

**IDENTITY CRISIS IN ADOLESCENCE PERIOD EXPERIENCED BY ASHA  
IN SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA'S *SECRET DAUGHTER***

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**Abstract**

*This research aims to identify the identity statuses which mark the identity crisis of the main character in Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, Asha, an Asian-Indian adolescent who lives in America with her adoptive mixed-race parents, to find out the impact of Asha's identity crisis towards her sixth stage of psychosocial development, and to identify how the psychosocial issue is reflected in the novel. To answer the objectives, this research employed Erikson's fifth and sixth psychosocial development stages theory, Marcia's identity achievement status, and literary elements theory. The research is a qualitative research with content analysis method. The main source of the data was a novel entitled *Secret Daughter*. The data were collected by reading and re-reading, noting, identifying, classifying and categorizing, analyzing and interpreting. The triangulation method was also used to obtain the validity and credibility of the findings. The findings are as follows: (1) Asha experiences identity diffusion status, identity foreclosure status, identity moratorium status, and identity achievement status which mark her identity crisis; (2) Asha is able to establish intimacy and obtain the virtue of love by forming relationship, establishing the sense of trust, understanding others, and acknowledging others; and (3) the author reflects psychosocial issues through characters and settings.*

Keywords: adolescent, Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, identity crisis, identity statuses, psychosocial

## INTRODUCTION

'Identity' is one of the most important aspects for every human being. Erikson (1980: 109) states that, "The term 'identity' expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others". Identity is about knowing who himself or herself is and what he or she believes and being able to interact with various types of a person without taking issues of diversity as problems.

People ought to face some phases of identity crisis before obtaining and understanding their identity. Erikson (1968: 16) states that crisis is now being accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation.

Identity crisis happens as an internal clash of a person who is in doubt about who he or she really is,

what he or she wants, and what people want them to be. Identity crisis in adolescence stage which occurs at the age of 12 to 18 or so is classified as the most critical crisis in human's life. It is marked by identity statuses: identity diffusion status, identity foreclosure status, identity moratorium status, and identity achievement status.

The result of identity crisis in adolescence period can give impact to the adulthood period. Adolescents who fail to overcome their identity crisis will be arriving to the stage called as identity repudiation. On the other hand, adolescents who can successfully solve their identity crisis will understand their role in society and develop fidelity.

Social conditions become the most important aspect in determining whether adolescents will be able to get their sense of identity or arrive in role confusion. Peers in family, neighborhood, and school as well as culture and tradition are possible to influence an individual's process while having identity crisis during their adolescence years.

The illustration of identity crisis appears within literary works. Shilpi Somaya Gowda published a novel entitled *Secret Daughter* in 2010. Asha is the main character in the novel. She is an Asian-Indian adopted daughter who lives with her mixed-race parents in America. She experiences a complex identity crisis in adolescence period. She can successfully solve her identity crisis at the fifth stage of psychosocial development theory and establish the sense of intimacy at the sixth stage of psychosocial development theory.

This research focuses on Asha's identity statuses which mark her identity crisis in *Secret Daughter*, the impact of Asha's identity crisis towards her sixth stage of psychosocial development, and how the psychosocial issue is reflected in the novel.

## RESEACRCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative research with content analysis method. The main source of this research was a novel entitled *Secret Daughter*. To support this research focus, theories of

Erikson's fifth and sixth psychosocial development stages, Marcia's identity achievement status, and literary elements theory were used.

The data was collected by reading and re-reading, noting, identifying, classifying and categorizing, analyzing and interpreting. The triangulation method was also used to obtain the validity and credibility of the findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Identity Statuses of Asha's Identity Crisis

There are four identity statuses which mark Asha's identity crisis. They are identity diffusion status, identity foreclosure status, identity moratorium status, and identity achievement status.

