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Subversion of the Biological Identity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*

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Letter of Recommendation

This thesis entitled “Subversion of the Essentialist Identity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s *Secret Daughter*,” submitted and prepared by Tara Kumari Joshi, student of Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, has been examined and accepted as a fulfillment of the requirement for the Master’s Degree.

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Letter of Approval

The thesis entitled “Subversion of the Biological Identity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s *Secret Daughter*,” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Tara Kumari Joshi has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Tara Kumari Joshi

## Subversion of the Biological Identity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*

### Abstract

*This research explores the conflict between biological and cultural identities which entail the identity crisis of the main character Asha in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel Secret Daughter, who lives in America with her mixed race foster parents. The Researcher examines the issue of identity conflict and identity crisis from the perspective of the theory of identity by Stuart Hall, Richard Jenkins and Adrian Holliday. Going through the issue of identity conflict, this research presents identity crisis and the feeling of incomplete and uncertain in the life of an adoptive girl, Asha. When her biological identity does not match with the culturally constructed identity then she goes through the identity crisis. This thesis tries to show how Asha's classmates treat her as 'other' in the classroom leads to her through the identity crisis. At the very starting, there comes a problematic situation in her life due to the conflict of biological identity and culturally constructed identity but with the change of time, she gets the ultimate solution of her problems when her culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity.*

**Key Words:** Identity Crisis, Culture, Conflict, Biological, Adaptation, Love, Hate, Ambivalence, Hybridity, Discrimination, Gender

It was on January 23, 2018 while I was preparing to begin writing my research that I read a news story on [bbc.com](http://bbc.com). According to the news reporter Gita Pandey, two mothers, one Hindu another Muslim had given birth to their boy babies in a maternity ward in a hospital in the state of Asam in India. Accidently and due to human error the two babies got exchanged and the Hindu mother took home the Muslim baby and the Muslim mother took home the Hindu baby. However soon one of the mothers had doubt if the baby she was raising was her biological child. Soon events took surprising turns. There was a prolonged court case leading to a DNA test of both babies. The court determined the biological parents and ordered for exchange of babies to their biological parents. But the babies, who by now had grown up as toddlers were not ready to desert their foster parents because they had not only acquired their biological identities but also their cultural identities as a Hindu and a Muslim. Neither the foster mothers were ready to give up the babies they were raising because in spite of being their foster mothers, they had developed deep affinities with the babies they were raising. Finally both families involved decided to let the children grow adolescent with the families they were growing with and let them decide themselves when they became young enough to consider such complex issues as their biological and cultural identities.

This research paper also explores an issue very similar to this true story but the events in this case take place not in the real world but in the world of fiction. It deals with the issue of identity and identity crisis in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel *Secret Daughter*.

The term 'identity' is a very crucial aspect in the life of every human being. Sometimes we undergo through identity crisis. Identity crisis means the condition of being uncertain of one's feeling about oneself. A person's identity is based on the

traits, characteristics, roles, and social relations, and social group memberships that define who one is. In general way, people think that identity is the given name by parents to their children. In fact, it cannot be equated as simple as a person's name. It is constructed on the basis of gender, race, class, generation, family, genealogy, religion, politics, ideology, culture, discourse, power and so on. So it is always in flux; it can change anytime according to time, location, situation, context, profession.

This research paper is an attempt to analyze the issue of identity crisis in Gowda's *Secret Daughter*. The conflict between the biological identity and the culturally constructed identity creates identity crisis in a person's life. When these two identities differ from each other, then people face identity crisis. One of the major characters Asha has identity crisis in the novel *Secret Daughter* because her biological identity conflicts with her constructed cultural identity. The admixtures of two identities creates a kind of problem in her life

There are various kinds of identities in human being's life such as ethnic identities, sexual identities, gender identities, class identities, political identities, transgender identities, culturally constructed identities, and biological identities etc. These all are based on society. Among these the researcher deals with the biological identity and culturally constructed identity.

Biological identity is related with the 'blood'. It is in the genes or it is in the DNA (Bernath 35). It is formed by the particular background of family lineage. It is highly rooted in human nature. In biological identity people belong to certain family lineage, branch, race and ethnicity. It is fixed in life long time of the person's life. Similarly, culturally constructed identity refers to identification with a particular group based on various cultural categories. It is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, languages, norms and

customs. Stuart Hall, the famous cultural critic writes in his book *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, “The cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging, and continuous [. . .] actual history” (223).

Culture is the social behavior and norm, found in human societies. It is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, social habits, music and arts. It has many definitions. It is different from people to people. Edward T. Hall writes in his book *Beyond Culture* that, culture is not genetically and biologically inherited, and cannot exist on its own, but is always shared by members of society and family (16). It marks the human life, especially the general customs, norms, values and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time. In multi-cultural and multi-traditional society, human beings cannot remain in their own culture. They have to adapt themselves to, assimilate, and face dual cultural identity. In this process of adaptation, a hybrid culture is born.

