

## IDENTITY FORMATION IN GIBB'S SWEETNESS IN THE BELLY AND MUKHERJEE'S DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS

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**Abstract:** Diaspora is a literary work written as a consciousness toward the differences between old and new culture. It includes the alienation problems, the homesick feeling, the past nostalgia, and also the adaptation process affecting crisis identity. This research is aimed to describe the efforts of main characters in dealing with their identity crisis, the related factors, and the similarities and differences of identity formation by using Bhabha's Hybridity theory. Data source of this research was taken from words, phrases, sentences, statements, dialogues and monologues which record the thought and actions of the characters in the novels of *Sweetness in the Belly* and *Desirable Daughters*. This research finds out that the novels described clearly the efforts of main characters—Lilly and Tara—in forming their cultural identity as immigrants or diaspora. In *Sweetness in the Belly*, Lilly established her identity in Harare-Ethiopia and London and her friends also influence her in finding her identity. While Tara, in *Desirable Daughters* began her understanding on diversity in advanced country with the binary opposition between herself and her oldest sister. The forming of cultural identity deals with split ambivalence. It causes hybridity as the result of assimilation from two different cultures, East and West.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Hybridity, Identity formation, Homi K. Bhabha

### INTRODUCTION

There are a number of migrants moving into modern country forcedly because the conflict of their own country or self consciousness to get better job, salary, and life. Their existences as immigrants present the alienation problems with new culture, homesick and past memory to their country. This condition creates new problems for their identity to keep on their previous one or adapting the new one. Immigrants who have displacement in their own citizenship are known as Diaspora.

The situation experienced by immigrants above becomes the reason why many researchers investigate the phenomenon of immigrants and identity formation based on different cultural background known as Diaspora's literatures. The issues raised into these works discuss the

alienation problems with new culture, homesick, and past memory to their home country. The main problem in diasporic literature is diasporic phenomenon creating new problems toward their previous identity. In this case, some characters caught among back to their home country to save their identity, keep staying in new country and leave their own culture, or do hybrid by combining both previous and after one to be new identity.

Ashcroft et al. (2007, p. 108) explain that hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. This hybridity concept leads to new cultural identity created from interaction of two different cultures. It happens because of colonial process so that there is interaction among colonizer and colonized culture and then producing the new

similar culture but not the same. Meanwhile, Dehdari et al. (2013, p. 138) explain that hybridity enables the establishment of communication between cultures. It means that the two cultures cannot enter a proper interaction via the application of absolute domination on the side of one culture.

The term 'hybridity' has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha. His analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha (1994, p. 37) contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'Third space of enunciation'. Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity and to favour empowering hybridity where cultural difference may operate.

The purposes of this research are (1) to explain the main characters' efforts in dealing with their identity crisis; (2) to find out the family and friends' supports to their identity formation; and (3) to compare the similarities and differences of their identity formation. It is realized that Diaspora's problems began with the awareness of immigrants to the cultural diversity of new and old ones and then brings them to decide their identity to what they choose. Homi K. Bhabha, in his hybridity theory expresses that identity is dynamic in which an identity constitutes from the combination of other identity. His theory is able to answer the diasporic problems because he asserts that it is always a third space in between the clash of two different cultures. Every opposition formed by authors results in ambiguity as asserted by Bhabha (1994) that within *self* is always *other* there, and vice versa.

## METHODS

This study used the method of postcolonial theory's (PCT's) discourses, a critique of the discourses of modernity, utilizing social, culture, and political analysis to engage with the colonial discourse. Post colonialism has been defined as both a social movement and a research approach whose

main agenda addresses racism and oppression. Postcolonial research names the cultural, political, and linguistic experiences of former colonized societies by including voices, stories, histories, and images from people traditionally excluded from European/western descriptions of the world. It is built on an amalgamation of a sustained body of discourses, critical exchanges and recorded thought processes of a number of thinkers and scholars. Dirlik (1994, p. 351) points out that, "even as Europe and the United States lose their domination of the capitalist world economy, European and American cultural values retain their domination."

## FINDINGS

The efforts of Lilly in *Sweetness in the Belly* and Tara in *Desirable Daughters* deal with some phases in finding her identity classified into three components, they are:

### Unexamined Cultural Identity

In this phase, Lilly faces un-root identity caused by her parents who often moved from one country to another. English identity which is owned by her parents is *hippies* who are free and un-organized. It can be seen from Lilly's way in describing them, *make their way around the world....and obligation that would last the rest of their lives.....Gibb (2007, p.9)*. British identity which is taught by her parents tends not to have strong root due to the high displacement frequency during her childhood. Then she is adopted by Mr. Great Abdal and taught Islam and she accepts the culture of Islam without resistances (9, 54, 68). Meanwhile, Tara is not able to continue her study by her parents and she cannot resist matchmaking stated by her father (23)

