

STUDY OF MOTHER-SON RELATIONSHIP IN THE NOVELS OF GITHA HARIHARAN

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Abstract

This brief study discusses various dimensions of mother-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 mother-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.

Indian fiction in English has matured itself over the years. It has become more expressive and experimental, both thematically and stylistically, than ever, and has come to establish itself as an indigenous branch of world literature. With the passage of time novel in English became recognized as an effective vehicle of human relationships in Indian society. 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 Deshpande, 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.

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.

At the beginning of the human race, early human beings did not have defined relationships with each other. Later, they began to establish relationships. They started to develop "a feeling of closeness" which enabled them to preserve their relationships. Relationships enjoy the most significant place in human life.

Relationship is defined as a state of connectedness between people. Although today the society is going on with its crazy rhythm of everyday life, people tend to live in densely populated world, spending most of their time in the office and hardly knowing their neighbour's name, we still find ourselves in some kind of a relationship with friends, family, or colleagues.

The personal or interpersonal relationships are the core of human life or are the foundation of human life. Without these relations we even cannot imagine the human life. In our life we connect to each other in the form of relationships. Family relations as husband-wife, mother-son, father-daughter, brother-sister, mother-daughter, boyfriend-girlfriend, sister-sister and many other relations and friendship come under personal relationships. The list of relationships that come under the category of personal or interpersonal relationships, their values and importance is a very vast subject of study. Personal relationships further divided in man-woman relationships, man-man relationships, and woman-woman relationships for sound understanding of personal relationships. The prime purpose of this part is to gain sound knowledge of personal relationships.

In interpersonal relationships, family relations are the first peoples' relationships to enter into the field of relationships. Parents and relatives influence our emotional development by creating a model that we are sometimes bound to follow all our life, often subconsciously. People who have grown up in large happy families usually feel more emotionally secure than those, whose parents had gone through a divorce. For sure you know quite a few attractive and successful women who remain single for some mysterious reason. They often turn out to be victims of their past. Deep inside they cannot overcome the fear of being abandoned, that comes from their childhood, when one or both of their parents left them or just did not pay enough attention. A well-established young man can be scared of a commitment in a relationship as his parents' family model failed to convince him that getting married makes one happy. There are some types in personal or interpersonal relationships.

Mother-son relationship is one of the important man-woman relationships after husband-wife relationships in the sphere of personal or interpersonal relationships. Githa Hariharan in her novels depicts this relationship with sincerity coupled with its multiple dimensions.

Baba and his mother relationship in the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* shows a picture of this mother-son relationship in which a son is obedient towards his mother that he has a blind faith on her decisions. Baba, the father-in-law of Devi is a devoted son to his mother. His

father dies and his mother plays both the roles of a mother and a father in his life. When he turns into a young man his mother asks him to decide about his marriage. Githa Hariharan depicts it in these lines:

My son you are now the head of the household. Your father is no longer to explain, so I must be both mother and father. You are a man now. A man needs a wife to help him with the business of living. (Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, 61)

His mother is a very careful and a sincere woman who plays both the roles in his life of a mother and a father. She knows her duties and responsibilities of a mother towards her son so she decides to set the marriage of her son. She says to him: “I have three girls in my mind, all three from decent families. Hema, Parvati, and Mohana. Do you want to see the photograph?” (Hariharan, TFN, 61) This relationship projects woman as a responsible and caring mother. The mother of Baba asks him whether he wants to see the photographs of these three girls. She has all the planning of marriage in her mind but she wants that her son select one out of the three girls. So she makes a proposal to her son to see all three photographs and select one out of them then she could further talk to the parents of the girl but she keeps this proposal to her son then Baba replies to his mother: “No, no said Baba. If you think they are healthy and well-trained, why should I doubt on your word?” (Hariharan, TFN, 62) He has a firm belief on her mother’s choice. So he denies seeing the photographs of the girls. He leaves it to on his mother to decide the things regarding his marriage. After all she is his mother who always wants benefit of her son. But he makes a choice in the names of the girls.

