Manchester. Keiko was marginalised even after her death. Her suicide showed how the occident London marginalised the orient Japanese emotions as well. Keiko was pure Japanese and that very fact of her origin sufficed a justifiable conclusion on her suicide charge.

The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary, for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room. (10)

The war driven Japan had made Keiko's past life miserable but her mother Etsuko took all efforts to make it happy. "Your father was rather idealistic at times…In those days, you see, he really believed we could give her a happy life over here" (175-176). Though Etsuko had foreseen that Keiko might not be happy in the proposed new life she decided to bring Keiko to the new country with a new life. "I know all along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same" (176). However Etsuko had made an effort to transform Keiko's life to be happy with her new decision rather remaining to just accept things as they were. "It would have been so stupid…if you'd just accepted everything the way it was and just stayed where you were. At least you made an effort" (176). Niki consoled her mother to be guilt free. "…sometimes you've got to take risks. You did exactly the right thing. You can't just watch your life wasting away" (176). The efforts or the risks that Etsuko had taken were not clearly mentioned anywhere. It is just an inference that she should have struggled for a transition from the past to the present.

Niki was not too attached with her half-sister but the death of her disturbed her very much. She still could not accept the loss of her sister though she disliked her while she was alive. "Sisters are supposed to be people you're close to aren't they? You may not like them much, but you're still close to them" (10). She was naturally close to her sister not by sisterly love but may be because of the umbilical connection and the biological intuitiveness towards the sibling attachment. "I just remember her as someone who used to make me miserable" (10), yet she grieved at her loss.

At the grievance of Keiko's death and Niki's solacing her mother the plot unfolds flashbacking Etsuko's yester life. Niki who carries a sense of mission to console her mother's grief admires her past as well. She makes her mother understand that she was in no way responsible for Keiko's death. "I should have nor regrets for those choices I once made" (11). But what were the choices that she made was also not clearly mentioned anywhere. It is again left to the inference that she had made her choice to migrate to England with her English husband.

Through the narration of Etsuko, Ishiguro gives us the glimpses of Tokyo, particularly the war inflicted Nagasaki and how it had taken the peace and happiness of its people. Though the war shattered living for many, the novel presents a very important theme of survival for those who aspire for it. The novel presents three mothers in the American Occupation of Japan in April 1952 and how they struggle to cope with their survival. It also presents the struggle of the older Etsuko with her daughter Niki in Britain later around 1980s. Living in England and through the discussion with her younger daughter Niki about the recent death of her elder daughter Keiko the story unfolds as a reminiscence of Etsuko and her journey with other women each of whom was determined to have a survival. The novel presents three kinds of women: Etsuko, Sachiko. Fujiwara, who fights with their life and tries to add meaning to their survival.

The story unveils with the pretext of war in the past and its impact on both the Korean and Japanese people and how the supremacy of American power had devastated both the countries. While fighting was still on the go in Korea with numerous American soldiers, Nagasaki is made to set free but the imprints of war remained stronger. "I was once told that before the war a small village had grown up on the river bank. But then the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins" (11). Though the rebuilding of the city was in progress it could not bring

back the original beauty of the city. Even after the rebuilding process is completed;
…between us and the river lay an expanse of waste ground, several acres of dried mud and ditches. Many complained it was a health hazard, and indeed the drainage was appalling. All year round there were craters filled wall stagnant water, and in summer months the mosquitoes became intolerable. From time to time officers were to be seen pacing out measurements or scribbling down notes, but the months went by and nothing was done. (31)

However the apartment, in which Etsuko lived, was an outcome of the brutal war but gave its occupant a new lifestyle. The apartment housed many new expanding firms that placed the young husbands in good employment and made the young wives busy with the household thresholds. There were no traces of the impact of war in them. "But to watch them busily involved with their husbands and their children, I found this hard to believe-that their lives had ever held the tragedies and nightmares of wartime" (31).

