The Ghosts of Vasu Master
The Ghosts of Vasu Master represents the psychological trauma of the protagonist (Vasu Master) and his journey from a broken and dismantled self to a confident, hopeful and creative person. This novel is about the self discovery of Vasu Master through teacher-taught relationship. Vasu Master’s quest for identity is identified with the journey of mind along time and space. In this novel, one finds a flood of human emotions in the complicated life of Vasu Master. He is an English teacher in P.G. Boy’s school, Elipetti. The story starts with his retirement from the school. His students present him a notebook as a farewell gift. In this notebook, he starts jotting down his observations, feelings and memories about teaching.

The novel reveals the story of a retired School Master who after his retirement as a teacher, faces major challenge of his life when he has to deal with his complex self and teaching of a mentally disturbed student Mani. The relationship between Vasu Master and Mani shows a new side of teaching profession which is reflected in one of the three epigraphs at the beginning of the novel by Charaka, the Ayurvedic doctor in Hindu Scriptures explaining that: “The entire world is teacher to the intelligent and foe to the unintelligent” (Hariharan 1994: IX).

This novel can be considered an experimental novel as this novel begins with the ending of the teaching profession of Vasu Master and not with the birth or beginning of his profession which otherwise normally happens. But this ending of the profession is not a normal ending for Vasu Master. At this point, he finds a new chapter in his life. This chapter asks him some of the most important questions related to the significance of life and teaching. After teaching for nearly forty years, he retires without a sense of fulfillment. His present as well as his past haunts him like a ghost. “His world is peopled by ghosts and absences, it is a world of forgetting and remembering” (Butalia, vol.19). He is constantly at war with his present to search his identity. He is unable to find the
significance of his life and existence. His way of teaching during his job depicted in the novel also reflects his psychological turmoil.

In the light of the theory of “Existentialism”, one sees him unable to find the significance of life and existence. This shows his sense of alienation from the self. Vasu sees himself as a stranger who is in search of a definite identity in this infinite world. Vasu wakes up to find himself dead as he depicts his condition through the lines of Franz Kafka, who says, “A man didn’t know that he existed, until one day he awakes to find himself dead” (24). At the time of retirement he realizes that after forty years of teaching, he is unable to read the psyche of his students and this shows his lack of knowledge of educational psychology. He feels guilty and starts searching his true self. However, after retirement a new chapter of his life begins which paves the way to know and understand himself. Now, Vasu Master is not any more surrounded by the walls of a classroom or the pressure of following the commands of any principal. During his search of identity, he recollects many incidents from the past and starts discovering the true nature of teaching, and the relation between a teacher and his students.

Marcia’s theory of psychology portrays Vasu in the stage of “identity diffusion” as he lacks both a sense of having choices in life and interest in committing to those unchosen roles even. Vasu Master lives alone in a remote village of Elipetti. His wife is no more and his two sons namely Vishnu and Venu live in Madras and Bombay respectively. He also does not have very healthy relationship with his colleagues. Living alone, he is frequently haunted with feelings of isolation. In these hours of isolation, he often recalls his childhood, his grandmother, his father and his wife. One finds Vasu pretty perplexed by the jumble of memories, stories and images that seem to come to him of their own accord. He often says, “I am not sure what different pieces have to do with one another, I am digressing” (17). One finds Vasu Master unable to maintain relations and balance in his own life.
Bahuguna has rightly stated that “Mani can be compared with Darshil of Taare Zameen Par (a famous film by Amir Khan)” (vol. 3). Like Darshil Mani also hates pens, pencils and notebooks. Finally, Mani’s father finds Vasu Master as his teacher. The real challenge comes when he starts teaching Mani- the most complicated and intractable case. When he starts teaching Mani, he starts exploring his own self. "Perhaps no school, no teacher can assume responsibility for the learning that should stretch across the entire lifetime of the pupil. But then how do you weave a web that links and transfigures each line of experience, every point into one learning?” (26). Mani is an object of ridicule for the whole town. Mani is twelve years old when he approaches Vasu Master but “with it seems the brain of a six or seven years old” (10). Rude and silent Mani is born as a normal child, walks and talks at the right time, then, slowly, he becomes quieter. His head grows like a ripe long papaya. “He has been caned, shouted at, tied up and finally hounded out of school for disruptive behaviour” (Seshadri, vol.4). His parents opted for many schools as well as private tutors, but in vain. In the beginning Vasu thought that there could be no change in Mani. “To date I had thought of Mani as a mask, a log of wood, a hounded animal, an impervious brick wall a frozen puddle of drain water, a freakish victim, a cunning beast of prey” (51).

Vasu starts teaching Mani. With the passage of time, he seeks Mani as his only companion. In the process of teaching Mani, he not only discovers himself but also provides the necessary healing to Mani. He says:

But Mani was a puzzle; the kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part; if I was to know what I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late. (99)
The novel is a complete web of stories. It is a kind of metafiction. In the course of all these stories, Vasu recalls his dead wife telling a story, her friend's stories, the teaching parables of his friend Venkatesan's Swami, and many other narratives from almost every character in the novel. While writing his memoir about his career he tells the readers stories about his sons who want him to act his age and live his normal old age life, the owner of the school where he taught, his wife, himself, his dead father (an Ayurvedic doctor) and his grandmother.

"Burrowing into the deep recesses of his collective unconscious, Vasu Master unlocks the doors to a secret wisdom-enshrined in the mother of all stories, *The Panchatantra*" (Roy, vol. 33). Through this Vasu tries to awake the intelligence of his reticent pupil. There is a repetitive tale of "Grey Mouse" and a fly named "Blue Bottle" which moves parallel with the novel and supports the belief of Vasu. Throughout the discourse readers will see Grey Mouse (Vasu) and Blue Bottle (Mani) going through all the four stages of identity formation as stated by Marcia.

