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**Commodity Fetishism in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills***

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**Abstract**

*Kazuo Ishiguro's A Pale View of Hills (1982), a Nobel Prize-winning novel, explores how human relationships become transactional, eroding genuine interpersonal and familial bonds. This study examines characters' alienation through Karl Marx's critique of capitalist society and the concept of the commodification of human relations, illustrating how marriage and other personal connections shift from emotional to economic exchange. As relationships become entangled in consumer culture, cultural and personal identities are lost, leaving individuals traumatized in the aftermath of the Second World War. The characters Etsuko, Keiko, Sachiko, Mariko fail to form authentic relationships with other members due to the pervasive influence of western capitalist interactions, leading to alienation and, ultimately, the suicide of Keiko. Commodity fetishism weakens individuals and strengthens monetary value, giving additional importance to the exchange value. This vulnerability smashes the complete harmony of the social relations. This article argues that socio-economic pressures reshape personal and social connections, demonstrating that commodified relationships fracture individual and cultural identities in post-war Nagasaki of Japan. It infers the novel as a critique of capitalist society.*

**Keywords:** capitalist society, commodity, family bonding, fetishism, transaction

**Introduction**

Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* deals with the disruption of familial and social bonds due to the direct impact of capitalist culture. The setting is the post-war reconstruction phase, when Japan is rigorously involved in reconstruction and reconciliation. The novel underlies the undercurrent of a war-affected family that is bound to take a shift from conventional familial culture to consumer culture. This study explores the way family is affected by the post-war culture in which societal bonding gets erased due to the West's predisposed commodified culture of Japan and its consequences. The narrator narrates the story from England, who migrated from Japan in a post-war situation for a better life. War-torn Japan propels them to move away from the country that is into a new phase of reconstruction. However, reconstruction led to an economically driven present situation. The current situation goes beyond the common public interest of the people and delves into commodity fetishism.

Postwar recovery remains a core issue of the novel for critics because the setting of the novel is the post-war phase of Japan. The people are struggling to find and adopt with

new ways of life amidst the devastation and trauma of war. The war imprinted the people with collective and personal trauma, trying to reconcile the past with the present as Japan tries “recover from the horrors of the atomic bomb” (Calinescu, 2020, p. 77). After the surrender of Japan, the Allied Powers “enacted reforms and reconstruction through a military government that was put in place in Japan” (Woodside, 2015, p.1). The Japanese show “experiencing the new-found leniency in the economic sphere” (Woodside, p. 7). The war-torn country paved the way to leave the country in pursuit of a better future abroad. The protagonist, Etsuko, leaves Japan and lives as an immigrant in England, recalling the past. The story is narrated through the flashback of the narrator-cum-protagonist. Orphaned by the devastating war, the protagonist, “Etsuko’s existence, marked by solitude and introspection, forms the crux of the story” (Deepa, p. 97). The assertion as an introspection derives the author the one-to-one correspondence between the author and the protagonist. However, the novel is the epoch of history, a transformation from Feudal to capitalist democracy.

Protagonist’s alienation, dislocation, and loss are caused by economic pressures is due to the highly commercialized Japanese capitalist society. “After the war, savage militarists were replaced with savage capitalists” (Feng and Pakri, 2024, p.42). The external context is the post-atom bomb Japan, a complicated commodified material world, whereas the internal context is the world of the characters – their relationships, dreams, sufferings, alienation, and loss due to western capitalists’ mode of thinking. Both the worlds are on a par with each other for the readers, though “it is the interior context of his character’s world that Ishiguro is interested in, not the external circumstances” (Matek, 2018, p.131). The interior of the novel explores the internal world of the characters with great dexterity and “has revealed the connection of human psyche with the external world” (Joseph and Saji, 2022 p. 97). The chief concern is how Japanese society is affected by the capitalist mode of thinking.

Character-to-character relationships are in danger due to the loss of conventional familial values. This is so because familial value has been converted to money relation. Etsuko is taken by Seiji Ogata, whom she addresses with respect as Ogata San. She gets married to his son, Jiro. Etsuko’s relationship with him did not last long after she gave birth to her first daughter, Keiko. She gets married to an Englishman and visits England with her new husband and daughter and settles permanently. After the death of her second husband, she is alone. Her first daughter, Keiko, commits suicide because she could not adjust to the new sociocultural context. Etsuko narrates all the events to Niki. “By narrating Sachiko story, she speaks her own story of her dead Japanese daughter Keiko through Mariko and her emotional alienation” (Padhee, 2020, p. 91). Her younger daughter, Niki, born from her English husband, lives separately. Marriage does not last long in the new sociocultural setting and leads to separation. Due to Keiko’s failure to adjust in a new setting, she commits suicide.

