**CHAPTER IV****FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the findings, and discussion of the study based on the analysis conducted.

**4.1 Findings**

This chapter describes the findings about Mary Lennox's identity construction in *The Secret Garden* and the influence of dwelling through nature, especially in the garden. The findings are divided into three key parts: Mary’s Identity Construction in the Initial Phase, Mary’s Deconstructed Identity through the Dwelling Process, and The Intertwined Identity and Dwelling. Each finding is supported by textual evidence from the novel, along with analytical interpretation.

Mary’s Identity Construction in the Initial Stage

The findings indicates that Mary’s identity construction can be illustrated in a chronological sequence—from the initial phase to the terminal phase of her life. In the initial phase, Mary Lennox's identity is constructed by colonial superiority in India. As she was born and raised in India, she spent her childhood following the mixture of tradition and values between India and the colonial system of the British Empire. These two different traditions and values impacted her physical and psychological growth. This impact can be seen from the identity of Mary, who is illustrated as physically ill. The following section outlines the first phase of Mary's identity construction.

Physically Ill

Mary is depicted as a fragile, sickly child, with a weak body and poor health condition. This depiction can be seen from the onset of the novel, which overtly stated the physical illness of the main character, Mary. As illustrated in the following extract:

*“Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another.” (p. 3)*

By emphasizing Mary's yellowish hair and skin, the previous quotation highlights her physical fragility. It is possible to interpret this yellow tone as an effect of both environmental factors and severe illness. Mary's serious health condition is a result of her exposure to the hot and dry climate while growing up in colonial India, as well as a lack of emotional support and care. The statement that she has *"always been ill"* highlights how persistent her fragile state is and implies a persistent physical fragility in character. Mary’s physical condition is further characterized through the depiction of her thin body and unfriendly expression:

*“She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression.” (p. 3)*

The description above confirms that Mary is malnourished and emotionally distant. Three times in one line, the term *"thin"* emphasizes her body's thinness. In combination with her *"sour expression,"* Mary’s lack of warmth indicates that she has not experienced affectionate care because of her colonial upbringing, which shaped her early perception as a lonely and emotionally distant person.

Disagreeable and Emotionally Cold

Another major aspect of Mary's initial identity is her disagreeable behavior and emotional coldness characteristic. Given the fact that she frequently appears as a child who is difficult to get along with, she grows isolated since she lived with no one except the servants after her parents died. People's descriptions of her at the beginning of the story make this abundantly clear;

*“When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen.” (p. 3)*

The phrase *"disagreeable-looking child"* indicates her negative outlook has become so deeply embedded that it influences how other people see her physically. As a result of her identity being socially constructed to be unwanted by frequent external judgments, she experiences early isolation. Another sign of Mary's disagreeable character is her failure to maintain relationships, particularly with her governesses. Her actions caused a few of the caregivers to resign.

*“The young English governess who came to teach her to read and write disliked her so much that she gave up her place in three months.” (p. 4)*

Thereby, Mary's failure in maintaining a relationship with her governess illustrates how people find her disagreeable behavior offensive. Those who were meant to take care of and teach Mary were turned away by her presence, as evidenced by the fact that her governess *"disliked her so much."* This evidence supports the thought that she is emotionally distant and difficult to handle. This pattern also happens in her interactions with children in India, where her harsh attitude leads to further isolation.

*“Mary hated their untidy bungalow and was so disagreeable to them that after the first day or two nobody would play with her.” (p. 11)*

The quote above demonstrates even more how Mary's negative outlook causes her to become isolated from others of her age. She is completely rejected because of her harshness and inability to adapt to other people. Because she was not socially or emotionally supported during her childhood, she grew to be difficult to make friends. She behaves in this conduct unknowingly until it becomes a part of who she is. Mary's lack of awareness of how disagreeable she serves as an example of how her behavior is not an intentional act but rather reflects a performative identity created by her surroundings:

*“She did not know that this was because she was a disagreeable child; but then, of course, she did not know she was disagreeable.” (p. 14)*

The quote above reinforces Mary's non-intentional behaviors. This passage emphasizes the fact that Mary's behaviors are not intentional. She lacks the ability to recognize how others perceive her, which indicates that her disagreeable attitude is caused by her social and emotional upbringing. Her environment and the lack of affection contribute to the development of her unpleasant personality instead of fostering authenticity.

