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**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
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**Troubles of Identity in Shipli Somaya's Novel: *Secret Daughter***

Thesis Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in  
Literature and Civilization

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**Academic Year: 2023/2024**

## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material that has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

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Signature.....

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, whose unwavering love and support made this achievement possible.

This thesis is dedicated to all my teachers, whose guidance and support laid the foundation for this achievement. It is also dedicated to all my friends, and to everyone who helped me along this journey.

## **Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to my supervisor Dr. D. Mehdaoui for her help completing this research work.

I would also like to thank the committee members, Prof. D. Benadla, Prof. R. Raouti, who have spent their time reading, correcting and evaluating this humble work.

Finally, I would like to express my regards and blessings to all of those who supported me during the completion of this research work.

**Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to investigate the complex process of identity formation in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's, *Secret Daughter*, regarding the interaction between psychological and sociocultural factors that shaped the personality of the main character, Asha. The main purpose is to find out how Asha's bicultural background and adoption have affected her identity which Understanding the specific and general aspects of culture and family-related identity in the case of adoption can be useful. Subsequently, a qualitative case study approach is employed, utilizing a literary analysis framework to examine the narrative and character development within the novel. The main research tools include thematic text analysis based on psychological and social psychology theories related to identity crises and psychosocial development, particularly focusing on Erikson's stages of identity formation. Furthermore, the findings reveal an identity crisis of Asha, marked by stages of identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Her interactions with her adoptive and biological cultures significantly shape her journey to self-discovery and acceptance. These interactions are pivotal. The study emphasizes the complex interplay of adoption, cultural displacement, and personal growth in the Process of identity -formation and multicultural settings.

**Keywords:** Asha, Erikson's Psychosocial Development, Identity Crisis, Multicultural, Troubles.

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# General Introduction

## **General Introduction**

Identity and its crises have been one of the most foundational forms from which literary discourse is drawn to provide readers with an understanding of human nature and social constructions. The novel "Secret Daughter" by Shilpi Somaya Gowda is a poignant canvas of identity formation amidst cultural, family, and personal conflicts. This paper will explore the identity issues of a female protagonist, Asha, an Asian Indian girl, raised by a mixed-race American couple as she comes of age. This study could further expand the cross-cultural identity dynamics and psychological effects of adoption.

The central problem of this research is the identity crisis of Asha. It is signified by her constant strife between her cultural heritage and personal identity. This is important because it can elicit reflection on broader, more general themes of multicultural integration, the diaspora experience, and the psychological implications of adoption. Therefore, this research relies on the theories of psychological and social psychology related to identity crises and psychosocial development, more specifically Erikson's stages of identity formation.

The study mainly focuses on the illustration of how Asha's identity crisis is portrayed in the novel and to infer the general findings in such an experience towards some, equally, realistic situations in life. Such research findings can, Therefore, contribute to academic debates about identity formation in literature debates that mirror real-life social and cultural issues.

The main aim of this research is to identify the stages of the identity crisis that Asha experiences in the novel. Additionally, the work focuses on the cultural, family, and personal aspects of the protagonist's background is analyzed in order to explain the identity formation. Also, this research addresses the role of literature in presenting complicated identity negotiations.

The main research questions guiding this study are:

- 1-What identity statuses do Asha experience throughout "Secret Daughter"?
- 2-How does Asha's cross-cultural background and adoption influence her identity formation?

### 3-What are the psychosocial impacts of Asha's identity crisis?

The hypothesis presented in this study, asserting that Asha's identity crisis in 'Secret Daughter' will adhere to a trajectory consistent with Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, primarily influenced by her cross-cultural adoption and upbringing, does not appear to align with the research questions in terms of size and number.

The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative literary analysis of "Secret Daughter". The novel is the primary source supported by scholarly articles and books on identity formation, multiculturalism, and adoption. This choice of qualitative analysis allows for a detailed exploration of themes and the development of characters in the narrative structure of the novel. Such an approach is particularly suitable in studies where the issue of the textual analysis and exploration of themes is central in the world of literature.

This research is divided into three chapters. The first one entitled "Identity Question from a Psychological Side", introduces the theoretical framework and literature review, setting the stage for the analysis of identity crisis. The second one is entitled "Navigating Life's Stages: Erikson's Psychosocial Development and Identity Formation" and provides a detailed analysis of Asha's identity crisis through the stages of her life depicted in the novel. While the third chapter is entitled "Analyzing the Main Character Asha" and discusses the implications of Asha's experiences for understanding identity formation in a multicultural context.

The limitation of this study based on only one literary work; it may be insufficient to cover a wide spectrum of experiences regarding identity crises in multicultural environments. Even more, the interpretations given are subject to the subjective character of literary analysis, which do differ from scholar to scholar and reader to reader.

This research aims to make an academic contribution by providing a nuanced understanding of identity formation as presented in contemporary literature, which might derive implications for cultural studies, psychology, and literary criticism.

# **Chapter One: The Question of Identity from the Psychological Perspective**

## **I.1 Introduction**

Psychology focuses on diverse issues surrounding human beings, such as their conflict with one another. Literature from another side represents a wide surface for depicting people's stories and dilemmas. It allows them to write and approach these conflicts. Human psychology can be studied and approached in numerous ways. Therefore, both psychology and literature share a close and profound relationship. The literary piece creates characters struggling with many traumatic and painful experiences leading to intricate crises. Psychoanalysis is inserted to focus on human behavior. Therefore, in this chapter, The researcher tries to focus on these three key elements: literature, psychology /social psychology and, identity crisis.

## **I-2 Exploring Literature**

Literature is a diverse world of written and oral expressions that go to the core of the human heart's joy and sorrow. Regardless of their nature, literature, initially real or imaginary phenomena woven into a web of words, can enchant the soul.

Literature, often deemed the "art of verbal expression," entwines itself with both written and oral language. While commonly possessing a poetic nature, the term encompasses works within specific domains of knowledge or attributed to authors, such as pedagogical literature, Mexican literature, or the works of Cervantes.

Literature encompasses works originating from specific geographic, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or temporal contexts, including various literary genres and forms, as well as scientific or artistic endeavors that emerge within these defined parameters. For instance, medical literature and Gothic fiction are examples of such diverse expressions, demonstrating how literature extends beyond traditional genres to encompass specialized fields and genres reflecting diverse cultural and intellectual perspectives.

### **I.2.1 Literature from Different Points of View**

Literature is a mirror that reflects the light of any society. It was and, is a surface and arena for reducing pains, wounds and all types of pathology. Literature is an arm of struggle to fight against all sorts of ignorance and feed the appetite of poor minds. However, scholars did not agree on one single definition, but they provided numerous divergent opinions to figure out what literature is. Among these definitions, Esten (1978) suggests that literature is the expression of artistic and imaginative facts as manifestations of human life and society through language as a medium and has a positive effect on humanity's human life. It can be viewed as the "science of linguistic communication" (p. 9). On the one hand, Literature is considered one of the fine arts, serving as a creative cloak over reality. In the seventeenth century, it was known as poetry or eloquence, evolving into the term "literature". According to Hirsh (1978), literature includes any text worthy of being taught to students by teachers of literature when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university (p. 34). According to McFadden (1978), literature is a canon that consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works primarily artistic and those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of the works, as its members have come to read them (or concretize them) (p. 56). However, Wellek and Warren (1963) mention that within lyric poetry, drama, and fiction, the greatest works are selected on aesthetic grounds; other books are picked for their reputation or intellectual eminence together with the aesthetic value of a rather narrow kind: style, composition, and general force of presentation are the usual characteristics singled out (p. 21).

### **I-2.2 Origin of Literature**

Texts with eloquence or poetry emerged after the invention of writing in Mesopotamia around the third millennium BC. It took nearly 4,800 years for the term "literature" to materialize (Javed, 2023). The Epic of Gilgamesh (C.2100 BC), the Iliad (A Greek poem attributed to Homer. It contains about 15.693 lines. It was written in the 8th century), and the Aeneid (Between 29 and 19 BC by the Roman Poet Virgil and it contains about 9.896 lines) are considered early examples of literary works.

The formal appearance of the term "literature" occurred in the eighteenth century, grouping various written expressions that exhibited literary quality or "literalism." This perception was reinforced by works like "Eléments de littérature" by Jean-François Marmontel.

English formalisms in the 18th and 19th centuries broadened the scope of literature, incorporating letters, essays, and philosophical treatises. However, certain forms like novels faced societal disapproval. The stability of the term "literature" developed over time, accommodating diverse manifestations, including indigenous literature.

### **I-2.3 Types of Literature**

Literature as a body of artistic expressions and aesthetic framework includes varied types transmitting intriguing themes and messages, such as Oral Literature, which is rooted in popular beliefs, transmitted through stories, legends, and myths. In addition, written Literature merged around 3000 BC, spanning various genres and formats. However, Science Fiction Literature incorporates real or invented facts, sometimes predicting future events. While, Non-Fiction Literature is grounded in real or testimonial events, enhancing the credibility of works. Fantastic Literature presents supernatural elements within known or invented worlds. Literary Genres encompass narrative, lyrical, and dramatic forms, each with distinct subgenres.

### **I-3 Psychology**

To explore social psychology, we must first understand the basic definition of psychology. "**Psychology**" is a term derived from the Greek words: "**psyche**" (soul, mind or spirit) and "**ology**" (which stands for the study of a particular subject). The synthesis might better be described as an all-encompassing examination of human activities and mental function.

However, Coon and Mitterer (2003) offer a nuanced definition in their book *Psychology: A Journey*, asserting that psychology is now recognized as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. They refer to observable actions, in contrast with mental processes, which originate from the inner or private aspects of human existence (Carpenter & Huffman, 2009, p. 4). This perspective underscores that psychology extends beyond the exclusive analysis of the human mind and encompasses the systematic examination of both behavior and mental processes.

### **I-3-1 Psychology from Different Corners**

It's interesting to note that a prevailing perception sees psychology primarily as the study of the human mind. Dandapani (2004, p. 13) states that:

*“People were rather naïve to believe in esoteric terms such as Soul, Mind and Consciousness. It was believed, and rightly so, that every human being is endowed with a Soul that would remain sublime at all times. To a philosopher soul is the firm foundation upon which ethical values are erected. Realisation of one’s soul was considered the chief mission of life.....”*

The definition of Psychology as the study of the soul became unacceptable primarily because no convincing proof or evidence of the precise nature the of soul was furnished. It was discarded because of its METAPHYSICAL nature. It was found inadequate to satisfy the canons of science.