But I don’t like the names Hema and Mohana. They are too frivolous. They sound like back-chatting, tantrum-throwing, and modern girls. You can go see Parvati. There’s an old, reliable name! Go see if you like her. (Hariharan, TFN, 62)

Baba has no question and doubt regarding the wisdom and choice of his mother. He values and respects of her decisions. What she decides is only for his benefits. So there is no ifs and buts in the mind of Baba on the decisions of his mother. He further tells to his daughter-in-law, Devi:

See Devi, said Baba, we knew what filial piety means. We have never have been thought of questioning our parents’ wisdom. I saw my wife first time on our wedding day. We blessed with a special kind of trust you don’t find anymore. (Hariharan, TFN, 62)

So Baba is a son who gives his mother respect, love and care. So this relationship shows a side of mother-son relationship where both mother and son respect love and take care of each other.

Mayamma and her son Raja shows another shade of this mother-son relationship. Mayamma married to a drunkard husband. One year spent but no child was born from her. Mayamma suffers a lot in the hands of her mother-in-law and drunkard husband because she is a barren woman. She is tortured by them every day. So, now suffering is her fate. Her husband is so lustful man that he awakes her whole night. “Her husband works her up every night, his large hairy thighs rough and heavy on her, pushing, pushing” (Hariharan, TFN, 62) whole night she suffers a lot in the hands of her lustful husband and in the morning:

She woke up at four in the morning and walked among the blue tipped shadows to the pond. She prayed, made vows, dipped herself again and

again in the in the pure coldness. She starved every other day. She gave up salt and tamarind. (Hariharan, TFN, 80)

All this she does just for a child. She prays to gods every day and night just to get a child. Not only this:

She tied little wicker baskets with crimson strips of cloth on the tree dedicated to jaganmata. She meditated for hours before pan of clear water, representative of the golden- complexioned Shashti, giver of children. She fed the snakes for rice and curd; she bathed the all conquering lingam with sandalwood, milk and her tears of ardour. To please the evil conjunction of the planets, she offered tulsi leaves on the family shrine, chanting mantras without stopping breath. She invoked every day the goddess' thousand names; five hundred times she prostrated herself at the feet of ever fertile mother. Every six months she renewed her vows; every six months she invited six Brahmins to fast and sent them away with the richest gifts she could lay her hand on. (Hariharan, TFN, 80-81)

Now after the long ten years of worship, pain and suffering she gives birth to a son. She is a mother now and the label of a barren woman removes from her name. But eight years later, her husband worn in to middle age with dissipated excess, disappeared, and taking with him all the money in the house.” (Hariharan, TFN, 81) Now she lives with her hard earned only son Raja. But her son is totally opposite what she thinks. “The son fed on lavish helping of tenderness and yearning even before he was born, turned sour early.” (Hariharan, TFN, 81) When Mayamma’s son reaches at the age of fourteen, he opens his real hood of a cobra snake. “At fourteen he threatened to beat his mother and sold her last pair of gold bangles. (Hariharan, TFN, 80-81) From the beginning of her married life Mayamma suffers in the hands of her drunkard husband and her cruel mother-in-law; she hopes now that her son will give her comforts, love and respect but alas her son starts misbehaving with her. Mayamma spent ten precious years of her life in worshipping of gods to get a son. She suffers as a wife, as a daughter-in-law and her sufferings culminate as a mother. Her son is a stigma on the name of a son. Mayamma now is a weak woman; her capacity of bearing tortures now decreases day by day, on the other hand the degree of the tortures increases day by day by her son Raja.

The wastrel son kept Mayamma busy. She earned a little; she could cook, clean with the strength of a young woman. Now longer fourteen, he did not stop at threats. The night she refused to give him her diamond earrings (her daughter-in-law—to be’s trousseau), he hit her with an iron frying pan. The kitchen swirled around her head and she screamed Devi, Mother hears me. Through the cloud of pain, wet, sticky about her head on the hard floor, she felt her rough hands on her ears, grasping, tearing away. (Hariharan, TFN, 82)

This is a tragic story of a mother. Mayamma would never think that such kind of son born from her womb after wasting ten years of her life. Now she thinks that a barren woman was a better title for her than of a mother. But after getting such big dose of tortures from her cruel son she never changes her heart towards him. She is a suffering motherly figure on this earth. But the feeling of motherly love for his son never dies in her heart. When her merciless son falls ill, she sits by him for two months day and night. “When he falls ill with high fever, there was no tenderness left in Mayamma’s hands. They were efficient, cool but withheld reassurance.”