Selfish

The other trait that strongly defines Mary's early identity is her selfishness. Her constant self-centeredness and expectation that others will take care of her needs reflect her superior colonial upbringing. This self-centeredness is stated explicitly in the story:

*“By the time she was six years old she was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived.” (p. 4)*

The quote clearly portrays Mary as selfish and dictatorial from a young age. The terms *"tyrannical"* and *"selfish"* highlight her excessive sense of importance, which was likely fostered by her colonial environment, where her native workers dutifully obeyed her. Mary's emotional self-centeredness and detachment from actual interactions further distance her from other people and maintain her initial identity as an emotionally isolated person.

*“… and as she was a self-absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done.” (p. 10)*

The quote above indicates how Mary's self-centered attitude is typical. The use of the term *"as she had always done"* shows that her habits are frequent and not just a passing phase. She performs an isolated identity, obsessed with herself and unaffected by the needs or feelings of others, because she was not shown empathy or care in her childhood.

Spoiled

A different characteristic that defines Mary's initial identity is her spoiled personality. She grew up expecting to be served continuously, having been raised in a colonial home where native servants attended to her every need. Mary’s total reliance on others to carry out simple duties is indicative of that follows:

*“The little girl did not offer to help her, because in India native servants always picked up or carried things.” (p. 21)*

This quote depicts how Mary's colonial upbringing has influenced her behavior. She has been raised to accept service from others, so she never even thinks about offering assistance. It points to a deep-rooted feeling of privilege and a lack of independence from an early age.

*“Who is going to dress me?” demanded Mary. (p. 28)*

Mary's inquiry indicates that dressing herself is challenging for her. It portrays a demanding attitude and a firm belief that someone else should be in charge of fulfilling her fundamental need. This section emphasizes how spoiled she is and how entitled she is as a result of her upbringing.

*“I never did in my life. My Ayah dressed me, of course.” (p. 29)*

Mary boldly confesses that she has never done the basic act, such as getting dressed. The use of the word *"of course"* implies that she considers the action to be entirely typical, which furthers her belief that taking care of herself is the responsibility of others. The term Ayah refers to a native Indian female servant who typically cared for British children during the colonial period. Mary's identity becomes firmly fixed in privilege and alienation due to her complete reliance on her Ayah for basic necessities. The episode additionally shows her lack of independence and empathy for people who have helped her, as she views such care as standard procedure rather than assistance.

Mary’s Relationship with Nature and the Emergence of Dwelling

The immersion process in Misselthwaite Manor's nature, especially after discovering the secret garden, causes Mary's identity to change. Mary experiences an intense transformation, from a distant and emotionally isolated child to a more approachable, thoughtful. Through the concept of dwelling, which emphasizes emotional and physical connection in the setting one lives in.

Mary's direct interaction with nature makes her transformation noticeable rather than merely vague or symbolic. She spends time working in the garden rather than only admiring it. She started by turning over damaged soil, removing weeds, and cleaning overgrown paths. She gradually started watering growing plants, planting fresh blooms, trimming dead branches, and reducing broken tree parts. These direct efforts to restore and care for the garden's life reflected the progressively developed mental and physical healing she underwent.

As she committed herself to taking care of the garden, Mary formed a stronger bond with nature, herself, and people around her as well. Through Mary’s shifting relationship with the garden and her role as its caretaker, the following section highlights six key aspects of this transformation: physical healing, joyfulness, growing affection, thoughtfulness, empathy, and curiosity.

