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TEACHER-TAUGHT RELATIONSHIP & SELF-DISCOVERY IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S
THE GHOST OF VASU MASTER

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Abstract

The study examines the evolving dynamics of the teacher-taught relationship in Githa Hariharan's *The Ghost of Vasu Master*. It highlights the power dynamics, influence, and emotional complexities that shape their connection. The study further explores Vasu Master's authority and mentorship impact on Chetna's growth and perception of herself. It investigates the psychological and emotional effects of this relationship on both characters, digging into themes of trust, manipulation, and self-discovery. By employing a textual analysis approach, the research explores the narrative techniques employed by Hariharan to portray the intricate dynamics between teacher and student. Set against the backdrop of a small coastal town in India, the narrative weaves between the past and the present, revealing fragments of Vasu Master's life. The ghost in the title is the past memories of Vasu Master which continue to haunt him. The healing begins when Mani his pupil takes entry into his life. Their connection is multifaceted, characterized by mentorship, intellectual camaraderie, and a deep sense of trust. Through its profound introspection, the paper challenges traditional notions of authority and mentorship, revealing the transformative power of human connections that transcend the boundaries of time and place. The narrative serves as a poignant exploration of the transformative potential of human connections and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Ultimately, this research paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the profound themes of mentorship and self-discovery in *The Ghost of Vasu Master*.

Keywords: teacher-student relationship, mentorship, identity, social dynamics, self-discovery

Introduction

In the literary realm, there are voices that transcend boundaries, challenge conventions and illuminate the intricacies of human experiences. Githa Hariharan, an exceptional writer, is

undoubtedly one of those luminaries who dares to push the boundaries of storytelling. With her evocative prose and unwavering exploration of social and political complexities, Hariharan has carved a distinct place for herself in the world of literature. She was raised in Bombay and Manila

after being born in Coimbatore in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu in 1954. Her works often navigate the rich tapestry of Indian society capturing the intricacies of its history, culture, values, and socio-political landscape. Hariharan's narratives challenge ingrained societal norms and expose the fault lines within our collective consciousness. Her stories become windows into alternate worlds, where characters navigate the tumultuous terrains of personal freedom, societal expectations, and the relentless pursuit of truth. In all her novels of her, she deals with the theme of social, and political issues. Githa Hariharan's diverse body of work includes short stories, theses, novels, newsprint editorials, and thought-provoking articles.

Among her creations, "The Ghosts of Vasu Master" stands out as a captivating narrative centred around the enigmatic professor, Vasu Master, and his student, Mani. This novel boasts unique and experimental storytelling elements, showcasing Hariharan's innovative approach to weaving a compelling tale. It highlights Vasu's earlier life experiences as well as the interaction between a teacher and a pupil.

Madhu Jain regards this novel as, "a marvellously written book with wit as corrosive as dry ice and sharpness which can pin down vague niceties like a needle through a butterfly, and the ability to anthropomorphize animate and inanimate life. . . Hariharan takes in her large fabulist sweep most of the problems of India: from post-colonial hang-ups or blues, clerk mentalities and, allegorically India's perennially troublesome unity-in-diversity and lots more of . . . Big issues of life." (Web)

Vasu's retirement from PG School Elipettai appears to be the culmination of a forty-year teaching career, but it actually marks the beginning of something new. He starts to take a step closer into his subconscious mind in an effort to comprehend the real purpose and essence of his life. The plot revolves around Vasu Master's psychological issues and how he handles them as a result. Through the protagonist's interactions with his learner, the author explores the very concept of education using

imagination and fables like the Panchtantra. Vasu Master's life is a good vehicle for expressing human feelings. Following his retirement, he begins writing down his views, experiences, and reflections about teaching. He starts instructing Mani. It's a process of self-discovery. He accepts this as a sort of challenge while educating Mani about life's morals, really reliving some of his own childhood experiences. The use of flora and animals to illustrate a lesson to youngsters in the narrative reminded us of the Panchatantra legends. Here, Vasu Master instructs Mani to use the same concept. Vasu Master's history haunts him, so he doesn't only live in the here and now. He seeks to better understand the present moment and now.

