
Psychosexual Survival in Wartime Literature: Intimacy as a Coping Mechanism in *Love and Ego* (2024)

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Abstract:

This research paper, titled “Psychosexual Survival in Wartime Literature: Intimacy as a Coping Mechanism in Love and Ego,” examines the ways in which psychological trauma, emotional displacement, and physical vulnerability during wartime foster the development of psychosexual bonds as survival mechanisms. Rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis and trauma theory, the study investigates how characters in *Love and Ego* utilize intimacy—not solely as a romantic expression but as a psychological sanctuary to regain agency, identity, and emotional equilibrium during crises. War engenders a milieu of fear, loss, and existential ambiguity, wherein traditional social norms disintegrate, facilitating intricate manifestations of emotional and physical attachment. This study posits that intimacy evolves into an adaptive mechanism, offering individuals psychological security, emotional stability, and a strategy to navigate trauma, abandonment, and solitude. The paper further investigates the interplay of ego, desire, and survival instincts, obscuring the distinctions between love, need, and psychological dependency. The study ultimately illustrates how wartime literature reconfigures human relationships, portraying them not as embodiments of idealized love, but as reflections of emotional survival, attachment anxiety, and the intrinsic human necessity for connection amid chaos.

Keywords: Psychosexual survival, Trauma theory, Wartime literature, Psychoanalysis, Freudian ego, Intimacy, Coping mechanism, Emotional displacement, Love and Ego, Psychological refuge.

Dr. Prashant Connodgia began his academic career in 2017 at Basanti Devi P.G. College, Deoli Gulaothi, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh. Over the years, he has contributed significantly to teaching, research, and academic development. He has published several research papers in national, international, and UGC CARE-listed journals, reflecting his scholarly engagement and commitment to research excellence. He has actively participated

in numerous national and international seminars and conferences, further enhancing his academic exposure and intellectual growth. In addition, he has attended various workshops and professional development programs, including the MMTTP held in Gorakhpur, to refine his pedagogical and research skills. At present, he is serving as a faculty member at Shree Dronacharya P.G. College, Dankaur, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, where he continues to contribute to academia through teaching, research, and mentorship with dedication and distinction.

Introduction:

Dr. Vikas Sharma is a well-known professor, writer, poet, and researcher of modern Indian literature, especially English and Hindi creative writing. He is now a Professor in the Department of English at Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCS University) in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India. He has made a name for himself as a respected figure in creative writing and literary scholarship.

Master's Degree (M.A. in English) from the Institute of Advanced Studies at Meerut University Campus in Meerut. He got his M.Phil. in English from Dr. H. S. Gour Central University in Sagar and his Ph.D. in English from Kumaun University in Nainital. He also got a D.Lit. (Doctor of Letters) from CCS University in Meerut for all of his work in literature and research. He has written many novels, poetry collections, and edited anthologies that deal with a wide range of topics, from identity and social issues to spiritual reflection. People have said that his work shows "contemporary Indian realities" and deep social and psychological issues. *Love's Not Time's Fool* is a book that looks at how people feel and how they interact with each other. *I.A.S. Today* is a book that compares the lives of bureaucrats with philosophical and spiritual ideas. *498: Fears and Dreams* is a book that talks about social fears and hopes.

Medicine: Light in Twilight is a work of fiction that mixes human suffering with hope.

Ashes and Fire, Hope Against Hope, Sana, Tomorrow, and Tomorrow are more novels that show different sides of Indian society and emotions.

Wartime literature frequently explores the psychological, emotional, and ethical traumas associated with conflict. War devastates societies and political systems, while also leaving enduring impacts on identity, memory, relationships, and emotional integrity. The novelist depicted in a very realistic way to expose the horror of war in the following lines "Missiles were dropped... killing fifty civilians and injuring hundreds of women and children. Merciless indeed!" (*Love and Ego* 32). Wartime realism, depicting war by its direct, indiscriminate cruelty on civilians rather than through heroic combat. Elaine Scarry contends, "contemporary warfare obliterates both bodies and language, diminishing human existence to mere statistics of pain and mortality" (*The Body in Pain* 63). War literature increasingly highlights the internal experiences of individuals whose fear, relocation, loss, and uncertainty alter their emotional connections. In these narratives, connection transcends

romantic or sensuous dimensions, serving as a fundamental requirement for psychological existence.

