

## **IDENTITY CRISIS IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S 'THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER'**

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**Abstract:**

*Indian English literature is overwhelmed with the social and cultural ethos of India. It represents Indian scenerio in one sense and Indian psychology in another. Many novelist tries to focus on Indian tradition, religion, society which seen in their surroundings. Some novelists of Indian English writing are revolutionary as they remarkably expose other side the fact lurks on the surface of the society. They bombastically expose the hidden but unraveled truth of the traditional ethos which makes impact on the individual's psychology.*

*Githa Hariharan's novels, short stories, essays, newspaper articles and columns are immensely popular in the contemporary Indian English writing. Githa Hariharan's 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master' (1994) is outstanding novel asserts in-depth psychology of the Indian teacher Vasu Master and his dumb and contented ward Mani.*

**Keywords:** *Identity, Psychology, Self-realization, Education system, Teacher.*

**Introduction:**

Literature is mirror image of human life. It incorporates the threads of human psyche and their action in life. While studying literature, one can study literature as to discover unknown meaning of life. The modern psychological novel presents the deeper and more searching significance of the present scenario. It displays the structure of psychology of modern man. The thoughts and feelings of the personage of the novel show the way to search the self-consciousness. Githa Hariharan's 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master' evinces the self-assertion of a retired teacher Vasu Master whose life becomes meaningless after retirement and shows the loss of individuality.

Githa Hariharan expresses the concept that the unconscious mind can be studied through self-realization. She investigates the complex structure of unconscious psyche of her characters. She takes the reference of Sigmund Freuds' theory of 'Psychoanalysis' from the book 'Art and Literature'. According to Freud, the receipt of psychological fallout is the infamous of

unconscious behavior and experience. Most of the substance of the unconsciousness is unacceptable or unpleasant, for example fillings of pain, distress, anxiety or strife. The unconscious also contains what Freud calls laws of transformation; these are the principles that lead the process of repression and sublimation. In 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master', Vasu Master sustains number of psychological conflicts. Hariharan used tales, incidents and narratives to explore Vasu Master's conscious psychology.

Being the protagonist of the novel, Vasu Master shares past events of his life with several other characters. These other characters of the novel too narrate their own stories. Every chapter is formed as an independent tale; which shows the innovative quality of the novel. It is similar like monologue with a salient listener.

Vasu Master has recently retired as a teacher from P.G. Boy's school, Elipettai. He is the teacher of English language and literature. On his retirement, he gets a note book as a gift from his students. He plans to write an essay entitled "From decades in a classroom" as a guide to young teachers. Instead of his vast teaching experience, he cannot write about his teaching as the past events follow him like Ghosts. Though, after his retirement, he wishes to start the second half of his teaching career. Vasu Master provides tuition classes to teach Mani, a slow learner along with three more students. Mani is a papaya shape head and is dumb and contented child. Vasu Master observes, "It was this Mani who came to me, twelve years old, with, it seemed the brain of a six or seven-year-old" (GVM: 12). Mani was not considered a clever child, or an especially attractive but he was quite and confused one. Vasu Master accept him 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 chare immediately because I knew Mani was not like the other three tuition boys. They seemed bore and lazy, a 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 (GVM: 10).*

The new scenario away from the school atmosphere draws forth reconciliation of the past memories and enables to discover him. This loneliness brings him isolation which leads to the way of memorization of the past. Vasu Master does not stay only in the present; the past life also obsessed him and he is trying to find solace with memories.

The novel reminded the panchatantra stories and the usage of plants and animals to explain a point to children. Vasu Master uses the stories of the past events for teaching to Mani. When he realizes that Mani is impatient and irritated with pens, pencils and notebooks, he employs new tactics and teaches the true meaning of the words intellect and love. Vasu Master does not get quick success with Mani but actually finds at least one thing that has appearance of keeping him amusing and merrymaking. Vasu Master himself wasn't brought up on such stories which are commonly told children in their childhood. He observes that the stories in his childhood which he heard weren't similar with the stories other children heard. Now he observes their strength and discovers them useful for himself. At this level Vasu Master's teaching to Mani arrives at psychological level where he makes an attempt to help Mani to get him free from demons and burdens. At the present stage, he finds their power and finds them useful for himself also. The childhood memories and his past are recounted, all in trying to understand the present. These stories are told in short chapters alternating between events in the present, stories, and recollections, along with speculation and reasoning of Vasu Masters past. The novel is interfused with many stories of Vasu Master that recalls in the process of teaching for Mani and learning for himself.

