

Shilpy Gowda's *Secret Daughter*: an emotional depth in the lives of motherhood with glimpse of cultural diversity

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Cultural diversity has myriad in every religion, society and country. Indian civilization and Indian culture is the oldest one in all over the world. India has multi-lingual and multi-religious country with many states. There is lots of difference in every culture and society. Every religion in India has its own distinct traditions and culture. It varies in food, language, standard of living and economical status. Language changes every region to region, and rules and customs of society changes. Majority Indians are staying in rural India and this rural India has not that much developed. The people are illiterate and far away from modern thinking. Still the people believe in superstitions. In such areas, many societies and families are male dominated. Women have no value. She has no status. Whatever the male member of her family says, she has to follow the same. Her feelings and emotions have no value. She is considered as secondary. In addition, these cultural traditions of Indian people have strong bonding from their ancestors until today. They follow the same path of family structure of male dominance, which is deeply rooted in their standard of living. Many Indian rituals are not good. Socialists and activists are trying to fade away these rituals and traditions, which affect the society, but they are not successful up to the mark.

Another important aspect of Indian culture is caste system and it sticks to them from birth to death. In India, the people are recognized by his/her caste, where he/she is born. Their social status depends on this, throughout their own life. Next to caste, is the issue of class discrimination. There is fight between upper and lower class people. Wikipedia defines:

Cultural diversity is the quality of diverse or different cultures. It can also refer to having different cultures respect each other's differences.

The phrase cultural diversity is used to mean the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region or in the world as a whole (Web).

Every culture is different. Here the differences in cultures are American and Indian. Comparing to Indian culture, American culture is advanced. The major differences in these two cultures are family relations. In Indian family, woman has no value. Indian woman performs the role of daughter, wife and mother. Her world is limited to this. Her major role is to expand the family and follow the family's traditions. She is not allowed to take education earlier time as she has no rights to say few words. She has to obey her husband and listen his words in every manner. She has no freedom to express her ideas. This is the main problem of Indian woman, which leads to her inferior position. She always become sufferer and never enjoys equal status with male. Opposite to this, American family values woman, gives independence to her status and her words. She has freedom to express her opinion.

The present research paper is based on Shilpy Gowda's *Secret Daughter*: an emotional depth in the lives of motherhood with glimpse of cultural diversity. Shilpy Gowda is born with Indian parents who immigrated from Mumbai to Canada. She is recognized as Canadian novelist. She has attraction to Indian culture. She is the bachelor of economics and completed her MBA afterwards from Stanford University. She has very keen attachment for children. She works on Advisory Board of the Children's Defense Fund. She is the patron and volunteer of organization named Childhaven International. She often visits Indian orphanage in the summer holidays, which binds her closeness with orphan children. This visit strikes the idea to write her debut novel *Secret Daughter*, which is published

in 2010. In 1991, she visited Indian orphanage and got the inspiration to write this novel. The novel focuses on major two things, one is infertility in America and other is female infanticide in India. The story has a span over 20 years. Various things like cultural diversity, mother hood, coming of age and family relations are the strong points to make this book as bestseller. It received as a "Heathers Pick" at Indigo bookstores. Her other novel *The Golden Son* is also in bestsellers books.

The novel has two storylines, one from Indian couple and another American couple. Indian couple, Jasu and Kavita is economically poor belongs to workers family. They give birth to a baby girl. Kavita is the mother of this innocent newborn girl child. Kavita and Jasu lives in small village of rural India. This is second time that she gives birth to baby child. Her husband and his family kill her first daughter, as they want son. This time she does not want to repeat the same. She runs with her newborn baby to Mumbai and keeps her in an orphanage, thinking that the child will get good life there and will be safe. She gives her the name Usha, means dawn. The name of a baby girl symbolizes her to live bright life. Kavita puts one silver bangle to Usha's ankle. Kavita carries her baby child to orphanage due to fear of her husband Jasu, that he will do something harmful to her baby. In her society female is worthless, as she cannot perform physical task and huge amount of dowry to be prepared for her marriage. Therefore, the girls are unwanted for these reasons.