In this dualistic state of mind, Etsuko invents a unique technique to talk about the experiences with her daughter. She creates a shadow character - Sachiko for herself and Mariko for Keiko. Etsuko thus remembers “with distant dismay, her Shadow’s doings, mainly fueled by Sachiko’s obsessive desire to emigrate from post-war Japan, despite her

daughter's opposition" (Calinescu,2020, p. 83). Niki stays for three days with her mother and leaves her home with complex feelings and memories. Unhappiness, dismay, and post-war pain lead to unhappiness.

Migration, dilemma, separation, alienation, and suicide are the results of the shift from familial and societal unity to distraction due to the conversion from unity and harmony to commodity fetishism. Conversion of human value to objectification and commodification results in anguish and apprehension. This study deals with the way interrelations of the characters have been chaotic because of the pervasive influence of the western-capitalist culture that is to say commodity fetishism.

### Review of Related Literature

Set in the backdrop of post-war Japan, *A Pale View of Hills* delves into commodification, alienation, dislocation, and forfeiture of the main characters of the novel. This study brings forth the commodified human relation during the post-war period. With the destructions of war, the implicit and explicit outcomes of the reconstruction and rebuilding of Japan and its economy commenced. However, it brought the extreme point of exchange and sign exchange value in the society. The characters are scattered as debris of the devastation caused by the Second World War. The human connections are commodified, which Marx terms "commodity fetishism" (p.47), to discourse about the shift from social integrity to disintegration and chaos.

Critics examine different facets of the novel, focusing on diverse issues due to the multilayered themes of the novel. Calinescu (2020) observes the novel as reflecting "Ishiguro's own migration experience, being himself born in Nagasaki and moving with his parents to England" (p.78). The writer further (2020) asserts how the author explores the themes of "time, memory, identity, displacement, historiography, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioral and linguistic modelling" (p.75) in his writings. The experience of migration and identity is the outwardly visible theme of the novel.

For Matek, there is a one-to-one relationship between the narrator and author in terms of plot evolution because it dives into the depth of autobiography. The protagonist, Etsuko, shares common experiences with Ishiguro during her stay in Japan. Despite the protagonist and the novelist having common experiences. Critical evaluation in terms of autobiographical undercurrent is one facet of the critics. Matek (2018) discusses the autobiographical undercurrent of his novel "mirrors somewhat the circumstances of his own life" (p.129) that are common with the protagonist. *A Pale View of Hills* does not provide ample evidence to the readers of being an autobiographical creation. Calinescu's major concern is with the "protagonist's pidgin identity" (p.77). The divided autobiographical identity of the main character deserves one aspect of signification of the novel along with the narrative technique.

Similarly, the narrative technique of the novel is another concern of the researchers. The story is narrated by Etsuko, who uses the flashback technique. All the events are told by Etsuko in remembrance of the past. She "narrates her past in Nagasaki after the World War

bombing of Japan” (Padhee, 2020, p.90). The flashback technique is one interesting aspect of the novel. She recalls mountains back in Japan where she was born and grew up. Furthermore, she does not want to feel melancholic remembering Keiko after her suicide; however, she cannot help remembering. She concludes by pointing out the protagonist “willing to find new motivation for living ... although her pidgin identity impossible to recalibrate” (p.91). Joshi and Shinde (2022) interpret the text, exploring the theme of cultural change. The shift of culture from patriarchal Japanese society to the culture of democratic Western society results in extreme individual freedom. This freedom, however, creates societal and cultural conflict. Keiko “a pure Japanese girl who struggled a lot to cope with her new life in England and to adopt the western culture” (p.137), could not adjust herself to the western culture and “finally failed ... and hanged herself in her apartment” (p.137). There are descriptions in the text that are about the “blending of both Japanese and Western cultures” (p.139). This shift functions as an important issue of the novel.

