

## Recollection and Ruminations of Memories: A Study of Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*

**Meenakshi Rana**

*Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab (India)*

### ABSTRACT

*The present paper explains the notion of recollections and ruminations of memories in the novel *An Artist of the Floating World* that is connected to the past life of the characters. *An Artist of the Floating World* is the story that gives the details of time after World War Second by the narrator of the novel. Kazuo Ishiguro explores the opinion that how memories affect the life of human beings in the present time. The main protagonist of the novel is Masuji Ono who plays the role of father and grandfather. The novel elucidates the notion of Japanese culture, the conflict in generations, the loss and World War II with the help of reminiscence with the reflection of memories in his life. The character of Ono explains his sense of guilt and he worked in the nationalist government in the time period of war. The present study firstly explores that how the characters of the novel suffer or living a conflicted life because of memories and secondly how with the help of recollections of memories and ruminations the narrator interprets the whole story to the readers.*

**Keywords:** *Memory, Recollection, Ruminations, Sufferings, World War II.*

### INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro has written *An Artist of Floating World* in 1986 that sets in World War II. This is the second novel of Ishiguro. The novel is divided into four sections by using time symbol: October 1948, April 1949, November 1949, and June 1950. The present study explains about the main protagonist and narrator of the novel Masuji Ono. Ono is leading a conflicted life due to his memories in the present time. Ono is an old painter and recollects his past life by recollecting his memories. He is depressed with the changes that happened after World War II in Japan. He does not like the changes that occur in the cultural values and the system of education. Ono thinks that behavior related to his paintings has changed in the present time and he does not like the impact of Western culture on the culture of Japanese. The career which Ono has before a war is destroyed due to war and affects his reputation. Ono considers him guilty for the death of his wife, Michiko and son Kenji during the war. The present discussion presents Ono's recollection of the memories that reflects his past and present.

# X International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research (IEI, Chandigarh) Institution of Engineers, India , Chandigarh



22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020

[www.conferenceworld.in](http://www.conferenceworld.in)

ISBN : 978-81-944855-2-0

Kazuo Ishiguro born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954 when he was five years old he moved to England in 1954. Kazuo Ishiguro in his school time experiences the differences whether in the context of culture or in another field. He discovers himself as “a curiosity in the playground” (Shaffer 1-2) and alters himself in a new atmosphere and tries to accept the new reality of his life. Kazuo Ishiguro gives many interviews and themes of his novels are related to memory and postwar time. He went to the University of Kent at Canterbury and the University of East Anglia. For his first three novels, he was awarded. For his first novel *A Pale View of Hills* he is awarded by the Winfred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature; he won Whitbread Book Year prize for his second novel *An Artist of the Floating World*, and for the third novel, *The Remains of The Day* the Booker Prize- Britain award is given to Ishiguro and this award is top-level award of Britain’s literary award (Vorda et. al 131).

Mason in the interview with Ishiguro asks about theme and subjects in the novel *An Artist of the Floating World* of the older artist Ono. Kazuo Ishiguro explains about the novel’s theme and subject that:

I’m drawn to that period in Japanese history because that’s what happened to a whole generation of people. They lived in a moral climate that right up until the end of the war said that the most praise- worthy thing they could do was to use their talents to further the nationalist cause in Japan, only to find after the war that this had been a terrible mistake. *An Artist of the Floating World* is an exploration of somebody trying to come to terms with the fact that he has somehow misused his talents unknowingly, simply because he didn’t have any extraordinary power of insight into the world he lived in. (Ishiguro 339)

Kazuo Ishiguro in the novel *An Artist of the Floating World* explains that through recollections of memories how human beings’ role changes in that particular atmosphere of the particular society. The concept of memory in the life of Ono is very important because his memories are a burden on him in his present life. *In Memory, Narrative, Identity* Nicola King explains:

The late twentieth century has also seen an increased focus on questions of memory as the generations which experienced the atrocities of the two world wars die out, and as new or revived national movements base their demands on memories of oppression or trauma . . . the recent insistence on the role of memory also mark a renewed desire to secure a sense of self in the wake of postmodern theories of the decentered human subject. (King 22)