Grey Mouse represents the image of Vasu and the fly Blue Bottle, of Mani. "As Mahesh Kale points out in volume 2, that the Grey Mouse is not a mouse, but a person in grey profession i.e. teaching." Just as Grey mouse keeps himself shut inside a whole, Vasu has never realized his true self. It is only in the company of the Blue bottle (or Mani) that he realizes his true identity. The story "Blue Bottle Finds a Friend" shows the meeting of Blue Bottle with Grey Mouse. One sees Blue Bottle in the company of other flies which mock at him for not being swift and normal. Other flies do not like him and think him as a burden and responsibility. The other flies unlike Blue Bottle are swift and not afraid of the dangers of the spider and his web. At this time, Grey gives him shelter. Other flies warn him to act wisely as this dumb and violent insect could create problem to him, but the Grey Mouse seems sure of Blue Bottle's reformation and neglects this all.
Till now, Grey Mouse is almost confined to his hole, always fearful to the dangers of the world outside. Rejected by his compatriots for being too large, not quick enough, and perhaps not clever enough, Blue Bottle finds a home with Grey Mouse. They do not emerge from it for a long time. Grey Mouse starts loving Blue Bottle more than either pupil or son in the same way as Vasu begins to feel for Mani. So, one sees that the animals are as memorable as their human counterparts. One sees an image of Vasu’s father in a Firefly, his son Vishnu’s in Buck-Tooth and of Gopu’s (Mani’s brother) in a Wingless Wasp.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Vasu is shown to be continuously ill with diarrhea but the problem is inside his mind not outside. In the novel he narrates some incidents that he experiences himself and sometimes he records the stories told by others. There, one finds the materialistic views of Vishnu, Spiritualistic view of Venkatesan’s Swami, and the political activism of Gopu. There is also the world of the animal fable, his wife Mangala’s ghost story, her friend Jameela’s wordless tapestries and her own fable, his father’s Ayurvedic lectures, and the powerful muteness of young Mani, the great unsaid hero of the book. The novel represents Vasu’s views on education, methods of teaching and ancient education system. Vasu thinks, “All of us are pupils and teachers, while there is life in each of us, we learn and we teach” (28). With the passage of time, while teaching Mani, Vasu Master learns the broadest meaning of teaching. He realizes that one has to “first become a judge, an ideologue, a priest and a doctor to be a teacher in real sense” (29).

Mani is the mirror image of Vasu. They both seem to be sailing on the same boat as one suffers from identity crisis and another from his problematic mind. Mirrors are strong symbols in the story and readers are supposed to chart the various angles of refraction and reflection. Vasu looks into all these mirrors to understand his real place
and identity. He stops feeling like a master, like the rest of those whom he knows. Being out of an institutional practice, Mani teaches him to shed his old skin like a snake. Vasu is very kind and gentle teacher who is often criticized for not being rude and rough with the students in order to prepare them to encounter the roughness of the world. The relationship between an institution and the discourse it imparts becomes meaningless for Vasu when he sees Mani- a living symbol of its effects.

Mead has rightly said that selfhood is attained through reflexivity. Vasu interacts with others and this interaction changes the course of his responses to the self. He tries to study his “shadows” in the depth of all these mirrors. He looks at each person in his life through his/her reflections in yet another. Readers get bewildered when he says “but now I think about it, perhaps the words I thought then spoke aloud were different” (28). The particular mirrors as well as the stories about these mirrors explain the readers of what these are capable of. Once, Vasu comments that I can “See my own mangled body in the mirror of Mani’s eyes” (25), which in a way tells the readers that speechless and impatient Mani is the “mirror of his youth”, who remains silent for hours in his authoritarian father’s office. He also remembers the authoritarian ego of his father when he sits as a master in front of Mani and realizes Mani’s state of mind. Afterwards, he finds his dead wife’s mirror. "I looked into the mirror and I saw an ugly stranger. He had grey thinning hair. His face was scarred. Pockmarks, creases, a map of lines and grilles. The eyes were what shocked me the most. They were a hounded animals" (40).

Vasu often feels that he has some kind of “emptiness” inside him but he was not able to understand the source of this emptiness. Existentialist theory states that he finds himself in an unsympathetic, uncertain and strange universe, in which meaning is not provided by the natural order, but rather can be created. Vasu thinks that everyone is hounded by death, therefore he wants to come out of the “hole” which is symbolic of his
alienated self. While making notes to reflect his “forty years in a classroom”, Vasu tries
the name this “hole” in a number of ways. Physically body is deteriorating daily:

The body is so easily damaged, its mutilated ruins disposed of. I knew this
now as never before. All I could do was look into the mirror- the mirror I
found in Mangala’s trunk, perhaps keep track of more than one body, one
face- the before and the after. In the depths of the mirror, this actually
seemed possible. The face of the present loomed large in the foreground, a
reflection that often seemed sharper than the reality, each pockmark a
permanent scar or wound, but from this vantage point I could also look
back in snatches, remember all the parts of the changeable body, it’s
ancestors and descendents, so that I could see it whole again. Otherwise I
become a flat, one dimensional figure, a man in the present of an empty
room on the verge of eviction. (90)

After thirty years, in a dream, he finds himself again in the room which he and
Mangala shared during the bereavement rituals after his father’s death. Both “actor and
spectator”, he examined a swelling wound on his body, when he cut it, there was pus, but
also “the wound was choked with maggots- hundreds of tiny, restless creatures, feeding
and growing, filling up the gaping hole” (122). This “hole” indicates the empty place in
Vasu’s life, the “pus” represents his poor defense, the “maggots” show the gnawing
carrion feeding for a lifetime off that hole. He visits various doctors to cure this lifetime
problem of diarrhea and insomnia, but, none of them can diagnose this wound, this
“hole”. “May be you should try something else (a doctor) finally mumbled. Have you
considered homeopathy? Or ayurveda?” (1). This dream helps him to gain age-old
wisdom of Ayurveda outside the failed lineage of patriarchal transmission. He follows
the advice of physician to take hold of this ayurvedic wisdom. He feels, “I had to
conduct my next medical examination in my own half-baked and haphazard fashion” (109). This suggests that he wants to fill this “hole” and wishes to be “whole” again. His perception offers him a virtual depth. He feels how “the fatal hole I saw before me had moved closer and closer till we occupied the same space” (36), and he tries to use these mirrors intentionally to comprehend his complex character which he might not have anticipated earlier.

There are certain characters in the novel, who try to suppress the self of Vasu. Consequently, he loses his self-confidence. His boss and owner of the school Veera Naidu, his son Vishnu, fellow teachers like Raghavan and his friend Venkatesan’s Swami, his students like Raman and Gopu, try to bully him like his father. He cannot rebel because he seems to be totally misfit in this patriarchal set-up. When Veera Naidu describes him as a patient, mild and soft spoken teacher at the time of his retirement, he thinks that whether these qualities are virtues or signs of weakness in a teacher.