The destruction of natural wilderness and leading the land to concrete landscape is another concern of the critics. Along with the cultural displacement, the Japanese began to be distanced from nature as the bomb threatened nature and the reconstruction gained momentum. So, this text has been interpreted by some through the lens of eco-criticism. The concern about wilderness in the text is viewed by Feng and Pakri, (2024) with references to “a wasteland, a river, and woods” (p.39) that are located in front of the apartment of Etsuko alongside “the newly built concrete apartment blocks, the symbol of civility and culture” (p.40). According to them, the degradation of nature and estrangement of Mother Earth are the causes of people’s suffering. They relate to mythological wilderness, which was “dwelled by ogres, satyrs, or Wild Man” (41), and opine that “the big city is the urban wilderness dwelt by modern cannibals” (p.41). People do not have the value of the human; rather they are the non-human beings.

The natural wilderness and the psychological wilderness of the characters are explored by Feng and Pakri. The characters “leading to self-destruction” (p.46) indicate the results of the society. Taketomi (2020) connects her interpretation to ecocriticism; however, she focuses more on the symbolic meaning of natural phenomena. She explores the image of the river, which, according to her, “signifies the boundary between life and death” (p.74). She mentions, “Near Ishiguro’s grandparents’ house is a small river called Nakajima Gawa” (p.74); which might have inspired Ishiguro to bring its imagery. According to her, “For people in Nagasaki, the river is particularly meaningful, especially to victims of the atomic bombing” (p.75). It is important to note that “In Buddhism, a river is considered a symbol that divides life and death” (p.76). She foregrounds “folklores of ghosts related to rivers and wells in Japan” (p.86). The focus here is on the interpretation of the images of the folk culture of Japanese society.

Joseph and Saji highlight the themes of isolation and loneliness as an important concern of the novel. Keiko, a victim of loneliness and trauma, commits suicide. “It is evident that Keiko committed suicide only because of the lack of social interaction and commitment” (Joseph and Saji, 2022, p. 732). Joseph and Saji further analyze the novel

through the framework of the “Theory of Suicide” by Emile Durkheim, a pioneering sociologist (p.731). They bring this theory to explore the cause of Keiko’s suicide. The reader comes to know “four types of suicide i) egoistic ii) anomic iii) fatalistic and iv) altruistic” (p.731). Keiko’s is an egoistic suicide, in which the victim feels the absence of “social integration” and “suffers from depression” (p.731). Deepa’s exploration of the theme of suicide and its cause is similar to the examination of Joseph and Saji. She correlates the migration of Etsuko from Japan to England with the suicide of Keiko. She writes, “Etsuko... leaves Japan to begin a new life in the west country that eventually leads to the suicide of Keiko” (p.102). Deepa focuses on the theme of Etsuko's memory and guilt. It was the guilt of Etsuko that she did not give good motherhood to Keiko. She takes herself as guilty of her daughter’s suicide. Her “guilt and emotional upheaval goes side by side her feelings of loneliness” (p.98). Etsuko tells the story of Sachiko and Mariko to Niki, intends to share “the guilt of Keiko’s suicide tortures her every time” (p.99). She refuses to accept the guilt of her daughter’s suicide. She tries to prove that she is not guilty of her daughter’s suicide.

The novel has been examined, much to explore migration and its impact on common people. While Deepa asserts that migration is solely responsible for Keiko’s suicide, “practical dimensions of migration and trauma are less important in Ishiguro’s novel than their psychological effects” (Matek, 2018, 130). According to Matek, Etsuko’s migration is both “literal” and “symbolic” (p.130). Matek is interested in studying migration, trauma, and memory on a deeper level – a “psychological process” (p.131) whereas Tijana Matovic explores “temporal aspects of traumatic memories” (p.470) through the Lacanian approach. Sheng-hao (2020) scrutinizes the text as a pursuit of identity with the lens of Spatial criticism. Space is not just the backdrop where events take place; however, the places shape the identity of the characters and give meaning.

