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NOVELS OF GITHA HARIHARAN: A MIRROR OF FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This brief study discusses various dimensions of father-son relationship in the novels of Githa Hariharan. She has presented a huge variety of this relationship, like illiterate, well educate, talented Brahmin family background, lower caste, rich and poor etc. This study explores through these fictional father-son relationships the main reasons, loose points and gaps of break-up, and destruction of this harmonious relationship. The sole aim of this study is to provide learning from the mistakes of the fictional characters so that we cannot repeat the same mistakes in our actual life because life is not so long that we learn by doing own mistakes so we must need to learn from these fictional characters and live with harmonious relationships.

**Key-Words:** Dimensions, father-son relationship, illiterate, well educated, talented Brahmin family background, lower caste, rich and poor, main reasons, loose points and gaps of break-up, and destruction, harmonious relationship.

Novelists since the formative years of this genre have been exploring through it, human relationships in the complex Indian society. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Shashi Despande, Arundhti Roy, Kiran Desai, Jumpha Lahiri, Geeta Mehta, and Githa Hariharan etc., have produced social novels which deal with the theory of human relationships in the traditional and transitional Indian society.

Githa Hariharan born in 1954, is one of those enigmatic writers, whose works have received wholehearted commendation by critics like Michael Ondaatje and J.M. Coetzee and as well as a tense and bemused condemnation by many critics in India and abroad. Githa Hariharan is not merely a novelist, but a philosopher, a weaver of stories, a teacher, a scholar and a famous literary figure among the literary artists of Indian writing in English.

Githa Hariharan penned several novels, short-stories, essays, newspaper articles and columns. She wrote five novels namely *The housand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). Githa Hariharan was not merely a novelist but a short-stories weaver also. A collection of highly acclaimed short-stories published under the title *The Art of Dying* (1993) and a book of stories for children, *The Winning Team* in 2004. Hariharan has also edited a volume of stories in English translation from four major South Indian languages, *A Southern Harvest* (1993) and co-edited a collection of short-stories for children, *Sorry, Best Friend!* (1997).

Hariharan one of the front-ranking women novelists of Indian Writing in English, explores the concept of human relationships in her literary works. Hariharan unties the Gordian knot of complex, religious,

traditional and social life by her pen, through the concept of human relationships. One can easily understand Indian life, its cultural religious, mythical and social values after comprehending the concept of relationships, which is a strong binding factor for all the Indians belonging to different castes and faiths.

Hariharan not only deals with the human relationships as per the eastern paradigm, but he views such relationships in the western concept, too. Her works mirror Indian life. One can see the clear picture of man-woman and man to man relationships as analyzed by the novelist after reading all her novels. Githa Hariharan deals in her fiction with various themes but exploration of human relationships in their myriad dimensions is an important area of Githa Hariharan's interest.

Githa Hariharan's first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), brought her recognition in the form of Commonwealth Writers' Prize in the Eurasian region, in 1992. P. Geetha in her article observes about this novel, "It (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is a study of the concept of motherhood done in an innovative manner, drawing upon the oral tradition of story-telling and rereading of epic characters." (50)

Man to man relationship is the second category after man-woman relationships in sphere of personal or interpersonal relationships. Father-son, brother-brother, uncle-nephew, grandfather-grandson, brother-in-law- brother-in-law, maternal uncle-maternal-nephew, maternal grandfather-maternal grandson, and step father-step son etc. are the chief relationships come under man-man relationships.

In her novels Githa Hariharan majorly deals with father-son and brother-brother relationship. She presents these relationships in her novels and shows their myriad dimensions.

In her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan is depicted Mahesh and his father relation, which is a fine example of father-son relationship. Mahesh's father to whom his wife, Devi called Baba, is a retired Professor of Sanskrit. He has a vast knowledge of brahminical scriptures. He believes in Manu's laws and proud to be a Brahmin. He has "the appearance of a dignified patriarch." (Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, 51) Mahesh, his son is a modern man who passed his degree in management and doing a job in a company. Baba is a now a free person after retirement and Mahesh is a very busy one. Most of the time he remains out of the house because of his travelling job. The father is a very knowledgeable person of the scriptures written by Brahmins. He says to Devi. "Mahesh speaks of something called management all the time. He chuckles. I am earning a degree in the management of life." (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces of Night*, 51) Baba wishes that his son also follow the same things which he knows from these scriptures but Mahesh doesn't like his view on life. He has no time for such thoughts. His father Baba says once to Devi, the wife of Mahesh:

Whenever you are remember you are a Brahmin. You may not know it, but underneath that skin flow a fine-varied river of pure blood, the legacy of centuries of learning. (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces of Night*, 52)

He is an ardent follower of Manu and who believes in Manu's laws and the rigid Varna system. But his son Mahesh works in a company and is a busy man. So he has no time to listen and follows his father's view point. Once when Mahesh talks to Devi, he says about his father: "Oh yes Baba and his Brahmin Saints from a glorious past. But let me tell you, Devi, Baba is still to learn how things work in real life." (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces of Night*, 55)

So this relation presents the picture of father-son relationship in which father remains an ardent follower of Manu and a busy son who has not a single day to talk to his father.

