



TEACHER – STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S *THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER*

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ABSTRACT

Relationship is the bondage in which the Indian society prevails. Githa Hariharan being an Indian women writer has written many novels and short stories. In all her novels she deals with the theme of social, political issues. She also deals with problems faced by women in Indian society. One another theme is relationship. In all her novels, she deals with some kind of relationship. In the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* Hariharan deals with the relationship between a teacher and a student. She also says about the importance of teaching and education. Similarly in this novel, Hariharan says how Vasu Master put his effort to teach Mani and his life after retirement. This paper deals about the relationship between Vasu Master and Mani.

Key Words: Relationship, teaching, education, teacher, student.

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The Indo – Anglian literature comprises of many women writers in English. In such a condition women writers have been playing an important role as a representative. Most of the Indian women novelists deal with the issues of women and their problems. These Indian women novelists have high knowledge of life and it reveals in their writings. These writers pave way for the younger generation of Indian women novelists. Women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair have contributed a lot to Indian English Literature.

Among the younger generation writers, one notable novelist is Githa Hariharan. Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. She

is known for her writings which represent the Indian society she deals with modernity in her novels. Her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) brought fame for her in the literary world. Hariharan won the Commonwealth writer's prize for her first novel in 1993. In this novel she deals with mother – daughter relationship. Hariharan's second novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* was published in 1994. Her third novel was *When Dreams travel* (1999) followed by *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). She has also written short stories and articles and columns for newspaper. The main theme in Githa Hariharan's novels is searching for self – identity. She has also dealt with the theme of social, political and cultural issues in her novels.

This paper deals with the relationship between a retired teacher and a student in the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*.

The Ghosts of Vasu Master

This novel of Githa Hariharan is extremely different from her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. All the novels of Githa Hariharan comprises of plural form such as 'faces', 'ghosts', 'times', 'dreams' and 'histories'. This is a remarkable feature of Githa Hariharan.

Importance of relationship

In Indian culture relationship plays a significant role. Relationship is a link or bondage between individuals. This bondage is a base for a healthy society. It may be between father – son, mother – daughter, sisters, teacher – student, etc. Since Githa Hariharan is an Indian women novelist, she deals with the theme of relationship between a teacher and student. She reveals the importance of relationship between individuals.

Relationship between a teacher and student

Teaching is one of the best professions. A teacher is responsible for a good society, because a teacher produces proficient youngsters. Dr. Radhakrishnan is one of the best and because of that we Indians are celebrating his birthday as teacher's day. A child spends most of his/her time with its teacher. So, teacher – student relationship is very important. Let us the relationship of Vasu master and his student Mani.

As said above *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* deals about the bondage between Vasu, the teacher and Mani, his student. Hariharan deals with the emotions, feelings of a retired school master. This novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* has three epigraphs:

"The Entire world is teacher to the intelligent and foe to the unintelligent" - Charaka

"We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly followed"- Shakespeare

"I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non – violence are as old as the hills"- Gandhi. (GVM ix)

Vasu master's life

Teaching is an active activity. Similarly Vasu Master was an active teacher during his profession.

Vasu master was an English teacher in P.G. Boys School in a small town Elipetti. The novel begins with the retirement of Vasu. The significant element in this novel is ending of Vasu's profession is the beginning of the novel. It paves the way for the beginning of Vasu's new life, that is, life after retirement. Even the retirement Vasu was not satisfied in his profession. Even though he teaches the same class for forty plus years he was not able to read the mentality of the students. Later he realizes that he has wasted his life for forty years. The retirement life paves him a way to discover and understand himself and his life. Hariharan portrays this novel from the present to the past and from the past to the present.

During the retirement life, Vasu wish to teach. So he decided to teach for four students. One among the four students is papaya – headed Mani. Mani was an abnormal person. He looks like a mentally – retorted child. Vasu wishes to prove his talent by teaching Mani. But his son Vishnu says Vasu to take rest and to spend his retirement life in a peaceful way. But Vasu did not wish to act as a common man. He wants to do something experimental in his life. So Vasu thought that to teach Mani is great challenge for him. Only after his retirement Vasu wakes up and came to know that he was a teacher. Vasu master thinks of his past and he links that to the present.

"So I began the second half of my teaching career on a quieter but far more ambitious scale than the first." (TGVM P. 13)

Character of Vasu

As said before Vasu is doing experiment in his life. The character of Vasu is very important because he is the central figure in the novel. Vasu's character is revealed through the thoughts about himself and thoughts of others. Not only that, it is also revealed by what Vasu thinks about others. Vasu's personality changes from time to time according to the situation.

Vasu master decided to write an essay on '**Four Decades in a Classroom**'. But he was not able to write because of the past memories which disturb him. His last words to his students were;

“All of us are pupils and teachers. While there is life in each of us, we learn and we teach” (GVM 28).

Vasu master ideas on teaching remind us of the ancient education which prevailed in India. The Gurukulam way of teaching is the best method of teaching. Only in this method there prevails a direct relationship between a teacher and a student. Not only that the teacher gives importance to the welfare of the student. Vasu teaches his student by telling stories which he heard from his grandmother. He wanted to relate these stories in his real life situation.