Hybridity is simply a mixture of two things. It refers to the creation of new mixed culture within the contact zone produced by immigration of people to different place. It is cross-cultural exchange. Different critics put their views differently. Among them, Bill Ashcroft writes, “Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial” (118). He argues that hybridity means not only cultural and cross-cultural exchange rather it takes many other forms.

Similarly, the term ambivalence means a state of having an uncertainty or fluctuation about something or someone. It is a simultaneous and conflicting reaction, belief or feeling towards some object.

In the novel *Secret Daughter*, in chapter twenty six, when Asha’s classmates define her as the ‘other’ and one of the women whom Somer and Asha meet in Menlo

Park also implies that Somer cannot be the biological mother of Asha because she physically does not resemble her. Others treat Asha as the 'other' because of her biological identity of an Indian girl and this issue puts Asha into a conflict regarding who she actually is. Asha comes home and tells her mother that she does not look like mother but somehow like her father. She starts raising the question, "who am I?" "Who are my biological parents?" She is trying to define her identity biologically but Indian-American parents have given her culturally constructed identity. This biological identity has the conflict with the culturally constructed identity. And this conflict has led to the crisis of identity. This crisis of identity causes all other incidents that happen in the novel. Therefore, one of the major characters Asha is having identity crisis in the novel *Secret Daughter* by Gowda.

Asha has identity crisis because her biological identity conflicts with the culturally constructed identity. The conflict between her biological identity and her culturally constructed identity leads to her crisis of identity and it gets resolved when Asha's culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity. It means cultural assimilation is the ultimate solution to all social and cultural conflicts in today's globalized world.

Based on above mentioned problem of this research, the researcher brings some research questions. The research questions are: How does Asha have identity crisis? How does she go through the identity crisis? Why does she have identity crisis? What leads to Asha's crisis of identity? How does the conflict get resolved?

Academically this research provides some important information about identity crisis of the adopted children later in the discussion section. It also makes significant contribution to how the conflict between biological identity and culturally constructed identity creates identity crisis in a person's life. Furthermore, the

researcher hopes that people will pay more attention towards the issue of identity crisis during mix of biological identity and culturally constructed identity.

The major objective of this paper is to find out the identity crisis due to the conflict of biological identity and culturally constructed identity that lies in *Secret Daughter*; the study does not focus upon other thematic and structural importance that text may have. Similarly the researcher identifies how the major character Asha's identity crisis issue is reflected in the novel.

The primary audience of this paper is my supervisor and members of research committees. And the secondary audience can be the people who consult library and other students who want to write their paper in this field in future.

The researcher reviews the literature related to researcher's issue. Numerous critics have conducted research work on Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*. I found that the critics I studied do not talk about the conflict between biological biological identity and culturally constructed identity. Seemin Hasan, Sajalkumar Bhattacharya, Bindu P., Adlina Larasati, and Rebecca Steinitz have done research on this novel from different perspectives. Among them one of the researchers Adlina Larasati talks about the issue of identity crisis in adolescence periods but my research sees this novel from the new perspective of the issue of identity crisis which is not discussed yet.

Seemin Hasan is a lecturer of undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, India. She has done research under the title "The Dynamics of Repatriation in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*." In her research she focuses on the impact of adoption, repatriation, race and relief in the life of three women characters in the novel namely Asha, Somer and Kavita. The similarity between the research done by Seemin and my research is that

one of the women characters, Asha is main object in both studies. However, the differences of my research in general from Hasan's research are that the research objectives. My research focuses on the issue of identity crisis due to the conflict of biological identity and culturally constructed identity. In her research she writes, "In Gowda's novel, the need for repatriation occurs in the life of a twenty-year old Indian girl adopted by a doctor couple in America" (144). In above lines she talks about why Asha is searching her originality. But my research discusses how she faces identity crisis and to what consequences this leads and how it gets resolved.

Similarly another scholar Sajalkumar Bhattacharya, an Associate Professor in the Department of English, at Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, West Bengal, India, has done the research under the title "The return of the Native, but Not Alone!: Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure Seekers* and Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*." In his research he mainly focuses on the impact of failure of transnationalism which caused expatriate Indian novelist in an uncomfortable situation. He raises the issues of Indianness, alienation and expatriate in his works. But my research mainly focuses the issue of identity crisis in the life major character Asha in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*. In his works he argues that, "*Secret Daughter* is not merely a story of the return of the native. The Indian familial space does not merely embrace its diasporic citizens back, but it is a powerful site from which India can offer solutions to the problems of fractured families of the West" (38). He illustrates that India is the place of solution for all the immigrants who are in the problem in the west. However, the main focus of my research is Asha's identity crisis due to the conflict of biological identity and culturally constructed identity. My research does not focus upon the author, Gowda.