Initially Etsuko was not able to mingle with her neighbours not because she was unfriendly but that she wished to be left alone. Slowly later she finds Sachiko who had also remained aloof and befriended her. At first Etsuko found Sachiko as a reluctant mother raising her daughter Mariko in a very impulsive way. Etsuko was shocked to know that Mariko was not going to school and left always alone as Sachiko went about in her weary way to build up a fresh living for them. Thus Mariko was left to be in her own delusion and she imagines that she had befriended a woman who lived across the cottage and that she would give her a good company on her mother's absence. But only later discussing with Sachiko she found that it was her hallucination, an impact that had left in her after watching a woman dying.

Sachiko had moved to this place from her uncle's house from the other side of Nagasaki in a hope to start a new life in America with her American boyfriend Frank. Her uncle was not a blood relative to Sachiko but a relative of her husband. Having lost her husband in the war she felt the life in that uncle's house was like leading a refuge's life. So after having lived there for one year she moved out on the account of a trivial quarrel with her cousin Yasika-San. But Mariko did not like Frank and thus not willing to go to America but rather to get back to Sachiko's uncle's house. The house had plenty of rooms and thus she can take her cat and kittens which could also have a room over there. If they travel elsewhere they need to leave behind her possessed cat and kittens. Etsuko finds something misappropriates between the mother and daughter as the mother had left her daughter to grow anti-social not mingling with the society and left in delirium. Mariko does not join the company of other children in the neighbourhood but always lead an erratic character built on her own delusion. She often does a make-believe story about the woman whom she says encountering quite frequently. "She came again last night. She said she'd take me to her house…she's going to show me where she lives" (27).

Until Sachiko gets her migration plan succeeded she needed a job and thus on her request Etsuko finds her a job in her friend Fujiwara's noodle shop. She does well in the noodle shop but she takes Mariko along with her to help her. It disturbs Etsuko very much that a little girl is made to work by her own mother. As a woman in the early stage of pregnancy Etsuko wanted to celebrate motherhood. But Sachiko as a mother is so indifferent to her daughter. Moreover Etsuko wanted to have a very safe pregnancy period. She was even more careful this time as she never wanted to happen this time as it happened to Kazuo. In spite of the heavy earthquake the baby was healthy but the bomb blast had devastated everything.

Unlike Etsuko, Sachiko is very cool and not as protective as Etsuko. In fact on one particular night Mariko did not return home even after late hours. When Etsuko's husband Jiro and her father-in-law Ogata-San as well was panicked to even call the police, Sachiko was rather cool and she kept searching Mariko around the apartment as she knew Mariko would not have gone anywhere. She firmly believed that she would by herself come back to the cottage; "probably rather pleased with herself to have caused this fuss" (39).

Etsuko could no more stand the lethargic attitude of a mother and persisted Sachiko to take a serious attempt of searching Mariko. She accompanied her in the search though against the will of her husband as it was too dark already. Even in the process of their search

Sachiko was not tensed but was anxious to share the news about her migration to America very shortly.

There is no need to be so alarmed. Nothing will have happened to her. In fact, Etsuko, I came really round because I wanted to tell you some news. You see it's all been settled at last. We're leaving for America within the next few days. (37)

Etsuko was still perplexed at the whereabouts of Mariko. But Sachiko remained calm. "There is no need to look so worried, Etsuko" (39). However this time she said with a wobbled voice thus assuring the motherly love and responsibility. If at all she was freaking out depriving her time with her child it was also because of the love and care for her daughter. Born in a wealthy family and married to a wealthy husband she suffered the loss of her dignified life that the war had erupted. Yet she had not exploded along with her loss, she is detaining her strength to survive. She could not accept the asylum in her so called uncle's house. Thus she is prepared to chase her hope to migrate to America to set a free life that would bring all welfare to her daughter. In fact she had left the daughter alone for almost four hours and had gone to the cinema and the bar not anticipating that her daughter is turning too anti-social. However it was all to arrange for the fly to America through her American friend, Frank.

