



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FALLOUT OF VASU MASTER IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S *THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER*

R.MANIMOZHI¹, Dr.R.SHANTHI²

¹Assistant Professor of English & Research Scholar, A.D.M.College for Women (Autonomous), Nagapattinam

²Associate Professor of English & Research Guide, A.V.V.M. Sri Pushpam College (Autonomous), Poondi, Thanjavur Dt.



R.MANIMOZHI

ABSTRACT

Literature is a study of human psyche. It helps the writers to encompass several genres to present the hidden meaning of life. The contemporary Indian English writers have brought to light various hidden under world sufferings and problem. Psychological harmony is predominant for an individual to lead a peaceful life. **Gita Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*** deals with the psychological fallout of retirement – the suffocating emptiness, the feeling of displacement and the loss of individuality of Vasu master, the protagonist. According to Freud, the psychological fallout is due to the influence of unconscious behavior and experience. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. The unconscious also contains what Freud calls **laws of transformation**. These are the principles that govern the process of repression and sublimation. In general, the unconscious serves the theoretical function of making the relation between childhood experience and adult behavior intelligible. Vasu master too undergoes various psychological conflicts. Thus the paper attempts to analyse the psychological sufferings of Vasu Master after his retirement as a school teacher.

Key words: psychological conflicts, sufferings, subconscious mind, self-discovery.

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problem. Psychological harmony is predominant for an individual to lead a peaceful life. The modern psychological novel reflects the deeper and more searching inwardness of the present scenario. The thoughts and feelings of the characters show the

way to identify the self-consciousness. **Githa Hariharan's *The Ghost of Vasu Master*** deals with the psychological fallout of retirement – the suffocating emptiness, the feeling of displacement and the loss of individuality of Vasu master, the protagonist.

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Githa Hariharan explores the concept that the unconscious mind can be studied through self-discovery. She is also interested in the depiction of complex layers of the psyche of her characters. She used fantasy, fable and several imaginary characters. The novel has been divided into forty eight chapters. These are tales, anecdotes and incidents, related to Vasu Master's life. ***The Ghosts of Vasu Master*** displays several levels of storytelling. Vasu Master not only tells stories, he also hears stories narrated by others. The tales narrated in the novel is taken from the Mahabharata and from folklores.

Multidimensional vibrations of voices are witnessed in the novel. Hariharan has used fantasy, fable and several imaginary characters to highlight the psychological waves of Vasu Master. Vasu Master is the protagonist of the novel and shares his story with several other characters who narrate their own stories. Every chapter is organized as an independent tale; it shows the innovative quality of the novel. Even sometimes there is no logical link between the events in a chapter. The single chapter looks independent one. It is like a monologue.

Vasu Master, the central character of the novel has recently retired from his job. The story of the novel is about a retired school teacher and his

memories about his past life. He gets a Note book as a gift from his students on the occasion of his retirement. He plans to write an essay entitled '**Four Decades in a Classroom**' as a guide to young teachers. But he is unable to write about his teaching experiences because his memory about his past disturbs him. Though, he is retired from his duties as a school teacher, he intends to begin the second half of his teaching career. Vasu Master starts his tuition classes; Mani a slow learner along with three more students joined the class. Mani is twelve when he comes to Vasu Master, but "with, it seemed, the brain of a six or a seven-year-old"(Hariharan, 11). The boy was called as Papaya-Head Mani and he never opens his mouth at any situation. Vasu Master took this as an opportunity to prove his experience as a teacher and he said,

"Of course I will teach him, I heard myself say, bringing the interview to an abrupt end. I accepted my new charge immediately because I knew Mani was not like the other three tuition boys. They seemed bored and lazy, and I often thought that they richly deserved the two doses they got of the same lessons, once in school and then again in my room". (Hariharan, 10)

The new situation away from the school atmosphere provokes him to recall the past memories and to discover himself. However, there is no common connection among the stories Vasu Master told series of stories and several fables to Mani. Vasu Master doesn't live only in the present: the past memories also haunt him, and part of what he is

trying to do is to "make peace with memory". Mangala is Vasu Master's wife. It is a tragedy on the part of Mangala that though she gave Vasu Master two sons, Vishnu and Venu, he reminds her more as a cloudy memory than as a person. The focus of his memory always lays somewhere else and she always remains in the background. His memory:

"I found myself speculating about her real self, a woman who had remained as obscure as my forgotten mother. At this distance, the Mangala I recalled was pale and insubstantial; a figure perennially on the retreat. I always saw her in my mind against seashore in the background, the monotonous slosh and thud of waves against rock

and sand drowning out all possibility of words". (Hariharan, 41)

Vasu Master is often disturbed by the memories of his father who have passed away some thirty years ago, ghost of his dead wife Mangala and her friend Jameela and his grandmother. He dreamt that after his father's death, he and Mangala stayed for a few months in one room. His mind was filled with memories of grief. He saw his father's skull split open in the fire. As Vasu Master says,

"I never think of this room. Of course I lived in it, as I have said, only for a few months. But perhaps I have also felt just a little superstitious about the place. Even when lit by something as unreliable and treacherous as my memory, I see in it my father's skull as it was, the intact but hollow frame that confronted me one last time before it split open in the crackling fire that engulfed it". (Hariharan, 121)

When he awoke he saw nothing. Once he had a dream about Mangala's journey. He remembered his journey towards Madras with Mangala and their sons Vishnu and Venu. Mangala told stories about ghost. She is expert in narrating hundreds of ghost stories. "Eliamma Goes Fishing" was the story told by her. When Vasu remembered Eliamma, he saw 'Begum Three-in-one', the ghosts of Eliamma, Mangala and Jameela. He remembers, "Eliamma, Mangala and Jameela were, in my mind at least, ineluctably linked, always hand in hand. But though one had gone ahead of the other, both Eliamma and Mangala were receding ghosts". (Hariharan, 131)

Vasu Master remembers his father's house as well as his grandfather and grandmother's house in Nageswaram. As the psychological father Freud says, 'The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.' Every night he recalls the landscape of Nageswaram in his dreams. He says,

"The slim, dark coconut trees melted into the night. The trunks, though I could see them from memory, had completely merged with the gathering darkness; but we saw an occasional flash of rustling

fronds or a clump of large shiny nuts". (Hariharan, 253)

His grandmother did not believe in ghosts, but Mangala believed in it. The novel is a long narrative in prose explaining the actions of fictitious people. Githa Hariharan depicts a highly complex work which pictures the human condition and human action.

Hariharan presents the novel with the past, present and future to give the novel a touch of thrilling and suspense. She also succeeds in portraying Vasu Master as a remarkable orator. A dynamic series of painful events have marked a drastic turning point in his life. The Ghosts of Vasu Master is an intensely self-reflexive act and witnesses the displacement, emancipation, temper, sentimentalism, discomfort. Finally, the readers can trace out the soul of Vasu Master fighting against many violent inner forces with unfortunate destiny.

Psychoanalysis is a tool to explain the human behavior in a broad way. It is not merely about the problematic behavior of the human psyche, it is merely about the passive recipient of love and also it helps to identify the sufferings of the subconscious mind. This novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is used as a tool by Githa Hariharan to expose the inner conflict of the retired school teacher. He suffers because of the interpretation of the dreams. The psychological fallout of Vasu Master is because of alienation.

Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is a bold attempt in narrative structure.

The past rises up before him and reaches out into present. He is disturbed by the memories of his dead wife Mangala, his ayurvedic father, his long-dead grandmother.

Vasu's world is peopled with ghosts and absences; it is a world of forgetting and remembering. It is a voyage of self-discovery.

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