Likewise, another critic Bindu P., Assistant Professor in the Department of

English Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswa Mahavidyalaya University at Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, India and part time research scholar at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, wrote the article on the novel in the year 2015. Bindu's research topic is "Trauma and Quest of a Mother in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*. Bindu's main focus on this research is trauma of a biological mother and foster mother. Bindu argues that "This paper is an attempt to analyze and explicate the trauma of the biological mother Kavita, who yearns for her secret daughter Usha in Gowda's *The Secret Daughter*" (304). The above lines illustrate that Kavita is a biological mother of Asha who lost her two daughters due the poverty and cultural problems. Kavita is a mother of two daughters but she feels barren because she does not have them with her. She fails to give sense of solace to her two daughters. Bindu focuses on this research from the perspective of trauma but my research particularly focuses on the conflict of biological identity and culturally constructed identity.

Similarly Adlina Larasati, wrote a thesis titled "Identity Crisis in Adolescence Period Experienced by Asha in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*" in the year 2017 at the Yogyakarta State University in Indonesia. In Larasati's research the main focuses is identity crisis in the life of Asha. The similarity between Larasati's research and my research is identity crisis in the life of major character Asha. However, the difference of my research in general from Larasati's research is the theory used and the issue of representation. Larasati's research focuses on the identity crisis through the psychological concept but my research focuses on the aspect of conflict between biological and cultural identities. Larasati argues that, "Gowda's *Secret Daughter* can be a powerful source to reveal the sightings of identity crisis in adolescents through its main character" (9). Above lines show that Asha is major character who feels identity crisis in her adolescence period.

Rebecca Steinitz, a reviewer, editor, and writing coach reviews the novel in *Boston Globe*, and she writes that “The Gowda’s first novel, *Secret Daughter* offers a new bridge between the two countries: adoption. The story of Asha, her Indian birth mother, and her American adoptive mother, *Secret Daughter* adds a fraught take on motherhood to familiar themes of alienation and cultural identity” (n.pag). Steinitz analyzes the novel from the perspective of motherhood and relation of two countries due to the adoption. She raises the issue of identity crisis from the perspective of culture but my research focuses on identity crisis from the perspective of biological identity and culturally constructed identity.

Likewise, Wendy Smith, who is a contributing editor and a frequent contributor to *Book World*, reviews the novel in *The Washington Post*, and writes, “A No. 1 bestseller [. . .] *Secret Daughter* tells a nuanced coming-of age- story that is faithful the economic and emotional realities of two different cultures” (n.pag). Smith points out that *Secret Daughter* raises the issue of two cultures which are totally different from each other. One is Indian culture where women are dominated by males and on the other hand in the Western culture son and daughters are treated equally. Kavita has lost two daughters due to the phallogentric society that always expects a woman to give birth to a boy baby. Due to the poverty and patriarchal culture Jasu Merchant kills their first daughter which is heart touching reality of some villages in India. Culture and poverty are one of the major problems of the female infanticide. In her research, she focuses on the issue of economic and emotional realities of the two different cultures but my research focuses on identity crisis.

In this way, many critics have analyzed the novel in many ways, some of the critics point out the issue of motherhood, adoption, repartition, economy, identity crisis, post-colonialism and some critics analyze it from the perspective of

contemporary realities of the Indian immigrants in the United States. The critics who have written their research paper on the issue of identity crisis have failed to pay attention to the aspect of the conflict between biological identity and culturally constructed identity. But this research paper mainly discusses the conflict between biological identity and culturally constructed identity in the novel *Secret Daughter*.

The primary research method of this paper is the library research. The data will be collected from primary text-book and secondary resources found in the library and periodical research journals and articles. Likewise, there will be the textual analysis too.

This research paper is an attempt to study Gowda's *Secret Daughter* through the lens of the identity theory by Stuart Hall, Richard Jenkins, Adrian Holliday and post-colonial theory by Homi K. Bhabha.

To prove above mentioned claim and hypothesis the researcher draws the concept of biological identity and the concept of culturally constructed identity. Similarly researcher draws post-colonial concepts like the cultural ambivalence and hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha. As a postcolonial critic and theorist Bhabha has forwarded such theoretical concepts in his various texts.

Identity is one of the most essential aspects for every human being. Regarding the term identity Richard Jenkin says, "Without repertoires of identification we would not be able to relate to each other meaningfully or consistently. We would not have that vital sense of who's who and what's what. Without identity there could be no human world" (7). It is part of human being's life because without identity a person remains incomplete and uncertain in his/her life. It provides meaning and purpose to life. Without identity it is almost impossible to have a meaningful life. It affects our life positively and negatively. Thus, identity plays central role in every human's

being's life.

Famous cultural critic Stuart Hall argues that, "identity is a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). He argues that identity is a never ending process. It is always in the making. Every single person may have multiple identities in the process of production. This means that identity construction can be seen as an ongoing project.

The idea of identity when used in broad sense is something ambiguous. As Hall argues, the term identity is always in the process which is never complete in the life of human beings. Adlina Larsati writes in her research works that, in general, people think that identity is the given name by parents to their children. In fact, identity cannot be equated with a person's name so easily. The meaning of identity is not that simple as people define through a person's name. Therefore, identity is about knowing who himself or herself is and what he or she believes in. Regarding that, identity can be different or same to one person and another depending on how someone undergoes his or her life (1). So the term 'identity' is very broad term which is something confusing and uncertainty in the life of human being.