Patriarchal domination and the search for identity prevail over the concern of the critical assertions. Sheng-hao (2020) posits three spaces in the text where the characters struggle to pursue their identity. Japanese society is “a space where the male authority prevails” (p.875), denying a space for women. Post-war Japan became “a space where Western ideas struggle against Eastern ones” (p.875). The women “are excluded from the central space of the patriarchal society” (p.875). The characters move to other places in pursuit of identity. After the bombing, “Japan becomes the colonial space of America” (876) in which women are bound to construct a Third space for themselves. As Sheng-hao (2020) mentions, “Etsuko constructs her Third space out of her country house ... characterized by its openness to diverse cultures” (p.878). The dialogue between Etsuko and Sachiko arouses emotion and empathy in the reader. The text has been studied from “Nussbaum’s theory” that the novel “leads the reader to explore in depth the nature of empathy” (Partenza,2019, p.128). According to Martha Nussbaum, “the empathetic relationship requires the subject to maintain the necessary distance between him/herself and the other” (p.128). Partenza (2019) observes that “empathetic interaction is the result of words —said and unsaid” (p.129). The unsaid words contribute to the conversation. Calinescu’s interpretation is based on pidgin identity, post-war trauma, and gender issues.

Cultural shift draws the consideration of Joshi and Shinde (2022), who have explored the cultural changes in the novel. They have argued that the cultural shift from Japan to the West is responsible for the loss. Feng and Pakri have analyzed the text through the perspective of ecocriticism. They have explored the wilderness and its relevance in the novel. Taketomi also has connected her interpretation to ecocriticism, bringing forth the river image and its meaning in Japanese society. Joseph and Saji have brought “Theory of Suicide” by Emile Durkheim in the interpretation of the text. They have explored the causes of Keiko’s suicide. Song (2023) has explored the trauma of female characters by applying trauma studies. Sheng-hao has interpreted the text through space criticism, pursuing the third space. The novel draws critical response from diverse critics due to its multilayered themes.

Critics have asserted the novel from viewpoints including migration trauma, identity crisis, openness to assorted culture, suicidal mania, patriarchal mistreatment, conflict between East-West culture, and cultural vicissitudes. However, commodification of relation and chaos in the family relation of characters. This research aims to bridge the research gap and lay a foundation for further study. After surveying current literature through multiple facets of lenses, one domain of the novel is still to be explored. Karl Marx’s commodity fetishism is a deserving theoretical perspective to study the text because consumer culture, importance to monetary value, and the shift from family bonding to chaos are the results of commodity fetishism. Therefore, this study explores the influence of internal and external factors in human relationships due to the fast recovery phase through the lens of Marx’s commodity fetishism.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a textual reading of *A Pale View of Hills* from Marxist perspectives of commodity fetishism to explore objectified human relationships and its impact on society. The content analysis of the novel uses a theoretical standpoint as the methodology of the study and textual evidences and warrants as the evidences for the validity of the logic.

### **Theoretical Framework: Commodity and Commodity Fetishism**

Marx’s theory of commodity connects the object with market and labor value. For a general perspective, a commodity is a product that is purchased and sold in the market. However, in capitalism, the term commodity has deeper social, economic, and cultural implications. It has a relation to production, market, labor, and value. For Jackson (1999), “commodities are simply objects of economic value” (p.96), which means they are “products of exchange” (p.96). Karl Marx defines a commodity as “a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants” (p.27). A commodity has to satisfy human wants and needs. Marx posits that a commodity has “use value” and “exchange value” (p.27). The utility of a commodity that comes upon consumption is its use value. It is enough to infer that anything useful for satisfying human requirements and desires is a commodity - iron, wood, copper, and cotton, to name a few. The emergence of the exchange value from the use value of the society diminishes the societal significance. There is an exchange value of a commodity

when “values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort” (p.27). Exchange value changes from objects to monetary value. Exchange value is inseparable and is “inherent in commodities” (p.27). To be taken as a thing and as a commodity, it has to possess an exchange value. It is interesting to know that “a thing can be a use value, without having value” (p.30). This case happens when “its utility to man is not due to labor” (p.30). Marx gives examples of “air, soil and meadow” (p.30). A commodity is a complex idea in capitalism. It appears to be a simple and “a very trivial thing, and easily understood” but in reality, it is “a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx, p.47). Marx asserts the way society diverts from use value to exchange value as found in the novel.

It is human labor that creates value “but is not itself a value” (Marx, p. 35). Paraphrasing Marx, exchange is a process to transfer commodities from hands in which they have no use value to the hands in which they get use value (p.71). Marx mentors how “commodification converts use value into exchange value” (Jackson, 1999, p. 96). Paraphrasing Marx, Jackson outlines “commodification is the extension of the commodity form to goods and services that were not previously commodified” (p.96). In a capitalist society, all the possible things are commodified. The value of not only a material thing is sought after; intangible entities are also measured in terms of money. Money plays a major role in society. Money for Marx “is the supreme embodiment of exchange value and abstract labor ...” and a thing “most needed for survival” (Foley, p. 182). Financial transaction is not the medium through which value is measured “but money itself is a commodity ... Capable of becoming the private property of any individual” (Marx, p. 84). Money appears to be a mere medium of exchange, but it is a commodity. To clarify the concept, Marx writes that money can be commodity-cum-medium. According to him, money is “a commodity that functions as a measure of value” (p.84). For Marx, “Gold (or silver) is ... money ... because it functions as money” (p.84). So, the character of money is floating from time to time and place to place.

