

“WOMEN AND MARGINALITY: A CASE STUDY OF GITHA HARIHARAN’S *THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER*”

SHEHJAD SIDIQUEII

Asst. Professor Dept of English
Arts, Science & Commerce College,
Badnapur Dist. Jalna (MS) **INDIA**

ABSTRACT

*Githa Hariharan’s novels focus on feminist elements and the *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is not exception to this. However, Githa Hariharan portrays the marginalize women in Indian society. The feminine ghosts include his mother, grandmother and the actress Rita –Mona is boyhood fancy. Vasu Master’s mother died when he is still a boy. She does not have a name for almost a year after her birth. Her parents did not want to spend money on the naming ceremony for one more daughter. They also feared that people would laugh at them for not producing a son. The old sweeper women comforted her mistress saying that the girl would be the Laxmi of her husband’s house. In this way she got the name Laxmi. But to the end of her life, she remained the sixth daughter of female weary ‘she could never get over her inferiority complex. Githa Hariharan is critical of the constraints of domestic life dominating patriarchy.*

Literature has been truly described as mirror of society and it reflects social interactions prevailing at the time when author is evolved in the process of dialectics between society and culture. Understanding sociological realism is a new trend in the literary world. Critics have rightly perceived that most literary historians and critics have taken some account of the relation of individual authors to the circumstances of the social and cultural era in which they live and write, as well as of the relation of a literary work to the segment of society that its fiction represents which the present work is addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The Ghosts of Vasu Master where Githa Hariharan depicts Vasu’s feminine ghosts who are Mangala, Jameela and Eliamma, the real ghosts from Mangala’s story. H.B. Patil has rightly observed that

“Many critics attempt to explore the novel with different perspectives including feminism, psychology and self discovery. The present novel is essentially about stereotypes as found in the literature and culture of India. The focus of the novel is on the exploration of the stereotype of traditional Indian woman in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. In it Vasu Master’s mother Lakshmi and his wife Mangala exhibit the stereotype of traditional woman. These characters represent the formula of the psyche of millions of Indian women.” (H.B. Patil 1)

Githa Hariharan’s novels focus on feminist elements and the *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is not exception to this. However, the feminine ghosts include his mother, grandmother and the actress Rita–Mona is boyhood fancy. Vasu Master’s mother died when he was still a boy. She does not have a name for almost a year after her birth. Her parents did not want to spend money on the naming ceremony for one more daughter. They also feared that people would laugh at them for not producing a son. The old sweeper women comforted her mistress saying that the girl would be the Laxmi of her husband’s house. In this way she got the name Laxmi. But to the end of her life, she remained the sixth daughter of female weary ‘she could never get over her inferiority complex. Githa Hariharan is critical of the constraints of domestic life dominating patriarchy. It has been rightly pointed that

“The feminist theories based on ‘gender’, structured the shape of the feminist debate in the 1980s. These theories identify and deconstruct stereotypes, create resistance to the ideologies promoted by them and encourage women to seek alternative ways of life.” (Sinha 109)

Patriarchy and Social Relationship:

Patriarchy is a unique character of traditional Indian society, which is reflected continuously from ancient to modern period. The male domination in a society not only creates women’s life miserable but also it disturbs their peace and harmony. In the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* the main figure Vasu Master is a product of patriarchy prevailing in traditional Indian society. Though he is an English teacher, yet he is highly influenced by age old traditions and customs in our society. He is found and brought up in a rigid social system and he never touched by the progressive winds.

The behavior of Vasu Master has been depicted in an effective manner. His relationship with his wife Mangala and other female characters show his secondary attitude to look at women. The male domination in an age old social structure is reshaped by author through the character of Vasu Master and the story is webbed around him.

The socio cultural realities have been exposed properly. The Ghost of Vasu Master is a narration which reflects the patriarchal system and the rebel of women in this system. The

feeling of feminist aspirations is also slowly depicted in this novel in an indirect manner. There are no propagandist approaches of the author.