From the very beginning one finds Vasu attracted towards his father's Ayurvedic Bible but he was not allowed to read it. Years later, eventually, when he sets aside a stern and dictating teaching methodology used by his other fellow teachers, and, opted for teaching- the art of making balanced human beings, he comes to know how his father’s Ayurvedic art works. It is a sort of healing as mentioned in Ayurveda rather than teaching. Vasu recalls, “My father, dead some thirty odd years, began to stalk me like a stubborn ghost” (2), a ghost who withholds his most precious book (the Ayurvedic recipes) he mocked the boy Vasu by quoting Shakespeare ironically to the boy’s pockmarks. “Boys in particular,” he would say, “need a caning every single day” (49). He was very authoritative and treated Vasu like a helpless object. He is helpless because during the Sanskrit lessons Vasu is expected to fall flat, a passive inert sponge, at his feet” (12), “quite happy to be a Tamil speaking Subhuman” (20).
Vasu tells Mani a story named “Firefly’s Legacy” where Firefly is a counterpart of his own father. He with the help of this story makes one understand that requirements and conditions change with time. Once a wasp asks Grey Mouse the reason behind dreaming and living in the world of memories. To this, he replied that one should know how to make a dream or a memory a reality, or, how to make an obstacle a weapon. According to the story, to travel the dark patches of the forest, Firefly craved a magic lantern and latched it to himself. The light of the lantern helped him to cross the forest and he saw everything in the colours of this light. Firefly was overwhelmed and wanted this light never to fade so that the fellow travellers or the passers-by could also see in the same way. But it was not helpful to others as they could only see the shadows, not the solid objects. In a way, Vasu makes it clear that one’s (his father) views cannot be accepted unquestionably, as they might be true only in his times and according to his requirements. Instead of looking at the shadows, one tries to look at the clues to solve the mysteries of one’s life.

Veera Naidu, the owner of the school where Vasu used to teach is one who always tries to bully Vasu. He is not the principal of the school but behaves like the one. For him teaching is not a noble profession but business only. He never gives freedom to the teachers to work according to their will and requirements but he wants them to work according to his whims. He asks his teachers to rank the students according to their monetary status, which is very difficult for Vasu to digest. He has no faith in his teachers and often when he goes out on tours, he asks them to keep a check on one-another, which in itself is a disgrace and insult to such a humble profession. Vasu being very nice and gentle is his easy prey. He often boasts of his wealthy son who is well-settled in America, and puts him down by enquiring about his sons and their meager income. Naidu feels happy in the company of teachers like Raghavan who are nothing more than
a “yes boss” figure. Later in the novel, Vasu comes to know through Gopu that Veera Naidu denies increments to the teachers for the next three years, retrenches two unfit teachers and suspends one teacher with false allegations, and openly demands bribes from students for admission.

Vasu feels broken and this further aggravates his psychological turmoil, when his son Vishnu commands him to move from his village Ellipetti. Vishnu, tries to suppress his personality and wants him to spend his rest of the life according to him. Vishnu is shown as a materialistic person. He is very busy with his job and his family (wife and two sons). He hardly finds any time to meet his father. One does not see any emotional bonding between them. Once, when Vasu discovers a family photo, he sees all the family members as strangers. Even at the time of his retirement, after forty years of dedicated service, neither of his sons comes. Vishnu writes him a letter asking him to pack his things up and leave his village. This shows that he is not at all interested in knowing his father’s will. He enquires about his provident fund and pension papers. When Vasu writes him back showing his disinterest in leaving his place and tells him about his tuition boys including the special one Mani, he asks him not to be foolish and act wisely like other retired people.

Here, Vishnu can be compared with “Buck-Tooth” (elder litter of Grey Mouse), about whom Vasu tells a story to Mani which is in fact the story of his son- Vishnu. Vasu tells Mani that one day, after many years, Buck Tooth visits his old father, when he comes to know that he has given shelter to a band of flies and moths. When he sees his father in the company of Blue Bottle, he feels ashamed. He does not like his old father playing with a dumb fly. Grey finds his son very unhappy. Grey Mouse realizes that his son does not like his father doing something nice and useful in his own, familiar mouse hole. But, Grey Mouse praises Blue Bottle for being unique and precious. He tells his
son that Blue Bottle is unique because what he can do, other flies cannot do. He makes it clear that other flies are swift but they can only buzz in the same tone in unison, whereas Blue Bottle knows to be wild as well as calm, still and patient. This shows that Vasu asserts his will in doing what pleases him. No doubt Mani is not like other normal children but Vasu takes it as a positive gesture. He knows that being different is not easy but in such a situation one learns according to his peculiar needs and personality grooms.

Raghavan, who is much junior in the college to Vasu, also feels happy in pulling his leg if given a chance. He advises Vasu to be stricter with students and tells him how to manage the class. Vasu feels disturbed due to this unnecessary supervision and guidance. In order to prove himself the most efficient and superior teacher, he interferes in Vasu’s academic life quite often. Not only the teachers but the students like Raman and Gopu also try to suppress him at times. Raman is a rich father’s son and favored by teachers like Raghavan and Veera Naidu. He is not a good student and to overcome this weakness, he always tries to bully Vasu in the class by asking irrelevant questions, by playing mean and vulgar jokes, by drawing obscene pictures on the black-board. On many such occasions, he captures the attention and favor of some of the boys like him and feels like a hero of the class. No doubt, Vasu knows how to handle such students but being sheltered by others, somehow he disturbs Vasu psychologically.

Gopu, (Mani’s brother) is another character in the novel, who unlike Raman tries to dominate Vasu. Gopu is an old student of Vasu’s P.G school. In a story named “Can a Wingless Wasp Fly Again?” the readers see the frequent visits of the Wasp to the Grey’s mouse hole. He goes there to meet the Blue Bottle as he knows him since his baby-fly days. The Wasp feels unhappy and angry to see the Grey mouse restricted to his mouse hole. He asks the mouse to come out and face the dangers of the world like spiders and crows. He asks the mouse to demand his place if not given, irrespective of the fears and
dangers. The wasp tries to make him understand that he is bigger than all these dangers. Here, one notices that the wasp is without wings but he feels complete as he never thought of his wings and learnt to live without them. Here the Wasp is the symbol of Gopu, who never thinks about his shortcomings. He is shown as an impatient man who takes quick decisions without calculating the probable risks and dangers. Vasu learns after few meetings with Gopu that he has a fixed chart of priorities.

Through Gopu, Hariharan presents the modern political scenario. Gopu is totally disparate to Veera Naidu, who wants to wield power and authority. He furiously remarks, “What kind of society are you letting them out into? Do you realize, he asked me, that your pupils are being bought and sold?” (102). Gopu shows his anger on the growing exploitation in the schools and colleges where people only do jobs to receive profit. Gopu discusses about cheating, paper leaks, bribes, capitation fees, rival unions, and bargains. Vasu feels as if he is a pupil to Gopu in the same way as Mani is to him. Gopu tells a fable “When the Python Wakes”, where the forest and tribes are in league to over throw the designers and owners, which indirectly hints at the expulsion of Veera Naidu. Gopu even instigate Vasu to write a pamphlet against Veera Naidu, to be used in his agitations. Here, Gopu is representing an image of the “python”, who wakes up strongly and overthrows all the foreigners (Veera Naidu) who wanted to establish their factories in his jungle by cutting the forest and by killing those tribal people who were not supporting them.