Through their strenuous search Etsuko and Sachiko at last found Mariko on the other side of the river bank. She was bundled up lying on the grass along the bank. She was alive with a deep hurt. "It's not serious…it's just a graze. See, it's just a small cut" (41). Though it was from a heavy fall from the tree in the attempt of climbing it, Etsuko was frightened that something else could have happened. She also wondered if that make-belief woman did really exist on the other side of the river and she had her role in the hurt. Sachiko was certain that the lady was a pure imagination. Of course a part of worse reality that had lubricated her imagination. Mariko just imagines about a lady whom she had met once when she was young and that lady is very much dead to be worried off. But Mariko still clings on to that lady's memory and cooks up her imaginary story. "If it wasn't for the war, if my husband was still alive, then Mariko would have had the kind of upbringing appropriate to a family of our position" (43). Now that Sachiko is trying to raise her daughter in a distinguished way curtailing to her family's dignity, this war-torn Tokyo will never give her that opportunity. So she is in search of her ray of hope though it is against her moral conduct. In this place Sachiko had become the poor victim of slut-shaming.

Slut-shaming is used to humiliate and discredit women who strive to break free from this "pure" mould. It aims to punish and ridicule women for not following cultural norms. Women are frequently stigmatised if they have a "high" number of partners, because our culture is fixated on female purity, and a "high" score indicates that women are of dubious character. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be embarrassed if they have a "poor" number because our society associates sexual conquest with male success. (Salam, Shawrina, January 6, 2022, https://feminisminindia.com/2022/01/06/what-is-slut-shaming-regulating-female-sexuality-through-humiliation/)

Sachiko had been the content of the gossips that her neighbours carried away because of her extra marital affair with an English man. Initially Sachiko was very ashamed about her being humiliated by her neighbours that she had brought disgrace to their culture. She was slut-shammed and left with no companions until Etsuko had befriended her. Slowly she overcame from the victimisation with her strong determination to cope with her life. But she believes America would be a better place to Mariko and she would be having all freedom there. "Life's much better for a woman in America" (146).

However Etsuko's approach of life was quite contrary to Sachiko. She was also a poor war victim. But her past was not mentioned anywhere by the author. It is just left to the reader's presumption that she should have lost her family and Ogata-San was kind enough to take her in and got her married to his son Jiro. Though it was said that she had a miscarriage with her former pregnancy with Kazuo, the details of the same was also not mentioned clearly. Nevertheless it is left to conclude that she must have had an unhappy past and that she is coping to survive. Etsuko finds happiness in her present life though with the dominating husband who play a solemn patriarchal role. "I am very happy with my life where I am" (40).

Etsuko was happy with her expecting child Keiko. She was unlike Sachiko who finds happiness in opportunistic way. She changes her attitude according to her situation. Earlier she pleaded Etsuko for the job at the noodle shop which was greatly needed for her then. "A friend of yours who ran a noodle shop…You were saying she may want an assistant. A small job like that would be very useful to me" (20). Later with a promising chance to fly to America she was not even bothered to tell Mrs Fujiwara about quitting her job. She found suddenly it was below her self-esteem to have worked in the noodle shop claiming her ancestral pride which was a sheer vacuum now.

Etsuko, can you appreciate how loathsome it's been for someone such as myself to work each day in a noodle shop? But I didn't complain and I did what was required of me. But now it's over, I've no great wish to see that place again. (46-47)

Etsuko on the other hand was always a girl with right attitude. Her roles as a wife, daughter-in-law and to-be-mother were perfectly played. However when the novel opens she is said to be present in England, having married Mr Sheringham, an English man and widowed presently with her half Japanese daughter Niki living in London and pure Japanese daughter keiko dead in Manchester. What happened to Jiro or to Ogata-san or her Japanese life was untold. What brought her migration to England and marriage to an English man and what caused his death was also untold. She brought Keiko here to set up a happy life and it turned the way round transferring Keiko a replica of Mariko who also turned to be an anti-social shutting all the time within the four walls of her room in an eccentric way. She eventually abandoned her home and moved to Manchester to lead a life in solitude and ended in suicide.

It leads to a perplex weather Etsuko was retelling her own life in the guise of Sachiko or really Sachiko existed. After all the story spills through the memory of Etsuko and it was she the whole authority of what to recollect and how to recollect. "Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here" (156).