This study analyzes psychosexual survival in wartime literature, namely in the novel *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*, and explores how closeness aids individuals in coping with trauma and existential crises. Contemporary war narratives significantly diverge from heroic or nationalist themes. They emphasize fragmented subjectivities, emotional dependence, and the collapse of societal norms. War affects ethics and societal structure, compelling individuals to reconcile emotional necessities with survival instincts. Anxiety, repression, fear of abandonment, and identity fragmentation are indicators of psychological distress. Literary works depicting wartime events frequently illustrate personal relationships as temporary refuges where individuals seek to regain normalcy, stability, and meaning. These relationships frequently exhibit ambivalence, dependency, and moral ambiguity because to the tension between genuine emotional connection and survival.

Freudian psychoanalysis and trauma theory elucidate these processes. According to Freud, the ego, repression, and libidinal impulses help individuals in resolving internal conflicts under difficult situations. Trauma theory elucidates how violence and loss disrupt cognitive and emotional continuity, necessitating compensatory attachments. Intimacy in wartime literature is perceived as a psychological adaptation to stress rather than a purposeful or idealistic decision. Consequently, psychosexual connections encompass desire, fear, memory, and survival.

Love and Ego define itself in contemporary military fiction by situating the narrative within the Russia–Ukraine conflict and emphasizing the emotional and psychological tribulations of those impacted. The narrative explores how fear, displacement, and emotional isolation alter relationships, rather than focusing on heroics or ideological conflict. Intimacy between Rada Lee, a Ukrainian soldier and Nathleen who is a Russian woman in this novel represents the protagonists' desperate endeavor to preserve their identities and emotional equilibrium under war destruction. These connections blur the distinctions between love, dependency, and psychological necessity, illustrating the weakness of human relationships during crises. The novel "Love and Ego" comprises two narratives: one set in India and the other within the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The narrative from India provides a brief insight into the clash between tradition and individual ego. The narrative centers on two couples, Savi-Manindra and Sachi-Aryendra, whose personal conflicts establish the psychological and moral foundation of the novel prior to the wartime context. The depicted extramarital relationship between Savi and Aryendra in the novel illustrates the confrontation of traditions and fosters their individuality through the mechanisms of desire and reinforcing ego. It serves as a prelude to the wartime tale in the novel. How realistically Prof. Sharma portrayed the extramarital intimacy between Savi and Aryendra, "She noticed lechery in his eyes... He moved towards her and kissed her cheeks. She was startled and kissed him in response" (*Love*

and Ego 21). Savi's observation of Aryendra's lechery constitutes her conscious awareness. Aryendra's attempt to kiss Savi's cheeks first demonstrated his role as a dominant participant, but Savi's subsequent response can be interpreted as indicative of a passive and submissive class. Her astonishment arises from the clash between her ego and the illicit desire, while kissing signifies the capitulation of the ego to the libidinal impulse.