Vasu and his father in the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* sets another example of father son relationship. Vasu's father is an Auryavedacharya and a self confirmed person. Vasu is a timid child who always afraids from his father. His father was a "healer" but irony is this that he could not treat his own son who suffers in his whole life from stomach pain problem. This relation shows a new dimension of father son relationships which presents a healer or Ayurvedcharya and a son who suffers from stomach pain problem.

Vasu-Vishnu relation depicts another example of father-son relationship. Vasu is a retired school master who has two sons Vishnu and Venu. In his life Vasu completes all the responsibilities of a father. He gives good education to his son Vishnu who is now doing a job in town. When Vasu master retires, his son

Vishnu does not come to attend the retirement function of his father. He writes a letter to his father in which he writes:

I am sorry I could not attend your retirement function. But though I have been terribly busy, I thought of PG on 15th last month. May be I shouldn't say it, but you have been wasted on Veera Naidu's factory. Between us, I am glad you are out of that hole. Any way, it is time to forget all that. What is important that you have retired after all years of devoted service and now you should think more of you comfort. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 56-57)

A son who gets two times bread, education and job by the money which earned Vasu Master from his teaching in Veera Naidu's PG school. Now after getting a good job he says that Vasu wasted his life there. Vishnu further wrote in the same letter:

Leela and I (and the Children too) want you to pack up and move to Madras. If you need help with winding up, I can make a Saturday off. But let me know well ahead of time, because I must speak to the manager. He may not want any of us taking leave when things are so hectic. I can send you the money for the ticket if you have a lot of expenses. But please don't forget to check up on your pension and provident fund papers. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 57)

Vishnu worries more about pension and Provident Fund papers of his father. Even he gives a choice to his father that he can send him money if his expenses are increased. Vishnu presents a modern son who has no time for his old father and who only writes but never comes to meet his father in village and takes him along with him in Madras. So the relation of Vishnu and his father shows the materialistic busy son and an old, unhealthy alone father in the village.

Vasu-Venu relation presents new angle to see this father-son relationship. Venu is younger son of Vasu master who also lives in city. He is also in job in Bombay. He is such kind of a son who also makes formalities to his father. He shows more but in actual he has no love and care for his father in his heart. His letter makes stunned to Vasu master. He wrote a letter for formality:

Had a letter from Vishnu about you moving to his house. Hope you will be comfortable there and well looked after. We must arrange your visit to Bombay after you are settled. But I don't know whether you will find my bachelor's flat convenient. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 57)

Venu is more advanced than his brother he already makes it clear in advance to his father that he will not feel comfortable with him in Bombay. He says this to his father so that his father can never think or plans to come to Bombay to live with him. He does not stop here further he writes in the letter that he does not live alone there but his roommate also. Why he writes this? Reason is this that that his father can never think of coming to him. He continues in his letter:

Sampath has left, but I will soon have another roommate. You must be relieved to have finally retired and seen the last of PG and Veera Naidu. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 57)

Venu is a very clever son. He does not like that his father live with him. He forgets his duty of a son. His both sons forgot this that they are because Vasu was. After all this Vasu feels in the loneliness of his old age that there is no one of his in this world even his own sons turn their eyes from him, he says:

I did feel a strange detachment from the family love that had been allotted to me as substance, thoughts the promised taste of nectar did not allow. My children were strangers to me, though I could claim little credit for that. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 57)

Vasu master and Venu relationship presents a new angle to see this father son relationship where an old unhealthy father and the two clever sons who think that their old father is a burden upon them.

In *When Dreams Travel*, Sultan Sassanid's relation with his two sons, Shahzaman and Shahryar describe the another view of father son relationship. Sultan Sassanid has two sons, Shahzaman was his younger son and Shahryar was elder one. Sultan Sassanid is a very powerful king. He divides his kingdom in his two sons. Except dividing the kingdom he does not play any important role in the lives of his sons. He gives his own city Shahbad to Shahryar, his elder son and Samarkad for the younger son, Shahzaman. He presents a father who divides his legacy equally to his sons. This relation is a fine example of father son relationship where a father divides his kingdom to his sons nothing else except it.