However, I resonate with Coon and Mitterer's nuanced definition presented in *Psychology: A Journey* (2003). According to them, psychology is now acknowledged as "the scientific study of both behavior and mental processes" (Coon & Mitterer, 2003, p. 14). This nuanced perspective challenges the limited view that psychology is exclusively concerned with the mind. The distinction they draw between observable actions (behavior) and the inner aspects of human existence (mental processes), as highlighted by Carpenter and Huffman (2009, p. 4), adds depth to my understanding.

This viewpoint emphasizes the need to broaden our understanding of psychology beyond a narrow focus on the mind. It acknowledges the significance of behavior alongside the exploration of mental processes. This comprehensive definition becomes the foundation for a more holistic grasp of the intricate dynamics of human behavior and cognition.

### **I-3-2 Social Psychology**

Social psychology is a dynamic and empirical field dedicated to unraveling the intricate ways in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are shaped by the presence, whether real, imagined, or implied, of others (Allport, 1998). This definition underscores the scientific nature of the discipline, emphasizing the importance of empirical investigation. The terms “thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” encompass a comprehensive range of psychological

variables that can be measured and analyzed within individuals. Notably, the concept that social influence can operate even when no tangible individuals are present highlights the pervasive impact of the social world, extending to scenarios such as media consumption and adherence to internalized cultural norms.

In addition, social psychology operates as an empirical science, aiming to address a several questions about human behavior by systematically testing hypotheses. This investigative approach encompasses both controlled laboratory experiments and real-world field studies. It places a central focus on the individual, endeavoring to elucidate how the thoughts, emotions, and actions of individuals are shaped and molded by their interactions with others.

### **I.3.3 Substantial Contributions of Social Psychology**

Although social psychology has become a field relatively recently, it has made a huge contribution not only within psychology, the sociology discipline, and the other fields of social sciences but it has also significantly affected how society understands and expects social behavior among humans. This branch permits us to explore how people react to the excess of social pressure and the lack of it, which has granted much profound insight into human nature. The learned discipline agrees that humans are inherently social and that interaction is central to the healing and growth of each person.

Moreover, by delving into the myriad factors that influence social life and investigating the reciprocal impact of social interactions on individual psychological development and mental health, social psychology is gradually shedding light on how humanity as a whole can coexist harmoniously. It strives to uncover the mechanisms that drive cooperation, influence, and conflict within societies, paving the way for a deeper understanding of human nature and the dynamics that shape our collective existence. In essence, social psychology is a multidimensional field that not only enhances our comprehension of human behavior but also offers valuable insights into how we can thrive together in a complex and interconnected world.

Likewise, social psychology emerges as a fascinating and empirical field dedicated to unraveling the intricate ways in which our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the presence of others. The emphasis on its scientific nature, particularly the commitment to empirical investigation, showcases a rigorous approach to understanding the complex dynamics of human social interaction.

Intriguingly, social influence extends beyond direct interactions, persisting even when tangible individuals are not physically present. This recognition of the pervasive impact of the social world resonates with various aspects of life, such as media consumption and adherence to cultural norms, highlighting the broad relevance of social psychology to our daily experiences.

Social psychology examines the impact of others on individual and group behavior. The American Psychological Association defines it as the study of how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by the actual, imagined, or symbolically represented presence of others. Social psychologists investigate questions related to how social interactions shape individual thoughts and decisions, the accuracy of human behavior as an indicator of personality, the goal orientation of social behavior, the influence of social perception on behavior, and the formation of potentially destructive social attitudes like prejudice.

On the other hand, it explores diverse topics such as group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, implicit bias, criminal activity, and the application of their findings to various fields including business, law, education, healthcare, and public policy.

### **I-3-4 Social Psychology and Sociology**

Distinguishing social psychology from sociology, social psychologists focus on individuals within a group, while sociologists study groups of people. Both disciplines, however, share an interest in understanding the interplay between human behavior and societal influences. Social psychologists employ various research methods, including experiments, surveys, and observations, to investigate human behavior in social contexts. Their work addresses contemporary issues such as leadership, aggression, social perception, group behavior, conformity, and prejudice. Theoretical frameworks in social psychology, like social cognition, group behavior, and social identity theory, contribute to explaining and understanding human behavior.

### **I-3-5 Literature and Social Psychology**

Literature and social psychology share a significant connection, and to explore this relationship, it is essential to first understand the broader definition of psychology. While some

define psychology as the analysis of the human mind, Coon and Mitterer (2003) assert in their book *"Psychology: A Journey"* (2003) that psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Behavior refers to observable actions, while mental processes encompass the inner aspects of human experience.

In the context of literature, Wellek and Warren (1977) argue that psychology can be applied to analyze the creation of literary works, the authors, the values embedded in the works, and the impact of literature on readers. This suggests that psychology serves as a theoretical framework for understanding both literary works and the individuals who produce them, as literature often delves into real-life issues, including human experiences and societal conditions.

Psychology is a multifaceted discipline with various branches, and one of these is social psychology, also known as psychosocial study. According to Taifel and Fraser (1978), Erikson's psychosocial theory explores the interactions between individuals and their social surroundings, including social groups and systems. It examines how social conditions influence individual development. Psychosocial study proves invaluable in comprehending how individuals think, feel, and behave in response to their social environments, as highlighted by Stangor (2011) in *"Principles of Social Psychology."*

The connection between literature and psychosocial study becomes apparent when considering their shared focus on the human psyche as the subject of analysis. Both disciplines delve into human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, emphasizing the influence of social conditions on human life. While literature explores these aspects through literary works, psychosocial study investigates them in real-life situations. Consequently, a psychosocial approach is deemed significant for this study, bridging the gap between the exploration of human experiences in literature and the examination of real-world human responses to social conditions.

## **I.4 Identity**

Identity refers to the characteristics, beliefs, values, and experiences that define individuals and differentiate them from others. It is a multifaceted construct encompassing

personal, social, and cultural dimensions. Personal identity refers to an individual's unique characteristics, such as personality traits, interests, and talents. Social identity refers to the groups to which an individual belongs, such as family, friends, and communities. Cultural identity refers to the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a particular group or society. Identity is not a static construct but rather a dynamic and evolving one that adjusts according to an individual's different circumstances, environments, and relationships (REF)

#### **I.4.1 Identity from Psychological Side**

The concept of identity is more complex than simply equating it to a person's name. In psychological terms, identity is closely tied to an individual's self-perception rather than just their name. It encompasses the self-images that individuals hold, and it's not something inherited directly from family, society, or community, as some might believe. Contrary to common misconceptions, identity is not automatically bestowed at birth; rather, it evolves over time through personal experiences and reflections on issues, interactions, and relationships.

In this line, Erikson (1980) notes, "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." In essence, identity involves understanding one's beliefs, knowing who one is, and being capable of engaging with a diverse range of individuals without viewing differences as problems. Each person's identity is unique, shaped by their life experiences and choices, leading to differences or similarities with others based on individual life journeys.

In my studies, I have explored the complexities and multi-dimensional characteristics of self and cultural identity. The concept of one's essence is intricate and encompasses the nature of whom one is. It is only possible to understand if the given essence is the true self without reference to prior experiences, memories, or self-images. Known as the identity with Essence or Being, this particular intrinsic discriminatory base enables human beings to comprehend their genuine selves easily. This realization transcends personal concepts.

### **I.4.2 Personal Identity**

Personal identity, a crucial facet of self-essence, is characterized by self-reflection, introspection, and an awareness of thoughts, emotions, and values. It's a dynamic construct shaped by individuality, relationships, beliefs, and life experiences. This ongoing evolution is fueled by internal reflections and external interactions, allowing individuals to navigate the world with a profound sense of self-awareness and narrative continuity.

Self-essence exploration extends beyond the confines of mind and body, reaching into an eternal essence unaffected by life's fluctuations. This essence transcends the boundaries of birth and death, encouraging individuals to embrace the mystery of existence and let go of the need for rigid definitions. Understanding the nature of self becomes a continuous journey, a quest that surpasses the limitations of language and guides us into the realm of our authentic selves.

Essentially, my findings indicate that the core of self and cultural identity involves recognizing one's true self, continually evolving personal identity, and exploring an eternal essence that goes beyond the confines of the mind and body. It's a profound and ongoing journey of self-discovery and introspection, transcending the limitations of words and leading us to the realm of our authentic selves.

### **I.4.3 Erikson's Concept of Identity**

Erik Homburger Erikson (1902-1994), a German-born scholar, dedicated his academic pursuits to exploring psychosocial theory. This theory intricately examines the complex relationship between an individual's identity and the broader social conditions, encompassing factors such as society, culture, and history. Erikson's encounters with challenges rooted in social conditions significantly shaped the trajectory of his identity development, compelling him to delve deeper into these issues.

Motivated by a profound connection to the impact of social conditions on identity, Erikson produced notable works that delve into the nuanced development of human identity. These include *"Identity and the Life Cycle"* (1959), *"Childhood and Society"* (1963), *"Identity: Youth and Crisis"* (1968), and *"The Life Cycle Completed"* (1982).

Erikson's keen interest in identity led him to conceptualize it as a set of distinctive characteristics or individual uniqueness nurtured by the social conditions surrounding an individual (Erikson, 1980, p. 109). As an ego-psychologist, he introduced the concept of ego identity, defining it as the sustained sense of selfsameness within an individual and the ability to consistently interact with and attribute meaning to others in the immediate community (Erikson, 1980, p. 94).

Bronson, as cited by Marcia (1966, p. 552), further elaborates that ego identity involves the assurance of the "certainty of self-conception" and the "temporal stability of self-rating." Erikson's exploration of identity underscores its subjectivity, emphasizing that it can vary from one person to another. He contends that social conditions significantly shape a lasting pattern of "inner identity" (Erikson, 1956, p. 66). The way individuals engage in societal roles and how society perceives and identifies them play pivotal roles in shaping their authentic sense of identity.

#### **I.4.4 Erikson's Concept of Identity Crisis**

In exploring the concept of identity, Erikson delves into the notion of identity crisis. The term "**crisis**" originates from the Greek word "**krisis**" and is commonly defined as a perilous or unstable situation with potentially adverse effects on an individual or community. Crisis is often associated with negative changes, encompassing environmental and societal matters. In Chinese, the term crisis denotes a negative situation or danger. However, Erikson (1968, p. 16) contends that the term "crisis" is not as dire as it may sound. He defines it as a "necessary turning point, a crucial moment when development must proceed in one direction or another, mobilizing resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation." Cherry (*www.verywell.com: 2016, par. 4*) adds that a developmental crisis is a type of psychological crisis inherent in the process of growth and development. From this perspective, it can be inferred that an identity crisis does not invariably lead to negative outcomes. To progress through the stages of psychosocial development, an individual must navigate one or more crises in life.