(Hariharan, TFN, 82) But Mayamma remains a mother to him. She cares him during his illness as a loving and caring mother. Raja is a monster in the skin of a son. But Mayamma presents a mother who after bearing so much cruelty still is a mother of care and love and still cares him during his sickness.

For two months she sat by him all night, bathed him, and dried the cracked body with a soft old sari. He has never been a son to her as much as he was then, now that she had curbed the flow of her pleas. The fever rose and fell, rose and fell till he was reduced to helpless, delirious moaning. The day he died, Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of life's handiwork: now all these snatched from her. (Hariharan, TFN, 82)

The relationship of Mayamma and her son Raja adds a new dimension in mother-son relationship which depicts a barren woman who wastes ten precious years of her life in worshipping the gods just to gain a son and a son who is a monster in the guise of a son.

Lakshmiamma and her town-living educated son relationship throws light on the hidden side of mother-son relationship. Lakshmiamma is an old woman in her mature seventies who lives in a village alone. She is aunt of Mayamma. In the name of the family, she has nothing, except, the mongoose in her backyard, pigeons on the tiles and a lizard in her rice gruel and an empty old house. Her only son, the heir of this family wealth, lives forty miles away in a town. He is always busy in his town life and has no time for his old mother. "He sent her money orders once a month twenty rupees, and a line to say that he was busy, he would visit next year." (Hariharan, TFN, 125) The son who is educated by her mother has no times for her now. After this "the money orders stopped coming." (Hariharan, TFN, 125) Lakshmiamma complains in temple in every evening. She goes to neighbours' houses impatiently. The neighbours say to Lakshmiamma:

Patience, Lakshmiamma, they said sagely. Money is not that easy to come by these days. Among themselves, they clucked their tongues, and spoke of young men who lost their souls in towns, and old women who lived too long. (Hariharan, TFN, 125)

She is in waiting that her son will come to see her one day. And what could she do except to take a hope. She does not open the gate of the home for three days. Everyone thought that she has died.

Then, for three days Lakshmiamma was not to be seen. Her front door was shut all day long and the ants quickly built muddy heaps outside the door. The villagers spoke for writing to the son, and clucked their tongues again. (125)

This is the miserable condition of an old mother who lives alone in the village without her son. The son has not a single day to meet his mother. Her son never thought that his mother is an old lady and she needs care and help in her old days. So it is the duty of a son to take care of his mother, come to village and live with her or take her along with him in the town. The old woman Lakshmiamma was not seen by anyone. She locked herself in her home and the villagers were so worried about her when they did not see her for three days. But on the fourth day she opened the door and swept away the ant hills. She loses her control over her senses. "Then she sat on the front veranda gazing impassively at persons by. Half an hour later, the entire village was in an uproar." (Hariharan, TFN, 125) In the old age of her seventies, Lakshmiamma the old

mother defeats from life. She is alone in the last years of her life. Her only son pays no attention to her. In her loneliness and boredom, Lakshmiamma loses control over her senses and sits naked in the front of the door.

Lakshmiamma has taken leave of her senses, they said, oh this is what happens when a woman lives too long. She casts away her shave, the very source of her womanhood. (Hariharan, TFN, 125)

She lost control over her senses. This is a tragic and miserable condition of an old mother and the son enjoys his busy life in the town. He cannot even imagine that what the condition of his mother in the village is. Everyone stares on Lakshmiamma's naked body but she has no tension of it. "She may have seen the hanging jaw, the wide-eyed gaping stare, and the averted faces. But she sat on, unconcerned, stonily silent, stark naked." (Hariharan, TFN, 125-126) This is the picture of an old suffering mother of an unconcerned town living educated son. Everyone stares on her nakedness then, "an hour later, four old women shooed her inside. They chanted mantrams, exorcised the demon, and covered her body." (Hariharan, TFN, 125) Lakshmiamma suffers a lot in her old age in which she is helpless to do anything and her life full of loneliness and boredom. After few weeks the son comes to meet her old mother and then returns to the town again without taking his mother along with him. "After few weeks, the son arrived, looking shiftily, Lakshmiamma followed him to the bus stop, meek and silent. But the villagers swore that they saw a half smile of triumph on her face." (Hariharan, TFN, 126)

Lakshmiamma and her son relationship shows another dimension of mother- son relationship where a mother is in-waiting of her town-living son spends old age full of suffering and alienation.