Indian society is traditional and it is governed by norms and conditions prevailed in the traditional system in a rigid manner. It has been observed that

“The basic issue on which feminists and their opponents differ is whether the different stations males and females occupy in life are the consequences of certain innate qualities or they are the products of male cultural hegemony of patriarchy.” (Pandey Miti 26)

Tradition and Protest:

All the characters in this novel are thus socially representing certain class of society. They are realistic, objective and closely relate to social phenomenon. Different figures, such as Mangala, Jamilla, Eliamma represent their rural background in the coastal India. Mangala and Jameela were born in a same village and shared sufferings commonly. Eliamma belonged to fisherman community and she is struggling hard for achieving her bread. It has been rightly observed that “Eliamma walked alone by the sea night after night. She looked out into the watery horizon with longing. She yearned to go for beyond the distance she could swim. She wanted to be in the centre of the expanse she saw, in a womb held in palace by the ocean’s ancient secrets.” (Hariharan Githa 127)

This passage shows how Githa Hariharan had a clear understanding of social surrounding problems around him. Eliamma struggle of life has been depicted by Githa Hariharan in an accurate manner. The entire phenomenon of characters evolved and depicted show how her female characters are representing social struggle and sufferings through out their life. The progressive feminist elements have been depicted through her characters. The successful literature can always be described as dialectics between tradition and modernity. Githa Hariharan has registered her protest against the traditional system through the character of Eliamma who remains a free-bird.

The characters have a strong feminist bearing. Mangala and Jameela find their voices in the marginalized media of sewing and stories, sites where the ghosts of lost sisters may live, visible to those who are as receptive as Eliamma was to her stranger. For Githa Hariharan it would seem that the subaltern position of a postcolonial woman finds its voice through means comparable to her character’s strategies. Subaltern consciousness is a great character of Githa Hariharan’s progressive feminism. She is in favor exploited working women who is the sufferer of the system. Githa Hariharan is also Eliamma, the woman writing who must trade

her body with the ghostly male, moving invisibly through male narratologies, her touch deadly to their gendered forms, conventions, conceptions, values and structures.

About the process of dialogue between tradition and modernity we have seen the fable of timelessness in which Tradition and Modernity are Old and New, united in a fluency which speaks the present in a non modern way. And we have been watching Vasu balancing himself in relation to a series of figures with too oppressive a form of rationality, whether Modern and Tradition.

Thus, close observation of tradition and protect against it, is an important feature of Hariharan's novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. The literature is social entity has been evolved by writer, by making a clear distinction between age old traditions and revolt against them. The sociological study of Githa Hariharan's novel shows that she had made a painstaking analysis of social reality through her novel. The three major characters of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* can be noted below:

- The novel focuses on the character of Vasu Master and the entire theme is unfolded around him. The characters around him describe struggle between tradition and modernity.
- The main point is description of subaltern consciousness and depiction of marginalized women. Githa Hariharan has tried to reveal the exploitation of Indian women in an interesting realistic manner.

The author's close observation is a part of social reality. It has been pointed that, "By this time I must have seen Jameela without her burqua, because when I remembered her deep, throaty laughter, I saw her again. She was full, earthy, with a slight limp that offset her ripe perfection." (Hariharan Githa 43)

Thus Hariharan has depicted social customs and traditions through her characters. The meaning of the word Eliamma is world's earth mother. Hariharan has tried to unfold some hidden facts when she writes that, "Something as yet unknown, hidden perhaps in the depths of the water mid-sea." (Hariharan Githa 126)

Githa Hariharan has reflected her feminism through different codes. They are not only social, but they are cultural. Cultural code refers to all the systems of knowledge and values evolved by the texts. The study of cultural codes in the novel can make us to understand feminism in a righteous manner.

SUMMARY:

SHEHJAD SIDQUII

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The different aspects explained in this chapter clearly show that this novel is a one of the achievements of Githa Hariharan. Her style, method of presentation and the handling of messages clearly show that she is writer of high class.

Her narrative style is a grand success and her achievements clearly illustrate the elements of feminism tried by her forcefully. The socio cultural success of this novel is thus depicted in this careful analysis. The discourse analysis which was conducted in this chapter draws different aspects of the character of Vasu Master which is a prime theme and character of the novel, which is evolved by Githa Hariharan in a climax.

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