Talking about identity, Stuart Hall writes, "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (225). He argues that identities are categories in different forms which are not single. We can say through these lines that past experience can determine our projection of the future and the way in which we construct our identity. In the above quote he points out that cultural identities are not fixed entities but they are guided by the past experience and the feelings in which we grow and learn in the childhood. It is a form of name which we give others or ourselves.

Identity plays important role in everyone's life. Regarding the identity Richard Jenkins states that, "The notion of identity applies to the entire universe of creatures, things and substances, as well as to humans, and its general meanings are worth considering" (4). In the above quote, he argues that identity is not important only human being rather it is important to all the creatures in the universe.

The identity crisis can be seen through the main character Asha in the novel *Secret Daughter* by Gowda. She was born in India but later Indian-American couple adopts her from an orphanage in Bombay when she was one-year old. She lives in the United States of America with her foster parents Somer and Krishnan. The issue of identity crisis actually never bothered her when she was a child. She never asks a single question about her life and reality when she was a child. However, when she enters her adolescence and teenage years, she then begins to question her history and identity. She starts to feel incomplete and uncertain in her life with the cultural identity. The following lines clearly reflect these things:

I wish you were here to help me. I'm supposed to write a biography of myself for eight-grade social studies, but I don't know where to begin. I don't know where I really came from. Whenever I ask my mom, she just gives me the same story – they picked me up from the orphanage in India when I was a baby and brought me to California. (137)

In above lines Asha finds it difficult to write her own biography with culturally constructed identity. Asha feels incomplete and uncertain about herself with her culturally constructed identity. Her biography requires her to write her own background including where she comes from and who her biological parents are. Here she needs her biological identity but her foster parents have given her culturally constructed identity. Her culturally constructed identity fails to provide enough

information to write her biography. Even she asks her mother many times and mother answers her. She still does not feel right because her foster mother has given her culturally constructed identity. She is not certain about her own real identity. Her identity is in crisis.

Identity is complex thing which is not stable and fixed, and is always fluctuating. The notion of identity is ignored unless it is questioned by others. So the crisis of identity may happen due to the lack of location to specific culture or notion. Regarding this issue Stuart Hall quoted in Kobena Mercer, says, “Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (275). He says that the question of identity is only considered when she or he departs from the fixed and stable culture. That is why the crisis of identity consists of the feeling of alienation, someone who is dislocated from his/her known culture or origin.

In the beginning part of the novel, Asha thinks that she is the daughter of Somer and Krishnan. As Hall has argued, Asha has very coherent notion for identity as an American. But her notion of the coherent identity was displaced by her experience in the classroom when her classmates commented about her eyes, hair in leg and other things.

In the novel *Secret Daughter*, in chapter twenty-six, when her classmates define Asha as the ‘other’ because she physically does not resemble like other American girls. Other American girls treat Asha as the ‘other’ because of her different biological identity as an Indian girl and this issue puts Asha into identity crisis regarding who she actually is. The situation is depicted in the lines, ““God, Asha, you so don’t need eye makeup,” one of the girls says still peering directly at herself in the mirror as she speaks. “I know, I would kill for eyes like that. They are so exotic. Did

you get them from your mom or your dad?’” another asked, brushing out her golden hair” (133). In the above lines we see that Asha is treated as the ‘other’ by her classmates. Asha has a pair of Asian-Indian eyes which definitely look different from her school friends and other American peoples. Therefore her friends often talk about her ‘exotic’ eyes. Her ‘exotic’ eyes create some distance between Asha and her American friends. Her appearance makes her upset all the time when she is with the American girls. From this point Asha feels her identity crisis and starts to doubt her own self.

Asha’s American identity is culturally constructed and her Indian identity is biologically constructed. Her biological identity and culturally constructed identity do not match. When Asha’s biological identity does not match with the culturally constructed identity then she has a problem. Culturally constructed identity is more powerful than the biological identity. That is why American society does not accept Asha easily. It forces Asha to search her biological identity. She wants to define her identity biologically but her Indian-American parents have given her culturally constructed identity.

Identity is matter of defining by self or other according to the race, ethnicity, language, physical appearance and other things. It depends on person’s belief and concept. Asha’s American friends and one of the women whom Somer and Asha meet in Menlo Park expect Asha to look physically like the American if she is Somer’s daughter. Their expectation is that Asha should look like an American biologically and physically but Asha does not biologically look like an American. She is American only culturally because she wears American dress, speaks English language fluently and eats American foods. Regarding this situation one of the women whom Somer and Asha meet in Menlo Park also implies that Somer cannot be the biological mother

of Asha because she physically does not resemble her. The situation is clearly depicted in the novel in following lines:

“You should come by here at noon on Fridays,” the woman says. “I get together with some of other nannies from the neighborhood every week for a picnic. The kids have fun together, and we get some grown-up company.”