Gopu’s single vision lies in the formation of a new world. He seems to be so single-minded and articulated in achieving this vision that he forgets to account for simple human failings; to heal, to provide love and pleasure to others. One finds that Gopu also needs to travel a long path if he really wants to understand himself and find his identity in true sense in this world. Gopu is also sure of his powers and strengths like
Vasu’s father but he too is weighed down by some fears: obsession with failure, misery and doom. Vasu makes it clear to Gopu that one does not fight because one is scared, but because there is no other way. One needs to fight with one’s own self and doubt is required for progress.

The next character who tries to dominate Vasu through his religious teachings is of Swami, a religious guru of his friend Venketesan. Venkatesan asks Vasu to be a devotee of Swami in order to get real meaning of life and to be free from worries of all kinds. Vasu notices the concern and love of Venkatesan for him when he asks him to do so. Vasu visited this guru along with Venketesan for some time and finds that he only talks about self-realization. He wants to show his power and supremacy over his followers. He only has shallow knowledge and fails on practical grounds. Once, a young disciple of Swami enquired about the nature of truth as he finds him delivering almost the same lecture every time with little modifications, but Swami himself got puzzled and could not give any satisfying answer to him. Vasu is aware already that the discourse of Swami is one-dimensional and one can easily understand what he really wants— a sense of dominion.

His hand went slack and he shut his eyes, a saint weary of his own miracles. My children, he then sighed, you see before you a parent weighed down with responsibility. Can you imagine the size of my task? Digesting the stray pieces of Karma all of you have packed a hidden away? (149)

Stryker states that a strong sense of personal identity appears when a person continuously struggles in society to find his place but achieving only this personal identity is not enough. To have affirmation and recognition in society, a man must understand his relationship with others. Vasu denies Venketesan to visit the Swami again
as on one hand, he cannot correlate with him and on the other hand, he feels more
confusion and suppression after every visit. He tells Venketesan that he cannot see with
Swami’s eyes and listens through his ears when he has his own eyes and ears. He asks
Venketesan that how Swami can make every person happy by giving them the same type
of cure when they all have different types of problems in life. He astonishes that if he
could not become a “Master” in real sense after teaching for so many years, what makes
him a “Swami”? Vasu admits to himself that, “The obstacle not one of us seemed to leap
over, resolve to satisfaction, was the need to find a leader who combined all the qualities
that would enlarge our own incomplete selves” (174).

Vasu is a strong advocate of Gurukul system. This Gurukul is not a pair of rules
and dogma, but a “living relationship” in which “the pupil imbibed the inward methods
of the teacher; the secrets of his mind and the spirit of his life and work; all too subtle to
be taught” (199). Here, the relation between a Guru and a student is totally different from
the modern system. Vasu finds students more disciplined, more respectful and more
anxious to learn in this system, than the students of modern system but his opinion about
ideal guru changes afterwards; he finds a guru ideal who tells his students, “I don’t want
to cheat you with half-truths or intermediate truths. If I am to teach, and you are to learn,
both of us must use this Gurukul for self-fulfillment” (195).

Vasu being a true believer of Rigveda knows well that healing is not possible
without loving, living is not possible without knowing and when understanding reaches
its zenith, things become easy to do or accomplish. Without this process, doing is
nothing else but an exercise of power rather than a common need for a social healing. He
realizes the ideal form of teaching. “Is there anything else as hopeful as a healing love?
What Mani and I face together is our common need to make more sense of the world
around us; so that we are able to do more in it. Together, can we prove that learning to
live and knowledge are not two separate things?” (221).
Vasu like all other teachers knows well that being a chief figure among the students always gives a sense of supremacy and power. A man’s ego desires respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment. Vasu feels and sees all this as a part of modern teaching. Hence, the “eloquent cane” mentioned by his colleagues, their rude and rough behavior with their students, and the persistence on order and discipline suggests only one thing- distribution of information from a teacher to an inert student. Vasu realizes that real education is something much more than ordinary classroom teaching.

His colleagues often ask him to be harsh and rude with the students in order to prepare them for the outside world as they will have to spend their lives doing things they do not like; or being pushed around. Vasu himself realizes that his favorite Srinivas, “a very sweet child” and “a general favorite,” is not in fact what he is pleased to have produced: “I recognized him for what he was” a good servant; a loyal, reliable subject” (209). Vasu is not comfortable with the traditional education system so he incorporates some new methods to teach his reticent student. Vasu tries to teach Mani for more than two months with the help of pens, pencils and notebooks but find no change in him. He immediately discovers the character of the challenge put to him by this silent boy. Vasu enquires “did he really need a teacher?” and comes to know that Mani needs “someone my father would have called a truly pragmatic healer” (14).

The story “Why are Grey Mouse and Black Crow Neighbors?” tells the readers that survival is the biggest need of every human. Here, Grey Mouse represents a common man and Black Crow as well as Spider represent the outside world. The story tells that near the hole of Grey mouse, there lives a crow. Grey Mouse and Crow both are busy in their lives. Grey Mouse is busy in solving the problems of his life, and enquiring about the unanswered questions of his life. He feels great pain when he sees Blue Bottle not able to perform very simple leaps and repeating the same mistake. He feels painful
not because of Blue Bottle’s shortcomings but because of his own inadequacy as a master. Like Vasu he also feels a “hole” within himself. To fill this vacuum Grey is trying harder day by day. He is very much aware about the movements of the spider and wants to save Blue Bottle from all types of dangers.

Grey Mouse acknowledges Crow’s power and presence and Crow notices the increased interest of the Mouse in his movements. Grey Mouse was no more in a position to ignore the presence of the Crow. This story signifies that Vasu is well aware about the dangers of the outside world. He knows that if he and Mani, both want their place in this world, they need to find the ways to escape dangers and understand themselves.

Just as his father treated his patients, similarly Vasu chalks out a plan to heal and teach Mani- the mentally retarded child. Once, Vasu recalls a case where his father (an Ayurvedic doctor), nurses a cousin for a month, knowing she will die, when she returns to her in-laws. “She knew what her ailment was, he told my grandmother. She learnt to feel for it as you should for a wayward sister. She didn’t have the time or will power to confront the cause. But I prepared her, he said. I saw the way she had to go, and I eased the journey. That is all I can do” (16). While for some it is a fatalistic approach but Vasu realizes that this is a strategic response of his father to the conditions which are not under his control.