Physical Healing

Throughout her time in India, Mary rarely did anything. She lived a fatigued, passive life and was constantly serviced by native workers. Because activity and the fresh air were not stimulating her body, she was unable to create a healthy appetite. But Mary's physical state steadily improved after she got to Misselthwaite Manor and started working in the secret garden—digging, pulling weeds, planting, and moving around above soil. This transformation was apparent in her restored appetite:

*“…she had been healthily hungry for the first time in her life.” (p. 51)*

This is an essential statement. For the first time, Mary experiences hunger as a normal and healthy reaction to prolonged physical activity rather than as a result of illness or habit. She is starting to live in harmony with the environment as her work in the garden boosts her metabolism along with other bodily functions. More than merely physical well-being, this hunger signifies the beginning of an actual life that is based on involvement, activity, and presence in the environment. Mary’s physical healing also noticed by people surrounding her;

*“Tha’s a bit fatter than tha’ was an’ tha’s not quite so yeller. Tha’ looked like a young plucked crow when tha’ first came into this garden.” (pp. 91–92)*

Ben Weatherstaff, an old gardener at Misselthwaite Manor, objectively confirms Mary's transformation. When Mary first got there, she was yellow, thin, and dull, which is illustrated by “young plucked crow”.

*“I know I’m fatter,” she said. “My stockings are getting tighter.” (p. 92)*

Mary's recognition of her physical growth can be seen in a particular quote. Her stockings have tightened, highlighting her development in a practical, childlike manner. One of recognition and pride rather than guilt or worry. She starts to regard her body as strong, capable, and actively shaped by her own work, which shows pride in her growth.

*“I’m growing fatter,” said Mary, “and I’m growing stronger. I used always to be tired. When I dig I’m not tired at all. I like to smell the earth when it’s turned up.” (p. 106)*

Mary's physical transformation leads to this remark. She openly contrasts her current state, where working in the garden energizes her rather than drains her, with her previous self, who was constantly weak and exhausted. Her enjoyment of the soil's scent demonstrates a more profound sense of awareness of her surroundings. She now comes alive, works, and develops in the garden, which is more than simply a setting for her to play. Mary creates a new identity via constant physical contact—one that is solid, active, yet adaptable to the living environment.

Joyfulness and Emotional Openness

Mary encountered significant emotional shifts that were marked by sincere joy and enthusiasm in alongside her physical transformation. Joy was nearly nonexistent at the early stages of her life in India. Her days were filled with emotional neglect, loneliness, and a cold, monotonous routine. But as she became closer to nature, Mary started to experience joy—not as a brief emotion, but as a continuous emotion that comes from being rooted in existing in life.

*“She went from place to place, and dug and weeded, and enjoyed herself so immensely that she was led on from bed to bed and into the grass under the trees.” (p. 81)*

This quotation captures Mary's pure delight in simple activity. The repetitive movement from bed to bed reflects the cycle of fostering the garden. Working with her hands and actively taking care of a living thing brings her joy instead of receiving service like she used to. Her enjoyment is genuine and comes from a strong connection with the surroundings that she works to heal as implied by the words *"enjoyed herself so immensely*."

*“She was beginning to like to be out of doors; she no longer hated the wind, but enjoyed it.” (p. 89)*

The example given above illustrates how Mary's awareness of nature is now completely different. In the past, the wind marked discomfort or even threat. But now, she learned to accept it as part of her environment. Mary's enjoyment of the wind indicates an emotional shift as she starts to embrace and even cherish her surroundings rather than rejecting them. Harmony with surroundings that signify familiarity and emotional stability is an essential part of a dwelling.

Therefore, Mary's joy was not just an emotional decoration—it was transformative. The more she engaged with the garden through active care, the more she was able to feel a sustained internal joy. This joy, born of presence and hard work, replaced the emptiness and boredom that once defined her emotional world. It helped her relate better to her surroundings and the people in them.