Vasu – Mani relationship

Vasu master undertook Mani as his student. Mani was a slow learner. He was a twelve year old boy but he seems to behave like a seven year old boy. That means Mani was a mentally disorder person. He was not able to speak. Many schools and many private tutors were tried for Mani. But no one was able to teach Mani. And at last Mani was brought to Vasu master. A wonderful thing is Vasu also wish to teach Mani. Mani cannot be taught in the method of teaching common student. He needs something different. So Vasu has to devise new techniques by implementing new ideas from what he exposes in his teaching experience. So he thinks about all the ghosts like his mother Laxmi, wife Mangala, his father who was an Ayurveda doctor. These ghosts teach him an alternative method to teach Mani.

Vasu master educates and cures upto his extent. The process of education of Mani begins as Vasu master started to tell stories that he heard. While teaching Mani, Vasu remembers his life from his childhood. Vasu was not able to teach Mani by using pen, pencils and notebooks, because Mani gets irritated on seeing those items. Finally, he decides to teach Mani by telling stories. Mani got entertained and he was interested on hearing those stories. Githa Hariharan uses fantasies, fables and imaginary characters in this novel. Hariharan uses tales from Panchatantra and it helps Vasu to teach his student Mani. Vasu feels that the cow that lived in the tree, the cob-web in the corner of his room is the company he has in his retirement life.

Mascot of Melting Pot

Vasu starts to narrate a story of a fox. In this story, a fox became the king of a forest unfortunately. The animals became lazy. The fox did not like this. So he arranged a meeting and instructed he animals not to kill any one for their prey. The animals started to follow the words of the fox and so all the animals became the equal citizens of the forest. The forest was named as ‘Melting Pot’. After some years a strange creature was born and it was named as ‘Mascot’. The old fox died and so all the animals take care of Mascot. Mascot was allowed to wander freely in the forest. But the young fox suggests Mascot not to wander freely in the forest. This was the last warning given to Mascot. So now Mascot was left alone. And once again the forest becomes a jungle. Thus the story ends.

After finishing the story, Vasu master looks at Mani. For the first time, Mani shows some kind of expression in his face. So Vasu also feels happy on seeing Mani’s reaction to the story.

Lions and Tigers

This story was said to Vasu master by his grandmother. Now, at present Vasu says this story to his student Mani. Once there lived an old woman and a little boy in a forest. The old woman was in the habit of cutting wood for their daily needs. But the little boy would not assist her in her work, because he thought that the forest as full of danger. But so far he did not see any wild animals in that forest. Once, the old woman narrated a story about lions and tigers. The little boy was not able to differentiate between the real tiger and the story tiger. One night the boy thought that the tiger came into his hut and he ran away and jumped into the river and drowned. Later it was come to know that it was not a real tiger and it was an imagination tiger.

Through this story Vasu master taught Mani about the difference of reality and imagination. Vasu says yet another story of ‘Now’, ‘Old’ and ‘Timeless’. This story was said to him by his father to cure a patient and make him normal. After hearing the story the patient also behaves as normal person. Similarly Vasu also wants to this method to make Mani a normal person. So he says this story to Mani.

The story of Grey Mouse and Blue Bottle

One afternoon, while Vasu master was waiting for Mani, he looks at a crow. Suddenly he thinks of Grey Mouse. The Grey Mouse and the crow cannot be friends, but they remain as neighbours. The crow always watches the Grey mouse activities. Once while Mani and Vasu were sitting in the house they came to notice the baby fly grew into a beautiful shiny Blue Bottle fly.

Then I began, Grey mouse worked harder and harder with Blue Bottle and made plans for them together because he could no longer conceive of a life without Blue Bottle. (GVM 251)

One day, the Blue Bottle caught in the spider's web. It is struggling to come out of the web. The Grey Mouse started to love the Blue Bottle. One day Grey Mouse came out from the mouse hole for sunlight and fresh air. Grey Mouse is always thinking about Blue bottle. Grey mouse tells Blue bottle about a heart forest. By telling the story of heart forest Grey taught a lesson to Blue bottle. That is danger is always there for all. Similarly danger may come to Blue Bottle either in the form of spider, bandicoot or crow.

Comparison of Grey Mouse and Vasu Master

The Grey Mouse is compared to Vasu master who is the central figure. Similarly Blue Bottle is compared to Mani who needs the help of Vasu Master. Grey Mouse shows confidence as Vasu master and so Blue Bottle that is Mani will survive in a good manner.

Improvement of Mani

When Vasu master started to teach Mani, Mani was not able to understand anything. He did not show any kind of expression. So, Vasu master was upset and worried. But at the same time, when Vasu started to teach Mani by telling stories, he saw a great difference in Mani, because Mani was able to understand and he is giving response to stories. This the beginning of Mani's learning. This makes Vasu happy. The fact is that Mani was not able to speak.

Achievement of Vasu

Vasu was dissatisfied in his teaching during his profession in P.G. Boys School. So he wanted make use of his retirement life. So he decided to

teach Mani, a weak student who was not able to understand anything and he was neglected by many teachers. He took this as a challenge and he succeeds in this. The main reason for his achievement is, he got down from his position as a teacher. He goes along with Mani. He uses the method which kindles Mani psychologically. By this achievement Vasu feels proud about himself, because only now he realizes his personality.

Conclusion

So, Hariharan says about the importance of teaching and a teacher in this novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Not only that, she also says the importance of relationship between a teacher and a student. Only because of good relationship Vasu Master is able to teach Mani and finds improvement in his education. Hariharan also says about a life after the retirement of a teacher and how he/she can fulfill his retirement life. So, from this it is understood that relationship is important between individuals.

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