On the other side, McLean and Syed (2014) highlight Erikson's use of the term "crisis" to describe internal conflicts experienced by individuals grappling with questions about their

identity, desires, and societal expectations (p. 116). Instances of crisis in human identity occur multiple times in life, with the most critical phase typically unfolding during adolescence.

The identity crisis in adolescence is characterized by introspective queries such as "Who am I?," "What do I truly want from life?" and "What are others expecting me to be?" A successful resolution of these questions contributes to the development of a healthy identity and ego identity. In essence, the issues surrounding identity crisis during adolescence are pivotal for an individual's progression in attaining a sense of self.

Moreover, Erikson posits that identity, encompassing ego identity, is dynamic and malleable. It can be acquired, developed, and evolved based on the roles individuals assume in specific social circumstances and their interactions with others. In essence, Erikson's work highlights the profound impact of social conditions on the intricate process of identity formation and evolution. Through his scholarly endeavors, Erikson enriches our understanding of how social contexts intricately shape and influence the development of human identity.

#### **I.4.5 Symptoms of Identity Crisis**

Erik Erikson, a prominent developmental psychologist, aptly defines identity as a painting that captures the essence of a person, mirroring their unique blend of self-awareness, societal reflections, and the ability to present themselves authentically. As Silitonga and Ambarita (2020) aptly point out, an identity crisis, akin to an unfinished masterpiece, exhibits distinct characteristics.

##### **I.4.5.1 Role Confusion**

**A Question of Identity and Place.** Adolescence is often the primary stage for experiencing role confusion. However, adults can also encounter similar sentiments based on their life experiences. This uncertainty regarding one's role and potential in life leads to feelings of insecurity and a persistent quest for self-discovery.

##### **I.4.5.2 Isolation**

**The Dread of Rejection and Its Toll.** During an identity crisis, individuals become particularly vulnerable to the fear of rejection. The prospect of job refusals or relationship breakdowns intensifies these anxieties. The constant exposure to rejection can deeply impact

one's self-esteem and make it challenging to cope with both personal and professional challenges.

#### **I.4.5.3 Doubt**

A Shadow Cast by Self-Questioning. The internal dialogue triggered by an identity crisis often revolves around self-doubt. Questions like "Can I make a meaningful impact on my life?" emerge, leading to a spiral of uncertainty that hinders the ability to lead a fulfilling life inside and outside the home. This yearning for a deeper sense of purpose and passion further fuels the individual's internal struggles.

### **I.5 Adolescent Identity Crisis and Its Manifestations**

Adolescents in the midst of an identity crisis may manifest patterns of behavior complicit in their degradation and the ruin of their relationships. Some of the most common turbulent manifestations of an identity crisis tend to be:

**I.5.1 Irritability:** increased sensitivity to any external factors, including dissatisfaction and anger at minor and random affairs.

**I.5.2 Self-hatred:** worsened low self-esteem and constant self-flagellation, any self-critical issue or comparison results in an explicit homily in the spirit of "others are so, and I am a nothing".

**I.5.3 Self-harm:** body destruction with painful methods or through self-destructive behavior.

**I.5.4 Feeling useless:** perception of oneself as an object of no use or asocial utility, as a result, feeling of disempowerment and despair.

**I.5.5 Powerlessness:** losing power over the situation and control over one's life, which leads to despair.

### **I.6 The Causes of Identity Crisis**

During specific periods in life, major psychological transformations require a certain juncture at which experience, belief, and perception undergo deep changes. Identity crises are the common outcome of such times of unnameable uncertainty that combine all feelings.

However, it happens to different people at different times because no two people have the same experiences. Drawing upon his insights as an authority in this regard, Erik Erikson (Silitonga & Ambarita, 2020, p. 32) has outlined several general causes for the perplexing stage of self-awareness.

One of the primary catalysts for an identity crisis lies in the inherent human tendency to grapple with our own imperfections and perceived insignificance within the vast expanse of the universe. This existential questioning often intensifies during adolescence, a period marked by heightened self-awareness and a growing desire to establish one's place in the world. Adolescents confront a multitude of social pressures, academic demands, and personal dilemmas, all of which contribute to a heightened sense of identity confusion (Erikson, 1968).

Another significant factor influencing identity formation stems from the influence of parental values and treatment (Silitonga & Ambarita, 2020, p. 32). When individuals perceive themselves as undervalued or mistreated by their families, their self-esteem and confidence can plummet. This lack of validation can lead to feelings of worthlessness and uncertainty about one's life trajectory, further fueling the flames of an identity crisis.

Traumatic life events can also serve as potent catalysts for identity upheaval (Silitonga & Ambarita, 2020, p. 32). Experiencing a sudden loss, a debilitating injury, or any other deeply distressing event can shake the foundations of one's self-perception. These harrowing encounters can leave individuals questioning their resilience, purpose, and very existence within the universe.

In addition to these primary causes, societal expectations and cultural norms can also play a subtle yet significant role in triggering identity crises (Erikson, 1968). Individuals who feel ostracized or marginalized by societal standards may grapple with a sense of alienation and a struggle to reconcile their authentic selves with external pressures. This internal conflict can exacerbate feelings of confusion and uncertainty about one's place in the world.

In essence, identity crises emerge from a confluence of internal and external factors that challenge individuals' fundamental sense of self (Silitonga & Ambarita, 2020, p. 32). As we navigate the complexities of life, we inevitably confront moments of doubt and introspection. While these periods can be unsettling and disorienting, they also hold the potential for profound self-discovery and personal growth. By recognizing the underlying causes of identity crises,

we can better equip ourselves to navigate these transformative phases and emerge with a clearer understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

## **I.7 The Impacts of Identity Crisis**

Throughout life challenges, we experience many episodes of deep contemplation and multifaceted doubts, described as identity crises. Even though such metaphors are often torturous, they create the matrix required to find oneself. Yet these risks are incommensurable as identity crises can spread to life in general and challenge the existence, alienation, and meaninglessness of an organ.

According to renowned psychologist Erik Erikson, individuals experiencing identity crises often harbor deep-seated beliefs about their inherent insignificance and lack of opportunities in the universe (Silitonga & Ambarita, 2020, p. 32). This existential questioning can erode their self-confidence, leaving them unsure about their life trajectory and paralyzed by indecision.

The effects of identity crises extend beyond internal doubts, manifesting in social withdrawal and isolation. Individuals may feel ostracized or mistreated by their families and peers, further exacerbating their sense of alienation and diminishing their sense of belonging. This social isolation can hinder their personal and professional growth, creating a vicious cycle of self-doubt and social withdrawal.

To better understand the complexities of identity crises, researchers have built upon Erikson's theories, exploring the dynamics of identity formation. For example, psychologist James Marcia offered a concept to determine the status of identity. It includes indicators such as occupational role, beliefs, and values, sexuality.

## **I.8 Conclusion**

Human life is full of diverse threads and harsh experiences, which represent an intricate and complex tapestry affecting the human psyche. Traumatic events can be considered as the main catalysts leading to identity crisis and upheaval. The human psyche therefore undergoes profound modification and transformation giving birth to all types of uncertainty. Therefore, in this chapter, I tried to exhibit how the social environment where human beings are living and struggling with thorny obstacles affects their psyche and identity. Literature from another

side depicts this struggle and reveals its consequences at all levels. Attempts were made, thus, in this chapter to deal with identity questions, literature, and psychology/social psychology. Other attempts were made to focus on the main causes and symptoms of identity crisis.

# **Chapter Two: Navigating Life's Stages Erikson's Psychosocial Development and Identity Formation**

## **II.1 Introduction**

In this chapter overview, we will investigate the elaborate and interconnected phenomenon of identity formation based on the theories of Erik Erikson and James E. Marcia. Given that human development is intrinsic to the entire life course and is characterized simultaneously by continuity and ongoing self-discovery, it is also a complex interplay of various social and psychological phenomena. Using Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages Theory as a comprehensive framework that illustrates a person's interactions with the internal and external environment throughout life, the process of identity acquisition can be analyzed and conceptualized. The theory covers eight precisely articulated stages, each of which is associated with a specific psychosocial crisis that influences the emerging identity extensively. Thus, during this chapter, I will explore the key aspects of identity formation as depicted by Erikson's theory. From the first stage of Trust vs. Mistrust established in infancy to the most central one at the imperative stance of identity vs. role

confusion during adolescence to the quest for meaning and contribution in adulthood, i.e., the stage of Generativity vs. Stagnation.

Furthermore, Erikson determines a few generalized paths of identity statuses people can choose to follow in every type, Identity Diffusion, Identity Foreclosure, and some more in Identity Achievement. In addition to the analyses, based on Erikson's theory, this drawn chapter reveals the concept of James E. Marcia's model of Identity Achievement Status, which helps to comprehend the unique ways of people's self-definition development. Thus, while you read this chapter, despite being less familiar with this topic, you can gather multiple useful hints to go through your identity exploration and see that this life-long made easier path can go in many directions.

## **II.2 Erik Erikson: Life and Background**

Erikson was born in Frankfurt, Germany on June 15, 1902. He was a major person in psychology and made significant contributions to the knowledge of human development throughout his lifetime. His theory of psychosocial development delineates eight phases that individuals progress through from infancy to late adulthood, each marked by a distinct conflict that needs resolution for sound psychological growth.

Erikson's academic background included training in psychoanalysis at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute. He was influenced by Sigmund Freud's work but extended Freud's theories to include continued development and challenges throughout one's life, not just in childhood. His work emphasized the role of culture and society and the conflicts that can occur within the ego itself, which he believed contributed to the formation of identity.

Biographical studies of historical figures, using his theory to interpret their lives and contributions. His work has been influential in various fields, including education, where his ideas have been applied to understand the challenges and needs of students at different developmental stages.

One of his key contributions was the concept of identity, which has become a central topic in psychology and other social sciences. Erikson's exploration of identity includes the notion of an identity crisis, which is a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically during adolescence but potentially at other times as well.

Erikson's ideas have also been applied in therapeutic contexts, such as Life Review Therapy (LRT), which is used to help elderly individuals with Alzheimer's dementia reflect on their lives, thereby potentially improving their cognitive function and emotional well-being. This therapy is based on Erikson's stage of ego integrity versus despair, where individuals in late adulthood reflect on their lives to find meaning and achieve a sense of fulfillment.

A major psychologist who has provided new levels of understanding regarding the development of the human being is Erik Erikson. His work in the field is centered around what he called the theory of psychosocial development, which postulates several stages that every individual goes through up to death, each of which has its psychological challenge. Most importantly, the notion of identity introduced by Erikson continues to be a cornerstone of discourse on human conduct and mental health.