Vasu Master is living alone in a remote village of Elipetai. His wife Mangala is dead and two sons Vishnu and Venu living in Madras and in Bombay respectively. Vishnu and Venu do not appeared directly in the novel but they write letters to Vasu Master which is the only reference of their appearance. He has no healthy relationship with his colleagues. Due to these aspects, he has strong feelings of loneliness. He always feels nostalgic, remembering his childhood, his grandmother, his father and his grandmother and his wife who split his personality-both mentally and physically, adds to his miseries. He often says: "I am not sure what different pieces have to do with one another, I am digressing" (GVM: 17). A teacher with both internal and external conflicts cannot work as a good teacher. He cannot keep his students away

from ignorance and illiteracy. As a human being, he seems to be unsuccessful for keeping relations and balance his own life. Vasu tries to fill the gap of his life after retirement and to restore his title of 'Vasu Master' in the real sense. Vasu accepts Mani as his only ally, who can contribute him past in words and the solid hope of future. Vasu realizes that it is the time for which he has been waiting all these years, for a new beginning. He wakes up to find himself dead as he depicts his condition through the lines of Franz Kafka, who says, "a man didn't know that he existed until one day he awoke to find himself dead" (GVM: 24). It is this unusual stage of life he tries to find out 'self' through meaningful teaching and providing 'healing' for Mani as well as himself he says:

*But Mani was a puzzle; the kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part; if I was to know I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late (GVM: 99).*

Hariharan portrays Vasu as her mouthpiece to comment on the education system, teaching method and ancient education system. Vasu Master conveys the idea of a teacher and student in his speech of retirement as:

*Today well will just talk about the things you have learnt, want to learn, and more than everything also, about what a pupil is, and what a teacher is my parting words to you, children, is that all of us are pupils and teachers. While there is life in each of us, we learn and we teach (GVM: 28).*

He remembers the table of mouse asked a wise snake that he wants to be a teacher. The snake answered, "you have to first become a judge, an ideologue, a priest and a doctor" (GVM: 29). Vasu Master further conveys that a teacher is like mother who 'grow a womb' of knowledge and learning that nurtures, then delivers. (GVM: 30). Vasu Master's efforts to teach Mani emancipate the way to find out broadest meaning of teaching; he is a kind of psychologist than school teachers that introspects the process of teaching in scientific ways.

In the novel Vasu Master and Mani are almost equal and parallel as both causes-one from identity crisis and other form the problematic mind. They have a kind of "hole" which needs to fill the gap of the hole in certain ways. Vasu Master's notes reflect his "Forty years in a class room," he sees a number of ways to home this "hole". One is physical; the body locked in temporality and measured as deterioration.

*The body is so easily damaged, its mutilated ruins disposed of. I knew this now as never before. All I could*

*do was look into the mirror- the mirror I found in Mangala's trunk; perhaps keep track, of more than one body, one face-the before and the after. In the depths of the mirror, this actually seemed possible. The face of the present loomed large in the foreground, a reflection that often seemed sharper than the reality, each pockmark a permanent scar or wound but from this vantage point I could also look back in snatches, remember all the parts of the changeable body, its unchangeable body, its ancestors and descendants so that I could see it whole again. Otherwise I became a flat, one dimensioned figure, a man in the present of an empty room, on the verge of eviction (GVM: 90).*

Vasu now makes a decision to learn to know himself as a human being. He tries to create a rapport between Mani and him, to validate, conform, encourage, support, enhance. At trust, Vasu Master is not much successful with Mani, "It had been two months, twenty-four lessons since we first met, and the voyage I had lovingly planned had not yet begun" (GVM: 45). But Vasu has belief in education system that if the teacher's heart and soul belongs to his pupil, he can teach him the truth exactly as he knows it. Vasu decides to take Mani with him, on his weekly visits to library. In the meantime, he gets success to create, a good relationship with Mani and wins his trust. After teaching for some time one day Vasu finds that Mani is interested in stories and this provides him necessary due, to gain access to Mani's heart and healing.

*When I first filled up the silence between us up the silence between us with nonsense about animals and forest, his, ask of defiant imperviousness slipped he sat, chain cupped in both hands, elbows on the table watching my face .... This look was my first reward; it told me that Mani was with me; so part of my story (GVM: 77).*

Mani's affirmative response paves new ways for Vasu Master. It balances his self-confidence to create a web of fables and parables to teach Mani. Vasu Master mingles reality with these fables and parables to teach and to cure Mani. These stories and his childhood experiences reward treasure of amusement and learning for Mani. For these stories he was inspired by his grandmother, who had narrated him many stories in his childhood. At these stages Vasu realizes usefulness of these stories and their importance. So Vasu Master's realization of self is going to initial and speeded up through the teaching of Mani.

The stories told, are divided in many chapters. Every story has multiple meanings carrying Vasu and Mani as the part of it. Among these, the stories of grey mouse and fly blue bottle move parallel with the novel. Symbolically, Vasu Master resembles with grey mouse, almost confined to the mouse whole always fearful to the dangers of the world outside. The disable fly blue bottle is the image of Mani. The disabilities and muteness's of Mani carry similarities with the fly blue bottle. At the last part of the story grey mouse comes outside the hole showing self-confidence and courage to face any kind of situation. The blue bottle too realizes its self-identity instead of being disabled. The self-assertion of both Vasu and Mani take them for the journey to Vasu's ancestral village Nageswaram. Vasu Master enters in a new world, of reality through his journey to Nageswaram. Now, he is free from his confined mentality to become awaked individual.

#### **Conclusion:**

Githa Hariharan expresses the notion that the unconscious mind can be studied through self-realization. She investigates the complex structure of unconscious psychology of her characters. In 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master', Vasu Master sustains number of psychological conflicts. Hariharan used tales, incidents and narratives to explore Vasu Master's conscious psychology. At last, Vasu Master enters in a new world of reality through his journey of life. His ward Mani is also satisfied the new enlightened mind for the further life. Both Vasu Master and Mani are free from their restricted mentality to become awaked individuals.

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