Kazuo Ishiguro through this novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, explains the life journey of Ono with the help of his memories of past and rumination that affects the present time of his life. Ono’s memories affect his life in the context of his daughter’s marriage, the impact of western culture on his grandson and the failure of Japan in the war. Paul Connerton in *How societies Remember* explores the notion connected to the recollection of memories and says that:

There is difficulty extracting our past from our present: not simply because present factors tend to influence – some might want to say distort – our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present. (Connerton 2)

*An Artist of the Floating World* is set in postwar Japan and the novel explains the painter's experiences who, in the 1930s, maintain militarism. The novel presents the recollections of memories of the painter, who is retired now, that are outcomes of the disaster of a nation. Ono is an old man who looking his past life and recollects his memories. He tries to avoid his feelings of regret and tries to evaluate his past honestly. Ono suffers self-deception when he narrates the story and he is not clear about his feelings and tries to hide his emotions and knowledge. He always thinks the work of his life is wasted and does not matter to anyone. In the novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, reminiscences of Ono disturbs his present life. He wanted to become a painter in his teenage but his father does not like the profession. Ono's father burned all Ono's paintings at his age of fifteen. The novel explains Ono spends his days by attending his garden; maintain the repair of home and lives with his two daughters and grandson.

In the novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono recollects his memories and rumination by seeing a home. Ono presents the image of damaged home after the war and explains the emotions. He uses the house as a symbol to reflect the tragic memory and sufferings of himself and his daughters especially with veranda. He says:

Members of my family, and particularly my two daughters, had always been fond of passing the time sitting there, chatting and viewing the garden; and so, when Setsuko – my married daughter-first came to visit us after the surrender, I was not surprised to see how saddened she was by its condition . . . and cracked where the impact of the blast had pushed up the boards from underneath. (Ishiguro 12)

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono leads a conflict life due to his past deeds and he is confused whether his deeds or bad or good. Ono reminds his past thoughts and thinks about one morning where two of his colleagues rising to the Tortoise's easel and gives him a challenge related to his lack of speed when Master Takeda left the room. The expression on the face of Tortoise is nervous and he says: "I beg you to be patient with me" (68). And Ono says that it is enough and explains to colleagues that they are taking with someone who has artistic integrity. Ono in these lines explains the thinking that is free from fear and says:

So I do not think I am claiming undue credit for my younger self if I suggest my actions that day were a manifestation of a quality I came to be much respected for in later years – the ability to think and judge myself, even if it meant going against the sway of those around me. The fact remains, certainly, that I was the only one to come to the Tortoise's defence that morning. (69)

Ono recalls his memories of past in his conversation with Shintaro and tells him to face the past whereas in his case he is not able to accept his actions' accountability that he has done in the past and says that: "I said, 'why don't you simply face up to the past?'" (103) Ono remembers the memories and he uses the words of self-perception by which he explains his actions slowly in the story of the novel and reveals to the reader about his deed of the past that

he is failed to accept those actions in his life. Ono also remembers Hirayama boy who earns money with mimicry of the patriots and to gain the popularity of the people he sings songs that are from the military. People do not mind at that time but after the war the attitudes of the people towards patriotic songs have changed and they beats the child to sing a song of patriotic. The other characters of the novel always question the memories of Ono. Ono recollects the memories of the conversation with Setsuko. Ono has a conflict with his daughter Setsuko in the context of a marriage of Noriko. In the early part of the novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, Setsuko says that postwar gives him defame only because of his nationalist thoughts. She tells him that these thoughts are not good for his reputation and for marriage of Noriko. But in the end of the novel when Ono asks her daughter about an earlier conversation she says that she has no reminiscence about the former discussion and she says to his father that:

Forgive me, but it is perhaps important to see things in a proper perspective. Father painted some splendid pictures, and was no doubt most influential amongst other such painters. But Father's work had hardly to do with these larger matters of which we are speaking. Father was simply a painter. He must believing he has done some great wrong. (192-193)

These lines show the difference between thoughts of Setsuko and Ono. Because Setsuko's thinking is different from the earlier one and for Ono it is like an astonishing moment and the conversation is the difference between his emotions of loss and embarrassment to his undistinguished place in history.