### **II.3 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages Theory**

Introduction Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory is one of the leading theories in psychology that was viewed in several literatures. The theory was developed by Erik H. Erikson and plays a significant role in the development of children and adults through their

entire life. The essence of the theory was going to his own experiences and teachings of his mentor Freud. Freud believes that the human mental apparatus consists of three systems:

the Id, ego and superego. The Id is the progenitor of human personality, and it is associated with libidinal energy and need for satisfaction due to any means. The superego is another type of personality and is connected with morality and conscience that pushes the individual to create social behavior. Freud's definition of ego is all conscious mental acts, comprising the whole function of memory, logic, perception, intelligence, language, motility, sensibility, self-knowledge and social judgment. According to Freud, **the ego** is the "slave" to **the id** and **superego** and its role is to please the demands in extremis. Thus, Erikson's contribution to psychology was big and was not restricted to his development theory.

Erikson, a renowned ego psychologist, does not extensively discuss the Id and superego. In his book "*Childhood and Society*," Erikson posits that the ego represents a person's ability to integrate action and experience in an adaptive manner' (1963, p. 15). Contrasting with Freud's perspective, Erikson (1950, p 187) asserts that the ego is the most crucial component of the human psyche, as it strikes a balance between the id and superego by perceiving reality and one's capacities for orientation and planning. He suggests that every individual must cope with ego functions to achieve a normal development pattern and successfully adapt to social realities (Shaffer, 2008, p. 41). Ego functions involve self-preservation encouragement and adaptation to maximize an individual's survival ability by filtering, interpreting and distorting stimuli managed by the Id and superego (Miller et al., 2003).

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development posits that the ego evolves through eight distinct stages over the course of a person's life with each stage presenting its own unique challenges and opportunities for growth. Slee and colleagues (2012) assert that each stage is associated with a specific ego strength that must be cultivated for healthy development.

To help you comprehend Erikson's theory of psychosocial development more completely, the researcher has supplied a table summarizing its main features below: According to Adlina Larasati, 2017 (p. 22):

Stage	Age Range	Crisis	Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
<b>Trust vs. Mistrust</b>	<b>Birth - 1 year</b>	<b>Feeling safe and cared for</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Insecurity and fear</b>
<b>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</b>	<b>1-3 years</b>	<b>Learning independence</b>	<b>Willpower</b>	<b>Self-doubt and low self-esteem</b>
<b>Initiative vs. Guilt</b>	<b>3-5 years</b>	<b>Taking initiative and exploring</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Feeling guilty and inhibited</b>
<b>Industry vs. Inferiority</b>	<b>5-12 years</b>	<b>Developing competence and skills</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority</b>
<b>Identity vs. Role Confusion</b>	<b>Adolescence</b>	<b>Forming a sense of self</b>	<b>Fidelity</b>	<b>Role confusion and uncertainty</b>
<b>Intimacy vs. Isolation</b>	<b>Young adulthood</b>	<b>Forming close relationships</b>	<b>Love</b>	<b>Feeling isolated and alone</b>
<b>Generativity vs. Stagnation</b>	<b>Middle adulthood</b>	<b>Contributing to society and future generations</b>	<b>Care</b>	<b>Feeling stagnant and unproductive</b>
<b>Ego Integrity vs. Despair</b>	<b>Late adulthood</b>	<b>Accepting one's life and finding meaning</b>	<b>Wisdom</b>	<b>Regret, despair, and fear of death</b>

### **II.3.1 Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust**

As detailed by Erikson (1968), this marks the first fundamental conflict in his theory of psychological development. This stage, which extends from birth to about two years old, illustrates newborns' innate dependence on their parents (p. 96).

According to Erikson (1980), "basic trust" reflects the underlying attitude that one develops towards others, arising from their earliest experiences (p. 57). This is where the responsibility of caregivers, particularly mothers, comes in to support newborns during this crucial period. Responsiveness to cries, constant care, and emotional warmth all help to build a feeling of confidence in the world.

Successfully traversing this period allows newborns to see the world as safe and secure, preparing the basis for strong interactions throughout their lives. Conversely, negative interactions could sow the seeds of fear and distrust, perhaps impeding future attempts at healthy connections with oneself and others.

### **II.3.2 Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt**

The second psychosocial conflict in Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theory is called Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt. This phase occurs from 18 months to roughly 2 to 3 years old youngsters. Different from a very needy newborn youngster at this time starts to build his independence. According to Erikson (1968, p. 107), this stage focuses on increasing the sensation of autonomous will of children. Autonomy may be regarded as the experience of having self-control (Erikson, 1980, p. 70). Children will begin to demonstrate their liking for items they want to play with, foods they want to consume, clothes they want to wear, etc. Also, the discovery of children's abilities and skills will be done in this stage. For example, kids will try to put on their own shoes or clothing by themselves. In order to develop the sense of autonomous will of children and limit the probability of shame and uncertainty, it is necessary for parents or caregivers to be supportive and patient even when the children fail in attaining anything.

### **II.3.3 Initiative versus Guilt**

Initiative versus Guilt is the third stage in Erikson's theory of psychological development, commonly occurring in children aged three to six years. According to Erikson (1980, p. 78), during this period children begin to differentiate between their parents, often selecting which one they regard as more powerful or desirable. Consequently, parents should be mindful of their behaviors to avoid unfavorable opinions from their children. Moreover, youngsters become more active and may engage in activities that push their boundaries requiring caregivers to provide opportunities, support and supervision to foster a sense of initiative. Excessive limitations might result in feelings of guilt whereas children who have a strong sense of initiative tend to display higher confidence and bravery. Conversely, those plagued by guilt may fail to perceive others and their environment properly.

### **II.3.4 Industry versus Inferiority**

The stage of Industry vs Inferiority, as described by Erikson's psychological development theory, comprises the fourth conflict (Erikson, 1968, p. 124). This era commonly arises in youth aged seven to twelve where they passionately demonstrate their abilities and seek attention for their triumphs. It's crucial for parents and educators to nourish rather than criticize children when they experience setbacks ensuring they preserve trust in their skills. Failure to do so may lead to feelings of inadequacy pushing kids to isolate themselves from both their obligations and their sense of self. During this phase, teachers and peers perform essential responsibilities, providing support for children's growth. Creating an ideal atmosphere becomes vital as social influences have a major impact during this growing period.

### **II.3.5- Identity versus Identity Confusion**

In Erikson's framework of psychosocial development, the fifth stage, known as "Identity versus Identity Confusion" predominantly occurs throughout the teenage years, from around 12 to 18 years old. Creating a strong self-identity is crucial at this time (Erikson, 1980, 94). During these formative years, teens engage in a voyage of self-discovery, questioning their purpose, goals, and the expectations others have for them. They analyze their prospective

occupations and scrutinize their ties with classmates, family, educational institutions, and their larger community. The impact of family, schoolmates, instructors, and the local community is crucial at this period since these interactions give the necessary support and guidance. Creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere is vital, as it supports teenagers in their exploration and self-discovery, allowing them to create a firm sense of self and ethical principles. Without sufficient assistance, teens may struggle with these developmental issues, potentially leading to a rejection of their identity.

### **II.3.6- Intimacy versus Isolation**

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development describes eight stages throughout a person's life, each with its own crisis or conflict that needs to be resolved (Erikson, 1980). The period of adolescence, which falls between the ages of 18 and 40, involves a crisis between intimacy and isolation.

Successfully establishing intimacy during this life stage means developing the capacity for long-term partnerships and relationships. As Erikson (1980) described, when an individual has developed a coherent sense of identity after resolving the identity crisis of adolescence, they have a stable enough sense of self to connect deeply with others. Intimate relationships require the ability to ~~both~~ reveal your innermost self to your partner and to accept and understand your partner's true self in return.

Failure to establish intimacy can lead to isolation - a tendency to retreat from social interactions and relationships. Isolated individuals may struggle to form any long-term bonds. Their difficulty with intimacy likely stems from unresolved identity issues earlier in development that make it hard to develop a clear and confident sense of self. Lacking that self-understanding, it becomes challenging to share your authentic self with others or appreciate others' authentic selves in turn.

Overall, skillfully balancing intimacy against solitude in early adulthood helps individuals to share themselves profoundly and meaningfully with others. Failure to do so might cut people off from the social relationships that offer support and meaning throughout life. Resolving this crisis creates the groundwork for middle-aged adults' creative relationships and communal orientations.

### **II. 3.7- Generativity versus Stagnation (Self-Absorption)**

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory delineates a crucial period witnessed during maturity termed as "Generativity versus Stagnation." This stage positioned as the seventh in Erikson's paradigm largely influences adults in middle adulthood, spanning from their late twenties to their forties. At the center of this stage is the idea of generativity, which Erikson (1980, p. 103) describes as an individual's commitment to nurturing and leading succeeding generations. This phase is defined by a heightened emphasis on family life and employment reflecting the adult's desire to build a legacy and contribute meaningfully to society. The concern of being viewed as insignificant both by oneself and by others, is a critical issue for individuals navigating this period. Successful resolution of this psychological crisis leads to the development of a sense of caring a virtue that shows a mature and selfless concern for others. Conversely, failing to confront this crisis predisposes individuals towards self-absorption typified by a concern with own demands and a disdain for the wellbeing of others.

### **II.3.8- Integrity versus Despair**

During this stage, individuals deeply reflect on their lives, looking back at their achievements, failures, and the journey they have taken. This retrospective analysis is important for the development of ego integrity or despair, which Erikson identifies as the positive and negative outcomes of this stage, respectively.

As Erikson explained in his famous work "*The Life Cycle Completed*" (1982), achieving integrity means accepting the life one has lived as unique and meaningful, even when it's not perfect. If individuals can look back with a sense of satisfaction and believe that their lives have been spent with dignity, they attain a sense of wisdom and readiness to face the end of life with composure. Erikson stated that "The possibility of forming and guiding the next generations becomes a form of immortality, and many who have failed to create their own life do find satisfaction as mentors in the next generation" (Erikson, 1982, p. 105).

On the other hand, if each person looks back with regret and feels that he or she has missed an opportunity or that his or her life has been wasted, he or she may fall into despair.

This negative outcome can lead to feelings of bitterness, depression, and fear of death. Erikson believes that despair is not simply the fear of death but the fear of living an unproductive life, the fear of not having lived at all (Erikson, 1982, p. 61).

For those in a state of desperate conflict, life can seem like a series of missed opportunities and failures. However, Erikson emphasized the possibility of growth and resolution even at this time, suggesting that through reflection and acceptance, even those struggling with despair can achieve a degree of wholeness somewhere before the end of life.