#### 1. Identity Diffusion Status

Erikson (1980: 97) mentions identity diffusion status points out the condition in which adolescents are not yet sure about who they are and what they want to be. They feel incomplete and are uncertain towards themselves. Adolescents also tend to experience

acute upset and excessive self-awareness which becomes the main cause of facing difficulties in forming relationship. Afterwards, difficulties in concentration and/or making decision also become a typical characteristic of adolescents who are having identity diffusion status.

Asha begins to feel incomplete and uncertain towards herself as seen below.

*I wish you were here to help me. I'm supposed to write a biography of myself for eighth-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.* (Gowda, 2010: 137)

Asha finds it difficult to write her own biography. The condition shows that Asha feels incomplete and uncertain about herself. That feeling may occur because biography requires her to write her own background including where she comes from. She has asked her mother about where she actually comes from. From the line "...she just gives me the same

story..." indicates that Asha asks Somer not only once or twice. Even so, she still does not feel right.

Asha also shows a tendency of having an acute upset which can be seen below.

*Asha tenses. "I don't know," she says quietly. "I think...they skipped a generation." She turns away from the mirror, her face burning, and returns to her locker.* (Gowda, 2010: 146)

Asha is getting upset easily even for a small thing. In this case, she feels offended by the statements of her friends regarding her appearance. Asha has a pair of Asian-Indian eyes which definitely looks different from her school friends.

By having identity diffusion status, Asha also has a tendency to face excessive self-awareness as depicted below.

*My age? "Are you . . . sure?" The words and numbers bang around in Asha's head like billiard balls . . . 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.* (Gowda, 2010: 270)

The passage indicates Asha's negative assumption towards her and her real parents. Even though it is true

that her biological father does not want her, her mother tries her best to keep her safe. She does not think of any possibilities regarding why her parents give her away.

By having excessive self-awareness, Asha may also find difficulties in forming relationship with their friends as portrayed below.

*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. (Gowda, 2010: 146)*

The line "She doesn't want to share her whole personal history with the perfect mirror girls" makes it clear that Asha does not want to share her story because they are 'perfect mirror girls'. Asha lacks of confidence not only because she is adopted but also because she is different from American people.

Asha does not have any troubles in establishing decisions. However, Asha has a problem in concentration like what is portrayed in the passage below.

*"Asha, a B in math and a C in chemistry?" her mother says. "What's the big deal?" Asha says. "I've had straight As all through high school; it's just one bad semester. . ."* Asha keeps her eyes focused on her plate. (Gowda, 2010: 148)

The passage shows that Asha has a problem with her study. That assumption is strengthened by the fact that she usually has an A for every subject. Therefore, she possibly has something in mind that disturbs her study.

## 2. Identity Foreclosure Status

Shaffer (2008: 190) states that adolescents in this status have established their assumption and commitment to certain roles, beliefs, values, without further identification and exploration. The excessive role of parents and significant relations are very crucial in identity foreclosure status. It can be the factor that triggers an adolescent to have identity foreclosure status.

Asha tends to easily establish her belief towards certain things before doing further considerations as seen below.

*He told me about the kite-flying festival that kids in India have in January, and the colored paint they throw for that holiday in the spring. It sounds like a lot of fun. I've never been to India.* (Gowda 2010: 137)

She prematurely establishes her beliefs towards a kite-flying festival in India. She has never been to India but she assumes that the kite-flying in India sounds enjoyable. In fact, she only hears the story about that festival through her father. She does not find further information about the kite-flying festival in India.

Asha's adoptive parents, Krishnan and Somer, trigger Asha to have identity foreclosure status. They push Asha to study hard so that she always achieves good score as seen below.

*“. . . It's time to get serious, Asha, this is your future we're talking about!" He pushes back from the table, chair legs screeching against the kitchen floor to accentuate his point.* (Gowda, 2010: 149)

The passage shows how Krishnan wants Asha to follow what he wants. The role of Asha as an adolescent who likes to study is shaped by her parents all this time. Asha has

no choice but to study if she does not want to get into trouble with her parents.

