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**Bunch of Memories shapes a teacher in Gita Hariharan's  
*The Ghosts of Vasu Master***

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**Abstract :**

Githa Hariharan's Vasu Master, a retired and alone teacher, tutor of speechless boy, Mani spends retiring days with bunch of past memories related to school days and family. Collective past memories inspire Vasu Master to keep interest of taking interest in teaching and learning. Vasu Master's bunch of memories enables him to live little bit happy retired life after writing his memories. Master's life can be classified into three phases: one as an honest school teacher and family man, second as a solitary walker after retirement and before the entry of Mani and third is his involvement in teaching to physically handicapped Mani. Initial phase was straight in his life however later two phases are shaped with bunch of memories of school days and family responsibilities. Life of Vasu Master is the anecdote of innovations in teaching and understanding the inner realities of students.

**Key Words:** Memory, Teaching, Loneliness, Involvement.

Githa Hariharan (1954) is one of the names among prolific narrative writers in Indian English Literature. Her novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) explores the multi-layered world of a retired school teacher Vasu Master. Master recalls his dead wife, his school, Principal, pupils, separated sons, rural atmosphere and many more things. The situation in his teaching life shifts after the entry of Mani, a dumb boy as his pupil. Master tells story after story though he had doubt about Mani's learning capabilities to whom he called 'Papaya-Head Mani' (8). The shift turns from negations to optimisms about Mani after telling him certain meaningful stories. Articulation of those stories by Hariharan itself is a specimen of paradoxes and at the same time the inspiring anecdotes for human life. Vasu Master's life is a strange mixture of many things to whom lot of memories give shape. It can be divided into three phases: first is his life as an honest school teacher and responsible family man, second is his alone life after the death of wife, separation of sons and after his retirement, third is his innovations in teaching to Mani, a physically challenged boy who suddenly entered as his pupil.

**1) Vasu Master as School Teacher and Family Man**

Vasu Master is the school teacher in the small village, Elipetti's PG Boys school. Already he had written an informative essay 'Four Decades in a Classroom' (27) and he wants to give the essay as a gift to his pupils in the classroom 6B. Though there was small number of students in his class, he was the popular teacher. Notebook as a gift was given by his students to him later he has written the memories of school days specially incidents with pupils, with his co-teachers and Veera Naidu, the Head Master of school. He recalled many more about his specific pupil, Mani. Vasu master was the 'silent' and capable teacher of his school. With his identity as teacher in school, he had also the identity of 'wise man' in his family.

Vasu Master easily and clearly remembers his family. His father was the expert in Aayurved and he explained him the importance of Aayurved as healer. Master supposed his father as his prime guru (teacher). He had memories of father, mother, wife, friend of wife and children. There was lot of impression of father on his mind. His father was teacher and philosopher for him. He had lost his mother

in his early age, so father was the only parent for him and he inspired Vasu for many times on many steps. After father, another significant person in his life was his wife, Mangala. She was the conventional figure of Indian wife. She was the moral support of Vasu Master and their two sons Vishnu and Venu. Before his retirement she died and he became alone after the departure of young Vishnu and Venu for Madras. Master had also memories of Jameela, friend of Mangala. After retirement, when he opened her box, he found so many things of Mangala, specially a mirror and certain photos and after looking the things he had recalled each and every thing of their married life. This photographic memory of Mangala and belongings enriches his recalling power even after the age of retirement.

## 2) Vasu Master as Solitary Walker

After retirement Vasu Master was alone, detached from school duties and household responsibilities. Master talks about his routine as 'solitary walks to the town library and back ... (27). This state of 'solitary' denotes his condition of alienation, aloofness from his own world. Meanwhile, in the tranquil condition he was trying to solve the knots of his life when he rightly observes his life and that he was trying to, 'unravelling knots of ideas, dreams, wishes and memories... (27). He had dreams many times, he had hidden wishes about certain things and he was able to memorise every detail of his past life. This conditions symbolises that his so many memories shape his being 'teacher' with speculations based on his own life-experiences. His father the entire force for him. He had recalled his father's sayings many times. In one incident, his father said him very important thing that, '*Our bodies are gardens, my father had then said to me, to the which our wills are gardeners.* (74) The kinship between physical body and abstract mind sharpened Vasu Master's emotional beings into neutral watcher.

Even he had neutral feeling about his family after recall of lot of memories when he says, 'I did feel a strange detachment from the family love that had been allotted me as sustenance, though the promised taste of nectar did not follow. (57) The detachment for beloved ones after their departure denotes his overcome on extra sensitive feelings. He get balanced emotions through this 'detachment'. Being 'solitary' is not at all alone and depressed but being a emotionally balanced person who can manage bitter memories in their life. Vasu Master gets the skill in it and so he turned towards next phase of his life, he became tutor of physically challenged child, Mani.

## 3) Vasu Master's involvement in Teaching in Specific Child

Vasu master was not in the condition to forget his pupils, his classroom and school even after retirement. He was ware about 'even a retired teacher must learn some new tricks of survival... (4-5) however he involved in past incidents. His involvement with pupils was remarkable but Mani was very special pupil for him. Mani had admitted in the school when he was twelve years old and had six or seven year old brain. Before coming to Vasu Master, Mani had left four schools. Vasu Master realized Mani's condition so he says, 'Mani was eight when he finished with school Or I should say, when school finished with him' (9). When any student leaves school, not that child finishes but the school finishes herself. This abstract thing is the defeat of school system in any society, in any nation. Sensible Vasu Master accepted the challenge of teaching Mani, what Mani's father said that Veera Naidu had this belief on Vasu Master only. Vasu Master's capability of being 'teacher' is more than teacher but as 'facilitator' the word has been aggravated for use in NEP 2020.

In one incident, Vasu Master imagines himself as Mani when he remarks that 'I became Mani... (162). It is hard task for any teacher to become student and more difficult to suppose themselves as brain-challenged student. For Vasu Master, this thing was easy as he thought about that child supposing himself that child. His deep involvement in teaching Mani was with innovative ideas. He taught Mani the life lessons through series of stories. Initially Mani was not responding, but patient Vasu Master helped him

to learn certain things. At the end, VasuMaster felt the inner reality of Mani when he says, ‘So Papaya-Head Mani – fool, clown... Mani continued to be crippled by his silence, his separateness. But somewhere deep inside he was calm and composed being; three dimensional; with a secret landscape equal to any other. (234)To find out ‘secret landscape’ in the mind of specific pupil is the finding out open platform to such learners and it was the Vasu Master’s success of being complete teacher, tutor and facilitator.

### Conclusion

‘I stood there alone, a schoolteacher with his heart foolishly exposed and spoke. I said to them: When you pull off one layer after another, is there anything left? (160). Vasu Master had many times dreams on different contents. He imagines himself ‘onion’, the layered object without centre. In fact, Vasu Master’s layers are the part of his centre, as his each part provides certain and determined things of his personal and professional life. Being a teacher is the availability of opportunities to read and to acknowledge students inner thoughts and to shape them in the right ways. Hariharan’s Vasu Master provides great anecdote in front of the teachers.

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