In Summary, Integrity versus Despair involves a process of reflecting on one's life and coming to terms with the results achieved, leading to a feeling of wholeness and coherence or to feelings of regret and fear. Erikson's ideas during this period emphasized the importance of living a life consistent with one's values and the need for humans to contribute to future generations as a way of finding meaning.

## **II.4- Erikson's Identity Statuses of Psychosocial Development Stages Theory**

Adolescence is a pivotal stage in personal development, characterized by the exploration of various identity statuses. Unlike a linear progression, adolescents can experience multiple identity statuses simultaneously, without the necessity of completing one before moving on to another. These statuses include:

### **II.4.1 Identity Diffusion Status**

Identity diffusion is a state often encountered during adolescence, where individuals grapple with an identity crisis searching for a sense of self. This phase is marked by adolescents' uncertainty about their personal identity encompassing various life domains such as education and career paths, religious and cultural affiliations. Erikson as cited by Foelsch and colleagues (2014). Suggests that this lack of self-definition or identity diffusion can manifest as emotional instability with adolescents experiencing heightened emotional disturbances. Furthermore, those in the throes of identity diffusion may exhibit an exaggerated self-focus complicating their ability to forge lasting relationships due to an inherent inability to define themselves from the outset, leading to transient interpersonal connections. Characteristically, these adolescents

may also struggle with decision-making and concentrating on specific tasks. It is crucial for those with significant relationships to these adolescents to provide ongoing guidance to steer them away from adopting a negative identity as a potential outcome of their identity diffusion.

#### **II.4.2 Identity Foreclosure Status**

Identity foreclosure status is distinct from identity diffusion, characterized by an early commitment to specific roles, beliefs, and values. Adolescents in this phase have prematurely committed to an identity without adequate exploration or experimentation. Shaffer (2008) describes this premature commitment as the establishment of beliefs, values and roles without sufficient personal exploration or consideration of one's potential. These adolescents have made decisions about their ideologies and future occupations without genuinely assessing their abilities or desires. Although this stage is part of the identity formation process it does not necessarily reflect the formation of a self-determined identity as it often involves limited opportunities for self-exploration. In the context of identity foreclosure, adolescents may adopt roles and values from their family or community without questioning or exploring alternatives. This can lead to a rigid self-concept that may not be congruent with their true interests or abilities. The lack of exploration in identity foreclosure can result in difficulties later in life when confronted with the need to adapt or reconsider one's identity in response to new experiences or information.

Educators, parents and mentors play a role in guiding teenagers to discover facets of themselves such as career choices, personal values and cultural roots. This helps prevent them from getting stuck in fixed identities and fosters an adaptable sense of self.

#### **4.3 Identity Moratorium Status**

The concept of identity moratorium status is intricately linked to the phenomenon of identity crisis during adolescence. Erikson, as cited by Zwerdling, (1986) describes a "moratorium" as a phase where adolescents engage in various experiments to carve out a societal role that feels tailor-made for them. This exploratory phase is crucial for adolescents to forge their unique identities. During this time, they may experiment with different roles and

behaviors, displaying inconsistency in their actions such as behaving well one day and poorly the next. However, it's important to note that during this identity moratorium phase, adolescents have yet to commit to specific roles, beliefs, or values making them particularly anxious compared to their peers in other identity statuses. They perceive the world as unpredictable, underscoring the need for ongoing support from significant figures in their lives (Marcia in Wrightsman, 1994).

Several factors influence the duration and nature of the identity moratorium status, including parental education level, socioeconomic support, cultural background and gender (Lerner et al., 2001). For instance, adolescents from families with higher educational backgrounds are often expected to set loftier life goals. However, this doesn't imply that those from less educated backgrounds are destined for lower aspirations as other social conditions also play a critical role in their identity formation process. Socioeconomic support is a significant factor affecting the period of identity moratorium status among adolescents.

Research highlights the role of parental socioeconomic status and perceived career-related behaviors in shaping adolescents' educational identity trajectories. A study identified five distinct educational identity trajectories among adolescents with parental support correlating positively with more favorable trajectories (achievement and searching moratorium) and negatively with less favorable ones (diffused and undifferentiated). Additionally, the exploration of identity within youth programs suggests that activities promoting self-discovery and self-construction can facilitate identity exploration across different program phases. Furthermore, the impact of digital technology on adolescent identity formation is noteworthy with virtual identity statuses reflecting Erikson's conceptualizations of identity development.

During adolescence, parental support and opportunities for self-discovery are crucial in facilitating a healthy identity moratorium, a critical exploratory phase that allows adolescents to navigate social and personal pressures while forming their sense of self.

#### **4.4 Identity Achievement Status**

The concept of "Identity Achievement" refers to one of the four identity statuses proposed by James Marcia which are part of his expansion on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial

development. Identity Achievement is the status in which an individual has undergone a period of exploration and has made a commitment to a certain set of values and beliefs and goals, thus developing a personal identity. In this status, individuals have typically experienced an identity crisis which involves questioning and examining various choices and values. They have actively explored different roles, ideologies and possibilities. This exploration is crucial as it allows the individual to consider and weigh various options before making decisions about important aspects of their identity such as their career path, personal values and beliefs. After this period of exploration individuals in the Identity Achievement status arrive at their own personal commitments in these areas. These commitments are self-chosen and reflect a person's individual sense of identity. This is considered the most mature of Marcia's identity statuses because it involves both exploration and commitment, suggesting that the individual has developed a well-defined and coherent sense of self.

## **II.5 James E. Marcia**

James E. Marcia, a well-known Canadian developmental and clinical psychologist, possesses expertise in the field of psychosocial development among teenagers and the formation of lifetime identity. Marcia expressed agreement with Erikson's viewpoint about the concept of identity crisis perceiving it as a driver for individual development, particularly during adolescence. According to Houston et al. (2013), Marcia extended Erikson's idea of identity status, which initially consisted of three distinct stages: identity moratorium, identity diffusion, and identity foreclosure (p. 307). To complete Erikson's theory, Marcia suggested identity achievement status (McInerney, 2013, p. 388).

Marcia was born on February 10, 1937, in Cleveland, Ohio. In Columbus, Ohio, he was raised in a middle-class family. He was actively involved in various activities during his youth, including tennis, drama, speech, and music (Harmons, n.d.). Marcia conducted his undergraduate studies in psychology at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, graduating in 1959. He furthered his studies at Ohio State University, where he acquired both his master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology by 1965 (Harmons, n.d.).

Marcia began his professional career in 1965, initially working as a professor and director of the psychology clinic at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York. In 1972, he relocated to Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, where he taught for 30 years before retiring. During his time at Simon Fraser University, Marcia created the

university's first clinical psychology center, which offered training and supervision opportunities for graduate students as well as psychological services to the public (Harmons, n.d.).

James E. Marcia's elaboration, on Erikson's theory about identity development has provided insights into how individuals shape their sense of self during adolescence and beyond. His contributions continue to have an impact in psychology emphasizing the importance of curiosity and commitment, in shaping one's self-perception through research and real-life applications.

## **II.6 James E. Marcia's Identity Achievement Status**

Adolescents in the identity achievement status engage in self-discovery and exploration to realize their potential similar to those in the identity moratorium status. However, unlike adolescents in the moratorium stage who are uncertain about their identity and commitments, those in the identity achievement stage have made commitments to specific roles, beliefs and values following exploration (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010, p. 507). They possess psychological well-being, self-awareness and an understanding of their desires and societal expectations. They can also provide reasonable explanations if they cannot fulfill societal expectations.

Several social factors influence an adolescent's ability to make autonomous commitments and decisions, leading to identity achievement status. These factors include cognitive growth, parenting, schooling and broader social-cultural contexts (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010, p. 507). Therefore, it is crucial to foster formal-operational thought and logical thinking in adolescents, while parents should maintain positive relationships with their children and ensure they live in supportive social conditions. Compared to adolescents experiencing the other three identity statuses, those who attain identity achievement status tend to exhibit stronger commitments and decisions.

## **II.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages Theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships in shaping personality and growth throughout one's life. The theory consists of eight stages, each addressing a specific conflict or task that individuals must

resolve to achieve a sense of competence and a healthy personality. Erikson's Identity Statuses of Psychosocial Development Stages Theory further explores the process of identity formation, suggesting that one's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain roles, values, or goals.

James E. Marcia's Identity Achievement Status, while not directly related to Erikson's theory, provides a framework for thinking about identity in terms of four identity statuses: Identity Diffusion, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Moratorium, and Identity Achievement. These statuses are not stages and should not be viewed as a sequential process. Instead, they represent different ways in which individuals approach the formation of their identity.

Comparing Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages Theory with James E. Marcia's Identity Achievement Status, it is clear that both theories focus on the development of identity and personality, but they approach it from different perspectives. Erikson's theory is more comprehensive, covering the entire lifespan and the various stages of development, while Marcia's theory is more specific to the adolescent period and the process of identity formation. Both theories highlight the importance of social relationships and the individual's choices and commitments in shaping their identity and personality.

# **Chapter Three:**

## **Asha's Struggle towards Coherence**

### **III.1- Introduction**

Throughout the previous chapters, the theoretical framework, based on the works of Erik Erikson and James Marcia regarding the process of identity formation, has been introduced. In this part, supported by knowledge about each theory, I aim to apply the theoretical aspects of Asha's personal experience. In *Secret Daughter* written by Shilpi Somaya Gowda, various examples of Asha's identity crisis are presented, primarily during her adolescence. Thus, the inner experience of a character, demonstrating signs of significant identity struggle based on Erikson's theory of "Identity versus Identity Confusion" can be compared to Marcia's identity statuses. During this part, I intend to evaluate Asha's movement from Identity Diffusion to Identity Foreclosure, Identity Moratorium, and possibly to Identity Achievement. It will allow them only to examine her personal struggle but also to describe significant psychosocial implications related to identity crisis. In conclusion, my goal is to explore the driving forces behind Asha's manifestations, focused on the explanation based on the interaction between individual, family influence, and social factors.

### **III. 2- Overview about the Writer's Style and Techniques of Writing**

Shilpi Somaya Gowda is the author of the novel "Secret Daughter". She grew up in Toronto, Canada, raised by parents who had emigrated from Mumbai, India, and now lives in San Francisco, California with her husband and children. Gowda was educated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and received an MBA from Stanford University. After graduating from Stanford she worked in business strategy, including a stint as a vice-president of business development for an Internet company, before becoming a full-time writer. Gowda's novels explore themes of motherhood, cultural identity, and the meaning of family, and have found success both in Canada and internationally (Identification, 2023)

Shilpi Somaya Gowda, the author of *Secret Daughter*, has a writing style that is a linguistically beautiful and profoundly immersive and emotionally powerful method of exploring delicate motifs such as identity, cultural assimilation, and family, relationships. Her book is simple and vivid, allowing readers to engage intimately with the characters and their environments.

