

DIMENSIONS OF FATHER-IN-LAW-DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AND FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN THE NOVELS OF GITHA HARIHARAN

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Abstract

This brief study discusses various dimensions of father-in-law-daughter-in-law and father-daughter relationship in 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-in-law—daughter-in-law and father-daughter relationship 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.

Father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship has its own place in personal relationships. Githa Hariharan presents two examples of this relationship in her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, which presents two different dimensions of this relationship.

Sita and her father-in-law relation present a picture of an aggressive father-in-law and a submissive daughter-in-law relationship. Sita has fond of playing Veena. When she comes in her laws' home after marriage, the Veena is a part of her dowry. But one day in morning time when she was playing Veena in very melodious tone as she was daily play it because it was her talent

or she was a young maestro of Veena. Sita is a very obedient daughter-in-law and wife. But one day her rigid and traditional father-in-law shouts on her in morning time when she was playing Veena. He roared: “Put the Veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law? Sita replies: Yes. I am a wife, and a daughter-in-law.” (Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, 30) From that day she never touched the Veena again. So this relation shows how a father-in-law kills the talent of his talented young daughter-in-law of playing Veena.

Baba and Devi relation is another example of father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Devi grows with the stories of her grandmother. Sushma Arya judiciously comments:

After her marriage, in her husband’s house also Devi meets a counterpart of grandmother in Baba, the grandfather. For lonely Devi Baba is a good companion. Strangely, Baba is also storehouse of stories to share with her. Githa Hariharan compares Baba’s stories with that of the grandmother. (52)

But the stories told by Baba are totally different from the stories of her grandmother. The stories of grandmother strengthen her Self; give courage and inspiration to Devi in her struggling life. On the other hand, the stories which told by Baba were guide her for the role and duties of a wife. His stories are full of rules and codes setup by Brahmin scriptures. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments on the stories of Baba:

Baba’s stories – stories from the scriptures, of saints and their virtuous wives, insisting upon the sanctity and supremacy of Brahminical order. Baba’s stories contain in themselves the imposition, customs and codes, ‘shoulds’ and ‘should nots,’ of the male value structure that are meant to percolate and condition the female psyche so that they accept a subservient and inferior role. (163)

After her marriage with Mahesh – a busy touring job person, *the other male authority in the family is Devi’s father-in-law who narrates to her stories from the Puranas and the Vedas and exposes her to the classical written tradition.* Baba takes the place of her grandmother. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments:

Devi’s father-in-law’s stories were elaborate elucidation of the codes laid down by Manusmriti, and full of examples of virtuous and chaste women, inspiring their husbands along the path of ‘Dharma’ by their self-abnegation and subservience. (153)

He always gives time to Devi and tells her a number of stories. Sushma Arya judiciously comments on Baba:

Baba, ‘the decent patriarch’ tells the stories about saints like jayadeva, Puradara dasa, Naryana Tirtha. In these stories, women are presented as instruments of the saints’ initiation into bhakti. Grandfather’s stories are didactic. Devi later comes across an unread story of Kritiya, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. The grandmother’s stories overtly give devi feminist messages whereas the patriarchal grandfather directly guides her through the traditional path to be passive heroine. (52-53)

It is a second thing that all his stories are male dominated and he is an ardent follower of Manu. “Baba’s voice is the voice of ‘magisterial Manu.’ His stories uncover the functions decided

upon by society for women.” (Ray, 159) *Her father-in-law fills her empty hours with his stories. Baba, as Devi called her father-in-law, told her a member of stories. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments on the stories of Baba which are full of woman slavery:*

Baba’s stories, dominantly project images which render women secondary and which depict then in restricted models, reinforce inequalities and discrimination. His stories epitomize the idea of ‘womanhood’ or ‘femininity’ as perceived by social norms, and define the gender specific roles of a mother, daughter, wife and daughter-in-law. In role-definitions, neglect, disposal and loneliness are recurring features. Women are disposed of, discarded, rejected and subordinated. They are able to redeem themselves mainly through devotion, sacrifice and sublimation. In Baba’s account women’s lives are by male control, deriving them the element of the choice. His stories evoke traditional taboos on the moral behaviour and conduct of women. In relation to their various social and familial roles and establish the patriarchal structure, which defines all social discourse. (159)

He loves Devi as his own daughter and likes her very much. Devi also respects him. So, this relation between Baba and Devi presents another picture of this relationship.

The relation of Uma and her Father-in-law shows another angle of this father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. “Uma is a motherless girl, even her girlhood, spent with an indifferent father and a hostile step mother.” (Hariharan, TFN, 35) Uma’s father-in-law is a drunkard. He crosses all the limits of this relation. He turns into an animal after drinking even that he forgets what he is doing? He drinks very badly and then turns into an animal. Uma afraids so much that “her foreboding grew into terror when her drunken father-in-law kissed her roughly on the lips” (Hariharan, TFN, 35) The relation of Uma and her father-in-law set an example of a sex ridden father-in-law who becomes an animal after drinking, even that he forgets that to whom he is kissing sexually, is his own daughter-in-law.

