

The Ghosts of Vasu Master :An experimental Novel

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On the surface level it seems that the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* written by Githa Hariharan is about the teacher, Vasu Master and his pupil, Mani. The novel contains some special aspects of experimental technique. It is the second novel by Githa Hariharan, the winner of Commonwealth Writers Prize for her best first novel-*The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Vasu Master has recently retired from P.G. Boys' school, Elipettai. He was the teacher of English Language and Literature for nearly forty years. The very beginning of the novel can be considered as experimental beginning. Normally the traditional novel begins with the birth or beginning of a profession. However this novel starts with ending of profession, that is the retirement of Vasu Master. After working for forty years as a teacher, he retires but without sense of fulfillment. And he wakes up to find himself dead. As Franz Kafka says :

“A man did not know that he existed until one day he awoke to find himself dead.”

This is what exactly happens with Vasu Master. As his profession ends, he awoke to know that he was a teacher. He feels sorry that he has wasted those forty years.

However his retirement turns a new beginning for him, to know himself. It becomes a search for his own identity. His past memories haunt him like ghosts. So the ghosts are the past memories of Vasu Master which keep him haunting and which disturb him. He leads his life in isolation but after some days he turns his isolation into solitude. The isolation is like punishment whereas solitude can be creative. The process of self discovery is speeded up by Mani's entry in the life of Vasu Master. Mani is his pupil of tuition or coaching class. He is an abnormal boy and is unable to speak and write anything. Actually something had gone wrong with Mani. His normal development is disturbed by something. The doctors, the teachers and the schools had failed to cure him. At last he is brought to Vasu Master who himself is struggling to find solution to his personal and physical problems.

It is a complex novel but not the difficult one. In other words it looks complex but if we devote we can understand various aspects of it. We are unable to find numerical links as there are no numbers given to chapters. There are forty eight chapters in the novel but there is no logic of line in the chapters. Even sometimes there is no logical link between the events in a chapter. The single chapter looks independent one. It is like a monologue. Virginia Woolf says : “A chapter is an interior monologue.”

In an experimental novel the focus is not much on action but on what character makes of an action. His reactions to action and consequences of action are significant. The character Vasu Master fits well into experimental technique. His mind is significant in assessment of environment, as the mind moves from present to past or from past to present or from anywhere to anywhere. In this connection Virginia Woolf says :

“Watch your mind on Sunday. It is formless with showers of experiences. Let's record them as they are.”

As a result of it there is no perfect link in the chronology of events in the novel.

In the experimental technique the character emerges from reaction to action. The character Vasu Master emerges from his reaction to action. Rather than the story of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the character Vasu Master is important and he is centre of focus. As the experimental technique the character Vasu Master is not presented, but rather he is revealed through thoughts of himself and thoughts of others and also his thoughts about others. Instead of reading about character, the readers read about personality. The personality of a character changes from time to time with experiences. The novelist talks about not only of character but also about what character might have been. In the novel there is psyche moment that is time taken by the mind. At one psychology hour one personality exists. The various pieces of personality are joined together. According to Joseph Conrad what we find in modern experimental novel is :

“His vision of her vision and
her vision of his vision of her vision.”

In other words the character thinks about her thinking and she thinks about his thinking about her thinking. Actually in the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* the above method can be applied to Mani and the protagonist Vasu Master.

As a teacher it is very difficult to teach and educate an abnormal student who is unable to speak and write and whose head has grown bigger than his body, than to teach a class of hundred or two hundred students of normal ability. Vasu Master, who has not done anything special in forty years of teaching career, accepts the challenge to teach and educate Mani. Vasu Master tries to go closer to Mani's heart by telling him animal fables and stories. As a child Mani is closer to animal world than to the world of grown up people. The story telling method is the one of the best methods to educate. Dr. U. R. Ananthmurthy, the well known writer has said :

“Our universities need to appoint old men and women to tell the stories. Because it the best method of education as we are educated by our grandparents by their story telling.”

The retired teacher Vasu Master cures and educates Mani, though not completely. The process of education of Mani begins as he starts drawing the marks and the pictures of stories that he heard from Vasu Master. The language itself has come into existence through the marks and the pictures. So it is the beginning of Mani's study of language. Vasu Master compensates his forty years job by educating an abnormal pupil, Mani.

The experimental novel should be studied as a major form of expression of artistic, cultural and intellectual curiosity. R. L. Stevenson says :

“The change in the novel should be associated with the

changes in the views of life and concept of time.”
The changes are related to content, technique and language.
The writers writing such novels can be called revolutionary novelists.

Notes :

- 1.Beach, J. W. The Twentieth Century Novel Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi.1965
- 2.Hariharan, Githa. The Ghosts of Vasu Master , Penguin Books: New Delhi. 1994
- 3.Matz , Jesse. The Modern Novel Blackwell Publishing , New Delhi. 2004
- 4.Neill, Diana. A Short History of the English Novel Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi.1971