### 3. Identity Moratorium Status

Erikson (in Zwerdling, 1986: 67) mentions that 'moratorium' is a period in which adolescents do some experimentations in order to find a niche in society which suits them and seems to be uniquely made for them. Adolescents in this status have a tendency to try new things as the form of self-exploration and self-discovery. As a result, adolescents in this identity status can get anxious easily.

The reflection of identity moratorium status can be seen through Asha who likes to do explorations as seen below.

*"So, I have some news." Somer looks up and Asha continues. "You've heard the Watson Foundation? They grant fellowships for college students to go abroad for a year. I applied to do a project on children living in poverty. In India." Asha's eyes dart back and forth between them.* (Gowda, 2010: 175)

Asha joins a student fellowship to know the feeling to be a real journalist by examining a bigger issue

in India, in this case is about children living in poverty. Besides the reason about being a real journalist, the fact that the program takes place in India makes her become more enthusiastic to take the opportunity.

Apart from actively doing exploration, she faces the phase to deal with anxiety as the aftermath of making decision carelessly as represented below.

*... She was so confident on the way over here, but now her legs feel weak, and her heart is racing.* (Gowda, 2010: 288)

It shows that she has an overwhelming desire in looking for her real parents. Nevertheless, the line "...She was so confident on the way over here, but now her legs feel weak, and her heart is racing." signifies that she is not completely convinced towards all consequences of her decision to find her birth parents.

#### 4. Identity Achievement Status

As written in Houston *et al* (2013: 307) that Marcia indicates adults, including adolescents, can be classified not only in three statuses but

in four status. He adds his theory of identity achievement status to the existing theory. according to McInerney (2013: 388), adolescents in identity achievement status have made commitment to certain roles, beliefs, and values after doing explorations and discoveries.

Asha has established a commitment to a certain role after her exploration as seen below.

*The urgency of her father's work reminds her of her own, working under deadline at the Daily Herald—the pressure, the constant awareness of time ticking down, the need to stay singularly focused until the end. She loves that feeling, and the accompanying rush of adrenaline on which she thrives.* (Gowda, 2010: 186)

She knows the feeling to be pressured, especially when there is a deadline of her report. She always does her best and she has never complained anything. At some points, she feels anxious about being a journalist. Even so, she continues to be a journalist. Therefore, she has discovered the consequences of being a journalist. She has defined her role as a journalist

or someone who likes journalism after doing enough exploration.

Asha also establish her commitment to certain values after doing enough exploration in India as a journalist as depicted below.

*Asha wipes the tears away from her cheeks and forces herself to watch the rest of the interview. . .she realizes how insensitive she was, with her questions about the short hair and school. (Gowda, 2010: 320)*

She ultimately commits to social values, specifically about humanity in which she does not want to hurt others. She begins to respect and courteous to others. She then learns to make an interview without having to hurt others' feeling.

### **B. The Impacts of Asha's Identity Crisis Toward Her Psycho-social Development.**

Erikson (1980: 101) states it is only young adults who have a reasonable sense of identity can establish the real sense of intimacy. Erikson (in Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2015: 394) states that intimacy is signified by the ability of forming relationship, establishing the

sense of trust, understanding others, and acknowledging others.

#### **1. Forming Relationship**

Asha establishes the sense of intimacy by forming relationship is shown clearly below.

*Priya winks at her over the fried rice, and all three of them dissolve into the giggles of a bunch of old girlfriends. Asha laughs so hard that green tea comes out of her nose, and tears from the corners of her eyes. (Gowda, 2010: 225)*

Asha forms a relationship with Priya and Bindu. Priya and Bindu have known each other since their childhood. Yet, Asha is not bothered by the fact that she is a 'newcomer' in their relationship. The lines also indicates that she is comfortable with Priya and Bindu. She does not have anything to worry about so that she can laugh that hard.