### Cultural Identity Search

This phase consists of two places i.e. Harare and London. In Harare, there is denial from Harare's society convincing that she is a *forenji* and they thought that she is not part of their community (49, 57, 94, 95). In the other hand, she find out contrary tradition between Islam taught by her step father and Harare's tradition (75, 76, 77, 78,). In London, she resists as a British by convincing her identity as an African (p. 13, 17, 18, 32) and she doubts with her present existence in which she feels live among the past (un-root identity) and the

future (pointing at the possibility of her identity will change) (9). It happens until she feels not completely Ethiopian and British (152). Meanwhile, Tara is desperately to be American (82) but her societies where she lives still assume that she is an Asian (78) and think that she is a *pariah* (the lowest caste) (109). It occurs until she feels no belonging of identity (24, 194). Finally, she gets her home in San Francisco blasted (273, 274) indicating that her adventure in America is over.

### Cultural Identity Achievements

Lilly comes back to her parents' hometown, London and receives her old cultural identity and still keeps holding her faith as a Muslim. Meanwhile, Tara returns to India and relearns India's tradition, but, she still has different point of view toward her Hindu's dogma.

Besides, the supports from family and friends are very helpful to construct Lilly and Tara's identity. In *Sweetness in the Belly*, Amina introduces Lilly to Robin who is not Ethiopian so that Lilly is able to interact with out of Ethiopian immigrants (341). She recalls her truly identity existing when she was born (400). Robin tries to teach her about English culture that is never taught by her parents (391, 407, and 408). In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara's sister, Padma, always tries to convince and remind her who is too modern to come to Indian perception (143). She always worries about her youngest sister who is alone in San Francisco (98), so she suggests her to return to India to relearn Indian tradition (66)

The novels above present the correlation among east and west in which the modern one is shown with a flexible, practical and logical things as well as freedom. However, traditional one is rigid, mystics, rituals, and life in the rules of religious tradition. It can be seen from Tara's attitudes in *desirable daughters* and Robin's characters in *sweetness in the belly* as western pointing out with their attitudes and daily life tend to modern life. Then, the traditional one is represented by Padma's and Lilly's character shown with their effort to keep maintaining their tradition in big country.

Then, Tara and Lilly as the main characters in *Desirable Daughters* and *Sweetness in the Belly* have diaspora in which Tara moves to America with her husband and

son *after crossing the dark waters to California.....* (23). But, Lilly moves to England as refugees from Ethiopian caused by Revolution in Ethiopian society with their government 'Haile Selassie'; '.....she announced that we had all arrived in England' (7).

This diaspora gives influences toward their identity formation where both of eastern and western blend in Tara' and Lilly' selves. Finally, this problem causes their crisis identity with maintaining or leaving one of their belonging identities—eastern or western, or do negotiating with mixing them into new identity tending to multicultural identity. Both of them come to their country without leaving the culture where they lived.

Tara returned to India to relearn Hindu doctrines because she is too modern and has left or forgotten her Indian tradition. Although she has come back home to relearn her Hindu dogma, she still has modern attitudes in her daily life by saying, 'you see.....God doesn't care if you eat beef'. This sentence shows her refusal to understand Hindu tradition. This is described from her statement about beef in which India proscribes Hindu followers to eat.

Besides, Lilly as a British living in Ethiopian and been part of them in society and culture, should move to her parents' hometown as an immigrant. She chooses different English identity from her parents and most of English society who are Protestants. She also still keeps her previous religion learned from the Great Abdal i.e. Islam tending to be multicultural. This combination of this identity—among east and west—can be described from this statement; 'This is just what the world looks like now: a veiled Ethiopian woman skiing down the side of a Canadian mountain. The picture of resilience. The new world (407).

Furthermore, the novels have different authors' background and culture. Camilla Gibb is a British and has interested in Middle East culture inspired by her mom's man opening her eyes to an explosion of color, texture, and happiness. She thinks that it was filled with people who are expressive and not English. Yet, Bharati Mukherjee (2002) is from Calcutta, India, she is from comparatively wealthy Bengali Hindu Brahmin family, and during her early childhood they lived with their large extended family. She became a U.S. citizen in 1989 and that year accepted a

position teaching postcolonial and world literature at the University of California in Berkeley.

Moreover, they have different settings and plots in which *Sweetness in the Belly* is a story with three settings i.e. Morocco, Harare, and London. Those places give experience toward the main character in dealing with her identity construction. This story tells about a European woman who does not inherit her original culture as her parents are hippies not belonging fixed place or nomadic. After they are died, Lilly is adopted by the Great Abdul and learned Islam in Morocco. The conflict in Morocco makes her and her foster brother, Husein, move to Harare. She finds out different Islam with what she already learned. Islamic culture in Harare has mystic things not existing in Quran and then she should rebuild her identity so that she is to be one of them. Finally, at Haile Selassie's government, the society had revolution impacting on the movement of the community from Ethiopian to London. This place is her parents' hometown and she is being one of immigrants and Ethiopian refugees. Here, she should decide to take her parents' culture or previous culture where she had grown up.