Githa Hariharan in her novels presents various dimensions of father-daughter relationship. As the father-daughter relationship has the chief importance in the field of interpersonal relationships. In her novels, Hariharan is presented this relationship in its myriad dimensions.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi and Mahadevan relation is an example of this relationship and is a harmonious one. Mahadevan loves her daughter, Devi very much. He provides her full freedom to bloom:

Both Devi and Mahadevan had grown into the sly, shifted eyes accomplices of a muting that threatened to erupt through books, daydreams, gods and goddesses, secret corners, the innocent (and therefore more dangerous) sensuality of a stranger like Annapurna. (Hariharan, TFN, 105)

Mahadeven and his daughter Devi’s relation is a very lovable one. Both love and respect to each other. He provides full freedom to his daughter Devi. By his encouragement she studied in America. He believes in equality of man and woman that is why he provides all possible sources to his daughter.

Uma and her Father relation in another example of father-daughter relationship Uma is a motherless child. So she needs more care and love from her father or in other words her father has double responsibilities of a father and a mother on his shoulders. It is his duty to play both

the roles of a father and a mother for his daughter Uma. But he remarriages with another woman and behave with Uma indifferently. His behaviour is very cold and rigid towards Uma. He presents a picture of careless father and who sets Uma's marriage in a family of drunkards where her husband and her father-in-law both are number one drunkards. He presents a father who did not play a role of a father with sincerity.

In *When Dreams Travel* Wazir and his daughters, Shahrzad and Dunyazad relation adds another dimension in this father-daughter relationship. Wazir is an ideal and learned person. He has two daughters Shahrzad and Dunyazad. He nurtures his both daughters like sons and makes them intelligent, witty, and full of wisdom, courageous and ideal one. He plays role of a father who made his daughters independent. He loves and cares his daughters very much. He sends her daughters to Sultan Shahrzad who needs a virgin every night and he kills the girl before morning. Shahrzad save the city by her wisdom and changes the heart of a merciless Sultan by her witty stories. Both, Shahrzad and Dunyazad prove by their wisdom that they are the daughters of Wazir. When the whole city empties from virgins then only two daughters of Wazir left in the city. Wazir decides to send his daughters to the palace and to save the city. He says to his elder daughter Shahrzad about the danger of the palace:

It is a dangerous mission my daughter! Dunyazad knows his narrow eyes bore holes into her sister's face with their intensity. And having warned her, signaled his love in the only way he knows, he goes on quickly: Have you made up your mind? Do you have to go to the palace tomorrow? (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 51)

The wazir, father of Shahrzad nurtured his daughters like warriors of wisdom. They are pupils more than daughters for him:

He has trained and matured her till she crossed over to firm ground, exiled herself from the shifting, unreliable sea of a feminine enclosure. Now today he waits for the last word from Shahrzad. He waits for her pupil's fees in full measure. (Hariharan, *WDT*, 51)

After listening to her father and mentor Shahrzad says: "Yes father' says Shahrzad I must go. Nothing can change that, I know." (Hariharan, *WDT*, 51)

So this relation of Wazir and his daughters presents an angle of father-daughter relationship in which one can see an ideal father daughter relationship. Here the father matured and trained his daughters as intellectuals. Provide them proper training and her daughter save the city by their wisdom.

The novel *In Times of Siege* presents another dimension of this father-daughter relationship through Professor Dr. Shiv Murthy and his daughter Tara. Dr. Shiv Murthy has only one daughter. He gives her well education and when she gets a job in Seattle, America, at this situation, Shiv Murthy plays a duty of a father and sends her wife Rekha with her daughter and remains alone in India. He loves her daughter very much so when the opportunity knocks in her life, that is the job in America, then without waiting anything he makes all arrangements for her to go America along with her mother Rekha. He plays all his responsibilities what a father have but there is a big difference in the ideology of both Shiv and Tara. Shiv always tries that his daughter becomes a learned personality. But Tara always has a totally different point of view for the things from her student life and now she has some sort of job in America to do with computers.

Shiv's daughter Tara, always an indifferent student, now has some sort of job in America to do with computers. Her salary -- a clear indication that Rekha's genes have triumphed

over his—would have assure his uncle that Shiv’s existence is justified. (Hariharan, In Times of Siege, 111)

Dr. Shiv Murthy now comes to know or he “wonders about Tara: how well does he really know about her? She is young than Meena, but unlike her, Tara couldn’t wait to finish with life as a student.” (Haiharan, In T. of Siege, 111) Shiv, the father of Tara worries about history, humanity, countries, people, sentiments, truth, and value of human life. His world is full of uncertainties. On the other hand, “her world is a small, small place, but she knows it very well, Delhi to Seattle via computer courses, competitive exams, a job that promises a yuppie future.” (Haiharan, In T. of Siege, 111-112) Tara’s behaviour was also indifferent towards her father because of the ideological differences. She never worries about the world or humanity its pains and sufferings but rather she overcomes from doubts in very early years of age:

Shiv remembers the time when she was seven or eight, a plump, neat little girl, she sought him out in his study and told him, with all the confidence of a conformist bent on survival. ‘My teachers and friend say there’s a god. The whole world says it; only you say there isn’t a god. I’ll believe the whole world, not you. (Haiharan, In T. of Siege, 112)

Tara is a daughter who can believe on the world means majority, however it is wrong or right. She never uses her own wisdom to justify what is wrong and what is right. She always runs with majority. Her behaviour is very crude towards her father, even when a problem arises in the life of Shiv Murthy regarding Basava’s lesson in B.A. course. In this situation he feels alone and he needs the company of his family even of his daughter also. But Tara, besides helping him and to make believe him that his daughter is with him, she sends an email to him which is totally opposite to the hope of Shiv Murthy.

I’ve getting messages from friends in Delhi and some Indian here it’s a sort of weird and embarrassing to explain why you have written something against our temples and priests all that. It’s only after coming to the US that many of us have learnt to appreciate Indian traditions. This sounds like a lecture, doesn’t it and that must amuse you, considering I always ran away from lectures! (Haiharan, In T. of Siege, 112)

So this relation between Shiv and his daughter, Tara shows the new angle of father daughter relationship. Here a daughter believes on the opinions of majority, however it is wrong and right, she never worries about this and never agree upon the opinions and thoughts of her own father, though they based on logic and rationality. Her father pays all his duties and Tara never behaves as a daughter to him.

In Fugitive Histories Mala and her father relation is another example of father-daughter relationship which presents this relationship with new angle. Mala’s father is traditional and patriarchal. “He used all his energy on discovering in genius ways of smoking cigarette or drinking a glass of whisky.” (Hariharan, Fugitive Histories, 15) He is a drunkard from his youthful days. Mala is an educated young girl who decides to marry Asad, a Muslim by birth and a secular by thoughts. To tag with any fold and religion is not his business. When the father of Mala or Malathi comes to know her decision of marriage with Asad, a Muslim who is an artist painter by profession, he behaves like a traditional Indian father on her decision of love marriage. So Mala is in Madras, in her parents’ home, summoned by them to explain why she wants to disgrace them with her this decision. Mala’s father says:

‘How can you want to marry him?’ asks her father genuinely puzzled. ‘Think of the difference!’ he says. ‘It’ll always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It won’t go away just because you’re married.’ (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 69)

The father presents a traditional Indian father who always against the lover marriage. On the other hand Mala presents a daughter who affirms on her decision and a helpless father.

So this relation shows a different angle of father-daughter where the father is helpless against the decision of her daughter of her love marriage however he remains disagree and unhappy on this decision and a daughter who does not afraid of her father’s commanding voice and affirms on her decision.

Asad and Sara’s relation shows another angle of this father-daughter relationship. Asad is a Muslim by birth and a secularist by thoughts. On the other hand, Sara, her daughter is a hybrid child, half-Hindu and half-Muslim. She believes in the secular ideas of his father but when she is young girl and goes to Ahmadabad then people asks her whether she is Hindu or Muslim. Then she feels confuse that what reply she gives to them. So her father’s philosophy or ideology comes to die when she comes across these questions in practical field of life. She thinks:

Is Asad’s dream also gone? The dream that made him say you did not have to worry about whether you are Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian, or part Hindu, or atheist by default, it is just to be you. (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 102)

But she affirms in her behaviour on the ideas of her father because she likes them but on the same time she suffers from identity crisis. Yasmin a Muslim girl asks her: “You are a Muslim, aren’t you, Didi? She asks.” (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 167) On this Sara replies: “My grandmother was, says Sara. I have Muslim relatives and Hindu relatives. I’m neither. Sometimes I think I’m Indian. But most of the time I’m Sara.” (167) So this is the philosophy of her father, Asad, which makes her Sara, not a Hindu and Muslim. This philosophy is the inheritance of her father for her. Asad presents a picture of a liberal father who does not like that his children called him Abba of Appa. “Asad would insist his children needn’t call him Abba and Appa, just by his name. It was a perfectly good name, not titles necessary, he joked.” (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 47)

Sara and Asad relation is a fine example of father-daughter relationship. Asad as a father teaches his daughter about the humanity not about any religion. Sara follows the same thing in her life. This relation presents a father who has a liberal personality. He is Asad only nothing else and a daughter who logically concises the ideas of her father.

Abba and Yashmin’s relation shows another face of father daughter relationship. Abba is a man who lost his only son in 2002 massacre of Gujrat. Now he has only one child that is his daughter, Yashmin, who is a school going girl. Abba promotes her daughter for education. He encourages her. Abba presents a sufficient father and Yashmin a girl who want to take responsibility of his brother on her shoulders. So she works hard to achieve her goal.

Githa Hariharan in her novels shows various dimensions increases of this father-daughter relationship. She depicted this relationship with its various ups and downs. Her novels are a window through which one can peep and can see the myriad dimensions of father daughter relationship.



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