Growing Affection to Others

One of the most obvious signs of Mary's identity transformation is her growing ability to form emotional attachments, as in the early phase, Mary presented as disagreeable, emotionally cold and stiff, and having no interest in forming bonds with people around her. She was raised in an emotionally empty society where she did not receive any affection and was not given any in return. But her heart opened up when she began to work in the garden. Slowly, Mary’s affection for the garden spread to everyone around her. Her identity experienced a significant transformation as an outcome of this transition from isolation to social affection, starting from a short quote as follows:

*“I like your mother,” said Mary. (p. 63)*

That short yet meaningful remark is remarkable since it comes from someone who has previously shown dislike or disinterest for everyone. Mary's mother, who was more focused on preserving social appearances than raising her kid, gave her little to no care when she was growing up in India. Mary never learned to show or accept affection as a result. Therefore, it is not surprising that she finds herself fascinated by Martha—Mary’s maid’s stories about her mother, Mrs. Sowerby, who is characterized as generous, kind, and *"lovely."* Hearing about such care draws Mary's interest and makes her yearn for it, as she lacked an emotional model of parental love.

*“You do cheer me up,” she said. “I like to hear you talk.” (p. 72)*

In this particular case, Mary expresses appreciation and interest for the person's presence in spite of knowing that they help her feel better. *"I'm glad to hear you speak"* indicates that Mary is interested in a relationship for its purpose, not only because someone is meeting her needs. This is an important transformation from the person she once was, who purposefully refused to listen to other people to the point that she put her fingers in her ears to avoid hearing anything.

*“Dickon,” she said. “You are as nice as Martha said you were. I like you, and you make the fifth person. I never thought I should like five people.” (p. 109)*

As if puzzled by how much her world has widened, Mary, who used to be distant from everyone, has begun to keep track of the people she has come to like. The fact that she counts the number of people she likes shows how uncommon and significant these relationships are to her. It also conveys a sense of pride and a suppressed pleasure at realizing that she is capable of friendship and love. Her tone is straightforward and charming, suggesting that her love is now real, simple, and emotionally rooted.

Heightened Curiosity

Closely connected to her growing thoughtfulness is Mary’s awakening sense of curiosity—one of the clearest signs that her identity is being reshaped through her experience of dwelling. Mary's rising curiosity closely relates to her increasing thoughtfulness and is one of the first signs that her identity is changing as part of her experience of dwelling. Mary is emotionally distant and uninterested at the very beginning of the novel. She shuts her ears when she dislikes hearing something, avoids interactions with others, and avoids learning. Both her emotional and intellectual lives are static. She does, however, become more thoughtful and curious as she immerses herself in the patterns of nature. Mary's mind is opened, and a genuine desire for understanding is sparked by the garden's mysteries, cycles, and transformations.

*“What is a moor?” (p. 22)*

The starting point of Mary's intellectual engagement with her new surroundings is this straightforward question. In her former life in India, she was not very interested in her surroundings, much less the local way of life or the environment. She now begins to ask questions out of a genuine curiosity rather than out of obligation. Her curiosity demonstrates her shift from a passive existence to active discovery.

*“Do bulbs live a long time? Would they live years and years if no one helped them?” (p. 83)*

This is a very passionate question. Mary's interest in whether bulbs can endure on their own is an expression of her own hidden fears regarding growth and survival. She was emotionally neglected for years, just like the bulbs, but she is also starting to flourish in her new environment. This example shows a profound, symbolic relationship with the persistence of nature in addition to intellectual curiosity. Her questions are essential and emotional in addition to being intellectual.

*“She stayed with him for ten or fifteen minutes longer and asked him as many questions as she dared.” (p. 95)*

The example given illustrates Mary's level of involvement. Instead of avoiding or excluding people, she now actively searches out information, asks questions, and has the courage to engage in dialogue. She has the desire to learn because she wants to connect with her surroundings and other people, not because she feels pressured to do so. Crucially, she cultivates her curiosity in the same environment where it develops.

The Intertwined of Construction Identity and Dwelling

By the conclusion of the story, Mary’s identity is no longer simply marked by physical change or emotional healing. Instead, her identity becomes deeply intertwined with Mary’s experience of dwelling in the secret garden. Her body, emotions, social behaviors, and environmental awareness converge to form an entire identity grounded in social and ecological circumstances. Mary’s transformation undergoes a process that is not temporary but embedded in her relationship with the garden, which now symbolizes a permanent site of dwelling and identity.

