



Dignity – The key aspect of professionalism in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day

Janani R¹, Dr. Manju Kumari K²

¹ II M.A English Literature , Department of English – SF (UG & PG) , Nirmala College for Women , Coimbatore , Tamilnadu , India.

²Dr.Manju Kumari K, Assistant Professor , Department of English –SF (UG & PG), Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore , Tamilnadu , India.

ABSTRACT:

Travel has always been a medium to understand the culture and human connection of different people. There is a sort of relaxation one can attain in travel. Kazuo Ishiguro, Japanese-born British novelist known for his lyrical tales of regret fused with subtle optimism. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) deals with Stevens, the protagonist giving a wonderful portrayal of an English Butler who serves at Darlington Hall. He gets an opportunity to take an expedition to the countryside of England. As he travels he gets acquainted with different people. Stevens gets reminded of his Darlington days and the gentlemen who would visit Darlington Hall with whom he had a good relationship. Stevens is known for his dignity and loyalty. It is through the life of Stevens that Ishiguro enlightens how dignity plays an important role in a butler's life. Throughout the novel, Stevens serves as a dutiful butler who completely devotes himself to serving Lord Darlington and hence has no personal space to think about himself.

Keywords: Expedition, Dignity, Loyalty, Personal life.

Stevens, the protagonist of the novel *The Remains of the Day* is a butler who works in the Darlington Hall. Stevens was under the service of Lord Darlington, after his death the Darlington Hall gets under the custody of an American gentleman Mr. Farraday. Because of his compulsion Stevens decides to take a tour to the countryside of England and the other reason to take up this tour was to meet Miss. Kenton to discuss staff planning. Stevens has been working as a butler for thirty-five years. This was very first time he was going out of the Darlington Hall. As he turned on his Ford he was filled with the thoughts of how Darlington would look empty without his presence. As he moved to Salisbury, Stevens understood that this journey was going to give him a lot of experiences.

As he tours, Stevens collects some nostalgic memories that he had in Darlington Hall and he informs about the debate the butlers used to have. Stevens and other butlers discussed what quality was required to become a great butler. To which Stevens answers that dignity is the sole element to become a great butler. " 'dignity' has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits" (43). Throughout the novel, there is no particular definition given for the term dignity, it is rather exemplified with lots of instances and anecdotes. "The most crucial criterion is that the applicant be possessed of a dignity in keeping his position" (16). Like Darlington hall, Hayes society is a reputed place which claimed butlers who possess the quality of dignity.

Dignity is the term that often occurs in this novel *The Remains of the Day*. When Mr. Graham and Stevens have a debate on dignity, Stevens speaks about his father who is the epitome of dignity. Stevens gives the example of his father who tells a story about an Indian Butler, one afternoon as Indian Butler entered into the dining hall he finds a tiger under the dining table but he didn't make any chaos. He came to the drawing room where his employer was having tea with his fellow visitors. Without making a fuss about it he informs the employer about the incident and gets permission from him to shoot the tiger. After completing his mission the Indian Butler came out acting normal and served for the dinner. "Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time" (37).

Stevens gives yet another example of his father who served for Mr. John Silver. Two of his guest asked Stevens' father to drive the car since the chauffeur was on leave. They wanted to go to different places and spend their evening. Both of them were drunk and they were rude to Stevens' father when he picked the wrong route. But Stevens' father didn't care about it. It was when they started talking bad about his employer that he got angry got down from the car and looked at them with authority. This proves that Stevens' father respected his employer, even though he was embarrassed by those two, he didn't show his anger. He projected a perfect balance between personal dignity and readiness to oblige. The best quality of a butler is his patience to handle any kind of situation.

Stevens remembers an incident where his father served a General whom his father hated because of his policies in the Southern African war that led to the death of Stevens' brother. After losing his son, Stevens' father was not in good terms with the General. When the General visited the employer, the employer knowing the rage of Stevens' father over the General, the employer asked Stevens' Father to take a day off. But even losing his son and knowing that the General is the reason for his son's death still he served him. When the General left the house he gave a large tip to Stevens' father he accepts it, but asked his employer to give this to charity. Through these incidents Stevens makes it clear of how a butler should act in a problematic situation. A butler must be patient and must serve without any hesitation and dignity is an important key aspect to be a great butler and Stevens then speaks about a great butler who always wears 'Professionalism' as a suit like gentlemen. He further tells that nothing can tear their suit. This portrays Stevens sense of Professionalism and his character.

Dignity is the quality that Stevens has in his blood. The very first thought that came to him when asked about dignity is of his father. A similar kind of attitude can be found in Stevens' character too. He has worked as a Butler for more than thirty-five years without giving any importance to his personal life. Stevens is not bothered about his father's death. He has a soft corner for Miss Kenton but professionalism becomes a barrier for him to enjoy his life. He locked himself in the Darlington hall serving Lord Darlington and the present employer Mr. Farraday. It was this gentleman who allowed Stevens to tour England. During this tour, Stevens realizes that he has lost many precious moments of his life just by locking himself in Darlington hall serving for more than thirty-five years. Just like his father Stevens has never shown any reluctance towards the work given to him.

This expedition made Stevens understand how much time he had wasted without looking after his own needs. At the beginning of the road trip, Stevens says that he took this trip for a professional purpose to meet Miss Kenton who is also one of the employees of Lord Darlington. Stevens felt the presence of Kenton as he faced a new problem. One can also understand that though Stevens had feeling for Kenton he never dared to confess it. But as the novel proceeds, it is understood that he is in love with Kenton but he didn't give much importance to it because he served Lord Darlington. After Miss Kenton got married Stevens meets her at the end of his travel and Kenton confess her love for Stevens. "For instance, I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you, Mr. Stevens" (251).

The most devastating incident that happened in Stevens' life is his Father's death. Miss Kenton took charge of his father because Stevens was busy with the conference that was held in the Darlington hall and he is in charge of it. Being a son, Stevens should have taken some time to look after his father. Stevens has always been busy that he has lost his sad and happy moments in his life. When Miss Kenton gave Stevens the news about the death of his father he wasn't much moved. "I'm very busy just now, Miss Kenton. In a little perhaps. In that case, Mr. Stevens, will you permit me to close his eyes?" (111). This act of Stevens shows that his profession was more important to him than his personal life. Throughout the novel, Stevens decoded the term dignity with various incidents that occurred in his life. "dignity was something one possessed or did not by a fluke of nature; and if one did not self-evidently have it, to strive after it would be as futile as an ugly woman trying to make herself beautiful." (34).

Stevens engrossed into the professional life which made him to forget his personal space. Towards the end of the novel Stevens understands that there is no use in thinking about the past or the happiness that he has lost. "You've got to enjoy yourself, The evening's the best part of the day. You've done your day's work. Now you can put your feet up and enjoy it." (256). He rather takes everything in a positive way and said that he will work more hard to satisfy his new employer Mr. Farraday.

References:

Agarwal, Shikha. "Thematic concerns in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro." *IJELR*, vol.5, no.2, 2018, pp.110-114.

Baena, Victoria. "The Remains of the Day Themes: Dignity and Greatness ." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jun 2017. Web. 28 Aug 2022.

Haywood, Ryan Grant "A Quest for Closure: Stevens's Journey in Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*." *Gradesaver*, <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-remains-of-the-day/essays/a-quest-for-closure-stevens-journey-in-ishiguro-s-remains-of-the-day>. 18 Aug 2022.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. Faber & Faber, 1989.