1.1 Self-Discovery

In Githa Hariharan's 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master,' the struggle for identity is associated with the journey of the mind across time and space. Vasu Master's life is filled with human emotions. He taught English at P.G.Boys' School. Vasu Master's retirement from the school is the starting point for the narrative. His pupils gave him a notepad as a parting gift. He begins to write down his observations regarding teaching in the very same notepad. He spent most of his days in solitude until the process of self-discovery is accelerated by the entrance of Mani, his pupil from the coaching class. Mani, an abnormal boy who cannot speak or write, carries a troubled past that has disrupted his normal development. Despite various attempts by doctors, teachers, and schools to help Mani, they have been unsuccessful. In this compelling narrative, Mani's presence becomes a catalyst for both characters, as they embark on a journey to find solutions to their personal identity.

Mani is mocked by the entire town. Even his parents, who were sick of him, wanted to get rid of him. The school principals frequently confess the following about Mani:

"We don't know what is wrong with him and we can't give him special attention, they said. It is not our job, Mani disturbs the class."(11)

Vasu Master accepts the assignment to train Mani because he has certain objectives and aspirations. He follows the Gurukula educational philosophy, which places a strong focus on the importance of a tight relationship between the teacher and the pupils. Vasu Master glides through his own repetitive recollections from childhood while educating Mani. He discovers that Mani cannot be treated by books, education, chalkboards, doctors, or hospitals. He did this by telling him a number of stories and fables, including Grey Mouse and the Blue Bottle and Grey Mouse and the Black Crow, as well as tales about spiders, fireflies, wingless wasps, and other critters. The use of plants and animals to teach youngsters a lesson in the story strongly reminded us of the Panchatantra legends. This narrative also includes elements of a famous Bollywood movie "Taare Zameen Par". Here, when Vasu Master notices that Mani is impatient and aggravated with pens, pencils, and notebooks, he instructs Mani using the same concept. And in doing so, he imparts to us the actual significance and range of meanings of the words "intellect" and "love."

Vasu Master doesn't have much instant success with Mani, but he does discover something—"the stories"—that at least appears to keep him intrigued and interested. He mentored and loved Mani as if he were his own son. He began to paint his dreams and visions, which brought back memories of his wedding to Mangala, his grandpa practising rasayanam, his grandmother, his days in graduate school, etc. Vasu Master was not exposed to proper stories growing up. He learns that the stories he heard as a child were very different from those other kids heard. He now recognises their effectiveness and finds them helpful for himself. At this point, Mani's training with Vasu Master has reached a psychological stage, and the latter is attempting to assist Mani in overcoming whatever personal obstacles and burdens that the latter may be carrying. But now that he can see their effectiveness, he also finds them beneficial for himself. Vasu Master doesn't just live in the here and now; he is also plagued by his past. He recalls events from his youth and his past in an effort to comprehend the present.

The Ghosts of Vasu Master is a novel that deals with self-discovery. It is a key tactic for fiction writing and is employed by Githa Hariharan. In reality, self-discovery is a psychological process in which the main character looks back on his own life, including his acts, accomplishments, and failures, utilising self-knowledge and self-memories from the past. It is, in a nutshell, the process of being aware of oneself. Through "self-discovery," one may get insight into their personality and seek to improve any weaknesses that are holding them back from succeeding in their careers.

1.2 Realm of Narratives

Three distinct narrators, one for each of the novel's three sections, are used. The first is a collection of tales that Vasu Master related to Mani, his mentally handicapped pupil. The confrontations between Vasu Master and the spectres of his recollections make up the second segment. Stories told by many characters in the story are featured on the third track, which Vasu Master listens to. The book's chapters are laid out in the form of rambling narratives. Vasu Master uses personal tales, parables, and allegories to make observations and analyse himself and how they affect Mani. According to Vikash Bhardwaj and Surender Kumar:

"Vasu Master begins to weave a web of fables and parables and tales of undigested 'karma' with more real-life images to inspire, to teach and to cure Mani of his unexplainable reticence and defiance. Through these fascinating and fantastic stories, he travels into his own childhood and also into his innermost recesses of fear and weaknesses. He recounts scenes from his past, trying to understand the present."