Production and consumption are integral aspects of modern capitalist society, though such tendencies were prevalent even during the pre-Marx era. History is evidence that “people have been treated as commodities at various points in human history” (Jackson, p.99). Humans were treated as commodities of having use value and exchange value. This novel highlight that “his maternal grandfather was one of the victims who died of nuclear radiation while helping burn the bodies” (qtd. in Feng and Pakri, 2024, p.54), They are converted into slavery. Furthermore, they are objects to buy and sell. The commodification in modern society is different from that of antiquity in terms of humanity, morality, and legality. In the words of Pokharel, “Power policies of superstructure move hand in hand for the dismantlement of the base structure of the community” (p.100). The society moves under the control of the power structure.

Marx introduces commodity fetishism, saying that it “is not hard to understand, and there are no disagreements between Marxists as to its content” (Dimoulis and Milios, p.3). It is a mysterious character of commodity. The “exchange-value is a relation between persons;

it is, however necessary to add that it is a relation hidden by a material veil” (qtd. in 276 Prodnik), and that is the concept of commodity fetishism has its origin in the “peculiar social character of the labor” (48) that produces the commodities. Writing on fetishism, Dimoulis and Milios remark, “Commodity fetishism is treated as the quintessence of Marxism and basis for the theory and politics of the transition to socialism” (p.3). Marx asserts that fetishism “is the universal incarnation of abstract human labor” (p.50) that has relation to individual producers in the way “coats or boots stand in a relation to linen” (p.49).

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **A Pale View of Hills: Commodity Fetishism**

Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel depicts dehumanized and displaced human relations that are transactional and financially evaluated. In post-war Japan, the rebuilding of infrastructures and the capitalist activities pushes the society into commercialization and commodification of material things. Every possible thing has been commodified, and its use value and exchange value are sought after. Human beings as such and their relationships are no exception. “Not only have the capitalists commodified nature and natural resources as factors of production, but they also dehumanized most of the humans” (qtd. in Feng and Pakri, p.35). The rebuilding of Japan is reflected in the need for the rebuilding of relationships.

The protagonist, Etsuko, after having a daughter with her English husband, wants to give her an English name. She is reluctant to give a Japanese name to her because naming is a social status marker. She makes a compromise with her husband regarding naming; as she narrates, “the name we finally gave [their] younger daughter ... was a compromise I reached with her father” (Ishiguro, p.3). Her latent intent is to sell the name as she knows that an English name has more exchange value in Europe than a Japanese name. Relationship is not meant to have emotional bonding. Selfishness is predicted in relationships. Etsuko remarks regarding Niki’s attending Keiko’s funeral as “I never expected you to come” (Ishiguro, p. 3). Attending a funeral by family members is much anticipated unless their relationship is deformed by capital market. Niki, who lives alone, is not expected to attend her elder sister Keiko’s funeral. Keiko did not attend her father’s funeral, and Niki Keiko’s. It is not simply because Keiko is from a different father; it is because of the diminishing value of family relations in consumer society. Keiko lives in aloofness, displaced from the kins. Etsuko tells Niki that Keiko rarely comes out of her room. She would listen to the radio and read the papers. Entry into her room by family members is forbidden. At mealtimes, she comes to the kitchen, takes the plate, and shuts herself again. (Ishiguro, p.29). This is the sign of alienation, the preliminary phase for depression. Ultimately, she commits suicide in a room in Manchester, “the landlady who had opened the door, thinking Keiko had left without paying the rent” (Ishiguro, p. 29). Commodifying the death of Keiko, the newspaper reported “that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room” (Ishiguro 3). The newspaper does not indicate empathy for the loss of the life. This is the dismal situation of the novel.