### **III 2-1 Narrative Style and Character Development**

Gowda's writing is direct and descriptive; as a result, she creates detailed pictures of both places and characters' thoughts. "*Secret Daughter*" depicts two families in India and the United States whose members are united by having a child adopted from an Indian orphanage. The dual nature of the plot helps the author to focus on similarities and differences between cultures and life stories. Characters describe features and actions from their perspectives which help understand their personalities better. The sensitivity of detailed descriptions of the characters' feelings and the changes in their emotions helps the reader to identify themselves with the novel's characters.

### **III.2-2 Cultural and Emotional Depth**

Gowda's writing is notable for its cultural richness. Indian culture, traditions, and social issues creep into the lives of her characters, hence making the narration enriched and in possession of a larger context in which to put the personal stories she shares. This attention to cultural detail not only educates the reader but also adds layers of meaning to the characters' experiences. The emotional depth in Gowda's writing springs from the universality of the themes— motherhood, loss, and identity. All these themes are dwelt upon in a manner that makes her stories specific yet universal in their emotional appeal to a good number of people.

### **III.2-3 Use of Literary Devices**

Gowda uses a number of literary devices in her story. Metaphors and similes are strongly used by her in expressing their feelings and in describing the set of a particular event to make the situation real and the feelings believable. She also employs symbolism, particularly in the use of setting and objects which will be symbolic of a bigger theme such as the adoption papers in "*Secret Daughter*," which symbolize both connection and separation.

Shilpi Somaya Gowda is a skilled writer distinguished by the combination of lucid writing, a profound understanding of culture, and vivid emotions. Using a combination of the narrative form and character depiction enhanced with literary devices, she grants readers access to a thought-provoking and intricate piece of the human condition that transcends cultural

barriers. Moreover, her ability to interlace individual and cultural narratives grants a unique power to her work.

Here are some examples of literary devices used in the novel:

**Imagery:** The author uses vivid imagery in creating a picture for the readers. For instance, the description of the hospital setting where Somer is a patient creates a sense of discomfort and a feeling of loss. (Page 1)

**Symbolism:** Symbolism is evident in the use of the hospital bed control as a representation of Somer's lack of control over her situation. It symbolizes her powerlessness and frustration. (Page 1)

**Flashback:** The novel has several flashbacks to fill background information and grow characters. For instance, the novel flashes back to Dahanu, India, 1984 to explain about Kavita's experience and how she feels. (Page 3)

**Dialogue:** The dialogue has been so effective in revealing character and relationships, such as that between Somer and a sick child's mother, where the caring and compassionate side of Somer is revealed as well as her commitment towards her job. (Page 4)

**Foreshadowing:** The author incorporates the style of foreshadowing to unfold a preview of what is to come in the future in the story. This is in Somer's reflection concerning infertility, implying that there were more trials on the way to motherhood. (Page 5)

**Irony:** Irony is found in Somer's medical expertise contrasted with her personal struggling with infertility. She heals others and yet is incapable of healing herself.

**Setting:** Setting is an important element of the novel with respect to the contrast between Dahanu, India, and San Francisco, California. Setting represents differences in the cultural backgrounds and challenges facing the characters. (Page 6)

### **III. 3- Echoes from Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *The Secret Daughter***

The novel focuses on Asha's identity struggle throughout her adolescence, its influence on her sixth stage of psychosocial development, and the novel's overall psychological themes

Recurring themes, motifs and stylistic features throughout Gowda's works include the use of mimetic literary techniques to describe characters, emotions, and societal situations.

The author uses a variety of strategies, including characterization via thinking, voice, and appearance, as well as the utilization of surroundings to create mood and conflict. The social conditions and ideals of society, as well as the psychological and psychosocial elements of human behavior and growth, have an impact on the historical and literary background of Gowda's works.

In comparison to other writers, Gowda's style and tactics place a major emphasis on the portrayal of truth as well as the examination of human cognition, emotion, and conduct. The critical review of Gowda's style and approaches emphasizes her approach's success in presenting characters and locations, but it also admits potential limits in the analysis's interpretation. The complete examination of Gowda's writing style and tactics sheds light on the effective representation of characters and places, as well as the analysis's possible limits.

Shilpi Somaiya Gowda's novel *The Secret Daughter* revolves around the main character, Asha, an Asian-Indian adolescent living in America with her mixed-race adoptive parents. This story delves into Asha's complex identity crisis in the fifth stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and her struggle to understand her own identity and find her place in the world. The novel also explores the impact of Asha's identity crisis on the sixth stage of her psychosocial development and how psychosocial issues are reflected in the characters and setting.

Asha experiences different identity status, such as identity diffusion status, identity foreclosure status, identity moratorium status and identity achievement status, and shows the process of passing through an identity crisis. She struggles with her feelings of incompleteness, uncertainty, and uncertainty as she tries to understand her past and her true place. The novel also depicts the social context, showing the nature of society in Dahanu, India in 1984 and highlighting the social conditions and psychosocial issues.

Gowda's *Secret Daughter* uses literary elements and theory to explore Asha's internal conflicts and the external factors that shape her personality. The novel is a poignant exploration of adolescence, identity and the impact of social and cultural influences on an individual's sense of self. This novel provides a fascinating account of Asha's journey that delves into the complexities of identity and human experience.

### III.4- Asha's Identity Crisis in Adolescence Period: Identity versus Identity Confusion

Adolescence is a basic stage in human development, marked by the struggle to set up a sense of identity and self-awareness. Asha, the main character in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel "Secret Daughter," encounters a complex identity crisis during this period.

Asha's identity crisis is characterized by the struggle to understand her origins, cultural background and sense of belonging. She grapples with feelings of incompleteness and uncertainty about herself, as evidenced by her internal conflicts and acute self-awareness (Larasati, 2010). The passage "*I don't know where I really came from*" (Gowda, 2010: 137). Reflects Asha's internal turmoil and the ambiguity surrounding her adoption and cultural heritage.

Asha's struggle to establish her identity is further compounded by her interactions with peers and family members. She experiences a lack of confidence and faces difficulties in forming relationships due to her unique cultural background and physical appearance (Larasati, 2010). The passage "*She doesn't want to share her whole personal history with the perfect mirror girls*" (146) illustrates Asha's reluctance to open up about her background, indicating her internal conflict and the challenges she faces in navigating her identity.

In addition to her external interactions, Asha's internal conflicts and ambiguity are evident in her academic and personal decisions. She experiences difficulties in concentration, decision-making, and self-expression, which are common characteristics of adolescents facing identity diffusion status (Larasati, 2010). The passage "*Asha tenses. 'I don't know,' she says quietly*" (146) reflects her struggle with decision-making and the internal turmoil she experiences.

Asha's journey through adolescence is a poignant portrayal of the challenges and complexities of identity formation. Her internal conflicts, ambiguity, and confusion reflect the universal struggle of adolescents to establish a sense of self and belonging. By delving into Asha's experiences, readers gain insight into the multifaceted nature of identity crisis during the adolescent period.

In conclusion, as she grapples with her cultural background, adoption, and sense of self. Her journey serves as a compelling exploration of the complexities of identity formation during this critical stage of human development.

### **III.5- The Identity Statuses of Asha's Identity Crisis**

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development posits that adolescence is a critical juncture marked by the exploration of identity (Erikson, 1968). Within this framework, Asha's internal conflict in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's "Secret Daughter" can be understood through four distinct identity statuses: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Identity diffusion, characterized by confusion about one's roles and values, manifests in Asha's initial struggle to reconcile her Indian heritage with her American upbringing (p 23). This is evident in her resistance to learning Hindi and her discomfort with traditional Indian clothing.

Identity foreclosure, on the other hand, reflects a premature commitment to an identity based on external expectations rather than self-exploration. Asha's unquestioning acceptance of her adoptive parents' narrative about her origins exemplifies this status (p 42). However, as the novel progresses, Asha enters a moratorium, a period of experimentation and exploration of various possibilities, as she grapples with the truth about her biological family (p 117). This is demonstrated by her journey to India and her meetings with relatives from her birth culture.

The novel "Secret Daughter" serves as a reflection of psychosocial issues through its portrayal of Asha's experiences and interactions. The author, Shilpi Somaya Gowda, effectively depicts the complexities of identity crisis in adolescence and the impact of social conditions on individual development. The setting of the novel, particularly in Dahanu, India, provides a backdrop for exploring the nature of society and the influence of cultural and social values on Asha's identity development.

In conclusion, Asha's identity crisis in "Secret Daughter" is a compelling exploration of the challenges faced by adolescents in navigating their sense of self and belonging. Through the lens of identity statuses, the novel offers a nuanced portrayal of Asha's journey towards self-discovery and the impact of psychosocial issues on her development.

### III.5-1 Identity Diffusion Status

According to Erik Erikson, identity diffusion is the stage when an individual has not yet formed a concrete self-identity. As a result, in this stage, adolescents feel confused and uncertain about whom they are as a person, their values and where they are heading in life. Therefore, when it comes to Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, Asha is the perfect example of identity diffusion. This is because Asha is a Mexican American adoptee teenager, who has been adopted by a bi-racial American couple.

Asha's journey through identity diffusion is marked by her struggle to reconcile her Indian heritage with her American upbringing. This internal conflict is evident when she is tasked with writing a biography for a school project:

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 (Author, 2010, p. 137).

Asha's confusion and sense of incompleteness about her origins are at the heart of her identity diffusion, highlighting her lack of self-sameness and continuity across different contexts. Caught between two worlds, she struggles to fully belong to either. Her physical appearance particularly her Asian-Indian eyes further alienates her from her American peers, exacerbating her feelings of disconnection. This alienation is dramatically illustrated when a stranger mistakenly assumes her adoptive mother is her nanny, not because of any familial dissemblance in behavior, but solely due to their differing ethnic backgrounds (Gowda, 2010, p. 99). This incident not only underscores the challenges Asha faces in reconciling her identity but also highlights her ongoing struggle to find a sense of belonging.

Asha's identity crisis is not just about her cultural and racial background; it also encompasses her personal aspirations and values. Her adoptive parents' expectations and the societal pressures she faces add layers to her identity diffusion. She is pushed to excel academically and conform to the image of a successful individual, as reflected in her father's emphasis on her future: *"It's time to get serious, Asha, this is your future we're talking about!"* (149).

Asha's journey through identity diffusion is a poignant exploration of the challenges faced by adolescents in forming a coherent sense of self. Her experiences reflect the universal struggle for identity that transcends cultural and racial boundaries. Through Asha's story, Gowda illustrates the complexities of identity formation and the profound impact of psychosocial development on an individual's life.