The title of the novel demands for a clear understanding weather the hill looks pale or the view is pale. It is of course the pale memory of the protagonist is sneaking out and she tells whatever is necessary to the daughter who has recently developed an interest in learning her mother's past. "For in recent years she has taken it upon herself to admire certain aspects of my past, and she had come prepared to tell me things were no different now, that I should have no regrets for those choices I once made." (10-11). What gave her choice and how did she choose was also untold.

It was only Sachiko who always searched for an alternate choice and with few failed attempts to fly America eventually succeeded with her plan to move to Keibo and then to take off to America as soon as Frank sets up everything there to receive Sachiko and Mariko. What happened to Sachiko and Mariko further was not discussed. But who had set Etsuko arrival here to England was not told at all. Thus it mystifies weather it was Etsuko a replica of Sachiko. "It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not happen in quite the way they come back to me today" (41).

Thus while narrating about their visit to Inasa Mountain, Etsuko's memory lapses abruptly to say Keiko was happy that day. While she was still pregnant with Keiko and actually Mariko was the little girl who was happy about the picnic, Etsuko says Keiko was happy thus giving a loop to consider whether she was telling her own difficult times with Keiko in the name of Sachiko-Mariko.

"Oh, there was nothing special about it. I was just remembering it, that's all. Keiko was happy that day. We rode on the cable cars." I gave a laugh and turned to Niki. "No, there was nothing special about it. It's just a happy memory, that's all." (182)

Even at another instant when Etsuko consoles Mariko to yield to her mother's desire to migrate to America she pacifies Mariko:
"In any case," I went on, "if you don't like it over there, we can always come back." This time she looked up at me questioningly. "Yes, I promise," I said. "If you don't like it over there, we'll come

straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there, I'm sure we will." (173)

The inclusive of Etsuko in the conversation that "we'll come straight back" implies that it may be she and Keiko but she displaces it with Mariko. The ambiguity in her narration could have been because she was not daring to tell her true life story. Cynthia F. Wong observes; "Etsuko's inability to deal with her past as crucial" (127-145). Or maybe she was bound to the cultural limitations that repressed women who chose to rebuild their life according to their need. Ken Eckert sees "cultural factors of evasion and repression in post-war Japan as the key cause of Etsuko's unreliable narration" (77- 92). However both Etsuko and Sachiko are inter-twined or separate counterparts' they are mothers who always wanted their life to move forward brushing away all their setbacks.

In England weather Etsuko was happy with her second husband was not known. But she was in a constant distress with both her daughters; the elder one who had grown eccentric and the younger one who had grown erratic. Keiko had turned anti-social and Niki had turned anti-familial. Niki had lost faith in family bonding and the institution of marriage is simply an absurd to her. She is not for family as she expresses that there can be no joy expected in a "horrible screaming" (41) of a just born child. Her friend had given birth to her child recently but she was not into wedding knots. To Etsuko it is a cultural shock but to Niki that does not make any difference between having married and not having married. "What difference does it make whether she's married? She wanted it, she planned it and everything" (49).

Nor did Niki develop any special love towards her half-sister. She was of course her other half even if she could not approve of it. Though she had come down to console her grieving mother who stumbles to disclose even the death news to her other acquaintance, Mrs Waters for instance; she had no regards at the loss of her half-sister. "She was never a part of our lives-not mine or Dad's anyway. I never expected her to be at Dad's funeral" (52). She had never felt for her sister when she was alive and she had the same anxiousness even after her death. Niki feels something that was disturbing in the house abut Keiko even after six years since she had left the house and now almost dead too.

On her fourth day of her stay Niki tells her mother right away that she could no longer stay in her own bed room which was quite opposite to Keiko's room. She felt the spell of Keiko following the house even after her death. So she shifts herself to the opposite room.

Having transformed from her old life in Japan, Etsuko finds no hope in her new life in England with her English husband. Life in Tokyo with her Japanese husband Jiro neither gave her any liberty nor was she happy with her new life in England. However it had moulded her to be more determined and that she learnt to accept the reality. "Such things are long in the past now and I have no wish to ponder them yet again. 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).