Isolation is another facet of the novel that hints at the loss of bonding. Sachiko, a friend of Etsuko, is a derelict mother. She does not care for her daughter Mariko, nor is she



attentive to the latter's needs. Mariko is often left alone to play in isolation. Once Etsuko finds Mariko playing near a river, she suggests that Sachiko not leave her daughter alone, saying, "Your daughter seems quite young to be left on her own all day" (Ishiguro, p.6). Though Sachiko is worried about the future of her daughter, Mariko is not more than an object for her. She is determined to transport her daughter to the USA like a commodity as her "daughter's welfare is of the utmost importance" (Ishiguro p.24) to her. She makes a plan to go to USA with Frank, an American drunkard, who "drinks his piss" (Ishiguro 48). Despite Frank being a bad match, Sachiko chooses him, commodifying her marital relationship to gain something tangible, that is, money, power, and status. Human value is turned into transactional value. Despite Frank's denial, she settles the matter by having a discussion with him in detail as she told Etsuko "I've given the whole matter much consideration, and I've discussed it with Frank" (Ishiguro, p. 24). Later, Frank is "entrusted with a job on cargo" (Ishiguro 95), leaves for America alone to make some money for the arrangements, which is for Sachiko the "most sensible solution" (Ishiguro, p.96). Sachiko desires to fulfill her material needs through Mariko's prosperity in the USA. Material objects no longer remain valuable in themselves; rather they get value once they retain transactional value. In a conversation with Etsuko, she says her daughter "could become a business girl, a film actress even. Americas like that" (Ishiguro, p.24). Her unconscious desire is not the real growth of her daughter but her fulfillment to make money by any means. Moreover, Mariko is a commodity that is creating use value for Sachiko. Her marriage with Frank is a compromise for material gain. The explicit and implicit transactional motive destroys the personal worth and lifts it up to the transactional value that is a form of commodification.

Etsuko gets married to Jiro and gets security and shelter as the exchange value of marriage. As mentioned earlier, Etsuko is taken in by Seiji Ogata, whose son is Jiro. Etsuko feels easy with her father-in-law; however, she cannot sustain a relationship with Jiro – he is too busy to accompany his wife and daughter. When she is pregnant with her first baby, he keeps himself busy in his job. Etsuko tells Niki, "My husband never knew Keiko in her early years" (Ishiguro 53). The ignorance to the new child is due to the belief that she does not produce financial support. Jiro needs a wife who would fulfill all the needs of the family. "Alienated under capitalism, he has become haughty ... patriarchal towards his wife, just like capitalists' exploitive ... attitudes towards nature" (Feng and Pakri, p. 42). His lack of love and romance with his wife can be comprehended when Etsuko tells Niki, "Young couples to be seen in public holding hands something Jiro and I had never done" (Ishiguro, p.67). For Jiro, Etsuko is a mere commodity whom he can consume in any way he likes. When Sachiko remarks, "Jiro is a good husband to you, I hope" (Ishiguro, p.17), Etsuko replies, "Of course. I couldn't be happier" (Ishiguro, p. 17). As for his father, he "was simply waiting for Ogata-San to return home to Fukuoka" (Ishiguro 71). He does not have deep love and affection with his father. Etsuko shares a memory of an argument with her husband about the father-son relation as she states, "I remember when I first married, there was a lot of argument because my husband didn't want to live with his father" (Ishiguro, p.103). Ogata, on the other hand, needs Jiro to play chess in the least. It is Ogata who first teaches Jiro to use tricks of chess. He repeats, "I always warned you about using the castles too early" (Ishiguro, p.72) and suggests his son "A good chess player needs to think ahead, three moves on at the very least"

(Ishiguro, p.72). Jiro, trained by Ogata in chess, exhibits reluctance to give Sonny company to him to continue the game. At times, he gets irritated with his father's arrogance for indulging in the game. He says, "Father, this is all nonsense. I have better things to do than think about chess all day" (Ishiguro, p. 73). Jiro is a materialistically conscious character. He has a sense of the use values and exchange values of things. He does not want to spare time idly. Furthermore, he wants to sell his time to get its exchange value. This material consciousness of his can be understood when he says to Ogata, "I have better things to do with my time" (Ishiguro, p.73). Ogata finally returns to his home.