It is written in widely acknowledged book *The Ego and the Id* (1960) thus, "Repressed instincts never cease to strive for satisfaction; they wait for opportunities to become active." (Freud 17), Savi and Aryendra's repressed desire becomes active when they get opportunity in the absence of their partners and involve in sexual activities. This narrative transitions without a definitive conclusion, abruptly shifting to the wartime account of Rada Lee and Nathleen, both victims of conflict and isolation. The male character hails from Ukraine, while the female character is from Russia, and their confrontation occurs during the war. Both sprang from painful circumstances, and their meeting constitutes a covalent relationship due to their mutual dependence. As they draw closer and physically connect, they provide each other with emotional solace. It is presented vividly in the novel *Love and Ego*, "They explored each other's bodies like a treasure trail... she felt revived when they came together as though she had been in a coma for the past few years of grief." (36) From a psycho-sexual perspective, this passage represents sexual intimacy as a mechanism of psychological survival and revival after prolonged trauma. The metaphor of a "coma" is especially significant, as it suggests a state of emotional numbness, repression, and suspended psychic life, caused by accumulated grief, loss, and wartime anxiety. Sexual union here functions not merely as physical pleasure but as a therapeutic release of repressed libido. According to Sigmund Freud, libido is the primary psychic energy that sustains mental life. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he argues that suppressed sexual desire leads to neurosis and psychic stagnation, whereas its expression restores vitality to the ego (Freud 45–47). Nathleen's sense of revival reflects this Freudian principle: the release of libidinal energy reactivates her emotional life, rescuing her from psychological paralysis.

Freud further explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that individuals traumatized by loss or violence often enter a condition of psychic withdrawal, where the ego distances itself from life to avoid further pain. Nathleen's grief; stemming from widowhood, illness, and war—has pushed her into such a defensive numbness. Sexual intimacy becomes a life-affirming act, aligned with what Freud calls Eros, the life instinct, which opposes Thanatos (the death drive).

The phrase "explored each other's bodies like a treasure trail" symbolically signifies reclaiming bodily autonomy and sensual curiosity, which trauma often suppresses. Trauma theorist has noted thus, "recovery from trauma begins when the survivor reconnects with the body and regains control over physical experience (Herman 95). Thus, the mutual

exploration depicted here is not exploitative but restorative, allowing the traumatized subject to re-enter embodied existence.

Moreover, Freud's concept of sublimation and catharsis is relevant. Sexual union in this context works as catharsis, releasing years of accumulated grief and restoring emotional equilibrium. As Freud observes in *The Ego and the Id*, when the ego successfully negotiates between instinctual desire (id) and past trauma, it regains stability and vitality.

Therefore, psycho-sexually, this moment marks a transition from repression to affirmation, from grief-induced dormancy to emotional resurrection. Sexual intimacy becomes a survival strategy, enabling the character to reclaim her humanity amid war and loss. The passage thus exemplifies psycho-sexual survival, where love and physical union counteract trauma, death, and despair.

Trauma in wartime literature refers to a long-term psychological rupture produced by violence, loss, displacement, and the continual threat of death. Such trauma frequently causes emotional numbness, identity fragmentation, and a reduced attachment to life. In the novel when Rada Lee got shelter in Nathleen residence and he point gun on her thinking that she might not inform to the Russian army and her fearless behaviour toward him forced to ask why she not afraid of him then she says," "My first husband left home... my second husband committed suicide... now Ukrainians are planning to take revenge. With all the mayhem around, I am not scared of death." (Nathleen 34), here in the quoted paragraph from the novel illustrates a psychological situation influenced by cumulative trauma, wherein recurrent loss results in emotional desensitization and modified terror response. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Nathleen's assertion of being "not scared of death" does not merely reflect courage; it is a defensive mental retreat stemming from unresolved grief. Sigmund Freud posited that extended exposure to loss and trauma frequently propels the psyche beyond the pleasure principle into a condition where the death drive (Thanatos) prevails. He says "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13). Nathleen's life story in which one spouse left her and the other killed himself has made her ego less attached to life. Death doesn't seem so scary anymore because the mind has already gone through a metaphorical death through emotional pain. Freud adds on stating that when mourning becomes pathological, the person internalizes the loss and focuses their emotional energy within, which causes them to become detached from their desires and fears (*Mourning and Melancholia* 245). Nathleen's peaceful acceptance of death shows how sad she is about it. Her mind has learned to deal with stress by decreasing her hopes for survival, which, strangely enough, helps her get through the pandemonium.