Ono's grandson Ichiro tells Ono about that he is pretending a cowboy then Ono is curious to know about the character's name because he thinks that Ichiro will tell the name of Japanese character but he relates cowboy with American culture. Ono tries his best to convince Ichiro to play the Japanese role and tells him that: "Ichiro, 'I said, more firmly, 'wait a moment and listen. It's more interesting, more interesting by far; to pretend to be someone likes Lord Yoshitsune. Shall I tell you why?'"(30) Ono with his recollects memories of an art studio that printed copies of Japan's image on cheap rate and the time when he tried to detain the floating world in the village of Mori-san at bohemian and as a nationalist painter the success he got at that time. Ono calls to minds about the strict atmosphere of Mori-san. Mori-san only wants to change the identity of paintings at that time in the city. He portrays their connection:

His influences over us was not, of course, confined merely to the realms of painting. We lived throughout those years almost entirely in accordance with his [Mori-san's] values and lifestyle, and this entailed spending much time exploring the city's 'floating world' – the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink which formed the backdrop for all of our paintings. (144-145)

In the novel first time the concept of suicide is mentioned in the conversation between Jiro Miyake and Ono. Jiro Miyake tells Ono that the man was well famous before the world war and had guilt that Japan defeated in the war. This incident explores the pain and psychology of Ono. "Our president clearly felt responsible for certain undertakings we were involved in during the war . . . His act was an apology on behalf of us all to the families of those killed in the war" (55). Ono shares his feeling and emotions with Saitos in dinner at *miai* of Noriko. Saitos are

not aware of the matter that Ono is explaining to them. Ono has regrets of past from his artistic and political life and says to them:

I must say I find it hard to understand how any man who values his self-respect would wish for long to avoid responsibility for his past deeds; it may not always be an easy thing, but there is certainly a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes one has made in the course of one's life. In any case, there is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith. It is surely a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them. (125)

So above lines explain the behavior of Ono that he tries to heal himself from his disturbing experience. He talks about his regrets that are not known by others. He explains that there is not shame or afraid to accept his mistakes.

In the novel, *An Artist of the floating World* Ono remembers the old days and thinks that young men have not that much bad identity. He thinks that they have a good heart and says that:

I fell a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be. But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well. (206)

## CONCLUSION

The concluding lines explain the turning point of the protagonist's behavior in the novel. Ono feels always alone after the war whether in thoughts, culture and generation gap. He feels isolation in Japan among the young generation. He dislikes them because they follow the new values of American culture. Ono always maintains distance from young people because of his past features. Silvia Tellini in *Identity and nation in Kazuo Ishiguro's An Artist of the Floating World* explain Ono's character by saying: "... his description reminds us of the motifs he used to paint at Mori-san's villa; paintings that had given him a glimpse of the floating world in the past, seem transmuted now into a floating optimistic hope for the future of the next generation" (Tellini 9). Noriko is married to a alleged man whose name is Taro Saito at the end of the novel. Setsuko tells her father that now he is free from his guilt. Ono suffers in his life because of his past deeds but now he is aware of his actions. He recalls his all past memories to satisfied his guilt. He feels satisfy from his inner now and centers his attention and energy towards his grandson Ichiro. In the end of the novel, Ono discovers his feelings and tries to revolve through these feelings. He hears the young generation's conversation about old buildings where they spend their time with old friends. Ono feels comfortable among them and thinks the similarity of thoughts of the young generation with old ones and he also rethinks about his old friends. Ono wishes for success for the young generation without representing any irony.

# X International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research

(IEI, Chandigarh) Institution of Engineers, India , Chandigarh



22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020

[www.conferenceworld.in](http://www.conferenceworld.in)

ISBN : 978-81-944855-2-0

## REFERENCES

- [1] Shaffer, Brian W. *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998, pp. 1-2.
- [2] Vorda, Allan, Kim Herzinger, and Kazuo Ishiguro. *An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro*. *Mississippi Review*, vol. 20, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 131-154.
- [3] Mason, Gregory, and Kazuo Ishiguro. *An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro*. *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1989, pp. 335-347.
- [4] King, Nicola. *Memory, narrative, identity: Remembering the self*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. 22.
- [5] Connerton, Paul. *How societies remember*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- [6] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *An Artist of the Floating World*, Faber & Faber, 1986.
- [7] Tellini, Silvia. *Identity and Nation in Kazuo Ishiguro's An Artist of the Floating World*, vol.10, no.2, May 2018, pp. 1-10.