*Nannies?* After a polite moment, Somer stands and collects her belongings. “I’m not her nanny,” she says, “I’m her mother.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I just assumed ... I mean, I thought because-”

“Its fine,” Somer says, in a tone that indicates otherwise. “She looks more like her father, but she has my personality.” (99)

The above lines show that Asha physically and biologically does not resemble her mother. Her cultural appearance only resembles with her mother. The whole problems emerge in Asha’s life because of the conflict between how she biologically looks and how her cultural identity is constructed.

She wants to define herself biologically like other American girls but her foster parents are unable to give her that identity. She finds her physical identity different from others. The lines in the novel show this situation clearly, “she doesn’t want to share her whole personal history with the perfect mirror girls. She wonders if they would envy the black hair that sprouts every day on her legs, or her dark skin that tans after just ten minutes in the sun, even when slathered with sunscreen” (133). The above lines imply that Asha does not like to share her story with the ‘perfect mirrors girls’. It is clear that Asha does not like to share her story because they are ‘perfect mirror girls’. Asha lacks the confidence because she looks different from the American people. Her legs are hairy and her skin is dark. Her feeling towards her own

appearance makes herself as an imperfect girl. She assumes that a beautiful girl should have a fair and smooth skin. But she does not have fair and smooth skin. All these problems force Asha to search for her own originality.

Identity is one of the most important issues in human life. Richard Jenkins argues that, “Identifying ourselves or others is matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction” (4). He points out that identity is based on people’s thought who they are and how they want to introduce them to others. Identity gives the meaning of life. He argues that identity is important subject for every human being. Every person wants to define through the particular identity either that will be biological identity or culturally constructed identity.

In the novel *Secret Daughter* Asha feels identity crisis in her life. During her childhood, she never questions about her identity and the reality to her parents. She never feels incomplete and uncertain in her life. Hence, she becomes more sensitive when her friends other her. She starts searching her biological identity when she reaches her adolescence period. She starts asking her parents about her reality. She argues that:

“It’s not fair”. [. . .] “Everyone else knows where they come from, but I have no idea. I don’t know why I have these eyes that everybody notices. I don’t know how to deal with this damn hair of mine”, she yells, clenching it in her fist. I don’t know why I can remember every seven-letter Scrabble word, but none of the periodic table. I just want to feel that someone, some-where, really understands me! (137)

In the above lines Asha represents her reality. Due to her different physical appearance, American people notice her differently. They treat her as the ‘other’ due to her different eyes and the color of hair. And Asha feels uncomfortable while

American people notice her differently. Her physical appearance does not resemble with her foster mother. As Richard has argued, Asha also asks her reality to her parents to find her meaningful life. She wants to know her reality regarding where she comes from. She wants to know where she got her eyes.

Asha all the time feels incomplete and uncertain in her life. Her uncertainty and incompleteness about herself can be seen when she is teenage. She feels there is something missing in her life even though she already has foster parents Somer and Krishnan. As she mentions, "I have spent sixteen years not knowing, sixteen years asking questions nobody can answer. I just don't feel like I really belong, in this family or anywhere. It's like a piece of me is always missing. Don't you understand that? She looks at her parents, searching their faces for something that bring her comfort" (138). Throughout these lines Asha feels desperate towards her life. Her foster parents treat her as if she is their real daughter. They always fulfill her needs. They always think about her life and her career but she never understands them. However, she is disturbed by the fact that she is adopted and does not know her biological parents. She feels confused about where she should be in this world because she does not know about her reality. At this stage, she does not understand the importance of culturally constructed identity rather she only searches for her biological identity. She starts questioning every time to her parents about her biological identity.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write that identity is socially constructed in, "gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family, genealogy and religious and political ideologies, to cite the most obvious" (33). As Smith has argued, we can find that Asha's identity changes while she is in the different place, nationality and different time in the course of her life. While she is in American

school and Menlo Park, she is treated as 'other' but when she is in India she belongs to the educated family background. It marks how the identity of a person shifts when there is a shift in place and time. This issue is clearly depicted in this line, "We too are excited to have such an accomplished young woman here" (184). The same person Asha got her different identities while she was shifting to different places. At the same time, Asha has been treated as a foreigner in her native country India. The line in the novel shows, "Her cousins have explained that Indians can peg her immediately as a foreigner, with her Western-style clothing and shoulder-length hair" (183). Asha shifts from America to India for certain times and she gets multiple cultural identities

Essentialist identity is fixed in human nature. Ganesh Nathan argues that, "The paradigm of essentialism, basically, is rooted in human nature; therefore notions of culture within this paradigm are characterized by being static, homogeneous, deterministic and bounded" (3). In the above lines, Nathan points out that essentialist identity is related with family lineage. The culturally constructed identity is changeable which challenges the notion of essentialism and is basically rooted in human conditions instead of human nature in today's globalized society.