Another psychologist from a trauma-theory perspective, observes that survivors of sustained abuse and betrayal frequently experience psychic numbing, a state characterized by diminished terror reactions due to an exhausted nervous system (Herman 47). Nathleen's absence of terror is not indicative of bravery but rather a manifestation of survival fatigue, a condition in which the mind ceases to respond to peril due to the intolerability of perpetual vigilance. Next the trauma reflects when she saw dream in the absence of Rada Lee, "Even the death of the dream child gave her a lot of grief." (Sharma 43) This quoted line illustrates the incursion of trauma into the unconscious, wherein loss is incessantly re-enacted in dreams. Sigmund Freud posits that catastrophic grief manifests in dreams as he psyches obsessively revisits unresolved loss (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 16). Nathleen, in her dream, confronts her unresolved grief stemming from the death of her son, who had been born with Rada Lee and perished in war while on his way to school. She has also endured the loss of two husbands: one who died in warfare and another who committed suicide. Trauma theorist Judith Lewis Herman states that dream imagery signifies unassimilated trauma, in the form of imagined imagery even to produce real emotional pain (Trauma and Recovery 51).

In the novel the author emphasised on the instinctual drive which is very natural but bounded with societal norms but it never ends when it got the opportunity it comes out. As he depicted in the following lines: "Man is man, animal instinct dominates him even during terrible times" (41). This phrase shows the Freudian idea that instinctive desires are always there, even when people are acting civilized, even in a crisis. Sigmund Freud thinks that repression never entirely eradicates unconscious desire; in extreme circumstances, the ego's control diminishes, permitting the id's instinctive desires to emerge. The author further demonstrates how ego mediates between fear, instinct and reality which he exposed in the following lines:

"Change your perspective... think of today's sunlight... above all love for me. Since we can love each other... there is no reason to be sad." (p. 46)

These lines show how the ego works as a middleman, turning fear and instinct into a reality that is emotionally stable. Sigmund Freud says that the ego finds realistic sources of consolation and significance to balance the id's innate cravings with the outside world. In the darkest phase of the war period the novelist has soothed the situation by using the coping mechanism which has been illustrated in the following lines, "It is love that wins everybody and every situation." (39) This phrase depicts love as a psychological strategy that aids humans in withstanding trauma, fear, and instability in times of conflict. Trauma theorist Judith Lewis Herman posits that the establishment of emotional connections reinstates a sense of safety and significance, hence facilitating survivors' ability to manage profound stress (Trauma and Recovery 133). Rada Lee demands to leave the Nathleen's residence then Nathleen asked him to stay more for a week and says, "Who'll open the door for the enemy? ... Here, I am with you to love you without asking for anything in return." (p. 47) These lines

show how love may help people get over their ego, where love is stronger than fear, pride, and self-interest. Sigmund Freud says that love makes the ego's defences weaker, which lets the ego go from being narcissistic to being emotionally invested in others.

Conclusion:

This study shows that *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga* is an important analysis of psychosexual survival during wartime, where intimacy is seen as a psychological necessity. Dr. Vikas Sharma's novel goes beyond war fiction by focusing on the interior lives of the hurt, illustrating how love, desire, and emotional commitment can help individuals overcome violence, displacement, and death. The book's Indian and Russo-Ukrainian stories show how ego, repression, and instinct are constantly revised amid crises, revealing weak moral and societal conventions. Indian adulterous affairs establish the atmosphere for Rada Lee and Nathleen's wartime closeness, where love triumphs over nationalism, fear, and ego-driven hatred. The study uses Freudian psychoanalysis to explain how emotionally weak people's repressed libido revives wounded egos. Trauma theory explains how emotional connections reduce psychic numbing and existential dread, helping characters reclaim body and meaning. Intimacy is where life instincts combat destruction and death anxiety, according to Freud and Herman. *Love and Ego* concludes that wartime love is a way to fight back, not retreat. It disturbs the ego, heals trauma, and reinforces humanity against war. The story redefines proximity as mental power and moral opposition, influencing modern combat literature.

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