*Desirable Daughters* has setting in India and America. It tells about Indian woman moving to India with her husband and she deals with her identity crisis where she leaves her Indian culture and be American by adopting the culture in all life aspects such as dressing and styling. She had divorce and lived together with *hippies* in California. This identity crisis makes her come back to India to relearn Hindu doctrines. Both of the novels have significantly different country—east and west. Lilly, in *Sweetness in the Belly*, wants to be admitted as Ethiopian but she is a British and Tara, *Desirable Daughters*, wants to be part of American society while she is an Asian.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter reveals the discussion of the formation of Tara's and Lilly's identities portrayed in *Sweetness in the Belly* and *Desirable Daughters*. The final of these novels show that there is mixture of two different cultures in an individual staying in multicultural place. The identity construction in this study is line up with the theory explained by Homi K Bhabha (1994). He

convinces that the culture is a hybrid process. A culture is the result from 'meeting/ touching' between two different cultures and then creates new culture or 'hybridity'. In this process, an individual will deal with *split* or *ambivalence*, in which an action to accept or reject will hit at the time.

*Sweetness in the Belly* has different story from general postcolonial but it still has a strike of two cultures in herself. Lilly in this story deals with lost identity because her parents never introduces her to her real identity namely British, so that the first culture she recognized is Harare culture through her adoptive father the Great Abdal. Here, she knows Islam and being one. Then she migrates to Harare and finds out new problems in which there is opposition toward the local tradition and Islam doctrines known through her adoptive father. Islam tradition in Harare does not exist in Quran and her logic cannot receive it. When she already negotiates with this culture, she is forced to migrate to where she comes from, her parents' home town, England caused by revolution. She should re-experience fight identity between her parents' or Ethiopian identity. Finally, she comes back to hers and still holds on Islam.

In addition, *Desirable Daughter* shows binary opposition between Indian tradition and modern California. This opposition leads to ambivalence. This novel concludes that tradition is a good culture making immigrants still exist in new country so that Tara who is already too modern is returned to India to be re-purified. In other side, when she comes back, Tara makes a new problem by arguing with her father about the doctrine she learns. When she is re-purified, she rejects to come back to traditional doctrines.

From the above stories, it implies that the culture always develops from time to time and there is no pure culture between colonizers and occupied country. These cultures assimilate each other and have modernization. In *Sweetness in the Belly*, the main character keeps holding Islam although she stays in her parents' hometown—London, she does not want to come to her parents' religion. Beside, the main character in *Desirable Daughter* is returned back to her country and relearn her Hindu doctrines and rejects to follow that tradition. In short, this

novel identifies the failure for returning to the ideal tradition.

The conclusion above is line up with Bhabha's theory that in *self*, there is *other* and vice versa. In traditional values, it finds out modernity, and vice versa. It is assimilation of two cultures living in the same area. He adds that no world is homogenous; it will always form *split* identity involving the process from interaction of two different cultures, colonial and colonized. The resulted cultures clash is meant as hybridity/ third space/ ambivalence. Indirectly, the hybridity are formed between two opposition—east and west already overthrow the colonial discourse living in postcolonial society. There is no west superior to east, it's only hybrid/ third space blurring rigid space among them to be parallel/the same.

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of migrants moving into modern countries forcedly because the conflict of their own country or self consciousness to get better jobs, better salary, and better life. This increasing force is commonly known as diaspora. England and America are advanced countries having multiculturalism and being the land of destination by immigrants, including Ethiopia and India. They are claimed as the land of promises.

This research applies Bhabha's theory proposing to review immigrants' identity

formation is described by Gibb's and Mukherjee in their novel *Sweetness in the Belly* and *Desirable Daughters*. In *Sweetness in the Belly*, there are three places in forming Lilly's identity starting with no one until coming back to her parents' hometown. In this story, Amina and Robin are her friends helping her to find out her lost identity. Besides, in *Desirable Daughters*, this research consists of eight binary oppositions set out the two sisters having different characters, and how her sisters' efforts guide her to return to traditional values. Here, Tara is represented as modern American and Padma is traditional Indian.

The stories above imply that identity always develops and assimilates one to another. A person should be conscious with his/her native and assimilate with the society around them. The identity in multicultural places does not have pure identity anymore caused by colonialism. For example, after the main characters come back to their country, they still hold the culture where they ever lived before. It can be seen when Lilly still holds Islam when most of societies she lives are Christian, and Tara rejects her Hindu doctrine caused by the influence of modernity when she lived in America. Finally, Bhabha's hybridity can be proofed that there is no pure culture. The culture is the result from the process of hybrid.

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