On the other side American doctor couple, Somer and Krishnan trying for their own child but unfortunately; they are unable to have their own child due to early menopause of Somer at the age of 30. She is disturbed and hates her body for not giving a birth to her child. Krishnan advises her to adopt a child from an orphanage. Those who do not have children, they can adopt from orphanage. Krishnan belongs to India so he feels that it is proper to adopt a child from India. Somer does not like the idea but later on, she agrees to Krishnan's words. When Somar goes to India to adopt a child, she gets very upset by the cultural difference. Krishnan forces her to try to adjust but it is somewhat difficult for her. The couple adopts a girl child from orphanage in Mumbai and named her Asha. They return to America. Coincidentally, Asha is the same daughter, which

Kavita kept in an orphanage named as Usha. The article published in *Good reads* says:

Asha, adopted out of a Mumbai orphanage, is the child that binds the destinies of these two women. We follow both families, invisibly connected until Asha's journey of self-discovery leads her back to India. Compulsively readable and deeply touching, SECRET DAUGHTER is a story of the unforeseen ways in which our choices and families affect our lives, and the indelible power of love in all its many forms (Web article)

These are the two story lines of the novel. On one side, there is a suffering of Kavita and another Somer is suffering to have her own child. Meanwhile, Kavita gives birth to a son named Vijay. Kavita's husband Jasu shifted his family to Mumbai for the betterment of his son's life. Kavita never forget her daughter Usha. She always thinks of her and mourns for her. Jasu's male dominance has shown here. He cares for son but do not want daughters.

The story shifts 20 years later. Somer is somewhat struggling her life. She is odd among her family, as Krishnan and Asha are attached with same heritage and culture. Somer is attached with American culture and mismatches with the culture of Krishnan. She tries that Asha should learn and match with American culture, but Asha is curious to know about her own original culture and wants to meet her own relatives in India. Fortunately, she got the opportunity to visit India for writing the story about unprivileged people in India. She also comes to know about her real birth parents.

In India, Asha starts searching for her real parents. There in America, due to cultural differences Somar and Krishnan separates from each other but Somar realises her mistakes and wants to unite with Krishnan again. She also realises that she has to give up her identity for the sake of her family. She becomes successful in that and learns that life is a big compromise and if you love someone, you have to keep the things back and compromise the things with loved ones.

The sentences are full of emotions. There is vivid description of American and Indian cultures, food and people. Gowda nicely writes all the characters with real portrayal of both the cultures. The story is heart touching by the description of orphanage and adoption. Shilpi Gowda tells about the emotional depth of two mothers, their sufferings for daughter.

Both are having real ache for motherhood. The sufferings of three female characters, Kavita, Somar and Asha in their own way feel real. Kavita wants her newborn baby to live her life so she keeps the baby her in orphanage but mourns her throughout her life. Somar wants her daughter Asha to learn American culture but she fails in that and Asha never adjust with American culture, and suffers as a minority in America. Even though she grown-up in California, she wants her own heritage and desires to visit her birth country.

Gowda highlights here infertility of women as well as disregard for female child in India. She has nicely woven the stories of two families, poor merchant family in Indian village and doctor family in America. Review by Library Journal says:

Responding to poverty and a cultural preference for boys, an Indian mother hides her newborn daughter in an orphanage. The girl is adopted by an Indian-born doctor and his American wife, who live in California. Parallel stories are told of young Asha's life in America, where she is distanced from her native culture, and the growing rift between her adoptive parents, along with the fate of her birth parents and their son, who leave their small village for Mumbai and gradually rise out of poverty. After a slow start and some trite dialog, the book becomes more engrossing, as Asha takes a journalism fellowship in Mumbai and seeks a greater connection to her roots. First novelist Gowda offers especially vivid descriptions of the contrasts and contradictions of modern India. (Web article)

Culture plays very complex role in human life. It unites people as well as separates. Here the difference is between Western culture and Indian culture. The two mothers' from different atmosphere and different countries are affectionate towards one daughter. Gowda nicely illustrates their love and tie-up with their daughter. One sacrifices and other accepts the girl. *Secret Daughter* reveals the secret of Usha/Asha as a secret daughter of Kavita and Somer. Finally, Asha comes to know the truth about her orphanage and adoption.

Mother sacrifices her feelings of motherhood for the sake of daughter. In India, thousands of baby girls are killed where culture favours son. She fears but due to love about baby child, she keeps her in an orphanage. This is the story of identity of mothers. It is about

their struggles and challenges to face in families. With the inspiration to give justice to women and daughters, Shipi Gowda writes this novel. She has nicely presented the stories of two families' with powerful writing. Author adequately exposes the complicated life and psychological dilemma of American and Indian woman. The disparity between West and East is the main theme of this novel. The story shifts from India to America And then America to India. The author scrutinizes here bicultural families. She boldly presents the story of problematic relationships of two couples. This is breathtaking book for giving the importance of girls and their lives. Feel proud to be a citizen from the country rich in its culture and traditions but at the same its shameful thing to know that girls are less important compare to sons. It highlights the issue of female infanticide in rural India, especially among poor labourers in India. The story also tells us the impotence of gender in society. Female gender is not valued in family and civilization.

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