The final phase of Mary Lennox’s transformation demonstrates how her identity is shaped not only by social interactions, but also by her sustained and embodied relationship with the natural world—a process conceptualized by Greg Garrard as *dwelling*. This idea emphasizes that identity is not formed in isolation but through repeated, meaningful interaction with a specific place. In *The Secret Garden*, this place is the garden itself, which becomes both a physical space of activity and a symbolic space of healing and belonging for Mary. One of the most visible outcomes of this dwelling is the change in Mary’s physical appearance, as recognized by those around her:

*“She’s begun to be downright pretty since she’s filled out and lost that ugly little sour look.” (p. 257)*

This statement marks a significant shift from how Mary was initially described—sickly, thin, and emotionally closed. The phrase *“filled out”* reflects her physical development, suggesting she has grown stronger and healthier, while the loss of her *“sour look”* indicates a release from emotional rigidity. This physical change does not occur in isolation but is the result of her continual presence and movement in nature, which restores her body and alters how others perceive her. In this context, her outward beauty becomes a manifestation of inner healing—a harmony between the self and the space she now inhabits. Another description further reinforces the connection between movement, health, and identity.

*“She had been running in the garden every day and among the bracken and heather on the moor.” (p. 247)*

This quote illustrates Mary’s repeated, active engagement with her environment. She is no longer a passive, confined child but someone who immerses herself physically in nature. The words *“every day”* emphasize the consistency of her interaction, which is crucial to the concept of *dwelling*. Through this habitual relationship with the garden and the moor, her body is revitalized and her identity reconstructed—not by internal psychological reflection alone, but through movement, exposure, and lived experience in the natural world.

Thus, Mary’s transformation in the final stage is not only emotional or social but also deeply ecological and corporeal. Her physical renewal becomes visual proof of the healing power of dwelling. The garden does not merely serve as a backdrop to her story—it becomes a participant in her becoming. Mary’s body, behavior, and identity coalesce in her relationship with this space, illustrating that identity construction is not solely an act of the mind but also of the body in place.

**4.2 Discussion**

This section discusses the study findings related to the theoretical framework that was employed in this study, notably Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Greg Garrard's concept of dwelling in ecocriticism. The analysis indicates that the construction of Mary Lennox's identity in The Secret Garden is not fixed or inherent but rather an ongoing process influenced by repeated social interactions and environmental participation. The discussion is structured into three principal insights derived from these findings.

Identity as a Performative Construction

The findings indicate that Mary’s initial identity is not an inherent or fixed trait, but rather a product of repeated behaviors shaped within a colonial and patriarchal environment. Her characteristics—such as emotional detachment, selfishness, a sense of entitlement, and physical frailty—do not emerge from her internal essence but are the result of sustained engagement with social norms and expectations. This supports Judith Butler's theory that identity is not a stable state of being but rather a performance, continuously enacted through repetition within a normative framework (Butler, 2002).

This study adds to the growing body of studies that assert identity is socially constructed through repeated action. Utami et al. (2022), for instance, analyze the film Brave to show how the protagonist's recurring acts of defiance deconstruct gender stereotypes. Similarly, Tarighat and Sadati (2023) explore gender identity in *Zohreh and Manouchehr*, highlighting how performative behaviors challenge traditional binaries. Sirait et al. (2025) examine gender performativity in *Clueless*, revealing how the characters resist fixed gender norms through ironic and subversive acts.

In a related vein, Inayah and Fauzi (2024) analyze *The School for Good and Evil*, illustrating how performative repetition reconfigures identity outside of moral binaries. Fitriani et al. (2019) also contribute to this discourse by investigating gender construction in *The Danish Girl*, where the protagonist’s evolving identity emerges through a process of sustained performance rather than innate characteristics.

In line with these studies, this study shows that Mary Lennox’s identity is constructed not through inherent traits, but through repeated social acts that are later disrupted and reoriented through her interaction with nature. Her transformation therefore exemplifies the performative fluidity of identity and situates childhood identity within broader cultural and spatial contexts.