The Ghosts of Vasu Master addresses all of the unprocessed aspects of life (karma) that have left him with chronic diarrhoea throughout his professional life. The tale shifts between a number of discursive frames that are arranged throughout the novel, aside from the experiencing and narrating selves. There is the materialist outlook of his son Vishnu, the genuine spirituality of Venkatesan's Swami, and the aspirational activity of Gopu. Vasu's

mind is complicated by the animal fable universe, his wife Mangala's ghost story, her friend Jameela's wordless tapestries, and her own fable, as well as his memoir of his career as a teacher and his more intimate autobiographical musings, his father's ayurvedic lectures, Mani's profound muteness, and all of these other factors.

Divyaranjan Bahuguna writes in an article, "Githa Hariharan finds herself at the nexus of the structures of narrative, education, gendering, postcolonialism, and postmodernism. As these multiple stories bring many internal conflicts. The weaving of different experiences within the various characters and their personalities puzzles. In fact, Vasu is pretty puzzled by the jumble of memories, stories, and images that seem to come to him of their own accord. He often says "For some reason, I thought of" whatever story comes next; he seems not to know. He begins the same linear form and the same question-answer rhetoric. It is an intermingling of images in which the angles of refraction and reflection are for us to chart. There are temporal mirrors of experiencing selves, narrating self, and reader. In this wilderness of mirrors, Vasu feels lost, confused, and sidetracked." (Bahuguna)

2.1 Vasu Master as a Teacher

Vasu Master, the protagonist and narrator of the book, reflects on his presence in this world, his beliefs, and his aspirations in terms of teaching. He thinks back on his former recollections, which carry with them strange dreams and ghosts while feeling lonely and sleepless. In reality, one should combine prior experiences with the present to forge a brand-new future. In this regard, the renowned contemporary English poet T.S. Eliot states, "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." In the same manner, Vasu Master recalls his earlier recollections and paints fancies and visions to provide fresh perspectives on an ideal world.

Vasu Master describes the challenging task of teaching Mani in the following words, "But Mani was a puzzle; the kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand

Mani, even in part; if I was to know what I was to him and he to me and if I were to find myself before it was too late." (99). Vasu's views on education and knowledge are portrayed in the words, "...all of us are pupils and teachers. While there is life in each of us, we learn and we teach."(28) Making Mani brave and confident is the major goal of Vasu's Master's instruction. Vasu Master is unfamiliar to Mani because he is the teacher. Vasu has attempted to give him the confidence to blend in with society by telling him several legends. In reality, he is also on a self-discovery trip as he looks for answers to his own physical and mental problems as he instructs Mani. The storyline relies heavily on Hariharan's use of Panchatantra tales to instruct Mani.

Vasu's health is another problem in his life; the reason for his physical condition is unknown. The first chapter depicts Vasu's first trip to the doctor:

"I sat on the chair, waiting for the old man to tell me what was wrong with me. I seemed to have sat there before, on a similar wooden chair, waiting for the man across to speak. The man held the key to the secrets of my body."(1) But the doctor admits defeat, "I can't find a thing wrong here... Maybe you should try something else... Have you considered homoeopathy? Or Ayurveda?" (1)

While seeking ways to manage his physical ailment, Vasu is investigating alternate methods of teaching and learning as well as techniques to heal the mind. In addition to other tales, Vasu Master tells us about the Grey Mouse, Blue Bottle, Black Crow, Spider, Python, and a plethora of flies. Each of these tales has a twofold meaning that is connected to Vasu Master and Mani. Grey Mouse and the Fly Blue Bottle, which stood in for Vasu and Mani, respectively, were the two most well-known tales. Two flies who stand in for Vasu and Mani, respectively, in these tales are Grey Mouse and Blue Bottle. Vasu's story is used as a model, with Grey Mouse filling in for the Master. He is unable to leave his mouse tunnel since he is terrified of the outer world. Mahesh Kale opines, "The Grey Mouse is not a mouse, but a person in grey profession ie, teaching."