Immediately, he recognizes that Mani is a puzzle, not a riddle. Unlike a puzzle, a riddle has the answers hidden inside it. As one cannot find any trick to save this dying cousin, in the same way there is no trick to transform Mani also. They are:

The kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part, if I was to know what I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late. (99)
Vasu realizes that Mani is the kind of puzzle which can only be solved by joining all its scattered pieces and transforming him into a complete whole, the same way he made a whole of his body across time by looking into the mirror. “Life” his father declaims, “is nothing but one long balancing act” (21), keeping food and organs and fluids in good relation. “All nature’s manifestations,” he goes on, “---go through a process of change. A change that is inevitable and that follows a cyclical pattern of birth, growth, decay and death & birth” (22).

Vasu feels that to understand Mani or himself, he must also understand the mutual bond- a kind of understanding that comes when one weaves together lives, dreams, memories, knowledge and action.

A person is three things at a time. To reach him, educate him, all three- his body, his self and his social involvement – must be touched. This is why an ayurvedic diagnostic examination investigates the seeker’s (or the patient’s) digestive power; the emotional and social spheres which encase him; the peculiarities of the land in which he grew up, and where he contracted his disease; and the distinguishing disease patterns of that land. (178)

Three things are noticeable here. A complete human being includes the body, feelings and one’s social environment. Another important point here is the equation between a “patient” and a “seeker”. Vasu passes beyond his father precisely at this point. Does the healing power (or the path to self realization or the pupil’s learning) reside primarily within the seeker’s mind?”(153). Vasu’s question clearly indicates his father’s “hole” of self-doubt. Vasu realizes that his father lacks the spirit, charisma and inspiration to awaken that will. This question raised by Vasu aligns the student; the patient, and as well as the religious seeker. “I had to somehow build a bridge between us” (52), he often thinks in order to heal Mani. Vasu understands the problems in the personality of Mani and tries to correct them accordingly.
Vasu blends the healing technique of his father and his own perception of life and lays the cables to suspend the bridge over the dark "hole" of his life, he fears. His father talks about the power of healing, but it is not healing itself. The knowledge of his father is bookish to some extent; it often failed on practical level. The inadequate knowledge and self-doubt led him to commit suicide.

Vasu teaches Mani through different stories that he tells him during the course of this novel as:

Stories seem to soothe Mani. It mattered little what they were about, since he showed no sign of understanding them. But when I first filled up the silence between us with nonsense about animals and forests, his mask of defiant imperviousness slipped, and he sat, chin cupped in both hands, elbows on the table, watching my face. (76)

He does not impose any meaning or interpretation on the stories as he wants Mani to form his own viewpoint regarding these stories. Mani brings this growth and expansion in him. "A story can be peopled with named and recognizable terrors, so that the child is less afraid to look his own fears in the face. If Mani can acknowledge his fears through mine, through my private mythology, will it help him name them- aloud- at last?" (181).

Following the Marcian concept of "choices" and "commitment", Vasu on one hand makes relevant choices in life and on the other hand shows complete willingness to commit to them. He recognizes his identity and strongly shows his relative strength in terms of his commitment to the choices made. He starts visiting town library and returns back with "volumes of wisdom" to enhance his exclusive part of knowledge. He reads them regularly and explores beyond the boundaries. He starts dissolving the roles and proprieties these boundaries dictate. He uses his fables to remove boundaries and to understand the real meaning of discipline.
In a story named “The Dreams of a Mouse” the readers see that like Vasu, Grey Mouse also dreams about the survival of Blue Bottle. Vasu’s dreams make readers see his suppressed and repressed part of personality. In Jungian terms, this side of personality of Vasu remains suppressed as till this point of time he is only identifying with the negative qualities. He sees and understands this hidden bright side of his personality through dreaming. Like Vasu, Grey Mouse seems to be equally aware that dreams help you in attaining your aims. In this story, Vasu tells about a mouse that after passing several difficult tests of endurance learnt not to tremble or quake after watching a cat’s paw. He meets a snake one day and he follows him to the pond. The mouse sees snake leaving his skin and shell of eyes which he no longer needed. Then snake enquires the mouse that what he learnt from this, and the mouse replies that mind is harder to kill than the body, which implies that one needs to dream to sustain one’s life, and use the mind to fulfill those dreams. Vasu Master does not only dream to cure Mani, but also, works to figure out another route to citizenship for him.

Existentialism states that a person’s existence lies upon freedom and choice. Humans always have a choice. This theory does not stand in favour of any kind of “determinism”. The only way one knows (and teaches) is to run a race full of obstacles. When the person jumps over a hurdle, he immediately finds the next followed by the next and so on. Life is a battle, and to overcome all these hurdles the person needs a password made by someone else. But, Vasu decides not to go through a direct route with gatekeeper’s passwords. He sees a new route with the help of the wilderness of mirrors and eventually getting this route in the silent depths of Mani’s eyes.

In the story “Hot Iron, Ready to Pour,” Vasu abandons his role of “Master”. In this chapter he reflects upon a lesson featuring “advice to young men by William Cobbett”. He recognizes what a child feels when he stands alone near the blackboard,
having a chalk in his hand so that he can defend himself and fends off failure. This “Master” does not know what is inside his pupil. The real position of the pupil remains unknown, uninvestigated, and un-listened to. One sees that not only as a master, but also as a father, Vasu is unable to read the psyche of his sons. “It was an odd thing: I had spent every day of my adult life with growing boys, but the truth was that I had no idea what to do with the two who lived in my own house”(85).

Vasu condemns the static roles and functional relations of the modern education system. He no more wants the respect and status of that “idyllic” Guru, but yearns for the kind of intimacy and purity of a teacher-student relationship. Vasu understands that a teacher must know how to step back and restrain himself from explaining everything to everyone without any requirement or invitation which only implies satisfaction of ego. He realizes that all the students can never be the same, so one needs to keep in mind the individual differences and work accordingly. Interpretation differs from individual to individual and one can never get a fixed meaning. Now, he only wants the knowledge of Mani’s resources and kind of relationship to have such knowledge.