#### **2. Establishing the Sense of Trust**

Asha is also able to establish the sense of trust as portrayed below.

*Asha nods. She hasn't told anybody yet. And once she speaks the words out loud about the truths she now knows, they will become and irrefutable part of her. "I found them. I didn't meet*

*them face-to-face, but I found them.”* (Gowda, 2010: 350)

Asha meets Sanjay at a bride’s *mehndi* party. She has spent some of her time together with Sanjay. At the beginning of her relationship with Sanjay, she only tells him what she wants to tell him. Of course, she does not tell him the secret. As the time goes by, her relationship with Sanjay becomes deeper. One day, she tells him about her secret.

### 3. Understanding others

Asha also represents her ability to understand others as shown below.

*Dadima doled out her stories in small doses, reaching further back into her memory as the days went on. Asha learned to navigate the delicate balance of being a good listener: asking just enough questions to keep Dadima going without disturbing the flow of her memories.* (Gowda, 2010: 264)

When Asha is in her identity crisis, she is very ignorant. However, Asha finally seems to understand others. In this case, she becomes a good listener. She understands her grandmother by not asking too many questions which may disrupt her memories.

### 4. Acknowledging others

Asha begins to be able to acknowledge others as seen clearly below.

*My family. People Asha had never met and barely spoken to just one year ago, who have fetched her from the airport in the middle of the night, taken her to tourist sites they had no interest in seeing again, taught her how to wear a lengha, fly tissue-paper kites, eat all kinds of new foods. She was not born into this family, she did not grow up with them, but it has made no difference. They have done everything for her.* (Gowda, 2010: 339)

It can be seen that Asha considers Krishnan’s family who has done so many good things to her as ‘my family’. Previously, Asha often has problems in figuring out who her family is. She always complains the fact that she does not know about her birth parents. She often feels incomplete and uncertain about herself to the point that she feels she does not belong in this world.

### C. The Elements of Literature which Represent Psychosocial Issue

In this study, two elements of literature are worth considered for the analyzing process. They are characters and settings.

### 1. Characters

According to Taifel and Fraser (1978: 22), Erikson's psychosocial theory reads up the interaction between individual and others, social groups, and social systems around them. It also learn how the psychology of social affects the development of an individual. Thus, the element of character is worth deliberated to see the issue of psychosocial.

### 2. Settings

The element of settings is also worth considered in order to see the social conditions in which the characters live. Wiesner (2011: 16) mentions one of the functions of a setting is to enhance the character's characterization and conflict. The description of social condition is often used to explain the settings of their story Rollins (2010: 14). Gowda's *Secret Daughter* employs societal settings by describing social conditions

in Dahanu, India in 1984, where people kill baby girls because they do not want to have daughters. Gowda also portrays societal setting by presenting the nature of society in which a profession of doctor is exposed as a prestigious job.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results show that Asha, an Asian-Indian adopted daughter who lives with a mixed-race couple in America, suffers a complex identity crisis during the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development theory, identity versus identity confusion. There are four identity statuses which signify Asha's identity crisis. Those statuses are: 1) identity diffusion status, 2) identity foreclosure status, 3) identity moratorium status, and 4) identity achievement status.

Afterwards, having the sense of fidelity and loyalty, in the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development theory, enables Asha to form the sense of intimacy. There are four characteristics which denote intimacy. The characteristics are: 1) forming

relationship, 2) establishing the sense of trust, 3) understanding others, and 4) acknowledging others.

The last result is Gowda's *Secret Daughter* portrays the issue of psychosocial through two elements of literature. They are characters and settings. The main character, Asha, and the secondary characters in this novel, Kavita, Jasu, Krishnan, and Somer, reflect the issue of psychosocial through sentences. Subsequently, this novel use societal settings to represent the issue of psychosocial. The author portrays the social conditions in Dahanu, India in 1984. Afterwards, Gowda also depicts the nature of society through the belief about doctor as a prestigious job through the characters of Krishnan.

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