Dwelling as an Ecological Identity Construction

Mary's connection with the natural environment, particularly the secret garden, intricately links her identity construction. Greg Garrard’s ecocritical concept of *dwelling* suggests that identity is not simply a matter of physical placement but is deeply embedded in the spaces where individuals participate in sustained, meaningful interactions. Dwelling implies a sense of ethical and emotional commitment to a place—a concept relevant to Mary’s transformation throughout the novel.

The findings demonstrate that Mary’s physical recovery, emotional growth, and developing social awareness emerge directly from her regular involvement with gardening and consistent exposure to the natural world. These behaviors are not passive; they involve care, curiosity, and attentiveness, reflecting her gradual rootedness in the garden as a place of belonging. Her transformation from a physically ill and emotionally withdrawn child into an empathetic and vibrant character illustrates how identity becomes ecologically grounded through interaction with a specific place. The larger environment of Misselthwaite Manor, in addition to the secret garden, plays a big role in Mary's change. Unlike in colonial India, where the oppressive heat confined her indoors and made her socially isolated, the cool air, soft winds, and open sky of Yorkshire encouraged her wish to go outside, walk, and play.

This process is supported by interdisciplinary ecological studies. According to Oliver et al. (2022) , formative experiences with nature are vital to the development of an *interdependent self-identity*, one that includes both social and environmental dimensions. Mary’s frequent performances—digging, walking, breathing in fresh air—become repeated acts of ecological dwelling that reinforce and reshape her identity over time.

In addition, journal article in *Sustainability* shows that children form values and a sense of belonging through interaction with physical spaces, especially green environments. The study notes, “*The places children dwell in and interact with can play a significant role in forming identity, values, and sense of belonging*” (Sustainability, 2021). The garden in *The Secret Garden* functions precisely in this way: as a transformative dwelling space where Mary learns to care, communicate, and coexist.

Mary’s transformation, then, extends beyond internal emotional change. It signifies an embodied, place-based identity formation. In Garrard’s terms, her identity becomes inseparable from the land—her very sense of self is cultivated, quite literally, in the soil of the secret garden. Her care for the plants mirrors her growing care for others, illustrating how environmental and social dwellings converge in the shaping of self.

Therefore, Mary’s ecological interactions are not secondary to her identity formation; they are central. The garden is not a mere backdrop to her story but the very stage on which her identity is performed, tested, and transformed. Through Garrard’s and complementary ecological perspectives, it is evident that Mary’s dwelling in the garden serves as a foundation for a sustainable and embodied selfhood.

The Intertwined of Identity and Dwelling

Mary Lennox’s identity transformation in *The Secret Garden* reaches its full realization through the interplay between Judith Butler’s concept of performativity and Greg Garrard’s notion of dwelling. Rather than being formed solely by internal realization or external social forces, Mary’s identity is reconstructed through repeated behaviors performed within a meaningful, ecological space—the secret garden.

According to Butler, identity is constituted through performative acts—repetitive actions within a social framework that are recognized and affirmed by others. In the case of Mary, these include her newly learned behaviors: helping others, showing affection, initiating play, and expressing concern. These acts are not expressions of a fixed self, but rather repetitions that gradually shape her subjectivity. As she repeatedly enacts these behaviors, her identity becomes stabilized and socially acknowledged.

However, what distinguishes Mary’s transformation is that these performative acts take place within a specific ecological setting—the garden—which plays a critical role in enabling the change. Greg Garrard’s ecocritical theory of *dwelling* posits that identity is embedded in physical place through sustained interaction. The garden provides Mary not only with a setting but with a space of healing, and belonging, which is essential for her to repeat and internalize these new behaviors.

For example, Mary’s physical change—described as having *“filled out and lost that ugly little sour look*” (p. 257)—is a result of her bodily engagement with the environment. She runs, digs, plays, and breathes fresh air daily. These physical actions are not just expressions of health but performative acts of identity, supported by the nurturing space of the garden. Her identity is thus not only acted but also lived in place—a product of performing in nature.