Sultan Shahryar and Umar relation is another example of father-son relationship. Sultan Shahryar has only one son Prince Umar from his second wife Shahrzad. Umar does not get mother's love because his mother Shahrzad was died after his birth. So he grows under the love and care of a nurse, named Sabiha. Sultan Shahryar deprives him from his fatherly love and care because his father remains busy to build a tomb in the remembrance of his beloved Sultana Shahrzad. Umar loves his city when he turns in a young man and he is also a God fearing man. He does not like his father work on building a tomb. According to Umar, his father is wasting the public money on such kind of building. Umar is a rebellious Prince. He rebels against his father. He makes captive his own father in the tomb or monument. He addresses to his father. "Your time is past, father. Now you should if it is not too late turns your thoughts to all merciful and plead forgiveness for your sins." (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 102) Umar is a courageous and rebellious son who captures his own father and realizes him his sins.

Their relation shows new face of the father son relationship. A God fearing and moral son makes prisoner to his own father who was a past sinner and now is wasting public money on the memorial monument in the remembrance of his Malika Shahrzad.

In some ways their relationship has resemblance with Mughal Badshah Shahzahan who built Taj Mahal in the remembrance of his queen Mumtaz Mahal and his son Aurangzeb who kills his own brother to get the kingdom and stops all constructing works which were started by his father. After Aurangzeb's death the whole Mughal Empire comes to the end.

The novel *In Times of Siege* has a relation of Prof. Shiv Murthy and his lost father which shows another dimension of father son relationship. Dr. Shiv Murthy is a professor in a Central Open University of Delhi. His father was a freedom fighter but he disappeared when Shiv only a child. Shiv tells about his father.

He was a freedom fighter, but for him the freedom movement did not end in 1947. In fact the burden of the new world-- the travails of free India-- sat heavy on his shoulders. (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 34)

Shiv's father remains in his memories. He feels in his dreams that: "His father's hand holding his, his father's hand not as soft as his mother's." (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 35) When the problem arises by the Hindu fundamentals, as they said that his lesson on Bassava in B.A. course hurts their sentiments, and they demand that the University withdraws that lesson from course and Prof. Shiv Murthy apologizes publically. In these days Shiv is restless and alone. Then one night his father echoes with approval:

'Shiv', he can hear his father's ghost say to him now. 'if you want to get hold of something and learn all about it, know it, it does not matter whether that something is in the past or the present. All that matters is that you are free thinking. That you are moral courage.' (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 40)

Shiv's father however was disappeared before a long time. But his ghost memories guide Shiv in his days of fix. Shiv thinks that his father's memories is legacy for him. In the long span of the absence of his father, he lives with the memories of his father.

But all these years later, he knows that when he remembers his father he is speaking for his father as well as for himself. The father's voice, the voice of the remembered, is a part of his own voice. This is his father's legacy to Shiv: the gift of remembrance. (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 192)

Shiv has an inheritance of his father's memories. It is what his father left for him. These memories and the remembrance are the guiding forces for him. In this relationship one can see a son who happy with the memories of his father who regards his father even he is not in the world. The memories of his father guide Shiv in his whole life and also are the rich source of pleasure.

The relation of Dr. Arya and his son Akshai presents another face of this father-son relationship. Dr. Arya has only one son who is blind. His name is Akshai. Akshai is totally depends on his parents. Dr. Arya never thinks that Akshai is a burden on him. But on opposite of this, Dr. Arya is very careful towards his son. Even he is so possessive that he does not allow to his wife to give a bath to Akshai. Their relation is based on sympathy, love and care. Dr. Arya emotionally attaches with his son Akshai. However beside, a father he is not a winsome personality only his duties, responsibilities and interest towards his son as a father present him a good person.

Asad and Samar relation in the novel, *Fugitive Histories* shows the father son relationship with another angle. Asad is a Muslim by birth and a secularist by ideas. He doesn't believe in any fold and religion. He marries to a Brahmin girl named Malathi or Mala. They have one son Samar and a daughter Sara, Asad loves his children very much. Asad hopes that his son follows his view point but Samar bends to Islam and becomes a Muslim. Asad and Samar relation shows a father, who is a firm believer that we are Indians for some time and in remaining time only human beings, nothing else. But when Samar accepts Islam, this hurts the feelings of Asad. This thing increases gap between them and they become stranger to each other. Their relation presents a father son who turns to strange to each other just because of ideological difference. In the last days of his life Asad says, "We've marched all our lives and nothing has cleared. Or it's changed for the worse." (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 215) This is the pain of a father whose own son does not understand his father.

In conclusion one can say that Githa Hariharan has presented this father-son relationship with its myriad dimensions. She has depicted various ups and downs of life in this relationship. She is very crystal clear about human a relationship that is why she has shown the real situations of human life through the concept of human relationship. Her fiction is a microcosm of human relationships and a window through which one can peep and see the multi hued rainbow of human relationships.

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