Vasu Master agrees with Gandhiji when he said that it is imperative to absorb and rejuvenate the current wisdom of the world. As a result, the job of a teacher is portrayed as difficult and rigid. The political and social backdrop of a nation has an impact on the teaching process as well, thus teaching methods must also be appropriate for that culture. In the same way that Vishnu Sharma instructed the ignorant children of King Amar Sakti, Vasu Master instructs Mani via his stories. The dreams of animals like the Grey Mouse, which he revealed to Mani, are as important to Vasu Master. The reason why animals may dream could be because of Vasu Master. The same number of questions are present in Grey Mouse's thinking as they are in Vasu Master's. Grey Mouse had a dream about everything he had seen, heard, and thought of earlier in the day. He also dreamed about Blue Bottle, the flies, wasps, and other insects. He once resolved not to quiver or quake after seeing a cat in his dream. He caught sight of a chilly pond's edge. In a dream, anything is conceivable, including the impossibilities. In one of his dreams, Vasu Master once saw Mani's visage as an egg. Vasu Master is deeply devoted to Mani, in reality. Dreams are very beneficial for Vasu Master in bringing back memories since they bring to life many events from his former life.

When he wakes up, he sheds fresh light on his dreams. After awakening, he occasionally experienced terror, as he himself admits:

"But that night was different; I woke up the next morning with a fear that made me examine my body once again, very carefully. (121)

2.2 Teacher-Student Relationship:

In essence, the fables are all symbolic depictions of Vasu's existence and life. Mani welcomes these communications. He tries to speak and uses his own name, "Mani," as he learns to be courteous and has his confidence in others restored. The stories have an incredibly good impact on Mani. He picked up manners and even acquired artistic talent. But most significantly, he has regained his confidence in others. The moment Mani speaks to

Vasu verbally for the first time and uses his own name, "Mani," Vasu has achieved his goal.

Vasu gains a great deal from this partnership as well. Vasu may view his own history via the mirror that is Mani. A teacher must, above all, be a mother, according to Vasu's father. Vasu has been successful in producing a womb of legends and has, like a mother, given birth to an advanced and knowledgeable Mani. We are brought back to the thriving ancient Indian educational institutions by Vasu Master's reflection on the responsibilities of a teacher. Due to the intimate teacher-student connection it fosters, Vasu brings back the Gurukulam method from the past.

In exchange, the student gives his tutor his whole personal attention and the instructor gives his entire personal attention to the student's wellbeing. Modern educational practices are called into question by The Ghosts of Vasu Master. It is a re-examination of the limited text selection that pupils are subjected to in today's shallow educational system. The legitimacy of Western educational and medical resources is questioned repeatedly throughout the tale. The shell of Vasu's anxieties melts as he teaches Mani about himself, and he discovers solutions to the many problems he has in life. This book depicts the story of a teacher and a student who support and enhance one another as they explore their true selves. The interplay between the academically learned and the undeveloped person is shown in The Ghosts of Vasu Master.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan has succeeded in portraying a charming and beautiful relationship between teacher and pupil via this delightful tale, where both parties understand one another. When one is absent, the other gets left out. Vasu's forty-year teaching career, therefore, appears to be coming to an end with his retirement from PG School Elipettai, but it actually marks the beginning. He starts writing down his opinions, encounters, and musings about teaching when he retires. He begins teaching Mani. It's a process of learning about oneself. He saw this as a challenge, and while he taught Mani about life's ideals, he really relived parts of his own formative

years. We were reminded of the Panchatantra legends by how the story used plants and animals to teach children a lesson. The same idea is used by Vasu Master to train Mani here. In an effort to comprehend the essence of his life and its actual purpose, he starts to delve into his inner thoughts. As Vasu educates Mani about himself, his fears begin to dissolve as he learns how to deal with all of life's difficulties. In this book, a teacher and a pupil uncover their genuine selves with one another's help and enhancement. The Ghosts of Vasu Master depicts the interaction between the intellectually sophisticated and the underdeveloped individual. The story focuses on Vasu Master's psychological issues and how he handles them as a consequence. As a result, the story powerfully illustrates the bond between teachers and students and how both would be lacking without the other. Both contribute in some way to each other's personal development and improvement. Through this beautiful novel, Githa Hariharan has succeeded to represent a lovely and beautiful bond of teacher and taught, where both comprehend each other. One is incomplete without the other.

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