

Theme of War in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract

By virtue of winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 2017 and short listed in 1986, 2005, Kazuo Ishiguro ranks among the famous and popular British novelist like Samuel Beckett, Doris Lessing, William Golding, Seamus Heaney, V. S. Naipaul and Harold Pinter. His novels have a great advocacy and appeal of human concern. This research paper attempts to examine the elements of war in his works. The World War caused havoc and devastation to the world and left a very horrible and dreadful impact on the civilization. They made women widows and children fatherless. Ishiguro's novels, "A Pale View of Hills" and "An Artist of The Floating World" present a very tragic and gloomy picture of Japan. The cities became barren and children born thereafter had one or the other deformity or due to dropping of bombs. Besides, the article explores the emotional and psychological trauma of war form which the Ishigurian protagonists suffered. But, inspite of all this, his novels always end with an optimistic note assuring his readers about better days ahead. He intends to warn the world that the wars solve no problems and warring countries have to sit for negotiations to reach some form compromise.

Keywords: World War, Horrible, Dreadful, Heinous Picture, Emotional and Psychological Trauma, Optimism, Solution.

Introduction

Narration of war, the most topical issue, happens to be of utmost concern for the novelist. Warring countries have learnt little from the mistakes committed in the past and indulge in warfare merely to satisfy their egos. But Ishiguro is quite optimistic and hopes that mankind would never again. Ishiguro himself says: "would never...again see on this globe a calamity on the scale of the Great War." (When We, 42)

Aim of the Study

This research paper attempts to examine the elements of war in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro.

He has very ably and deftly elaborated and illustrated the horrible, dreadful and psychological effects along with financial hardship and difficulties of war novels after novel. But the novelist has a noble purpose behind this description. He intends to warn the world that war solves no problem, except causing havoc and devastation to the civilization which is advancing by leaps and bounds day in day out. Mark how Ishiguro is worried about it when he observes, "The War, ghastly"...represents "no more than 'an awkward window in Man's evolution.'" (When We, 42)

War leaves very horrible and dreadful effects and results to begin with, on the land as well as on the lives of people. Soldiers die soundlessly leaving behind their near and dear ones helpless and destitute women become widows and children lose their fathers. Civilians too suffer immensely during war.

Note, what Etsuko remarks in "A Pale View of Hills", "I could see...that expanse of waste ground." (12) "I lived with then there were those who had suffered those with san and terrible memories. But to watch them each day, busily involved with their husband and their children, I found this hard to believe – that their lives had ever held the tragedies and nightmares of wartime." (13-14)

Sachiko suffers from the dreadful trauma of the World War II as she recalls "if it wasn't the war...my husband was still alive." (A Pale, 45) She goes on to reflect, "I know it was a terrible thing that happened here in Nagasaki", she said finally. "But it was bad in Tokyo too. Week after week it went on, it was very bad. Towards the end were all living in tunnels and

derelict building and there was nothing but rubble. Everyone who lived in Tokyo saw unpleasant things. And Mariko did too." (A Pale, 73)

In the very beginning of the novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, it is informed that most of the members of the Sugimura family are killed and a large portion of their house is also damaged in the war. Ono while going to purchase their house remarks:

"Then when I surmised that most of her family member from the time of the sale was now dead, I began to feel pity for her...The house had received its share of the war damage. Akira Sugimura had built an eastern wing to the house, comprising three large rooms, connected to the main body of the house by a long corridor running down one side of the garden...The bulk of the bomb damage had been to this section of the house, and as we surveyed it from the garden I could see Miss. Sugimura was close to tears...I reassured her as best I could that the damage would be repaired at the first opportunity and the house would be once more as her father had built it." (An Artist, 11)

Bombing converts all places and all sights over the cities into ruins. Ono, again, observes in this respect when he says, "The Okada-Shingen Society no longer exists today – one of many such victims of the occupying forces – but quite possibly you will have heard of it, or at least of the exhibition it held each year until the war." (An Artist, 88)

The smell of bombing is so strong that it makes its powerful impact in the nostrils of the survivors. "I still turn over in my mind that cold winter's morning and the smell of burning growing ever stronger in my nostrils." (An Artist, 181) "The smell of burning still makes me uneasy...it meant bombings and fire." (An Artist-200)

Another most damaging and most adverse effect of war is on the human psyche. People commit suicide, children's academic careers are disrupted and disturbed; relations and marriages are broken and people are entirely displaced. War makes an indelible impression on the psyche, particularly of women as they are more emotional than men. It becomes both a force of destruction and creation for them. Note what Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes remark in this respect:

"The impact of world war II, and in particular the atom bombs, on the consciousness of Japanese women is, curiously, a force of both destruction and creation that results in a wholly ambivalent attitude towards motherhood, which, although formerly associated with a duty towards the nation, now becomes a possibility of forging a newfound selfhood." (6)

War very adversely affects the lives of both Etsuko and Sachiko. The former develops a sort of unbecoming and strained relationship both with her husband and father-in-law probably on account of, a man Nakamura-san, once close to her heart, lost

during the war. She leaves her husband for England. While for the latter life becomes 'a tale told by idiot' after losing her husband in the war.

"Things were very difficult when Mariko was born"...Perhaps it was foolish to have married when I did. After all, everyone could see a war was coming. But then again, Etsuko, no one knew what a war was really like, not in those days. I married into a highly respected family. I never thought a war could change things so much. (A Pale, 75)

She further confides to Etsuko that

"These are difficult times we've come through, Etsuko. If it wasn't for the war, if my husband was still alive, then Mariko would have had the kind of up-bringing appropriate to a family of our position." (A Pale, 45)

War's evil effects on people's psyche have other terrible outcomes too. While some undergo physical changes, others start committing suicide, "Kuroda's face", in *An Artist of the Floating World* "which had been quite round before the war, had hollowed out around the cheekbones, and what looked like heavy lines had appeared towards the chin and the throat." (A Pale, 78)

Mariko remembers a woman who commits suicide. "She killed herself. They said she cut her throat." "She was upset about something. Anyway she went running off out into the streets." (A Pale, 74) It was a terrible thing that occurred in Nagasaki.

Countries engaged in warfare pass through hard times as Ishiguro narrates in his novels. They experience sluggishness and slowness in business. Companies are in deep recession and there is spread of unemployment. Miss. Kawakami, for instance, does her best in order to get rid of the current situation. But there is no denying the fact that she has been greatly aged by the war years "...Business...has become increasingly difficult for her; certainly, it must be hard for her to believe this is the same district where she first opened her little place those sixteen or seventeen years ago. For nothing really remains of our pleasure district now; almost all her old competitors have closed up and left, and Miss. Kawakami must more than once have considered doing likewise." (A Pale, 23)

Even artist who have no retirement age are largely out of work due to war Oji who was a famous artist once, has to bid farewell to his work as there is no work for him and this is so because Japan gets terrible setback in the war mark what he says in this regard, "father says you used to be a famous artist. But you had to finish... Because Japan lost the war." (An Artist, 32)

Conclusion

Thus, as seen in the novels, the effects of war are terrible. The novelist strongly advises the world powers against waging wars.

Anthology : The Research

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