Vasu tells a story named “The Mascot of the Melting Pot”, a fable about a fox who become the king of a forest by chance. This fox calls a meeting of all the animals in the jungle. He tells them about his divine dream that the animals should not kill one-another and live like one family. So the animals from that day become the equal citizens of the forest. As a result, a strange and wonderful creature is born, a mixture of so many animals. He is given the name-“Mascot”. He is loved equally by all and passes a good life. Suddenly, one day all the animals start recalling their own true features and the forest becomes the “jungle” again. Then a wise fox advised Mascot to find his apt place in the jungle to avoid any kind of danger. Mascot could not understand and is torn into pieces. This story supports Vasu’s view that one can no longer be made blind or deaf. Each one has a free will to assert or act.
“The theory of individualization” states that an individual can develop his/her personality when he/she has the freedom to make choices in his/her own life. One can pick and choose good points from both the traditional approaches and the modern approaches so as to progress in one’s life. Vasu takes the hold of a transmission from his father and tries to make it valid than the state within which his father’s complex personality generated it. Vasu recalls a story told by his father to get a clear idea of tradition and its bond with modernity. This story he tells to one of his patients and not to Vasu. Like Bible, Vasu does not inherit it but is supposed to claim and then pass it on to pupils like Mani. The story tells about a father, who divides his land among his three sons namely: Old, New and Timeless, each of which embodies a different understanding of tradition. Old believes that someone else has already lived his life for him before, so that all he has to do is to copy. He sows the same crop every year and hopes for a good harvest every time. It shows that he favors and practices a static conception of tradition which is other to modernity. Such type of static tradition will gradually deplete the soil in short order.

New “split himself in two” pursuing the novelties of modernity. He tries new type of crop every year without understanding the needs of the soil. Timeless, of course, is different:

He followed the old ways and planted one crop for four years in a row.
When he saw that the soil was tiring, he consulted several men of his choice. He found that the ground rules had already been laid: the heating season, the pattern – which was essentially immune to change - to his own fields; and his needs. (194-95)

Here, it becomes clear that if one is immune to change, it does not mean that he is going to copy the same pattern, rather he is adapting to the pattern. It is like language, used by one according to one’s needs.
Now, Vasu recognizes the point that why Mani fell in love with failure. He “is dump because he has been told that that is what makes him who he is” (145). He is unable to perform any role within the boundaries of “New” and “Old” and seems to be a failure. For Mani, “the world is senseless. It also plays mean, unfair tricks. So the world is enemy” (187). The difference between the “Old” and the “New” is so vast that one cannot dream to be at both the places at the same time. One cannot stick to the tradition like “Old” and cannot totally separate from it like “New”, but in timeless world, everything is possible and things change for betterment.

James has rightly said that many times people hold different selves as they have different positions in society and simultaneously have different groups of people responding to these selves. In this way, a man enters into the overall self which is organized into multiple identities, each of which is tied to the aspects of social structure. Now, Vasu and Mani start to reinvent their lives together, there are not only moments of healing, but one finds a different kind of site where soil and pattern replenish each other, in which modernity’s split is healed. Metaphorically, it involves Mani’s “two faces”, one “scarred”, one lit by the “possibility of love”. Vasu recognizes both the faces well and now can distinguish their individual features, still respecting their permanent union. Vasu understands this sense of tradition (niti) only after reading and going through Mani’s faces. “The word which I surely must have heard from my father, though I didn’t remember it – is Niti” (212). He gets this name “niti” from his father, but he totally agrees and understands that he can only and only claim it through the secondary source of books where living tradition is held as knowledge rather than being. Niti is nothing else but the method of living your life wisely. Vasu recalls that his father once told that only those people can understand its real meaning and can adapt to it, who lives in the society. In other words, it involves doing what you require, to fend off hurt and
developing what nurtures you and then the final touch: will to take action with
determination. Tradition is active, flexible, fully engaged with the changing realities of
daily life. Real sense of tradition lies in not copying it blindly and not getting isolated
from it totally. A tree produces new branches often but it is firmly planted in the earth
with still and supportive roots. This kind of wisdom (tradition) one finds while
undergoing the loss and recovery of self. Vasu gets totally transformed by understanding
this sense of tradition.

The story “The Frayed Black Curtain” reveals Mani’s desire to draw something
on the sheets of paper. This shows that the “black curtain” which was earlier hanging in
front of Mani’s eyes and was making his vision hazy is now tattered. Now Mani is able
to see through this. Vasu gives him pens, pencils and sheets of paper. For the whole
week Mani makes a number of pictures but after completing each, he colors the entire
sheet with black pencil, making it impossible for Vasu to see anything. Vasu does not get
discouraged as he knows that it takes longer time to put a total end to a thing, and, then
to begin a fresh. One day Mani draws a picture of a house, having two men- one big and
one small. Vasu looks it carefully and returns to Mani. Mani does not darken it like other
pictures. Vasu enquires if Mani wants to tell something. Mani nods in return. Vasu’s
happiness knows no bounds. Mani gives Vasu a big full smile and whispers pointing to
the small man in the picture: Mani. Vasu realizes that Mani has learnt to work in spite of
his disabilities.

As Vasu and Mani were having a better understanding of each-other, Vasu tells
the story “The Spider’s Pleasure” to Mani, which in fact indicates the desire of
comparatively stronger people to marginalize their weaker counterparts and hence get
acknowledgment. The Spider can no more tolerate the confident and loud buzz of Blue
Bottle, increasing day by day. Although the web of the Spider is full of flies, which keep
on buzzing in Spider’s praise and keep on luring other flies in the cobweb, but he wants Blue Bottle to acknowledge his web equally. He knows that Blue’s buzz neither praises him nor recognizes his presence. The Grey Mouse whom the Spider has ignored being just a mere squeaky mouse is now challenging his existence and rule. Grey Mouse teaches Blue Bottle well to meet the dangers of the outside world, and one day not able to resist the need of sunlight and fresh air, Grey Mouse prepares himself and his pupil Blue Bottle to set out from the mouse hole soon. He was fully aware about the dangers of the world but moving out is necessary for him and his pupil to find their places in the world.

To read the complex layers of Vasu’s psyche, many female characters are well explored by Githa Hariharan. Vasu recalls a calendar having a picture of “Rita Mona” an actress posed as an Apsara, whom he describes as “her hypnotic, piercing look, and the breasts which swelled out of the calendar to smother me, were the only sights in the world which moved me to the point of constipation”(17). Here, one sees in Vasu a mixture of desire and fear. Desire of having the pleasurable gaze again and again and fear of patriarchy – his father. On the one hand, he is drawn towards her aggressive sexuality, and, on the other hand, his father’s religious sermons let her stay on the wall.