The very first line of the novel; "Niki, the name we finally gave my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation, it was a compromise I reached with her father" (9). The foundation of her life in Japan as well as in England was not laid on love and understanding but on compromise and convenience. She had to balance her life with her two daughters and Etsuko's life with her two husbands and two daughters was always in a flux.

However Etsuko learnt to be stable with the challenging flux she had travelled her life's journey. She had come to accept people and situation as they are. She says she was not ashamed of Niki who is living in London with her college friend David but in no hopes of getting married. She just lives there and does what she liked. "I am not ashamed of you Niki…You must live as you think best" (181).

This freedom was deprived to both Etsuko and Sachiko in Nagasaki. There was no women freedom. A woman to exercise her vote to a political leader of her choice was also an act of defame that she had brought to the husband. As Jiro's friend Handa remarks; "They don't understand politics. They think they can choose the country's leaders the same way they choose dresses" (63). Sachiko was abandoned to speak English at her husband's house.

You see my father used to speak good English. He had connections in Europe and he always used to encourage me to study the language. But then of course when I married, I stopped learning. My husband forbade it. He took away all my English books. (72-73)

Life changed to all in general and in particularly to Etsuko, Sachiko and Fujiwara both internally and externally. "You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left" (58). Thus the three women were the victims of the shock.

I know it was a terrible thing that happened here in Nagasaki…But it was bad in Tokyo too. Week after week it went on, it was very bad. Toward the end we were all living in tunnels and derelict buildings and there was nothing but rubble. Everyone who lived in Tokyo saw unpleasant things. (73)

Thus Sachiko and Fujiwara were reduced to a low status in no time. Mariko's emotional quotient was dilapidated. The death of woman which she had seen by herself had robbed away her childhood happiness. It resulted in an endless paranoia for her. "They play at make-believe and they get confused where their fantasies begin and end" (75). War was so cruel to take away the peace and happiness from everyone. "I never thought a war could change things so much" (75).

Fujiwara had lost her four children and her husband in the war. Her only living son Kazuo-San is also crippled with broken emotion at the loss of his beloved Michiko. "It must have been such a blow to her, but she just kept going" (111). She managed to push her life through the noodle shop that she ran and was quite optimistic that her son Kazuo would one day get married and set up his own family. Etsuko and Sachiko had learnt from Fujiwara to be optimistic and count on the blessings.

With Fujiwara's ray of hope and the brighter side of the Inasa hilly area, both Etsuko and Sachiko determined to be optimistic with their life and the different shape that it does take them. Inasa the hilly area of Nagasaki renowned for its mountain scenery was badly hit in the war. But now it was reconstructed to bring back the same elegance. "You wouldn't think anything had ever happened here. Would you? Everything was so full of life. But all that area down there –all that area was so badly hit when the bomb fell. But look at it now" (110-111). Thus down from the Inasa hill both Etsuko and Sachiko thought to gear up their lives.

Today I've decided I'm going to be optimistic. I'm determined to have a happy future. Mrs Fujiwara always tells how important it is to keep looking forward. And she's right. If people didn't do that, then all this—all this would still be rubble. (111)

Thus both of them found their way out from the debris and had set yet another futuristic life. The word both needs an extra attention. Weather it is Etsuko and Sachiko or Etsuko and Etsuko; they had decided to come out of the debris and set a transition to a better future. As Maurice Stevens' sys:

The traumatic event possesses specificity; there is an agent and victim of injury, a place and time of occurrence, and a blooming narrative of accountability or innocence. On the other hand, its unknowability, that is, the degree to which trauma exceeds signification or eludes description, makes it particularly susceptible to becoming something else as well. The event is also enigmatic. (2)

It is left to our inference that Sachiko should have gone to America and started a new life. And Etsuko had come to England to start her new life. Or it is Sachiko and Etsuko, Mariko and Keiko, America and Britain one and the same. However it is; "It couldn't have been easy, what you did, Mother. You ought to be proud of what you did with your life" (90)

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