Human bonding is affected by the atmosphere in which they reside because it gets underlying vibration for positive thinking. Niki leaves her mother's house for London only five days after her arrival because "the country house and the quiet that surrounds it made her restless" (Ishiguro, p. 3). The few days she spends there by "listening impatiently to ... classical records" and flicking "through numerous magazines" (Ishiguro, p. 3). The house Etsuko lives in England symbolizes a commodity since it does not give a homely environment and familial attachment. It is not a 'home' for them. Born and grown up in England and fathered by an Englishman, Niki embodies Western values and lifestyle. According to Etsuko, "Keiko, unlike Niki, was pure Japanese" (Ishiguro, p.3). During her five-day stay, "she did not mention Keiko until the second day" (Ishiguro, p. 3). Etsuko picks up the matter with a persuasive tone: "Sisters are supposed to be people you're close to ... you may not like them much, but you're still close to them" (Ishiguro, p.3). Family bonding is a significant aspect for maintaining harmony in the society.

Freedom and happiness are interrelated to make life blissful. For Niki, relationships do not matter. She loves freedom from familial bonding. She makes her own decisions. She is defiant of the institution of marriage. Since she has experienced her parents' marriage, not bringing good fortune to her and other members, she takes marriage just as a commodity. When Etsuko asks her about her plan of getting married, she asks a counter question, "Well, why, should I get married? That's so stupid, Mother" (Ishiguro, p.102). She has understood that women are considered a commodity (machines to produce children) in a capitalist consumer society. She explains to her mother further, "So many women just get brainwashed. They think all there is to life is getting married and having a load of kids (Ishiguro, p. 102). When marriage destroys bonding, social chaos emerges to blur happiness.

The extreme pressure for the reconstruction of the socio-economic condition minimizes happiness and maximizes alienation and loss. Keiko's character is bizarre for her family. She is the most pathetic character in the story as the real victim of the rebuilding Japan's socio-economic pressures under the capitalist structure. The backdrop of rebuilding is evidenced in the text with the mention of "American soldiers ... identical apartments ... concrete pillars ... large American car" (Ishiguro, pp. 4-5). She has been traumatized, dehumanized, and commodified by her surrounding circumstances. Etsuko remembers her as Mariko, who had a sorrowful childhood. Keiko lived in alienation and was not considered a part of the family. Niki tells Etsuko about Keiko, "She was never a part of our lives — not mine or Dad's anyway" (Ishiguro, p. 28). Memory and loss pervade the plot.

The readers suppose the relationship of Etsuko and Sachiko is one with emotional bonding and true friendship. However, their friendship is influenced by commodity fetishism. They consider the value of the commodity hidden in them as persons. Etsuko cannot understand Sachiko, though they spend time in each other's company. Etsuko tells Niki about Sachiko: "I never knew Sachiko well" (Ishiguro 4). Etsuko is critical about Sachiko's upbringing of Mariko while Sachiko remarks about Etsuko as showing signs of being "a splendid mother" (Ishiguro, p.6). It is clear that their "friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks" (Ishiguro, p. 4). On a deeper level of understanding, there is no such a woman as Sachiko. It is the shadow character of Etsuko herself.

Human beings and objects imbue their meaning beyond material value and lead to the exchange value. This commodification ruins the true meaning of life and livelihood. The longing of the external circumstances for personal growth through transaction leads to aspiration and anxiety that in turn, destroys personal and social value in the novel.

### Conclusion

This study details with the shift of the characters from the pre-war period to the reconstruction phase in which the narrator recalls how the characters are influenced by the capitalist society. Owing to the socio-economic pressure, they find it hard to exist at present and are ready to move for a better future. In the pursuit of a prosperous future, they happen to make their present even worse. They are victimized by the new shift of the society that is commodification and involve themselves in the process. They are not able to maintain genuine relationships with other members of society. The massive influence of consumerist selfishness plays a role in their relations. The characters are innocent, for they have been influenced by the circumstances in which they live. The commodification of any possible thing can be taken as a usual phenomenon in postmodern consumerist society. It was a time of rebuilding and reconstruction of Japan, a transition from Monarchy to democracy, and external intervention. Characters in the novel are representatives of the people of different walks of life in Japan. This study went through a serious and systematic process of analysis of the characters and the context, exploring human connections and bringing forth the findings that the relations of the characters are treated as commodities. The relations are sought after in terms of exchange value. This researcher believes that this finding will add a new perspective for further study. This study infers the point that social components have to raise issues about the true value of financial advancement because fiscal advancement does not guarantee family and social synchronization. Therefore, this novel is a critique of commodity fetishism.

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