In *When Dreams Travel* Umar and Sabiha relationship show another face of this mother-son relationship. Sabiha is not his real mother, she is his nurse. Umar's own mother Shahrzad dies just after his birth thereafter Sabiha is both mother and nurse of Prince Umar: "She was fat, this nurse, and called not unkindly, Sabiha of giant globes." (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 215) She is a generous lady who takes care and nourishes Prince Umar from the first day of his birth: "Sabiha is full tightly packed breasts had fed him generously from the very first day of his life" (Hariharan, WDT, 215) Umar is not a healthy child, he is very weak from his birth. He could also die like the other two babies- his brother and sister if Sabiha does not care of him, especially, if she does not feed him with her breasts' milk. The novelist writes about Sabiha:

She had in fact seen him through his infancy years in which her own mother had bigger business at hand, though he like the other two babies which did not survive, was weak and fretful. Sabiha was always there, large and comforting. (Hariharan, WDT, 215)

Sabiha is full of motherly love and care and she gave excess of it to Umar. In other words, she devoted her full life for the nourishment of this prince child. If Umar is alive in this world it is only because of Sabiha.

She seemed to have been put on this earth only to feed Umar, nourish and protect him from the numerous evils royals are vulnerable to. Umar had not spent a day in his brief life when he had not seen her. (Hariharan, WDT, 215)

Umar is now a young, God-fearing Prince of Shahabad city. He loves Sabiha very much. He could not live without her love and care. Their relationship is full of love, care and respect. Sabiha pours out all her motherly love to Umar. Though many years passed and Umar turns to a

young handsome prince form an infant child. Now he can take care of himself but for Sabiha he was still a child and she takes care of him as a little child.

She still comes to him every night, and left his chamber only when he was fast asleep. Many years his searching little hands would slip into her robe and snuggle into the deep valley between her breasts. She would stroke his hair, sing a song or two in the thin, bird like voice that lived, incongruously, in that padded body. (Hariharan, WDT, 216)

Umar also cannot sleep without her songs and presence. He needs daily full dose of motherly love from Sabiha. Her presence has a meaning for Umar, without it feels restless. Whether she sings motherly song for him or not but her presence must for him.

But whether she was still or talkative, her presence tricked into him like that earlier steady dip from her nipples into his expectant mouth. Her presence, a comforting smell of milk, a whiff of garlic and sweat, sucked him into a safe place and lulled him to sleep. (Hariharan, WDT, 216)

So this relationship between Sabiha and Umar presents a mother and a son who cannot live without each other. Sabiha is a nurse who becomes a real mother of a prince. It presents the ideal picture of ideal mother-son relationship.

In Times of Siege Mrs. Arya and Akshai relationship is an example of mother-son relationship. Mrs. Arya is a mother of a blind son. So, the mother has special care and love for her blind son. The meaning of having a blind son only a mother can understand. She devotes to her son and she has a sympathetic attitude towards him. But her husband is indifferent towards her. He even does not allow her to give a bath to her blind son. She depicts her pains of a sufferings mother: “he (her husband) won’t even let me bathe the child. She looks both proud and pained as she says this.” (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 29)

The relationship of Mrs. Arya with her son shows longing and suffering of a mother for her blind son who even deprives from the right of giving bath to her only son by her husband which shows the new colour of this rainbow of mother-son relationship.

Thus, the novels of Githa Hariharan is a window of mother-son relationship, one can peep through it can see the multi-colour rainbow of mother-son relationship. One can also learn from this variety of mother-son relationship what things which make the relation harmonious are and what are the things which make a relationship worst.

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