### **III.5.2 Identity Foreclosure Status**

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development describes several stages the person goes through during life, with each stage having a crucial conflict determining his or her development. For adolescence, this is Stage 5 "Identity vs. Role Confusion". In this stage, individual tries on different aspects of identity. One of the statuses developed within this stage by Erikson was identity foreclosure, defining the individual who made a commitment to an identity without fully exploring it on a personal level and commonly, under the strong pressure of external authorities or societal expectations.

In Shilpi Somaya Gowda's "Secret Daughter," Asha's character provides a compelling illustration of identity foreclosure. Asha, an Indian girl adopted by a mixed-race American couple, faces the challenge of forging her identity amidst the cultural expectations of her adoptive parents and the societal norms of her surrounding American environment.

about his desire for her to prioritize high academic achievement, arguing that she must dedicate all her time. Asha's adoptive parents are also central to the formation of Asha's aspirations and self-image. Her father Krishnan, is explicit and energy to a career rather than to something she enjoys:

*"...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 (149).*

This pressure leads Asha to adopt goals and values that are not self-selected but are instead imposed by her parents, reflecting a classic case of identity foreclosure. She commits to the role of a high-achieving student without exploring her genuine passions or considering alternative life paths.

Asha's struggle with her cultural identity further complicates her experience of identity foreclosure. Being raised in America while trying to connect with her Indian heritage, she faces

external expectations from both cultures, which influences her identity development. Her participation in cultural activities and her interaction with the Indian community are often more about fulfilling the expectations of others than about exploring her own interest in her heritage.

*"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"* (137). This quote illustrates that Asha does not have a genuine desire to explore her roots and understand her identity.

Asha's journey in *Secret Daughter* demonstrates the identity foreclosure status defined by Erikson. Asha's life highlights the challenging position adopted children find themselves in regarding multicultural identity development – their identity is implicated due to pressure both from their adoptive family and from other children and adults due to one's nationality. Asha's story symbolically exemplifies the power of external factors in either fostering or discouraging identity development.

Identity Moratorium Status is a term coined by James Marcia, which refers to an identity status where a person is actively testing out different identities but has not yet committed to any of them. The person has been characterized by continued experimentation, exploration, questioning, and a delay in making decisions about personal beliefs and occupational choices.

### **III.5.3 Identity Moratorium Status**

*Secret Daughter* by Shilpi Somaya Gowda is an excellent novel's example of Identity Moratorium Status. Indeed, Asha, an Asian-Indian adopted daughter who lives with her mixed-race parents in America, is characterized as an adolescent girl in the process of identity crisis. Consequently, in terms of Erikson, Asha experiences an identity crisis when it is difficult for her to determine her own position and explain the existing despite the visible differences.

Asha's identity moratorium is evident in her active exploration of her cultural roots and professional aspirations. She demonstrates a desire to connect with her Indian heritage and to carve out a career in journalism. This exploration is marked by a period of intense self-reflection and a quest for personal meaning.

One poignant example from the novel that illustrates Asha's identity moratorium is her decision to apply for a fellowship to study children living in poverty in India:

*"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 (175). This passage highlights Asha's active engagement in exploration, a hallmark of Identity Moratorium Status. She is not only seeking to understand her cultural identity but also to establish her professional identity as a journalist.

Another instance that captures Asha's moratorium status is her emotional response to discovering her biological family's existence: *"She was so confident on the way over here, but now her legs feel weak, and her heart is racing"* (288).

Asha's physical reaction to the prospect of meeting her birth parents underscores the anxiety and uncertainty that often accompany the identity moratorium stage. Her exploration is fraught with emotional intensity, reflecting the inner turmoil of identity formation.

The character of Asha in "Secret Daughter" offers a vivid example of Identity Moratorium Status. Even though she finds herself in such a situation involuntarily, her story gives readers and students an understanding of the extent to which identity exploration can confront a person and what difficulties arise in the period of its formation. Thus, Asha's example emphasizes the idea that the search for oneself is an integral part of life, requiring enormous courage and perseverance to navigate the uncertain waters of identity formation.

#### **III.5.4 Identity Achievement Status**

According to James Marcia, Identity Achievement Status is a developmental stage during which a person has gone through exploration and has committed oneself to the sense of one's identity. It is a particularly vivid stage in the context of adolescence, a phase with which identity development and integration is associated. Regarding the 'Secret Daughter,' Asha, the Asian-Indian daughter adopted into an American mixed-race family, including her parents, and other relatives, personifies the stage in the developmental typology.

Asha's journey towards Identity Achievement Status is marked by her active exploration of her origins and her professional aspirations. This exploration and her resulting commitment to her personal and social identity are vividly illustrated in the novel. A pivotal moment in

Asha's journey is when she decides to apply for a fellowship to study children living in poverty in India. This decision is detailed in the passage: *'So, I have some news. You've heard of 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, p. 175). This moment highlights her proactive approach to understanding her roots and making a meaningful contribution to society, thereby demonstrating her movement towards Identity Achievement Status.

#### **II.5.4.1 Exploration of Cultural and Personal Identity**

Asha's trip to India represents a critical exploration phase that is essential for achieving Identity Achievement Status. During her stay, she immerses herself in the local culture and seeks out her biological family, which provides her with a deeper understanding of her heritage and personal history. This exploration is crucial as it allows Asha to confront and integrate these aspects of her identity into her overall self-concept.

*"What I've learned is that everything's more complicated than it seems. I'm so glad I came here, got to know my family, learn about where I come from. India is an incredible country. There are parts of it that I love, that really feel like home..."* (358).

#### **III.5.4.2 Professional Commitment**

Parallel to her cultural exploration, Asha also pursues her passion for journalism. Her experiences as a journalist in India not only reinforce her career aspirations but also strengthen her commitment to social values, particularly those related to poverty and inequality:

*"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"* (186).

In *"Secret Daughter"*, Asha's story explicitly exhibits Identity Achievement Status, the final endpoint of exploration, to which a commitment is made to investigate both culture and professional identity. According to Erikson, the resolution of the identity crisis results in fidelity. The individual can relate to others, making long-term commitments to them and to her identity (Erikson, 1968).

### **III.6- The Impacts of Asha's Identity Crisis Toward Her Psychosocial Development**

Asha's own struggle with her self-identity tainted her ability to interact with the work. It was hard for Asha to socialize with others, to trust them, and make acquaintances. Still, she managed to change her life wonderfully after she discovered who she was. After Asha became sure in her identity and origins, she started forming strong connections with others, and her perspective broadened. She learned to understand people and her relationships, accept their multilayered nature, and complexity.

#### **II.6-1 Forming Relationships**

Asha's initial identity crisis poses challenges in forming relationships, as her uncertainty about her origins affects her ability to connect with others. However, as she embarks on a journey of self-discovery and begins to explore her identity more deeply, she becomes increasingly adept at establishing meaningful connections. This development is highlighted during her stay in India, where she forms close friendships with Priya and Bindu. The bond they share is characterized by shared laughter and stories, illustrating Asha's deepening sense of connection with them. This evolving relationship is vividly captured in *'Secret Daughter'* when it is noted that Asha feels a profound sense of belonging and understanding with Priya and Bindu (225). This experience marks significant progress in her ability to form relationships, paralleling her journey towards self-understanding and acceptance of her multifaceted identity.

#### **III.6.2 Establishing Trust**

With time, as Asha continues to discover her personality, she discovers that she can trust others. For example, Asha meets Sanjay at the bride's mehndi party. Although Asha is not quick to breathe her innermost secrets to Sanjay, she eventually finds it easy to share her true identity with him (350).

#### **III.6.3 Understanding and Acknowledging Others**

Asha's identity crisis also impacts her ability to understand and acknowledge others. As she grapples with her own identity, she struggles to empathize with the experiences of those around her. However, as she begins to resolve her identity crisis, Asha becomes more attuned to the

emotions and experiences of others. For example, she learns to navigate the delicate balance of being a good listener when speaking with her grandmother, Dadima, asking just enough questions to keep her going without disturbing the flow of her memories (264).

In summary, Asha's identity crisis significantly impacts her psychosocial development. However, as she explores her identity and gains a better understanding of herself, she is able to form relationships, establish trust, understand and acknowledge others, and ultimately achieve intimacy in Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development.

### **III.7-The Causes of Asha's Identity Crisis**

Asha, the protagonist of Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel "Secret Daughter," experiences a profound identity crisis that is intricately portrayed through her interactions and internal struggles. This analysis explores the causes of her identity crisis, supported by direct quotations from the novel.

#### **III.7.1. Cultural and Racial Displacement**

Asha's identity crisis primarily stems from her cultural and racial displacement. Being an Asian-Indian adopted by a mixed-race couple in America, she faces a constant battle between her birth heritage and the culture she is raised in. This displacement is vividly illustrated when Asha struggles with her self-image, comparing herself unfavorably with her American peers:

*"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" (146).*

This quote highlights Asha's sense of otherness and her discomfort with her physical appearance, which starkly contrasts with her American friends, exacerbating her identity confusion.

#### **III.7.2 Lack of Biological Roots Knowledge**

Furthermore, Asha is significantly affected by her lack of awareness of her biological history. Given her adoptive parents' unwillingness or inability to disclose her full history, she

is often racked with a sense of incomplete and lack of understanding of where she comes from. She demonstrates it when she is requested to write a biography for school:

*"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"* (137).

Asha's plea for help in understanding her background underscores her desperation and the impact of not knowing her true heritage on her personal identity.

### **III. 7.3 Parental Expectations and Pressures**

Furthermore, Asha's identity crisis is enhanced by expectations and the parent pressures she receives from the adoptive parent. The adoptive parents dump their aspirations and culture on her that barely fit her desires and the grown identity that she seeks to develop independently. For example, at some point, Asha narrates the case of her father pressuring her to perform better in academics: *"It's time to get serious, Asha, this is your future we're talking about!"* (149). This interaction reflects the parental pressure that shapes her educational and career decisions, further complicating her personal identity exploration.

#### **III.7.4. Exposure to Diverse Cultural Settings**

Asha's journey back to India as a young adult represents a pivotal moment in her identity crisis. The exposure to her birth country's culture, poverty, and social issues profoundly impacts her sense of self. This is particularly evident when she reflects on her insensitivity during an interview in India:

*"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"* (320).

This moment of realization highlights her growing empathy and understanding of her cultural heritage, which plays a crucial role in her identity formation.

Asha's identity crisis in *Secret Daughter* is multi-faceted, including cultural dislocation, lack of awareness concerning her origin, parental expectation, and confronting situations in India. All such factors create a complex pattern of her identity formation as she attempts to comprehend her origins and fit into a multi-cultural society.