Asha has also compulsion to search for her biological identity according to her time and situation. As Ganesh has argued, Asha also deeply rooted in her human nature. She wants her static identity. She wants to go to her birth place to search her biological identity but her foster parents reject to take her to there i.e. India. Regarding this situation Asha asks her foster parents, "Why don't you ever take me to India? Every other Indian kid I know goes all the time" (137). This line shows that Asha wants to go to her birth-place to search for her biological identity. She requests her parents to take her to India. She is not happy with her culturally constructed identity that is why she searches for the way to go to India.

Regarding the essentialist identity Adrian Holliday argues, “The temptation to be essentialist is quite deeply rooted in a long-standing desire to “fix” the nature of culture and cultural difference” (6). He argues that essentialist identity is deeply rooted in particular family lineage which is fixed. It is fixed when a person born. It cannot be change according to time, place and human condition. Cultural identity changes according to time and condition but biological identity is deeply rooted in human nature.

In the novel *Secret Daughter*, Asha is in identity crisis because her biological identity conflicts with her culturally constructed identity. Asha struggles in her life to search for her biological identity. She always quarrels with her foster mother to search for her biological identity. She returns to India from America to find out her biological parents. The conflict of these two identities brings identity crisis in her life.

Asha is always curious about India. India is the place where she was born. She has a desire to go to India and search for her biological parents. She is never satisfied with her foster parents in America. Regarding this point Asha requests her father, ““I want to find my birth parents.” After a moment, she continues, seeming desperate now to get the rest of the words out. “I want to know who they are, and see if I can meet them. I know it’s a long shot, Dad. I have no idea where to start or how to look for them, so I really need your help”” (251). The lines show how Asha really wants to meet her biological parents. She wants to know history of her biological parents. She has a curiosity to know who and where her real parents are. She does not have much information about them that’s why she decides to ask for her father’s help. Asking her foster father, points out that Asha’s serious desire to find her biological identity.

Biological identity is inherited identity which is closely related with genes. Regarding biological identity Vivina Bernath mention that, “A few years decade ago

we used to say “biological identity is in the blood” to indicate that trait, a preference, or a career choice was innate, inherited, hardwired into one’s very being. Today we are more likely to say “it is in the genes” or “it is in the DNA” (35). In the above lines, Vivina argued that biological identity is not constructed identity rather it is deeply rooted with the family lineage which is transformed by genes of family members.

Asha all the time thinks about her biological parents. As Vivina has argued, she wants to introduce herself through the biological identity. She wants her fix identity which provides only her biological parents. In this point, she has a curiosity all the time to meet her biological mother. Regarding this point Asha says to Sarala who is her Dadima, “I was just thinking about my mother. My, you know, my biological mother. I was wondering if she ever thinks about me, if she worries about me” (241). In these lines we see that Asha expresses her feelings towards her biological parents. She all the time thinks about them. She wants to see her mother’s love towards her. She all time wandering about her root and originality.

Cultural critic Stuart Hall explores two concepts of cultural identities which are essential cultural identity and non-essential cultural identities. He argues that, Essential cultural identity is formed by the particular background resemblance which family and society has in a specific place, based on the culture, ethnicity, and race (224). The essentialist cultural identity is shaped by particular family, race ethnicity which is different from non-essential cultural identity.

In India, Asha spends lots of time searching for her biological parents. Asha finds as much information as possible regarding the orphanage named Shanti from where she was adopted. She puts her courage to visit Shanti by herself although her grandmother offers to accompany her. She has an overwhelming desire to look for her

real parents. In spite of various difficulties, Asha finds her biological parents' address and reaches there. The situation is clearly depicted in the following lines:

Asha sees a binder on the table in front of him. “Can you check please?

Kavita Merchant?” ...

“Merchant... *Hahn*. Vijaya Merchant. Six-oh-two.”

Vijaya? “How about Kavita? [. . .]

[. . .] Kavita Merchant lives here, yes. Only the flat is in Vijaya’s name.

“Vijaya?”

“*Hahn*. Vijaya. Her son.”

What? “No, that can’t be her. She... doesn’t have children. I don’t

think this woman has children. Kavita Merchant?” She says again [. . .]

“Must be about your age. Nineteen, twenty years old.” (274-75)

The above lines show Asha’s struggle to meet her biological parents. She reaches her biological parent’s rented room but she does not meet them because they have gone to the village.

Stuart Hall asserts, “[. . .] cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world” (223). He points out that culturally constructed identity is more important than biological identity in today's globalized society. People struggle to search for their biological identity but at last they get ultimate solution when they assimilate culturally constructed identity. So Hall argues that cultural identity plays crucial role in every human being's life.

