Writing the Female Body: A Study of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills* 

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**Abstract.** Ishiguro projects the struggle of a migrated woman and the search for her identity primarily, at the same time subtly describing the pains and fears of a woman who traverses through the phase of pregnancy and imminent motherhood. Contemporary literary criticism may focus on the problematics of the conscious and subconscious desires of the characters, but body essentially is the locus of all human adventures which are represented through desires, moods, fears, creativity and feelings. The paper discusses Ishiguro’s depiction of pregnancy in *A Pale View of Hills* and his projection of female body in order to determine that pregnancy and procreation are no longer taboo subjects and to analyze the impact pregnancy has on female.

Kristeva talks about the female body, motherhood and pain which is not a construct of the society and culture. She presents a universal and natural interpretation of womanhood. Ishiguro effectively presents this pressure of being a female through Etsuko’s character in *A Pale View of Hills*. Etsuko’s own painful experience of pregnancy and maternity has made it difficult for her to believe that for other women, pregnancy can be a matter of happiness and joy.

1 Introduction

The representation of women in literature primarily has always been through the lens of masculinity. The male author gazes at the female persona and creates women characters that have been perceived through the rules of patriarchy. The feminine physique, sensibilities and urges were attenuated to conform to the existing patriarchal standards. Contemporary writers have made considerable changes with the changing times and they have succeeded in writing about women sensitively giving due representation to the fairer sex in their writings.

Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *A Pale View of Hills* has female protagonist Etsuko who has migrated from Japan to England. Her memories lead the reader to a labyrinth of her life and the saga of her life unfolds in front of the reader disclosing the mysterious suicide of her daughter Keiko. She has another daughter Niki with her second husband which posits her as an essential figure of motherhood in the novel. There is a parallel mother–daughter relationship in the novel, Sachiko and Mariko, through which Etsuko projects her anxieties and trauma of being a mother and a woman.

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Candis Bond remarks, “Pregnancy, one could argue, creates an entire new system of external, tactile stimuli that could positively alter the mind’s ways of knowing and experiencing the self and the world” (p. 23).

2 Material and Methods
3 Discussion

Ishiguro provides ample examples of these changes in a woman as he describes Etsuko’s first pregnancy and her expectations of motherhood. Etsuko’s pregnancy and related fears can be traced in the following words, “The child’s response had, it is true, upset me somewhat; for in those days, such small things were capable of arousing in me every kind of misgiving” (Ishiguro 167). The child’s response had, it is true, upset me somewhat; for in those days, such small things were capable of arousing in me every kind of misgiving.

Ishiguro effectively presents this pressure of being a woman and culture. She had convinced herself that nobody is happy at the news of pregnancy and says, “But people always pretend to be delighted. It’s like that film we saw on the television last night” (Ishiguro 48). The paper explores the text and analyses various incidents, situations, and characters of the novel A Pale View of Hills.

Mrs Fujiwara’s enthusiasm about the birth of Etsuko’s child makes Etsuko anxious instead, “Etsuko, you’re looking rather tired today.” “I suppose I am.” I laughed a little. “It’s only to be expected. I suppose”’ (Ishiguro 77). Mrs Fujiwara’s enthusiasm about the birth of Etsuko’s child makes Etsuko anxious instead, “Etsuko, you’re looking rather tired today.” “I suppose I am.” I laughed a little. “It’s only to be expected. I suppose”.

Like every woman in the patriarchal society, Etsuko’s self is fragmented, as on one hand she yearns to be an independent woman and on the other hand expectations of being an ideal mother are weighing upon her. The famous feminist critic Julia Kristeva writes about this ordeal, which is the fate of every woman, in her essay “Stabat Mater”.

Ishiguro does not directly refer to her fears and is not ready to acknowledge her suppressed guilt of not being a good mother for Keiko and creation of negative images about children, e.g., Mariko’s fear of Etsuko (Ishiguro 17, 83, 173), child drowned by a mother (Ishiguro 173). Like every woman in the patriarchal society, Etsuko’s self is fragmented, as on one hand she yearns to be an independent woman and on the other hand expectations of being an ideal mother are weighing upon her.

A Pale View of Hills

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“Perhaps you’ll get married and have children soon,” I said. “I miss little children.”

“I can’t think of anything I’d like less,” said Niki.

“Well, I suppose you’re still rather young.”

“It’s nothing to do with how young or old I am. I just don’t feel like having a lot of kids screaming around me.” (Ishiguro 21)

Niki’s decision is an assertion of a woman that she has control over her body and is not bound by the reproductive expectations of the society. Niki considers those women “miserable” who believe that childbearing is their only option.
“So many women”, he said, “get stuck with kids and lousy husbands and they’re just miserable. But they can’t pluck up the courage to do a thing about it. They’ll just go on like that for the rest of their lives.”

“I see. So you’re saying they should desert their children, are you, Niki?”

“You know what I mean. It’s pathetic when people just waste away their lives.” (Ishiguro 89-90)

Ishiguro subtly projects the idea of female body and maternity, yet he is silent about certain aspects of motherhood. He does not delve deep into the female experience of child bearing and remains silent about the tribulations of a female during child birth. The silence and omission about the female reproduction issues and health can be read as the reflection of the socio-cultural attitude towards “female body”. Ishiguro’s novel A Pale View of Hills poses compelling questions about pregnancy, female experience and women’s agency within the society.

4 Conclusion

Ishiguro’s novel is conspicuous by absence and inadequacy of father, Jiro is not a helpful husband. He appears in the novel to give commands to Etsuko for her household duties as a wife, “I wouldn’t mind some tea, you know” (Ishiguro 154). He seems to have no interest in Etsuko’s life and he never appears to be a considerate husband or father. He never enquires about Etsuko’s health and made no comments about her pregnancy.

Evasion and repression are evident in the relation between husband and wife, where a pregnant woman does not get the emotional and psychological support from husband, which leads to the suppressed anger in Etsuko. The event of pregnancy which is supposed to be full of happiness becomes a source of trauma for the wife.

Ishiguro presents an ambivalent attitude towards pregnancy; the novel is full of anxieties and fears desires and experiences of woman during the period. Etsuko’s worries about impending motherhood combined with various reproductive issues and health in the novels. Ishiguro’s characters like Etsuko, Niki and Sachiko are on the threshold of a metamorphosis into a confident and self-aware womanhood. The paper tries to locate Ishiguro’s writing amidst the modern historical and philosophical influences in which the individual is not bound by the expectations of gendered binaries and women’s voices are heard and the spirit of humanity is alive and dynamic.

5 References