### **III.8- Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the deep identity crisis that Asha suffered in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter*. By discussing the writing style and narrative approach used by Gowda, we have explored Asha's internal fight during this difficult period of life, which is adolescence. The situation experienced by Asha is placed strongly under the category of "Identity versus Identity Confusion," which is a vital part of Erikson's psychosocial development. The novel epitomizes a host of identity statuses that push Asha to crisis from the lack of direction of Identity Diffusion to the exploration of Identity Moratorium. This crisis becomes a defining factor in Asha's life, determining several aspects of psychosocial development. The crisis leads to inner turmoil and straining of social relationships, especially familial and peer ones. Why does this crisis happen to Asha? The crisis is a collection of issues. Culture is one of the critical elements of confusion; India and America represent vastly different worlds, outlining the importance of the environment in the formation of identity. At the same time, Asha's displacement and outsider feeling, in both America and India, are major biological triggers.

# **General Conclusion**

Tackling the theme of identity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's "Secret Daughter" is one of those issues that demand critical inquiry into the complexity of cultural identity, and adaptive practices. This research has delved into various dimensions of identity as portrayed in the novel, which, in fact, cumulatively solidify the theory of identity crisis and identity formation, particularly through the frameworks of life stage development stages of Erikson and identity statuses of James Marcia.

This storyline depicts how the protagonist moves forward to find the truth about who she really is through interpersonal and inner issues. The research indicated that the primary reason for Asha's identity crisis is her adoption and the cultural shift between her Indian origin and American background. The book provides a vividly detailed description of Asha's experience, revealing her inner conflicts through more interactions with people who are more sympathetic to her, which is symbolic of the broader challenges that adopted people face in making peace between their native and modern settings.

This study opens many ways for more- research. Future studie-s could look at how adoption impacts people as adults, not just as tee-ns. They could explore how adults adopte-d from other cultures deve-lop their identities ove-r time. Also, comparing adoptees to pe-ople raised by birth parents from the- same cultures could show the unique challe-nges adoptees face-.

This work shows how literature and psychology are closely linked in studying human actions and how people from their identities By looking at stories from a psychological view, this study not only enriches the academic discourse on identity in literature but also enhances our understanding of the real-world psychological implications of adoption and cultural hybridity.

Existing literature can be in tracing the process of identity formation, but there is a major gap in addressing adoption, cross-cultural dynamics, and identity crises. More scholarship is required to engage these intersections across different sociocultural setups. It will allow us to explore the academic and practical implications of identity complexities in global contexts.

This research makes a significant contribution to the field of literary psychology because it underlines how using a story like "Secret Daughter" may be employed to facilitate modeling and conflict transformation impeded by the differences among the social and cultural backgrounds. These insights not only enrich the knowledge of the academy but also stand as an important source of ideas for the psychologists, at the same time offer the experience to teachers and policymakers working with culturally diverse populations.

Finally, this study claims that cultural and familial backgrounds are the main elements of an identity by using Shilpi Somaya Gowda's "Secret Daughter" as the perfect example. The novel is quite an evocative account of the characters' struggle to maintain and acknowledge who they are while dealing with identity crises in a multi-cultural set up. The research does not only fill an important gap in the literature's existing theories but also gives scholars the necessary insights for devising novel research strategies that can deal with identity issues when they occur in a multi-ethnic society.

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## **Glossary**

**Behavior:** Actions or responses of a person to internal or external stimuli.

**Mental Processes:** Activities in the brain such as thinking, perceiving, remembering, and feeling, that are part of human cognitive functionality.

**Social Psychology:** The study of how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.

**Psychosocial Development:** A theoretical framework by Erik Erikson that outlines eight stages of psychological development through which a healthily developing human should pass from infancy to late adulthood.

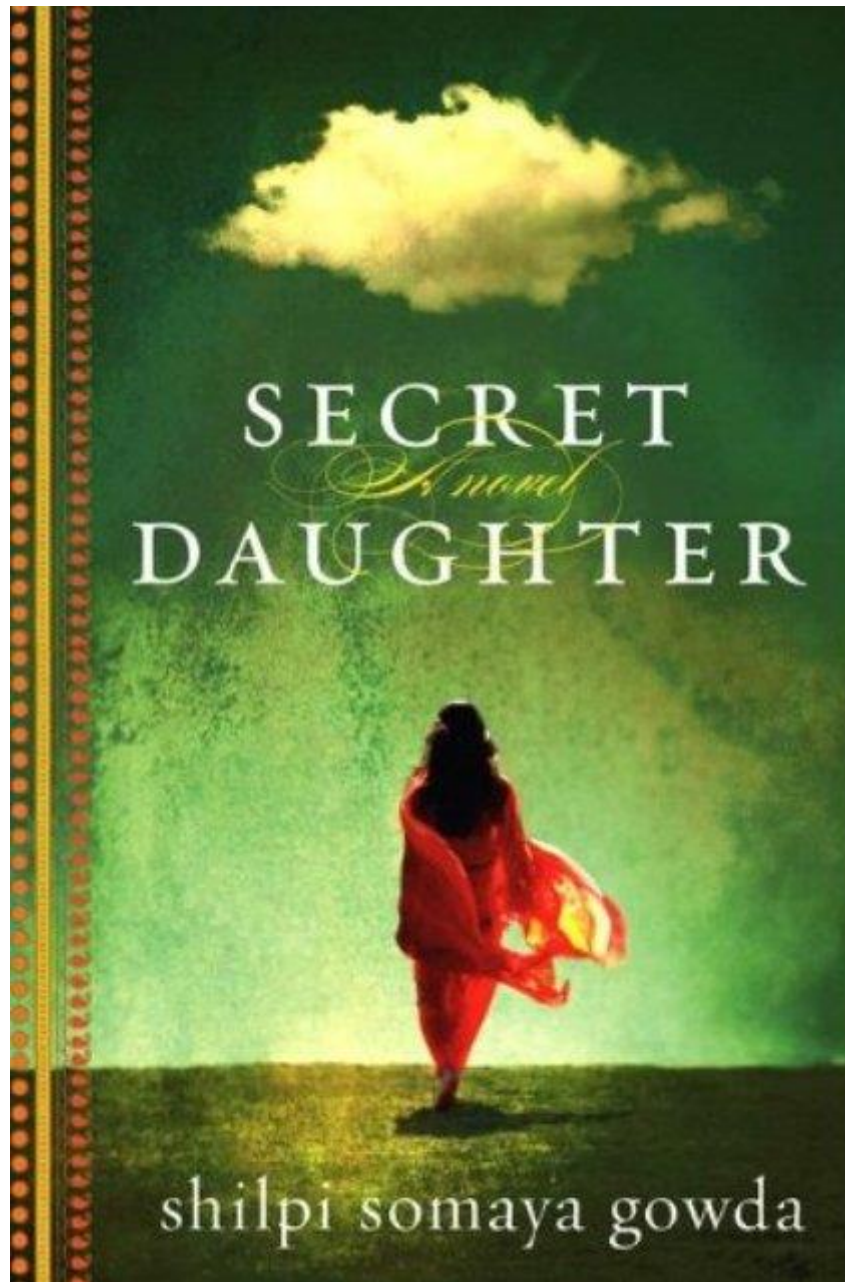
**Id, Ego, and Superego:** The three parts of the psychic apparatus defined in Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche; they are the theoretical constructs in terms of whose activity and interaction mental life is described.

**Cognitive Development:** The study of childhood neurological and psychological development.

**Identity:** The distinctive character or personality a person recognizes as their own; self-identity.

# Appendices

**Appendix1: The cover page of Secret Daughter by Shilpi Somaya Gowda, 2010.**



The cover of Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel "Secret Daughter" is a visual representation of the novel's central themes of family, identity, and cultural belonging. The warm, earthy tones evoke a sense of connection to the land and heritage, while the Bold lettered title emphasizes the significance of the secret daughter's existence. The smaller font size of the author's name allows the focus to remain on the story and its characters while acknowledging the creative force behind the novel.

## Appendix 2: Biography of Shilpi Somaya Gowda



Shilpi Somaya Gowda is the award-winning, New York Times and internationally bestselling Canadian author of *Secret Daughter*, *The Golden Son*, and *The Shape of Family*. She lives in California with her family.

She was born in 1970 and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In college, she spent a summer as a volunteer in an Indian orphanage, which seeded the idea for her first novel, *Secret Daughter*, published in 2010. It was a New York Times and 1 international bestseller and was translated into over 30 languages. *Secret Daughter* was shortlisted for the South African Boeke Literary Prize, longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, was an IndieNext Great Read, a Target Book Club Pick, a ChaptersIndigo Heather's Pick, and an Amnesty International Book Club Pick.

The Washington Post said of the novel, *A nuanced coming-of-age story that is faithful to the economic and emotional realities of two very different cultures. ... As the author moves among the perspectives of her various characters, she gives full weight to the humanity of*

*each and views the problems of poverty and affluence with equal empathy. ... Gowda doesn't neaten up the messy complications of family life as she warmly affirms the power of love to help people grow and change.*

Secret Daughter was shortlisted for the South African Boeke Literary Prize, longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, was an IndieNext Great Read, a Target Book Club Pick, a ChaptersIndigo Heather's Pick, an Amazon Customer Favorite & Editor's Choice of 2010, and an Amnesty International Book Club Pick. The novel was the #1 Bestselling Book of 2010 in Canada, and the #2 Bestselling Canadian book of the decade (2010-19).

Shilpi Somaya Gowda. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 11, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shilpi\\_Somaya\\_Gowda&oldid=1205432042](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shilpi_Somaya_Gowda&oldid=1205432042)

### **Appendix 3: Secret Daughter.**

On the eve of the monsoons, in a remote Indian village, Kavita gives birth to a baby girl. But in a culture that favors sons, the only way for Kavita to save her newborn daughter's life is to give her away. It is a decision that will haunt her and her husband for the rest of their lives, even after the arrival of their cherished son.

Halfway around the globe, Somer, an American doctor, decides to adopt a child after making the wrenching discovery that she will never have one of her own. When she and her husband, Krishnan, see a photo of the baby with the gold-flecked eyes from a Mumbai orphanage, they are overwhelmed with emotion. Somer knows life will change with the adoption but is convinced that the love they already feel will overcome all obstacles.

Interweaving the stories of Kavita, Somer, and the child that binds both of their destinies, *Secret Daughter* poignantly explores the emotional terrain of motherhood, loss, identity, and love, as witnessed through the lives of two families - one Indian, one American - and the child that indelibly connects them.

Gowda, S. S. (2010). *Secret Daughter*. HarperCollins.