The reader feels somewhat astonished on finding the influence and presence of this “Rita Mona” much more in him than his mother or his wife, both of whom die early but never really much “lived” in his awareness. He recalls them only at times when the “loud and tyrannical” voices narratize them for him showing their importance and place according to the set rules of patriarchy. His mother, for example, is more emblem than character- an unwanted daughter in a family that needed a son, unnamed for an year until the sweeper does it, “a timid, worrying little thing” who “fought a losing battle on all fronts” and who “melted away into the shadows of this loud, tyrannical household. She
only lived to give her husband his heir. The most significant fact about her is not really about her at all, “what I remembered of her was irretrievably mixed with what I had heard” (31).

Vasu is cut off from the female power. He is a product of male set-up in society. This absence of strong female identity in Vasu’s life makes readers understand the ways of patriarchy to suppress women. As Chodrow rightly said that a woman is never judged by her own individual identity rather she is judged through social relationships. Vasu’s wife, Mangala, the mother of Vishnu and Venu, is also seen as a gloomy reminiscence than as a person. She is “a figure perennially on the retreat”, and as obscure to Vasu as his forgotten mother. The focus of Vasu’s memory always lays somewhere else and she always remains in the background. Even in his dreams she is “dressed in silence” and offering him just a partial view. Despite of living for so many years together, Mangala is only a dull memory to him. One sees Vasu’s attraction towards Jameela, the childhood friend of Mangala, who moves to their village, and with whom Mangala resumes a close relation, just evading the eyes of male supervision. “I could no longer explain how it came to be that I was always in school when Jameela came home” (43). Vasu tells the readers that “it was their completion of each other that held me, the co-existence of earthy and ethereal, cocoon and butterfly. A perfect pair, team or couple” (43). Here, Mangala is the prototype of Sita and Jameela of a voluptuous Apsara and Vasu is held by their mutual completion recalling their “double – scaled laughter” and the moments of their time-out sitting and stitching together the sceneries of their fancy.

In the novel, a pair of stories told by Mangala and Jameela brings a great change in Vasu’s outlook. Each story, offers Vasu a chance to understand what he could not understand through a “forgotten mother” and a wife” perennially on the retreat”. On a holiday trip at the beach, Mangala tells a story namely “Eliamma Goes Fishing” which is
in fact about her own life indicating a place and status of a woman in this male-dominated world. Before narrating the story, one finds Mangala staring at some remote point in the distance. The staring eyes of Mangala can be compared with her character Eliamma’s eyes “always intent as if straining to see something at a great distance” (124-26).

Eliamma tries to see something which is not known, hidden perhaps in the depths of the sea, namely the unanswerable paradox of her gender. To know the unknown and formidable, Eliamma makes a bargain with a stranger: by exchanging bodies with him for a month, she can be invisible so that, finally, she can go out to sea on boats otherwise barred to her by the men. After becoming invisible she enjoys the journey of the sea. After some time, she plans to go back into her body. She waits for that stranger for days but he never turns up to trade back their original bodies, and so she is caught in a eerie state of indiscernibility in which “everything she touched sickened: froze; died; or became invisible to everybody but her” (130).

Her, Cixous theory of “Binary Opposition” helps in revealing Eliamma’s location at a place which is already set-up by gender designs where she can have restrictive relations with everything and everyone around her. When she tries to alter her place according to her wish, she becomes invisible to her culture. This suggests that in a male dominated society, a woman cannot think of her own place and decide on her own. She is always considered the part and parcel of the male.

Mangala always remembers her childhood memories, which made her happy and excited. She shares it with her friend, Jameela. This implies that after marriage there is nothing pleasing and exhilarating in her life. Though Vasu is a teacher and well educated, he cannot accept his wife “other than himself”. One more point to note here is that Vasu discovers her trunk treasure after five years of her death which signifies his little interest in his wife. She stood by him through thick and thin but always remained
unnoticed. When Vasu sees their wedding card, two boxes of kumkum and her wedding sari in her trunk, then he realizes her spiritual attachment with him.

She cannot share her memories with Vasu Master, because there is a sense of respect which makes their relation more of a worshiper and God than of a husband and wife. After spending so many years together Vasu master wonders “who was she?” (43).

Jameela’s story “Begum Three-in-One” again discusses the fate of females in society. This story is about gender scripting, though Vasu is as speechless about its echoes as he is about his own sexual fascination to Jameela. The three caterpillars (sisters) in her story tell each other stories, collecting “a common fund of patterns; a rich mingling of dreams, a tapestry that belonged to all three equally” (133). One day when these three sisters namely Ammukutty, Nainikutty and Ummikutty were taking rest in their cocoons on the tree, three brothers trace them. Ammukutty gets killed by the eldest brother. He gets a yard of silk. Her life ends as an object of desire before starting. The second brother catches Nainikutty, who shrouds herself in a paper box, lays eggs and starts waiting for her coming death. All this time before her death she spins the old dreams in her head. By the time, the third brother climbs up the tree, Ummikutty escapes deep into the forest. Due to constant fear of the outside world, she hides herself in a shapeless camouflaging sack. She goes on weaving and spinning the stories and the dreams which are full of meaning. These stories are not easy to understand as these not only belong to her but also to the ghosts of her dead sisters. This is the reason she is no more called Ummikutty but “Begum Three-In-One”. Symbolically Begum Three-In-One constitutes Eliamma, Mangala and Jameela.

Here, Hodgson raises a valid question regarding “female identity”. He opines that female identity is always justified by and defined in male terms. He says that a woman’s identity must be judged around the areas where women are expected initially to form an
identity. Mangala and Jameela speak through the marginalized media of sewing and stories, sites where the ghosts of lost sisters may live, visible to those who are as accessible as Eliamma was to her stranger.

Eventually, through introspection Vasu becomes well aware about the filths in the tradition, the mutiny of the young, and the business of all sorts of fake Gurus --- Preaching too many interpretations of truth. He equally acknowledges the effects of caste politics and the desire for “a bigger, bloodier share” which is spreading “the poison that is choking all of us” (239). And diarrhea is the result. Amidst this conflict, Vasu moves on to his own timeless vision of politics rejecting all the models like that of a bureaucrat, follower, neocolonialist, politician, Brahmin, patrician as mentioned by his father during one of his discourses. Vasu reaches a final position outside the boundaries of Old or New, as he becomes well aware that everyone has to decide and determine the type of model one wants, keeping in view one’s requirements as people share a culture “where ancient systems of thought…live and grow on the same shady tree” (180), under which human race is sitting and which has modernity in its branches and leaves. When Vasu recalls the discourses of his father, he realizes the mutilated state of Ayurveda, in modern times, the human effects of the categorized social structure and the harsh effects of caste domination. Hence, Vasu learns to place himself in the society neither as a follower nor as a leader. He denies investing his labour in politics for Gopu’s desire and purpose of ego justification. He believes in the Brahminical wholeness but does not want any kind of hierarchical privilege. In other words, he recovers a "wise conduct of life".