Asha is an adopted daughter who always struggles to meet her biological parents. When Asha reaches near them she finds that her parents discarded her simply because she was a girl child but they kept her brother Vijaya simply because he was a

boy child. For this reason, Asha develops a dislike for her biological parents. She says:

My age? “Are you ...sure?” the words and numbers bang around in Asha’s head like billiard balls. Suddenly, the facts arrange themselves in an unmistakable order. It finally makes sense, and then again none at all. Her real parents had a child, another child. One they’d chosen to keep. Her mouth tastes of sour acid. They kept him. Their son. *They kept him instead of me.* [. . .] It wasn’t me that they couldn’t afford one. *It was just me. It was me they didn’t want.* (275-76)

In the above lines, Asha thinks that her biological parents kept her brother instead of her due to her gender. Because of this, Asha begins to love her foster parents and stops her mission to search for her biological identity. At this point, Asha's culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity. She further says, ““They had a son after giving me away. They kept him because he was boy, and--”” (314). Asha develops a dislike for her biological parents and starts loving her adopted parents.

Stuart Hall argues that, “Cultural identity [. . .] is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past” (225). He argues that it is not a genuine insight. There is a cultural identity in history. Cultural identity will change continuously. It is not permanent as long as there is culture and power. He further asserts that, “It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories” (225). It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent “self.” In this way our identifications are continuously being shifted. Cultural identities change according to time, place and situation. It gives ultimate solution to the people

who are in the problem. So, cultural identity plays biological role in the life of all human beings.

Asha has identity crisis in her life because of dual identity. The conflict between her biological identity and her culturally constructed identity leads to her crisis of identity. And this crisis gets resolved when her culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity. At last, her culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity because she stops searching for her biological identity and assimilates the culturally constructed identity. Following lines depict it clearly:

“You know, I think I always held it against my parents that there was no biological connection between us. I used to think something was missing. But now . . . it’s remarkable really-- they’ve done so much for me, you know, even without the blood. They did it just...because they wanted to.” She wipes her mouth with a napkin and smiles. “So I suppose I owe a debt of gratitude to a lot of people.” She takes a deep breath. “And an apology to my mom.” (316)

The above quote, Asha develops her intimacy towards her foster parents. She understands the importance of culturally constructed identity. Her culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity because she assimilates her culturally constructed identity. She understands the value of her foster parents which gives her ultimate solution of her problems.

Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as tradition, heritage, language, norms and customs. Stuart Halls argues that, “cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and

vicissitudes of our actual history” (223). Hall argues that cultural identity is not fixed rather it is moveable. He further argues that, “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (226). Hall points out that cultural identity links a person’s certain values norms and customs. It is point of identification with particular culture. Cultural identity is always in the process of production and changeable.

As Hall has argued, Asha also feels comfortable with her culturally constructed identity. She relates herself intimately with her foster mother whom she disliked earlier when she had her identity crisis. She often shows her anger and hatred towards her adoptive parents. During the time of her identity crisis, her mother would always be wrong because she expected her biological mother to understand her better. In this context, Asha argues that:

[. . .] You don’t want what the best for me. [. . .] You don’t even know me. You’ve always tried to fit me into some perfect image of the kid you want. You just imported me into your little fantasy, but you don’t see *me*. You don’t love *me*. You want me to be like you, but I’m not. She shakes her head frantically as she speaks. That’s the truth. Maybe if you were my real parents, you would understand me and love me the way I am. [. . .] Why don’t you ever tell me about my real parents? You’re scared they’ll love me more than you do. (136)

The above quote reflects that Asha does not like her foster parents and their love towards her. During her identity crisis, Asha’s relationship with her foster mother is not in a good state. They often have an argument over something. Asha often disagrees to the attitude of her mother and vice versa. She does not want to hear much

from her mother. She only interacts to her when it is necessary.

But when she gets a solution by assimilating with culturally constructed identity she starts understanding Somer very well. These lines in the novel show this, “Asha leaps forward and throws her arms around Somer’s neck. “Oh, Mom. Are you sure you’re okay? Positive” (319)? The above line shows that Asha understands her mother as a daughter who asks the condition of her mother. She shows her attention towards her mother very intimately. Furthermore, she asks about her mother's condition for several times which also points out how she cares about her mother.

Asha starts loving her foster mother very much after her acceptance of cultural identity. She easily shares her feelings with her mother. She starts regretting her guilt in front of her mother. In the novel Asha says that, “Mom, she says, I’m sorry . . . I’m sorry about everything that happened before I left home. I know it wasn’t easy for you” (322). In above lines Asha has realized her guilt which she has done in her early age towards her mother. She shows her intimate relation towards her mother. Asha starts talking with her foster mother as her biological mother.

She finally finds the meaning of family that she has now. She is now grateful to have them. She starts feeling complete and certain towards herself. The way she has that conversation to her mother also shows her moral value about being honest to her mother. She finds her complete life with them. By assimilating with the culturally constructed identity, Asha gets the solution of her problems.