After looking into so many mirrors and getting a reflection out of each, Vasu starts to practice a strategy that at times seems far away from truth but which equally applies to individuals and society as nothing works excluding error or restricting your methodology and focusing only on one ideal of rightness. In the novel, earlier we noticed
a passage dealing with an “unfinished tale” which was linked to three sets of labels: “story (allegory, parable, fable). Or unreality (fiction, myth). Or falsehood (lie, invention)” (103). This states that to achieve a complete whole one needs a discourse “unfinished’ in character so that we can exclude the excursion that comes with a finished form. Every individual needs to interpret a given situation taking the help of parables and fables. At times, we need to jump deep down into the unreal to escape the deep seated beliefs about reality.

The Writer has skillfully taken the forces of “reality’ and “perfection” to some higher level outside the set pattern of traditional discourse to prove her argument and Vasu’s tactic. The story “A Painted Devil” in the novel tells about a boy who truly believed in “exploration, threat and clandestine” and asked her grandmother for stories about the Tigers and Lions he wanted to see in the forest. At first sated on them, he then has delusions of them until he drowns in a river trying to escape a tiger that “was only in his head” (51). This tale suggests the human nature of desiring one kind of story, about believing in that story’s exact reality, and about acting in reality as if one were in just such a story. For the grandmother the forest was only a place full of leaves, fruits and berries. Grandmother tells that Tigers are a romance that one gets in one’s head and can die from, but the boy takes these stories as answers, prepositions about the true nature of animals in the forest, and attempted to live in the story’s “truth” rather than with the story’s “unreality” and “falsehood” and then beyond its limits as fable or invention.

*The Ghosts of Vasu Master* are the ghosts that haunt everyone, especially Indians with parapsychological intensity. But, like Vasu Master, one needs to unlearn all that is learnt and invent different routes to understand and define the world around oneself. This novel is a treatise on healing as well as education. Githa Hariharan has beautifully shown the mutually transferential way of self-discovery of Vasu through Mani. In this process
she has dealt with all the limitations of the existing modern education system, which makes roles static and hinders the growth and expansion of mind as well as consciousness. It is antithetical that Vasu was a teacher but unfortunately he was not a student. His actual learning begins when he ends up formal teaching process. One sees that Vasu is a product of traditional ideology having clear results of social circumstances. Social system controls him. He is at war with himself (man verses teacher) which makes him unsure of his clear cut role as a teacher, father and a member of society.

All the parables and fables which Vasu heard as a small boy, he, years later, finally, fabricates into a story rather than considering them as a truth. He understands that his stories have oblique rather than simple linkage to reality as reality is neither in nor out of stories but one himself weaves them depending upon the situation. In Freudian sense, Vasu truly reshapes not only his own identity but also of his pupil Mani by continuously having a sense of being the same person and on the other hand by acknowledging his relationship with and role in society. No doubt, he faces various types of challenges and difficulties but in the end achieves his identity.

In the end, he goes to his ancestral village Nageswaram along with Mani, indicating an entry in to a new world of reality. He learns to strangle his observations, his explanations and gives Mani just the stories to take outside the teacher’s rhetoric of power and when he starts drawing the marks and pictures of these stories, his process of education starts. Mani creates his own symbols on paper and moves three steps closer to citizenship. Now, Vasu realizes that they both are not only capable of creating a new world but also of deciding their own places in it. At Nageswaram, his birth place, he seems to relocate his lost identity which is free from all fears, inhibitions, confusions, frustrations and resentments:
Then I looked at Mani in the dim light and saw that he too had a wound. I examined it carefully and tended it. I forgot my own for a brief and blessed intermission. When I remembered it again, he — not being squeamish; not being full of hypnotic lies; not being ruthless; and being entirely without words — stroked my wound till I thought a hard, thick scab might grow over it. (258)

Subsequently, in the story “Two Scenes in a Mousetrap”, the readers see Grey Mouse enjoying pleasure and pain together. Grey Mouse finally leaves the mouse hole followed by Blue Bottle. After coming out, Grey smells some good food and moves towards the wooden box from where smell is coming. He sees a piece of fresh golden brown bread and could not resist his will to act. The moment he enters the box, his tail cuts in to two pieces. He feels pain in the tail along with the pleasure in the mouth which signifies that it is foolish to expect one without the other. He looks for Blue Bottle for help, but does not find him nearby. With one last effort, he eats the whole piece of bread. He wriggles his body and peeps through the slats on the other side of the trap. He sees Blue Bottle, leaping in and out of a weak, fading sunbeam.

Vasu tells about the moment when the Grey Mouse, “stopped brooding over the pain in his hole and nursing it, immediately, the vapory ghosts and devils who had taken refuge in the hole, like homeless tramps in a derelict building, began to fade away. He felt in their place the beginnings of something solid and dauntless” (251-52).

The relationship between Mani and Vasu works well gradually, whether it is mirrored through an animal fable, a dream, Vasu’s story about Vasu and Mani, or their lives. In one of the stories he sees “a huge snake, its hooded head lifted enquiringly” with “a thousand eyes……embedded along its sinuous body.” (264). He, now feels his own self like “a hardy rope; all the weak, disjointed strands now linked and strengthened” in a
complete whole. When Vasu starts seeing “something solid and dauntless” in his own estimate of the self, “then the Swami and other extraneous familiars faded forever. In that precious moment, at the blessed point of release, the undigested chunks that had clogged my heart and intestines all my life were subsumed; and made whole ---when I woke up, I felt refreshed, even exhilarated. The day ahead was no longer full of empty life or the fearful waiting of a lifelong fugitive” (265).

Now Vasu learns to digest the chunks of life and wisdom and fills the blank space of his life. Now, Vasu is no longer haunted by his father in any of his “discourses”. At the end, when Vasu becomes intentionally unseen to the hopes of all those whom one has seen trying to script his retirement as closely as his professional life had been, he recovers.

Finally, Vasu reveals that all approaches are universal and are bound by their relativity. The world is mysterious. To reach the destination there is no set path, except trial. The novel ends with the series of riddle like questions set like an examination paper. He does not give answer to any of the questions. The open ended conclusion leaves many a questions unanswered. It is a story that will never be finished; a story that carries new beginnings; a story that will lead to the telling of other stories.