At the end of the story, Asha’s culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity. She becomes closer to her foster mother because when she finds that her biological parents kept Vijaya because of being a son and they discarded Asha because of being a daughter. After this, she no more has her affinity with her biological identity. In this way her culturally constructed identity wins over her

biological identity. Asha gets solution of her problem by assimilating with the culturally constructed identity. It means cultural assimilation is the ultimate solution to all racial and cultural conflicts in today's globalized worlds. At the end of the story, all characters assimilate to culturally constructed identity. Asha assimilates to culturally constructed identity because she starts loving her adoptive parents, Somer assimilates to the Indian culture by accepting Dadima's gift when she comes to India second time and Krishnan assimilates to the American culture because he finally decides to settle in America.

Foreign culture is not our root culture. There occurs a situation of ambivalence due to the hybridity. Ambivalence is the crisis of identity, rootlessness, displacement and unbelongingness. Similarly, hybridity brings ambiguities in identity creation. Homi K. Bhabha points out that a culture is always changeable and it has flexibility where there is the possibility of the new generation which Bhabha calls "the third space". We can see how Bhabha's notion of hybridity connects to his use of the term "the third space" in a 1990 interview with Jonathan Rutherford in the following lines:

[. . .] hybridity to me is the third space that enables other positions to emerge. [. . .] I try to talk about hybridity through a psychoanalytic analogy[ . . .]it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together that traces of certain other meanings or discourses [ . . .] The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (211)

Bhabha talks about ambivalent position, hybridity and third space in his interview with Rutherford. "Third" is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where identity in all its ambiguities is constructed and reconstructed. 'Third space' is

uniqueness of hybridity. Hybridity brings ambivalence position in a person's life.

Asha is an Indian girl who is adopted by Asian-American couple. She accumulates western cultures in America. When she comes to India to search for her biological identity, she finds herself in an ambivalent position due to her dual culture. Her original cultural identity is in crisis because of cultural admixture. As she expresses:

Then there is the Indian food served thrice daily, which is spicier than she's accustomed to and forces her stomach through its own adjustments. She does not feel like herself and every aspect of her surroundings- the bread that comes wrapped in small squares, the newspapers the color of pale pink nail polish- reminds her of how far she is from home. She considers calling home for some comfort, but pride holds her back. (181)

Regarding the culture of food and environment, she finds different kinds of food and culture in India in comparison to America. But she is not comfortable with the Indian foods as much as she is comfortable with American food. She cannot enjoy the food of Indian culture in the same manner as she enjoys American foods. Even in India, she remembers the American food. She has a kind of attachment with the American culture where she grew up. From the above lines, we find that at the same time she is detached from the American culture and accepts the Indian culture but at the same time, she is attached with the American food, lifestyle and culture. Living with different value and tradition, she holds different opinion to the American culture. She holds double identity. She is in a situation of in-betweenness. She is in-between due to the interaction of two cultures which brings her ambivalent position. Her respect towards both cultures shows that she is living in an ambivalent position.

The establishment of identity is a never ending process. Both biological identity and culturally constructed identity is influenced by the condition of one's environment and his/her interactions with the other societies and persons. So Asha is facing the identity crisis in foreign land as well as in India due to her cultural hybridity and her interaction towards societies, environments and persons. She does not have her static and single identity.

In a multicultural society, human beings cannot remain in their own culture. They have to adapt themselves to, assimilate, and face dual cultural identity. In the process of this adaptation, a hybrid culture is born. It is the process that has been made possible by globalization. In the multicultural societies, people adopt cultures as their own. Asha also accepts both cultures the Indian and the American. It gives rise to her multicultural identity and solution of her problem of identity.

Although all the theorists, critics and reviewers helped me to examine Gowda's *Secret Daughter* from different points of view and reach the conclusion that due to the assimilation to the culturally constructed identity, Asha succeeds in establishing her culturally constructed identity as a supermodel in today's globalized world. She decides to live with her foster parents in America by adopting culturally constructed identity. Her culturally constructed identity wins over her biological identity. However, she has struggled so many times searching for her biological identity, later on as she understands; she accepts the culturally constructed identity.

She is an Asian-Indian adopted daughter who lives with mixed race couple Somer and Krishnan in America, suffers an identity crisis in her life. The conflict between her biological identity and her culturally constructed identity leads to her crisis of identity. In the foreign or western countries, the phenomenon of identity crisis can be the major problems for the immigrants. Those citizens who are

Immigrants face and experience multi-cultural and multi-tradition life in the western countries. That multi-cultural and multi-traditional life triggers them to have a more complex kind of identity crisis. Furthermore, the cases of adaptation are common in the western countries. Bringing the adoptive character Asha in the novel *Secret Daughter*, Gowda represents the contemporary realities of the adopted children who are facing the identity crisis in their lives in the western countries.

Gowda, by challenging the contemporary issues on her postcolonial writing presents to the reader the issues of everyday realities faced by many people in foreign land. She represents the story of immigrants' citizens who migrate in the western countries to fulfill their ambitions. What she implies with this victory of culturally constructed identity is that cultural assimilation is the ultimate solution to all racial and cultural conflicts in today's globalized world.

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